

## ‘THE CASE OF THE MISSING PHILOSOPHERS IN PLATO’S *TIMAEUS-CRITIAS*’

The ultimate topic of this paper, though I shall not do more than touch upon it, is the nature of Plato’s later political thinking; i.e., his political thinking after the *Republic*. The dialogues most directly involved here will, of course, be the *Politicus* and *Laws*<sup>1</sup>. According to the type of view on *Politicus* and *Laws* that many modern interpreters have tended to favour, these two dialogues show Plato moving away from the ideal of the philosopher-ruler, and towards some kind of accommodation with the requirements of *practical* politics. Among the pointers to this alleged shift in Plato’s position is the apparent absence of philosopher-rulers from what otherwise looks like a summary, in the *Timaeus-Critias*, of the political ‘proposals’ of the *Republic*. Thanassis Samaras, in his new book *Plato on Democracy*<sup>2</sup>, illustrates one way in which the general argument might go:

“So, provided that we accept for the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* a date later than the *Politicus* and earlier than the *Laws*, the following pattern emerges: in the *Politicus*, Plato uses the idea of the philosopher-ruler, but at the same time expresses reservations about the possibility of its realisation. In the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, he remains silent about perfect mortal rulers, but at the same time he substantially elevates the role that (good) laws play in good government and he refuses to confer absolute power even on Zeus and his divine Demiurge. Finally, in the *Laws*, he is ready at last to admit unequivocally that remaining uncorrupted by unchecked power lies beyond the limitations of human nature ... [I]n that dialogue Plato produces a whole constitution which is described in almost minute detail. This constitution ... is the philosophical counterpart to a specific act of legislation: the Reforms of Solon.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nearly everyone treats these as postdating the *Republic*, and even while I reject some of the standard arguments for so doing, I see no reason to dissent.

<sup>2</sup> Thanassis Samaras, *Plato on Democracy*, New York: 2002 (Major Concepts in Politics and Political Theory 23).

<sup>3</sup> Samaras (cf. note 2) 210–11. N.b. also Samaras’s claim that the *Laws* marks “Plato’s increased acceptance of democracy”, ib. 349.

I myself, in an earlier paper<sup>4</sup>, said, much as Samaras says, that “there is no mention of philosopher-rulers” in the *Timaeus-Critias* (Samaras [cf. note 2] 199). However my own concern was precisely to insist that this did *not* signal the abandonment of, or any scepticism about, the “ideal of philosopher-rulers”. Plato left them out, I claimed, “because they [sc. the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*] simply represented one way of expressing an idea which could also be expressed without them; broadly, that the requirement of the good life, whether for city or for individual, is that it is done philosophically, on the basis of reflection”.<sup>5</sup>

Malcolm Schofield goes a little further: in his view, the philosopher-rulers were, in a way, there in the *Timaeus-Critias* all along<sup>6</sup>. There may be no mention of philosopher-rulers (‘kings’) in Socrates’ summary of “yesterday’s” conversation,

“[b]ut [writes Schofield] for our present concerns what matters are the remarks Socrates goes on ... to make about the difficulty of finding people who could give an account of the ideal city at work (19D–E). They would need to be persons who unlike himself or the sophists, could hit upon what men who are simultaneously philosophers and statesmen (πολιτικοί) would do and say in wars and battles’ (19E–20A). The assembled company meet the bill, equipped as they are by nature and nurture for speech and action alike. Socrates’ testimonials to the qualifications of Critias and Hermocrates are couched in relatively vague terms, but Timaeus, has had experience of the greatest offices and honours in the city, and has also in my opinion reached the highest point [ἄκρον, which as Schofield observes in a footnote echoes *Republic* VI 499C ἄκροις εἰς φιλοσοφίαν] of all philosophy’ (20A).

Timaeus, then, is a philosopher and statesman who is to help perform an analogue of the fundamental task assigned to philosopher rulers in the *Republic*. As philosopher rulers are required in order to bring the ideal city into being in the first place, so Socrates needs philosopher-statesmen to help with the practical part of the discussion the interlocutors are to be engaged upon. That discussion will describe the conduct of guards who are – after all – to be the philosophers and statesmen they were in the *Republic*. So the idea of philosopher rulers *is* in play, twice over: as part of the political theory under

<sup>4</sup> Why is the ideal Athens of the *Timaeus-Critias* not ruled by philosophers?, in: *Méthesis: Revista Internacional de Filosofía* X 1997, 51–7.

<sup>5</sup> Rowe (cf. note 4) 56.

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Schofield, The disappearing philosopher-king, in his: *Saving the City*, London/New York 1999, 31–50 – a revised version of *The disappearance of the philosopher-king*, published in: *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 13, 1997 (1999), 213–41, and followed by a response from Rachana Kamtekar (*Philosophical rule from the Republic to the Laws: commentary on Schofield*, ib. pp. 242–252).

discussion, but then transposed from the domain of theory to reflection on authorial creation of the representation of that domain ...

Why is the *Timaeus*'s recall of the idea of philosopher rulers deferred and indirect? I want to provoke the question rather than answering it. But it may be worth remembering that the *Republic*'s own introduction of the philosopher rulers (i) is similarly deferred [sc. until Book V]; (ii) though not in the least indirect, involves the reader in a radical shift of perspective; (iii) is among other things designed to incorporate in the ideal city understanding of the principles which have guided its inventors in their devising of it (VI 497C–D). Perhaps the *Timaeus*'s presentation of the contents of the *Republic* is meant to replicate – after its own fashion – the *Republic*'s rhetorical strategy, and to give practical reinforcement to its suggestion that seeing the role of philosophy in the ideal city is something which will require active work by the reader.<sup>7</sup>

I understand this last part as intending just that any *practical*, or *actual*, 'realisation' of Callipolis, the city of the *Republic*, will involve philosophy, but not necessarily philosopher-rulers as these are described in the text; and that was essentially the conclusion of my 1997 essay.

Now in fact Schofield goes on to combine this reading of the *Timaeus-Critias* with the claim that in the *Laws*, at any rate, if not in the *Politicus*, "Plato appears to have abandoned ... the trust in the union of philosophy and power he had signalled in the *Republic* when discussing the conditions necessary for bringing the good city into being."<sup>8</sup> So here Schofield shares common ground with Samaras. I shall not say any more about this larger debate in this context, beyond pointing to a passage in the *Laws* to which I shall refer again, briefly, at a later stage: the passage in Book XII (963A–964D) where the Visitor from Athens describes the kind of grasp that the Nocturnal Council will have to acquire of the central subject of *virtue*, or *excellence* (ἀρετή): a passage that is strongly reminiscent of the atmosphere of the so-called 'Socratic', sometimes misleadingly labelled<sup>9</sup> as 'definitional', dialogues (a passage, then, that makes it hard to suppose that 'philosophy and power' are not still married, let alone have finalised their divorce). What I wish to focus on instead is Schofield's star passage at *Timaeus* 19D–20A, which he claims has the effect

<sup>7</sup> Schofield, *The disappearing philosopher-king* (cf. note 6) 32–3.

<sup>8</sup> Schofield (cf. note 6) 50. He continues: "Here, at any rate, the familiar developmental story of optimism turning to pessimism is vindicated." Footnote: "Thus in this respect, at least, my conclusion agrees with e.g. G. Vlastos, *Socratic knowledge and Platonic 'pessimism'*, in: *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1973, 215–16, contra e.g. E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, London 1918, 340, who thought that Plato never abandoned the ideal of philosopher rulers as an ideal."

<sup>9</sup> "Misleadingly", at least to the extent that the label suggests that Socrates was interested in definition (or even the logic of definition?) for its own sake.

of making the character Timaeus into a “philosopher and statesman who is to help perform an analogue of the fundamental task assigned to philosopher rulers in the *Republic*” (see above). This was a passage that I did not specifically discuss at all in 1997; by implication, and in fact, I read it in light of 18A4–8, where Socrates is evidently referring to the limited comparison in *Republic* II (375A–376C) of the “guards” with watchdogs: “Because we said, I think, that the guards must have a certain sort of nature, one that is simultaneously, and exceptionally, θυμοειδής and philosophical”. There is, however, more to 19D–20A, as Schofield points out: the ‘philosophy’ that Socrates is attributing to Timaeus is rather more than the kind of φιλοσοφία suggested by the comparison with well-bred dogs. It is Socrates’ opinion that Timaeus has ‘reached the highest point of *all* philosophy’, and whatever may be meant by ‘all philosophy’, it is surely something that canine minds could not even dream of.

But Schofield seems to me to go too far when he suggests that Socrates represents Timaeus as a “philosopher and statesman”, comparable with the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*. One of the essential points is made by Rachana Kamtekar, in her response to Schofield’s original paper: “Timaeus is said [sc. by Critias] to have studied astronomy and especially the nature of the universe – but not dialectic.”<sup>10</sup> That is, he is not said to have studied dialectic. He is not said *not* to have studied it, either. Perhaps “all philosophy”, in Socrates’ comment at 20A4–5, is meant to include dialectic; and certainly, if “yesterday’s” conversation περὶ πολιτείας ... (17C2) took anything like the form of the *Republic* (it wasn’t the *Republic*, of course, because that involved different interlocutors), then Timaeus will have had at least some limited experience of Socratic methods. On the other hand, he shows not the slightest inclination to use the same *method*, of question and answer, that Socrates presumably used the day before; Timaeus launches straight into a monologue, as indeed does Critias. Unless monologue can itself be in some way ‘dialectical’, then it looks as if Timaeus and Critias show themselves *not* to be experts in dialectic by their very mode of presentation.

Of course Socrates only talks about ‘philosophy’, not ‘dialectic’; and maybe here in the *Timaeus-Critias* the link between the doing of philosophy and any sort of Socratic *conversation*, involving question and answer, has been broken. But this much we can say: first, that philosophy as understood in the *Republic* just *is* dialectic, conceived of as question and answer, or else statement, challenge and defence – this general summing up of the description of the ‘dialectical art’ in *Republic* Book VII would surely be uncontroversial.

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<sup>10</sup> Kamtekar (cf. note 6) 244. She continues: “The surprise here would then be Plato’s expansion of the category of people who have sufficient experience of philosophy and politics to represent the ideal city, and so to approximate the condition of philosopher-ruler, to include Timaeus.”

sial; and second, that the foundational musings of the Nocturnal Council in the *Laws* – in that Book XII passage I fleetingly referred to before<sup>11</sup> – are also envisaged as taking question-and-answer form. So even if Plato seems at some point to have lost some of his drive as a writer of plausible-seeming *conversations*, nevertheless the Socratic model of philosophical method is evidently still there as a paradigm. Well, one might propose in Schofield’s defence, perhaps after all Timaeus’ monologue is just the *outcome* of dialectic, and moreover something that could instantly be transformed into dialectic by being challenged, by becoming part of a conversation (with the reader?). Further: are we not already, in Book VI of the *Republic*, presented with real-life analogues of the philosopher-rulers? These are the ἄκροισι εἰς φιλοσοφίαν at 499C, who are recalled by Socrates’ description of Timaeus as φιλοσοφίας ἐπ’ ἄκρον (ἀπάσης) ἐληλυθ[ότα] (see above): “If, then, some compulsion has either been laid in the past on those at the highest level in philosophy to take care of a city ...”. Somewhere, at some time, perhaps, top philosophical minds might have had political control ... Either, then, expertise in dialectics is presupposed in the *Timaeus-Critias*, or else it is less important than we might have thought (or so I conclude, dialectically, for now: I shall almost immediately start rowing back on some aspects of that conclusion, particularly in relation to the treatment of *Republic* 499C)<sup>12</sup>.

Is all, then, in order for the Schofield reading? I myself continue to have reservations about his way of taking the passage, which seems to me to be rather more slippery and elusive than he supposes.

1. Schofield does not quote the whole of what Socrates says about Timaeus. Timaeus has not just “had experience of the greatest offices and honours in the city, and ... in my opinion reached the highest point of all philosophy”. The passage runs “[For the claim that Timaeus and the other two ‘share in both things’, 20A1, i.e. φιλοσοφία and political expertise, I call in witness that] Timaeus here, (a) belonging to the most well-governed (εὐνομοτάτη) city in Italian Locri, and (b) second to none in that part of the world in (i) wealth and (ii) birth, has had experience of the greatest offices”, etc. Point (a) is obviously relevant enough to Timaeus’s claims as a potential philosopher-ruler: his belonging to a well-run city will suggest that he has grown up in the right way, and had the *right kind* of political experience. But it is less clear what wealth and birth – that is, high birth in the ordinary sense – have to do with the matter; are they not precisely the kinds of criteria for choosing rulers that the Socrates of the *Republic* is *rejecting*? One might respond: just so,

<sup>11</sup> I.e. 963A–964D.

<sup>12</sup> See especially nn.16 and 20 below.

because after all we must expect the philosopher-rulers' analogues in the real world, outside the imaginary Callipolis, to be the products of their own societies (only Callipolis will *systematically* produce people of the appropriate sort, who will otherwise be likely to appear, if they appear at all, under the best existing conditions: good government/laws, wealth, noble birth ...). But:

2. There is still that unexplained expression Socrates uses: Timaeus “has also in my opinion reached the highest point of *all philosophy*”, which might be taken as suggesting a division of ‘philosophy’ into different departments (‘all *sorts* of philosophy’; ‘love of/study of all sorts of subjects’?). If there is any such suggestion, it is reinforced by Critias’ description of Timaeus as ἀστρονομικώτατος ἡμῶν, and as “having made most effort [sc. more than the rest of us?] to know about the nature of the whole” (27A3–5, the passage referred to by Kamtekar: see above note 10). It still remains possible that ‘all philosophy’ is meant to include the kind that Socrates is interested in, and the kind of method associated with it; or that Plato is, implicitly, moving beyond Socrates (despite the *Laws* XII passage: see above). Must we not in any case suppose Plato to be committed to what he has Timaeus tell us? Why would it make sense for Plato to use, even to invent, Timaeus, to speak at such length if there were supposed to be doubts about his philosophical capacities? This, however, is not – as I shall suggest later – quite the knock-down argument it may seem. It remains the fact that we are only given evidence in 20A for Timaeus’ political, not for his philosophical, grasp; and actually Timaeus will contribute nothing directly to the account of ancient Athens at war, which was the subject for which the combination of theoretical and practical skills seemed to be required.

3. As for Critias’ qualifications, Socrates relies on what ‘we here in Athens’ know about him. Here something will depend on which Critias is in question: the member of the Thirty Tyrants and opponent of Socrates, or the same Critias’ grandfather. If our Critias is the first of these two, it seems scarcely conceivable that Plato should be seriously praising him for his φιλοσοφία; at any rate, if this is the same Critias who is found in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* trying to shut Socrates up (1.2.30–38). If our Critias is the Tyrant’s grandfather, as seems more likely (and as I think myself is virtually certain), we have not the slightest evidence that he was interested in any sort of philosophy at all, though he was evidently a prominent politician: a candidate for ostracism, and opponent of Pericles<sup>13</sup>. Plato might mean to *make* him into a philosopher. But there is little clear sign of that, as it happens, in what the character Critias has to say either in the *Timaeus*, or in the *Critias* (before our text breaks off); at least, if he is supposed to be reporting what

<sup>13</sup> See now Debra Nails, *The People of Plato*, Indianapolis 2002, Critias III.

(Dropides said) Solon said, and not making it up himself – in which case he would be standing in for Plato, and making his lessons (philosophical and political) for him. About Hermocrates, of course, there is not much to be said, since nothing much is said about him, and our text never gets round to his contribution. But if he is supposed to be the Syracusan who was involved in the defeat of the Athenians in 415–13, then the position will be the same as with Critias (if Critias is the grandfather of the Tyrant): since he is not in fact – so far as we know – much of a philosopher (in the Socratic-Platonic mould), either we should be taking what Socrates says about his philosophical credentials with a pinch of salt, or Plato is choosing to *make* him a philosopher.

4. Of these two options, however, the first is surely the more likely. We know, and the dialogue's original readers/hearers would have known, that Critias and Hermocrates were public figures: the name 'Critias' would have been associated primarily with political events (especially around the end of the fifth century), and Hermocrates, as Thucydides' narrative surely guaranteed, would have lived on in the public memory for his part in Athens' Syracusan disaster. And that primary association is surely underlined by the very fact that Socrates relies on what 'we Athenians' know about Critias<sup>14</sup>, and on the evidence of 'many witnesses' for Hermocrates' qualities (20A6–8). The very choice of the particular pair, Critias and Hermocrates, seems to be *because* of their political prominence (or in the case of Critias, the prominence of his name): Critias, because he belongs to the generation of Marathon and Salamis, and because – so I propose – he is *not* the younger Critias (I shall return to this point in a moment), Hermocrates because of his role in Athens' defeat, and also perhaps because of the Sicilians' own record in resisting great foreign powers: Carthaginians, Etruscans<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> No matter that Aristotle, at *Rhetoric* 1416b27–8 uses 'Critias' as an example of someone whose actions are 'not known by many', and so would need exegesis before being praised. George A. Kennedy (*Aristotle: On Rhetoric* [newly translated ...], New York 1991, ad loc.) supposes the reference to be to the younger (Tyrant) Critias, and supplies "not many know [his <good> actions]". That is not impossible, and we should probably note that there seems to be, or to have been, something amiss with the text immediately following. But it might just be worth speculating that Aristotle rather has the older Critias in mind; even that he might be making a wry comment on what Socrates says here in the *Timaeus* about (what I take to be) this Critias, who otherwise fails to make much of a mark on the historical record.

<sup>15</sup> Cornford also, plausibly, proposes Hermocrates's political career at Syracuse as a relevant factor (F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, London 1937, 2).

5. So *philosophy*, I suggest, has the back seat in this context<sup>16</sup>. But even when Socrates first introduces ‘philosophy’, in 19E5, he is already putting it there (i.e. in the back seat). The whole sentence (19E2–8) deserves close attention.

Socrates has just said that poets, past or present – to whom I shall return – would find the task of praising the men and institutions of Socrates’ city beyond them. “And the tribe of the sophists”, Socrates goes on, “for their part: I’m sure they’re very expert in many other fine sorts of λόγοι, but I’m a bit afraid that, because they wander about from city to city and have nowhere governed their own habitations (οἰκήσεις ... ἰδίας), they may be unable to hit upon (ἄστοχον) all the things, and the sorts of things (ὅσ’ ἂν οἷά

<sup>16</sup> Being φιλόσοφος need here be not much more than having the capacity to reflect intelligently about a subject, and so to speak intelligently about it: the main requirement put on Timaeus and the others is to provide λόγοι. This takes us a bit further on, but perhaps not too much further, than the φιλοσοφία of the guards of *Republic* II, when these are compared with watchdogs: knowing one’s enemies and one’s friends (if that is all that is meant: see further below) might be an important part of the military expertise that Socrates has in mind in the *Timaeus* – though being able to *talk* about what one is doing, which is certainly beyond dogs, is what he particularly emphasises (19C7–8, E7–8). On the other hand Timaeus’ familiarity with “all philosophy” also apparently includes expertise in some extra specialist subjects: see above.

Malcolm Schofield, who along with Rachana Kamtekar was good enough to read and comment on the whole of the present paper in draft, charges me with coming “close to self-contradiction” here, given that I have already accepted his suggestion that *Timaeus* 20A φιλοσοφίας ... ἐπ’ ἄκρον ἀπάσης ... echoes *Republic* 499C ἄκροις εἰς φιλοσοφίαν (see above). I take his point, which forces me to be bolder than perhaps I should have wished to be in the present context. I now plead, in my defence: (a) that if there is an echo of *Republic* VI at *Timaeus* 20A (I agree that there is), and if at the same time I am right about the qualifications of the *Timaeus* trio (see above), either the ἄκροι of *Republic* VI are not in fact Socratic dialecticians – which, given that Socrates is talking in the *Republic* passage not just about the present, but about the ‘unlimited’ past, might tend to look improbable in any case: apart from Parmenides, and maybe Zeno, whom else from the past would Socrates be likely count as a dialectician?; or else they are Socratic dialecticians (past ones being merely hypothetical: see further note 19 below), and the implicit reference in *Timaeus* 20A to *Republic* VI is a more complicated issue than it looks. I also plead (b) that in any case it is not clear how much better than ‘watchdog’-types even top-notch non-Socratic ‘philosophers’ would have been in Plato’s eyes. Further (c), what exactly Socrates wants to compare with the quality he praises in watchdogs in *Republic* II is by no means clear: might the watchdog’s attitude towards those who are συνήθεις τε καὶ γνώριμοι (375E) perhaps be meant to evoke the idea of the universal ‘friendship’ for (love of, desire for) what is οἰκεῖον at *Lysis* 221D–222D (for the adjective γνώριμος, cf. *Lysis* 214B, perhaps with *Timaeus* 34B)? These are deep waters, which will be explored – though not with reference to the *Republic* or *Timaeus* – in: Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, *Plato’s Lysis*, Cambridge, forthcoming. But what I would like to press, for now, is at least the point that any connection between *Timaeus* 20A and *Republic* VI is going to be a less than straightforward matter, because of complexities both in the *Timaeus* and in the *Republic*. See note 20 below, which takes the argument a step further.



τε), that men who are both φιλόσοφοι and πολιτικοί, engaged in (πράττοντες ἐν) war and battles, would do and say when encountering different people (ἐκάστοις?), in fact and in theory (ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ)". This is an extraordinarily difficult sentence to understand and translate. But I think it may help to begin by noticing the clear echo of *Protagoras* 318E5–319A2, where Protagoras states what he teaches: "What someone coming to me will learn is εὐβουλία about what belongs to himself (τὰ οἰκεῖα), how he might best govern (διοικεῖν) his own household (τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν); and what belongs to the city, how he might most effectively do and say what belongs to the city." Socrates in the *Timaeus* seems to be parodying this claim: because they're never at home, never in their own city (or household), sophists have no idea what to say or do in any encounter with anyone, whether in practice or in theory – and there will be a particular irony in the reference to οἰκήσεις ... ἰδίως, which on the reading I propose hints at the original τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν, after we have just been told/reminded that in the ideal city the guards will have no private property (18B–C). In any case, the upshot seems to be that the sophists would be unequal to the task in hand *just because they have not had any experience of government* – which is just what Timaeus, apparently, and Critias and Hermocrates, have had. That is, the sophists' lack of political experience seems to be *all* that prevents them from "hitting upon what φιλόσοφοι ... καὶ πολιτικοὶ men (ἄνδρες) would say and do". Give them that experience, and all would be in order; some sort of 'philosophical' understanding would evidently come along with it. This does not look much like the sort of 'philosophical' understanding Socrates is normally interested in.

6. And the dismissal of the poets, as rival candidates for singing the praises of the best city, has equally little to do with philosophy as the *Republic* consistently appears to understand it. The poets' problem is that they are imitators, and that "... while it is difficult for any group of people (ἐκάστοις) to give a good imitation in action (ἔργοις) of what lies outside the things they are brought up with, it is still more difficult for them to imitate it in words (λόγοις)" (19D7–E2). I notice Archer-Hind claiming that "Proklos raises needless difficulty about this. Plato simply means that to describe such things worthily requires a rare literary gift: it is far easier to find an Agamemnon than a Homer."<sup>17</sup> But I think there is a problem here, and not least because Socrates looks as if he might be reversing what he says, or said, in *Republic* V, precisely in relation to the best city. What he said was that drawing something is easier than finding it represented in practice (472C ff.); so, he concludes, don't force me to show happening τῷ ἔργῳ what we went through

<sup>17</sup> R.D. Archer-Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato*, London 1888, ad loc.

τῷ λόγῳ (473A5–7)<sup>18</sup>. The Hackett translation has “It’s difficult enough for any one of them [the poets] to do a decent job of imitating in performance, let alone in narrative description, anything that lies outside their training”,<sup>19</sup> but while this might sit well with Socrates’ comparison of Critias’ audience, at *Critias* 108B, with a theatre audience, it is surely stretching the text beyond tolerable limits. My own guess, though I admit that it is pure speculation, is that Plato is having Socrates covertly refer to one particular poet: *Critias the younger*. “It is difficult enough” – so I propose Socrates might be saying – “to imitate good models well in one’s behaviour, as Critias the younger failed to imitate his grandfather; still more difficult would it be for him to fulfil the task we have in mind here, of imitating/representing the best city and its citizens in words”, sc. because they are *so* far outside his own political experience. (Hence my earlier proposal that Critias the elder is chosen partly because he is not Critias the younger: this would be Plato’s apology for the behaviour of his own appalling relative.)

7. In fact Socrates counts himself out, too, as an encomiast of the best city on the grounds of *his* lack of the relevant experience; or, perhaps, on that basis and on the basis of his general lack of knowledge (19D2 καὶ τὸ μὲν ἔμὸν οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν).

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Of course, it is philosophers that we might have *expected* to be contrasted with poets and sophists. My claim, however, is that this is not exactly how it turns out: Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, to whom Socrates is passing on responsibility for the next stages in the discussion, are, for all their other qualities, not clearly marked out as philosophers. They are πολιτικοί, perhaps of a particularly intelligent and reflective kind, and one at least of them (Timaeus) has other specialist resources. But any comparison of them with the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*, though it may be hinted at, is not clearly borne out in practice. And this (here I pass on to the next stage in my argument) is, in my view, the real explanation of the disappearance of the philosopher-rulers from what otherwise looks like a summary of the sketch of the best city in the *Republic*. It is a sketch of a kind that would make the *Republic*’s proposals intelligible and acceptable to practical politicians/statesmen like Critias and Hermocrates: a version that leaves out the third and larg-

<sup>18</sup> The situation becomes still more complicated if one brings in *Timaeus* 26C7–D3.

<sup>19</sup> Tr. Zeyl, in: J.M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, Indianapolis 1997.

est 'wave' of *Republic* V (473C ff.), which causes such consternation to Glaucon and Adeimantus – namely the suggestion that “unless philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men *genuinely and adequately* philosophize, that is, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils ...”<sup>20</sup>. Giving Critias and Hermocrates a version that leaves *this* out means that he can co-opt their support as narrators – and first Critias’, as part of that complex web of fiction that locates the best city in prehistoric Attica<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, it is a way of avoiding the chicken-and-egg problem that emerged in the *Republic*, namely that philosophers would be needed to set up the best city, but that the best city would be the only reliable way of producing philosophers. In ancient Athens, which was nearer to the beginning of the world, the gods could be relied upon to do what, in later times, it requires hard-won philosophical expertise to replicate. Old Athens, the one that defeated the power of Atlantis, had its institutions established directly by Athena and Hephaestus, who continued to oversee them from their temples on the acropolis. Still, those institutions, mirrored in the Egyptian city of Saïs, which provides another putative link with real life and real history, were pretty much those of Callipolis, or rather of the city Socrates described to Timaeus, Critias, Hermocrates, and that curiously anonymous fourth person of *Timaeus* 17A (who must, I suppose, be meant to be Plato, making his usual pretence of being absent even more transparent than usual).

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<sup>20</sup> *Republic* V, 473C11–D5, in Zeyl’s translation, with one small change, and with italics added. The importance of the italicised words, from the point of view of my own reading, should by now be clear enough: they will suffice to give the further necessary specification, retrospectively and prospectively, to the notion of the ‘philosophical’ as it is introduced in II, 375A–376C (the watchdogs) and at VI, 499C (the ἄκροι εἰς φιλοσοφίαν).

<sup>21</sup> Just why should Plato *want* to co-opt non-philosophers? (This is a question Rachana Kamtekar pressed on me, in some valuable comments that also helped me clear up some unclarity or plain mistakes.) Firstly, I think Socrates is supposed to be quite serious when he suggests that he lacks the kind of competence required to fulfil the kind of narrative role that he asks for from the others. But second, and more importantly, it is crucial – so I shall propose: see the concluding paragraph of the present paper – to Plato’s whole design for the *Timaeus* that the account of the physical universe be provided by a non-philosopher; only so (I venture) would it have been possible to give the kind of prominence that Timaeus’ whole λόγος in fact gives to the *details* of the physical universe, and (just as significantly) to allow for that *variation of tone* that necessarily accompanies that account. (If this is an inadequate response to Kamtekar’s question, as it is, I fear that it is the best I can do for now, short of writing another paper; but she is perfectly right in saying that I owe the reader at least some kind of show of an explanation.)

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Schofield's claim was that "the idea of philosopher rulers *is* in play [at the beginning of the *Timaeus*], twice over: as part of the political theory under discussion, but then transposed from the domain of theory to reflection on authorial creation of the representation of that domain." I have so far, in effect, argued for the falsity of the second part of this claim. But I now want to propose that the first part is right. I began this paper by talking about the "apparent absence of the philosopher-rulers from Socrates' summary"; and in fact they *are* there, for the reader who knows where to look. They are there in 18A, in the reference to "gymnastic and music, and all the μαθήματα that are appropriate to [the guards]"; they are there in the sudden reference at 18D to "the rulers" (male and female), since anyone who knows the *Republic* knows who these are; and above all they are there – and also not – in Schofield's passage at 19E, and those φιλόσοφοι ἄνδρες ... καὶ πολιτικοί (So: again, it *wasn't* the conversation Socrates 'reports' in the *Republic* – it involved different people; but it also *was* that conversation. The reader, in collusion with the author, has the advantage over the interlocutors.) But – and here is the difference between my reading and Schofield's – 19E in fact only *gestures towards* the figure of the philosopher-ruler (as 18A, 18D hint at it), serving, as it were, to remind the reader of where he or she is coming from. Philosopher-rulers, in the sense of the *Republic*, play no role in the scenario of the *Timaeus-Critias*, even by way of constituting the standpoint of the interlocutors as creators of, and judges of, the various presentations to follow<sup>22</sup>. Philosopher-rulers, and philosophy in general, are for the time being left on the sidelines. But, as I hold, it is important that they be there, and be gestured at; for in the real world they are the only means by which a rational society may – on Socrates', or Plato's, account – be achieved<sup>23</sup>. We no longer live in close proximity to the gods (if indeed we ever really did).

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According to the reading I propose, Critias at least, and probably Hermocrates, are not philosophers, in the Socratic/Platonic sense. Critias is a narrator, who understands something, because of his nature, and his upbringing; but the real source of, and authority for, what he has to tell us about the best society – which is, of course, not Callipolis, but an

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Schofield's "reflection on authorial creation of the representation of [the] domain [of the theory in question]", and Critias's reference to himself and the group as δικασταί at 27B.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the reference to Athena's own φιλοσοφία at *Critias* 109C7.

'actual' city that closely resembled it – will be what Solon said about what the Egyptians said about that original Athens; and so, ultimately, Critias's source and authority, according to the implications of the whole elaborate fiction, are the founders of primitive Athens, Athena and Hephaestus themselves. We do not know exactly what Hermocrates would have talked about, and it is hard to guess: all we have to go on is Socrates's suggestion that Critias and Hermocrates – and actually Timaeus too<sup>24</sup> – will somehow be illustrating, and praising, his best city in action (19B–20C). But to the extent that Socrates treats the two of them in exactly the same way, and to the extent that their real-life counterparts evidently belonged to the same type, we may reasonably treat Hermocrates on the same basis as Critias. So my general conclusion is that neither Critias nor Hermocrates is, or is made into, or needs to be, a Socratic philosopher. They are right-thinking, upstanding, intelligent men of action, πολιτικοί, but not φιλόσοφοι in quite the sense that Socrates is φιλόσοφος, or the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* are φιλόσοφοι. (But this carries no implication, I insist, that Plato no longer sees a role for Socratic philosophy in the city; he does, and he has left sufficient signs that he does – for the reader.)

What about Timaeus? I have cast doubt on *his* philosophical credentials too. And that may be enough, for some, to bring down the whole of my argument. (How could that great account of the cosmos and its origins not be meant to be *philosophical*? Why would Plato have devoted so much space to it, if it were not?) There is a story to be told about Timaeus, too, and his contribution to the feast (17A), which I have told elsewhere<sup>25</sup> – a story which is in my view capable of saving the claim that, at the very least, questions need to be asked about exactly how serious Socrates is when he *seems* to make Timaeus into a fully-fledged philosopher. In short: Timaeus' account is, for the most part, based on – inferred from – the physical evidence, and to that extent is (by the very standards of the *Republic*: see especially the account of the two types of astronomy in Book VII) a kind of second-best. That, however, really is a story for another occasion, to which I refer only in order to indicate that some sort of response is available, however effective it may in the end prove to be, to what may appear the obvious objection to my main conclusion about

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting, however, that only the first two are addressed at 19C8–D1.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Rowe, The Status of the "myth" in Plato's *Timaeus*, in: Carlo Natali, Stefano Maso (eds.), *Plato Physicus. Cosmologia e antropologia nel Timeo*, Amsterdam 2003, 21–31.

the *Timaeus-Critias*: that the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* have not gone missing in the *Timaeus-Critias*, but are merely hidden for the moment in the wings<sup>26</sup>.

Durham

Christopher Rowe

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<sup>26</sup> Two bibliographical postscripts: (1) I note with some satisfaction that my conclusions here partly coincide, or at least overlap, with some remarks of M.M. McCabe's which were partly responsible for my starting to think about the introductory conversation in the *Timaeus*. "But then," she writes in *Plato's Individuals*, Princeton 1994, 186, "think again about the *Timaeus* itself. Here we have a dialogue (to be generous) that undercuts itself. It begins with a recapitulation of the *Republic* that is wildly off the mark [footnote: "Off the mark in the sense that it omits the cornerstone of the arguments in the *Republic* – the metaphysics and epistemology of the central books"], continues to some rude remarks about myth; and then offers a grand cosmological myth, founded on principles of likelihood – principles that *Timaeus*' epistemology rejects as second-rate." The story that I myself tell about *Timaeus*'s 'myth' sets out to explain why Plato might have thought it useful to leave us with something 'second-rate'. (2) In her excellent new book *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge 2002), Ruby Blondell repeatedly contrasts the *lack* of effective characterisation in the *Timaeus-Critias* with the characterisation in other dialogues. It cannot be denied that *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Hermocrates*, and even *Socrates* are given little by way of colour or detail. Nevertheless, the whole of my argument will, I hope, have served to show that in these dialogues as in others, the actual *choice* of characters, and the way that they are presented, matters very much indeed. I would go so far as to say that we cannot even begin to understand the *Timaeus* and its fragmentary sequel until we have got properly to grips with the precise way in which *Timaeus*' and *Critias*' monologues are introduced. (My thanks, finally, to my colleague and friend Michael Erler, who solicited the present paper, and invited me to present it in Würzburg; and to my seminar audience in the Residenz there, who gave a lively hearing to its first, oral, version.)