

«μὴ νεωτερίζειν»: Platonic worries about the risk of ethico-aesthetical
paranomia between harmonics and politics.

Why does Plato, in the context of book IV where the general features of virtues are defined in order to structure the best constitution, insist so much on the political risk *hidden* in musical innovation (*neoterismos*; IV 424b)? How is the tendency to break the rules (*paranomia*) connected to modifications of musical *nomoi*, whose educational effects in Books II-III appeared to be so relevant?

It is possible to answer these questions by starting from the analysis of Plato's use of precise technical references to harmonic language when describing the characteristics proper to the two most "diffused" (*dià holes*, IV 432 a-b) virtues in Kallipolis: *sophrosyne* and *dikaiosyne*.

These are both defined by the language of *harmonia* (IV 430e-432b1; IV 443c9-e3), which reveals a possible solution both of the conflicts within the soul and between the individuals through the global virtuous development of the political *holon*. This, on one hand, permits the individual to achieve an equilibrium between the passionate elements of the soul, while on the other hand it enables the «action proper to each person» (*ta hautou prattein*) to be integrated within a unitary political framework. It is significant that the results achieved in defining these virtues are expressed through the conceptual dimension of a complex *harmony*, which is capable of restoring unity between potentially disruptive elements, «making them one from many» (IV 443e1), but without depriving them of the possibility to express their own individual potential.

Once the connection is established between the features of virtues and harmonic structures on the formal level, after its extensive exploration in Books II and III from a mimetic-musical point of view, the reason for Plato's reference to Damon on this subject becomes clearer: it is not possible to modify the musical *nomoi* without altering the *megistoi nomoi* (i.e the laws of the State), as they are mutually connected both on the formal and on the psychological level. Through the musical *nomoi*, the principle of *paranomia* insinuates itself into the soul and, even if it remains invisible, ends up in growing «like a wave», since it «overturns everything, in private and in public» (IV 424e). In this same context, moreover, Plato underlines that the «guarding tower» (*phylakterion*) for defending the state will be built *en mousiké*, which originally made it possible to form virtues and gave them its own shape.

After showing the ethico-psychological origin of the Platonic fear of musical *neoterismos*, I will conclude by trying to outline what kind of musical *neoterismos* in particular aroused Plato's anxieties. It is reasonable to identify this with the innovations introduced by the school of *Nea Mousiké* which, in the pursuit of growing public success, had radically and consciously subverted the rules and styles (*nomoi*) of musical representations, reaching an apex with Timotheus' *Persians* and *Semele's Birth-Pangs*.