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Review of *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics*, by Mary P. Nichols; *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, by Judith A. Swanson

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in recent social and political theory. These are deployed to attack, on the one hand, empirical political science and, on the other hand, normative theory with universalist aspirations, such as that found in the work of Rawls. Zolo argues that the complexity of modern societies and the resulting fragmentation of standards of truth doom both of these enterprises. Instead, we should begin with a view of politics as achieving "the selective regulation of social risks." We accede to political authority because this serves to reduce the uncertainties of social life, which, in the contemporary world, always tend to increase.

This leads to a view of democracy that we might call neo-Schumpeterian. Zolo whole-heartedly endorses Schumpeter's famous attack on "the classical doctrine of democracy" but then goes on to argue that Schumpeter's own elite-competition model has been overtaken by recent developments. Parties no longer genuinely compete to attract the popular vote: instead, they collude with each other and establish client relationships with groups outside the political sphere. The electorate no longer possess even that minimum level of political rationality needed to make the competitive model work. Their political experience is constructed for them by the mass media, which is most effective when not engaged in overt propaganda. The resulting system, Zolo argues, no longer deserves to be called a representative democracy: "liberal oligarchy" would be more accurate.

Having delivered this indictment, Zolo's book comes to a sudden halt. He is hardly enchanted by the system he has described, but he appears to lack the resources to propose an alternative. Yet this disability is self-inflicted. He has ruled out, on epistemological grounds, empirical evidence that might, for instance, challenge his account of the effects of the mass media. And his attack on normative theory overlooks the fact that the systems he is describing are held together, in part at least, by the democratic principles espoused by their members, politicians, and voters alike. (One of the less helpful of Zolo's borrowings is a form of functionalism that seeks to explain the workings of the political system without reference to the aims and intentions of the actors themselves.) That is why Rawls's ambition to defend a normative theory by reference to the shared public culture of liberal democracies is not absurd.

One might say that Zolo, having written his *Prince*, ought now to attempt his *Discourses*. Yet this is a challenging book for those inclined toward the radical democratic view taken up by most of the contributors to Mouffe's collection. Zolo lays his finger on the central difficulty: "What this radical-democratic vision appears to me to lack most of all is a perception of the variety, particularism and mutual incompatibility of social expectations in non-elementary societies. It fails to consider the structurally scarce nature both of social resources and of the instruments of power responsible for the allocation of politically distributable resources" (p. 70). In other words, some, at least, of the conflicts thrown up by a fragmented society are zero-sum; and simply to encourage higher levels of political participation by hitherto excluded or passive groups does nothing to resolve this problem.

The challenge for would-be radical democrats is to show how it is possible both to respect the separate identities of the many groups that emerge in such a society and, at the same time, to arrive at collective decisions that are recognized as legitimate by all these

groups. How can we be authentically female, black, gay, French-speaking, and so on but also equal citizens identifying with the laws and policies of the state? The challenge is a formidable one; and it is tempting to escape it by taking refuge in diffuse and obscure formulations in which Mouffe's book, unfortunately, abounds. Here, for instance, is the editor herself:

The creation of political identities as radical democratic citizens depends therefore on a collective form of identification among the democratic demands found in a variety of movements: women, workers, black, gay, ecological, as well as in several other "new social movements." This is a conception of citizenship which, through a common identification with a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, aims at constructing a "we," a chain of equivalence among their demands so as to articulate them through the principle of democratic equivalence. (p. 236)

If this means anything at all, it suggests some spontaneous tempering of conflicting group demands in the name of democracy. But why and how?

Not all the contributors to Mouffe's book are so evasive. Candid recognition of the conflict between personal identity and citizenship can be found in the chapter by Jean Leca, who draws attention to the breakdown of a common culture (in France, especially) and the increasing difficulty of establishing cultural communication between different groups (ethnic, regional, etc.), and in an elegant essay by Michael Walzer, who praises the rise of civil society as a sphere of free association but sees that it cannot fully substitute for democratic citizenship on the national scale. A robust form of republicanism is defended by Sheldon Wolin in the concluding chapter, and Mary Dietz endeavors to make this stance more appealing to feminists (though the constructive part of the argument remains somewhat undeveloped). Another robust republican, Hannah Arendt, is discussed in a helpful chapter by Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves: d'Entreves perhaps underestimates the distance that separates Arendt from the contemporary politics of identity.

One theme that is missing from Mouffe's book is the idea of deliberative democracy, defended recently by Joshua Cohen, James Fishkin, and several others. If we are to acknowledge social complexity without falling prey to the pessimistic conclusions of Zolo's realism, it is to the possibilities of democratic dialogue between competing groups that we must surely look.

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Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics.

By Mary P. Nichols. Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991. 233p. \$50.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy. By Judith A. Swanson. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. 244p. \$32.95.

These two studies—both eminently worth reading—have several points in common. Both Mary Nichols and Judith Swanson are sympathetic readers of Aristotle who seek to make sense of his texts without denying their difficulty and ambiguity. Both acknowledge the strangeness of those texts as seen from any modern point of view, but both presuppose—and then go on to show—that these texts are nevertheless pertinent for our own thinking about politics. Both avoid the sort of

anachronistic, simplifying, and inevitably condescending reconstruction of Aristotle as a systematic philosopher that characterizes both Anglo-American analytic philosophical studies and the critical dismissals of Aristotle from historicist and poststructuralist perspectives. Biographically, both authors express gratitude to Joseph Cropsey in their prefaces. Thematically, both are concerned with the problem of how to understand what Aristotle means by including, as an integral part of his political theorizing (both in *Ethics* 10 and *Politics* 7), the apparently antipolitical proposition that the political life cannot be ranked as highly as the philosophical or contemplative life; and both respond to this question in novel and interesting ways.

But the answers the two books give to this interpretive puzzle are diametrically opposed to one other. For Swanson, Aristotle's explicit preference for philosophy is meant to call attention to the dangers of the political life and the attractiveness of lives lived outside the public realm; whereas Nichols, places Aristotle's occasionally explicit preference for philosophy in the context of the *Politics* as a whole to show that this preference is not antipolitical but carries with it the message that philosophy is only possible for those who live a certain kind of political life. The interpretive controversy is a legitimate and necessary one, since Aristotle's brief discussion in *Ethics* 10 and scattered remarks in *Politics* 7 give no unequivocal answer to the question of how this infrequent privileging of philosophy over politics can be made to comport with his extensive defense of the political life, properly understood. Nichols and Swanson, in effect, give two quite different responses to the interpretive problem of what to do with Aristotle's ranking of philosophy over politics. Their interpretations open the way (as such interpretations should) to serious reflection on the politics of our own time. For Swanson, Aristotle's elevation of philosophy yields a defense of modern liberalism that can avoid the weaknesses of present-day rights-based or utilitarian political theories; for Nichols, reading Aristotle on this question can lead us to a more complex and less utopian understanding of politics than any modern political theory can, an understanding that—surprisingly—provides a powerful clarification and justification of modern democracy.

Stylistically, these are also two very different kinds of book. Nichols presents her novel and often controversial interpretations (e.g., that "polity" is the simply best regime, that the regime "according to prayer" is called the best only in irony, and that the best human life is impossible without political activity) in the form of a topic-by-topic and book-by-book commentary on the *Politics*. But her commentary is never so detailed that it fails to keep the whole text in view, thus opening her reading to question and revision by other readers of the *Politics*. All of us who teach the *Politics*, no matter how many or how few times we have done it before, will teach the book better and with more pleasure having read Nichols. The book should be of value both for experienced Aristotelians who need to see the text with a freshly invigorated eye and for beginning, nonspecialist teachers who are looking for interesting ways to problematize the *Politics* for their students.

Swanson's argument for her equally controversial thesis, on the other hand, ranges over Aristotle's corpus as a whole, connecting Aristotelian ideas and lines of argument that are generally not connected, rather than

commenting intensively on a single text. Her claim is that—contrary to modern communitarian interpreters of varying political stripes—Aristotle's political philosophy establishes the supreme human value of a set of activities—including, but not limited to, philosophizing, the family, friendships, and the economy—that can flourish only within the private realm, activities that are inevitably threatened by the public. Her application of the private/public distinction to the text is less problematic than it may, at first glance, appear to be. While Aristotle does not speak of a distinction between private and public as such and thus does not himself explicitly assert anything about the value of either "the private" or "the public," Swanson's use of these terms as a way to open a dialogue with Aristotle is by no means an anachronistic imposition of modern concepts on a Greek text. One clear instance of a conception of "the private" in Greek philosophy is in Plato's *Laws* 739c–d, where the Athenian Stranger distinguishes between "what is called the private" and that which is said to be common, arguing that in the best regime everything would be common, including that which is by nature private, such as the eyes and the ears and the hands. There can be little doubt that Aristotle would both understand and reject the Stranger's claim; the modern formulation of the private/public issue would thus not be hopelessly unintelligible to the voice we can imagine speaking to us in the texts of Aristotle.

In essence, Swanson says that modern liberalism can borrow from Aristotle a defense of the private realm that is stronger than the familiar Lockean argument for the separation of private and public realms. There is a serious practical difficulty about this, however, in that Swanson's Aristotle would defend the private out of a deep mistrust of democratic public opinion, which he takes to be the principal obstacle to the development of human virtue. Thus, to accept Swanson's Aristotle on privacy, modern liberals would have to be convinced of the wisdom of abandoning their commitment to liberal democracy.

Be that as it may, Swanson's Aristotle is concerned with establishing a robust private world that might shield good and potentially good human beings against the corrupting influence of public opinion (pp. 207–08). There is, for her Aristotle, a reciprocity between private and public that is really a kind of rapprochement between the few and the many: the private sphere educates good rulers for the city, while the city, in exchange, protects the privacy and the private achievements of the more virtuous few. A central interpretive difficulty is how to make Swanson's picture square with two Aristotelian claims: (1) that a human life lived outside the laws is more likely to be beastly than angelic and (2) that for these laws to educate in virtue effectively, there must be not only widespread public consent but a significant degree of political participation, as well. When they are not actively appropriated by a majority of the citizens, the laws must fail to perform their primary function of supplying a moralizing authority that defines the city without reducing it to a unity. Swanson's response here is that the maintenance and revision of the laws and customs of any given polity are not of great concern because there is, for Aristotle, both a readily knowable natural hierarchy among human beings and a readily knowable substantive natural law to guide practical reason. (Aristotle, to most Straussians and to Nichols, seems to deny both of these things.) So long as the few

who are best by nature rule, guided only by their independent judgment and by the precepts of a natural law that is embedded in the unwritten customs of every polity, there is no reason to be much troubled by those laws that make Athens distinctly Athenian.

The spin that Swanson puts on Aristotle is opposed to Arendtian and communitarian readings; but her own theoretical framework is not evident (to this reader, at least), though it seems to be in the direction of Oakeshott and possibly Voegelin, rather than Strauss. But this is never altogether clear, so it is difficult to ascertain what overall political theoretical conception supplies the context and motive for Swanson's unusual reading of Aristotle. This makes it hard to see any consistent narrative or discursive line to her argument as it moves from chapter to chapter to consider the virtues that her Aristotle thinks must be developed in the household (rather than the city), in the relation between master and slave, in the separate spheres of husband and wife, in the economic market, in friendship, and in philosophy. Her writing is sometimes awkward and stilted and conjures a very censorious and moralistic Aristotle, as though she were not yet fully comfortable with her texts. A provocative and wide-ranging study of this kind always risks relying too heavily on quirky readings of single passages taken out of context, on theory-driven readings of ambiguous passages, and on repeatedly exaggerated formulations of the point the author urgently wants us to hear. Swanson's work sometimes suffers from all these weaknesses, but her occasional stylistic infelicities do not obscure the novelty and the importance of what she has to say. There is something powerfully plausible in her assertion that Aristotle at least implies a conception of the private not as a protected space for pursuing one's own good in one's own way but as an opportunity for cultivating virtues. Swanson has read widely and well, and the book vividly calls attention to the various ways in which Aristotle's discussions of character and moral education regard public life with a much higher degree of suspicion than any ardent communitarian, ancient or modern, would display.

Mary Nichols is a master of the difficult rhetorical art of exposing her arguments to challenge without abandoning them, and because of this, her book speaks with an unusual authority that must arise from many hours intelligently spent reading and thinking and conversing about the meaning of the *Politics*. *Citizens and Statesmen* is a marvel of close reading combined with clarity and consummate accessibility. For Swanson's Aristotle, political life is neither ennobling nor challenging. For Nichols's Aristotle, it is both. Her study takes, as its point of departure, the dispute between "democratic" and "aristocratic" interpreters of the *Politics*, both of whom see in Aristotle a way of challenging modern liberalism by bringing to the fore qualities that liberalism seems to lack—democratic readers stressing Aristotle's focus on the importance of a political community composed of equal and participatory citizens, aristocratic readers, Aristotle's recognition of human inequality and of the importance of leadership by virtuous statesmen. Nichols's argument is that the two readings are each partially true and partially distorting; each exaggerates one element in Aristotle's political understanding, by depreciating either the extent to which Aristotle acknowledges human inequality (the typical failure of the democratic reading) or the extent to which he is aware of

the dangers of falsely claiming superiority or overstating the degree of superiority of some to others (the typical failure of the aristocratic reading). Nichols's position is that good politics for Aristotle must accommodate the just claims of both the democratic many and the statesmanly few; to hold otherwise, she argues, is to court democratic or oligarchic despotism. Statesmen and democratic citizens are mutually dependent. Without some degree of democratic participation as a check on their powers, statesmen are likely to forget that they are humans subject to human limitations and incline to substitute tyranny for polity; without statesmanly leadership, citizens will fall into factional conflict and reduce the political community to civil war.

Similarly, philosophy and political activity are mutually supportive activities. Statesmanship involves learning the complexity of the world, learning what can be controlled and what is beyond control. By acting as statesmen and only by acting as statesmen, philosophers like Aristotle are in a position to understand themselves and so to make a step toward understanding the whole. The *Politics* itself, Nichols argues, involves statesmanship of this kind. Nichols is careful not to dissolve all difference between philosophy and statesmanship. (Unlike the statesman, Aristotle's chief interest, she says, is not establishing the best possible polis but understanding beings.) But there is no immediate royal road to wisdom for Nichols's Aristotle: the path to such understanding lies only through the city. Her account of the need for mediation and indirection in Aristotle's version of philosophic education recalls the Platonic Socrates' flight to the *logoi* (rational and rambling speeches, as opposed to algorithmic deduction or intuitive silence) and to self-understanding as a necessary stage of the human journey to wisdom, in spite of the fact that she, too, often insists on a picture of a rigidly aristocratic Plato to serve as a foil for her more flexible and democratic Aristotle. It is also the case that her reading needs to be tempered by readings like Judith Swanson's. I would add that, contra Nichols, the road through politics and self-understanding is not the only option Aristotle suggests for our indirect approach to the hidden truths of things. Potentiality, actuality and the other central elements of first philosophy can also be approached through the careful study of nature and the many natures—through what we call natural science. In the end, what matters most is that both Nichols and Swanson implicitly maintain still a third mode of indirect access to the things that are, the way of articulate and critical reflection on texts such as Aristotle's *Politics*.

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The Quality of Life. Edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 452p. \$65.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

This plump volume records the proceedings of a conference held at Helsinki in 1988, under sponsorship of the UN's World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER). We are told on the fly sheet that WIDER's purpose "is to help identify and meet the need for policy-oriented socioeconomic research on pressing global and development problems, as well as common domestic problems and their interrelationships." It is not altogether easy to see how this conference and the