TRUTH, LIES AND HISTORY IN PLATO'S
TIMAEUS-CRITIAS

From antiquity on, the status of Critias' account has been the subject of intense debate. Is the Atlantis story 'real history'? The dialogue invites us to raise this question but also to reflect on its terms. In this paper I shall argue that the story should be seen as 'history' only in a special Platonic sense: it is a story which is fabricated about the past in order to reflect a general truth about how ideal citizens would behave in action.

The *Timaeus-Critias* tells two stories.[1] One, by Critias, is an account of the war between ancient Athens and Atlantis; the other, by Timaeus, is an account of the creation of the *kosmos* and everything in it. Critias and Timaeus tell their stories in response to Socrates' request to be entertained in return for the entertainment he provided yesterday, which was an account of an ideal city very similar to that of the *Republic*. This is how he puts it:

> 'And now, in the next place, listen to what my feeling is with regard to the city which we have described. I may compare my feeling (πάθος) to something of this kind: suppose, for instance, that on seeing beautiful creatures, whether works of painting (γραφή) or actually alive but in repose, a man should be moved with desire to behold them in motion and vigorously engaged in some such exercise as seemed suitable to their bodies; well, that is the very feeling I have regarding the city we have described. Gladly would I listen to anyone who should describe in words our city contending against others in those struggles which cities wage; in how proper a fashion it enters into war, and how in its warring it exhibits qualities such as befit its education and training in its dealings with each several city whether in respect of military actions or in respect of verbal negotiations.' (19b3-c9, transl. Bury with alterations)[2]

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[1] I follow what seems to be an emerging consensus in referring to the two dialogues as one work; cf. D. Clay, 'The Plan of Plato's *Critias*' in T. Calvo and L. Brisson (eds.), *Interpreting the Timaeus-Critias*, Sankt Augustin 1997, 49-54. For the most recent 'historiographical' interpretation of the *Timaeus-Critias* see K. A. Morgan, 'Designer history: Plato's Atlantis story and fourth-century ideology', *JHS* 118 (1998) 101-118.

[2] ἀκούοιτ' ἂν ἤδη τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα περὶ τῆς πολιτείας ἣν διήλθομεν, οἷόν τι πρὸς αὐτὴν πεπονθὼς τυγχάνω. προσέοικεν δὲ δή τινί μοι τοιῷδε τὸ πάθος, οἷον εἴ τις ζῷα καλά που θεασάμενος, εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα, εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀφίκοιτο θεάσασθαι κινούμενά τε αὐτὰ καί τι τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν δοκούντων [19c] προσήκειν κατὰ τὴν ἀγωνίαν ἀθλοῦντα· ταὐτὸν καὶ ἐγὼ πέπονθα πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἣν διήλθομεν. ἡδέως γὰρ ἄν του λόγου διεξιόντος ἀκουσαιμ' ἂν ἄθλους οὓς πόλις ἀθλεῖ, τούτους

The passage presents several puzzles as to how to understand the objectives of the *Timaeus-Critias*. Socrates wants to see his ideal citizens in motion rather than at rest. What does this mean? Proclus and Porphyry take the difference between being in motion and being at rest as equivalent to the Aristotelian distinction between actuality and potentiality.[3] Actualities perfect or complete (τελειόω) potentialities. Aristotle takes virtuous character (ἀρετή) to be an acquired disposition (ἕξις) to do virtuous deeds (πράξεις). The actuality that completes a virtuous character is action, *praxis*. So by asking to see the animal that was still (ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα) in motion (κινούμενα) Socrates means that he wants to see perfected in action the virtuous character that his education has given his citizens.

Though one perhaps should not press the similarity with Aristotle, this interpretation makes good sense of two points in Socrates' speech. The first is that Socrates cashes out the notion of being in motion in terms of πράξεις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις. These actions should do justice (τὰ προσήκοντα ἀποδιδοῦσαν) to the education and rearing of the citizens (τῇ παιδείᾳ καὶ τῇ τροφῇ). It is therefore natural to take the citizens' actions as in some sense actualizing their education and rearing. The combination of words and action (κατά τε τὰς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις πράξεις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις διερμηνεύσεις) suggests the example of a Homeric warrior who displays his ἀρετή not only in the ἀγῶν of arms but also in that of words.

The second point is that Socrates in the same speech goes on to say that he is looking for an encomium of the city (τὴν πόλιν ἐγκωμιάσαι, 19d2). According to the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* demonstration and magnification of great deeds (πράξεις/ἔργα) is an essential part of the encomium.[4] In this sense, praising the citizens' πράξεις would complete the encomium of the just city that Socrates might be said to have begun in the *Republic*.[5]

αὐτὴν ἀγωνιζομένην πρὸς πόλεις ἄλλας, πρεπόντως εἴς τε πόλεμον ἀφικομένην καὶ ἐν τῷ πολεμεῖν τὰ προσήκοντα ἀποδιδοῦσαν τῇ παιδείᾳ καὶ τροφῇ κατά τε τὰς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις πράξεις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις διερμηνεύσεις πρὸς ἑκάστας τῶν πόλεων.

[3] Cf. fr. VII in A. R. Sodano, *Porphyry, In Platonis Timaeum commentariorum fragmenta*, Naples 1964.

[4] Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, 35 and K. Dover (ed.), *Plato* Symposium, Cambridge 1980, 12, who lists the four parts of the encomium as: (i) those blessings with which the subject is endowed independently of his own *aretê*; (ii) his *aretê*; (iii) his forebears; and (iv) his notable *erga* (ὅσα … διεπράξατο, 1.6).

[5] Socrates gives his account of the just city and its citizens in reply to Glaucon's request to 'αὐτὸ [sc. τὸ δίκαιον] καθ' αὑτὸ ἐγκωμιαζόμενον ἀκοῦσαι' (358d1-2). Glaucon proposes to praise (ἐπαινῶν) the unjust life so that he in return can hear Socrates condemn it and praise (ἐπαινοῦντος) justice (358d3-6). Socrates accepts the plan (358e1-2). This of course does not mean that what it means for Socrates to give an encomium will be the same as

The two points complement each other in view of Aristotle's comment in *EN* 1.9 1099a4-8 that 'just as at the Olympic games the wreaths of victory are not bestowed on the most handsome or the strongest persons present but on those who enter the competition (for amongst these the winners are found), so also in life it is those amongst the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί who act rightly (οἱ πράττοντες ὀρθῶς) who carry off the prizes'. Just as an athlete needs to show his prowess in competition, so our guardians need to demonstrate their virtuous character in action if they are going to attract our praise.

Socrates draws a contrast between an animal wrought by painting or drawing and one which is really alive but motionless (εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα). I suggest that the analogy points back to the *Republic* and the question raised there about the realizability of the ideal city. At *Republic* 472d Socrates had explained that the ideal city should not be dismissed simply if the possibility of its existence could not be proven. To make the point he uses an analogy between his description of the ideal city and the drawing of an ideally beautiful man:

> '"Do you think, then, that he would be any the less a good painter, who, after portraying a pattern of the ideally beautiful man and omitting no touch required for the perfection of the picture, should not be able to prove that it is actually possible for such a man to exist?" (οἴει ἂν οὖν ἧττόν τι ἀγαθὸν ζωγράφον εἶναι ὡς ἂν γράψας παράδειγμα οἷον ἂν εἴη ὁ κάλλιστος ἄνθρωπος καὶ πάντα εἰς τὸ γράμμα ἱκανῶς ἀποδοὺς μὴ ἔχῃ ἀποδεῖξαι ὡς καὶ δύνατον γενέσθαι τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα;) "Not I, by Zeus," he said. "Then were not we, [472e] as we say, trying to create in words the pattern of a good state?" "Certainly." "Do you think, then, that our words are any the less well spoken if we find ourselves unable to prove that it is possible for a state to be governed in accordance with our words?"'

The point of Socrates' analogy is to abstract, for the time being, from the question of the realizability of the ideal city. Later in the *Republic* (498d-502c) Socrates argues that the ideal city can indeed be realized in this world. But at this stage he does not want the question of its realizability to interfere, since he is trying to describe what the *ideal* state would be like. In the *Timaeus* Socrates seems to refer to this analogy between a verbal imitation of his citizens and of beautiful animals 'wrought by painting/drawing' (ζῷα καλα ... ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα, 19b5-6). Since Socrates in the *Republic* used the notion of a painted human being as a way of sidestepping the claim to represent real-

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what it means for a non-philosopher, cf. Socrates' strictures on the encomium at *Symposium* 198b-199b.

ity, the natural way of taking the idea in the *Timaeus* that the beautiful animals are a product of painting is that these animals might not exist or might not be capable of existing. In contrast, the idea that they might 'also be really living' (καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς) would suggest the situation in which the animals really did exist.

If the motionless citizens of the *Republic* might be taken either as a product of Socrates' account or as really living, then there are also two ways in which his ideal citizens could be shown to be in motion. If they were merely fictive they could be shown in motion as the characters in a fictional motion picture, or if they were really alive they could be shown to be in motion as real people, like the people portrayed in a documentary. Nabokov's 1938 novel *Laughter in the Dark* illustrates how Socrates' request might be satisfied by a fictional work. The protagonist, Albinus, an art historian, develops the desire to the see the characters of an old painting such as Breughel's in motion:

> 'It had to do with coloured animated drawings—which had just begun to appear at the time. How fascinating it would be, he thought, if one could use this method for having some well-known pictures, preferably of the Dutch School, perfectly reproduced on the screen in vivid colours and then brought to life—movement and gesture graphically developed in complete harmony with their static state.'[6]

From his admiration for the old masters Albinus had formed the desire to see their paintings turned into a movie.[7] Compare Socrates' desire to see his ideal citizens as wrought by a painting/drawing in motion. Albinus wants to see his characters brought to life with their 'movement and gesture in complete harmony with their static state'. Similarly, Socrates wants to see his citizens performing actions that 'do justice (τὰ προσήκοντα ἀποδιδοῦσαν) to their education and rearing (τῇ παιδείᾳ καὶ τροφῇ)'. Albinus does not imply that the characters in the old painting will become any more 'historical' by being shown in motion. Motion may impart a greater degree of 'realism' to a painted character than stillness, but a moving picture if it is based on a fictional motionless picture will still be the invention of the artist.

In contrast, Critias offers an allegedly historical account (i.e. a 'documentary') of Socrates' ideal citizens in the guise of the real ancient Athenians (τοὺς ἀληθινοὺς προγόνους ἡμῶν, 26d2-3). By saying that the ideal citizens either may just be a drawing or may really be alive Socrates has allowed for

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[6] Quoted from the New Directions edition, New York 1991, 8.

[7] Incidentally, this project was later realized in the vignette of van Gogh's 'Crows' in Akira Kurosawa's 1990 film *Dreams*.

such an account but has not insisted on it. Since Socrates' primary wish was to hear an account of his citizens in motion the question of its fictionality or historicity is secondary. By asking to see his ideal citizens in motion Socrates has not asked for a greater degree of historicity than he did for the account of his ideal citizens as motionless in the *Republic*. So even if Critias' account turned out to be a fiction, not history, that would not defeat the purpose of the account from *Socrates'* point of view, as long as the account adequately showed his citizens in motion, i.e. in a way that corresponded with their education in the *Republic*.

The *Republic* problematizes the relationship between history and fiction.[8] At *Republic* 382c1-d3 Socrates suggests that the stories we tell about the ancient past should be taken as useful inventions:

> 'also in the 'constructions of stories' (ἐν μυθολογίαις) which we were talking about just now, since we do not know the truth about the ancient events, we liken (ἀφομοιοῦντες) the falsehood/story (ψεῦδος) to the truth as much as possible, in this way making it useful'.

The passage occurs in a context where Socrates distinguishes good from bad 'lies' or stories (ψευδῆ). The stories we tell about the past should be as close to the truth as possible. But since we construct such stories precisely in the absence of historical knowledge, the truth that we liken our stories to cannot itself be historical. It must be another sort of truth. In the case of the stories about the past that involve the gods the truth is how the gods would behave, given that they are good (379b). The first line of the passage quoted ('the construction of ancient events which we were talking about just now') refers back to 380a where it was said that if we attribute to the gods the punishment of Niobe or of the participants of the Trojan War we have to make it clear that the punishment happened for the benefit of those punished. In other words, the stories have to represent the actions of the gods in accordance with the truth about them, namely, that they are good and can therefore only do good things. Given that they are good, a story that represents the gods as doing evil, or lying or changing in any way must be wrong. We can say that such a story must be wrong, not because we happen to have

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[8] I agree with Christopher Rowe's comment on the use of the concept of fiction in interpreting the *Republic*'s discussion of poetry: 'While I accept many of Christopher Gill's strictures against too easy an attribution to Plato of modern concepts of fiction ('Plato on falsehood–not fiction', in C. Gill and T. P. Wiseman, *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, Exeter 1993, 38-87), it still seems to me that such a contrast is fundamental to Plato's complex deployment of the notion of *muthos*': C. J. Rowe, 'Myth, History and Dialectic in Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus-Critias*' in R. Buxton (ed.), *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*, Oxford forthcoming, n. 1.

any historical knowledge of what the gods have been up to but because we know what the gods *could* not do if they are perfectly good. We can deny, for example, that the castration of Ouranos ever happened not because of what we know about the past as such but because of what we know generally to be the truth about divine agency. The purpose of telling stories about the past actions of the gods is to illustrate this truth. It is not to report any historical knowledge about particular divine acts, of which we have none.

The question of what sort of stories we should tell about the past actions of human beings, however, seems to be more difficult than deciding on which stories to tell about gods and heroes. It is not immediately clear why this should be so, for one might think that a good human being is one that does the sort of thing that a god would do and avoids doing the sort of thing a god would not do. Socrates justifies his claim that 'we can't evaluate this kind of writing (that is, writing about human beings) at the moment' (392a10-11) as follows:

> "'Because what we'd claim, I imagine, is that poets and prose-writers misrepresent people in extremely important ways, when—as they often do—they portray unjust people as happy (εὐδαίμονες) and just people as unhappy, and write about the rewards of undiscovered injustice and how justice is good for someone else, but disadvantageous to oneself. I suppose we'd proscribe assertions of that kind, and tell them that their poems and stories are to make the opposite points, don't you think?"— "I'm certain we would," he said. "Well, if you concede this, then won't I claim that you've conceded the original purpose of the enquiry?"—"Yes, I take your point," he said. "So we'll postpone our conclusion that these are the types of stories that should be told about people until we've got to the bottom of justice and found out how, given its nature, it rewards its possessor whether or not he gives an impression of justice." (392a13-c4, transl. Waterfield with substitution of 'justice' for 'morality').

The 'original purpose of our enquiry' was to show how it is more advantageous for someone to be just than unjust. This is the conclusion we want to establish but before we can do so we need to understand what justice is. For only then can we see what it is about justice that makes it advantageous to its possessor. But why do we need a separate account for justice in order to portray human beings benefiting from their goodness when we did not need such an account in the case of the gods and heroes? The short answer would seem to be that since the gods are by definition both good and εὐδαίμονες the problem of demonstrating how εὐδαιμονία follows from their justice (which is the very point on which Socrates has been challenged) simply does not arise.

By *Republic* 10 Socrates has accounted for the nature of justice and argued that justice makes one happy. But rather than saying which stories we should then tell about human beings he seems to say that we should not tell any imitative poetry at all. This comes as something of a surprise since, as we saw, Book 3 seemed to say that poetry was acceptable if it imitated the actions of good men and showed how they were rewarded for their virtue.[9] The question was not whether to compose imitative poetry at all but how to compose imitative poetry properly. In Book 10, on the other hand, imitative poetry seems to be rejected as such. The reason given is that imitative poetry necessarily deals with what is far removed from the truth and so necessarily cultivates the wrong part of the soul. There are different ways one can try of lessening the tension between the two books. One is to point out that Book 10 does admit into the city at least the sort of poetry that praises gods and good men (607a3-5): 'you should know that the only poetry we can admit into our city is hymns to the gods and encomia of good men'. So it may be that imitative poetry need not *necessarily* represent a bad character' though it is its natural tendency to do so.[10] Socrates says that it is easier (but not necessary?) for poets to imitate an excitable emotional character because such a character admits of 'multi-faceted' imitations (μίμησιν ποικίλην, 604e1, cf. ποίκιλον ἦθος, 605a5). A rational and quiet character, in contrast, is much more difficult for the poet to imitate (but not impossible?) and for the theatrical audience to understand, since 'the experience (πάθος) is alien (ἀλλοτρίου) to them'. Perhaps one can say that poetic techniques naturally lend themselves to the representation of a multifaceted character, just as an artist's full palette of colours lends itself to the painting of a many-coloured

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[9] There is a problem here with the notion of μίνησις. In Book 3 the term seems to be used for a particular sort of poetry in which the author assumes the voice of his subject (e.g. when Homer speaks in the voice of Chryses, *Rep.* 392d-393b), whilst in Book 10 it is used quite generally for the imitation (in words or pictures) of a particular thing or person which is produced in the absence of any knowledge of that thing and which achieves its effect only in the absence of any knowledge in the audience. I take it that the general reference to Homer (who as an epic poet would use both μίνησις and διήγησις, cf. 392d) and the tragedians means that the poetry discussed in Book 3 is considered imitative from the point of view of Book 10, whether that poetry employs μίνησις (in Book 3's sense) or διήγησις as long as it represents its object in a way that shows no knowledge of its subject-matter. By 'imitative poetry' I shall from now on refer to the poetry so described in Book 10 on the assumption, however, that the poetry of Homer and Hesiod criticized in Book 3 (which clearly does not show any knowledge of the gods and heroes) could also be understood as imitative in this sense.

[10] Note the phrasing at 605a2-6: the imitative poet isn't by nature related to the rational part of the psyche (ὁ δὲ μιμητικὸς ποιητῆς δῆλον ὅτι οὐ πρὸς τὸ τοιοῦτον τῆς ψυχῆς πέφυκε), nor is his art of the sort to please it, if he wants to please the many, but rather he is naturally related to the excitable and varied character because it is easier to imitate.

portrait. However, this does not mean that the poet *has to* represent a multi-faceted character any more than the artist has to make use of all his colours.

In *Timaeus* 19d-e Socrates asks for an encomium of his good citizens in action, but the sense, if any, in which he envisages such an encomium to be an imitative poem is not clear. He considers three kinds (γένη) of producers of λόγοι as potential encomiasts: the poetic kind, the sophistic kind and 'your kind', that is, the kind of philosopher-statesman to which Timaeus, Hermocrates, and Critias supposedly belong. His dismissal of the actual poets, past and present, is not based on their being imitators as such but on their not having the required background (τροφῇ):

> 'I have come to hold the same opinion [i.e. that they cannot praise Socrates' citizens sufficiently] about the poets past and present, not because I in any way disrespect the poetic tribe (οὔτι τὸ ποιητικὸν ἀτιμάζων γένος, 19d5), but it is clear to all that the imitative people (τὸ μιμήτικον ἔθνος) will imitate most easily and best the things with which it has grown up, but what happens outside the experience of each person he finds difficult to imitate well in deeds and even more so in words.' (*Tim.* 19d3-e2)

Plato's use of 'ethnos' and 'genos' is worth noting here. Though he may be using the two terms for stylistic variation, the two terms are also commonly used to mark the difference between a nation (ἔθνος) and a tribe (γένος).[11] If Plato has this distinction in mind, the τὸ ποιητικὸν γένος (which includes poets past and present) constitutes a subclass of the μιμήτικον ἔθνος, which possibly covers a wider range of imitators. The suggestion that the the mimetic nation has a wider extension than the poetic tribe also makes good sense of the point that imitation in deeds, as well as imitation in words, is referred to, whilst poets are not known for their imitation in deeds. The criterion of good imitation both in words and in deeds is experience (τροφῇ) of the subject-matter. The passage thus suggests that whilst all known poets would fail as imitators of Socrates' citizens because they have no experience of such characters, there might be another sort of imitator (included in the more general class of the μιμήτικον ἔθνος) who does have the relevant experience and therefore could imitate the citizens. Socrates dismisses the sophistic kind since, even though it is experienced (ἔμπειρον) in many fine speeches, the Sophists' lack of affiliation to a *polis* makes them unable to grasp (ἄστοχον) the sort of character who is both political and philosophical and the sort of things he would say and do in a war. In contrast, 'your kind' is the only one which has the required experience of both statesmanship and philosophy. Not only did Timaeus grow up in the proverbially well-governed Locris,

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[11] Cf. *LSJ s.vv.*

where he has also held all the important public offices, but he has also reached the height of all philosophy (20a1-5).[12] Many witnesses can testify to the adequacy of Hermocrates' nature *and* upbringing (τροφῆς) for the task (20a8-b1). Meanwhile, the Athenians are said 'all to know that Critias is ἰδιώτης in none of the matters about which we speak' (20a6-7), which must mean that Critias himself has held public office, as well as having had some philosophical experience. The speakers are elected, then, to perform the encomiastic *logos* insofar as they have experience of both philosophy and statesmanship. Unlike the poets, then, the three speakers seem to have exactly the sort experience that is required if they are to be good imitators of Socrates' citizens.

The case of Solon illuminates the relationship between imitation and experience. Critias received the Atlantis story from Solon through his grandfather, also named Critias. When Critias the younger was a boy, he and the other boys performed Solon's poetry at the Apatouria because of its novelty value. On one such occasion Critias the elder tells Ameinandros, who has praised Solon for being the 'freest (ἐλευθεριώτατον) of all the poets' (21c2), that Solon would have been as famous a poet as Hesiod and Homer if he had completed the story he brought back from Egypt, that is, the Atlantis story. Instead, he was forced to abandon the project in order to attend to political events in Athens and to write poetry merely as a sideline. The comparison of Solon with Homer is interesting in the light of *Republic* 10.599b-e, where Socrates argues that if Homer had had any knowledge of the subjects he undertook to expound—warfare, tactics, politics and human education—there would have been at least one city which attributed political improvements to him,[13] in the way, for example, that the Athenians cite Solon. This point rides on the back of the statement that anybody who knew how to produce both real things and imitations would put far more effort into producing real things (599a). In other words, those who can, do, those who can't, write poetry. If we bring these comments to bear on the *Timaeus*, it seems that Solon's failure to develop as a poet reflects the fact that the Athenians thought (not necessarily correctly) that he possessed useful knowledge. It was the demand for this knowledge that prevented him from becoming a full-time poet. Solon's failure to develop as a poet seems, perhaps paradoxically, to illustrate the point that he was thought to have knowledge, which is what is required to write good poetry, and such a person is far too important to be allowed to spend his time writing poetry.

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[12] I take the perfects as stressing the (relevant) experience that Timaeus' past accomplishments have given him now.

[13] Cf. *Ion* 541d.

In the absence of Solon's ποίησις, we have only his λόγος (cf. *Critias* 113a3-4), as it was told to him by the Egyptian priests and handed down to Critias. But even though such a λόγος lacks metre, rhythm, metaphor, etc., there seems to be a way in which it can be considered a sort of imitative poem. For Critias asks that his account be accepted as an incomplete imitation (μίμησις, ἀπεικασία, 107b5), whilst (*Tim.* 29d) Timaeus requested that *his* account be received as a mere εἰκὼς λόγος or εἰκὼς μῦθος of an εἰκών of an intelligible paradigm. In other words, Timaeus also presents his account as a sort of likeness. In reply to these requests, Socrates compares Timaeus and Critias to poets (*Crit.* 108b) and their audience to that of a theatre. The narratives of Timaeus and Critias are thus set up in comparison with, and, I would suggest, as a challenge to, those of the poets. Just as the 'poets' Timaeus and Critias are chosen according to criteria that explicitly exclude all present and past poets, so their audience consists of an exclusive group of philosophers or philosopher-statesmen who present a stark contrast with the (at least from the point of view of the *Republic*) uneducated mass audiences of the Athenian theatre. The *Timaeus-Critias* seems therefore to introduce us to a new sort of philosophical-political μίμησις which responds to the invitation of *Republic* 10 to produce encomia of good men whilst avoiding its grounds for censuring existing imitative poetry. It is a μίμησις which: (a) likens itself to an intellectual reality and does not confuse imitation with reality; (b) is based on philosophical-political expertise rather than the usual ignorance; and (c) is performed under the critical scrutiny of other philosopher-statesmen. In retrospect, it seems that it may have been in order to open the door to this alternative kind of imitative poetry that Socrates apparently allowed for a μιμητικὸν ἔθνος of wider scope than the ποιητικὸν γένος of present and past poets. The message was that imitation need not be bad, *if* it is based on knowledge.

So far, I have argued that the objective of the *Timaeus-Critias* is to tell the sort of story about good human beings initially suggested in *Republic* 3 and approved by *Republic* 10. The story is fictional history in the sense that the particular events recounted are made up as a likeness of the truth about the behaviour of good men and their rewards, just as the stories we tell about the gods are to be made up according to our conception of their goodness. The story can be seen as a form of imitative poetry but in a different sense from the form that was rejected in *Republic* 10, insofar as it is based on philosophical and political expertise.

But how does Critias' own portrayal of the Atlantis story fit in with such a notion of philosophical poetry? His denial that the story is μῦθος might suggest that we should take it as 'real history' and not as the sort of fictional but truth-based 'history' envisaged by Socrates in *Republic* 3. In other words, it might suggest that the account is not to be taken as ποίησις at all. We need

then to look more carefully at Critias' denial that his story is μῦθος in order to assess the extent, if any, to which the Atlantis story can be seen as an example of fictional history. Critias claims that his account is not subject to the usual Greek ignorance of the past because it comes from Egypt. His account has the sort of ἀκρίβεια that we would normally only expect, at least on a Thucydidean conception of historiography, from recent history and not from ancient history. The story of Niobe (referred to also in *Rep.* 380a, cf. above) is held out by the Egyptian priests as an example of how the Greeks tell stories (μυθολογεῖν, 22b1) in the absence of historical knowledge (22a-b). Another example is the story of Phaethon, who borrowed his father's, the sun god's, chariot and burned the earth before he was destroyed by Zeus' thunderbolt. This story, the Egyptians say, is spoken in the form of a μῦθος by the Greeks, whereas the truth is that the event referred to by the myth of Phaethon was one of the regularly occurring conflagrations of the earth caused by planetary parallaxis (22c-d). The Egyptian explanation of the truth behind the μῦθος seems to be echoed by Critias' statement that he will transfer what was said by Socrates 'as in a μῦθος' to the realm of truth. Critias' historiography, like the Egyptians' natural philosophy, apparently replaces the mythical by a more exact literal truth.

In both cases, however, it seems that the Egyptians or Critias would have to grant the 'mythical' some sort of truth. Critias' account is after all based on Socrates' μῦθος in the sense that Critias takes over Socrates' ideal citizens as they have been educated by him. 'Lucky coincidences' aside, Critias is not just relaying a story that happens to match that of Socrates, he is telling the history of Socrates' citizens in action, though these are now identified as Athenians. In the case of the Egyptians' response to the Phaethon story, one might say that the scientific truth behind it does not so much refute the μῦθος of Phaethon as translate it into a different form (σχῆμα), a form in which it is explained as an instance of a more general scientific phenomenon. Similarly, Critias cannot simply reject Socrates' μῦθος, since it is in this μῦθος that his allegedly historical characters were educated (cf. 27a9-b1: παρά σου δὲ πεπαι-δευμένους διαφερόντως αὐτῶν τινας). Rather, like the Egyptians' retelling of the Phaethon story, Critias is now retelling the story about Socrates' citizens as a true account in the sense that it is now about empirical entities, the ancient Athenians.

The identification of Socrates' ideal citizens with the ancient Athenians is the key move, then, in Critias' claim to be presenting an historical account. It is worth paying close attention to the manner in which the move is made in the following passage:

> 'The citizens and the city which you [sc. Socrates] narrated to us yester-
> day as (ὡς) in a μῦθος, having transferred it to the real world (ἐπὶ

τἀληθές), we shall posit (θήσομεν) as (ὡς) being that city here and the citizens whom you were considering we shall assert (φήσομεν) to be those real [ἀληθι-νούς] forefathers of ours, whom the priest mentioned. They will fit in every respect and we shall not speak out of tune when we say that they were the men who existed at that time.' (26c7-d5)

Critias completes the point at 27b1-6:

'[it seemed to us] that I should make them [sc.the ideal citizens] citizens of this city here [Athens] having brought them before you as (ὡς) before jurors according to Solon's account and law on the grounds that (ὡς) they were the Athenians at that time, who went unnoticed until the report (φήμή) of the ancient writings informed us about (ἐμήνυσεν) them, and henceforward make our speeches (λόγους) about citizens on the premise that (ὡς) they already are real Athenians.'

Both passages rely heavily on 'ὡς' constructions. On each occasion I have tried to translate ὡς neutrally but all of its occurrences in the two passages might also be translated 'as if'.[14] Both passages construct the transfer of Socrates' citizens into the real world as dependent on speech acts ('we shall posit', 'we shall say'). In the second passage, the speech acts are taken specifically from the law courts. Like jurors, we have decided to grant citizenship to the ideal citizens on the basis of the (spoken) report (φήμή) of the old writings and the account and law of Solon. The little we know of Solon's citizenship laws points: (a) to the granting of political rights to the so-called *thetes*; and (b) to the granting of citizenship to exiles.[15] If either of these is referred to, the point *may* be that, just as Solon extended citizen rights to those who were previously not considered Athenians, so we shall now include people as Athenian citizens who were not previously (e.g. in the *Republic*) thought to be so. The language suggests that the ascription of Athenian citizenship to Socrates' ideal citizens is, as one might put it, the result of an illocutionary act: like jurors presiding over a case we make them citizens by saying that they are so. The language wavers between, on the one hand, a view of the speech acts as simply restoring them to their rightful status of real Athenians that they always had, and, on the other, a view of them as making the ideal citizens *into* Athenians by bestowing citizenship on them by a quasi-judicial act. The reference to Solon's law rather suggests that there is an ex-

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[14] Thus the Thomas Taylor translation, *Plato, The* Timaeus *and the* Critias *or* Atlanticus, Washington D.C. 1944, 106, and P. Murray in Buxton (ed.) (forthcoming); cf. also Rowe (forthcoming).

[15] Cf. G. R. Stanton, *Athenian Politics c. 800-500 BC*, London and New York 1990, 65-66.

pansion of citizen rights, that is, a creation of *new* citizens rather than a recognition of old ones.[16] The passage, in other words, is carefully constructed to allow for a reading that takes Critias' history as constructed in the act of telling it.

Another question that may make one suspect that Critias' history is constructed for the occasion is the question of why, given that Plato makes Critias identify the ideal citizens with allegedly historical characters, these characters are then identified as *Athenians* rather than, say, Spartans or Cretans? The identification of the citizens with Athenians creates an interesting point of contact with the *Menexenus*.[17] On N. Loraux's reading, the *Timaeus-Critias*, like the *Menexenus,* presents a pastiche of an encomium of Athens (as represented by the funeral orations of Thucydides, Lysias, et al.).[18] The encomium presents an idealized version of history seen through Athenian ideology. The *Menexenus* parodies the obfuscation both of value and fact produced by the funeral oration. If Loraux is right, then the identification of the ideal citizens with the ancient *Athenians* may work as a distancing device in the *Timaeus.* If we are skeptical of the tendency of Athenians to idealize their past, we will be wary of the suggestion that if there ever were ideal citizens they were *Athenians.* However, Socrates was not objecting in the *Republic* to the invention of stories about the past but rather to the values that are currently represented by such stories. So Plato's point in making the story about the ideal citizens as Athenians may not really be to reject the tendency to invent idealized history as such. Rather, by substituting the usual political role models for the ideal citizens of the *Republic,* he is criticizing the particular ideals that the Athenians use their past to reflect. In presenting the Atlantis story as the story of Socrates' ideal citizens Plato redeploys Athenian encomiastic history in the service of a new ideal different from the Athenian.[19] We may recall in this context that the first reason that Socrates states for accepting Critias' account as meeting his needs is that the account will serve as a proper praise of Athena on the day of the Panathenaia (cf. 26e3 with

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[16] Cf. also the specific reference at *Tim.* 21b2 to the Κουρεῶτις of the Apatouria, the day on which young boys are entered as members of a phratry.

[17] Cf. Rowe (forthcoming) and I.D. Otto, 'Der Kritias vor dem Hintergrund des *Menexenos*', in Calvo and Brisson (eds.), 65-82.

[18] Cf. *The Invention of Athens*, Cambridge Mass. 1986, 296-304; cf. also now Morgan (n. [1]).

[19] As Rowe puts it, 'Instead of serving to reinforce present aims and values, myth becomes a means of reconsidering and replacing them': Rowe (forthcoming); for a different gloss on the effect of Plato's redeployment of Athenian encomiastic history see Morgan (n. [1]).

21a2).[20] However, the Athena that Critias' story celebrates is a philosopher-warrior goddess (that is, a guardian character) rather than an Athenian democratic Goddess.[21] Just as Plato appropriates the Athenians' forebears in the service of a new set of philosophical ideals, so he appropriates their patron goddess.

We may ask, in a similar fashion, why it is through the *Egyptians* and their meeting with Solon that we are supposed to have received the Atlantis story. The Egyptians are in one sense the perfect source of supposedly ancient history insofar as, according to Herodotus (2.15), they were commonly thought of as the oldest nation, or at least one of the oldest nations, on earth. According to Critias, the Egyptians are not the oldest nation as such (that honour goes to the Athenians), but they are the only known nation whose culture has survived intact *ab initio*. Herodotus says that the Egyptians were the first nation to develop the art of writing, through which they have kept records of ancient events.[22] According to Critias, the Egyptians are the oldest literate nation again only in the qualified sense that they, unlike the Athenians, have an unbroken tradition of literacy.[23] In other words, though the Athenians are a nation of greater antiquity and cultural achievement, the Egyptians are a nation of greater *uninterrupted* civilization. Critias thus reinterprets the Herodotean *topoi* about Egypt so as to give the ultimate cultural seniority and superiority to Athens.

In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger professes admiration for certain Egyptian institutions, such as their rules against changing choreography and their emphasis on mathematical education (656d-657a). However, he immediately qualifies this praise by saying that there are also many bad things in Egypt (657a5). Indeed, at *Laws* 747b8-c8, the Athenian Stranger says that:

> 'all these subjects of education [sc. economics, politics and all the crafts (τεχνάς) but especially arithmetic] will prove fair and fitting, provided

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[20] On the identification of the festival, cf. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, London 1937, 5.

[21] 24c7-d1: φιλοπόλεμός τε καὶ φιλόσοφος ἡ θεός.

[22] Cf. Herodotus 2.77: μνήμην ἀνθρώπων πάντων ἐπασκέοντες μάλιστα λογιώτατοί εἰσι μακρῷ τῶν ἐγὼ ἐς διάπειραν ἀπικόμην, on which A.B. Lloyd comments: 'Here μνήμην = *memoria* in the sense of history', *Herodotus Book II. Commentary 1-98*, Leiden 1976, *ad loc.* (330).

[23] Cf. *Tim.* 22e-23b. The point that the Athenians were literate at the time of the Atlantis war can be inferred from the statement that 'your people and the others are but newly equipped, every time, with letters and all such arts as civilized states require; and when, after the usual interval of years, like a plague, the flood from heaven comes sweeping down afresh upon your people, it leaves none of you but the unlettered and uncultured...' (*Tim.* 23a5-b1, transl. Bury).

that you can remove illiberality (ἀνελευθερία) and love of money (φιλοχρηματία) by means of other laws and institutions from the souls of those who are to acquire them adequately and to profit by them; otherwise you will find that you have unwittingly produced the so-called "knavery" (πανουργία) instead of wisdom (σοφία). Examples of this we can see today in the effect produced on the Egyptians and Phoenicians and many other nations by the illiberal character of their possessions and their other institutions'. (Transl. Bury)

The Stranger goes on to suggest that part of the reason for the unfortunate effect that the Egyptians' education has on them may be the influence of their natural environment on their character (747d-e).[24] In the *Republic,* too, the Egyptians and the Phoenicians are held out as examples of φιλοχρηματία, corresponding in this respect to the desiderative part of the soul, just as the Greeks' φιλοσοφία corresponds to the intellectual part and the Scythians' combativeness to the spirited part (τὸ θυμοειδές) (435e-436a). We notice in this context that the Egyptians, like the Phoenicians, are known as traders, a profession with which typically comes a reputation for greed and deceptiveness.[25] Plato is building on a stereotype of the Egyptians as cheats and liars already present in Aeschylus,[26] Aristophanes,[27] and Cratinus.[28] Though the Egyptian education as such is praiseworthy, its effect on the Egyptian character is to render them knavishly clever rather than virtuously wise.[29]

In these passages, then, deviousness rather than wisdom seems to be the hallmark of the Egyptian character. It does not have the intellectual virtue of the intellect (σοφία); rather, their intellect is subservient to their desiderative part (ἐπιθυμία), attempting through the acquisition of money to satisfy the

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[24] In the *Timaeus,* in contrast, the same environment is stated as the reason why we should trust the Egyptians' information about the past (22d).

[25] Homer, *Od.* 14.288-9 with *Od.* 15.15-17 (quoted by F. Meijer and O. van Nijf, *Trade, Transport and Society in the Ancient World*, London 1992, who provide further sources for Greek attitudes to trade, 3-14).

[26] Fr. 373: δεινοὶ πλέκειν τοι μηχανὰς Αἰγύπτιοι.

[27] Cf. *Clouds* with *Thesmophoriazousai* 921-2, at which the scholiast paraphrases ᾐγυπτιάζετε with ἐπανουργεῖτε.

[28] Fr. 406 (Kassel/Austin): αἰγυπτιάζειν ... τὸ πανουργεῖν καὶ κακοτροπεύεσθαι.

[29] Cf. Aristotle *EN* 1144a24-8: 'there is a certain faculty called cleverness (δεινότης). This is a capacity which enables us to do the things which lead to the aim that we propose and to attain it. If the aim is noble, this is a praiseworthy faculty, but if it is not, it is knavery (πανουργία), which is why we say that both the practically wise (τοὺς φρονίμους) and the knavish (τοὺς πανούργους) are clever.'

desires of the body. Such a character is the opposite of the philosophical character, which loves the truth.[30] So we should expect a story told by an Egyptian to be deceitful. Making the Egyptians the source of the Atlantis story might then be another way of Plato's advising us not to take the account *au pied de la lettre*.

However, as we know from *Republic* 2, there are good and bad lies (ψευδῆ). Whereas Hesiod's story of the castration of Ouranos is a bad lie, the famous myth of the three metals in *Republic* 3 is a good lie, because it represents the truth about the structure of the human soul and about how the city should be organized. The introduction of this myth is relevant to our purposes:

> "'Now", I [Socrates] said, "can we devise one of those lies [ψευδῶν]—the kind which crop up as the occasion demands, which we were talking about not long ago—so that with a single noble lie we can indoctrinate the rulers themselves, preferably, but at least the rest of the community?"—"What sort of lie?", he [Glaucon] asked.—"Nothing too outlandish," I replied, "just a tall [lit. Phoenician] story about something which happened all over the place in times past (at least, that's what the poets claim and have persuaded us to believe), but which hasn't happened in our lifetimes and I'm not sure it could, and people would need a great deal of convincing about it"'. (414b8-c7, transl. R. Waterfield)

The reference is to 389b where we were told that the rulers could lie for the good of the city, when either an external or an internal threat made it necessary, whereas no one else was allowed to lie. It is acceptable for the rulers to lie because they know the truth and hence will not be deceived in the respect that matters, that is in their souls, even though their words may be deceitful. The myth of the three metals is one of those stories told by the rulers which are literally false but which are true in the sense that they represent what is good for the city. In agreement with *Republic* 382c1-d3 (discussed above), the myth is made up as a story about the past and is recommended because it is useful to the city (κήδεσθαι, 415d4, cf. χρήσιμον, 382d3).

Given Socrates' other comments on the Phoenician character, we would expect a Phoenician story to be less than noble. But in this case what attracts Socrates to the comparison of his myth with a Phoenician story (like his comparison in this passage with the poets) is not its moral character as such but the readiness with which it is made up to suit the purpose at hand. The

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[30] Cf. *Republic* 485c-486a, where honesty, the love of truth and the rejection of φιλοχρηματία and ἀνελευθερία are hallmarks of the philosopher, the last two, as mentioned above, being the hallmarks of the Egyptian and Phoenician character at *Laws* 747b.

Phoenicians, like the Egyptians, are clever at coming up with useful stories but Socrates will employ this cleverness in a good cause rather than for the sake of πανουργία. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates comes up with another 'ancient' tradition (ἀκοὴν τῶν προτέρων, 274c1), the famous story of Theuth and Ammon. In reply, Phaedrus remarks 'you easily make up stories from Egypt or wherever you like' (275b4-5). Again it seems that Egyptian stories are tall stories in the sense that they are freely invented. Nevertheless, Socrates insists on the truth of its message, namely, that writing cannot teach you anything but only serve as a reminder of what you already know.

Critias denies at first that his story (like a poet's) is spoken offhand, but he later conspicuously contradicts himself.[31] So there is reason to take Critias' story, despite his initial protestations, as invented for the occasion. Critias' elaborate demonstration of his sources and their authority certainly *suggests* the use of a critical historical method to reconstruct a set of historical events. We are familiar from other dialogues such as the *Symposium* and the *Menexenus* with Plato's use of historical references which are clearly anachronistic.[32] On these occasions, the impression is that supposedly historical references achieve the contrary effect of underlining that the dialogue is not a historical document.[33] Though none of the other dialogues employ historiographical method as overtly as the *Timaeus*, it may well be that Plato uses such method in order to heighten the account's *pretence* to historicity, its fictionality, rather than to overcome this fictionality.[34]

We should notice the strength of Critias' claim to historicity. Solon asks of the priests to hear everything δι' ἀκριβείας (23d).[35] The priests oblige by first telling him the events in outline, whilst promising to go through the detail (τὸ ἀκριβές) later (23e6). Fifth and fourth century historiographers often deny the possibility of ἀκριβεία for ancient history (τὰ παλαιά).[36] Ancient his-

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[31] Cf. οὐ μὴν ἐβουλήθην παραχρῆμα εἰπεῖν (25e5-26a1) with ἐκ δὲ τοῦ παραχρῆμα νῦν λεγόμενα (*Crit.* 107d9-e1).

[32] Cf. Dover, *op.cit.* 10 with the references to the Corinthian war and the King's Peace at *Menex.* 244b3-246a4.

[33] Cf. C.J. Rowe 'On Plato, Homer and Archaeology', *Arion*, Winter 1998.

[34] The use of historiography in the *Timaeus-Critias* thus raises important wider questions about the status of the Platonic dialogue as fiction, which I cannot attempt to tackle within the confines of this article. For some observations on the issue, cf. Rowe (forthcoming).

[35] For the sense of ἀκριβεία as 'in conformity with external reality', cf. J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*, Cambridge 1997, 68 and S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. I, Oxford 1991, 60.

[36] Cf. Marincola, 70 (with n. 33 on Thucydides 1.20.1 where 'τὰ παλαιά refers to what occurred before the Peloponnesian War, including the Persian Wars').

tory escapes proof (ἔλεγχος) and 'accuracy' (ἀκριβεία) and hence, as Thucydides puts it, achieves a sort of spurious authority as myth (1.20-21).[37] On this strict criterion, ancient history is therefore not a proper subject matter of historiography. We can leave it to the poets to make up stories about the ancient past. One of the more trenchant advocates of the idea of accuracy in ancient history is Ephorus: 'On contemporary events we regard as most believable those who give the most detailed account (ἀκριβέστατα). On events in the distant past (τῶν παλαιῶν), however, we consider such an account wholly implausible on the grounds that it is unlikely that all actions and most speeches would be remembered over so long a period of time.'[38] Critias' claim to present an accurate account of events 9,000 years ago would strike historians of Ephorus' stripe as 'wholly implausible'. We may of course still insist that Critias' story is exceptional since it is based on Egyptian evidence, ancient history being to the Egyptians as recent history is to us because of the Egyptians' immutability and exceptional memory. However (even setting aside misgivings about the Egyptians' honesty), the small-print gives the lie away. Our earliest existing sources (assuming that the Egyptian began writing down their sources at the founding of their nation) are 8,000 years old (23e).[39] The accuracy of the account is supposedly ensured by the fact that it was written down and so escaped the vagaries of oral memory and ἀκοή.[40] However, it transpires that, even if the events were recorded 8,000 years ago, the writings still only represent what the Egyptians gathered from hearsay (ἀκοῇ ἴσμεν, 23a2) about events that took place a thousand years before.

Again, the references to still observable evidence *suggest* the careful use of autopsy to verify the verbal evidence.[41] Yet the role of autopsy when applied

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[37] Cf. J. Moles, 'A False Dilemma: Thucydides' History and Historicism' (forthcoming).

[38] Fr. 9 in F. Jacoby, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin 1923, 70 (Wiseman translation); cf. Marincola (1997) 70.

[39] However, at *Laws* 2.657a the Athenian Stranger insists that the statutes written or engraved in the temples are not loosely speaking but literally ten thousand years old (οὐχ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν μυριοστὸν ἀλλ' ὄντως). The over-precision of the dating (as well as its incongruity with the *Timaeus*) suggests that Plato is playing fast and loose with the Egyptians' perceived antiquity.

[40] Cf. *Tim.* 24a1-3: τὸ δ' ἀκριβὲς περὶ πάντων ἐφεξῆς εἰσαυθις κατὰ σχολήν, αὐτὰ τὰ γράμματα λαβόντες, διέξιμεν.

[41] Solon is asked to observe (σκοπεῖ, 24a2) the laws in Egypt to get παραδείγματα of how things were in ancient Athens. He perceives (ἠσθῆσαι, 24b1) the division of warrior class from the other classes in Egypt and he sees (ὁρᾷς, 24b7) how the law makes the Egyptians study cosmology. There is evidence (τεκμήριον, 110e6) of the excellence (ἀρετή) of the region even now in the fact that the country is still as fertile as any other country

to ancient history can itself be seen as questionable. As Thucydides (1.10.1-3) argues in the *Archaeology*, 'Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be ... If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye (*apo tês phaneras opseôs*) that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it was' (transl. Warner).[42] Autopsy of monuments can be a misleading guide to political realities and the more so the further removed in time one is from those realities. In the case of Solon, who relies so heavily on the authority and honesty of the Egyptians for the interpretation of what he sees, there is no guarantee that what he supposedly sees is any more correct than what he hears.

Critias' use of the gods is a further significant detail in this context. Whereas Thucydides' refusal to discuss divine matters can be seen as part of his self-conception as a rational historian,[43] Critias' account, in contrast, relies heavily on the supposed actions of Athena and Poseidon in the foundation and organization of Athens and Atlantis. The story itself breaks off at the beginning of a speech by Zeus to the assembled gods, a speech that reminds us of the assembly of the gods in *Odyssey* 1.

What makes Critias's ancient history suspect as history is not, then, that it simply fails to live up to the stricter standards of contemporary history as Thucydides and Ephorus see them. For that he might be excused. The problem is not that his history trails off into myth in a manner one might associate with Herodotus. The point is rather that he presents ancient history as if it were constructed according to the rigorous standards that Thucydides, amongst others, thinks should apply (and here only with difficulty) to contemporary history. So when Critias presents his account as *akribês* and *alêthês logos*, one infers not only that the Atlantis story fails as history in a rigorous sense (for if there was any honest interest in the use of source material and historiographical method, why not simply present the account as rough

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even after the catastrophes that wrecked it. Critias points to 'the clear evidence' (φανερὰ τεκμήρια, 111a3) of dense forests in the mountains ('there can still be found intact rafters cut from trees that were felled and brought down to be used for the great building projects', 111ac5-7), and the still remnant monuments of ancient springs are signs (σημεῖα, 111d8) of the abundance of rain at that time.

[42] Cf. Marincola (1997) 68.

[43] Cf. J. H. Finley, *Thucydides*, Cambridge Mass. 1942, 310-11 and Hornblower's criticism of the alternative view that Thucydides accommodates religion to some extent (Hornblower (1991) 206-7); cf. also Moles *op.cit.*

and vaguely plausible ancient history?), but that the story is a straight out *pseudos* invented for the occasion.

What, however, would be the point of such an elaborate pretence to historicity? *Rep.* 414b8-c7 (just quoted) suggests that the point of inventing stories and presenting them as history is that it makes people believe in the possibility of events they would not believe possible in the present. If so, there is an obvious advantage for Socrates in presenting stories about his ideal citizens as history, as he does in the case of the *muthos* of the three metals. At the end of the latter *muthos* Socrates asks Glaucon 'Can you think of any scheme so that they will believe this story (*muthos*)?', to which Glaucon responds 'No, not they themselves but their sons and then thereafter the rest of the generations'. The story of the three metals is told as a story about the past because we are more likely to believe unlikely things if they are attributed to the past than to the present. Even so, Glaucon suggests that the story will still only be credible to the second generation of citizens in the ideal state. The reason is perhaps that even though we are more credulous when it comes to the past than the present, what we are told about the past still has to bear some measure of resemblance to our present-day experience if we are going to believe it. So it is only once the ideal city *has been* instituted (i.e. with the second generation) that there is anything in the citizens' own experience and upbringing to make this *muthos* seem plausible, even when told as a story about the past. Like the myth of the three metals, I would suggest, the Atlantis story is told as a story about the past so that we may believe in the possibility of events that we might *out of hand* deem impossible if told about the present. The important point about the Atlantis story, then, is not that it is set in the past as such, but rather that it is a setting of which we are ignorant. The story might equally well be set in the future or in the present in some distant location, if that helps us abstract from our present-day experience as the main criterion of what is possible and impossible.[44]

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[44] Cf. *Rep.* 6.499c-d: 'If then the best philosophical natures have ever been constrained to take charge of the state in infinite time past, or now are in some barbaric region far beyond our ken, or shall hereafter be, we are prepared to maintain our contention that the constitution we have described has been, is or will be realised when this philosophical Muse has taken control of the state. It is not a thing impossible to happen, nor are we speaking of impossibilities. That it is difficult we too admit' (Shorey transl.) with M. F. Burnyeat, 'Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City', in J. Hopkins and A. Savile (eds.), *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art*, Oxford 1992, 184. Burnyeat points to the parallel between the communality of women and slaves in the *Republic* and amongst the Agathyrsoi in Herodotus 4.104. By travelling far enough you could find to be custom elsewhere what was ἄτοπον to a Greek. In a sense, Plato exploits both our ignorance of the ancient past and our relative ignorance of foreign lands, for instance Egypt, in order to present his fiction as plausible. Thus both ancient Athens and contemporary Egypt are made to have the institutions of the ideal city.

I have argued that we should view the Atlantis story in the *Timaeus* as an 'Egyptian story' constructed along the lines of Socrates' recommendations for the poetic use of ancient history in the *Republic*. However, there might seem to be one specific problem for this interpretation, since Socrates, when accepting Critias' story as serving his purpose, says that *to te mê plasthenta muthon all' alêthinon logon einai pammega pou* (26e4): 'the fact that it is not a fabricated story but a true account is a huge affair (*pammega*), I suppose (*pou*)'. However, on closer inspection Socrates' language suggests implied criticism of the distinction. The term '*pammegas*' occurs only three times in Plato and nowhere else in extant Greek literature.[45] According to R.S.W.Hawtrey, *PAN*-compounds generally (though not always) imply disapproval in Plato, sometimes being associated with the sophists (e.g. *passophos*) and sometimes with the world of the senses (e.g. *pantodapos* and *pantoios*).[46] Hawtrey relates the use of '*pammega*' at *Phaedrus* 273a5 to Phaedrus' 'exaggerated passion for rhetoric' (60) and notes that 'some implicit criticism by Plato may reasonably be assumed' (61). The other two occurrences of *pammega* (*Phaedo* 109a9 and *Tim.* 26e5) Hawtrey takes to be 'neutral, both occurring in passages of some solemnity' (61). However, given Hawtrey's general argument, it would seem plausible to apply his observation about *pammega* in the *Phaedrus* also to *Timaeus* 26e5 and see the term also here as introducing an element of implicit criticism through rhetorical exaggeration. '*Pou*' should then be taken to strengthen the note of disbelief.[47] Similarly, Socrates' statement that it is by good fortune (*agathêi tuchêi*) that the Atlantis story has come up since it would be impossible to 'find others if we dismiss these [i.e. the ancient Athenians conceived as historical representatives of the ideal city]' (26e5-6) sounds suspiciously as if he thinks that he is being rather too lucky and that the story might indeed be *plastheis muthos*.

However, Socrates' irony, such as it is, may not imply that Socrates suspects that Critias' account is *plastheis muthos* <u>rather than</u> *alêthinos logos*. Instead, the irony may imply criticism of the distinction between *plastheis muthos* and

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[45] Cf. R. S. W. Hawtrey, 'ΠΑΝ-Compounds in Plato', *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983), 56-65.

[46] *Op.cit.*

[47] Cf. J. D. Denniston, *Greek Particles*, Oxford 1959, 490-1: 'From που meaning "somewhere" is developed the sense "I suppose", "I think", the particle conveying a feeling of uncertainty in the speaker. Hence, further, που is used ironically, with assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground. The tone of uncertainty, whether real or assumed, is ill-adapted to the precision of history, or to the assertiveness of oratory ... που (κου) admirably suits the easy colloquial style of Herodotus and, par excellence, the ironical bent of Plato, in whom it is very common.' Denniston (493) mentions *Tim.* 26e as an example of που occurring last in a sentence such that 'doubt is thrown as an afterthought'.

alêthinos logos, as applied to the subject in hand. In other words, the suggestion may be that we should take the account of his citizens' noble deeds as, in some sense, <u>both</u> *plastheis muthos* <u>and</u> *alêthinos logos.* For even if the Atlantis story fails to be true in a literal historical sense, it may still succeed in being true as an illustration of a general truth. If Plato is making up the Atlantis story according to the guidelines of *Republic* 3, then the story is not simply a lie. Rather, it must be a story that illustrates a truth of some sort. This truth, I have suggested, is the truth about how good citizens would behave in action, my reasons being: (a) that this is the sort of human subject that *Republic* 10 allows for and *Republic* 3 seems to encourage (by analogy with the stories about the gods); (b) that this is the subject that Socrates explicitly says (19e6-8) he wants portrayed in the *Timaeus.*

If this is right, Timaeus might be seen as correcting Critias, in line with Socrates' possible irony. After Critias' contrast between his *logos* and Socrates' *muthos,* Timaeus' description of his own account as both *eikôs muthos* and *eikôs logos* is conspicuous.⁴⁸ There may be a connection between Timaeus' use of both *muthos* and *logos* to describe his account and Socrates' jumbling up of the terms in the *Republic.*⁴⁹ Not only does Socrates, as we have seen, in principle approve of *mutologia* in the education of the guardians in *Republic* 2-3, but he also describes his own account as *mutologia.*⁵⁰ A central tool in such *mutologia* is the use of images (*eikones*). Socrates repeatedly uses *eikones* to illustrate an aspect of theory, particularly when the truth, if served straight up, would appear to be beyond the grasp of the interlocutor.⁵¹ Thus the Sun is an *eikôn* of Goodness (509a9), the Cave an *eikôn* of our present condition (515a4, 517a8), whilst the ship with its unruly crew is an *eikôn* for the attitude of society to philosophers at 488a-489e. However, the *eikôn* at *Rep.* 9.588bff. is particularly informative:

> 'Now then, having determined the power and quality of justice and injustice, let us have a little conversation with him [who said that injustice was a gain to the perfectly unjust who was thought to be just],—What shall we say to him?—Let us make an image of the soul in words [εἰκόνα

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⁴⁸ E.g.: τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον (29d2), κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα (30b7), τὴν τῶν εἰκότων λόγων δύναμιν (48d3), κατὰ τὸν εἰκότα λόγον (55d5), τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον (68d2).

⁴⁹ Cf. Rowe (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ 376d9: ἴθι οὖν, ὥσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές τε καὶ σχολὴν ἄγοντες λόγῳ παιδεύωμεν τοὺς ἄνδρας; 501e4: ἡ πολιτία, ἣν μυθολογοῦμεν λόγῳ.

⁵¹ Cf. 506d-e with 533a1-3: 'You won't be able to follow me there, my dear Glaucon,' I said, 'which is a pity, because there'd be no shortage of determination from me, and what you'd see there wouldn't be an image (εἰκόνα) of what we're talking about: you'd see the truth itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἀληθές) ...' (transl. Waterfield).

πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ] that he may have his own words presented
before his eyes.—Of what sort?—An ideal image of the soul, like the
composite creations of ancient mythology [*μυθολογοῦνται παλαιαί*], such
as the Chimera or Scylla or Cerberus, and there are many others in
which two or more different natures are said to grow into one.—There
are said to have been such unions.—Then do you now model (*πλάττε*)
the form of a multitudinous, many-headed monster, having a ring of
heads of all manner of beasts, tame and wild, which he is able to gener-
ate and metamorphose at will.—You suppose marvelous powers in the
artist (*πλάστου*); but, as language is more pliable (*εὐπλαστότερον*) than
wax or any similar substance, let there be (*πεπλάσθω*) such a model as
you propose.' (599b6-d2, transl. Jowett with alterations)

Socrates here casts himself in the role of the ancient mythologists. Like them
he will fashion (*πλάττειν*) an *εἰκών*.[52] The *εἰκών* closely reflects the tripartite
theory of the soul and the way in which the souls of the just and the unjust
are differently organized. The *εἰκών* is supposed to clinch the argument (cf.
589b-c) against Thrasymachus initiated in Book 1, so it cannot, any more
than the central images of the Sun or the Cave, be dismissed as a mere or-
namental flourish. Yet Socrates compares this *εἰκών* to the product of *μυθο-
λογία* and emphasizes throughout that the image is a fabrication (*πλάττειν*).

There are lessons here to be learned, I would suggest, also for the *Ti-
maeus*. Firstly, the opposition between *πλασθεὶς μῦθος* and *ἀληθινὸς λόγος*
cannot be upheld in the case of *εἰκόνες*. The *εἰκών* of the composite beast in
Rep. 10 is both a fabrication *and* true in the sense of illustrative of correct
psychological and moral theory. The term '*μυθολογία*' is appropriately ap-
plied to the production of such *εἰκόνες* insofar as it makes something up
(*πλάττειν*) which is literally false (*μῦθος*) but is also illustrative of a rational
truth (*λόγος*). Secondly, the demiurge in the *Timaeus* makes the world as an
eikôn of the eternal model. In this respect the demiurge, and not Timaeus,
can be compared to Socrates in the *Republic* when *he* fashions (*πλάττειν*) a
likeness of an intellectual truth.[53] However, by attempting to explain the
creation as an *εἰκών* of the eternal model Timaeus might be said to recreate
the world in his *λόγος*.[54] On two occasions Critias and Timaeus talk about

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[52] Cf. 588d10: '*περίπλασον δὲ αὐτοῖς ἔξωθεν ἑνὸς εἰκόνα...*'.

[53] Cf. *πλάττειν* (42d6), *πλάσας* (50a6, 73c8, 74a2), *πλασθέντι* (78c3).

[54] For a discussion of the analogy between Timaeus' account and the demiurge's crea-
tion, cf. C. Osborne, 'Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Ti-
maeus*' in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996,
179-212.

Timaeus as if he (rather than the demiurge) had created human beings,[55] just as Critias talks of Socrates' having educated them.[56] Similarly, Socrates in the *Republic* spoke as if he (rather than the educators in his account) was educating the guardians by his *logos*.[57] Such passages suggest that the narrator creates in his *logos* what the subject of his narrative (according to the *logos*) creates in the world. Since Socrates' εἰκόνες in the *Republic* are also verbal (cf. εἰκόνα πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ, 588b6), it might after all be right to compare Socrates' fabrication of images there with Timaeus' attempt to represent the κόσμος as an εἰκών in his account. Socrates and Timaeus are both mythologists when they create an image in words of an intellectual truth. From the point of view of such philosophical mythology, Critias' attempt to distance his historiography from μῦθος is wholly misplaced.

To conclude: I have argued that Plato through Critias invents a story about the actions of Socrates' ideal citizens, modelled on the truth about how they would behave. It is constructed as a story about the ancient past because our ignorance of ancient history allows us to suspend disbelief in the possibility of the story. Critias presents the story as λόγος rather than μῦθος, using historiographical methods to support his claim. However, on closer inspection it appears that these methods do not serve to establish the account as more historical but rather as more deceptively like a historical account. Historiography is thus suborned in the *Timaeus* to make the Atlantis story seem more truth-*like*, which is to say, a stronger, more plausible fiction (ψεῦδος).[58]

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[55] *Tim.* 29a9-10 (Critias speaking) ὡς παρὰ μὲν τούτου δεδεγμένον ἀνθρώπους τῷ λόγῳ γεγονότος; *Crit.* 106a: (Timaeus speaking) τῷ δὲ πρὶν μὲν πάλαι ποτ' ἔργῳ, νῦν δὲ λόγοις ἄρτι θεῷ γεγονότι προσεύχομαι.

[56] *Tim.* 27e8 παρά σου δὲ πεπαιδευμένους...

[57] *Rep.* 376d9 λόγῳ παιδεύωμεν τοὺς ἄνδρας.

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