

Timotin Andrei, *La démonologie platonicienne. Histoire de la notion de daimon de Platon aux derniers néoplatoniciens*, (Brill: Leiden, 2012)

Presented as a PhD thesis at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 2010, Andrei Timotin's recent book on Platonic daemonology covers some of the still rather uncharted areas of Ancient philosophy, in a way that combines both the speculative and the cultic aspects of the Graeco-Roman belief in intermediate beings. While there are only a few scholarly publications on precisely this topic prior to Timotin's study, the author's "Aperçu historiographique" (pp. 4-11) indicates that daemons were nonetheless the concern of several classical philologists of the previous two centuries, starting with Joseph-Antoine Hild (1881) and leading up to the seminal study of Marcel Detienne (1963).<sup>4</sup>

Although these and other authors owe considerable credit for gathering much of the material on which his own book is based, Timotin rightly points out that the interpretative frameworks of the German and French schools ought to be critically reassessed. For instance, older German scholarship usually denied any philosophical significance to the class of *δαίμονες* and tended to interpret Plato's interests in daemonology as an

<sup>4</sup> Joseph-Antoine Hild, *Étude sur les démons dans la littérature et la religion des Grecs*, Paris 1881; Marcel Detienne, *De la pensée religieuse à la pensée philosophique. La notion de 'daïmôn' dans le pythagorisme ancien*, préface de J.-P. Vernant, Paris 1963.

intrusive element of popular superstition into the eclectic reservoir that the philosopher's writings allegedly were (p. 6).<sup>5</sup> French scholars, the other hand, have generally held to the view of a coherent daemonology in Plato, at least since Joseph Souilhé published his study on the philosophical concept of *μεταζύ* in 1919.<sup>6</sup> Detienne then introduced the categories 'religious' and 'philosophical' for describing the two extremes in the historical development of the concept of *δαίμων*. Detienne considered Pythagoreanism to be essential in this evolution and particularly important for Plato. However, Timotin regards this hypothesis of Pythagorean influence on Plato's daemonology difficult to ascertain, due to the lack of direct evidence (see p. 45). Overall, a glance at later studies indicates that, although one can observe an increasing interest in Ancient daemonology, there have been very few ground-breaking *methodological* and *philosophical* discussions on the matter (p. 7-10).

As to Timotin's own approach, he still follows, in one sense, the traditional line of a philological analysis of the relevant "doctrines, texts, and authors" (p. 11). However,

<sup>5</sup> The author also includes Max Mühl's study in this category ("Die traditions-geschichtlichen Grundlagen in Platons Lehre von den Dämonen (*Phaidon* 107d, *Symposion* 202e)", in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 10 (1966), pp. 241-267), since Mühl also stressed the incoherence and irrationality of Plato's daemonology (p. 6), surmising that daemonology pertained to the Orphic and Oriental influences on Plato.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Souilhé, *La notion platonicienne d'intermédiaire dans la philosophie des dialogues*, Paris 1919.

bygoing beyond the unidimensional understanding of the daemon's essence and function, his study is much more inclusive than previous ones. In fact, the author proposes a threefold line of inquiry, which is then pursued in the main chapters of the book. These different aspects are referred to as the cosmological, the religious and the personal (p. 3). Although the author makes this thematic distinction, he significantly anchors all these diverse developments in the widely shared antique practice of interpreting Plato. Timotin therefore relays a preliminary chapter ("Les figures platoniciennes du *daimōn*", pp. 37-85) as a solid textual foundation, from which he draws in subsequent discussions (see p. 11).

The chapter on Plato is itself preceded by a synthesis of the most important references to the category of *daimōn* in earlier Greek literature ("La notion de daimon dans la littérature grecque jusqu'à Platon", pp. 13-36). What the survey shows, is that the range of functions attributed to daemons in literary works of the Archaic and Classical Age can be understood as varieties of the same basic meaning of the verb *δαίωμαι* "impart, distribute, divide": daemons are responsible for distributing the lots of fate, be it in the form of providential care, or in that of retributive punishment. Also noteworthy in this chapter are Timotin's passing remarks on Empedocles and Parmenides (p. 21), both of whom defined daemoniac nature to be intimately related to destiny, generation, and nature. This makes the two Eleatic forerunners of the Platonic doctrine of intermediaries.

Unfortunately, the question of continuity between these early Presocratic ideas and their formulation by Platonists is not seriously taken up in later chapters.<sup>7</sup>

Timotin's discussion of Plato starts with a clear differentiation between two categories of daemons: (a) the one represented by Eros and described mainly in *Symposium* 202d-e, and (b) a heterogeneous class of "guardian" daemons. To this second class belong personal daemons (including the daemon of Socrates), but also the daemoniac nature of the human *νοῦς* (*Timaeus* 90a-c). Although one could probably try to subsume Eros under the second category as well, the author's division does prove helpful in many respects. Arguing that Plato's intention was to change some of the older Greek conceptions of daemons, Timotin sees the unique figure of Eros as instrumental in this significant shift of meaning. In order to preserve a high understanding of the gods as beings imperious to passions and desires (*ἐπιθυμίας*), Plato uses the myth of Eros' birth to explain why the mediating and initiatory role has to

<sup>7</sup>With respect to the Presocratic concepts of *daimōn*, I should mention that at least a brief discussion of the Derveni Papyrus would have been welcome, since some of its fragments show striking parallels to other texts discussed by Timotin. Consider, for instance, following passage: "an incantation by *magoi* can dislodge daimons that become a hindrance; daimons that are a hindrance are vengeful souls. The *magoi* perform the sacrifice for this reason, as if they are paying a blood-price". See RICHARD JANKO, *The Derveni Papyrus: An Interim Text*, in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 141 (2002), pp. 1-62; here p. 12 (text and translation).

be fulfilled by a being that is neither fully self-sufficient, nor fully indigent. The epoptic value of the daemonic is furthermore linked to the Socratic vocation of being the *δαιμόνιος ἀνήρ* who enables others to ascend to the World of Ideas. According to Timotin, Plato's other intention of redefining *daimōn* was to divest it from the negative qualities that Greek religion had suffused it with (see p. 47f.).

Following the detailed discussion of the various daemonic figures in *Phaidon*, *Timaeus*, *Politeia*, and *Leges*, Timotin concludes that there is a strong connection between the daemonic nature and mythical discourses such, the latter being itself an intermediary, namely between *δόξα* and *ἐπιστήμη* (p. 83). The implication of this connection would be that, for Plato, the aim was not so much to formulate a comprehensive doctrine of intermediate beings, but rather to make certain noetic contents accessible, by means of singular mythical narratives. Since these are in turn always contextual, one cannot talk, in the case of Plato, about daemonology in the absolute sense. Consequently, later attempts by Platonists to systematize those mythical accounts are to be understood as overly dogmatic readings, which ignore the indissoluble link between content and form displayed by Plato's dialogues themselves (p. 84).

In an extensive fourth chapter ("Démonologie, cosmologie et théories de la providence", pp. 85-161), Timotin proceeds to identify the main stages in the formation of this systematic daemonology, starting with the *Epinomis* and the teachings of Xenocra-

tes. Already in the earliest discussions of the Old Academy, the two distinct categories of daemons present in Plato, tend to be unified by a convergent reading of *Timaeus* 39e-40e (the hierarchy of beings and cosmic elements) and *Symposium* 202e (Diotima's definition of Eros). In the newly formed cosmological scheme, the *daimones* come to occupy the intermediary realm of Air and Water (sometimes also Aether), thus standing between and binding together the highest and the lowest realms of material existence (see p. 88, 97). The unfolding of this basic scheme in the writings of the most relevant Middle and Neoplatonic authors reveals an essential continuity of terminology, themes and dilemmas, although Timotin also notices an attenuation of the active role of daemons in the highly sophisticated hierarchies of Late Neoplatonism.

Of the three aforementioned aspects of Ancient daemonology addressed in the book, the one most thoroughly and convincingly analyzed is perhaps the religious (or cultic) dimension. In the fifth chapter ("Démonologie et religion dans le monde gréco-romain", pp. 163-241), Timotin focuses particularly on the person of Plutarch, who, being both philosopher and an initiated priest of Apollo, uniquely encapsulates in his writings the Platonic ideal of conforming traditional cults and practices to the exigencies of reason. Likewise, in his interpretation of myth, Plutarch not only resumes some of the principles laid down by the Old Academy, but he equally foreshadows the typically Neoplatonic appreciation of allegory as a mystagogical tool (pp. 180-183). Another

interesting aspect touched upon in this context is Porphyry's negative stance towards certain forms of ritual, an attitude worth comparing with contemporary Christian (and Gnostic) redefinitions of the notion of *δαίμων* (see pp. 208-215).

The last chapter of the book tackles the personal or inner dimension of Platonic demonology, a problem informed not only by Plato's repeated reference to the daemon of Socrates, but also by the identification of *φνοῦς* and *δαίμων* in *Timaeus* 90a. Here again, Timotin proceeds chronologically and lays special emphasis on the Middle and Neoplatonic instantiations of these teachings, especially those found in Plutarch, Apuleius, Plotinus and Proclus. The survey shows that, in the Imperial Age and in Late Antiquity, several questions arose from the attempt to harmonize some of the apparent inconsistencies in Plato: particularly under debate was the question whether daemons reside "inside" or "outside" the soul and what the means were of "perceiving" them. Plotinus thus emerges as a stronger advocate of a purely interiorized cult of the intellect, while Iamblichus and Proclus exhibit a lively interest for concrete visionary experiences (see e.g. Hecate's luminous appearance mentioned in *The Life of Proclus*).

Despite certain disadvantages that any overarching study of Antique philosophoumena implies (such as an uneven treatment of all important authors or, in some cases, the unscrutinized acceptance of the "broad consensus" of scholarship), *La démonologie platonicienne* is one of those long awaited syntheses that will help enhance our under-

standing of the more ambiguous terms employed by the Platonic tradition. As an essential category of Platonic thought, the *μεταζύ* once commented upon by Souilhé (and of which the daemon is the most obvious representative), finds in Timotin's work a new ground to be redefined and reconsidered upon. Therefore, the rigorous analysis displayed in the book will hopefully be succeeded by complementary studies in the realm of metaphysics, theology and comparative religion.

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**Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Lo specchio alto. Astrologia e filosofia fra Medioevo e prima età moderna* (Fabrizio Serra Editore: Pisa, 2012).**

**A** seguire la fantasia etimologica di Isidoro di Siviglia, l'uomo, in greco *anthropos*, deriverebbe il suo nome dalla capacità di volgere il suo sguardo verso l'alto (*anatrepo*)<sup>8</sup>. Verso gli astri. L'unico tra gli esseri viventi a potere tanto, se si esclude il più sapiente contemplatore del cielo di tutto il creato: il gallo. Anche questo straordinario animale, infatti, può drizzare la testa in su, osservare le rivoluzioni celesti e scandirne col canto, preciso come

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. ISIDORO DI SIVIGLIA, *Etym.* XI.1, 5: «Graeci autem hominem "anthropon" appellaverunt, eo quod sursum spectet sublevatus ab humo ad contemplationem artificis sui».