

Christopher Bobonich, ed.
Plato's Laws A Critical Guide.
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The first two articles in this anthology address how to read the *Laws*. The approaches provide an illustrative way of thinking about the entire anthology. Malcolm Schofield advocates a view of the *Laws* from within, using the resources of the dialogue to develop and defend Plato's project. Christopher Rowe, by contrast, believes the *Laws* to be radically incomplete and expects us to supply the necessary philosophical material from other dialogues. The articles that follow more or less fall into one of these two methodological camps.

Malcolm Schofield's "The *Laws*' Two Projects" responds to Aristotle's complaint that the *Laws* describes an ideal state and a less than ideal state with no clear relationship between the two. While Schofield provides an interesting resolution of this problem, the methodology he employs serves as the focal point for this essay, since how we approach the *Laws* is more important than any particular view of this dialogue. Schofield does not discuss methodology, but there are two closely related ideas that govern his approach. (1) Puzzles and questions raised in the *Laws* should be answered, if they are at all answerable, by uncovering resources *internal* to the dialogue. (2) The *Laws* should be read independently of philosophical doctrines peculiar to any one dialogue or group of dialogues. Schofield turns to the *Laws* to find the basis for Aristotle's criticism. He identifies the distinct projects objected to by Aristotle in Book III and Book V. Schofield focuses on the relevant passages and their contexts to develop a solution based on the common element between the projects, the maximization of friendship within the polis. Schofield weaves together a variety of passages and major focal points from the *Laws* to provide greater insight into the philosophical material contained in the *Laws*.

Christopher Rowe rejects both (1) and (2). Rowe claims that Plato expects readers of the *Laws* to be familiar enough with the other dialogues that the reader supplies those dialogues' doctrines or arguments when needed. Rowe's view is that Plato in the *Laws* works on many different levels simultaneously. There are those who read the *Laws* and are satisfied with the work as it stands. But there are also readers who expect philosophical justification. Those readers are intended to supply the philosophical material from other Platonic works.

There are four problems with Rowe's approach. The first is that it invites a superficial reading of the *Laws* supplemented by philosophical material and views worked up in other dialogues, which Plato scholars know so much better. Given that the *Laws* is not as well known, well read, or well discussed as the rest of the Platonic corpus, Rowe's strategy relegates the *Laws* to that status in perpetuity. Second, as scholars approaching the *Laws*, we cannot determine what is lacking from the dialogue until we have a fuller understanding of what is there. In other words, we cannot reasonably employ Rowe's methodology until we have a very sound grasp of the *Laws* on its own. Rowe prohibits the *Laws* from employing new dialectical and philosophical ideas. It requires that Plato is stagnant in his thought and only concerned with a different audience or purpose. Finally, there is a textual problem. The Athenian reiterates how

important it is that they are at leisure to have a full discussion and shouldn't leave out any details. Many chapters in the anthology serve to show the problems in Rowe's approach.

Richard Kraut in "Ordinary Virtue from the *Phaedo* to the *Laws*" develops a view of the virtues acquired by the citizen that departs from the *Republic's* dialectical context. Since the *Laws* differs dialectically from the *Republic*, Kraut can use Plato's silence on certain philosophical topics, not to fill in with doctrine from the *Republic*, but to mine the *Laws* for the philosophical view that fits within that context. Kraut does an excellent job of this, drawing from claims in the *Laws* about the citizenry, such as their participation in selecting rulers, their lack of freedom to travel abroad without permission, and the prohibition on professing atheism to provide an account of ordinary virtue that is unique to the *Laws*.

Terence Irwin in "Morality as Law and Morality in the *Laws*" examines the *Laws* to discern the extent to which Plato portrays morality as an internal natural law. Irwin's project exemplifies the ways in which the *Laws* deals with different issues than what Plato has taken up before. To grasp this adequately requires a rejection of Rowe's method. Thus, Irwin argues convincingly for a Platonic conception of law that is limited to the *Laws*. In particular, he argues for law as necessary for a well-functioning society, as a rational order, and law as second best to knowledge. Although Irwin supports this last claim from the *Statesman* and *Republic*, he provides evidence from the *Laws* for the supremacy of knowledge over law.

Thanassis Samaras in "Family and the Question of Women in the *Laws*" discusses the implications of the inalienability of land and common meals on the family structure. He notes that Plato promises to give an account of how the common meals will be organized but never does. Now, on Rowe's account, we look to other dialogues for an answer. But no other dialogue explains how to set up common meals for an entire citizenry. Samaras argues that the lack of an answer leaves us with a tension in the *Laws* between Plato's commitment to strong household units and his commitment to communal meals. Having dealt with the role of the household, Samaras then provides a defense of Plato's status as a proto-feminist. Samaras argues from the *Laws* that women are as capable of being virtuous as men, that they have equal opportunity to become virtuous in Magnesia, and that women are eligible for high office in Magnesia. Consequently, Plato's *Laws* maintain the progressive (for its time) view of women put forward in the *Republic*. It is noteworthy that Samaras does not fall back on the *Republic's* view, but carefully sifts through the text of the *Laws* to come to this conclusion, thereby foregoing the shortcut offered by Rowe and truly enriching our understanding of the *Laws*.

Robert Mayhew in "The Theology of the *Laws*" rejects Rowe's method: "If the *Laws* is to shed light on this discussion, however, its theological views must be brought out from the shadow of these other works and examined in their own right, unconnected to the central interpretive issues of other dialogues." Mayhew then advances a view of the theology of Books 4 and 7, which he reconciles with the more complicated theology of Books 10 and 12. Mayhew argues that the focus of Plato's theology turns out to be political. Plato proves the existence and goodness of god, which is identified with virtuous reason or the rational soul. Having established the existence of a good god, Plato can easily dispense with heretical views. Mayhew identifies a key element in Plato's theology, which is that by identifying the god(s) with right reason, Plato establishes them as rulers over the cosmos. In spite of his efforts, Mayhew

concludes that the theology of the *Laws* is vague and incomplete. Rather than turning to other dialogues or criticizing Plato for this, Mayhew makes the case that the incompleteness results from Plato's dialectical context in the *Laws*. Since they are legislating for ordinary citizens who are not governed by philosopher rulers, there is no need for tackling the difficult theological issues and perhaps an inherent danger in attempting to do so.

Andre Laks in "Plato's 'truest tragedy': *Laws* Book 7, 817a-d" focuses on the Book 7 passage when the Athenian considers allowing tragedians to enter Magnesia. In light of the tragedians' request, the Athenian claims that the legislators are engaged in the truest tragedy. Laks rightly insists that we ought not to look back to the *Republic*'s view of tragedy, but should instead undertake to discover the *Laws*' view. Laks proposes two conflicting ways in which the legislators are tragedians. He suggests that Plato means for us to consider both of these incompatible accounts of legislative tragedy, thus leaving us with a problem in need of further resolution.

Julia Annas's "Virtue and Law in Plato" investigates how a life of slavery to law, as advocated in the *Laws*, can foster virtue. After posing this question, Annas goes outside of the Platonic corpus to find an answer, using the work of Philo of Alexandria to find a model for the laws in Magnesia. The connections between Plato and Philo (who wrote commentaries on the Old Testament) are interesting, especially in light of Numenius' claim that Plato is simply Moses speaking Greek. However, the methodology is suspect. While an appreciation of Philo might make a reader sensitive to ideas in the *Laws* that were unnoticed before, the basis for understanding Plato's *Laws* ought to be found as close to the text as possible. Thus, the appeal to Philo is either unneeded, because we have good textual basis for the views we develop, or unhelpful, because Philo is too far removed to provide substantive insight.

Dorothea Frede in "Puppets on Strings" offers an account of Plato's moral psychology from Books 1 and 2 with a focus on the analogy of the human soul to a puppet. Although Frede's account depends on a close reading of *Laws* 1–2, her approach runs afoul of a proper reading of the *Laws* for two reasons. First, although she takes pains to differentiate the *Laws* from the moral psychology of Plato's other dialogues, she fails to avoid the expectation that the *Laws* is engaged in the same sort of project as those dialogues. The very expectation that there is a moral psychology in *Laws* 1–2 indicates an insensitivity to the context of that discussion. And Frede seems to realize this, as she says that "the puppet analogy serves only a limited purpose and may not fully disclose Plato's psychology in the *Laws*." The analogy is introduced to explain moderation and put to use only in a brief discussion of the educational function of drinking, thereby giving no indication that we should expect anything like the moral psychologies we see in other dialogues. Also, Frede limits her account to Books 1–2, ignoring an abundance of passages on pleasure and pain that must be considered in developing an account of moral psychology from the *Laws*.

Rachana Kamtekar in "Psychology and the Inculcation of Virtue in Plato's *Laws*" examines the contribution of physical education to virtue in the *Laws*. After noting deficiencies in the literature to explain this matter, Kamtekar points out that the *Laws* provides little by way of giving an account of the soul and decides that we ought to rely heavily on the *Timaeus*. Thus, her paper is more about defending a view of soul from the *Timaeus* than the *Laws*. Her view is

that physical education gives us a first step on the ladder to virtue by teaching us to take pleasure in order. While this seems right, the reliance on the *Timaeus* is unmotivated if not unnecessary.

Christopher Bobonich in “Images of Irrationality” argues for a conceptualistic over an imagistic view of non-rational motivations in Plato’s later dialogues. Bobonich mentions the *Laws* a couple of times, but largely ignores that dialogue as he works almost exclusively with the *Timaeus* and simply assumes that the carefully worked out view he develops can be attributed to the *Laws* as well. While this is a good paper on Plato’s moral psychology, it certainly isn’t a paper about the *Laws*. All references to the *Laws* could easily be dropped without changing the philosophical nature of the paper. Bobonich provides a worst-case scenario of Rowe’s method. His articulate and carefully reasoned work on the *Timaeus* is attributed to the *Laws* without any substantive attempt to defend this as part of the *Laws* philosophical framework. Or, to look at it the other way around, it is a best-case scenario for Rowe’s approach, as the silence in the *Laws* on a theory of the soul simply makes room for the theory of the *Timaeus*.

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