

## *Book Reviews*



**Thornton Lockwood and Thanassis Samaras, Eds.**

*Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. x + 266 pp. \$99.99. ISBN 9781107052703 (hbk).

Scholarly works on Aristotle's *Politics* have been proliferating over the past several decades. Thornton Lockwood and Thanassis Samaras have now added another to the number. They themselves point out that in the English-speaking world alone some 30 books (including several translations) and hundreds of articles have been published since the 1980s. We should of course be glad that the Stagirite's reflections on politics are receiving serious attention. But, one may ask, are not the existing publications enough? In one sense yes (how much that is new or interesting can one still say?); in another sense no. Aristotle's writings are so rich and concentrated that probably any reader will find something else to draw attention to. In the book in question, Lockwood and Samaras have collected 12 essays which cover more or less all the books of the *Politics*: Jill Frank on logos and politics in Aristotle, Pierre Pellegrin on politics as a natural science, Marguerite Deslauriers on rule over women, Lockwood on political critique, theorizing, and innovation in *Politics* book 2, John Mulhern on the term 'politeia', Ryan Balot on the mixed regime, Samaras on citizenship, Christopher Bobonich on decision making and the many, Eckart Schutrumpf on distribution of political power, Arlene Saxonhouse on the corruption of regimes, Pierre Destree on improving imperfect cities, and Josiah Ober on the best regime. Book 1 of the *Politics* perhaps gets the most attention but it's nice to see a discussion devoted specifically to book 2. There is coverage more or less of books 3 to 6 (though 6 is not much dealt with) and of books 7 to 8.

No reviewer is going to agree, or be satisfied, with everything in so many and so diverse contributions. Suffice it to say that all the essays contain something to provoke thought or pique interest. Frank intrigues, if she does not convince, with her analysis of Aristotle's *logoi* as enthymematic 'persuasions' in the middle voice (but are Aristotle's arguments on slavery and women really inconsistent?); Pellegrin exploits the biological works to thematize the

complexity in Aristotle's understanding of political science (politics is a practical and not a theoretical science but it has a natural base – no 'ought' from 'is', but also no 'ought' without 'is'); Deslauriers tries to loosen Aristotle's strictures on women and their lack of authority in deliberation (but it's hard to ignore Aristotle's claim that the lack is in the soul and not in extrinsic circumstances); Lockwood rightly draws attention to the way book 2 prepares for Aristotle's proposals in books 7 and 8 (he passes over Aristotle's cryptic remarks on Solon – do they refer more to polity than the best regime?); Mulhern gives another of his thorough reviews of uses of a particular term, *politeia*, in Aristotle, which he thinks ambiguous enough to deserve different translations in different contexts (but does not 'citizenship' mean sharing in rule, 'arrangement of offices' how those share who do share, 'regime' the quality of those who share, 'polity' one such quality?); Balot gives a solid review of the multiplicities of the 'middle' regime (but without thematizing that Aristotle himself says it's not a single kind with a single name); Samaras exploits the first of Aristotle's list of five democracies to make Aristotle more favorable to rule of the people than he otherwise appears (other commentators have, to the contrary, thought this first kind was a rhetorical mask for tyranny); Bobonich puzzles over the analogies Aristotle uses to show how a good regime can be produced from mixing a bad many with a good few (the analogies are not strong, to be sure, but does Aristotle's purpose require them to be stronger?); Schutrumpf counsels students and translators of Aristotle not to confuse justice with the just or to miss that broad political participation, if it is sometimes counseled as a necessity by Aristotle, never becomes a right (but is Aristotle's pragmatism sometimes defeating his elitism, or is our egalitarianism sometimes defeating justice and the just?); Saxonhouse sees all regimes as subject to destruction from within including the best regime (but is the best regime included in the subject matter of book 5 – does that book not deal with lesser regimes as gymnastics sometimes deals with lesser bodies?); Destree returns to the old problem of the difference between books 4-6 and books 7-8, but agrees in the end that these books too, like books 7 and 8 are about virtue and making regimes more virtuous; Ober thinks the best regime of 7 and 8 is really a kind of polity because it enfranchises all adult males (slaves excluded), which is a bit hard to reconcile with its plainly aristocratic character.

This last essay brings out a feature found in several of the others: the attempt to make Aristotle's views more palatable to us and to our democratic political theorizing. The sticking point, as always with Aristotle in such matters, is virtue, which must be at its highest in the best regime. Those who don't have this virtue, can't share in the best regime, and those who don't have any virtue can't share in any regime worth the name. Attempts, in this book as well as