points—I attempt to show that the city-soul analogy works formally as well as poetically, and that Callipolis is a happy city, indeed, the happiest of cities (*pace* p. 315). But I do not deny, in fact I emphasize, that its happiness pales beside that attainable by the individual philosopher and that such an individual will be prone to regret that the two kinds of happiness are linked. Whether one seeks to resolve or to intensify the overt puzzles in Plato's text is mostly a matter of temperament. The text has surely left enough unsaid to give leeway to either inclination. What Rosen has constructed in the space Plato has opened for him is a magisterial, comprehensive, and, in its essence, wholly original interpretation of the *Republic* that demands the attention of every thoughtful reader of Plato.

–G. R. F. Ferrari

LIVING WITHOUT THE GOOD

Joshua Mitchell: *Plato's Fable: On the Mortal Condition in Shadowy Times* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. Pp. 226. $35.00.)

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000344

Joshua Mitchell's *Plato's Fable* is an interpretation of the *Republic* that emphasizes the role of imitation. Mitchell contends that the human condition is such that we are perpetually trapped in "shadows from which there is no escape" (p. xii), which makes us, by necessity, "imitative beings" (p. 1). Imitation is problematic, he argues, because our imitations tend to become worse, not better, over time (p. 17). Liberalism has responded, unsuccessfully, to this problem with identity politics (pp. 4–7) and socialization (pp. 8–11). Plato's fable offers another possibility: Though our imitations "are durable and deep," they can be altered—but "only by reason" (p. 12). The reason required for such a change, however, is "divine reason" (pp. 16–18), not liberalism's reason, which is instrumental or calculating and serves the appetites (p. 14).

The difficulty is that divine reason requires illumination by the Good (p. 17), and the Good, in turn, requires a properly oriented soul for its reception. The *Republic* is a fable, Mitchell argues, that intends to use its lies in speech to heal the lies in the soul in preparation for the Good (pp. 39–43). But Socrates fails to turn his interlocutors' souls toward the Good (p. 46) and so can only describe the consequences of living without the Good (p. 75). Similarly, Mitchell claims to say not "what divine reason *is*" but only what it is set against (p. 16).

Socrates' failure to convince his audience leads to the discussion of the decline in regimes and souls, the longest and, I think, most valuable part of Mitchell's book. All defective regimes are fundamentally unstable because each filters justice through its particular lens and, therefore, fails to render to each his due. The sons of each regime realize their fathers' measures are

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000344 Published online by Cambridge University Press

defective, but their own measures will be equally defective because they, too, lack the true measure, the divine measure, the Good. Without the turn toward the Good, the tyrant, democrat, oligarch, and timocrat remain absorbed in this world of flux because it is all that they can see.

"The looming question," in terms of Mitchell's analysis, "is whether the sons can receive from their fathers what they truly need" (p. 147). He concludes that any regime which is based on mortal mimesis is bound to fail. Even the best regime, which imitates the divine pattern, will decline if passed on only mimetically (pp. 53, 66–71). Only the opening of the soul to the Good—which cannot occur mimetically—will suffice for the salvation of regimes.

Mitchell's conclusion sets Plato's fable against the "fable of liberalism," particularly its Tocquevillian version, according to which an aristocratic or timocratic epoch is replaced by an oligarchic epoch in which reason is freed to "make a *productive* purchase on the natural world" (p. 170). Mitchell emphasizes that this replacement occurs not because of contingent historical events, like the scientific revolution or the Reformation, but because of "the emergence of the contradiction that lurked in the divided souls" of the aristocratic or timocratic epoch (p. 173).

Volume One of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Mitchell argues, indicates the way in which America is fundamentally mimetic: American institutions are still those of the Founding Fathers, and as long as they remain stable, America is preserved "by mimetic good fortune" (p. 187). However, Volume Two of *Democracy in America* reminds us of the antimimetic bent of the sons of oligarchy, intent on replacing the structures of their fathers with ones of their own making. But neither maintaining the structures of our forbears nor replacing them with structures of our own making will suffice in the end: "Only philosophy, which is attentive to the divine pattern, can save us" (p. 191).

Mitchell writes clearly and gracefully, displays an intimate familiarity with the text, and makes many intriguing suggestions along the way. The discussion of the decline of regimes—particularly the tension between fathers and sons (pp. 75–79, 89, 104, 108–9)—is excellent. He provides a careful interpretation of how each regime/soul type views death. His analysis of the similarities and differences between philosophy, on the one hand, and democracy and tyranny, on the other, is also quite good, though one wishes he had said more in this context about oligarchy, given its place in the liberal fable (p. 13). However, some of Mitchell's broader interpretive claims are rather problematic.

While Mitchell's emphasis on the Good's transcendence is not unique, he pushes its divine nature beyond, I think, what is supported by the dialogue. Because the Good is beyond man's capacity to achieve on his own, Mitchell claims the liberation of the prisoners in the Cave is accomplished not by the philosopher (p. 71) but rather by "a divine gift" (p. 17) of "the Good itself" (p. 72). "The philosopher cannot come into being, then, by mortal effort alone" (p. 68, cf.; pp. 45, 111, 136, 141). But this leaves philosophy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000344 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ambiguous: Is it a discovery or a revelation? And is the role of the philosopher merely to be a prophet, warning about the consequences of not turning toward the Good? Mitchell asserts that religion and philosophy are members of the same genus (p. 18) but never clarifies what the specific difference might be (see, however, pp. 139–44).

Perhaps because he emphasizes philosophy's proximity to religion, Mitchell seems to deny that there is a tension between philosophy, or divine reason, and the city. This is brought out textually in his glossing over the first two waves of the regime in speech (p. 60); his silence about the ultimate decline of the regime in speech (*Republic* 546a–e); and in at least three places where he substitutes "philosophy" for the rule of philosopher-kings as the cure to our ills (pp. 50, 144, 193). Moreover, his emphasis on the necessity of replacing the ancestral pattern with the divine pattern overlooks not only the difficulty of replacing the ancestral pattern but also perhaps the desirability of doing so: "A complete break is needed. The philosopher understands this" (p. 108). Might the philosopher also understand the impracticality or undesirability of doing so, given the difficulty of turning others toward the divine pattern?

Mitchell thinks not: He says that both the philosopher and tyrant recognize the desirability—for admittedly different reasons—of dispensing with such things as filial piety (p. 69, 108). But Socrates, however much he desired to replace the mortal pattern of Athens with the divine, was always careful in how he raised questions about the difference between the ancestral and the good. The *Republic* takes place in the dark, outside of the city, after Cephalus leaves.

Despite these hesitations, *Plato's Fable* represents an original and worthwhile contribution to scholarship on the *Republic*. Mitchell certainly will find no favor with the postmodern souls he gently likens to tyrants (p. 174), and his account of liberalism will raise the ire of its theorists (see especially his critique of rights on pp. 115–19). The book's most natural audience, ancient political theorists, may be dismayed that he has taken little note of current Platonic scholarship. But it would be a shame if Mitchell's words fell, as he claims those of socrates do, on deaf ears.

–Kevin M. Cherry

THE WAY TO HAPPINESS

Joshua Parens: *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing Alfarabi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. Pp. ix, 170. $55.00, hardcover.)

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000356

Abu Nasr Muhammad Alfarabi (870–950 C.E.) was recognized as a celebrated philosopher, "the greatest indeed that the Muslims ever had," in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000344 Published online by Cambridge University Press