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POLIS, THE JOURNAL FOR ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN POLITICAL THOUGHT 37 (2020) 177-220

POLIS

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Book Reviews

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Jula Wildberger, (2018) *Stoics and the State: Theory – Practice – Context.* Staatsverständnisse, 105. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. 263 pages, €39,00, ISBN: 9783848728435 (pbk).

The Stoics and the State is a welcome, and highly recommended addition to the growing literature on Stoic political thought by an eminent specialist of Stoicism, who is above all known for her monograph on Seneca's thought placed in the context of Stoicism as a whole.[1] Earlier books on Stoic political thought offer either developmental accounts or discussions of selected themes. Among the former are Reesor's *The Political Theory of the Old and Middle Stoa* (1951), which is still helpful but all too brief, Erskine's *The Hellenistic Stoa* (1990), which more narrowly focuses on the early and middle Stoics' involvement in actual politics, and Schofield's *The Stoic Idea of the City* (2nd ed. 1999), a study of the development of the political thought of the founders of Stoicism in the 3rd century BCE, Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus. As for the thematic discussions, Laurand's *La politique stoïcienne* (2005) deals with the themes of 'appropriation' (*oikeiosis*), political community, and practical politics, whereas Vogt's *Law, Reason and the Cosmic City* (2008) addresses the topics of anticonventionalism, community, and law. Different from Schofield and Vogt, Wildberger does not restrict her account to the early Stoics alone. Like Reesor and Laurand, she also pays attention to the Stoics who worked in Republican and Imperial Rome.

What puts this book apart from the others is that Wildberger discusses the evidence from a modern point of view, that is the theory of the state as it has found its classic expression in Jellinek's *General Theory of the State* (*Allgemeine*

1 J. Wildberger, *Seneca und die Stoa: Der Platz des Menschen in der Welt* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006).

 | DOI:10.1163/20512996-12340262

Staatslehre) and – in an updated version – in Jellop's *The State*.[2] To Jellinek's three elements, population ('Staatsvolk'), territory ('Staatsgebiet'), and institutions ('Staatsgewalt'), Jellop adds 'Staatsidee' or 'state objective' as a fourth element. One of the possible objectives of the state is the 'raison d'état', when the state claims to act in order to protect its security (Jellop, pp. 62-64), but should not be exclusively identified with it, as Wildberger seems to suggest (p. 19): other possible objectives are e.g. clientelism as in the Roman republic or parliamentarism as in modern liberal democracies. Even though these modern elements do not fit the ancient evidence without further ado, Wildberger's approach is thus both refreshing as well as exciting.[3] For those already familiar with the ancient evidence, the book allows the opportunity to rethink it; for those who lack this familiarity, the book is an opportunity to make clear the relevance of Stoic political thought to rethinking the modern conception of the state.

Wildberger is well aware of the difficulties that go with this approach. In the first chapter she starts with the problem of translating the Greek (and later also Latin) terminology in the vernacular languages, including the translation of the Greek word *polis* as 'state', a word that after all got its special, political meaning in the early modern period only, and achieved its classic expression in the first chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince*. In the second chapter Wildberger brings up four Stoic definitions of the state, as they are extant in three later sources: Dio of Prusa (1st century CE), Clement of Alexandria (2nd century CE), and Stobaeus (5th century CE). In the subsequent chapters she discusses these four definitions carefully, relating them to other evidence from the point of view of these four elements. What is the territory that goes with the state thus defined? Does it refer to a local state or rather to the world at large? Who are its citizens: are these 'perfect' human beings only? What are its institutions? What is its overall objective?

In chapter 3 Wildberger deals with the evidence about 'local' states, downplaying the accounts according to which the early Stoics would have outright rejected the institutions of these traditional 'dwellings', like temples and courts, claiming that the early Stoics would have declared them unnecessary only. What really matters, and this brings her to the objective of the local states,

2 G. Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Häring, 1914); B. Jellop, *The State. Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

3 With B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), it may be asked whether understanding the 'other' is ever possible?

is that they accommodate the essentially social and rational nature of human beings.

In chapter 4 Wildberger discusses the first of the two major contributions of the Stoics to the history of political thought (cf. p. 13): their alleged conception of the 'world' (*kosmos*) as a state. She is more cautious, claiming that the Stoics 'were somewhat less hesitant to call the cosmos a *politeia* than a *polis*' (p. 63). *Politeia* should then be understood, not so much as constitution, but as political practice. This practice can be used both with regard to the world itself (which the Stoics after all considered as a living being) as well as with regard to its inhabitants. Chapter 5 deals with the Stoics' other major contribution to the history of political thought: their conception of the 'common' law, which in the later tradition is referred to as 'natural' law. The Stoics identified law with the divine active principle of reason pervading the world or with – in Wildberger's formulation – 'God in his function as Law' (p. 72). In the standard formulation in our sources this function is characterised as 'prescribing what is to be done and prohibiting what is not to be done'. In chapter 6 the obvious follow-up question is about world-citizenship, about who is capable of 'following the divine Commander' (p. 89). Here the Stoics made a distinction between those human beings who always make correct judgments ('sages') and the vast majority of human beings who are not (yet) able to do so ('fools'). Whereas only sages have full citizenship, Wildberger argues that fools are part of the cosmic population, too, but that their citizenship is more restricted: they participate as either slaves, exiles, or children. In chapter 7 the topic is the relation between the world governed by the divine common law and the particular local states: she stresses the non-utopian character of the common law, with which in principle not only human beings could bring themselves in agreement: also local states with their local laws could do so.

In the last chapters Wildberger moves away from the analytical framework, providing a diachronic overview of the engagements with practical politics of the early Stoics (chapter 8) and of the Roman Stoics, both in the later Republic and in the early Empire (chapter 9). In the final chapter she discusses some moments in the reception of Stoic political thought, with Lipsius, Kant and Nussbaum. Whereas Nussbaum often stresses the Aristotelian background of her capabilities approach, Wildberger makes clear how much this approach also owes to the Stoics, especially with regard to dignity and human rights. As for Lipsius, Wildberger's account (p. 205) of the conflict with Coornhert in the period of the Dutch Revolt (rather than Wars) is somewhat infelicitous: where in his concern for 'safety and stability' (*constantia*) Lipsius propagates religious coercion, the humanist (more so than Calvinist) Coornhert, an early defender

of the freedom of religion, objected that such coercion is only desirable if one were able to decide which religion is the right one.[4] The volume closes off with an excellent, up-to-date bibliography, and two indexes: one of the sources, the other of selected Greek and Latin terms. The book is well produced, with some typos still remaining.[5]

The account Wildberger thus offers is engaging, both with regard to her interpretation of the evidence and – as will be clear by now – with regard to her application of the modern theory of the state to this evidence. Even at the points at which one could disagree with her interpretation (both the limited evidence as well as the chosen theoretical framework obviously allow for leeway here), she offers her readers food for thought.

Of course, there are limitations, too. Wildberger's choice for the modern point of view makes that the intellectual background against which the Stoics developed their political thinking is mentioned only in passing. Those who are seeking answers to questions such as 'whom were the Stoics inspired by?' or 'whom did they argue against?' will have to look elsewhere. As for her analysis of Stoic political thought, the focus is on the continuity of Stoic thought rather than on the differences that existed among the Stoics, especially between the early Stoics and the middle Stoics, such as Panaetius and his pupil Hecaton, both from Rhodes. Different from the anticonventionalist early Stoics, these middle Stoics, active in late Republican Rome, appeared to have presented a version of Stoicism more palatable to the traditional taste of the nobility they catered for. It is this version of Stoicism, as transmitted and adapted by Cicero in his *On Duties*, that would come to play a major role in the (early) modern reception of Stoicism.[6] But then with regard to these Roman Stoics Wildberger rightly makes the point that here there remains still much work to be done (p. 169).

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4 See J. Lipsius, *Politica. Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, J. Waszink ed. (Van Gorcum, 2004), p. 117, to which n. 764 should have referred.

5 See, for instance, De (p. 76 n. 203), influental (p. 79), Rhodus, diplmatic (p. 165), Reasoing (p. 236), Politica (p. 242); De Bom et al. 2011 is referred to in n. 754, but omitted from the bibliography.

6 Compare, for instance, O. Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).