
Aristotle's Political Theory: An Introduction for Students of Political Theory,
R. G. Mulgan. Oxford: Clarendon Press,
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As the title indicates, this book "is intended for students of political theory who are meeting the *Politics* for the first time and in an English translation" (1). Mulgan has certainly written a clear, concise, readable, and helpful book, recommended for the purposes stated. Greek terms are used sparingly (although Mulgan tends, quite rightly, to retain the word "polis" throughout), as are technical terms. The text is free of footnotes except to page numbers of the Aristotelean *corpus*. However, at the end of the book Mulgan does include some scholarly notes; since these are not referred to in the text itself, the interested reader must run a check to see whether the author has commented on any given page. Finally, Mulgan has provided a "Select Bibliography," although it does not include all of the secondary sources referred to in the notes. The references in the notes, however, show that Mulgan has read widely in the secondary literature. He cites authors as diverse as Leo Strauss and J. L. Ackrill, and takes into account French and German sources. Mulgan usually relies on Sinclair's translation of the *Politics* (Penguin Classics). This decision was no doubt made in the light of the nature of the intended audience, although it cannot be said that translation is in all cases the best.

Although we are told that "this study makes no claim to be complete" (1; see also 127), most of the central topics of the *Politics* are discussed in sufficient detail to shed light on them, and quite frequently to indicate some virtues and defects of Aristotle's approach (below). The book is divided into seven chapters, entitled (respectively) "Human Good and Political

Science," "The Polis," "The Household," "Constitutions," "The Rule of the Best Man," "Practicable Preferences," and "Political Disorder."

Mulgan is to be commended for his adoption of two methodological principles. The first is that "the *Politics* reflects a unified and coherent body of political theory" (1). Thus Mulgan rejects the view that doctrinal differences within a text are to be explained *primarily* on the basis that the author wrote the text over a given period of time and changed his views about the subject in question as he "matured." Rather, "different topics give rise to different questions" (1). Still, Mulgan is prepared to say that there are *some* inconsistencies internal to the *Politics*, and in these cases he may be willing to make quite a few external criticisms).

The second principle is that the study of an ancient text is of genuine interest to us as we attempt to reflect on modern political life (2) even a text which appears to be so unscientific. One need not be a classicist or an antiquarian to benefit from a study of the *Politics* (an assumption related to the nature of the audience which Mulgan wishes to address). Thus we have some references in the body of the text to modern political life and belief, although they are infrequent, and those to modern political philosophers or scientists are kept to a minimum.

With much of Mulgan's analysis I have no quarrel. Nevertheless, several criticisms are in order: In his opening discussion of the meaning of the term "polis" (16), Mulgan does not adequately discuss the point that Aristotle does not clearly distinguish between "society" and "state"—a fact which is strange from a modern standpoint (similarly with the discussion of the ethical/legal and unwritten law/written law distinctions; see 56, 79-80). It scarcely seems possible to understand the radicalness (for us) of the *Politics* without understanding this issue. Aristotle is not a "conservative," a "liberal," a "libertarian," a "socialist"—in short, he does not fall into any of these modern categories (Mulgan's references to

Aristotle's "conservatism" aside; 11,35,100; cf. 99). Yet Mulgan refers to Aristotle's position in his opening discussion, very briefly, and then immediately criticizes him from a characteristically modern standpoint. The language which Mulgan uses to make his criticisms is itself somewhat difficult to follow. The "societal" meaning of "polis" is referred to as the "inclusive" sense of the term, while the "state" meaning of "polis" as the "exclusive" sense. Then Aristotle is said to make an "illegitimate inference from the supremacy of the state to the conclusion that its function is to use its power without restraint in the pursuit of human good" (17; on 26 "illegitimate" is replaced with "fallacious," though this term seems to get qualified further on in the paragraph). In other words, Aristotle is an "authoritarian"—a point which Mulgan repeats over and over again throughout the book (e.g., 17, 26, 28, 33-34, 78, 80, 100). At one point "authoritarian" is used synonymously with "totalitarian" and "paternalistic" (34). But why is the inference in question "illegitimate"? Mulgan himself notes at various places in the book that the inference is based on Aristotle's "belief in objective values, in his faith in the powers of education and law and in a conception of freedom which emphasizes correctness rather than autonomy of action" (26; also 78, 100). Thus the inference is illegitimate if one does not share Aristotle's "belief," or more precisely, his philosophical views on these issues. These views cannot be so simply rejected, and it is a pity that Mulgan's discussion of Aristotle's "authoritarianism" will not force students of the *Politics* to confront Aristotle's position here as a viable and challenging one. A discussion which attempted to make Aristotle's position worth taking seriously might try to avoid the word "authoritarian" (not to mention "totalitarian") which carries strong negative connotations to our Western-liberal ears.

Mulgan devotes four pages at the very start of the book to Aristotle's notion of the human good; but some effort should

have been made (in chapter two) to connect this section up to the discussion of the society-state issue (Mulgan does note on page 6 that there *is* a connection). Indeed this section in chapter one should have been longer, since the topics at issue do supply the foundation for much of the *Politics*. It does not seem to me that the student audience Mulgan has in mind will have a good enough grasp of this foundation to appreciate central doctrines of the *Politics*. I note, however, that Mulgan does point out the complexity of the notion of "individualism" in the context of Aristotle (33-34).

On two related issues, Mulgan's account could use further development. We are told that Aristotle "places little value on individual freedom in the sense of personal autonomy or the right to act as one chooses" (34). To be a "free" citizen in the *polis* for Aristotle "is essentially a matter of having independent value, of existing for one's own sake and not for another's, rather than of being able to choose and act independently" (15), it "is essentially a question of independent value, of being treated as an end and not as a means; the extent of submission to, or exemption from, legal control is irrelevant" (133n). The notion that one is an end in oneself and yet not allowed to act independently will strike the modern reader as bizarre. Mulgan does not say enough to explain this odd conception of "freedom," and so to make Aristotle's view plausible.

Secondly, Mulgan does not pay sufficient attention here to the problem of the relationship between the good man and the good citizen (it is mentioned on 57). The problem is interesting since it bears on the question of "authoritarianism," i.e., on the relationship between the individual and the state, and on the meaning of "freedom." The problem is also closely connected, of course, with the dual nature of "virtue" for Aristotle. The fact that Aristotle devotes considerable attention to the problem in question may indicate that Aristotle is well aware of a potential incoherence in the view that the end of the *polis* is the same as that of the individual, and so that the *polis* should or

could assume "total authority for the achievement of the individual's goals" (34). Pursuit of the problem of the good man and good citizen would, I think, raise the issues of "authoritarianism" and "individualism" on a far more interesting level than is in fact done by Mulgan. Aristotle's treatment of the problem should be connected up with his interesting discussion in the opening chapters of Book VII of the relative value of the "contemplative" and "active" lives (an issue which Mulgan does not analyze in sufficient detail; see 33, 89).

One other criticism of Mulgan's book concerns its constant repetition of the thought that Aristotle is, at many essential points, reflecting the beliefs or conventions of Greek society (e.g., 4, 6, 11, 20, 22, 25-26, 43, 44, 91-92, 97). It may be that this is so; but it is not necessarily the case that Aristotle espouses given doctrines *because* they are current in his culture. It is not helpful to encourage students of the *Politics* that this is so, i.e., to avoid confronting Aristotle's position as one which is intellectually respectable. For example, we are told that in making the ideal of *eudaimonia* not attainable by everyone Aristotle is "reflecting the attitudes of his own society" (6), as though this observation accounts for Aristotle's adoption of a "necessarily exclusive" ideal. Yet Mulgan also points out that the exclusivity is a function of Aristotle's view that not everyone has the requisite philosophical aptitude or the requisite (and moderate) material means to be happy (6). What is to be gained, then, by suggesting that Aristotle's views can be dismissed on the basis of his having lived in ancient Greece? Mulgan implies, in effect, that the "common sense" on which Aristotle seems so often to rely is historically determined, i.e., that it is finally equivalent to prejudice (e.g., 11-12). A similar conclusion would have to be drawn about the nature of *phronēsis*. It does not seem likely that Aristotle would accept these inferences, and their validity is by no means self-evident.

In sum, Mulgan is sometimes misled-

ing and at other times just too brief in his criticisms and discussion of the *Politics*. One may wonder whether Mulgan's book really does force the student to take Aristotle's political theory seriously, and so whether the second "methodological principle" referred to above is borne out in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, the book is worth reading (I have not mentioned the many points Mulgan makes with which I agree), and is a welcome contribution to the relatively small body of contemporary literature on the *Politics*. □

Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy, Mortimer J. Adler. New York: Macmillan, 1978, 220 pages.

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For anyone who has ever tried to teach the philosophy of Aristotle to undergraduates or for anyone who would like to understand the essentials of the Philosopher's doctrine, Adler's work is an invaluable aid. It would be difficult to find a better and more lucid introduction to Aristotle's thought. The book is written for "everybody except professional philosophers" (vii) because Adler considers philosophy to be everybody's business. More than any other subject he thinks "...philosophy is useful—to help us to understand things we already know, understand them better than we now understand them" (ix). For this purpose he finds there to be no teacher better than Aristotle (x).

The book is divided into five parts. There are twenty-three chapters, plus an epilogue of helpful references from Aristotle. Part One examines Man the Philosophical Animal. Part Two considers Man the Maker. Part Three deals with Man the Doer. Part Four treats of Man the Knower. Part Five examines Difficult Philosophical Questions. Especially valuable as an objective presentation of