Plato’s Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions

Although a great deal has been written on Plato’s ethics, his cosmology has not received so much attention in recent times, and its importance for his ethical thought has remained underexplored. By offering integrated accounts of *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, *Politicus*, and *Laws* X, the book reveals a strongly symbiotic relation between the cosmic and the human sphere. It is argued that in his late period Plato presents a picture of an organic universe, endowed with structure and intrinsic value, which both urges our respect and calls for our responsible intervention. Humans are thus seen as citizens of a universe that can provide a context for their flourishing even in the absence of good political institutions. The book sheds new light on many intricate metaphysical issues in late Plato, and brings out the close connections between his cosmology and the development of his ethics.

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A Rosa Mazzini,

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Preface

This book is the result of many years of thought and research, and has taken on several different shapes before reaching its final version. It started as a project based on (and soon took off beyond) my Ph.D. thesis, written between 1992 and 1995. My research on Plato’s cosmology goes back somewhat further, and I am happy that, as this book is coming to fruition, my La noción de dios en el Timeo de Platón, originally published in Buenos Aires in 1991, is due to appear in its second edition for a Spanish-speaking readership. Proper acknowledgements were made in both those productions to scholars and institutions, in Argentina and in England, which contributed to my research then. But I would like here to thank David Sedley and Richard Sorabji for their keen criticism early on. I am also grateful to Christopher Shields and Raphael Woolf, who commented on different chapters of the book, and to the anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press for their helpful suggestions. It is my pleasure to thank, in addition, the National Endowment for the Humanities for generous financial support, and the Center for Human Values at Princeton University, which has allowed me to finalise the manuscript in optimal research conditions and in an excellent collegial environment.

Previous versions of sections of this book have appeared as follows: Chapter 2, Section II.2 is based on Carone (2004c); Chapter 3, Section III is based on Carone (1997); parts of Chapter 5, Section I are based on Carone (2000); Chapter 6 is based on Carone (2004a); parts of Chapter 7 are based on Carone (1993); and parts of Chapter 8 are based on Carone (1994). I am grateful to the editors of those outlets for permission to reprint this material.

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