

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

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SOCRATES' SECOND SAILING: ON PLATO'S *REPUBLIC* by Seth Benardete. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pp. ix, 238. \$29.95.

As with much of Benardete's other work, this is not an easy book to read. To say that it is dense, boldly paradoxical, replete with hellenized English, and abjures the standard expectations of expository writing only hints at the difficulties one must face in reading this text. Sentences, such as "The true city is the true lie" (p. 66) or "By the omission of the line [of Homer] the poets are forthwith expelled, though by the same token they are allowed to stay" (p. 68) or "Socrates has used the eideticizing power of the thumoeidetic to get rid of the gods. . . . The falsity of the thumoeidetic is its truth" (p. 102), can leave the reader — or, at least, they left me — baffled. And yet this is also classic Benardete, where cryptic allusions, startling paradoxes, new questions (that seem obvious once they are asked) about long-accepted passages all work to give brilliant new insights into the Platonic text and therewith as well the possibility or impossibility of combining politics and philosophy, practice and theory. Benardete notes that his book began with a review of Leo Strauss's *The City and Man*, and while it owes its thematic concerns to Strauss, the execution is all Benardete's own. At its better moments, Benardete's style becomes the modern writer's version of the Platonic dialogue. The perplexities induced by the paradoxes presented make us aware of the inadequacy of the model of rationality favored by many — if not most — readers of the *Republic* for whom the forms exist as an external standard of value, accessible to the mind ascending, and brought down by the philosopher to the world of the city. Although Benardete's spare prose allows no references to the scholarship he rejects, it is just such readings of the *Republic* that must yield to Benardete's analysis.

Benardete begins by taking us back to the *Phaedo* and Socrates awaiting death in the prison of the Athenians. Why is Socrates here? Mind cannot be the cause since the mind of the Athenians — execution — is one, that of Socrates — suicide — another, and yet they both lead to the same action. Similarly, mind as the explorer in search of mechanical causation cannot and

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does not order for the sake of that which is good. And so, we must look elsewhere to explain what mind itself cannot; we embark on a “second sailing,” a methodology that Benardete calls “eidetic analysis,” one that eschews teleology “without giving up on either mind or the good” (p. 4). Eidetic analysis, always opposing, always joining, isolating, and associating, entails two opposed analytic approaches which Benardete says control his reading of the *Republic*: “burstlike” and “filiamentlike.” Yet the insights and interpretations he offers, irrespective of the name he may assign to it, emerge from his own subtle questions, his own subtle reflections, his own deep knowledge of the Greek language. A missing *eta* raises questions about the identity of justice found and the justice sought (p. 88) or a misplaced *alpha-privative* removes doubt from a verb of desiring (p. 96). Who, for instance, has asked before to whom do those who hold the figures reflected on the wall of the cave speak – to the cavemen or to themselves? Benardete uses this question to suggest that “the speeches of the carriers do not necessarily have anything to do with the artifacts they carry” (p. 173), which in turn suggests to Benardete “the arbitrariness of speeches in the cave” and thus the possibility of examining “predicates without subjects” (p. 177), or the many without the one. This becomes the starting point for the second sailing, for it leads forward to one of Benardete’s central themes about the nature of the constructed city in speech: It need not exist as an *idea* for it to reveal the “envelope of unreality in which every city exists and without which none could exist” (p. 185).

Elsewhere, Benardete notes the inordinate amount of time that Socrates seems to spend on isolating the desiring part of the soul from the reasoning parts – inordinate since this opposition seems so obvious. But, as Benardete remarks, the problem sets Socrates against Socrates, for Socrates has argued elsewhere that we always desire the good and that, therefore, desires could not oppose our reason. “Socrates against Socrates is a conflict that only the highest principles could resolve” (p. 94). Those highest principles, are, in part, the desiring of what we do know that we want and the implications of discovering what it is that we want (e.g., not just drink to quench thirst but drink that is good for the human being who is not only soul but must have body as well). The process is one that brings us more to the joining than to the separation of body and soul, to the replacement of “nature with syntax” (p. 96); this, in turn, underscores Benardete’s point that the city of speech, or the city as *idea*, cannot exist apart from the “dialogic city” where Socrates rules over the young men in Cephalus’s house. The *ideas* are created by ourselves.

This interaction between the dialogic city and the city created by speech is at the core of Benardete's analysis. The latter is "made," the former comes into being and while the contradictions emerge in the "made" city, the dialogic city becomes the *Republic* itself. But the two cities exist not in simple opposition to one another. Rather, the process of creation entails the politicization of the dialogic city as the interlocutors metamorphose from a "we" of production (in the city of pigs) to the "us" against "them" of politics (in the fevered city). And as the ruler in the dialogic city, Socrates can turn Glaucon and Adeimantus into defenders of justice in the created city before they in the dialogic city know what justice is. Such is the power of speech. Further, by placing his interlocutors outside the constructed city, Socrates can make them see its beauty from without and be happy with that beauty, although were they to exist within the city, they might, as Adeimantus indeed does, question the unity of beauty and happiness. As the dialogic city always "shadows" (p. 169) the city in speech, the latter city is undermined throughout and, with the questioning of that constructed city, we question the *ideas* created as well, the education that such *ideas* would require, the separation from the physical world entailed in such *ideas*—and we become aware of the joining of the mind and the physical worlds, of practice and philosophy as we would not were the focus only on the city of speech. This emphasis on the dialogic city as necessary for uncovering the true lesson of the *Republic* makes us aware of the limits of the city of speech; it is in this conclusion that we see most vividly the debt to Strauss's reading. But Benardete goes beyond Strauss in questioning not only the city in speech; we are left at the end of his analysis deep in the cave where "[t]he images of things are the truth of things" (p. 228) and where philosophy as "a rare strand in the bond of the cosmos" may only arise "if babies who die at birth [and] choose a life at random . . . sometimes get lucky" (p. 229).

Benardete's interpretations are always novel, sometimes outrageous. Often, he will posit a reading that then becomes the untested basis for further claims. Having posed the question about the audience for the figureholders of the cave, he accepts his own proposal that they *may* be speaking to themselves as the grounds for the subsequent analysis. One must be willing to follow him, as Adeimantus and Glaucon do with Socrates, though we may then find ourselves exclaiming with Adeimantus, "[W]hen the little are collected at the end of the argument, the slip turns out to be great and contrary to the first assertions" (487b; Bloom translation).

As one reads Benardete's book, one is reminded of the Platonic dialogue as a model: The content cannot be abstracted from the form in which it is presented. But, I fear, that while the form of Plato's dialogues may draw us

into the discourse of the characters, Benardete's style may establish a barrier for many. "Clarity makes us surreptitiously the standard," Benardete comments during his discussion of the divided line. "It is the subjective side of Truth" (p. 166). Though in Benardete's reading, Socrates is turning us toward this subjective side as the beginning point for our philosophic search, Benardete does not see this as an injunction to clarity on his own part. This is a shame, for the novelty of his readings could do much to draw many back into the *Republic* as a work far richer even than the one that has enchanted readers for millennia and far more engaged in controversies of current theory and practice than is usually acknowledged.

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SELF-DIRECTION AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY: ROUSSEAU AND HERDER by F. M. Barnard. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. vii, 330. \$69.00.

F. M. Barnard is already well known as a distinguished interpreter of Herder, but his views on Rousseau are much less familiar; it seems reasonable, then, to focus a brief review on his "reading" of the citizen of Geneva.

The first thing to be said is that Barnard captures Rousseau's voluntarism, the centrality of *volonté générale*, as well as anyone ever has. "Causality of will," Barnard rightly says, "is for Rousseau an unquestioned presupposition of human agency and human accountability. . . . [Rousseauian] freedom, defined in terms of willing . . . combines at least two distinct dimensions of willing, one defined by its subjective source, the other by its objective content, and it is through the combination of these two dimensions that moral freedom . . . acquires its substantive meaning." It would be difficult to improve on this statement.

Had Rousseau not been centrally concerned, indeed, with the voluntariness of morally legitimate human actions, some of the structural features of his political thought would be (literally) unaccountable. Above all, the notion of *general will* would not have become the core idea of his political philosophy. He would just have spoken, à la Plato, of achieving perfect *généralité* through civic education (as in *Republic* 462b: "do we know of any greater evil for a state than the thing that distracts it and makes it many instead of one, or a greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?")