

Orestis Karatzoglou, *The embodied self in Plato. Phaedo - Republic - Timaeus*. Trends in classics. Supplementary volumes, 120. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. Pp. xxii, 178. ISBN 9783110737400. \$114.99.

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Preview

The immortality of the soul is one of the central doctrines of Platonism. Atticus (2nd century AD) takes the other main tenets, most importantly the moral accountability of persons and the possibility of knowledge, to follow from this one (fr. 7 Des Places). The idea is that the soul after departing from the body at death will get its deserved rewards and punishments and that we acquire knowledge by recalling the knowledge of Forms gathered through immediate view of them in a disembodied state before birth. Both of these doctrines presuppose a kind of personal identity, situated at the level of the (rational) soul. We also learn from the *Phaedo* that humans (embodied souls) can improve their mundane life by getting closer to the view of the Forms: which is most perfect when the soul is on its own, so better life can be achieved by leaving the body as much as possible. On this view the body is a hindrance to human knowledge.

Karatzoglou aims at contesting this fairly ordinary (labelled by the author ‘Neoplatonist’(xviii)) reading of Plato.¹ He purports to show that our self (the person) for Plato includes the body as an indispensable component, or at least that there are different conceptions of personal identity in Plato—pure soul and embodied soul—and in each occasion Plato uses the one which best suits his purposes in context. Although this is the alleged purpose of the study (xvi-xvii), we do not get an analysis (or description) of the embodied concept of personal identity or self. Is it that besides our rational soul our body also constitutes our identity? Or that our identity is accounted for by a soul that includes non-rational elements or even the body? We get indications for each alternative (chapter 1 on *Phaedo* for the former, chapter 2 on *Republic* and chapter 3 on *Timaeus* for the latter), but a clear exposition of the concept is nowhere to be found.

What Karatzoglou offers—instead of analysing the concept of an embodied self—is three essays on three dialogues of Plato that are related in some way to the main idea of the book, viz. that the body plays an important role in our self. Since I believe the book does not succeed in offering a coherent analysis of the concept,² I discuss each chapter as independent works, indicating where they contribute to the overarching topic and where do they fail to do so.

Chapter 1 argues that Socrates’ purpose in the *Phaedo* is not to *demonstrate* the immortality of the soul, but rather to *persuade* himself and his audience about it in order to show that fear of death is not reasonable. In this persuasion Socrates is shown to rely on the unverifiable hypothesis that pure knowledge (of the Forms) is possible. This makes immortality a matter of

¹ See, e.g., Sorabji (2006) *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*; Long (2005) *Platonic Souls as Persons*, in Salles (ed) *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought*.

² Two recent studies offer more coherent interpretation of embodied self: Zoller (2018) *Plato and the Body: Reconsidering Socratic Asceticism*; Jorgenson (2018) *The Embodied Soul in Plato’s Later Thought*.

hope (*elpis*), a kind of non-rational belief, and the arguments for immortality (flawed and unpersuasive for the audience as they are) resemble to mythologies to be told to children. In his analysis, Karatzoglou “pays particular attention to the reactions of the internal audience” (16) to theses and arguments, especially tracing their doubts and reservations. He shows that instead of being successful in persuading his friends, Socrates invites them to continue examining the basic hypotheses after his death (notably the possibility of knowledge).

As such, the chapter provides interesting insights about the interlocutors’ attitudes; but as to the topic of the book it provides only hints and doubtful connections. While recapitulating Socrates’ metaphors for death that indicate distinctness of soul and body—separation, prison, and purification (4–14)—Karatzoglou suggests that certain bodily affections of the mind are indispensable for human beings, even for Socrates, a genuine philosopher. Sense perception is required for attaining knowledge by providing opportunity for recollection (19, more explicitly xix); Socrates’ calm attitude towards death and his belief that the soul is immortal is based on his hope (*elpis*) in the possibility of knowledge, and hope is supposed to be a bodily state (26–9); Socrates ventures to be victory-lover (*philonikos*), which is related to honour-loving (*philotimia*: at *Republic* VIII 545a2–3), which again to the spirited part of the *Republic* soul, that is, again, something bodily (33); identifying the arguments for the immortality of soul as myths that are non-rational makes Socrates’ procedure in the *Phaedo* non-rational and so “bodily” (46–7). Even if these factors show that humans in their worldly life must have a body, it does not follow that personal identity (that is, even post-mortem and pre-natal identity) has anything to do with the body. Even if these states are needed for certain purposes, presumably Socrates’ soul in itself (Socrates himself) could do better without them. There is also a methodological problem. Karatzoglou, even though he emphasises the importance of the context of the occurrence of a phrase or thought—different conceptions of body, soul, and personal identity can be at play in different places—sometimes, in his interpretation, he neglects where a phrase occurs in the dialogue (e.g., he identifies the content of Socrates’ *elpis* as the possibility of knowledge in general, although it occurs mainly in the context of his “apology” (*Phaedo* 63e–70a), and so presumably being a hope that he himself will acquire true knowledge after death), or even freely imposes concepts and phrases from one dialogue to another (e.g., the connection between *philonikia* and *philotimia* from the *Republic*, or even stressing the importance of *philonikia*, which presumably Socrates applies for himself ironically).

Chapter 2 aims at saving the unity of the soul from tripartition in the *Republic*, through (i) emphasising evidence in favour of taking soul parts as aspects rather than distinct agents (section 2.1–2.3), and (ii) coordinating the stages of the educational program for guardians to different types and unities of virtue, and in turn to different degrees of unity of the soul (section 2.4–2.5). (i) Siding with the aspect reading, Karatzoglou presents the interpretative problems without many new arguments (section 2.1), and attempts to disarm two objections. While he convinces us (section 2.3) that the metaphorical language reduces the weight of the mythological allegories of the soul division that suggest separate agents (*Republic* IX 588b–589b, soul as monster, lion, and human; and *Republic* X 611b–612a, about Glaucus), his reasoning against the thesis that non-rational parts of the soul have desires and beliefs (section 2.2) is flawed. He puts side by side the main passages of moral psychology (*Republic* IV 441c–442d) and those of conflict between perception and reason (*Republic* X 602c–603a), suggesting that the content of beliefs of the non-rational parts should be the same in each case. In the latter case it is clearly perceptual content, so he states it should also be such in the agreement of the three parts of the soul (442c–d) and in the learning (in fact habituation (65–

6)) of the spirited part (442a–c). But perceptual belief is not sufficient to explain motivation in moral psychology. Even though he mentions alternative solutions (64) that reserve belief for the rational part, the point of the division of the soul was to explain contrary motivations, and these motivations should depend on beliefs about (with the content that) *something* (towards which the motivation is intended) *as being good*.

(ii) In the other strand, the author first offers two distinctions among virtues: (a) natural vs. technical; within technical (b) pre-reflective vs. post-reflective (section 2.4),³ and then maps the three stages of virtue to three levels of unity of the soul (section 2.5). Natural virtue is the potentiality to become rational that every human being has from birth, by which every soul has a minimal unearned unity. The soul can be further unified by acquiring technical virtues—the other cardinal virtues—through educational efforts: the pre-reflective stage through musical and gymnastic habituation in the early life (*Republic* II-III), though keeping some disunity by keeping non-rational desires; the post-reflective stage through higher studies of mathematics and dialectic (*Republic* VII) that lead to the complete knowledge of philosophers and the maximal unity of their soul.

My main concern with the chapter is that these two moves, (i) and (ii), point in opposite directions. If unity is saved by taking division conceptually, the soul has unity from the start throughout its life, and so unification of the soul becomes pointless. On the contrary, if genuine unity of the soul is only achieved in philosophers through higher education, the soul at first should be disparate (yet with minimal unity). How a single soul with three aspects constitutes such a disunity is not discussed sufficiently by Karatzoglou.

The book is based on Karatzoglou's dissertation,⁴ which becomes clearest in Chapter 3: in his analysis of the *Timaeus*, Karatzoglou recapitulates much of the interpretative efforts of earlier authors, even when these do not relate to the topic of the book. He argues that the World's soul shares certain features with its body, as they are created from the same stuff including the Receptacle and Necessity. Through analysing the creation of body and precosmic stages he identifies two apparently conflicting features of the Receptacle: (a) as a permanent qualitative substratum for the elements changing into one another and for the possibility of reference in language (section 3.2), and (b) as a source of motion and change in precosmic state (section 3.3). He suggests—based on the account of the creation of the World soul and evidence from the *Sophist*, *Parmenides*, and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A—that (a) corresponds to Sameness and (b) to Difference (section 3.4–3.5).

In this analysis Karatzoglou wanders furthest from the topic of self, as the discussion is about the World soul rather than human soul, and even more about the stuff out of which it is created. Even if granted that the World soul contains the bodily Receptacle (as having been generated from it), it remains unclear how we are supposed to draw any conclusion about personal identity. But the stuff out of which something is created is not the same as a component that constitutes something; Karatzoglou seems to confuse the two concepts. Moreover, while in the first chapter we got careful analysis of the context and the reactions of

³ The analysis is based on chapter 4 of Gill (1996) *Personality in Greek epic, tragedy, and philosophy: the self in dialogue*.

⁴ Quite comprehensively, after a quick comparison.

each interlocutor, Karatzoglou takes everything in the *Timaeus* at face value, praising the literal readings over other possibilities,⁵ not even giving due weight to the status of Timaeus' speech as a likely story in a mythical format.

The book contains studied analysis of many passages in Plato's *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* (and some other dialogues)—although often relying on works of others. But it fails to succeed in its explicit aim of exploring Plato's self as embodied, and the concept of personal identity. So, it remains a collection of three essays, with weak overall coherence, rendering the framing Introduction and Epilogue deceptive.⁶ The individual essays are still worth used for in-depth study of the discussed dialogues.⁷

⁵ Notably, he presents the source of (irregular) motion in precosmos without soul as a “major interpretative problem” (122), yet stresses that this motion should be understood literally (128). But his “solution” is just the restatement of the issue: “disorderly motion could have predated the creation of the soul” (129).

⁶ The book is nicely produced, with few typographical errors (mostly in the footnotes and the Bibliography). Many quotations from Greek (and terms) appear without translation, which limits the possible readership unduly.

⁷ I am grateful to Dániel Attila Kovács for his suggestions to improve my review.