

many versions, the core claim of any natural law theory is that the existence and content of positive law depends, in some way and to some extent, on some extrapositive normative foundation. Duke argues that Aristotle's views on justice and law do not fit well with the Thomistic version that favors a divine foundation, and they have a rather strained relation to the Stoic view that what accords with nature is a foundation. By contrast, Duke finds several ways in which Aristotelian positive law draws upon reason as a normative foundation because what is lawful, in a focal sense, has a normative orientation toward the common good as grasped by a rational legislator. Chapter 7 closes the book by showing how Aristotle's conception of equity (and the ability of excellent agents to handle particular situations well) does not undermine the value of law by injecting arbitrariness and "decisionism" into its foundation. While appeals to equity and the particular insights of exemplary agents highlight the shortcomings of the universality in law, they do not undermine the rule of law since Aristotelian equity is exercised by someone drawing on legislative science, wisdom, and experience rather than any contingent psychological preference.

Let me close with a friendly criticism of this otherwise excellent book. While Duke has done an admirable job recovering Aristotle's notion of law, I do wish he had said more about its significance and legacy. This is a monograph that rescues Aristotle from many positions: he is rescued from intellectualism, holism, natural law (of a sort), decisionism, and so on. But for what does Duke believe we are saving Aristotle? To what precisely does recovered Aristotelian law contribute? I often found myself reminded of political philosophies that resist easy assimilation to the social contract tradition. But it is not clear whether Duke would agree.

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Tae-Yeoun Keum: *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 322).

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At the end of *The Myth of the State*, a work devoted to modern rationality's triumph over mythic obfuscation and a warning against a potential reversal of this victory with the rise of fascism in the early twentieth century, Ernst Cassirer retells an ancient Babylonian myth about the creation of the world.

Before he could begin creating the world, Marduk, the highest god, had to vanquish and subjugate the serpent Tiamat and the other “dragons of darkness.” Marduk slew Tiamat and “out of the limbs of the monster” he formed the world. For Cassirer, this myth presents an allegory for the status of myth in our world: the mythical monsters persist; “they still survive in this universe.” What Cassirer calls “the world of human culture” must continue to struggle against such monsters; mythical thought always threatens to rise anew, like the return of the repressed, to “pervade the whole of man’s cultural and social life” (Yale University Press, 1946, 297–98).

Retelling this story in the penultimate chapter of *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, Tae-Yeoun Keum seeks to illustrate a basic tension at the heart of her analysis: the concurrent critique and deployment of myth in Cassirer occurs again and again in the history of philosophy. For Keum, Plato stands at the head of this tradition: his dialogues twin seemingly opposing commitments to rational inquiry and imaginative myth-making. As Keum puts it: “Plato’s borrowing from the literary genre of myth and its tropes in his philosophical writings sits oddly against the standard of rigor that he is said to have invented for philosophy” (23). “Plato’s legacy,” then, is a strange and perplexing mixture of “notorious mythmaker” and “champion . . . of a demythologized, rational philosophy” (24). Keum’s book aims to account for what Plato and his successors found compelling about myth as well as how their own uses of myths might instruct political theorists today faced, as Cassirer foretold, with mythical monsters revenant and threatening.

*Plato and the Mythic Tradition* organizes its “study of myth through Platonic eyes” (1) around three central questions. First, Keum asks how to interpret Plato’s legacy in the light of the myths found in the Platonic texts. Keum shows how Plato has attracted readers interested in imitating and reworking his myths in the service of their own philosophical projects. Leibniz, for example, wrote a “Petite Fable” to illustrate his doctrine that human beings live in the “best of all possible worlds” (105). This fable followed Plato, in Keum’s reading, by presenting a deliberative philosophical response to a problem occasioned by Leibniz’s commitment to rationalism. With rational inquiry still incomplete, Leibniz needed an “unconditioned story” to act as a placeholder for the more perfect knowledge yet to come (124). Myth thus serves philosophy as a provisional necessity along the way toward demythologized knowledge.

Leibniz’s mingling of myth and philosophy opens a second question in Keum’s study: What can Plato’s legacy illuminate about the place of myth in political thought? Keum reads Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* to show how philosophy often depends on myth. A tale of the conquest of King Utopus supplies the origin story for More’s Utopia; a lawgiver named King Solomon plays a similar role in Bacon. Referring to preestablished mythological traditions—reproducing narrative tropes of


Greek mythology, for example—these founding figures (and their authors) imbue themselves with mythic authority. For both of their political visions, myth provides a “stabilizing force” (73) that can protect philosophy and allow for experimentation (103).

More and Bacon anticipate the German Idealists, whom Keum treats in a later chapter to engage her third central question, namely, how myth as a literary genre—Keum’s primary focus—relates to “deep myths,” the constitutive stories that are taken for granted in a given society, or what Keum calls “the tacit substratum,” as distinct from literary myths as “narrative genre of fantastical tales” (7). German Idealists dreamed of “a new mythology” that could provide a common language to reconcile individual freedom and the political community. Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poesy* and Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* admired Greek myths and maintained that Idealism could provide the basis for a distinctly modern mythology. German idealism thus sought to combine “a rational tradition based on Plato’s ideas” and a “poetic tradition of Platonic mythology” (173) to produce an enlightened community.

Prior to exploring these three questions through a range of modern thinkers, Keum also offers a reading of Plato’s *Republic* to illustrate the complexity of its engagement with myth. Examining the myth of the metals, the allegory of the cave, and the myth of Er, Keum suggests that all three “share a common plot, which recalls the experience of being delivered from a state of dreaming, underground, to wake up into a new reality aboveground” (40). These myths fit into a “coherent inquiry” about how philosophical natures can be cultivated and sustained. They also suggest a “paradoxical doubleness” in which myth both creates an authoritative claim about human nature and political reality and simultaneously shows the provisionality of this claim by being embedded in philosophical speech. Philosophy does not oppose myth but draws upon it “as a medium” to access “thick and deeply ingrained” parts of our worldviews (67).

Are “philosophy” and “myth” as separable as Keum’s reading assumes? Plato’s *Republic* presents them completely intermingled; Keum’s assertions to the contrary, “Plato” does not speak nor does he assert the priority of philosophy to myth. For Keum, literary myths are a “resource” that can be “harnessed” and “used”; they are inert props for the philosopher to deploy as he wishes. This raises a pair of problems left unaddressed in the book. First, it threatens to reduce the complexity of Plato’s writing by making it anticipate a particular and limited version of post-Enlightenment European philosophy, one wedded to a narrative of philosophical progress that was simultaneously wielded to condemn large swaths of the globe to conditions of tutelage. And second—and to return to Cassirer—it leaves political theorists at an impasse when responding to the mythical monsters of the present moment. Even girded with the literary genre of myth, philosophy, as Keum admits, “is at once more sequestered and more specialized than ever before” (238). Might not part of the problem lie in philosophy’s insistent

separatism from the imaginative and figural forms it holds at arm's length? Here too Plato's writing—not solely philosophical nor merely literary—could prove instructive.

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