Lucia Prauscello


*Republic* X’s infamous expulsion of the poets from utopia, presented as the culmination of an ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’ (607b5-6), has long been taken to be emblematic of Plato’s disdain for poetry and its deleterious effects. Yet, as recently explored in work such as Destrée and Herrmann’s *Plato and the Poets* (Brill 2011), the philosopher’s attitude toward poetics is vastly more complicated. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Laws*, Plato’s longest and arguably most important work of political philosophy. In the second-best city, the imagined Cretan polis of Magnesia, choruses play the starring role in optimizing not only the political community writ-large, but also the individual souls of its members. It is this surprisingly prominent part given to the chorus that has attracted Lucia Prauscello (hereafter P.) to Platonic political philosophy. An expert on Greek poetics and performance culture, P. examines the choruses described in Plato’s *Laws* to show how they shape the moral and political lives of ordinary citizens by cultivating in them the virtues required in the second-best polis.

Following a preface, introduction, and section titled ‘Preliminaries’, the bulk of the book is divided into two parts. The first, ‘Performing ordinary virtue in Plato’s utopias: citizenship, desire and intention’, consists of a pair of chapters that investigate the mechanics of citizenship in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. The second part, ‘Citizenship and Performance in the *Laws*’, is a detailed study of the civic choruses in Magnesia.

In her first chapter, ‘Citizenship in Callipolis’, P. sets out to investigate what motivates citizens in Plato’s *Republic* to pursue virtue. She demonstrates that within the hierarchically segregated citizenry, ‘erotic passion’ (*erōs*) serves as the impetus to virtue exclusively among the elite guardians (who experience it interpersonally) and the philosopher-kings (who enjoy access to its higher, non-personal form), while ‘friendship’ (*philia*) is the force that drives what she terms ‘ordinary citizens’ to perform their necessary role *qua* citizen. Indeed, it is the ‘ordinary virtue’ (*dēmotikē aretē*) imagined in the Platonic utopia that takes center stage in P.’s analysis in contrast with the top-down mechanisms of statecraft so often at the center of discussions on Platonic political philosophy. Finally, P. seeks to contextualize the bifurcated desire that allows Callipolis to function socially and politically within ‘contemporary Athenian democratic ideology’ (p. 48). Here she focuses almost exclusively on the discourse of the erotics of citizenship emanating from Pericles’ funeral oration in Thucydides.
She draws on Wohl’s *Love among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* (Princeton: 2002) to good effect, but oversimplifies the challenges associated with linking Thucydides to fourth-century Athenian political discourse a full generation after the end of the Peloponnesian War to the exclusion of other more contemporary evidence.

The second chapter, ‘Citizenship in Magnesia’, contrasts the notions of citizenship in the *Republic* with those developed in the *Laws*, again paying attention to the virtue of ordinary citizens. A careful analysis of the semantics of desire leads P. to posit a paradigm she terms ‘erotic citizenship’, which accounts for the essential function played by ‘desire’ (*epithymia*) and ‘erotic passion’ (*erōs*) in creating and sustaining ‘volitional citizenship’. Here too, P. regards contemporary Athenian discourse surrounding citizenship as the crucial context for what she sees as Plato’s insistence on volition as a precondition for citizenship. Her discussion of Lysias 31 *Against Philon* and Demosthenes 23 *Against Aristocrates* offers a starting point for an examination of this issue, but P. develops this line less thoroughly than one might expect given how important she claims contemporary political discourse is for her argument. Relevant scholarship on this topic is cited abundantly in the footnotes, but it might also have been examined in the text to good effect.

The third chapter, ‘Citizenship and Performance in the *Laws*’, is a detailed study of the civic choruses in Magnesia and begins with a chapter on ‘Choral Performances, Persuasion and Pleasure’ in which P. tackles some of the most complex issues relating to Plato’s views on music’s impact on moral psychology and social practice. Here, P. carefully teases out the nature, civic contexts, modalities, and origin myths of Magnesian ‘chorality’ (*chorēia*) in the *Laws*. Whereas Plato condemns the dangers of pleasure and pain produced by music in *Republic* X, he designs his second-best polity so as to capitalize on music’s psychagogic force, which P. argues is constitutive of the erotic citizenship she describes in Chapter 2. This chapter is so full and rich that it seems unfair to ask for more here. Yet, it is surprising that P. does not say more about the moral and social role played by praise, a central component of Magnesian *chorēia* that seems essential to her characterization of music culture in the *Laws*.

Closely connected with this largely theoretical treatment of *chorēia* is P.’s study of the *Laws*’ three choruses in the fourth chapter – ‘Patterns of Chorality in Magnesia’. The Dionysian Chorus of Elders, which Plato himself admits sounds rather absurd (*mala atopes*, 665b), requires the most detailed examination and its role within the social and musical world of the *Laws* is fittingly the central focus of this chapter. From this P. moves on to focus more specifically on the enigmatic dance term *emmeleia* and its relation to the Magnesian