SOCRATES: It looks as though I shall lack for nothing—as though I'm in for a brilliant feast of words in return for mine of yesterday. Apparently, then, Timaeus, it will be your job to speak next, once you've invoked the gods as custom requires.

c TIMAEUS: Of course, Socrates: anyone with even a slight amount of sense always calls on the gods at the start of any enterprise, great or small. And we are people who plan to talk, somehow, about the creation of the universe, or whether it might even be uncreated, so if we're to avoid going wildly wrong, we really have no choice: we must call on gods and goddesses and pray that our account meets with their approval—with *their* approval above all, but then also
d with ours. As far as the gods are concerned, let this be our invocation; but we also need to call up our own resources, to reduce the chances of any failure of understanding on your part and to enable me to express my thoughts on the matters before us as clearly as possible.

Our starting-point lies, I think, in the following distinction: what is it that always is, but never comes to be, and what is it that comes to be† but never is?* The former, since it is
28a always consistent, can be grasped by the intellect with the support of a reasoned account, while the latter is the object of belief, supported by unreasoning sensation,* since it is generated and passes away, but never really is. Now, anything created is necessarily created by some cause,* because nothing can possibly come to be without there being something that is responsible for its coming to be. Also, whenever a craftsman takes something consistent as his model, and reproduces its form and properties, the result is bound in every case to be a thing of beauty, but if he takes as his
b model something that has been created, the product is bound to be imperfect.

The whole universe or world (or whatever: let it be called by whatever term it finds acceptable)… well, the first question

to be asked about it is the perennial first and fundamental question: did it always exist, in which case it was not created and has no beginning, or has it come to be, in which case there was something that began it in the first place?* It has come to be. After all, it is visible, tangible, and corporeal, and everything with these properties is perceptible, and we have already demonstrated that everything perceptible — which is to say, everything that is grasped by belief with the c support of sensation — is subject to creation and belongs to the class of things that have come to be.

Now, we've already said that anything created is necessarily created by some cause. But it would be a hard task to discover the maker and father of this universe of ours, and even if we did find him, it would be impossible to speak of him to everyone. So what we have to ask is, again, which of those two kinds of model* the creator was using as he constructed the universe. Was he looking at what is consistent 29a and permanent or at what has been created? Well, if this universe of ours is beautiful and if its craftsman was good, it evidently follows that he was looking at an eternal model, while he was looking at a created model if the opposite is the case — though it's blasphemous even to think it. It's perfectly clear, then, that he used an eternal model, because nothing in creation is more beautiful than the world and no cause is better than its maker. The craftsman of this universe, then, took as his model that which is grasped by reason and intelligence and is consistent, and it necessarily follows b from these premisses that this world of ours is an image of something.

It is, of course, crucial to begin any subject at its natural starting-point. Where an image and its original are concerned, we had better appreciate that statements about them are similar to the objects they explicate, in the sense that statements about that which is stable, secure, and manifest to intellect are themselves stable and reliable* (and it's important for statements about such things to be just as irrefutable

c and unassailable as statements can possibly be), while statements about things that are in fact images, because they've been made in the likeness of an original, are no more than likely, and merely correspond to the first kind of statement: as being is to becoming, so the truth of the one kind of account is to the plausibility of the other.* So, Socrates, you shouldn't be surprised if, when discussing gods and the creation of the universe, we often find it impossible to give accounts that are altogether internally consistent in every respect and perfectly precise. We'll have to be content if we come up with statements that are as plausible as anyone else's,* and we should bear in mind the fact that I and all of you, the speaker
d and his judges, are no more than human, which means that on these matters we ought to accept the likely account and not demand more than that.

SOCRATES: Excellent, Timaeus! You're absolutely right:* we must, as you suggest, be satisfied with that. We're impressed and delighted with your preamble, so do please go on to develop your theme.

TIMAEUS: I should explain, then, how this created universe
e came to be made by its maker. He was good, and nothing good is ever characterized by mean-spiritedness over anything; being free of jealousy,* he wanted everything to be as similar to himself as possible. Wise men tell us that there
30a is no more important precondition for the created world than this, and we could not go wrong if we were to accept it. For the god wanted everything to be good, marred by as little imperfection as possible. He found everything visible in a state of turmoil, moving in a discordant and chaotic manner,* so he led it from chaos to order, which he regarded as in all ways better.*

What is perfectly good can accomplish only what is perfectly beautiful; this was and is a universal law. So the god
b took thought and concluded that, generally speaking, nothing he made that lacked intelligence could ever be more beautiful than an intelligent product, and that nothing can have

Euripides, *Medea* 826–9; ps.-Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 5; Aristotle, *Politics* 1327b.

24e *Pillars of Heracles*: the straits of Gibraltar.

25a *that genuine sea*: Greek geography recognized three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa, in our terms) grouped around the Mediterranean, with a further sea surrounding all of them. Here Plato supposes a further continent surrounding the outer ocean.

25b *Etruria*: specifically the central part of Italy, but here meaning Italy as a whole.

25c *abandoned . . . brink of disaster*: this description sounds rather like the plight of Athens in the Persian invasion of 480–479 BC.

26c *for permanence*: the 'encaustic' method of painting involved applying coloured waxes to a surface and fixing the colours in place by means of a heated metal rod. It was used especially for painting difficult surfaces such as stone, or other objects that would stand outdoors.

26e *a true historical account*: Socrates is delighted with Critias' story, though he gives no grounds or criteria for his judgement that it is true.

27a *specialized in natural science*: we know nothing of any real Timaeus, but the fictional characteristics suit him well for the task of describing the origins of the cosmos and of man. 'Natural science' was a broad discipline, covering everything from cosmology and astronomy and the laws of nature, to biology and medicine.

27a *from you*: from Socrates, because Critias has already identified the citizens of bygone Athens with those of Socrates' imaginary community (26d).

27d *what is it that always is . . . never is?*: Timaeus begins his discourse with a distinction that will affect the nature of his whole account, between being and becoming. Some things (i.e. forms) always are, without ever changing, while others undergo change. The verb 'to become' in Ancient Greek has two different senses. It can mean to come into existence (or be created), or it can mean to come to be something.

28a *object of belief, supported by unreasoning sensation*: the things that do change are those of the world about us, which we perceive with our senses. Similar views are expressed in *Republic* (510 ff.), where Plato develops the analogy of the divided line, to explicate his views on knowledge. A line is divided into four sections (**L1–L4**), with types of belief/knowledge correlated to types of entity. The task of the philosopher is to ascend the line (cf. the cave analogy of *Republic*, which follows on from the divided line).

noêsis, understanding	**L4**	*epistême*, knowledge	Intelligible entities
dianoia, intelligence	**L3**		
pistis, belief	**L2**	*doxa*, opinion	Sensible entities
eikasia, illusion	**L1**		

So Timaeus will deny that we can have knowledge, in the strong Platonic sense, of the world about us and we have to settle for opinion.

28a *anything created is necessarily created by some cause*: a strong principle, which lays the foundations for the view that as the cosmos has come into being, it too must have a cause.

28b *did it always exist . . . in the first place?*: another key question for Timaeus' account. Has the world come into existence, or has it always existed? If it has come into existence, he will have to explain how and why it came into existence. And his answer is unequivocal—it has come into existence.

29a *two kinds of model*: it is not clear that Plato gives a real choice between the two models that the demiurge may base the cosmos on. What would the changing model be? The conclusion, that the demiurge bases his work on the eternal model, is no surprise, though it is not entirely clear what the eternal model is either. Timaeus' argumentation here is far from watertight; he is effectively presenting an overview in an introductory speech.

29b *are themselves stable and reliable*: our accounts of the stable, intelligible entities have to be stable themselves and entirely reliable, or in other terms, have to be secure knowledge, while (29c) our account of what are likenesses, on the other hand, can be no more than likely. Note the word-play (see p. xxxiv).

29c *to the plausibility of the other*: the analogy is again reminiscent of the divided line of *Republic*.

29c *impossible to give accounts that are . . . perfectly precise . . . as plausible as anyone else's*: the account that Timaeus will give will deal with the physical, sensible world and so can be no more than likely, but he will make sure that it is as good as or better than any other account of the world. There are certain affinities between Parmenides' poem and Timaeus' speech here. Both separate the objects of reason and sensation, reckoning these to be co-ordinate with what is knowable and what is opinable, and both require explanations to be similar in type to what they explain (see especially Parmenides, Fr. 1 28 ff.). We might also compare Timaeus' repeated use of *eikos* to describe the status of any account of the physical with Parmenides' similar usage at Fr. 8 60–1, 'I tell you this way of composing things in all its plausibility, so that never shall any mortal man outstrip you in judgement.'

29d *You're absolutely right*: unlike the Socrates of Plato's earlier works, here Socrates is remarkably compliant, as he was with Critias too.

29e *being free of jealousy*: this establishes a theme for the whole of *Timaeus*. Whoever constructed the cosmos is good, and has no jealousy: he desires that everything should be as good as possible; he creates maximum order, as order is always better than disorder. This passage marks the