

Zacharoula PETRAKI, Sculpture, weaving, and the body in Plato (= MythosEikonPoiesis, Bd. 17), Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2023, 351 S., 7 col. illustrations, ISBN: 9783111178196

The question of how one might know the Platonic real world, that is to say, the ideas, the noetic dimension, the intelligible plane, and especially the relations that the forms establish with their respective phenomena, is one of the core issues of Platonic metaphysics. However, it has never been definitively and unambiguously explained by Plato. Indeed, he was often compelled to utilise metaphorical language in order to illustrate the connection between universal forms and particular entities: for example, the semantic areas of craftsmanship and biology in the *Timaeus*, or terms such as *mimesis*, *methexis*, *parousia*, and *koinonia*, which Plato explicitly regarded as provisional concepts that required further discussion to explain their full philosophical meaning. Petraki's volume is dedicated to the concept of *mimesis* and the significance of the visual, plastic, representational and performative arts, with a particular focus on sculpture and weaving, in shaping both Plato's theory of the participation of contingent entities in ideas and his conception of the human being in all its aspects (human beings as individualities, as parts of an indistinct 'multitude', and as a 'whole', that is, as members of a cohesive civic community and as a union of body and soul). The volume addresses these questions in seven chapters, which are further enriched by an *index locorum* and *rerum* and an updated bibliography.

Chapter One, *Introduction* (pp. 1-26), briefly summarises the main themes analysed in the volume: these include the mimetic and participatory relationship between entities and ideas, as well as the interconnection between the body and the soul. The primary hypothesis put forth is that painting, sculpture and weaving served as a source of inspiration for Plato in his conceptualisation of the ontological interdependence of sensible entities/the body and forms/the soul.

Chapter Two, *The Phaedo* (pp. 27-56), primarily focuses on the *Phaedo* as a dialogue that provides the conceptual basis for admitting the existence of a relationship between contingent beings and their respective forms, as well as between the body and the soul. These issues are subsequently revisited and developed in other dialogues. Petraki asserts that the disembodied soul has a privileged relationship with forms, given its nature is akin to the ideas. However, the *Phaedo* suggests that the body may also participate in the ideas. It is thus necessary to posit the existence of a distinct form and a 'form-copy' of this form, which is 'in' each particular entity. When a 'form-copy' enters the

body, other opposite 'form-copies' are forced to withdraw (for example, the form-copy 'greatness in Simmias' forces the form-copy 'smallness in Simmias' to leave Simmias). As a result, opposite 'form-copies-in-us' are replaced by one another. Furthermore, the *Phaedo* introduces the concept of somatisation of the soul as a means of elucidating the relationship between the body and the soul. If the soul is compelled to inhabit a body, there is a possibility that the body will force the soul to adopt its own disposition, primarily characterised by an inclination towards bodily sensations and pleasures. The image of the bronze-casting technique, with souls as wax-covered clays encased in an external casting mould (i.e. the body) and held together by nails (i.e. material desires), perfectly illustrates this relationship. Finally, the eschatological myth of the *Phaedo* describes varying degrees of existence, with the most virtuous humans occupying a superior position, which is somehow fashioned to resemble a more refined physical form. This reflects their ontological status, as their souls are said to experience a distinct state of embodiment, of somatisation, more precisely, the physical sphere is subject to the dictates of rationality; in this way, the human whole resembles the statues of gods and goddesses, usually made of precious materials that perfectly reflect the purity of their spiritual character and morality.

In Chapter Three, *The Symposium* (pp. 57-105), Petraki demonstrates how the *Phaedo's* conceptualisation of the body as a site of antitheses is re-evaluated by Plato in his *Symposium* and examined from diverse perspectives. Aristophanes' discourse on the primordial human condition evokes the lost wax technique when elucidating the genesis of the body (at the hands of Zeus and Apollo). It postulates that the body's birth necessitates the imposition of a defined form, established by a univocal model, on an amorphous material. Additionally, there are references to the indirect lost-wax technique, a process that joins together different elements (analogous to the joining of two lovers by Hephaestus and subsequently by Love) to create a single product. This results in the infusion of the characteristics of 'one' and 'whole' into the creation. This image is then philosophised by Diotima, who points out that there is a rupture between the 'one' and the 'whole' when one focuses on the corporeal level. By employing dialectics in order to abstract and universalise properties common to many particular sensible entities, one can identify similarities between different beings, ultimately arriving at a universal model in relation to which the many singular entities have been formed. Nevertheless, this gives rise to the issue of how a mixed and diverse world can be ordered in a way that reflects and participates in forms, a question that remains unresolved in the *Symposium*. The concluding remarks of Alcibiades also evince some elements derived from Greek sculpture, particularly the notion that divine statues embody the essence

of divinities. These statues are not mere representations of the divine; rather, they signify a divine presence, given that some of the power of the gods and goddesses resided in statues and temples. In this manner, such artefacts transcend the limitations of human nature. The body of Socrates, which is likened to divine statues, can be seen as an epiphany of the divine. The divine qualities of philosophers, that is to say their constant immersion in the intelligible realm, reverberate not only in their souls but also in their bodies. Even the body can thus be considered a catalyst and a marker of the relationship between the soul and the ideas.

Chapter Four, *The Republic* (pp. 106-176), examines the function of sculptural language and imagery in relation to the *Republic's* concepts of unity and harmony. This is exemplified by the case of Socrates and Glaucon as 'theoretical' sculptors of ideas and problems, or with the model of the lost wax technique, which is used to illustrate how the virtuous soul imposes an anthropomorphic form on the body (in contrast to the tyrant, whose corrupt soul reproduces either animal or monstrous motifs). In this way, the concept of *mimesis* and the representational power of Greek art demonstrate how contact with ideas can transform the human condition. Furthermore, the concepts of the 'painted statue' and the 'single body', as discussed in *Republic* IV and V, are fundamental to emphasising the civic unity of the ideal *polis*. It is essential that all citizens experience the same pleasures and pains and make decisions as a single organism. The act of creating a statue and subsequently painting it serves Plato's purpose of introducing the theme of political unity. The ordered city is seen as a reflection of the unity between the soul, its constituent parts and the body. This, in turn, represents the harmony between the diverse human natures that coexist within the same society. This concept is known as the city-soul isomorphism. In order to achieve a harmonious visual presentation, it is necessary to combine different elements, a process that is analogous to the creation of a painted sculpture. Nevertheless, this representation is more appropriate to the social cohesion between the classes of governors and warriors. Consequently, in the *Republic*, Plato is unable to fully extend this model of unity to all citizens, including the productive group of artisans, merchants and peasants (the most irrational people contrarily to the governors and warriors; they are also subjected to specific and different political norms, for example they still live in traditional families, possess private property, etc.). In other words, the imagery of sculpture does not allow Plato to fully account for individual diversity. This is why, in other dialogues, such as the *Statesman*, he follows the metaphor of weaving, with a possible change of ontological perspective.

Chapter Five, *The Politicus* (pp. 177-223), considers the significance of the imagery of weaving, which appears to supersede sculpture in the context of the *Statesman*: this metaphor better encapsulates the social union between disparate elements, and furthermore, it implies the mathematization of body and soul as geometrical lines. It is evident that the *Republic's* imagery of music is effective in conveying the concepts of "order" (*taxis*), "proportion" (*symmetria*) and "accuracy" (*akribeia*), which are mathematical concepts with implications that could be extended to the ordering and governance of society. However, music necessitates commensurability between its elements. In contrast, weaving is a superior method for conveying the overcoming of incommensurability between disparate and irreconcilable components. Politicians as weavers are thus able to unite elements that remain distinct in themselves, each with its own defining characteristics, thanks to their knowledge. Given the existence of different kinds of psychic inclinations in the character of citizens, a sort of mathematical knowledge of how to establish mathematical connections of linear and incommensurable magnitudes is required. The soul can be conceptualised as a linear and incommensurable magnitude, subject to varying degrees of irrationality. The coordination of embodied souls can be likened to the imprinting of geometric shapes on cloth, as proposed by Plato in his ethical and political approaches to the *Statesman*. The awareness of the existence of incommensurability and irrationality – which cannot be eliminated, but can be incorporated into a broader structure – may have been influenced by the mathematical studies carried out at the Academy, particularly those of Eudoxus. Painting and sculpture mix and transform different components into a single new thing (the perfect classes of citizens, i.e. governors and warriors, into a perfect society, excluding the worst, the producers); on the contrary, weaving preserves the identity and characteristics of each element (even the most irrational ones) when they are joined together to form a whole; as such, it better accounts for unity in a complex political reality.

Chapter Six, *The Laws* (pp. 224-291), offers an analysis of the reappraisal of this imagery in the *Laws*, where weaving is linked to painting, sculpture and, above all, *choreia*, that is to say, the dances and choirs officially established by the city. Through *choreia*, citizens are able to realise their full potential and reconnect with the divine. As a result, their bodies become a physical extension and representation of the order of the cosmos. In more precise terms, Plato at times regards citizens as "statues" (*eikones*) and "imitations" (*mimemata*) of universal harmony. *Choreia* imposes order on those who use reason as a catalyst to instil virtue within themselves, so that their external appearance reflects the (perfect) internal structure of their souls. Similarly, *choreia* unites diverse elements together.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, *Epilogue: Resemblance* (pp. 292-317), Petraki concludes the investigations by considering the theme of the participation of two beings in the divine realm, for example Socrates and Theaetetus as two human beings who resemble each other. The physical resemblance (*homoiotēs*) between two individuals, as depicted through the imagery of vision, symbolizes their shared moral character and disposition of the soul. It represents the notion of possessing similar virtues and intellectual capacities, thereby illustrating a philosophical *philia* that unites two individualities. This concept is analogous to the bond that unites the human and the cosmos, as discussed in the *Timaeus*.

Petraki's volume provides an exemplary demonstration of the significance and, to some extent, the fluidity of a central theme in Plato's metaphysics. By adopting an innovative perspective, Petraki illustrates the potential influence of Greek arts, particularly sculpture and weaving, on the imagination and philosophical conceptualisation of the relationship between generated entities and the ideas, between the body and the soul, both individually and collectively. This influence is considered not only from a metaphysical and ontological point of view, but also from a political one. In this way, Petraki correctly reconstructs the complexity of the figure of Plato, who was always careful to reassess, assimilate and develop the reality of his time, bending it to the purposes of his discourses. A chapter devoted entirely to the *Timaeus*, however, is absent from the volume: an in-depth analysis of this dialogue in light of Petraki's main thesis could have confirmed the importance of craftsmanship, sculpture and moulding metals and wax in the conceptualisation of the ontological and cosmological relationship between forms and sensible phenomena. In conclusion, the volume's interdisciplinary approach between Greek art and the history of philosophy represents a fruitful method of interpreting Plato's dialogues and will undoubtedly contribute to a research path that will be further developed by new contributions.

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