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# MYTH AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE *TIMAEUS*

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**Abstract.** What is the value of myths and mythmaking in the Platonic worldview? I argue in this paper that the retelling and explanation of the creation myth in *Timaeus* shows that myth and mythmaking ultimately bind religion and science, that is, the why and how of reality, together. It gives an analysis of the creation myth together with Plato's view of mythmaking, both present in this particular dialogue, which show how myth legitimizes reality through a cycle of narration and interpretation. Within this cycle, therefore, new knowledge and insight into reality are produced, which in turn bind the Greeks' perspective more seamlessly: their beliefs about themselves and the world are almost inseparable from their explanation of how things work. It concludes by showing us the essential character of myths in the classical worldview as bearers of meaning, which allows us to reflect not merely on our present views on myths, but also the way we interpret the myths that persist until today.

**Keywords:** Plato, *Timaeus*, myth, religion, science

## Introduction

In her exposition of certain "theological sidelights" from Plato's *Timaeus*, Sarah Broadie emphasizes an "integration" between theology and science, which seem to lie on opposite poles in terms of producing knowledge. She says that

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> [t]he Timaean story of divine world-making is designed to be a deeply penetrating and detailed account of its composition, structures, and workings of a vast range of physical entities. Far from showing only that divinity is responsible for the things of each kind, the story sets out to explain precisely how they were made and why the distinctly described physical features are as they are.[1]

Broadie not only gives us an appropriate way of reading Plato and his use of myth as an introduction and exposition to his philosophical worldview, but also leads to a critical examination of the relationship between religion (or, more properly, its theological worldview), and the empirical sciences. These two, for quite a long time, have become placed in stark opposition to each other when it comes to their perception of reality. As Harald Haarmann puts it, the modern world has put a stark contrast between myth and reason, something that the ancient world strived to complement.[2]

More specifically, this contrast lies in the way that religion and science are understood as having opposing sources of knowledge and conclusions about the world. On one hand, the scientific worldview, more particularly of the natural sciences, is a product of a specific method of observation, grounded in observable and measurable data from which one derives theories, laws, and principles that enable us to understand and manipulate the physical world.[3] This is, of course, very different from the religious worldview, which comes from varying

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[1] Sarah Broadie, "Theological Sidelights from Plato's 'Timaeus,'" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 82 (2008): 3-4.

[2] Harald Haarmann, *Myth as Source of Knowledge in Early Western Thought: The Quest for Historiography, Science and Philosophy in Greek Antiquity* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 2.

[3] This, of course, is largely related more particularly to the "natural" sciences (that is, *modern* and empirical), and with a particular focus on the method as that which makes it scientific. I am aware that this definition already gives us a certain position on what counts as scientific and non-scientific (in this regard, see David L. Miller. "The Nature of Scientific Statements," *Philosophy of Science* 14, no. 3 [1947]: 221-23); however, I remain with this definition as this is the one that we find relevant in the cosmic worldview of the *Timaeus*.

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forms of "divine revelation," and hence holds as true that which goes beyond or remains outside of the observable, calculable, and observable.[4]

Hence, we have what seems to be two perspectives that, on the surface, seems to have few points of contact, and yet both are useful in deriving and making meaning out of the world, with human existence as part of it. And in this regard, I argue that the creation myth within the *Timaeus* seamlessly holds and enriches its scientific elements seamlessly, not running the risk to mix or confuse one with the other. Insofar as this dialogue is concerned, myth comes to bridge the two, which leads us to an insight on how myths become distinct carriers of meaning in his dialogues.

## An Overview of the Creation Myth in Plato

The creation myth which makes up more than half of the *Timaeus* is the philosophical core of the whole dialogue. In fact, one cannot speak of the significance of the *Timaeus* without going through this lengthy creation account, a discourse that was prompted by the characters' earlier discourse on the greatness of the city of Athens and its victory over Atlantis, which by itself is another mythical account (cf. *Timaeus* 19d).[5] Thus, the creation myth appears to be the backdrop of

[4] The relationship between science and religion is less complicated than the attempt to define both of them, yet covers various considerations such as object, means of observation, and truth-value of statements, among others, that would spell the difference between these two worldviews and sources of knowledge. For a full treatment, see Helen de Cruz, "Religion and Science," in Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2025), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/religion-science/.

[5] See Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19d (6). I take all references from the *Timaeus* from this translation, and place them in the main text using title of the dialogue (*Timaeus*) together with the corresponding Stephanus page number.

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the Atlantis myth, and gives the whole narrative its context.[6] In fact, it is only in *Timaeus*, hardly appreciated even at present, that one finds a tightly coherent cosmological account that gives a comprehensive view of Plato's understanding and image of the *kosmos* in all its glory.[7]

This lengthy account, found in *Timaeus* 27c onwards, comprises the entire speech of *Timaeus*, and I break this down in several parts for the purpose of seeing not just its scope, but also the meaningful sequence that it meaningfully bares. The schema is as follows:

| **Stage of the Creation Myth** | **Corresponding Section** |
|---|---|
| The beginning: an invocation of the gods, whose aid Timaeus sought in narrating | 27c-27d |
| The primary question: *What is it that always is, but never comes to be, and what is it that comes to be but never is?* | 27e-28a |

[6] This is the assumption held by commentators of the *Timaeus*, finding their basis on the narrative found in *Timaeus* 25e-26a, when Critias claims that the Atlantis myth is but part of a larger story that Timaeus clearly recalls. (see also Leonardo Taran, "The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*," *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter* [1966]: 2.) There is no clear, single origin of the creation myth in Timaeus, and it was assumed that this particular creation myth in which a divine craftsman is responsible for the emergence of realty is a commonly held and narrated myth. It is possible, however, that Plato himself derives and reworks this myth coming from other mythical accounts that were known in his time. Though this paper does not dwell on this, one can point out that, in line with the research of R. E. Gmirkin, one can see the *Timaeus* as a development of Anaxagoras' notion of the *Nous*, "fitting" it into a myth (see Russell E. Gmirkin, *Plato's Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts: Cosmic Monotheism and Terrestrial Polytheism in the Primordial History* [New York: Routledge, 2022], 259). Various studies reveal close connections with the Genesis myth of creation, but no direct evidence can prove that one is related to another.

[7] Quoting Victor Brochard, Elsa Grasso affirms the fact that the question of the value of myth and hence its importance in the Platonic corpus is raised most often when one encounters the *Timaeus*. See Elsa Grasso, "Myth, Image and Likeness in Plato's Timaeus," in *Plato and Myth*, ed. Catherine Collobert et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 343.

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| | |
|---|---|
| Exposition of the divine craftsman (the *demiurgos*) that created reality after models. The divine maker created the elements, the world's spatial dimensions, and the mixture of the souls and the bodies that make them present | 29a-37c |
| The creation of time | 37d-38d |
| The creation of heavenly bodies and the distinction of the created beings | 38e-40a |
| The divine maker's act of handing over creation, and leaving the rest to the gods. | 40b-41d |
| The creation of souls and implantations into bodies, therefore having male and female forms | 42a-42d |
| The anatomical composition of the human being, together with its motions | 42e-47e |
| Return to the explanation of the universe as the copy of the model that the divine craftsman has conceived | 48a-48e |
| The third element: the "receptacle (or nurse of all creation, *chora*), and its relationship with the four principal elements | 49a-50c |
| The shapes of the world and the mixture of its elements | 50d-51c |
| Causality as the governing principle through which one links creation | 68e-69c |
| The malaise of the body, and its pains and pleasures, its movement and its appetites | 86a-92a |
| Conclusion of account, affirmation of perfection | 92b-92c |

This proposed structure may not cover all the pertinent details, yet we see here the breadth and depth of this long discourse that reveals an entire worldview, that is, a coherent reality that has an explanation even to the last detail. One can already treat this as an *encyclopedic*—to use an anachronistic term—account of the world. Moreover, it seems to not just come from a singular worldview tackling a singular topic; rather,

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it goes through multiple accounts and perspectives which form part of human experience, from which explanations are brought forward in relation to the movement, distance, shape, time, and formation of the whole world as the *kosmos*. At the same time, we see that Timaeus does not back down in its assertion of its divine origin; he treats the truth of the whole matter as warranted by the gods. The narration of the myth lies within the boundaries of the religious, all the while affirming truths that ground common human experience; however, it is embedded within a well-known creation myth that is made more complex and intricate, thus integrating everything within the gamut of human experience.

But while the modern, untrained reader can only reduce this mythological account as purely symbolic or figurative, it is clear that Plato also inserted explanations of nature as experienced by the human person. Crude as myths and myth-making seem to be, it remains meaningful and revelatory of the ancient worldview that Plato largely adopts, though we see that the developed myth carries legitimate answers regarding the composition of all reality. With this, we can ask: *How, then, did Plato use myth as that binding force between the two?*

## Myth as Carrier of Wisdom

An important key in understanding Plato's use of myth is his discourse on the very purpose of telling myths. One immediately recalls this discourse in *The Republic*, pointing out that myths are narrated because it becomes easier for the people to understand certain explanations that otherwise can become very complex to remember.[8]

As it seems, the status of the "reality" of such myths are hardly the concern of Plato. In fact, in the creation myth of the *Timaeus*, Plato playfully and creatively uses it in two ways. First, he uses it as a backdrop

[8] See Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed., trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), III, 377a-378e (54-56). Allan Bloom used the word "narratives" and "stories," but in the course of the dialogue, eventually, Plato makes use of the very content of myths, not confined to the origin and cause of things, but the very stories that make up the gods and heroes.

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of the myth of Atlantis, through which he asserts the significance of Athens, and second, as seen above, he inserts the theories of shapes and the physical account of the world as consisting of four basic elements. Ayreh Finkelberg sees this as a peculiar element in the *Timaeus,* which tells us that Plato asserted that the mythical account can be seamlessly combined with the geometrical view, expressing a synthetic worldview that does not need to separate one from another.[9]

This view of the Platonic myths brings forth two important implications in the analysis of the creation myths. First, as contemporary readers of Plato, we were warned to evaluate the meaning of the myth not by our modern standards of what is "real," that is, equivalent to the systematization of empirical information; rather, we have to look at the nature of the myth's function in classical antiquity, as one which brings forward an explanation to phenomena which otherwise can be unknown yet apparently obvious in one's experience.[10] Put briefly, it tries to contain within itself—within explainable confines—the borderlines between what can be known and what is yet unknown. Corollary to this is the second: it matters little whether the supposed myth must be understood either literally or figuratively.[11] I explain these two points in the analyses below as the principal characteristics of myth-making, which makes myth not only an effective carrier of knowledge but also and more importantly, insofar as it is relevant to the *Timaeus*, one that bridges scientific and religious knowledge altogether.

## The Narrative Content of Myth and its Demonstrative Power

Regarding the first point, it is important to see that this particular suspension of the real, in order to give way for the myth to convey a reality that is obvious, leads us to the narrative function of the myth,

[9] As Finkelberg aptly states, "Plato apparently held that the geometrical method can be consistently employed in philosophical discourse and may be a convenient way of philosophical inquiry." cf. Aryeh Finkelberg, "Plato's Method in *Timaeus*," *The American Journal of Philology* 117, no. 3 (1996): 407.

[10] Haarmann, *Myth as Source of Knowledge*, 6-7.

[11] See Finkelberg, "Plato's Method in *Timaeus*," 391-392.

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which attests to the reason Plato uses it. To explain the aforementioned first point above, one must see that for Plato and his audiences, it is not so much its literal or figurative meaning. Rather, it is the fact that it presents a coherent, well-thought-out, and sensible story through *and* in which the history of humankind (or, in Plato's case, the Athenians) is appended. While the modern mind dismisses myth and confines it to the corners of ancient literature and the "bedtime story," Harmann says that such is not the case for the people of antiquity, specifically Greeks, emphasizing that

> [t]he organic whole of the Greek world-view where terms referring to narration form a network to express the living experience of people in the cultural surroundings in which they have shaped for themselves in mental constructs.[12]

This means that if one assumes the place of the audience of Plato's dialogues, myth is received not *only* as a story made for entertainment and curiosity. Rather, it provides a link between present and past in all its aspects. It matters little whether what aspect of these myths are true or not, or a mix of real events and well-constructed ones. What matters is that it provides an idea that the present reality is part of a bigger whole that has a source which grounds the reason for reality to exist as such. It is a "grand history," or in the words of Elsa Grasso, a *genesis*[13] with which one finds a source of something to which the audience belongs. In the *Timaeus*, the audience finds themselves opened to this history's specifically divine origin, made possible "by unwinding [history and reality] at once, chronologically, along narratives, and 'visually,' in the mental image which discourse elicits in the reader."[14]

It is not, therefore, disconcerting to think that in the dialogue, Timaeus smoothly places this story to widen and deepen the inquiry regarding the city. Specifically, the creation myth is a presentation

[12] Haarmann, *Myth as Source of Knowledge*, 39.

[13] Grasso, "Myth, Image and Likeness in Plato's *Timaeus*," 350.

[14] Ibid., 362.

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that is both an *eikos logos* and at the same time, an *eikos mythos*.[15] It is a "likely story" that is also, at the same time, told and retold to be a "meaningful story" ripe with philosophical discourse. Significant in this part of the *Timaeus* is a link to the past which the narrative provides to its audience, relating it to the present as thought and constituted. The primary question, therefore, this: *How, then, do we become as such?*

And in this regard, the floodgates of narrative open up and provide a clear picture that carries a plethora of meanings at various levels, *all together at once*. The *why* and the *how* merge together not only as part of the narrative but as elements that make up a whole. There is no contrasting reality that is presented, but only an integrated whole.

Two things, therefore, are reconciled. On one hand, the myth gives space for a distinct and divine origin of the world and its people; it is the genesis of both the divine and the human. However, it is also possible that this narrative leaves space to explain how things happen to be as they are. Plato shows that in this drama between gods and men, one can see that all of reality is carefully thought and formed by a divine craftsman, one that also divides the work in the formation of this coherent whole. It is a reality made up of basic elements and, at the same time, basic forms and figures. It is filled up with bodies that work harmoniously, and from this idea of harmony, one can also see not just the function of parts but also the possible defects in those parts. Within this narrative reworked to bring forth reason, one sees that it taps not just into the sense of a long history, but also into the activity and inherent sense of meaning-making.[16]

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[15] The question on whether the *Timaeus* is *mythos* or *logos*, that is, either as a myth laden with symbols or a narrative that lays down the real structure of the universe is a topic taken by the renowned commentator on Plato, Myles F. Burnyeat, which Grasso brings up once again (see ibid., 350-51). This work does not go into a complete analysis of Burnyeat's work, its critics, and Grasso's reaffirmation in her own argument; however, it is also important to take note of it at this point of the argument.

[16] See Haarmann, *Myth as Source of Knowledge*, 35-36.

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All of these happen within the context of a story. It is a narrative which carries the basic truths, and as such, its coherence stands unquestioned because of its integrity and sequence. The whole myth is not merely a poet's play of symbols (which is the reason for Plato to take poets in disdain), but also a vehicle of intelligibility, of origin, of history, and of existential significance. The whole myth-making truly makes sense, as in the words of Ludwig Edelstein, "[r]eason to Plato is supreme; myth is subservient to reason. . . . Plato's philosophical fable is the fable of the philosopher."[17] Thus, one can see how the Platonic myth *constitutes* the understanding of reality. In this point one sees a concoction of what is known to be the knowledge brought by the gods, that is, the religious worldview, and on the other hand, the knowledge of the mind regarding its life, that is, what we know as a physical, scientific worldview.[18]

This whole discussion shows that the narrative of the creation myth effectively bridges what is known as religion and what is known as science for the ancient mind. In a way, the modern mind that searches for a definite divide between the empirical and the fictional, the "scientific" and the "religious," misses the point of the whole myth. The speech of Timaeus carries with it altogether—without confusion or conflation—symbol and reality, origin and explanation. This, however, takes us to another level of interpretation in which this bridge is strengthened, that of the myth's *form*, that is, of myth as such.

## Plato's Mythmaking and the Legitimacy of the Myth

To consider the myth as it is and how it functions requires that we take Plato's mythmaking seriously. If the value of the myth is in the meanings that its narrative carries, as demonstrated above, then it follows that whether one reads a myth in its literal sense (the narrative as it is) and in its figurative sense (the meanings that symbols and elements of the story carry), the meaning that the myth transmits does not

[17] Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function of the Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 4 (1949): 467.

[18] See Haarmann, *Myth as Source of Knowledge*, 27-28.

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diminish. Rather, both ways of understanding and interpreting them remain valid and supplement each other. This leads us to explore not just these given meanings, but also and more importantly, the very act of producing that myth, through which it was given *as such*.

In *Timaeus*, we see the strange but effective concoction of individual myths together with physical and metaphysical principles. Plato then reminds time and time again that this mythmaking is a "sacred" activity, worthy in the eyes of the gods, and is therefore nothing short of truth and fidelity. It is, in the strictest sense, a bringing forth from ignorance to knowledge, from ambiguity to clarity, from a view that resembles shadows to a view that is outside the cave and under the sun's splendor.[19] Furthermore, Plato is not hesitant to combine myths not merely to integrate them to a whole narrative, but also to preserve what is reasonable in them. Deviating briefly from his master Socrates, who has a slightly more negative view of myths, he recognized the use of myths and made full use of it, with this concoction as a gateway to discourse.[20]

This emphasis leads to another direction in the discussion of myth: the act of mythmaking so as to reorient and even reconstitute discourse. It is not enough for us to say that Plato does the transferring from *mythos* to *logos* (and in some instances, to a notion of *historia*, according to Porphyry and the Middle Platonist schools).[21] More than just merely repetitions of a one-time transfer, it seems that in the act of re-constituting, narrating, and expanding the understanding (not so much as an explanation in the sense of modern, scientific, and technical discourse) of myths, Plato also traverses back and forth from *mythos* to *logos*, always bringing new insights and new questions to deepen the

[19] See Plato, *The Republic*, VII, 514a-520a (193-98).

[20] Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function of the Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 4 (1949): 466. Note that there is a whole discussion on whether Plato's Socrates really shows a contrasting view of myth, or there are times in which Socrates merely serves as a "foil" to magnify the purpose of myths.

[21] Harold Tarrant, *Literal and Deeper Meanings in Platonic Myths* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 48-49.

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subject matter at hand. As readers of *Timaeus*, this is already familiar territory, given that the creation myth is preceded by other myths that are related to it.

Similar to the enriching hermeneutical circle that proceeds as a deepening spiral proposed by Paul Ricoeur in his analysis of biblical texts in relation to Christian faith,[22] we see here an enriching meaning of myths, for Plato keeps coming back to it and expands its meaning, going through a cycle of explanation and narration; in this movement, myth is over and over again legitimized and given greater weight.

As a consequence, myths gain greater weight in philosophical discourse; they carry meaning in a more profound way. They become sacred activities, much like repeated prayers in what can be compared as a "Platonic liturgy" (to use a term that seems to be out of place). But with that, the Platonic discourse also solidifies itself as a description of the movements of heaven and earth, of the parts of the body and its health, of the Forms and the human aspiration to contemplate them. Both the *why* and the *how*, the scientific and the religious, are harmonized and carried together with weight. In this movement, the myth becomes legitimate, and its legitimacy legitimizes all that it carries with it. One sees the unfolding of all these especially in the *Timaeus*, for the simple reason that the telling of the myth is in fact a *reflection* of the myth being told. As Grasso succinctly points out,

> [t]he content of the belief called forth by the myth can only be viewed as the most satisfactory representation for thought, as regards axiologically major issues: the meaning conveyed by [*mythos*] through its images will be similar as possible, on a largely sensible, anthropomorphic mode, to what a divine intelligence's action may be.[23]

[22] See Paul Ricoeur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, part II, ed. Jean-François Courtine, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky and Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 127-46.

[23] Grasso, "Myth, Image and Likeness in Plato's *Timaeus*," 364.

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In relation to Grasso's point earlier, we see that Plato draws the relationship between the divine craftsman as the father, the maker, and how it relates to the myth-maker as the creator of an image. In drawing this relationship, the myth-maker, like the divine craftsman, is also involved in the work of creation.[24]

Thus, the creation myth in the *Timaeus* is more than just a mythical articulation of the origin of the world. In telling this myth, Plato acts as a "creator" of meaning, drawing from conventional knowledge and weaving them together into a discourse that expresses profound philosophical truth in a particular direction: from the divine entities to the humans who worship and recognize their divinity. We thus see an act of *double legitimacy* that happens at the same time. On one hand, we see Plato as the narrator of myth legitimizing the narrative content in his myth-making in view of the education of the *polis* and in transforming it as a source of rational discourse; on the other hand, in doing so, the myth legitimizes the action of the myth-maker in such a way that as the divine craftsman makes the world in the fashion of his thought, Plato unites himself in this divine activity of creation through his own re-fashioning of myth. There is a reciprocal relationship that enriches both these actions together, which is both and at once a double legitimacy in the content and the form of the myth.

This act of legitimacy spills over and becomes present in the other elements of the myth and its recounting. This implies, therefore, that *mythos* and *logos*, as related elements, give weight to each other. Inasmuch as *logos* legitimizes and justifies the use of myths, *mythos* also justifies *logos*, in such a way that myth demands some form of understanding to bring it to greater light.[25] Alternatively, putting these two terms on the level of the threshold that exists between the graspable ideas and the realm of what cannot be grasped into the unknown, as V. W. Sease notes,

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[24] Grasso, "Myth, Image and Likeness in Plato's *Timaeus*," 361.

[25] Rick Benitez, "Myth, Dialogue and the Allegorical Interpretation of Plato," *Modern Greek Studies* (Australia and New Zealand) 1 (2013): 6.

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> [the language of the *Timeaus*] is not the language of one who is proclaiming the priority of a transcendent, supra-rational insight over logical discourse, but rather an admission of inability to articulate adequately his tentative grasp of his problems. Or it is an indication that the subject of discourse is by its very nature *below* the threshold of discursive thought; this is the case of his treatment of the physical world in *Timaeus*.[26]

While *mythos* is considerably an expression of the limits of thought and discourse, we see in Plato the twofold act of recognizing this limit and at the same time articulating it in a discourse that, to a certain extent, leads to further understanding. In the end, this double legitimization affirms not only the necessity of myth, but also the necessity of it being directed toward further understanding through philosophical discourse.

From this, another level can then be implied, which answers the point on the relationship between religion and science, between the recognition of the gods and, in the tradition of ancient science, "saving that which appears." More specifically, it grounds the possibility of making predictions, for in doing so assumes that nature moves in an orderly and intelligible fashion, so much so that one could make models of it through which phenomena could largely be predicted.[27]

Going further, one can say that in recognizing that the creation myth as a narrative is an act of service to the gods, part of its demands

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[26] Victor W. Sease, "The Myth in Plato's Theory of Ideas," *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1/2 (1970): 191.

[27] See Benitez, "Myth, Dialogue and the Allegorical Interpretation of Plato," 13. Regarding the description of the physical world as a Platonic rendering of the principle of "saving that which appears" (*sozein ta phainomena*), see G. E. R. Lloyd, "Saving the Appearances," *The Classical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1978): 209-210. It is important to note that Lloyd argues that ancient science, limiting himself to astronomy, recognizes its models to be orderly, intelligent, and yet not a total representation of reality itself. Yet, Lloyd claims that there are instances in which "saving the appearances" means also that these mathematical models have something to say on the distinction "between mere 'appearances' and their underlying 'realities.'" (ibid., 221). In this regard, then we see the principle as having a *theoretical* aspect rather than merely an *applied* (i.e., predictive) one.

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would be to give account of how things work, which, to a certain extent, obliges Plato to insert the "scientific" elements that he sees are inevitably part of the creation myth.[28] This attempt at discovering the intelligibility and order that is inherently in the world is grounded on a particular belief that the myth upholds, namely the intellect and order of its maker which deserves to be recognized for what it is. This very recognition of the maker, as seen in *Timaeus*, is embedded and included in the very explanation of the products of his work. In other words, the religious activity justifies and even demands the scientific activity.

Consequently, this explanation of *how* things work also gives Plato and his audience the path toward *why* things work. In a way, Plato's extensive explanation of the physical world through the creation myth in the *Timaeus* gives a demand that the ones who caused these movements in harmony ought to be recognized not only as they are, that is, the divine craftsman and his creative activity as supposedly divine, but also worthy of rendering recognition and gratitude. In the assertion of this entire world, there is the credit to "a perceptible god, greatest and best and most perfect." (Timaeus, 92c)[29] The account of the world as crafted, done in the very crafting of the myth itself toward discourse, hearkens back to the divine reality of both myth and myth-maker. The multiplicity of details and the accounts, therefore, leads back to the faithfulness to the gods that Timaeus recognizes at the beginning of the dialogue. The scientific activity, therefore, justifies the religious activity.

All of these varying but interacting layers of legitimacy give myth its greater grounding in Plato. And in the creation myth alone, all these are delivered in an instant that a commentator on Plato would need to unpack even further. Nonetheless, it gives us a clear answer as to

[28] Grasso, "Myth, Image and Likeness in Plato's *Timaeus*," 352.

[29] G. E. R. Lloyd, "Plato as a Natural Scientist," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 88 (1968): 82. The Waterfield translation renders this last section in this manner: "[The universe] was created a visible living being, encompassing within itself those creatures that are visible; it was created a perceptible god, made in the likeness of the intelligible god. This universe of ours is single, the only one of its kind: there is none greater or better, none more beautiful, none more perfect."

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how myth stands as a bridge, in fact a firm one for the ancient mind, between religion and science. They justify each other, and by the time Plato delivers these myths, they cannot be inseparable because they each serve a purpose for each other.

## Conclusion: The Necessity of Myth

The argument on myths may go inexhaustibly; however, the reasons presented above give us a wider view of Broadie's sidelight on the mix of religion and science in the *Timaeus*. This particular focus on the creation myth gives us a rather clear picture, even if it is just a fragment of the whole, of the purpose of myth as a bridge between religion and science.

In summary, in both its content and form, myth effectively and creatively brings together the religious and the scientific. In terms of narrative content, myth links Plato and his audience to a wider narrative network through which they see the tight connection between their history as a people and the history of the world, as well as a relationship between the way things work and why they work as such. And at the level of form, the myth legitimizes and gives greater grounding to the relationship between religion and science, in turn based on a deeper legitimacy established between the myth's narrator and the narrative content.

Given the richness of the myth, what then can we learn as *contemporary* audiences of Plato? Perhaps we as a people can benefit from this view especially at a time when we are more conscious of the *real*, beyond narrow views that are confined to extremes. This view of myth precisely helps us avoid kinds of fundamentalism which spring from both scientific and religious worldviews espoused by their respective communities. And in a world where we discover that beyond the world of experience there are still more questions than answers, given the discoveries of particle physics on one hand, and the emphasis on the *homo religiosus* on the other hand, we are greatly encouraged (and slightly pushed) toward a healthy integration. Such integration, I believe, can only work on our benefit, living in a world that there is

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still a great unknown, and yet there are imminent problems that we need to respond and give answers to.[30] And in this regard, Plato and his narration of myth can indeed be of great help, especially with the myths with which we live at present.



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[30] As a sidelight of my own, it is worthy to mention and continue this research on the possible grounds of the "co-inherence" of religion and science, which transcends dialogue and goes to the level of action toward common questions and common problems that both religion and science, together, can address. See Philip Hefner, "Religion and Science: Separateness or Co-Inherence?" *Zygon* 41, no. 4 (2006): 781–84.

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