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CALL FOR PAPERS

for the First Middle East Regional Meeting of the International Plato Society

Theôria as Cognition in Plato

May 24-26, 2023 Ankara, Turkey

Concerns for *theôria* and theoretical life had always been a major issue in ancient philosophy after Socrates; and this theme had found some of its most authentic philosophical elaborations in the *protreptical* genre. Much of the current literature on theoretical life in Plato focuses on *bios theôretikos* as an ethical and practical issue; but *theôria* itself has rarely been taken as the focal subject. Andrea Wilson Nightangale's (1) work is a remarkable exception in this regard, which proves how rich this theme can be for scholars of ancient philosophy.

The themes of *theôria* and theoretical life are elaborated in many of Plato's dialogues, especially in *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Philebus*, *Phaedrus* and *Timeaus*. However, it is a remarkable fact about Plato's treatment of *theôria* in these dialogues that it is, most of the time, approached as part of some mythical or mystical narrative. In the *Republic*, for instance, it is famously woven into the Allegory of the Cave and the Myth of Er; or in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* it is modeled on mystic initiations at the Eleusinian Festivals. Why does Plato choose to present it this way? Is the *bios theôretikos* the life that Socrates leads or the life that he only speaks about? Is it the life of someone who actively engages his fellow citizens in the market or the life of one who has climbed out of the cave and gazes at the the Good? It is clear to any reader of these dialogues that *theôria* in Plato has strong epistemological, cognitive and psychological components to it. As T. Benatouil and M. Bonazzi put it, we have in Plato "a psychological and epistemological elucidation of contemplation, assigning it to a separable and immortal faculty, *noûs*, and distinguishing it from other lower cognitive activities such as sensation, opinion, experience, practical reason, etc." (2). This conference is motivated by the idea of exploring this cognitive core in Plato's mostly metaphorical presentation of *theôria* in the dialogues. More precisely, the purpose of this conference on "*Theôria* in Plato" is to investigate the nature of *theôria* itself in Plato

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from a cognitive, epistemological and psychological point of view. The conference aims at reflecting on the theoretical nature of *theôria* in Plato.

One pressing question is, however, whether there is a *bios theôretikos* that is distinct from an ethically and practically engaged life. Plato seems to intentionally reject the distinction between theoretical and practical lives by showing Socrates as both practical and theoretical. This apparent unification comes under scrutiny in later dialogues when Socrates is not the interlocutor. The conference theme can be, therefore, understood from a broader perspective as including the theoretical examination of delimiting a distinct theoretical life in Plato.

Other potential issues and questions to address include:

- What is the object of *theôria* in Plato?
- What kind of a state of mind is *theôria*?
- What is the nature of the self as the subject of *theôria*?
- If *theôria* is a state of knowledge, what kind of knowledge is it (propositional knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance, etc.)?
- According to Plato, what relation does *theôria* bear to other cognitive states, such as sensation, *doxa*, memory, etc.?
- Does *theôria* have a method? What is (if there is any) the relation between *theôria* and dialectic?
- If *theôria* in Plato has a unique kind of pleasure, what is its nature, and what relation does it have to other kinds of pleasure?
- What is the nature of *theôria* as the constitutive activity of *bios theôretikos*? For instance, does this activity have a special teleology of its own?
- What differences are there between human and divine *theôria*?
- Is *theôria* an attainable ideal for human beings? If it is unattainable, what might be the alternatives for human beings? How would the ideal of *theôria* ground these alternatives and make them legitimate alternatives? In other words, what do we humans do in the absence of *theôria* and what should we do?
- Are there any differences between Socrates and Plato concerning the issue of *theôria*?
- Are there any differences between Plato's middle and late dialogues regarding *theôria*?

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- What elements can be collected from later Platonists to shed light on Plato's notion of *theôria*?
- Other traditional "spectacles" of the period (such as the theatrical and musical contests, sport events and some religious rituals like pilgrimage, for instance), are usually considered metaphors for philosophical *theôria*. What exactly do these metaphors elucidate? What can be the significance, for Plato, of the resemblances and differences between those traditional spectacles and *theôria* in philosophy?
- What is the relation between *noûs* and *dianoia* in *theôria*? Is it possible to have one without the other?

(1) A. W. Nightingale (2009). *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(2) T. Bénatouïl and M. Bonazzi (2012). "θεωρία and βίος θεωρητικός from the Presocratics to the End of Antiquity: An Overview". In T. Bénatouïl and M. Bonazzi (eds.) *Theoria, praxis, and the contemplative life after Plato and Aristotle*. Leiden-Bristol: Brill, p. 4.

Some other details are as follows:

1. The conference will have

Prof. Elisabetta Cattanei (Università degli studi di Genova) and
Prof. Mauro Bonazzi (Utrecht University) as the keynote speakers.

2. Other invited speakers of the conference are:

Mehmet M. Erginel (Eastern Mediterranean University)
Andrew German (Ben Gurion University of the Negev)
Béatrice Lienemann (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität)

3. Scholars from Turkish universities are invited as respondents for each invited talk.
Invited respondents from the host country are:

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Ömer Aygün (Galatasaray University/Utrecht University)
James Griffith (METU)
Damien Storey (Koç University)
Hikmet Ünlü (Hacettepe University)
Daniel Wolt (Bilkent University)

4. The language of the conference is English.
5. Participation fee: 50 EUR.
6. Organizational responsibility: Refik Güremen (METU Department of Philosophy)
rguremen@metu.edu.tr

Submissions

We have slots for ten other speakers. (All talks will be given in person.) The conference is open to both senior and junior researchers from all countries. We are eager for submissions from women scholars. On-campus accommodation facilities will be offered to participants.

Submissions (for a 30-min. presentation) should include a title page with the title of the presentation, author's name, a mini-bio, institutional affiliation, and email address. A 600- to 750-word abstract should be prepared for blind review and sent as a second file (docx or pdf only). Please email all submissions or questions to phil@metu.edu.tr

SUBMISSIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY February 1, 2023.