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978-0-521-06748-5 - Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the *Timaeus-Critias*

Thomas Kjeller Johansen

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PLATO'S NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Plato's dialogue the *Timaeus-Critias* presents two connected accounts, that of Atlantis and its defeat by ancient Athens and that of the creation of the cosmos by a divine craftsman. This book offers a unified reading of the dialogue. It tackles a wide range of interpretative and philosophical issues. Topics discussed include the function of the famous Atlantis story, the notion of cosmology as 'myth' and as 'likely', and the role of God in Platonic cosmology. Other areas commented upon are Plato's concepts of 'necessity' and 'teleology', the nature of the 'receptacle', the relationship between the soul and the body, the use of perception in cosmology, and the dialogue's peculiar monologue form. The unifying theme is teleology: Plato's attempt to show the cosmos to be organised for the good. A central lesson which emerges is that the *Timaeus* is far closer to Aristotle's physics than previously thought.

DR THOMAS KJELLER JOHANSEN is Reader in Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs* (Cambridge, 1997).

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Acknowledgements

In 1992–3 I attended two graduate seminars at Cambridge given by Myles Burnyeat and Geoffrey Lloyd, followed by a May Week seminar, all dedicated to the *Timaeus*. The aim of this ‘Year of the *Timaeus*’ was, in part, to rescue the dialogue, once central to the Platonic canon, from the relative obscurity into which it had slipped. Ten years on, as the bibliography will testify, the rescue mission is well under way. This book represents my contribution.

My efforts have been helped by many whom it is my pleasure to thank here. I began the work in earnest during a happy year as a junior fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies, under the directorship of Kurt Raaffaub and Deborah Boedeker. A research leave award from the AHRB subsequently allowed me bring the project to near completion. Finishing touches were added during my stay at the Institute for Advanced Study in 2002, where I enjoyed the help and encouragement of Heinrich von Staden.

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