

YOUNG ACADEMICS

by Nomos

Jibiao Jiang

Craft of Soul

The Generation of Sovereignty
in the State Theory of the Later Plato

YOUNG ACADEMICS

by Nomos

Philosophie | 10

Jibiao Jiang

Craft of Soul

**The Generation of Sovereignty
in the State Theory of the Later Plato**

With a Foreword by Prof. Dr. Martin Saar

Tectum Verlag



Onlineversion
Inlibra

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

1st Edition 2026

© The Author

Jibiao Jiang
Craft of Soul
The Generation of Sovereignty in the State Theory of the Later Plato

Young Academics by Nomos: Philosophie; Vol. 10

ISSN 2940-0821
ISBN 978-3-68900-626-6 (Print)
978-3-68900-627-3 (ePDF)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783689006273>

Published by
Tectum – ein Verlag in der Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG
Waldseestraße 3–5 | 76530 Baden-Baden | Germany
www.tectum-verlag.de

Production of the print edition:
Tectum – ein Verlag in der Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG
Waldseestraße 3–5 | 76530 Baden-Baden | Germany



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution
4.0 International License.

Foreword

Jibiao Jiang submitted an excellent MA thesis at Frankfurt University; its extensively revised version now forms the basis of this book. *Craft of Soul: The Generation of Sovereignty in the State Theory of the Later Plato* presents an original interpretation of aspects of the classical—indeed, the most canonical—political philosophy in the Western tradition. For a long time, Plato's conception of the *polis*, the state, and political community was primarily a subject for specialists. On the one hand, scholars emphasized the historical specificity and contextuality of his work but rarely connected it to contemporary debates. On the other, some theorists following Leo Strauss's influential reading insisted on the esoteric, even elitist character of Platonic thought—arguing that it was inaccessible to the »masses« and fundamentally incompatible with modern democratic demands.

The tide has turned, however—at least partially. A newer trend in recent discussions has emerged, bold enough to either assert direct relevance for contemporary political thinking (as in Alain Badiou's original reading and translation) or to reopen questions of historical continuity and discontinuity, tracing new connections and identifying *topoi* that link ancient political thought with early-modern, modern, and late-modern concepts. Michel Foucault's readings of early and late antique texts (from Plato to the Cynics, the Stoics, and early Christian authors) have been seminal in this regard. Though neither a specialist in Greek or Latin nor a historian of antiquity or political thought, Foucault managed to make daring contributions to all of these fields. He argued that ancient conceptions and practices of government and governance constitute the matrix upon which later political ideas and practices implicitly built. Fur-

thermore, he demonstrated how the relationship between the self, truth, and political order has shaped the history of Western political thought more profoundly than most modern theories—let alone liberalism—have been willing to acknowledge. The cognitive divides between Antiquity, the Christian and early modern periods, and high or late modernity may, he contended, be less profound than previously assumed. Consequently, the debate on the periodization of European history might need to be revisited on this premise (see, e.g., the classic interventions by Paul Veyne or the recent contributions by Bernard Jussen).

Jibiao Jiang's work is situated within this intellectual context. He devotes his study to the multifaceted Greek concept of *techne*, which has played a crucial role in philosophy since Plato, particularly in his political thought. Jiang engages extensively and controversially with numerous interpretations of this term, tracing continuities and ruptures within Plato's corpus while mapping the entire semantic network in which *techne* is embedded. Plato himself acknowledges that human action can never fully master causal relationships; there remains room for chance, fortune, fate, and divine favor. Yet human—especially political—action can proceed virtuously and prudently, with a reasonable prospect of success, if it employs a wise selection of means and strategies and adopts a rational perspective on its ends. This approximation of meaningful action to the orientation toward truth also explains Plato's opposition to the Sophists. Political action, however, in the end remains fundamentally distinct and precarious in its form, always retaining an element of contingency. Consequently, the command and application of *techne* never entirely submits to human intentionality, and the wise governance and cultivation of souls can never be reduced to mere instrumentality.

Following a thorough examination of interpretive challenges, Jiang connects these historical questions to systematic inquiries into power and politics, drawing inspiration from Foucault's intensive use of ancient concepts. He corrects Foucault's own suggestion that modern power theory had diverged from its ancient model on this point in question, arguing instead that Foucault, without fully acknowledging it, himself conceives of the relationship between power and knowledge within the broad framework of a *techne*-based understanding—thus thinking more »Greek« than

he would admit. Jiang also challenges the notion that the *topos* of sovereignty is quintessentially modern. For Plato, securing political order is the foundation for all other political strategies and projects; thus, a *techne* of state preservation has always been an essential component of the political and cannot be separated from it. He links this insight to an engaging discussion of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben.

Yet these undeniably compelling reflections are situated within the aforementioned tension. On the one hand, they reaffirm the historical singularity of Greek philosophy, demanding philological rigor. On the other, they insist on a strong ontological claim—unhesitant to embrace anachronism in identifying eternal laws of political thought, thereby even echoing Straussian tendencies. However, the most intriguing aspect lies at the systematic level. Building on Foucault, Jiang argues that we can derive insights into the specific forms of sovereignty, state power, and the governance of souls from the Platonic framework. Plato systematically intertwines the soul, the state, and *techne* in his theory; this proves useful and illuminating for both standard cases of contemporary governance (particularly the regulatory power of state law) and its extreme exceptions (such as emergency laws in wartime or the »war on terror«). Here lies a peculiar yet enduring relevance of ancient concepts and models of thought for the analysis of contemporary power.

Can we, then, (once again) be Platonists? Of course not. As Foucault remarked in a similar context, no era can answer its questions with responses from the past. Yet ancient political thought can serve as a mirror in which we recognize, in refracted form, elements of our own time. These attempts of re-reading the canon and breaking it out of the confines of received readings are part of a global conversation in which European and Asian perspectives often converge but also diverge in fascinating ways. Jibiao Jiang's work is a significant contribution to this conversation on politics today.

Frankfurt am Main, August 2026

Prof. Dr. Martin Saar

Contents

Foreword	V
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <i>Techne</i> : A Concept of Power–Knowledge	7
1.1 Hephaestus	8
1.2 Athena	10
1.3 Practice as a Result of Strategy	12
1.4 The Priority of Hephaestus	13
1.5 The Function of Appearance	17
1.6 The Goal-Directedness of <i>Techne</i> in Plato’s Philosophy	18
1.7 In Defense of the Common Interpretation of <i>Techne</i> in Plato’s Dialogues	21
1.7.1 TNP	21
1.7.2 TIR	23
1.7.3 ANP	26
1.8 A General Concept of <i>Techne</i> in Archaic and Classical Greece	27
1.9 Plato’s Πολιτική Turn: The Sublation of »the Will to Know«	29
Chapter 2: The Soul	33
2.1 The <i>Nomos–Physis</i> Opposition	34
2.2 The Function of the Soul	41
2.3 Justice as <i>Techne</i>	44

Contents

Chapter 3: A Craft of Functional Lawmaking	47
3.1 The Purpose of Lawmaking	47
3.2 Plato's Concept of <i>Nomos</i>	50
3.3 The <i>Nomothetike</i> and the <i>Nomos</i> of Souls	54
Chapter 4: Governing Souls	57
4.1 Discipline	58
4.2 Rhetoric	62
4.3 The Guardians of the <i>Nomos</i> in Individual Souls	65
4.4 Ineliminable Sovereignty	69
Chapter 5: Paradigms of Sovereignty	77
5.1 Political <i>Techne</i> : The Generation of Sovereignty	79
5.2 Reason of State: Sovereignty Generated within Governmentality	83
5.3 Guantanamo Bay: Sovereignty Generated through Citizens' Souls	85
Appendix 1: List of Functions of the <i>Nomos</i>-Guardians	89
Bibliography	91
Acknowledgements	95