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## THE REVIEW OF *BETWEEN MYTH AND SCIENCE. A TREATISE ON PLATO'S COSMOLOGY*

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## РЕЦЕНЗИЯ «МЕЖДУ МИФОМ И НАУКОЙ. СОКРОВИЩА КОСМОЛОГИИ ПЛАТОНА»

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**Аннотация.** Монография Александра Кандича — первое в истории сербского научного сообщества исследование одного из наиболее значимых диалогов Платона. Даже спустя два с половиной тысячелетия с момента своего написания «Тимей» продолжает привлекать внимание учёных, от философов до физиков. Действительно, идеи Платона в несколько изменённом виде окружают нас по сей день: это и принцип симметрии, и идея о начале времён, и стремление познать природу в её математической простоте и красоте. В своей работе А. Кандич не только идёт по стопам признанных знатоков древнегреческой философии, таких как С. Броуди, Ф.М. Корнфорд, Г. Властос и др.; но вступает с ними в полемику. Из двух основных подходов к диалогу, предлагающих отбросить мифические элементы как несущественные или, напротив, рассматривать их как необходимую часть космологии Платона, автор придерживается второй точки зрения, которую отстаивает последовательно и убедительно. В первой части монографии исследуются мифические аспекты «Тимея». А. Кандич подробно обсуждает базовые понятия, такие как «демиург» и «мировая душа», необходимые для дальнейшего анализа космологии Платона и приходит к выводу, что мифическое у Платона служит доказательством существования «латентной» части человеческой психики и когнитивных способностей. В отличие от большинства досократиков, Платон показывает, что люди наравне с богами способны постичь фундаментальные принципы природы. Далее следует глубокий анализ математической и натуралистической сторон диалога. Автор видит в сочинении Платона указание на существование тесной связи между структурой психики (и опытом тождества) и идеальными математическими структурами, так как сама по себе математика не сообщается физическими объектами, а является подлинно философской. Отдельно рассматривается сходство эпистемологии и философии науки Платона и их современного понимания. Оригинальные и аргументированные интерпретации А. Кандича демонстрируют психологизм идей древнегреческого философа и раскрывают другие важнейшие философские вопросы, затронутые в тексте «Тимея».

Aleksandar Kandić's monograph entitled *Between Myth and Science: A Treatise on Plato's Cosmology* is the first study of Plato's *Timaeus* published in Serbian scientific community. Interpreting one of the most influential Plato's writings, the author, among other things, deals with the beginnings of science in ancient Greece. Even after almost two and a half millennia, the *Timaeus* continues to attract the attention of researchers from various fields, and, in addition to many philosophers, such as K. Popper, it was also studied by the famous physicist W. Heisenberg. It is important to note that some of Plato's concepts are present in contemporary natural sciences, though in a different, modernized form: first, the principle of symmetry (within the theory of supersymmetry, or SUSY), then, the idea that the world has a beginning in time (Big Bang theory), as well as the tendency to understand the fundamental principles of nature as mathematically simple, and even beautiful.

In his reading of the *Timaeus*, Kandić not only follows the most influential researchers of ancient philosophy such as S. Broadie,

F. M. Cornford, G. Vlastos, L. Brisson, J. Dillon, T. Kj. Johansen, T. Robinson and others, but also openly enters into polemics with them whenever necessary, in the spirit of his argument. Noting that there are two basic ways to interpret the *Timaeus* — the first according to which the mythical elements of this dialogue are superfluous and can be eliminated, and the second according to which the mythical elements are, in fact, essential for Plato's cosmological position — the author clearly opts for the second interpretation. He defends his position in a consistent and persuasive manner throughout all the chapters of his study. Although Plato's cosmology is set in a distinctly mythical framework, since a certain *architect* is considered to be the cause of the existence of the universe (instead of purely mechanical natural forces), Plato uses mathematical terms in the central, cosmological parts of his writing to explain the structure of the physical world. This approach has already seemed problematic to Aristotle, and in particular, it may seem inconsistent and confusing from the standpoint of the methodology of modern natural sciences.

The first part of the book deals mostly with the mythical aspects of the *Timeaus*. Kandić provides an extensive discussion of the notions of the demiurge and world soul, which is supposed to set the stage for the analysis of natural philosophical parts of Plato's cosmological treatise. His main thesis, clearly inspired by the readings of Broadie, Robinson, Brisson and Meyerstein, as well as other contemporary philosophers, is that the main purpose of mythical notions in the *Timaeus* is to establish the existence of a *latent*, inherent structure of human psyche and its cognitive capabilities. Unlike most of the Presocratic philosophers, or Greek poets, Plato is keen to show that humans are just as capable of understanding the fundamental principles of nature as the Gods. Hence the radical revision of traditional Greek mythology, which gains pace in the *Republic* already.

After the brief, intermediary chapter which explores the relationship between muthos, logos, and episteme, the author proceeds to the most important sections of his treatise — the analysis of mathematical, natural philosophical aspects of the dialogue. Instead of only comparing Plato's mathematical astronomy and microphysics to the observational data available at the time, which is, for example, what Vlastos does in his reading, Kandić follows, criticizes and complements Johansen in his endeavor to explain the very origin of our knowledge of mathematical notions. It seems that, according to Plato, an intimate relationship exists between the structure of psyche (or the experience of self-identity) and ideal, mathematical structures. Although sensory experience, such as observation of

regular motions of heavenly bodies, represents the first step in acquiring mathematical knowledge, the mathematical information itself is not present within physical objects. Mathematical entities are psychophysical in nature, as they provide *shape* to the supposed latent, or inherent structure of psyche, which is hinted at by the aforementioned mythical notions. The intense discussion is followed by the chapters which examine the similarities between Plato's conception of science and the methodology of modern natural sciences, as well as provide thoughtful insights into Plato's epistemology and philosophy of science.

The interpretive solution that Kandić elaborates in detail is original and very well founded. Plato's basic intention is to introduce us to natural philosophical issues through psychology. If the mythical terms in the *Timaeus* refer to a certain inherent structure of the human psyche from which every cosmological or scientific explanation begins, then it is impossible to remove them from Plato's work. Moreover, it is precisely in this way that a significant distinction between model and reality is established — a distinction widely recognized by modern science. Before embarking on cosmological research, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the abilities and limitations of our cognitive apparatus. Are there, for example, dominant structures in the human psyche, do they and to what extent influence the shape of our scientific theories, can they be described mathematically, and most importantly, do they have a biological or biophysical basis? These are just some of the fundamental issues that Kandić deals with in his work, interpreting Plato's original text.

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Conflicts of interest. The author declares absence of conflicts of interest.

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