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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought. by Arlene W. Saxonhouse

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Source: *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May, 1994), pp. 546-548

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2132166>

Accessed: 16-09-2018 22:21 UTC

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*Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought.* By Arlene W. Saxonhouse. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Pp. 253. \$29.95.)

In Book II of the *Politics*, in his famous critique of Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle argues that Plato's just city possesses too much unity: "It is clear that if the process of unification advances beyond a certain point, the city will not be a city at all" (1261a16-8; Rackham translation). In imposing systems of communal property and family on his Guardians, Plato deprives them of all differences and at least by implication, transgresses the limits of human nature. The main accomplishment of Arlene Saxonhouse's *Fear of Diversity* is to place Aristotle's concern with excessive unity in a broad literary context.

Saxonhouse's main theme is "the fear of diversity—a fear that differences bring on chaos and thus demands that the world be put into an orderly pattern" (x). She argues that certain authors embrace the truth of diversity and others attempt to deny it. The first three chapters are devoted to Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, the Pre-Socratics, and single tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Plato receives four chapters (mainly on the *Euthyphro*, *Menexenus*, *Statesman*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*), with the final two on Aristotle's *Politics*.

Though approximately two thirds of the book are given over to Plato and Aristotle, the earlier chapters are fresher and make a greater contribution. Saxonhouse is a gifted guide through different literary genres. Lucid and engaging, she deftly sheds new light on her theme, distributing interesting insights along the way. The stage is set in the opening chapter on the *Ecclesiazusae*, which describes how Athenian women, dressed as men, take over the Assembly and pass radical decrees, instituting communal property and sexual relations, thereby eliminating natural differences within the city. The *Ecclesiazusae* bears a curious relationship with Plato's *Republic*. In presenting his own account of community of women and children, in Book V, Plato makes unmistakable verbal allusions to Aristophanes' play. But less well known are similar themes Saxonhouse locates in Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, along with other works.

Plato is widely viewed as denying the necessity of worldly diversity in pursuit of the ideal truths expressed in his theory of Forms, which he ruthlessly wishes to bring into existence in the political realm. Saxonhouse attempts to undermine this conventional view of Plato, through careful reading of the dramatic and literary aspects of different dialogues. She claims there is "less a fear of diversity and more an ambiguous pursuit of unity" in these works than is widely believed (91). Aristotle, who fully appreciates the need for diversity, emerges as "the hero of this book": "Aristotle deals with observed diversity in the world, not through denial, as so many of the others we have discussed have done, but through typologies and hierarchy" (191). In doing so, he becomes the founder of political science.

No reader can come away from *Fear of Diversity* without new appreciation for issues of diversity in the Greek world and how different thinkers deal with them.

But there is also much to criticize. Throughout, the book is underargued; Saxonhouse's method is summary of and commentary upon Greek texts, with her order of exposition dictated by the order of her texts. This causes a number of significant problems, which I can only touch upon in this brief space. I will briefly discuss two.

First is a lack of precision. A number of thinkers are shown to be concerned with issues of unity and diversity. But there is little discussion of exactly how they understand these issues, or evidence that they view them in similar ways. Plato's theory of forms represents an attempt to combine supreme moral, epistemological, and metaphysical values in one tightly knit theory. But is there any reason to believe that *this* is what Aristophanes rails against in *Ecclesiazusae*, or Sophocles in *Antigone*? In addition, Saxonhouse identifies a wide variety of distinguishable themes as concern with unity. Examples are contexts in which Plato appears actually to be concerned with control of appetite (see 135–36) and levels of metaphysical reality (see 145). Thus the relationship between concerns of unity and these other matters should be sorted out. Careful analysis—beyond commentary—would shed important light on Saxonhouse's central argument.

Though Saxonhouse makes a number of interesting points, she does not defend them from obvious objections. For instance, attempting to enlist Socrates on the side of diversity, she distances him from the speech of the “Laws of Athens” in the *Crito* (107–10). This is a novel interpretation, but the evidence is obviously flimsy; it would be easily brushed aside by proponents of more traditional interpretations. A particularly clear instance of inadequate interpretation is her reading of Socrates' arguments in the *Euthyphro*. This is one of a series of dialogues in which Socrates attempts to find the definition (or essence) of a moral term, in this case, “piety.” Search for universal definitions is one of the main contributions to philosophy ascribed to Socrates by Aristotle. Though Saxonhouse is aware that Socrates presents foreshadowings of the theory of Forms in the *Euthyphro* (99 n. 12), she presents him as an *opponent* of unity: “Socrates' task here, I believe, is to force Euthyphro to understand complexity, to raise questions about attempts to impose abstract definitions and principles, *ideas* of right and wrong, just and unjust, pious and impious, on a complex world” (100). Her main evidence is the fact that Socrates, in accordance with his elenctic method, counters Euthyphro's attempts to describe the essence of piety. But the possibility that Socrates has in view a different essence of his own is not explored. The obvious context in which to view this issue, Socrates' quest for moral essences in a series of dialogues, is ignored.

The main problem with Saxonhouse's interpretation of the *Euthyphro* is not that it is incorrect—though I think it is. Rather, she knows her view flies in the face of “the preponderance of scholarly work on the dialogue” (100, n. 13), and yet feels no need to defend it. In this, as in other cases discussed throughout the book, traditional scholarly views are held for good reasons: there is strong evidence for them. Saxonhouse generally stays on the level of observation and assertion. She

does not acknowledge, let alone engage, opinions opposed to her own. More important, the evidence behind these opinions is not examined. Her unwillingness to make the case for her original interpretations lessens the value of her interesting book.

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*The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* By Michael Novak. (New York: The Free Press, 1993. Pp. xvii, 334. \$24.95.)

We can be grateful that Michael Novak's new book is a polemic: in an always reader-friendly style, he persuasively argues for us to agree with him, or, as the case may be, disagree. This reader mostly disagrees, but for any reader what should mostly come across is a sense of the battle and of the grounds on which it is being fought. To duel with Mr. Novak is to become engaged in the central ideological issues of our time.

In this perspective, Mr. Novak, in straightforward, technical terms, is a reactionary: he looks backward to a capitalism defined and made popular by Adam Smith. Listen to his enthusiasm for capitalism as a solution to the poverty of Latin America. There is, he says, in that part of the world, "a vast pool of the unemployed" which

contrasts vividly with enormous amounts of work that need to be done to improve the conditions of daily life among the poor. By what mechanism shall these two factors—work to be done and workers needing employment—be brought together, if not by the rapid generation of tens of millions of *small* businesses engaged in manufacturing and services? (156, italics added)

But Mr. Novak is also a radical. He wants always to go to the root of the matter, and the root of the matter is not principles of economic organization but morality set in the broadest philosophical context.

No capitalism will work unless the people in it want it to work, and are themselves willing to work hard making it work. And they will not be willing to do that unless imbued in profound terms with a sense of the dignity of their own subjectivity, with a stouthearted courage for their spirit of enterprise, with an appreciation for their untapped reservoirs of creativity, and above all with a loving willingness to work hard and long not only on behalf of self but also with and for family, neighbors, and even, quite abstractly, the common good.

It is this radicalism, this conviction that what the world truly needs is new commitment to an ancient morality, that accounts both for the book's title and its central claim:

democratic capitalist society is . . . /the/. . . this worldly form . . . most responsive to the social implications of the gospels yet developed by the human race (228)

Claims of this order, in the judgment of this reviewer, can only be allowed to stand so long as the vision Mr. Novak has of "capitalism" is taken as in some measure a fair representation of the practice of "successful" capitalist societies