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LEISURED ARISTOCRATS OR WARRIOR-FARMERS? LEISURE IN PLATO'S *LAWS*

THANASSIS SAMARAS

ARE ALL OR ONLY some of the citizens of the *Laws* fully leisured?¹ The answer to this question is critical for the determination of the constitutional type of Magnesia, the city of the *Laws*. If all citizens are fully leisured, Magnesia is a colony in which economically unproductive citizens dominate non-citizen groups such as metics and slaves. It is therefore a clear-cut, unmitigated aristocracy.² If, however, many citizens are actually involved in agriculture and do not enjoy uninterrupted leisure, the constitution of Magnesia turns out to be quite different. In this case, it is a moderate timocracy. It is moderate, because it is based on the notion of political balance between free, independent, laboring farmers, on the one hand, and wealthy, idle landowners, on the other.³ It is a timocracy because greater wealth, which as we shall see Plato associates with greater virtue, gives to the richer citizens a dominant political role.⁴

1. In this paper I am using the word "leisure" to designate the freedom from the need to work manually or spend time on activities necessary to ensure one's economic well-being. Therefore, I would not characterize the farmer who needs to spend a substantial amount of time overseeing his farm as leisured, even if he does not regularly engage in manual labor himself; this person, to the extent that he spends valuable time for estate management, does not enjoy leisure. But the individual who spends time on politics or recreational activities such as hunting or athletic training would qualify as leisured under this definition. On the other hand, I am not using "leisure" as an exact translation of *scholê*. Although "leisure" is the closest possible English translation of *scholê*, the Greek term has a wide range of meanings, and not all of them are captured by "leisure."

2. Since Magnesia is a colony, citizenship is bestowed on the basis of being an adult member of one of the founding families, which in this case replaces the aristocratic principle of being born into a noble family.

3. It is obvious that the political character of the work will be different in either case. If Magnesia is a forthright aristocracy, then it bears a strong resemblance to the city of the *Republic*. Despite the fact that private property is endorsed in the *Laws* and not in the *Republic*, both cities, are in this case, fully controlled by a leisured upper class that absolutely dominates the rest of the population politically. The fact that manual laborers are considered citizens in the *Republic* but not in the *Laws* is actually a much smaller difference than it may appear at first sight: the Producers, that is, the farmers, craftsmen and manual laborers of the *Republic*, have absolutely no control over their fates and are allowed no political autonomy whatsoever. Their citizenship, therefore, is purely nominal and does not involve even the slightest shred of political self-determination. The resemblance of Magnesia to Aristotle's best city of the seventh book of the *Politics* is even greater on the assumption of an all-leisured citizen body. In both cases, an idle landowning aristocracy dominates non-citizen groups, that is, metics and slaves. Aristotle explicitly claims that these classes are necessary for the existence of the city, but not a proper part of it (1321a21–28). If, however, as I propose, the majority of Magnesian citizens are farmers working on their own land, the constitution of the *Laws* becomes more akin to some forms of Aristotle's polity, especially those dominated by "the middle citizens" (*hoi mesoi*), than it is to the perfect constitutions of the *Republic* or of Book 7.

4. I use the term timocracy in the same way that Aristotle uses it in *Eth. Nic.* 8.10.1 and 3, that is, as designating the constitution in which political offices are distributed on the basis of wealth.

Determining the laboring status of Magnesian citizens, however, does present a problem. The *Laws* includes both passages indicating that all of them will be fully leisured and passages that lead to the opposite conclusion. The moral psychology of the dialogue would seem to affirm the former thesis: Plato associates virtue with leisure, and virtue is unquestionably the aim of all activities of Magnesian citizens. It is for this reason that, analyzing the dialogue primarily from the point of view of its ethical theory, Christopher Bobonich argues for a leisured citizenship, although he does not explicitly deny the possibility of some citizens occasionally physically working on their land.⁵ The assumption of a fully leisured citizen body, however, is contradicted both by several passages where Plato associates leisure with only the higher citizen classes and by the overall social and political structure of the *Laws*. How can this conflict be resolved? Although a number of commentators address the issue in passing or as part of a wider project, no study concentrating exclusively on this question exists in the literature.⁶

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss the passages suggesting an all-leisured citizen body and the way in which Plato's theory of virtue appears to require universal leisure. In the second section, I present the textual evidence for the thesis that most citizens will be working on their land. In the third section, I look at several fundamental social and political features of the dialogue and explain why these features make no sense if all citizens are leisured. My conclusion is that the majority of the citizens are not fully leisured; on the contrary, they have to spend a substantial part of their time overseeing their estates and, in all probability, they have to physically work on these estates on occasion. Finally, I suggest a possible answer as to why in some places Plato refers to a virtue dependent on the freedom from the need to work, despite the fact that the social structure of the *Laws* makes full leisure unattainable for most of his citizens.

I

There are certain passages in the *Laws* that, taken in isolation, appear to promote the view that all citizens are fully leisured. The strongest of these passages is 806d–e:

What then would be the way of life of human beings for whom the necessities were taken care of in due measure, for whom matters pertaining to the arts were handed over to others, and whose farms, assigned to slaves (*geôrgiai de ekdedomenai doulois*), provided sufficient produce from the things of the land to allow human beings to live in an orderly way?⁷

5. Bobonich 2002, 390–91.

6. Arist. *Pol.* 1265a15–16, takes the citizens of the *Laws* to be entirely leisured (*argoi*). The same position is held by David Roochnik (2010, 10) and, more reservedly, by Bobonich (see n. 5 above). Saunders (1970, 29–30) allows that a citizen will “car[e] for his farm,” but rules out physical labor. Brunt (1993, 264) also accepts that citizens will manage their estates, but does not dismiss the possibility that they may have to work manually on them. Fuks (1979, 58–61) takes the most explicit position in favor of the view that all citizens will oversee their farms and the poorest ones will also physically work on them. Morrow (1960, 531–32) notices that “there is no glorification of physical labor in Plato,” but also points out that “it seems not to be Plato’s intention that his citizens shall be exempt from the care of their property and from personal labor on their land.”

7. All passages of the *Laws*, unless otherwise stated, are translated by Pangle (1980).

Whereas *geôrgia* in the singular means "cultivation of the land," *geôrgiai* in the plural can designate "farms." This passage states, therefore, that actual labor on the land will be left to slaves. If this were the only part of the text addressing the matter in the *Laws*, one would have to assume that all citizens are fully leisured.

This assumption could potentially be buttressed by some other parts of the text: the first is 832d, where Plato writes that the city "presumably dwells in the greatest leisure" (*scholên . . . megistên*).

This passage appears to furnish support to the claim that Magnesian citizens will be leisured, but, actually, it is far from unambiguous. Does *megistên* mean that citizens will enjoy absolute, uninterrupted leisure, or does it mean "greatest possible"? Both readings of the Greek are perfectly plausible. If *megistên* means here "greatest possible," however, 832d is compatible with the assertion that citizens may, at least under some circumstances, contribute their labor to their farms. In the same context, Plato also writes that Magnesia's citizens will be, because of their laws, "free as regards one another" (*eleutheroi te ap' allêlôn*, 831d2) and "the least likely . . . to become lovers of money" (*philochrêmatôi*, 832d2). The kind of activities that Plato dissociates from leisure in this passage fit the description of artisanship and hired labor, but not necessarily farming one's own land. "Free as regards one another" means that no citizen will work for somebody else. This freedom, whose importance is regularly emphasized by anti-democratic authors of the Classical period, is not violated by work on one's own land.⁸ "Love of money" is connected with the lower classes in the *Republic*, but putting in the labor required for one's lot to sustain one's family would not make a person *philochrêmatos*. Moreover, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., making money is associated more often with industry and commerce than with farming, and Plato makes this connection in very strong terms in 831e. Therefore, whereas 832d positively reinforces Plato's prohibition of industrial and commercial activities to citizens (a prohibition that we will discuss soon), it does not make clear if the citizens will be fully leisured at all times or if this is only a desirable situation, which may or may not be obtained in Magnesia.

The second passage is 807c-d:

And for the men who lived this way the activity that would be left is neither the smallest nor the humblest, we assert, but is in fact the greatest of all the tasks that can be assigned by a just law. For just as the life of a man who aims at victory in the Pythian or Olympian games wholly lacks leisure for all the other activities, so doubly or much more than doubly full of business [*ascholias . . . gemôn*] is the life that's most correctly called a "life"—that of a man who is devoted to cultivating his body in all respects and his soul as regards virtue. Not even a small part of any of the other activities should be allowed to pose an obstacle to his giving the body its appropriate exercises and food, and the soul teachings and habits; the whole night and day are scarcely sufficient time for the man who's doing this to get the complete and adequate benefit from these things.⁹

8. On the aristocratic concept of freedom, see Raafaub 1983.

9. Pangle translation, adapted.

This passage patently associates training one's soul in virtue with leisure—leisure in the sense of abstaining from any economically productive activities.¹⁰ It also makes clear that virtue is the aim of all the activities of the citizens of the *Laws*. What is not equally clear, however, is if Plato claims that all citizens will be leisured all the time, or if this is an ideal situation that the lawgiver would like to have in his city, but which may not always be attainable in practice. Plato is unequivocal that the pursuit of virtue is a full-time occupation. But from this it does not necessarily follow that all Magnesians will be leisured and, in fact, Plato does not state in this passage that this will be the case. Importantly, 807c–d comes right after a passage in which Plato emphasizes that the city of the *Laws* is not perfect and that perfection is incompatible with the existence of private property and the individual family. But if the city of the *Laws* is not perfect, then it is definitely conceivable that the ideal conditions required for the full achievement of virtue may not always be obtainable in Magnesia. So, although 807c–d posits a strong connection between the cultivation of virtue and leisure, it does not explicitly state that all citizens will have such leisure.

The third passage is 835d–e:

... a fear came over me as I reflected on the problem of how someone will manage a city like this, in which young men and women are well reared, and unoccupied with [*argoi*] the severe and illiberal toils [*ponôn sphodrôn kai aneleutherôn*] that do the most to quench wantonness; and where sacrifices, festivals and choruses are the preoccupations of everyone throughout their whole lives.¹¹

Argoi is a strong term, but, as Nicole Loraux points out, the synonym for *argia* is not “leisure” (*scholê*), but rather terms such as *rhathymia*, *malakia*, and *tryphê*.¹² In any case, the key to the whole passage is deciphering what may or may not come under the term “severe and illiberal toils.” “Severe” (*sphodrôn*) appears to rule out hard physical labor, but does it rule out any kind of labor? “Illiberal,” on the other hand, in this context designates forms of labor that would be regarded, from an aristocratic point of view, as not befitting a free individual, that is anything involving working for someone else. But what tasks should be nominated “illiberal”? There is another part of the text, 846d–847a, which may shed some light on this question:

... no native inhabitant, nor any domestic servant of a man who is native, is to labor at the craftsmen's arts [*dēmiourgika technēmata*]. For the man who is a citizen possesses already a sufficient art [*technê*], requiring much practice and many branches of learning: preserving and holding the common order of the city, which must not be a part-time pursuit. There's almost no human nature that is capable of laboring with precision at two pursuits or two arts [*technas*], or even practicing one adequately himself while overseeing someone else who is practicing another. This, then, is the rule that should prevail in the city: No one

10. Plato writes that this life will be full of *ascholia* (807c7; cf. c4), which means that it will completely lack *scholê* (*ascholia* is the antonym of *scholê*). But those Magnesians who are able to devote their whole time to the quest for virtue do not have to work for a living and thus are leisured in the sense of the word specified in n. 1.

11. Pangle translation, adapted. I follow Bobonich (2002, 390) in his change to Pangle's translation of *argoi*.

12. Loraux 1982, 176.

is to be a metal worker and at the same time a carpenter, nor again is a carpenter to supervise others who are working in metal instead of his own art . . . Each single individual in the city is to have one art and make his living from that. The City Regulators must labor to maintain this law, and if one of the native inhabitants inclines to some art [*eis tina technên apoklinêi*] instead of cultivating virtue, they are to punish him with blame and dishonors until they have succeeded in putting him back on his own straight track.

Both 835d–e and 846d–847a suggest that the cultivation of virtue is a full-time pursuit, but when it comes to the question of which arts are incompatible with it, only the traditional “mechanical” arts are mentioned. There is no reference to agriculture in this context and therefore we are not told whether overseeing one’s estate or engaging in physical labor on it are incompatible with the pursuit of virtue or not.¹³ One may speculate that the farmer who needs to work all the time on his farm may not have the time to be an active citizen. But Mediterranean agricultural activities are to a large extent seasonal, with intense labor required during some periods of the year and very little during others. Is the farmer who helps out on his own land during harvest a hopeless *banausic* who can never achieve virtue? And what about the gentleman-farmer who just enjoys working on his own land?

Actually, contemporary authors reflecting aristocratic views unfailingly include crafts like carpentry or shoe-making, but not farming, in those *banausic* arts that are inappropriate for a free man. The most characteristic example of an elite writer defending the compatibility of aristocratic virtue and agricultural labor is Xenophon. In a number of works, mainly in the *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon argues that not only is agricultural labor fully consistent with (aristocratic) virtue, but it actually contributes to it. Xenophon uses the concept of *ponos*, a concept that initially meant hard, undesirable labor or suffering, to designate a different kind of toil, which may be defined as “valorized effort.”¹⁴ This new meaning, which according to Loraux did not exist until classical times, makes it possible for Xenophon to use the term *ponos* to denote a kind of labor that is not degrading like the mechanical arts, but forms an essential component of an elite lifestyle that Xenophon wholeheartedly recommends.¹⁵ It is also important, from our point of view, that Xenophon clearly affirms that it is not only overseeing one’s estate that is noble, but also physically working on it. In *Oeconomicus* 5.4, he underlines the beneficial effects of both overseeing one’s estate and toiling on one’s own land, without drawing any distinction between the wealthy landowner who does the former and the small farmer who engages in the latter. Further, in 4.21–24 he points out that Cyrus had planted many of the trees of his garden in Sardis himself and that he never went to dinner, when healthy, “before working up a sweat either by practicing some military skill or doing some agricultural work” (*geôrgika erga*, 4.24).¹⁶

13. Strictly speaking, *geôrgia* is an art, and Plato’s point that no one can succeed in two *technai* would appear to mean that citizens should not engage in it. Nevertheless, the mention of two typical *banausic* arts, metalworking and carpentry, in this context, indicates that Plato is thinking only of those arts that virtually all elite Athenians took to be morally and psychologically degrading. *Geôrgia*, as I argue below in the text, does not belong to this group.

14. See Johnstone 1994, 220.

15. Loraux 1982, 172.

16. Translation Pomeroy (1994). Cf. also 4.4.

There can be no question that if Cyrus, Xenophon's icon of aristocratic virtue, engages in agricultural *erga*, this activity cannot be demeaning in any way. According to Vassilis Anastasiadis, "involvement with the land was never considered degrading in antiquity."¹⁷ Moreover, the *Oeconomicus*, the only work of the period dealing exclusively and at length with the economy of the *oikos*, the "household" that constituted the fundamental economic unit of the Greek world in antiquity, clearly treats overseeing one's farm and laboring on it not only as compatible, but practically complementary. As Sarah Pomeroy aptly notices, "[t]he *oikos* described by Xenophon combines features of the farm employing the labour of the family with the type of economic unit exploiting slave labour."¹⁸ Nor is agricultural labor, as far as Xenophon is concerned, incongruent with performing one's civic or military duties (4.3).

Since this is the standard elite view in the fourth century B.C.E., there is nothing extraordinary in Plato—himself an elite author—adopting it in the *Laws*.¹⁹ This fact, coupled with the fact that there is absolutely no allusion to farming in 846d–847a, strongly indicates that farming is not one of the "severe" and "illiberal" tasks that Plato finds incompatible with citizenship.

There is one passage in the *Laws*, 643b, where Plato mentions farming alongside a *banausic* craft, housebuilding. He then proceeds to draw a distinction between education aiming at virtue and education aiming at money or power (643b–644b) and calls the latter "vulgar" (*banauson*, 643a3) and "illiberal" (*aneleutheron*, 643a4). Although this passage could be read as suggesting that toiling on the land is incompatible with virtue, this suggestion is at best tentative. The two *technai* that are explicitly named as incompatible with virtue are "trade" (*kapêleias*, 643e1) and "merchant shipping" (*nauklêrias*, 643e1), while farming is not mentioned in this part of the text. So, like previous passages discussed in this section, 643b–644b reinforces the point that Plato thinks of the pursuit of virtue as a full-time occupation, but it does not prohibit farming to Magnesian citizens nor does it state that all of them will be fully leisured. In fact, it occurs in the first book, before the founding of Magnesia is specifically discussed, and therefore does not include any precise claims about the division of labor in the new colony.

So, of the passages possibly suggesting a fully leisured citizenship in the *Laws*, 832d, 807c–d, and 643b–644b make the point that leisure is desirable, but do not state that all citizens will enjoy it without interruption, and 835d–e never includes agricultural work in the *ponoi sphodroi* and *aneleutheroi* that are incompatible with the moral development of citizens. This leaves 806d–e as the only passage stating that citizens will abstain from agricultural work.

17. Anastasiadis 2004, 74.

18. Pomeroy 1994, 44.

19. In the *Republic*, where Plato certainly adopts a more exclusive form of government, farming is forbidden to the Guardians along with all other manual occupations. Unlike the citizens of the *Laws*, who are heads of households and own their own farms, the Guardians have no individual land property and are supposed to spend their whole time in study and contemplation. This means that farming is essentially grouped with the rest of the menial activities that are left to the Producers and that, as Plato argues, deform and ruin the soul (495b–e). But this attitude toward farming is clearly much more unfavorable than the mainstream aristocratic standpoint of the fourth century B.C.E.

But before we return to this passage, let us consider the evidence for the opposite thesis.

II

The assumption that the members of the lower citizen classes will not enjoy uninterrupted leisure is supported by several parts of the text.

In 842c–844d Plato raises the subject of agricultural laws (*nomoi* . . . *geôrgikoi*, 842e6). He points out that whereas most of the Greeks get their food from both the sea and the land, Magnesians will only use the latter. This makes the job of the lawgiver easier, because he has to give:

. . . only half as many laws, or even far fewer than half, and the laws are more appropriate for free human beings [*eleutherois anthrôpois mallon prepontes*]. The lawgiver for this city can just say good-bye to most of what pertains to ship owning [*nauklêrikôn*], wholesale trading [*emporikôn*], retail merchandizing [*kapêleutikôn*], innkeeping [*pan-dokeuseôn*], custom duties [*telônikôn*], mining [*metalleiôn*], loans [*daneismôn*], compound interest [*epitokôn tokôn*], and tens of thousands of other such things, and proceed to give laws regulating farmers [*geôrgois*], herdsmen [*nomeusi*], bee-keepers [*melittourgois*], and those who guard such things and take care of the tools (842d–e). The most important things have already been taken care of in legislation—marriage, the generation and rearing of children, and then also education and the institution of ruling offices in the city. Now he is compelled to turn to the legislation concerning food and those who toil [*syndia-ponousin*] to provide it.²⁰

This passage is crucial. To begin with, Plato draws a sharp distinction between arts or sources of income that have nothing to do with the cultivation of the land and activities related to farming. He then declares that no laws will be necessary to regulate the former. Why? The reason is that, as we have seen, no citizen is permitted to engage in them, and therefore the lawgiver, being concerned exclusively with the citizens of Magnesia, does not need to produce legislation in these areas. But he will legislate for farmers, herdsmen, and bee-keepers, just as he legislated on the important issues of marriage, the raising of children, and the political offices of the city. In context, there can be no doubt that the “farmers, herdsmen, [and] bee-keepers” mentioned in 842d7 are citizens.

In addition, Plato's agricultural laws must be “appropriate for free human beings” (842d2) and “free” is here almost certainly a synonym for “citizens.”²¹ The assumption that these laws are addressed to citizens is further reinforced by 843c–d, where Plato writes that “[a]nyone who oversteps boundaries [*hos d' an epergazêtai* . . . *huperbainôn tous horous*] and encroaches on a neighbor must pay for the damages and, in order to be cured of lack of awe and illiberality, must pay the injured party an additional amount equal to twice the damages.” Here there can be no question that *hos d' an epergazêtai* refers to a citizen, since the punishment for a slave would be corporal, not monetary. This point is made in more general terms by Glenn Morrow, who remarks that

20. Pangle translation, adapted.

21. For Plato's use of “free” as a synonym for “citizen” in other points of this part of the text, see Saunders 1972, 76–77.

the fact that “these ‘agricultural laws’ are intended to regulate the relations of citizens, not slaves only, is clear from the fact that the penalties for violations are fines and damages, not stripes; and the distinction is in one case drawn between a slave and a free offender (845ab).”²²

Therefore, when 842c–844d, with its strong evidence for citizen-farmers, is read in conjunction with 846d–e, which forbids the practice of mechanical arts to citizens, the following picture emerges: Plato treats the traditional crafts that involve working for monetary profit and for somebody else (in the sense of producing something to be used by somebody else, if not in the sense of having a boss) as absolutely incompatible with citizenship.²³ This is a point of view identical with that of the *Republic*, as well as with contemporary aristocratic opinion. Nevertheless, activities like farming and bee-keeping in which one may engage for the direct benefit of one’s household, are not regarded in the *Laws* as incompatible with meaningful citizenship.²⁴

In 763d, Plato states that because City Regulators “should have the capacity and the leisure [*scholazontas*] to look after the common things . . . every man may nominate anyone he wishes from the [two] higher classes.”²⁵ There can be no question that leisure is here associated exclusively with the higher classes.

In addition, in 758b the Athenian Stranger says that “most of the time all but a few the Councilmen must of necessity be allowed to stay at their own private business and attend to their own affairs [*kata tas hautôn oikêseis*].” The Council is composed of 360 members, 90 from each property class. In context, the few Councilmen who do not need to attend to their affairs and thus are fully leisured, can only be the members of the higher classes.

Moreover, in 756b–e Plato describes the election of the Council, a fairly significant institution of the city.²⁶ In this election, the two higher classes participate in the whole process; the third one is excused from voting for the Council members of the fourth class; and the fourth from voting for the members of the two lower classes.²⁷ There can be only two explanations for this voting procedure: that lower class citizens have less free time and that the election of the members of the higher classes is more important than that of the poorer Councilmen—and the two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

In a similar vein, in 764a Plato specifies that attendance of the Assembly is obligatory for the two higher classes, with significant fines imposed for absence, whereas the third and fourth classes are not legally obliged to participate. This is a straightforwardly oligarchic measure, since it secures an increased number of upper-class Magnesians attending the Assembly and

22. Morrow 1960, 152.

23. On the implications of producing something to be used by somebody else for the social and political position of the producers, see Vernant 1983, 224–25.

24. As noted in n. 3, the Producers of the *Republic* are formally citizens, but their citizenship is completely meaningless, since it does not involve any kind of political participation, and participation is the essential attribute of citizenship for the Greeks.

25. Pangle translates *timēmatōn* as “class” in the singular, but Plato’s plural obviously designates the two higher classes.

26. On the importance of the Council see Morrow 1960, 176, and Brunt 1993, 259.

27. Fuks (1979, 60) finds in this provision evidence that the members of the third and fourth classes will physically work on their land. Otherwise, he claims, a single day’s absence from their field would not matter.

probably dominating its decisions.²⁸ But how could this difference between the higher and the lower classes be justified if there was no difference in their laboring status? Actually, if the members of the lower classes were leisured, their failure to participate in the Assembly would be an obvious dereliction of civic duty, and characteristic of persons lacking political virtue. It is only on the assumption that these individuals may be tied up in their farms that their excuse from participation in the Assembly can possibly be justified.

III

In addition to the fact that Plato intends his farming laws to be appropriate for free citizens and repeatedly associates leisure with the higher classes, there are fundamental elements of the social and political philosophy of the *Laws* that are absolutely irreconcilable with the assumption of an entirely idle citizen body.

One such element is the role that the four classes play in the *Laws*. If all citizens are leisured, the distinction between the four classes becomes rather minimal and politically inconsequential. In this case, all the citizens of the *Laws* are landed aristocrats and they form essentially one economic class divided into four parts, rather than four classes.²⁹ The only difference is that some citizens are richer than others—and even the extent to which one may be rich or poor is strictly regulated (744e–745b). But, despite the fact that the major officialdoms are open to members of all classes in Magnesia, there are good reasons to think that the four classes have salient differences between them.

First of all, the procedures for the elections of the Council and for participation in the Assembly confirm that Plato thinks that there is a cleavage between the higher and the lower classes in terms of social and political outlook. His insistence on having both procedures dominated by the (presumably more conservative) upper classes is definitely congruent with the assumption that the four classes differ in terms of laboring status and, by extension, in terms of social outlook and beliefs. It would make little sense, however, if they all shared the same level of leisure.

In addition, part of the justification for the greater role of the upper classes in the Council comes from Plato's reiteration of the supremacy of proportional or geometric as against arithmetic equality (757b–e). The defense of this supremacy is a central feature of Plato's political thought throughout his career.³⁰ But in the context of the elections for the Council it is particularly interesting, because it indicates that the higher classes have more of a legitimate claim to political power, and since power in the *Laws* is bestowed on

28. What Plato does here, in effect, is to invert the democratic measure of pay for participation in the Assembly, which was intended to make sure that poor citizens would be able to attend regularly.

29. If this were true, Plato's four *timēmata* would be dissimilar to the four classes of Solon, which obviously constitute his model (as Morrow [1960, 83–84], rightly observes). Solon's classes were clearly distinct in terms of both economic income and social status.

30. See *Grg.* 508a and the way that Plato attacks democracy for employing arithmetic equality in *Resp.* 557a, 558c, and 561a–e.

the basis of virtue, it implies that the members of the upper classes have more virtue than those of the lower ones. As Peter Brunt notices,

It is rather curious that in the context of his provision that the four property classes should be equally represented in the council, which on the assumption that fewer citizens would be registered in the higher classes would have meant that those classes were represented out of proportion to their numbers, Plato should have introduced an exposition of the doctrine, which suited oligarchs, that the right kind of equality is geometrical and not arithmetical . . . By implication greater wealth is proof of superior worth!³¹

Again, it is hard to imagine why Plato would insert his defense of geometric equality in his discussion of the Council elections, unless we assume that he expected the members of the upper classes to be more virtuous, on average, than those of the lower ones. If this is the case, it becomes obvious that Plato wants to use virtuous people from all property classes for the officialdoms of Magnesia, which explains why there is no class barrier to the major offices, but he still anticipates that most of these will be filled by members of the higher classes.³² This strategy in the allocation of political office, however, makes sense only if we assume that the two higher *timēmata* correspond roughly to real-life landed aristocrats, whereas the lower two correspond to laboring “middling” farmers.

The assertion that the differences between the four classes are pronounced enough and extend to laboring status is further corroborated by the way in which Plato uses the lot in the *Laws*. Although it is absolutely clear that he regards sortition not just as incompatible with good government, but actually as an obstacle to it, he still employs it in Magnesia.³³ Its use is completely inconsequential politically, but it is, Plato thinks, necessary (757d4–e2):

Nonetheless, necessity compels every city to blur somewhat the distinction between these two [kinds of equality], if it is to avoid partaking of civil war [*staseôn*] in some of its parts . . . Because of the discontent of the many [*dyskolias tôn pollôn heneka*] they are compelled to make use of the equality of the lot . . .

Since Magnesia is actually one of those cities that employ sortition, this passage leaves little doubt that Plato does not think of lower-class citizens as fully leisured aristocrats. In fact, he comes pretty close to equating them with the Athenian (or any other Greek) *demos*.³⁴ Not only does he call them *hoi polloi*, a term normally reserved for the democratic masses, but he talks about their discontent if the lot is not used. But how would it be possible for these citizens to be so insistent on the use of the lot and possibly even to revolt over it, if they shared in the idle lifestyle of the higher classes? Within the historical context of ancient Greece it would be entirely absurd to call leisured landowners *hoi polloi*, or to expect them to be in favor of the lot. In fact,

31. Brunt 1993, 275; cf. Pangle 1980, 461.

32. This is also the view of Morrow (1960, 230).

33. In 757b–758a Plato calls geometric equality “the judgment [of] Zeus” and emphasizes that this is the equality that must be employed in politics. He then explains that arithmetic equality must be used only in order to avoid “civil war” and the “discontent of the many” and “as rarely as possible.” It is therefore clear that the lot is an impediment for good government, to be used only to the extent necessary to prevent civil strife.

34. Here I use the term *demos* in the way Plato and Aristotle mostly use it, as designating the lower classes. The term can also mean the whole citizen body.

hoi polloi would normally designate the opposite end of the social spectrum, the low-class citizens working for a living. The mere use of this term demonstrates that Plato thinks of citizen classes with real differences in their social and political outlook, the *hoi polloi* who lean toward democracy and, by implication, the *oligoi* who endorse oligarchic principles. The mere use of *hoi polloi*, especially when taken in conjunction with Plato's restatement of the value of geometrical equality, provides a compelling argument for the thesis that lower-class Magnesians cannot be fully leisured.

Furthermore, the *Laws* contains a number of obvious oligarchic features, such as the domination of certain institutions by the upper classes, the restriction of some minor offices to the members of either the first or the first and second classes, the extensive use of election, which is identified by Aristotle as an oligarchic procedure (*Pol.* 1294b7–10), and even the fact that voting is to be open.³⁵ Even though, as we shall see, the dialogue does adhere in some important respects to the principle of the “mixed constitution,” and does strive to achieve some balance between aristocratic or oligarchic and democratic ideals and practices, in the end it is undoubtedly tilted toward oligarchy.³⁶ The question then becomes, however, why would Plato give this predominantly oligarchic character to his constitution—and, indeed, why he would use the concept of the “mixed constitution” at all—if there were no real differences between the four classes. In that case, there would hardly be any diverse social interests to be reconciled, and the mixing of oligarchic and democratic practices would be meaningless. It is only by accepting that the difference between the four classes is not trivial that these characteristics of the *Laws* can be explained.

Moreover, since all lots are equivalent, the four classes are formed on the basis of the movable property that the settlers bring with them to Magnesia. This property includes slaves. The wealthiest citizens have up to four times more movable property than the poorest ones, which means that they have up to four times more slaves, but a plot of equal size.³⁷ So, if the poorest citizens have enough slaves to cultivate their land without ever working on it themselves, the richest Magnesians will have three slaves for each one that they can productively employ. In this case, even allowing for using some of them as domestic servants, there will be a surplus of slave labor in the city, with all the potential economic and social problems emanating from it.³⁸ Is

35. The City Regulators and the Temple Treasurers are elected from the members of the highest class (763d and 759e–760a, respectively) and the Market Regulators from those of the two highest classes (763e). On the significance of open voting, see Morrow 1960, 289.

36. Aristotle rightly remarks that the tendency of the *Laws* “is to lean rather towards oligarchy” (*Pol.* 1266a7; trans. Saunders 1995).

37. This interpretation is offered by Morrow (1960, 131 n. 112), who points out that this is also Aristotle's understanding of the matter (*Pol.* 1265b22 and 1266b7) and accepted by Bobonich (2002, 568–69 n. 4). It may be noted, however, that the “limit of poverty” (*penias . . . horos*, 744d8) is explicitly the value of the lot and its equipment, not twice the value of the lot. If we accept that the lowest class have no assets on top of their lot and the tools and animals that are needed for its cultivation, the position that they are leisured becomes completely untenable: without slaves, the members of the fourth class will have to cultivate their land themselves. But even in Morrow's reading, the discrepancy in the number of slaves that the higher and the lower classes own is serious and leaves only two alternatives: either an overpopulation of unemployable slaves in Magnesia or non-leisured citizens belonging to the fourth and probably the third class.

38. Plato never makes a distinction between domestic and agricultural slaves in the *Laws*.

Plato blind to the fact that the higher classes have more slaves than they can possibly use, or does he intend poor citizens to contribute physically to the farming of their land? In terms of the social and economic feasibility of the whole project of Magnesia, the latter interpretation is clearly preferable.

But this is not all. The central political principle of the *Laws* is that of the “mixed constitution.” This principle is stated in 756e, where Plato writes that the “selection procedure [of the Council] would strike a mean [*meson*] between a monarchic and a democratic constitution [*politeia*].”³⁹ Despite being mentioned only in the context of the election of one particular institution, the concept of the “mixed constitution” undeniably informs the whole political system of Magnesia. It is explored already in the third book. There, in the course of a long historical narrative, Plato explains that both Persia and Athens did well as long as they maintained moderate, middle-of-the-road constitutions. They declined, however, when they moved to extremes.⁴⁰ Persia moved to the extreme of despotism, Athens to the extreme of unchecked freedom (693d–701e). Sparta, however, was able to remain stable and flourish, because it had a “mixed constitution,” in which the kings represented the monarchic, the Gerousia the aristocratic, and the Ephors the democratic element.⁴¹ What is noteworthy here is that Plato finds the key to the success of the Spartan model in its proper “mixture” of monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic institutions. Moreover, he clearly treats different institutions as expressing the political views of different parts of the population: the Gerousia represents the upper classes, the Ephors the lower ones.⁴² Although today we would tend to see the Spartan *homoioi* as a single economic class, Plato ostensibly thinks that there are diverse social interests within the Spartan citizen body and attributes the success of the Spartan constitution to its ability to offer some degree of satisfaction to all of these interests. The historical success of the principle of the “mixed constitution”—as well as the disastrous consequences of abandoning it—functions as a potent argument for its adoption in the *Laws*. But if Magnesia’s “mixed constitution” is going to involve a balance between aristocratic or oligarchic and democratic institutions, as well as a balance between conflicting interests, there must be a certain degree of differentiation among the classes. There would be little point in employing a “mixed constitution” in a city with essentially one economic class.

This point is particularly important, because the notion of the “mixed constitution” informs both the way that Magnesia’s institutions are set up and operate and the way that the interests of the four classes are satisfied in the *Laws*. In terms of the manner in which it shapes the political structure of Magnesia,

39. Pangle translation, adapted.

40. We would be inclined to treat this narrative as pseudo-historical today, but the boundaries between history and myth were not firmly fixed in Plato’s time. Even Thucydides, despite stating that mythological narrations do not provide historical knowledge (1.22), includes such elements in his “archaeology” (1.9–12).

41. The fact that Plato sees the Ephors as the democratic element of the Spartan constitution is affirmed by the fact that he considers the “power” (*dunamis*) of the Ephors similar to the “power” based on the use of the lot (692a).

42. In fact, in 692a Plato associates membership in the Gerousia with old age rather than aristocratic descent, but both the traditional understanding of the Spartan system in his time and his association of the Ephors with the masses indicate upper-class membership.

one may notice that Plato retains democratic institutions, or at least institutions whose proper function was crucial to the good function of democracy, but limits their authority. So, there is an Assembly in Magnesia, which elects most of the high officials of the city and probably controls foreign policy.⁴³ Nevertheless, not only is there no pay for participation in the Assembly, as was the case in Athens, but the higher classes are discouraged from abstaining from it by sizable fines. Similarly, Plato introduces a Council, but the election of its members is dominated by the upper classes, it has fewer functions than its Athenian counterpart, and it is stripped of the crucial judicial prerogatives of the latter.⁴⁴ Plato maintains the democratic institution of the popular courts in Magnesia, but the most important cases are judged by "select judges." The lot is used, but only for minor appointments or in the last stage of elections, when a small number of candidates has already been reached by voting (this is the so-called *klêrôsis ek prokritôn*, essentially an oligarchic procedure). Its political significance is therefore nonexistent. Plato creates powerful magistrates, but places special emphasis on their accountability. Finally, he leaves all offices in principle open to all citizens, but the upper classes are expected to fill most of the major political positions.

In all these ways, Plato thoughtfully and deliberately strives to achieve a compromise between oligarchic and democratic constitutional principles and political practices. His constitution may not be perfectly balanced, since it undeniably leans toward oligarchy, but it is definitely "mixed."

Furthermore, the constitution of the *Laws* is not "mixed" merely in the sense of combining democratic and oligarchic practices; it is also "mixed" because it attempts to accommodate the political values and ideals of different classes. This becomes evident from a number of features of the *Laws*. One such feature is Plato's use of the lot. As already noted, the lot is employed not because of its intrinsic worth, which is nonexistent, but only to prevent the "discontent of the many" (757d4). This statement makes it clear that Plato regards the political aspirations of low-class citizens as legitimate enough to justify the use of an essentially counterproductive method of selecting state officials. Similarly, his praise of the Spartan political system, a system that in his own understanding involves different institutions representing the interests of the rich and the poor, indicates that Plato regards the balancing of such interests as vital for good government.

There is even more evidence that Plato views the compromise of conflicting class interests as *sine qua non* for a successful constitution. In 832b–c, the Athenian Stranger declares the following:

None of these [democracy, oligarchy and tyranny] is a genuine political system [*ou polit-eias*]: the best name for them all would be "party rule" [*stasiôteiai*], because under none of them do willing rulers govern willing subjects: that is, the rulers are always willing enough, but they never hold power with the consent of the governed. They hold it by constant resort to a degree of force, and they are never prepared to allow any of their subjects

43. This is the opinion of George Klosko (1986, 213). Given that Plato nowhere assigns responsibility for foreign policy to a specific institution of the city, Klosko's assumption is very plausible.

44. In Athens crimes against the state were presented to the Council before possibly being tried by the Assembly. In Magnesia, they go to three high officials (768a).

to cultivate virtue [*kalon*] or acquire wealth or strength or courage—and least of all they will tolerate a man who can fight.⁴⁵

“The rulers” are the ruling party in a democracy, an oligarchy, or a tyranny—they are what Aristotle calls the *kurion* of the city, the particular group that controls the constitution. Plato’s point is therefore unequivocal: any constitution that is dominated by one class is not a real constitution at all and does not deserve the name of *politeia*. It is a *stasiôteia*, the normally violent rule of one faction over another.

Plato makes the same point in similar language in 712e–713a: “[t]he other things we just named [tyranny, democracy, aristocracy, kingship], they aren’t regimes [*politeiai*] but city administrations [*poleôn de oikêseis*] where the city is under the sway of despots, with some parts enslaved to other parts of itself [*douleuousôn meressin heautôn tisi*].” Again, what is to be deplored about these cities is the fact that one class politically dominates the city and essentially “enslaves” the other classes. The use of *douleuousôn* is particularly revealing here: Plato uses the strongest term linguistically available to him to describe the subordination of one class to another in the aforementioned constitutions.

Finally, in 715b Plato emphasizes that “[we do not] declare any laws correct that are not laid down for the sake of what is common to the whole city [*heneka tou koinou etethêsan*]. Where the laws exist for the sake of some, we declare the inhabitants to be “partisans” [*stasiôtas*] rather than citizens [*politás*].” Once more, the point is clear. What sets apart the correct *politeiai* from the undesirable *stasiôteiai* is the fact that in the latter, unlike in the former, one class dominates over all the others. But in order for this argument to be made at all, at least two classes with distinct political interests must be available in the city. If Magnesia involved only leisured aristocrats, hardly differing from each other socially or economically, Plato’s repeated exhortations to avoid the despotism of one party over another would be rendered entirely meaningless. But if he thinks in terms of at least two groups, one involving the more wealthy aristocrats and the other self-employed farmers, then this line of argument, as well as his insistence on the value of a “mixed constitution,” can be justified. In fact, a social and political utopia in which a homogeneous citizen class controls non-citizen groups would be an entirely inappropriate framework for advancing the ideal of the “mixed constitution.”

One more feature of the *Laws* strongly suggests that many of the citizens will personally oversee their estates and in all probability work manually on them, at least part of the time: the fact that those roughly belonging to the two lower classes fit the description of the relatively prosperous “middling” farmers who provide their own arms and serve in the *phalanx* as *hoplitai*, whereas the members of the two higher ones correspond to the real-life aristocrats who never engage in productive labor and serve in the cavalry. It is without doubt an interesting characteristic of Magnesia that its defense is based exclusively on cavalry and heavy infantry (753b–d, 755e–756a), despite the fact that its terrain is mountainous (and so more suitable for, say, archers than for heavily

45. Trans. Saunders (1970).

armed soldiers) and not too far from the sea. It actually appears that political rather than military considerations shape the armed forces of the *Laws*, and the significance of this becomes clearer when we compare the military organizations of the *Laws* and the *Republic*. The former is evidently based on the ideal of the *hoplitês* who provides his own arms and whose citizenship explicitly depends on his military contribution as a heavily armed infantryman. In the *Republic*, on the other hand, there is a professional army, and citizenship and military duty are not co-extensive. This model of the professional soldier who is sustained on the labor of the lower classes—free or unfree—and goes on to join the ruling elite after a certain number of years of military service fits Sparta—the Lacedaemonian lack of philosophical achievement notwithstanding.⁴⁶ A citizen body consisting of all men bearing arms, on the other hand, fits any number of Greek cities between the eighth and the fourth centuries B.C.E., including the ancient Athens from which Plato draws most of his inspiration in the *Laws*, as Morrow has meticulously shown.⁴⁷ Although it is not impossible to imagine an army of *hoplitai* consisting of leisured aristocrats, the fact is that, historically, such an army in almost all Greek cities included self-sustaining farmers rather than wealthy noblemen.⁴⁸ This entails that the outlook of the average Magnesian citizen is not similar to that of the landed Athenian aristocrat and/or the Spartan peer (*homoios*), as one would expect if all citizens were leisured. On the contrary, it is plainly based upon the model of the traditional Greek self-employed hoplite-farmer. These *geôrgoi*, sometimes designated as the “middling” farmers, were not leisured.⁴⁹ In terms of both social status and political ideas they were distinct from both the aristocracy and the propertyless mass of native adult males who were citizens in a democracy, but not in other constitutions. But if the archetype of the Magnesian citizen is the farmer-warrior, the assumption of an all-leisured citizen body cannot possibly be maintained.

Moreover, as Morrow has convincingly argued, Plato's model of agricultural cultivation is not Sparta, but Athens in an earlier period of its history.⁵⁰ The Athenian model, however, does not include mainly idle landlords, but small landholders toiling on their own land. In the real world, institutions like the neighborhood courts are clearly set up to settle disputes between small farmers, not aristocrats, and their inclusion in the *Laws* indicates the existence of the former. Richard Stalley finds further evidence that a majority of the citizens will be (probably laboring) farmers rather than aristocrats in the facts that “[t]here are supposed to be 5040 citizen households in a relatively small and infertile area” and that “[t]hey will not be rich and there will be rather a lot of them.”⁵¹ He concludes that “[t]his does not fit the conventional

46. The fact that not every Auxiliary, i.e., not every soldier, will become a philosopher does not cancel out the fact that the inspiration for this arrangement comes from Sparta.

47. Morrow 1960, 79–91; see also Hanson 1996, 190.

48. The single anomaly to this rule is Sparta.

49. On hoplite-farmers as a recognizable middle group, see the references in Hanson 1995, 309 n. 9; cf. also Hanson 1996, 289–312. On the “middling” as opposed to the aristocratic ideology, see Morris 2000, 109–93 and Ober 2000, 35–41.

50. Morrow 1960, 151–52.

51. Stalley 1983, 110. The former point is originally made by Arist. *Pol.* 1265a15.

picture of an aristocrat.”⁵² This consideration is significant because a large number of idle aristocrats in a Greek city would be implausible to Plato’s contemporaries: all Greek aristocracies were of limited numbers, and in the *Republic* Plato leaves no doubt that the leisured top class, the Guardians, will have very few members.⁵³

There is one final factor that lends credibility to the assumption that Plato finds his model in the majority of the Greek cities of an earlier time and does not think in terms of a hugely overpopulated aristocracy. The notion of the “mixed constitution,” the fundamental political principle of the *Laws*, is actually associated with the “middling” farming class, at least in the minds of those advocates of the “mixed constitution” who use it as a slogan against democracy. As early as the late fifth century B.C.E., some Athenian oligarchs came up with the concept of the “ancestral constitution,” a hugely glorified Athenian constitution of the past associated with either Cleisthenes or, more usually, Solon.⁵⁴ This concept was probably used for the first time by the so-called “moderate oligarchs” who followed Theramenes. Their political program involved restricting the franchise to those with landed property and moderate wealth. It was with aims such as these that the regime of the so-called Five Thousand succeeded the narrow oligarchy of the Four Hundred in 411–10 B.C.E. The regime of the Five Thousand lasted only a few months and was succeeded by the restored democracy. Its program was never fully implemented and probably included little more than the exclusion of low-income citizens from political participation. But the social composition of the citizen body that the leaders of the Five Thousand envisaged would be remarkably similar to that of Magnesia.⁵⁵ Actually, this movement has been interpreted, and with good reason, as representing an invitation by the oligarchs to the moderately wealthy Athenian farmers for a sharing of power between the two groups to the exclusion of the landless.⁵⁶ Martin Ostwald notices that the Theramenian ideal “included the abolition of pay for office and the restriction of the franchise to those able to serve with their fortunes and persons, that is, to the hoplites and the upper classes.”⁵⁷ The democrats’ response to these claims was, predictably, that the real “ancestral constitution” of Athens was democracy.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, as early as the late fifth century B.C.E., if not earlier, critics of democracy identify the “ancestral” with the “mixed” constitution. According to Alexander Fuks,

... a mixed-moderate constitution was an ideal of the Theramenian group; it appears as a middle course between democracy and oligarchy in Theramenes’ speech in the *Hellenica*;

52. Stalley 1983, 110; cf. 102.

53. Rhodes (1982, 8) argues that the richest class in Athens had 1000 to 1200 members, probably less than 5 percent of the total population.

54. According to the probably pseudo-Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* 29.3, the slogan of the “ancestral constitution” (*patrios politeia*) was used for the first time in 413 B.C.E. by Cleitophon to support Pythodorus’ motion for the replacement of the democracy by an oligarchic government.

55. Although it does not, of course, prove anything, it is worth noticing that the number of citizens that the “moderate oligarchs” thought appropriate for Athens was 5000, not far from Magnesia’s 5040 heads of households.

56. De Ste. Croix 1981, 291–92 and Hanson 1995, 375.

57. Ostwald 1986, 472.

58. [*Ath. Pol.*] 34.3.

it is a *metria sygkrisis* for Thukydides, and a *mesê politeia* for Aristotle. For Isocrates the "good democracy of yore" [*ekeinê* or *alêthês dêmokratia*] is clearly a constitution of the right blend of different elements.⁵⁹

There is little doubt about the very close association, if not identification, of the "ancestral" and the "mixed" constitution around the time of the composition of the *Laws*. Isocrates unequivocally identifies the two in *Panathenaicus* 153 and Aristotle writes in the *Politics* 1273b35–39 that some people thought of Solon as "having mixed well the constitution," a view with which he is in apparent agreement.⁶⁰ This could actually very well be the position of the Academy in Plato's later years: both Morrow and Trevor Saunders believe that by "some people" Aristotle means Plato and his school.⁶¹

If this is the intellectual climate of the mid-fourth century B.C.E., it becomes possible to see how the *Laws* both adheres to and reinforces the identification of the "ancestral" and the "mixed" constitution. The dialogue explicitly adopts a "mixed constitution." But does it also propound a version of the "ancestral" Athenian one? Prima facie, this appears to be a questionable claim, given that Magnesia is a Dorian colony. Nevertheless, Plato's harsh criticisms of the Dorian preoccupation with war in the first two books and, more importantly, the fact that the majority of his measures come from the Athens of an earlier day—and some, like the introduction of the four *timêmata*, can be associated directly with Solon—indicate that the *Laws* is actually, at one level, an idealized form of the ancestral constitution of Athens.⁶²

Given that the *Laws* does offer a version of both the "mixed" and the "ancestral" constitution, it is reasonable to interpret it as part of this wider political movement proposing an alliance between the upper and the "middling" classes. But it can only work at this level, of course, if at least some of its citizens correspond to real-life farmers.

In conclusion, the evidence that when he develops the political theory and the constitutional structure of the *Laws* Plato is thinking in terms of at least two different citizen groups, one consisting of idle aristocrats and one consisting of hoplite-farmers, is overwhelming. Given that in the Classical Greek world these farmers typically work on their land, the thesis of a fully leisured citizen body cannot be sustained.

The only remaining question is how we can explain the passages discussed in section I above. If Plato wants all of his citizens to be able to acquire virtue and if full leisure is an essential prerequisite for this acquisition, then all of them must be leisured, or virtue becomes an unattainable goal for those who are not. How can we resolve this contradiction?

One solution could be that Plato approaches his citizen body from two different angles in the *Laws*: in some places he thinks in terms of moral psychology and emphasizes the importance of leisure for the cultivation of

59. Fuks 1953, 8.

60. Isocrates claims that Lycurgus modeled his legislation of Sparta on ancient Athens, which was "a democracy mixed with aristocracy." It is also worth noticing that Sparta was regarded at the time as one example of a "mixed constitution," a belief that Plato appears to endorse in the third book of the *Laws*.

61. Morrow 1960, 82 and Saunders 1995, 168.

62. For the resemblances between the *Laws* and Solon's legislation, see Morrow 1960, 83–86.

virtue. This might create the impression that all Magnesians are fully leisured. But when he addresses questions of political and constitutional theory, Plato clearly conceives of a citizen body consisting of at least two groups, one of which is not leisured. The philosopher never irons out the differences between these two approaches and the issue remains ultimately unresolved.⁶³

This interpretation, however, may be too uncharitable to Plato. As we have already seen, in 832d *scholên . . . megistên* can be translated “greatest possible leisure,” leaving open the possibility of some Magnesians not being totally free from toil, and in 807c–d Plato stresses the desirability of leisure in connection to the pursuit of virtue, but does not go as far as stating that all citizens will actually be leisured. Both passages therefore claim that leisure is important for the quest for virtue, but the way in which they are phrased indicates that this is an ideal condition that the legislator might hope for, but not one that will always be attainable or that he can take for granted. Bobonich, who leans toward the position of an entirely leisured citizen body, rightly points out that the question of leisure cannot be ultimately answered in terms of Plato’s moral psychology alone: “Certainly how much leisure the citizens would have who lived in an actual city founded in general accordance with the sketch of Magnesia will depend on their geographic and economic circumstances.”⁶⁴ This is actually a critical point: whatever Plato’s theory of virtue may imply, the question of leisure cannot be settled in separation from either the “economic circumstances” or the social and political arrangements of Magnesia.

The assumption that an all leisured citizen body may be a (probably unattainable) ideal is supported by another basic feature of the *Laws*. As both Bobonich and I have argued, the virtue expected from the citizens of the *Laws* is not the virtue of Plato’s middle period philosopher-rulers, which is grounded on perfect knowledge, but a kind of virtue that involves less strict epistemological demands and is therefore more easily attainable.⁶⁵ This allows for the possibility of even citizens engaging in some kind of manual labor being able to achieve it. A comparison with the *Republic* is useful here: in that dialogue the Guardians are unequivocally forbidden from getting involved in any form of manual activity, including agriculture, but the kind of virtue that they are requested to achieve is an exceptionally high one, involving both a perfect metaphysical understanding of reality and an almost inhuman degree of control over their bodily desires. Although both attributes are desirable in the *Laws*, they are not what Plato requests from most of his citizens and they are not a precondition for holding formal political office.⁶⁶ Given that offices

63. This is the interpretation of Morrow 1960, 137–38: “The more likely explanation is that Plato sometimes thinks of all his citizens as having sufficient means and leisure for the ‘craft of citizenship,’ as he calls it . . . But he more often regards his state as comparable to the Attica of older days, with its small proprietors living on their land and most of them compelled to give attention and labor to its cultivation.”

64. Bobonich 2002, 390–91.

65. Bobonich 2002, 258–92; and Samaras 2002, 335–42.

66. The Nocturnal Council does engage in metaphysical inquiries, but they are not authorized to override the laws of Magnesia and their recommendations can only be implemented through official channels. They are therefore not an unaccountable dictatorial super government. This interpretation of the role of the Nocturnal Council was offered by Morrow (1960, 500–515), and is now almost universally accepted. The one dissenting voice is Klosko (1988, 74–88). Klosko’s interpretation, however, fails to account for the fact that the

are distributed on the basis of virtue, this entails that not even the best of the Magnesians are expected to reach the same degree of moral perfection as the Guardians, and this is altogether in keeping with the fact that the model of the *Laws* is "second best" to that of the *Republic*.⁶⁷

But is the kind of virtue that Magnesians aspire to achieve compatible with some form of manual labor? There are three features of the *Laws* that indicate that the agricultural labor of free men and women does not make this achievement impossible. First, Plato does not claim in this work, as he does in the *Republic*, that any kind of manual work deforms the soul and makes it absolutely incapable of conquering virtue.⁶⁸ Second, agriculture is nowhere included in the list of activities that are prohibited for citizens. Third, contemporary elite opinion would not include working on one's own land in the *ponoi sphodroi kai aneleutheroi* that Plato mentions in 835d, or more generally in the activities that are morally inappropriate for a citizen. For all these reasons, the most reasonable way to read the *Laws* is as involving the assumption that work on the fields, unlike all other forms of manual labor that are categorically forbidden to citizens, is not mutually exclusive with the attainment of moral virtue.

But is not involvement with the land prohibited in 806d–e, where Plato writes that farms will be "assigned to slaves" (*geôrgiai de ekdedomenai doulois*)? As a matter of fact, this passage does not state that citizens are forbidden to work on their fields. It only asks what would be the best kind of life for citizens who are moderately provided for and thus it could conceivably be referring to the ideal conditions that the legislator wishes for, but cannot take for granted. To read it as an outright claim that citizens may never work on their land, on the other hand, contradicts the substantial textual evidence for the social and economic differences between members of the four classes, takes all Magnesian citizens to be idle aristocrats in the face of the indisputable fact that most of them correspond to real life hoplite-farmers, and turns Plato's "mixed constitution" into an empty, meaningless concept. In the end, the interpreter of the *Laws* has to decide between the strictly literal interpretation of four words in a work of more than three hundred Stephanus pages and the whole logic of the social, political, and constitutional arrangements of the *Laws*. It should not be a hard decision to make.

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Nocturnal Council is to inquire about domestic and foreign laws (952a1 and 5) and instill the results of this inquiry into the legislative apparatus of Magnesia (962b–e); it is not given permission to override the law. In addition, Klosko argues for a radical break between the first eleven and a half books and the second half of Book 12, for which there is no other evidence and which would render meaningless the rule of written law on which Plato emphatically insists in the *Laws*.

67. 739b–e, 807b–c; cf. 732e.

68. See n. 19.

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