

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2019

Volume 45 Issue 2

- 155 Ian Dagg Natural Religion in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws*
- 179 David N. Levy Aristotle's "Reply" to Machiavelli on Morality
- 199 Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo "Deceived by the Glory of Caesar": Humility and Machiavelli's Founder
- 223 Marco Andreacchio **Reviews Essays:**
Mastery of Nature, edited by Svetozar Y. Minkov and Bernhardt L. Trout
- 249 Alex Priou *The Eccentric Core*, edited by Ronna Burger and Patrick Goodin
- 269 David Lewis Schaefer *The Banality of Heidegger* by Jean-Luc Nancy
- 291 Victor Bruno **Book Reviews:**
The Techne of Giving by Timothy C. Campbell
- 297 Jonathan Culp *Orwell Your Orwell* by David Ramsay Steele
- 303 Fred Erdman *Becoming Socrates* by Alex Priou
- 307 David Fott *Roman Political Thought* by Jed W. Atkins
- 313 Steven H. Frankel *The Idol of Our Age* by Daniel J. Mahoney
- 323 Michael Harding *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thrasymachean-Dionysian Socrates* by Angel Jaramillo Torres
- 335 Marjorie Jeffrey *Aristocratic Souls in Democratic Times*, edited by Richard Avramenko and Ethan Alexander-Davey
- 341 Peter Minowitz *The Bleak Political Implications of Socratic Religion* by Shadia B. Drury
- 347 Charles T. Rubin *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child* by Eileen Hunt Botting
- 353 Thomas Schneider *From Oligarchy to Republicanism* by Forrest A. Nabors
- 357 Stephen Sims *The Legitimacy of the Human* by Rémi Brague

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- Editor-in-Chief* Timothy W. Burns, Baylor University
- General Editors* Charles E. Butterworth • Timothy W. Burns
- General Editors (Late)* Howard B. White (d. 1974) • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987)
Seth G. Benardete (d. 2001) • Leonard Grey (d. 2009) •
Hilail Gildin (d. 2015)
- Consulting Editors* Christopher Bruell • David Lowenthal • Harvey C.
Mansfield • Thomas L. Pangle • Ellis Sandoz • Kenneth
W. Thompson
- Consulting Editors (Late)* Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) •
Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • John Hallowell (d. 1992)
• Ernest L. Fortin (d. 2002) • Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) •
Joseph Cropsey (d. 2012) • Harry V. Jaffa (d. 2015)
- International Editors* Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
- Editors* Peter Ahrens Dorf • Wayne Ambler • Marco Andreacchio •
Maurice Auerbach • Robert Bartlett • Fred Baumann • Eric
Buzzetti • Susan Collins • Patrick Coby • Erik Dempsey •
Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman • Edward J. Erler • Maureen
Feder-Marcus • Robert Goldberg • L. Joseph Hebert •
Pamela K. Jensen • Hannes Kerber • Mark J. Lutz • Daniel
Ian Mark • Ken Masugi • Carol L. McNamara • Will
Morrisey • Amy Nendza • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G.
Rubin • Thomas Schneider • Susan Meld Shell • Geoffrey
T. Sigalet • Nicholas Starr • Devin Stauffer • Bradford P.
Wilson • Cameron Wybrow • Martin D. Yaffe • Catherine
H. Zuckert • Michael P. Zuckert
- Copy Editor* Les Harris
- Designer* Sarah Teutschel
- Inquiries* ***Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy***
Department of Political Science
Baylor University
1 Bear Place, 97276
Waco, TX 76798
- email* interpretation@baylor.edu

The Eccentric Core: The Thought of Seth Benardete. Edited by Ronna Burger and Patrick Goodin. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2018, viii + 323 pp., \$26.00 (paperback).

Approaching Seth Benardete: On *The Eccentric Core*

ALEX PRIOU*

LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY

alexpriou@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

The Eccentric Core is an eclectic collection of writings having to do with the late classicist and philosopher Seth Benardete (1930–2001). Its editors do not explain the order of its chapters, but one readily discerns it. The volume has two main parts: writings about (chaps. 1–27) and writings by (chaps. 28–30) Seth Benardete. The first main part also admits of a division: Harvey Mansfield's short memorial essay on Benardete's life (chap. 1) and writings on Benardete's works and thought (chaps. 2–27). The second of these parts is clearly divided in two: essays on Benardete's interpretation of the development of biblical, Greek, and Roman thought, on one hand (chaps. 2–13), and book reviews chronicling his own development as a thinker, on the other (chaps. 14–27). These are the two main arcs of the volume. Both proceed chronologically: the first arc is arranged according to the date of the text or

* I am thankful to Timothy W. Burns and Gwenda-Lin Grewal for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

thinker discussed, while the second is arranged according to the date of the original appearance of the work under review. The first thus gives us Benardete's history of philosophy, while the second gives us a history of Benardete's philosophy. In addition, the second arc brings *The Eccentric Core* full circle, as the reviews of such retrospective and, in the latter two cases, posthumous works as *The Argument of the Action*, *Encounters and Reflections*, and *The Archaeology of the Soul* necessarily drift into the sort of personal recollections that we find in the volume's opening chapter. We are thus invited to consider the connection between a man and his works, between his particular existence and the truths of the tradition he uncovered and conveyed, between his development and that of the history of political philosophy. By what procedure, we wonder, may a particular man uncover a general truth?

Benardete had (or has) a phrase for this procedure: eidetic analysis. In the introduction to *Socrates' Second Sailing*, Benardete says the following of eidetic analysis as it shows up in Socrates' autobiography in Plato's *Phaedo*:

The bits and pieces of the good that show up in opinion are not as bits and pieces what they are in the whole truly articulated by mind. These bits and pieces are the speeches or opinions of things to which Socrates has recourse after the possibility of looking at things directly has foundered on the problem of causality. These fragmentary speeches parade as wholes or *eidē* (*Statesman* 262a5–263b11), and Socrates saw it as the proper task of philosophy to proceed from them to the true *eidē*. I call this procedure eidetic analysis.¹

The dismemberment of putative wholes and the consequent discovery of their partiality occur in what Benardete describes as “the unexpected break and the unexpected join in arguments that constitute the way of eidetic analysis.”² Elsewhere Benardete clarifies that, “inasmuch as the way out of the city lies of necessity through the city”—that is, inasmuch as the city has an ontological as opposed to merely conventional status—“neither the whole nor man can be understood without the city. . . . Political philosophy is the eccentric core of philosophy.”³ This Socratic insight—which Benardete credits to his teacher, Leo Strauss—lies behind the co-presence of the personal and the theoretical in *The Eccentric Core*. As the contributors variously attest, Benardete was

¹ Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's "Republic"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Seth Benardete, “Leo Strauss' *The City and Man*,” *Political Science Reviewer* 8 (1978): 5.

“an extraordinary man” (1);⁴ he and his work are “idiosyncratic” (267), have “established a reputation” (236), and are possessed of an “originality” (274) coupled with “sheer power” (291)—all words meant to distinguish him in his particularity. Yet his idiosyncrasy includes, in Bryan Warnick’s words, his “keen eye for subtle connections among different passages and for subtle differences among similar passages” (215). “Let us say it openly,” writes Heinrich Meier. “Benardete is the most demanding interpreter of Plato *conceivable*. But whoever engages him seriously will be richly rewarded” (80, emphasis added).⁵ Benardete’s slipperiness as an author is not reducibly his own, but rather necessarily bound up with “the unexpected break and the unexpected join in arguments”—it is of a piece with political philosophy. Seth Benardete is the eccentric core of *The Eccentric Core*: because every chapter is about him, it must eventually be about something else.⁶ What Benardete says of Socrates one can therefore say of him: “In his connecting something with something else or disconnecting something from something else, we are forced suddenly to ascend merely to catch up.”⁷

II. BENARDETE’S HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

The first chapter is Ronna Burger’s “Definitional Law in the Bible,” the only contribution treating a biblical text. Burger’s aim is to search for “the common ground of the biblical and Greek text” so as to illuminate “the contrasts between the two that may shed light on each” (6). She identifies two common themes—*erōs* and law—and asks whether either provides any wholeness to man. Ostensibly only political, law is latently definitional insofar as its prohibitions offer a “determination of what it is to be human as such” (14, 16).⁸ The experience of *erōs* in turn promises wholeness free of divine prohibition, as per Aristophanes’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. But for Aristophanes, “the longing that defines the human condition is a wound . . . that cannot be healed” (7). The biblical parallel deepens this criticism in the “striking conclusion” that, “in trying to get back to the noetic human being of Genesis 1, behind

⁴ All citations are to *The Eccentric Core*, unless noted otherwise.

⁵ In the original German version, Meier uses the word *denkbar*. Cf. Heinrich Meier, foreword to *Socrates and Plato: The Dialectics of Eros*, by Seth Benardete (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2002), 17.

⁶ The colon separating the strange-sounding title, *The Eccentric Core*, from the more usual-sounding subtitle, *The Thought of Seth Benardete*, suggests that the latter explains the former.

⁷ Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 5.

⁸ Cf. Seth Benardete, *Plato’s “Laws”: The Discovery of Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 139–40.

the clothing of the law, we discover, instead, the bestiality of the human without the law” (17). We of course wonder what *Socrates’s* response would be, that is, whether his extralegal alternative to human wholeness avoids both the bestialization of man and Aristophanes’s “tragedy of eros” (7). Burger sees in woman’s dialogue with the serpent her discovery of “the desire for wisdom” (10). Does the pairing of the violation of law with dialogue and the desire for wisdom evince some awareness on the author’s part of the possibility of a Socrates?⁹ Is God’s punishment of man and woman a biblical echo of Athens’s judgment on Socrates? Benardete interprets God’s act of giving man animal skins to wear as suggesting that it is law that bestializes man.¹⁰ But wouldn’t that mean that Socrates’s extralegal investigations constitute a move away from the bestial and toward the properly human?

Burger’s essay forces us to pose these difficult questions, and the remainder of *The Eccentric Core’s* first arc can be understood as exploring them through an examination of Socratic philosophy’s emergence, flourishing, and effects. In this way, *The Eccentric Core* shows us how much of Benardete’s thinking was pursued in response to Strauss’s articulation of the problem of reason and revelation.¹¹

Laurence Lampert’s essay on Benardete’s interpretation of the *Odyssey* focuses on Odysseus’s discovery of nature and on the task of legislation Teiresias assigns him in Hades. The former occurs not just in Hermes’s revelation of the nature of the *moly*, but also in the series of events beginning from the release of the winds of Aeolus, during which Odysseus discovers his lack of divine support and that he is his men’s equal (21ff.). But what this discovery also shows him is that, though he shares with his men their humanity, they do not share in his knowledge: what binds their community is belief (27, 30–31). This insight will guide Odysseus in the act of legislation that is to follow his re-establishment of peace in Ithaka (31). According to Lampert, then, Odysseus’s philosophic journey culminates in—nay, entails—an act of legislation (31–32, 35–36). By bringing an oar to those knowing nothing of seafaring, Odysseus ensures they will mistake it for a god’s winnowing fan, which in separating human wheat from its chaff will promise justice in the

⁹ Consider Burger’s careful hesitation in the two sentences beginning with “or” on p. 8.

¹⁰ Burger identifies an alternative to Benardete’s interpretation, namely, that the clothing suggests what man would be in absence of divine law—how he does indeed behave in the chapters that follow (12).

¹¹ For this reason, perhaps, Benardete’s first two major works, *Sacred Transgressions: A Reading of Sophocles’ “Antigone”* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s, 1999), originally published in *Interpretation* in 1975, and *Herodotean Inquiries* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), republished by St. Augustine’s Press in 1999, concern the tension between the sacred and the city of arts.

afterworld and so, in Benardete's words, "put everyone in fear and trembling" (38–39). Benardete's reading of the *Odyssey* thus offers us a glimpse into what Burger called "the common ground of the biblical and Greek text."¹²

Following Burger, we find John Blanchard on Parmenides and Olivia Delgado de Torres on Plato's *Parmenides*. The two pair well, as Blanchard draws a line from Hesiod to Parmenides that sheds light on both Plato and Aristotle, while de Torres delves deeper into the connection between Parmenides and Socrates through a consideration of how the *Parmenides* informs the *Republic*. Guided by Benardete's essay "The First Crisis in First Philosophy,"¹³ Blanchard considers why poets and philosophers have resorted to deceit and lies (49–51). If his Muses tell lies like the truth, then Hesiod "himself may (or may not) have imitated their intention, just as he chose to imitate their speech (but needn't have)" (51). Likewise, the two parts of Parmenides's poem appear to be the way of truth and the way of opinion, but the two ways occur only in the goddess's speech, which is preceded by the youth's speech about his ascent to the goddess prior to her revelation: "since his story envelops hers, the goddess' teaching about the truth of being is not coextensive with Parmenides' teaching" (57). To understand Parmenides, then, "it would seem necessary to try to take the setting into account" (58). The tendency of a teaching's setting to disrupt, even falsify that teaching lies at the heart of Parmenides's thought; but "nowhere does this requirement seem to have been taken more seriously than in the dialogues of Plato" (58).

That the setting's disruption is both unexpected and instructive led Benardete to conclude that "Parmenides' achievement was to show that the funny is not an obstacle to *logos*," an achievement Plato has the elder Eleatic impart to Socrates.¹⁴ In the *Parmenides*, de Torres shows, the young Socrates's zeal for speeches (*hē hormē hē epi tous logous*) motivates his "headlong dash to the *eidē* and away from the laughably paltry" (69). Parmenides cautions Socrates not to dishonor hair, mud, and dirt, and so "suggests that truth is most hidden in the things common opinion deems worthless" (69). "The ordinary is anything but commonplace"; rather, it is "uncommonly strange," *atopon* (67). The fulfillment of Socrates's embrace of the laughable comes in *Republic* V, where he "braves three great waves of laughter.... At last, Socrates is no longer afraid of

¹² See note 9 above.

¹³ Seth Benardete, *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, ed. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3–14.

¹⁴ Seth Benardete, *The Archaeology of the Soul: Platonic Readings in Ancient Poetry and Philosophy*, ed. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2012), 232.

hair, mud and dirt, for the crux of his argument...turns on Praxagora's suggestion in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazousai* that...the title to rule is not grounded in the ability to grow a beard" (73). In his wandering, Odysseus came to learn that not knowledge but belief binds the city; Parmenides taught Socrates this same lesson, while showing that to escape these bonds requires taking the shameful seriously, without fear of becoming a laughingstock.

The interpretations of Parmenides and Plato's *Parmenides* might have led directly to Burger's second contribution and Michael Davis's first, both of which discuss Benardete's interpretation of Plato's *Republic*. But that subject is introduced through Meier's preface to Benardete's 1999 lecture at the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung in Munich, "Socrates and Plato: The Dialectics of Eros." Drawing upon his many conversations with Benardete on the subject of *erōs*, Meier prepares for Benardete's demonstration of how, in "Platonic philosophizing, political philosophy and eros are not just particular matters among others...but rather, they lead into the center of the philosophic movement itself" (79). In addition, the position of Meier's piece makes Burger's and Davis's essays the central pair of the first arc (chaps. 7–8 of 2–13). Fittingly, too, since they share a theme: *thumos*, *erōs*, and the *eidē*. Together, they consider how the passions of the soul structure reality into kinds and whether this structuring is rational or willful. This bears on our larger question whether philosophy, in venturing outside the city, becomes bestial or emerges as properly human.

Picking up where Blanchard and de Torres left off, Burger notes that Parmenides's challenge to Socrates is to replace "punitive gods, who enforce justice, and beautiful gods, who inspire eros" (82), with an account of "the effects of the beautiful and the just on the human soul" (99). Socrates accomplishes just this in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. Burger notes that, beginning with the *Republic*'s tripartite division of the soul, "eros as desire for the good, which has philosophy as its core, is on this account utterly incomprehensible" (87). But Benardete observes that, when attempting to distinguish a third part of the soul (*thumos* or spiritedness), Socrates uses the example of Leontius, who blames his eyes for enjoying the sight of the corpses of punished criminals. The division of soul thus emerges when spiritedness posits desire as though separate from itself, so that it can blame desire for enjoying the sight of just punishment. In this way, the soul ashamed of its (thumotic) desire for punishment attempts to exculpate itself, only to punish itself as other: it still enjoys the sight of just punishment it had sought to avoid, for it is spiritedness that longs for *that* sight. This patently imposed structure "discloses

the essential limits of the thumotic soul; what lies beyond those limits is the erotic soul, which belongs above all to the philosopher” (92). The alternative is to be found in the *Phaedrus*, where the sight of the beautiful beloved initiates an ascent to the hyperuranian beings, producing a twofold motion: horizontally toward the beloved and vertically toward beauty itself. Only if the charioteer reason restrains the black horse will the white horse raise the lover and so make him beautiful to the beloved. But, as Benardete points out, the black horse resembles Socrates and thus seems to contain within it *erōs* entire (95–96, 308–9). On this reading, the idealized image the lover creates of himself is done not in ignorance but self-consciously and rationally; the resulting image reflects rather the beloved’s self-ignorance and so initiates his ascent, culminating in a friendship directed toward the good.

For Burger, then, “erotic passion results, however mysteriously, in the soul’s ascent to the vision of the *beings*, while there seems to be no equivalent to that for the thumotic soul” (98, emphasis added). For Davis, however, “the erotic is...not simply at odds with the thumoeidetic” (119), even when it comes to being. His essay’s subtitle—“On the Spirit of Ideas”—suggests as much. Following Benardete, Davis distinguishes between *idea* and *eidōs* along the following lines. As Davis explains, Socrates proposes that “in answering [the question of what imitation means or wants to be] they will use their usual [or customary] method of setting an *eidōs* over a many that they know to be a one but without knowing how they know. That is, *eidōs* here grounds a question. Socrates then changes terminology; artisans are said to look to the *idea* to know what to imitate” (119).¹⁵ In Benardete’s words, “that the posited *eidōs* could be the same as the *idea* of the craftsman seems impossible, for the *eidōs* is initially a question—‘What is that which makes every couch a couch?’—and the *idea* is an answer to which the couchmaker has complete access” (119). That is, the *eidōs* is the form, inasmuch as it induces wonder about how the many, different particulars are of one and the same kind; the *idea*, however, presumes one has answered the question “What is it?” such that the many particulars are unproblematically one and their unity unproblematically accessible. But, as Benardete observes, “couchmaker as accomplished Platonist is not easy to accept.”¹⁶ In Davis’s words, “we all make types of the true reality,” which as a question is atypical, and we do so unknowingly (120). “The movement from *eidōs* to *idea* is a movement into the cave disguised as a movement out of the cave” (120). Following Davis,

¹⁵ Cf. *Republic* 595c8–596b10; Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 215–16.

¹⁶ Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 216.

then, we might be reluctant to distinguish, with Burger, the thumotic and erotic souls with reference to being.

Then again, would the *idea* of the craftsman really constitute “the vision of the beings,” as Burger puts it? That is, we might doubt, with Burger, whether *thumos* could actually play a role in asking the question of what something is and in understanding why our experience of that something prompts us to inquire into its being. But we might also ask, with Davis, whether purging knowing of all thumotic projections once and for all sounds suspiciously like Leontius’s thumotic demand for blameless eyes. If that were possible, wouldn’t this book be called *The Core: The Thought?* So far as I can tell, then, the question whether the passions of the soul have structured reality falsely even in knowledge of ignorance must remain open, as must our more general question whether philosophy, in venturing beyond the city, becomes bestial or properly human. If political philosophy is the eccentric *core* of philosophy, and not merely a surface propaedeutic to be completed and then disposed of upon reaching the depths, then—to return to our guiding concern—the tension between reason and revelation appears to be insoluble. Or at least the challenge of revelation would demand of philosophy a decisiveness anathema to its essential openness.

The final selection on Plato is by Robert Berman, and its subject is the compatibility of punishment with Socratic philosophy. At first blush, “the Socratic principle” that “no one commits a criminal wrong voluntarily” seems to entail “Socratic abolitionism” (125–26). If “everyone wants what is truly his own good, but, since what goes around comes around, doing wrong to another ultimately brings harm to oneself,” then who but the ignorant would do wrong (126)? And wouldn’t they do so only involuntarily? Berman examines some unsuccessful attempts to respond to the Socratic challenge to the possibility of just punishment in the *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Laws*. The only prospect for a coherent response, should there be one, would lie in a Socratic version of culpable ignorance, a negligence in caring for one’s own good (130, 139). In the case of the “pretense to wisdom (*doxosophia*),” Berman argues, “one can be at fault for a kind of negligence in avoiding the challenge of seeking to discover within oneself anything one believes one knows without truly knowing” (141). Interestingly, in this case Berman’s “eidetic division” of the phenomenon of wrongdoing and punishment seems to collapse into a simple unity: not only is the same man both victim and criminal, his crime is being just who he is, while his punishment is remaining such—he is even the very law transgressed, his inalienable love of the good (cf. 127). The only coherent—that is to say,

rational—punishment would be Socrates’s decision to leave a conversation. Anything else would be subrational or thumotic: it would be bestial.

The final three essays on Greek thought all concern Aristotle, and each shows how Benardete had come to understand Aristotle as a Socratic-Platonic political philosopher (148–49, 159–60, 173–74). Together with the final essay on the literature of Imperial Rome, these contributions explore the manifold forms Socratic philosophy might take. They are a fitting transition, then, to the second arc of *The Eccentric Core*.

Most scholars approaching Aristotle’s account of the slave-by-nature in the *Politics* conclude that “Aristotle simply read a central institution of his own world into the very nature of political society” (144). For Goodin, however, the account is “of more than just historical interest” (145). “It is what one might call an ‘ontology’ of slavery,” since Aristotle gives “a metaphysical definition of the slave-by-nature,” in addition to making the master-slave relationship one of the two “basic components of the household,” which is “the basic unit of the *polis*” (144). If *archē* is at the core of political life, then the master-slave relationship, as “Aristotle’s model for the relation of ruling (*archon*) and being ruled (*archomenon*)” (148), is essential to his political philosophy. “The heterogeneous master-slave relationship looks like the paradigm of the way human beings are generally bound to one another” through need (157). So understood, Aristotle’s account “can, perhaps, serve as a moderating influence in our utopian tendencies” (158). The necessary ugliness of the city is an ontological impediment to the possibility of a Kallipolis. Aristotle’s apparently abhorrent justification of the slave-by-nature thus shares the sobriety of the *Republic*’s critique of political idealism.

Richard Velkley provides two contributions, one for each of Benardete’s two essays on Aristotle. Though Velkley (following Benardete) sees *De anima* III.3–5 as a “prelude” to *Metaphysics* A.1–2 (159–62, 171–74), they are reversed in this volume.¹⁷ In *De anima* III.3–5, Aristotle shows that *phantasia* (imagination) gives mind access to the *noēton* (intelligible) “by suspending the truth-claim of the sensible and converting ‘I see a man’ into ‘It seems to be a man.’ It allows the sensible image to be viewed just as image” (161; cf. 175–76). For the world to be intelligible, *phantasia* must “transform the *aisthēton* [sensible] so it can be read as a *noēton*” (177). Prior to the activation of the intellect, then, there is a passive intellect aware of the possible intelligibility

¹⁷ Velkley informs me that the order in which they appear in *The Eccentric Core* is the order in which they were written.

of the perceptible. But by focusing on access to the *noēton*, *De anima* sets aside the unity of the intellect: “the unity of soul described in *De Anima* is... but an abstraction” (168). As the precondition for access to the *noēton*, the passive intellect is “the ground of knowledge of ignorance” (179). One must therefore turn to wonder, which paradoxically combines the desire-to-know’s “indiscriminate greediness to transform the opaque into the plain” with our “recognition of the opaque in the plain” (167).¹⁸ For this reason, *De anima* III.3–5 serves as an introduction to *Metaphysics* A.1–2, whose subject is the relation of wisdom to wonder.

But by reading these essays in reverse, we are pressed to explore an observation Velkley makes in passing (in a footnote), namely, that it is possible to correct Aristotle’s overly precise account of soul in *De anima* only “through a use of *phantasia*” (174n4). Thus, the description of *phantasia* in *De anima* to some extent aids in understanding Aristotle’s account of the experience of wonder in the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle distinguishes the wonder that initiates philosophy from the wonders resulting from poetic production (167–68). Whereas poets “think that making is the ground of the whole,” the philosopher recognizes that “production presupposes incompleteness” (168). It is to this whole that the philosopher turns. The philosopher thus “strangely finds great satisfaction in dwelling on the causes of perplexity and in resisting every alluring prospect of solution,” that is, of a “poetic solution of human problems” (168–69). In contrast, poets “wonder also at the given, but they wonder even more at what they make” (168). Noticing the tension between the *aisthēton* and the *noēton*, the poet wonders at his ability to combine them while the philosopher wonders at their simultaneous convergence and divergence.¹⁹ Considered in light of *phantasia*, poetry emerges as philosophy *in potentia*. Paradoxically, the charm of the beautiful is broken through the beautiful itself, namely, through the experience of philosophic wonder—whence Benardete’s wonderful, aphoristic remark: “the wonderful is a beautiful perplexity” (167). No wonder, then, that when Benardete finally returned to Aristotle it was to produce (with Davis) a translation of Aristotle’s *On Poetics*: a philosophy of poetry is essentially thinking about thinking.

Holly Haynes contributes the final essay of the first arc, the sole chapter devoted to Rome. In it, she seeks to articulate “Benardete’s understanding of Roman Imperial literature as a representation of Plato’s vision of tyranny”

¹⁸ One is reminded of Benardete’s discussion of *eidōs* and *idea* in *Republic* X.

¹⁹ See Benardete’s distinction between the conjunctive and disjunctive two in Benardete, *The Argument of the Action*, 282–83.

(183). Tacitus, Haynes explains, sees in the term *imperium* a justification of rapaciousness and the specious identification of laying waste with establishing peace (184). This linguistic move constitutes an act of political usurpation intended “to assign subjects their place and make them believe they want to take it” (186). Benardete quips, “Tacitus is the truth of Vergil” (183); for Vergil, Haynes explains, “‘republic’ looks like a dream that was never anything but the founding fiction of imperialism” (189). “In Vergil’s world, when Greece is gone, monsters remain” (193). “Odysseus discovers philosophy” and “what it is to be human,” while “the Romans’ world is...flat, like Aeneas himself” (193–94). “Aeneas is the prototype of the Imperial subject, the exemplum of one who lives in the desert” (195). Horace, in turn, “expresses the transition from Greece to Rome in terms of the loss of poetry and philosophy” (198), while Petronius’s *Satyricon* is so much a pastiche as to expose in Rome “both the proliferation of representations and the dearth of intellectual imagination” (204). Strikingly, the authors discussed managed to represent the surrounding imperial wasteland not simply in lamentation at the loss of Greece but as a meditation on their situation. They serve as models for reviving Platonic political philosophy in an era anathema to it.

As a whole, then, *The Eccentric Core*’s first arc shows us the flourishing of political philosophy from Homer to Aristotle, along with its atrophic form in Rome. It thus prepares us for the second arc, in which Benardete emerges as an example of the attempt to preserve the Socratic model Strauss imparted to his students.

III. A HISTORY OF BENARDETE’S PHILOSOPHY

As mentioned, the second arc is comprised of reviews of Benardete’s books organized by the original appearance of each. These chapters thus serve as a chronicle of Benardete’s philosophic journey. And, again, because the reviews proceed chronologically, they eventually cover *The Argument of the Action*, *Encounters and Reflections*, and *The Archaeology of the Soul*—that is, those retrospective books published towards the end of Benardete’s life and after his death. The second arc can therefore be divided into two subdivisions: reviews of those books devoted to specific texts or thinkers (chaps. 14–21) and reviews of volumes that compel their reviewers to appraise Benardete’s life and work as a whole (chaps. 22–27).

The eight reviews in the first subdivision begin with his doctoral dissertation on Homer's *Iliad*,²⁰ then cover three of his books on Plato, and end with his book on the *Odyssey*. What in Plato, we wonder, compelled Benardete to revisit Homer some forty years later? That book's subtitle, *A Platonic Reading of the "Odyssey,"* emphasizes this return, as does the preface:

More than forty years ago, when I first studied Homer, I used something I found in Plato in order to understand the plot of the *Iliad*.... Plato was there as a map or grid that allowed me to trace out faint trails.... It did not occur to me that Plato had learned from the poets, and what for me was a projection backward inverted the indebtedness of philosophy to poetry. I was still under the spell of the opposition between them, which Plato himself had established when he had Socrates speak of "the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy."²¹

Likewise, in his preface to *Achilles and Hector*, Davis convincingly argues that Benardete's later note to the book gives it a personal path that makes his return to Homer seem itself Homeric—like an intellectual *Odyssey*, as it were.²² The selection of reviews thus appears to echo Benardete's portrait of himself as a sort of Odysseus making his way back to the firm land of Homer after decades of being tossed about on a Platonic sea of speeches.²³

The Odyssean Benardete begins in Troy with *Achilles and Hector*, of which we find reviews by Steven Berg (208–11) and Warnick (212–18). On Benardete's reading, the *Iliad* shows us Achilles's "ambition...to leave behind humanity in the ascent to divinity" (209). More precisely, it "displays the tragic consequences of this ambition" or "experiment in immortality" (209), and therewith "the paradoxical nature of heroism" (216). The tragedy lies in "the progressive isolation of the hero...with the sloughing off of the constraints of 'civil shame'" (209) at the deed of "neglecting one's comrades-in-arms" (216). This leads to a "Cyclopean isolation" that makes "heroic virtue identical to

²⁰ Seth Benardete, *Achilles and Hector: The Homeric Hero*, ed. Ronna Burger (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2005) was written in 1955 but published as a book only posthumously in 2005 (whence these reviews).

²¹ Seth Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre: A Platonic Reading of the "Odyssey"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), xi.

²² Benardete, *Achilles and Hector*, xi.

²³ Missing are *Sacred Transgressions*, *Herodotean Inquiries*, *The Tragedy and Comedy of Life: Plato's "Philebus"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and Plato's "Laws." On the books on the *Antigone* and Herodotus, see note 11 above. Benardete's translation of and commentary on the *Philebus* completes his trilogy of works considering Plato on the good, the just, and the beautiful (*Tragedy and Comedy of Life*, ix). Likewise, one can understand his book on the *Laws* as an extension of that on the *Odyssey* (cp. Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre*, 152, with Benardete, *Plato's "Laws,"* xi–xii). That is, the Homeric Benardete doesn't tell the whole story.

bestial vice” (210). “Within a hero is the negation of the hero” (217). This “mindless anonymity...aspiring to solitude” stands in contrast to “the ‘namelessness’ of Odysseus,” “the anonymity of mind” (210). Homer thus prepares us in the *Iliad* to turn to the *Odyssey*.

Instead, the Odyssean Benardete sails to Plato’s Socrates. Not without justification, however: in the introduction to *The Being of the Beautiful*, Benardete states that “Socrates’ turn to the human things was a wresting away from the poets of the beautiful and an establishing of it as the philosophic question.”²⁴ It is sensible, then, to turn to this work after *Achilles and Hector*. But, as Davis asks, what does Plato’s trilogy, whose unifying subject matter is knowledge or science (*epistēmē*), have to do with the beautiful (219)? Davis shows that the beautiful and philosophy share a structure: just as the beautiful appears complete in itself and yet points beyond itself, so too does thinking require treating a part of the whole as a complete whole in itself in order to discover its partiality (220–21, 225). “The beautiful makes it possible to know in part because of an illusion of wholeness, which, because it is an illusion, makes pure knowledge impossible” (225). Consequently, “the beautiful simultaneously enchants and disenchants. We are at once made aware of beings as complete and as pointing beyond themselves” (225). Davis’s point is evident both in what he says and what he does: though he focuses nearly exclusively on a part of the trilogy, the *Theaetetus*, one still learns how it is that the whole trilogy concerns the beautiful (cf. 224). We still come to know why Benardete’s title makes sense.

Stanley Rosen’s short review touches on Benardete’s commentaries on the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, showing how the sophist’s phantastics requires knowledge of soul and how the *Statesman*, by pointing to *nomos* or law as the phenomenon obscuring such knowledge, proves “more profound than the *Sophist*” (233–34). We are thus guided from epistemology and ontology to political philosophy, and with that to the pair of reviews on Benardete’s book on Plato’s *Republic*, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*. Will Morrisey’s and Arlene Saxonhouse’s reviews help show how *Socrates’ Second Sailing* develops the theme of *The Being of the Beautiful*. Socrates’s discussion with Thrasymachus prompts Benardete to ask whether the city has a function and whether it is the best instrument for that function (238). If, as Benardete observes, “justice and happiness do not go together” (240), then “the tension between the city and philosophy is ultimately due to the philosopher’s selfishness” (242).

²⁴ Seth Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful: Plato’s “Theaetetus,” “Sophist,” and “Statesman”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), xix.

Though the beautiful or noble attempts to reconcile justice and happiness, this only means that, in Benardete's words, "the city may ultimately make its citizens, but it will never make the philosopher" (242). Indeed, "even the best regime, the city in speech, the highest politics, cannot make even one philosopher," Morrissey remarks. "Nature does that" (244). Thus, as Saxonhouse observes, there are two reactions we can have to the city in speech: "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" (251). The beautiful is thus "the envelope of unreality in which every city exists and without which none could exist" (251). To recall Davis's review of *Being of the Beautiful*, the beautiful appears complete in itself and yet points beyond itself. It is what allows the cave to be a cave, to be both closed and open inasmuch as it enchants Glaucon with its apparent wholeness and leaves Adeimantus dissatisfied with its failure to supply happiness, to be good.

Abraham Anderson's review of *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's "Gorgias" and "Phaedrus"* (University of Chicago Press, 1991) expands upon the Odyssean Benardete's Platonic wandering through the beautiful in a way that prepares us for his journey home to Homer. Benardete sees in the succession of interlocutors in the *Gorgias* "the three parts of the soul in the psychology of the *Republic*" (256). Gorgias stands for the rational part, inasmuch as he maintains rhetoric is an art. But he also wants rhetoric to be powerful. As Anderson elaborates, "such a science would not be suitable for public persuasion, which takes place under circumstances that leave no room for teaching" (254). For this reason, Polus drops the requirement of knowledge and fixates on power (255). What is required, therefore, is a private form of rhetoric, whose peak the *Phaedrus* presents as Socratic conversation. Anderson, however, shows that the peak lies rather in the (written) Platonic dialogue, "with its capacity for repeating at once the living whole of a conversation and the logical order of its parts" (258). But if Socrates eschews writing, and a form of writing is superior to Socratic dialectics, then wouldn't Socrates's "wresting away from the poets of the beautiful" be partial rather than whole?

Thus, when Benardete returns to Homer it is not to Homer simply, but to a Platonic Homer, wherein the distinction between Platonic dialogue and Homeric epic appears to collapse. As Martin Sitte remarks, *The Bow and the Lyre* "is intended to initiate us into Homeric dialectic" (259, with *Bow and the Lyre*, xiii). To do so, however, Benardete must venture beyond Homer's

“surface simplicity” into its depth, wherein one discovers the “subtle interplay of will and reason” and thus “the relation of justice and wisdom” (260–61). That is, one discovers that the *Odyssey* has the same concern as the *Republic* (261). Sitte thus suggests reading *Socrates’ Second Sailing* after *The Bow and the Lyre*, so as to work out this connection (262).²⁵ In this way, Sitte reminds us that Benardete’s Odyssean self-portrait conveys not a final return home but the discovery of a kind of questioning that is always possible but for that very reason always latent and thus in need of recovery.

Benardete’s Odyssean wandering not only shows us how Homer guided Plato; it is itself the recovery of a possibility often suggested to him by his teacher, “the *late* Leo Strauss.”²⁶ Benardete finds himself in the position of Plato, forced to recover a truth of the human condition through poetry, imagery, and allusion rather than direct dialogue. As Benardete passed nearly two decades before the appearance of *The Eccentric Core*, we are to the late Benardete as Benardete was to the late Strauss. What he says of Strauss we may therefore also say of him: “I did not know then what he really meant, and I do not know now whether what I think I now understand was what he really meant. This book, in any case, was written to explore the possibility he indicated.”²⁷

As mentioned, the three books reviewed in the second subdivision are all in some sense retrospective, so that the reviewers are in a position of evaluating not just a book but a man. They are thus compelled to show us both what he has seen and how he came to see it, to condense Benardete’s Odyssean travels into a core insight. But what looms largest is not a thought but a man—another man: Socrates.

Steven Berg notes that *The Argument of the Action* “encompasses the greater part of the most significant authors of Greek antiquity” (263). Compelled to speak tersely of such breadth, Berg prudently focuses on the Socratic turn, whose pulse can be felt at the heart of each essay, however anachronistic that may seem. Indeed, because, as Berg remarks, philosophy “cannot have a perfectly original starting point, but is always and necessarily the recovery of a prior possibility” (265), it is never so of its time for the accusation of anachronism to be proven easily. Edward Rothstein’s review of the volume illustrates this point by focusing on Benardete’s interpretation of Sophocles’s *Oedipus Tyrannus* rather than the Socratic turn, while still eventually making his way

²⁵ See, too, note 23 above.

²⁶ Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre*, xiv, emphasis added.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

to a Socratic-Platonic insight. Juxtaposing Benardete's manner of interpretation to Oedipus's manner of rule, Rothstein says that Benardete "looks not for unity but for peculiarity," while Oedipus "persists in focusing purely on the abstract. He becomes a tyrant, seeking to establish public order as if it could be created by formula" (268). Benardete's interpretation thus echoes Strauss's reading of Plato's *Republic*, as both criticize the attempt to replace "the ambiguities, unpredictability and variability of humanity" with something like pure theory (269). Whether we follow Sophocles's path through the story of Oedipus or Plato's through the demands of Glaucon, we see through the alluring veil of idealism to a tyrannical suppression of the occasional in human life and thinking.

If the retrospective character of *The Argument of the Action* inclined Berg and Rothstein to reflect on the man no less than his work, the intensely conversational and personal character of *Encounters and Reflections* necessitates that Mark Blitz and Vincent Renzi do the same. Blitz begins with the familiar theme of how in both poem and dialogue "the plot embodies its own logic" (272)—how the action, even and especially when it is the action of an argument, has an argument of its own. Philosophic reflection must take poetic form because of what Benardete calls "the encounter with the question, which can't be determined by formula or concept" (272). That is, "if the Platonic dialogue and ancient poetry have to do with the oddity of the individual," then "something is being disclosed in a particular that is incapable of being disclosed in any other way" (272).²⁸ This insight guides *Encounters and Reflections* itself, which "not only discusses the importance of the individual, it exemplifies it" (272). Renzi's review does the same, both by mixing an appraisal of Benardete's works with his experiences of the man himself (275, 275n2, 279n13) and by attempting to articulate Benardete's "understanding of philosophy" as "concrete encounters with the unexpected in human life" (276). The former no less than the latter helps "to show that the whole metaphysical problematic of Being is an unavoidable epiphenomenon of human life" (278). That is, teachers like Benardete demonstrate through their apparent indispensability that reflections cannot be entirely separated from the encounters that provoke them and thus how even the most abstract problem is rooted in the experiential.²⁹

²⁸ Consider Strauss's critique of Gadamer: "The experience which I possess makes me doubtful whether a universal hermeneutic which is more than 'formal' or external is possible. I believe that the doubt arises from the feeling of the irretrievably 'occasional' character of every worthwhile interpretation" (Hans-Georg Gadamer and Leo Strauss, "Correspondence concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 [1978]: 6).

²⁹ The two halves of *Encounters and Reflections* were originally interwoven, prior to their division and organization by the book's editor, Ronna Burger. To understand this book properly according to its

The title of the last volume under review, *The Archaeology of the Soul*, exemplifies this feature of thinking, for it suggests that only an inquiry into something particular—historical beginnings—will uncover or illuminate something general—the soul. Thus, in Benardete’s remarks on Achilles, Odysseus, and Parmenides, Berg finds a common thread: a form of eidetic analysis (cf. 286). In this way, “Benardete traces what we generally understand to be the Socratic turn to the very origin of Greekness: Homer was there before them all” (286). But why did what was originally Homeric or is generally Greek eventually earn the adjective Socratic? Svetozar Minkov proposes that “one could justify calling Parmenides Socratic or Platonic insofar as Plato has made the philosophic experience more conspicuous or even rendered it more intelligible” (289). This is possible, Minkov suggests, because “Benardete uncovers a Socrates who is ‘immune from illusions, hopes, and ideals, and is eros itself united with mind’” (289).

Minkov’s suggestion reminds one of Socrates’s remark in Plato’s *Apology* that the god appears to have used him as a paradigm for human wisdom (*Ap.* 23a7–b4). Facilitated by Platonic poetry, Socrates’s life emerges as that rare combination of circumstance and meaning—in Aristotle’s words, of *aisthēton* and *noēton*—that allows an example to become exemplary and so facilitate the recovery of a rare human possibility. By means of the beautiful, Plato made Socrates appear whole so as to aid others in coming to know what he actually stood for. The Socrates made young and beautiful is the ark of the problem of Socrates.

IV. THREE PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED ESSAYS BY BENARDETE

It is fitting that this volume closes with three shorter works by Benardete. Each essay, previously unpublished, manages to give us a view of the whole of one of his books in just a few pages. I will attempt here to say something brief about these abbreviations, something like three abstracts on Benardete’s distillations of his labyrinths.

In “The Bed and the Table,” Benardete gives an overview of his interpretation of the *Republic*. Emerging from Glaucon’s demand for luxury, books II–IV focus on the beautiful. Socrates divides the city into classes and the soul into parts, then assigns each a virtue; justice is present here “as a principle but not as a virtue identifiable as such” (293).³⁰ Books V–VII focus on the good in

title, one would have to reconstruct the original order of the conversations using the occasional clues as to which section followed which. See the editor’s preface to *Encounters and Reflections: Conversations with Seth Benardete*, ed. Ronna Burger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), viii–ix.

³⁰ See Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 88–91.

connection with the “lower demand” that the city in speech be realizable, but “curiously” the good qua principle is “divorced from becoming” (293). Justice and becoming are finally combined in books VIII–X, but “in the context of degeneration,” so that justice seems entirely restricted to the realm of becoming. “Justice cannot be and be an ‘idea’” (293). Socrates thus “presents the second sailing as first”: the beds and tables Glaucon thumotically demanded in book II recur as *ideai* in book X (292, 295). “The ‘ideas’ are the ultimate in luxuries” (295). As all meaning and no reality, the *ideai* are “unrealized possibility,” so that “to be is to be an eternally unrealized possibility” (299). They are gods without will,³¹ as unreal a fiction as the inventions of the poets. “Glaucon’s *Republic* ends with VII: after that it becomes a critique of Glaucon” (294) that culminates in Socrates’s depiction of the tyrant (295–97). “After Book VII, Glaucon never laughs” (294).

The next essay condenses *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy* into some six or seven pages. Benardete’s explicit concern is “how a stated pattern or paradigm in Plato is related to the argument in which it is embedded” (303).³² The relationship is essentially disruptive, as the argument leads to “the deformation” of the stated pattern (305).³³ Thus in the *Gorgias* Socrates presents legislation as providing for the soul the sort of good that gymnastic provides for the body, whereas their spurious counterparts sophistry and cosmetics flatter soul and body by providing only what is pleasant. Later, however, Callicles disrupts this paradigm by praising courage in the pursuit of pleasure: “he makes the higher sense the lower” (306). This reveals, Benardete argues, that Callicles “is not at all concerned with the beauty of criminality—that is Polus—but with the fear of suffering injustice” (306). This disruption points to a confusion and thus to Socrates, for whom “to act justly is to make another perplexed” (307). The *Phaedrus*, in turn, as a writing about writing, makes sense of the *Gorgias* and, indeed, every dialogue. The manner in which the argument of the *Phaedrus* disrupts the paradigm of the chariot should be familiar from Burger’s contribution above. What Benardete concludes here is that “the structure of any Platonic dialogue consists in a hyperuranian *aporia* and a white horse image, which presents that perplexity in a complete and finished form” (309; 97). But if the dialogues represent with special beauty what

³¹ Ibid., 64.

³² Though the title of the chapter is “Two Paradigms,” the handwritten manuscript reads “2. Paradigms”: it appears concerned with paradigms in general. Nevertheless, the essay does treat two paradigms, one from the *Gorgias* and another from the *Phaedrus*. Even so, the only time Benardete uses the phrase “two paradigms” is in reference to two paradigms within the *Gorgias* alone (304).

³³ That is, Benardete takes up the tension between a teaching and its setting, as discussed by Blanchard.

is essentially a common human problem, then “Plato made a higher religion out of the Homeric gods: the dialogues are the new deities behind which are the truth about the beings—what we do not know” (309).

The final chapter is “Herodotus’ Understanding of *Barbaros*,” in which Benardete gives the reader a snapshot of his *Herodotean Inquiries*. Benardete’s concern with the meaning of *barbaros* takes him directly to the meaning of Greekness. The distinction is initially linguistic, so that *barbaros* “is in itself completely neutral and yet in usage completely loaded” (312). But by dividing the non-Greek into three countries—Egypt, Persia, and Scythia—and making each stand for something general—“the thesis that there is nothing but body,” the thesis that there is “nothing but soul,” and “the issue of the image and poetry,” respectively—Herodotus can make Greekness “something more than a label for a language” (313). Through Scythian imagery and poetry, Homer and Hesiod “beautified the holy obscenities of Egypt and took away the bestial disguises of the gods” (315). Likewise, Persian truth-telling occludes how “law is the concealment of the naked truth,” so that the Persians are forced, like Hesiod’s Muses, to tell lies like the truth (316). Egypt, Persia, and Scythia are too much themselves to understand anyone else, while Greece is so derivative as “to be at home in homelessness” (314).³⁴ It is in this form of moderation that “Herodotean wisdom has its roots” (314).

Benardete remarks that Herodotus’s procedure is “to impose a pattern of right onto events and at the same time take the pattern apart in order to discover the nature of human things” (314). That Benardete’s account of Herodotus’s procedure is so similar to his account of Platonic writing in the preceding chapter goes some way toward showing that “at the heart of Greek moderation lies Greek poetry” (314). Their similarity would incline most readers to collapse Herodotus with Plato. But, to quote Rothstein again, Benardete “looks not for unity but for peculiarity.” That he could grasp this similarity and yet notice a subtle but fundamental difference suffices to show that he, too, embodied this moderation.³⁵

³⁴ At the center of Herodotus’s map, Greece keeps each of the earth’s three regions free from the influence of the others, and thus keeps each free to exert its undiluted influence on the Greeks. See Hdt. 4.36–42.

³⁵ Cf. Benardete, *Herodotean Inquiries*, 130–31.