PLATO'S VISION OF CHAOS

I

In the creation myth of the *Timaeus* Plato describes God as wishing that all things should be good so far as is possible. Wherefore, finding the whole visible sphere of the world not at rest, but moving in an irregular fashion, out of disorder He brought order, thinking that this was in every way an improvement. To achieve His end He placed intelligence in soul and soul in body, reflecting that nothing unintelligent could ever be better than something intelligent (30 a–b). From this account of creation it would seem that God confronted a chaotic world whose disorderly motions existed in full independence of the principle of soul. Yet, in his doctrinal pronouncements in the *Laws* (892 a) and the *Phaedrus* (245 e) on the origin of motion, Plato declares soul to be elder born than bodies and the prime source of all their changes and transformations. If this is so, then it would appear that soul must be the source of the chaos that God, with the help of intelligence and soul, combated when He imposed order on the world. It is hard to escape the thought that Plato's creation myth is incompatible with his doctrine. If soul is the prime source of all change, then how can the world be moving before God imparted to it the intelligent soul that helped Him bring order out of chaos?

The apparent discrepancy between myth and doctrine has long drawn the attention of Plato's interpreters. Among modern writers the effort to account for the puzzling disorderly motion mentioned in the *Timaeus* has taken two generally distinct forms. There are those who have been reluctant to tax Plato with an inconsistency and who have, accordingly, argued that the creation myth of the *Timaeus* must be interpreted in the light of the doctrinal pronouncements of the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* which trace the origin of motion to soul. Their conclusion has been that the disorderly motion God combats in the *Timaeus* must originate with an irrational element in the soul occupying the body of the world. The creation myth itself is not a description of how the world actually was at one time, but only of how it would be if soul were left bereft of reason and had to guide things always irrationally. Cornford and Morrow are examples of writers who have argued in this manner.[1] Others, however, have refused to be influenced by the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* in their reading of the *Timaeus*, which, they claim, recognizes a sharp distinction between orderly motion initiated by soul and disorderly motion arising from a separate, purely bodily source. The motions of soul supervene on material motions which soul does not originate, but merely controls for the sake of its creative ends. Vlastos and Crombie are examples of writers who have argued for close versions of this thesis.[2]

An important feature of the debate on this topic is that virtually every scholar participating in it has agreed that the disorder God combats near the beginning

[1] F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 175–7. G.R. Morrow, 'Necessity and Persuasion in Plato's *Timaeus*,' *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 432–7.

[2] G. Vlastos, 'The Disorderly Motion in the *Timaeus*;' 'Creation in the *Timaeus*: Is it a Fiction?' *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 416–19. I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* ii. 216–19.

of the *Timaeus* is to be equated with the effects of what, in later passages, is called the wandering cause of necessity (*ananke*). At 47 e–48 a Plato declares the creation of the world to be the combined work of necessity and intelligence wherein the ruling principle, intelligence, persuaded the subordinate principle, necessity, to guide the greater part of created things toward perfection. Necessity is a secondary and co-operative principle of causation which does not originate motion but which transmits it. Plato associates this secondary form of causation with bodily substances only, not the soul, and writes of it as producing chance effects without order or design (46 c–e). Cornford, Morrow, Vlastos, Crombie, and other writers all assume that God's persuasion of necessity is the same as His victorious intervention in the world which brought order out of a primal chaos.[3]

II

One of the attractions of the line of argument taken by Cornford and Morrow is that it represents an effort to find a consistent position in Plato's work. Their effort, however, is marred by an impossible assumption and an embarrassing lack of textual support. The impossible assumption is that an irrational element in the world soul can be equated with the wandering cause, necessity. Soul-initiated movement is teleologically directed movement. Plato stresses this point in the *Laws* when he declares soul to be elder born than all bodies and the first cause of their changes and transformations. The wisdom, foresight, law, and art of soul must, he writes, be prior to the secondary, derivative effects of the hard and the soft, heavy and light, which are without purpose but work through aimless chance alone (889 c; 892 b–c). In the *Timaeus* he makes this same point. Primary causation, responsible for the initiation of movement, is a function of 'invisible soul'. Secondary causation, responsible for the transmission of momentum, is a function of 'visible bodies' which work without design (46 d–e). Since 'necessity' is Plato's name for the secondary form of causation, it refers to a non-teleological principle. In contrast, soul simply is for Plato the locus of foresight and design in the world. Thus nothing about the work of the soul may be identified with necessity. If chaos is explicable as a function of chance, it cannot also be explained as a function of design, irrational or otherwise. An irrational purpose is a purpose still. The equation of an irrational element in the soul with necessity simply violates the sharp distinction Plato draws in both the *Laws* and the *Timaeus* between the primary causation of soul and the secondary causation of material bodies. Cornford's and Morrow's line of argument thus leaves Plato's position in disarray and nothing is to be gained by following their suggestions on how the *Timaeus, Laws,* and *Phaedrus* are to be reconciled.

In addition to this major problem, there is a lack of textual support for a key element of their argument. Plato does not refer to an irrational part of the soul God houses in the world. If these defects are to be corrected in any effort to

[3] Cornford: 'if you abstract Reason and its works from the universe what is left will be irrational Soul, a cause of wandering motions . . .' (*Plato's Cosmology*, 203). Morrow: 'chance and necessity characterize the world prior to the entry of the intelligent cause . . . the disorderly motions upon which intelligence works are due to the irrational parts of the world soul' (*Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 432, 437). Vlastos: 'some occurrences . . . are not fully susceptible of rational explanation, and we are to expect these whenever [necessity] operates in isolation from [intelligence]. And this is precisely the condition of the primal chaos . . .' (*Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 418). Crombie: Necessity is 'the element of brute fact with which reason was faced when it came to its creative work' (*An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* ii. 216, 219).

find an interpretation of Plato which leaves his position consistent, the distinction between primary and secondary causation must be left intact. At the same time textual support for a source of disorderly motion stemming from soul would be most welcome.

The effort to find a way of reconciling the *Timaeus* with the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* is worth continuing. This is not just because a charge of inconsistency should, as a matter of scholarly practice, be made as a last resort. There are serious problems with the positions of Vlastos and Crombie. In isolating the *Timaeus* from other dialogues, they face a more serious textual and doctrinal conflict than they acknowledge. In the case of Vlastos, indeed, the dismissal of the conflict rests on an impossible reading of Plato.

The claim that some kind of material motion exists prior to and independent of the work of the soul seems to be in harmony with the creation myth of the *Timaeus*, and on this point Vlastos and Crombie rest much of their case. Yet, their claim is not in harmony with an apparent ambition the *Timaeus* shares with *Laws,* the *Phaedrus*, and other dialogues. That ambition is to provide an alternative to materialism. In the *Laws* Plato ascribes to his materialistic opponents the view that all grand, fair, and primary things are the products of nature and chance, art being an enterprise which takes over the undesigned works of nature to fashion insignificant, artificial toys of little real significance or genuine worth. Such a view undermines the authority of culture and law by declaring them to be derivative and conventional, without a basis in the principles responsible for the structure of the world (*Laws* 889 a–890 b). It is a view, too, which fails to distinguish between a true cause, or choice, and the material conditions which allow it to function as a cause, thereby leaving unexplained all the truly important features of the world (*Phaedo* 99 b). To combat this view Plato declares the primal works of what we mistakenly call nature to be in reality those of art (*Laws* 892 a). The cosmos is actually a divine artefact (*Sophist* 265 e). It is to support precisely this thesis that Plato attributes to the foresight of artisan souls the origin of all the changes which visit material substances. In the *Timaeus* the world is still a divine artefact. God is a demiourgos, or culture-maker, who fashions the cosmos as a pictorial image of what Plato calls intelligible Forms (29 a–b). If God works with material which is in motion but is not moved by soul, then the designs of art are not primal, but derivative. They supervene, as Vlastos puts it, on events more primitive than themselves. The account of art as something secondary given by the materialist and heatedly rejected by Plato in the *Laws*, in the *Phaedo*, in the *Phaedrus*, and in the *Sophist* would then apply to the world after all, and a key part of a determined, virtually lifelong attack on materialism would fail.

Since the *Timaeus* identifies the world as a product of art in the manner of the *Laws* and other dialogues, it would seem that Plato's hostility to materialism is intact in that dialogue. Thus one cannot conclude that motion originates independently of soul without coming into conflict, not just with doctrines external to the *Timaeus*, but with an ambition which appears central to the writing of the *Timaeus* itself. Vlastos asks if the reader of the *Timaeus* would have any reason to think that the doctrine of the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* is implied in that dialogue. Although he thinks the answer to his question must be 'no', an answer of 'yes' is in order. The *Timaeus* is a teleologist's manifesto. Everything sensible is created (28 c). Matter is not, then, a primal cause. There is no phenomenal entity which is not to be explained in non-phenomenal terms. The motion of visible bodies derives from something invisible. The world itself is a product of art, designed by

an artisan-soul with benevolent motives. The necessity He persuades to do His bidding is carefully said to be His 'minister' which can transmit, but not initiate, motion on its own (46 d–e). The import of these doctrines is that the designs and purposes of soul are prior to the motions of bodily things, and so the interpreter of Plato has a warrant from the *Timaeus* itself to search for a way to reconcile those doctrines with the creation myth which pictures God as combating a disorderly motion He is not responsible for.

This warrant is in no way invalidated by an effort Vlastos makes to discredit it. He distinguishes between material motions incapable of rational explanation and the supervening motions of soul which admit of a fully intelligible explanation. Plato, however, stresses throughout the dialogues that nothing in motion is capable of being fully understood or explained. Knowledge of empirical, moving things is impossible; only opinions about the world can be entertained (*Timaeus* 29 c–d). The *Timaeus* itself is only a probable *mythos*, not a certain *logos*, and it makes no knowledge claims. All its tenets are presented as matters of probability only. Thus Vlastos misconstrues the function of God; He does not make the world, or any part of it, intelligible. This point is important, for Vlastos appeals to the unintelligibility of the motions of blind necessity to show that, in spite of textual implications to the contrary, they cannot be traced to the intelligible motions of soul. No motion, however, is intelligible for Plato, not even those initiated by soul, and so the unintelligibility of some motion is no reason to infer that it has an origin apart from soul.[4] Vlastos's effort to discredit those passages in the *Timaeus* which suggest that soul does initiate all movement misconstrues Platonic epistemological theory and misrepresents the function of God. His views, and those of his followers, offer no serious objection to the effort to find a way of reconciling the *Timaeus* with the *Laws*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Phaedo*. Indeed, their views are so out of harmony with textual suggestions and apparent ambitions of the *Timaeus* that they invite the effort they oppose.

III

If a viable interpretation of the creation myth in the *Timaeus* is to be found, the generally accepted equation of chaos with the effects of necessity, or secondary causation, must first be given up. God combats a disorderly motion He is not responsible for. That motion either has a teleological or a non-teleological origin. If, as Cornford and Morrow claim, its origin is teleological, it cannot without contradiction be traced to the aimless, purely bodily cause of necessity. If, as Vlastos and Crombie claim, its origin is non-teleological, it still cannot be traced to necessity without conflicting with two important Platonic pronouncements: the claim of the *Timaeus* that necessity is only the minister of God, with the power to transmit but not to initiate motion, and the parallel claims of the *Laws*, *Phaedrus*, and *Phaedo* which grant to the foresight of soul the origin of all motion.

Giving up the equation of chaos with the effect of necessity does not do violence to Plato's text. Commentators have simply assumed that the effects of necessity make up the disorder God combats. Plato himself never says they do. Indeed,

[4] The point that nothing empirical is fully intelligible is a sufficient refutation of Taylor's thesis that what Plato calls necessity would 'vanish from our account of the world' if we were to have knowledge, not just of some, but of all the causes responsible for change (*Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Oxford 1928, 300). Only the Forms are objects of knowledge for Plato; thus not even God can have anything but a probable opinion about His creation which can never match in full the features of the Forms it participates in.

when he takes up the topic of necessity he makes it clear that he is turning from an initial discussion of the world's teleology, or primary causation, to deal with a quite distinct set of considerations (*Timaeus* 48 a). He does write of necessity as producing chance effects without order or design, but there is no compelling reason to assume that he has broken the format of his dialogue by referring to a matter already dealt with when discussing the world's teleology. If that assumption is made, a number of puzzles result. God eliminated some kind of initial but impermanent and corrigible disorder in the world. Yet Plato writes of necessity as always producing chance effects without order or design (46 e). Necessity is also a permanent feature of the world (47 e–48 a). Indeed, it allows, so the *Phaedo* implies, choice to act as a cause. Thus necessity's chance effects would seem to be permanent. Plato does not write that they, even in part, have been or could be eliminated. On the contrary, they are everywhere present and must, even after the ordering work of God, be acknowledged (48 a). How necessity might be held responsible for a chaos now eliminated from the greater part of the world is thus exceptionally unclear.

Then, too, Plato does not picture God as combating necessity. God uses the secondary, co-operative causes of necessity as His ministers to create from chaos the best world possible (46 c–d). These causes are presented, so to speak, as God's allies in the struggle against a primal disorder. The assumption common to the views of Cornford, Morrow, Vlastos, and Crombie that God struggles with necessity to achieve a victory over it does not fit Plato's description of how primary and secondary causation are related. In persuading necessity to do His bidding God guided the greater part of created things toward perfection. The present, improved state of the world is thus the result, not of a partial triumph of God over a recalcitrant necessity, but of their joint co-operation in bringing order out of a chaos they both oppose—one by choice and design, the other by virtue of its ministerial, implementing status. Necessity can scarcely be both the co-operative agent and the opponent of God. Yet that puzzle is the inescapable result of identifying the effects of necessity with the chaos God combats.

Apart from these reasons for not equating chaos with the work of necessity, the further point needs to be made that the disorder Plato attributes to secondary causation does not appear to be of a magnitude to stir the concern of God. At 52 d–53 a in the *Timaeus* the primal elements of air, earth, fire, and water are pictured as having been shaken by a winnowing motion in space. The effects of this motion are undesigned and so fit Plato's account of secondary causation. Yet the result of the winnowing of the elements was their rough ordering into separate regions with fire grouped with fire, earth with earth, and so on. Where a bit of chaff falls from a winnowing-basket is in part a matter of chance; still, the light and the heavy tend to be separated; and the result of a mechanical operation of this kind is a certain degree of order. God, in Plato's account, does not interfere with the winnowing of the elements, having no reason to regret their orderly groupings. Chaos would thus seem to have a different origin.

As a last consideration which must challenge the equation of chaos with the work of necessity, it may be noted that one reason God gave order to the sphere of the world was to provide a lesson to man on how he might regulate the vagaries and irregular, graceless ways of his own life. These vagaries, as yet uncorrected by God, have something to do with discord in the courses of our souls (47 c–e). How the correction of a purely bodily disorder could serve as a lesson on how to bring harmony to the soul is very unclear, given the Platonic doctrine

that soul and body are distinct. By consulting the order of the heavens we are meant to learn some kind of lesson in morals, not just in engineering. Thus aimless necessity is not a promising candidate for what God contended with when He brought order out of disorder. If the dispute on how the chaos of the *Timaeus* arose is ever to be resolved, some other, more viable candidate must be found.

IV

A list of the credentials a qualified candidate should have may be useful. Obviously, the conflict between God and chaos must have a teleological origin. If it does not, the doctrine that soul initiates all motion cannot be kept intact; nor can the parallel distinction between primary and secondary causation be maintained. Neither can any sense be made of the moral lesson God intends us to learn if His victory over chaos is simply some kind of engineering feat. Likewise, the evident ambition the *Timaeus* shares with other dialogues to provide an alternative to materialism would be left unfulfilled. Chaos, then, must have a teleological origin. To allow for conflict between itself and the ordering work of God, the teleology resident in chaos must be resistant to the control of reason and productive of some important kind of disorder affecting both the soul and bodily things. It must, however, be subject to control, and its effects—both psychic and material—must be preventable. At the same time, God's correction of its disorderly tendencies must be compatible with the point that nothing in motion is ever fully intelligible. Finally, one should be able to cite textual support for the claim that Plato recognizes the existence of a teleological principle which is productive of chaos.

Once the presumption is given up that God combats the effects of necessity, it is easy to find a candidate for the source of chaos which has the requisite credentials. That candidate is the pleasure-seeking teleology of the animal appetites. The dialogues are steeped in the doctrine that human beings are subject to a teleological conflict between reason and appetite. All desire and purpose originate with soul (*Philebus* 34 seq.), but different types of desire characterize the soul. Indeed, the differences are so marked that we can best think of ourselves as societies of three agencies each, torn by rival ambitions. In the *Phaedrus*, where Plato attributes to soul the power to initiate motion, he also likens the human personality to a union of powers such as can be illustrated by a chariot pulled by a team of horses and guided by a single charioteer (245 e–246 a). One of the horses symbolizes the power of the irrational appetites in life which have bodily pleasure as their end. The charioteer symbolizes the distinct power of reason. The second horse symbolizes the imitative spirit of man which has no purpose of its own. For the most part the two basic powers, or agencies, are in conflict with one another, so much so that every one of us is in a more or less constant state of internal warfare with himself (*Laws* 626 e). No victory, Plato remarks, is more primal or subtle than victory over self—that is, victory of reason over appetite.

Before attempting to show how this doctrine of psychic conflict might apply to the creation myth of the *Timaeus*, it is necessary to discuss the character of the strife Plato sees as endemic to the relations between reason and appetite. It is a strife which appears to have an important metaphysical dimension. Bodily things, or what Plato calls the particulars of appearance, participate in the intelligible Forms which constitute reality. They do this by somehow picturing the Forms. The more fully a particular participates in a Form, the more fully it

deserves to be called by the name we use in referring to it. The more fully, for example, two apparently equal sticks participate in The Equal Itself, the closer they come to fitting the concept of equality and so to deserving the adjective 'equal'. To the extent to which things succeed in deserving the words we apply to them, they approach being knowable, for knowledge presupposes truth and truth is possible only to the extent to which language applies to what we apply it to. We cannot, to continue the example, know that merely approximately equal things are equal, even though we might say they are, for equal they are not. All particulars, Plato holds, only strive to some degree to participate in the Forms (*Phaedo* 75 a). This effort on the part of appearance to be like reality is nothing other than the element of intelligence or reason which, in some measure, guides the world in an effort to make it as fair, as conceptually perfect, and as close to being knowable as possible. If this effort should fail, the particulars of the world would be less like the conceptually perfect Forms than they might be. As a result, they would also be less intelligible than they might be. They would, so to speak, stand in need of aid, for they would be comparable to botched, distorted images which fail to reflect precisely the eternal models whose names they claim.

In Plato's judgement the effort of living things to be like the Forms does, at least in the world's sub-stellar regions, fail to be as successful as it might. What we call nature is really a realm of art which requires our aid. The doctor and animal-breeder have a function, for example, because nature tends to degenerate if left to itself. Pedigree cocks and hunting-dogs illustrate this point by quickly procreating inferior versions of themselves when left without a breeder's care (*Republic* 459 a–b). The same is true of human beings (*Apology* 20 a–d) and, by extension, all other sub-stellar species of plant and animal life. The source of this pervasive tendency to neglect the ultimate goal of appearance lies in the pursuit of the delights which accompany change. The erotic appetites do not seek the perfection and beauty of the Forms, but long instead for the constant conception and generation of becoming (*Symposium* 206 e). They do this because they are infatuated with the physiological pleasures which exist only as long as the processes they accompany last (*Philebus* 53 c). The conflict between reason and appetite is basically a conflict between an agency which adheres to the true *telos* of appearance, struggling to make the moving world like the unchanging Forms, and an agency which neglects that *telos* in favour of pursuing the pleasures of constant change. So it is that much of organic nature is botched with its teleology divorced from a primal love of the Forms. So, too, is it that a true philosopher in whom the rule of reason may be found will abstain from satisfying the organic appetites (*Phaedo* 81 ff.).

The conflict between reason and appetite is connected in an important way to a paradox of Plato's metaphysics. In order to be like the unchanging Forms, the world of appearance must change. For example, an animal can partake of an eternal life only through reproduction (*Symposium* 208 a–b). But a changeable thing, by virtue of its motions, can never be fully like the stable reality it strives to be like. Thus it behoves a particular to move and to change as little as possible, for the less it changes the more it approximates to the status of its eternal model. The pursuit of pleasure, however, conflicts with this principle. The quicker an animal can deplete itself, the quicker it can re-experience the pleasures which come with drinking and eating. Thus the pursuit of pleasure conflicts with the rational economy of motion the true *telos* of appearance requires. A world directed

by appetite and devoted to pleasure moves excessively. It falls into conceptual disorder, partaking less than it might of the stable Forms its frenzied motions only dimly reflect. Plato's vision of chaos would seem to be a vision of the world guided by the appetites only and directed to an endless pursuit of pleasure the reason leaves unchecked.

Attributing to the organic appetites the origin of chaos has the credentials a viable interpretation of the creation myth in the *Timaeus* should have. Chaos is given a teleological origin. Thus the doctrine is saved that soul is the primal cause of all motion, for purpose is resident only in the principle of soul. Also saved is the distinction between primary and secondary causation, for irrational purpose is not equated with aimless necessity. Plato's attack on materialism is left fully intact. Apart from this basic advantage, tracing chaos to the unchecked appetites specifies a clear source of disorder that reason can move to control, although not to the extent that the world is ever made fully intelligible. Reason merely manages the appetites of living particulars to make them fuller participants in the Forms. It cannot make them into intelligible duplicates of reality. In its capacity to manage the appetites the reason also has an obvious function which gives to Plato's creation myth a moral dimension. We should all control in our lives the appetites which God brought under restraint in the case of the stars. Finally, there is more than ample textual warrant for this interpretation. Plato does not mention an irrational part of the world soul, but he does habitually tax the organic appetites with irrationality, rebelliousness, and disorder. Vlastos claims that linking soul to the irrationality of becoming would be grotesquely un-Platonic. If so, Plato's doctrines are not Platonic, for all desire is felt by soul, and the erotic and tyrannical desires of the soul are those furthest removed from philosophy, reason, law, and order (*Republic* 587 a–b). Health in the personality and justice in the state require their control. From the *Phaedo* to the *Phaedrus* to the *Republic* and the *Philebus* it is the irrational, pleasure-seeking appetites which Plato contrasts most forcibly with the orderly work of reason. There is no strong cause to think that in the *Timaeus* he changed his mind.

V

That God confronts a chaos produced by the pursuits of animal appetites is a thesis important aspects of the *Timaeus* support. Plato certainly pictures God as imparting intelligence and soul to body after He finds the world in disorder, and if taken literally this suggests that disorderly motion exists prior to any pleasure-seeking work soul might perform. Yet there is good reason to accept as well made Cornford's claim that Plato's creation myth describes, not how the world was at some inanimate beginning, but only how it would be if the principle of soul directing it were deprived of intelligence. The creation myth itself, for example, appears to acknowledge that the earth has always been alive, and that God did not find an inanimate universe in disorder. God created a better world than He found. The only thing mentioned which makes it better is that it is now an intelligent creature taken as a whole rather than an unintelligent creature (30 b). The creaturely, animate status of the pre-existent cosmos is thus apparently acknowledged. Certainly Plato stresses that the world is a living organism (31 a). He also stresses that the world existed prior to, or independent of, the intelligent work of God. God is never presented as the creator of appearance; He merely improves on what He finds. Given the animate and pre-existent status of the world, the implication is present that God did confront a besouled as well as disorderly

realm when He decided to guide the greater part of created things toward perfection. This implication is reinforced by Plato's later discussion of how Forms and the particulars of appearance are related. At 50 c–d in the *Timaeus* he compares appearance to the offspring of reality. The paternal Forms act upon the maternal receptacle of space to create children which share their father's names, making language applicable to both reality and appearance. God goes unmentioned in this account. Apparently living particulars exist independently of Him. Indeed, if God is to be given a cosmological role to play which fits the terms of this account, He has to be seen as a kind of cosmic animal-breeder who does not procreate appearances Himself, but who guides a productive, animate process which could and would proceed without His attention.

Viewing God as an intelligent breeder of living appearances is compatible with the function assigned to Him in Plato's creation myth. There Plato's concern centres on the motives of God. The maker of the universe looked to an eternal, not a temporal, pattern when He improved upon the disorderly world (29 a; 37 c–d). His aim was to make appearance as much like reality as possible. The improved world He produced is contrasted with a rival, imperfect, and unintelligent creation whose maker looks only to an empirical model for guidance (28 a–b). What distinguishes the work of God is thus its teleology. What is important about it is not that it adds purpose to the aimless, but that it involves an effort to be like reality rather than an effort to be like something merely apparent. God makes the world responsive to a goal beyond itself. He turns time, for example, into an image of eternity. His world is not one in which instrumental, aimless effects are suppressed. It is, rather, one in which a love of being enjoys hegemony over a love of becoming. It is a world which is comparable to an animal that has been bred into a superior version of what it would be if left in the control of appetites which seek only the pleasures of change and becoming, thereby ignoring the features of reality.

If God is basically like an animal-breeder, then of course one should be able to find evidence that He combats, not inanimate chaos, but disorderly desires. Evidence of that kind is present in some abundance. God gave man the power of sight so that we might behold the orderly heavens and learn to imitate the work of reason, thereby correcting discords which may have arisen in the courses of our souls. Any such correction requires a mastery of the desire for irrational pleasure (47 d). On the ground that we are meant to do for ourselves in the substellar world what God did for the heavens, the conclusion follows that God's victory over chaos is akin to the victory of reason over appetite. The soul of a person, Plato also remarks, may be without intelligence. In that case a man will 'walk lame' to the end of his life. Correcting any such defect requires education of the soul (44 c). Combating aimless, mechanical effects is of no use. Thus Plato clearly subscribes in the *Timaeus* to the thesis of many other dialogues: discord and ill health represent a failure of intelligence to control the personality. Pleasure, pain, fear, anger, and other feelings of an organic kind must, he writes, be conquered if a man is to help the revolutions of his soul control the turbulent mob of material substances which make up his body and produce its sensations (42 a–c). Reason, in short, must control the appetites before intelligent direction of the body is possible. The most subtle and primal victory is not victory of the purposeful over the purposeless, but victory over self. One is not reading a novel doctrine into the *Timaeus* by suggesting that God confronts a chaos originating from an organism's undisciplined pursuits. The world's primal disorder has a psychological

and moral, not a material and mechanical, base.

A consideration which lends further credence to this interpretation of the *Timaeus* involves Plato's description of what God did in bringing order out of disorder. Vlastos says that He added teleological motion to aimless motion. Cornford suggests that He added rational motion to irrational motion. What Plato says, however, is that He subtracted motion from those parts of the world He improved. He deprived the stars, for example, of all rectilinear motion, making them move in a circle and so in only one of seven possible ways (34 a). He imposed on the outer sphere of the earth a rational economy of movement. In doing that He made the changeable realm of appearance less changing, and so more like the static realm of reality it somehow represents. Thus God does not introduce any kind of coherent motion into the world. Instead He restrains the impulse to move excessively. In that capacity He is also like a charioteer or animal-breeder who seeks to rein the undisciplined appetites of His charges.

When all these points are added together a strong case emerges that God's ordering of chaos is akin to the work of the animal-breeder and animal-trainer. He does not add purpose to the totally purposeless. Neither does He combat chance effects. Like the breeder of a superior strain of stock who has a clear idea of what traits are most desirable in an animal, He gets a living organism to respond on its own to the ultimate *telos* of appearance. He guides it toward the perfection its organic appetites would never, without discipline, bring it near. The chaos He combats is like the moral and political chaos which yet surrounds us in our lives. If a true philosopher-king should ever arise to become a breeder and educator of men, he would do for us what God did for the stars. Plato's vision of chaos is a vision of moral, not merely mechanical, disorder. It is not necessity, but irrational impulse, that his God combats. This, at least, is a more probable account and a likelier story of his position than the standard thesis that God, unlike ourselves, has only to battle against the goalless irregularities of random chance.

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