

CHRISTIAN MUELLER-GOLDINGEN, *Aristoteles, Politik: Einleitung und Kommentar, Band 1: Bücher 1, 3, 7 und 8*, Wissenschaftliche Kommentare zu griechischen und lateinischen Schriftstellern, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016, viii+340 pp., ISBN 978-3-8253-6614-8.

The commentary by Ch. Mueller-Goldingen (in future M.-G.) on books 1, 3, 7 and 8 of Aristotle's *Politics* (in future *Pol.*) cannot be considered a scholarly work - if one understands scholarship as revealing that the author is informed about the research of others in the area he writes about and subjects the results of such scholarship to a critical examination. M.-G.'s bibliography (pp. 329f.) comprises a total of two pages on which references to introductions (Ackrill, Barnes, Meyer) and Lexica (Metzler, *Der Kleine Pauly*, Stuttgart - Weimar 1979 - the comprehensive and more recent *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 16 vols., Stuttgart - Weimar 1996-2003 was not used) and works of a similar nature abound. He cites the book on Aristotle by O. Höffe, *Aristoteles*, München 1999, but not the more pertinent publication by O. Höffe (ed.), *Aristoteles: Politik* (Klassiker Auslegen vol. 23), Berlin 2001, nor does he include G. Patzig (ed.): *Aristoteles' „Politik“*. *Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum Friedrichshafen / Bodensee 25.8. - 3.9. 1987*, Göttingen 1990, nor B. Zehnpfennig (ed.), *Die „Politik“ des Aristoteles*, in: *Staatsverständnisse*, vol. 44, Baden-Baden 2012. Except for a study by M. Dreher on Athens and Sparta (2001) there is no scholarship on Aristotle's *Pol.* of this millennium quoted. M.-G.'s reference to his own bibliography in an earlier publication from 2003 does not make up for the deficiencies in the new book. Here (p. 329), his statement that commentaries on *Pol.* are rare ("Mangelware") reveals ignorance. All books of the *Pol.* have been commented in the Clarendon Aristotle Series,<sup>1</sup> by P. Simpson,<sup>2</sup> and the author of this review<sup>3</sup> - an Italian commentary is in progress.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. Saunders, *Aristotle: Politics. Books I and II translated with a commentary*, Oxford 1995; R. Robinson, *Aristotle: Politics. Books III and IV*, Oxford 1992; D. Keyt, *Aristotle: Politics. Books V and VI*, Oxford 2001; R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Politics. Books VII and VIII*, Oxford 1997.

<sup>2</sup> P. Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle*, Chapel Hill 1998.

<sup>3</sup> E. Schütrumpf: *Aristoteles Politik Buch I*. Übersetzt und erläutert, in: *Aristoteles Werke in Deutscher Übersetzung* Bd. 9, Teil I, Berlin - Darmstadt 1991; Teil II, *Aristoteles Politik Buch II*, 1991; Teil IV, *Aristoteles Politik Buch VII-VIII*, 2005; Teil III, *Aristoteles Politik Buch IV - VI*. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von E. Schütrumpf, erklärt von E. Schütrumpf und H.-J. Gehrke, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> *Aristotele. La Politica, Libro I - Libro IV*. 4 vols., Direzione di L. Bertelli e M. Moggi. Rome, 2011-2014.

The absence of familiarity with, and reference to, scholarship on *Pol.* is felt everywhere in M.-G.'s comments. They do not reveal how controversial many passages are, they do not provide the reason why he chose one explanation where different ones have been proposed, and his comments have the additional disadvantage that they do not offer to the reader the opportunity to get an impression of pertinent research on any issue in this Aristotelian work. M.-G.'s book is not addressed to a reader who possesses some knowledge of ancient philosophy since M.-G. explains the most basic issues, and in the same way it does not expect that its reader has an interest in further study of Aristotle's *Pol.* since it does not give any guidance if he wants to pursue a subject addressed in *Pol.* that interests him. This reviewer experienced intellectual claustrophobia. There exists a number of recent book publications which give exactly this guidance one expects: a recent (2015) volume "offers fresh interpretations of Aristotle's key work and opens new paths for students and scholars to explore."<sup>5</sup> M.-G.'s book does not meet by itself this standard, and because of its serious limitations it cannot inspire a reader to learn alternative ways, "new paths" to the understanding of the *Pol.* of which there are many.

M.-G. must have believed that 10 pages (pp. 1-10) would do for an introduction to the complete *Pol.* He uses Aristotle's reference at 5.10 1312b10ff. to the death of Dionysios II in 344 B.C. in order to establish a *terminus post quem* for the date of the writing of *Pol.* (p. 2). It is hard to understand why M.-G. overlooked that Aristotle mentioned earlier in the same chapter (1311b2) a later event which is closer to home for the philosopher, namely the murder of Philipp of Macedon that took place in 336 B.C. and allows to assign the writing of *Pol.*, or parts of it, to a later period in Aristotle's life.

In line with the above description of M.-G.'s *modus operandi*, the introduction offers a lot of names dropping – Protagoras, Hippias (p. 2), Xenophon (*passim*), Plato's *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* (p. 7), Antisthenes, Aristippos (p. 10) however, he rarely, if ever, gives an exact reference which would allow the reader to look up these texts.

M.-G. (p. 3) finds in Aristotle's *Pol.* a model of philosophy of history and anthropology which he explains teleologically. One of Aristotle's most often quoted remarks, namely that "man is by nature a political creature" (1.2 1253a2f.) is paraphrased by M.-G. as meaning that man realizes his existence as human being by choosing a political life (p. 5), or as living in the *polis* ("Leben in der Polis", p. 10) – the two explanations do not amount to the same. A lot has been written, and quite recently, on this subject from which M.-G. could have benefited – the one and only publication he refers to in

<sup>5</sup> Th. Lockwood - Th. Samaras (eds.), *A Critical Guide to Aristotle's Politics*, Cambridge 2015.

his commentary on this passage (p. 22) dates from 1977. Here briefly my position: Aristotle describes here the *apolis* not as a man who withdraws from an active political life, but one who is quarrelsome and does not obey laws since he lusts for war. By contrast, according to Aristotle, a man who belongs to the *polis*, is able to participate in an association of human beings who share a perception of what is just and unjust (1.2 1253a18), in the only association where justice is practiced. The famous phrase should, therefore, be understood: “man is a creature that by nature belongs to the *polis*” since as its part (1253a20-29) he benefits from, or is subjected to, decisions on what is just which, being based on justice, are “the order of the political community”, or better: “of the community of the *polis*” (1253a38).”

The commentary does not contain an introduction or preface to the individual books which would outline the topics or issues treated and discuss the logic of the sequence of the material presented.

*Pol.* 1.1 starts by stating the genus proximum (“association”, *koinōnia*) and differentia specifica (“strives for the highest good”) of the *polis*. M.-G. (p. 11), who provides a different explanation, omits for a reason unclear to me to reveal the content of this introductory statement which after all contains the fundamental principle of Aristotle’s *Pol.*, namely that the *polis* is an association. It will be verbally repeated at a crucial point of the argument in 3.3 1276b1, cf. 6 1279a21, and this concept serves as the starting point of his comprehensive criticism of Plato’s *Rep.* in *Pol.* 2.1-5.

M.-G. considers the introduction of the next topic in *Pol.* 1.1, Aristotle’s distinction between rulers in different associations, as somehow unexpected. However, after Aristotle had identified the *polis* as the association which strives after the highest good, he follows this line of argument by distinguishing the rule in a *polis* from that within a household – the latter lacks anything that is “great” (1.7 1255b33, cf. 7.3 1325a25). Throughout his commentary M.-G. does not give to the understanding of the sequence of arguments the attention it deserves.

Referring to Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s *Rep.* in *Pol.* 2.1-5 M.-G. (p. 6) credits Aristotle with the - modern - concept of separation of power and calls it an article of faith (“Credo”). Nothing can be found of that sort in 2.1-6. When in 2.9 1270b21-26, after his highly critical remarks on the Spartan constitution, Aristotle acknowledges that the sharing of political prerogatives by the institutions of kings, senate, and ephors contributes to the stability of the Spartan state, he actually does not explain their different duties, let alone their balance – for ephors and senate he uses the same term “far-reaching decisions” (1270b28f.; b39) – but his interest is here and throughout the *Pol.* to guarantee that “all *participate*” (*koinōnein*, 4.13 1297a39) in the constitution.

The scheme of three correct and three mistaken constitutions in *Pol.* 3.7 M.-G. (p. 113) considers “central” to Aristotle’s theory of constitutions.

However, outside of *Pol.* 3 Aristotle assumes the existence of more than one form of democracy and oligarchy (4.1 1289a7ff), and usually he distinguishes four subspecies which cannot be found in book 3. Furthermore, *Pol.* 3 does not know mixed constitutions which are truly ‘central’ to books 4–6, and already discussed at 2.6 1265b33–1266a5. Finally Aristotle’s recommendation that “all should participate in the constitution” (see above) aims at eliminating the distinctions between the traditional forms of constitutions as listed in *Pol.* 3.6–7 which are defined by the fact that different sections of the free population exercise political rights whereas the others are excluded. For Aristotle, this distinction between those who rule and those who are ruled and taken advantage of should become meaningless, cf. 5.9 1310a2–12.

At *Pol.* 3.9 Aristotle discusses the claims of oligarchs and democrats to deserve a superior or equal share in the *polis*. This claim is called *dikaion*, a “right”, however it is not justice (“*Dikaiosynē*”, “Gerechtigkeit”, M.-G. 119–121) which is a character quality.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle resolves the dispute between oligarchs and democrats mentioned by introducing the superior claim of virtue to participate in the *polis* while granting to oligarchs and democrats a “part of what is right”. Why this constitution should be called a “perfect *polis*” (“perfekte(.) Polis”, M.-G. p. 126) is not clear – and what is the difference between “perfect” and “ideal” considering that the best state of *Pol.* 7 has much stricter requirements for the qualification of its citizens?

*Pol.* 3.18 ends with an incomplete sentence referring to an investigation of the best state – the complete sentence is found at the beginning of *Pol.* 7. Compared with the comments by M.-G. p. 127, the treatment by M. Curnis<sup>7</sup> shows what a difference it makes to be well informed about the scholarship on this often discussed passage.

The best state which is the subject matter of *Pol.* 7/8 is called by M.-G. ideal state (“Idealstaat”, “Idealstaatsentwurf”, “idealer Staat”, pp. 123; 187; 195; 200 and passim). This terminology makes it a model like the state outlined in Plato’s *Republic* which is “a paradigm in heaven” (9 592b) never to be realized but offering orientation for a lawgiver who devises a constitution. However, in the introductory chapter of *Pol.* 7 Aristotle qualifies “living under the best political order” by adding “according to the conditions available for them” (7.1 1323a18f.), and in doing so he chooses an option which is according to the list of alternatives in *Pol.* 4.1 1288b26 only second best. And from a very practical point of view, at 7.11 1330b4–17 he envisions the possibility that not enough fresh water is available. In this case, large

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. Schütrumpf, *Little to do with Justice: Aristotle on distributing political power*, in Lockwood – Samaras (eds.), *Critical Guide* 2015, 163–83; E. Schütrumpf *An Overdose of Justice or The Chimera of alleged ‘Distributive Justice’ in Aristotle’s Politics*, in: A. Havlíček (†) – Ch. Horn – J. Jinek (eds.), *Nous, Polis, Nomos*. Festschrift Francisco Lisi, St. Augustin 2016, 239–56.

<sup>7</sup> M. Curnis in: Accattino – M. Curnis: *Aristotele. La Politica, Libro III*, 2013, 258–62.

cisterns should be built to collect rainwater. As an alternative, water for food should be separated from that serving other needs – these are clearly less than ideal conditions.

In the Introduction, M.-G. refers (p. 3) to the ideal state (“idealen Staat”) of *Pol.* books 7-8 as evidence that Aristotle’s concept of practical philosophy is guided by the unity of ethics and politics. However, the best state does not exhaust the whole spectrum of constitutions, and his recommendations for stability, e.g. to combine arithmetic equality with merit (5.1 1302a7f.), is not of ethical nature. In the same context M.-G. identifies the ideal constitution (“ideale(.) Konstitution”) as being a mixture of oligarchy and democracy (cf. p. 7). However, the mixture of oligarchy and democracy does not serve the purpose of being an ultimate norm or beacon that guides one’s action with the understanding that the ideal goal cannot be realized. After all it is explicitly distinguished from the form of constitution “which alone it is justified to call aristocracy” (4.7 1293b1-6), and for this reason alone this specific mixed constitution cannot be called “ideal” – it is actually the constitution found in most states (4.8 1294a15-19). Furthermore, Aristotle does not state that in this mixed constitution *all* members of the state learn through education to act ethically as M.-G. p. 3 claims. Moreover, Aristotle’s recommendation for the best state that is within reach of most men and most cities does not give up just a few of the “ideal requirements” but rejects them outright (4.11 1295a25-31).

There is one Index (pp. 331-340) covering both ancient authors and subject matters. On p. 331 there is an entry “Aristoxenos 319, 332, 324 von Tarent 307, 312” – from which city does the first mentioned Aristoxenos hail, and are they different men?

I could touch only upon a few problems, and not the most egregious ones, in M.-G.’s commentary which I judge on the whole to be totally unsatisfactory. It suffers from the complete absence of any familiarity with scholarship on this foundational text of political philosophy, and in this sense it does not meet any scholarly standards. It is conceptually weak, lacks analytical acumen and an awareness of the need of analysis of a philosophical text on the part of the commentator. Given the fact that it is not a scholarly book, M.-G. could have made an effort to write better and more elegant prose. This book should have never been published, let alone in a series titled “scholarly commentaries,” and one can only hope that no volume 2 will ever be added to this volume 1. It compares unfavorably with commentaries which were published in the same series, e.g. A. D. Leeman – H. Pinkster on Cicero’s *De oratore*. It is pity that a beautifully produced book contains a text of such poor quality. As the adage says: you must not judge a book by its cover.

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