Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought

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Cosmology, psyche and ātman in the Timaeus, the Ṛgveda and the Upaniṣads

Hyun Höchsmann

I see that I am about to receive a complete and splendid banquet of discourse. (Plato Timaeus 27b)

‘A feast of reason’ – cosmology in the Timaeus

Anticipating ‘a complete and splendid banquet of discourse’, Socrates prompts Timaeus to begin his narration about ‘the knowledge of the nature of the universe’ after calling upon the gods, ‘as custom requires’ (27b). To launch the ‘discourse about the universe’ with the epic convention of the invocation of the gods places Timaeus’ description of the origin and the nature of the cosmos in the realm of poetic invention – the realm of muthos.2

Timaeus explains that we cannot know the cause of the creation of the cosmos with certainty and that his transmission is only a probable story (eikōs muthos, 29c–d). Why is the origin of the cosmos difficult to ascertain and the pattern on which it is built unknowable? For Plato it is not because, as Heraclitus remarked, ‘nature loves to hide itself’ (B123). If Plato contended that he had some privileged way of knowing the origin of the cosmos, he would be enlisted in the ranks

1 I am indebted to Richard Seaford for his insightful comments on this chapter
2 .Cornford (1997: 31): ‘The Timaeus is a poem . . . There are two senses in which the Timaeus is a myth or story (muthos, cf. Frutiger, Mythes de Platon, 173ff.): [in the first place] no account of the material world can ever amount to an exact and self-consistent statement of unchangeable truth. In the second place, the cosmology is cast in the form of a cosmogony, a “story” of events spread out in time. Plato chooses to describe the universe, not by taking it to pieces in an analysis, but by making it grow under our eyes.’ Since, as Cornford states, for Plato, ‘To find reality you would do better to shut your eyes and think’, we might say that Plato makes the universe grow in our minds.
of a mystic. But the cosmos Plato envisages is a formidable construct of reason. In *How Philosophers Saved Myths* Luc Brisson elucidates Plato’s presentation of Timaeus’ discourse as both *eikōs muthos* and *eikōs logos* as follows: ‘And this is because the dialogue is a discourse on the constitution of the sensible world, that is the “image” or “copy” of the intelligible world.’ As Brisson notes, Plato contrasts (29b3–c3) the true discourse and a credible discourse in terms of their corresponding subjects, the model (*paradeigma*) and its copy (*eikon*). Timaeus’ discourse is a description of the physical world of becoming which cannot be known with certainty.

The starting point of Plato’s cosmology (27d–28a) is the distinction between *being* (‘that which is always real and has no becoming’) comprehensible by rational understanding and *becoming* (‘that which is becoming and is never real’) perceived by the senses. The first question regarding the world (‘heaven or the world – let us call it by whatever name which would be adequate for it’) is then:

Has it always been or has it come to be, starting from some beginning? (28b)

Clearly, the world has come to be ‘since it can be seen, touched and has a body and all such things are sensible’.

**Desiring goodness, beauty and harmony**

Desiring that all things should be good, and, insofar as it is possible, nothing imperfect, the *dēmiourgos* took all that is visible – not at rest, but in discordant and unordered motion – and brought it from disorder to order since he judged that order was in every way better. (30a)

Desiring to make the best universe from a model, *paradeigma*, with the available material in the ‘receptacle’ of the material, *khōra*, the *dēmiourgos* builds the
cosmos as a living being as it is the most beautiful. He makes one unique cosmos and not multiple universes since a part is less complete compared to the whole (31a–b, 33a–d).6

The true cause (aitia) of the coming to be of the cosmos is the desire of the dēmiourgos that all things should be good, ‘insofar as it is possible’. This qualification foreshadows another factor operating in the process of ordering the pre-existing material.

The generation of this world was a result of a mixed combination of necessity (anangkē) and reason (nous). Nous overruled necessity persuading it to guide the greatest part of things that become towards what is best. (48a)

As Brisson and Meyerstein explain, ‘A cause, called anangkē, perpetually resists the order the demiurge attempts to introduce in the world.’7 Anangkē is an ‘errant cause’, a recalcitrant and an intractable feature of the khōra, within which ‘all that is visible’ is found. From the contents of the receptacle the dēmiourgos separates out four ‘kinds’, fire, air, water and earth. With triangles as the fundamental units, he constructs regular solids as the figures for the primary elements (53c–55c).

The soul of the universe and the divine part of the individual soul are made by the dēmiourgos. The world soul is made from a harmonically proportionate combination of sameness, difference and being (35a–b). The compound of the three constituents is divided in accordance with the interval of a musical scale (harmonia).8 Being endowed with reason and harmony (36e–37a), the world soul is a formal ordering principle of the constituents and the interconnected elements of the universe. The dēmiourgos makes the immortal part of the individual souls from the remaining material of the world soul ‘in somewhat the same way, but less pure’. The mortal parts of individual souls, made by the gods (created by the dēmiourgos) are prone to erratic and discordant motions (41d–42d). The conception of the psyche in the Timaeus as comprising the immortal part (reason) and the mortal parts (appetitive and spirited) consolidates the tripartite view of the soul in the Phaedrus, Republic and the Laws.9

The rational part of the individual soul must govern the two subordinate

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6 Seaford (2004: 247–8) accentuates the self-sufficiency of the cosmos in ‘needing no other’ and being ‘a sufficient acquaintance and friend for itself’ (Tim. 33d).
7 Brisson and Meyerstein (1995: 23) point out that anangkē is usually translated as ‘necessity’ (‘constraint regarded as law prevailing through the material universe’), but this is different from the way in which anangkē operates in the Timaeus.
8 See Cornford (1997: 60–7) on being, sameness and difference in the creation of the world soul.
9 Robinson (1990: 105) compares the three parts of the soul in the Timaeus to reason, spirit and appetite in the Republic (439a–441d).
parts of appetite and spirit and the body as the world soul governs the cosmos. But if the world soul and the individual soul are not isomorphic, how can the individual soul emulate the order-creating activity of the world soul? The congruence between the world soul and the individual soul is not structural since the world soul has pure reason whereas the individual soul is a tripartite composite of reason, spirit and appetite. But there is a functional congruence: the order-sustaining functions are the same in the world soul and in the individual souls (90c–d). The world soul creates and sustains order within the cosmos, the individual soul, by studying the harmonious order of the world soul, strives to manifest order within itself.

Cosmogony, ātman and brahman in the Rgveda and the Upaniṣads

Then, in the beginning, from thought there evolved desire, which existed as the primal seed. (RV 10.129.4)

The universe comes into being as an activity of desire. Among the various cosmogonic poems in the Rgveda and the Upaniṣads there is a common premise: all things have originated from one primal cause. In one cosmogonic poem the creation of the universe takes place through the sacrificial division of the body of a primeval progenitor (puruṣa): the sun from the eye, the moon from the mind, wind from the breath, sky from the head and earth from the feet (RV 10.90).

The coming to be of the universe in the Rgveda and the Upaniṣads could be characterised as ‘spontaneous order’ (self-organisation) in contrast to the mathematical order in the Timaeus where the cosmos as a living organism comes to be not as the result of matter’s internal self-organisation but by rational order established from an external cause. However, similar to the conception of the universe as a work of a craftsman in the Timaeus the universe is compared to a work of a sculptor, a smith or a carpenter in the Rgveda (10.81). In the Rgveda 10 Cornford argues that there is ‘an irrational element in the World-Soul’ (1997: 176, 209–10): The body of the world ‘contains motions and active powers which are not instituted by the divine Reason and are perpetually producing undesirable results. Since all physical motion has its ultimate source in a living soul, these bodily motions and powers can be attributed to an irrational element in the World-Soul.’ Notwithstanding Cornford’s comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the Timaeus, the obduracy of necessity in disorderly motion does not entail imputing an irrational element in the world soul. As Cornford emphasises, since disorderly motion, chaos, has existed prior to the creation of the world soul and reason can mitigate ‘discordant and unordered motion’, by persuading necessity in ‘the greatest part of things that become towards what is best’, persistence of disorder does not provide the ground for the belief that the world soul is afflicted with an irrational component.


12 Translations of the Rgveda are adapted from Jamison and Brereton 2014.
(10.72) the gods are not at the very beginning but come into being subsequently as in the Timaeus. The genealogies and prodigious deeds of various gods (Agni, the fire god, Indra, the highest god, Varuna, the sky god, gods of the storm, and other major gods) are celebrated with elaboration of ritual and sacrifice throughout the Rgveda (1.26, 1.85, 1.92, 2.12, 4.18, 5.85). There is a closer interaction between the gods and the mortals than in the Timaeus as the gods are recipients of offerings and sacrifices, dispensers of alleviation of calamities, and averters of disasters who can be placated with entreaties.

In a notable later poem in the Rgveda all pervious perspectives on cosmogony are abruptly called into question, bringing the uncertainty of knowledge regarding the origin of the cosmos into the forefront:

Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it? – from where was it born, from where this creation?
The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?
This creation – from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not – he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows. Or if he does not know . . . ? (RV 10.129.6–7)

The uncertainty of the knowledge of the origin of the cosmos persists even with recourse to the higher authority of the gods, since what is sought is the primal cause before the gods came into existence. Inviting conjectures and disputations (perhaps not excluding the possibility of a plurality of universes), the correspondence with the emphasis in the Timaeus that all investigations in cosmology are provisional is significant: cosmogonic theses are speculative and incomplete as cosmology is not a closed system. With a direct reference to the poets (sages, kavi) who sought the connection between ‘the existent’ and the ‘non-existent’, enquiry into the beginning of the universe is an open-ended investigation in the realm of poetic insight. When regarded as a collection of cosmogonic verses, Rgveda is also in the realm of muthos. While Timaeus’ discourse aims at alleviating the uncertainty in presenting itself as an approximation meriting confidence, the persistent questions, ‘Who? When? Where?’ in the Rgveda ignite a debate regarding the origin of the universe.

Continuing the enquiry into the origin of the universe, the Upaniṣads invoke Prajāpati, ‘Lord of Creatures’ (BU 3.9.6). Desiring expansion, Prajāpati begins to generate a variety of living beings from self-division. Again, desire is the cause of partition from the initial unity (Prasna Upaniṣad 1.4). This primeval desire as an impetus for the creation of the universe is distinct from the desire of the démiourgos, ‘that all things should be good’. In the Upaniṣads it is not the desire for goodness which provides the motivation for the creation of the universe but a morally non-committal impulse for expansion. In the beginning
ātman in the shape of puruṣa (person) desired a companion and divided himself into two (BU 1.4.1–3). Proceeding from this initial division the world and the deities arise out of puruṣa (Aitareya Upaniṣad, 1–2). The origin of the universe is not chaos but singularity. The universe comes into being from a process of separation and multiplication from simplicity to complexity and from division of one substance into the manifold of phenomena. Given this conception of the unity of the origin of all things in the universe, the central thesis of the Upaniṣads that the essential self (ātman) of each individual entity is identical with or incorporated within the totality of all that exists (brahman) can be regarded as a corollary (ChU 3.14.1–4; BU 2.5.19).

The earliest mention of ātman is in the Ṛgveda (1.115.1; 1.162.20; 10.16.3; 10.33.9).13 Similar to the concept of psyche before Plato, ātman has a range of meanings.14 Ātman is variously interpreted as breath, soul, essence, or the true self which underlies all change. ‘Breath’ in the wider sense includes breathing, thinking, speaking, seeing and hearing and is frequently equated with the life of the individual self (BU 1.5 21).15 One pervasive meaning of ātman is ‘the ultimate essence of a human being’.16 Ātman is the common essence of all entities underlying the multitude of diverse manifestations.17

As from the flames of fire, sparks fly out in every direction, so from this self (ātman) the vital functions (prāna) fly out to their separate places, and from the vital functions, the gods, and from the gods, the worlds. (KauU 4.19)18

Brahman also has a range of meanings as an epistemological and a metaphysical concept, including ‘a formulation of truth’ or ‘ultimate and basic essence of the cosmos’.19 In the Upaniṣads, two divergent perspectives on ātman and brahman are presented: some texts emphasise that brahman is identical with ātman while others consider that ātman is a part of brahman.20 What is the identity or the constitutive relation which holds between ātman and brahman? Like rivers flowing in different directions which merge into the ocean and become one, individual souls are part of the ocean of one universal soul (ChU 6.10.1). Brahman is ātman when embodied within a particular individual entity.

13 Deussen 1906: 86.
14 For expositions of psyche prior to Plato see Snell (1946).
15 Olivelle 2008: l. The significance of ātman as breath can be compared to psyche in Homer as vital breath.
16 Olivelle 2008: lv.
18 Translations of the Upaniṣads are adapted from Olivelle 2008.
19 Olivelle 2008: lvi.
That from which these beings are born; on which, once born, they live; and into which they pass upon death – seek to perceive that. That is brahman! (TU, 3.1)

When ātman (or brahman or puruṣa) enters into material bodies, the constituents of individual bodies are separated parts of universal elements within the individual embodiment.

Tell me – when a man has died, his speech merges into fire, his breath into air, his sight into the sun, his mind into the moon . . . his material body into the earth, his self (ātman) into space, the hairs of his body into plants, the hair of his head into trees and his blood into water – what then happens to that person? (BU 3. 2.13)21

Both the identification and the incorporation of ātman within brahman aim at a comprehensive and fundamental principle underlying the multitude of phenomena.22 When it is identified with ātman, brahman comprises the aggregate of all individual ātman and is coextensive with the totality of all that exists:

Ātman is indeed brahman. It is also identified with the intellect, the mind and the vital breath, with the eyes and ears, with earth, water, air and sky, with fire and with what is other than fire, with desire and the absence of desire, with anger and the absence of anger, with the righteous and the unrighteous; this self that is made of everything. (BU 4.4.5)23

When the various applications of the concept of ātman are assembled, it can be understood as the synthetic unity of the functions of reason, intellect and sense perception.

There are significant differences between the world soul and individual soul on the one hand, and ātman and brahman on the other. Ātman and brahman are not created, as the world soul and the individual souls are in the Timaeus. To the extent that the individual souls in the Timaeus are neither identical with the totality of the constituents of the universe nor merge into the world soul, brahman is not analogous to the world soul. Even if the three parts of the soul in the Timaeus could be understood as forming a unity, this is distinct from ātman merging into

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21 This is similar to the myth of creation of the primordial Titan, Pan Gu, in China, whose body is transformed to the sun, the moon, the earth and the ocean.

22 Olivelle 2008: lv. Brereton (1990: 118) observes that: ‘Upanishadic teaching creates an integrative vision, a view of the whole which draws together the separate elements of the world and of human experience and compresses them into a single form. To one who has this larger vision of things, the world . . . forms a totality with a distinct shape and character.’

23 Yeats (1975: 9) encapsulates the main thought of the Upaniṣads as follows: to ‘postulate an individual self possessed of such power and knowledge [and] to identify it with the Self without limitation and sorrow, containing and contained by all . . .’.
brahman. However, brahman can be characterised as the soul of the universe, as that which animates the universe.

There are further differences between the Timaeus and the Upaniṣads regarding the goodness of the world. From readily observable phenomena questions arise concerning the goodness and the order in the universe emphasised in the Timaeus: What of the rampant and seemingly random evil in the world? More frequently not nous but ‘the errant cause’ seems to hold sway. One possible view of the problem of evil is developed in the Upaniṣads: the world is a battlefield of the demonic and the divine.

There were two kinds of descendants of Prajāpati, the devas (gods) and the asuras (demons). The devas were the younger, the asuras were the elder, and they contended for the world. (BU 1.3.1)

The divine, the demonic and the mortal all originate from one primordial being:

The descendants of Prajāpati are of three kinds, the devas, men and the asuras who lived as disciples with their father, Prajāpati. (BU 5.2.1)

Prajāpati teaches the same to all:

Prajāpati said ‘We must seek and aspire to know the self which is free from evil, old age, death and sorrow, from hunger and thirst, and which desires and envisages what it ought to desire and envisage. One who has sought and understands the self attains all worlds and all desires.’

The devas and asuras both heard these words and said, ‘Well then, we will search for the self (ātman) by which one attains all worlds and all desires.’ (ChU 8.7.1–2)

The life and death struggle between the divine and the demonic for the possession of the world and attainment of all desires ends with the victory of the gods.

So long as Indra did not understand the self, the asuras (demons) conquered him. When he understood it he conquered the asuras, obtaining pre-eminence among all gods, supremacy and sovereignty over all beings. (KauU 4.20)

In the Vedas and the Upaniṣads there is no explicit argument for the continued existence of the created world as in the Timaeus, but from the eternity of brahman the same implication might be drawn. The identification or incorporation of ātman with brahman as the totality of all that exists would entail the existence of one universe as in the Timaeus. However, in the absence of the goodness of the

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24 According to Guthrie, ‘the three parts of the soul, when they reach the divine level, are not merely in harmony but merge into one, namely nous’ (1962: 4:425).

25 In the Mahābhārata one hundred demonic sons are born from the beautiful Gandhari and resort to treachery to overthrow the Pandavas, the five sons of gods.
dēmiourgos which ensures the continuation of the universe (Tim. 41a–b), in the Upaniṣads the oceans, the heaven, the constellations and the abodes of the gods are ephemeral and immersed in the perennial cycle of destruction and creation:

All this is perishable . . . The great oceans dry up; the mountains fall; the pole-star strays; the wind ropes (holding the stars) are cut; the earth is submerged; the gods depart from their place –

In such a world of samsara (wandering back and forth) what good is it pursuing the enjoyment of pleasures . . . (MaiU 1.4)26

The answer to this question is self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge and the knowledge of the universe

The moral and epistemological significance of self-knowledge or self-realisation is pervasive in the Upaniṣads. The most fundamental thesis of the Upaniṣads is that the true self, ātman or puruṣa (person) is the same as the self of the universe, brahman (Isa Upaniṣad, 6–7; BU 2.5.19).27 Self-knowledge consists in recognising that the true self, ātman, is identical with the totality of reality, brahman, and culminates in ‘bliss’.28

In the beginning this world was only brahman; therefore it knew even that the ātman is brahman, therefore it became all. It is the same with the sages, the same with men. Whoever knows the self as ‘I am brahman’, becomes this entire universe. Even the gods cannot prevail against him, for he becomes their ātman. Now, if a man worships another god, thinking: ‘He is one and I am another’, he does not know. (BU 1.4.10)

Cosmology is the prerequisite for self-knowledge and ethics in the Timaeus and the Upaniṣads. The knowledge of psyche and ātman is inseparable from the knowledge of the totality of existence and imbued with moral significance. The knowledge of the true self within the framework of cosmology is metaphysical in the Timaeus in so far as the dēmiourgos, the eternal model of the universe and the forms are concerned. But it is also empirical, since the activity of psyche takes place neither in solipsistic introspection nor is derived from a priori principles but in relation to the order and harmony of the planetary movements corresponding to the laws of musical harmony. The activity of ātman encompasses all that is encountered in existence.

The precedence of the soul over the body in Plato and the priority of the

26 Translations of the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad are adapted from Roebuck 2014. Olivelle 2008 does not include the Maitrāyaṇīya.
27 Olivelle 2011.
spiritual over the transient material world in the Vedic tradition arise from the conception of what constitutes a moral life. As in the Timaeus the real or true self is not the body, but the soul. Socrates’ exhortation in the Timaeus for all to attend to the divine part within, and his impassioned exhortation for tending to the good of the soul in the Alcibiades and in the Gorgias, are analogous with the admonition of the attachment to delusions of desire in the Upaniṣads.

Carried along by the waves of the qualities, unsound, inconstant, disconnected, full of desires, wavering, he falls into believing, ‘I am he, this is mine’; he binds himself with himself, as a bird with a net . . . (MaiU 3. 2)

Self-knowledge, the knowledge of the ātman as brahman, raises human beings to the level of the gods.

Whoever knows ‘I am brahman’ becomes the self, ātman, of all, including the gods. (BU 1. 4.10)

In the Upaniṣads full equivalence between divine and human reality is affirmed by knowledge of the true self as brahman. In the Timaeus there is at most a parallelism between the divine and the human existence. Even when a soul attains goodness through reason and the result is eudaimonia, it is only an approximation to the divine. As Pindar observed:

Creature of a day – What is he?
What is he not?
Such is man – a shadow in a dream.
The delight of mortals grows in a short time, and then it falls to the ground, shaken by an adverse thought.
But when the brilliance given by Zeus comes, a shining light is on man, and a gentle lifetime. (Pindar Pythian Ode 8)

The chariot of the soul

Let us liken the soul to a pair of winged horses and a driver. The horses and drivers of the gods are noble and good but those of other beings are mixed . . . the charioteer

29 Plato emphasises the priority of the soul also at Phaedo 79dff., Phaedrus 245dff. and Laws 896c (‘the soul is anterior to the body’). In the Laws the soul is the most divine and ‘most his own self’ (726a) which governs all things (896dff.). See also Bostock 1986.
30 For early developments of the view that the self is soul in Hesiod, Pindar, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Empedocles, and that it may survive death, see Long 2015.
31 As reason is the divine element in man, in the activity of reason we can ascend to the level of the gods, ‘becoming like a god (homoiosis theoi) insofar as it is possible’ for a mortal (Theatetus 176a–b).
32 See also Magnone, Forte and Smith, and Schlieter in this volume.
drives a pair: one of the horses is noble and good but the other is of opposite breed and character. So in our case the driving is of necessity troublesome and difficult . . . The soul looks after all that is inanimate . . . When it is perfect and fully winged it rises up and governs the whole world. But a soul which has lost its wing carries on only until it gets hold of something solid and then settles down taking on an earthly body . . . The whole now, soul and body fused, is called a living being with the epithet ‘mortal’. (Phdr. 246a–c)

In the chariot metaphor of the Phaedrus the soul is not a static substance but an activity, a dynamic process of its constituents. Psyche and ātman are likened to a chariot both in Plato and in the Upaniṣads, signifying the conflicting forces within the soul, which need to be harmonised. In the Timaeus, before the souls are placed in the bodies, the dēmiourgos placed each in a star, ‘mounting them as it were in chariots’ (41d–e).

The star-chariot of the soul in Timaeus, the chariot of the soul in the Phaedrus and the Kaṭha Upaniṣad illuminate the composite nature of psyche and ātman and the unity and harmony in the soul as the goals of moral autonomy and freedom.

Know the self as riding in a chariot, and the body as the chariot. Know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the reins. The senses, they call the horses, and the objects of the sense are the paths . . . [When] the self is unified with body, senses and mind, the wise call him the ‘enjoyer’. (KaU 3.3–3.5)

The emphasis on the intellect and its function has some points of similarity to reason represented by the charioteer in the Phaedrus: only when the intellect is the driver can the soul attain true understanding of itself as brahman (KaU 3.6–9).

Immortality, divinity, eudaimonia and dharma

There is one race of men, one race of gods; and from a single mother we both draw our breath. But all allotted power divides us: man is nothing, but for the gods the bronze sky endures as a secure home forever. Nevertheless, we bear some resemblance to the immortals, either in greatness of mind or in nature, although we do not know, by day or by night, towards what goal fortune has written that we should run. (Pindar Nemean Ode 6)

Pindar’s view of man as having ‘some resemblance to the immortals, either in greatness of mind or in nature’, is further developed in the Timaeus as the gulf

33 The tripartite structure of the soul is further developed in the Republic (435c, 550b, 580d–581e): the ‘rational’ (logistikon), the ‘irrational’ or appetitive (alogiston or epithumetikon) and the ‘spirited’ (thumoeides).
between the gods and mortals is bridged, in so far as this is possible, by the activity of the soul.

If a man perseveres in pursuing learning and wisdom he will certainly be led to immortal and divine thoughts reaching truth and will attain immortality to the full extent it is possible for human nature. (90b–c)

Plato concludes the *Timaeus* with a resounding affirmation of the possibility for achieving *eudaimonia* (happiness) for all those who strive to attend to the divine part of the soul.\(^3\) Plato’s conception of the divine is not that of the soothsayers or inspired poets but firmly grounded in the soul’s activity towards beauty and goodness and the study of the natural phenomena, ‘the thoughts and revolutions of the whole world’. The alignment of the activity of the *psyche* with the planetary movements revitalises its original state.

The motions that have an affinity to the divine part in us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These, therefore, are the ones that every one of us should follow. We should redirect the revolutions in our head that were thrown off course at the time of our birth by coming to learn the harmonies and the revolutions of the universe, and bring the intelligent part, in accordance with its original nature, into alignment with the objects of the intellect. We shall then attain the fulfillment of the best life set by the gods before mankind for the present and for the time to come. (90c–d)

The divine part in us is that which is conducive to the flourishing of the individual in unison with the order, goodness and beauty of the universe.\(^3\)

The individual soul is urged to aspire towards goodness by studying the order and harmony of the cosmos.\(^3\) The soul contemplates the harmony of the spheres, not turning inward but outward to the universe. In the contemplation of the beauty of the universe the soul reflects the goodness of the universe, linking the cosmological and the ethical. But it would seem that the goodness of the *dēmiourgos* and the universe is not moral but aesthetic goodness and beauty arising from the transformation of disorder (chaos or undifferentiated matter) to

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\(^3\) The soul is divine and immortal and ascends to abide with the gods when it is freed from bodily constraints (*Phd.*, 80e–81a).

\(^3\) Einstein reinvigorates Plato’s insight on the interconnectedness of the individual and the universe: ‘A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “the universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us restricting us to our personal decisions and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty’ (Calaprice 2005: 206).

\(^3\) As Robinson (1990: 105) has pointed out, the goodness of order is emphasised in the *Gorgias* (503–504d). Also in the *Republic* by creating order and harmony within, the soul attains virtue (431d–e, 442c–d, 443c–444a).
order. However, to the extent that moral goodness can be conceived as the order and harmony of the internal organisation of living beings which enables them to flourish together, it could be brought about by the contemplation of the order and harmony of planetary movements.

The goodness of the dèmiourgos, cosmos and the world soul are a priori and axiomatic. The dèmiourgos is good; the cosmos, being the work of a divine craftsman, is good; and the world soul and the divine part of individual souls, also the work of the dèmiourgos, are, therefore, good. The goodness of the individual soul is a posteriori and can only be achieved through continuous striving after the pattern of ordered harmony exemplified in the planetary movements.

By achieving immortality and attending to the divine element Plato means the continuous search for knowledge and truth. In the Timaeus, a just soul returns to its star, while an unjust soul is reincarnated (42a–d.). Being divine and immortal, the rational part of the soul ascends to its star. Only nous is free from the cycle of rebirth (42a–d); the appetitive and spirited parts are mortal.37 The activity and the resulting condition of the soul determine the body it will occupy in rebirth: a well-ordered soul will be lodged in a higher form of life, the disordered in a lower form. The central place of the transmigration of the soul in Plato’s ethics is elucidated by Luc Brisson in ‘Myths in Plato’s Ethics’: Myths have ‘a fundamental and permanent’ importance in revealing ‘the emergence of a tendency to orient ethics towards physics . . . by resituating man within his place on the scale of all living things’.38

The cosmogonic processes in Rgveda and the Upaniṣads seem morally and aesthetically neutral: the world is not described as good or beautiful. Unlike in the Timaeus, there is no motivation of the maker of the world to create a cosmos bestowing on it beauty and goodness; there is no eternal model, a paradigm of supreme goodness. However, an ethical conception of the cosmic order is emphasised in the Rgveda, the Upaniṣads and in subsequent Indian cosmologies.39 While the anthropomorphic conceptions of the process of creation in the Rgveda and the Upaniṣads are distinct from the mathematical structures and the ordered harmony of the cosmology in the Timaeus, both regard the universe as a hierarchically organised and interrelated system in which order prevails. The concept of rtá (order, truth, cosmic order or course of nature) in the Rgveda can be compared to the concept of order in the Timaeus. Upheld by the gods, Varuna and Mitra (RV 1.2.8; 4.5.4–9), rtá is pervasive. Agni, the god of fire, is

37 The customary view that only nous is free of the cycle of rebirth (for instance Guthrie 1971: 2:223–4) has been contested by Robinson 1990.
38 Brisson 2004a: 63.
39 Olivelle 2008: xlvii. ‘The ethicization of cosmic order evident in the Upaniṣads remains a constant feature of later Indian cosmologies.’
'the guardian of rtá’ (RV 1.1.8; 1.77.5). Usias, the Dawn, does not depart from rtá (RV 1.123.9). It might seem that rtá is similar to anangkē, necessity, in the Timaeus because of its inexorability. But unlike necessity, rtá has a moral function in sustaining world order. Cosmic and moral order are not inherent features of the universe in the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic texts as they are in the Timaeus but are maintained by gods.

(Indra) lead us along the path of truth (rtá), across all difficult passages. (RV 10.133.6)

Rtá is the truth and cosmic principle which ensures the functioning of the universe. Conceived as the laws that sustain the continuity of the universe, rtá is aligned with the moral laws governing the realm of actions and develops into the concept of dharma (duty, justice, right action).40 Dharma is both cosmological and ethical: it is that which sustains the world order and upholds justice, right action and duty.

Actions in accordance with dharma (in the sense of sacrifice, charity, study, asceticism) lead to ‘the realm of the blessed’, but only the knowledge of brahman leads to immortality.

The one who abides in brahman achieves immortality. (ChU 2.23.1)

As in the Timaeus, immortality must be achieved by attending to the divine dimension. When the universe is divided into human beings, ancestors and gods, those who follow the world of the ancestors will return to be reborn in this world, while those who follow the world of gods will become immortal (BU 1.5.16; 6.2). This is partly analogous to the hierarchy of the gods and mortals in the Timaeus and the prospect of mortals becoming like gods, in so far as it is possible for mortals.

Paralleling the rebirth of discordant souls in the Timaeus (42b–c), the cycle of rebirth is also recurrent in the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic texts. The moral laws governing rebirth are the same for psyche and ātman: those who perform good actions are reborn in good circumstances and those who perform bad actions, into the opposite (ChU 5.10.7).

As a man acts, as he behaves, so he becomes. A man of good actions will become good, a man of bad actions, bad. He becomes pure through pure actions, bad by bad actions. (BU 4.4.5)

‘Thinking thoughts immortal and divine’ and endeavouring ‘to attain immortality in the fullest extent which human nature is capable of’ (Tim. 90c), the soul moves upwards (ChU 8.6.6):

40 For the evolution of the concepts of rīta and dharma, see Horsch 1967, Hacker 1965, and Jurewicz and Chaturvedi in this volume.
There is this verse:

‘There are a hundred and one arteries of the heart. One of them penetrates the summit of the head. Moving upwards by it, a man reaches immortality. The others lead to departing in different directions – In different directions’

**Epilogue: Convergent and divergent evolutions of ideas from the Timaeus, Rgveda and the Upaniṣads to the cosmology of the present**

We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us. Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of truth and knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.41 These remarks regarding the difficulty of knowing the nature of the universe have come down to us not from Greek or Indian philosophy but from Einstein. They echo the perspective of cosmology as an open-ended enquiry in the Timaeus and in the Rgveda. The metaphysical foundations as well as the mathematical and empirical aspects of Platonic, Vedic and Upaniṣadic cosmology have been compared to current research in cosmology. 42 The comparisons with science tend

42 In the later texts of Purana, the cycles of destruction and rebirth are attributed to the universe. This aspect of cosmology in Indian thought has been compared to the current views of cosmology by Carl Sagan (1980) and Firtjof Capra (1975). ‘Hindu religion is the only one of the world’s great faiths dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond, to those of modern scientific cosmology. Its cycles run from our ordinary day and night to a day and night of Brahmā, 8.64 billion years long. Longer than the age of the Earth or the Sun and about half the time since the Big Bang. And there are much longer time scales still’ (Sagan 1980: 213–14). In ‘Worlds on worlds are rolling ever’, Shelley describes the cycle of creation and immortality:

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth’s orient portal
And death’s dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go;
New shapes they still may weave . . .
to emphasise either the *a priori* and metaphysical aspects of current cosmology or the mathematical and empirical aspects of Platonic, Vedic and Upaniṣadic cosmology. Beginning with Heisenberg, the parallels between particle physics, chemistry, cosmology and Plato’s ideas regarding the origin of the universe continue to stimulate discussion.\(^{43}\)

The philosophical impulse to seek unity among multiplicity permeating the account of the creation of the universe in the *Ṛgveda*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Timaeus* continues to resonate in the present. Tracing the convergence and the divergence in the evolution of the concepts of cosmos, *psyche* and ātman aims at a reciprocal enhancement of our understanding of the continuing exploration of the nature of the cosmos and the soul which animate the universe. The conceptions of the universe and of the nature of soul in *Timaeus*, *Ṛgveda* and the *Upaniṣads* converge and overlap but do not coincide.

The ethics of *Timaeus* and the *Upaniṣads* have a thematic and discursive correspondence, laying the foundations for moral realism, the view that moral values, principles and actions have objective validity beyond individual preferences, cultural norms, conventions or social institutions. The knowledge of ātman and psyche prepares the ground for moral universalism and the autonomy and responsibility of the individual. Subjectivism and relativism are regarded as partial perspectives of the whole. Interpretive analyses of ātman and psyche as the constant and enduring self throughout persistent change can enhance our understanding of personal identity and continuity of consciousness.\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Heisenberg 1974. See also Brisson and Meyerstein 1995: 40–1. Machleidt (2005) explains that, as Heisenberg recognised, the ideas of modern particle physics which regard geometric symmetries as generating the particles from a few elementary components are close to Plato’s views. Lloyd (2007) has emphasised the significance of *Timaeus* in symmetry analysis in inorganic and physical chemistry. Plato’s questions in the *Timaeus* are still being asked in contemporary cosmology: whether the universe had a beginning and whether it has an external cause or is self-generated (Carroll 2010); whether the universe exists in time and why the universe exists (Leggett 2010).

\(^{44}\) ‘Whatever the date, those forest Sages began everything; no fundamental problem of philosophy, nothing that has disturbed the schools to controversy escaped their notice’ (Yeats 1975: 11).