REVIEW ARTICLE — JUSTICE AND POLITICAL RIGHTS IN ARISTOTLE’S *POLITICS* BOOKS III–IV

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In the 1950s J.L. Austin conceived and proposed to Oxford University Press a series of small volumes on Aristotle’s writings, which would present translations and commentaries adapted to the interests of analytic philosophers. Tragically Austin died before the series got under way, but for nearly four decades, his successor, J.L. Ackrill (now with Lindsay Judson), has edited the Clarendon Aristotle series. Each volume in the scrupulously edited series offers literal translations and concise commentaries emphasising important philosophical issues and holding Aristotle to the same exacting standards that one should expect of a contemporary philosopher. The volumes have appeared slowly, however, and have generally treated detached books from Aristotle’s longer treatises. For example, the very first book in the Clarendon series (in 1962) was Richard Robinson’s edition of *Politics* Books III and IV. Although Book III is arguably the philosophical backbone of the *Politics*, it cannot be fully understood in isolation from the rest of the work. Happily, the Clarendon series now covers the *Politics in toto*. Trevor J. Saunders’ translation and commentary to Books I and II was reviewed in *Polis* vol. 15 (1998), pp. 151–60. Robinson’s original edition of Books III and IV, republished with a supplementary updated essay by David Keyt, is the subject of this review. David Keyt’s translation and commentary to Books V and VI was reviewed in *Polis* vol. 19 (2002), pp. 163–73. Finally, Richard Kraut’s translation and commentary on Books VII and VIII will be reviewed in a future issue of *Polis*.

Because Books III and IV form the theoretical core of Aristotle’s *Politics*, it is unfortunate that this volume suffers by comparison with the other three. The editors of the Clarendon Aristotle Series made a strategic error in reprinting the translation and comments of Richard Robinson without alteration and contriving to update merely with a supplementary essay by David Keyt. Although Keyt did a splendid job within the constraints placed on him, the rest of the volume remains outdated and unsatisfactory in many ways. This was not entirely the fault of Robinson, whose volume unfortunately preceded J.L. Ackrill’s own contribution, a major scholarly achievement which set the

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format for the series and also established a very high standard for all subsequent volumes. For example, Ackrill’s edition contains a very literal translation of Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, followed by a detailed philosophical commentary keyed to the text by paragraphs. Ackrill’s influential commentary succeeded in demonstrating both the philosophical interest of Aristotle’s texts and the value of analytic philosophy as a tool of interpretation. Robinson in contrast follows each chapter with a fairly brief ‘comment’, which is not keyed to paragraphs and does not analyse or criticise Aristotle’s arguments in any detail.

Aside from format, the content of Robinson’s comments also leaves much to be desired, as Keyt (p. 126) points out:

Although Robinson claims that ‘the Politics is the greatest work there is in political philosophy’ (p. xii), he never makes clear what its greatness consists in. He says, for example, that ‘the Politics is a collection of long essays and brief jottings pretending to be a treatise’ (p. ix). He thinks that Aristotle prefers reporting the political principles of others to adopting political principles of his own (p. 70). The positive ideas he finds in Books III and IV are few and mostly commonplace . . . Moreover, Robinson is a fierce opponent of Aristotle’s naturalism and paternalism, the latter of which he calls ‘the most fundamental and most grave error in Aristotle’s politics’ (p. xxii). Robinson’s account of the Politics is curiously at odds with his evaluation of it.

In view of these remarks alone, it would therefore have been far preferable to revise or replace the Robinson volume with a new, thoroughly updated version.

In spite of its shortcomings, however, this volume contains valuable material for the student of the Politics (thanks in no small part to Keyt’s supplementary essay). The remainder of this review will consider some important issues in connection with Robinson’s translation and comments, and will then consider Keyt’s new contribution.

**Translation**

Robinson’s aim as a translator differed from that of later Clarendon translators, who, like Ackrill, have ‘sought exact conformity with the Greek’, in order to make the original arguments as accessible as possible to Greekless readers. Robinson, in contrast, announces, ‘My aim has been to produce a writing which will make upon twentieth-century readers as nearly as possible the same impression as Aristotle’s text made or would have made upon his contemporaries’ (p. xxvii). Robinson also remarks that Aristotle’s ‘style is beautiful’, and he resists ‘the temptation to try to write better than our author did’. ‘A translation should not be less obscure than its original . . . I have tried not to substitute sophistication for his simplicity, or faded metaphors for his directness, or to give a synonym when he repeats the same word’ (p. xxix).

There is tension among Robinson’s principles of translation. A translator