Myth and philosophy on stage in Platonic dialogues

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3.5 *The Atlantis myth. The ideal, fantasy and critical commentary* – Timaeus and Critias

3.5.1 *Preface*

An analysis of the Atlantis myth, as it is presented in both the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, using my proposed methodology raises doubts since the approach has so far depended on the interdependent co-existence of *mythos* and *logos* in the same text. The two texts do not provide any example of dialectic argument – in fact the two major parts of the *Timaeus* and all of the *Critias* are narrative monologues. Also, the history of Athens and Atlantis has no didactic counterpart but, in a prelude to the story, only alludes to a previous conversation which could be interpreted as implying some of the arguments constituting the first five books of the *Republic*. Plato's treatment of ancient Athens and Atlantis certainly does not contain any argument in the form we have become used to in previous dialogues. In this chapter I will be focusing on the Atlantis myth and critically approach it using the same methods I have used to study the other dialogues. I will pay some attention to the creation myth only insofar as it will support my structural and stylistic analysis of Critias' story. Timaeus' cosmogony/cosmology in the *Timaeus* renders arguments for how the universe came to be the way it is and why it functions the way it does but these arguments are in no way comparable to what we have come to be accustomed to in Plato's characteristic discursive formulations. In fact, the cosmogony and the cosmological account are plausible only if certain simple beliefs about the basic elements constituting the physical world are taken for granted.[1] Therefore, it is not unreasonable to categorize the two dialogues as essentially narrative expositions. In terms

[1] What Timaeus offers in the *Timaeus* seems to go against what Plato advises in the *Phaedo* when he rejects Presocratic attempts to explain causation in terms of physical conditions. In the *Timaeus* Plato takes the physical conditions of causation as significant factors and as indispensable as necessity or formal causes (See Johansen [2004] pp. 16-21; also, cf. with my interpretation of the *Phaedrus* as a transition which introduced and incorporated a new view of the physical world).

of my theory of mutual scaffolding this presents a problem. How can this method work if the dialogues do not contain an argumentative counterpart to *mythos*?

I can provide an answer by explaining a number of points about the literary genre that Plato chose to structure the dialogue and certain literary devices used within this framework. The Atlantis myth is clearly not a moral allegory, an example for educative purposes or a rhetorical device used to arrive at knowledge. I want to argue that it is a philosophical myth of a peculiar kind which has a mutual scaffolding relationship with Plato's arguments for two fundamental topics: epistemology and politics (metaphysics is another issue of equal importance that I will explore briefly in relation to Timaeus' account). The interdependence between narrative and philosophy exists through mutual scaffolding but, as I will demonstrate, they do not interact by supporting each other but through a similar technique applied for critique. The argumentative part of the dialogue must be read within the myth itself; in fact, the Atlantis myth is a practical illustration of Plato's self criticism or, more accurately, a critique of an idealistic interpretation of his philosophy. As a historical account that arises as a response to the formal and rational principles used to develop the theory of recollection and the ideal state it is, therefore, both *mythos* and *logos*: a combination of a narrative which takes particular arguments as its backdrop and is presented, in the dialogue scene, as a scientific historical account. The use of mutual scaffolding to combine *mythos* and *logos* into a harmonious unit, along with an amicable dramatic situation, sets up a framework for a form of critique to take place in the dialogue where myth represents a likely but ironically unreasonable consequence of accepting rational theories.

Plato is using a kind of fantasy writing (similar to the modern genre) in the two dialogues which means that he does not require elaborate presentation of the arguments. Similar to many works of fiction which generally wear emblems of socio-cultural-philosophical theories, the two major myths in the two dialogues are marked with a heavy influence from Plato's epistemology, politics and metaphysics even if these theories are not detailed. The arguments can occupy a place in the text simply through implication

and the narrative offers many indications regarding a relationship with *logoi*. The *Meno*, as I explained, is a form of 'meta' dialogue that functions as an instruction guide for how hypothesis should be used in a philosophical way and does not consist of a myth but makes reference to one. In similar fashion, the *Timaeus* and *Critias* do not include dialectic arguments but make reference to ideas that those acquainted with Plato's thought are familiar with and which have previously been supported by sophisticated arguments. But unlike the *Meno* the Atlantis tale, a 'self-reflective/critical myth', reveals the problems with using a hypothetical method; Plato wants to illustrate that, in practice (in reality), the consequences of basing an account on a rational ideal can be, ironically, unreasonable, i.e. intellectually and practically dubious and possibly detrimental to a society and its individuals, including their philosophical development in general.[2] The references to the ideal state must be seriously considered and connected to the story using mutual scaffolding. In addition, the role of mutual scaffolding is clearer, and can be implemented successfully, only once the myth has been understood as an experiment in a particular philosophical example of fiction.[3]

3.5.2 *Theme introduction, setting and narrative mode*

The dialogue opens by Socrates clarifying the number of companions present; friends that he had apparently been conversing with on the previous day. He also indicates that one individual is missing due to illness but we are not told who it is.[4] The characters that accompany Socrates in the dialogue are Timaeus, Critias and Hermocrates. I will analyze these characters in "Character selection" but I will mention here that all in attendance are described as statesmen that have been trained in

[2] In contrast, the comogonical/cosmological account represents a better and less problematic use of ideal principles while remaining faithful to the subjective perspective of the narrator.
[3] For a comprehensive description of the philosophical implications of fantasy fiction see J.R.R. Tolkien's essay entitled "On Fairy Stories" (1966).
[4] Consider the fact that Plato was ill in the *Phaedo*.

philosophy. It is not too hasty to assume that they are 'philosopher-kings'. I think the fact that Plato chose these characters to assist in bringing his ideal state to life,[5] in combination with the way Socrates is represented, reveals many critical features about Plato's personal view of politicians and philosophers[6] even if they share affinities with or are trained in Plato's school of philosophy and model their activities on ideal principles and an ideal state.[7] The presentation of the mythic history of Athens by Critias, a character who is described as a philosophically trained statesman, will be taken into serious consideration and I will argue how Critias' personal and socio-cultural characteristics influence the status and meaning of the content in the dialogues.[8] In other words, Plato's choice of a practical politician from the Athenian ruling class as narrator for the myth can be interpreted as his methodological suggestion for how the myth should be received and evaluated.[9]

[5] Johansen (2004) pp. 32-33.

[6] The features I will elucidate relate to the reliability or unreliability of 'ideal' individuals to construct a suitable account based on a worthy rational hypothesis and the ability of a reputable philosopher (Socrates) to evaluate them.

[7] Gill (1977) p. 288. Gill recognizes the fact that the philosopher-statesmen differ from poets in their predispositions and can therefore produce a good representation of the ideal state. He extrapolates certain comments made from the *Republic* and asserts that, in the *Timaeus*, the interlocutors have good knowledge of the real nature of the state and will produce a good representation of it. He states: "a representation which attributes to its subject its proper character and shows that its moral goodness leads to its success in the world." The view I will argue for below, and that Gill suggests on pg. 289, is that Plato introduces the characters as the most appropriate candidates for the job but that their productions vary in terms of their quality and message.

[8] In Finkelberg's paper "Plato's Method in *Timaeus*" (1996) p. 391, he states, in relation to the metaphorical and literal interpretations of the creation myth, that "the issue can hardly be settled by a direct appeal to the text". Also, this attitude reflects many approaches to the Atlantis myth. I think that some external assistance is needed in interpreting the text but this should not devalue the importance of the text itself in expressing the most important points that Plato wanted to make. By concentrating on the text many salient features of the dialogue lead the reader to a better understanding of the purpose and open up new and more compelling interpretative tools: plot structure, character selection, the use of tropes and the philosophical use of themes and motifs. Also, we are still left with the question of what external material is accurate and useful when analyzing the text. I think considering literary and cultural factors, as well as Plato's own style, can help more than an appeal to commentators or critics. Finkelberg brings up some important issues but it seems he is mainly reacting to the literal and metaphorical interpretations rather than concentrating on revisiting the text without influence from the perspectives of others.

[9] Equally, Timaeus' characteristics are important for understanding and evaluating his myth. I will touch on the role of Timaeus in the dialogue and the influence his character has on his narrative but my primary focus will be Critias and his story.

Even though Socrates does not participate in most of the two dialogues his role is crucial for understanding the stories, their status and the characters that tell them. Why does Socrates respect the three politicians so much? He is younger than them but youth has not deterred his critical approach to a debate in other dialogues. The opening scene suggests that it could be simply the fact that they are philosophers who are active in politics. If this is the case it would represent a somewhat naïve attitude. In other dialogues Socrates tests his interlocutors before passing judgment and accepting or rejecting their views. In the *Timaeus* and *Critias* the other characters step into the dialogue with grand reputations – unquestioned and unanalyzed. Socrates is presented here by Plato as an admirer – a believer waiting to be told the truth. He trusts that the politicians will give him exactly what he requires; Socrates is certain that they will bring his ideal state to life because of the simple fact that they are statesmen educated in philosophy. In this section I will explore whether Plato intended the characters of Critias and Timaeus to be completely competent and reliable philosophers and statesmen (reliable narrators) and whether their narratives should be considered appropriate for the topic. Theoretically speaking, are the consequences they draw from their hypotheses (recollection, the ideal state and the theory of Forms) the kinds of consequences we should desire and do the accounts that incorporate them live up to the expectations of the hypotheses and, therefore, are they philosophically sophisticated? It is not enough to assume that the characters and the two main narratives are up to standard merely because all parties in the dialogue accept them to be. I have already illustrated how Plato paints Socrates in an unfavorable light in some dialogues. Therefore, it is not implausible to argue that the 'philosopher-kings' could be committing error and are possibly a little misguided. I will argue that in terms of their credentials and their respect for ideal principles they live up to the expectations of a philosophical ruler in the form that Plato has us understand in the *Republic*. However, the consequences in the form of their expositions, the creations of these hypothetical 'philosopher-kings' are far from ideal. In fact, Plato may be expressing some interesting critical thoughts concerning the delicate nature of ideals and their precarious utility in man's creative processes.

In terms of the setting, Plato does not spend any time explaining the environment in which the dialogue is taking place. The details of space are not a concern of the dialogue. There are a few possibilities for this technique. First, the Atlantis myth focuses a lot of attention on describing the typology and society of a lost civilization and ancient Athens (not to mention that the *Timaeus* also describes the genealogy of the story and, after the Atlantis myth, offers a detailed account of the cosmos). In terms of literary style, Plato's decision not to evoke any imagery for the location of the dialogue redirects the reader's immediate attention to the imagery of the Atlantis myth (there is minimal risk of misdirecting or distracting the focus of the reader or listener from the more pertinent tale). Secondly, Plato refers to a conversation the topics in which resemble certain arguments in the *Republic*. It may be that the intellectual context that the myth is a response to is an alternative to a physical setting – the intellectual framework that sets up the dialogue may be a sufficient replacement. Last, in support of the last point on the possible theoretical nature of the dialogue, like the *Meno*, which does not have a physical setting or lead in, the intention of the *Timaeus* and *Critias* may also have been a strictly theoretical or 'meta' issue. In the background to the myth we have an abstract constitution or, more accurately, principles for an ideal state.

Also, the reference to the earlier conversation about the ideal state represents an example of recollection and the rest of the dialogue explores the complexities of recollection for preparing and delivering a 'true' account. I will demonstrate how Plato is addressing issues regarding the application of theory for practical purposes – theoretical concerns analyzed within the framework of a socio-politics discussion. As I mentioned above, the discussion of political issues is accompanied by a lead-in involving an epistemologically suggestive and significant scenario. Prior to Critias' account he engages in a philosophical act of recollection by trying to remember the philosophical discussion of the previous day about the principles of an ideal state, the story told to him during childhood, and the connection between the two. Even Timaeus' account is a response to Socrates' description of an ideal state – he too is influenced by and must

remember the earlier conversation and responds by beginning his account with some basic details concerning the theory of Forms.[10]

I agree with Desmond Lee that the previous day's conversation that is referred to is not the *Republic*.[11] The interlocutors are different and the recapitulation of the topics mentioned in the *Timaeus* only refers to issues raised in the first five books and leaves out some of the most important philosophical elements of the *Republic*. Also, understanding the *Timaeus* as a sequel to the *Republic* gives too much attention to another dialogue which contains significant discursive material specific to it, as well as its own myths, themes and motifs. To interpret the *Timaeus* as essentially dependent on the *Republic* weakens the unique literary place and philosophical significance of the myths in Plato's *oeuvre* since the different myths are structured uniquely and send very different messages. What we can say with any certainty is that the conversation they are continuing was about an ideal state and that the topics were those recapped by Socrates before Critias' monologue (I will detail the topics in "The philosophical arguments" section). And we may assume that the arguments they discussed on the previous day to justify certain laws resembled those in the *Republic*. What is important to consider is that Plato carefully selected these topics and describes them in the form he does with the Atlantis myth in mind – the presentation of which I will argue can be unified with the arguments using mutual scaffolding.

Socrates provokes the myth by expressing his dissatisfaction with the state he described. He regrets that it lacked life and resembled pictures or motionless objects rather than a real state. This distances the *Timaeus* from the *Republic* even further because the *Republic* contains vivid metaphors, examples and its own monumental myth

[10] Timaeus' case slightly differs from Critias'. Timaeus must also remember a conversation with Critias' from the day before after they left Socrates and went to Critias' house. There is an additional element in Timaeus' process of recollection that is worth consideration. For a list of the essential features of the opening passage of Timaeus' cosmogony/cosmology see Runia (1997) p. 103.

[11] See Lee's introduction to Plato (1977) p. 23. Also see Clay (1997) pp. 50-51. For arguments supporting the view that the *Timaeus* is a sequel to the *Republic* see Voegelin (1947) p. 308 and Johansen (2004) p. 7-23).

at the end. Also, we must not forget the fact that the pretext for explicating the ideal state in the *Republic* is to arrive at a convincing account of a just man – Socrates' method is to describe the pattern of a just state in order to then describe the model of a just man since he believes it is easier to move from a larger example to a smaller more particular example. In the *Timaeus*, however, Socrates requests an account that transports the abstract into reality. He hopes that his comrades can describe his perfect society but not doing what actual societies normally do on a daily basis, or the profundity with which the state would react to serious and complex legal, cultural or other philosophically pertinent problems. Socrates wants to see his state performing, strangely, only two very particular functions. In addition to "transactions with other states" Socrates asks that his ideal state be described in the act of "waging war successfully and showing in the process all the qualities one would expect from its system of education and training, both in action and negotiation with its rivals." (19)

The role of explicit first person narrator shifts from Socrates to Critias for the Atlantis tale, and then Timaeus for the cosmological account. Socrates practically excludes himself from the dialogue after he acknowledges that he is incapable of describing his ideal city in a real situation. He realizes that such a task is out of his experience and best left to the others who are referred to as both philosophers and statesmen. As a result, the genealogy and explication of the myth becomes a monologue by Critias. The fact that Critias is the one who, in response to Socrates' account of an ideal state, remembers a childhood story; that he is the only one who has access to the Atlantis myth; and the fact that he is the only one who can tell the myth, is significant. For one, he is the only Athenian amongst Socrates companions and from a high standing family at that – he was a relative of Plato. Critias is related to the line of transmission both ancestrally and socially; he is linked to Solon not just as a fellow citizen but also on the level of class and ideology. These details, their influence on the interpretation of the myth and the relevance of certain features of the story, will be addressed throughout this section and especially when I discuss the character of Critias in "Character selection".

The introduction of the *Critias* begins with Timaeus transferring the narrator's role to Critias. Critias continues by asking for a degree of leniency from his audience and making some interesting comments regarding the mimetic nature of statements. We are told that all statements are essentially "pictures or images" and the acceptance or rejection of a statement is strongly influenced by the severity with which we judge it (107). Critias exposes this factor involved in deliberation and asks his interlocutors not to be too harsh in evaluating his story. He contrasts the difficulty of Timaeus' account with the difficulty of his task, explaining that his is harder due to the fact that it attempts to describe human subjects rather than divine. Critias explains that divine themes are easier to account for because since we are all ignorant about the gods a likely account is sufficient. However, in the case of human topics any description becomes subject to strict criticism because of our familiarity with many features of the account.

> So in what immediately follows, you should make allowances if my narrative is not always entirely appropriate; for you must understand that it is far from easy to give satisfactory accounts of human affairs (107).

Socrates happily grants Critias this favor and there are no objections to Hermocrates being given the same allowances (108). Critias' introductory comments about the difference between rendering an account of divine things in contrast to human things are rather rhetorical and he does not provide his listeners any decent basis for respecting his request for leniency; the interlocutors just agree without questioning. Once again we have an example of Socrates as an ardent believer in his philosopher-statesmen.

3.5.3 *The myth*

After Socrates had finished praising the other interlocutors for their philosophical and practical political talents Hermocrates mentioned a follow up conversation that took

place after the previous day's discussion (20). This conversation did not include Socrates and was held at Critias' house where the others were staying. This passage tells us that the dialogue took place in Athens and, more importantly, that the story is first recalled and told by a reputable Athenian in the surroundings of his own home in Athens. The place of historically significant Athenian figures in the transmission of the myth is confirmed when Critias' mentions that the myth was passed onto his great-grandfather, Dropides, by Solon. Dropides was archon of Athens after Solon and, therefore, the first to carry on Solon's reforms. Afterwards, the myth was passed down within the family until it reached the Critias in the dialogue. I believe these factors indicate that Plato intended the Atlantis myth to contain a strong sense of Athenian identity. In addition, I want to argue in this section that the genealogy itself is also part of the myth and adds to the philosophical significance and nature of the historical account (I will account for the characteristics of the transmitters, place of transmission and other relevant details as literary devices).

> It [the myth] relates many notable achievements of our city long ago, which have been lost sight of because of the lapse of time and destruction of human life. Of these the greatest is one that we could well recall now to repay our debt to you and to offer the Goddess on her festival day a just and truthful hymn of praise (20-21).

Critias' recount begins with his memory of a festival he attended when he was about ten years old along with his Grandfather, also named Critias, who we are told was almost ninety. The boys who recited poetry at the festival mainly chose Solon's poetry which was a popular choice at the time. The narrator then describes how a fellow clansmen and his grandfather spoke of Solon's poetic preeminence during which grandfather Critias mentions the story Solon brought back from Egypt. In this passage the older Critias explains that Solon would have surpassed Homer and Hesiod in poetic creations had he not been preoccupied with statesmanship. We are told that the story brought back from Egypt tells of the "greatest and most noteworthy" achievement of Athens, i.e. an account

that fits the genre of epic.[12] What Plato has Critias do here through the explication of the details of transmission is an important cultural practice in socio-political rhetoric. In this instance, an Athenian political figure is providing a 'folktale' or a patriotic historical account that defines Athenian identity and distinguishes Athens as a distinct and privileged culture in the Greek world due to its noble origins and potential (geographically and socially).

Another crucial aspect of the genealogy one needs to consider is the symbolic and cultural place of Egypt in ancient Greek thought.

> 'Tell us from the beginning,' came the reply; 'how and from whom did Solon hear the tale which he told you as true?' (21)

According to Critias' genealogy an Egyptian priest from the city of Sais, in the district of Saitic, told Solon the story while he was visiting Egypt. The Egyptian king Amasis is mentioned as coming from this city and the patron god of the city is Neith, the equivalent of Athena. Critias informs us that the Saisians were very friendly to Athenians due to the fact that they believed that they were related. Throughout the narrative Critias portrays the Athenians in a very favorable light – when describing the Egyptian perception of Athenians in general and of Solon in particular. Plato's mention of these details must be taken seriously for a number of reasons. First, King Amasis II, or Ahmose II, established close ties with the Greeks in many respects; the most significant being his contribution to rebuilding the temple of Delphi and his marriage to a Greek princess. Herodotus writes about this particular king at length and praises his achievements therefore increasing his popularity – and possibly the popularity of the Egyptians in general – within Greek society and thought.[13] Second, the city itself was the Egyptian sister city of Athens and protected by a goddess acknowledged by Critias as Athena. And third, Solon hears about the existence of ancient Athens for the first time by a local priest in the Egyptian city; the

[12] The fact that comparisons were drawn with the epic poets supports the classification of the Atlantis myth as a form of epic.
[13] See Johansen (2004) p. 39, for contrasts between Herodotus' comments about the Egyptians and Critias'.

priest being the equivalent to a priest of Athena. These features confirm the genealogy as part of the myth, albeit in a peculiar way since Plato seems to be combining a sense of cultural legitimacy with what would otherwise be completely unimaginable as well as unverifiable. In fact, the priest tells Solon that he has historical records to prove what he is telling him and says he will show Solon in due time. The genealogy contributes to the understanding of the tale by adding a number of important dimensions to the myth which I will discuss later, particularly when I relate it to *anamnesis*.[14]

The priest had told Solon that pre-deluge Athens was exceptional in many respects, particularly in governance and war. There is a parallel, the priest notes, between the laws of Egypt at that time and ancient Athenian institutions and he begins to list some of the features of Socrates' ideal state that were mentioned at the beginning of the dialogue. In addition to these laws, one of the advantages of ancient Athens was its geographical location which their Goddess originally chose for them and which contributed to influencing their characteristics. From among their many successful activities and exploits one stood out as exceptional: their victory in defeating a belligerent Atlantis.

At the time of the battle between the two Greek powers Atlantis, under the rule of a king, controlled not only the island of Atlantis but "many other islands as well and parts of the continent; in addition it controlled, within the strait, Libya up to the borders of Egypt and Europe as far as Tyrrhenia" (25). The priest claimed that they had planned to conquer most of the known world including Egypt and Athens until the army of Athens, in the face of formidable odds, defeated them and quelled their imperialist aims. After briefly describing the battle Critias finishes the story with an account of the deluge that submerged the island of Atlantis and killed the majority of Athenian citizens.

[14] There is no historical accuracy in relation to the contents of the myth, nor its transmission, "it is introduced exclusively for the purpose of conveying the meaning which it has within the fabric of the *Timaeus.*" (Voegelin [1947] p. 316)

Apparently, according to Critias, the society and its inhabitants described by Socrates on the previous day bore an uncanny resemblance to the details concerning ancient Athens. In the *Critias* Plato has Critias describe first how the gods divided up the earth and then allocated the rule of each region to a particular god according to intelligent agreement and justice. They ruled over their terrain using these same virtues which they passed onto the native inhabitants. Athens was ruled by Hephaestos and Athene who together had a reputation for their love of knowledge and skill which they passed onto the Athenian people. After the deluge the advanced members of the community perished leaving only unlettered mountain dwellers. Therefore, pre-flood Athenian history was lost and no effort was made to recover it due to a primary concern for survival. Interestingly, war is a central theme in Critias' account and he mentions that Solon's account of the war revealed that women also took part in military engagement – a role we are told is natural to both genders. Critias indicates that the myth he was told resembled Socrates' ideal city in terms of its most important issues – particularly issues concerning their military power (110-111). After briefly explaining the forgotten origin of some Greek names and the benefits of the original natural environment, Critias provides some of the dimensions of the Acropolis as it existed then and some basic demographic information concerning the different classes. He then goes on to describe some details concerning Atlantis. First, after Critias mentions how the Egyptians translated the Greek names in the story which Solon then translated back into Greek after researching the meanings, we are told that Poseidon ruled Atlantis which was occupied by an earth-born population. Poseidon's own offspring, which he begot with one of the mortals born of the soil, became the dynasty of kings that ruled the different regions of the island. Then, Critias' narrative goes on to describe features of the island's typology, the guardians of each region, its natural resources, architecture, military service, governance, the court of law and political ceremony. The dialogue is cut off when Critias begins to tell of Atlantis' regression from a well-functioned state of citizens, akin to the gods, to a power mongering empire made up of people who were more mortal than divine and who were to be punished and disciplined by Zeus.[15]

[15] For an interpretation of the abrupt ending that considers the possibility that Plato intentionally ended it

3.5.4 *The philosophical arguments (hypotheses)*

As I explained earlier, neither the *Timaeus* nor the *Critias* contain arguments like those of other dialogues. However, in the *Timaeus* the topics that constituted the previous day's discussion on politics and society are listed, arguments for which exist in other dialogues, particularly the *Republic* (*Tim*, 17-18). So far I have been arguing that the myths and arguments of different dialogues are conditioned by narrative plots, themes and motifs particular to each text. Therefore, my claim here is not that the specific arguments from other dialogues must be imported into a reading of the Atlantis myth but that it is unavoidable that some core socio-political ideas be read into Socrates recapitulation. Also, the fundamental premises used to construct the theory of recollection can be presupposed when interpreting Critias' description about how he recalled a childhood story to match Socrates' explanation of the ideal state from the previous day – this act of remembering must not be simplified and taken as a mundane non-philosophical type of remembering but as a more sophisticated, intellectual kind of memory function. I believe it is enough to mention here that the theory of recollection is a constituent part of Critias' reaction to the previous day's discussion in the form of the Atlantis myth, including the genealogy. I cannot see a problem with the fact that, unlike the *Meno* or the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents the scene as Critias first encountering ideas and then proceeding to remember an instance in the physical world rather than engaging with the world and remembering the Forms. It is made clear that after the conversation of the previous day he experienced a moment where he realized that he was not only informed about good government but recollected absolute principles for a just state. This impact was conditioned by the story he heard as a child and therefore one may argue that Critias' experience of the ideal was determined by his earlier experience when he heard the tale, i.e. an encounter with the world which he did not initially realize was a signifier or memory inducer of the ideal.

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the way he did for specific literary and philosophical reasons see Clay (1997) pp. 51-52.

The principles of the ideal city are stated concisely but the way it is recapped leaves a lot open for interpretation (and possibly manipulation). The fact that the interlocutors need Socrates to remind them again is significant because it exposes the difficulties associated with abstract accounts, particularly in relation to politics since most people are accustomed to dealing with socio-political issues in practice on a regular basis. First, society is to be divided into classes each with its appropriate training and vocation. The segregation is justified especially by the attitude that it creates in the guardians, particularly in relation to their performance in war.[16] As part of their training they must develop their characters both in terms of spirit (fortitude and determination) and philosophy which means that physical conditioning must accompany intellectual education. Also, the guardians must live a modest and non-materialistic life and must not be distracted from their responsibilities to the state. In addition, women need to be trained in the same way as men and can share the same occupations. And children should be the responsibility of the whole community and not solely of their parents. Finally, marriages are to be arranged, clandestinely, by the state with the view of coupling citizens together who best match each other in terms of their excellence (17-19).

3.5.5 *Mutual scaffolding*

The mutual scaffolding relationship combining *mythos* and *logos* in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* differs from my analysis of the other dialogues in many important ways. Firstly, the connection through mutual scaffolding is made in clever cooperation with what we classify now as fantasy tropes which include apocalypse, a device used often in narrative constructions about a lost civilization or one phase in the early history of civilization. The mutual scaffolding relationship is made when the main arguments – epistemology, the ideal state and metaphysics – influence the narratives by initiating them

[16] It is unclear whether the type of guardians referred to are the military as a whole or only the military leaders. Could Socrates and his companions be advocating a military state?

as intellectual and creative responses to philosophical positions. In turn, the narratives influence the arguments by way of critical reciprocity. The myths, as attempts by the characters to positively advance the arguments, are actually Plato's critique of individual ways of using the philosophical theories. In their dramatic representation the Atlantis narrative is a serious attempt to justify argument but, in an ironic twist, it exposes the kinds of mistakes that fallible humans can make when trying to interpret an 'ideal' by making it actual.[17] It is a mutually supporting unity because the very purpose of the dialogue was to demonstrate the problems with using the logic of the theories in different situations and, therefore, both myth and philosophy need to cohere through mutual scaffolding for the message of the dialogue to be conveyed. The accounts are both plausible consequences of the rational bases they project from, yet because they are also fantastic they disconcert views regarding the actual applicability of the rational arguments. I will address the topics of epistemology (the theory of recollection), politics (the ideal state) and metaphysics (theory of Forms) consecutively. I must mention that metaphysics pertains to Timaeus' cosmogony/cosmology but it is relevant to refer to it to some extent because of the plot structure it shares with the Atlantis myth and, of course, their internal *mythos*/*logos* interdependence using mutual scaffolding – similarities that will support my interpretation of the Atlantis myth.

a. *Influence of the plot*

> What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator." He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true:" it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside.[18]

I will explore the features of the plot in detail in "plot structure" but it is useful to mention here some of the characteristics in order to understand its role as a regulating

[17] Gill (1977) p. 289.
[18] Tolkien (1966) p. 37.

factor in the Atlantis myth and the arguments it refers to or implies (these features also play an equally important role in Timaeus' account but I will only make brief comments on it where it sheds light on Critias' story). In Greek mythology the term 'golden age' is often used to describe a pure ideal state or utopia. This fictional historical era is represented in the literature of many cultures throughout the world. The different stories that depict an original historical stage of perfection share a similar narrative framework which has affinities with Critias' myth especially since most 'golden age' tales often end as a result of some form of catastrophe. I will illustrate how this plot structure is used to tell the Atlantis myth. It is interesting how Plato begins the *Timaeus* with an ideal, perfect hypothesis (the previous day's description) and then shows the hypothesis being put to use by a politician who wants to illustrate its reality and demonstrate its truth by providing us with a historical narrative. In the literary sequence of the *Timaeus*, the consequence of the hypothesis, the narrative Critias produces, is far from ideal in many respects. I have mentioned a number of points regarding this evaluation of the tale and now I will explain further the reasons for my analysis and how the myth represents, in literary form, the demise of what was imagined to be a theoretical utopia – the 'golden age'. Both the form of the scenario within which Critias leads up to and tells his story and the myth itself express this plot structure. The following comogonical/cosmological account also begins with an ideal – the theory of Forms – which leads to a perfect creation.[19] However, the myth ends negatively by describing certain corruptions such as disease and the emergence of immoral creatures which are the outcome of previous unethical lives. Without going into a full inquiry I will make a few comments throughout this chapter on the way the plot structure of Timaeus' monologue reflects Critias' and exhibits the same mutually supportive unity consisting of *mythos* and *logos*.

[19] D.T. Runia argues that, like the use of proemia by authors prior to Plato, one of the main features of Plato's introductory section is the stipulation of the methodology which the author uses and its influence on the truth-claim ([1997] pp. 105-107). Also, see T.K. Johansen (2004) p. 21-22, for structural comparisons between the Atlantis myth and the cosmology.

b. ***Rethinking recollection***

The epistemological significance of Critias' account has been neglected in most commentaries of the Atlantis myth. Critias' act of recollection needs more elaboration here because it expresses Plato's more refined critical stance on *anamnesis*. The fact that Critias can remember a childhood story perfectly but is unsure of the earlier philosophical conversation is telling and I want to argue that by inserting this detail Plato is making a profound statement regarding recollection.[20] Firstly, the mention of the goddess Memory, mother of the muses, is significant in this respect. In the *Critias*, Critias replies to Hermocrates by stating: "Meanwhile I must follow your encouraging advice and call on the gods, adding the goddess Memory in particular to those you have mentioned. For my whole narrative depends largely on her" (*Critias*, 108d). A reference to the goddess Mnemosyne is also made in the myth of Er and holds a place in Orphic traditions. Critias remembers and seriously considers Socrates' description of an ideal state – one based on the Form of justice – and uses his memory to bring the blueprint to life.[21] He is a statesman and a philosopher and therefore Socrates and the others give him the liberty to demonstrate how the perfect society operates – all parties express complete faith in him. But, as I explained above, the conditions of Socrates' request are not philosophical but almost a call for propaganda and Critias' account seems extreme on many levels. It seems that Critias' story is more a glorification of Athens or, more accurately, the aristocratic class of Athens than a narrative focused on the idea of Justice. And the narrative framework, the fallen utopia, in which he arranges his ideas, information, themes and motifs, is selected for the same patriotic purpose which I will deal with in detail in 'Plot structure'. For now, it is enough to state that the plot is characterized by cultural, social and political oppositions which are not realistic but designed to enforce an identity characterized by a form of moral and cultural superiority. Even the apocalyptic ending is a way of avoiding blame and confirms the purity of the Athenians as victims of unfortunate natural circumstances. I will argue how these and other factors indicate that

[20] Voegelin (1947) pp. 313-314.
[21] Osborne contrasts Critias' unoriginal, handed down, story to Timaeus' novel, inaugural, account (Osborne [1996] pp. 185-6).

Plato is critically commenting on a point regarding the application of ideals or Forms; simply looking to the Forms or recollecting the Forms is insufficient and one must acknowledge the fact that influences and prejudices weigh heavily on human accounts.

The dialogue reveals how recollection of the Forms, principles based on them or accounts modeled on them, are always connected to a narrative which means that the precision of the Forms must be appropriated if it is to become knowledge. This is what Critias does in his tale and what Timaeus does, also. But more important, and more human, than merely looking at perfect models and creating an exposition in accordance with them Plato gives us an example of how even philosopher-kings interpret at the same time as recollecting and only a naïve Socrates who is in awe of his interlocutors, in contrast to Socrates the dialectician, can accept their accounts on face value.

> That was why I was so quick to agree to your conditions yesterday, thinking that I was pretty well placed to deal with what is always the most serious difficulty in such matters, how to find a suitable story on which to base what one wants to say (26).

Critias' statement about providing a narrative basis for one's thoughts should not be taken lightly. I believe Plato wants to draw attention to the place of a literary plot (in this case a Golden Age plot as I will explain later) in theoretical deliberation; a plausible interpretation if we consider the range of historical narratives underlying, regulating and cooperating with theories from all disciplines, cultures and periods (whether they are made explicit or are implicit). In addition to the above quote, Critias makes some interesting remarks about the narrative he presents to the group. At 26 Critias expresses his amazement at how childhood stories remain in our memories in contrast to Socrates' account from the previous day which he claims he can only remember in part. He then describes his technique of connecting an abstract hypothesis with a story in an attempt to illustrate what consequences can be expected:

> We will transfer the imaginary citizens and city which you described yesterday to the real world, and say that your city is the city of my story and your citizens those historical ancestors of ours whom the priest described (26).

These important passages are clear indications that Plato wants to explore issues associated with recollection that he had previously taken for granted, possibly for rhetorical reasons associated with issues in other dialogues. These scenarios in the *Timaeus* project the complexities inherent in Plato's epistemology and provoke us to ask questions regarding the unavoidable subjective input associated with considering 'objective' principles, incorporating them into a comprehensive account and then anticipating or testing the consequences.

Critias' rendition is not just an attempt to transfer the imaginary state into a real state but is an exercise in *anamnesis*, supporting my claim that there is a relationship between the function of the myth and Plato's 'theory of recollection'. In most of the dialogues where recollection is either the focus or a crucial element in the arguments the theory stands as it is in basic form. It is not problematic and is justified because, as a working hypothesis or part of a working hypothesis, it is more advantageous and conducive to knowledge than other approaches. However, in the *Timaeus* there are no competing theories, no hostile or doubting interlocutors, and, thus, we are encouraged to ask Plato why everything about the conversation and the relationship between the parties is going so smooth. Critias' account is based on his memory of the previous day which in turn sparked memory of a childhood story (or, as I mentioned above, how the childhood story assisted Critias' realization that yesterday's discussion was ideal). Here we have a natural, uncontrived, example of recollection and the cultural, social and political context that it is necessarily tied to. Therefore, it is the ideal city in reality not because the events actually took place the way Critias and his predecessors say they did. It is 'real' because the situations are realistic acts of story telling made up of social, cultural, aesthetic and philosophical components arranged in the way the story tellers want them to be; the scene demonstrates an instance of recollection the way it actually happens regardless of

whether we receive a good or a bad exposition. By constructing this section of the dialogue in this way Plato tries to recreate a 'real' instance where an individual tries to remember an ideal, combine it with an intimate memory or a chronicle of events it may share affinities with, find the most appropriate narrative plot within which to structure it, and present it as the 'most likely' of accounts.[22]

Plato's meaning of 'real world' in this case does not imply that it actually happened, as Critias would like us to believe, but just that it is a plausible example of what could have happened hypothetically. It is a thought experiment combining logical, possible and actual events and the only ones who will believe it wholeheartedly are individuals such as those characters represented in the dialogue. There are many indicators throughout the text where one of the characters advises the others to recognize the verisimilitude of the tale in contrast to other comments that it is true. In these examples Plato is trying to tell the reader to understand the story in the context of the dialogue as a form of memory induced interpretation. Critias' recollection and presentation are characteristic of his personality and background and the fact that Socrates does not see through him confirms his submissive character role in the dialogue and, at the same time, is a device used to send a message about the truth status of the tale and the critical philosophical implications of the whole situation.

c. *Revisiting the ideal state*

Apart from the epistemological importance of Critias' account the section makes a profound political statement, as well. After the myth is introduced and outlined in the *Timaeus* Socrates, with complete commitment, commends Critias for telling a "true history" and one that is suited for the day on which the dialogue takes place; the day of the festival of Athena. I believe there is a necessary connection between the fact that the story was told on this day, certain details of the story, and the appellation 'true'. Plato ascribes truth to the mythical history but the way in which it is true must be critically

[22] Johansen (2004) p. 24, fn. 2.

assessed. The myth is told by Critias who, as I have alluded to already, represents the Athenian ruling aristocracy (a point I will elaborate on further in 'Character selection'). Consistent with his character as a proud and active citizen, he renders a historical account that glamorizes the potential of Athenian society and government. The myth describes the most virtuous time in Athenian history. The great period of Athenian history described contrasts with the problem ridden era of Plato's Athens in its most important qualities.[23]

Also, to avoid having to admit to regress or demise, Critias inserts the occurrence of a natural catastrophe to separate the 'golden age' from the less than ideal situation of 5th and 4th century Athens. The representation of ancient Athens is a romantic and grandiose depiction with patriotic sentiments. It is perfect in many aspects including the values of the state, the principles of society and its innocent and tragic end. The account is true because it is, for an Athenian patriot and politician, as ideal a history as could be imagined. Socrates' ideal city, therefore, becomes real and the myth becomes true because they interrelate on these levels. In the same way that I explained Critias' animation as 'real' the story is a 'true' history because it is the kind of history that an aristocratic Athenian statesmen would arrange and accept – Plato is showing us a real example of how 'true' history is told and how its veracity is contingent on those who tell it and those who believe it.

> But what should be the status of the evoked idea if it failed to be embodied in a historically real order? What is the meaning of the well ordered polis when its evocation is not the first step to its embodiment in reality? Is it, after all, an irrelevant velleity, the

[23] K. Morgan interprets the truth status of the account, following Rowe, as ironic (Morgan [1998] pp. 102-103). She states that the use of the myth as ironic and the emphatic way it is presented instructs the reader to distinguish between the dramatic construction and appeal of the text and whatever the author's intended message may have been. I agree that this distinction is an important one but I argue that the myth and the implied arguments need to be seen through mutual scaffolding as opposed to opposition (Morgan seems to base her interpretation on criticism of myth in the *Republic* and the use of the 'Noble Lie', pp. 102-104). The unity of myth and argument in this case (the Atlantis myth, the dramatic setting in which it is remembered and told and the ideal starting point) exposes the fallibility and misuse of ideal principles by reconstructing a 'real' situation in narrative form. The necessity of the narrative counterpart to the discursive theory lies in the fact that it obliges the ideal to prove itself in practice and subject itself to criticism which could not be made if it remained theoretical.

> impractical program of a philosopher dabbling in politics? And, quite generally, what is an idea which neither remains set up in heaven, nor becomes the form, the "measure" of some piece of reality in the cosmos? Is it an ideal at all; or perhaps no more than a speculative opinion?[24]

Reality and truth, in this case, depend on how a theory can be demonstrated to be actually possible and perfectly desirable, thus any story that incorporates the theory with popular appeal and political weight can be true. By understanding the dynamics in this sense we witness the revitalization of an old theory as Plato redefines it by framing it into a new plot. He puts the structure of the best city in the hands of an Athenian politician and the result is the tale of ancient Athens. The myth, therefore, is true only when recognized by the group of friends in the text as a series of probable events, consisting of appropriate characters, places, actions and reactions in which the ideal principles of the best city can be slotted into.[25]

Through the mouth of Critias, one may assume that Plato is proposing a form of propaganda for a Spartan-like Athenian state. The structure of the ideal state is comparable to the framework on which the Spartan state functioned and by presenting Critias as its adherent – not to forget his ancestors and Solon – it may seem as though Plato is indirectly advising and promoting a particular style of governance for his home state. He gives the responsibility to Critias because of his status as a high ranking political figure and represents Socrates as vehemently agreeing with him and supporting him. However, as I have argued, the result is a very uncomfortable exposition that is more akin to the historical narratives created by romantic nationalists. Instead of an ideal realization of ideal principles Plato leaves us with the Atlantis myth which we must

[24] Voegelin (1947) p. 311.
[25] Some scholars suggest that the myth reflects contrasts between Athens and imperial Persia (Johansen (2004) p. 11). In addition, the tale may function simultaneously as a critique of Athens' maritime imperialist exploits.

ponder upon and interpret along with the far too ideal context in which it is told and accepted.[26]

> The power of national myths on the popular mind dramatizes the need for philosophical control, and the Atlantis myth is an example of such manipulation, as the genres of philosophy, history, and oratory intersect. Both the myth and the cosmology are constructed to make a point about the way the world should be, the principles upon which we should construct it, and the means by which such models are rendered believable.[27]

It is not uncommon for a politician or a philosopher to introduce a narrative that best conveys the meaning and purpose of a new theoretical program. And it is obvious that this task must be fulfilled by one who is acquainted with the intricacies of political machinations. But this does not mean that Plato, through Critias, merely wants to persuade the public of his idea of a good state or glamorize his logic. In the case of Critias' story, Plato illustrates how a special kind of *mythos* can be linked to abstract laws, in accordance with the immediate context and Critias' own idiosyncratic views and agenda. The laws can now be envisioned as having a salient and poignant place in a structured historical sequence, making them realistically and epistemologically identifiable. But the intention behind the laws and their noetic character are tied to Critias' knowledge and interpretation. In other words, the plot that is used to direct and characterize the ideal is determined by the way one – in this case Critias – sees oneself and one's society and, therefore, how one cognizes the ideal as knowledge. In this sense, history is being told through the eyes of theory and theory is being adapted by a particular account of history and a notion of identity – a connection that is clear if recognized through mutual scaffolding.

[26] Johansen (2004) p. 38.
[27] Morgan (1998) p. 118.

d. ***Metaphysics as hypothesis***

> …the solution has to be found within the myth of nature and its cosmic rhythms. The idea of the well ordered polis is not embodied at present in a historical society; if we ascribe to it, nevertheless, objective status as a "measure" in reality, the ascription of objectivity must be based on an earlier or later embodiment of the idea; moreover, we need a theory which explains the temporary disembodiment. Into the creation of this myth of the polis, as the "measure" of society which in its crystallization and decay follows the cosmic rhythm of order and disorder, has gone the ripe art of Plato the poet.[28]

I want to address the second narrative in the *Timaeus* in order to compare the structure and theoretical dynamics of the Atlantis myth with Timaeus' cosmogony/cosmology and illuminate the consistency of Plato's method in the text.[29] The epistemological and political reconsiderations I discussed in relation to the Atlantis myth are reflected in the way the use of a metaphysical theory is criticized in the cosmogony/cosmology; in many ways Timaeus' production resembles what Critias did with the Atlantis myth. The hypothesis in the form of theory, the response to the hypothesis in the form of narrative, the narrative as a personally conditioned consequence, the author's use of myth as critique of the hypothesis, and the 'golden age' plot are all demonstrated in Timaeus' monologue. As I explained, Critias had his own reasons for submitting such a story and there are good reasons why Timaeus renders his in the way that he does (reasons I will deal with more in "character selection"). Again, mutual scaffolding will be used to combine the arguments with the narrative – the narrative acting as a subjectively interpreted consequence of the theoretical hypothesis stated in the beginning, i.e. a myth that functions as a tool to expose the practical problems associated with abstract laws.

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[28] Voegelin (1947) p. 312.

[29] I agree with Finkelberg that the *Timaeus* is a cosmogonical account that does not necessarily reflect Plato's position on creation or generation (Finkelberg [1996] p. 393). I think that Finkelberg's argument can be expanded to discuss the way the narrative was used to introduce a plot and other literary and dramatic features into the text as a whole. These correspond with and characterize the Atlantis myth, the setting of the dialogue and the issues brought up in the prelude to the two main accounts. I cannot deal with these issues within the constraints of this thesis, however I believe they are worthy of special attention and further analysis.

"*Timaeus* is neither truth nor fraud, it is a hypothetical argument committed to nothing but its own consistency."[30]

The introduction of Timaeus' monologue is actually a summary of the theory of Forms which is followed by a discussion of the differences between the cosmos and its eternal model.[31] The early section which contrasts being and becoming is significant because as an example of the ideal theory it acts as hypothesis; in the text it represents a perfect paradigm.[32] The account which follows is one possible creative result of the theory; Timaeus' cosmogonical/cosmological account is the consequence of the hypothesis.[33] Just like Critias' narrative which I analyzed above, the story of the origins and nature of the cosmos is tainted by Timaeus' philosophical and religious positions. He too is influenced by the conversation from the previous day but rather than produce a treatise of political relevance he presents a cosmogony/cosmology. It is enough to mention here that his Pythagorean affiliation and training under Philolaus characterized his rendition in the same way that Critias' socio-political standing influenced his (for further clarification supporting character selection and formation see the section on 'Character selection'). Timaeus' rendition shares the same plot structure as the Atlantis myth but the apocalyptic end is exchanged with a form of cosmic corruption.

Also, if we focus on the Demiurge section as an example of perfect creation we can extrapolate some interesting points regarding the way Forms are used. The Demiurge looks to the Forms and what he creates is good. This is unlike the uncertainty of human production where the role of personal interpretation is indispensable. Therefore, in

[30] Finkelburg (1996) p. 404. Finkelberg looks at the account as hypothesis for acquiring knowledge (pp. 403 and 405) but like other studies that are sympathetic to the place of myth he does not explore the direct and systematic interrelation between the myth and the philosophy. He seems to be looking to external theories and judging the text without a close analysis of the language, themes, motifs, structure and characters. If the myth is to be taken seriously in terms of its role as hypothesis then a very accurate and comprehensive look at the relation of different elements in the text needs to be elucidated in relation to it. Finkelberg also provides some interesting comments in relation to hypothesis and Aristotle's critique of the creation myth. Aristotle's interpretation becomes misdirected if the narrative is understood in terms of its plot and the tropes used to connect it to other elements in the text (p. 407).
[31] For a detailed account and analysis of Timaeus' preamble see Runia (1997) pp. 101-118.
[32] Runia (1997) pp. 112-113.
[33] Osbourne (1996) pp.191-193.

contrast to the Demiurge's activity, in human production it is crucial to consider the relativity of 'good' and the fact that the outcome may be one instance in a whole spectrum of different qualities depending on innumerable factors. I think Plato has Timaeus use the example of the Demiurge to explain the creation of the cosmos because, as the most authentic and original act of creation imaginable, he knows it is extreme and completely ideal.[34] Consistent with its ideal act which is devoid of physical, historical and socio-cultural characteristics, the Demiurge itself is transparent, like the receptacle, and exhibits no characteristics particular to humans. Its creative activity can not be compared to or guide human endeavor because we could never replicate such a perfect intellectual and practical process.

There are other factors that make the creation story important for Plato's approach. For Plato, the only being capable of conducting the task is a god. The story of the Demiurge is an example of an idealized creation, and not a real human activity, and I believe Plato is criticizing those who held that if one merely follows ideal principles one could gain knowledge and represent the truth. Timaeus is a philosopher-king and creates an account of the cosmos that is loyal to a theory of Forms. However, the account involves a lot of interpretative baggage, which I will expose, that demonstrates that believing that a commitment to Forms is enough to give a true account is naïve. The Atlantis myth and the role of Critias best represent this critical feature of the dialogue.

Critias and Timaeus both attempt to do what the Demiurge does – they look at the previous day's argument and attempt to create something accordingly. The other interlocutors naively believe that what they receive is the most likely account and it is unbeknown to them how much baggage the narrator brings to their understanding and use of the ideal principles of a state, a philosophical evocation of memory or to the theory of Forms. Also, we must not forget Socrates' attitude toward them and their myths – he is a typical 'yes man' in this dialogue which raises suspicion of the validity of the form, content and conclusions; a salient point I believe Plato wants us to be wary of.

[34] Cornford describes the Demiurge as being driven by unrestricted purpose (Plato [1966] p. 165).

The place of the Atlantis myth can be better understood in relation to the cosmogony/cosmology, and vice versa. Like the cosmology, the storyline of the Atlantis myth begins with a golden age or pure origins. The reason behind the perfection of Athens' and Atlantis' original period is the result of both communities abiding by ideal principles. The message we are given is that since they implemented the rules of an ideal state they functioned perfectly. Ultimately, Athens' success in the war with Atlantis was primarily due to their commitment to justice. The apocalypse at the end is a device used to separate time, explain society's lack of memory and erase any possibility of fault. Also, consistent with similar accounts from different traditions, the use of apocalypse is a literary indicator of what we would now call the fantastic. When we recognize the subjective interpretation inherent in Critias' story, the nationalist and pretentious reaction to an ideal hypothesis, the use of fantasy becomes more apparent. Thus, the relationship between 'ideal' bases or paradigms and philosophical accounts or narratives becomes a question of literary concern and relevance.

One of the most interesting aspects of the hypothesis used in Critias' account is that it implies that ideals must be imagined to have come out of a natural environment conductive to their emergence and implementation with systems in place to develop them. Ideals can not simply be imagined without a context for application or problems that necessitate their arrival (cf. my account of performance in the *Phaedrus* chapter) – even if the delivery, the formation of the principles, is not desirable. Plato is rendering a sociological and anthropological account of the creation of ideals and principles, i.e. they are, in their exposition, historically and socially conditioned in addition to being based on axioms (having affinities with mathematical and geometrical axioms). One needs only to look at the way in which political theories are created as a result of a socio-cultural milieu and a network of historically conditioned political factors even though many claim to be based purely on rational principles or scientific observation.

> The Forms serve as paradigms both for the physical world created by the demiurge, and for the world in discourse created by Timaeus: his discourse gains its validity not from faithfulness to the way things appear, or the way particular things 'actually happened', but in virtue of its attempt to express in words a likeness of the perfect and eternal reality.[35]

Like Timaeus' account, Critias' account is full of idiosyncrasies, which I have already described. His cultural, social and political biases pervade the story in the same way Timaeus' metaphysical, scientific and religious affiliations influence his account (I detail these characteristics in the section on 'Character Selection'). However, it is important to distinguish between the two tales. Regardless of its subjective conditioning Timaeus' account is closer, yet far from sufficient, to the standards that Socrates sets for a suitable account. Timaeus commitment to the strictures of geometry and mathematics, and the fact that he argues deductively from describing the cosmos and gradually moving down to man and other forms of life, renders his account more desirable than Critias' even though both stories are consequences of ideals and share the same plot (as I will explain further in 'Plot Structure'). The two stories must be contrasted in terms of their use of a hypothesis, their loyalty to the ideal and the final presentation as one of the main consequences of the hypothesis in order for the purpose of the text and its peculiar style to be appreciated.[36] Finkelberg recognizes the function of the cosmogonical myth as not merely instruction but "the way of analytical inquiry, just as in geometry instruction and inquiry are one and the same argument.[37] He argues that the premises, such as the assumption about creation, do not need to be considered as anything more than hypotheses. The hypotheses are important not because they are true but because of their instructional and methodological value and the consequences they influence.

[35] Osborne (1996) p. 179.
[36] Osborne (1996) pp. 184-185.
[37] Finkelburg (1996) pp. 402-403.

Plato is giving free range to his statesmen to interpret and exploit his republic in whatever way they want. He is doing this to demonstrate how far and in which directions a theory or ideal can be taken. The dialogue says a lot about the difficulty of historical accounts, political theories and scientific explanations – theories in general all have a subjective nature to them depending on who is appropriating them. The Atlantis myth is in an interdependent relationship with arguments from the *Republic*, and other dialogues to a lesser extent, but the final product turns out to be something Plato cannot agree with. Many features of the story appear to resemble idealistic nationalist narratives and the characters involved, both the adamant orator and the agreeing recipients, are inferior inquirers in contrast to the protagonists from other dialogues. But it does show us the potential that the unity of myth and argument has and how myth, in its philosophical and higher literary form, is needed for theory to be effective – even if the outcome is abusive or prejudiced. Plato also shows us how critique of a hypothesis can be demonstrated by selecting a narrative which exposes uncritical or subjective aspects of those who develop it or subscribe to it.

3.5.6 *Plot structure*

In relation to the plot used to structure, characterize and direct the different elements in the *Timaeus* one must seriously consider other 'golden age' or utopian myths.[38] In the case of the Atlantis myth it is worth highlighting its affinities with Hesiod's *Works and Days* (many of my comparisons with the plot and its constituent features apply to the cosmogony/cosmology, as well). It is helpful to take a closer look at the following passage in Hesiod's text:

[38] Other Greek myths that represent this plot structure which I will not consider here are Orphic and the poetry of Empedocles. Also, for examples from other cultures and eras see Virgil's *The Georgics*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch, the Hindu epic Mahabharata, Christian millennialism, the book of Isaiah, the Book of Enoch, and early modern and positivist notions about the status of the European Enlightenment,

106 If you see fit, I will tell you another story right to the end, well and skillfully. Toss it about in your chest, how gods and mortal people are sprung from the same source.[39]

109[40] at the very first the deathless ones who have Olympian homes made a golden race of mortal people, who existed at the time of Cronus, when he was basileus in heaven. They lived like gods with woe-free spirit, apart from and without toils and grief; wretched old age did not hang over them, but unchanged in feet and hands, they delighted in festivities beyond all evils. They died as if overcome by sleep. They had all good things. The grain-giving plowland of her own will bore her produce, much of it, and without grudging. And they enjoyed the fruits of their works in ease and peace with many good things, [rich in sheep, dear to the blessed gods]. But ever since the earth covered over this race, they are divinities in accordance with the plans of great Zeus, and good ones on the ground, guardians of mortal people [- they watch over dikai and cruel works, wrapped in mist, wandering everywhere over the earth], givers of wealth: and this is the excellent prize that they got.

127 Later those who have Olympian homes in turn made a second race, much worse, from silver, resembling the golden one in neither physique nor thought. By contrast a child was nurtured playing at his devoted mother's side for a hundred years in his oikos, an utter fool. But precisely when [each] reached puberty and reached the peak of his youth, they lived for a very short time, having pains on account of their follies: for they were not able to hold back outrageous violence[41] from each other, and they did not see fit to serve the deathless ones, not even to do actions at the holy alters of the blessed ones, which is proper behavior for people according to their customs. These the Zeus, the son of Cronus, hid away in his anger, because they did not give honors to the blessed gods who hold Olympus. But ever since the earth covered over this race, these are called blessed mortals under the ground; they belong to the second rank, but honor attends upon them all the same.[42]

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[39] "*sprung from the same source.* Ordinarily this should refer to people and gods being descended from the same blood source. But here it must refer to the Golden Race, who "lived like gods" (112)" (Tandy and Neale translation of Hesiod [1996] p. 66, note 39).

[40] See p. 66, note 40 for the influence of the Near East on Hesiod's tale of the degenerative races of heroes (Hesiod [1996]).

[41] By violence the translators mean *hubris* as the antithesis of *dike*.

[42] Hesiod (1996) pp. 67-69.

The sequence of these passages follows the 'golden age' plot, particularly its fall from glory. In order to draw parallels with Plato's Atlantis myth it is necessary to look at certain points in Hesiod's account and interpret them as events making up part of a predetermined plot. Afterwards, I will compare the structure and the dynamic interaction of its constituent parts with the Atlantis myth.

At 108 Hesiod begins by establishing the fact that one of the essential features of his tale is about the homogeneous origins of gods and humans. The original humans created a golden race of people during the time of Cronus and enjoyed a utopian existence. Consequently, they were just guardians over mortals and successful in cultivating the land. At 127 we are told that a second inferior race grew up to become part of society. This 'silver' race became proud, abusive, and impious. Zeus, angry with them, hid them away however they continue to receive honor and praise regardless of their rank.

Like Hesiod's account the Atlantis myth, like the cosmogony/cosmology, begins by acknowledging and praising the 'golden' era of Athens and Atlantis.[43] Both the Athenians and the Atlantans were originally akin to the gods. For this reason both civilizations enjoyed a utopian culture. The Atlantans degenerated more than the Athenians due to their greater and more rapid degree of mixture with 'people of the soil'. Therefore, the second inferior race, the one that began an imperialist mission, was the result of the golden race's lack of commitment to the principles and cohesion of their original state. Critias' myth is modeled on the same paradigm as Hesiod's. Plato's project, as I have argued, has a more philosophical purpose than *Works and Days* but the plot structure shares a resemblance too uncanny to ignore. Regardless of the differences distinguishing Hesiod and Plato as thinkers and writers the narrative framework, in certain literary and epistemological respects, influences both authors by determining the

[43] The genealogical account, the narrative about the transmission from the Egyptian priest down to Critias, also reflects the regression theme at the basis of Hesiod's plot – an old wise civilization handing the tale down to children with no historical memory (Voegelin [1947] p. 312).

selection and arrangement of information, the movement and significance of the scenes and the interaction of the elements within the story.

3.5.7 *Character selection*

a. *Socrates*

Socrates' role in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* is unique in comparison to his position in all the other dialogues. Dialectical exchange in a true philosophical sense is missing and therefore the younger Socrates becomes the facilitator and fan of independent speeches or interpretations with a great deal of subjective baggage which give rise to numerous philosophical problems. He does not respond to the narratives with questions but instead uncritically accepts and praises the stories without providing any logical basis for accepting them. From the very beginning he steps back, observes and refuses to play a prominent role or contribute in a significant way. Plato creates Socrates this way because he wants to see the possibilities of his ideals in the hands of 'fully qualified' interpreters without any hindrance, and maybe a touch of partisan encouragement.

b. *Critias*

There is much debate still circulating regarding the identity of Critias in the two dialogues. I do not wish to get involved in these disagreements because for the purposes of my argument it is important only that he was an aristocratic Athenian, a statesman and a philosopher, and member of the family whose lineage is connected to Dropides and grandfather Critias. Whether it is the Critias from the Thirty tyrants or the older Critias does not greatly influence my interpretation, however if it is Critias the tyrant my theory is strengthened because it implies that the patriotic, aristocratic and political pride expressed in the nature of the myth is amplified. It may be the case that Plato himself was

not concerned with the exact identity of Critias and merely invented the character using the name because it was a well-known name in his aristocratic family.[44] If this is the case then it confirms further the suggested notion that history is full of inaccuracies and involves a degree of prejudice and guess work. Also, it represents the nature of history writing as partly political and idealistic. Most importantly, Critias shows us how an ideal constitution can be both validated by writing a new history and then used as a justification itself for political power. We must be fully aware that Critias is telling the Atlantis myth and not Plato and that he is not an authorized interpreter of the ideal state but just an individual with his own agenda and an overambitious interpreter of Socrates' views on statehood.

c. *Timaeus*

The character of Timaeus may well be completely fictional or modeled on someone else – most likely Archytas of Tarentum.[45] But many scholars agree that he is a fictional Pythagorean philosopher known as Timaeus of Locri. Judging simply from Plato's dialogue it may be deduced that he is a Pythagorean philosopher and politician. Cicero refers to Timaeus of Locri as a Pythagorean philosopher who was a close acquaintance of Plato.[46] Also, Proclus, in his commentary on the Timaeus, refers to Timaeus as a Pythagorean.[47] However, the most striking examples of Timaeus' Pythagorean background have been detailed by C.L. Huffman in his book *Philolaus of Croton* especially the similarity between Philolaus' theory of attunement and Timaeus' account in the *Timaeus*.[48] In his cosmogony/cosmology Timaeus exposes many aspects of himself in the same way that Critias does. His description of the origins and nature of the universe is presented with complete conviction and he believes that since it coincides

[44] Voegelin (1947) p. 316.
[45] Lee's introduction to Plato (1977) p. 29.
[46] Cicero (1999) I.X.
[47] Taylor (1820) pp. 187 and 199.
[48] Huffman (1993).

with his hypothesis, the Platonic theory for being and becoming associated with the existence of Forms, it is a complete and perfect account.

d. *Egypt and the Egyptian Priest*

> Solon has been given a charter myth for Athens from the Egyptians, conveniently fetishized as preservers of accuracy about the past.[49]

I believe that the Egyptian factors in the dialogue must be given more attention than commentators have dedicated so far. Egypt has occupied an important place in the Western imagination since ancient times till the present day.[50] It is often associated with perennial wisdom and the origin of knowledge,[51] particularly of a mystical kind. I have argued that the plot structuring the narratives involves themes such as the 'golden age', an adaptation of the philosophical theory from an ideal state or utopia. In this context Egypt as a place of origin and mystical knowledge is consistent with the storyline. The fact that the story was preserved in Egypt by Egyptians and transmitted back to the Greeks is significant because it illustrates how, according to a sophisticated and comprehensive literary style, the genealogy of the tale follows the same sequence as the myths, i.e. the tale begins with the archetypal preservers of history, the Egyptians, and is transferred down to Critias who is a 'child' in relation to historical memory.

e. *Solon*

Solon is the first Greek in the transmission of the myth and the first to trust that the myth is legitimate. Because of his reputation as philosopher-statesman-poet it is unthinkable that he could have passed on a false historical account or that he could not

[49] Morgan (1998) p. 104. Also see fn. 11.
[50] Johansen (2004) pp. 39-40.
[51] Johansen (2004) p. 36.

judge whether parts of it or all of it were wrong.[52] Solon represents the philosopher king outlined and praised by Plato in the *Republic* and many of his qualities are exemplified in the three philosopher politicians in the dialogue. The narrators of the myths are furnished with trust and respect on the grounds that they resemble the individual who brought back the story to Greece. Solon's character is a form of archetype that places the other three characters in perspective, i.e. Solon is a quintessential outstanding Athenian citizen, an exceptional and complete statesman and model for Greek excellence (or, more accurately, Athenian excellence). The characters in the dialogue accept this model and the accounts that prevail must compare to the legend of Solon in terms of style, content and direction. The fact that Plato has Solon, Critias and Timaeus convey narrative accounts illustrates, according to the critical analysis I presented in this section, the consistency with which Plato designed the dialogue and enforces the interpretation I have made.[53]

f. *Atlantis*

One of the most important literary elements used in Critias' myth is the explicit contrast made between ancient Athens and Atlantis. The conflict between the two civilizations features, on the one hand, a pristine example of the ideal state and, on the other hand, an example of the same kind of state in one of its worst stages of decline, i.e. a standard scenario based on a dichotomy of good versus evil. Plato's use of this dualism trope in contrasting the two powers coincides with Critias' character as a biased Athenian

[52] Morgan (1998) pp. 108-109. On page 112 Morgan argues that the role of Solon "is closer to a parody of contemporary practice than an appropriation of it." This coincides with my view that Plato presents Critias as an aristocratic nationalist engaged in the aggrandizement of Athens – his account is rendered as an obvious form of political propaganda. "Whereas the interlocutors must accept the noble lie at face value, we must not do so, but must recognize that Atlantis is a speculative exercise in political rhetoric, albeit philosophically based. Our focus must be on the construction." However, I believe that Morgan's use of the term 'Noble Lie' does not encompass the fact that the tale exploits ideal principles and displays unconstructive, non-philosophical, patriotic and aristocratic sentiments.

[53] Voegelin argues that Solon represents the author, Plato, and the passages explaining Solon's poetic skills are autobiographical. I disagree with his conclusions because they are based primarily on the fact that the myth was created by Plato and therefore the first Greek transmitter must be, symbolically, the creator of the tale (Voegelin [1947] pp. 318-319). Voegelin ignores the other important literary factors, explained above, introduced by the special use of a figure such as Solon.

and the history of Atlantis follows the same plot structure of the myth as a whole – a golden age leading to an apocalypse within a fictional environment.

The concept of an enemy or the 'Other' and the depiction of Atlantis as the quintessential enemy are important for many reasons. Atlantis falls from its golden age and therefore represents motion or change while Athens is presented as unchanging and static in its virtues. Unlike other myths where evil is a natural quality, Atlantis declines from its ideal stage and *becomes* an archenemy.[54]

3.5.8 *Index of themes and motifs*

a. ***Hypotheses***

- The ideal state and its citizens
- Theory of Forms and its related themes (27-29)

b. ***Recollection***

- Socrates reminds the others of the previous day's discussion by presenting a summary and consistent use of terms relating to recollection (17-19)
- Socrates' interlocutors remember yesterday's conversation at Critias' house (20)
- Critias remembers his childhood story and the history of its transmission (20-
- Timaeus' account is also based on his memory of yesterday's discussion of the ideal state and a metaphysical theory
- Critias' comments regarding how Socrates' account reminded him of a childhood story (26)
- Critias' acknowledgment of the difficulties associated with his recollected account (Crit. 107-108)
- Evocation of the goddess Memory (108)

c. ***Golden age (pure beginnings)***

- Athens and Atlantis – at the height of their civilizations
- Egypt – symbol of perennial wisdom; exercise accurate memories
- Theories – recollection, ideal state, metaphysics

[54] Morgan (1998) pp. 114 and 117, for a comparison between Atlantis and Athens at the time of Plato, and Atlantis and the Persian Empire.

d. ***Regress***

- Deluge (Atlantis myth)
- Atlantis' demise
- Cosmic corruption (cosmology)

e. ***Athenian pride***

- Solon
- Critias' (Plato's) family lineage
- Egyptian praise
- Athens' victory; their pure and unadulterated origins; survival
- Atlantis as an archetypal evil nemesis; tyrants and imperialists; the 'other'