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THE COGNITION OF THE WORLD SOUL IN PLATO'S *TIMAEUS* (TIM. 37a2–c5)

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Abstract: This study focuses on explaining the problem of cognition of the world soul through a detailed analysis of passage 37a2–c5 from Plato's *Timaeus*. It is divided into three sections, each dedicated to interpreting a different part of the passage. First, the necessary conditions for the soul to be able to cognize correctly are discussed. Second, it is demonstrated that the world soul's cognition is essentially discursive. It is further argued that the soul makes two different types of declarations that form a single complex inner speech, allowing the soul to cognize both the corporeal and the intelligible. Finally, it is explained how specific cognitive acts arise from the soul's inner speech.

Keywords: Plato, the *Timaeus*, world soul, cognition, knowledge, belief, speech

Introduction

The following study¹ focuses on interpreting passage 37a2–c5 from Plato's *Timaeus*² and addresses the issue of how the world soul cognizes. At this point of the dialogue, Timaeus has already explained the nature and ontological status of the soul through the description of its creation by the demiurge from the intermediate kinds of being, sameness, and difference (see 35a1–b3). He has also explained how the world soul obtained its mathematical structure, spherical shape and circular motion, and how it was joined with the world body (see 35b4–37a2). The passage in question, which follows immediately, is very important from an epistemological perspective but exceptionally difficult to construe, so despite having been commented on since antiquity, there is still no general consensus on its interpretation. Therefore, we find it useful to analyze it in detail once again. The following exposition is divided into three parts, each interpreting one section of the given passage. The first one deals with conditions that have to be met for the world soul to cognize correctly, the second one with an inner speech that arises in the soul based on its contact with an object of cognition, and the third one explains how specific cognitive acts finally arise in the soul. Let us begin by quoting the passage in full, both in the original Greek and in the English translation.

¹ This is a third and final part of a larger project aiming to interpret the problem of the constitution and function of the world soul in Plato's *Timaeus*. For the two preceding studies see Stránský (2022) and Stránský (2023).

² Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to Plato refer to this dialogue.

ἄτε οὖν ἐκ τῆς ταυτοῦ καὶ τῆς θατέρου φύσεως ἐκ τε οὐσίας τριῶν τούτων συγκραθεῖσα μοιρῶν, καὶ ἀνὰ λόγον μερισθεῖσα καὶ συνδεθεῖσα, αὐτὴ τε ἀνακυκλουμένη πρὸς αὐτήν, ὅταν οὐσίαν σκεδαστὴν ἔχοντός τινος ἐφάπτηται καὶ ὅταν ἀμέριστον, λέγει κινουμένη διὰ πάσης ἑαυτῆς ὅτι τ' ἂν τι ταῦτόν ἢ καὶ ὅτου ἂν ἕτερον, πρὸς ὅτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὅπη καὶ ὅπως καὶ ὁπότε συμβαίνει κατὰ τὰ γινόμενά τε πρὸς ἕκαστον ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν καὶ πρὸς τὰ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντα αἰεὶ. λόγος δὲ ὁ κατὰ ταῦτόν ἀληθῆς γινόμενος περὶ τε θάτερον ὄν καὶ περὶ τὸ ταῦτόν, ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ φερόμενος ἄνευ φθόγγου καὶ ἠχῆς, ὅταν μὲν περὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν γίγνηται καὶ ὁ τοῦ θατέρου κύκλος ὀρθὸς ἰὼν εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν διαγγεῖλη, δόξαι καὶ πίστεις γίνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς, ὅταν δὲ αὖ περὶ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἢ καὶ ὁ τοῦ ταυτοῦ κύκλος εὐτροχος ὢν αὐτὰ μνηύσῃ, νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποτελεῖται: τούτω δὲ ἐν ᾧ τῶν ὄντων ἐγγίγνεσθον, ἂν ποτὲ τις αὐτὸ ἄλλο πλὴν ψυχῆν εἴπῃ, πᾶν μᾶλλον ἢ τάληθές ἐρεῖ.

Since, then, [the soul] was composed of three components – namely, the nature of the Same, [the nature of] the Different, and of Being – since it was divided and bound together according to a proportion, and since it revolves in a circular motion back upon itself, whenever it touches something possessing scattered or indivisible being, it moves throughout its whole self and declares what it is the same as and what it is different from. [It also declares] in relation to what especially and how and in what respect and when it comes about that – among the things that come into being or in relation to those that are always the same – any particular thing acts upon or is being acted upon by any other particular thing. A speech, thus, arises, which is equally true whether it concerns the Same or the Different, and which is borne along, without sound or noise, within that which moves itself. Whenever it concerns the perceptible, and the revolution of the Different moves correctly and transmits [it] to its whole soul, true opinions and firm beliefs arise. But whenever it concerns the intelligible, and the revolution of the Same runs well and reveals them [i.e. the intelligible beings], understanding and knowledge necessarily result. If anyone were to claim that these two [forms of cognition] arise in something other than the soul, he would speak anything but the truth.³

Conditions for Knowledge (37a2–5)

For the soul to know, three conditions must be met, as outlined at the beginning of the passage.⁴ The first condition is that the soul must be mixed from being, sameness, and difference, which is an evident reference to passage 35a–b3 that we have analyzed in detail elsewhere.⁵ The second condition is that the soul must be divided and bound together according to a proportion (λόγος), which refers to passage 35b4–36b6. As we have previously argued, this operation aims to make the soul receptive to harmony.⁶ Now, however, it turns out that it is also a necessary condition for the cognitive process as such, so let us find some reasons why this is the case.

³ Trans. J. S. All other passages from the *Timaeus* are quoted in Zeyl's translation (see Plato, 1997).

⁴ We maintain that these should indeed be understood as necessary conditions enabling the soul to cognize properly. Before addressing the topic of cognition, *Timaeus*, as we observe, finds it necessary to mention explicitly once again the three things he previously discussed, beginning with the opening word ἄτε, which here carries a causal meaning and can be translated as 'inasmuch as,' 'because,' or 'since.' We can, thus, infer that without these conditions being met, the soul's cognitive function would either be impaired or entirely nonfunctional. From a philosophical perspective, it is not plausible to regard the soul's capacity for proper cognition as a mere accidental consequence of its composition. On the contrary, in Plato's strictly teleological universe, the demiurge is determined by his goodness to do only what is best (see 30a–b) and so everything has a certain purpose. And since the ultimate purpose of the world soul is to bring the reason (νοῦς) to the corporeal world (see 30b–c) and to care for it (cf. *Phaedr.* 246b6: ψυχὴ πᾶσα παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου) maintaining its order once imposed by the demiurge, it follows that the soul has to be intentionally constructed so as to cognize properly both the intelligible and the corporeal.

⁵ See Stránský (2022).

⁶ See Stránský (2023, 44).

Sensitivity to harmony and the possibility of knowledge may, in fact, be closely related. If we take the example of the souls of mortal beings, we find that when the revolutions of the soul are broken and damaged, it fatally affects the soul's cognitive abilities and rationality.⁷ In a state like this, harmony represents the primary remedy for the soul.⁸ In other words, for the souls of mortal beings, sensitivity to harmony is one of the important prerequisites for returning (as much as possible) to their best state and thus being able to properly cognize both the intelligible and the perceptible. A possible objection might be that the discussion here is not about the souls of mortal beings but about the world soul. This point is certainly valid but given that the souls of mortal beings are mixed by the demiurge from 'what remained of the previous ingredients' (τὰ τῶν πρόσθεν υπόλοιπα) and 'somewhat the same way' (τρόπον μὲν τινα τὸν αὐτόν) (41d5–6), we may assume that both types of souls share the same basic characteristics. Sensitivity to harmony may not have the same 'remedial' purpose for the world soul since its revolutions are never broken or damaged, but it is still essential.⁹

We believe, however, that there is another reason for this condition, which is even more important from the perspective of the world soul and closely related to the constitution of the corporeal world. When we look at how the demiurge creates the world body, we find that it basically consists of the mathematization of the traces of the four elements, through which these elements themselves come into being.¹⁰ The world body, as well as the world soul, thus, possess a certain mathematical structure,¹¹ and in this respect, both entities can (in a certain sense) be considered similar. So, if the pre-Platonic principle 'like knows like' applies also in this case, we can argue that this similarity is one of the necessary conditions for the soul's ability to know the corporeal world.¹²

⁷ See passage 43e8–44b1: 'It is this very thing – and others like it – that had such dramatic effect upon the revolutions of the soul. Whenever they encounter something outside of them characterizable as *same* or *different*, they will speak of it as 'the same as' something, or as 'different from' something else when the truth is just the opposite, so proving themselves to be misled and unintelligent. Also, at this stage souls do not have a ruling orbit taking the lead. And so when certain sensations come from outside and attack them, they sweep the soul's entire vessel along with them. It is then that these revolutions, however much in control they seem to be, are actually under their control. All these disturbances are no doubt the reason why even today and not only at the beginning, whenever the soul is bound within a mortal body, it at first lacks intelligence.'

⁸ See passage 47d2–e2: 'And harmony, whose movements are akin to the orbits within our souls, is a gift of the Muses, if our dealings with them are guided by understanding, not for irrational pleasure, for which people nowadays seem to make use of it, but to serve as an ally in the fight to bring order to any orbit in our souls that has become unharmonized, and make it concordant with itself. Rhythm, too, has likewise been given us by the Muses for the same purpose, to assist us. For with most of us our condition is such that we have lost all sense of measure, and are lacking in grace.'

⁹ If, hypothetically speaking, the demiurge had not granted the world soul sensitivity to harmony, it would be, in a certain respect, less perfect than the souls of mortal beings, which would be highly inappropriate.

¹⁰ See passage 53b1–5: '[...] at the time the ordering of the universe was undertaken, fire, water, earth and air initially possessed certain traces of what they are now. They were indeed in the condition one would expect thoroughly god-forsaken things to be in. So, finding them in this natural condition, the first thing the god then did was to give them their distinctive shapes, using forms and numbers.'

¹¹ As Dicks (1985, 106) puts it: '[Plato was][c]onvinced that the whole universe operated according to mathematical laws.'

¹² Cf. Cornford (1997, 66) or Corcilius (2018, 59–60), who writes: 'Structuring the world soul according to harmonious relations can explain how the world soul can cognize such relations when it encounters them in the things in the cosmos, as the mere presence of the elements of the cosmos in the world soul, without their harmonical proportions, cannot. [...] the harmonious arrangement of the world soul's own parts provides it with an internal

The third and final condition for knowledge is that the soul must revolve in a circular motion back upon itself, i.e., engage in a uniform and undisturbed circular motion. This condition refers to passage 36c2–d7, which describes the demiurge who forms the soul into a system of concentric circles or spheres,¹³ and sets it into motion. Circular motion thus appears to be essential for the proper functioning of the soul, and the ultimate rationality of the world soul depends on this motion not being disturbed in any way. This can be observed, again, in the comparison with the souls of mortal beings whose rationality is lost as a direct consequence of their incarnation to mortal bodies that causes a radical disturbance to their circular motion.¹⁴

The Speech of the Soul (37a5–b3)

In the following passage, Timaeus describes the way in which knowledge arises in the world soul. We learn that it is through its inner speech, which consists mainly of the soul’s declarations about the sameness or difference of a particular thing in relation to other things (and presumably also in relation to the thing itself). Although this basic message is quite clear, we consider this passage to be one of the most difficult to construe in the entire dialogue and its interpretation has indeed provoked many disagreements among scholars. For these reasons, we will now attempt to analyze it in detail. To begin, let us remind the relevant text in Greek once again:

ὅταν οὐσίαν σκεδαστὴν ἔχοντός τινος ἐφάπτηται καὶ ὅταν ἀμέριστον, λέγει κινουμένη διὰ πάσης ἑαυτῆς ὅτῳ τ’ ἂν τι ταῦτόν ἤ καὶ ὅτου ἂν ἕτερον, πρὸς ὅτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὅπῃ καὶ ὅπως καὶ ὁπότε συμβαίνει κατὰ τὰ γιγνόμενά τε πρὸς ἕκαστον ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν καὶ πρὸς τὰ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντα αἰεί.

Already Proclus distinguishes between three possible ways of construing this passage, all of them making sense.¹⁵ The first possibility is to read the entire passage as one sentence, the second as two sentences, and the third as three sentences. According to the first reading, the passage tells us that the soul ‘touches’ both intelligible and corporeal things, and based on this ‘touch,’ it declares both the sameness and difference of the known thing, as well as other aspects and relations in which it is involved. The second reading, which Proclus himself endorses, ends the first sentence with the word ‘ἑαυτῆς’ (37a7), and the remainder is understood as a second sentence (into which the verb ‘λέγει’ must naturally be inserted). The difference from the first variant lies in the distinction between what the soul says about the true nature of a given thing (i.e., whether it is intelligible or corporeal) and what it says about the aspects belonging to this nature.¹⁶ The third variant ends the first sentence the same way as the previous one, the second at ‘ἕτερον’ (37b1), and the remainder is treated as a third sentence, with the verb again taken from the first sentence. This reading differentiates not only between the declarations about the true nature of the particular thing and the rest of them but further between declarations about the particular thing’s

template that will allow it, presumably on the basis of the ‘like is known by like’ principle, to recognize when there are the same, similar, or deviant arrangements in the things it encounters in the cosmos.’

¹³ The meaning of the text is not clear at this point, but we are convinced that the world soul is more plausibly understood as a system of spheres, not circles – for a more detailed exposition of this problem, see Stránský (2023, 45, n. 10).

¹⁴ See again passage 43e8–44b1 which was quoted above in n. 7.

¹⁵ See Proclus, *In Tim.* II. 302.16–17: Τρεῖς εἰσι τῶν προκειμένων τούτων λέξεων ἐξηγήσεις, λόγον ἔχουσαι πᾶσαι. For the following exposition, see Proclus, *In Tim.* II. 302.11–303.14.

¹⁶ See Proclus, *In Tim.* II. 303.8–10: διαφέρει δὲ αὕτη τῆς προτέρας, ὅτι χωρὶς μὲν τὸν περὶ τῆς οὐσίας διακρίνει λόγον, χωρὶς δὲ τὸν περὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν.

sameness or difference in relation to other beings (or itself) and declarations about its other aspects and relations.

In the context of contemporary discussions, Luc Brisson recapitulates these three possibilities and endorses the first one.¹⁷ In our translation, we mostly follow Brisson¹⁸ and we construe the clause beginning with ‘ὅτω’ as dependent on the verb ‘λέγει’ and coordinate with the clause beginning with ‘πρὸς ὅτι’ which also depends on the verb ‘λέγει.’ The terms ‘ἕκαστα’ and ‘πρὸς ἕκαστον,’ refer, in our view, to the things that the soul ‘touches’ and grasps their various mutual relations. As for the verbs ‘εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν,’ we believe that they, quite naturally, express the fact that when a particular thing is involved in certain relations, there are two possible modes of this involvement: either it somehow influences other things (i.e., acts upon them) or undergoes their influence (i.e., is being acted upon by them). The world soul, of course, has to reflect all this in its inner speech if its knowledge is to be true and complete. In sum, then, we believe that the inner speech of the world soul consists, in principle, of two different types of declarations: 1) It defines the substance (i.e., ‘what it is’) of each particular thing, declaring its sameness and difference in respect to that thing itself as well as to other particular things (for we can characterize each thing as identical with itself and different from the others).¹⁹ After specifying the substance of each thing, the soul 2) grasps various relations which pertain to it and its active or passive involvement in them. All this holds true in respect to the intelligible as well as to the corporeal.

However, there remains a major ambiguity that needs to be addressed. It is articulated in the following question, to which Timaeus does not provide an explicit answer but which, in our

¹⁷ See Brisson (1998, 342–343). As for other alternatives, a rather strange reading is offered by Cornford (1997, 94, n. 4): ‘The soul tells – (ὅτω τ’ ἄν τι ταῦτόν ἢ καὶ ὅτου ἄν ἕτερον) whatever it may be (say B) that something (A) is the same as or different from – in what respect precisely and how and in what sense and when it comes about (ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν) that it (A) is, or is qualified by, each of these terms (same and different) (πρὸς ἕκαστον) in respect of any such thing (B), either in the sphere,’ etc.’ Cornford’s reading rests on four non-obvious decisions: 1) interpreting ‘ἕκαστα’ in 37b3 as accusative referring to the pair of sameness and difference (ταῦτόν καὶ ἕτερον – 37a7–b1); 2) rendering ‘πάσχειν’ as ‘be qualified by;’ 3) interpreting the pronoun ‘τι’ in 37a7 as the subject of the phrase ‘ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν’ (37b2–3); 4) interpreting the adjective ‘ἕκαστον’ in 37b2 as the antecedent of ‘ὅτω’ in 37a7. In Cornford’s reading, thus, if we understand it correctly, the soul presupposes the mere sameness or difference of a particular thing and declares only how this occurs and what are the aspects of that thing’s being same or different or being qualified by these terms (πρὸς ὅτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὅπη καὶ ὅπως καὶ ὁπότε συμβαίνει πρὸς ἕκαστον ἕκαστα εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν – 37b1–3). For a persuasive critique of Cornford’s reading, see Brisson (1998, 344–345), as the space is limited, and it is not possible to go through all the details here. For yet another reading which can be seen as a kind of ‘middle way’ between Brisson and Cornford, see Frede (1996, 38, n. 17).

¹⁸ His translation of this passage runs as follows: ‘(B) toutes les fois qu’elle touche quoi que ce soit qui a une substance divisible et [toutes les fois qu’elle touche quoi que ce soit qui a une substance] indivisible, un mouvement la traverse tout entière et elle dit (a) à quoi un tel objet peut bien être identique et de quoi il peut bien être différent, (b) et relativement à quoi surtout et sous quel aspect et comment et à quel moment il arrive que chacun eu égard à l’autre soit et pâtisse (c) dans la sphère des êtres devenus et par rapport aux êtres immuables.’ – Brisson (1998, 340). A slightly different translation appears in Brisson (2017, 126) but the alterations are not substantial, so it is not necessary to quote it again.

¹⁹ We must, however, keep in mind the distinction between two forms of sameness and difference (i.e., the divisible and indivisible ones – see passage 35a), from which it follows: 1) The sameness and difference will not pertain to the corporeal things in the same way as they will to the intelligible ones, as anything which is corporeal is constantly in the process of change; 2) Despite this fact, it is, according to Timaeus, still possible to meaningfully declare both sameness and difference about the corporeal things. In this context, Klaus Corcilius emphasizes that the world soul has no direct or intuitive insight into the essence of the particular things as such (i.e., without regard to other things), but its cognitive activity consists in comparing the thing it cognizes with all other existing things. – see Corcilius (2018, 66–74).

opinion, cannot be avoided: Does the first type of the soul's statements also include statements about the *similarity* of a particular thing to other things, or not? Closely related to this problem is also another question: Do the soul's statements about a particular thing always operate within a single 'realm' to which that thing belongs (i.e., intelligible or corporeal), or does the inner speech of the soul also reflect relations *across* both 'realms'?²⁰

We believe that there are at least three reasons that suggest positive answers to both questions. First, the revolution of the Same is referred to in several places as the revolution of the Same and the Similar (ταὐτοῦ καὶ ὁμοίου),²¹ which may indicate a close relation between declaring sameness and similarity. Second, and more importantly, the world soul holds true opinions and firm beliefs about the corporeal world (see 37b8). But having a true opinion about the corporeal world means, among other things, understanding it as an image (εἰκῶν) of the intelligible paradigm (cf. 29a6–b2). To know the corporeal world, it is, therefore, necessary to relate it to this paradigm to which it is somehow similar. If the inner speech of the soul did not include statements about similarity, reflecting relations across both 'realms', it would not be able to grasp the corporeal world as an image of the intelligible paradigm, and thus the world soul could not hold true opinions and firm beliefs about it.²² Third, and finally, we know that all types of the soul's statements pertain to both the corporeal and the intelligible 'realm' (see 37b2–3). This, in other words, means that even regarding the intelligible entities, the soul should declare 'in relation to what especially and how and in what respect and when it comes about that any particular thing acts upon or is being acted upon by any other particular thing' (37b1–3). Even if we accept a plausible (but not self-evident) hypothesis that there are certain mutual relations between the intelligible entities, it seems inappropriate to declare also their temporal aspect (see ὅποτε at 37b1), since the intelligible does not exist in time. Nevertheless, this difficulty can be avoided if we allow for the possibility of the soul's statements across both 'realms' because in regard to relations between the intelligible entities and the corporeal things, declaring their temporal aspect makes sense.²³

Cognitive Powers of the Soul (37b3–c5)

In the previous section, we saw that the knowledge of the world soul consists of a multitude of different but interconnected declarations through which the soul comes to know both the substance of each thing and numerous relations that pertain to it. 'A speech, thus, arises, which is equally true whether it concerns the Same or the Different, and which is borne along, without sound or noise, within that which moves itself.' (λόγος δὲ ὁ κατὰ ταῦτόν ἀληθῆς γιγνόμενος περὶ τε θάτερον ὄν καὶ περὶ τὸ ταῦτόν, ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ φερόμενος ἄνευ φθόγγου καὶ ἤχῆς – 37b3–6). It is quite clear, then, that according to Timaeus, knowledge is essentially discursive. It is probably not surprising that the soul makes this speech without sound or noise, but it may not be entirely clear what Timaeus means by saying that it is equally true whether it concerns 'the Same' and 'the Different'. This may, quite obviously, mean that the

²⁰ Both these important questions are also addressed by Moural (2012, 145–146).

²¹ See passages 36d1, 39b7–c1, 40b1–2, 42c4–5.

²² Cf. Karfik (2007, 109–111).

²³ This, however, brings along a rather non-obvious consequence: understanding the intelligible will not be complete if we do not also grasp it as a model for the corporeal world, i.e., we must also take into account its *paradigmatic* aspect. Of course, on an ontological level, this assertion does not deny the absolute independence and self-sufficiency of the intelligible entities. From an epistemological perspective, however, it seems important to relate to the intelligible not only in its separateness but also as a paradigm for the corporeal world.

world soul correctly declares both the sameness (or similarity) and difference of the given thing in relation to itself and other things.²⁴ It is not clear, however, why Timaeus should explicitly emphasize this fact, as there is no reason to think that the opposite possibility (i.e., that the world soul correctly declares only the sameness or only difference) would ever occur to the reader of the dialogue. Another rather tentative possibility is that by ‘the Same’, Timaeus means the intelligible, while by ‘the Different’ he means the corporeal, and he thus asserts that the speech of the soul is equally true whether it concerns entities of one ‘realm’ or the other. We can support this suggestion by claiming that although both sameness and difference manifestly pertain to both ‘realms’, the role of sameness is more dominant among the intelligible entities (as each Platonic form is always identical with itself in a strong sense) while the role of difference is more dominant among corporeal things (as each thing undergoes a process of change, being identical with itself only in a much weaker sense).²⁵

Timaeus, then, informs us of how exactly this inner speech arises. ‘Whenever it concerns the perceptible, and the revolution of the Different moves correctly and transmits [it] to its whole soul, true opinions and firm beliefs arise.’ (ὅταν μὲν περὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν γίγνηται καὶ ὁ τοῦ θατέρου κύκλος ὀρθὸς ἰὼν εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ²⁶ τὴν ψυχὴν διαγγείλη, δόξαι καὶ πίστεις γίνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς – 37b6–8).²⁷ ‘But whenever it concerns the intelligible, and the revolution of the Same runs well and reveals them [i.e. the intelligible beings], understanding and knowledge necessarily result.’ (ὅταν δὲ αὖ περὶ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἦ καὶ ὁ τοῦ ταύτου κύκλος εὐτροχος ὢν αὐτὰ μηνύσῃ, νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποτελεῖται – 37c1–3).

We believe that this section contains a certain tension. On the one hand, Timaeus claims that the individual cognitive powers pertain to the whole soul (δόξα and πίστις are said to do so in 37b7–8, and while in the case of νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη this is not mentioned explicitly, there is no reason to assume that it does not apply to them as well). On the other hand, it seems that the revolutions of the soul are at least to some extent specialized. When knowing the perceptible, the correct operation of the revolution of the Different is important, whereas when knowing the intelligible,

²⁴ See for example Cornford (1997, 96–97), Brisson (1998, 347–348) or Robinson (1995, 80).

²⁵ Cf. Stránský (2022, 468, n. 35).

²⁶ The meaning of the pronoun αὐτοῦ here is not entirely clear, and some scholars have proposed textual emendations. See, for instance, Archer-Hind (1888, 117), who reads αὐτὰ instead of αὐτοῦ, thus creating a parallel with the same pronoun in 37c2. This option makes good sense, as both pronouns could then refer to the objects that the soul ‘touches’ and cognizes, first within the corporeal, and then within the intelligible ‘realm’. However, since all extant manuscripts contain the form αὐτοῦ, we should try to find a different solution. This problem is already reflected by Proclus, who notes that the pronoun can be interpreted variously (πολλαχῶς), and he himself interprets it as standing in for λόγος (see Proclus, *In Tim.*, II. 311.30–33). A more plausible interpretation, however, seems to be to relate it to the closely preceding phrase ὁ τοῦ θατέρου κύκλος, as many scholars do – see, for example, Cornford (1997, 95), Robinson (1995, 81) or Martin (1841, 49). A rare criticism of both this and Proclus’ reading is advanced by Alfred Taylor, who argues that it would be strange to speak of the ‘soul of the logos’ or the ‘soul of the circle of difference,’ and he, therefore, suggests interpreting αὐτοῦ as standing in for οὐρανοῦ, since the entire passage deals with the soul of the world – see Taylor (1928, 180–181). This interpretation, again, makes sense, but from a textual perspective, it seems less likely given the absence of the term οὐρανός in the entire passage under discussion. Taylor is quite right in noting that speaking of the soul of the revolution of the Different, which is itself part of this soul, seems somewhat odd, but if we understand the phrase ‘its soul’ (ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ) as meaning ‘the soul in which this revolution belongs,’ it seems reasonable enough.

²⁷ We construe the phrase δόξαι καὶ πίστεις γίνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς chiasmatically (cf. Archer-Hind 1888, 117 or Karfík 2007, 110), though of course it cannot be ruled out that both adjectives apply to each of the nouns, and thus both opinions and beliefs are firm and true. However, this minor detail does not significantly alter the overall meaning of this passage.

the revolution of the Same must run properly. So, the question is: Do different types of knowledge pertain to different revolutions of the soul (i.e., δόξα and πίστις to the revolution of the Different and νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη to the revolution of the Same), or do all these cognitive acts always belong to the whole soul, meaning that its revolutions are not, in fact, specialized, or is there some other possibility?

Josef Moural also points to this tension, arguing that the text in question may not require any specialization at all and, moreover, that the strong specialization theory brings about absurd consequences since it is necessary to predicate sameness also in regard to the perceptible and difference in regard to the intelligible.²⁸ We find the claim that the text may not require any specialization at all problematic and we believe that the above-quoted passage 37b6–c6 quite explicitly contains at least what Moural calls a ‘quasi-specialization’.²⁹ On the other hand, it is undoubtedly true that the predication of both sameness and difference is necessary for true knowledge of the perceptible as well as of the intelligible, which means that the revolutions cannot be strongly specialized in the way in which Moural conceives it. A possible solution could be to accept the concept of quasi-specialization and argue that, due to the prominence of sameness among the intelligible entities and of difference among the corporeal things, the correct functioning of one of the revolutions is always crucial, while its cooperation with the other revolution is also needed but of secondary importance.

However, we find this solution rather unconvincing for several reasons. First, even this reading leads to the conclusion that for true knowledge, the correct functioning and cooperation of both revolutions is necessary (even if one should play a more important role). Thus, it is not clear why Timaeus shall consider it necessary to explicitly emphasize the dominant role of one of them. Second, even if we accept the thesis about the prominence of sameness in the intelligible and of difference in the corporeal ‘realm’, it would be clear that defining each particular substance (whether corporeal or intelligible) requires declaring its sameness with itself and difference from the others. The correct functioning of both circles would, therefore, be practically *equally important* in both cases. We thus believe that even the quasi-specialization theory does not allow us to fully understand the passage in question.

A different and quite interesting (and almost ‘Aristotelian’) solution that aims to preserve the strong specialization theory is proposed by Francesco Fronterotta. According to him, the regular and uniform motion of the revolution of the Same allows the intelligible entities to be properly ‘imprinted’ into it, and the soul, according to the principle of the identity of the knower and the known, identifies with the particular intelligible object and νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη thereby emerge. On the other hand, since the revolution of the Different, which is five times divided, does not possess such regular and uniform motion, it clashes violently with its objects of knowledge. As a result, no mutual identity is formed between the soul and the corporeal world, making only δόξα and πίστεις possible.³⁰ It seems to us, however, that Fronterotta completely ignores the discursivity of knowledge. As we have already seen, the world soul comes to know various objects via an inner speech that consists in declaring their sameness and difference, as well as different relations in which that object participates. Nowhere does Timaeus suggest that the soul identifies (to a greater or lesser extent) with the objects of its knowledge.

²⁸ Moural (2012, 143, 147–149).

²⁹ See Moural (2012, 147).

³⁰ See Fronterotta (2007, 120–121).

Let us, nevertheless, reconsider the question of whether the theory of a strong specialization, granted that we accept the discursive character of knowledge, really brings about absurd consequences, as Moural claims. We believe that Timaeus does indeed hold the strong specialization theory, but the consequences are absurd only if we accept a certain assumption that underlies Moural's interpretation. The assumption being that the function of the revolution of the Same is to predicate *only* sameness (or similarity) and the function of the revolution of the Different is to predicate *only* difference. Given how Timaeus labels the revolutions, this supposition seems reasonable, yet apart from this fact, nothing else supports it. On the contrary, in the preceding passage (see 35a ff.), we have seen that the entire original mixture from which the demiurge created the soul was made of the intermediate kinds of being, sameness, and difference. After being divided into harmonic intervals, the demiurge longitudinally cut it into two parts, folded them into the shape of the letter *Chi*, and by joining the ends together, created the spherical soul. The key message here is that both the revolution of the Same and the revolution of the Different are composed of being, sameness, and difference. In other words, both revolutions are made from the same mixture, and both, therefore, have a share in sameness as well as in difference.

We, thus, see no sufficient reason to assume that the revolution of the Same declares only sameness (or similarity) and the revolution of the Different only difference or, more generally, that each of the revolutions conducts its own independent inner speech.³¹ So, one can support, in our opinion, the strong specialization theory while at the same time avoiding the absurdity pointed out by Moural. But, still, we may ask: Why do the revolutions need to be specialized at all? Why is it not simply the whole soul that approaches both the intelligible and the perceptible? The answer lies, as we see it, in the different nature of the intelligible and the perceptible and, correspondingly, in the different motions of the revolution of the Same and the Different, the assumption being that through its motion, the soul can approximate (and therefore 'touch') the nature of the object it cognizes.³² It is by the simple, uniform, and regular circular motion of the revolution of the Same that the soul approximates the immutability and changelessness of the intelligible entities (cf. 34a1–3 where this motion is associated with *voũc*), whereas through also circular but various motions of the divided revolution of the Different, the soul approximates the manifold movements of the corporeal world (cf. 43b2–4). Plainly, the world soul still retains its intermediate position and circular motion, not identifying with either the motionlessness of the intelligible or the non-circular movements of the corporeality, but, nevertheless, due to the specific motion of both its revolutions, it becomes capable of 'touching' and knowing these two types of being.³³

Accordingly, we believe that Timaeus has good reasons for maintaining the strong specialization theory. And yet, this in no way denies the fact that inner speech and cognitive acts belong to the whole soul and not just to its parts. Through the revolution of the Different, the soul does indeed

³¹ Cf. Corcilius (2018, 79–81), who also claims that the whole soul leads only *one speech* and examines in detail the significance of the verbs *διαγγέλλειν* and *μηνύειν* (37b8 and c2). In his opinion, both revolutions function more like 'messengers' who transmit certain information without understanding. The revolutions of the soul as such, therefore, do not possess knowledge any more than, for instance, the movements of certain bodily particles caused by perception, which likewise inform (*ἐξαγγείλη* – 64b6) the rational soul about the character of the stimulus that exerted an influence (*τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὴν δύναμιν* – 64b6).

³² Cf. Karfík (2004, 197–198).

³³ Cf. Stránský (2023, 46–48).

‘touch’ the corporeal world, but only when it ‘transmits [it] to its whole soul’ (εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν διαγγεῖλη – 37b7–8), ‘true opinions and firm beliefs arise’ (δόξαι καὶ πίστεις γίνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς – 37b8). Neither δόξαι nor πίστεις thus belong exclusively to the revolution of the Different but to the whole soul. As we mentioned earlier, Timaeus does not say the same explicitly about the revolution of the Same, but we, nevertheless, believe that something very similar holds true also in this case. When the soul ‘touches’ the intelligible entities and the revolution of the Same ‘reveals them’ (αὐτὰ μηνύσῃ – 37c2), ‘understanding and knowledge necessarily result’ (νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποτελεῖται – 37c2–3) (again, as we see it, in the whole soul). Despite the difference between and specialization of the revolutions, it would, therefore, be incorrect to think of the soul as composed of two (or more) distinct and largely autonomous parts.

In the concluding sentence of the passage in question, Timaeus informs us that ‘If anyone were to claim that these two arise in something other than the soul, he would speak anything but the truth.’ (τούτω³⁴ δὲ ἐν ᾧ τῶν ὄντων ἐγγίγνεσθον, ἂν ποτέ τις αὐτὸ ἄλλο πλὴν ψυχὴν εἴπῃ, πᾶν μᾶλλον ἢ τάληθές ἐρεῖ – 37c3–5). This sentence has often been analyzed in the context of the question of whether νοῦς, according to Plato, can and does exist separately or whether it can arise only in the soul,³⁵ but this inquiry plainly lies outside the scope of the present paper.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have dealt with the problem of cognition of the world soul based on a detailed analysis of passage 37a2–c5 from Plato’s *Timaeus*. First, we demonstrated how closely it is related to Timaeus’ preceding exposition, as three conditions have to be met for the soul’s cognitive powers to function correctly. It has to be 1) mixed from (the intermediate kinds of) being, sameness, and difference; 2) divided and bound together according to a proportion, and 3) set into a uniform circular motion. If this is so, an inner speech can arise in the soul based on its ‘touching’ the intelligible as well as the perceptible objects. The cognition of the world soul, therefore, turned out to be essentially discursive. As we showed in the second part of this study, the inner speech consists of two different types of declarations. First, the soul declares mere sameness (or similarity) and difference of the particular object, both in relation to the object itself and to the others, thus revealing what that object is (i.e., its substance). Second, it declares various relations that pertain to that object and its active or passive involvement in them. All this gives rise to specific cognitive states in the soul. Thus, in the third part, we explained how exactly this happens. We mainly dealt with the question of specialization of the revolutions of the soul, embracing, in the end, a so-called strong specialization theory. We argued that the soul approximates, and therefore ‘touches’, both the nature of the corporeal realm (through its revolution of the Different) as well as the nature of the intelligible one (through its revolution of the Same). This ‘touch’ gives rise to specific cognitive states (i.e. δόξαι, πίστεις, νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη) that, however, always belong to the whole soul, not just one of its revolutions. The

³⁴ It is not entirely clear what this dual refers to. Grammatically, it could be referring to the two most recently mentioned cognitive acts, namely νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη, or to the two types of knowledge, that is δόξαι and πίστεις on one hand, and νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη on the other. In terms of the overall meaning of the passage we consider the second option more likely, as it is not clear why Timaeus would emphasize that just νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη arise only in soul, when δόξαι and πίστεις obviously do so as well.

³⁵ For a view that it does exist separately, see Hackforth (1936) or Menn (1995), for an opposite view that it does not, see Cherniss (1944) or van Riel (2013).

world soul, thus, conducts a single but incredibly complex inner speech that allows it to correctly cognize both the corporeal and the intelligible.

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