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**Review of Moore, Kenneth Royce. *Plato, Politics and a Practical Utopia*.**

**London: Continuum. 2012. ISBN 978-1-4411-5317-3**

In *Plato, Politics and a Practical Utopia* Kenneth Royce Moore offers a working model of Magnesia, the city of Plato's *Laws*. His method is to treat the "second-best city" "as if it were a real polis of the ancient world" (p. 82). Moore's conclusion is that Plato has created a "fairly large city", with some unusual institutional features, but one that is "strangely practical" and firmly grounded in reality (p. ix).

The *Laws* is often said to be a long and rambling work showing "various signs of incompleteness".<sup>1</sup> Unlike its primary text, Moore's book is short (136 pages) and readable. After a general introduction to the polis and its theory up until the time of Plato, the main elements of Magnesia's social and political organization are analysed. Chapter 2 handles the economy, chapter 3 the military, chapter 4 the judiciary, and chapter 5 the structure of government. Chapter 6 rounds things off by inviting the reader on an imaginative "tour" of the city. The whole is a useful overview of the Magnesian polity.

Some problems with organisation should be mentioned. Chapter 1 is entitled "The Development of the *Polis* and its Re-Development Under Plato". It covers the following topics in sequence: a general history of the polis (pp. 2-6); the dramatic setting of the *Laws* (p. 6); Plato's likely "inspiration" for writing the dialogue (p. 6); reasons for the location of Magnesia (p. 7); the Cretan and Spartan constitutions (pp. 8-10); and the role of myth in the founding of the city (pp. 10-11). The result is a somewhat disconnected series of topics shoehorned into a slightly artificial rubric. Organizational problems reoccur to some extent in succeeding chapters.

There are also some infelicities in copy-editing and style. Glen Morrow is referred to as Glen Marrow (viii). Sentences are repeated nearly verbatim at different points within the text (bits of chapter 1, p. 10, repeated in chapter 2, n. 99; bits of p. 34 repeated on p. 83; etc). Quoting and idea attribution are not transparently clear. For instance, Morrow is quoted in support of the view that the guardians of the laws (*nomophylakes*) add a "monarchical element in the city" (p. 88). This seems a puzzling claim. What must be understood is that Morrow is responding to Aristotle's objection that there is "no monarchical element in Plato's state" (1960, p. 525; cf. *Pol.* 1265b 28ff., 1266a 2ff.). He argues, in defence of Plato, that "monarchical" should be interpreted broadly as a "recognized center or

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<sup>1</sup> Bobonich 2002, p. 114; cf. Schofield 2010, p. 12.

source of authority" (ibid. p. 526). None of this can be readily understood by the reader: the attribution is misleading (see also p. 28, p. 30; cf. Morrow 1960, p. 192).

Moore's book is historical in orientation and tends to avoid discussion of philosophical and hermeneutic questions. This may seem objectionable. First, it is unclear how Moore's conception of Plato's second city as a "practical utopia" squares with his general methodology of treating Magnesia as if it were a "real polis of the ancient world" (p. 82). He seems to hold that Magnesia would be practicable if it corresponded in certain dimensions with known city-states of antiquity (p. 39). But should we expect this sort of correspondence of a practical *utopia*? Secondly, the author's handling of the relation between the *Republic* and the *Laws* is somewhat problematic. Moore assumes without argument that *Republic* articulates Plato's ideal city, the *Laws*, his second-best city. He also takes for granted that the city of *Republic* is an impossible ideal (p. 2). Both assumptions are questionable. As others have noted, the *Republic* falls short of the Athenian's best city, which requires complete communism of property and family (*Laws* 739a3-740c3).<sup>2</sup> And Socrates goes to substantial trouble in arguing that his *Kallipolis* could be realized (471e4-540d3).<sup>3</sup> Reasonable responses to these concerns may be given. But since Moore does not consider his position to be controversial, he does not provide such responses.

A further concern arises from Moore's handling of the literary dimensions of Plato's text. The *Laws* is formally speaking a direct dialogue. It represents a conversation between three individuals with discernible personalities. Moore almost entirely neglects the dialogical form of the *Laws*. This seems inevitable given the nature of his project: treating the text as though it were an exercise in urban planning, written at a time when "the prospect of founding a colony was not purely hypothetical" (p. 13). Now, at the level of the drama, the city of the *Laws* is clearly intended to be practicable. The Cretan Clinias enjoins his interlocutors to assist him in constructing "an imaginary community" for possible use as a "framework for the future state" which the Cnossians are attempting to found (703d1-5). On the other hand, at the level of the author, it can seem that the point of the *Laws* is to show the impossibility of constructing a virtuous society without someone like Socrates. The dramatic date of the *Laws* is prior to the Peloponnesian War and the Athenian Stranger, a pre-Socratic figure.<sup>4</sup> The Athenian's recommendation that the Nocturnal Council undertake inquiries

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<sup>2</sup> See Bononich 2006 and Laks 1990.

<sup>3</sup> See Laks 1990, pp. 214-216 on Socrates' conception of possibility.

<sup>4</sup> Zuckert 2009, p. 51 ff.

into the unity of the virtues, goodness and beauty (963 ff.) may suggest that Plato is leading "his readers to ask whether the pre-Socratic philosophy on which the Athenian [relies] is adequate to support his political project" (Zuckert 2009, 56). The neglected literary features of Plato's *Laws* and more general questions of Platonic interpretation are relevant to the very feasibility of Moore's study.

Dylan FUTTER  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Johannesburg, South Africa

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