COSMOLOGY AND POLITICS IN PLATO'S LATER WORKS

Knowledge of the structure of the cosmos, Plato suggests, is important in organizing a human community which aims at happiness. This book investigates this theme in Plato's later works, the *Timaeus, Statesman* and *Laws*. Dominic J. O'Meara proposes fresh readings of these texts, starting from the religious festivals and technical and artistic skills in the context of which Plato elaborates his cosmological and political theories, for example the Greek architect's use of models as applied by Plato in describing the making of the world. O'Meara gives an account of the model of which Plato's world is an image; of the mathematics used in producing the world; and of the relation between the cosmic model and the political science and legislation involved in designing a model state in the *Laws*. Non-specialist scholars and students will be able to access and profit from this book.

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The purpose of this book is to examine the relation between the order of the world and the order of what would be a good human community, as this relation was explored by Plato in his later writings. Among these writings may be counted the *Timaeus*, the *Statesman*, the *Philebus* and the *Laws*. The *Timaeus* will be discussed here, to the extent that its cosmology might relate to the conceptions of a good human community proposed in the *Statesman* and in the *Laws*. Some attention will also be given to the *Philebus*.

All four of these works of Plato have experienced a sort of renaissance in contemporary studies. The *Timaeus* has always fascinated. But a narrow perspective in the English-speaking world, in particular an anti-metaphysical stance, has distorted the way in which it was read, a prejudice that has happily given way in recent years to a wealth of work open to the many dimensions (and difficulties!) of Plato's text. Similarly, the *Statesman*, long overshadowed by an exclusive concentration on the *Republic*, has come into its own right and has been explored in detail and discussed in its possible relation to the *Republic* and *Laws*. Finally, the *Laws*, also long neglected, if not dismissed as the expression of disillusion and decline in Plato's final years, has more recently become the object of serious, sympathetic and detailed investigation.

In the vast sea of studies published on Plato, the theme of the relation between cosmology and politics, as this relation may be suggested in Plato's later works, is not absent. For example, André Laks, referring to earlier work by Glenn Morrow,[1] reports:

> He [i.e. Morrow] drew a parallel between the divine Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who is responsible for the organization of the universe, and the legislator of the *Laws*, who is responsible for the organization of the city – that is, of the city as it should be, as opposed to the universe as it is.

[1] Morrow (1954).

> The parallel, which assumes some kind of structural similarity between the political and the cosmic processes, is philosophically promising. One might expect this common structure to give us some clues about the 'political' aspects of Plato's cosmological theory as well as about the 'cosmological' aspects of this political theory. Furthermore, the cosmo-political parallel might be founded upon a more general metaphysical scheme that could explain some fundamental features of Plato's political philosophy.[2]

Laks goes on to point out, however, that Morrow did not pursue the cosmological-political parallel very far. I believe the same is true of more recent work on Plato's later dialogues. Attention has been called to the political purpose of the cosmological story told in the *Timaeus* and to the idea that the order of the world may serve as a model of political order,[3] but this suggestion has not been developed by means of an investigation of Plato's political theory in the *Statesman* and *Laws* which would show in more detail how, in particular, the cosmological-political parallel might work. Connections have been explored between the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and the ethics of the *Philebus*, with some attention being given to the political implications of the cosmological myth of the *Statesman* and of the cosmological argument of *Laws* Book X, but a discussion of the wider political theory of the *Statesman* and of the *Laws* is not undertaken.[4] It is my hope, in this book, to pursue the topic further, by means of a more extensive comparison between the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and the political theory of the *Statesman* and *Laws*.

The approach adopted in this book is singular in some respects. I will *not* attempt to make direct contributions to what have recently become mainstream topics in English-language discussions of Plato's later works. Rather, working outside this framework, I will draw attention to the cultural, religious and technical contexts in which Plato's writings live, contexts which are often neglected, if not completely ignored, in modern discussions. Plato's interest in the many technical skills and arts (*technai*) of his time is evident to his readers. And some note has been made of the presence of the great Athenian festivals in his work. Indeed it was during these festivals that the finest achievements of classical Greek expertise and art were on display. At the Panathenaic festival, a splendidly woven new robe for the goddess Athena was carried, for all to see, in a great procession

[2] Laks (1990), 209–10.
[3] Pradeau (1997), Part III.B; Schäfer (2005). Rudolph (1996) includes work by A. Laks and A. Neschke-Hentschke published elsewhere (Laks 2005; Neschke-Hentschke 1995) in versions to which I will refer.
[4] Carone (2005).

which went up to the Acropolis, now filled with magnificent new buildings, among them the Propylaia and the Parthenon, masterworks of architecture, sculpture, metalwork, painting and other arts. And at the City Dionysia, the Athenian population could admire and judge the very best of choral singing and dancing, of tragedy and comedy. In this book I will treat these festivals and these artistic and technical skills as connected, as they were at the heart of the life of the Athenian citizen and as they constantly nourished Plato's thought.

Attention will also be given in this book to the analogical way in which Plato often thinks, a method which allows him to detect similar structures in diverse contexts and on different levels, be it, for example, in the world, in the city, or in the soul. To shift contexts, to move from politics to cosmology, from cosmology to politics, serves, as Laks suggests in the passage quoted earlier, to reveal what is essential to both.

In approaching ancient philosophical texts such as those written by Plato, we can explore them by argumentative elaboration which seeks to tease out the theoretical structure and implications of the text. But we can also make new observations, pointing to aspects and connections which are not noticed, bringing into focus things which are not clearly grasped, throwing light, from a new angle, on features which would otherwise remain in the shadows. It is this latter method which I propose to follow in this book. It is my hope that such an approach might lead us to notice some unfamiliar connections, unsuspected aspects, in Plato's later work, a complement thus to excellent work recently done in the field.

This book has two parts, corresponding respectively to cosmology and political theory. In Part I, I examine the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. I attempt to bring out the importance of the dramatic setting of the dialogue, the Panathenaic festival, for the interpretation of the speeches which are recalled, held and promised in the *Timaeus*, as speeches in praise of Athena. I locate Timaeus' speech about the making of the world in this context, investigating the architectural concepts which Timaeus uses in describing how god made the world. In particular, I will try to show that if we take the trouble to consider the methods and terminology of classical Greek architecture, we will be in a better position to recognize and understand the concepts and language Plato uses in describing the construction of the world in the *Timaeus*. The use Greek architects made of models (projects) and detailed plans will throw new light, as I hope to show, on the way in which Plato conceived of the model of the world and the way in which he described the world as constructed following this model. In Part II, I examine the political theory of the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. I suggest

a Panathenaic context for the image of weaving used in the *Statesman* to describe political science. Weaving, as an image of political science, has implications for Plato's conception of political science, in particular the use made in weaving of models (patterns). I also discuss the relation between political science and legislation, a topic I take up again in relation to the *Laws*, where, I argue, Plato elaborates the model (in the form of a constitutional and legislative order) for a good city, not the plan of a particular political enterprise. I suggest the presence of another religious festival within this model, the City Dionysia, reformed and re-appropriated: the arts involved here are those of dancing and music. In both Part I and Part II, I will attempt to draw attention to structural analogies, to political ideas in Plato's cosmology and to the function of cosmology in politics.

This book begins with a Prologue, in which some general suggestions are made as to why Plato situates his dialogues in the past: a recent past, a distant past or even a past forgotten by his contemporaries and first readers. In the Epilogue, I return to this theme, to the extent that this past, I propose, speaks to the present and the future, in particular the political present and future of Plato's readers, those of his day and even those of today.

No attempt will be made in this book to extend the discussion of cosmological and political themes to texts Plato composed earlier in his life, for example the *Republic*. Nor will I venture into other domains of interest – for example, epistemology – which he also explored in his later writings, or into the much disputed field of attempted reconstructions of what Plato's oral teaching in the Academy might have been. To shed some new light on some aspects of Plato's later work is already ambition enough!

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