

As is well known, in the *Phaedrus* Plato explicitly assigns to the forms a special location, ‘the place above the heavens’ (247c).⁶⁷ There he says nothing definite about this ‘place’; and so, taken just by itself, that image could be sceptically interpreted as a mere metaphor. But the *Timaeus* lends it some definite content; for in the *Timaeus* it is very clear that Plato does regard the forms as occupying a non-spatiotemporal realm and hence as transcendent in sense (A).⁶⁸ To start with, the forms (more precisely, the form of animal and its species) are the unchanging, eternal model to which the Demiurge looked to fashion the universe, bringing order into a primordial chaos; and it was only after thus creating the body of the universe, as well as its soul, that the Demiurge set to create *time* (37cd, 38bc).⁶⁹

Now, when the father who had begotten the universe observed it set in motion and alive, a thing that had come to be as an image of the everlasting gods, he was well pleased and in his delight he thought of making it still more like its model. So, as that model is an everlasting [ἀίδιον] animal, he set himself to bringing this universe to completion in such a way that it, too, would have that character to the extent that it was possible. Now, the animal’s nature was eternal [αἰώνιος], and it was not possible to bestow this feature fully upon what had been begotten. But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving image of eternity [εἰκῶ... κινητόν τινα αἰῶνος], and as he went on ordering the heavens he made an eternal⁷⁰ image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity. This is precisely what we call ‘time’...

Time, then, came to be together with the heavens, in order that just as they were begotten together they should be also dissolved together, if a dissolution of them should ever occur. And it came to be after the model of the eternal nature, in order that it should be as similar to it as possible. For the model is in existence for all eternity [πάντα αἰῶνα], while it, on the other hand, has been, is and will be perpetually, for all time [τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον].

So the forms were already there before the beginning of time and hence exist timelessly and are *eternal*, whereas the created universe is merely *everlasting*, existing ‘for all time’. (But notice that it remains possible to speak of the forms as being ‘everlasting’ in some weaker, more generic sense; likewise they are soon going to be said to be ‘always’ in the same state, 38a2.) As a consequence, forms should not be spoken of in tensed language (37e–38a):

‘was’ and ‘will be’ are forms of time that have come to be, which we incorrectly apply to the everlasting being without realizing that this is so. For we say that it ‘was’ and ‘is’ and ‘will be’, but only ‘is’ is appropriate to it according to the true account, whereas ‘was’ and ‘will be’ are properly said about the coming-to-be that proceeds in time. For they are both motions [κινήσεις]; and it is

⁶⁷ The ‘supracelestial place’ is not also the habitat of discarnate souls. These live *inside* the heavens (247a5) and ascend to ‘the summit of the arch that supports the heavens’ (247ab) to gaze at the forms, which are *outside* (247c2). See de Vries 1969: 133.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ross 1951: 232; Wedberg 1955: 40–1.

⁶⁹ I take it that the *Timaeus* account of the world’s creation must, at least in its essentials, be understood literally and that no serious doubt about this, however problematic the matter may be, should survive Sedley’s (2007: 98–107) discussion. Anyway, much of what I am going to say could be reconciled with a non-literal interpretation.

⁷⁰ At 37d7 αἰώνιον ‘eternal’, read by all MSS and by Proclus, makes very poor sense. There is something to be said for Cornford’s (1937: 98 n. 1) correction ἀέναον, ‘everlasting’: cf. *Lg.* 966e.

not appropriate to what is always motionless in the same state to become older or younger in the course of time [τὸ δὲ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἔχον ἀκινήτως οὔτε πρεσβύτερον οὔτε νεώτερον προσήκει γίγνεσθαι διὰ χρόνου] – neither did it become so in the past, nor is it now such that it has become so, nor will it be so in the future. And all in all, none of the features that coming-to-be bestowed upon the things which move about in the realm of perception is appropriate to it.

Actually, in these lines, dense with Parmenidean echoes (cf. especially 28 B8.5 DK), Timaeus is not just inferring, from the previous assumption (i) that forms exist timelessly, that (ii) they should be spoken of tenselessly. He is also advancing another, independent argument, which aims to prove both (i) and (ii) and which can be reconstructed as follows. It makes no sense to make a tensed statement about a form – e.g. ‘Justice itself was a virtue yesterday.’ For such a statement to make sense, the form would have to exist in time, to ‘become older’ in the course of time; but for this in turn to be possible the form would have to undergo some change, which is impossible: ‘it is not appropriate to what is always motionless in the same state to become older or younger in the course of time’ (38a2–3). So the argument rests on the assumption that *time entails change*, and hence that *what is completely changeless must also be timeless*. This is why Timaeus can say that ‘was’ and ‘will be’ are ‘motions’ or ‘changes’ (κινήσεις, 38a2). He does not mean that the mere passage of time constitutes a kind of change (which would be odd), but that the passage of time entails change.⁷¹

And of course the *Timaeus* also rules out the possibility that the forms might be in *space*, whose notion it introduces precisely in order to account for the status of sensible particulars (52ac):

Third comes the kind of space [τῆς χώρας], which always is, does not admit of destruction and provides a seat for all the things that have coming-to-be... We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that is must necessarily be somewhere, in some place and occupying some region of space, and that what is not found somewhere, either on earth or in heaven, is nothing at all. Because of this dreaming state we prove unable to wake up and draw all these distinctions and others akin to them, even as regards the unsleeping, truly existing nature.

That is to say (as also the passage’s sequel, which I have not quoted, confirms), we are going astray when we claim that everything must be somewhere; for the forms – ‘the unsleeping, truly existing nature’ – are nowhere.

⁷¹ For the looseness of saying that ‘is’ and ‘was’ *are* motions, while in fact meaning that they *entail* motions, cf. *Sph.* 247e, where ‘the beings are nothing but capacity [δύναμις]’ actually means ‘something is a being if and only if it *has* capacity’ (*sc.* to act or be acted upon). The same sort of looseness is, I suspect, in play at *Th.* 156a ‘everything is motion and nothing else’.

My discussion of the *Timaeus* argument is indebted to Owen 1966: 39–40, though he seems to offer a different interpretation. Owen 1966: 28 explains how the assumption that time entails change can itself be made to depend on another, more basic assumption: ‘if X is to have a past distinct from its present, something must be true of that past which is not true of the present; and similarly with the future. Otherwise they could not be distinguished... times of which exactly the same things are true (at which the same states of affairs obtain, and which are not distinguished by their antecedents or sequels) are the same time. It is the identity of indiscernibles, with times and not objects for its arguments.’