THE MUSES' SPEECH IN THE *REPUBLIC*

N. BLÖSSNER: *Musenrede und 'geometrische Zahl': ein Beispiel platonischer Dialoggestaltung ('Politeia' VIII, 545c8–547a7)*. Pp. 194. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998. Paper. ISBN: 3-515-07540-2.

As an adjunct to his work on the *Republic*, Norbert Blössner has devoted a monograph to one passage from that work: the speech that Socrates places in the mouth of the Muses to explain the source of *stasis* in the (ideal) state and the inevitability of constitutional change. Combining a mathematical conundrum with political philosophy (an early exposition of *metabole politeion*) and a highly wrought literary framework, it makes unusual demands on the reader, and on the commentator.

B. focuses first on the mathematical passage, providing a commentary and a review of the main lines of approach to the problem, ancient and modern (Chapter 1). A central premise is that as described, the 'geometrical number' is not susceptible of arithmetical solution. B. argues that its character (whether a period of, or a point in, time) is unclear, that Plato's terminology and syntax are pervaded with ambiguities, and that the overall effect of riddling obscurity is intentional. B.'s exposition, based on a close reading of the primary and secondary literature, is thorough, lucid, and persuasive. He succinctly disposes (pp. 13–14) of the relevance of the cosmic 'Great Year'. He exposes the flaw in Adams' interpretation (that led him to the influential arithmetical 'solution' of 12,960,000), namely the assumption that *ἐπίτριτος πυθμήν* at 546c (i.e. the ratio 4:3 in its lowest terms) can mean the actual numbers four and three (pp. 70–2, with n. 219). His assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of this and later approaches are judicious and broadly fair. A fuller critique of the methods involved in Brumbaugh's metaphorical reading (cf. pp. 74–75) would, however, have been welcome, for although flawed in detail and in general application, it might yet encourage analysis of the figurative force, in context, of mathematical terminology that includes 'marriage', 'waxing and waning', 'harmonies', and relationships of power. B. tentatively offers a new approach (pp. 78–86), taking the number as a description of a geometrical figure based on the Pythagorean right-angled triangle. This has attractions: it is broadly consistent with the ancient comments; and it offers an analogue for the process of constitutional decline which invites the reader to think about the application of figure, and the numbers it embodies, to the matter in hand. A critique is best left to specialist reviewers, but it might be noted that whereas B.'s reconstruction (p. 82) is two-dimensional, Aristotle's comments seem to suggest a third dimension (*στερεός*, *Pol.* 1316[a]); and, of course, solid geometry features in the educational curriculum in the ideal state (528ab).

Chapter 2 subjects the speech to penetrating analysis, and identifies gaps and logical incoherencies in the argument. At the heart of this is an extended critique of the Muses' application of the general proposition that all earthly things must perish to an ideal state that has not come into existence. B. may make rather too much of the (non-)realization of the ideal state, given the reasonable inference (545cd and 547c) that change from aristocracy as a form of government is simultaneously under discussion (cf. the regents' selection of 'the best' [*τοὺς ἀρίστους*] of the next generation as their successors; 546d). More seriously, B. detects no logical connection between the mathematical passage and the causality of constitutional change, and consequently no gain either to regents or to readers in establishing a precise meaning for it (a conclusion that sits rather uneasily with the sophistication of B.'s. own reconstruction). He

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concludes that human fallibility lies at the root of the regents' poor choice of successors and of the constitutional change that flows from it.

So, does any serious purpose underlie the Muses' speech? B. takes Socrates' introduction, and his warning of the Muses' playfulness, more or less at face value as Plato's warning not to take them too seriously. But Plato elsewhere (especially in the *Phaedrus*) uses the conventions of Muse invocation and inspiration to sophisticated ends in establishing the truth value, partial or otherwise, of what is being said. B. broaches the issue of the Muses and fiction (pp. 92–6), but the discussion would have benefited from closer engagement with recent work on the subject of lies and fiction in the ancient world. He stresses (pp. 8, 142) the requirement on the reader to use critical judgement in assessing what the Muses are saying (and finds Glaucon, as a dialogue character, guilty of high credulity for his acquiescence in their analysis). He might have developed this approach further, for the reader is at liberty to interrogate the text for intertextual (and intratextual) allusion and to work out its significance for him/herself. It would be interesting, for example, to have an assessment of the wider relevance of Socrates' closing reference to a Homeric speech, by Glaucus (!), that contains the comparison of the birth and passing of generations of men to the sprouting and withering of leaves (*Il.* 6.146–9), and leads to the exchange of Glaucus' gold armour for Diomedes' bronze outfit (cf. the Muses' extraordinary conflation of Hesiodic ages, juxtaposing 'bronze' with 'gold', 547a). But B. does not show much interest in the (inter)textual third dimension, and he is generally less assured in assessing literary issues than the logical coherence of its philosophical content. He follows Hellwig in arguing that the speech is a pastiche of sophistic rhetorical showmanship (pp. 134–43), a judgement that places much emphasis on stylistic features lying on the surface of the text but does not account satisfactorily for (*inter alia*) the riddling character that B. himself identifies (pp. 64–5). Recent work on the Muses, including the use of question and answer exchanges with them (A. Harder, *Prometheus* 14 [1988], 1–14, is basic), has extended understanding of the conventions of 'inspiration' and their manipulation. Fourth-century sophistication in these matters was quite sufficient to allow for the presence, underneath the banter, of serious, 'inspired' content, intended as such by Plato if not necessarily by the dramatic character Socrates. Relevant though it is to B.'s. central interest in dramatic dynamics, this area remains largely unexplored. Likewise, the Muses' association with political harmony, evident in Hesiod (cf. pp. 141–2) and germane to Plato's purposes, might have received more space.

B. has given a masterly synthesis of the mathematical problem, and he has posed pertinent questions about the relevance and coherence of the Muses' speech; but the book does not bring to bear the full arsenal of analytical firepower now at the critic's disposal, and as a literary reading it misses its target.

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ANDREIA IN PLATO

A. HOBBS: *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*. Pp. xvii + 280. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Cased, £37.50. ISBN: 0-521-41733-3.

The basis of this book is a re-examination of the status of *thumos* or the thumoeidic element in the ethical psychology of Plato's work. Hobbs's central interest is in Plato's

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