

Cornel Florin MORARU\*

## *Mimēsis* and the polis. Biopolitical aspects of art in Plato's *Republic* and the *Statesman*\*\*

**Abstract:** This article examines the biopolitical dimensions of *mimēsis* in Plato's political philosophy, arguing that the regulation of imitative art constitutes a fundamental mechanism for governing life (bios) within the polis. By analysing key dialogues—particularly the *Republic*, *Statesman*, *Sophist*, and *Timaeus*—the study demonstrates how Plato's concern with *mimēsis* extends beyond aesthetic considerations, to the ontological relationship between *eidos* and *eidolon*, and the political dangers of substituting essence with appearance. Challenging Foucault's periodization of biopolitics as exclusively modern, the article contends that *mimēsis* functions as a metaphysical "functor" that operates across both ancient and modern governmentality, establishing isomorphic relations between model and exemplar, paradigm and instantiation. The analysis reveals how Plato's cosmogonic myths, especially the myths from *Timaeus* and the *Statesman*, ground political *mimēsis* in the recollection (*anamnesis*) of a pre-political „state of being” that is the source, but not the image of any of the actual political arrangements (regimes, states, constitutions etc.). Ultimately, the article argues that understanding contemporary biopolitical regimes and their artistic critiques requires returning to this original Platonic interrogation of *mimēsis*, while cautioning against reducing statesmanship to any single paradigmatic role.

**Keywords:** *mimēsis*, biopolitics, Plato, Foucault, *polis*, governmentality, pastoral power, political philosophy, imitation.

One of the things that might strike a modern reader when browsing through the classical texts of Ancient Greek political philosophy is the extensive nature of the discussions about art and the crucial role attributed to art in the *polis*. Both Plato and Aristotle devote a considerable amount of space to this topic, using art as a biopolitical

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\* Associate professor, PhD, National University of Arts, Bucharest; Researcher, CCIIF - The Research Center for the History and Circulation of Philosophical Ideas, University of Bucharest.

e-mail: cornel.moraru@unarte.org.

\*\* **Acknowledgement:** Paper supported by UEFISCDI research project PN-IV-P2-2.1-TE-2023-0636, BIOART – *Biopolitical Art in the Post-Holocaust Age: Philosophical Perspectives on Aestheticized Testimonies, Politicized Aesthetics, and Bare Life*, financed by UEFISCDI.

mechanism for administrating life (*bios*) within the population, and both link art directly to the constitution of the *polis*.

The banishment of poets and imitative artists from the *Republic* (Plato 1968a, 376e-398b; 595a-608b) is closely linked to an artistic canon that imposes on poetry in particular and art in general the need to provide, „besides bare pleasure, also some service to the constitutions and the human *bios*” (Plato 1968a, 607d). In other words, art is linked both to the political order of the state and to the regulation and administration of the individual *bios*. The mimetic activity needs to be strictly regulated, as if art and the state are so closely linked to each other, that a deviation from the prescribed pattern of the former could mean the dissolution of latter. By threatening “the constitution within oneself” (Plato 1968a, 591e), *mimēsis* threatens the state itself. This is why Plato is looking for a “pure imitator of the fitting” (Plato 1968a, 397d), that follows the patterns (*typoi*) established by laws (Plato 1968a, 398b).

The same also goes for Aristotle, who views *mimēsis* both as part of human nature itself (Aristotle 1965, 1448b; Moraru 2020, 61-72) and as a regulating mechanism of the state used to model the ethical character and in-form the *bios* of the citizens (Aristotle 1957, 1340a-1342b). This is why he views education in general and artistic education in particular as „a chief concern” (Aristotle 1957, 1337a) for a lawgiver. On the one hand, „a good character (*ēthos*) is always the cause of a better constitution” (Aristotle 1957, 1337a) and, on the other hand, „music has the power to provide the soul with some kind of character” (Aristotle 1957, 1340b). Here it could be argued that the meaning implied by the word *ēthos* is closely linked to *bios*, as far as „the best life (*bios*), separately for each, as well as collectively for states is the one accompanied by virtue, with enough means to take part into virtuous actions” (Aristotle 1957, 1323b-1324a). The power of music to “in-form” (moral) character and the way of life is due to the fact that “within the melodies themselves exists imitations of characters” (*mimēmata tōn ēthōn*, Aristotle 1957, 1340a). Just like in Plato’s political philosophy, *mimēsis* is a crucial aspect of the *polis*, that needs to be strictly regulated in order to shape the *bios* of the individual and of the state as a whole.

My main assumption in this article is that, in order to understand the contemporary biopolitical art, with its critical engagement with the ways in which political power operates through regulation, management, and control of biological life, bodies and populations, we need to go back to the root of the problem, namely, to reopen the original interrogation about *mimēsis* within the *polis*. As I will argue, the Ancient Greek political philosophy’s obsession with regulating art through some kind of “ideal” or even “utopic” model of constitution is the paradoxical

supplement to democracy. A good state, in the eyes of Plato at least, needed some kind of model(s) to imitate, some kind of paradigm(s) to fit into, and some specific kind of art to remind the people about their original goal as a society and as individuals. Otherwise, if this imitation goes bad, tyranny will come back in the *polis*, because “tyranny is born from democracy” (Plato 1968a, 562a).

Just like the imitating artist, the tyrant is as far away from the truth as one could be and cultivates the parts of the soul that are furthest away from the truth. Both figures are subversive because their actions, whether political or cultural, aim to undermine the principle of reason in favour of irrational passions. Even from the narrative point of view, in the unfolding of the *Republic*, the description and condemnation of the tyrant (Plato 1968a, 571a-588b) is placed right before the most vehement critique of *mimēsis* and imitative artists ever done by Plato (Plato 1968a, 595a-608b). This order is not arbitrary but, as I believe, serves a specific argumentative purpose. It prepares the ground for seeing the imitative artist not merely as a craftsman lacking in knowledge, but as a cultural agent who prepares, on an individual and psychological level, the ground for emergence of tyranny. Only in this logic could Plato legitimate the harsh conditions put on artistic creativity in his *Kalipolis*.

This is the first hint Plato gives us about some kind of *biopolitical* meaning of *mimēsis*. The platonic utopia, the “the city we’ve just finished to build as a colony, founded by arguments” (Plato 1968a, 592a) – as Glaucon described it – is nowhere to be found on earth, but merely a *paradeigma en ouranō*, “a model in the sky” (Plato 1968a, 592a), a mere sketch, a rough draft of a state, meant to be some kind of mental image (*eidolon*) used to recollect what an ideal state should look like. Being more and more concerned with the problems this mental image of an ideal state could be causing, Plato changes his concept of *mimēsis* in his later political writings, especially in the *Statesman*, in order to avoid involving the existence and development of a mental image (*eidolon*) of the state or its constitution.

The aim of this article is to take on this platonic hint and develop the concept of political *mimēsis* as a source and principle of Western biopolitics. As I will argue, the *biopolitical* meaning of *mimēsis* is responsible both for the rise of the twentieth century biopolitical totalitarian regimes and for the rise of biopolitical artistic movements that critique these regimes.

### 1. *Mimēsis and modern biopolitics*

One of the main objections that could be raised to this approach is that biopolitics, in the way it is conceived by Michel Foucault, is a

modern phenomenon, manifested especially towards the middle of the eighteenth century (Foucault 1976, 183). This has its obvious foundations in the mode of organizing sovereign power specific to modernity, which seems completely foreign to Antiquity in general. Pushing the origins of biopolitics back to the classical period of Greek philosophy would seem to be an obvious misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the subject, especially when Michel Foucault insists that biopolitics has its sources in a model of governing that was not present as a political paradigm in Ancient Greece (Foucault 2007, 135-138).

Indeed, what Foucault calls *pastoral power*, namely „the theme of the king, god, or chief as a shepherd (*berger*) of men, who are like his flock” (Foucault 2007, 123), which is the source model and analogy for what will later be called biopolitics, is, in his view, mainly an Eastern idea, consecrated in the Western culture by Christianity (Foucault 2007, 129). But there are recent studies that argue that pastoral power is not such a marginal phenomenon for Ancient Greek thought as Foucault would have us believe (Naas 2018; Backman & Cimino 2022; Zartaloudis 2019; Ojakangas, 2016). On the contrary, biopolitical approach to population regulation is quite widespread in classical philosophy and suffers a decline exactly in the period of Late Antiquity, in relation to “to the fall of the ethnically homogeneous political organization characteristic of the classical city-states” (Ojakangas 2016, 118). It is exactly when one would expect pastoral power to begin to manifest itself, that one seems to notice its dissolution. Moreover, there is a strange “absence of Christian pastoral themes from the medieval and early modern discourses on population” (Ojakangas 2016, 133). All these are quite difficult to explain in a Foucauldian paradigm, where the pastorate is “a source of specific type of power over men” and “*a model and matrix* of procedures for the government of men” (Foucault 2007, 147).

But even if we would concede to Foucault and accept his thesis about the birth and source of modern biopolitics in the Christian pastorate, a discussion about the biopolitical role of *mimēsis* would still be needed. The reason for this is that, if we accept *the image of the shepherd* as some kind of analogy or metaphor that guided the formation and perpetuation of the modern type of governmentality, then we assume some kind of mimetic mechanism that works quietly behind Foucault’s history of governmentality. If the pastorate is some kind of *model* for the modern exercitation of sovereign power, as the French philosopher explicitly states (Foucault 2007, 110; 140; 147; 164), then, with every form of government, we have some kind of instantiation of this model, some kind of hypostatization of pastoral power into modern governmentality. This specific relation between model and exemplar, between paradigm and example, through which a thing in general gets

instantiated and hypostatized, is exactly the type of relation specific to the process of *mimēsis*, which was never discussed rigorously and systematically by the founders of biopolitics as a philosophical research field.

This leads us to the idea that we need to redefine the meaning of *mimēsis* beyond its artistic and ethical connotations, in order to accommodate this notion of (bio)political imitation which we've noticed in the case of pastoral power and modern governmentality. It is not relevant at all if the pastoral power was central or not to Ancient Greek thought, as long as the same mechanisms of imitation work both in Greek and Christian culture, in order to constitute different types of governmentality. Conceived in this extended, biopolitical sense, *mimēsis* is more than the creation of mental or artistic images, it is a mechanism that governs governmentality and regulates the way biopower works upon a population.

If this is true, as I will argue, biopolitics has a closer relationship with art than previously thought. Art and biopolitics exist on the basis of the same “ontological operator” or “function”, that is imitation. As such a function, *mimēsis* is not just some kind of particular process of copying one reality to another, but also a specific form of *performative* establishment of existence, a clearly distinct mode of bringing together two domains that share some common expression. Thought in this way, *mimēsis* is the metaphysical equivalent of a mathematical functor, a mapping between distinct categories that preserves a unitary structure, a “translation” between two ontologically different worlds, that partake in one another. As such a metaphysical functor, *mimēsis* creates some kind of isomorphism between utopia and reality, idea and image, model and copy, paradigm and example. As Plato will come to argue in his later dialogues, imitation is not mainly an artistic concept, but a mathematical one (Fronterotta 2021, 286), and his essence is *isomorphism*.

If it's true that the constitution of governmentality as Foucault understands it (Foucault 2007, 108) is fundamentally mimetic in the extended sense I want to develop here, and that the model of pastoral power is found throughout the entire history of European culture – alone or in combination with other models – then the emergence of twentieth century biopolitics and the artistic critique of these mechanisms are the two sides of the same coin. They supplement each other, they come into being as imitations, because they are both the manifestations of the same fundamental functor.

## 2. The outline of the problem of *mimēsis*

If we judge from the number of places where Plato discusses the meaning and the aporias raised by the concept of imitation, we realize that it was quite an uncomfortable concept for him. From *Cratylus* to the *Sophist*, from the *Republic* to the *Statesman*, and from *Timaieus* to the *Laws*, the discussion about imitation accompanies Plato's middle and late thinking, like a shadow that gets cast over various philosophical themes, starting from the problem of language and the nature of art, going through the problem of cosmogenesis and ending with the problem of deception, dissimulation and political corruption. This is the reason why *mimēsis* is a multifaceted concept, shifting its meaning from one context to another (Halliwell 2021, 45). In order to see the original complicity between *mimēsis*, art and biopolitics, we need to separate the different meanings of imitation Plato works with, then ground them in an original experience, that could explain why the concept was so problematic for the Greek philosophical thinking in general.

It is clear that the main meaning of *mimēsis* is the artistic one. The essence of painting, poetry, tragedy, even music and dance are determined as imitation. Although a study of Plato's critique of these *technai* exceeds the scope of this paper, we can notice that it is closely linked to what we might call "education policies". Every time the Greek philosopher must discuss education of the *polis* in general, imitative arts and *mimēsis* are his predilect themes, because art "seems to be damaging the thinking of all those who do not have as an antidote (*pharmakon*) a vision (*to eidenai*) of its Being" (Plato 1968a, 595b). The antidote to the charm of art is the knowledge of this illusory character of images in general and of artistic images in particular. Introducing a distance between mind and reality, where being gets substituted by an image, mimetic art creates a fracture, a cleavage in the fabric of the *kosmos*, where illusion (*apatē*) does its magic. This distance from reality is also a departure from Being and, in fact, a departure from truth. "Mimetic art is far away from the truth and, as it seems, this is exactly the reason why it can produce everything, because it lays hold of a small part of each being, and that small part is an *eidōlon*" (Plato 1968a, 598b).

But the antidote (*pharmakon*) Plato proposes is itself the source of the problem. The knowledge of the illusory character of images (*eidōla*) is what poisoned Greek mind since Homer's times. The *eidōlon* is, for the Ancient Greeks, a terrible thing. It is the image, but also the phantom that haunts the mind and exhausts its powers. As Euripides writes about Helen (Euripides 1994, 31-36), which is the mythical archetype of such an *eidōlon*, she was just "empty appearance" (*kenēn dokēsīn*), the likeness made from a breath of heaven sent to bring war and fulfil the will of

Zeus. “Helen is the power of the phantom, the simulacrum – and the simulacrum is that place where absence is sovereign” (Calasso, 1993, 123). For the men fighting in Troy, Helen was absent, but her charm became more and more powerful as time passed. She was sent away by the gods, but its presence grew stronger and stronger as a mental image for the combatants, a symbol of pride for the Greeks and Trojans alike. “When the phantom, the mental image, takes over our minds, when it begins to join with other similar or alien figures, then little by little it fills the whole space of the mind in an ever more detailed and ever richer concatenation” (Calasso, 1993, 133). Soon enough, the Trojan War was fuelled only by an illusion, an illusion that killed a whole generation of heroes.

The notion of the *eidolon* was so deeply rooted in the Greek mind, that Plato had to depart himself from it and reject it violently. He needed an antidote for this illusion, but with every critique he took, he found more of a poison. He even associates his critique of imitative arts with the myth of Helen’s phantom (Plato 1968a, 586c). For his philosophy the problem was even more stringent, because the *eidolon*, conceived as image in general and as mental image in particular, could be too easily confused with the *eidōs*. Just like an *eidōs*, an *eidolon* is pure form, matterless, completely intangible. Still, the two are perfect opposites and, having the power fill the entire *topos* of the mind, the *eidolon* leaves no room for *eidōs*. “If the fiction of the mimesis is accepted, the possibility of travelling on a philosophical path towards the *eide* is denied, as the *mimētes* (imitator) cancels out the distance between *eidōs* and *eidolon*” (Esposito 2022, 97). The main problem is that “*eidōs* and *eidolon* are co-dependent and have the same source” (Esposito 2022, 96). Standing for pure essence and pure appearance, they represent two different aspects of vision that can never be clearly separated: the active one, which is contemplation without perception, and the passive one, which is perception without contemplation (Esposito 2022, 96). The essential connection of the two, the indestructible link between *eidōs* and *eidolon* is what Plato names *mimesis* and what he wants to exclude from the utopic state in the *Republic*.

Art is indeed the best example of such a connection. Creating “empty appearances”, art substitutes reality with a kind of nothingness, infects Being with non-Being, creating a hollowness in the fabric of the *polis*. Substituting the true *eidōs* with an *eidolon*, art could create her own idols and deconstruct the original *logos* of the state, that lays at the foundation of the constitution. In other words, art could create her own *raison d'état*, could institute her own political reality, which could be manipulated, because, as an *eidolon*, it has no connection to reason. Just like Being and non-Being or essence and pure appearance, *eidōs* and *eidolon* are

completely distinct in principle, but must somehow take part in each other in practice.

Plato knew that he could not get rid of pure appearance, because then the essence would be completely ungraspable by the mind. So, his first solution, the only one he saw viable at that time, was to subject the *eidolon* to the rigors and patterns (*typoi*) of reason (*logos*). He wanted to transform art from an *eidolon* that *substitutes* the *eidōs* to an *eidolon* that *stands for* the *eidōs* or simply put, an *eidolon of the eidōs*.

But at the moment he did that, the *pharmakon* found for curing people from artistic illusion started to poison an even deeper layer of the *polis* and faced a deeper problem. As such an empty appearance, made up of pure breath, Helen was just a name (Euripides 1994, 43), a name that would bring about the end of an entire age, namely the age of heroes (Calasso 1993, 335-336). The *eidolon* is not just an artistic image, but also the word, the spoken word as the element in which reason itself dwells. If thinking is “the interior dialogue of the soul with itself” (Plato 1967b, 263e), if reason is expressed in words, then how can one be sure that thinking is connected to reality? How can one be sure reason itself is not just a phantom of the mind?

These were the questions that Plato explicitly addressed not just in *Cratylus*, but also in *The Sophist*. In the first mentioned dialogue, the problem of *mimēsis* occurs exactly in the discussion about whether the basic elements of language (i. e. names) can offer, by their sound alone, a correct representation of things. More exactly, Plato questions whether words (or, more precisely, names) are bare imitations of the thing itself, produced by speech (Plato 1967a, 423b-434b). Although Socrates abandoned this hypothesis quite quickly, “its underlying conception of mimesis, however, is not jettisoned” (Pavani 2021, 99). Every process of signification implies, in some way or another, some kind of *mimēsis*, which is established by words. Even though we might not conceive words as direct imitations of things, the question whether meaning itself is or is not a *mimēma* remains open, because they are linked with mental images (Plato 1967a, 439a). The right word „paints” an image in our mind, an *eikon*, that seems to be distinguished somewhat from the *eidolon*, but not completely. When Plato starts to analyse most fundamental elements that compose words (that is the different kinds of vowels), he makes an analogy with painting (Plato 1967a, 424c-425b). When he raises the problem of the duality introduced by language into reality (i.e. the splitting between the word-image and the thing itself), Plato gives the example of painting (Plato 1967a, 432a-c). In the end, he has no choice but to take into consideration the fact that „the name is, in a sense, an imitation, just like a painting” (Plato, 1967a, 430e). The problem of linguistic *mimēsis* collapses quickly into an artistic problem, because it implies building a mental image of the thing signified by the

word. “The name as an instrument for distinguishing the essence of what it names establishes a relationship with this very essence, which is then explained in mimetic terms” (Pavani 2021, 99)

But not just separate words produce some kind of *mimēmata*. *Logos* itself has in its power the capacity to produce *eidōla*, appearances of truth without any substance. It is the case of the sophist, that mimics the philosopher, but “bewitch the young through their ears with words while they are still standing at a distance from the realities of truth” (Plato, 1967b, 234c). Just like the *eidōla* in painting, that can mimic everything, there also exist “spoken *eidōla*”, that can create the illusion of truth and reason regarding each and every opinion. The problem with the sophist is that he is the absolute master of “spoken *eidōla*”, a kind of phantom that doesn’t just fill the *topos* of the mind, it *is* this *topos*. Mind itself, in its discursive functioning, is a kind of *eidōlon* that incorporates all the possible *eidōla*. If the only part of the soul that can get to know Being as such and all the Ideas is a phantom, then all hope of knowledge and truth is lost. So, Plato’s stakes in the *Sophist* are high, because, if he cannot prove that being and non-being are not absolute, but mingled together, and that *eidōs* and *eidōlon* can thus coexist in the same soul, then all his philosophical system is a house of cards that will tumble down at the very first words of the sophist. The ontological hierarchy proposed in the *Sophist* is all but proof that thinking can be false or true, that non-being can co-exist with being, that phantoms can be spectres of truth.

But you cannot get rid of a ghost so simply, because when you show that thinking accommodates both truth and illusion, both *eidōs* and *eidōlon*, another cleavage gets opened in the fabric of the *polis*: the *eidōlon* of writing. If writing is a *phantom*, we’re right back at square one with the problem of *mimesis*. How can any knowledge in general (and political knowledge in particular) pass the test of time? If written word is an illusion of knowledge, a stray away from the truth, then how can laws be true and just? How can the rules of the canon that Plato imposed on art, in order to establish the constitution of the ideal *polis*, be maintained?

The problem with the mimetic process and the *eidōla* it produces is that every *mimēma* duplicates and ultimately has the power to substitute reality. The only way out would be to find a mode to contain all the *eidōla* within a certain *eidōs*, to bind it together under the same model (*paradeigma*), and to find a type of *mimesis* that doesn’t create phantoms of the mind, but real things. When confronted with the inescapable illusory nature of the *eidōlon* produced by *mimesis*, the only way out for Plato would be to show that the universe itself is a *mimēma*, but not an *eidōlon*, that the whole structure of the world – visible and invisible – is a contained mimetic one. Thus, if imitation – at least in one of its hypostases – creates reality, then the problem of *mimesis* would cease to

be a fundamental problem for the system as a whole, while remaining a problem for specific fields of knowledge.

Understood from this point of view, the myth of creation from the *Timaeus* is nothing but the platonic answer to this challenge. It shows exactly the need for the *eidōla* to be subscribed to a particular *eidōs* and be contained in their own realm, away from the „real”, paradigmatic reality. If the whole *kosmos* „imitates the eternal nature of a perfect and intelligible living being (ζῷον)” (Plato 1968b, 39e), then its life (i.e. its becoming) must be separated from its eternal model, because the mingling of the two would make the eternal model itself participate into becoming and death. Plato postulated three *eidē*, namely the model (*paradeigma*), the imitation of the model (*mimēma tou paradeigmatos*) and the receptacle of all generation (*hypodochē pasēs genesēs*) (Plato 1968b, 48e-49a). The imitation becomes thus one of the three primordial *eidē* that participated in the creation of the *kosmos*, an *eidōs* that gives substance to the „empty appearance” of the *eidōlon*. But this was not enough. In order to stop the realm of Being from transforming into a realm of the *eidōla*, in order to maintain the separation of the model from the imitation, Plato had to postulate a third “invisible, formless, all-receiving *eidōs*”, a paradoxical “formless form” that is the receptacle of all becoming, but participates somehow to the intelligible world (Plato 1968b, 51b). This *chōra* is the eternal and indestructible place of generation and becoming, the place where all the “imitations of the eternal Being” dwell for some time before they disappear (Plato 1968b, 50c). Everything that “takes place” is contained in this formless and invisible *chōra*, that keeps the *eidōla* from mixing with their models and from substituting them.

Some recent studies also notice a shift in Plato’s conception of *mimesis* starting with *Timaios*, where the activity of the divine craftsman also includes references to the sphere of mathematics (schemes, configurations and numbers). The work of the divine Demiurge, who possesses the maximum amount of knowledge and capabilities, is a work of “configuration”, of “schematization by means of forms and numbers of the chaotic, pre-cosmic elements” (Fronterotta 2021, 286). This is why “the main feature of this language and the corresponding conceptual armory, however, is not its reference to the operational sphere of craft – although this perspective is present too. Rather, it is the emphasis on the role and function of mathematics within the different stages of the production and development of the universe” (Fronterotta 2021, 286). Thus, the distinction between art (*technē*) and science (*epistēmē*), between illusion and knowledge begins to fade. The divine artist is a mathematician as well as an absolute artist. He does not produce *eidōla*, but configurations that can be reproduced by nature and by art.

### 3. *Political mimēsis* and the source of biopolitics

The first thing we might notice when it comes to the relation of *mimēsis* with the *polis* is that all of Plato's dialogues focusing on political problems end up some way or another also debating the meaning of imitation. This might legitimate the idea that, although we connect it especially with art, the notion of *mimēsis* was primarily a political issue for Plato. This is not only true in the case of education in the polis, but the mere essence of the lawgiver is understood by Plato by contrasting it with the nature of the artist (Verdenius 1962, 3).

All the existing constitutions, for better or for worse, are mere imitations of a unique, ideal and paradigmatic one (Plato 1967c, 297c), that could never exist per se in this world and that, strictly speaking, never existed. The role of the statesman is to mimic – as good as he is able – the actions of an archetypal “natural” rule, that Plato refers to in the myth of the Two Ages (Plato 1967c, 268d-274e).

Following this argument, the *polis* in general, the state as a historical phenomenon, defined by generation, becoming and destruction, is some kind of *mimēma* of a *paradeigma*, of an ideal model. But once the myth of cosmogenesis from Timaios is set forth, this *paradeigma* is not conceived anymore as a *utopia*, a “model in the sky” that could be described, imagined and dreamt of. Rather, the *paradeigma* of the state and the statesman is a generating matrix of all possible *utopias* and *dystopias*, all possible states and forms of governmentality. Just like the original arrangement of the universe – that was a *mimēma*, but not an *eidōlon* – the primordial “political arrangement” made by the Demiurge was not at all a “phantom city”, that gives the illusion it could be made real, but a *state of being*, a distribution of beings where the species and genera were not intermingled and were pastored by *daimons* (Plato 1967c, 271c-e).

What Plato wants to stress here is the idea that the “ideal state” from the *Republic* is not the pure Idea of a state, but an ontic configuration, a *mimēma* among other thousands and thousands of possible *mimēmata*. Plato realized that, in order to stop the *utopia* from becoming an *eidōlon*, he had to renounce the idea that it could somehow be true (even though just for reason alone) and represent the ideal rational state. The *paradeigma* of a state is not “something like a state”, a likeness (*eidōlon*, *eikōn*), but the arrangement of Being that makes every political configuration in general possible and, in some sense, even necessary. This is why, in a metaphorical sense, Plato had to move the *paradeigma* from the skies to the *archetypal past* of the myth, that precedes any constitution or state and is the immemorial source of every possible political arrangement.

The political sense of *mimēsis* springs from the myth of the two ages in the *Statesman*, where Plato establishes “a relation of *imitation* between the Age of Kronos and the Age of Zeus” just as there will be “(...) a relation between the one true form of government and the six imitations of that form” (Naas 2018, 93). We find the same idea in the *Laws*, where Plato notes that “long ages even before those cities existed (...) there existed in the time of Kronos a most blessed governance and settlement, on whose imitation the best of the states now existing are founded” (Plato 1967d, 713a-b). This is what we might call *political mimēsis*, that is based on some kind of memory or recollection (*anamnēsis*) of a state of being where cities were not even needed, an *apolitical* state of being, where freedom was not (yet) a political concept, but a gift of nature.

This past “is not simply something to be memorialized but an ideal to be recollected through a kind of *political anamnēsis*” (Naas 2018, 95). The political sense of *mimēsis* is a kind of recollection of something that never took place, and yet has always already existed, namely the recollection of that state of being where imitation didn’t produce phantomatic images, devoid of essence, but inserted order into chaos. As it has already been pointed out by Naas (Naas 2018, 91-92), there are two meanings of *mimēsis* in the late political dialogues of Plato, both producing essentially something which never existed, and not mere *eidōla*. The first is the “the joint imitation of the *kosmos*” (Plato 1967c, 284d), through which, by the help of Hephaestus and Athena, men invented art. The second is what Naas has called *political anamnēsis*, that is the recollection of the paradigm of governance from the age of Kronos.

But this is where things get tricky. Because, in the age before state, the paradigm of governance was mainly pastoral. The Demiurge was mainly described like a shepherd that must sometimes “purge” his flock and create a pure, unmixed population (Plato 1967d, 735b). This understanding of political *mimēsis* by recurrence to the image of the shepherd and aiming for an ideal population purity is the main source of ancient and modern day biopolitics. But I would argue that this is a misunderstanding of Plato’s intentions, because, in the *Statesman* at least, he stresses out the fact that, in the age of Zeus, the Statesman is not primarily a shepherd, a doctor, or a navigator, but a weaver. His art and science must be that of weaving together different characters in the city and different *paradeigmata* in his governance. In some sense, by recollecting the Age of Kronos as much as he is able to, he must act as a shepherd, a medic, a navigator, a chariot driver, an artisan and a father at the same time. Most important though is that he must be able to weave these roles together and act with flair depending on the context he is put into.

I think there are two lessons that, nowadays, after the century of most horrible biopolitical totalitarian regimes, we could learn from Plato. The first is that we shouldn't let our political *eidōla* haunt us and occupy the whole space of our minds. These phantoms, empty appearances that have a name, but no substance, are the reason for political polarization, the rise of extremist doctrines and the fragile condition of democracy in many parts of the world. The second lesson is that, in a world of multiple cultures, religions, ways of life and values, the real political leader must be some kind of a weaver that knows when it's time to heal and when it's time to steer, when it's time to lead and when it's time to listen, when it's time to act and when it's time to idle.

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