

PLATO'S ANTHROPOGONY AND POLITOGONY

In Chapter 1 we explored the origins of gods and the relation between the two divine families. But what do the gods do after they have been created? In Greek myths, they are busy negotiating their place in this world by means of securing alliances, organising plots, openly rebelling against poor leaders and fortifying their own position. Somewhere along the way they also generate human beings. Plato's *Timaeus* challenges such a discourse by shifting the focus from the usual political struggles of gods to what has always been, it seems, their ancillary job. The new defining and collective function of gods is nothing else but the creation of human beings. This role is deliberately introduced to reflect the main components of what has been already established: the cosmological activity of the Demiurge himself, the nature of the younger gods and the overall teleological orientation of the universe. At the same time, we saw that the *Timaeus* underlines significant differences between the traditional and cosmic gods: they do not have the same kind of ontological characteristics, the dialogue employs diverging explanatory schemes of origins, and human beings can acquire much less insight about the traditional gods than about the astral beings. So how does the function of creating humanity affect the two families of gods? Are they equal partners in their new job or does it produce new theological hierarchies and divergencies between them? There is one further layer to this question, which concerns the beginnings of human society. The gods do not leave it for human beings to create their own first cities. In fact, they participate in the origins of the human political world as well. Various Greek cities boasted about their privileged relation to those gods who founded their communities. Hence, the traditional gods are usually regarded as responsible for establishing the civic space. Sometimes they are even supposed to be the originators of laws and institutions. Are Plato's later works in support of such

political myths? And, more generally, to what extent is the discourse on anthropogony compatible with the discourse on politogony? This chapter examines the role of the traditional and cosmic gods in the present world as delineated in the *Timaeus*, the *Critias* and the *Laws*. Its objective is to determine the purpose of retaining the traditional gods as a separate group from the cosmic gods. It analyses three different approaches to these questions in the later dialogues and aims to determine how they understand the gods with respect to the origins of human beings, political communities and laws.

2.1 To Whom Does the Demiurge Speak?

Let us return to where we stopped in the *Timaeus*. Our focal passage at 40d6–41a3 (T1) is the main instance in the dialogue of an unambiguous contrast between the cosmic and traditional gods. In the rest of the dialogue, the distinction collapses, the gods are interchangeably called the *theoi* or *theos* without specifying which group of gods we should have in mind.¹ Naturally, the question is whether we should take an inclusive approach and accept the term *theoi* as incorporating both classes. The question is pressing, because after the origins of the traditional gods the Demiurge gives these *theoi* the task of generating human beings in a well-known speech (41a–d, see T14–T15 below). I shall label this task the ‘anthropogonic function’ of the gods.

The speech has a pivotal role in organising the cosmological discourse. It marks the end of the theogonic phase, in which the Demiurge created the gods, and begins the anthropogenesis, in which the younger gods will substitute for the Demiurge. It explains the reasons behind the need to replace the main cosmic protagonist with the lower deities. It also sets the general

¹ Van Riel (2013) 36–7 observes that the singular and the plural forms are ‘for the most part interchangeable. Sometimes the plural form of the verb referring to the gods is taken up by a single form within the same sentence. Moreover, instances of the singular form are so diverse that one cannot suppose that the word is always referring to the same single divinity . . . The most obvious explanation is thus that $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ is a collective term, by which “all gods” . . . are indicated under the heading of “god”. The “generic” use is more precise. In this sense, $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ refers to the genus of the gods: “the divine seen as a type representing the class (*all that is god*)”.’ See also Versnel (2011) 268–80.

2.1 To Whom Does the Demiurge Speak?

regulations for the younger gods regarding the way in which mortal creatures ought to be generated. So this is an important moment when assessing the status of each family of gods: if both the traditional and cosmic gods are the human-makers, then it shows that the dialogue has an even stronger commitment to making the cosmological discourse compatible with the poetic tradition than we argued for in the Chapter 1. For it would integrate the religious idea that the traditional gods are the creators of human beings with an otherwise novel cosmological account of the origins of humanity. Further, it would reaffirm the value of the serious reading of the religious theogony at T1. However, if the traditional gods are excluded from the addressees, then they lose the anthropogenic function, which is conventionally associated with them. On this basis, one may rightly doubt then whether T1 should be taken seriously. Thus, the question is whether there are any reasons to prefer the exclusive reading to the inclusive.

To determine which of the gods acquire the anthropogenic function, let us pick up where T1 terminates and have a look at the reasoning that leads to the allocation of the anthropogenic function in the Demiurge's speech:

T14 Zeus and Hera, as well as all those siblings who are called by names we know, were from Kronos and Rhea. And yet another generation came from these [viz. Zeus, Hera and others]. (1) In any case, when all the gods had come to be, (1.1) both the ones who make their rounds manifestly and (1.2) the ones who present themselves only to the extent that they are willing, the begetter of this universe said to them these things: (2) 'Gods of gods, those works whereof I am maker and father, whatever has come to be by my hands cannot be undone but by my consent. Now while it is true that anything that is bound is liable to being undone, still, only one who is evil would consent to the undoing of what has been well fitted together and is in fine condition. This is the reason why you, as creatures that have come to be, are neither completely immortal nor exempt from being undone. Still, you will not be undone nor will death be your portion, since you have received the guarantee of my will – a greater, more sovereign bond than those with which you were bound when you came to be. Learn now, therefore, what I declare and show to you.' (*Ti.* 41a1–b7, mod.)

ἐκ δὲ Κρόνου καὶ Ῥέας Ζεὺς Ἥρα τε καὶ πάντες ὅσους ἴσμεν ἀδελφοὺς λεγομένους αὐτῶν, ἔτι τε τούτων ἄλλους ἐγγόνους' (1) ἔπει δ' οὖν πάντες (1.1) ὅσοι τε περιπλοῦσιν φανερώς (1.2) καὶ ὅσοι φαίνονται καθ' ὅσον ἄν

Plato's Anthropogony and Politogony

ἐθέλωσιν θεοὶ γένεσιν ἔσχον, λέγει πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁ τὸδε τὸ πᾶν γεννήσας τάδε – (2) “Θεοὶ θεῶν, ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατήρ τε ἔργων, δι’ ἐμοῦ γενόμενα ἄλυστα ἐμοῦ γε μὴ ἐθέλοντος. τὸ μὲν οὖν δὴ δεθὲν πᾶν λυτόν, τό γε μὴν καλῶς ἀρμωσθὲν καὶ ἔχον εὖ λύειν ἐθέλειν κακοῦ δι’ ἅ καὶ ἐπιήπερ γεγένησθε, ἀθάνατοι μὲν οὐκ ἐστὲ οὐδ’ ἄλυτοι τὸ πάμπαν, οὐτι μὲν δὴ λυθήσεσθε γε οὐδὲ τεύξεσθε θανάτου μοίρας, τῆς ἑμῆς βουλήσεως μείζονος ἔτι δεσμοῦ καὶ κυριωτέρου λαχόντες ἐκείνων οἷς ὅτ’ ἐγίγνεσθε συνεδείσθε. νῦν οὖν ὁ λέγω πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐνδεικνύμενος, μάθετε.”

The composition of T14 shows that the closing remarks on theogony are meant to be continuous with the speech of the Demiurge. The first sentences of the passage close the line of descent of the traditional gods (41a1–3). In Section 1.5, we observed that the succession of gods in the theogonic tree is structurally marked by indefinite and progressive multiplication. We were not certain as to why the procreation of the traditional gods should stop at any point, for Timaeus did not spell out the reasons for giving a fixed number of them. It appears that the limiting factor is not internal to the nature of these gods. But the rest of the passage shows that the Demiurge is the external limiting factor, which intervenes into the generation of the traditional gods by addressing them and, as we are about to see, redirecting their procreative drive towards the creation of human beings. The situation is somewhat analogous to the Hesiodic theogony, where the interference of the presiding god, Zeus, stops the generational change and the fertility of gods by assigning them new functions primarily associated with responsibility over human life.² The fixed number of gods is part of the providential plan designed by the Demiurge.

At this point, T14 marks that the theogonic discourse has now completed the origins of all gods (41a3), which refers to both the traditional and cosmic gods. The two groups are then divided in terms of human epistemic access to the gods. In part (1) of the passage, some of these gods are visible and some are not. More specifically, (1.1) the cosmic gods clearly revolve in the skies, while (1.2) the traditional gods appear when they desire to. Both groups are later reunited because of their mutual dependency on the Demiurge in part (2). So far, there is nothing in the text to

² See further Clay (2003) 17–30.

2.1 To Whom Does the Demiurge Speak?

prevent us from the inclusive reading. The final sentence in the passage opens a discussion that will determine the anthropogonic function of the gods (see further Section 2.2). Some scholars insist that here the Demiurge creates a new class of gods, the demiurgic ancillaries, which will implement the anthropogonic function.³ But T14 cannot confirm such a reading: just before the beginning of the speech, Timaeus specifies that the Demiurge addresses the two groups of (I.1) and (I.2) by ‘speaking to them’ (λέγει πρὸς αὐτούς, 41a5) and the demiurgic function (δημιουργίαν, 41c4–5; see further T15) that will be mentioned in the speech is among the things said to them (ὁ τόδε τὸ πᾶν γεννήσας τόδε, 41a5–6). Our initial overview of the passage, therefore, leads to the conclusion that the literary composition does not suggest that the traditional gods are excluded from the audience addressed by the speech of the Demiurge.

But there is an alternative position, which argues that the inclusive reading is unacceptable because of the particular phrasing of part (I). Filip Karfik finds here a division between the stars and planets rather than a division between traditional and cosmic gods.⁴ He takes the former distinction from an earlier passage at 40a–d, which distinguishes the ‘unwandering’ beings, namely the stars who have fixed orbital rotations (40b4–6), from the ‘wandering’ beings, that is, the planets who have such irregular motions (40b6–8) that they are intermittently absent from our sight.⁵ Accordingly, Karfik applies this division to T14 and claims that the group in part (I.1) includes the stars that circle around their axes, while the group in part (I.2) refers to the planets which show themselves irregularly or, in other words, when they wish to. If this were so, then the Demiurge would distribute the anthropogonic function to the cosmic gods only and this would significantly lower the theological status of the traditional gods. This interpretation, however, is quite problematic.

³ Broadie (2012) 18. See also Nightingale (2021) 230–1, who argues that the demiurgic ancillaries must be some other, perhaps transcendent, gods, because in the previous cosmogonic phase the souls of the astral entities did not receive demiurgic capacities. But this is precisely the reason why the Demiurge gives his speech in this phase, namely to distribute the demiurgic power to the newly created younger gods.

⁴ Karfik (2004) 99–100.

⁵ For further analysis of this distinction at 40a–d, see Dicks (1970) 131–2.

First, we saw that T14 is composed in such a way as to encompass the origins of the traditional and cosmic gods and to ensure a smooth transition from theology to anthropogony. When Timaeus refers to all the gods in T14 (πάντες, 41a3), he wants to embrace the results of both theogonies. The formulation at T14 is broader and more inclusive than the formulation in Karfik's favoured passage at 40a–d. By contrast, the latter passage concludes the origins of the cosmic gods with a note that Timaeus has discussed only the 'visible and generated gods' (θεῶν ὁρατῶν καὶ γεννητῶν, 40d3–5), that is, the planets and stars, rather than 'all the gods'. The visibility of gods in the phrase at 40d3–5 nicely relates to the visibility of those in part (1.1) of T14, but not to those in part (1.2). For this reason, the broader distinction in T14 should not be conflated with the earlier and narrower distinction. Second, Karfik's thesis on the particular members within the distinction, the groups in parts (1.1) and (1.2), does not hold either. If the group in part (1.1) includes only stars and no planets, then it is perplexing why their rotations are called φανερώς at 41a4, for the axial circling of the stars is clearly not manifest (φανερὸς) to human eyes. If on the other hand, the group in part (1.1) includes all cosmic gods, then the adverb makes more sense, since some of the planets are indeed φανοί. Third, if Karfik holds that the group in part (1.2) includes only the 'wandering' planets, it will commit him to approach T14 as implying that the erratic motions result from the intentions and desires of these planets (cf. ὅσοι φαίνονται καθ' ὅσον ἂν ἐθέλωσιν, 41a4–5). But as I argued in Section 1.3, the usual homocentric rotation is the result of the circle of sameness, while the observable fluctuations in the opposite direction is due to the circle of difference. For this reason, we cannot construe the irregularities in motion, such as retrogradation, as originating from the desires of planets. We saw that the self-motion of planets is only limited to producing the axial rotation. In other words, the planets cannot appear or disappear to humans as they wish, for their intentions always result in the regular axial rotation. Instead, their 'wandering' is dependent on the motions of the world-soul.

For the above reasons the exclusive reading does not hold water. Therefore, I prefer to side with the orthodox approach in reading the group in part (1.1) as referring to the cosmic gods and the

2.1 To Whom Does the Demiurge Speak?

group in part (1.2) as referring to the traditional gods.⁶ This inclusive alternative has far more advantages: it is more flexible with respect to the dramatic and literary composition; it does not commit to dubious theoretical assumptions, such as voluntary irregular celestial motions; and it makes better sense of the distinction between the gods in the passage. In so far as the latter is concerned, the passage clearly describes the gods from the human point of view and takes into account their epistemic capacities. For when Timaeus speaks of planets that ‘revolve in a clear manner’ (περιπολοῦσιν φανερώς, 41a3–4), the remark is meant to emphasise not only the circular type of celestial motions expressed by the verb περιπολέω, but also the fact that they are clearly (φανερώς) observable to human beings. Likewise, the second group in part (1.2) follows this pattern. The most natural reading is to construe ‘the ones who present themselves only to the extent that they are willing’ (ὅσοι φαίνονται καθ’ ὅσον ἂν ἐθέλωσιν, 41a4–5) as referring to epiphanies. The passage uses a standard verb for epiphanic appearances and describes a typically asymmetrical relationship between the gods and human beings, where the encounter with the divine depends on the divine agency.⁷ Given the Platonic hostility to an anthropomorphic depiction of traditional gods, the passage carefully avoids describing the particular shape the gods assume when they present themselves or the changes of the shape, and so it

⁶ See Archer-Hind (1888) 137n16; Cornford (1937) 139; Morrow (1960) 445; Brisson (1992) 239n230; Van Riel (2013) 38n36, 51; Lefka (2013) 130; Opsomer (2016) 140. That the group in part (1.2) refers to the traditional gods was also accepted by Proclus, *In Ti.* III 164.14–16, 194.20–195.1.

⁷ *Homeric Hymns* 7.2–3, 46; Homer, *Il.* 1.195–200, 5.866–867 and *Od.* 16.161. For asymmetrical relationships in epiphanies, see Platt (2015) 494. Cf. *Homeric Hymns* 2.275–280; 3.448–451; Homer, *Od.* 13.312–313, 19.30–45. However, not all traditional means of divine communication are defended in Timaeus’ cosmology. In particular, the divinatory dreams are regarded as a psychological issue rather than religious, and some of them are not considered as a proper case of epiphany. For a number of standard examples of the connection between the two, see Kearns (2010) 94–101. See also *Ti.* 71a–72d, where it elaborates on the lower appetitive part of the soul seated in the liver. The liver communicates thoughts sent from the upper soul by transforming them into images seen in divinatory dreams. Depending on the health of the body and the fluids in the liver, the dreams can give either falsehoods or truths concerning one’s personal well-being (71e6–72a4). Hence, by connecting the liver to the rational part of the soul and making divination depend on the harmony of the soul, Timaeus makes the old religious practice an ethical-psychological phenomenon. For a recent detailed discussion of this passage, see Dixsaut (2003) and Struck (2016) 73–90.

makes the passage true to the Platonic theology.⁸ Finally, such a reading would also find a parallel in the *Laws* 11.930e7–931a7, where the Athenian Stranger introduces a comparable division between the visible gods of the cosmos and the invisible traditional gods, for whom devotees set up visible representations.⁹

The last question concerning T14 is the manner in which the Demiurge addresses the gods. The phrase θεοὶ θεῶν at 41a7 has puzzled Plato's readers since Antiquity, for its confusing form can have either an intensifying or partitive force.¹⁰ If the genitive in the phrase is partitive, the Demiurge seems to speak only to a certain group of gods. Hence, one would have to exclude either the cosmic or the traditional gods for a partitive reading to make sense – after all, these are the only divine classes at this stage of cosmology. Since there is no reason to exclude the cosmic gods, some would prefer eliminating the traditional gods by arguing that the latter were not directly generated by the Demiurge.¹¹ But is there really a need to assume that the Demiurge intends to distance himself from the traditional gods? He created Ouranos and Gaia, who are not only the primary cosmic gods, but also the most senior traditional gods, the progenitors of the later generations. It means that by extension the Demiurge is the ultimate causal origin of the remaining traditional gods as well.¹² Moreover, the Demiurge positions himself as the

⁸ It is noteworthy, on the other hand, that divine epiphanies were not restricted to anthropomorphic or zoomorphic encounters – amorphous epiphanies were widespread as well, for which see Versnel (1987) 50–1; Petridou (2016) 98–105.

⁹ Van Riel (2013) 51 argues that a concrete corporeal presence is a matter of choice for the traditional gods, as if they are incorporeal souls, which are capable of interacting with the material world. This thesis could be backed by *Lg.* 10.898e8–899a4, which suggests that the body–soul interaction may accommodate the idea that an incorporeal soul can affect a body without a bodily collision. In other words, there is some room for the kind of beings who are not always present in their corporeality, but nonetheless can have an influence on the physical world. If this is what T14 implies, then it would be truly an interesting case of religious rationalisation, for it would ontologically approve the conventional understanding of divine manifestation, such as Zeus appearing as a lightning storm or Poseidon channeling his power as an earthquake. The formulation in T14 is vague enough to open such a possibility, but since neither the passage nor the dialogue gives an explicit support to this claim, it is preferable to suspend judgement on this matter.

¹⁰ See Proclus, *In Ti.* III 202.20–206.22. ¹¹ Karfik (2004) 117–18, 145–7.

¹² For a similar position, see Solmsen (1942) 117. One could object that T14 is not concerned with the derivative gods for the following reason: the Demiurge presents himself as the maker, who can destroy his creation, and yet who guarantees the immortality of these gods with his personal assurance. This objection is unpersuasive, for it would imply that the Demiurge is incapable of destroying such beings who are not

2.1 To Whom Does the Demiurge Speak?

maker and the father of gods in T14 (δημιουργὸς πατήρ, 41a7). We saw in Section 1.5 that the title ‘father’ links the Demiurge to the biological framework used in the origins of the traditional gods. In the origins of the cosmic gods, he functions more as the ‘maker’. The joint use of the two titles then seems to connect the two families of gods rather than disconnect them. Finally, both ancients and moderns have noticed that the exclusive rendering at 41a7 contradicts lines 41a3–6 immediately above the address, which refer to all the gods inclusively.¹³ As a consequence, the partitive reading creates unnecessary complications with respect to the literary composition and the overall cosmology. On the other hand, the intensifying sense to the phrase θεοὶ θεῶν is consistent with the inclusive reading, according to which the Demiurge addresses both groups of gods. It allows us to construe the address as simply emphasising the elevated status of the gods among things which are divine in the universe, such as human intellect.¹⁴

My conclusion then is that the text leading to the allocation of the anthropogonic function unifies the two groups of gods into a new joint group of *theoi*. It means that the Demiurge addresses and distributes the new tasks to both the traditional and cosmic gods and so they jointly become responsible for the generation of human beings. We will take a closer look at the nature of the anthropogonic function (Section 2.2) and its implications for the relationship between the cosmic and the traditional gods (Section 2.3).

generated directly by him, say Ocean or Zeus. It would also imply that for the other gods the source of immortality is something other than the souls created by the Demiurge. On the latter point, see Van Riel (2013) 46–51.

¹³ Cf. Proclus, *In Ti.* III 203.27–32 and Cornford (1937) 368.

¹⁴ See also Van Riel (2013) 108, who takes ‘θεοὶ θεῶν as addressing that element which constitutes the divinity of the gods. This would be in perfect parallel with “a god for the gods” (θεὸς θεοῖς) at *LaWS* 10.987b, where intellect is indicated as that which is divine for the gods.’ Some older readings propose to view this phrase as a corruption. For instance, Taylor (1928) 249 aims to replace θεῶν, ὧν with ὄσων in the phrase θεοὶ θεῶν, ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς at 41a7. The translation would be ‘gods whose maker I am’ and it would naturally refer to the two groups of gods from the preceding lines at 41a3–6. The other alternative comes from Cornford (1937) 367–70 and Brisson (1992) 239n231, who suggest inserting a comma after the first word in the passage: θεοὶ, θεῶν ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατήρ τ’ ἔργων. We could then understand the sentence as a compressed form θεοὶ, θεῶν ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς ἔργων τε (ὧν ἐγὼ) πατήρ. The translation would be ‘gods, of gods whereof I am the maker and of works the father’.

2.2 The Younger Gods and Anthropogony in the *Timaeus*

We may now proceed with the speech of the Demiurge. After promising immortality to the cosmic and traditional gods, the Demiurge prescribes:

T15 (1) Learn now, therefore, what I declare and show to you. There remain still three kinds of mortal beings that have not yet been begotten; and as long as they have not come to be, the *ouranos* will be incomplete, for it will still lack within it all the kinds of living things it must have if it is to be sufficiently complete. But if these creatures came to be and came to share in life by my hand, they would rival the gods. It is you, then, (2) who must turn yourselves to the task of fashioning these living things, as your nature allows, imitating the power I used in causing you to be. This will assure their mortality, and this whole universe will really be a completed whole. And to the extent that it is fitting for them to possess something that shares our name of 'immortal', something described as divine and ruling within those of them who always consent to follow after justice and after you, I shall begin by sowing that seed, and then hand it over to you. The rest of the task is yours. Weaving what is mortal to what is immortal, (3) fashion living things. (4) Generate them, (5) cause them to grow by giving food, and when they perish, (6) receive them back again. (*Ti.* 41b6–d3, mod.)

νῦν οὖν ὁ λέγων πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐνδεικνύμενος, (1) μάθετε. θνητὰ ἔτι γένη λοιπὰ τρία ἀγέννητα· τούτων δὲ μὴ γενομένων οὐρανὸς ἀτελής ἔσται· τὰ γὰρ ἅπαντ' ἐν αὐτῷ γένη ζώων οὐχ ἕξει, δεῖ δέ, εἰ μέλλει τέλειος ἰκανῶς εἶναι. δι' ἐμοῦ δὲ ταῦτα γενόμενα καὶ βίου μετασχόντα θεοῖς ἰσάζοιτ' ἂν· ἵνα οὖν θνητὰ τε ἢ τὸ τε πᾶν τότε ὄντως ἅπαν ἦ, (2) τρέπεσθε κατὰ φύσιν ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ζώων δημιουργίαν, μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐμὴν δύναμιν περὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν γένεσιν. καὶ καθ' ὅσον μὲν αὐτῶν ἀθανάτοις ὁμώνυμον εἶναι προσήκει, θεῖον λεγόμενον ἡγεμονοῦν τε ἐν αὐτοῖς τῶν αἰεὶ δίκη καὶ ὑμῖν ἐθελόντων ἔπεσθαι, σπείρας καὶ ὑπαρξάμενος ἐγὼ παραδώσω· τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ὑμεῖς, ἀθανάτω θνητὸν προσφαίνοντες, (3) ἀπεργάζεσθε ζῶα καὶ (4) γεννάτε τροφήν τε διδόντες (5) αὐξάνετε καὶ φθίνοντα πάλιν (6) δέχεσθε.

T15 makes it clear that the anthropogonic function is not a simple task to create human beings in whatever way the younger gods want to, but a well-defined and multidimensional function captured in the speech by the six imperatives. The first imperative 'learn' (μάθετε, 41b7) establishes a vertical relationship between the Demiurge and the younger gods. It marks the fact that the Demiurge has a superior knowledge of the providential plan, which he shares with the younger gods, and an authority to decide

2.2 The Younger Gods and Anthropogony in the *Timaeus*

who will implement the scheme in question. According to this plan, the creation of the universe (οὐρανός, 41b8) as an Animal that encompasses all other animal species was the guiding idea behind the work of the Demiurge. However, some of these animals are yet to come. An actualisation of this idea requires generating the specimens of the three remaining mortal kinds, since without them the universe will be incomplete and imperfect (ἀτελής, 41b8). This job is given to the younger gods.

But why is it necessary for the highest god to delegate the task? Is this a conceit to make the younger gods more useful or is there a more substantive metaphysical reason why the Demiurge needs such helpers? In T15, the Demiurge confesses his inability to continue the work as he faces a problem not entirely unlike of Midas: whatever he touches becomes immortal. In terms of metaphysics, it means that the good nature of the Demiurge symmetrically translates into a good activity with good results. There is some tension in the fact that the good nature of the Demiurge compels him to make the gods immortal, but he also feels an obligation to give an additional assurance to the gods that their immortality will never be undone by destruction (see T14). The potential destructibility of gods is a highly unconventional suggestion, for even the defeated divinities are imprisoned rather than killed or destroyed in the Greek myths.¹⁵ It surely indicates that the Demiurge has omnipotent power, which cannot be matched by any traditional Greek god. But given that the mutilation, destruction and reconstruction of Dionysus is attested in the Orphic myths, this remark can be also viewed as distancing the Demiurge from the gods of the mystery cults. At the very least, it marks the moral superiority of the Demiurge to the Orphic gods, who by destroying something as good as their divine peers show that they actually want evil.¹⁶ Finally, the personal assurance of the Demiurge anticipates the Affinity argument in the *Phaedo*, according to which anything that is put together eventually has to split up and change, and body is precisely such a compound (78b–80d). This law holds for the universe of the *Timaeus* too, when the Demiurge creates the cosmic

¹⁵ See, for example, the Titans: Hesiod, *Th.* 717–19; Typhoeus: *Th.* 867–8.

¹⁶ For the Orphics, see Proclus, *In Ti.* II 145.4–146.22, 197.14–198.14 = fr. 210 Kern.

gods as embodied beings and then announces that 'anything that is bound is liable to being undone' (τὸ μὲν οὖν δὴ δεθῆναι πᾶν λυτόν, *Ti.* 41a7–41b3). The personal assurance of the Demiurge then is a response to this challenge. It grounds the continuous immortality of the younger gods in the exception provided by the will of the Demiurge, a divine intervention into the normal course of events.¹⁷

To return to our original question about the need of divine helpers, the answer is that the perfectly immortal world makes the overall condition somewhat deficient as the Demiurge would keep on generating only godlike beings, while the true aim is to fully accomplish the implementation of the genus 'Animal' with all its variations. David Sedley accurately captures the paradoxical imperfection of a world composed of only perfect beings:

God could, had he so chosen, have interpreted the notion of perfection more narrowly and limited his creation to the best beings. The price would have been to build an intelligent but unoccupied world. It would be like setting out to build the perfect zoo, and as a result deciding that no animal is good enough to live in it.¹⁸

The younger gods are fit for the more menial task of creating imperfect beings, because even though these gods are exceptionally good, they fall short of perfection due to their own lack of omnipotence and eternity. Combined with the potential destructibility and hence the potential mortality of the younger gods, their nature is well designed to include the capacity to make mortal creatures. Therefore, the cosmic and traditional gods have to learn about the next phase of cosmogony and become the creators of mortal beings.

But this appears to create a new problem. The situation seems to be as if the Demiurge washes his hands of human imperfections by leaving to his auxiliaries the dirty job of human incarnation, which will eventually translate into the source of human inability to choose good things only. On Sedley's interpretation, the real reason for delegating this task to the younger gods is to exempt the Demiurge from being responsible for the origins of evil – he is

¹⁷ The idea that souls are not eternal and that nonetheless a body-soul combination receives immortality from a higher philosophical principle contrasts sharply with *Phdr.* 245c–e, 246c–d, where soul *qua* self-mover is by definition immortal and eternal, because there are no other more fundamental sources of motion, while the body-soul combinations cannot receive this attribute, because bodies are always perishable.

¹⁸ Sedley (2007) 122.

2.2 The Younger Gods and Anthropogony in the *Timaeus*

blameless (ἀναίτιος, 42d4) in this respect.¹⁹ If this is the key motive, one may rightly doubt whether the Demiurge can be irreproachable on these grounds: for the criminal mastermind is implicated in any crime together with the actual implementors, his obedient minions. After all, it is the choice of the Demiurge rather than the younger gods to make humans imperfect. However, my contention is that this explanation displaces the timing of the origins of evil. Is it true that the younger gods create the bodily conditions for vice to emerge, and that without the latter human beings would not wilfully choose what is bad (κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἑκὼν οὐδέεις, 85d7–86e1). And yet the source of evil is located in humanity, for humans are given the power to choose how they respond to their own deficiencies (42b) and thus every human being ‘becomes the cause of his or her own evils’ (κακῶν αὐτὸ ἑαυτῷ γίγνεται αἴτιον, 42e3–4).²⁰ Except for a cryptic eschatological punishment for immoral lives noted in 90e (see T22), the first historical bad choices, moreover, are recorded outside of the theogonic and anthropogonic discourse – they appear in Critias’ story on the first human cities (see Section 2.5). As for the gods, a choice falling short of ultimate perfection is not necessarily an evil choice, especially if by doing so the Demiurge intended to boost the overall goodness of the universe and implement the providential plan.²¹

Now the specific way in which the younger gods are to substitute the Demiurge is by imitating (μιμούμενοι, 41c5) him as far as their nature allows them. The mimetic activity here is a teleologically oriented process in virtue of which a lower cosmic actor subordinates himself to the higher being, repeats similar actions to the ones performed by that being and, as a result, fulfils his nature.²² In effect, such mimetic activity expresses the second

¹⁹ Sedley (2007) 123–4.

²⁰ For this reading, see Carone (2005) 60. See also Broadie (2012) 101–6 and Meyer (2014).

²¹ This theodicy is in line with the theology of *Laws* 10, which emphasises the global goodness of the universe. Pace Nightingale (1996) 66–71.

²² The mimetic activity here is more elaborate than in *Republic* 10, where the imitator is distinguished from the divine demiurge, who creates the Forms, and a mortal craftsman, who applies the Forms in his craftsmanship. On Socrates’ view, the imitator produces mere appearances and deceptions of the things created by the mortal craftsman

mimetic level, for we found the first level when the Demiurge assimilated the universe to himself (see Section 1.3). The only consolation the Demiurge provides for the younger gods is the reminder that this is the only way to perfect the cosmos. Likewise, even at a lower cosmic level, human beings will be advised to imitate the revolutions of the cosmic gods, which we will explore further in Chapter 3. These mimetic levels, therefore, both separate and unite the creators and the created in as much as imitation articulates a hierarchy of repetition, but also creates a common path towards cosmological and moral excellence exemplified by the Demiurge (for the younger gods) and the cosmic gods (for human beings). The requested mimesis comes to fruition in the next two imperatives. The second instruction comes at (2): the younger gods must step in for the Demiurge by turning to (τρέπεσθε, 41c4) the activity that caused their origins, demiurgy (δημιουργία, 41c4–5), and using it for the generation of the remaining animals. The third command (3) to ‘fashion’ (ἀπεργάζεσθε, 41d2) reinforces the second imperative by reiterating the very same verb used for completing the production of the cosmic gods and the world-soul.²³ By imitating the craftsmanship of the Demiurge, the younger gods become like apprentices of the master craftsman working in a cosmic workshop.

The creative activity of the younger gods is repeatedly expressed in technological terms after the speech of the Demiurge (42e–43a, 45b, 69c–d). From a broader perspective, Timaeus’ account of human origins surely does not give a novel explanatory model. According to Nicole Loraux, Greek myths offer two ways in which the gods can originate human beings.²⁴ The first type can be found in the myths of autochthony, where humans emerge from the earth. Some of them grow from the dragon teeth like the Spartoi, the armed warriors of Theban myth, who were purposively sown in the earth on advice of Athena. Others appear accidentally like Erichthonios, the ‘founding father’ of the Athenian people, who develops from the dropped

(10.597e–598d). See also the discussion on divine and human creation in *Sph.* 265b–266d.

²³ Cf. ἀπηργάσατο, 34a5; ἀπεργάσασθαι, 37c8; ἀπείργαστο, 39e3; ἀπηργάζετο, 40a3.

²⁴ Loraux (2000) 1–3.

2.2 The Younger Gods and Anthropogony in the *Timaeus*

seed of Hephaestus.²⁵ The most prominent examples of the second type belong to Hesiod.²⁶ In his myth of the races, the first two human generations were constructed by an anonymous group of gods living in the period of the Titans and the next two races were fashioned exclusively by Zeus. The myth emphasises the creative aspect of this act (e.g. ποιήσαν, *Op.* 110, 128), but does not expound on its manner. A more specific description is provided by Pandora's story, where various gods contribute their own expertise in mixing together earth and water, moulding Pandora out of it, dressing and decorating her (*Op.* 60–82; *Th.* 571–84). We can see that apart from the basic distinction between two ways of originating human beings, namely natural growth and artificial construction, these stories do not form a common pattern. There is no single god responsible for anthropogony, nor a standard way of creating humans.²⁷ The anthropogonic stories do not envision humanity as originating with the universally agreed and shared ancestry at a fixed starting point – there was no Greek Adam and Eve.

Now some of the Presocratic cosmogonies attempted to give a more standardised account by settling the matter concerning the chronological beginnings of all humanity and the divinity responsible for it. Two figures stand out in this respect. Anaxagoras derived human beings from the seeds that were separated from the primordial mixture by the whirlpool caused by the cosmic Intellect. Empedocles, on the other hand, developed a more complex process, which is intermittently supervised by either Love (also called Aphrodite) or Strife. It begins with a construction of a myriad of fantastic beings that have to undergo a test of survival,

²⁵ The Spartoi: Plato, *Lg.* 2.663e–664a; Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.4.1. Erichthonios: *Bibl.* 3.14.6; Callimachus, *Hecale* fr. 260.18–29 Pfeiffer.

²⁶ For some parallels between the speech of the Demiurge and Hesiod's poetry, see Regali (2010).

²⁷ It is important to add that the purpose of the anthropogonic stories is to justify some aspects of the current human condition. Vernant (2006) 25–51 argues that the myth of the races depicts human beings in transition from the society of kings and warriors to the society of farmers, where *hubris* and justice are intermingled; Clay (2003) 81–99, on the other hand, claims that this myth examines how humans came to recognise the superiority of gods through the gradual aggravation of their capacities and lifestyle; Vernant (1980) 168–85 approaches Pandora's story as a charter myth of the human need for procreation, labour and marriage; Loraux (2000) 13–38 explores the egalitarian ideology behind and democratic implications of the Athenian autochthony.

after which emerge earthborns and, finally, sexually differentiated human beings.²⁸ Sedley draws attention to the curious fact that the divinities of both early philosophers are plainly craftsmen: Intellect works like a gardener, who prepares a hothouse environment suitable for the seeds to develop, while Empedocles' two principles work like carpenters and painters while constructing and decorating their creations.²⁹ This may look as if the Presocratics prioritised Hesiod's technological scheme, but the prominent role of seeds, earth and autochthony actually points to a synthesis of the earlier mythical distinction. At any rate, it is safe to say that Timaeus follows the earlier philosophers, when his gods employ crafts comparable to metallurgy, carpentry, painting and agriculture in constructing the world and its beings.³⁰ What is special about Timaeus' account, however, is the philosophical status of the technological explanatory scheme and the relation between the gods and their creations. The technological activity is no longer an unthematized metaphor. Time and again we saw that the technological model is carefully based on teleological reasoning of the Demiurge and tailored to the objectives of the providential plan. Timaeus' cosmology makes sure that the creation of human beings is an essential part of the nature of the younger gods in virtue of their function as the auxiliaries of the Demiurge – they create human beings not because they can or want to do this, but because it is the best thing for them to do.

The imperatives (2–3) signal the ending of phase one, in which the creation was managed by the Demiurge, and launch the second cosmological phase, in which this responsibility is given to the younger gods. In particular, it involves a request to produce the mortal soul and body out of the existing materials and weave it with the immortal rational soul created by the Demiurge, because the possession of the latter is the necessary condition for becoming an animal. What is more, the task anticipates the creation of humans as complex social beings. T15 makes clear that by endowing human beings with souls, the younger gods will turn humans into moral creatures capable of understanding justice, namely the

²⁸ I follow the reconstruction of both theories in Sedley (2007) 14–19, 33–52. See in particular Anaxagoras, DK59 B4, B12; Empedocles, DK31 A72.

²⁹ Sedley (2007) 20–5, 52–9. ³⁰ See further Brisson (1994) 35–50.

2.2 The Younger Gods and Anthropogony in the *Timaeus*

right social relations between themselves, and piety, which is the proper relation to the divine creators (θεῖον λεγόμενον ἡγεμονοῦν τε ἐν αὐτοῖς τῶν αἰεὶ δίκη καὶ ὑμῖν ἐθελόντων ἔπεισθαι, 41c7–8). In this way, the younger gods will create the conditions for the emergence of politics and religion. The passage reaffirms the idea that the younger gods and not the Demiurge are the objects of religious observation for human beings, who will become ‘the most god-fearing of animals’ (ζώων τὸ θεοσεβέστατον, 42a1).

On the other hand, the mortal soul and body will have an influence on the human moral and social life as well. In the later parts of the dialogue, we can find various, unsystematic reflections on how, for instance, the possession of eyes empowers humans to observe celestial motions and the change in time, which in turn stimulates an enquiry into nature and hence gives rise to philosophy (47a–b). The dialogue also ponders upon how the creation of the abdomen counteracts the threat of relentless gluttony, which would otherwise prevent human beings from engaging in philosophy and arts (72e–73a). Moreover, it examines how the harmful tendencies in civic life can be derived from noxious bodily humours and the respective changes in temper (87a–b). Therefore, the creation of the body and the soul will give all the prerequisites for human beings to understand their place in the world and their dependency on the gods. Just like the Demiurge through his act of creation hierarchically subordinated the younger gods, so the younger gods through their act of creation will acquire a hierarchical priority in relation to mortals: the human souls are given to the younger gods so that they could rule the humans (ἄρχειν, 42e2).

The last three imperatives (4–6) – ‘generate’ (γεννᾶτε, 41c2), ‘grow’ (αὐξάνετε, 41c3) human beings and ‘receive’ (δέχεσθε, 41c3) them after their death – mark a future transition to the third phase after the anthropogenesis, which will be the present world. They show that the younger gods will have a continuous role in the human life cycle. One of its facets relates to the natural processes, which is a domain of activity mainly associated with the cosmic gods and, above all, Gaia. I have argued that Gaia is a divine being responsible for making the climatic conditions ben-
evolent towards human flourishing and providing humans with

nourishment (see Section 1.7). Both Timaeus and Critias present her as the mother of human beings, which, in their view, is both a mythological and a cosmological truth (23e, 40b–c, 42d). Helios may also accompany her, because his power to give light and to disperse heat creates suitable conditions for growth of organic life.³¹ Another aspect of the anthropogonic function of the gods is the supervision of the eschatological mechanism (see further Section 3.1).³² In the closing episode of the dialogue, we take a quick glimpse into human afterlife. There the people who led a vicious life will be reborn as various animals. This process will initiate the origins of the remaining animals, whose bodily constitutions will reflect the deficient intellectual and ethical habits formed during the previous life. On the other hand, those who will lead a good life in accordance with the patterns set by the Demiurge will return to the company of the gods.³³ One could object that the speech of the Demiurge certainly misses a lot of essential aspects of what it takes to be human, but it only reveals the distance between what is important for us and for the gods. They are concerned with promoting life and animality, the paradigm of the universe, and so the generation of humanity is just a piece of the grand providential plan. The universe of the *Timaeus* is not anthropocentric, but zoocentric. In this way, the speech as a whole gives us a privileged access to the divine perspective on both the human and nonhuman condition.

2.3 Plato's Society of Gods

The Demiurge's speech establishes another layer of the primacy of the Demiurge in addition to his function as the creator and the father of the universe, and it also gives us a model of goal-directed

³¹ For Gaia, see *Ti.* 40b8 = T11; for Helios, see *R.* 6.509b3–4, where Socrates presents the god as the source of 'becoming, growth, and nourishment' (τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὐξὴν καὶ τροφήν). Broadie's (2002) 309–11 claim that the sun has no functional role in the sublunary realm in Plato's later dialogues is an overstatement. Cf. "Ἵδωρ δὲ πάντων μὲν τὸ περὶ τὰς κητείας διαφερόντως τρόφιμον, εὐδιάφθορον δέ· οὔτε γὰρ γῆν οὔτε ἥλιον οὔτε πνεύματα, τοῖς ὕδασι σύντροφα τῶν ἐκ γῆς ἀναβλαστανόντων, ῥάδιον φεῖρειν φαρμακεύσεσιν ἢ ἀποτροπαῖς ἢ καὶ κλοπαῖς, περὶ δὲ τὴν ὕδατος φύσιν ἔστιν τὰ τοιαῦτα σύμπαντα δυνατὰ γίγνεσθαι, *Leg.* 8.845d4–e1.

³² This function is also given to the gods in *Lg.* 10.904a–905c.

³³ Cf. *Ti.* 42b with 90b–d.

2.3 Plato's Society of Gods

practical reasoning. The speech shows how practical reasoning finds some cosmological limitations, namely the immortality coming from the creative works of the Demiurge, and then overcomes them by giving a cosmological solution, which is a delegation of various functions to the younger gods. In other words, the core of the divine practical reasoning at this cosmological stage is the distribution of roles or, to use a more religiously charged term, the honours (*timai*) that belong to the gods.³⁴ Once again, Hesiod's poetry can be used as a convenient foil for understanding the distinctiveness of Timaeus' proposals. In the *Theogony*, the distribution of functions happens during Zeus's accession to power, when he realises that the previous supreme gods, Ouranos and Kronos, failed to incorporate other gods into the cosmic organisation and thus secure stability in the universe. Zeus integrates his brothers, sisters, children and some of the senior Titans to the new order by assigning them honours, prerogatives and spheres of activity in this world (*Th.* 885).³⁵ Zeus's act of distribution creates a society of gods, which is hierarchical and based on family ties: his active supervision of the gods resembles the way in which a patriarch governs a household.³⁶ By contrast, the rule of the Demiurge is indirect and based on expert knowledge.

The closest parallel to this, which would equally emphasise the importance of task distribution, can be found in Plato's *Statesman*, where the philosopher-king or a true politician applies practical reasoning for precisely the same purpose.³⁷ Just like the Demiurge, the statesman has a demiurgic, artisanal task to weave the citizens described as a sort of primary political matter into a unified political community through social engineering (*Plt.* 308b, 309c–311a). But since the citizens are also influenced by various public activities, the statesman supervises the lower-level political actors responsible for those civic activities, such as generals, orators and judges, and delegates to them the required tasks (303e–305e). Thus, the statesman creates a political community of citizens and within it a smaller

³⁴ For the *timai* as the divine functions, see Clay (2003) 12–29 and Parker (2005) 387–445.

³⁵ It is noteworthy that this idea is not a result of Zeus's practical reasoning, but of advice given by Gaia (*Th.* 884).

³⁶ For a similar conclusion on the society of gods in Homer, see Graziosi (2016) 55–7.

³⁷ See further Laks (1990) and Adoméas (2001).

community of political assistants. In a similar way, the Demiurge turns the younger gods into his mediators, who form a single commission of auxiliary forces with the task of supervising human beings. They have some autonomy in the implementation of the anthropogonic functions, since the Demiurge does not intervene into their sphere of action and departs from the world-building altogether. A key proviso here is that the younger gods will aim to achieve the objectives set in the commands of the Demiurge by imitating the demiurgic paradigm. Thus, the younger gods have a strict subordination to their creator in as much as they follow and implement his orders and providential plan. But among themselves they are equal irrespective of whether they belong to the group of traditional or cosmic gods, since they all have a shared function of creating and taking care of human beings.³⁸ Therefore, by assigning the anthropogonic function to the younger gods, the Demiurge creates a unique society of expert gods that are equal in terms of their function.

The speech of the Demiurge is perhaps the most political moment in the narrative. In Chapter 1, we saw that political vocabulary is avoided when discussing the creative works of the Demiurge. Instead, cosmogony was explained in technological terms. But with the origins of the younger gods the situation alters, for the plurality of gods has to assume some form of organisation. One alternative could be a kind of cosmic monarchy: the Demiurge would continue to rule the universe and the younger gods would become his direct subjects and emissaries to the human beings. But the preferred alternative is an aristocratic, perhaps even technocratic, government: the Demiurge creates the best sort of gods, a group of intelligent and benevolent beings whose interrelations are devoid of conflicts and war and whose knowledge is the basis of their skilful divine work. They are instituted to create and to supervise the lesser beings, and to give an ethical ideal for humans. The eschatological mechanism,

³⁸ The analogy with the *Statesman* works on two levels. With respect to the Demiurge and each other, the younger gods are like the auxiliaries of the statesman. But with respect to the human beings, they are more similar to the absolute kings of the age of Kronos, whose function is to nurture the subjects (cf. *Plt.* 271d–272b with *Ti.* 41b–d). For the vertical relation between the gods and humans in the myth of the *Statesman*, see Betegh (2021) 90–3.

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

moreover, ensures that the people leading the right kind of ethical life would have a chance to enter this aristocratic circle.

On the whole, Timaeus' understanding of anthropogony is not antagonistic to the more conventional patterns of religious thinking in so far as he associates the origins of humanity with the gods. What separates Timaeus from the poets and the civic myths is not so much the manner in which the gods create human beings – the technological approach – but the fact that the generation of human beings defines the younger gods as a community of beings. From a theological point of view, the anthropogonic function does not differentiate between those gods who are capable of creation and incapable of it. Instead, this function unifies them into a homogenous group, in which every divinity works in concert. The novelty lies in the idea that all gods share equally in the anthropogonic function and equally understand the providential plan. Unlike the gods in Hesiod's myth of the races, they become collectively successful at creating the right kind of humanity. And their act of creation achieves the intended objective at the first try, thus eliminating experimentation, the need to create and recreate humans until the results are satisfactory. From an ethical point of view, it implies that the gods begin their existence as beings whose primary role is to care for human beings and thus become the source of goodness for them. However, the narrative does not present the society of the younger gods as the patrons of the first polities, which is another conventional religious idea.³⁹ Cosmogony does not continue into politogony.⁴⁰ Timaeus respects the initial agreement with Critias and leaves this topic for him. Let us now examine Critias' take on the traditional gods.

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

Timaeus' cosmology is interposed between two speeches of Critias. The first speech is delivered in the beginning of the *Timaeus* (21a–26e) as a preliminary reply to Socrates. After giving

³⁹ On the traditional gods as the patron gods in Greek religion, see further Sissa and Detienne (2000) 140–7.

⁴⁰ The anthropogonic and politogonic narratives are rarely continuous in the early philosophers, see Betegh (2016).

an account highly reminiscent of the *Republic*, Socrates expresses a desire to transfer this account into the realm of action: he wants to see an ideal city in motion, interacting and competing with other cities in war and diplomacy (19b–c).⁴¹ In response, Hermocrates proposes to hear out Critias' recollection of how he learnt a true story (λόγου . . . ἀληθοῦς, 20d7–8) about two cities, Atlantis and primeval Athens, that meets the subject criterion. Although Critias agrees to narrate the forgotten events, he tells little of those cities and the war between them. His major preoccupation is to give credence to the remarkable line of transmission of the story, in which participated his family, the legendary lawgiver Solon and a mysterious Egyptian priest. The second speech forms the whole of another dialogue, the *Critias*. It is a direct follow-up to Timaeus' concluding remarks on anthropogony discussed above (see Section 2.2), and proceeds with the origins of human social institutions (politogony), thus adding a political angle that was missing in Timaeus' cosmological discourse. Critias gives here some more information about the two cities by revealing how Atlantis turned into an imperialist sea power and how primeval Athens became a virtuous land power. But apart from some minimal comments concerning the attempts of Atlantis at world domination, there is again next to nothing about the war itself. The second speech is far more concerned with the social and infrastructural conditions of the two cities. It is also the key source on the traditional gods, who are strongly featured in the origins and development of the first human communities.

The scholarship on the *Timaeus–Critias* diptych usually interprets Critias' two speeches as either a 'historical pastiche' or a 'charter myth' or both. The first view points out that the Athens–Atlantis story draws heavily on the Athenian political transformations in the fifth century BC. In this respect, the moderate land power that is primeval Athens resembles what the classical Athens

⁴¹ Lampert and Planeaux (1998) 88–90 observe that despite the *déjà vu*, the events of the *Timaeus–Critias* are not in direct sequence with the *Republic*. The company of the interlocutors is no longer composed of the philosophical youth of Athens, but of the mature statesmen, who meet not on the second day of the festival of Bendis, but during the Panathenaia, and Socrates' recapitulation omits the crucial question of the *Republic*, namely the philosopher-kings.

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

used to be under the ancestral constitution, or Sparta during the Peloponnesian war, whereas the sea power of Atlantis re-enacts either the Persian Empire or the rich naval empire that Athens became after the Persian wars. Accordingly, the war between these two powers is modelled after either the Persian wars or the Peloponnesian war, both of which were won by the defenders.⁴² These sources of inspiration are bound to form a moralistic story loaded with multiple lessons: the victory of Athens against Atlantis serves as a warning against expansionist geopolitics, as a reminder about the merits of a land power fighting a sea power and as advice on the internal political factors that make any city sustainable. The alternative way to read the story is to take the historical allusions as a rhetorical strategy to envelop the Socratic city, primeval Athens, in historical surroundings familiar to the contemporary Athenians. On this reading, Critias seems to follow the Platonic rules on poetry faithfully (cf. *R.* 3.388d–e, 10.607a) while composing a eulogy to the heroic success of the Socratic ideal in the fictional war for freedom and thus giving a foundation narrative for the perfect city.⁴³ The story responds to Socrates' original request by showing how the identity of virtuous utopia might develop over time and teaching future politicians how to tell philosophically correct stories, noble lies to their own citizens.

These interpretations capture important discursive patterns, but they tend either to focus on the relation between Socrates and Critias too heavily or to carve out the two speeches from their immediate dramatic setting entirely. What they usually miss is how the two speeches of Critias frame the speech of Timaeus. In what follows, I want to readdress this imbalance by evaluating Critias' strategies and ideas in relation to Timaeus' discourse, a connection that Critias himself is eager to advertise (*Ti.* 27a). I begin by arguing that the first speech is concerned with the methods of knowing the past. It exposes the general untrustworthiness of traditional Greek mythology when it comes to understanding human origins and offers a set of alternative methods of inquiry based on, for instance, cosmological explanation, family

⁴² See further Vidal-Naquet (1986) and (2007); Gill (1977), (1979) and (1980); Pradeau (1997); Broadie (2001) and (2012).

⁴³ See further Johansen (2004) 46; Loraux (1986) 296–303; Morgan (1998) 103–8.

memory and historical information preserved in writing (Section 2.4). The first speech is broadly preparatory for Timaeus' discourse both in a positive and a negative sense: after Critias' introduction, Timaeus no longer needs to prove the value of cosmology, but he has to reconsider other methodological tools of Critias. Next, I turn to the second speech delivered in the *Critias* and argue that Critias coordinates some aspects of politogony with Timaeus' cosmological findings. In particular, the gods are presented as teleologically functioning beings with an aetiological role to explain the first political communities (Section 2.5). For this reason, the second speech can be considered as an independent, but still a sound, supplement to Timaeus' cosmology.

Given the prominent role of gods in the second speech, it would be only too natural to jump to the *Critias* immediately without examining the first speech in the *Timaeus*. But this would unduly ignore the controversies that make Critias a suspicious speaker. As a historical person, Critias has a poor track record when it comes to his political legacy, philosophical skills as well as his relation with Socrates and nephew Plato.⁴⁴ As a literary character, Critias is usually approached as an 'unreliable narrator', even as a hijacker, who 'tyrannically seizes control of the conversation in the *Timaeus-Critias*' – all thanks to his convoluted and pretentious attempts at proving the veracity of the Athens-Atlantis story.⁴⁵ By contrast, the upshot of our Sections 2.4–2.5 is to improve this negative image and to show that Critias is a quite serious thinker, who manages to accommodate a renewed version of mythmaking within the cosmological discourse.⁴⁶ It is true that Critias is not a zealous disciple of philosopher Socrates or a blazing convert of

⁴⁴ The association with Socrates: Critias, DK88 A1; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.2.12–39. The role in setting up tyranny and the subsequent violent persecutions in Athens: Xenophon, *HG* 2.3.1–2.4.43. The unsuccessful attempts at recruiting Plato: *Ep.* 7.324b–325c. Critias is featured in several of Plato's dialogues, such as the *Charmides*, the *Protagoras* and, of course, the *Timaeus-Critias*. There is no consensus on Plato's stance with respect to Critias: Notomi (2000) says that Plato wants to distance himself and Socrates from the notorious public figure, while Danzig (2014) insists that Plato defends Critias by drawing a sympathetic picture of him.

⁴⁵ See Clay (2000) 15 and Flores (2018) 182.

⁴⁶ For a more detailed analysis on Plato's reception of myths, see Brisson (1970) 406–15; Pappas and Zelcer (2015) 158–9. On Plato's critique of popular stories, see Detienne (1989) 167–86.

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

cosmologist Timaeus, but nor is Critias as philosophically dull as he is usually understood to be. Critias is actually a dynamic participant, who fully engages with both main speakers and provides some valuable input to the overall discussion.

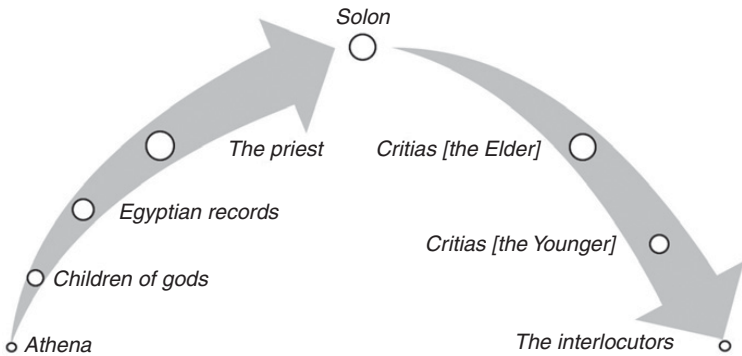
So why is Critias accused of bad faith? Perhaps the main reason is that Critias aims to reassure the audience that he did not come up with the story about Athens-Atlantis himself and defends an incredible way in which he received the story. First, Critias begins by explaining the inheritance of the story (*Ti.* 20e–21d). According to him, it came from the famous legislator Solon, who intended to transform the story into a poem, but was prevented by the political turmoil in Athens. Solon was a good friend of Dropides, who was the great-grandfather of Critias (the Younger), the character from our dialogue. And because of this relationship Solon probably spent some time with Dropides, which is the reason why Solon told the story to Dropides' son Critias the Elder, who is the grandfather of Critias the Younger.⁴⁷ Our Critias learned Solon's story from his grandfather during the festival of Apatouria. This intricate line of communication is summarised in Figure 2.1, which also points to a deeper level of transmission, the origins of the story (21e–23). Apparently, Solon learned the story from a nameless Egyptian priest, who in his turn acquired it from the records preserved 'in the sacred writings' (ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς γράμμασιν, 23e3), which were written in the temple inscriptions by the founding Egyptians (cf. γεγραμμένα, 24d7).⁴⁸ The very social structure of Egypt was handed down to the first citizens by their patron goddess.⁴⁹ In this way, the epistemic foundations reach the very beginnings of humanity and have a direct link to the gods.

⁴⁷ Some translators, such as Zeyl (2000) and Gill (2017), infer that Solon told the story to Dropides, who then told to Critias the Elder. The passage at 20d7–21a4 goes as follows: Ἄκουε δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάσῃ γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς, ὡς ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατος Σόλων ποτ' ἔφη. ἦν μὲν οὖν οἰκείος καὶ σφόδρα φίλος ἡμῖν Δρωπίδου τοῦ προπάππου, καθάπερ λέγει πολλαχοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῇ ποιήσει· πρὸς δὲ Κριτίαν τὸν ἡμέτερον πάππον εἶπεν, ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευεν αὐτὸς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ γέρων. The subject of ἦν at line 20e1 and λέγει at line 20e2 should be Solon and there is no reason why the subject of εἶπεν should change at line 20e4.

⁴⁸ The theme of knowledge and laws preserved in the sacred space is repeated throughout the *Timaeus-Critias*, see e.g. *Criti.* 119c–d.

⁴⁹ Instead of calling Athena by her name, the Egyptian priest always refers to the 'goddess' (ἡ θεὸς, 23d6; see also 24b5, 24c5). This ambiguous reference ensures a smooth transition to his further claim, which is that the very same goddess founded both the

Plato's Anthropogony and Politogony



The origins of the story (*Ti.* 21e–23d) The inheritance of the story (*Ti.* 20e–21d)

Figure 2.1 Critias' line of transmission

At this moment, modern critics would be ready to point out various complications surrounding the transmission: Critias is too apologetic to be persuasive, he mixes and matches oral and written traditions, he is eager to provide corroborative, but ultimately circumstantial, details and last but not least he has a relatively bad memory for telling a story which is several thousand years old.⁵⁰ It is impossible to deny these flaws. However, we should be less concerned about the obviously failed attempts to prove the truthfulness of the story and more about what his speech actually manages to achieve in the immediate dramatic setting. The line of transmission, I believe, is intended to remove the authority of Critias' own voice and substitute it with two competing voices of Solon and the Egyptian priest. This exchange between them is unmistakably a Herodotean *topos*. The episode is especially similar to the exchange between Hecataeus and a Theban priest, who compare and contrast their expertise in genealogies (*Hist.* 2.143).

Greek and the Egyptian polities. We can determine that the priest has Athena in mind rather than any Egyptian counterpart, such as Neith, thanks to his references to the classical myths of autochthony, such as Hephaestus' seduction, which are associated with Athena. By using this strategy, he retains the singularity of the patron goddess for both cities without engaging with a troublesome theological question – whether a god worshiped in different festivals and places has the same identity.

⁵⁰ For these points, see Clay (2000) 9–13.

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

More generally, Herodotus presents the Egyptian priests as experts in myths, religion and natural phenomena, as capable of demonstrating that human history reaches further than the Greeks suspect and of providing explanations that are not apparent to Greek thinking (e.g. 2.4, 2.19–28, 2.113–118). Critias follows suit by picking specifically a priest from Saïs, who is regarded by Herodotus as one of the wisest people he has met (2.28–29), and presenting Solon as indebted to the Egyptian laws (2.177). So the theme of priestly expertise is exploited to displace the Greek cultural authorities and sources and to prepare the ground for a new authority seemingly borrowed from the Egyptian stock.⁵¹ Let us take a closer look at how it takes place.

Solon's interest in Egyptian knowledge arose from indifference on the Egyptians' part to the stories regarded as the most ancient by the Greeks. Wishing to compare and contrast their expertise, Solon narrated the stories about the genealogies of Phoroneus, Niobe, Deucalion and Pyrrha, and presented them as a group of the first people, although the readers are not given any arguments in support of this idea. However, it seems that Solon's eccentric claim that Phoroneus is 'said to be the first human' (τοῦ πρώτου λεχθέντος, 22a6) comes from the mythical tradition of Argos, according to which Inakhos, the river-god of Argolis, produces the first human being by male parthenogenesis (Akousilaos, frs. 23–7 Fowler). His daughter Niobe is not identical with the famous Niobe, whose children were slain by Apollo and Artemis. In other sources, however, Phoroneus is just one of the primeval kings of Argos rather than the first man on earth (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.1.1–2).⁵² The inclusion of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the survivors of the flood, who repopulated the earth and began the Hellenic tribes (*Bibl.* 1.7.2–3; Pindar, *O.* 9.43–6), has to strengthen the impression that Solon is fluent in anthropogony, despite his Argive bias. But they cannot be the first people chronologically. What is more, there seems to be no direct connection between this couple and Phoroneus: Deucalion is usually regarded as the son of Prometheus (Hesiod, *Cat.* fr. 1), while Pyrrha is the daughter of Pandora and Epimetheus (Apollodorus,

⁵¹ On the Herodotean contexts, see further Pradeau (1997) 156–82.

⁵² See further Fowler (2013) 235–40.

Bibl. 1.7.2).⁵³ All of this has a peculiar impact on the image of Solon. Unexpectedly, he emerges not as an insightful lawgiver or a distinguished poet, but as a pre-philosophical mythographer, who has some understanding of the local and Panhellenic genealogies of heroes. And this is precisely the kind of authority that is about to be targeted by the Egyptians.

It is small wonder that upon hearing this sketchy and superficial information, one of the Egyptian priests laughs at Solon. According to him, the Greek myths and genealogies are nothing more than 'children's tales' (παίδων μύθων, *Ti.* 23b5), for they cannot trace their lineage back to the very beginning of humanity. We can discern at least three tools used by the priest to unearth the deeper layers of certain myths. The first is cosmology and meteorology by means of which the priest reveals certain facts about nature that are ingrained in the mythical imagination, a strategy already familiar from Plato's *Statesman* where the Eleatic Stranger performs a comparable act of deconstruction on the myths of Atreus, Kronos and autochthony (268e–269c). In a similar vein, the myth of Phaethon, for example, with its misguided protagonist who burnt the world with the chariot of Helios, is criticised by the priest for its flawed theological picture, that is from the perspective of *Republic* 2. The truth of the matter is that the heavenly bodies and their periodic movements are responsible for the periodic cycles of the destruction by cleansing the earth with fire (*Ti.* 22c–d). The priest also mentions the flood myths, which feature Deucalion and Pyrrha, and sharply observes that water cataclysms do not affect Egypt due to the different direction of water in this land (22d–e).⁵⁴ The value of these findings is emphasised by the fact that the Egyptian polity instituted cosmology as an officially approved science (24b–c), which mimics both the status of astronomy in the *Republic* (7.527d–530c) and the status of cosmology in the *Laws* (7.820e–821d, 12.966b–967e).

The second tool is written history by means of which the priest explains how the social structures of Egypt and Athens were

⁵³ Cf. Fowler (2013) 117–18, whose exploration of the missing link via Plato's *Timaeus* and Akousilaos ends with no conclusive results.

⁵⁴ There are more observations concerning the influence of temperature on society (22e, 24c) and how topographical idiosyncrasy can explain the distant past (25d).

2.4 Critias the Mythmaker

conceived. The next myth to be dissected concerns the autochthonous Athenian origins, according to which they came to be when Gaia was impregnated with the seed of Hephaestus, gave birth to Erichthonios, and then he was reared by Athena. The reality behind it, the priest notes, is preserved in the sacred records (23e, 24d). According to them, Athena herself brought forth the political order of Athens together with Egypt by giving them a perfect constitution, but without specifying the legal details and the actual social organisation (23d, 24c–d).⁵⁵ To have a better grasp of it the priest offers to take a look at analogous laws in Egypt, which are somewhat reminiscent of the *Republic*. They envision a society of six classes instead of three as found in Socrates' Kallipolis, with the priestly class on top instead of the philosophers, and with cosmology as the highest science instead of dialectics (24a–c).⁵⁶ But if we slightly modify the perspective, the Egyptian constitution actually has three main social classes: (1) the educated class (priests); (2) the military class (warriors); (3) the providers (craftsmen, shepherds, farmers, hunters). The resulting view differs from what we come to know about the best city in *Republic* 6, but not so much from the Laconistic constitution of Books 2–5. Crucially, it corresponds to Socrates' summary of his speech from the previous day in the *Timaeus* (17c–19a), which is the more relevant *comparandum*. Be that as it may, the emphasis on the recorded history signals that Critias has more faith in the value of written memory than Plato's *Phaedrus* (274c–275b), in which king Thamus objects that writing will increase forgetfulness, since people will no longer rely on their own memory, and it will grant only superficial wisdom, for they will know many contingent facts without any supporting arguments. But Critias is by no means eager to equate the utility of written knowledge with dialectical enquiry. After all, the Athens-Atlantis story is only

⁵⁵ Some commentators think that Athena herself governs the Athenians (e.g. Thein (2008) 77), which, as I argue below, is at odds with the more nuanced theory in the *Critias* (109c–d).

⁵⁶ Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.164, which ascribes seven classes to the Egyptian society, and 2.15.3, which regards the Egyptians as one of the first people on the earth. See also Stephens (2016), who investigates further similarities between Plato's utopian constitution and the historical Egypt.

meant to support Socrates' ideas about the perfect city rather than replace it.

The third and perhaps the least discussed tool is the family memory by means of which this story originated and was passed to the Greeks in the first place. Critias justifies his own privileged access to the divine knowledge precisely through his own family and genealogy (20d–21b) – the matters that are *oikeia* to him. This family received the story, because Solon was not only a friend, but also a relative of Dropides (οἰκεῖος, 20e1). It is remarkable that the Egyptians were keen on sharing their knowledge with Solon for a reason similar to the one we find in Critias' family: the priest claims that the Greeks are 'in some way related to them' (τινα τρόπον οἰκεῖοι, 21e7). The context suggests that their kinship comes from the fact that both nations have the same goddess, of whom the Athenians and the Egyptians are adopted children. In fact, the priest insists that all people who built and lived in the first cities were the offspring of gods, products of their making and education (γεννήματα καὶ παιδεύματα θεῶν, *Ti.* 24d5–6).⁵⁷ From Critias to the patron goddess, we have a repeating pattern: the informing agents relate the story because of their being *oikeioi* in relationship with the informed. By this point, the emphasis on familiarity, attachment and the privilege they grant should not surprise us. We were prepared for it by both Socrates, who wanted to hear out someone with a sense of political belonging at the Panathenaic festival, which celebrates the Athenian roots, and Critias, who inherited a family story at the festival of Apatouria, which initiates young Athenians into their political community.⁵⁸ The *oikeios* criterion for receiving information about the gods and the origins of humanity may seem insignificant in comparison to the more rigorous criteria provided by Timaeus' cosmology. But it is curious that when Timaeus turns to the origins of the traditional gods at 40d–41a (T1), he claims that we have to rely on those who are the children of gods (ἐκγόνοις . . . θεῶν οὔσιν, 40d8) and familiar with them (οἰκεῖα, 40e2).

⁵⁷ Cf. *Lg.* 5.739d, which suggests that the inhabitants of the perfect cities were the children of gods.

⁵⁸ For these festivals, see further Parker (2005) 254–6, 268, 458–61.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

If anything, it shows that Timaeus listened to the myth of Critias closely. He is happy that through the Egyptian priest Critias has already paved the way for cosmological investigation and so he does not spend more time at validating the purpose and benefits of such an endeavour. However, the problematic claim that Critias has a true *logos* about Athens-Atlantis to deliver (20d) obliges Timaeus to reconsider the *muthos-logos* distinction and, as we saw in Section 1.1, to explain why he can give nothing more than a likely story (*eikōs muthos*) about the origins of the universe. In addition, we also saw that the stories about the traditional gods based on familiarity are neither probable (*eikōs*), nor philosophically necessary (*anankaios*), which applies to the first speech of Critias retrospectively as well. Although Timaeus is quite critical in this regard, we also have to remember that he ignores a number of political and historical issues raised by Critias that fall outside his discourse and cannot be evaluated by cosmological methods. The discursive boundaries are respected. It is now time to see whether Critias was an equally attentive listener.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

In Section 2.4 I claimed that Critias' discursive strategy prepares the setting for Timaeus' cosmology. My next argument shall be that Critias' second speech, which follows immediately after Timaeus' account, is not a mere repetition or expansion of the first speech. Instead, Critias carefully listens to Timaeus' cosmological insights and when the moment comes to give the second speech, reformulates his own framework so that it would partly reflect what was established by Timaeus. This strategy was already anticipated in the concluding remarks of the first speech at 27a–b, where Critias promised his interlocutors that the second speech will triangulate between the ideas coming from Timaeus, Socrates and Solon.⁵⁹ In so far as Timaeus is concerned, Critias' particular

⁵⁹ Rashed and Auffret (2017) 239–41 have recently doubted the authenticity of the *Critias* on the grounds that Critias envisages only two speeches in *Ti.* 27a–b, one by Timaeus and another by him, whereas Socrates anticipates a third speech from Hermocrates in *Criti.* 108a–c. The argument is unpersuasive. First, we cannot use this passage in the *Timaeus* in order to challenge the authenticity of the *Critias*, because it is precisely the

promise was to continue the story with such a conception of human beings as developed by Timaeus' anthropogony.⁶⁰ We will see, however, that Critias goes the extra mile in his quest to bridge the gap between the two discourses: first, he revisits the epistemic status of the story and unlike in the first speech, he avoids committing to its factual truth; second, he creates a new link to cosmology by exploring the prehuman situation in which the society of gods operated; third, the story says next to nothing about the war between Athens and Atlantis, which is the usual object of contemporary scholarly discussions – the main focus now becomes the origins of the first political communities. My aim is to show that the cosmological discourse leaves enough space for the creation of new political myths, which is why Critias can try to synchronise his mythmaking with Timaeus' cosmology.

The second speech starts with Critias' plea for a sympathetic hearing of the story about Athens and Atlantis (*Criti.* 107a). He classifies the verbal discourses on divine and human subjects as 'imitation and representation' (μίμησιν . . . καὶ ἀπεικασίαν, 107b5–6) and compares them to drawings. Critias argues that the discourses on gods are like pictorial representations of earth, woods or the sky – no one really has competence on these subjects, and the observer will be satisfied with such paintings even if they are slightly imprecise. Specifically, most people are incapable of having accurate knowledge of gods (οὐδὲν εἰδότες ἀκριβῆς περὶ τῶν τοιοῦτων, 107c6–7), which leads them to produce obscure

place where another speech of Critias, which is not given in the *Timaeus*, is anticipated – a separate dialogue, which is the *Critias* itself. Second, it is not Critias who proposes to hear out two speeches in the *Timaeus* and then forgets about this in the *Critias*. It is Socrates who asks for another speaker in the *Critias*. Who forbade him from asking for a new speech? In a way, the situation is comparable to how Timaeus and Critias interact with Socrates at the very beginning of the *Timaeus*: Socrates requested to see the perfect city in action, but Timaeus and Critias explored some additional historical and cosmological material that was absent in the initial request. The fact that they did something that Socrates did not ask them to do does not cast any doubt on the authenticity of their accounts, and thus the authenticity of the *Timaeus*. On the sequence of speeches, see O'Meara (2017) 13–18.

⁶⁰ On this point, see Pradeau (1997) 130. On the dramatic relationship between Timaeus and Critias, see a sceptical reading by Broadie (2012) 117–72. For a more positive reading and the connection of cosmology and politogony, see Lampert and Planeaux (1998) 119–23; Betegh (2016) 10–16; Gill (2017) 21–34.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

(ἄσαφεῖ, 107d1) theological accounts with small degree of likelihood (βραχυῶς . . . ὁμοιότητα, 107c5). A truthful theological discourse is characterised by precision, clarity and high correspondence with the divine nature, though many are pleased to hear something about the divine even if it has little likelihood (σμικρῶς εἰκότα λεγόμενα, 107d7). But the discourses on human beings have to exhibit always these characteristics and become like pictures of the body – they require a ‘complete likeness’ (πάσας . . . τὰς ὁμοιότητος, 107d4–5), for everyone feels an expert in questions which are intimate and familiar to them. In other words, the audience expects from someone like Critias the kind of detailed story that can only result from having accurate knowledge.

Some scholars have taken this analogy as yet another instance of Critias’ pretension to a narrative with a higher epistemic status or degree of certainty than Timaeus’ discourse.⁶¹ It is true that we can find Critias judging his narrative in light of Timaeus’ story. He rightly characterises the cosmological-theological narrative as *eikōs logos* (107d6–7; cf. *Ti.* 29d2). And even if it has a low level of plausibility, he adds that his own discourse, in comparison, is mere improvisation (ἐκ δὴ τοῦ παραχρῆμα νῦν λεγόμενα, *Criti.* 107d8–e1). Contrary to the first speech, the second speech will refrain from insisting on the factual truth of his narrative and instead will rely solely on the writings and memory Critias possesses (108d–e, 113b).⁶² Thus, it does not advocate that this method is of higher epistemic value in relation to cosmology, despite the fact that Critias remains committed to the quasi-historical approach inherited from the Egyptians, though without hiding before their voices anymore (an exception: 110b). A more generous approach to Critias’ analogy would say that Critias is warning about the rhetorical situation of his speech: even if we hear a precise account of human affairs, it would still strike one as less persuasive than Timaeus’ story about the gods simply because the audience would feel more competent in Critias’ subject. Critias excuses himself in advance for being incapable of delivering what

⁶¹ For example, Osborne (1996) 187–8.

⁶² On this point, see Gill (2017) 22–3, 34–8. Cf. Pradeau (1997) 22–39 and Johansen (2004) 31–47, who do not make room for the methodological differences in the two speeches.

the audience expects of him. But he also promises them to aim at something similar to these expectations (107d–108a).

Let us now take a closer look at the opening of Critias' narrative. The story no longer begins with the creation of human beings. The new opening describes the prehuman phase and the divine allotment of the earth. In Greek myths, the gods usually choose their territories after the cities are already established, which means that they personally do not create their cities.⁶³ We can see that this aetiological sequence is reversed by starting with the drawing of lots and then transforming the traditional gods into the founding fathers and mothers. The method of division has to respect the nature of the gods and so every divinity must receive what is due to it, namely the lands that 'are fitting to each of them . . . and more belong to them' (τὰ πρέποντα ἑκάστοις . . . τὸ μᾶλλον ἄλλοις προσήκον, 109b3–4). In this way, the discourse of Critias lacks the typical conflicts of gods over the territorial claims, which is especially relevant to Poseidon, who is usually depicted as an active contestant in the Greek foundation myths, the best known of which is his conflict with Athena over Athens.⁶⁴ Thus, the allotment was carried out with justice, knowledge and without any kind of hostilities (109b). So far, Critias seems to understand the theological regulations concerning the descriptions of gods (cf. *R.* 2.378b–d). In addition, this part of his speech revisits the idea established in the speech of the Demiurge – the gods form a society and cooperate while creating human beings – and makes the gods behave in a similar manner to Timaeus' gods.⁶⁵

The emphasis on the uniqueness of each allotment, moreover, shows that neither the earth nor the gods are uniform. The conventional plurality of traditional gods and their individual characters

⁶³ On this point, see Sissa and Detienne (2000) 140–5. Their primary examples are Argos and Athens, though they also consider Naxos, Aegina, Troezen and Corinth as following this pattern. However, see Pindar, *O.* 7.54–63, where Helios acquires Rhodes before the cities are established. See also MacSweeney (2013) 44–156, whose examination of the charter myths in Ionia show that the founders of cities are usually various migrants, legendary figures and children of gods; Calame (2017) explores the role of Poseidon, Apollo, Zeus and the oikist Battus in the foundation of Cyrene.

⁶⁴ For the disputes of Poseidon with Athena, Hera, Zeus, Dionysus and Apollo, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.55; Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.1.4, 3.14.1; Pausanias 2.1.6, 2.14.4–5, 2.30.6, 2.33.2; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 9.6.1.

⁶⁵ For a similar approach to Critias' gods, see Thein (2008) 74–9.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

are preserved in the narrative. The same is true of the physical world, where each part of the earth has its own climatic peculiarities.⁶⁶ The novel factor here is the connection of both features and make the qualities of a given deity reflected in the chosen soil.⁶⁷ If the earth had been continuous in its climatic characteristics or the cities had been established by uniform cosmic gods, each portion of the earth would have been populated by similar communities. But now the geographical and theological differences make each city somewhat unique.⁶⁸ As we will see in a moment, Athena receives lands suitable for the development of wisdom and crafts, whereas Poseidon acquires an island suitable for seamanship. Presumably, one could also expect that the lands of Ares would be appropriate for martial life, while the city of Apollo would promote the arts of the Muses. This is not an entirely new idea in Plato's works. In Chapter 1 we saw that a correspondence between a divine character and political organisation finds an analogy on the individual level in the *Phaedrus* myth (252c–253c), in which Socrates introduces a great procession of the Olympian gods, where each god has different character patterns. In Chapter 3 moreover, we will explore how the Athenian Stranger of the *Laws* approaches various traditional gods as representations of different moral virtues. What Critias, Socrates and the Athenian have in common is a strategy to bring out the theological unity of traditional gods at the price of limiting their nature to a specific character trait, virtue, political idea, function or a certain combination of them.

Just before turning to the original settlements, we find a special emphasis on the identities of the patron gods. Primeval Athens has two patron gods, Athena and Hephaestus. This is not especially surprising, since the two gods were not only intimately related in

⁶⁶ These differences are also derivable to a large extent from the annual path of the sun, which gives rise to the tropics.

⁶⁷ On this point, see also Broadie (2012) 152.

⁶⁸ In this respect then, Critias' account also presupposes a kind of Montesquieuan link between the political organisation and geography. On 'political climatology' in Plato, see Galen, *QAM* 64.19–67.16 and Pradeau (1997) 56–66. The need for a just distribution of lands is usually evoked in establishing new colonies, see *Lg.* 5.736c–738a. The Magnesian lawgiver achieves it by safeguarding the strict geometrical equality of surface areas, while the gods of Critias consider the qualitative differences of the soil.

the charter myth of historical Athens, but also worshipped together in the *Hephaisteia* as the craftsmen's gods.⁶⁹ The twist here is to explain their close relationship and cooperation as ensuing from their similar nature: these gods are lovers of wisdom and expertise, *philosophoi* and *philotechnoi* (*Criti.* 109c7–8). Critias retreats from the sexual vocabulary he used in his first speech, where he relied on the myth of autochthony for the idea that Athena raised the Athenians from the seed of Hephaestus (*Ti.* 23d–e). On a closer inspection, the birth of the Athenians is now a purely horticultural process, almost as an implantation of sprouts in the earth, thus mimicking how Timaeus' gods sowed the human souls in planets (*Ti.* 42d–e; cf. *Plt.* 272d–e). And once the human matter is ripe and ready, the gods insert the best kind of intellectual capacities into human beings (see T16 below), which again reaffirms the technical expertise of these gods and their care for wisdom. Just as in the first speech, Athena raises citizens 'most similar to her' (προσφερεστάτους αὐτῆς, *Ti.* 24d1–2), which evokes the ideal of godlikeness (see further Section 3.1).

By contrast, Atlantis has a single patron god, Poseidon, who is associated with sexual potency and boundless physical power. Poseidon receives an island and remodels it into a central hill surrounded by two aquatic circles and three circles made of earth (*Criti.* 113d–e), which loosely imitate the circular structure of the universe (cf. *Ti.* 36d).⁷⁰ The Atlantids then are generated from Poseidon's sexual intercourse with a mortal woman named Cleito, thereby making their origins partly divine, partly human. This also sharply contrasts with the asexual generation of the Athenians. It is worthwhile, however, to note that Cleito herself is not produced by Poseidon: her family was as autochthonous as the Athenians (*Criti.* 113c8–d2). The idea of copulation expresses Critias' aim of giving the gods distinctive individual qualities and this is perhaps the first and only deviation of Critias from the rules of speaking about the gods that we find in Books 2–3 of the *Republic*.

⁶⁹ On this festival, see Parker (2005) 471–2.

⁷⁰ This an activity is certainly worthy of his traditional title the 'earth-shaker' (Ἐννοσίγαιος, *Homeric Hymns* 22.4; Pindar, *P.* 4.32) and finds parallels in other regional myths, such as the Thessalian story of the origins of the channel through which the Peneios river flows (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.129.4).

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

The biological framework intrinsic to the settlement of Atlantis will later become the key explanation for its further political development. Incidentally, Athena who produces her people as an artisan and Poseidon who begets them as a father represent the two aspects of the Demiurge who is jointly a maker and a father (see Section 1.1). The problem, however, is that *Critias*' gods were not meant to create their own distinctive peoples. If the story was to continue Timaeus' narrative fully, they should have preoccupied themselves only with the foundations of political communities, for by the time the earth was allotted the younger gods had already finished the creation of human beings.

The prehuman phase terminates with the gods' appropriation of different territories and generation of their people. Let us now look at the subsequent political organisations in different cities. The creation of the Athenian constitution is captured in a short passage, which directly follows the generation of the Athenian people:

T16 [H]aving made the good men autochthonous, they implanted to [their] mind the constitutional order. (*Criti.* 109d1–2)

ἄνδρας δὲ ἀγαθοὺς ἐμποιήσαντες αὐτόχθονας ἐπὶ νοῦν ἔθεσαν τὴν τῆς πολιτείας τάξιν.

The passage encapsulates both divine and human contributions towards the origins of the city without one side outweighing the other. Instead of asserting that the patron gods personally made the laws and then handed them down to the people, *Critias* claims that the patron gods inserted the understanding of perfect government in the minds of the Athenians. Athena and Hephaestus make a collective revelation of the perfect city to the people who have no previous worldly experience, no knowledge about political affairs, and are unaffected by particular historical circumstances.⁷¹ They are like the children with whom Socrates would find it possible to build Kallipolis (cf. *R.* 7.540e–541a), but the major difference is that each citizen starts his or her existence educated by the two gods and already knowing the paradigm of the perfect city. Relying on this divine gift, the Athenians can devise the legal

⁷¹ This scene reminds one of the Protagoras myth, in which Zeus distributes political art among the human species (*Prt.* 322c–d).

framework. And since each citizen has access to this knowledge, they can collectively compose the exemplary constitution without further recourse to the gods.⁷²

In this context, it is important to note a reconsideration of the pastoral images, which were used both in the first speech and at the beginning of the second speech (*Ti.* 23d; *Criti.* 109b.). Instead of relying on such traditional notions as ‘herdsman’ and ‘flock’ to account for the relationship between the gods and the people, Critias uses the analogy of helmsmen and ship (109c), which is a standard Platonic political analogy implying a rational direction of a soul.⁷³ In other words, Athena and Hephaestus do not coerce the Athenians into following the idea of a perfect city, but persuade their souls (πειθοῖ ψυχῆς, 109c3), so that they would come to know why this form of the city is the best possible one. The mechanism of revelation, therefore, is not irrational. It is reminiscent of the long preambles in the *Laws*, where each law has its prelude that persuades of its rightness. It is also reminiscent of the way in which the cosmic Intellect persuades Necessity to move the universe towards perfection in the *Timaeus*. Likewise, Critias holds that divine knowledge has an internal mechanism that allows it to persuade the agent into following the best course of action.

Let us conclude the origins of Athens with a short overview of its constitutional arrangements. The Athenians produced out of their divine knowledge a community of virtuous citizens, (1) which had artisan and guardian classes (110c3–6) and (2) an educational programme for them (110c6–7); (3) which abolished private property for the rulers (110c7–d1) and (4) established an

⁷² For a similar reading, see Brisson (1970) 408. In *Republic* 6, Socrates claims that a possible human founder of the perfect city ‘neither is, nor ever has been, nor will be’ (οὔτε γὰρ γίγνεται οὔτε γέγονεν οὐδὲ οὖν μὴ γένηται, 6.492e3), because such a person needs a divine character, and so this requirement can only be satisfied in an exceptional situation through ‘divine providence’ (θεοῦ μοῖραν, 6.493a1–2). In the famous passage at 6.499a–c, Socrates introduces two possibilities for such an exception to emerge: either the current rulers have to be inspired by the gods (ἐκ τίνος θείας ἐπιπνοίας, 6.499c1), or the current philosophers must turn to politics by chance (τις ἐκ τύχης, 6.499b5). As we know from *Lg.* 4.709b–c, ‘chance’ is just another name to designate the divine actions. In both cases divine assistance is the condition of possibility for the best constitution to emerge. It seems that Critias’ account satisfies the first option, namely the divine inspiration.

⁷³ Cf. *Euthd.* 291d, *R.* 6.489b.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

equality of gender (110b5–c2); which (5) included more unspecified activities of the so-called ‘guardians’ (110d4). If we compare with the *Republic*, the most notable omissions are (i) communal wives and husbands, and (ii) the rule of philosopher-kings, though the latter might fall under (5). Although the restated social organisation lacks the complete form of *Republic* 6, one should be cautious in drawing a conclusion from this picture that the primeval Athens is fundamentally different from Kallipolis. Critias’ task was not to repeat the social organisation of Kallipolis, but to present a living representation of Socrates’ philosophical city that would be capable of withstanding any political and military challenge – an objective, which he otherwise successfully accomplishes.

Moreover, we can see that the character traits of the patron gods have an explanatory role in both the generation and organisation of the city. Athena’s and Hephaestus’ expertise and wisdom translate into the origins of the Athenians as intelligent and virtuous people capable of bringing about a rational constitution by themselves. Athena’s union with Hephaestus not only leads towards the emergence of the artisan class, but also exemplifies the skilled and complex urban planning, which separates different classes from each other (110c), whilst at the same time giving them the kind of infrastructure they need for their social roles (112b–d). Finally, Athena’s militant character serves to explain the prominence of the military class as well as its exceptional skills in war, while her ambiguous gender identity serves to explain the gender equality in the city: the primeval Athenians made images of an armed goddess, because her ‘appearance and temple statue’ (σχημα καὶ ἄγαλμα, 110b5) represent the fact that both men and women served in the army and were capable of moral achievements. The patron gods, therefore, created institutions and social norms, which would facilitate the imitation of the character traits that are dear to them.

In comparison to Athena and Hephaestus, Poseidon seems to be more hands-on with the creation of Atlantis. After the birth of his sons, Poseidon divided the island into ten smaller communities and distributed each of them to his five pairs of twins. He

determined the relationships between them by forming a federation of princes presided over by the eldest son (114a) and gave them the laws:

T17 But the power among them and community was regulated according to the commands of Poseidon, which were handed down as the law and records by the first [rulers] inscribed on a stele of orichalcum, which was placed in the temple of Poseidon in the middle of the island. (*Criti.* 119c5–d2)

ἡ δὲ ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἀρχὴ καὶ κοινωνία κατὰ ἐπιστολάς ἦν τὰς τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος, ὡς ὁ νόμος αὐτοῖς παρέδωκεν καὶ γράμματα ὑπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐν στήλῃ γεγραμμένα ὀρειχαλκίῃ, ἣ κατὰ μέσην τὴν νῆσον ἔκειτ' ἐν ἱερῷ Ποσειδῶνος.

Like Athena and Hephaestus, Poseidon is presented as a bringer of civilisation, which is quite an original way to characterise the god usually depicted as a temperamental power of nature.⁷⁴ Although T17 is usually interpreted as a confirmation of Poseidon's personal law-making, there seems to be a mixture of divine and human agency comparable to what we saw in the Athenian case.⁷⁵ Poseidon communicated the laws as orders delivered as messages (ἐπιστολαί), but did not inscribe them on stone himself. This area of action, which consists of writing down what they heard and understood, was retained by the Atlantid kings together with a permission to implement the laws within their own domains however they wanted (119c).

The result was a monarchical federation with a presiding king, whose power was both secured and limited by the laws forbidding for the rest of the kings (1) to wage a war against any of the royal branches (120c7–8), or (2) to execute any of the princes without the consent of the majority (120d3–5), and requiring them (3) to give military assistance to each king in the case of emergency (120c6–7).⁷⁶ A notable feature of these laws is the general expectation that the kings will always have mutual consultations on criminal, military and political matters. Despite the leadership being given to the senior house, the final decision belonged to the judgement of the majority of

⁷⁴ Cf. Deacy (2008) 79–80.

⁷⁵ For the orthodox reading, see Voegelin (1957) 210; Ramage: (1978) 18; Gill (1980) 68; Broadie (2012) 116n1. For alternative reading, which I follow, see Brisson (1970) 426–7; Vidal-Naquet (1986) 274; Bertrand (2009) 17.

⁷⁶ On federalism in Greek politics, see Larsen (1968) xv–xxviii.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

kings (cf. I20d1–3 with I20d4–5).⁷⁷ For this purpose, they formed a royal council, a supplementary institution to support the functioning of the laws, where the kings ‘discuss the common affairs meeting in gatherings’ (συλλεγόμενοι δὲ περὶ τε τῶν κοινῶν ἐβουλεύοντο, I19d4). The political arrangement was strengthened by two additional factors. First, the kings acquired a share in virtue through their divine origin and kinship with Poseidon. Second, the kings created a ritual framework to communicate with Poseidon through a kind of divination, in which they re-enacted the founding oaths, imitated the founding kings, strengthened the collective decisions with divine approbation, hence ‘renewing the legislative contract’.⁷⁸

The latter, however, was not a stable basis for their virtue, since it was grounded in divine genealogy which was bound to be contaminated by marriages with human beings. This process did not produce an outright rift in the city. The second and subsequent generations still were governed by an exemplary constitution, presumably because the laws and religion held at bay the process of deterioration that began on the biological level. For a certain period of time, Atlantis was governed by reason, and its possessions grew due to the general disposition towards virtue and communal affection in the city (I20e–I21a). The continuous increase in wealth, of course, was not a neutral factor. From a political perspective, Atlantis’ wealth surely put an extra pressure on the city by providing a temptation to treat wealth as an end in itself.⁷⁹ But it is not the effective cause of why the political community ultimately began to decline. The main factor was the shrinking levels of divine nature and the increasing domination of

⁷⁷ Their judgments were passed as laws inscribed on separate golden tablets rather than the stele of orichalcum. According to Bertrand (2009) 24, τὰ δίκασθέντα in I20c3 testifies that their decisions were taken *in corpore*.

⁷⁸ Bertrand (2009) 23. On divination, see further Gill (1980) 69; Mezzadri (2010). The ritual contained a sacrifice of a bull, whose death was interpreted as chosen by the god and representing his message to the kings.

⁷⁹ Pradeau (1997) 269–71, 276 provides a compelling argument that the rapid growth in material possessions and other resources is related to the urban vision of Atlantis. Contrary to primeval Athens, designed as an enclosed civic space with habitable zones sufficient for maintaining a stable population, the circular districts of Atlantis have no definite planning. Except for the central acropolis, which functions as the guarantee of political stability, each of the remaining circles is merely an amalgam of various military, commercial and residential functions, repeating each other and multiplying without a determinate final point.

human character, which was prone to avarice, *pleonexia* (121a–b).⁸⁰ When the critical level of deficiency was reached, the material possessions became the primary target of the city, and Atlantis transformed into a bad constitution.⁸¹

A close reading of the constitutional arrangements of Atlantis should prevent us from a straightforward conclusion that Atlantis represents an ‘immoral’ or ‘degraded’ counterpart to primeval Athens. If that was the case, it would imply that Poseidon had intentionally created a defective political community, which goes against the rules on speaking about the gods. In our reconstruction, the foundation narrative tells a story about virtuous, pious and lawful monarchy of the Atlantids. As argued above, the difference between Athena's and Poseidon's foundations lies not in the preferred type of government.⁸² Both the aristocracy of philosophers and the monarchy grounded in quasi-divine qualities throughout Plato's main political dialogues are considered to be the best constitutions.⁸³ The main difference concerns the origins and the ways of sustaining political community: Athens emerged through inspired political reasoning, whereas Atlantis was a result of divine instructions; Athens was maintained through education and self-persuasion, whereas Atlantis was guarded by religion and laws. These differences are reflected in Critias' commitment to the plurality of patron gods and the diversity of the original space. In this scenario, each god received what was due to her or him, which made it inconceivable that Poseidon would acquire anything else than a place for a future seaport. Though naval powers in Platonic geopolitics are usually doomed to failure, it is worth noting that Atlantis did not collapse because of being a maritime state (Cf. *Lg.* 4.704e–707d). As we have seen, its ruin was caused not by external factors such as commerce or imported vicious habits, but by an

⁸⁰ Gill (1977) 297.

⁸¹ The story is in many ways parallel to the description of Persia in Plato's *Laws*. In its peak as an exemplary monarchy, Persia also boasted of a wise government based on counsel, friendship and communal reason (*Lg.* 3.694b). But a royal genealogy failed to uphold the political standards. Persia lost its good constitution due to the lack of proper education of the rulers (3.694c–d). Does it indicate that Atlantis would have fared better with stronger educational provisions? It can hardly be so, for it is significant that the primeval Athens eventually disappears too despite having the right kind of education.

⁸² For a similar view, see Mezzadri (2010) 399.

⁸³ See *R.* 4.445d, 5.473d–e; *Plt.* 292b–e, 301c–e.

2.5 The Patron Gods and Politogony in the *Critias*

internal inability to produce virtuous rulers. The deficiency of Atlantis is to some extent traceable to Poseidon, because he failed to provide appropriate safeguards to the Atlantids against this moral threat. The proliferation of excessive and luxurious urban designs of Atlantis and its island (*Criti.* 115c–117e) both reflects the character traits of Poseidon and may encourage the Atlantids to develop those very dispositions. We can draw a twofold conclusion: the constitution of Atlantis is not bad *per se*, but it is inferior to Athens; Poseidon is not a negligent god, but his providential care is inferior to that of Athena and Hephaestus. That being said, the ultimate blame for the war between Athens and Atlantis is on the Atlantids rather than Poseidon, since it was up to them to decide what to do with the arrangements the god provided for the city. Accordingly, the story finishes with Zeus punishing the wicked human beings rather than their patron gods (121b–c). What the story teaches us is that the organisation of the allotted territory reflects the nature of the patron god, but the subsequent history of the city reflects the moral decisions of human beings.

To sum up, I have argued that *Critias* frames the Athens-Atlantis story in such a way as to make it not about a specific political event, which happened in the distant past, but about the beginnings of cities, and thus about the political origins as such. This reading aims to make a better sense of the initial division of tasks between the interlocutors and it considers the philosophical proposals as entirely serious. *Critias*' response to Socrates' request prepared the setting for Timaeus' discourse by explaining the impact of cosmic processes on human history and proposing to investigate the nature and origins of the cosmos before the generation of humanity. In Chapter 1, we saw that Timaeus, in turn, was willing to explain the nature of gods in such a way as to make room for a more conventional discourse. The latter was accomplished by including the traditional gods into the new theogony and, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, attributing to them (and the cosmic gods) the function of generating human beings. And since Timaeus makes the traditional gods responsible for the origins of humanity, *Critias* is free to use the gods in his own narrative on the origins of politics. In other words, the traditional gods in *Critias*' political myth are derivable from Timaeus' cosmology, but the specific political aspect of their creative activity is an

extension rather than a continuation of the anthropogonic function established by Timaeus.

On the whole, Timaeus and Critias share a number of important assumptions: both of them frame their speeches as responses to Socrates, some of their key tenets pertain to the shared Greek cultural horizon, and, notably, they believe that the traditional gods have an important place in this world. As Gábor Betegh has argued, the two discourses are continuous in so far as both of them depict the gods as teleologically oriented beings in terms of their contribution to the origins and perfection of human beings. However, the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* are discontinuous in so far as the personal character traits of the traditional gods, preferred by Critias' political myth, are not derivable from cosmology.⁸⁴ Critias has to retain the specificity of gods, since it plays an important explanatory role in his account by giving the first cities a distinctive character. The diversity of the traditional gods is reflected in their personal motivations, particular actions and the polities they produce, and explains why human beings have such different ways of organising their communal life.⁸⁵ Although the official reason why politogony and cosmogony are kept as separate discourses is the initial task distribution among the interlocutors of the *Timaeus-Critias*, the true reason, I believe, is this particular advantage of using the traditional gods in comparison to the cosmic gods – for the uniform and orderly character of the cosmic gods would be a weak explanatory factor for such a complex, diverse and unpredictable phenomenon as politics.

The theological account of politogony is a sharp reaction to the previous philosophical takes on the origins of civilisation. First, it dismisses the mechanistic worldview, which would ground human progress in the internal workings of human nature. Timaeus' cosmology provided a genuine possibility for such an option by showing how certain political and ethical outcomes can find their source in the psychosomatic setup of humans (see Section 2.2). Instead, Critias chooses to pursue an agent-based model in some ways similar not only to the demiurgic cosmology, but also to the religious tradition. Second, it dismisses developmental accounts of human progress, according to which humans have to undergo certain stages of

⁸⁴ Betegh (2016) 13–15. ⁸⁵ On this point, see further Thein (2008) 78.

2.6 Divine Legislation in the *Laws*

experimentation and discovery in order to achieve the political condition. The best examples of this kind are Democritus' theory, where various external pressures force individual human beings to unite and find increasingly new means to tackle their natural deficiencies (DK68 B5), and the myth of Protagoras (*Prt.* 320d3–22d).⁸⁶ In the latter, human beings receive gifts from successively appearing gods that are unable to make them fully functional until humans are given the ultimate gift, the art of politics. By contrast, Critias has a theological safeguard against the need to refine human nature gradually – the excellence of the traditional gods immediately translates into the excellence of the first political communities. This foundation, moreover, means that Critias is sincerely committed to the existence of gods. Unlike Protagoras, whose gods can be interpreted in a metaphorical way as figures for the stages of human evolution, Critias makes the specific character of each political community depend on the specific character of the patron god.⁸⁷ And finally, the theologisation of politogony means the *Critias* also quietly engages with the readers' perception of the historical person Critias. It highly contrasts with the notorious atheistic rationalisation of religion and politics in the lost play *Sisyphus* attributed to Critias (DK88 B25), where the gods are invented by human beings in order to strengthen moral sentiments.⁸⁸ Even if the play does not indicate Critias' own beliefs, but rather the position of a fictional character, Plato's dialogue makes sure that we imagine his uncle as swimming against the currents of sophistic intellectualism.

2.6 Divine Legislation in the *Laws*

The very first lines of Plato's *Laws* pick up the theme of the *Timaeus-Critias* that we have been examining so far: should we attribute responsibility for the legal arrangements of present polities, such as Sparta and Crete, to a god or some man (I.624a)? The main interlocutors of the dialogue, the Cretan Cleinias and the Spartan Megillus, quickly respond to the Athenian Stranger's

⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis of Democritus' theory, see Cole (1967) 107–30.

⁸⁷ For the gods in the myth of Protagoras, see Kerferd (1953) and Morgan (2000) 138–47.

⁸⁸ The authorship of the fragment is a contested issue, because some ancient authors ascribe it to Euripides. See further Sutton (1981); Davies (1989); Kahn (1997).

question by choosing the god. One might think that these characters credit the gods with personal legislation and framing of constitutions. But we may also think that the gods might be the ultimate source of legislation, while not directly engaging in it. For instance, the gods may act through human proxies, who are inspired and led by the gods in their political endeavours. On a symbolical level, this ambiguity nicely ties with the setting of the dialogue: the three legislators, who are about to lay down the laws for Magnesia, discuss the legislative topics on their way to the shrine of Zeus, who has laid down the laws for the universe, which the utopian city will imitate in the future. In this final section of Chapter 2, our aim is to determine the precise relationship between the gods, laws and political foundations in the *Laws*.

Our initial reaction to the exchange between the Athenian, Cleinias and Megillus might be that they unanimously agree on the gods being the direct lawgivers of cities. But a careful reading of how they describe the foundation myth of Crete gives a more nuanced picture. The Athenian asks the interlocutors to follow Homer in thinking that the Cretan laws came from Minos' consultations and meetings with Zeus. The legendary king attended them every nine years, and in transitional periods, he transformed the divine pronouncements into a legal order (κατὰ τὰς παρ' ἐκείνου φήμας ταῖς πόλεσιν ὑμῖν θέντος τοὺς νόμους, I.624b2–3). The outline here is extremely similar to what we saw in Poseidon's relationship with his sons in the Atlantis story: the god pronounces the laws, while Minos retains some measure of freedom to interpret what he has heard from the father when putting together the legal code. Thus, the gods are not regarded as the direct lawmakers in either the *Timaeus-Critias*, or in the *Laws*, but rather as the source of legislation. It is completely in line with the broader Greek patterns of thinking about gods and political origins as well. In mythical imagination, the traditional gods do not produce written regulations or reveal law codes for cities. They usually inspire, endorse and give advice to their favourites, thus providing a divine sanction for the foundation of a city.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ See, for example, Minos: Plato, *Lg.* 1.624a–b; Pausanias 3.2.4. Zaleucus: Aristotle, fr. 548 Rose. Lycurgus: *Lg.* 1.632d, 1.634a. Epimenides: *D. L.* 1.10.115. However, Herodotus reports a version of the origins of the Spartan laws, according to which the

2.6 Divine Legislation in the *Laws*

The idea of indirect legal influence is further elaborated in the myth of Kronos in Book 4 (4.713a–714a). Let us have a closer look at its key passage. The passage can be divided into three parts: (1) the chronological and explanatory qualifications of the story; (2) the story itself; (3) its lessons for contemporary politics:

T18 (1) Take the cities whose foundation we described earlier – well, even before those, long before, in the time of Kronos, there is said to have been a government, a settlement, which was blessed by the gods and which serves as a model for all the best-run cities nowadays . . . (2) Kronos was aware, as we have explained, that human nature is quite incapable of being given absolute power over all human affairs without becoming full of arrogance and injustice. Reflecting on this he appointed kings and rulers in our cities who were not humans, but divinities, a more godlike and superior species . . . That is exactly what the god did, out of his good will towards humans. He put a superior species – the guardian spirits – over us, and they, to the benefit of themselves and us, kept an eye on us, giving us peace, respect, good order, justice which know no bounds, and making the race of mankind harmonious and successful. (3) There is a truth in this story even today. Where a city has a mortal, not a god, for its ruler, its inhabitants can find no relief from evil and hardship. And it deems that what we have to do is model ourselves, by any means we can, on what we are told of life in the age of Kronos. Whatever there is of immortality in us, we should follow that both in public and private life, in the management of our homes and our cities. And the name we should give these provisions made by intellect is law. (*Lg.* 4.713a9–714a2)

(1) τῶν γὰρ δὴ πόλεων ὧν ἔμπροσθε τὰς συνοικίσεις διήλομεν, ἔτι προτέρα τούτων πάμπολυ λέγεται τις ἀρχὴ τε καὶ οἰκῆσις γεγονέναι ἐπὶ Κρόνου μάλ' εὐδαίμων, ἧς μίμημα ἔχουσα ἔστιν ἥτις τῶν νῦν ἄριστα οἰκεῖται . . . (2) γινώσκων ὁ Κρόνος ἄρα, καθάπερ ἡμεῖς διεληλύθαμεν, ὡς ἀνθρωπεία φύσις οὐδεμία ἰκανὴ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα διοικοῦσα αὐτοκράτωρ πάντα, μὴ οὐχ ὕβρεώς τε καὶ ἀδικίας μεστοῦσθαι, ταῦτ' οὖν διανοοῦμενος ἐφίστη τότε βασιλέας τε καὶ ἄρχοντας ταῖς πόλεσιν ἡμῶν, οὐκ ἀνθρώπους ἀλλὰ γένους θειοτέρου τε καὶ ἀμείνονος, δαίμονας . . . ταῦτόν δὴ καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἄρα καὶ φιλάνθρωπος ὧν, τὸ γένος ἀμεινον ἡμῶν ἐφίστη τὸ τῶν δαιμόνων, ὃ διὰ πολλῆς μὲν αὐτοῖς ῥαστώνης, πολλῆς δ' ἡμῖν, ἐπιμελούμενον ἡμῶν, εἰρήνην τε καὶ αἰδῶ καὶ εὐνομίαν καὶ ἀφθονίαν δίκης παρεχόμενον, ἀσασίαςτα καὶ εὐδαίμονα τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπηργάζετο γένη. (3) λέγει δὴ καὶ νῦν οὗτος ὁ

Pythia herself declared the constitution to Lycurgus (φράσαι αὐτῷ τὴν Πυθίην τὸν νῦν κατεστεῶτα κόσμον Σπαρτιήτησι, *Hist.* 1.65.4). For a discussion of the association between these legislators and the gods, see Szegegy-Maszák (1978) 204–5; Schöpsdau (1994) 153–4; Naiden (2013) 84; Brague (2007) 20–3; and especially Willey (2016) 177–8, 180–8.

Plato's Anthropogony and Politogony

λόγος, ἀληθεία χρώμενος, ὡς ὅσων ἄν πόλεων μὴ θεὸς ἀλλὰ τις ἄρχη θνητός, οὐκ ἔστιν κακῶν αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ πόνων ἀνάφυξις· ἀλλὰ μιμῆσθαι δεῖν ἡμᾶς οἶεται πάσῃ μηχανῇ τὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ Κρόνου λεγόμενον βίον, καὶ ὅσον ἐν ἡμῖν ἀθανασίας ἔνεστι, τούτῳ πειθόμενους δημοσίᾳ καὶ ἰδίᾳ τὰς τ' οἰκήσεις καὶ τὰς πόλεις διοικεῖν, τὴν τοῦ νοῦ διανομὴν ἐπινομάζοντας νόμον.

Part (1) makes a chronological contrast between the Kronos myth and his earlier account of political genesis in Book 3, and asks us to remember the timeframe of Book 3. The discourse of Book 3 was designed to explain human history from its earliest known times to the present day. The story contains four successive stages: (1) the survival of a small number of people after a periodic destruction of humanity and their primitive life in autocratic communities located on hills (3.677a–680e); (2) the origins of the first cities, when groups of people began to build the walls and write legal codes (3.681a–682a); (3) the first cities established on plains, such as Troy (3.682b–e); (4) the emergence of ethnic groups, such as the Dorians, and the subsequent history up to the Persian wars (3.683a–699d). The Kronos myth is meant to take us to an even earlier period than stage (1). How is that possible? Book 3 is based on the idea that human history is cyclical, terminating with the universal destruction and then restarting with a clean slate, and explains the likely history of the current cycle. The myth of Kronos, on the other hand, does not concern itself with any particular cycle of human history. As flagged in part (2) of T18, the account concerns the time even before humans were capable of self-rule and the divinities were in charge of human life. The Kronos period is about the absolute beginning of human existence, when the first communities originated from the divine beings who supervised the humans. In this respect, the myth is parallel to Critias' story, for there too we find the periodic cleansing of the earth (*Ti.* 22c), the first communities governed by divinities (*Ti.* 24c; *Criti.* 109d, 119c–d) and the eventual ending of this period with the first destruction of cities (*Criti.* 121c).

But in contrast to both Book 3 and Critias' story, the purpose of the Kronos myth is not to explain the likely origins and development of polities. So far, the elderly statesmen have been discussing the opportunities to establish Magnesia. Just before the Kronos myth, the Athenian proposed that the quickest and easiest way to

do it is by having a young tyrant with virtuous character (4.709e–710b) and power to combine persuasion with force (πειθῶ καὶ ἄμα βίαν εἰληφότι, 4.711c4).⁹⁰ Although Cleinias and Megillus reluctantly allow the Athenian to proclaim tyranny as the best kind of political system (4.711e8–712a3), they are far from being eager to hand Magnesia over to even a flawless tyrant (4.712c2–5) and, in fact, the Athenian himself accepts that such tyrants are rarely to be found (4.711d1–3). Thus, they need a second-best constitution and the interlocutors do not seem to be sure about the other conventional constitutions either (4.712d–e). This is precisely the moment when we learn about the Kronos myth. Part (1) explains that the myth could serve as an imitative example to us (μίμημα, 4.713b3) by revealing the alternative mode of government. And as we will find out in part (3), the proposed alternative is nomocracy, the rule of law. In this respect, the transition from the young tyrant as the best constitution to the rule of law as the second best is analogous to the conceptual framework of the *Statesman*.⁹¹ In this dialogue, we also find a division between two types of rule. The Eleatic Stranger argues that the best kind of government emerges when a godlike statesman rules the city with expert knowledge (292b–293e), while the second-best government emerges when the power is given to the laws, which imperfectly represent the actions and knowledge of the statesman (297e). The Eleatic urges us to choose the worse option, which nonetheless approximates the so-called divine government in so far as it is possible in the current imperfect political world. The reason is that the best ruler is a practically unattainable solution and it comes about only by chance and miracle – just like the young tyrant in the *Laws*.

Part (2) moves on to depict the period of Kronos.⁹² The premise of the story is that human beings are already generated, but they

⁹⁰ On this passage, see Schofield (1997) 230–41 and Schöpsdau (2003) 158–78.

⁹¹ My reading of this link between the two dialogues has much in common with Adoménas (2001) 42–50, though the author does not explore the Kronos myth in detail.

⁹² The myth of Kronos of the *Laws* has a close counterpart in the Kronos myth of the *Statesman*, but I shall not compare the two accounts for the following reason: the Eleatic Stranger approaches divine care from a purely apolitical perspective, whereas here the Athenian Stranger repeatedly emphasises the political order of the lost age. For this difference between the two myths, see Vidal-Naquet (1986) 293; Van Harten (2003) 13; Schöpsdau (2003) 184; El Murr (2010) 293.

have no social life, and Kronos contemplates what would happen if they lived together on their own without gods. The future prospects are rather grim, for their weak nature would eventually lead them to *hubris* and injustice, which is a Hesiodic *topos* that marks the succession of human generations in the myth of the races (*Op.* 134, 146). The problem is that such prospects would conflict with the good intentions of gods. Kronos finds a solution in the lesser divinities, who were appointed as the governors of humans and whose more rational administration saved human beings not only from strife and moral decline, but even resulted in their flourishing. Up to this point, the themes in the Kronos myth are extremely similar to those in Critias' story. A notable exception is the mode of divine government, which is particularly oppressive: the gods ruled humans just as humans control flocks of sheep (4.713d) and without a recourse to legislation. This image evokes another passage from the *Statesman*, where the gods are presented as divine herdsmen enforcing their care for human beings in a tyrannical manner (276a–277a). It also reminds us of Hesiod's depiction of Kronos as a tyrant. In the poet's account, Kronos is regarded as the first ruler of the universe that came to power through rebellion and whose reign was marked by brutality against the younger generation of gods and instability in the cosmos.⁹³ In contrast to this sombre image, I believe that T18 can be approached as a distinct re-characterisation of Kronos. The new and philosophically sound Kronos remains a tyrant in so far as he has the sole power and authority over divinities and humans, but he becomes also an intelligent and benevolent leader, who examines the flaws in human nature and finds the best kind of political remedy for them. Kronos' supervision of gods is guided by reason rather than violence and his rule spreads justice and peace rather than chaos and further conflict. The Kronos myth, therefore, depicts the kind of political world in which utopian cities would prosper.

But we already know from the previous discussion that these virtuous tyrannies are impracticable, just as living in the period of Kronos is impossible, for it is long gone. Then what are the lessons of the story for the present human cycle? Part (3) reminds us that the Kronos myth has a mimetic function – we are about to learn

⁹³ For the conventional religious image of Kronos and his golden age, see Versnel (1994).

2.6 Divine Legislation in the *Laws*

how Magnesia will have to imitate (μιμεῖσθαι δεῖν, 4.713e6) life in the age of Kronos. First, we notice a distinction between political systems based on the rule of mortals and the rule of immortals. The self-rule of the people is not an option, since it amounts to letting our mortal parts, such as desires and emotions, govern the state: they lead into a type of government that reflects only factional interests and political chaos (4.714a), that is, the injustice and *hubris* prevented by Kronos. The alternative is to have the immortals and gods as the leading political principle, the divinities appointed by Kronos. Second, since a direct government of gods is no longer possible, we have to find a practical way to imitate life in the age of Kronos. The solution is to give the political power to the immortal part in us, which is our intellect. One can only embody intellect in the public sphere by making rational laws and subjecting oneself to them.⁹⁴ Thus, we reach the lesson for the Magnesian colony: it has to acquire a constitutional arrangement that could be rightly characterised as the rule of intellect and laws.

Let us now leave the Kronos myth and return to the broader question about the relationship between the gods and human politics. The outcome of our analysis shows that although the myth of Kronos continues to regard the gods as the originators of human politics and the founders of the first political communities, they are no longer the relevant explanatory factors of how human communities develop. They are conspicuously absent in the Athenian's account of human history in Book 3 – the first communities, the first laws and the great cities, such as Troy and Sparta, were established by mortal agents. Of course, an educational myth is not meant to be integrated into historical chronology. What the myth of Kronos does, however, is challenge us to think about the ways in which human beings should relate their own historical time to the divine mythical time, for although divine agency is uncharacteristic of our condition, we somehow have to rely on the rule of gods (4.713e). The practical solution is

⁹⁴ Cf. Bobonich (2002) 94–5; Schöpsdau (2003) 186–8. Mayhew (2011) 321 argues that the larger dialectical context of the passage indicates that the story is not only designed to justify the rule of law, but also traditional religion, mythical stories and other discourses that can support a life leading to ethical fulfilment.

to render the power to intellect and laws. Thus, the myth sanctions the rule of law by presenting it as the political condition that imitates the Kronos political system and the rule of his gods. This idea brings us back to the opening part of Book 1, from which we started this section: how do the gods help in lawgiving and settlement? The Kronos myth can provide a new interpretation of the Athenian's earlier remarks about Minos' consultations with Zeus in Book 1. Good lawgivers get their ideas for the legal codes not by personal conversations with the gods, but by listening to intellect, which is the most proximate link to the gods. Just as in the Greek myths, the gods inspire the Magnesians legislators and endorse their social arrangements, but do not directly devise the legal code.

But what kind of gods? Or rather how are the Magnesians likely to interpret the identities of the divine agents in the myth? Given the prominent role of T18 in the foundational narrative of Magnesia, we cannot isolate the myth of Kronos from religion and theology of the utopian city and the perception of the gods among its citizens. One way is to approach T18 from the cosmological perspective. The human intellect as the source of laws nicely relates to the cosmic Intellect as the source of universal order, which suggests that the cosmic gods are the immediate assimilative paradigms for the legislators. But in Section 1.7, I have argued that it is a big stretch to interpret the Kronos of Book 4 as a religious name for the cosmic Intellect of Book 10, not to mention the fact that the cosmic gods play virtually no role in Magnesians politics before the Nocturnal Council of Book 12. Another way is to argue that Kronos and his auxiliaries are still the reformed traditional gods. After all, these intelligent and benevolent beings actively shape anthropogony and politogony. So why not assume that the patron gods, who founded the first cities, are the very deities who provide the legislative ideals? Well, one reason is that the Magnesians perfect their political practice by imitating the cosmic gods and their intelligence rather than the traditional gods and their character patterns (see Section 3.6). Both interpretations, therefore, have their own drawbacks. Nonetheless, we are about to see that such an ambiguity will be fruitfully exploited throughout the *Laws*. In order to delineate the

2.7 Conclusions

different roles of the traditional and cosmic gods in human societies more fully, we need to examine the ways in which they provide imitative models for the Magnesians. I shall turn to this question in Chapter 3.

2.7 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to determine how the traditional and cosmic gods function when the theogonic phase is completed. We saw them continually appearing in the subsequent phases of anthropogony and politogony in Plato's later dialogues. The *Timaeus* considers the traditional gods and the cosmic gods as co-authors of human beings, who generated them as ensouled mortal beings. The *Critias* considers the traditional gods to be the sole founders of the first polities, who were the effective reason for the arrangement of their constitutions. The myth of Kronos in the *Laws* considers the gods to be the governors of the first polities, whose rule sets an example for new settlements. What unites the three dialogues is the idea that the two families of gods are responsible for human origins.

Such a responsibility is a religious idea, which finds new philosophical grounding in *Timaeus*' narrative. The creation of human beings is now presented as one of the key intentions of the Demiurge, who seeks to bring about universal perfection and goodness. Since a direct creation would make humans identical to the gods and distort the original design, the Demiurge delivers this task to the younger gods. The collective role of the traditional and cosmic gods is to finish the creation of the world by imitating the practical nature of their maker in their new domain of activity, which is the anthropogenesis. It is a religious innovation to regard the younger gods as forming a society of equal beings, whose excellence and knowledge allows them to perfect the universe by creating further species of animals. Once humans are generated as mortal beings, *Critias* explains how they have become political animals. In this account, humans discovered their civic nature with the aid of the traditional gods who helped them to establish the first cities. In this way, the story brings in another religious conception, namely the patron gods of cities. The novelty is the idea that the

arrangement of each community reflects the specific character of its patron god. But since each god was benevolent and intelligent in his or her own way, the diversity of communities resulted in different forms of political flourishing. And this is precisely the question that the Athenian Stranger explores in the Kronos myth: how to reclaim the political perfection of this initial period? According to it, there is some truth in the religious myths which depict the interaction between the first lawgivers and gods. If we understand the gods as intelligent beings, then the legal consultations with the gods can be interpreted as the obedience to rationality when making the laws. The way to approximate to the golden age of Kronos then is to establish the rule of law and imitate the divine government as far as our limited state allows us. Thus, all three dialogues qualify the traditional religious ideas pertaining to the activity of the traditional gods with some new philosophical meanings.

So despite the fact that the cosmological discourse was not used to rethink the ontological makeup of the traditional gods (Chapter 1), we now see that this discourse is deployed to define the joint functions of the traditional and cosmic gods in the origins of human beings. These gods are unequal in terms of what cosmology can say about the existence and nature of the traditional gods, but they are equal in terms of what it can say about their participation in anthropogony. In addition, Plato's philosophical myths enhance the role of the traditional gods in the area, which is beyond the theoretical concerns of cosmology, that is politogony. This move reintroduces a new distinction between the two kinds of gods. It also clarifies the ultimate purpose of retaining the traditional gods as a family separate from the cosmic gods. The homogeneity of the cosmic gods cannot explain the variety of the first human cities. But the heterogeneous character traits of the traditional gods nicely translate into the political diversity inherent in human nature.

Although our analysis shows a clear thematic continuity between the three dialogues, it does not mean that they are unified into a single philosophical theory. Timaeus' narrative, Critias' story, the Athenian's reflections on founding a new city – they all share some philosophical features which can be fruitfully used

2.7 Conclusions

to illuminate one another, but this is not equivalent to saying that they depend on one another. Plato does not derive the foundation of Magnesia from his account of politogony, just as politogony is not derived from cosmology. Nonetheless, this chapter has shown that Plato locates the traditional gods firmly within the political world. They are presented as beings whose function is to prepare the setting for communal living, to assist in establishing the first cities and to remain as the paradigms of political action. All of this is naturally tailored to their conventional religious identity as civic gods. Thus, we detect a pattern that dominates Plato's later dialogues: whenever Plato refers to the gods in a political context, these are primarily the traditional gods.