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Critical Evaluation of Gadamer's Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*

Tizar Shahwirman

*Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.), Philosophy, The Driyarkara School of Philosophy, Indonesia,
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9129-5152>*

***Corresponding author:** *tshahwirman@gmail.com*.

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Abstract: In *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus (Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos Timaios)* Gadamer criticised the neoplatonist interpretation of Plato's cosmogony, which posited the universe's emanation from "The One" in a hierarchical manner. Contrary to this, by interpreting *Timaeus* according to overall text analysis of Plato's dialectics, Gadamer argued that the universe came from the *logos'* efforts in organising various unordered materials to become more mathematically ordered. The purpose of this research was to critically evaluate his hermeneutical stance. A conceptual analysis has been conducted through an extensive and rigorous literature review to fulfill the research objectives. The result indicated that there was an inconsistency between Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus* and his hermeneutical thesis in his masterpiece *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)*. He interpreted *Timaeus* textually as if he had undermined his own philosophical hermeneutics framework, focusing on the pre-structure of understanding that contained prejudice and authority. This research will give a new perspective

in reconsidering the complexities of interpretation itself and enrich ongoing dialogues both within the discourse on Plato's dialogues and Gadamer's own hermeneutical framework.

Keywords: *Timaeus*, Dialectics, Idea, Hermeneutics

Introduction

Plato's dialogues have firmly attracted the attention of numerous world thinkers. His thoughts have always been interpreted from time to time, even though his works have existed for approximately 2500 years. His ideas have sparked numerous profound philosophical debates, which, in turn, have given rise to significant philosophical inquiries, shaping diverse frameworks for contemplating human existence and civilization. No wonder Whitehead (1978, p. 39) once said that the entire tradition of Western (European) philosophical thought is a series of Plato's footnotes. Grounded in Plato, western philosophy upholds systematic critical inquiry based on reasons, therefore leading to higher standards of argumentative rigour (Keum, 2023a, p. 39). It makes his philosophy frequently called "philosophy of inquiry" as a human orientation towards understanding the essence of things (Giménez, 2022, p. 81).

Plato's philosophical thought, especially his cosmogony, has attracted **Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002)**, a twentieth-century German philosopher best known for his thoughts on hermeneutics through his masterpiece *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)*, published in 1960. However, this paper did not primarily aim to scrutinise his magnum opus. This paper focused on Gadamer's essay titled *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus (Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos Timaios)*, written for the purpose of lecturing in the Philosophy of History course at Heidelberg University in the winter of 1973—the paper was published in 1974. Through this paper, Gadamer described and interpreted Plato's *Timaeus*.

According to Gadamer, the knowledge of Plato, especially in relation to the *theory of idea*, did not reflect Plato's true intentions for the theory. Through various books—both introductory philosophy books and those that specifically focused on Plato—Plato is often regarded as the bearer of a two-world theory, essentially separating between the sense-perceived world and the idea's world. The two-world theory states that the sensible world contains physical objects that are always changing, plural, and pseudo; while the idea's world comprises various ideas that are eternal, single, and ideal (Burgin, 2017, p. 161; Fine, 2016, p. 557). Everything in the sensible world (this world) is only an imperfect derivative of everything in the idea's world. Gadamer (1980, p. 156) argued that this assumption is arbitrary since the theory came from the tradition of Neoplatonism, emphasising the process of emanation of The One that externalises itself hierarchically to all parts of the universe, as if the "reality-in-itself" were unknowable since it is in *another world* where human senses cannot empirically reach the reality. In line with Gadamer, Wibowo (2016, p. 23) and Cahyadi (2015, p. 1–4) argued that the two-world theory is not supposed to be attached to Plato because we will never find the term "idea's world" or "intelligible world"

(*Kosmos Noētos*) in all Plato's dialogues. That term originated from Philon of Alexandria (20–45 BC) which was further popularized by Plotinos in the Neoplatonist tradition.

Gadamer cautioned us to be meticulously cognisant of the hermeneutical preconceptions shaping our perception of Plato's philosophy. I concur with Gadamer's perspective, as such awareness can enhance our discernment in identifying the genuine intentions of the author, enabling us to effectively differentiate between the author's primary message and others' specific interpretations. However, in Gadamer's view, this is such a complicated work, especially in *Timaeus*, due to its stand-alone position among Plato's dialogues. This assumption comes from the position of Plato's physics, which is acknowledged secondary compared to Aristotle's physics considered more primary and reasonable. This makes the myths in *Timaeus*—e.g., the mythical story of the Demiurge who acts as a craftsman of the universe—only considered empty metaphors (Gadamer, 1980, p. 158). Moreover, the interest of modern scientists such as Galileo and Kepler in the origin of the universe makes Plato's myth in *Timaeus* even more out of place.

For Plato, myth is indeed a fictional discourse. Myths need to be interpreted since those are actually a method to convey the truth (Wibowo, 2017, p. 67–68). Plato is aware of the limitations of human ratios, so myths are epistemologically required, especially if the discourse is about a matter of the soul, Gods/Divine, or cosmos. According to Deretic (2020, p. 441), the truth of the myth can be divided into three categories. They can be either true or false, probable, or factually false but communicating valuable truths. It depends on the historical context that motivated its establishment. In the educational context, platonic myth is not only a tool for philosophical pedagogy, an invitation to critical thinking, and a reflexive marker of certain epistemic limitations (Keum, 2023b, p. 5), but also a compass of the moral dimension, upholding the ultimate vision of education that embraces the cultivation of the love of learning to live a good life (Nakazawa, 2015, p. 130). In the theological context, platonic myth—comprising personification and deification—is a rhetorical-hermeneutical method that aims to convey religious ideas that seem harsh or offensive, so they can be more accepted by the audience (Kutash, 2020, p. 148). Hence, I argue that this should make us not interpret *Timaeus* in a literary way.

Therefore, Gadamer depicted another way of interpreting *Timaeus* to gain Plato's true intentions. Gadamer considered that this was possible if not placing *Timaeus* in a single position as though Plato's thoughts in *Timaeus* were separated from his thoughts written in other dialogues, especially those related to dialectics. Gadamer believed that philosophy for Plato was about dialectics (Zuckert, 2002, p. 202). Dialectic is a key element of Plato's philosophy because it always involves our *logos ousias*, or reason of being. Hence, Gadamer (1980, p. 159–160) was concerned with the interrelationship connection between the myths in *Timaeus* and the whole of Plato's dialectic, even when it is not a simple matter.

Gadamer argued that there are at least two methodological problems that make it difficult for us to do so. Firstly, our understanding of Plato often comes from secondary textual references, influenced by Aristotle's thinking on Plato. Contemporary preconceptions of scientific principles originating from Aristotle present methodological challenges. It leads Plato's original views in

Timaeus to get arbitrarily mingled together with modern horizons. Secondly, the dialogues in *Timaeus* often exhibit abrupt and incoherent changes in narrative tone, from a rational to a mythical style of writing. For that reason, it is important to understand the timely and spatial context in which the text was written, including Plato's overall dialectic, in order to completely comprehend Plato's true intentions in *Timaeus*.

When it comes to hermeneutical interpretation, there is a critical question that needs to be considered: is considering timely and spatial context, including Plato's overall dialectic, sufficient? Is that way coherent with the hermeneutical framework established by Gadamer himself as one of the predominant hermeneutic thinkers in the 20th century? Thus, the purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus*. To achieve that objective, this paper was divided into four parts. **Firstly**, Plato's epistemological claim about the origin of the universe based on Gadamer's reading of *Timaeus* were presented. That description analysed Plato's thoughts on the world-soul and the world-body and how they relate to each other in the discourse on the origin of the universe. **Secondly**, Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus* was described. Then in the **third part**, a critical response that will exhibit Gadamer's views that not only need to be appreciated, but also critically evaluated was provided. In the **final part**, the overall discussion was conducted and the author's position was determined.

To recapitulate this introductory section and clearly emphasise the intention of this paper, mentioned below the research problem, research focus, research aim, and research questions.

Research Problem

Plato's dialogues, especially the ones that involve mythical stories like cosmogony in *Timaeus*, are often interpreted through the lens of neoplatonism. It was mythically illustrated that the universe originated from the emanation process of The One, externalising itself hierarchically to all parts of the universe. In addition, another concept, like the two-world theory, was also interpreted that way. Gadamer argued that this kind of hermeneutical interpretation is firmly insufficient since neoplatonists were trapped in their pre-structure of understanding, involving religious points of view. For Gadamer, the allegory in Plato's *Timaeus* fundamentally depicts the mathematical attempt of the universe to form itself in an orderly manner.

As the main figure of hermeneutics in the 20th century, it was essential to critically examine Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus*. By examining it, this research gave a new perspective both within the discourse on Plato's dialogues and Gadamer's own hermeneutical framework. This invites researchers to reconsider the complexities of interpretation itself and enrich ongoing dialogues within the fields of philosophy and literary studies.

Research Focus

In this paper, the predominant focus was to critically examine Gadamer's *Timaeus* hermeneutical interpretation, as described in his essay *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus (Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos Timaios)*. To clearly comprehend Gadamer's analysis and interpretation,

this paper also presented Plato's dialogues (*Timaeus* and *The Republic*) mentioned by Gadamer in his essay.

Research Aim, Research Questions, and Research Method

This paper aimed to critically evaluate Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus*. To achieve the objective, the following research questions became the principal guide:

1. According to Gadamer's description, how did Plato illustrate the making of the universe based on *Timaeus*' dialogue?
2. How did Gadamer interpret *Timaeus*? What is his main argument in interpreting *Timaeus*' cosmogony?
3. Is Gadamer's interpretation sufficiently reliable?

The conceptual analysis, through a comprehensive and rigorous literature review, was undertaken to achieve the research objective. This involved Gadamer's primary essay itself *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus (Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos Timaios)*, Plato's *Timaeus*, and other supplementary writings that helped this research to create coherent and reliable arguments.

Timaeus Overview from Gadamer's Description

At the beginning of Gadamer's reading of *Timaeus*, he embarks by presenting an epistemological introduction outlined by Plato on the fundamental distinction between "Being" and "Becoming". Being is the ultimate reality that is fixed and can only be understood through reason (*noesis*), while Becoming is the "process of becoming" that is changeable and understood through opinion (*doxa*) mediated by the senses (Gadamer, 1980, p. 161). In further discussion, Being was presupposed as an idea and becoming was presupposed as all parts of the sensory universe. This distinction was a principal point of departure as it influenced the direction of the rest of *Timaeus*' narrative.

Plato then emphasised "things which have come to be" as something that has completed the process "becoming something". This aspect is extremely significant to note as it triggers the essential question, "What or who is the main cause (determining cause) of a thing in the process of becoming something?". Plato alluded to the figure of Demiurge—named by Gadamer as "the maker and father" (28c) or generally named by Plato and his commentators as "the craftsman" (42e)—who not only contemplated the final form of everything that is in the process of Becoming, but also realised it to be a concrete reality.

[Timaeus 28c] Further, we maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause. Now to find the maker and father of this universe [to pan] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible (Plato, 1997b, p. 1235).

[*Timaeus* 42e] When he had finished assigning all these tasks, he proceeded to abide at rest in his own customary nature. His children immediately began to attend to and obey their father's assignment. Now that they had received the immortal principle of the mortal living thing, they began to imitate the craftsman who had made them (Plato, 1997b, p. 1246).

According to Plato, Demiurge was a maker of everything, including the universe, but not a decision-maker whether something needs to be created or not. Moreover, the primary motive of Demiurgos in making things was never mentioned by Plato in *Timaeus* (Gadamer, 1980, p. 163).

Gadamer did not give further explanations about why Plato named Demiurge as “the father”, but Brisson did. In Brisson's view, the qualifier “father” associates with Hesiod's Theogony in which gods give rise to one another (Brisson, 2016, p. 11). It corresponds to a character qualified as “father of the world”. Additionally, numerous metaphors have been linked to the Demiurge. As noted by Brisson, the Demiurge is frequently depicted as a metalworker or a blacksmith, as he prepares and melts materials before shaping, molding, and organising the plates used to form the orbits along which the stars and planets move (Brisson, 2016, p. 12–21). Aside from that, Demiurge is also frequently depicted as a magistrate or even political orator since he persuasively convinces *Chora* (will be discussed later) to make his creation as perfect as possible.

The figure of Demiurge described by Plato receives special attention from Gadamer, not because of his role as the main cause of the formation of everything, but because of his abilities to organize unordered things into something ordered (Gadamer, 1980, p. 162). For Gadamer, the process of “becoming-something” is more important to explore. The condition is not merely about the process of copying the perfect structure of a form (paradigm-copy structure) in the idea's world, as believed by neoplatonists. According to Gadamer, the Demiurge is nothing more than a symbol of a change in conditions from unordered to ordered. The Demiurge is the *eikos logos*, making things ordered, not the figure of God Almighty as depicted by religious authorities (Gadamer, 1980, p. 164).

Furthermore, Gadamer mentioned what Plato said that Demiurge—because he always makes something good and beautiful by contemplating the idea; Selfsameness, Difference, and Being—puts the mind (*nous*) in everything, including the world or universe (Gadamer, 1980, p. 164–165). Plato continued, *nous* cannot live without a soul, so he presupposed that the world or universe has a soul; or in other words, it is called the world-soul. The world-soul is the entity that bestows life upon the world and facilitates uniformity or orderliness within it. Gadamer referred to the universe where we live as a “living and reasonable being” because of the existence of the world-soul.

The soul presupposes the existence of a body. The world-soul thus also presupposes the existence of the world-body, consisting of planets, stars, living beings, etc. Just as the soul is the *autokinesis* of the body, the world-soul is also the *autokinesis* of the world-body. Wibowo very well

explained the definition of soul that is relevant to the context of this paper based on his reading of *Phaedo*' dialogue.

If we explore Plato's dialogue more carefully, something similar to a definition is given by Plato anyway. In the book of Phaedo, we find a kind of definition of the soul, but in such a way that this definition seems unclear. According to Plato, the soul is autokinesis which means 'that which moves itself'. This definition is very fluid because it does not say what the soul is clearly. He only points out that the soul is the motion that moves itself, and insofar as it moves from itself, it is called immortal (Wibowo, 2017, p. 53).

Since the world-soul is located between the permanent idea (Being) and the changing world-body (Becoming), and the world-soul can correspond to both (35a); then the world-soul's movement (*autokinesis*) implies the presence of *Selfsameness* and *Difference* (Gadamer, 1980, p. 166–169). The world-soul not only enables the world-body to undergo fixed and orderly movements, such as those of the stars, planets, sun, and moon, but also manages any changes or variations in unordered movements.

[Timaeus 35a] The components from which he made the soul and the way in which he made it were as follows: In between the Being that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two. Similarly, he made a mixture of the Same, and then one of the Different, in between their indivisible and their corporeal, divisible counterparts. And he took the three mixtures and mixed them together to make a uniform mixture, forcing the Different, which was hard to mix, into conformity with the Same (Plato, 1997b, p. 1239).

In addition, the explanation for the emergence of the universe as part of the world-body triggered by the movement of the world-soul indicates the birth of time, teaching mortal beings (humans) about numbers. It is the mortal aspect that enables humans to comprehend time (numbers) and to inquire about the fundamental principles underlying everything (*physis*). In Gadamer's interpretation, Plato's explanation is a description of humans whose nature lies in their passion to invariably want to know everything.

In the midst of the complex illustration of the role of the world-soul (Reason) as the primary cause of the origin of all things, Plato turned his discourse in another direction. To quote Gadamer (1980, p. 170), "But at 47e the eventuality is squarely confronted that besides the rational purpose which determines all things there is that other cause which had been mentioned previously as Necessity (*ananke*)". Plato not only turned away from the role of the world-soul, but also contrasted it with something called Necessity (the secondary cause). Necessity is such a certain nature-like property possessed by the materials that make up the universe. It is such a kind of destiny that determines the behaviour of all required materials utilized to create the universe. These materials already existed before the process of forming the universe occurred. Gadamer

(1980, p. 171–172) mentioned that these materials were described by Plato into spatial shapes, symbolizing fire (tetrahedron), air (octahedron), earth (hexahedron), and water (icosahedron).

Gadamer depicted Plato's argument in *Timaeus* (46de), asserting that the rational world-soul (Reason) and Necessity cannot be disentangled, as the process of universe formation is depicted as a fusion of both, despite their fundamentally distinct realms of existence.

[Timaeus 46de] We must pronounce the soul to be the only thing there is that properly possesses understanding. The soul is an invisible thing, whereas fire, water, earth and air have all come to be as visible bodies. So anyone who is a lover of understanding and knowledge must of necessity pursue as primary causes those that belong to intelligent nature, and as secondary all those belonging to things that are moved by others and that set still others in motion by necessity (Plato, 1997b, p. 1249).

The world-soul (Reason) does organize the various materials that form the universe, but its arrangement is limited by Necessity which has determined the character or nature of these materials, so the Demiurge—as the craftsman of the universe—does not seem to be fully free in creating the universe. Consequently, the world-body is never exactly perfect like the idea that the Demiurge contemplates. I analogise the situation faced by Demiurge as a scientist of a technological device who makes new product features in the laboratory—such as the development of the lamp, telephone, or atomic bomb—by involving natural elements that already have certain mathematical properties. Such a logical form of interpretation is natural when we consider the way Gadamer interprets *Timaeus* logically. For Gadamer, the reality of the universe is just a mathematical contemplation.

Thus we are faced with the task of following not only the mythical tale but also the theoretical explanation “for you,” i.e., “you” who are mathematically trained and who can therefore follow the logic of the argument. We must sort out mythos and logos as they intertwine in the exposition which follows here (Gadamer, 1980, p. 170).

Plato said that Necessity resided in *Chora*. Gadamer (1980, p. 173–175) defined *Chora* as the space between the fixed idea (Being) and the changing body of the world (Becoming); or in other words, it was located alongside the world-soul. As it was located between the two core entities that underlied the origin of the universe, Plato called it “*the third genos*” or the third being.

It is the presence of *Chora*—which contains Necessity—that causes everything in the universe to never be perfect; or to use Plato's term, it will never perfectly resemble the idea as the symbol of perfection. Everything that exists in the universe is only an imperfect imitation of the idea. This was expressed by Gadamer (1980, p. 175) by referring to Cornford's writing, “In this passage Plato comes closer than anywhere else in the *Timaeus* to the problem of the eidolon [all sensual things that resemble ideas]”.

Timaeus in Gadamer's Interpretation

Gadamer recognised that all of Plato's illustrations for the origin of the universe cannot be fully understood by humans as rational beings characterised by reason. This leads him to interpret Plato with a more mathematical approach, as it is only through this lens that *Timaeus* can be fully understood (Gadamer, 1980, p. 176–177). Gadamer considered that other interpreters of *Timaeus* (Taylor, Cornford, etc.) could not interpret *Timaeus* reasonably since they failed to understand the nuanced changes in the dialogue that suddenly change from logical to mythical nuances. It trapped them into a neoplatonist style of interpretation, containing religious horizons of thought.

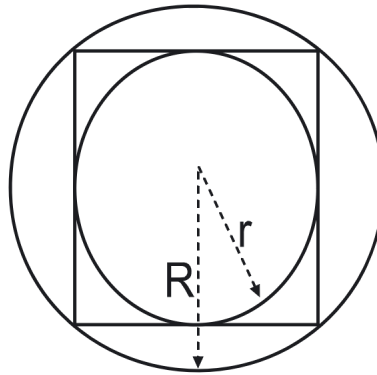
Gadamer considered that the universe was not simply created by a personal figure with unlimited power. In Gadamer's interpretation, the doctrines in *Timaeus* were not myths, but a collection of logical theories that explain how *logos*—symbolised by *nous* or the world-soul—organised the universe mathematically by involving matters (fire, air, earth, and water) whose movements have been limited (pre-ordered) by a space (*Chora*) which contained Necessity. Gadamer (1980, p. 179) stated that it was not about how a being can exist in the world, but how *Chora* or Necessity (lawfulness of space) can actualise a potential. According to Gadamer, the presence of Necessity that governs the character and behaviour of the materials of the universe is not about the wisdom of the Almighty, but merely intelligence struggling with mathematical problems.

In addition to the above arguments, the mathematical problem is also based on Gadamer's interpretation of the origin of the universe-forming materials, symbolised as regular solids; tetrahedron (fire), octahedron (air), hexahedron (earth), and icosahedron (water). Gadamer referred to Plato's explanation which suggests that the four regular solids originate or are derived from one regular solid source called the Dodecahedron (the fifth figure). The derivation was interpreted by Gadamer as the derivation of a logical mathematical equation. This derivation was possible because of the presence of Necessity (not because of the role of Demiurge) and it also causes various changes or contingencies in the universe (Gadamer, 1980, p. 183–184). Gadamer argued that this way of interpreting made the origin of the universe described in *Timaeus* understandable to humans as rational beings.

Gadamer is not the only thinker who interprets *Timaeus* mathematically. In line with Gadamer, Gregory interpreted *Timaeus* by considering mathematics as a hermeneutical basis. According to Gregory (2022, p. 359–360), we can only understand *Timaeus* if we interpret the movement or mechanism of the universe as a causal and universal law of nature, mathematically described through $f(y)$ or $f(x)$. Furthermore, the use of mathematical assumptions such as comparison or ratio is also possible to understand the universe. Gregory referred to Kepler's explanation inspired by Plato's regular solids in explaining the distribution of planetary orbits. For example, if combining several regular solids in a series (see Figure 1), it becomes possible to imagine a sphere that touches the surface on the inside and the outside simultaneously (Gregory, 2022, p. 364). Then, it is possible to calculate the ratio $r:R$ of the radius of the inner sphere and the radius of the outer sphere.

Figure 1

Use of Ratio in Measuring Orbital Distance



Aside from Gregory's interpretation, De Bianchi (2022, p. 159) also emphasised the importance of mathematics based on his analysis about the distinctions of time in *Timaeus* 37e-38a.

[Timaeus 37e-38a] For before the heavens came to be, there were no days or nights, no months or years. But now, at the same time as he framed the heavens, he devised their coming to be. These all are parts of time, and was and will be are forms of time that have come to be. Such notions we unthinkingly but incorrectly apply to everlasting being. For we say that it was and is and will be, but according to the true account only is is appropriately said of it. Was and will be are properly said about the becoming that passes in time, for these two are motions. But that which is always changeless and motionless cannot become either older or younger in the course of time—it neither ever became so, nor is it now such that it has become so, nor will it ever be so in the future. And all in all, none of the characteristics that becoming has bestowed upon the things that are borne about in the realm of perception are appropriate to it. These, rather, are forms of time that have come to be—time that imitates eternity and circles according to number (Plato, 1997b, p. 1241).

De Bianchi interpreted the expression “according to number” as “according to the laws or rules of numbers”. She mathematically expressed it through the premise, “There will always be an n greater than, equal to, or less than X ” (De Bianchi, 2022, p. 160). According to this rule, time can be divided into units, consociating the past (less than), present (equal to), and future (greater than). This discrepancy constituted a universal rule and is grounded in the analogy between number series and time series. This became the lucid reference to the foundation of mathematics intrinsically associated with time.

Furthermore, the mathematical nuance in the interpretation was also adopted by scholars who believed in modern atomism. According to Brisson and Ofman (2022), modern atomism initially argued that the regular solids in the *Timaeus* were not geometrical but thin physical

particles that possessed three dimensions, length, width, and depth, because void existed in the universe. This contradicted Plato's assertion in the *Timaeus* that the universe was constructed not only on physical principles but also primarily on mathematical rules. Plato had never also mentioned in his various dialogues that void existed in the universe. To overcome this difficulty, after studying Aristotle's texts that were associated with *Timaeus*, atomism scholars then replaced physical atomism with "*mathematical atomism*".

Those interpretations indicated that math—not God or the personal figure—was the real divine element. Again, as explained earlier, the Demiurge was nothing more than a symbol of a change in condition from unorganised to organised. The Demiurge was not a personal figure who actually creates and organises the universe (Gadamer, 1980, p. 179–180). Even though the universe and everything within it was in constant changes, it mathematically had endless regularities, proportion, geometry, and a teleological order (Vázquez, 2022, p. 2–3). It appears that the world-soul, which governs the universe through mathematical principles, resembles the cognitive capacity of human intelligence, thus rendering the ordered mechanism of the universe inevitable (Chen, 2022, p. 85–86)—this expression even leads the Demiurge to be called "The Divine Mechanic", inspiring cognitive science to be scientifically mental-mechanic in inquiring how human consciousness works (McDonough, 2021, p. 118). Thus, Gadamer believed that *Timaeus*' is a Plato's writing that needs to be interpreted using rational or logical reason. As mentioned by Ofman (2017, p. 1), this kind of interpretation makes *Timaeus* often referred to as *plausible myth* or *reasonable discourse*.

The attempt was made to present the ordering (diataxis) and origination (genesis) of the elements themselves for 'you,' i.e., for you mathematicians who can follow the account given, and to present it 'in an unaccustomed exposition' quite apart from any mythical tale (Gadamer, 1980, p. 178).

Discussion

Gadamer's way of interpreting *Timaeus* as one of Plato's last dialogues is of great interest to be critically evaluated. There are several aspects of Gadamer's interpretation that need to be appreciated on one hand and criticised on the other hand.

Before assessing Gadamer's interpretation, his contribution to facilitating a comprehensive understanding of Plato was acknowledged. It is known that Plato was a philosopher whose thoughts were not easy to interpret. Plato put his ideas into various dialogues by which he was not the predominant actor in the dialog. Moreover, his frequent use of myth or allegory ignited further discussions and interpretations for other thinkers who were interested in his dialogues. In addition to *Timaeus* that interestingly used the myth of Demiurge, it even seems to be concluded as an *aporetic* dialogue, as mentioned by MacFarlane (2023, p. 497–498) who emphasised the role of Demiurge that was simultaneously omnipotent and limited—Demiurge was the sole cause of everything, but he was limited by Necessity. Hence, one should agree with Gadamer's two theses on how Plato's *Timaeus* should be interpreted even in terms of some critical considerations.

Primarily, it is imperative not to erect a partition between *Timaeus* and other dialogues by Plato, particularly those pertaining to dialectic, as they represent Plato's predominant philosophical reflections on epistemology—the theory concerning how we acquire knowledge—relevant in this context to understanding the origins of the universe. By profoundly comprehending Plato's dialectic, we can better gain a comprehensive picture of Plato's intentions in *Timaeus*.

On the one hand, Socrates defined dialectic as a *tekhne* (skill of obtaining ultimate truth through “question and answer”); on the other hand, Plato constituted dialectics as an *episteme* (knowledge) or the intellectual process that moved us forward to achieve the irrefutable truth (the idea). Plato illustrated this intellectual process through the Allegory of the Cave in his work entitled *Politeia* (*The Republic*). Plato allegorically elucidated the four stages of attaining the ultimate truth or the essence itself through the allegory (Wibowo, 2017, p. 141–149). The first stage was *Eikasia*, the knowledge that only concerned illusions of sensual objects. The second stage was *Doxa*, which was the sensual object itself. The third was *Dianoia* or mathematically intelligent reality. The last stage was *Noesis* (*episteme*), which was the idea as the ultimate truth itself. As people progress from one stage to the next, we are consistently urged to reference the idea, despite its inherently unattainable nature owing to its divine essence.

Indeed, Plato's dialectic is essentially related to Gadamer's interpretation of the origin of the universe in *Timaeus*. He interpreted that the world-soul (Reason) organises the world-body rationally-mathematically (the third stage of Plato's dialectic) by referring to the idea even though the result will never be exactly the same as the idea because there is *Chora* that hinders it. This shows that Gadamer seriously built a solid integration between *Timaeus* and Plato's dialectic.

Examples of the process of linking *Timaeus* with other Plato's dialogues using a dialectical point of view—especially *Dianoia* (the third stage of dialectics)—were also carried out by another scholar. This made the interpretation of *Timaeus* vary, especially when it came to the Demiurge (Ilievski, 2022, p. 61–63). For instance, Gkatzaras (2018, p. 77–80) depicted the similarity between Demiurge and the Philosopher King depicted in *The Republic*. He intended to show that the idea (stated by himself as the *idea of the good*) as the pinnacle of dialectics—the foremost element that allowed Demiurge organising unordered things into something orderly—has an important role, not only in *The Republic*, but also *Timaeus*.

Gkatzaras contended that for further understanding of the Demiurge, reference can be made to the figure of the Philosopher King. Both have the ability to organise everything that is unordered into order. Plato in Gkatzaras' view described the Philosopher King (The Guardian) as a leader who can not only organize (*κοσμήσαντα*) and harmonise (*συναρμόσαντα*) his soul so he can be truly fair and wise, but also the country he leads. Those keywords (*κοσμήσαντα* and *συναρμόσαντα*) can be found not only in *The Republic IV* (443d), but also in *Timaeus* (24c, 35a, 37d, 53a, etc).

[The Republic IV 443d] A just individual does not permit any part of themselves to perform the tasks designated for another part, nor do they allow the different classes

within themselves to interfere with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious (Plato, 1997a, p. 1075).

[Timaeus 37d as an example] So, as the model was itself an everlasting Living Thing, he set himself to bringing this universe to completion in such a way that it, too, would have that character to the extent that was possible. Now it was the Living Thing's nature to be eternal, but it isn't possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten. And so he began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the universe, he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity (Plato, 1997b, p. 1241).

Gkatzaras also mentioned that the figure of the Philosopher King in *The Republic IV* (421b-c) was described by Plato as the best craftsman in his field which was in the leadership disposition—mentioned as *The Craft of Guardianship*.

[The Republic IV 421bc] With this in mind, we should consider whether in setting up our guardians we are aiming to give them the greatest happiness, or whether—since our aim is to see that the city as a whole has the greatest happiness—we must compel and persuade the auxiliaries and guardians to follow our other policy and be the best possible craftsmen at their own work, and the same with all the others. In this way, with the whole city developing and being governed well, we must leave it to nature to provide each group with its share of happiness (Plato, 1997a, pp. 1053–1054).

The term can be aligned with Demiurge in *Timaeus* who was also called by Plato as *The Craftsman*. Although *Timaeus* and *The Republic* have different major topics, Gkatzaras considered that they were related to each other. This was because he referred to Socrates' expression in *Timaeus* (19b-c) that Socrates wanted the formation of an ideal state.

Gkatzaras' interpretation is also similar to Silverman's interpretation, which stated that the figure of Demiurge is just a myth that symbolises an ordinary human being who would like to resemble the divine as a rational or logical figure who can unite things that are not organised—or even chaotic—into order, so that life becomes more virtuous (Silverman, 2003, p. 139). It could be posited that this interpretation aligns with a perspective Gadamer also espoused. According to Gadamer in Zuckert's view, Plato's dialogues in general, including his thoughts on the idea, describe practical (not just theoretical) thoughts about everyday life—unlike the views of other thinkers who believe that Aristotle's philosophy is superior because it is considered more practical than Plato's philosophy (Zuckert, 1996, p. 72). Gadamer argued that Plato's dialogues are a written depiction of Socrates who makes philosophy a key element for having a virtuous life. In other words, Plato's dialogues are nothing, but Socrates' attempt to deeply know what is truly good.

Aside from Gadamer, Brisson also has a similar point of view regarding the importance of *Dianoia* focusing on the role of mathematics in general Platonic dialogues as part of the dialectics process Brisson (2012, p. 216). It has been asserted that mathematics serves as the imprint of the intelligible within the realm of the sensible, as it embodies the symmetry that guarantees regularity to the empirical realities perceived by the senses. Mathematics has become Plato's methodological solution to the metaphysical problem addressed by his predecessor, Anaxagoras in *Phaedo* and Parmenides & Zeno in *Parmenides*, who explained nature (*physis*)—ultimate-intelligible reality (or the *idea* if using Plato's terminology)—without dealing with empirical realities (Brisson, 2012, p. 212). This kind of interpretation was adopted by Gadamer in understanding *Timaeus*.

To recapitulate, Gadamer encouraged the idea to associate *Timaeus* to other Plato's dialogues, especially those that emphasised the dialectical process. Gadamer nevertheless recognised the limitations of his thesis because his efforts in associating Plato's thought in *Timaeus* with Plato's dialectic in other dialogues—especially those written after *Timaeus* such as the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*—have not completely and thoroughly undertaken. There are many complex issues and *aporia* in these dialogues that do not seem to have any connection with *Timaeus* (Gadamer, 1980, p. 189–190). In addition, Gadamer (1980, p. 182) also admitted that his interpretation of *Timaeus* was the only one of many theories that were scientifically hypothetical. Gadamer's sincere admission seems to indicate that he emboldens other thinkers or scholars to interpret Plato's dialogues more carefully.

Secondly, Gadamer issues a crucial cautionary note concerning hermeneutics, which must be heeded by anyone endeavoring to interpret Plato's dialogues. He warned Plato interpreters on the first page of his writing in *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus* that we should be aware of the hermeneutical preconceptions or horizons of thought that underlie our view of Plato. He even gave an example through the perspective of Neoplatonism which was considered mistaken by him owing to its religious nuances. This hermeneutic consciousness is crucial to avoid being ensnared by concealed ideologies that are frequently embedded within Plato's philosophical perspectives. However, did Gadamer genuinely detach himself from a particular horizon of thought when interpreting *Timaeus*?

However, in my opinion, Gadamer's warning was not firmly heeded by himself when he interpreted *Timaeus*. He appears to be undermining his own position, particularly when asserting that the process of universe creation exclusively involved rational processes. The Demiurge seems to be demonstrated as a scientist who can organise his thoughts and scientific works in an organised and disaggregated manner. It can be posited that Gadamer still employs the conventional 20th-century perspective, heavily influenced by the methodology of natural sciences, which renders it challenging to fully grasp Plato's true intentions regarding the ideas presented in *Timaeus*. Gadamer (1980, p. 191) said, "The task in the *Timaeus* is obviously to combine teleological and mathematical-mechanical causal explanation". Then, he also said, "Only because of the reason already displayed in the realm of Necessity does the beautiful ordering of the visible world become possible at all" (Gadamer, 1980, p. 192). In other words, Gadamer resembles the

neoplatonists whom he criticized since they could not detach from a certain ideology or preconception. On the one hand, neoplatonists were affected by medieval-religious preconception; on the other hand, Gadamer was unconsciously trapped in modern scientism of the 20th century.

From the perspective of the current paper, Gadamer would have been able to avoid this shortcoming if he could have consistently applied his hermeneutical approach that he established in *Truth and Method*, his *magnum opus* published fourteen years before *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus*. In his masterpiece, Gadamer rejected the hermeneutical views of his predecessors, Schleiermacher and Dilthey (Hardiman, 2015, p. 160–167). Schleiermacher acknowledged hermeneutics as an art (*kunst*), focusing on the art of understanding the alienation found in ancient texts. The focus of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics was an attempt to overcome readers' misunderstandings when dealing with ancient texts. Therefore, through hermeneutics, Schleiermacher would like to bring back the meaning of the past, so misunderstandings with readers in the present can be clearly eluded. Unlike Schleiermacher, who was trapped in the romanticism of his era, Dilthey was trapped in the presuppositions of historicism, which considered that history was an empirical event in the past that needs to be re-presented objectively in the present moment through social science inquiries. Thus, according to Dilthey, hermeneutics is just a method of scientific research.

Hence, according to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the process of understanding involves reproducing the meanings of historical events, seemingly detached from the influence of present-day readers as interpreters. Both prompt the interpreter to regress in time to unearth the original meaning encapsulated objectively within the object. Gadamer criticised them because it was impossible to go back in time and find the meaning intended by the author completely as the consciousness always moves in history and is shaped by history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), so our understanding is always within a certain horizon. This indicates that the human process of understanding something cannot be completely separated from the pre-structure of understanding that contains prejudice and authority.

Gadamer considered that hermeneutics was a universal human ability to understand something. Grondin emphasised that the most important thing in hermeneutics according to Gadamer was not identifying the real intention of the author of the text, but the examined issue which Gadamer called *Sache* (subject matter or matter at hand) based on the contextual situation (horizon and historical context) of the interpreter (Grondin, 2002, p. 40). For Gadamer in Zuckert's description, hermeneutics helped humans understand themselves, each other, and the world around them (Zuckert, 2002, p. 205). Consequently, it is no wonder that Gadamer's hermeneutics is often referred to as "philosophical hermeneutics".

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics was strongly influenced by Heidegger. According to Grondin (2002, p. 37–39), Gadamer initially referred to Heidegger's (2010) thought in "Being and Time" which believed that the understanding of something was more practical (know-how) than the cognitive one (methodological). Heidegger was based on the German expression "*sich aufetwas verstehen*" which means "to be capable of something". Thus, a person who understands something

is a person who can master a practical ability. The ability Heidegger referred to is "*sich*" *verstehen*: understanding always implies elements of self-understanding. If I want to understand Plato, then it is about me understanding Plato or me understanding how to read French (not about the intention Plato refers to). In this sense, I can do it or I am capable of it. Both Heidegger and Gadamer believed that this is very common for us as a being who always seeks for orientation in life. That orientation is reinforced in an understanding grounded in my continual realisation of my existence. Under the influence of Heidegger, Gadamer detached from the tradition of Dilthey's hermeneutics or the methodology of the human sciences. To quote Grondin (2002, p. 38), "To understand, even in these sciences, he claims, is to be concerned, repeated, that is, to be able to apply a certain meaning to my situation ... It is always a possibility of my understanding that is played out when I understand a text".

In *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus*, as described at the beginning of this paper, Gadamer has actually mentioned that we should be aware of the pre-structures of understanding or hermeneutical preconceptions that underlie our view of Plato's thought. He was however inconsistent with his grand theses since he censured the interpreters who embrace the neoplatonic point of view. If Gadamer had consistently focused on his philosophical hermeneutics, he would have considered that the neoplatonists' interpretation was a common way of interpretation because their pre-structure of understanding was influenced by the conditions of their times, which could not be separated from religious nuances—just as Gadamer and other contemporary scholars and interpreters, whose pre-structure of understanding was immensely influenced by the conditions that were closely related to the development of science and technology in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to critically evaluate Gadamer's thoughts on one of Plato's last dialogues, *Timaeus*, with reference to Gadamer's essay *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus* (*Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos Timaios*). In *Timaeus*, which incorporates mythical elements, Plato narrated the tale of the universe's origin. Unlike the neoplatonist interpretation, which stated that the universe originated from the emanation process of The One that externalised itself hierarchically to all parts of the universe, Gadamer considered that the universe came from the *Logos*' attempt to organise various unordered materials into mathematically ordered ones. According to Gadamer, the neoplatonists were trapped in religious hermeneutical preconceptions that prevented them from understanding Plato's true intentions about the origin of the universe.

The current study argued that Gadamer's criticism of neoplatonists showed that he has not consistently adopted the hermeneutical approach he initiated in *Truth and Method*. In fact, that work was a *magnum opus* that made him one of the most prominent philosophers in the 20th century. If Gadamer had been consistent with his hermeneutical approach, then he would have considered the neoplatonist's interpretation, as a common interpretation since their pre-structure of understanding moved and was shaped in the historical condition of the medieval period (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), in which religious nuances were inevitable. Consequently, if Gadamer had

wanted to reproduce or bring back the true intentions of Plato, he should have used the hermeneutical approach initiated by his predecessors, Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Nonetheless, if he had undertaken it, his *magnum opus* would have been in vain, since in *Truth and Method* he seriously criticised the hermeneutical approach established by his predecessors.

In addition, aside from the epistemological or hermeneutical perspective, Gadamer's critique of the neoplatonist method of interpretation sparked a narrow space of intersubjective dialogue because he ignored the pre-structure of understanding that was actually considered essential in *Truth and Method*. This makes his unique hermeneutical approach, philosophical hermeneutics, throw away its ultimate purpose, which was to prioritise openness in dialogue (Gill, 2015, p. 9) among human beings and bolster intersubjective cross-examination between texts and readers (Joni, 2021, p. 1).

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The primary limitation of this research was its exclusive focus on Gadamer's interpretation of *Timaeus* as detailed in his essay *Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus*, as one of Gadamer's essay collections in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. This particular focus may not encompass the variations in Gadamer's interpretation found in his other works. In order to avoid methodological constraints and maintain clarity, this research deliberately limited its primary literature to this specific essay.

Future research could build upon the findings of this study by investigating the remaining seven essays in Gadamer's *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. This broader analysis would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's cosmogony within the framework of Plato's overall dialectics. Furthermore, the limited availability of books or journal articles examining Gadamer's interpretation of the *Timaeus* suggests a significant gap in the literature. Future scholars could address this by conducting thorough explorations of other Gadamer's essays and related texts, thereby offering much clearer insights into his hermeneutical approach to Plato's *Timaeus*.

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