

RIESBECK (D.) **Aristotle on Political Community**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. 322. £79.99. 9781107107021.

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Community (κοινωνία) is one of the most fundamental and distinctive concepts in Aristotle's writings on human action; the political species of community (alongside spousal community, household community, and the community of friendship) is probably the most complicated iteration of the concept. Thus, scholars of Aristotle's *Politics* (the primary audience of the volume under review) are much indebted to the publication of Riesbeck's revised doctoral dissertation (University of Texas, Austin, 2012) that successfully and persuasively elucidates political community by showing both its likenesses and differences from the other forms of community Aristotle analyzes. The question that Riesbeck uses to explore these concepts in Aristotle's writings: Is Aristotle's praise for the constitution (πολιτεία) of kingship (which in places the *Politics* identifies as the 'best constitution' [(*Pol.* 3.17.1288a15-19, 28-29)] philosophically compatible with his theory of community and commonality? At first glance, the question seems to yield a negative answer due to what Riesbeck calls the 'normative problem of monarchy': the exclusionary nature of monarchy seems to result in a bad (i.e., unjust) community. But further, the question seems to yield a negative answer due to what Riesbeck calls the 'conceptual problem of monarchy': conceptually, kingship is a constitution that—at least in the extreme form that Aristotle focuses on—makes the decision-making of the monarchy absolute and thus presents kingship as constitution that is not itself a constitution. Taken together, the normative and conceptual problems of monarchy have led readers of the *Politics* to think that Aristotle's account

of kingship is an errant appendix at best, perhaps 4th century BCE Macedonian propaganda at worst.

Riesbeck's volume begins and ends with chapters that articulate (chapter 1) and resolve (chapter 6) these 'problems of monarchy.' The problems' resolutions are based on carefully exegesis of all relevant Aristotle texts (including from the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*) concerning community (or κοινῶνία) in general (chapter 2), specifically political community (chapter 3), political or reciprocal rule (chapter 4), and the nature of citizenship and constitution (chapter 5). Although each individual chapter is a model of philosophical, philological, and historically contextualized analysis on its subject, the 'inner' chapters together provide the textual basis for Riesbeck to argue that Aristotle believes that political participation is not a necessary or constitutive component of human well-being and that participation in a community is compatible with the claim that a citizen-body is not coextensive with a community's ruling class. Riesbeck's 'test case,' namely whether for Aristotle kingship is compatible with political community, thus provides the basis for a plausible solution to a perennial problem in scholarship on Aristotle's *Politics* and a detailed analysis of the major concepts of Aristotle's *Politics* in general. Put slightly differently: scholars trying to make sense of Aristotle's notion of kingship will turn to Riesbeck's book as the pre-eminent scholarly treatment of that concept; the same scholars (I strongly suspect) will hang around to see how the foundational concepts of Aristotle's *Politics* cohere together.

Length precludes an extended critique of Riesbeck's magisterial volume, as does my agreement with much of what the book argues for. We do have one point of significant disagreement. Riesbeck is firmly committed to the claim that Aristotle distinguishes kingship from tyranny and that the former is a 'correct' constitution whereas the latter is a 'deviant' one (e.g., 33, 239-248). Indeed, an aspect of the normative problem of monarchy is just the claim that kingship

is a just form of rule. Nonetheless, over the last two decades the historical work of scholars such as Kathryn Morgan (e.g., *Popular Tyranny. Sovereignty and its Discontents in Ancient Greece* [Austin, 2003]), Sian Lewis (e.g., *Greek Tyranny* [Exeter, 2009] and *Ancient Tyranny* [Edinburgh, 2006]), and Lynette Mitchell (e.g., *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* [London, 2013]) has suggested that the distinction between tyrant and kingship is more complicated than the analytical crispness of constitution differentiation that Aristotle offers in some parts of the *Politics* (for example, *Pol.* 3.6). At the same time, the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens* likened the rule of Peisistratus to a ‘golden age’ (*Ath. Pol.* 16.2, 7, 9) and the *Politics* itself suggests in several places that tyrants can preserve their reigns by becoming more king-like (*Pol.* 5.11.1314a31-40, 1315a40-b10). Many of the passages that generate Riesbeck’s ‘conceptual problem of monarchy’ are instances in which the king becomes more ‘tyrannical’ (for instance, ruling regardless of the consent of the governed or solely in conformity with the king’s own will [*Pol.* 3.16.1287a1-3]). But if some passages in the *Politics* blur the line between kings and tyrants, that may be less of a ‘conceptual problem’ and more an instance of Aristotle being faithful to his 5th and 4th century historical sources.

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