All Things Natural

FICINO ON PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

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Notes and Additional Material by
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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE ON THE LATIN TEXTS

THE FLORENCE text of 1496 is the principal authority for the translation of the *Compendium*, but use has also been made of the Venice edition of 1491 and the Basle version of 1576.

Minor differences, too numerous to list in this volume, appear in these three versions: for instance, the last word of Chapter 8 of the *Compendium* is given as 'confirmavimus' in Florence and Venice, but as 'confirmabimus' in Basle.

The major variations in these three publications, however, are given below, with references from the English of this present translation:

Compendium, Chapter 7: Six consecutive paragraphs almost at the end of the chapter ('When we say – if we follow Plato … according to the poets.') occur in Florence only.

Compendium, Chapter 11: The final paragraph ('He says that … would come forth from it.') is in Florence and Basle but not in Venice.

Compendium, Chapter 19: In the sixth paragraph, the words beginning 'since in this way twelve borrows two sides' and ending 'from the further cube, namely, eight' are in Florence but not in Venice or Basle.

Compendium, Chapter 23: Basle gives a table of the elements and their qualities which does not appear in Florence or Venice.

Compendium, Chapter 26: This chapter is not in Venice. In Basle it is numbered XXVII.

Compendium, Chapter 27: In Basle this is numbered XXVI. Thus Basle reverses Chapters 26 and 27 of Florence. In the second paragraph, the second sentence and the single word 'moreover' of the third sentence appear only in Florence. Likewise, the penultimate paragraph of this chapter appears only in Florence.

Compendium, Chapter 29: The final paragraph occurs in Florence and Basle, but not in Venice.

Compendium, Chapter 32: Paragraph 23 ('But when we said that Saturn …') and paragraph 24 ('We should, however, assign …') appear only in Florence.

Compendium, Chapter 33: Paragraph 3: The words beginning with 'Stillness, and Motion', which conclude the first sentence, and ending with 'the Same, and the Different' in the third sentence, occur in Florence and Venice, but not in Basle.

Compendium, Chapter 34: The penultimate paragraph is given in Florence, but not in Venice or Basle.

Compendium, Chapter 34★: The second paragraph occurs in Florence only. Note also that the English translation follows the Florence text in attributing the number 34 to two consecutive chapters, this being the second of those two chapters. The result is that, from here until the end of the *Compendium*, the chapter numbers will lag one behind those of Venice and Basle.

Compendium, Chapter 35: Both Venice and Basle include a triangular figure with numbers. In Basle the topmost number shown is 6, whereas Venice shows the numeral 1 above the 6. This figure does not appear in Florence.

Compendium, Chapter 36: Venice has only the first six paragraphs of this chapter.

Compendium, Chapter 37: Venice lacks this chapter.

Compendium, Chapter 38: Venice lacks this chapter. It is erroneously numbered XXXVII in the Basle text.

Compendium, Chapter 39: This chapter is not in Venice.

Compendium, Chapter 40: In the title, only Florence has 'the words of God in relation to the gods; and the providence of the gods'. Venice has only the first six paragraphs of this chapter.

Compendium, Chapter 41: Paragraph 6: Only Florence has 'We have also spoken about sight in our commentaries on Plotinus.'

Compendium, Chapter 42: Basle erroneously gives the number XL to this chapter.

Compendium, Chapter 43: Basle assigns the number XLI to this chapter. The eighth paragraph ('Euclid demonstrates …') occurs only in Florence. In the tenth paragraph, the words 'and so twice sixty

scalenes are produced. In this shape there are twelve solid angles, each produced from five planes' and the words 'having eight solid angles, each of which is made of three right-angled planes' likewise occur only in the Florence text.

Compendium, Chapter 44: Basle gives the number XLII to this chapter.

Compendium, Chapter 45: This chapter appears only in Florence.

Compendium, Chapter 46: Venice and Basle have this as the final part of the chapter entitled 'More on man: how much regard he gives to the soul, and how much to the body' [Chapter 44 in Florence]. The chapter title is therefore only in Florence. In the third paragraph, the words 'that no one who has clearly perceived, at the outset, the misery which depravity brings in its train will voluntarily direct all his desires towards this end. You should also understand him to mean' occur only in Florence. In the penultimate paragraph, between 'just as the poets do' and 'So take these', Venice and Basle have 'Atque Timaeus Locrus in Lib. de Mundo fabulosa haec esse fatetur' ['And Timaeus of Locri, in his book *On the World*, says that these things are fictitious (or mythical)'].

For the translation of 'The Chapter Divisions of the *Timaeus*', the Florence text has remained the principal guide, but the Basle of 1576 has also been consulted. In this part of the work there are numerous minor discrepancies between the two texts, but no major divergences.

Marsilio Ficino's Compendium on the *Timaeus*

Chapter 1
The subject matter of the book

JUST AS Plato devotes his energies, in the *Parmenides*, to encompassing all matters divine, in the same way he embraces, in the *Timaeus*, all things natural; and in both dialogues he is principally a Pythagorean, his discourse being uttered through the mouths of Pythagoreans. In the *Parmenides* he emulates two Pythagoreans from Elea, Parmenides and Zeno, who wrote on divine matters. In the *Timaeus* he follows a Pythagorean from Locri named Timaeus, who wrote a book on the nature of the universe.

All this he does in such a way, however, that he includes in these writings the mysteries as well as eloquence. But since the divine world is the cause and model of the natural world, while the natural world is the effect and image of the divine world, it is for these reasons, too, that Plato, while speaking of the divine world in the *Parmenides*, occasionally moves down to the natural world, and when dealing in the *Timaeus* with the natural world he quite often soars up to the divine world. And it is not without some justification that he links divinity with nature, for nature is the instrument of divinity. And so Plato treats divinely of the natural world, as does Aristotle, and he treats of the divine world naturally.

He also interweaves mathematical items as the means between the divine world and the natural world. Through numbers the study of mathematics indicates the divine world, and through measurements it indicates the natural world.

The subject matter of this book may therefore be said to be the very nature of the universe, that is, a seminal and quickening power pervading the whole of the cosmos, being subject to the world-soul but exercising control over matter, and begetting all things in the sequence with which the soul itself conceives, while looking up to the divine mind and seeking the Good.

Chapter 2
The arrangement of the book and its parts

IT WILL BE SHOWN that the universe and its nature are not self-existent but depend on a higher, divine cause. It will also be shown that nature is arranged in many levels: celestial, elemental, simple, compound, rational, and irrational. All creation beneath the Moon will be seen to be related to a rational being, which is its end and its lord. Many more things will be said of this being, in relation to both the soul and the body; and more will also be said about those things which are compounded by nature beneath this rational being. Indeed, to put it briefly, the threefold world will be considered: the divine, the celestial, and the human.

It will further be shown that for all the things that are compounded in this world, and for the world itself, there are two chief internal elements: matter and form. But there are three external principles: the efficient cause of the world, the model cause of the world, and the final cause of the world. The efficient cause is divine power, intelligence, and will; the model cause comprises the Ideas conceived by divine intelligence; and the final cause is the Good.

Chapter 3
Introduction to the dialogue

LET US PROCEED, in any case, to the contents of the dialogue. Plato devotes five successive days to discussions. On the first day Socrates is at the Piraeus, discussing the State in the company of Polemarchus, Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Thrasymachus the Sophist. On the second day, in the city, he goes over the same topic again with Timaeus, Critias, Hermocrates, and a fourth person, an anonymous foreigner, who is perhaps a companion of Timaeus. On the third day they make an end of this topic. As if starting afresh, Timaeus immediately talks

about nature, in the company of Socrates, Critias, and Hermocrates; for the fourth person, who anonymously attended the second discussion, is absent from the third, since it is not right for all to share in matters that are somewhat secret. On the fourth day Critias speaks out. The fifth day has not yet dawned.

After the arrangement and concluding speech about the divine Republic in the world of men, Plato moves in the *Timaeus* to the celestial Republic, which is the model for the earthly one and is composed by God Himself. Then he proceeds to the antiquity of the world and of the human race, and to the wondrous deeds that were energetically accomplished by the ancients.

Chapter 4
An allegory of history; contents of the prologue

NEAR THE BEGINNING of this dialogue Plato relates an account of the war that was once fought between the Athenians and the men of Atlantis. It is clear that Crantor, the principal expounder of Plato at the time, takes the account to be devoid of any allegory. Some, on the other hand, take it as pure allegory, but they are refuted by Platonists of the highest standing, who declare that it is an historical account because Plato has uttered it. The tale that follows is indeed amazing, but totally true. They also consider that an allegorical meaning should be given to Plato's account, for he never exerts himself without good reason.

They therefore think that the war between the Athenians and the Atlanteans presents an image of all the confrontations in the universe. For, according to Heraclitus, war or opposition is the father of all things. Amelius gives the example of the opposition between the firmament and the planets, especially since it is said in *Critias* that the island of Atlantis was divided into seven circles. Origen, for his part, cites the opposition of the higher daemons towards the lower daemons and their victory over them, for the higher daemons had more power, whereas the lower daemons were greater in number.

Numenius refers to the pre-eminent souls which follow Pallas and which are hostile towards other souls who pursue the procreative process under Neptune.

Porphyry alludes to the battle between the daemons which entice towards procreation and the souls which strive for the realms above. He distinguishes three types of daemons: those that are divine; those that conform to a particular disposition, and whose ranks are filled with the specific souls that have obtained the daemoniacal lot; and those that are evil and harmful to souls. He therefore says that these lowest daemons assail the souls in their unending ascent and descent; and this is especially true of the daemons of the West, for he says that that region is considered by the Egyptians to be suitable for the harmful daemons.

Similarly Iamblichus, Syrianus, and Proclus add the never-ending opposition which holds sway everywhere between the One and the Many, Limit and Limitlessness, the Same and the Different, and between Stillness and Motion. All things are composed of these elements from the beginning. Again, being is either of itself or not of itself. Essence is either incorporeal or corporeal; and the incorporeal either moves down towards the corporeal or does not; while the corporeal is either permanent, being celestial, or it is transient, being elemental. Finally, in the heavens movements are opposed to each other, as are diverse powers; but beneath the heavens it is the qualities that repel each other.

In brief, all these differences are indicated by that war of old; and in all cases the Athenians represent what is higher and more excellent, while the men of the West stand for their opposites. Such an allegory is to no small extent applicable to the discussion by Timaeus and is confirmed by what we say in our commentary to *Critias.*