Christopher Bobonich’s edited collection, *Plato’s ‘Laws’: A Critical Guide*, comprises new essays on the dialogue by a highly distinguished group of scholars. As Bobonich notes in the introduction, only recently has the *Laws* become a focus of pronounced scholarly engagement (pp. 1, 4); the result is that the dialogue’s contributions on key Platonic themes — among them political philosophy, psychology and theology — are at last receiving their due.

Chapters 1 and 2 of *Plato’s Laws* treat the dialogue’s overarching agenda. The next three showcase an array of issues involving virtue and morality, central among them legislative preludes’ pedagogical role, while essays 6 to 8 concentrate on moral psychology. Finally, chapters 9 to 11 focus, respectively, on women’s sociopolitical and familial positions, the dialogue’s contribution to Plato’s late theology, and how to read Plato’s claim (7.817a–d) linking the *Laws*’ politeia with tragedy. This volume richly and admirably fulfils the stated goal of Cambridge Critical Guides to provide ‘cutting-edge research volumes on some of the most important works of philosophy . . . [that] will appeal to a scholarly and graduate-level audience’ (www.cambridge.org).

Due to the book’s importance, I attend to all its chapters, addressing both their scholarly innovations and spots where their thought-provoking treatments evince salient interpretive challenges, illumining thereby the necessity for further work — which inspirational role, in fact, Bobonich hopes the volume will serve (p. 4).

**Chapter 1:** Malcolm Schofield (‘The *Laws*’ Two Projects’) notes the dearth of scholarly discussion of Aristotle’s contention in *Politics* 2.6 that while the *Laws*’ stated goal is to propose a political grid that historical examination suggests could be readily deployed, its subsequent discussion reverts to a high-flying focus on ideals à la Kallipolis. Having taken his cue from the gleaning of two agendas by Aristotle, whom one would not typically view as a subtle exegete of the *Laws*, Schofield argues that its two ‘theoretical enterprises’ (p. 21) are deeply linked and not fundamentally at odds. Their precise relation — where robust idealizing trumps concessions to limitations guided by historical experience — is disclosed via attention to the twofold nature of
law; crucial here is the fact that citizens’ law-abidingness is voluntary, hence the salience of legislative preludes’ pedagogical role (pp. 27–8).

Schofield’s account of *Laws* 5.739a–e assumes its presentation of Magnesia as ‘second best’ (739b3) compared with Kallipolis (p. 16) — an interpretation assumed at all relevant junctures in the volume, Bobonich’s stress (p. 2) on scholars’ lack of consensus regarding the passage notwithstanding. From the fact that, as Schofield maintains, ‘the ideals of community, equality and friendship are still guiding principles’ (p. 16) in Magnesia, it need not follow that Kallipolis itself is the ideal being approximated. Both the *Republic* and the *Laws* seek to approach the unity symbolized by the former’s finger analogy (462c–d) as nearly as possible. In the *Laws*, however, unlike the *Republic* (464d with 416c–417b, 464a), Plato sees clearly that eliminating private possessions and instituting other measures with only a minority of the citizenry in view is not the sole path worth attempting. In fact, maximal unity across the citizen population *tout court*, featured at 739c7–d2, is the aim of key measures including all citizens’ substantive *paideia*, the premium placed on citizens’ deep mutual familiarity, and their responsibility to promote harmony through helping to bring its disrupters to justice. The passage’s summation at d3–4 (*kai kata dunamin hoitines nomoi mian hoti malista polin apergazontai*) reflects most directly the *Laws*, not the *Republic*’s, notion of how to promote the regulative ideal they share since only here do *nomoi* themselves constitute the foremost agency through which unity is produced.

This alternative reading of *Laws* 739a–e would conceivably render the gap between the dialogue’s dual threads as treated by Schofield somewhat less pronounced. Either way, however, Schofield is surely right to foreground, contra Aristotle, the two strands’ intertwining and to identify as Plato’s ultimate concern the best outcome *simpliciter*, not merely the best one can hope for given existent limitations. Schofield’s illuminating defence of this stance will surely promote further, fresh exploration of the dialogue’s political aims.

**Chapter 2** In ‘The Relationship of the *Laws* to Other Dialogues: A Proposal’, Christopher Rowe maintains that the dialogue operates on two planes: that of the Athenian Stranger’s interlocutors and most Magnesian colonists-to-be, and a more elevated level that ‘we, as readers, have to put in some effort to excavate’ (pp. 32–3). The latter audience must ‘read the *Laws* together with other dialogues (without distinction, i.e., not just dialogues of some particular “period”), at the risk of not understanding, with any completeness, what the

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