

Plato's Laws: A Critical Guide. Edited by Christopher Bobonich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 256. \$80.00 (Hardback). ISBN-13: 978-0521884631.

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This excellent collection of essays on Plato's *Laws* from major scholars presents reflections and developments on established topics in the literature and raises novel questions and arguments. It is elegantly edited, with themes in the background of one essay brought to the fore in the next, and it is a pleasure to read—not only the essays individually, but as a collection from start to finish.

As Bobonich notes in his introduction, it is no longer true to that the *Laws* is a neglected text. But he notes also that its enormous philosophical interest has not yet been fully explored. This makes the publication of a collection like this one an exciting event. Whatever faults one may find with the *Laws*, it raises direct questions of compelling philosophical interest and reflects on them in depth. Many of these questions—for instance, the role of law in the production of virtue and the nature of civic virtue—have been largely neglected by scholars of ancient philosophy and promise to illuminate material outside the dialogue as well.

These essays are not methodologically neutral. As Bobonich also points out in his introduction, they all assume that the *Laws* can be illuminated by parallel passages elsewhere in Plato's dialogues. The *Laws* is not read as a self-contained text containing all of the tools needed for its own interpretation. The essays come from the Anglophone mainstream, which considers other dialogues—and for that matter, other philosophers—as fair game in interpreting one dialogue or another, however divergent the resulting interpretations. So the *Laws* is compared to the *Republic* in several essays (in Rowe, Kraut, Samaras, and Laks), the *Philebus* (Frede), and the *Timaeus* (Kamtekar and Bobonich). Some essays also reflect on connections (or lack thereof) between the *Laws* and the work of other philosophers: notably Aristotle (in Schofield, Frede, and Laks) and Philo of Alexandria (in Annas).

The volume contains two essays on the general methodology and structure of the *Laws* (Schofield and Rowe); three essays on general questions about virtue, morality and law (Kraut, Annas, and Irwin); three essays on the moral psychology of the dialogue (Frede, Kamtekar, and Bobonich); and three essays on various other topics: the family and women (Samaras); theology (Mayhew); and art and tragedy (Laks). The volume thus has a strong focus on the moral philosophy of the *Laws*, especially its moral psychology. This is defensible given the current state of the literature and given what scholars of ancient philosophy are most likely to be interested in. But given the centrality of politics and law to the *Laws*, the volume definitely under-emphasizes political theory and the political dimensions of the moral philosophy. Not only is the number of articles dealing with political or legal questions in some depth relatively small, but the articles on

moral psychology make little effort to situate the theses of the *Laws* within its broader program. However, the neglect of political questions is not in any way unique to this volume. Rather, it reflects a longstanding defect in the mainstream literature on the moral philosophy of Plato and Aristotle: an artificial focus on the moral life of individuals, a focus that our authors did not share and that distorts and obscures many of their concerns.

Schofield's essay, 'The *Laws*' two projects', sets out to reconcile what he sees as two potentially conflicting purposes of the dialogue's political theory, on the one hand to present a certain political ideal along the lines of the *Republic*, and on the other to present certain workable, practical recommendations for real-life regimes and their real-life citizens. The second project, Schofield argues, is what Aristotle means by saying that the constitution of the *Laws* is 'more common' than that of the *Republic*. Schofield suggests that the two projects are reconciled in the dual nature of law, as a way of 'capitalizing on experience to achieve idealizing goals': law as educator can help produce a true community of the virtuous, while law as coercive acknowledges the failure to live up to this ideal.

In 'The relationship of other dialogues to the *Laws*: a proposal', Rowe argues that the *Laws* is directed at two distinct audiences: one less sophisticated, represented by Cleinias, Megillus, and the colonists themselves; and the other one well-versed in other dialogues of Plato and able to understand higher-level philosophy. The Athenian regularly talks over the heads of his interlocutors—and so, one presumes, the colonist-citizens to whom the *Laws* is also addressed. Rowe argues that the multiple audiences can reconcile apparent differences across dialogues. Rowe gives as an example the apparent conflict between the praise of philosopher-rulers (*Republic*) or legislator-rulers (*Statesman*) with the *Laws*' insistence on the inevitable corruptibility of human rulers. The simpler audience is meant to be persuaded that they themselves are unfit to rule and so ought to give themselves over to the law, while the more sophisticated audience would follow subtle references to the endorsement of philosophical rule in the *Republic* and *Statesman*. The essay is thus a defense of a unitarian approach to Plato's political philosophy.

Richard Kraut argues in 'Ordinary virtue from the *Phaedo* to the *Laws*' that Plato was concerned throughout his career with the capacities of ordinary people for virtue, because of his concern with the formation of community between those with understanding and those without. He finds evidence even in the *Phaedo* of a certain praiseworthy shadow of virtue in ordinary people, and attributes this to the conflicting opinions ordinary people hold about virtue, that it is both valuable for its own sake and for its consequences. The *Laws*, on his view, fills a gap left in the *Republic* concerning the moral condition of the lowest class of citizens, the producers. Thus 'political virtue' in all three dialogues refers to what can be held by ordinary people. Both law-governed Magnesia and philosopher-governed Kallipolis allow ordinary people to achieve their best condition.

A closely related question is raised by Julia Annas in 'Law and Virtue in Plato'. Annas asks how it is that law can produce genuine virtue in the *Laws*,

given that law alone might produce passive and mindless obedience. She surveys the three main interpretations of the persuasive preludes attached to the laws: (i) that they produce rational persuasion (Bobonich); (ii) that they function non-rationally (Stalley); and (iii) that they aim at rational persuasion but must make concessions to human nature (Laks). She compares Philo's discussion of the Ten Commandments, and suggests by parallel a further interpretation: the preludes present lawful behavior as contributing to certain ethical aims or goals. So the preludes and the laws are not alternatives, but rather following the laws is a way to aspire to the ethical ideals made explicit in the preludes.

Irwin continues the discussion of virtue in the *Laws* in 'Morality as law and morality in the laws'. He begins with Cicero's definition of natural law as correct reason agreeing with (human) nature and asks whether this idea can be found in the *Laws*. He finds a notion of internal law in the dialogue and distinguishes it from obedience to the city's laws. Internal law is not the city's laws, but the principle behind them; it is identified with reasoning and with wisdom. Its content, on Irwin's analysis, is that one ought to seek one's own happiness via the pursuit of the common good. We have a natural tendency to excessive self-love that doesn't suit our nature; the internal law corrects this by giving theoretical priority to one's own good, but practical priority to the common good necessary for achieving it. Irwin argues that this amounts to a notion of natural law in Cicero's sense (and in the sense of the later natural law tradition).

Dorothea Frede's 'Puppets on strings' turns to moral psychology, especially the theory of pleasure in the *Laws*. She sketches an overall thesis that pleasure for Plato is always filling a lack: Plato never gives a 'steady-state' theory, and on her view he nowhere anticipates Aristotle's view that pleasure is an activity. She then turns to a detailed defense of that thesis for the *Laws*. She argues that the puppet analogy is not meant as a comprehensive psychology but is rather directed at the limited purpose of explaining certain aspects of education, especially the importance of achieving harmony between reason and the emotions by conditioning in laws and practices. She concludes further that the pleasures cultivated in moral education are not activities, but rather pleasures in continuous striving to be better, and so that the *Laws* supports her general thesis.

In 'Psychology and the inculcation of virtue', Kamtekar raises the question of how and why physical education is important in the *Laws*, and the more general question of the influence of practiced motions such as dance and exercise on the emotions. How is it, for instance, that rocking a child relieves fears and so prevents cowardice (*Laws* 790d5-791c2)? She approaches the question via the account of psychic motions in the *Timaeus* and via the debate between Bobonich and Lorenz on whether late Plato believed in soul-parts that could function independently of reason or not. She concludes that physical education benefits in three ways: (i) by increasing strength and so preventing unnecessary pain in virtuous action; (ii) by decreasing the painful experience of fear and so preventing the formation of false beliefs in the badness of the objects of fear and (iii) by cultivating the pleasure in orderly behavior. That moral education is meant to culti-

vate pleasure in order and orderliness was originally defended by Bobonich in *Plato's Utopia Recast*. Kamtekar's overall argument is thus that Bobonich's account of moral education can be severed from his other views about the moral psychology of the *Laws*—namely his view that the irrational parts of the soul do not function independently of reason.

Bobonich concludes the section of the volume on moral psychology with 'Images of irrationality', which addresses directly the controversy concerning his views on the development of Plato's moral psychology in *Plato's Utopia Recast*. In his earlier work Bobonich argues (i) that Plato in the *Republic* gives conceptual resources and motivational independence to all three parts of the soul, and (ii) that he abandons the entire tripartite picture of the soul in the late dialogues and defends rather a unitary conception. Charles Kahn and, more extensively, Hendrik Lorenz have defended an alternate view, namely, that the tripartite theory is defended throughout Plato's life and that the lower parts of the soul are always radically different in kind from the rational part. Most importantly the content of irrational motivation is imagistic rather than conceptualized (See Kahn 2004, Lorenz 2004 and 2006). The key obstacle to Bobonich's thesis is the clear division of the soul into three parts in the *Timaeus*, a dialogue thought to be written in close proximity with the *Laws*. Bobonich initially proposed that tripartition in the *Timaeus* was metaphorical, and further that it was an intentional exaggeration meant to display the clear philosophical difficulties with the view (156-157; Bobonich 2002, 297, 321). In this essay, he holds to his previous proposal and attempts a fuller defense. This defense is chiefly undertaken by an exceptionally lucid battery of philosophical objections to explanations of irrational motivation in terms of imagistic content and associative reasoning. Chief among these are serious questions of how, according to such explanations, communication between the rational and irrational parts could work and how an irrational desire without conceptual resources could possibly motivate independently of reason. These philosophical difficulties, on Bobonich's argument, weigh strongly against attributing the imagistic view to Plato.

The final three articles cover special topics in the *Laws*. Samaras' essay, 'Family and the question of women', covers the treatment of women and the household or *oikos*. There lies on Samaras' view a tension between Plato's desire to grant women the public life appropriate to the virtue they are able to achieve and his concession to the necessity that women raise their own children and so be confined for a period to the *oikos*. Samaras treats this tension as closely related to a more general tension in the *Laws* between the demands of private life, private property, and the *oikos* on the one hand and public life in common on the other. Samaras carefully evaluates the Platonic proposals as conservative or radical in their context by a well-documented comparison with practices in Sparta, Solonic Athens, and ancient Athens.

Mayhew surveys the theology of the *Laws* by gathering together the various passages in the dialogue itself and drawing what conclusions can be drawn: that the gods of the *Laws* are good; that they have virtues and serve as standards for

humans to imitate; that they are closely related to reason; and that they govern the cosmos in some way or other. Mayhew argues that detailed answers to the theological and philosophical questions these claims raise are not to be found in the *Laws*, and he suggests that the vagueness of the theology is deliberate and arises from the popular character of the *Laws* and the social, political, and moral dangers of widespread theological speculation.

In the final essay in the volume, Laks gives an account of what Plato means in calling the constitution of the *Laws* the ‘truest tragedy’ at 817a-d. He first points out close parallels between the *Laws* passage and Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. Turning to the debates about tragedy found in the German idealists, he then argues for a deep connection between tragedy and law via moral theodicy, the idea that injustice is always punished and justice always rewarded. The necessity of punishment in the ‘truest tragedy’, Laks argues, is the necessity of the lawgiver’s recourse to punishment. Laks points out that Plato’s moral theodicy contains a necessary tension, as while justice is its own reward, it is not always rewarded with external goods. The notion of law in the *Laws* reflects this tension by its ideal of rational persuasion and the authentic happiness promised by true virtue on the one hand and its necessary and inevitable recourse to violence when persuasion fails on the other.

The anthology, despite its many worthy qualities, has two main defects for scholars. For one, it lacks an index locorum. In addition, while it does present an accurate and exciting picture of various central topics of scholarly interest in the *Laws*, it would serve as a poor guide to the existing literature, thanks to the relative scarcity of references and bibliography in many (although not all) of the essays. While a failure to refer to previous literature is sometimes justified when an article asks an innovative question, it is not always justified here. For instance, Kraut’s paper on civic virtue takes no account of recent work on these topics in Plato (for example, Kamtekar 1998, Wilberding 2009, or Broadie 2004) and makes only two references to previous literature. Likewise, Kamtekar’s article is only the latest in a recent series of essays on non-verbal elements of moral education: for example Schofield 2010, following Ford 2004. Scholars and students will have to look elsewhere for a fuller scholarly record on the questions approached in the volume.

My various complaints should not obscure the fact that this volume has a great deal to offer anyone interested in the *Laws* or in ancient moral philosophy. It does not supplant *Plato’s Utopia Recast* as the best entryway into the philosophical issues of the *Laws*, but it is a valuable supplement to it. It would be particularly appropriate reading for a graduate seminar on the *Laws*, or for scholars or graduate students seeking a way into the hidden splendors of the dialogue from a variety of angles.

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Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy. By Jon D. Mikalson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. \$99.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-0199577835.

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Jon Mikalson, Professor of Classics at the University of Virginia, is an expert on ancient Greek religion, and his long list of publications includes two of the standard works on the topic (*Athenian Popular Religion*, 1983, and *Ancient Greek Religion*, 2005). He has also written about the ways in which tragedians portrayed and transformed popular religion (*Honor Thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy*, 1991) and about the religious dimension of the Persian wars (*Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, 2003). In *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy* (2010), Mikalson describes how Greek philosophers understood and interpreted cultic practices, piety, human relationships to the gods, and the relationship between the gods and justice in their own societies. The book discusses several philosophers from the classical and early Hellenistic periods but it focuses mainly on Plato.

The introduction explicates religious terminology. In addition to terms well-known to philosophers (such as *eudaimonia*, *eusebeia*, *therapeia*, and *hosiotes*), the most important term for the book is *charis*: *Charis* is often translated as 'gratitude' or 'thanks', translations that Mikalson argues invite oversimplifications of the concept. *Charis* refers to a favor, for example a sacrifice, which pleases the recipient, creates an expectation of a favor in return, and strengthens the relationship between giver and recipient. It is a crucial part of the relationship between