
This is a wide-ranging book in which the author uses Aristotle to illuminate a number of issues in contemporary political philosophy and ethics. The perspective is that of someone who studies and teaches the history of political thought as a continuous tradition, using the major writers of the past not only to establish a pattern of historical development in values and social structure but also as a means of gaining critical leverage on the preoccupations of the present. It is within the best tradition of liberal arts education and is an admirable example of the humanising capabilities of this tradition.

Salkever’s main concern is with what he sees as the modern impasse about moral and political values caused by scientific rationalism and represented by the clash between neo-Kantian individualists, as, e.g., John Rawls, and communitarian traditionalists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre. He finds in Aristotle and Aristotelian method a way of moving beyond this impasse, of recognising the importance of historical context and community without surrendering to a pessimistic relativism. Aristotle also provides a means of resolving a number of other conflicts and exaggerated dichotomies, such as theory and practice, rule-based and virtue-based ethics, the public and the private spheres. In each case, the way forward is to ‘find the mean’, in the sense of identifying the elements of good sense on each side and using them to suggest a middle course which will avoid the narrow dogmatism and implausibilities of the alternative extremes. Salkever’s Aristotle, like Salkever himself, is essentially aporetic in method and tentative in conclusion, alert to the complexity of reality and suspicious of attempts at neat or final
answers. Aristotle's political science, or 'social science' as Salkever translates it, does not look for timeless universals but neither is it so culture-bound as to be unable to offer critical reflections on contemporary political experience.

Biology and a teleological view of nature play a central role. They provide the right framework for the analysis of the behaviour of living beings, other animals as well as humans. They demonstrate the unwisdom of a sharp dichotomy between rational humans, capable of free action, and the rest of nature, subject to mechanical causation. This point is further reinforced through an analysis of Aristotle's psychological concepts of soul, desire and choice in which the similarities as well as dissimilarities between humans and other animals can be analysed. This leads to Aristotle's theory of action, a subtle combination of rationality and character for which some of the best modern parallels are to be found in the writings of novelists, such as E.M. Forster and Jane Austen.

Readers of Polis will be most interested in Salkever's account of Aristotle and Greek political thought generally. He is particularly illuminating on the political animal argument of Politics Book 1 (72-81), seeing it as stressing the human need to live in a community under authority. He successfully rebuts those, such as Arendt and Pocock, who have attempted to co-opt Aristotle into the ranks of 'civic humanists'. A whole chapter, chapter 4 on 'gendered virtue', is devoted to the topical issue of Aristotle's attitude to women and the household. He argues that Aristotle rejects the misogyny of contemporary Athens (as expressed, for instance, in Pericles' funeral speech), pointing to his emphasis on the value of the household and his criticism of the male virtues of power and warlike courage. Building on the arguments of Saxonhouse, he attributes to Aristotle (as well as Plato) an.