



Chapter 2

Plato and Chartrian Neoplatonism

INTRODUCTION: PLATONISMS OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Beginning in the last half of the twelfth century and culminating in the thirteenth, Aristotle became the dominant figure throughout the European schools and universities. However, in the first half of the twelfth century, it was Plato who was *the philosopher*. Nowhere was this more apparent than among the Chartrians. All that was studied was filtered through the lens of Plato. This, in the twelfth century, meant foremost the *Timaeus* as it was read in an incomplete form from Calcidius' translation.¹

Many studies have been made of the powerful influence of the *Timaeus*. Winthrop Wetherbee stresses its influence in the strongest possible terms. He states that it "is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Timaeian Cosmos as a model of Chartrian thought. Not only was it a framework for original speculation but all serious literature, indeed all knowledge, was assumed to imply a Platonic cosmological setting without which it could not be fully understood."² We must keep this in mind when we review below the comments of those who wish to see the Chartrians as proto-naturalists who wanted to present the study of nature devoid of its Platonic metaphysical foundation.

The *Timaeus* was widely read throughout the twelfth century. In order to understand the Chartrian mind, therefore, we must understand it within the context of the *Timaeus*. This chapter will examine the nature of Plato's teachings that predominated in the schools of the twelfth century and describe how these teachings were interpreted at Chartres. We will also

