
This is a monumental book about the final phase in the development of Plato's political and ethical theory in the *Laws*. It would not be quite correct to call it a work about the political theory of the *Laws*, for it is not starting off with the overall text of that work as something in need of explanation. Nor is its primary interest in what Plato seeks to discuss in the *Laws*. For instance, I had reason to look and see if the index mentioned the important topics of communal meals or land division. The former received a little attention, the latter none that I could find. The principal subject is the underpinnings of Plato's political theory, above all its underpinnings in Plato's concept of the human person itself. The author is therefore raising issues of his own concerning Plato's own position in the *Laws*, and how that position had evolved.

Given the strong ancient tradition concerning this being the last of the dialogues, prepared for 'publication' by Philip of Opus, one does not have to be a developmentalist to accept the legitimacy of Bobonich's chronological suppositions. The *Laws* is contrasted primarily with the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, and strong claims are made concerning developments in political theory, which follow developments in Plato's psychology and epistemology. Overt epistemological and psychological content in the *Laws* is of course extremely limited, whether because of the limitations of the Spartan and Cretan interlocutors, the presumed limitations of the work's audience, or a lack of agreement over relevant details in the Academy. However, there is enough to suggest that we may reasonably supply some of the required material from the *Philebus* and from other stylistically close dialogues, particularly the *Statesman*. Given the lack of agreement about its date, the quasi-mythical and pictorial exposition about a lot of the details, and the somewhat ambiguous status of its protagonist, I am more cautious about sundry passages in the *Timaeus* that Bobonich calls upon to supplement his limited evidence (e.g. 77b-c at p. 281).

Many moderate Platonists today, while happy to admit the significance of differences in date and content between dialogues, are nevertheless cautious about strong developmentalist theses such as is propounded here. Differences

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in content are explicable in terms of the different functions of different groups of works, and some even determined by the dramatic settings. Again, there was a limit to what Plato could reasonably put into the mouth of Socrates, even allowing that he had no problem about having his Socrates pursue some distinctively Platonic developments of the themes that had interested his mentor. The more concerned that Plato was to present a credible, if updated, Socrates, the less opportunity he had to pursue anything that we should recognise as political theory for its own sake. Even when dealing with the Republic we should not forget that what comes closest to political theory is in theory present for the sake of an investigation of the function of justice within the soul of the individual. There are strong hints that ‘Socrates’ never seriously contemplated the implementation of this kind of state, though the Timaeus does have a distinctly didactic Socrates remind the gathering specifically of the political arrangements of that dialogue, and lamenting that he had never seen them in operation (17c–20c). Indeed Critias intends to go on to demonstrate that such a state had indeed been in operation, in Athens, a very long time ago. Whether Plato himself had become more serious in propounding his political views as time went on, or whether he had always been serious, yet difﬁdent about allowing his Socratic protagonist to become a political theorist, is an open question.

I shall assume here that Plato does indeed ‘propound’ something in these works, an assumption without which there could be no serious discussion of Bobonich’s book. Even so, I suspect that Bobonich has a more straightforward concept of the way in which Plato communicates than many Platonists today, and he is reliant upon the debatable assumption that Plato’s protagonists (at least in the dialogues he tackles) can in some sense be ‘spokespersons’ for his theory. But I shall question the assumption that either the Phaedo or the Republic propounds anything of any signiﬁcance about matters which they do not in any way set out to address.

Let me explain. Bobonich identiﬁes four claims about some non-philosophers (at least) that both Phaedo and Republic are supposed to have denied: that they are capable of being truly virtuous, of valuing virtue for its own sake, of valuing the true happiness of others for its own sake; and of living happy lives (pp. 7–8 etc.). To the extent that ‘genuine’ anything is not instantiated in any worldly particulars in these dialogues, we should be expecting some of this to apply even to the philosopher, and I have no doubt that both dialogues can cause the reader to reﬂect on the slender hope that could be held out for the non-philosopher. Humankind is intentionally depicted as being in a profound state of need, requiring rescue from the mire or the cave of non-reflective existence. Philosophy is intentionally presented as offering the hope of a cure. Without philosophy people are thought unable to know the correct goal in life, with inevitable consequences for their moral choice, their assessment of virtue, their ability to attain happiness as individuals, and their appreciation of what might achieve happiness for their friends.

It could be argued that it is precisely this weakness that makes it necessary for Plato to engage in political theory in search of a macro-organism that can proﬁtably engage imperfect individuals in a virtuously functioning whole. That the philosopher alone can be independently happy, which is the message I derive from the Phaedo, becomes a challenge that the philosopher alone can correct. Now it is Bobonich’s contention (p. 37) that the non-philosophic life in the Phaedo is simply not worth living, so that political arrangements and law can do nothing for them. But what does the dialogue actually show? It shows a man whose life has been as happy as could be imagined even at the point of death, and the tragedy that this death will mean to his friends until they ﬁnd another who can charm their souls (78a). Has Xanthippe’s life been not worth living? Or those of his friends, who clearly fall short of Socrates’ requirements for the true philosopher (61c)? The tragedy is the tragedy of his friends precisely because their happiness has been immeasurably enhanced by the presence of Socrates. So far they are not independently happy, and they must replace his voice within their community if (and in some cases this seems far from certain) they cannot replace it within themselves.

Again, Bobonich’s reading has the Phaedo promote messages radically different from the Laws precisely because of the radical dichotomy that he insists on employing between philosopher and non-philosopher. This tactic is questionable, for this is a dichotomy that the Statesman would reject, since the class of ‘non-philosopher’ is like the classes of ‘non-human’ and ‘barbarian’ appropriately rejected at 262a–e. As Bobonich recognises (p. 31), at the textually worrying 68c1–3 it is at least clear that the philosopher as ‘wisdom-lover’ is contrasted with others who are attracted to (and motivated by) other things, with some alternatives possible. A plurality of types is implied by 81e–82b, which distinguishes those who are physically indulgent from those who are grasping and from those who are unreflectively well-behaved. It is convenient for Plato to contrast the philosopher with all others in this work, but what it mostly shows is a philosopher in conversation with others who fall short of him and yet could not be described as unrefective. They are not body-lovers (Aristippus being excluded, 59c), nor are they principally lovers of cash or honour. They are in fact intermediates, at various levels of progress towards philosophy, for which reason Socrates is not wasting his time conversing with them. The Socratic community, as portrayed in the Phaedo, is a community beneﬁting in its entirety from the leadership of a philosopher.

Bobonich’s answer to the line that I am taking would appear to be found in the claim that ‘What is of importance is that non-philosophers do not appreciate the genuine standards of goodness and ﬁneness and that they fail to appreciate what it is that makes anything good or ﬁne’ (p. 30). But ‘appreciate’ is not a very clear epistemological concept. The theory of recollection has been
introduced in the *Meno* to defuse the old sophistic dichotomy between knowledge and ignorance, and it could be said that at 85c–d the slave already appreciates much of what he does not properly know. Though Bobonich may disagree (p. 487, at note 29), much the same could be said of the non-philosopher’s pre-philosophical appreciation of equality in the *Phaedo* (74–76), and the same is said to apply to fineness itself, goodness itself, justice itself and holiness itself (75c–d). If all or most human beings have some lingering awareness of key moral concepts, and have the mental powers needed to reflect philosophically on these, then something of the philosopher is potentially within them, even if it is usually stamped out by the nails of pleasure and pain (83d–e). Just because it is the figure of Protagoras who adopts the view that the roots of political virtue are distributed to all human beings in the dialogue named after him (322c–d), or that it is the figure of Timaeus who has the demiurge model all human souls on the epistemologically perfect cosmic soul (41d), we should not imagine that such views are foreign to Plato. Ignorance is not the natural state of the human soul, and that is particularly true of the *Phaedo*.

I might now be challenged to say how the author of the *Phaedo* would have envisaged a state that would make life worth living for the non-philosopher. I do not like such artificial questions, but with help from the *Gorgias* I could very well say something like this. Recent Athenian politicians are to be criticised for pandering to the uncritical demands of the common people, and forgetting the need to improve them morally (*Gorgias*, 515–20), and this is contrasted with Socrates’ genuine concern for his fellow citizens, revealed by his constant criticism (521d). He cannot make them all philosophers in any strong sense of that word, but he can at least prod them into adopting the right habits and improve them morally, with positive effects on the well-being of the community. I agree with Bobonich (pp. 19–21) that the *Phaedo*, like other works, does not paint a particularly rosy picture of what it calls ‘popular and community virtue’ (*demosiēki kai politikē aretē*, 82a–b), effectively comparing its practitioners to ants and bees, thereby capturing the idea of automated and unreflective good behaviour. If we take it seriously, reincarnation awaits these people too, though Plato is prepared to call them the ‘happiest’ (*eudaimonestatōi*) of the reincarnated.

I think it important that this good behaviour removes its practitioners from the dangerous grasp of the kind of intense physical pleasures and pains that are the major obstacle to intellectual progress (83b–e), making it possible for philosophy to take on its gently persuasive role (83a). Community virtue of this kind may be permanently unreflective in the case of bees, but in the case of human beings it counteracts the primary obstacle to a deeper appreciation of the true reasons for the behaviours that have been practised. A state based on the doctrines of the *Phaedo* would therefore use the traditional methods of ensuring appropriate behaviour to produce a citizen body that is not prevented by its life-style from being receptive to moral reasoning. Then, when it has produced ‘free’ people, it will employ reasoning to state the case for the behaviours that it requires. And this is what the *Laws* famously sets out to do.

It may be seen that my principal difficulty is with the strength of the developmentalist thesis espoused by Bobonich, rather than with his interesting treatment of the *Laws* itself. The developmentalist thesis to my mind is incomplete insofar as no passage from the politically important *Gorgias* is cited in the main text, and only four in the notes. This may owe something to the naïve supposition that the *Gorgias* simply presents Socratic thought, but it would in that case still be Plato’s Socratic thought. Developmentalism cannot afford to be selective.

There are ways in which the *Republic* seems better to present the paradoxes that Bobonich finds when he spells out the political implications of the non-philosopher’s separation from the Good itself. It is true that all the individual virtues sketched in book IV require the presence of wisdom, and that books V to VII treat this as something that only the philosopher will achieve (pp. 42–3). One might claim that we are not intended to read the later books back into book IV, but that would come close to applying a developmentalist approach *within* the *Republic*. More pertinently one could observe that even the philosopher is not going to grasp the Good until he has passed through a rigorous programme of specially devised education and training. So perhaps the real division is between fifty-year-old philosophers and all the rest (540a). But the clinical divisions for which this work is famous certainly sets the philosopher apart in terms of the happiness that he can attain as an individual. There are indeed objections to having any unsuitable individual practising the very art that in the right hands yields the truth (*Rep.*, 537–9), which is the final part of the road to such happiness.

However, is individual happiness the goal in those parts of books II–IX that deal with the macrocosm of the state rather than the microcosm of the individual? Philosophers do not necessarily come to engage in the governance of the community because it contributes to their own well being, for they must be compelled (539e). Their rule, if good, ought therefore to contribute to the communal good. They cannot make less able people, doomed as they are to lesser jobs and never reasoning properly, happy qua individuals. But the happiness of the state need not be the sum of the happinesses of its individual inhabitants. Rather the state must function in a way analogous to the individual, having its ruling part in charge, its intermediate part protecting its rule, and its lower part at least agreeing to be ruled as it exercises its own proper function. Just as the rule of reason in the individual will in book IX allow even the inferior parts of the soul to experience their own pleasures, so the rule of reason in the state may be expected to produce a pleasurable life for its inferior classes. Now Bobonich (pp. 44–5) is right to observe that the lower virtues of justice and temperance, as found in the ideal city, are significantly
different from the corresponding virtues in the ideal soul, and that true virtue will not be present in the lower classes. But they have something that goes by the name of virtue, a shadow virtue perhaps but not to be trivialised for as long as it endures (430b–c, 518d, 619c), so that their lack of genuine virtue does not prevent them being part of a happy and unified organism. Other goods within that state, including the goods of the lower classes, will be good only when controlled by the knowledge of the philosophers, but that need not be an obstacle to the happiness of the state.

Hence when on pp. 56–7 Bobonich spells out for us the danger for the individual soul of that type of virtue, known as political virtue (430c), which comes from practice without philosophy, he is making a limited point only. Such persons, it is suggested by the Myth of Er (619c–d), are in danger of making the worst of choices in their next life. If this is really doctrine, or if as is argued the myth has a message for this life too, then it does indeed suggest that once unprotected by their place in an orderly community such persons are in dire danger. However, there is likewise a suggestion that much of the blame might be attributed to their favourable, undemanding, and unthreatening treatment in the afterlife, and that would be finding fault less with routine communal virtues than with laziness and forgetfulness. Perhaps what their ‘afterlife’ had lacked was the annoying attentions of a Socrates! Operating according to law, good sense, or right opinion is in fact quite acceptable just as long as another view of what is best does not out it, but individually we are not safe until we have given our correct views permanence. This will not do involve philosophy, which becomes the only guarantee of individual happiness. It is no accident though, that the focus in Book X has switched back to the well being of the individual. The arguments for the rejection of dramatic poetry have come to concern the individual well-being of its audience. The role of justice and its fellow-virtues in the individual soul has again become paramount. And though we may blame the lack of philosophy for the failure ultimately to choose the right kind of life, we should not forget that the orderly life without philosophy seems to have been rewarded rather well in the afterlife.

One point that Bobonich makes strongly in the context of non-philosophical virtue is that its difference from true virtue is not just the difference between true belief and knowledge (p. 72). The former, he believes, is still closely linked with a false belief concerning central questions such as the proper goal. Certainly the ordinary person is routinely mistaken about the goal, as 505b–c shows. In a sense I should go further in the case of the Republic. I do not believe that doxa is well translated belief, for it is essentially what dokei tini (seems to somebody), closer to a ‘view’ of something, so that it represents only one perspective on things that require fuller inspection. It falls into the category of what is trained neither on reality nor on non-reality (478b–c). So the distinction between true and false doxai is a little problematic. Accordingly the non-philosophers’ problem is not that they judge from false belief (book IX shows that pleasure is not such a bad yardstick by which to judge the happy life), but they judge from a totally inadequate impression that is insecure and liable to be manipulated. And there lies the opportunity for the legal system: it must manipulate them for the better.

For this reason I find some continuity between the Republic and the well-known preludes employed by the Laws to introduce its legislation. In a section entitled ‘reason and the law’ (pp. 93–7), Bobonich talks of the violence of non-persuading laws (p. 97). Later he talks of the function of the preludes to supply teaching, giving ethical instruction, soliciting an active response from the citizens, and treating them like free people (p. 105). This seems to me to be much the kind of function required by citizens whose views need to be manipulated: removing the unhealthy perspective and replacing it with a healthy one in ‘Protagorean’ fashion (Thr. 167e). That function can be performed by a persuasive rhetoric, which Bobonich would deny can occur in the Republic on the basis of 590c8–d1, which applies the word ‘slave’ to ordinary folk who are ruled by the best. But the use of such a term follows after the statement that such persons cannot rule the desires within them, so that they need to be ruled, and the notion of a slave is heavily qualified by the requirement that such ‘rule’ is to have the best outcome for the slave in mind. Further the rule of internal reason is preferred for all where possible, and the rule of borrowed reason is a second best, employed only to ensure that all are united in friendship by being ‘steered’ by the same power (590d3–5). The rule is similar both to that of law, the ‘ally of all in the city’ (590e2), or to the control of children until such time as they can establish the ‘constitution’ (i.e. the correct relationship between parts of the soul) within. Such ‘slavery’ is quite compatible with the attempts made by the preludes to make the citizens see reason. Forging great gulfs between the Republic and the Laws on the basis of a couple of lines is only admissible if great care is taken. Such care would include the establishing the comparability of the two bodies of people legislated for, one including everybody in the city, and the other including only a quasi-elite of landowners selected on the basis of their capacity for virtue. And it would make sure that the similarity between the two groups was such that the term ‘non-philosophers’ could be applied in the same way to both.

Since I have suggested that there is plenty of scope for the orator’s manipulative art in the state envisaged by the Republic, one might pause to consider Bobonich’s rejection of a thesis of Laks: that the preludes attached to the statutes proper work through a rhetoric of praise and blame rather than through reason (pp. 110–8).2 I agree with Bobonich that Plato’s preludes vary in tone, and that he can never have felt constrained to use non-rational means of

At pp. 153–79 we meet an attempt to make such dependency theses that appear in the Philebus relevant to the Laws. This can be interesting, but hardly compelling. Take for instance the following statement (p. 159): ‘Nevertheless, Plato’s position [sc. on the mixed life at Philebus 21] so far bears a formal similarity to the Dependency Thesis, which is sufficiently significant to make it unlikely that it is unintentional.’ If the technical language of dependency were Plato’s own this might be the case, but it is not. Even so I am tempted to agree with the following (p. 179): ‘But the value theory that we have explored in the Philebus does . . . show that Plato holds that a grasp of objective goodness is a necessary condition of benefiting from things and shows at least part of the justification for this claim.’ Any reservation has to do with the Philebus being a work of personal ethics, thus unable to employ the strengths of some individuals to assist the weaknesses of others. It strikes me that a passage like 660e–661e may well make justice uppermost precisely because the common citizen is not supposed to have the goal-discerning knowledge within himself. This can come from the guidance offered by the legal system. So at 631b–d, which considers the city as a whole, Plato must place wisdom in leading position. But at 660e–661e the legislator wants it to be proclaimed (non-rationally by poets!) that justice is the controlling factor in the production of happiness, because justice will in fact be sufficient for the individual within this city — where the laws require what is truly lawful and rational.

It might be expected that if the guidance of wisdom in the state implied that each individual citizen must be wise in and of himself, then the wisdom required would involve genuine knowledge. Right opinion scarcely seems to be a safe guarantee of happiness when the individual is open to dissuasion. But Laws is not consistent in having wisdom imply knowledge. When at p. 197 Bobonich makes much use of Laws 687e5–9 to show that one must pray for wisdom, he forgets that the non-philosopher Megillus is drawing an inference, and that this must colour the content of wisdom itself! The Stranger, picking up the notion of the leading virtue of all at 688b, retreats to ‘wisdom and intelligence and opinion with a love and a desire that follows these’. Right opinion seems somehow to creep into the overall concept, making it easier, but less meaningful, to make all citizens ‘wise’. Bobonich is willing to accept that there are two meanings of ‘wisdom’ (p. 198). Indeed, we read: ‘we might worry that Plato in the Laws sometimes distinguishes wisdom from true opinion and suggests that only those who have gone through very advanced studies have wisdom.’ What we should in fact worry about, is that Plato’s terminology, confronted with non-expert interlocutors and an Academy home to a variety of theories on ethics, epistemology and psychology, is often deliberately non-technical, making the Laws a very difficult place to hunt down precise theses on every question of our choosing. It seems not to be the Stranger’s intention to say anything that cannot readily be ascertained to on

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3 I am not wholly satisfied with Bobonich’s translation on p. 120, not least because his revised order has him speaking of females as ‘good men’, and because élhos should not be translated as ‘habitation’.

4 Note that p. 197 talks of ‘two passages at Laws 631b–d and 660e–661e that make the possession of wisdom a necessary condition of benefiting from one’s dependent goods’. 660e3 is given as a reference for wisdom being the leader of the other virtues and of the dependent goods. I am puzzled. Perhaps Bobonich is relying again on 631c7–8 that seems to have the lesser virtues presupposed by wisdom, but when one says ‘with wisdom’ one is not specifying that the wisdom must be internal rather than in the external control of the wise.
some level by different audiences. Can this type of work submit to Bobonich’s methods?5

The Laws’ non-technical nature is, I believe, adequate to explain another difference from the Republic. While the Laws is happy to use the terminology of bravery (andresia) and of temperance (sophrosuné) to apply to virtuous tendencies arising from habituation, the Republic, like the Meno and Phaedo will consistently qualify the term in these cases, referring to popular or social virtues or saying how they arose through practice. The difference may have more to do with his earlier awareness that such virtues would not have qualified as such for Socrates. At any rate it is unfortunate that Bobonich seems not fully aware of the earlier use, and, with Republic 518d9–10 in mind, he refers at p. 205 to ‘Plato’s claim that courage and moderation are “so-called” virtues that are, unlike wisdom, “akin” to the virtues of the body’. This is misrepresentation insofar as courage and moderation are not named, and comparison with other passages (e.g. Phaedo 68c–69a) shows clearly that such virtue falls short of Plato’s demands of true courage and true temperance in these works. The passages in earlier dialogues that refer to less exalted species of courage and moderation should also have been kept in mind when speaking later of the reciprocity of the virtues. At p. 289 Bobonich refers to reciprocity as ‘one of the central claims about virtues in the early and middle dialogues’, while ‘in the Laws . . . Plato sometimes uses “courage” and “moderation” to refer to psychic conditions that can exist in a person apart from the other virtues’. In truth Meno 88b, Euthydemus 281c, Phaedo 68–69 and 82a–b, and various parts of the Republic show Plato’s acknowledgement of a set of non-reciprocal virtues or quasi-virtues.

Bobonich’s book makes a great deal of the changes in psychology and epistemology that underpin the alleged changes in moral and political theory in the Laws. He defends, quite properly, his decision to take the tripartition of the soul in the Republic seriously, and to find in it a position on how akrasia may be explained. This will involve language that suggests either conflicting sets of desires, or forces pulling in conflicting directions. Now akrasia has been a stock ethical issue since the Nicomachean Ethics, but the Republic is not treated at pp. 235–57 like an experimental stage in the development of a Platonic explanation. It is treated as if were a fully-fledged theory, which can be characterised more precisely as the text explicitly explains, and which must withstand the assaults of a number of well-known objections. For the purpose of doing philosophy I recognise that it is sometimes necessary to take a still photograph of a shifting scene, but I sometimes wonder whether strong
devolutionism does not make too much of the static river captured in its fossilised pictures.

The next step will be to show that the Laws does not imply a continued belief in tripartition. The puppet image of 644–5, particularly when compared with the imagery of the Republic, will be the key passage in establishing this. Precisely how much one should aim to extract from such images is a question that I leave to others, but I should neither want to minimise the importance of images nor to rely on them entirely. It is important, surely, that the puppet-person can actually pull against the strings of the desires, though not against that of reason (p. 266), though to me what this suggests is that reason may operate on us both from the outside and from within: from god or polis, or from the individual herself. A key question that emerges at pp. 264–5 is whether the person who knows can act akratically, and Bobonich’s affirmative answer seems well enough supported by 871a–e, where nobody is deemed reliable enough to exercise despotic power. That the Laws has moved on from the Republic is hard to deny. Precisely where it has moved on is not so easy to determine, either from within the Laws or from allegedly related works.

I would be unhappy if this discussion were to give too negative an impression of a book that has much that is worthwhile and challenging within its pages. The chapter on ‘Parts of the soul and non-rational awareness’ was rewarding. Here Bobonich argues that the late dialogues from the Phaedrus on deny any awareness of the Forms in the lower parts of the soul (p. 299), so that they cannot be motivated by concepts in any way (p. 300). This is of potential importance regardless of what one thinks Plato’s earlier position may have been — or whether it had really been thought out. On the other hand non-philosophers clearly are represented as having some kind of response to the Forms and to concepts by the time of the Phaedrus as Bobonich argues against Scott.7 This means that ‘Plato also deliberately makes room for one’s degree of Form-awareness to have widespread effects on one’s mental life’, and that ‘Even ordinary non-philosophic and non-scientific cognition will depend on a complicated structure of (at least partially) recollected knowledge’ (p. 302). As I have sought to show, this seems to have been the position of the ancient commentator on the Theaetetus (XLVI.43–XLVIII.7) for all relevant Platonic dialogues.8 In general I agree with the commentator here, and Bobonich is less concerned to argue for development on this issue, though the Phaedrus is clearly making this specific. A little later the Theaetetus

5 I think here of passages like pp. 209–15, on virtue and happiness, where Bobonich seeks the Laws’ position on theses like ‘Virtue is sufficient for Happiness’ or ‘Happiness admits of degrees’, where, to be fair, Bobonich admits that Plato’s language may not always reflect an official position (p. 213).

6 On relevant theoretical questions see now E.B. Pender, Images of Persons Unseen: Plato’s Metaphors for the Gods and the Soul (Sankt Augustin, 2000); the puppet illustration may fall outside its scope, but much of the theory would still hold good.

7 Dominic Scott, Recollection and Experience (Cambridge, 1995).

184–6 is also used to establish that non-philosophers access the same, or some of the same, non-sensible entities as philosophers. 'What is important for our purposes is that all human beings come into contact with non-sensibles ... Such use of the commons does not require recognition of their non-sensible status or full awareness of what they are.' This chapter proceeds well, and concludes with a very thoughtful approach to the problem of quite why it is that Plato thinks that pleasure and pain are such important tools in laying the groundwork for future virtue (pp. 350–73). My only worry here is a vague feeling that Plato must have something rather more simple in mind than would meet Bobonich’s approval. There must have been many details that the poor man never arrived at a definitive position on.

Finally we move on to Magnesia’s citizens (pp. 374–479). The chapter begins with something of an overview of the state and then gets down to discussing some of the normal problems that one would expect a book on the Laws to discuss: the extent of female equality and the powers of the nocturnal council for example. The ambivalence of the Laws on several key issues is well brought out, though Bobonich insists on confronting the work as an integral piece of truly Platonic thought. It is good to rise to this challenge, but there are still good reasons for thinking that the ideas and the written styles are more in accordance with the hypothesis that the whole is a project of the Academy with Plato at its helm, rather than a work controlled consistently by a single authorial vision. And if we are so ready to allow development between the Republic and the Laws (i.e. in dialogues totalling around 450 Stephanus pages on common chronological assumptions, 141665 words), why on earth should we deny that it could happen while he is writing the Laws (around 346, 106298 words)?

Bobonich then proceeds to issues that more obviously reflect his own interests and the overall interests of this book. Discussion is again interesting, but not always related to explaining the kind of text that we have before us. And there rests my final worry. This is a very long, densely argued book, which explores in great detail background issues that one hoped would somehow set to rest some of the many controversies about this long and difficult text. Certainly the twisted paths have both an interest of their own and a degree of explanatory value, but in the end I do not feel that the puzzles of the Laws have come much closer to a solution for me personally. Relying on the development to explain the situation arising from it, reminds me of the strategy of Timaeus, who, in the fashion of the myth-makers, explains the workings of the world in terms of its origins. The developmental thesis, which I can accept only in parts, serves only to explain what is not in this text rather than what is.