

Plato: *Laws* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). By Plato; Malcolm Schofield (Editor), Tom Griffith (Translator). Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. 502. \$24.99. ISBN: 978-0521676908

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Malcolm Schofield's introduction, notes, and other editorial matter supplement Tom Griffith's fluid translation of Plato's *Laws* in this addition to the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Other English versions of the *Laws* use vocabulary that is now dated (Jowett 1892, Bury 1926, Taylor 1934) or translate Plato's Greek too loosely (Saunders 1970) or rigidly (Pangle 1980). For students and the general reader, this version seems to me the best English translation of the entire *Laws*. However, the moral and political philosophy of Plato's *Laws* is shaped by certain metaphysical commitments that do not come through as clearly as they should have in this edition.

The translation's language is conversational, British, and sometimes light-hearted. Griffith writes, for example, 'It's a fair step from Cnossos to the cave and shrine of Zeus' (625b1–2); 'Our companion here has had a bellyful of them' (629b4); 'Does it put him among lawgiving's also-rans?' (630d2–3); 'do we include desires, pleasures, and those allurements ... which ... can still turn their hearts to putty?' (633d1–3); 'In command of men? Never. Of a bunch of real cissies? Yes' (639b10–11); and 'Let's stop messing about' (712b3).

Griffith lucidly renders many claims of philosophical importance: 'each individual one of us is either more than a match for himself or less than a match for himself' (ὁ μὲν κρείττων αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἥττων ἐστί, 626e8–627a1); 'Above all, what the lawgiver ... will always have

particularly in view, as he prescribes his laws, is human goodness of the highest order’ (τὴν μεγίστην ἀρετὴν βλέπων ἀεὶ, 630c3–4); ‘for people who are unjust, the things which are called bad are good, though for people who are just they are bad; conversely, for people who are good things which are called good really are good, whereas for people who are bad they are bad’ (τὰ μὲν κακὰ λεγόμενα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀδίκους εἶναι, τοῖς δὲ δίκαιοις κακὰ, τὰ δ’ ἀγαθὰ τοῖς μὲν ἀγαθοῖς ὄντως ἀγαθὰ, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖς κακὰ, 661d1–4); ‘the city, just like an individual human being, has an obligation to live a good life’ (δεῖ δὲ αὐτήν, καθάπερ ἕνα ἄνθρωπον, ζῆν εὖ, 828d10–829a1); ‘wealth exists for the benefit of the body, as the body exists for the benefit of the soul’ (ἐνεκα σώματός ἐστι, καὶ σῶμα ψυχῆς ἐνεκα, 870b3–4); ‘a true art or science of politics must necessarily concern itself with society and not with the individual (since it is civil society which unites cities, whereas what is individual tears them apart)’ (τὸ μὲν γὰρ κοινὸν συνδεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἴδιον διασπᾷ τὰς πόλεις, 875a6–8); ‘Soul ... is the driving force behind everything in the heavens, the earth, and the sea’ (Ἄγει μὲν δὴ ψυχὴ πάντα τὰ κατ’ οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλατταν, 896e8–9); and ‘it is nothing other than soul that makes each of us what we are; the body is a lookalike which in each case keeps us company’ (τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ’ εἶναι μηδὲν ἀλλ’ ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἰνδαλλόμενον ἡμῶν ἐκάστοις ἔπεσθαι, 959a7–b1).

I would translate a few lines differently. For example, in Book 1, when the Athenian Stranger calls wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage ‘divine goods’ and health, beauty, strength, and wealth ‘human goods’, Griffith writes, ‘Anyone who gets the greater gains the lesser as well—otherwise he loses both’ (631b8–c1). The Budé text reads, καὶ ἐὰν μὲν δέχηται τις τὰ μείζονα πόλις, κτᾶται καὶ τὰ ἐλάττονα, εἰ δὲ μή, στέρεται ἀμφοῖν. The Budé has ‘some city [τις ... πόλις]’ as the verb’s subject, not just ‘anyone [τις]’. Griffith and Schofield

remove πόλις ‘as a gloss’ (472). In their defense, E. B. England argues that ‘πόλις is out of place here’ (1921, vol. 1, 212), and Theodoret omits it. On the other hand, the manuscripts and Eusebius include it, and most translators keep it (Jowett 1892, Taylor 1934, Saunders 1970, Pangle 1980, Schöpsdau 1994, Lisi 1999, Brisson and Pradeau 2006, and Meyer 2015; Bury 1926 is an exception). Susan Sauvé Meyer defends the traditional reading, arguing that a sufficiency thesis which holds that ‘possessing the divine goods suffices for possessing the human ones’ is *more* plausible in the political case than in the personal one (2015, 109). She explains that exercising complete virtue would seem to involve proper engagement with the human goods and says, ‘The Athenian is entitled to assume that the legislator whose primary goal is to inculcate complete virtue in the citizens will have to provide them with an adequate level of human goods, and this may be all there is to the sufficiency thesis’ (2015, 110). Like Meyer and most translators, I would keep πόλις. One reason is that this passage appears shortly after the Athenian Stranger’s comparison of person, household, village, and city (626c–628e), which suggests that he considers the requirements of flourishing at these different levels to be similar.

A few lines later, Griffith translates ὁ δὴ πρῶτον αὐ τῶν θείων ἡγεμονοῦν ἐστὶν ἀγαθῶν, ἢ φρόνησις, as ‘Turning to the divine goods, first place goes to wisdom’ (631c5–d1). Meyer’s translation says, ‘Wisdom itself is first and leader of the divine goods’. I prefer Meyer’s version, for the Athenian Stranger says not only that wisdom outranks the other virtues, but that it leads them (ἡγεμονοῦν). The Athenian Stranger says that wealth should ‘follow wisdom’ (ἔπεται φρονήσει, 631c5), that divine goods look ‘to the leader, intelligence’ (εἰς τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν, 631d5), and in Book 10 that an intelligent soul ‘guides everything correctly and successfully’ (ὀρθὰ καὶ εὐδαίμονα παιδαγωγεῖ πάντα, 897b1–3). The Athenian Stranger

thinks that it is the leadership of wisdom and intelligence that makes other things beneficial for a person, household, city, and world.

It seems to me that Griffith's translation overlooks an allusion to the cosmic role of intelligence in a famous passage of Book 4 where the Athenian Stranger imagines himself addressing the new colonists. Here is Griffith's version of the opening lines: 'it is god ... who holds the beginning and end and middle of all things in his hands. Straight is his course, so nature ordains' (715e7–716a2). The Budé reads, ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός ... ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἔχων, εὐθεία περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος. The Greek text has nothing corresponding to the anthropomorphic 'in his hands', and the meaning of περιπορευόμενος, 'going round', is not revealed in Griffith's 'course'. England suggests, I think rightly, that 'περιπορευόμενος (cp. *Tim.* 33d ff.) is probably meant to bring before our minds the revolutions of the heavenly bodies' (1921, vol. 1, 448). In Book 10, the Athenian Stranger himself says that 'the entire path and course of heaven' resembles the 'motion, rotation, and calculations' of intelligent soul (897c3–8). Other translations of κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος at 716a1–2 make God's circular motion explicit: 'God ... completeth his circuit by nature's ordinance' (Bury 1926); 'God ... moves through the cycle of nature' (Taylor 1934); 'he marches in the cycle of nature' (Saunders 1970); 'the god ... revolving, according to nature' (Pangle 1980); 'el dios ... lleva a cabo sus revoluciones naturale' (Lisi 1999); 'der Gott ... indem er seiner Natur gemäß im Kreise geht' (Schöpsdau 2003); 'le dieu ... accomplit ses révolutions ... conformément à la nature' (Brisson and Pradeau 2006). Of English translations, only Jowett's does not suggest circular motion: 'God ... travels according to his nature' (Jowett 1892). The Griffith and Jowett translations would have more support if the participle were πορευόμενος rather than περιπορευόμενος. The Budé's critical apparatus gives πορευόμενος

as an alternative, but its only source is the pseudo-Aristotelian *On the Cosmos* at 401b26–27 where the unknown author quotes (or misquotes) the famous lines of *Laws* 715e7–a3.

Schofield's footnote shows that he is aware of the pseudo-Aristotelian passage (156n44). I am unsure, however, whether Griffith and Schofield are relying it for their circleless translation since πορευόμενος does not appear in their list of variations from the Budé edition (473).

In a last example, Griffith's translation mostly agrees with its predecessors, but they all seem to me not to understand the metaphysics of the Athenian Stranger's cosmic holism. In Book 10, the Athenian Stranger argues that the universe's parts, including human beings, come to be for the sake of the universe as a whole (903b4–d3). He says that the individual human being's part 'strives for the universe, always looking in that direction [εἰς τὸ πᾶν συντείνει βλέπον ἀεὶ]' (903c1–2) and that when a skilled craftsman creates a whole, each of the whole's parts is 'striving for what is best in common [πρὸς τὸ κοινῇ συντεῖνον βέλτιστον]' (903c7). Without manuscript support, Stephanus changed the neuter participle συντεῖνον to the masculine συντείνων, implying that the craftsman rather than the part strives for what is best in common. Bury's Greek text (1926) accepts Stephanus's emendation, but the editions of Burnet (1907), England (1921), and Diès (1956) do not. Griffith translates the phrase as 'he [i.e., the skilled craftsman] strives for what is best on an overall view', which would make sense if Griffith and Schofield accept Stephanus's emendation. But if they do, they did not flag it in their list of Budé variations.

Why do the universe's parts strive for the whole? Because each part has an end built into it. The Athenian says, 'Rulers of passion and action have been assigned forever to each of these parts down to the smallest, the rulers having built an end into the last partition [ἄρχοντες ... εἰς μερισμὸν τὸν ἔσχατον τέλος ἀπειργασμένοι]' (903b7–c1). This point does not come through

in the translations, however. England suggests that the last phrase be rendered as ‘controllers who have achieved perfection in the minutest details’ (1921, vol. 2, 491). Many translators follow him, writing that the rulers ‘have achieved perfection even to the minute particulars’ (Taylor 1934), ‘have perfected the minutest constituents of the universe’ (Saunders 1970), ‘have achieved perfection to the last detail’ (Pangle 1980), ‘have achieved their goal to the utmost fraction’ (Mayhew 2008), and ‘bis in die äußerste Unterteilung hinein Vollkommenheit verwirklicht haben’ (Schöpsdau 2011). Griffith tops them with ‘created them down to the last crossed “t”’. A problem for these translations is that the immediately prior sentence suggests that the parts have *not* been perfected. It says that ‘each part *as far as possible* undergoes and does what is appropriate [τὸ μέρος εἰς δύναμιν ἕκαστον τὸ προσήκον πάσχει καὶ ποιεῖ]’ (903b6–7). This implies that the world’s parts are not *fully* doing and suffering what they ought. Rather than make the Athenian Stranger assert that each part has been perfected and that it has not, we should read the text as claiming that each part, including each human being, has been given an end for which it strives. The rulers which implant these ends are, I suggest, roles for the world’s created parts—roles that are defined by their relations both to other roles within the world’s formal structure and to the structure as a whole. This cosmic holism uses metaphysical notions defined and explained in Plato’s *Parmenides* (157d7–158d2) and *Philebus* (53d3–54c11), echoed in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Λ (1075a11–25), and indicated by the Athenian Stranger’s analogies in *Laws* 10 (902d2–903a3, 903c6–d1) and by his claim in *Laws* 12 that the orderly movements of the heavens are caused by ‘thoughts of a plan about good things achieving their end’ (διανοίαις βουλήσεως ἀγαθῶν πέρι τελουμένων, 967a4–5).

I now turn to Schofield’s introduction. He first emphasizes the Athenian Stranger’s conception of the rule of law as the rule of divine reason (νοῦς) and the Athenian Stranger’s

inclusion of daily customs and habits in addition to constitutional arrangements as appropriate subjects of legislation. Second, Schofield addresses the apparently dual purpose of legislation in the *Laws*—complete virtue in individual citizens and harmonious unity of the city—and claims that the Athenian Stranger prioritizes the former. Third, Schofield explains why, according to the Athenian Stranger, human nature makes it difficult to cultivate complete virtue in a human being and why the Athenian Stranger is unwilling to place a human being, even a very good one, above the law. Fourth, Schofield describes the variety of the persuasive preambles that the Athenian Stranger affixes to his laws, preambles meant to secure the citizens' willing acceptance his prescriptions and recommendations. Schofield notes that, because the laws address various topics and audiences, some preambles are sermons, some appeal to ancient myths, some are reflections on law's role in society, and some are philosophical arguments. Schofield concludes his introduction by saying that the *Laws* was not meant to provide a clear template for use by a would-be statesman; its discussions are too winding and unhurried for that. Rather, for Schofield, the *Laws* is a politically idealistic work, but one whose view of human nature is more pessimistic than the *Republic's*.

When making his second point, Schofield describes the variety of statements in the *Laws* about the lawgiver's aim. Some statements emphasize the cultivation of virtue in individual citizens while others emphasize the creation and maintenance of a harmonious city. At one point the Athenian Stranger says that the various statements in fact express the same aim (693c4), and Schofield suggests that self-control is a possible uniting thread. Schofield concludes, however, that at 963a, as the dialogue concludes, Plato gives priority to the cultivation of individual virtue.

It seems to me, however, that the statement at 963a, which belongs to Cleinias, is meant not to contrast aiming at the city's good with aiming at the individual's good, but to contrast the

pursuit of virtue with the pursuit of more conventional political aims such as partisan interests, wealth, military conquest, and freedom (962d10–e4). The Athenian Stranger soon reminds Cleinias that virtue is led by reason (νοῦς), and he asks him and Megillus what it is that the statesman’s reason aims at. They do not know (963c3). By this point, however, they should know. The Athenian Stranger has argued plainly that experts—whether doctors, ship captains, generals, household managers, stonemasons, or statesmen—act for the good of a whole and all its parts (902d2–e3). He has often described the city as a ‘whole’ (664c6, 665c3–4, 731b1, 773c1, 778c5, 829e7, 822e5 [ὅλης τῆς πολιτείας], 830d1, 831a2, 836b2, 838d7, 839c8, 847e1, 856b5, 873b6–8, 874b2 [ὅλης χώρας], 875c3, 876b5, 909b5, 958c5, 964e4, 965a4, 968a3) and has often referred to the city’s twelve districts and tribes, and to the 5,040 households and householders, as the city’s ‘parts’ (737e3–4, 745b6–746d5, 758e2–3, 848d6–e5, 955c2, 956b4). The Athenian Stranger has also said that the citizens and their property belong to the family line, a line stretching from the family’s ancestors down through its descendants, and that the entire family and its property belong to the city (923a3–b1). It would appear, then, the statesman’s reason aims at the good of a whole, the city, and its parts, the citizens and their households and villages. Since a whole’s perfection depends constitutively, not instrumentally, on the perfection of its parts, it seems to me that the Athenian Stranger’s political holism allows the statesman to aim at cultivating the virtue of individual citizens for its own sake as well as for the sake of the city and, ultimately, for the sake of the universe.

Although this edition does not emphasize Plato’s cosmic and political holism, it is, in my opinion, the best available English translation of all twelve books of Plato’s *Laws* for students and the general reader.

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