FROM *REPUBLIC* TO *LAWS*

T. SAMARAS: *Plato on Democracy*. (Major Concepts in Politics and Political Theory 23.) Pp. xii + 405. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. Cased, €74.70. ISBN: 0-8204-5681-0.

After a brief exploration of the anti-democratic implications of Plato's Socratic dialogues (Chapter 1), this book traces the development of Plato's political views from the *Republic* (Chapters 2–7), through the *Statesman* and *Timaeus-Critias* (Chapters 8–10 and 11, respectively), to the *Laws* (Chapters 12–18). Samaras concludes (Chapter 19) that Plato becomes 'less anti-democratic', and he thereby joins the swelling chorus that praises the *Laws* and re-evaluates Plato's politics. Given its scope, thesis, and timing, *Plato on Democracy* might be overshadowed by Christopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford, 2002). This would be unfortunate. Bobonich's splendid study penetrates more deeply into Plato's reasons, especially in epistemology and moral psychology, but S. argues smartly for distinctive claims.

Broad agreement that the *Laws*' Magnesia is more democratic than the *Republic*'s Kallipolis can mask many differences. Some concern the meaning of democracy. S. sticks to the standards of classical Athens, according to which 'civil liberties' are a non-issue, slavery a fact of life, and class conflict the central concern (esp. pp. 84, 223–4). These standards unfortunately lead him to pass over the status of women (contrast Bobonich, pp. 385–9), but his focus on the plight of the laboring class is certainly reasonable. S. takes his own balanced view of Magnesia's treatment of laborers. He claims that laborers have some access to political power (pp. 221–3; contrast Bobonich, pp. 389–91), but insists that they enjoy significantly less political power than the higher classes (Chapter 13; contrast Bobonich, pp. 374–84).

Another set of easily masked differences concerns the relation between Magnesia and Plato's full political views. Many of the differences between Kallipolis and Magnesia might reflect only a shift in Plato's interests, from the project of envisioning the political analogue of the perfect soul (even if that ideal community is impractical) to a more practical, 'second-best' project. So the question is, to what extent does Plato ever reject (the various philosophical commitments that underwrite) Kallipolis as an ideal? According to S., Plato never fully abandons the *Republic*'s ideal or its epistemology and moral psychology (pp. 3–4, 274, 309, 345); he merely becomes less optimistic about the practicability of Kallipolis and more sympathetic toward a workable, less anti-democratic model. (Again, contrast Bobonich, esp. pp. 10–12.)

S. then faces a more restricted question: why does Plato come to embrace a less anti-democratic second-best? The most striking part of his answer is: history. Other *Nomoi*-philes who disagree with S. about the extent or depth of Plato's development might still find themselves agreeing with his attempt to explain some changes in terms of Plato's increasing attention to history as a source of political wisdom.

I am not sure that I do, however. I perceive two claims that S. does not keep entirely distinct. First, he says that Plato's *Republic* owes more to metaphysics and less to history than the *Laws*. (On this view, Plato gradually comes to see the wisdom of Scipio's strategy in Cicero's *De Re Publica* [2.3].) I doubt this. Consider first the *Republic*. S. does not much explain how *Plato* (as opposed to his philosopher-rulers) uses metaphysics to ground Kallipolis (cf. p. 114). S. could say that Kallipolis is constructed for maximal unity because Plato thinks that unity is the Good. But I am not sure that this gets the order of explanation right; civic unity is hardly an ahistorical

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ideal. Nor does S. deny that the *Republic* shows considerable reflection on the Spartan constitution and the defects of the Athenian democracy. S. relies heavily on his impression that *Republic* 8–9 are psychological and ahistorical (esp. pp. 126–32). I do not share this impression: why cannot Plato offer a psychological analysis that is deeply informed by historical reflection?

Now consider the *Laws*. S. claims that Magnesia is specifically inspired by the Reforms of Solon, and for support he adduces many parallels (Chapter 14). Unfortunately, most of these are general and explicable as the coincidence of two attempts to balance oligarchic and democratic demands. (Surely, Plato does not need to be inspired specifically by Solon to have that aim.) Moreover, the parallels need to be balanced against the Spartan elements of Magnesia, including the common meals that S. does not discuss (cf. p. 264). Finally, even if Plato's interests are, overall, broadly Solonic, what needs showing is that Plato intentionally followed Solon, and S. acknowledges that directly supporting evidence for this is weak (pp. 251, 265).

But let me be concessive toward the first claim: Magnesia is more explicitly tied to historical constitutions than is Kallipolis. Does this mean that Plato actually draws on history more as a source of political wisdom? Does it mean that Plato *justifies* the proposals of Magnesia more by reference to history?

S.'s second claim concerns not the historical roots of Plato's models, but the rôle of history *within* the models: he maintains that the rulers of Kallipolis make less use of history than the rulers of Magnesia. S. emphasizes that Kallipolis' founding requires a fresh start without history (p. 121), but he quietly acknowledges that Magnesia also demands a new beginning in a new place (p. 264). So S. argues that the philosopher-rulers are dismissive of law and afraid of change, whereas in Magnesia, the laws are to be respected but tinkered with, even by consideration of other cities' laws. This is, broadly speaking, correct, though S. overstates the antipathy to law in the *Republic*. (It seems to me that the philosophers rule Kallipolis only because they obey a law: see my 'Justice and Compulsion for Plato's Philosopher-Rulers', *Ancient Philosophy* 20 [2000], 1–17, and 'Minding the Gap in Plato's in *Republic*,' *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming). But what can we infer from this contrast? I expected S. to concede that it reflects only Plato's shift from one project to another: an *ideal* city cannot change without being worse (and the particular laws required in the ideal city need not be enumerated in the *Republic* [cf. 423d–424a]), whereas the details of a practicable, second-best must be worked out provisionally.

But in fact, S. frequently wants his twin claims about the increased rôle of history in Plato's political writing to *explain* Plato's increasingly less anti-democratic stance (pp. 188, 192–3, 220, 260; contrast p. 203). I do not see this. Why suppose that the turn to history is a *cause* of a turn toward democracy, and not merely a *symptom*? Indeed, on S.'s view, why not suppose that it is a symptom not of a deep shift toward democracy but of a shallow concession to practicality?

I have focused skeptically on the general claims that most distinctively characterize S.'s book, but the strength of this revised dissertation is in its details. S. discusses a full array of relevant evidence, he considers carefully a wide range of scholarly opinion, and he argues clearly and vigorously. *Plato on Democracy* is filled with careful and intelligent scholarship, and it will be useful to anyone interested in ancient Greek political thought.

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