

Aikaterini Lefka

« *Tout est plein de dieux* ». *Les divinités traditionnelles dans l'oeuvre de Platon. Du rapport entre religion et philosophie*, Préface de Luc Brisson, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013, Pp. 561, € 40 (pb.). ISBN: 978-2-343-00939-1.

In the Platonic dialogues which are generally considered to be authentic, there are 1,212 references to 81 individual, or groups of, traditional deities in Greek mythology. In this book Aikaterini Lefka (hereafter AL) has undertaken an exhaustive study of all such data, thereby shedding new light on religious concepts and their functions in all aspects of Plato's philosophy. The book is a revised and abridged version of AL's doctoral dissertation, successfully defended at the University of Liège in 2001.

In the Introduction (pp. 13-31) AL defines the subject of her research and, after outlining her methodology, outlines the structure of the book, whose six chapters cover Plato's philosophical theology as applied on the triptych: Nature, City-state and Soul.

Chapter I (« Les noms des divinités: Spéculations étymologiques du *Cratyle* », pp. 33-71) investigates a text that is unique in the Platonic corpus, namely the catalogue of deities in the *Cratylus*. AL undertakes an extensive analysis of the whole of this attempt to interpret many divine names as a means of understanding the human beliefs presupposed in them. AL's surprising conclusion is that in the *Cratylus* Plato already presents his own concepts of these deities, concepts which will remain unchanged in the rest of his oeuvre. The *Cratylus'* etymological speculations, often taken to be mere games, in fact reveal a much more serious and critical approach to the subject than is often realized.

In Chapter II (« Les divinités dans le *Kosmos* », pp. 72-128) AL provides an original interpretation of all the references to Ge / Gaia, Ouranos—Kosmos, Helios, Selene and the stars, thereby identifying subtle distinctions in the multiple uses of these names as mythological persons and simple or "divine" celestial bodies. This is an ambiguity that Plato likes to play with. The visible nature and the regular movement of these deities constitute the basis of the arguments used by Plato in order to defend the existence of all gods as well as the ethical importance of the study of astronomy and mathematics. AL points out that the role of the stellar deities has too often been neglected in discussions of the Platonic pantheon.

In Chapter III (« Les dieux créateurs et souverains des vivants mortels », pp. 129-188) AL discusses current hermeneutical positions on Plato's cosmogony and the role of the Demiurge in relation to the other gods. Against the most recent interpretations, which date back to the Neoplatonists, AL does not consider that Plato was a monotheist, namely that his "unique god" is identified

either with the Demiurge, or the divine Intellect, or the World Soul, or the Form of the Good. She argues that Plato was a polytheist, as was normal at his time, but one who insisted, not only on the common nature of divine beings, but also on the accordance of their thoughts and actions with the supreme god, the Demiurge. As a Platonic god, the Demiurge is a perfect being, one who knows the Good and applies it to the creation of the universe (divine, for the first time) and everything that it contains. The other gods participate in the creation of the mortal species and assume the administration of the universe according to the Good.

In Chapter IV (« Les divinités dans la *Polis* », pp. 189-275) AL stresses the theological norms (τύποι θεολογίας) that, for the first time in the history of Greek religion, provide a strict theological frame for every belief about any gods. Physically, morally and intellectually, it is the perfect nature of the divine that originally characterizes all gods for Plato. Based on this extremely radical religious position, he outlined an ideal political structure for his ideal cities as well as for the moral education of the citizens from their early childhood onwards. As for the well-known Platonic criticism of poetry and art in general, it is here examined in this moral and religious perspective.

In Chapter V (« Les divinités et le philosophe: Questions de vie et de mort », pp. 276-326) AL re-examines the religious positions of Socrates, the model of philosopher and human being for Plato, putting forward the view that philosophy is a “divine mission”. The chapter also includes an examination of the eschatological myths and the deities Plato refers to when he writes of death and the underworld. AL believes that the characteristics of each particular deity tend to fade away on this occasion, leaving only the common elements of divine nature as defined by the theological norms: perfect goodness, justice and intelligence as well as good will towards human beings. The happy fate of the philosopher’s mortal soul in the afterlife is put forward as an extra argument in favour of a protreptic attitude to the study of philosophy. Lastly, the author identifies the many original links that Plato makes between the gods and his metaphysical theories.

In Chapter VI (« Les puissances psychagogiques », pp. 327-426) AL analyses Plato’s original use of the character and functions of some minor deities to which he often attributes great importance. It is the case of deities that are usually identified as functions of the soul, but who, according to views common at the time, maintain an objective and individual personality, such as *Mnemosynē* and *Erōs*. The latter has received much attention from Plato, as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* testify. AL analyses all the references to *Erōs* and attempts to interpret the parts related to this deity, its role in the Platonic theory of love and its privileged relation to philosophy.

In the general Conclusions (pp. 427-450) AL recapitulates the conclusions arrived to in each chapter and reiterates that the image of each and every god in the corpus as a whole remains consonant with the view put forward in the *Cratylus*. AL draws attention to the various and complex links between Plato's religion and philosophy, suggesting an original and "dialectic" relation between them.

The book ends with the Bibliography (pp. 451-500), two valuable Annexes, in which all Plato's references to the traditional gods (pp. 501-536) are listed, and an *Index Locorum* (pp. 537-556).

All in all, AL's detailed study, which offers copious annotation (1,797 notes), is an exemplary contribution to Platonic scholarship. It shows the importance Plato ascribed to the traditional gods of the Greek pantheon and how he radically altered their personalities and roles. Students of Platonism will find themselves much indebted to her for this.

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