Jonas Tenzer

Prof. Jacques Bailly

CLAS 161 Plato / PHIL 108

5/3/23

The Double Explanation in the Timaeus

Steven K. Strange

**The Problem: Cause in the Phaedo and the Timaeus**

Socrates in the Phaedo says that at one point he was intrigued by Anaxagoras’ claim that reason is responsible for the natural world and its orderly arrangement. Socrates is disappointed in the fact that Anaxagoras does not back up this claim by showing how reason is the best way to configure the physical world. Anaxagoras’ explanation was in terms of sensibles and he did not try to link them to the role of reason as the cause of everything. Socrates is unsatisfied with Anaxagoras’ explanation for two reasons. The first is that Anaxagoras is trying to explain contrary facts by citing a single cause, for example, explaining how one thing becomes two by addition rather than division or separation. The second reason is that Anaxagoras, as mentioned above, explains in terms of sensibles, but sensibles do not relate to reason, at least not in the way that Anaxagoras explains. For example, Socrates is sitting in jail because he chose not to flee, and this is reason. A physiological explanation of how Socrates sits in jail would be necessary for a complete explanation, but on its own is not a cause. Socrates tries to explain how reason/ the good is the cause of everything through forms, but this does not fully address cause either. It is important to note that although Socrates first introduced the forms, Plato developed them by applying them to physics and in turn set forth the theory that forms are in fact the cause of the natural, physical world. In the Timaeus, Plato attempts to show how reason orders the world with what is best. He does this by saying that reason cannot be the sole cause and sensibles must also be admitted as possible cause. He does this by relating the sensibles to the Forms and stating that all sensibles were created in the image of these Forms, because the Forms are good.

**The Relation Between Reason and Necessity**

Plato states in the Timaeus that there are two sorts of causes, Reason and Necessity. There are not completely independent but overlap. However, Reason dominates Necessity. Reason is the forms and Necessity is the sensibles. The creator of the universe used reason to create the physical world, or the world of Necessity. The creator used Reason to create it because the world of Forms is the best. However, the sensibles around us can be explained by Necessity. Becoming is a result of Reason and Necessity but Necessity is dominated by Reason in this creation. Reason is perfect because the world of Forms is perfect. Necessity is the sensibles and the sensibles are not perfect, so necessity causes disorder.

**Reason and Necessity as Types of Causes**

In the Timaeus, Reason is the creator of the universe. The creator works by making this world as much like the world of Forms as possible, because the world of Forms is good. Anything good in the world can be explained by the creator instituting the good of the world of Forms into this world. Reason is always guided by the Forms, while Necessity is not. Evil, or badness, is not caused by Reason’s activity in the soul, but by Necessity, or disorder. Therefore, people should not be blamed for evil in their souls because it is caused by a disorder of the soul.

The structure of the Forms has consequences for the world we perceive. Forms sometime bring along other Forms, for example, the form of oneness brings along the Form of oddness. However, sometimes Forms also exclude other Forms, for example, oneness excludes twoness, and tallness excludes shortness. Because Forms sometime exclude other Forms, the world we perceive cannot be a perfect likeness of the world of Forms, or the world of Reason. The goals of the creator contradict each other, and the creator is limited by Necessity.

Why do Forms not contradict each other in the world of Forms and only in the world we perceive? If a Form contradicted a Form in the World of Forms, then how would they exist, because the world of Forms is perfect? The answer to this question is that contradicting Forms (co-present Forms) are only contradicting in the physical world and are only co-present there. "Necessity is not merely formal causality: it seems to involve material causality as well. The craftsman of the cosmos uses the reflections or images of the Forms in the Receptacle for his raw materials, as a sculptor would use stone or other material that he knows how to cleave or mold. Necessity comes into play only when these materials are combined: it is not the properties themselves that are incompatible with perfection but their joint embodiment. These constraints on Reason are intimately connected with the corporeality of the physical world." (Strange, P. 411)

Reason always makes things for the best, while Necessity tries to embody the forms in a physical world and what is best is irrelevant. Necessity is the cause of all evil but also causes things that are neither good nor bad, like things that are a compromise between Reason and Necessity. Necessity produces disorder when trying to embody the Forms because every Form brings along or excludes another Form. Every material object brings about side effects, and this is the cause of disorder.