

O'BRIEN, CARL SÉAN

The Demiurge in Ancient Thought. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 2015, 346 pp.

Carl Séan O'Brien's *The Demiurge in Ancient Thought* stands out as a fundamental research in the worldview of Platonism and schools influenced by Plato.

Published by Cambridge University Press, O'Brien's essay explains the latest ideas in the investigation about the demiurge. The scholar analyzed how the theories on this subject evolved over a period of 800 years: from Plato to Plotinus, and the new concepts added by Christians or Hermetics. Each chapter focuses on one thinker or school, beginning with an overview, followed by deeper explanation of some topics, and finally ending with a brief conclusion.

The investigation conducted by O'Brien mixes direct readings of the primary sources with complementary interpretations given by secondary sources, thus setting a rigorous work. Authors and schools are arranged following a chronological sequence, since O'Brien exposes the sequence of thinkers according to their epoch. Through the idea of the demiurge, presenting characteristics and differences, the book serves like a panorama of the middle Platonists and Neoplatonists, indirectly analyzed from their points of view on the demiurge.

O'Brien starts with Plato, whose demiurge builds the best world possible but elements outside of him constrain the creation. The platonic view is optimistic on this aspect. The point in Plato's theory is that the demiurge is more of a principle that ordered the cosmos than a creator of the universe.

Philo is the second thinker in the chain of this deep study. He was influenced by Jewish theology and by the Platonic school and the Stoic current. For Philo, the visible cosmos is produced by the intercourse of God with Sophia, his Wisdom and daughter, a point of view later followed by Gnostics, Neoplatonists and others.

The book goes on with the theories of the Stoics, the school that differs from the Platonic notion in two aspects: for them, the demiurge is perennially creating and concerned with his creation;

the second different line is the immanent nature of the demiurge, who works on matter from inside of it (pp. 89-90). However, the immanent condition of God within the matter entails philosophical problems: trying to delimitate where God starts and when matter finishes.

The dualism increased its influence among the Platonist thinkers from the next centuries who underlined the opposition between God or the intelligible world and matter or the real of phenomena: a major trend between Plutarch and Maximus (p. 121). The latter is one of the dualists who thought of a great split existing between God and matter, the Zeus' *pneuma* that created the cosmos, and three levels of divine goodness: Demiurge on the top, the Young Gods and *daimones*, providing a link with Demiurge for human being. His notion of the demiurge avoids considering the figure as the responsible of the world's evil.

The Neopythagorean philosopher, Numenius, conceived the divine split into three gods: the First God is not involved in the creation of the World. This Grandfather God creates the Second God, the demiurge, who produces the Third God looking at the platonic Forms; this third creator, a World Soul, focuses on the process of constant generation of the cosmos; however, both are actually one and are not attached to the intelligible. In fact, a general tendency in middle Platonist authors is to envisage that Demiurge transmit the Forms in the sensible realm.

According to O'Brien, Hermetism conceived the Nous like the demiurge. Like some of the other mentioned currents, they split the Creators. In this case, between the First Nous and a second Nous, who generates the world in a demiurgic way, and who works like the mind of material creation (p. 174). Moreover, there is a new level of creation with the Governors of Cosmos (planetary gods). An original aspect of Hermetism was their idea about humanity as a direct creation of the First Nous. The human nous was created in the First Nous image and likeness, therefore better than the demiurge because humans bear the image of God (p. 180). They need this figure because it would explain the existence of evil in the world, like for the Gnostics.

The opposite extreme of the Platonic demiurge is found in the gnostic demiurge, in which the Platonic creator has vanished. It is replaced by an ignorant one. The first problem with the Gnostic notion of the demiurge lies in the heterogeneous groups gathered under that label: “He is central to Valentinian and Sethian systems, but possibly absent in the systems of Menander and Saturninus” (p. 208).

Valentinian Gnosticism sets a lot of hypostases, ordered in pairs, between the First Principle or Primal Tetraktys, the Abyss, his emanations, and the Demiurge, who reigns in the Matter or Sublunar level (pp. 216-219). According to some of the Gnostic authors, the youngest Aeon, Sophia, wants to emulate the First Principle. Therefore, she creates an emanation of herself, a lower Sophia, the realm of matter, expelled from the godhead Pleroma. This fruit of her intention is an act of *hybris*. Christ and the Holy Spirit descend from Pleroma to the inferior dimension to stabilise it (pp. 221-222). Some of them pictured the demiurge as a creator-angel, creator of the physical world. Human beings remain on Earth like in a prison produced by the fall of Sophia, and the gnosis shines as the key to escape.

Some Christian authors also mixed platonic influences with their credo. In Origen, God Father is the creator of everything but his Son is co-creator. This is a very special relationship that avoids the typical separation into two gods that happens in Gnosticism. The Son acts as the logos and the wisdom of God (pp. 250-254). The Son is the instrument in the process of creation produced by the Father. Even the Holy Spirit plays the demiurgic role. Origen’s worldview locates the evil in the physical world, following the gnostic example, although the essential point in their approach is that evil is not in the core of nature, but in the decisions of each rational creature, based on free will (pp. 266, 277).

Neoplatonism constitutes the last link in the chain. Most of Neo-Platonists did not require the Demiurge for their cosmogonic model, but maintained some degree of the figure in other roles. Concerning their greatest philosopher, Plotinus, he demised the Demiurge reducing the process to a radical monism, in which the One generates as the light radiates in decreasing degrees. That justifies the differences of purity and evil in the universe. Quite sur-

prisingly, O'Brien qualifies the Plotinian model as a middle ground between Darwinism, Deism, the atomistic theory by Democritus and Plato's *Timaeus* (p. 290). After Plotinus, the weight of the idea decreased in the history of culture.

As a final remark, O'Brien succeeded in his effort to put this very concept into words. Doing this is apparently a huge challenge because, according to Plato or Origen, the human language is unsuited to express things related to God or the Demiurge. They are beings omnipotent and beyond time (p. 275).

To sum up, the *Demiurge in Ancient Thought* is a proposal to deepen our knowledge of the demiurge.

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OCHOA ABAURRE, JUAN CARLOS

Maestros del saber, aprendices del vivir. Los orígenes del conocimiento: del mito a la realidad, Eunate, Pamplona, D.L. 2016, 252 pp.

Juan Carlos Ochoa Abaurre concibe la filosofía como un arte de vivir, cuyo aprendizaje nos ha sido transmitido por los maestros del saber. A este respecto la filosofía se ha presentado desde sus orígenes griegos como una respuesta a los grandes interrogantes de la existencia, aunque sin duda sus precedentes son muy anteriores. Así, se retrotrae el origen de la filosofía a la larga presencia del chamanismo a lo largo de la prehistoria, o al papel desempeñado por los cazadores recolectores en las primeras etapas de la formación de las diferentes culturas. Al menos así ha sido descrito por Edward Burnett Tylor y por Clifford Geertz. Posteriormente estas mismas propuestas se proyectan sobre la cultura griega dando un nuevo sentido a la génesis de determinados mitos y ritos, como el mito de la Edad de Oro, o el rito de la muerte y resurrección, al modo propuesto por Mircea Eliade. Así se concluye la primera parte donde se reflexiona sobre los presupuestos antropológicos y vitales de un imaginario colectivo, que a su vez hunde sus raíces en el pen-