

DISORDERLY MOTION IN PLATO'S *STATESMAN*

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IN THIS PAPER I will argue that in the *Statesman* myth's account of alternating cosmic cycles, Plato views the phenomena, or physical objects, in and of themselves as a positive source of evil, moving erratically without psychic causes whether rational or irrational, direct or indirect.¹ In this respect and others, the cosmological commitments of the *Statesman* are the same as those of the *Timaeus*² and are inconsistent with those of the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* X, which view souls as self-moving motions, which are in turn the sources of all other motions (*Phaedrus* 245c9, *Laws* 896b1).³ In the *Statesman* and *Timaeus*, Plato views the

¹The view that the disorderly motions in the *Statesman* have no psychic causes has also, but for reasons different than the ones I will advance, been held by Vlastos and Herter: Gregory Vlastos, "Disorderly Motion in the *Timaeus*," *CQ* 33 (1939) 71–83 (reprinted in R. E. Allen, ed., *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* [London 1965] see esp. 394–395); Hans Herter, "Gott und die Welt bei Platon: Eine Studie zum Mythos des *Politikos*," *BonnJbb* 158 (1958) 106–117, esp. 111 (hereafter Herter), and "Die Bewegung der Materie bei Platon," *RhM* 100 (1957) 327–347. The following abbreviations will be used: Robinson = T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (Toronto 1970); Skemp = J. B. Skemp, *The Theory of Motion in Plato's Later Dialogues* (Cambridge 1942), enlarged edition Amsterdam 1967; Skemp, *Statesman* = J. B. Skemp, *Plato's Statesman* (London 1952).

²See R. D. Mohr, "The Mechanism of Flux in Plato's *Timaeus*," *Apeiron* 14 (1980) 96–114.

³Robinson (134 f., 139), mistakenly, I think, takes the *Statesman* myth to be a synthesis of the autokinetic doctrine from the *Phaedrus* and the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, which he dates earlier than both the *Statesman* and *Phaedrus* and in which he (correctly, I think) finds no trace of the autokinetic doctrine. Robinson takes several reflexive phrases in the myth as referring to autokinetic soul:

(i) αὐτὸ ἐαυτὸ στρέφειν αἰεί, 269e5 (of the Demiurge). But στρέφειν cannot merely be a synecdoche for κινεῖν, for so construed it does not fulfil the demands of the context. It is because the Demiurge moves constantly *in one direction* rather than because it is autokinetic that it is said that the Demiurge cannot cause two contrary motions. That the phrase is reflexive merely means that the Demiurge's rotation is independent and non-contingent, in contrast to the rotations of the world.

(ii) τῆς αὐτοῦ κινήσεως, 269e4. The antecedent of αὐτοῦ, though, is the World-Body (269d7–8), not the World-Soul, which it comes to possess (d8–9, with d1). The phrase merely describes the motion of the World-Body (or World-Body/World-Soul complex) as it is moved in the train of the Demiurge's rotation. The term αὐτοῦ means something like "proper to itself under the best of conditions."

(iii) finally, δι' ἐαυτοῦ, after Burnet, 270a5. This expression may simply be taken mechanistically (as Robinson admits it might be), for the immediately ensuing account of the world's reverse motion is *described* entirely on a mechanistic model (270a6–8), even if one wishes to claim Plato *means* something else. But in the latter case the phrase ceases to be direct evidence for autokinesis. But in any case, I think

soul, as in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* X, as a simple substance rather than as a kind of motion. Further, on the one hand, in the *Statesman* and *Timaeus*, the World-Soul, which extends throughout the whole World-Body and which is paradigmatic for souls in general (*Timaeus* 41d), is not even viewed as a cause of motion, but is merely viewed as a maintainer of orderly motion against the spontaneous chaotic motions of the corporeal,⁴ while, on the other hand, Plato's unique, divine, demiurgic Reason or God, in these dialogues, though he is a source of motion—that of all orderly motions of both bodies and souls—is not himself a soul.⁵ It would seem then that on the nature of God, soul, and the corporeal there will be no way of reconciling the *Statesman* with the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* X, if it turns out that physical motions in the *Statesman* myth are spontaneous rather than psychically induced.

Many critics have tried to square the presence in the *Statesman* myth of motions which on the face of it have no psychic causes with the autokinetic doctrine. The strategies critics have used to bring about a reconciliation are the same as have been attempted to square the *Timaeus* with the autokinetic doctrine. There are four such strategies. One view is that an irrational part of the World-Soul is the cause of erratic motions.⁶ As far as the *Statesman* is concerned it is sufficient to point out, against this view, that what irrationality the World-Soul has is *caused by* rather than causes disorderly physical motion (273a, c–d). A second strategy, having its roots in Plutarch, is that there is an evil counter World-Soul which works over and against the rational World-Soul and which is the source of chaotic motions.⁷ This view runs up against the explicit denial of a Zoroastrian model of explanation for celestial dynamics (at 270a1–2).⁸

the reading of the BT manuscripts should be preserved: δι' ἐαυτόν, meaning “through-out itself” and looking forward to σεισμόν πολλόν ἐν ἐαυτῷ, 273a3. In this case the phrase carries no causal or instrumental force.

⁴See R. D. Mohr, “The World-Soul in the Platonic Cosmology,” *IJCS* 7 (1982) 41–48.

⁵See R. D. Mohr, “The Relation of Reason to Soul in the Platonic Cosmology,” *Apeiron* 17 (1983).

⁶This view is held by F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London 1937) 57, 175–177, 205 f., 209 f., and Glenn Morrow, “Necessity and Persuasion in Plato's *Timaeus*,” *PhR* 59 (1950) 147–163, reprinted in Allen (above, note 1), see esp. 437.

⁷Plutarch *On the Psychogony in the Timaeus* in C. Herbert (ed.), *Moralia* 6. 1 (Leipzig 1954) 1014a–1015 f. This view has been advanced in this century by Skemp, 74–78, 82–84, 112; E. R. Dodds, “Plato and the Irrational,” *JHS* 65 (1945) 16–25 (reprinted in *The Ancient Concept of Progress* [Oxford 1973], see esp. 115–116); and J. S. Clegg, “Plato's Vision of Chaos,” *CQ* n.s. 26 (1976) 52–61.

⁸Skemp (26; *Statesman* 107) is not unaware of the problem this text presents and seems in dealing with the *Statesman* myth to push the irrational psychic force back within the World-Soul proper, but he leaves the whole issue of the status of his irrational World-Soul somewhat vague. Robinson (137) suggests the obscurities surrounding the status of irrational psychic factors are endemic to the text of the *Statesman* myth and “point to Plato's discomfort about the whole matter.”

A third reconciliatory strategy is to claim that disorderly motions are inadvertent but inevitable spin-off effects from the orderly actions of the wholly rational World-Soul.⁹ As an interpretation of a text rather than as an attempt to save the text from itself, this view has to read the mechanical model at 270a6–8 as the explanation of the efficient cause of the reverse circuit of the universe. But the model is meant only as an explanation of why the reverse circuit lasts as long as it does; its efficient cause is assumed *already* to have been explained (270a7–8, note especially *διά*, a7). A fourth strategy tries to claim that the autokinetic doctrine is intended by Plato only to explain the source of motions in the orderly and ensouled cosmos and is not meant to explain the source of motions in the pre-cosmic or a-cosmic eras.¹⁰ The special difficulty which the *Statesman* myth presents this strategy is that there still must be found psychic causes for the disorderly motions of the retrograde world, since it, though disorderly, is still an ensouled world. This would involve abandoning the strategy or reverting to one of the earlier alternatives.

Now, I take it that the cause of disorderly motion is simply equivalent to the efficient cause of the retrograde cycle. This is obviously the case if the alternating cycles are intended to be read non-literally, that is, as dramatic representations of constitutive factors which in fact obtain simultaneously in the actual world.¹¹ For then the reverse circuit represents nothing over and above the disorderly motions in it. But even if we do suppose the system of counter-cycles is to be read literally, it is important to notice that the initial motions of the world, after the withdrawal of the Demiurge, are chaotic. That these motions become (at least temporarily) ordered again during the counter-cycle into a circular revolution is the work of the World-Soul remembering the teachings of the Demiurge (273b1–2). The World-Soul is, I suggest, not being viewed primarily, if at all, as a source of motion but rather as a maintainer of order against the naturally inherent tendency of the corporeal towards disorder. Plato, I suggest, is distinguishing the *cause* of the reverse circuit *qua* motion from the *cause* of the reverse circuit's being orderly and

⁹This view is held by Harold Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* 1 (Baltimore 1944) 444–450; rev. of A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* 2: *Le Dieu cosmique* in *Gnomon* 22 (1950) 207–210; "The Sources of Evil according to Plato" *ProcPhilSoc.* 98 (1954) 23–30, reprinted in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato* 2 (Garden City, N.Y. 1971) 244–258 (on the *Statesman* myth in particular see nn. 21, 44); and Leonardo Tarán, "The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*," in J. P. Anton and G. L. Kustas, eds., *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y. 1971) 386–388.

¹⁰For a critique of this now widely held view see R. D. Mohr, "The Principle of Motion Doctrine and the Sources of Evil Problem in Plato," *Apeiron* 14 (1980) 41–56.

¹¹I have suggested elsewhere that the question of the meaning of the alternation of cosmic cycles can and should be isolated from the question of whether Plato believed in an *initial* act of world formation ("The Formation of the Cosmos in the *Statesman* Myth," *Phoenix* 32 [1978] 250–252).

circular. Therefore the cause of the reverse circuit is equivalent to the cause of disorderly motion. This cause which we are looking for is a proximate efficient cause; there is no suggestion that the reverse circuit is simply a ricochet effect.

I will suggest that it is the purpose of the argument at 269d5–270a2 to explain the proximate efficient cause of the reverse circuit. Once the argument is parsed, it becomes fairly easy to sort out what in the rest of the myth is to be taken literally and what figuratively.

The argument (B below) with its immediate context (A and C below) runs as follows (269c4–270a8):

- A At one time God himself guides and transports this world in its revolving course, but at another time, when the revolutions have at length reached a measure of time allotted to him, he lets it go, and then, in turn, the world, which is (*ὄν*) a living creature and is allotted intelligence by him who fashioned it in the beginning,¹² revolves on its own (*αὐτόματον*) in the opposite direction. Now this reverse motion is a necessarily inherent part of its nature (*ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐμφυτον*) for the following reason (*διὰ τὸδ'*):
- B I To stand always in accordance with the same things and similarly and to be always the same (*τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν αἰεὶ καὶ ταῦτόν εἶναι*) is a condition fitting only to the most divine of all things. But, the nature of a body is not of this disposition. And what we call the heavens or the formed universe, while, on the one hand, it has received many blessings from its parent, nevertheless, on the other hand, also partakes in a body. Therefore, it is impossible for it to be free from change throughout its entirety.
- B a Nevertheless (*γε μὲν*) to the extent that it is possible the world moves in a single uniform course in the same place (*ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ κατὰ ταῦτα μίαν φοράν*). Therefore, it is allotted a countercycle which is the least deviation from its own (*αὐτοῦ*) motion.
- B b i Now, to turn itself always (*αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ στρέφειν αἰεὶ*) is hardly possible for anything but him who guides all the things which move backwards (*αὔ*).
- B b ii And (*δέ*), it is contrary to divine law (*οὐ θέμις*) for him to move now in one direction and now in the opposite direction.
- B II Now as the result of all this (i.e., Bb and the facts in A), we must not say either that the ordered universe turns itself always,
- B III or again that it is always turned by God in two opposite courses,
- B IV or again that two gods with opposed thoughts turn it.
- C The only remaining alternative is what was earlier stated (*ὅπερ*

¹²On the significance of formation *κατ' ἀρχάς* in the myth see the article referred to in note 11.

ἄρτι ἐρρήθη καὶ μόνον λοιπόν), namely BI, that at one time it is guided by an external divine cause, and gains the power of living again and so receives a restored immortality from the Demiurge, but at another time when it is let go, it moves (itself, MS B) throughout itself (δι' ἐαυτόν, MSS BT), being left to itself in due season (as indicated previously) such that it carries itself backwards through many myriads of circuits, because it is very large and most evenly balanced and proceeds upon a very small foot.

The overall structure of the argument is the following. Section A establishes what it is that the argument is trying to prove. The argument proper, B, is cast as a large-scale disjunctive syllogism. We are offered what is taken to be an exhaustive list of alternatives (BI, II, III, IV). Then one by one alternatives are eliminated until but one alternative remains (BI). It is, then, asserted to be the case by the force of the syllogism. The start of the argument is signaled by the διὰ τὸδ' of 269d2, and the phrase ὅπερ ἄρτι ἐρρήθη καὶ μόνον λοιπόν of 270a2 both indicates the form of the argument as a disjunctive syllogism and also ends the list of possible disjuncts. Section C, then, is an elaboration of the disjunct that is asserted by the force of the syllogism. The asserted disjunct is BI. Section C is not to be viewed on its own as the point of what is established by the argument, but must be interpreted in light of BI. Nor is section C merely a restatement of the facts contained in A, despite a strong similarity in language between the two passages. Section Ba is a promissory note, claiming that in fact it is going to turn out that the reverse motion established in BI is of a uniform sort; the note is made good only much later at 273a–e. Section Bb contains extra information, over and above that given in section A, which is used in eliminating the unsuccessful disjuncts (BII, III, IV). The content of the argument is analyzed below.

SECTION A

The purpose of section A is to show that the argument B will explain the proximate efficient cause of the reverse circuit of the universe. Many translators (Skemp, Fowler, Taylor) and critics take the issue of the cause of the reverse motion of the universe as already settled within section A itself by reading the participial construction ξῶν δὲν καὶ φρόνησιν εἰληχός . . . (269d1–2) causally rather than merely descriptively. Such a reading presupposes some rational psychic or animating force, namely, the rational World-Soul, as the cause of the reverse circuit and as an explanation of the expression αὐτόματον (269c7). Two points, however, weigh against this reading. First, it seems to be contradicted by the

discussion of causes at the end of the *Sophist* where spontaneous causes (αἰτίας αὐτομάτης, 265c7) are said to generate without intelligence (ἄνευ διανοίας φούσης, 265c8) and are specifically contrasted to causes, like the World-Soul, which arise from Divinity (ἀπὸ θεοῦ, 265c9) and are endowed with reason (μετὰ λόγου τε καὶ ἐπιστήμης, 265c8). It is left open whether these spontaneous causes are irrational psychic causes or non-rational mechanistic forces;¹³ but rational psychic forces seem to be ruled out. Second, whatever is being explained by argument B is being explained *despite* the fact that the world is rational, rather than *because* it is rational, for the claims of argument B are said to hold *even though* the world has received many blessings, including rationality, from the Demiurge (in BI, 269d8–9). It does not seem possible then that the participial expression ζῶον ὄν . . . (269d1–2) is meant to explain the reverse circuit of the universe or is to be read causally.¹⁴ Rather the expression should merely be taken descriptively. The participial phrase is similar to expressions in the *Timaeus* (30b8, 36e3) and, like them, tells us only that the universe is endowed by the Demiurge with a rational World-Soul. No functional analysis of what role the World-Soul might play in the myth is stated or implied by the construction. Further, that the argument B proceeds *despite* the fact that the world is rational means that the purpose of the argument is not to explain the benefits which accrue to the world as the result of its being rational. The purpose is not to explain that the world's reverse motion is in fact initially uniform. Rather, the purpose of the argument is just to explain the cause of the reverse motion *qua* motion.

SECTION BI

If my analysis of the structure of the argument B is correct, the source of disorderly motion is to be found in BI. Here we are told that there is something which is most divine and that its attributes are denied to the phenomena just as being bodily.

There are two possible candidates for what is called “the most divine of all things:” (1) the Platonic Ideas¹⁵ and (2) the rationality of the Demiurge.¹⁶ I will argue for several reasons that it is the Ideas that are

¹³Skemp (21) clearly is going beyond the text when he claims that only irrational psychic forces are meant. Further, insofar as the “commonly expressed opinions” which Plato is rejecting out of hand at *Sophist* 265c look very much like the views of Empedocles, it is likely that the spontaneous causes are mechanistic.

¹⁴So correctly Robinson 132, n. 17. Herter (109) takes the participial construction of 269d1–2 as his proof-text, and indeed only text, for the view that the cause of the reverse circuit of the universe is the rational World-Soul.

¹⁵So Robinson 132, n. 6; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* 5 (Cambridge 1978) 179.

¹⁶So Skemp, *Statesman* 105; cf. Skemp 25, n. 1.

intended.¹⁷ The Ideas are called divine in both the *Phaedo* (81a5) and the *Republic* (500c9), and in the *Phaedrus* the Ideas are that by which the divine is divine (249c6). This derivative status of the gods to the Ideas in the *Phaedrus* would explain the superlative *θειστότατοις* here in the *Statesman*.

Now phrases similar to those describing the properties attributed to the most divine here, namely being *τὸ κατὰ ταῦτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν αἰεὶ καὶ ταῦτόν εἶναι*, are elsewhere in the dialogues regularly used to describe essentially *both* the eternal immutability of the Ideas (e.g., *Phaedo* 78c6, 80b2–3; *Republic* 479a2, *Sophist* 248a11; *Philebus* 59c3, 61e2–3; *Timaeus* 28a6–7, 38a3, 52a1) *and* the uniform motion which characterizes rationality (*Timaeus* 36c2, and esp. *Laws* 898a8–9).¹⁸ So the phrase here (BI) is, just by itself, ambiguous. It should be noted, however, that whenever Plato uses similar phrases to refer to the Ideas he does not use them attributively, i.e., as qualifying something further. The predicates rather are used to describe as best Plato can the *status* of the Ideas; they describe the formal, external, or metaphysical properties of the Ideas. When, however, he uses similar phrases in senses that would apply significantly to motions and not to the Ideas (as at *Timaeus* 36c2, 41d7, 82e1, where they mean “uniformly,” “in the same mode,” “in the same proportion”), it is always clear that the phrases are indeed being used attributively of motions, as indeed is the case in Ba where *κατὰ ταῦτὰ* qualifies *κινεῖται*. But this is not the case in BI. Plato could not have made it any clearer that he was describing a *state* of affairs rather than a type of motion than by using the neutral verbs he does use (*ἔχειν . . . εἶναι*). He could easily have clarified his meaning, however, if motion was intended, simply by replacing these verbs with *κινεῖν* or *τείνειν*. Alternatively, if uniformity of motion was intended he might easily have clarified the matter by adding the qualification *ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ* as at *Laws* 898a8 and as in Ba. For this qualification further describes uniformity of motion, but is entirely inappropriate to the Ideas, for Plato is explicit that in no sense does the relation *ἐν* hold of the Ideas (*Timaeus* 52a3, 52c6–d1).

Further, when the family of predicates describing the most divine is used of the circling of rationality in the *Laws*, the circling, as E. N. Lee has shown, functions as a kind of mass-term rather than a count-noun; the rotation is not the motion of circumnavigation but the rotation of the whole circle like the rotation of a wheel that spins in place.¹⁹ Now this account of the predicates as applying to rationality makes them

¹⁷For two recent defences of the traditional view that the theory of Ideas is present in the *Statesman*, see Guthrie (above, n. 15) 175–180; R. D. Mohr, “*Statesman* 284c–d,” *Phronesis* 22 (1977) 232–234.

¹⁸Robinson and Guthrie (above, n. 15) fail to take these passages into account.

¹⁹E. N. Lee, “Reason and Rotation,” *Phronesis* Suppl. Vol. 2 (1976) 70–102, esp. 76–78.

inapplicable to the Demiurge of the *Statesman* myth, since his rotations are explicitly viewed as countable (269c6) and repeated attention is drawn to the fact that his tasks are periodic and intermittent (269c-d, 272e, 273e).

Further and most decisively, when the related predicates assigned to the most divine are elsewhere in the dialogues denied of the phenomena, as they often are and as they are in *BI*, it is always by contrast to the Ideas that they are so denied and not by contrast to rationality. And when on the other hand the predicates are negated in the *Laws* passage (898b5-8), the negations hold not of the phenomena but of (irrational) souls. It is not even clear what the denial of these properties as essentially characterizing rationality would possibly mean when applied to the phenomena, to which neither rationality nor irrationality are appropriate predications.

I suggest, then, that while the phrase τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα . . . ταῦτόν εἶναι just by itself is ambiguous, it nevertheless refers here exclusively to the Ideas.

Now what the denial of these predicates to the phenomena means, however, is also ambiguous.²⁰ In some places in the dialogues the denial seems to mean only that an object may in one respect (in respect to a given time, location, observer, or partial aspect, cf. *Symposium* 211a) have one property and in another have an opposite or contrary property. This is clearly the case in the Argument from Opposites in *Republic* 5 (479a-c, cf. 7 [522c-525c]) and in the closing argument for immortality in the *Phaedo* (102b-c,e; cf. *Hippias Major* 289a-c). In these cases the denial of immutability to the phenomena is merely the claim that phenomena are *capable* of motion, are *capable* of being qualified by opposites, are of no necessarily determinate quality. The phenomena, on this view, are disparate but not contradictory.

Elsewhere, however, the denial of immutability to the phenomena is clearly the much stronger assertion that the phenomena are in a universal, chaotic flux (e.g., *Philebus* 59b1, *Timaeus* 28a, 30a, 49a-c, 52e-53a, 58a-c). At *Phaedo* 90c4, for instance, when phenomena are said to be οὐδὲ βέβαιον, Plato means by this that "everything is driven and tossed this way and that, turned upside down just as in a tidal channel where the flux and reflux is strong, and nothing ever remains in one place for any time" (90c4-6; see *LSJ*, s.v. εὐριπτος).

The logical correlate to this state of affairs is to claim not just that the phenomena are capable of having contrary predicates in different

²⁰For a different reading of what is entailed in the denial of these predicates see T. Irwin, "Plato's Heracliteanism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977) 1-13. Irwin claims the denials have a single sense and that Plato nowhere holds that the phenomena are in a universal flux.

respects, but that they are indeed subjects of self-contradictions. Twice in the *Phaedo* this much stronger claim is made that the phenomena, by sheer contrast to the self-identity of the Ideas (78e2–3), are never identical with themselves, are never self-consistent (αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς . . . οὐδέποτε, 78e3 [which is taken to be the fuller meaning of the denial of phenomena being κατὰ ταῦτά, 78e4]; μηδέποτε κατὰ ταῦτά . . . ἐαυτῶ, 80b4–5). The same logical claim is made of the phenomena in the *Timaeus*: all possible predicates, including contradictory ones, can be predicated of anything at any time (49b2–5). Now to deny the self-identity of the Ideas to the phenomena in this sense is not to claim that the phenomena in no way exist, but only to claim that they are in the process of change. In the *Parmenides* (155e–157b, and cf. 156e7–8 for the full generality of the doctrine) it is claimed that when a thing is changing from having a property to having its opposite, it passes through what is called “the suddenly” in which it neither has the property nor its opposite. This is logically equivalent to a denial of the law of non-contradiction. And in the *Timaeus* Plato describes things in the process of changing as τὰ ἀνομοιούμενα ἐαυτοῖς (57c3–4). To say, then, that the phenomena lack the permanence and self-identity of the Ideas, in one sense, means to claim the phenomena are actually changing. And to claim that they are *never* αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς and *never* κατὰ ταῦτά ἐαυτῶ (cf. also *Philebus* 59b1) is to say they are in a universal flux.

Of the two options of interpreting the denial of permanence to the phenomena in the *Statesman*, clearly the first, namely the view that the phenomena differ in different respects and are merely *capable* of change (1), is simply irrelevant to the argument, which is trying to establish a cause for the reverse circuit, but (2) also ensures only the possibility of motion without guaranteeing the actuality of any motion. Since the further claim is immediately made (in BI) that because the world is bodily, it cannot be free of change, what is required is that the denial of permanence to the phenomena entail actual, not just potential change. So the first alternative interpretation of the denial of permanence to the phenomena fails.

It seems that the second sense, namely, that the phenomena are contradictory and in flux, is the sense of the denial that is intended and that fulfils the demands of the context. The claim of BI, then, seems to be that the phenomena just on their own are the cause of the reverse circuit, or of what it stands for on a non-literal reading, disorderly motion. This is reinforced by the addendum that the Demiurge and his minions, the World-Soul, other souls and their rationality, are all irrelevant to explaining the cause of the reverse circuit (BI, 269d8–9). Moreover, it seems the Demiurge and his minions are not even primarily being viewed as efficient causes of motion; their function is not to stir up

motion, it would seem, but rather to retard and stabilize the phenomena, since the motions of the corporeal are said to exist *in spite of* these various agents (ἀτὰρ οὖν δῆ, 269d9). I suggest, then, that when in A it is said that the reverse circuit is αὐτόματον (269c7), this means that the phenomena move on their own without any assistance from external agents.

The particular contribution of this *Statesman* passage to other passages in the dialogues which assert that the phenomena, in contrast to the Ideas, are in flux, is that while the others assert that the phenomena *necessarily* are in flux, the *Statesman* in addition asserts that they *on their own* are the cause of their being in flux. The *Statesman* asserts that they are necessarily *and essentially* in flux. Now the *Statesman* does not go on to give a mechanism by which it is explained how the phenomena do maintain on their own a chaotic flux; this task, though, is accomplished in the *Timaeus* (58a–c, see n. 2).

SECTION Ba

The γε μήν of 269e2 is strongly adversative. Having established the counter-course of the universe *qua* motion, Plato goes on to suggest that, despite our expectation that in the absence of the Demiurge the motion may be disorderly (cf. *Timaeus* 53b), the counter-motion will in fact to a large, but qualified (κατὰ δύναμιν) extent be the uniform motion of rotation in a single place (direction?). I take the shift from τὸ ἀνάπαλιν ἵέναι (A, 269d2) to τὴν ἀνακύκλῃσιν (Ba, 269e3) as significant. The emphasis here (Ba) is on the circularity and uniformity of the counter-motion but neither the cause of uniformity nor the reason for its partial failure is here explained. These explanations are only forthcoming at 272e–273e and are so delayed, I suggest, since they are in fact irrelevant to the argument which B is trying to establish, namely the efficient cause of disorderly motion.

That Plato here (Ba) and later (272e–273e) draws special attention to the uniformity and circularity of the reverse course causes trouble for those critics, like Skemp, who claim that the efficient cause of the reverse circuit is an irrational World-Soul or an irrational element in the World-Soul which, as irrational, could only cause disorderly motion. The best Skemp can do (27; *Statesman* 89) is attempt to explain away the regularity of the reverse circuit as an exigency of myth's structure. This attempt is unconvincing when compared to explanations which "save" rather than destroy the appearance of the initial orderliness of the reverse circuit (see below).

I take, unlike most critics, εἰληχεν at 269e4 in an impersonal sense to mean "obtain by lot or by fate" rather than "obtain by the will of the

gods" (see *LSJ*, s.v. *λαγχάνω*), and not as referring to the Demiurge. In the *Statesman* myth there is a sense of an impersonal, non-temporal, fate or destiny behind every component of its ontological scheme (cf. Cornford [above, note 6] 208). The Demiurge, admittedly, is himself a personal source of destiny for some things. He is explicitly the source of the destined aspect of the World-Soul (*φρόνησιν εἰληχὸς ἐκ τοῦ συναρμόσαντος αὐτό*, 269d1). However, the Demiurge himself seems to be subject to certain destined restrictions not of his own making (*τοῦ προσήκοντος αὐτῷ μέτρον. . . χρόνου*, 269c6–7). This thought is even more clearly enunciated when it is said that it is not *θέμις* (269e7) for the Demiurge to have two contrary motions.

There is nothing, therefore, in Ba or elsewhere in the argument to suggest that the reverse circuit is either directly or indirectly caused by the Demiurge. Even if *εἰληχεν* did, however, refer to the Demiurge it would not entail that he was the cause of the motion of the reverse circuit but only entail that he was the cause of its regularity.

SECTION Bb

Section Bb adds information to that already given in A which will be used to eliminate the later disjuncts (BII, III, IV). Two points are made. First, we are told that the Demiurge, who guides all things that *αὖ* move, is the only thing which always turns itself (Bbi). This has been taken to mean that the Demiurge is an autokinetic soul and that the motion of the phenomena (and indeed the counter-motion of the universe) has its source ultimately in the Demiurge.²¹ However, the *αὖ* here, I suggest, means only "backwards" rather than "in turn." For by this point we have repeatedly been told that the universe does have a reverse course and this expression is the briefest way of describing that. So the phrase *τῶν κινουμένων αὖ πάντων* (269e6) does not mean that the motion of the phenomena is being viewed as essentially transitive and not as essentially spontaneous.²² Rather, I suggest, the eternality and reflexivity of the Demiurge's turning mark him as the only entity whose rotation is independent and non-contingent. Any other rotation, whether of the phenomena or of the World-Soul and souls generally, is derived and contingent. I take it that the reflexivity and eternality here do not simply mean that the Demiurge is the only thing that can circle in the same *direction*, for this is the second point made in Bb and this second point is not viewed as explaining the first (*δέ*, 269e6).

The second point made in Bb is that it is contrary to divine law (*οὐ*

²¹Robinson 133, 135; Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil according to Plato" (above, note 9) nn. 21, 44.

²²Against *αὐτὸ ἐαυτὸ στρέφειν αἰεί* referring to autokinesis see above, note 3.

$\theta\epsilon\mu\varsigma$) for the Demiurge to move at different times in different directions (Bbii). A similar appeal to impersonal divine law is made in the *Timaeus* where it is said that it is never $\theta\epsilon\mu\varsigma$ for the Demiurge to do anything other than the best (30a6-7). The reason in the *Statesman* that the Demiurge cannot have contrary motions is two-fold. First, the motions which the Demiurge would set up by moving in opposite directions would be erratic and he is only a source of order and goodness. Second, to so move would draw into doubt his essential and eternal rationality, which is characterized by uniform motion in a single direction.

The image of the Demiurge that emerges here (and from 272e-273e, to glance ahead) is that the Demiurge operates somewhat like a mechanical clutch. When he is in contact with or engages the world, he imparts both his rotation, i.e., his motion as circular, and the direction of his motion to the world; but he can disengage from the world and still continue with his motion and direction, while the world, then, goes on its own way.

SECTIONS BII, III, IV

With Bb in tow, Plato is ready to state and eliminate what he takes to be an exhaustive set of remaining possible explanations of the reverse rotation of the universe.

The first possibility which is entertained and dismissed is that the world always turns itself (BII, 269e7-8). Now we can presuppose as established that there is a reverse circuit of the world (269e3). So when it is denied that the cosmos is always self-turning we must suppose that the direction of the hypothesized turning is in the direction of the retrograde cycle of the universe. The denial, then, does not seem to be that the world is in no sense self-moving, but is only that the cosmos cannot maintain on its own orderly motion. The *kosmos* here (269e8) seems to be the ordered World-Body without necessarily including the World-Soul, for at 269d8-e1 (in BI) *kosmos* is contrasted both to the corporeal as such and to the World-Soul which it receives from the Demiurge. The schema that is being denied here (BII, 269e8-9), then, is that of the Demiurge eternally revolving in one direction outside of the universe and the universe itself spinning eternally in the opposite direction, both being completely independent of each other. The passage adumbrates 273a ff. where the cosmos when independent of the Demiurge begins to decay, because the cosmos cannot eternally remain uniformly in motion, and only by the Demiurge's intervention can it be restored to order. The denial of the world's eternal self-turning is a direct corollary of the fact that eternal self-turning is an exclusive possession of the Demiurge (Bbi, 269e5-6).

The next possible explanation of the reverse circuit is that the Demiurge moves the world as a whole always in two directions (BIII, 269e9–270a1). The denial is obviously meant to be a direct corollary of Bbii, namely, that the Demiurge cannot move now in one direction, now in another. It would seem, therefore, that Plato is not even entertaining the possibility (let alone affirming it) that anything but immediate direct effects are going to count as possible causes of the reverse circuit; this disjunct shows that indirect causes, such as those Cherniss wishes to find as the cause, are not even considered.

The final possible explanation of the reverse circuit is that there are two gods who turn the world with conflicting purposes (BIV, 270a1–2). The denial of this view is a denial of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster is mentioned by name at *Alcibiades* 1 (122a). The reason for the denial of this view is the same rationale that stands behind Bbi, namely, since for Plato it is inconceivable that gods are sources of evil, it is therefore impossible for them to have conflicting purposes.

With these competing disjuncts dismissed, the argument returns to and asserts by the force of the disjunctive syllogism the earlier alternative BI, that the corporeal is the efficient cause of the reverse circuit (270a2–8). The description given in this return must be read in light of the alternatives already given and does not itself state for the first time the cause of the reverse circuit. The cause is merely summarized. This occurs in the line “but at another time when it [the world] is let go, it moves itself throughout itself” (C, 270a5–6). This looks directly forward to the description of the chaos that ensues upon the Demiurge’s withdrawal from the world, described at 273a: “And as the universe was turned back and there came the shock of collision, as the beginning and end rushed in opposite directions, it produced a great earthquake within itself” (Fowler).

The new information conveyed in C is that the reverse circuit lasts for a very long time. This is explained (*διὰ*, 270a7) by means of a mechanical model. It should be noted (*contra* Cherniss) that this model is not given to explain the efficient causality of the reverse circuit; that, at this point, is assumed. Those who seek a non-mechanistic explanation of the reverse circuit similarly err. For they feel the need to *explain away* the model as “an appeal to the example of a familiar piece of apparatus [which] may help to justify a piece of cosmology which was bound to strike astronomically-minded hearers as—unlikely, to say the least” (Skemp, *Statesman* 102, cited with approval by Robinson 137, n. 23, and by Herter 109, n. 13). The apparatus entertained by Skemp and others is a globe suspended from a twisted string, which as it unwinds suggests the retrograde cycle of the universe. Cherniss takes the passage so interpreted as his proof text for the view that disorderly physical motions

(represented by the reverse circuit and reflected in the model as the alleged unwinding of the thread) as secondary spin-off effects of the Demiurge's primary organizational efforts (reflected in the alleged winding up of the thread) ("Sources of Evil," [above, note 9], n. 21). I suggest, though, that this is not even the model Plato has in mind. The mention of the small pivot (270a8) and the lack of any mention of a string or wire strongly suggest that Plato is thinking here of a spinning top (as at *Republic* 436c) rather than a suspended globe. Further, the model of the suspended sphere does not fit or explain the purpose or details of the passage. The suspended sphere is taken as an image for how the world might move on its own. But this is not what is required of the model. What is required is an explanation of why the world revolves for such a long period on its own. Further, the details we are given of the mechanism, namely, that it is very large, evenly balanced, and on a very small pivot, are all irrelevant to the image of an object suspended from a twisted thread. Whereas all these details are exactly relevant to why, say, a top would spin many times on its own.²³

With this analysis of the argumentative section completed, the rest of the myth falls fairly easily into place. One troublesome point of interpretation is determining the reference of the expression *σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία* (272e6). This *εἰμαρμένη τε καὶ σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία* is said to turn the cosmos back again when the Demiurge withdraws from the world (272e5–6). At first blush the expression seems strong literal evidence for those who wish to see an irrational psychic force as the cause of the reverse motion of the universe.²⁴ It is the mainspring of Plutarch's reading of Plato's cosmology. My sympathies, though, lie with Vlastos, who sees this as a colorful expression for a purely physical impetus.²⁵ Herter (111) is correct to see the expression as having a backward reference to a similar expression in an identical context (*ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔμφυτον*, 269d2–3, in A). The two expressions seem merely stylistic variants of each other. Herter, however, mistakenly interprets the earlier expression by reference to the allusion

²³R. S. Brumbaugh has tentatively suggested that the mechanical model described at 270a is a precursor of weight-and-water operated clocks and that this accounts for the model's possessing a foot or pivot ("Plato and the History of Science," *StGen* 9 [1961] 523–524, 525–526). This view has in turn tentatively been accepted by Skemp 129–130 in the enlarged edition of 1967.) This model, however, fails to explain why the pivot's being small and why the pivoted body's being large and evenly balanced account for the long duration of the reverse circuit, since on the model of the weight-and-water operated clock the length of duration of the clock's running on its own is dependent solely on the size of the clock's well-shaft and the rate at which water runs out of the shaft (see Brumbaugh 526, n. 30). Like those critics who take the model to be a suspended globe, Brumbaugh mistakenly assumes the mechanical model is invoked to help explain the cause of the reverse circuit.

²⁴Skemp 26–27; cf. *Statesman* 107–108; also see Robinson's qualified acceptance of Skemp's interpretation, 136–138 and 135, n. 18; and see Herter 111–112.

²⁵(Above, note 1) 395.

to the World-Soul at 269d1 (in A), a line which he, as we have shown, mistakenly reads causally rather than descriptively. Rather, the phrase ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐμφυτον is to be explained in the argumentative section B; but in B there is no mention of an irrational soul, or irrational aspect of a soul, as the cause of the reverse circuit. Further, the term ἐπιθυμία is used loosely in a non-technical sense elsewhere in the myth (272d3). We can, then, with some confidence say that ἐπιθυμία (272e6) is a poetical expression for what is indeed not a psychic force. Moreover, the phrases ἐμφυτον and ἐπιθυμία seem to adumbrate and form a group with the expression "that which is inherent in the primeval (i.e., acosmic) nature" (τὸ . . . σὺντροφόν) at 273b4–5, which is in apposition to "the corporeal" (τὸ σωματοειδές, 273b4) and explains the cause (αἴτιον) of the World-Soul's being disrupted.

I agree with Herter (111) that matter, which is itself moving chaotically, infects and exerts pressure on the World-Soul. Robinson, on the other hand, claims that though the bodily is that which accounts for the evil in the world, the bodily itself is not as such positively evil. He compares (136–137) the bodily to a virus, which in itself is inert and neutral, and which is active and harmful only when in contact with a living organism. This image, however, does little justice to the quite active, even explosive disruptions by which the corporeal, when the gods withdraw from the world, temporarily but completely throws out of kilter the organizing ability of the World-Soul (273a–b). Robinson (138) correctly sees that in this passage Plato is applying on a cosmic scale the same corruption of the soul by the corporeal as is described in the discussion of the newly incarnate infant soul in the *Timaeus* (43a ff.). The parallelism is striking. It extends to such details as the bodily in the discussion of the infant soul, as in the *Statesman* myth, being said to flow in the opposite direction to the circuits of rationality (*Timaeus* 43d6–7). But *contra* Robinson, in both the *Timaeus* and the *Statesman* myth the incursion of the bodily is hardly that of a neutral, inert, and impassive substance. In the *Timaeus* the soul is confined within "the flowing and ebbing tide of the body" (43a5–6), which is described as "a strong river" (43a6). The result of the confinement of the soul in the body is that the soul suffers violent motions (43a7, cf. 43c7–d2), and loses its ability to maintain order (43b1, cf. 44a4). Further, sensations, which are treated as incursions of the corporeal into the soul, are said to assail the soul and cause a yet greater tumult (43b6–c7). The parallelism of *Statesman* 272e–273e to the infant psychology of the *Timaeus* strongly suggests that the bodily condition which infects the World-Soul is not inert and passive, but is actively chaotic.²⁶

The World-Soul of the *Statesman*, because it remembers the teachings

²⁶Cf. Vlastos (above, note 1) 397.

of the Demiurge, is able to restore order to the world after the initial active incursion of the bodily into the World-Soul (273a7) and so leads it from a state of *σεισμός* (273a3) to a motion of *uniform* rotation (*εἰς δρόμον κατακοσμούμενος*, 273a6–7). The universe, however, despite its shaking, is already said to be on its reverse circuit (*ὁ μεταστρεφόμενος*) when the World-Soul asserts its influences (273a1–2, 4), so again it does not seem possible that the World-Soul is being viewed as the cause of the reverse circuit.

The organization which the World-Soul is able to restore to the universe is temporary. For the bodily again begins to assert itself, with the result that, as in the infant psychology of the *Timaeus*, the soul's rational faculties begin to break down. In the *Statesman* this is characterized by loss of memory (273b3, c6). The primeval bodily condition (273b5, b7–c1, c7–d1), however, is the cause (*αἴτιον*) not only of the World-Soul's forgetfulness but also of all difficulty and injustice which arises in the universe (273c1). Now it is true that disorder (*ἀταξίας*, 273b6) and lack of harmony (*ἀναρμωστίας*, 273c7), which characterize the ancient bodily condition, could apply to either static or dynamic states. But insofar as the ancient condition, when it holds power (*δυναστεύει*, 273c7), is said to burst forth (*ἐξανθεῖ*, 273d1) resulting in the world's being storm-driven (*χειμασθεῖς*, 273d5) at sea, it again is fairly clear that the disorder of the ancient state is a dynamic one.

With the forgetfulness of the World-Soul comes an increase in the disorder of the corporeal. There is no suggestion, however, that the World-Soul contributes to this increased disorder as a proximate efficient cause. In this the *Statesman* myth differs from the infant psychology of the *Timaeus*, where the once rational, infant soul, when made irrational by the incursions of the bodily, in turn causes violent motions in the corporeal (43a7–b2). Rather, in the *Statesman* myth the World-Soul seems simply to relinquish its care and rule over the universe as a result of its forgetfulness, such that the corporeal may on its own, in the absence of organizational restraints from the World-Soul, revert to its ancient state of chaos. It seems, then, that as the World-Soul's memory is erased, the World-Soul does not become actively irrational, but simply becomes non-rational. With the increasing forgetfulness of the World-Soul, its activities do not become erratically exuberant but become increasingly dull and lacking in energy (*ἀμβλύτερον*, 273b3). In this case, again, the World-Soul is not being viewed primarily, if at all, as an efficient cause of motion but is being viewed mainly as a maintainer of organization (which it transmits to the World-Body from the Demiurge) against a natural tendency of the corporeal to be chaotic.

I suggest that the World-Soul operates rather like a governor on a steam engine: the governor regulates the motions of the machine in such a way that the machine's self-sustained independently originated

motions, which because of unpredictable conditions of combustion tend to run off to excess, are nonetheless uniformly maintained and do not destroy the machine itself. However, the governor neither initiates the motions it regulates nor is it itself the cause of its being synchronized with the machine. This synchronization, which enables the governor to govern, is derived from some external source. And like a machine-governor, the World-Soul here is capable of maintaining order only within a certain range of natural disruptions. Chaos wins out.

The primitive condition of the corporeal, towards which the dissolving (*διαλυθείς*, 273d6) universe tends, is characterized by unlimited dissimilarity (*τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον*, 273d6). This characterization of the primeval corporeal condition looks very much like the characterization of the corporeal as such in *BI* (269d5–7), where self-identity is denied of the corporeal.²⁷ Since no psychic cause is found in 272e–273e for the reverse circuit of the universe and since, as we have seen, the primitive condition of the corporeal is a dynamic state, the two characterizations of the corporeal as being denied self-identity mutually support the view that the corporeal in and of itself is in chaotic motion.

The cosmological schema which emerges from our analysis of the *Statesman* myth, then, is that the corporeal on its own without psychic influences moves chaotically, is the efficient cause of the retrograde cycle of the universe, and is a positive source of disorder and evil. That the retrograde motion caused by the corporeal is uniform, at least initially, is the result of the ability of the World-Soul to sustain organization. That the World-Soul has such an ability should dissipate the concern of some critics (Herter 111; Robinson 137) that the *σύμφυτον ἐπιθυμία*, whether interpreted as an erratic physical or irrational psychic force, could not be the source of motion which is uniform. The World-Soul itself, however, seems not primarily to be viewed as an efficient cause, either of motions as such or of motions as regular or erratic. The World-Soul is simply a *maintainer* of the organization of both itself and the World-Body (272a7–b1). The Demiurge, who stands over and above the World-Soul and who is the source of its existence, is the *source* of the orderliness of both the World-Body and World-Soul, which the World-Soul tries to maintain against the inherently chaotic motions of the corporeal.

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²⁷This characterization also looks very much like an adumbration (or echoing) of the *Timaeus*, where the chaotic flux of the phenomena is described by saying the pre-cosmic Receptacle is full of entirely dissimilar powers (*μήθ' ὁμοίων δυνάμεων*, 52e2). I think the reading of the *Statesman* mss *τόπον* (273e1) should be retained over Proclus' extension of the passage's marine metaphor, *πόντον*. The phrase "the place of unlimited dissimilarity" may in fact be a direct reference to the Receptacle (cf. *ἐν τινι τόπῳ καὶ* [= i.e.] *κατέχον χώραν τινά*, *Timaeus* 52b4–5).