

*Plato Laws 1 and 2.
Translated with and
Introduction and
Commentary.* By Susan
Sauvé Meyer (2015,
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It is perhaps not entirely normal to review a paperback issuing of a book already reviewed in its hardback issuing,¹ but Susan Sauvé Meyer's (hereafter "SSM") Clarendon translation and commentary of *Laws 1 and 2* certainly deserves the attention of the readers of this Journal.

Although serious Plato scholars have generally been aware of the *Laws*, this lengthy dialogue has generally gotten much less attention than most other works of Plato, surely less than the *Republic*. For English-readers there have been several decent translations – T. Saunders (1970) and T. Pangle (1980) are two of the more recent. Detailed commentaries have been more scarce – L. Brisson & J.-F. Pradeau (2006) and especially K. Schöpsdau (1994-2011) have been valuable for readers of French or German, and Robert Mayhew (2008) in Clarendon for *Laws Book 10*.² C. Bobonich has written a good deal about the *Laws*, including a book focusing primarily on the *Laws*, and an edited volume of essays.³ Beyond this core bibliography there is of course more, but not an overwhelming list, not the sort of bibliography one would see of the *Republic*.⁴

As previous reviewers have noted, the translation is both clear and sensitive to philosophical points. A large advantage of the Clarendon format is the opportunity to defend one's translation, and to include alternative readings of difficult passages. A sample: at 629d2 the Athenian says that *stasis* is πάντων πολέμων χαλεπώτατος, translated by SSM as "the hardest conflict," by Bury (in Perseus) and Saunders as "most bitter," and by England as "deadliest." SSM defends her translation by contrasting *chalepos* with its opposite *praos*, and pointing out that at 630a4-5 Theognis is quoted to the effect that civil war is the most difficult to fight (p.99).

The commentary often gives succinct philosophical analyses: at 631b6-c1, the Athenian

says that a city that receives divine goods (wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice) also receives the human goods (health, beauty, strength, and wealth), “otherwise it is bereft of both.” SSM points out (p. 109) that this joins a “sufficiency thesis (possessing divine goods suffices for possessing the human ones) and a necessity thesis (possessing the divine goods is necessary for possessing the human ones.” Is it the city or individuals who receive the relevant goods? Some, e.g. Bobonich, have wanted the text to tell us that the Athenian is talking about individuals, but that’s not entirely plausible, since virtuous individuals may be ill or poor. Rather, the Athenian is talking about *cities* that possess the “divine goods,” without which they cannot reasonably expect to receive the “human goods.”

Another spot, a few pages along, concerns the understanding of courage, argued by the Athenian to oppose not only fear and pain, but also desire and pleasure (633c9). SSM usefully distinguishes (A) pleasant and painful experiences and (B) affective responses to the prospect of A-type experiences. It’s the B-type, the anticipations, that one must battle against, and the Athenian’s notion of appropriate training for the courage to resist is directed against those. SSM makes clear how the Athenian envisages the well-regulated drinking parties to educate participants to proper responses to the prospects of pleasure and pain.

Book II begins with a focus on the thesis that only the just are truly happy – a theme that many will remember from the *Republic*. Is the Athenian defending the sufficiency thesis, that “Anyone who is just is happy,” or the necessity thesis, that “Anyone who is not just is unhappy”? SSM (p. 258) does not believe that Book II provides the arguments to decide whether Plato is committed to one of these theses; rather, she believes that the Athenian is arguing that it is

essential that the state *teach* that the just life is happiest and most pleasant.

I felt particularly enlightened by SSM’s explanation of the three choral groups: the “Chorus of the Muses,” composed of children to the age of 18, the “Chorus of Apollo,” from 19 to 30, and the “Chorus of Dionysus,” from 30 to 60. The Athenian spends much the most amount of time talking about the aesthetic virtues that are meant to emanate from the Dionysian choral groups, but SSM makes clear how those regulate the educational functions of the Chorus of the Muses and stabilize the productions of the Chorus of Apollo.

Anyone who wishes to understand Plato’s contribution to political thought must turn to the *Laws* as well as the *Republic* and *Statesman* (and other dialogues too). An understanding of the complex and sometimes obscure *Laws* is very much facilitated by this excellent translation and commentary. One shouldn’t try to read the *Laws* without it!

NOTES

1 Online, by D. J. Riesbeck in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2016.05.23 and by N. R. Baima in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2016.06.26; in print by M. Brumbaugh in *The Classical Review* July 2016, and by M. L. Bartels in *Mnemosyne* 70.6 (2017) 1059-1072. There may well be others.

2 L. Brisson & J.-F. Pradeau (2006). *Platon Les Lois, traduction, introduction, et notes*. 2 vols. Paris: Flammarion. Robert Mayhew (2008). *Plato: Laws 10*. Oxford University Press. Oddly, SSM does not include Mayhew in her bibliography or index. T. Pangle (1980). *The Laws of Plato, translated with Notes and an Interpretive Essay*. University of Chicago Press. T. Saunders (1970). *Plato: The Laws. Translated with an Introduction*. Penguin. K. Schöpsdau (1994-2011, three volumes). *Platon: Nomoi (Gesetze)*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

3 C. Bobonich (2002). *Plato’s Utopia Recast*. Oxford University Press. Ed. (2010), *Plato’s Laws: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge University Press.

4 PhilPapers claims 205 items under *Plato: Laws* and 1385 under *Plato: Republic*.