

## Abschlussbericht

### Workshop *A Language for Spation-Temporal Entities in Plato's Timaeus?*

Organizers: Dr. Anna Pavani und Diego García, M.A.

Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 26–27 Oktober 2023

Our Workshop centered around a particularly difficult section of the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 48e–53c). There, Plato introduces the Receptacle of all Becoming and characterizes sensible items as immanent features coming to be in the Receptacle. Our guiding questions were both of metaphysical and of linguistic nature. On the one hand, we aimed to promote discussion on the metaphysical status of sensible, spatio-temporal items coming to be in the Receptacle. Are these items to be construed as universal features, or rather as tropes? Do they persist through time, or are they more like a series of independent individuals merely resembling one another? On the other hand, we aimed to raise questions regarding correct speech about sensibles. How can we talk correctly about these items, according to Plato, given that they are in continuous flux? Finally, these topics inevitably raised questions about the metaphysical principles, such as the Receptacle and Forms, introduced by Plato to account for our cognitive grasp and speech of sensibles. What are these principles, and how do they contribute to our grasp of and language about sensibles? In what follows, we shall present the Workshop's main results by briefly summarizing its development.

We started our workshop with an evening session consisting of a keynote address and a round table. In her **lecture**, Prof. Sattler (RUB) touched on the metaphysical foundations for sensibles, addressing Plato's complex conception of space both in the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus*. This provided the background needed for all the more specific discussions to come. In the **roundtable** led by Diego García (LMU), we sought to set the more immediate setting for the subsequent day's discussion. We addressed a crucial, albeit often overlooked issue: what is Timaeus' problem with elemental phenomena in continuous transformation (cf. *Tim.* 49a6–d3)? Why exactly is correct language about these phenomena so challenging? We thus tackled the difficult question of why, according to Plato, the constant change of an entity leads to its unintelligibility. Two possible answers could be summarized as

follows: (a) perhaps the continuous change of phenomena into one another indicates that phenomena are never numerically distinct from one another, but rather make up a phenomenal continuum in which no discrete entity can be individuated; or (b) maybe, even though we can proffer an allegedly correct utterance about a sensible item at some point in time, that item's subsequent change falsifies our previous utterance, or rather shows that it was false all along. These considerations led to asking why Plato investigates precisely elemental phenomena in continuous change to get clearer on the nature of the Receptacle. One answer to this question takes into account the Receptacle's particular status as an object of cognition: the Receptacle, it would seem, can only be cognitively accessed through analysis of the phenomena appearing in it. This consideration brought us back to Prof. Sattler's remarks on the difficulties we face in talking about space, as voiced in Plato's late dialogues.

Like the first one, the second Workshop day combined different formats. The morning session consisted of two **close reading sessions** led by Anna Pavani (RUB) and Luca Dondoni (London) and dedicated to the difficult sections 49c–50c and 51e–52d, respectively. These sessions allowed us to outline the various philological and philosophical possibilities offered by Plato's intricate and condensed text. With both stretches of text, we touched on the question about the metaphysical status of sensibles in the *Timaeus*. In particular, Anna Pavani's portion of text helped approach this question by analyzing Plato's characterization of sensibles as 'suches' (*toiauta*), while Luca Dondoni's stretch of text raised considerations as to what it means for sensibles to be 'images' (*eikones*) of Forms coming to be in the Receptacle. One key question in these discussions regarded the extension of Plato's characterization of sensibles: are all sensibles *toiauta* and images of Forms, or are only a subset of the *toiauta* images of Forms? The format proved particularly well chosen: all participants intervened with questions and remarks, thus fostering an extremely productive discussion on what could be said to be a misread, yet by now much more re-read passage of the Platonic corpus.

After the lunch break in the mensa, we set forth our work in the afternoon session with two papers followed by a response and a plenary discussion. The morning session with all its attention to the details and the various possible readings of the Greek text set an optimal basis for the talks and responses in the second half of the second day. In his **talk**, Prof. Federico Petrucci (Torino) considered the *toiauta* from

the point of view of the causes that produce their coming to be in the Receptacle. Petrucci distinguished two causal factors in the coming to be of the *toiauta* in the Receptacle: on the one hand, since the Receptacle always –even in the pre-cosmos– participates in Forms, Forms are the productive causes of pre-cosmic traces of elements in the Receptacle, and more generally, Forms are the productive causes of the coming to be of perceptual properties in the Receptacle. However, since those perceptual properties in and of themselves lack teleological organization, Petrucci suggested, the Demiurge is needed as an additional productive cause that organizes the pre-existing perceptual properties according to a teleological scheme, hence turning them into an organized cosmic whole. In her **response** to Petrucci’s paper, Alesia Preite (Heidelberg) focused mainly on the notion of perceptual properties coming to be in the pre-cosmic Receptacle, the causal role of Forms, and the Demiurge in this process. What does it mean for a property, say, e.g., fieriness, to come to be in the Receptacle? Is fieriness a compound of other perceptual properties, and if so, do those properties in turn come to be as images of Forms? How do the polyhedral shapes bestowed by the Demiurge upon elemental bodies relate to elemental Forms and elemental phenomena? Furthermore, can we distinguish so strongly between the causal contribution of Forms and the Demiurge in the coming-to-be of a teleologically ordered cosmos?

The second **paper** was given by Samuel Meister (Tübingen). He also tackled the topic of the *toiauta*, putting forth the view that they are general characteristics (as opposed to tropes), or bundles thereof, coming to be in Receptacle. Meister argued that, if the *toiauta* were tropes and thus individual entities, there would be no reason for Plato’s claim that we cannot refer to them through deictics such as ‘this’ (*touto*). Meister also examined and criticized a recent version of Cherniss’ revisionist translation of the ‘much-misread passage’ (Nakamura 2022), and persuasively made the case that the traditionalist reading of the passage is still to be preferred. Finally, through an examination of Plato’s characterization of sensibles as images, Meister proposed to understand sensibles as general features, or bundles thereof, inherent in the Receptacle in a way analogous to how accidents inhere in Aristotelian substances. In his **response**, Lorenzo Giovanetti (Rom) focused on the implications of construing sensibles as general features or bundles thereof. One main question regarded the role of Forms in this construal of the *toiauta*. If there are simple as well as complex *toiauta*, one might pose the following question: What

*toiauta* are there Forms of? What are the simplest *toiauta*, and how do they combine to make up more complex ones?

We were glad to continue the discussion over the conference dinner held at YAMAS, which, as the name suggests, fosters the conviviality the *Timaeus* addresses at its very beginning. The generous funding provided by the GANPH allowed to cover the participants' stay at the LSI, thus providing a further opportunity to also discuss *Timaeus*-related matters on the way home and over breakfast. Not only the Workshop itself but also the ensuing discussions proved how much work is still needed to do such complex topics justice.

The various discussions during and beyond the Workshop brought out a significant lack of current scholarship about the *Timaeus* as far as the role and scope of Forms in this dialogue are concerned. Although all interpretations of the Receptacle section rely on construing some set of sensible items as images of Forms, no study has yet been dedicated to which sensibles exactly are images of Forms and which are not. The participants agreed, then, that this topic should be further investigated. We are currently searching for a convenient venue to publish the papers that will develop some of the crucial aspects that we were able to discuss at the RUB during one and a half days of intensive *Auseinandersetzung* with one of Plato's most discussed pages.