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The Myth of Cronus in Plato's *Statesman*: Cosmic Rotation and Earthly Correspondence

<https://doi.org/10.1515/apeiron-2017-0047>

Abstract: The cosmological myth in Plato's *Statesman* has generated several longstanding scholarly disputes, among them a controversy concerning the number and nature of the cosmic rotation cycles that it depicts. According to the standard interpretation, there are two cycles of rotation: west-to-east rotation occurs during the age of Cronus, and east-to-west rotation occurs during the age of Zeus, which is also our present era. Recent readings have challenged this two-cycle interpretation, arguing that the period of rotation opposed to our own is governed neither by Cronus nor by Zeus, but is instead a separate rotational cycle during which chaos reigns before a divine ruler reestablishes control. We introduce a new constraint on any plausible interpretation of the myth. According to the *Correspondence Principle*, changes in fundamental cyclical processes that shape the way of life on earth (mode of generation, growth, aging, and mode of death) occur if and only if there is a change in the direction of cosmic rotation. We use the *Correspondence Principle* to defend a version of the standard two-cycle interpretation.

Keywords: Statesman, Plato, Myth of Cronus, cosmology

The cosmological myth in Plato's *Statesman* has generated several longstanding scholarly disputes, among them a controversy concerning the number and nature of the cosmic rotation cycles that it depicts. According to the standard interpretation,¹ there are two cycles of rotation: west-to-east rotation occurs

1 See, e. g., Diès (1935), Cornford (1937), Skemp (1952), Ferrari (1995), McCabe (1997), Lane (1998), Kahn (2009), Marquez (2012).

We are grateful to Emily Austin, Rachel Parsons and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments. This paper originates from our discussions of the myth with Beba Cibralic and Priyanka Fouda.

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during the age of Cronus, and east-to-west rotation occurs during the age of Zeus, which is also our present era. Recent readings have challenged this two-cycle interpretation, arguing that the period of rotation opposed to our own is governed neither by Cronus nor by Zeus, but is instead a separate rotational period during which chaos reigns before a divine ruler reestablishes control.² According to these recent three-cycle readings, we cannot, at present, be in a godless era, for the necessary degradation of the cosmos and everything therein would render politics futile. We introduce a new constraint on any plausible interpretation of the myth. According to the *Correspondence Principle*, changes in fundamental cyclical processes that shape the way of life on earth (mode of generation, growth, aging, and mode of death) occur if and only if there is a change in the direction of cosmic rotation. We use the *Correspondence Principle* to defend a version of the standard two-cycle interpretation. Contrary to three-cycle interpretations, the absence of close divine governance, far from making politics moot, allows for and necessitates political activity.

The Myth of Cronus, as presented in the *Statesman*,³ provides an account of divine influence on the directional rotation of the cosmos and the corresponding conditions on earth in order, in part, to expose the errors that the authoritative Eleatic Stranger and Young Socrates have made in the preceding account (274e1-3).⁴ Their discussion aims to isolate the true statesman, and the myth constitutes another starting point (ἄλλης ἀρχῆς, 268d5) and a different road (ἐτέραν ὁδόν, 268d5) towards that end.⁵ At the conclusion of the tale, the Eleatic Stranger explains two mistakes that the myth revealed in the previous account: the account confused the divine shepherd of the age of Cronus with the statesman of the current era, and it was neither complete nor clear

² Brisson (1995), Carone (2005), and Rowe (1995) are the central proponents of readings that involve more than two rotational cycles. While Brisson and Rowe differ in many details of their interpretations, both espouse three-cycle views (Brisson (1995, 353, 358–60), Rowe (1995, 189)). Carone's position is somewhat less clear, as her reconstruction follows the order of the myth's narrative, though she seems to hypothesize five cycles or periods (2005, 244 n. 37), and it is doubtful whether she thinks the cycles are repeating (2005, 127). For our purposes, Carone's reading is like three-cycle readings; the arguments she provides against the standard two-cycle reading are largely the same.

³ Plato offers a different, shorter version of the Myth of Cronus at *Laws* 713b-714a; our focus is the version in the *Statesman*.

⁴ We rely throughout on the latest edition of the Oxford Classical Text for the Greek (Duke et al. 1995).

⁵ Cf. 269c1-3, 275b1-7.

(274e9-275a6). That we have to apply our reasoning (λογισμός, 270b3) in order to understand the cause (αἴτιον 269b9, 270b3) of the myriad changes in the cosmos and on earth, and that the Eleatic Stranger draws upon the myth in the subsequent discussion, notably as an example of a model,⁶ further attest to the importance of the Myth of Cronus within the dialogue as a whole. We ought, then, to take seriously the content of the myth, and the two opposing modes of coming-to-be (γένεσις) that it depicts.⁷

I The Myth of Cronus

According to the two-cycle view we defend, when Cronus comes to be in charge of ruling and rotating the cosmos, altering its course from the current direction of rotation to the opposite direction (henceforth, ‘reversed’ rotation),⁸ a number of changes occur on earth: the old grow younger until they dissolve into nothing (270d3), people are born from the earth rather than through sexual reproduction (271a-c), and everyone is free from need, strife, war, and dissent, due to the

6 At 277b the Eleatic Stranger includes the myth as one of the ‘great models’ (μεγάλα παραδείγματα, 277b4), but criticizes its length, lamenting that they were forced to use more than they should. He returns to this worry about the myth’s length at 286b6-c4, however, suggesting that it was not excessive after all.

7 We do not take a stand on either the literalness of the myth, as history and cosmology, or the extent to which the myth should be consistent with Plato’s cosmology in the *Timaeus*. Carone argues expressly for a literal reading (2005, 127–9), while most interpretations have instead favored non-literal readings (see, e.g., Vidal-Naquet (1978, 137), Brisson (1995, 360–1), Rowe (1995b, 13)). Rowe states: “The impressive cosmological myth in the *Politicus* gives a kind of pseudo-history of the universe, which is actually a way of describing different aspects of its present state” (2005, 239) (cf. Rowe (1996, 160 n. 17), Diès (1935, xli), and Skemp (1952, 89, 103)). And most commentators do not treat the cosmology of the myth as a wholly serious piece of Platonic cosmology, given the divergence with the model in the *Timaeus*.

8 From 269c-270a the Eleatic Stranger introduces the two opposing rotational cycles, characterizing the cycle that is not accompanied by god as moving in ‘reverse’ or ‘backwards’ (ἀνὰ πάλιν, 269d2, 270a7). But of course the term is relational; it is thus misleading to assign ‘reverse’ rotation as a fixed term to one of the two opposing cycles of rotation. However, it will be helpful for consistently tracking the two cycles. We use ‘reverse’ rotation to describe the rotational direction opposite our own. If we were to adopt the assignment of ‘forward’ and ‘reverse’ from the Eleatic Stranger’s initial specifications, our current era would be a ‘reverse’ cycle, for it is godless and self-moving. But, more often, the Eleatic Stranger uses other terms to describe the opposition (e.g., ἐνὶ τάναντία, 270b8). We need not suppose that there is any trouble with moving in ‘reverse’ referring to one direction of motion at 269c-270a and a different direction of motion in 270bff (pace Rowe (1995, 189)).

personalized nurture of divine spirits (271d-e). Conversely, when the cosmos reverts to its present day rotation, moving under its own power, people age from young to old, eventually dying and returning to the earth (273e12-13), humans reproduce sexually, performing the functions of begetting, birthing and rearing of their own accord (274a1-274b1), and life on earth is rife with difficulty (274b6-c5).

The Eleatic Stranger's language throughout the myth underscores the explicit causal connection between the direction of cosmic rotation and earthly phenomena, supporting the interentailment of a number of macrocosmic and microcosmic phenomena. We call this connection between macrocosm and microcosm the *Correspondence Principle*. In his introduction of the myth, the Eleatic Stranger attributes the changing in the setting and rising of the sun and the other stars (269a), the kingship exercised by Cronus (269a7-8), and the reproduction of men from the earth rather than via sexual reproduction (269b2-3) to the same *pathos*. Identifying the *pathos* that is responsible for these changes, the Eleatic Stranger explains that the movement of the universe "now in the direction of its present rotation, now in the opposite direction"⁹ is the cause (αἴτιον) of astonishing events on earth (270b3-5), and, when the cosmos experiences great changes, "we must therefore suppose that the greatest changes also come to be at that time for us who live within the universe" (μεγίστας τοίνυν καὶ μεταβολὰς χρή νομίζειν γίγνεσθαι τότε τοῖς ἐντὸς ἡμῶν οἰκοῦσιν αὐτοῦ, 270c4-5). These changes initially include widespread destruction, since living things do not tolerate massive changes well. During the opposing rotation cycle that follows, humans age from old to young "in accordance with the retrogradation of the universe" (270d3-4). And the mode of coming-into-being changes from sexual reproduction to resurrection from the earth "following the reversal of things" (271b7-9).

Once the earthborn race have completed their allotted number of births, rotation shifts again, as Cronus retires from his post as the steersman (272e). Cosmic rotation returns to the current direction, which "leads to the sort of coming-into-being (γένεσις) which obtains now" and things on earth also changed, "imitating and following on the condition of the universe" (273e8-274a1). Unlike the previous era when god tended to human beings so that they had neither spouses nor children (272a1), the present era is characterized by human beings' self-sufficiency from god with respect to their mode of

⁹ Translations are heavily informed by Rowe (1995), with occasional modifications. Translations of other dialogues are from Cooper (ed.) (1997).

generation. This change in reproduction is appropriate since, as the Eleatic Stranger notes, self-sufficiency in the mode of reproduction on earth parallels the universe's self-sustained motion (274a4-9). Rather than living under divine care, humans must be self-reliant, "just like the cosmos as a whole, which we imitate and follow for all time" (274d5-e1).

The myth proves difficult to follow because the narrative skips around as the Eleatic Stranger, generating his own story, weaves together elements from the three established myths to which he refers briefly at 269a-b: the myth of Atreus and Thyestes, the tale of the Golden Age of Cronus, and the story of ancients who were born from the earth.¹⁰ The Eleatic Stranger oscillates back and forth between describing two different cycles or periods, each of which has its own course of time. During each of these cycles, there are different processes on both the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, further complicating the story as the Eleatic Stranger switches between both the two eras and the two levels of description. It is crucial to keep distinct the progression of the narrative, on the one hand, and the progression both of and within the two alternating cycles within the narrative, on the other.¹¹ The "end of everything" (τέλος πάντων, 273e5), at which point Cronus saves the cosmos, returning to guide it again, is the chronological end of the story, but it is not the end of the myth (which does not occur until 274e1).¹² The myth culminates in the present era with the Eleatic Stranger's report of humans caring for themselves with help of technology, but he later intimates that the myth lacked an end (τέλος, 277b7).

II Establishing the Correspondence Principle

Many scholarly interpretations of the cosmic rotations in the myth acknowledge the causal relationship between the direction of cosmic rotation and some

¹⁰ Though we find elements of each of these stories woven into the Eleatic Stranger's myth, we should not expect the myth to be wholly faithful to each story. As Marquez argues, there are two broad themes in all three myths (2012, 129–130). First, we might see them as political 'origin' myths. Second, they all clearly distinguish a 'before' and an 'after', which supports a two-cycle interpretation. On Plato's use of Hesiod, see Van Noorden (2014).

¹¹ Van Noorden stresses the discord between the narrative structure and the narrative order within content of the story: "The Eleatic Stranger's insistence on 'moving onward' to the goal (τέλος) of his own account (i. e., the one functional to the immediate, dialectical context) keeps it ostentatiously unsynchronized with the cosmic cycles he is describing" (2014, 147) (cf. McCabe (2000, 148 n. 38)).

¹² Indeed, some translators take "τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τέλος πάντων εἴρηται" (273e4-5) this way: "so now the whole tale is told" (Fowler and Lamb (1975, 65)).

aspects of life on earth.¹³ Indeed, it would be hard not to endorse some version of correspondence given the repeated claim that microcosmic processes imitate and follow the cosmos (273e8-274a1, 274d5-e1). However, these competing views differ with respect to how they specify the relevant correspondence, and so with respect to whether correspondence tells in favor of a two-cycle reading. There are, for instance, prominent three-cycle interpretations that recognize some version of correspondence. Clarifying the scope of the *Correspondence Principle* will help, centrally, to adjudicate the dispute over the number of rotational periods.

Carone presents a detailed and nuanced reading of the cycles of cosmic rotation. According to her account, the first phase of reverse rotation (270b10-271b3) involves earthborn humans aging from old to young until they disappear. She takes 271b3 to mark a transition from a period of autocratic reverse rotation to a period of Cronus-controlled forward rotation (271b4-c2), during which a different set of earthborn people grow from young to old, springing up from the earth like plants (272e3), and humans are free from suffering. A second phase of reverse rotation (272d6-273d4), following the Golden Age of Cronus, sees the earthly events mirror those of the first reversal. Finally, Zeus seizes control of the cosmos and returns it to forward rotation. Humans age from young to old and reproduce sexually in this era (273e6-274e1). On Carone's interpretation, then, two periods of the same forward direction of rotation involve disparate means of generation: during the first period of forward rotation (the age of Cronus), people are earth-born, but during the present period of forward rotation (the age of Zeus), people come to be through sexual reproduction (2005, 135–9). And yet Carone stipulates: "It is essential to bear in mind that in the myth the microcosmic events follow the same direction as that of the cosmos" (2005, 134).¹⁴

Rowe and Brisson also adopt three-cycle readings, and their views admit correspondence between the direction of aging on the earth and the direction of cosmic rotation while leaving out, like Carone, mode of generation as one of the features that must correspond. All of these readings that posit more than two cycles therefore share the following two important similarities. First, they dissociate mode of generation from the rest of the earthly phenomena impacted by

¹³ Brisson (1995), Rowe (1995), Ferrari (1995), McCabe (1997), Lane (1998), Carone (2005), Kahn (2009), Marquez (2012).

¹⁴ Cf. Carone's claim that "[w]ith its emphasis on the close connection between macro- and microcosm, the myth tells us that the direction of ageing of individuals follows the direction of the cosmos" (2005, 131).

cosmic rotational direction. There are thus two different races of earthborn humans, one set of which ages 'backwards' during a period of reversal and destruction, the other of which ages in our current direction during the time of Cronus.¹⁵ Second, the direction of cosmic rotation is the same 'forward' rotation in the period ruled by Cronus and the current period, in relation to which Zeus is the assigned deity. The notion that we are now in a godless era, in which the cosmos is necessarily moving by itself towards chaos, has struck interpreters as problematic, given Plato's teleological and theological commitments. We return to this second issue in Section IV.

The crux of the argument for thinking that the Eleatic Stranger divorces mode of generation from the direction of cosmic rotation, and the concomitant change in the direction of aging on earth, comes from the claim at 272e3 that, during the time of Cronus, souls fell "into the earth as seeds" (εἰς γῆν σπέρματα). The image of seeds suggests, according to Carone (2005, 131–2) and Rowe (1995, 194), that babies will be born from the earth, sprouting up like plants, and maturing under Cronus' nurture into adults. These earthborn babies stand in contrast to the description of the geriatric earthborn, who age in reverse, appearing younger and smaller with time, and eventually disappearing (270e, 273e).¹⁶ However, the language of souls returning to the earth as seeds is compatible with the emergence of grown human bodies from the earth. Carone considers this option, but argues in reply that, at the end of the process of reverse aging, nothing falls into the ground at all: the language of disappearance in the description of the geriatric earthborn precludes the Eleatic Stranger's claim about seeds returning to the earth applying to these earthborn people (2005, 132, 140). Carone is right that nothing visible literally falls into the earth, but *souls* returning to the earth to animate their next earthborn bodies would not be visible.

¹⁵ Rowe explains, "in the reversed cosmos people are re-born from the earth as adults, so in the age of Kronos they are reborn as babies – and it is a different kind of rebirth" (1995, 193).

¹⁶ There seems to be a secondary consideration as well for supposing that the age of Cronus should not be identified with 'reverse' cosmic motion: aging backwards, as it were, is undesirable, and so hardly fitting for the Golden Age. Rowe, e. g., points out that, "In Hesiod, as it happens, the birth of grey-haired babies is part of a nightmare of a future, iron, age of decadence" (1995, 192). But we need not think that aging in the opposite direction carries a negative valence in the context of the Eleatic Stranger's myth, for his myth does not adhere strictly to any of the three background stories upon which it draws. Moreover, other scholars have found reverse aging fitting for an idyllic era (e. g., Kahn describes it as, "the picturesque story of old men melting back into babies" (2009, 152)).

The Eleatic Stranger's focus at 270e and 273e is different from that at 272e3; that is, he offers two different sorts of accounts of the earthborn, but these disparate kinds of description do not reflect a difference in the nature of the earthborn themselves. There is a single race of earthborn humans throughout. At 270e-271c, the Eleatic Stranger wants to impress upon Young Socrates the many wondrous changes that occur during the period of rotation that opposes ours. At this stage in the story, the only change that has been introduced is the cosmic change from one rotational cycle to the next; the Eleatic Stranger now turns to explain the ramifications of the new cosmic order for living things on earth. First, from 270d-e, he describes the new process of aging that results, terminating in a different kind of death, and then he offers a complementary account of the mode of birth at 271a, weaving in, for the first time, the tale of the earthborn that he introduced briefly at 269b. As time proceeds on an opposite course, so too humans grow younger 'to look at' (ἰδεῖν, 270d9).¹⁷ They do not, of course, in fact grow younger, since aging itself is a simply function of the passage of time, and temporal progression continues, albeit in the opposite direction. The point is that the *visible* markers that we now associate with growing older will reverse as people 'age', and humans during that rotational period eventually become so small that we can no longer see them. They die by disappearance. The focus of 270e is thus on the *observable* changes that occur on earth.¹⁸

When the Eleatic Stranger explains at 273e what happens on earth when the cosmos returns to the present cycle of rotation, he similarly describes the reversal of processes that one would witness on earth at the transition. The animals which were close to disappearing stopped shrinking and began to grow larger, and the ones that had recently sprung from the earth exhibiting the signs that, from our perspective, represent old age, soon died and passed below the earth again (273e10-11). By contrast, the passage at 272e in which the Eleatic Stranger refers to souls as seeds occurs in a different explanatory context and does not portray observable phenomena. Instead of explaining the changes on earth that result from cosmic change, the Eleatic Stranger is explaining how cosmic change itself comes to be: why does Cronus, the metaphorical captain of the universe, stop steering? The answer seems to be that the earthborn race had been used up, and the process by which this generative cycling occurs involves

¹⁷ Rowe makes much of the distinction implied by the exegetic infinitive: "it is not that they stopped getting older, only that they kept *looking* younger" (1995, 190).

¹⁸ The focus of 270e is on what is observable because these are the features that are captured in the memories of our earliest ancestors, who serve as witnesses of the preceding era (271a8-b2).

souls falling into the earth as seeds, presumably to animate corpses from the previous rotational cycle. Indeed, though the Eleatic Stranger does not make it explicit, it would make sense if souls fall to earth as seeds to animate new bodies precisely when the visible bodies to which they have been attached disappear. Bodies are put back together again and given life by the earth (271b4-8, 272a1). Once every soul has animated its allotted number of bodies,¹⁹ Cronus must release control of the cosmos. Of course, we cannot see the souls giving life to bodies, just as we cannot observe Cronus letting go of the cosmos, though both of these invisible, intelligible occurrences explain what we can see.

Further examination of 270e-271a tells in favor of correspondence between the nature of generation, on the one hand, and the direction of aging and cosmic rotation, on the other. For one thing, the overall progression of this section of the myth supports a close connection between mode of destruction and mode of generation. The Eleatic Stranger first relates the reversal of apparent aging and destruction by disappearance, prompting Young Socrates to ask about the complementary natural phenomenon: “But then, Stranger, how did animals come into being (γένεσις) then? How were they begotten (ἐγεννώντο) of one another?” (271a3-4) In response, the Eleatic Stranger denies that reproduction during that period of rotation was in the nature of things (οὐκ ἦν ἐν τῇ τότε φύσει, 271a5-6), and then goes on to explain how, instead, humans sprang from the earth.

For another, the specific language that the Eleatic Stranger uses in responding to Young Socrates's question indicates strong causal concordance. The Eleatic Stranger states:

“For I think we must reflect on the consequence [of what we have said] (τὸ γὰρ ἐντεῦθεν οἷμαι χρὴ συννοεῖν). If old men went back to being children, it follows (ἐπόμενον) that people should be put together again, there in the earth, and come back to life; they would be following the reversal of things, with coming-into-being turning round with it to the opposite direction (ἐπεσθαι τῇ τροπῇ συνανακυκλουμένης εἰς τάναντία τῆς γενέσεως), and since (δὴ) they would according to this argument necessarily (κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἐξ ἀνάγκης) come into existence as earthborn, they would thus acquire that name and have that account given of them ...” (271b4-c1)

¹⁹ Marquez argues that the appropriate measure consists in a ratio of soul to body in the universe. Cronus releases the cosmos when each soul has completed cycling back through each of the bodies that it animated during the prior forward cycle, save one, purifying the universe by reducing the amount of body in it (2012, 138–143).

The fact that humans must come to be from the earth can be inferred from the fact of their regression to childhood, once we reflect on it. Because the visible effects of aging are themselves, from our rotational period's perspective, proceeding in reverse, following the cosmic direction of rotation, there must be another, corresponding way that humans come to be. The Eleatic Stranger has already made clear that the direction of aging follows the direction of cosmic rotation; this correspondence is not disputed. Now, the Eleatic Stranger infers here, from the direction of aging, a different mode of generation. Depending on how one understands 'ἐπεσθαι τῇ τροπῇ συνανακυκλουμένης εἰς τάναντία τῆς γενέσεως' (271b7-8) – in particular, whether *genesis* includes not only mode of generation, but the direction of aging – there may be room for thinking that, while aging in the opposite direction entails a different mode of generation, being born from the earth does not entail aging in our current direction. Indeed, three cycle readings turn on precisely this possibility.

However, first, the most natural way of reading the reversal described at 271b7-8 is as referring not to the textually proximate turning back of aging– the Eleatic Stranger has already linked coming to life from the earth with old men returning to childhood in 271b5-6. Rather, the reference is to the palintropic cycling which the ES earlier labeled the cause of all of these phenomena. Second, the Eleatic Stranger presents the connection between mode of generation and direction of visible aging in the opposite order at 273e, supporting their interentailment: "When the cosmos had been turned back again on the course that leads to the sort of coming-into-being which obtains now, the movement of the ages of living creatures once again stopped and produced new effects which were the opposite of what previously occurred (στρεφθέντος γὰρ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου τὴν ἐπὶ τὴν νῦν γένεσιν ὁδὸν τὸ τῆς ἡλικίας αὐτὸ πάλιν ἴστατο καὶ καινὰ τάναντία ἀπεδίδου τοῖς τότε)." Because the Eleatic Stranger separates *genesis* explicitly from aging, *genesis* cannot refer more broadly to all human processes of development; the Eleatic Stranger is referring to the mode of generation (reproduction) that obtains during our present era and necessarily corresponds with aging. Again, a proponent of a three-cycle view might argue that the correspondence between reproduction and aging in our current rotational period does not establish their *necessary* correspondence. But it would be quite strange if the turning of the cosmos *did* determine the mode of generation, direction of development, and mode of death in both our present era and in the reversed period of chaos, but *not* during the Golden Age of Cronus.

Recall that rotation of the cosmos "now in the direction of its present rotation, now in the opposite direction" (270b7-8) is the expressly stated cause of all of the microcosmic phenomena that the Eleatic Stranger illustrates. It

should thus come as no surprise when, in the remainder of 273e-274a, he says these processes on earth imitate and follow the cosmos, unambiguously and repeatedly connecting mode of conception, birth, and nurture:

And all other things changed (τὰλλὰ τε πάντα μετέβαλλε), imitating and following on the condition of the universe (ἀπομιμούμενα καὶ συνακολουθοῦντα τῷ τοῦ παντὸς παθήματι), and in particular, there was a change to the mode of conception, birthing and nurture, which necessarily imitated and kept pace with the change to everything (καὶ διὴ καὶ τὸ τῆς κηρύσεως καὶ γεννήσεως καὶ τροφῆς μίμημα συνείπετο τοῖς πᾶσιν ὑπ' ἀνάγκης); for it was no longer possible for a living creature to grow within the earth under the agency of others' putting it together, but just as the world-order had been instructed to be master of its own motion, so too in the same way its parts were instructed themselves to perform the functions of begetting, birth and rearing so far as possible by themselves, under the agency of a similar impulse (οὐ γὰρ ἐξῆν ἔτ' ἐν γῇ δι' ἐτέρων συνιστάντων φύεσθαι ζῶον, ἀλλὰ καθάπερ τῷ κόσμῳ προσετέτακτο αὐτοκράτορα εἶναι τῆς αὐτοῦ πορείας, οὕτω δὴ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ τοῖς μέρεσιν αὐτοῖς δι' αὐτῶν, καθ' ὅσον οἶόν τ' ἦν, φύειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν καὶ τρέφειν προσετέτακτο ὑπὸ τῆς ὁμοίας ἀγωγῆς). (273e12-274b1)

We cannot divorce any of these cyclical life-sustaining processes on earth from one another, or from the direction of cosmic rotation. The *Correspondence Principle* includes all of them.

III The Scope of Correspondence

We have been arguing that the mode of generation cannot be separated from the direction of aging on earth, for both are the result of the same macrocosmic motion; the *Correspondence Principle* establishes that a set of related cyclical processes specifically concerning generation (fusion of body and soul), growth/aging, nurture, and destruction (separation of body and soul) correspond with the direction of cosmic rotation. But perhaps correspondence includes not only this set of life cycle constituting processes, but *all processes* on earth. At 273e12 the Eleatic Stranger claims that *all other things* changed (τὰλλὰ τε πάντα μετέβαλλε), and, after highlighting the change to conception, birth and nurture, repeats that these generative processes followed along with *everything*. And indeed, if time itself is flowing in the opposite direction, we might think, as some scholars do, that life on earth during periods of reversal is a mirror replica of the previous forward cycle, like a film playing in reverse.

Getting clear on whether life is lived in rewind during the age of Cronus matters not only for the scope of correspondence, but also, more generally, for understanding life under Cronus' divine rule. One rather literal, mundane reason

for rejecting the film-in-rewind interpretation is that the Eleatic Stranger's pastoral picture of life under Cronus includes humans consuming food from the earth without the labor of cultivating it (272a2-5). It seems, then, as if digestion, at least, proceeds in the standard order. A second reason for thinking that life under Cronus is not simply life rewinded is that the Eleatic Stranger raises, but does not settle, the question of whether life was happier (εὐδαιμονέστερον, 272b4) during that era. If humans practiced philosophy, explains the Eleatic Stranger, then people were far happier at that time. If, however, people merely ate and drank with the animals, exchanging myths, and not seeking knowledge, then, he implies, they were less happy (272b8-d1). Any recognizable form of philosophy would be impossible in a life lived wholly rewinded, but the Eleatic Stranger does not rule out the possibility of philosophy.

Some interpretations have filled in an answer, arguing that philosophical activity is impossible during reverse rotation because the nurslings of Cronus lack memory.²⁰ Moreover, divine spirits provide for all needs (271d6-e5); human beings are not required to engage in social intercourse, including conversation, let alone philosophizing.²¹ The argument that the absence of memory precludes philosophical discussion rests on the following features of the myth: when the earthborn humans rise from the ground, they remember nothing from their own previous lives (272a1-2), and humans during the present age forget the teachings of the past age over time, so whenever the eras are reversed, human memory of the prior period is dim at best (273b3-7, 273c).

While it is certainly true that we currently struggle to retain the memories of the previous cycle from our earliest ancestors, this tells us little about the recall capacities of human beings during the age of Cronus. And, while it may be true that human beings in fact tend to forget historical events, collectively, over time, the Eleatic Stranger is not making this point in 273b-c. At this point in the myth, the Eleatic Stranger is again operating on the macrocosmic level,

²⁰ Scodel (1987, 81 n. 9), McCabe (1997, 107–8), and Ferrari (1995, 393–4) are among those who argue that the absence of memory precludes philosophy during the time of Cronus. Rowe (1995, 193–4) and Carone (2005, 143), by contrast, maintain that philosophy is possible in the age of Cronus, though they do not confront the worry about memory because they maintain that aging during that era proceeds as it does now.

²¹ Brisson emphasizes the absence of need for social and intellectual interaction (1995, 358), and McCabe stresses the role of need as well, explaining that, “Plato often uses sexual intercourse and reproduction as a metaphor for philosophical activity” (1997, 108). If we do not need to tend to our own generation by taking others as reproductive partners, it seems we may not need to take others as interlocutors either.

describing the course of the cosmos itself. The 'teachings' at issue are the teachings that the cosmos received from Cronus before his departure. Even supposing that memory is one of the things that corresponds at the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, the forgetfulness of the cosmos during our era would again correspond only to our own forgetfulness, and not that of the nurslings of Cronus. At any rate, it is not clear why, even if the claim applies to humans during the reign of Cronus, a collective memory lapse of this sort would preclude doing philosophy.

Remembering nothing of one's previous incarnation is compatible with philosophizing, especially given that, in our current era, we also do not recall our prior instantiations, as Plato stresses elsewhere. For instance, at *Phaedo* 76c-d, in the context of the Recollection Argument for the soul's immortality, Socrates commits himself to the view that we forget, at the time of birth, the knowledge that our souls had while disembodied. Similarly, Plato depicts how we forget our previous lives in the Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* (620e-621a). Finally, nowhere does Plato indicate that humans during the Golden Age fail to possess the capacity for memory, or fail to retain memories built up over the course of their current lives; it seems that, as with philosophy itself, the question of whether humans possessed memory during the time of Cronus remains open.

Further, that the care of divine spirits renders social intercourse and philosophizing *unnecessary* does not entail that they do not occur at all. With so much leisure and freedom from hunger, savagery, war, internal dissent, political constitutions, and toil (271e5-12), humans during the age of Cronus would be in an ideal position to engage in philosophical discourse. Although the technological advancement and development of communities during our present era results from necessity (274c), we should certainly not assume that necessity is the *only* driver of human rational activity.²² Indeed, this is precisely what Plato is exploring: with all needs satisfied, will humans do philosophy? Will they have a desire for knowledge? It is significant that this is the only open question in the entire myth. Rather than postulating answers, we might ask why Plato chooses not to provide one. The Eleatic Stranger leaves the issue conspicuously unresolved; if all life were lived backwards, this would not be an open question, for humans simply would not be capable of engaging in conversation and doing philosophy.

²² By assuming that humans during the reign of Cronus will not philosophize because they do not need to, we risk projecting our own state affairs onto the reverse cosmos. Van Harten calls into question this assumption as well, pointing out that the exercise of philosophy may well not be the result of practical rationality (2003, 131–2) (cf. Lane (1998, 131)).

There is reason, then, to resist understanding reversal as living in rewind. A final reason comes from considering what the *Correspondence Principle* already includes. If the modes of generation and death correspond with the direction of temporal progression, then it cannot be the case that life in the reversed period is an unraveling of the entire course of each corpse's forward life. Resurrection from the earth is consistent as an opposed mode of generation; disappearing, on the other hand, is not an analogous mode of destruction. Human conception does not, in our current era, proceed spontaneously from thin air.

Although living things on earth themselves follow and imitate life at the cosmic level, this does not entail that every process which belongs to living things on earth will constitute an instance of emulation or have a macrocosmic analogue. To be sure, the Eleatic Stranger, in recounting the earthly consequences of the cosmic order, alludes to myriad other changes which would take too long to detail (271e, 274b). But even if there are a multitude of observable microcosmic processes which correspond to the macrocosmic state of affairs, the emphasis of the myth is on the life cycle of humans, for that is what is relevant to illuminating the nature of the *politikos*. Unlike the previous era when god tended to human beings so that they had neither spouses nor children (272a1), the present era is characterized by human beings' self-sufficiency from god with respect to their mode of generation. This change in reproduction is appropriate since, as the visitor notes, self-sufficiency in continuing the *genos* on earth now parallels the cosmos's self-sustained motion (274a4-9). Rather than living under divine care, humans must now be self-reliant, using our own *phronesis*, "just like the cosmos as a whole, which we imitate and follow for all time" (274d5-e1).

Just as the cosmos is necessitated, as a result of the bodily element in it (*σωματοειδές*, 273b4), to become autocratic (274a5), so too human beings within the cosmos necessarily become responsible for their own persistence; they experience needs generated by their own embodiment,²³ and these needs compel us to associate, to form communities, and to engage in politics.²⁴ Not only do the processes associated with literal *genesis* correspond to the order of the cosmos, then, but there is further correspondence between the role of necessity

²³ Ferrari notes that a two phase view appropriately emphasizes a world where humans want for nothing versus one where "necessity is a potent force" and humans move toward self sufficiency out of necessity. This contrast is, he argues, apt for a dialogue on politics (1995, 392).

²⁴ This is not to claim, however, that politics itself is merely for the sake of meeting basic bodily needs. Indeed, as the myth demonstrates, conceiving of humans as livestock to be reared and shepherded conflates the divine ruler of the opposing era with the statesman we are seeking.

in the self-moving of the cosmos and the necessity that impels humans to form communities and establish systems of government. Humans *must* be self-directing when and only when the cosmos as a whole is self-directing.

IV Defending a Two Cycle View

The *Correspondence Principle* supports a two-cycle reading of the myth. At the opening of the story, after he has mentioned the three myths that he will borrow from and integrate, the Eleatic Stranger explains that there must be exactly two directions of rotation (269d-270a). The bodily component of the cosmos necessitates change, so the cosmos cannot move unceasingly in the same way. Instead, “as far as possible” (κατὰ δύναμιν, 269e2), it moves in a single motion in the same place in the same manner. Rotating in the contrary direction constitutes the smallest possible deviation from its motion. Sometimes, then, the cosmos is guided by god (the identity of whom is not explicitly established when introduced), at other times, it moves in the opposite direction by itself, of its own power. When the cosmos rotates in the direction opposite to our current direction of rotation, human growth and development similarly proceed on the opposite course (270e), as we have seen. Neither of these points are in dispute. So too, no one contests the explicit textual evidence for thinking that humans are born from the earth during the reign of Cronus.

Three-cycle interpretations hold that, although there are only two opposed directions of cosmic rotation and thus aging, there are different ways of literally coming-to-be and different divine figures associated with the same two cycles of macro- and microcosmic time, thus creating more than two periods. That is, what remain controversial are (a) the connection between the mode of literal coming-to-be and the direction of rotation, and (b) the relationship between deities and the two cycles of motion. The *Correspondence Principle* establishes (a) directly and clarifies (b) by inference. Competing readings maintain that the cosmos rotates in the same ‘forward’ direction during the age of Cronus as during our present era, the age of Zeus, separated by chaotic ‘reverse’ cycling.²⁵ There are thus, according to three cycle readings,

²⁵ Rowe understands reversal as an “interlude in cosmic history” that separates the course of motion which obtains during both our era and the era of Cronus (1995, 189). Carone stresses that the cosmos remembers god’s instruction for only a very brief time during reverse rotation, suggesting a rapid rate of decay, but it is not clear that the passages she cites (273a5-7, 273c5-6) support this suggestion (2005, 127, 137, 241 n. 10).

two different cycles with the same rotational direction and different ruling deities. Cronus controls the mode of generation when he turns the cosmos, and, though Zeus also guides or watches over the cosmos to produce motion in the same direction as Cronus, humans must sustain their own *genos* under his rule. The *Correspondence Principle* rules this out. If direction of rotation and mode of generation are interentailing, and if, as all are agreed, humans are born from the earth during the time of Cronus (and they are not currently born from the earth now, during the age of Zeus!), then time must progress ‘backwards’ during the time of Cronus. There are thus two and only two cycles of cosmic rotation, each with a unique affiliated deity.

To be clear, the presence of Zeus in our current era is not tantamount to his ruling over the cosmos as a whole; Zeus does not direct the motion of the cosmos or accompany it as it rotates.²⁶ In fact, it is not at all clear whether being within the age of Zeus means much at all from the perspective of divine teleology. Zeus is mentioned by name only a single time in the entire myth, and the Eleatic Stranger attributes the association between our present age and Zeus to others: “What you are hearing about, then, Socrates, is the life of those who lived in the time of Cronus; as for this one, which *they say is in the time of Zeus* (ὃν λόγος ἐπὶ Διὸς εἶναι), the present one, you are familiar with it from personal experience” (272b1-3). The Eleatic Stranger has been switching back and forth not only between the two eras, but also between the macrocosmic level and the corresponding microcosmic level. At the macrocosmic level, ‘the god’ (ὁ θεός) comes up repeatedly, but it would be strange if ‘the god’ referred to Cronus at some points in the story and to Zeus at others without acknowledging the change in referent.²⁷

Brisson argues that it is Zeus, and not Cronus, who steps in and saves the cosmos from utter chaos (1995, 359). His reading relies heavily on the end of

²⁶ For the competing view that Zeus is the god mentioned at 269c5 and 269e5-270a5, see Carone (2005, 129, 133–4). She relies chiefly on the notion that the god who turns the cosmos in the myth of Atreus and Thyestes (269a1-5) is Zeus, so we should expect the Eleatic Stranger to remain faithful to the assignment of Zeus as the deity responsible for the first turning of the heavens in the narrative (2005, 129, 134).

²⁷ A third option is that ‘the god’ (ὁ θεός) throughout is neither Zeus nor Cronus, but a distinct governing deity, perhaps the demiurge of the *Timaeus*. Marquez favors this option, arguing that the god cares for the whole, and not the parts (i. e., the various species of animals), which are divided up and assigned to subordinate daimons. Cronus is, according to Marquez, the daimon assigned to tend the human herd (2012, 148–150). This view has much to recommend it, though the Eleatic Stranger seems to imply that the same god who controls the whole also takes charge of humans: god *himself* watches over humans (θεός ἑνεμεν αὐτούς αὐτὸς ἐπιστατῶν, 271e5).

the myth, where the ES describes other members of the Zeus-generation Greek pantheon (Prometheus, Hephaestus) giving gifts to aid the struggling humans at the start of our current era (1995, 350, 359–363). But this cannot be what is happening on earth when god takes control *after* a ‘reversed’ cycle. For one thing, humans need these gifts precisely because animals have become savage, the climate has become colder and less hospitable, and there is no food springing automatically from the earth: life is difficult *now*, in our current age. For another, the Eleatic Stranger’s account of god returning to the helm of the cosmos to prevent its destruction at 273d-e cannot be referring to Zeus, since the god who rescues the cosmos is the one who initially ordered things, and he sets them in order again, making the cosmos deathless (ἀθάνατον, 273e4). This is the same description given of the demiurge back at 270a. When he takes control, guiding the cosmos, he renews its immortality (τὸ ζῆν πάλιν ἐπικτώμενον καὶ λαμβάνοντα ἀθανασίαν ἐπισκευαστήν παρὰ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ, 270a4-5).

The Eleatic Stranger canvasses various possible explanations of the change in the movement of the cosmos from 269e-270a. First, he rejects the notion that the god himself moves the cosmos in one direction at some times and in the opposite direction at other times. He then claims that it is not always under its own control, presumably for the same reason that he rejected the previous option: a single cause of motion cannot produce two disparate directions of rotation.²⁸ Nor, he adds, is the cosmos rotated by two different gods, each of whom turns it in a different direction. (Perhaps because the gods cannot be in conflict, responsible for opposing rotations.) The Eleatic Stranger does not expressly consider and reject the possibility that the cosmos is moved in the same way by two different gods at different times, but if this were the view, one would expect him to countenance it in this opening passage. Instead, in his description of the movements of the universe, the Eleatic Stranger explains that sometimes (τοτέ μὲν), god himself (αὐτὸς ὁ θεός) guides its rotation, and other times (τοτέ δὲ), he releases it, suggesting that a single god is responsible for the changes in cosmic rotation (269c4-d3).²⁹ Introducing two deities as causes of the same motion during different cycles is, moreover, at odds with the singular, unnamed god throughout; it is more likely one and the same god that is referred to at each stage. Most importantly, it is not parsimonious. The cosmos resists

²⁸ One might compare Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII 8 1073a28: a single motion must be produced by a single cause.

²⁹ Not only do the correlatives (τοτέ μὲν ... τοτέ δὲ, 269c4-5) in this passage strongly imply that a single god is responsible for the changes in cosmic rotation, but they also suggest a contrast between exactly two rotational periods, telling in favor of a two-cycle interpretation.

variation; interpretations that introduce more complexities must adequately justify these explanatory complications.³⁰

So then why might one be moved to adopt a three-cycle reading? There are some aspects of the way the Eleatic Stranger characterizes each period at different points in the narrative, as well as temporal claims, that seem tough to reconcile with a two-cycle reading. For example, at 270c-e, the Eleatic Stranger depicts the widescale destruction that wipes out most animals at the point of transition between one cycle and the next, inaugurating a period in which human growth proceeds in the direction opposite ours. Mass destruction seems an ill-fitting way to usher in the Golden Age of Cronus, Rowe argues (1995, 190). But the Eleatic Stranger is making a more general claim: anytime there is a major transition, many living things do not survive. The stoppage of time is a major transition. It does not matter to which rotational cycle the cosmos transitions.

There are also temporal difficulties. In order to argue for a period of reversed cosmic rotation in between the age of Cronus and our present age of Zeus, Carone appeals to the Eleatic Stranger's way of speaking about the cycle of cosmic rotation at 273b-c: the cosmos remembers the teachings "at the beginning more accurately, towards the end more dimly" (273b2-3). This implies, she argues, that that reverse cycle is in the past (2005, 137). But the 'end' here does not mean the end of a reverse cycle that actually preceded our current cycle *in time*. For this is not how time works: time just is, or is a function of, rotational cycling. In a loose sense, it is of course in 'the past', insofar as there have been countless iterations of the cosmic rotational cycle we now occupy. In another sense, though, it is not in 'the past', for our present era is situated within the type of cycle that the Eleatic Stranger offers from 273a-d. We are now within a cycle in which the cosmos is self-guided. There is a beginning and an end within each rotational cycle, and the two cycles repeat *ad infinitum* (268e8-9). The Eleatic Stranger has reminded us of this point in describing the transition between the prior cycle and the one described in the rest of 273a-d: the beginning and the end rushed in opposite directions (ἀρχῆς τε καὶ τελευτῆς ἐναντίαν ὁρμὴν ὁρμηθεῖς, 273a2-3). The *very* end of one cycle just is the *very* beginning of the next: time stops at the point of transition.

Finally, there is a more pressing worry for a two-cycle reading.³¹ As we mentioned in section II, readings that introduce additional cycles agree that the

³⁰ McCabe concurs that this option would undermine the canons of simplicity introduced at 269d-270a (1997, 103).

³¹ McCabe (1997) and Lane (1998) recognize this as the chief reason to reject a two-cycle reading (though they both develop convincing responses, defending two-cycle views).

cosmos rotates in the present direction during the age of Cronus as well as our present so-called age of Zeus. If our current period of rotation indeed rotates opposite the direction of rotation in the age of Cronus, and if, presently, the cosmos is left to move itself without a divine co-rotator, the force of necessity dooms us to eventual chaos as the cosmos itself degrades. Carone worries that this saddles Plato with an excessively pessimistic view of our present position, drawing on the overall aim of the dialogue: “So how can one look forward to the best kind of politics when the universe itself is on the path to decay?” (2005, 127) Given the close correspondence between macrocosmic and microcosmic states of affairs, and Plato’s teleological commitments, it seems the search for the statesman becomes moot if we are in a cycle that is ‘backwards’ relative to the age of Cronus.

In response to this worry, some proponents of the traditional two-cycle view have emphasized the eventual return of the god: we have another age of Cronus to look forward to. God never fully abandons the cosmos; he remains present at his lookout post (εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ περιωπὴν ἀπέσται, 272e4-5) even when he stops guiding rotation. While this may mitigate the teleological pessimism to an extent, it does not mitigate the apparent impossibility of political progress and so the apparent futility of politics, especially since humans do not rule over themselves in the time of Cronus.³² At the very opening of the myth, the Eleatic Stranger attributes the ‘backward’ motion of the cosmos to the fact that it is living and endowed with intelligence (φρόνησις, 269d1). Teleology is not, then, absent from our cycle, even if the god who sometimes accompanies the cosmos is. Both the cosmos itself and humans set their own ends.³³ Moreover, Plato elsewhere states that self-motion is the best kind of motion.³⁴ If we are concerned to connect the myth and his views in the *Timaeus* (a questionable concern given that, among other things, it is not clear how seriously Plato intends the cosmology of the myth), we might take away the following lesson: there is a crucial tension between self-rule and the guaranteed best rule. Cronus’s control assures that the cosmos and all of the creatures within are perfectly cared for, but at the expense of their self-direction; the source of the

³² We thus agree with Carone, who counters that, even if Cronus were to return and rescue us, this will not solve the problem, for there is no politics in the age of Cronus (2005, 127). She responds to Rowe (1995, 13) and Skemp (1952, 114).

³³ McCabe (1997) and Lane (1998) both rightly press this point. Plato intentionally downplays divine teleology in our present era to bring human autonomy to the fore: humans must also use our intelligence (φρόνησις) to set our own ends.

³⁴ See, e. g., *Timaeus* 37b5, 77c4-5, 89a1-3.

cosmos's motion, and the source of human life-sustaining motion, is external and not internal. On the other hand, when the cosmos and human beings must move ourselves, constituting our own living, originating motion in the best way, there is room for error in the motion produced. We are capable of injustice only when we are autocratic.

Replying to the teleological objection, Lane persuasively argues that we should not associate the macrocosmic and microcosmic states of affairs such that life on earth necessarily descends into chaos as the cosmos suffers increasing forgetfulness (1998, 109–110). She distinguishes between two sorts of imitation. If X imitates Y in a first-order way, then X does or undergoes the same thing as Y with respect to first-order bodily movements. For example, one child might imitate a child who is skipping by skipping herself. But it is also possible for X to imitate Y in a second order way, Lane contends, by imitating whatever leads Y to produce bodily movements. Humans imitate the cosmos in a second-order way, becoming self-directing during our present era. But we are detached from the cosmos when it comes to what imitation yields. We have already seen a clear example of this detachment with respect to one central way in which humans during our era imitate the divine: mode of generation. The cosmos itself experiences cycles of coming-to-be, but it remains numerically one. Human persistence in this way is impossible; the best we can do is to preserve the *genos* via reproduction and community building.³⁵

One might point out, however, that the Eleatic Stranger attributes the bad and unjust things (ἀδίκηα, 273c1) on earth to their corresponding heavenly counterparts: as these things come to be at the macrocosmic level, so too they come to be at the microcosmic level (273b8-c2). But this is not a problem for a two-cycle interpretation; it is an accurate image—pessimistic or not—of our current era. The Eleatic Stranger describes the admixture of difficulties and injustice for living things during the present age. It is the presence of injustice in our present period that necessitates political expertise. Far from being moot, then, politics are essential for combating the difficulties and injustices that permeate current human life.³⁶

³⁵ At *Symposium* 207d-208b Diotima explains that mortal nature in general partakes of immortality by generation, leaving a new one to replace the old; we cannot remain numerically the same. For a detailed and convincing account of how reproduction and community building go together (at least in the *Republic*), according to which citizens of *kallipolis* can best hope to attain immortality 'by proxy', see Austin (2016).

³⁶ Further, it does not follow from the inevitability of cosmic decline that politics is futile. Politics can, for instance, slow decline or contribute to a state of affairs preferable to a world without politics, despite the increasing entropy of the cosmos. We thank an anonymous referee for stressing this point.

At the narrative end of the myth, the Eleatic Stranger refers to gifts from the gods—fire and the arts (τέχναι), along with instructions and teaching (274c-d). The gods intervened with assistance during the beginning of our current era because of the harsh conditions that humans confronted, and we rely on their teachings and gifts of fire, *technai*, seeds, and plants to survive. Conspicuously, especially in a conversation about statesmanship, civic virtues are not named among the gifts distributed to our progenitors, though the Eleatic Stranger does say that everything that constitutes human life comes to be from these gifts. By contrast, in the story in Protagoras' 'Great Speech', Protagoras lists the same divine gifts from Prometheus but includes the civic virtues.³⁷ With instruction, fire, and other *technai*, but without the art of politics, humans would inevitably wrong each other whenever they founded cities, according to Protagoras; their cities would be destroyed (*Protagoras* 322b).³⁸ If the civic virtues are deliberately left out as gifts in the *Statesman*, then vital components of cities' existence are left up to human beings to develop. This corresponds to the cosmos' self motion: since humans no longer receive care from the god, they must direct their own lives and discover justice for themselves (274d5-6).³⁹ To what extent humans have succeeded in doing so awaits the proper account of the statesman.

V Illuminating the Politikos

The myth is supposed not only to demonstrate the extent of our errors of the earlier divisions (274d8-e3), but also, more generally, to serve as a model (παράδειγμα, 277b4). While it is beyond the scope of this project to canvass all

³⁷ Also in contrast with the *Protagoras* story, the Eleatic Stranger does not mention Zeus himself in the bestowing of gifts. Recall that Zeus is only referred to once in our current myth, and even then, the Eleatic Stranger makes a point of attributing the designation 'the age of Zeus' to others (272b1-3).

³⁸ Protagoras expounds the position that *all* human beings get a share of justice (322c-323a). Perhaps Plato intends to revisit this issue in the *Statesman* context. Elaborating upon the major error that the Eleatic Stranger diagnoses directly following the myth indicates that, in contrast to the divine ruler of the previous era, the statesmen of our current period "are by nature much more like their subjects" (275c2-3).

³⁹ McCabe offers an alternative explanation of the missing shame and justice: They are left out because, "this myth argues that taking others as partners is a consequence of the circumstances of the age of Zeus—that is, they are explained *by the myth*, not by the deus ex machina device of gifts from the gods" (1997, 108 n. 62). But we might wonder whether, if necessity forces us to associate in order to survive, it must bring shame and justice with it.

of the respects in which the myth may help to illuminate the true *politikos*, there are important points of comparison which emerge most clearly if one endorses the *Correspondence Principle* and the resulting two-cycle reading.

To motivate the telling of the myth, the Eleatic Stranger remarked, “as for the state of affairs that is responsible for all of these things, no one has related it, and we should relate it now; for once it has been described, it will be a fitting contribution towards our exposition of the king (εἰς γὰρ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπόδειξιν πρέψει ῥηθέν)” (269b9-c2). The state of affairs is revealed to be the movement of the universe “now in the direction of its present rotation, now in the opposite direction” (270b3-5). Right at the outset of the myth, then, the Eleatic Stranger underscores the importance of the relationship between the direction of cosmic rotation, on the one hand, and the rising and setting of the sun and other stars, the kingship of Cronus, and the mode of generation on earth, on the other. Throughout the myth, he emphasizes correspondence between these phenomena as aids in discovering the true statesman.

Directly following the myth, the Eleatic Stranger explains the great mistake in the preceding account of the statesman: “when asked for the king and statesman from the period of the present mode of rotation and generation we replied with the shepherd from the opposite period (ὅτι μὲν ἐρωτώμενοι τὸν ἐκ τῆς νῦν περιφορᾶς καὶ γενέσεως βασιλέα καὶ πολιτικὸν τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἐναντίας περιόδου), who cared for the human herd that existed then, and at that a god instead of mortal—in that way we went very greatly astray” (274e9-275a3). In explicating the error that the myth exposed, the Eleatic Stranger couples rotation and generation, and contrasts the rotation and generation that obtain under divine guidance with our current period.⁴⁰ Far from a novel argument, this point is drawn from the repeated emphasis throughout the myth on correspondence between the direction of cosmic rotation, mode of generation, and rule on earth. With the correct understanding of and emphasis on correspondence in the myth, we are better positioned to grasp how its stated purpose connects with the explanation of the error following the myth.

In addition to reinforcing the *Correspondence Principle*, this passage provides further support for the two-cycle reading that the principle favors, first, by establishing a sharp divide between the divine herding of the other era and the

⁴⁰ Rowe reads the contrast at 274e11-275a1—“from the opposite period” (ἐκ τῆς ἐναντίας περιόδου)—as referring not to the opposite direction of rotation, but as claiming that rotation and mode of generation happened in an opposite way (1995, 198). But, generation aside, it is hard to see how rotation happening in an opposite way could be other than rotating in the opposite direction.

human ruler that the dialogue aims to track down (cf. 276d). Of course, readings according to which there are more than two cycles will emphasize that the way Zeus rules is very different from that of Cronus. But conceding that there is, in our present era, persisting divine presence sacrifices the sharp contrast between divine and mortal ruling.⁴¹

Second, the Eleatic Stranger mentions only two periods in this initial presentation of the major mistake: the present period and the opposite period (274e9-275a1). If two cycles with the same direction of rotation were sufficient to highlight the earlier errors and establish the relevant political contrasts, then it is not clear how the 'backwards' rotational cycle of the myth plays any explanatory role at all. Given that a central motivation for readings with more than two cycles is consistency with Platonic teleology, it seems the myth could better accomplish the same explanatory work in the dialogue without introducing an inconsistency with the cosmology of the *Timaeus*.⁴² Recall, too, that the rotational direction of the cosmos, and not simply the presence or absence (or partial presence) of god, is cited as the cause of all of the other phenomena (270b3-5). And when the Eleatic Stranger later refers to the myth, he does so as being about "the reversal of the cosmos" (τὴν περὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀνείλιξιν, 286b8), suggesting that reversal of motion is the central contrastive feature.

Examining the myth in the context of the dialogue as a whole lends further support to the contrast between two eras, and, more directly, to the association between literal *genesis* and other central aspects of the human life cycle,

⁴¹ Carone accepts this outcome and thinks we ought to see not only contrasts but also parallels between the ages of Cronus and Zeus. Both the rule of Zeus and the idealized conditions under Cronus serve as models for the current statesman. Though he cannot sculpt nature itself, the statesman can help to secure desirable environmental conditions for human persistence (2005, 142–44).

⁴² There is no reverse rotation in the *Timaeus*, so it is not clear why Plato would introduce reversal periods unless they were doing important work in the myth. Moreover, competing readings that want to separate our present era from a godless 'backwards' cycle for the sake of teleological consistency seem not to recognize the difficulty with introducing *any* 'backwards' cycle, whether or not such a cycle corresponds to our present cosmic period. Surely, if we take the teleological constraint literally, god *never* lets go of the cosmos. Brisson and Carone skirt this difficulty by supposing that our current era is a synthesis of the age of Cronus and the reversed periods of chaos (Brisson (1974, 490–2), Carone (2005, 141)). But the bodily element that forces the cosmos to turn by itself, and that instigates decline, does not wholly permeate the reverse rotational cycle; the cosmos is able to right itself and move in an orderly fashion at first during reversal, before decline begins. The reverse cycle is itself a combination of intelligence and necessity.

including growth and development. In the early divisions, we learn that all directive sciences issue orders for the sake of some coming-to-be (γενέσεώς τινος ἕνεκα, 261a11-b2), and, once we confine ourselves to the domain of living beings, the Eleatic Stranger broadens the scope of the science to include nurture (τροφή) (261d3). That he extended *genesis* to include, explicitly, the process of nurture implies that the conversation had, to that point, been concerned with literal generation (cf. 266a-b). And it also expresses a correspondence between generation and rearing. The kind of knowledge sought is set over both generation and growth and development.

If the direction of human growth and development during the age of Cronus proceeded as it does during our era, it would be harder to account for the differences in the way the ruler should approach fostering that development. The myth reveals that the early divisions went astray in conceiving of human statesmanship as merely a sort of nurture (τροφή); it is aligned with caring (ἐπιμέλεια) more generally (276c-d).⁴³ The expansion to ‘care’ as the way of attending to and supporting human growth, setting the human statesman apart from the divine herdsman, emphasizes the concern with facilitating development of human beings of the present era. The differences in human nature during the opposing period of rotation consist in more than the mode of generation: human nature as a whole is different because the process of living itself on earth moves in the opposite order. The overarching point remains: both the divine herdsman and the human carer must exercise their rule in relation not only to *genesis* but also, chiefly, to promoting the growth and development of human beings.⁴⁴

The final image of the statesman at the end of the dialogue confirms that these two aspects of the role must go together. The statesman weaves together the naturally courageous and naturally moderate dispositions by ensuring that they marry and reproduce with one another, even though each type of person tends to be attracted to others who share their natural disposition (310b-e); it is the task of the statesman to produce political stability through this interbreeding. But the statesman also designs and directs the educational program (308d-e), producing

⁴³ As Rowe notes, however, some of the difficulties with separating the true statesman from the pretenders would remain even if they had made this substitution in the initial divisions (1996, 161 n. 19).

⁴⁴ At 275c1-4 the Eleatic Stranger states, “and the statesmen who belong to our present era are much more like their subjects in their natures and have shared in an *education* and *nurture* closer to theirs” (τοὺς δ’ ἐνθάδε νῦν ὄντας πολιτικούς τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ὁμοίους τε εἶναι μᾶλλον πολὺ τὰς φύσεις καὶ παραπλησιαίτερον παιδείας μετεληφέναι καὶ τροφῆς).

true and stable “opinion about what is fine, just and good” (309c). This divine bond within the souls of the citizens only “takes root, through laws, in those dispositions that were both born noble in the first place and have been nurtured in accordance with their nature” (310a). The *Correspondence Principle* and the accompanying two cycle reading make better sense of the framing of the dialogue: human generation and development go hand-in-hand, and the expertise of statesmanship is rightly concerned with both.

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