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BOOK REVIEWS

Andrew Murray, *Thinking about Political Things: An Aristotelian Approach to Pacific Life* (The Marist Series 3; Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), i-xiv, 193 pp.

In three years of teaching philosophy to Papua New Guinean nationals in a Catholic seminary in the Highlands, my most successful class was a course on economic and political theory. The brighter students embraced the economists who gave them the conceptual tools they needed to understand their own experience of the great changes and constant clashes in worldviews that have taken place since Western contact, which in some places in PNG was only in the 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s. For example, studying the economic theories of John Locke and Adam Smith empowered my students to understand the presuppositions of Westerners, including missionaries, who tried to buy pieces of land for axes and razorblades, and to articulate their own traditional understanding of land as communally owned and inalienable from the community. For myself, a highly educated American, such intellectual empowerment is one of the primary goals of all my classes. I wish to mediate to my students the best of the Western intellectual tradition so that they can acquire the concepts and develop the critical thinking skills which will enable them to navigate successfully their future roles as priests in a society in which traditional, Christian (in different varieties), and secular values and practices exist side by side, sometimes in competition, sometimes in synthesis, and all too often with inconsistencies. My goal is not to Americanize or Westernize my students, for I have no delusion that Western societies are ideal societies or that American values are the same as Christian values. Rather, it is to develop in them the critical and speculative thinking skills that are taken for granted in Western liberal arts education, so that my students can be liberated in their mental life, even as their country was politically liberated forty years ago. Now, having read Andrew Murray's *Thinking about Political Things*, I wish that it had been on hand to use as a text in my economic and political theory course, for he and I share a similar vision of the service that a classically-trained philosopher can offer to the people of the Pacific.

Thinking about Political Things is “a work of political education” (7). Murray seeks to use the topics, distinctions, and concepts found in Aristotle’s political works to illuminate the political situations and problems of the Pacific island countries and to give Pacific Islanders the conceptual tools needed to better address them. One thesis of the book is that modern political theory, which began with Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) and continued with philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), is ill-suited for Pacific life and that the Pacific Islanders were ill-served when the various colonial powers sought to implant the political structures of the modern nation state upon their former possessions. The modern state arose out of the old European monarchies, which had sought to establish centralized control over relatively large territories and populations (e.g., France, Spain). According to Murray, modern political theory assumes that humans are naturally solitary individuals, motivated by a desire for pleasure, who are at war with each other. Realizing the difficulties of anarchy, the people of a region voluntarily give their power to a sovereign (whether a king or parliament), who has a monopoly on lethal force. This sovereign maintains the peace and enforces economic contracts, through threat of irresistible force, so that the people have the security needed to prosper and live “relaxed and comfortable” lives (151). Modern states generally treat ethics and personal happiness as a private matter to be taught by religion, allowing people to pursue diverse lifestyles and contrary understandings of happiness so long as they do not harm others. In their 20th century incarnations, modern societies are expected to generate enough income for a complex bureaucracy, strong military forces, and extensive government services.

While the modern state has been relatively successful in large, multi-racial countries with plentiful resources, such as the United States, and in smaller European countries with people who readily identify as a single nation (Denmark, France), Murray argues that this model and theory are simply out of place in the Pacific. In the current Pacific countries, there is little tradition of strong, centralized government or of the rule of written law. Apart from Tonga, which alone escaped colonization, most of the present national boundaries are artificial legacies of colonialism that either group together people of different ethnic backgrounds (such as PNG and the Northern Solomons) or divide up the more natural grouping (PNG and

West Papua, the Samoas, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands). Populations – Nauru has a population of 10,000, Guam has 160,000, Vanuatu 262,000, PNG has the most at 7 million – and natural resources tend to be small and scattered, so that it is simply unrealistic to expect that the Pacific nations will be able to develop the complex economies of the West or even of Southeast Asia. Colonial population shifts have also resulted in large originally non-native populations in some countries such as Fiji and the Mariana Islands. More importantly, pre-political structures such as the family, village, and tribe tend to be foundational in the personal identity of Pacific Islanders, so that the Western emphasis on individualism is simply alien. Pacific Islanders traditionally experienced life holistically, meaning that spiritual, social, economic, and political relations were all tied together. As a result, the Western practice of assuming different roles and dividing different spheres of life from each other (e.g. religion and politics) presents difficulties. Therefore, Murray concludes, “Too often, Pacific island countries have received constitutions, laws, and policy that might better suit their large neighbours. It is now time for them to learn from one another about how to best to adapt the kind of life possible in their countries to a world in which global forces play an increasingly significant part” (42).

Murray is right that Aristotle can help Pacific islands develop their own alternative models to the modern state, because Aristotle (384–322 BC) himself is pre-modern. The ancient Mediterranean world mostly consisted of small political communities (city-states) much more similar in scale to island nations than to most modern states. While Greece had advanced literature and arts and trade, much of society was still concerned with food production, and pre-political structures such as tribes still existed. Perhaps reacting to Plato’s abstract political theory, Aristotle studied how the various city-states in Greece actually functioned, and thus his political theory is infused with realism and an eye for detail that can help contemporary readers to rethink their presuppositions about politics and to be open to new possibilities. The gulf between Aristotle and most modern political thinkers is clearly expressed by Aristotle himself:

It is manifest therefore that a country is not merely the sharing of a common locality for the purpose of preventing mutual injury and exchanging goods. These are necessary pre-conditions of a country’s

existence, yet nevertheless, even if all these conditions are present, that does not make a country, but a country is a partnership of families and of clans in living well and its object is a full and independent life (*Politics* III.5.1280b30–35).¹

Aristotle goes on to say that friendship is the goal and the glue of social life, so that politics seeks not just living in common but citizens doing beautiful deeds for and with each other. For Aristotle, a country is more than just a mutual defence pact directed towards economic prosperity. It is a community united in friendship directed towards a common vision of the good life (happiness) in which all its members are to share. The political community is built upon the pre-existing natural communities of the family and tribe and is not in competition with them. Aristotle's description of political life fits my own experience of life in PNG, in which local communities seek right internal and external relations (friendships, *wanbel tru*) in order to achieve *gutpela sindaun* (the good, peaceful life). Thus, in this area and many others, Aristotle can help Pacific Islanders to think more clearly and deeply about political concepts they already have, rather than to replace their traditional political ideas with modern political theories.

Thinking about Political Things outlines most of the topics and concepts of Aristotle's *Politics* in ten short and easy-to-read chapters. Some material from Aristotle's works on *Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics* is also included, as are insightful contrasts with modern political theory. Murray often uses examples from the political situations of various Pacific nations as illustrations and applications of Aristotle's ideas. Additionally, the book contains four "excursions" on the *wantok* system in Melanesian, Fiji's ongoing constitutional crisis, Tonga's successful monarchical government, and on the attempts of the native peoples of the Mariana Islands and Micronesia to survive colonization and achieve political autonomy. These excursions both discuss the specific political realities of the Pacific and use Aristotle's concepts to illuminate them. A modified version of the first excursion appears in this issue of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*. To aid the reader unfamiliar with Aristotle, especially those who may be inspired to read the philosopher directly, Murray includes an outline of the

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944). All quotations from the *Politics* are from this translation.

Politics and a chart showing how the chapters in *Thinking about Political Things* line up with the chapters of Aristotle's works. Finally, to aid the reader unfamiliar with the Pacific nations, Murray has included a chart of basic facts about the different nations (land area, population, GNP, political status) and extensive maps. This book is a model for making philosophy accessible to different audiences. I will now present detailed summaries of these chapters and then of the excursions, with additional comments that seek to clarify and, in some places, correct Murray's explanations of Aristotle's political thought.

Chapter 1 explains the purpose and thesis of the book, as summarized above, including an introduction to Aristotle and his writings. Murray notes sympathetically here and throughout the book that Pacific Islanders are annoyed when their countries are said to be "weak states" (1), for this implies that they have failed to correctly implement the model of the modern state. He suggests that the perceived failure may not lie with Pacific Islanders themselves, but is a conceptual failure of the West and former and current colonial powers to imagine alternative models of political communities, models that better fit the obvious fact that Pacific life is materially and culturally quite different from life in North America and Europe. All too often the good aspects of Pacific life – close communities with distinct traditions, food and shelter for almost all, close connections to the land and sea, and the ability to be at peace in the present rather than ever scrambling to get ahead – are not properly recognized and celebrated. That happiness is not the same as economic growth and may not depend upon strong central government is something that the West has forgotten, but that Aristotle and the Pacific recognize.

Chapter 2 draws upon *Politics* I to discuss the formation of countries. In contrast to Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau, who imagine humans as originally living solitary and autonomous lives, Aristotle says that humans are naturally social and form extended households (parents and children, master and servants) and village communities in order to survive and because our rational and talkative nature orients us toward community life. These pre-political communities unite to form a political community or country so that the people can be secure and self-sufficient, and also because only a political company enables "the full flowering of the human nature" (14). Aristotle also distinguishes different kinds of rule: husband

over wife, parents over children, master over servant, king over subject, and citizen over citizen. To extend fatherly rule into politics is paternalism; to extend mastery rule into politics is despotism; and both fail to fully achieve a political community. The true virtue of a citizen consists in knowing how to rule according to the law and how to be ruled by the law. To me, this is a tremendous insight into the difficulty that non-Western countries have with democracy sliding into autocracy. The virtue of every prime minister and president can be measured by their willingness to be ruled by another. Any leader who places himself above the rule of law and the electoral process is a poor citizen who threatens the existence of the political community.

Here and in a later discussion in Chapter 9, Murray notes that Aristotle views the husband and wife as complementing each other, but not as being equals in the marriage relationship. Aristotle clearly indicates that it is barbarous for the husband to treat his wife as a servant or property. Marriage is a partnership in which the husband and wife complement each other's virtues and perform complementary roles in the household. He teaches that the rule of the husband over the wife is political insofar as it is for the good of the family (and not merely for the good of the husband) and involves deliberation and a division of household authority, but the rule is not political insofar as the authority is not shared equally and the wife never rules the husband.² While I find Aristotle's perpetual subordination of the wife problematic, his account of the household is certainly close to the traditional roles that men and women play in maintaining the household and family in the Pacific. Therefore, Aristotle's account of the household could help Pacific Islanders develop their own understanding of the husband and wife having equal but distinct authority in the family.

Chapter 3 uses Aristotle's criticisms (in *Politics* II) of ideal states, as presented by other philosophers, and of actual constitutions to discuss the need for statesmen to learn from the experiences of other nations, especially those with similar living conditions, and to avoid the error of political rationalism, which assumes that there is one best political model that should be imposed regardless of the circumstances. Murray explains

² According to Aristotle, in a republic, men of equal virtue take turns ruling and being ruled by each other. In marriage, the rule always belongs to the husband, though he is supposed to delegate to his wife authority over household tasks that women are more fit to accomplish. See *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.10.1160b33–38 and *Politics* I.5. 1259a40–1259b4.

that for Aristotle there are four senses of the best constitution: (i) the best possible without qualification; (ii) the best that certain circumstances allow; (iii) the best a certain people may achieve; and (iv) the best that is generally achievable. One of the basic points of *Thinking About Political Things* is that Pacific politicians ought to think about what is best for their country in terms of (ii) and (iii), and that Pacific communities should not be judged against (i). Summarizing Aristotle's criticism of the communal society that Plato presents in the *Republic*, Murray discusses the questions of what brings political unity to Pacific nations and the value of individuals having enough land to enable themselves to learn responsibility and generosity.

Chapters 4, 5, and 7 cover the heart of the *Politics*: Aristotle's detailed discussions of citizenship, the various kinds of constitutions, the absolutely best constitution, the best constitution generally achievable, and how to keep the political community from collapsing. Within these general topics, Murray raises additional political "things to think about" such as the composition of and requirements for human happiness, the different kinds of political offices, and the nature of political speech. Here I offer my own summary of Aristotle on constitutions in order to clarify and supplement Murray's presentation. Most fundamentally, a citizen is a person eligible to hold political office and to participate in political deliberations. The political community is composed of the country's citizens, therefore, if political power is concentrated in the hands of a single person, Aristotle doubts whether the inhabitants of that country are properly citizens and whether a political community truly exists there. In general, Aristotle supports a wide distribution of at least some political power to the larger community, perhaps through voting or jury duty, so that the majority of the community feels personally involved in the political process. Aristotle begins his analysis of constitutions simply by repeating Plato's analysis in the *Statesman* that one can distinguish between rule that is directed towards the happiness of the whole community and is, therefore, just, and rule that is directed towards the short-term benefit of those who are ruling and is, therefore, unjust. One can then distinguish whether a single person, a few, or the majority of people are ruling, and thus identify the following pairs of just and unjust constitutions: monarchy and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, and republic and democracy. I note that by "aristocracy" Aristotle does not mean the rule of landed nobility, but the rule of the best

qualified. Then, Aristotle moves beyond Plato to ask what are the qualities that entitle one to political power in the different constitutions. In the three just constitutions, office is awarded on the basis of moral and intellectual virtue. In the best constitution without qualification, the citizens will recognize either one person of outstanding virtue as king (monarchy) or will cultivate a cadre of talented individuals who will take turns ruling (aristocracy).³ In terms of a second best constitution, if the general populace has developed moral virtues such as moderation, a republic can be established in which the people vote for the best rulers and the best laws (*Politics* III.11.1288a1–32). In the just constitutions, rulers and citizens alike will respect the rule of law, with the wise rulers understanding when exceptions to the letter of the law ought to be made.

In his discussion of the best constitution that is commonly achievable, Aristotle recognizes that in most political communities people are motivated not by a love of the common good, but by self-interest or the interest of their social class. Generally, each social class advances its own criteria for who ought to rule, criteria that result in the unjust constitutions that are not directed toward the flourishing of the entire community. For example, the poor say that all citizens are equally qualified to rule and thus desire direct democracy or a random distribution of offices, so that the poor are most likely to be the dominant faction in the government. The poor will treat freedom and equality as the goal of the state, so that the will and whim of the people is more powerful than the law or property rights. The rich will argue that wealth is a sign of political ability and education and will seek property qualifications on who can vote and who can hold office in order to marginalize the poor, so that the government will follow the interests of the rich. Lastly, if a society has a hereditary nobility, they will claim the right to rule based on good birth and will seek automatic inclusion within the political system. Conversely, Aristotle argues that freedom, wealth, and birth no more qualify someone to rule than they qualify that person to pilot a ship. Rather, ability is what should count. Thus, Aristotle identifies the relevant political abilities as the moral and intellectual virtues and describes in detail better and worse democracies and oligarchies, depending on the moral character of the dominant social class and the political structures they

³ Such an aristocracy is discussed in some detail in *Politics* VII and VIII, which concern the best constitution possible without qualification.

create.⁴ All too often, a political community collapses into an unending conflict between the rich and the poor, oscillating between oligarchy and democracy with periods of tyranny when one side commits itself to a strong man. Yet all is not doom and gloom, for Aristotle argues that skilled statesmen can create a constitution that blends together certain aspects of democracy and oligarchy so that the different social classes are involved in some aspect of the political process and, thus, the whole political community comes to embrace the constitution. Insofar as a blended constitution is directed towards the preservation of the country and not the interest of any one faction, such a blended constitution is called a republic. If this constitution also results in virtuous men being chosen as leaders, then it can even be considered an aristocracy. For example, this kind of aristocratic republic may involve the poor by allowing all to vote for office-holders and requiring office-holders to be publically audited at the end of their term. Voting itself has an aristocratic element because it involves choosing the best candidate for the job. At the same time, certain offices may have property qualifications, which may result in more educated people running for office. Aristotle leaves the details of this best widely achievable and most stable constitution to the actual statesmen.

As Murray indicates, the value of Aristotle's analysis for the Pacific is manifold. For example, governments should seek to involve the whole of their populace while also being able to govern effectively. Governments must avoid shifting into *de facto* oligarchies in which only the rich can successfully run for election. Aristotle opens up the possibility of an incredible variety of constitutional forms in which different methods can be used to connect different social groups to the political process. For example, whereas the modern state makes little provision for hereditary nobility or traditional chiefs, the Pacific nations ought to try to connect their constitution to their traditions, as, for example, Tonga does with its mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Given the relatively

⁴ Murray says that oligarchs claim that wealth merits political office, democrats that freedom merits political office, and the virtuous say that capability merits political office. He claims that for Aristotle these are only partial views (70-71). This, however, is inaccurate. For Aristotle virtue, both moral and intellectual, is the real qualification for political office, just as skill in navigation is what qualifies one to be a pilot. Similarly, Murray says that those who seek virtue have a partial grasp of the human good (146), whereas for Aristotle the human good or happiness consists in virtuous activity.

small size of Pacific countries, experimentation with blended constitutional forms should be easier to accomplish in the Pacific than it is in large Western countries. Unlike the modern ideal of the stable state, Aristotle pictures a country as a living organism whose leaders must direct towards the common good in ever-changing circumstances. Murray also raises a number of questions about how to apply Aristotle's ideas to the Pacific. For example, who are the poor in Pacific society when urban areas tend to have cash economies but few gardens, and rural areas have subsistence economies but plentiful food? Additionally, Murray emphasizes that the distribution of political power and the distribution of the resources and wealth of a country are both matters of justice, in which the goal should be for as many as possible to be satisfied, so that they will love and support the constitution. Murray and Aristotle argue that the development of a middle economic class generally brings stability to the government and is a sign that the constitution is directed towards the good of all. The harmonization of varied claims for power and resources is especially important in multicultural Pacific societies.

Chapter 6 invites readers to think about what may be the best constitution given the particular circumstances of a country. Murray reinterprets Aristotle's comments on how race, climate, and economic activities affect a people's character to mean that a country's culture or cultures must be taken into account in setting up its political institutions. The small populations and resources of Pacific nations also make it difficult for them to achieve the material prosperity now taken for granted in the West. Creative partnerships among island nations or with Western nations may allow Pacific Islanders to enjoy certain goods and services. Perhaps it should be mentioned that these partnerships should not be exploitative, as when Western countries bribe Pacific nations to take in unwanted people (as when Australia set up detainment centres in Nauru and PNG or the USA sent terrorism detainees to Palau) or to vote a certain way in the United Nations. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on when monarchical government is appropriate.

Chapter 8 discusses in detail how Pacific nations might foster the happiness of their citizens. For Aristotle, happiness or human flourishing consists of developing and living out the moral virtues, which enable us to control our emotions and desires rather than being controlled by them, and

the intellectual virtues, which perfect our reasoning and enable us to make wise decisions and grasp the truth. Aristotle distinguishes entertainment whose goal is relaxation, from virtuous political activity which is strenuous but necessary for a flourishing community, and the activities of leisure, such as art, science, and speculative thought, in which man's highest rational capacities are developed and expressed. As Aristotle says in *Ethics* VI.12–13, political activity is directed at making happiness possible, while wisdom is happiness itself. How can a country steer its citizens away from the life of pleasure and ensure some leisure for them all? Can a country inculcate the moral and intellectual virtues in its citizens through education? Murray notes that the Pacific has a strong tradition of informally educating children who watch and imitate their parents at work, so that young children can be surprisingly self-sufficient, being able to cook their own food, fish, cross mountains, make gardens, etc. Conversely, if my own experiences in PNG are representative of the region, having the appropriate curriculum, material resources, and trained personnel for formal education is a continuous challenge for Pacific nations. In their appreciation for the educational and communal value of song and dance, Plato and Aristotle are quite close to Pacific Islanders, some of whom even identify the sing-sing (traditional festival) as a defining human activity.⁵ In these questions about education and festivals, Plato's *Laws* fills in the religious aspect which Aristotle lacks. Plato argues that ethical training generally requires divine authority for it to be adapted by the whole community. Furthermore, religious festivals by their nature distribute the surplus of the community to all its members, and through song, dance, sacred drama, and traditional stories people lacking formal education or speculative ability contemplate divine realities. Even from a philosophical perspective, religion has a key role to play in the flourishing of the human community.⁶

Chapter 9 raises a number of economic issues inspired by Aristotle's pre-capitalist understanding of wealth. For Aristotle, material goods are

⁵ J.C. Goodale, *To Sing with Pigs Is Human. The Concept of Person in Papua New Guinea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

⁶ For a discussion of festival as contemplative activity, see J. Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), chapter 5, and J. Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. R. and C. Winston (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965).

properly produced to be used. To produce a good simply for the purpose of selling it for money is contrary to the nature of the thing. For example, a shoe's natural purpose is to be worn, not to be sold. Therefore, over 2,000 years before Karl Marx, Aristotle understood that trade alienates one from the natural purposes of material goods. Furthermore, Murray focuses on Aristotle's idea that wealth is only valuable insofar as it enables a household to live well and virtuously. For natural wealth such as food, land, and timber, there is a natural maximum beyond which a household can no longer use its wealth but must give it away or trade it. There is no such limit regarding money, which does not rot or revert to jungle, but Aristotle firmly believes that money is a means to facilitate fair trade between people. By itself, money is useless and thus cannot bring about human happiness. Here, I wish Murray had discussed in greater depth the great difference between pre-capitalist understandings of wealth and those of capitalism. In capitalism, land, people, and money are commoditized: they are valued not for their use but for their ability to make money, which is seen as an end in itself. Even though traditional societies sometimes commoditize people (women and slaves) and things (pigs and shells), happiness is generally understood to be found in personal relationships, and so material goods have their value insofar as they are useful for family and communal living and for maintaining personal relationships. Thus, for example, in PNG, people will earn money because they have a pressing need such as school fees or doctor bills or social obligations such as bride price or funerals; but the idea of saving money for the general future or investing it for a future profit is difficult. As Murray notes, maintaining a business is difficult because the capital for the business is often used to pay for the welfare of one's tribesmen. Murray also raises issues such as the just distribution of the land and the difference between commercial justice (a fair trade between two parties) and distributive justice (the fair distribution of goods or evils through the community). The West tends to focus almost exclusively on commercial justice, whereas traditional Pacific societies focus on distributive justice. Thus, if a community in PNG feels that it is not benefitting appropriately from a development project on its customary land, it will sometimes simply end the project regardless of the contract. Not being taken advantage of is often more important than economic development.

The book concludes in Chapter 10 with a discussion of various things that are good for humans to have and do, and the question of which are prerequisites for happiness and in which happiness consists. Murray summarizes the main themes of his study and argues once again that Aristotle's political thought is much more appropriate to the realities of political life in the Pacific than is modern political theory. Murray closes with a series of questions for Pacific Islanders to ask themselves. For example, what intellectual and moral virtues do Pacific people need for successful living? What bodily goods and what external goods are necessary and desired, and how can people be moderate and just in their desires for and distribution of such goods? He also challenges Westerners to humbly acknowledge the good to be found in Pacific life and the evils found in modern Western societies. Finally, a brief epilogue challenges Pacific Islanders to respond to Murray's retrieval of classical Western political theory with a retrieval and renewal of their own "Pacific traditions of political theory and practice" (155).

Murray's four excursions into the political life of particular Pacific nations are meant to demonstrate how Aristotle's concepts and categories can clarify and even illuminate the value of aspects of Pacific political life that modern political theory finds problematic. They are meant to validate the relevance of Aristotle for thinking about political things in the Pacific. The first excursion, which is on the Melanesian *wantok* system, is a good example of the fruit of Murray's method. He correctly explains that *wantok* is an analogous concept, meaning that it covers a number of different realities that are related to a central meaning. The *wantok* system is an expansion of the traditional obligation to support one's tribesmen to people who are not tribesmen but who share a commonality when they are in a foreign setting. For example, if two men from Enga (a Highlands province) were in Chimbu (another Highlands province), they would expect mutual support from one another because of their common origin. However, if an Engan and a Chimbu man were in the distant capital of Port Moresby, they may expect support from each other as Highlanders. Finally, if an Engan and a man from the capital were in Australia, they would expect support from each other as PNG nationals. As Murray notes, the *wantok* system can easily disrupt political activities modelled on the Western system because those in power and those providing services will often give preferential

treatment to their *wantoks* and tribesmen, who will in turn support them in elections. Politics turns into a spoils system in which politicians seek to acquire public funds for the benefit of themselves and their tribesmen. Modern political theory, which generally considers only individuals and an all-powerful government, can only view the *wantok* system as a problem. Murray, on the other hand, argues that the *wantok* system represents pre-political relationships and obligations that ought to be the foundation of the political community of PNG. As Aristotle himself noted, a country is created by families and clans seeking to achieve the good life together. Before Western contact and colonization, PNG was divided into some 800 different linguistic groups and even more tribal groups, with most people being confined by fear to a small geographical area. Today, PNG nationals can travel throughout their country and most can communicate with each other through *Tok Pisin*. While most PNG nationals only feel at home in their tribe's area, one must acknowledge the tremendous progress that PNG has made in forging a national identity and the fact that the tribes are the foundation of PNG society. Therefore, political institutions and practices must be modified in order to take the pre-political reality into account. One example of this is the current preferential voting system in which each citizen gets three votes, with the expectation that the first vote will go to the candidate his tribe has chosen. Additionally, citizens should be educated in the moral virtues required for a just distribution of PNG's limited services and resources. Finally, I would suggest that the churches of PNG need to take a strong stand against favouritism and corruption by distributing their own offices and services to those who truly deserve them and by not accepting inappropriate gifts from the government.

The excursion on Fiji looks at the difficulties that the country has had since independence in 1970 of determining who is a citizen, of forging a harmonious national identity, and of fairly distributing political power among native Fijians and Indo-Fijians (originally sent to Fiji to administer the British colony there). Fiji continues to seek the best constitution for its post-colonial circumstances. Murray summarizes the intricate constitutional arrangements meant to resolve these issues and says that it is too early to know whether the 2013 constitution will succeed in uniting the people. He himself offers the Aristotelian suggestion that the problems will only end if the two peoples can unite in true friendship.

By contrast, the excursion on Tonga cautiously acknowledges the success of Tongans in thinking through and resolving their own political problems. Favourable cultural, geographical, and historical circumstances led to Tonga transitioning from a traditional monarchy to a “constitutional government under the king” in 1870 and then to a “constitutional monarchy” in 2010 (88). Tonga appears to be a good example of a blended government since the current constitution involves a monarch, representatives of the nobles, and elected representatives of the people. Murray, however, does not develop this point.

The last excursion uses the Mariana Islands and other countries in Micronesia as an example of thinking about what constitution is best for a certain people because of their circumstances. Murray explains that these islands were often bartering pieces in the imperial squabbles between Spain, Germany, the United States, Japan, and Great Britain. The native people of the Mariana Islands are now a minority, though a strong one, in their own islands. Many of the Micronesian countries have managed to achieve autonomy while remaining in association with the USA, so that they benefit from some of the power and resources of the USA. Yet Guam still does not have political autonomy because the USA wants to continue to use it as a military base. These chapters revealed to me my own country’s disingenuousness in outwardly opposing colonialism during the twentieth century while snatching up territory in the Pacific. Murray offers interesting observations on how culture, history, and geopolitics have shaped the political possibilities of these tiny island countries, though the explicit ties to Aristotle’s political thought ultimately become tenuous.

I offer two final comments. First, I hope that *Thinking about Political Things* will produce further studies of this kind. I would love to see further application of the details of Aristotle’s political ideas to the specific challenges facing different Pacific nations. Additionally, I believe that other political and economic thinkers such as Montesquieu, a French political thinker who also argued that the constitution of a country must take into account the character of the people and their material conditions in order to be successful, would be helpful for the people of the Pacific. Plato might also be used to supplement some of Aristotle’s political ideas, especially since a number of Aristotle’s insights were probably inspired by Plato’s *Statesman* and *Laws*. Second, while Murray is right in insisting that the

good found in traditional Pacific life must be acknowledged, missionaries and Pacific Islanders alike must not romanticize life in the Pacific. At least in PNG, the life expectancy is ten years less than in the USA and fifteen less than in Australia,⁷ many people die from treatable diseases, and many people live in fear of sorcery and of the violence that follows sorcery accusations. The flourishing of rural communities is often hindered by the lack of basic educational opportunities, health services, communications, and transportation. Much thought, experimentation, and work must be done in order for Pacific nations to reach the happiness political life is directed towards.

In sum, Murray's study is far more than a retrieval of Aristotle's political thought for Pacific Islanders. It can serve as an introduction to political theory, in general, and classical political thought, in particular, as well as an introduction to the political history of the Pacific island nations. Murray has done an admirable job of producing a work of political education. I warmly recommend his book to all who wish to think more clearly and deeply about political things. I myself will use it next time I teach political theory to PNG seminarians.

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⁷ CIA, *The World Fact Book*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2102rank.html#pp>. Accessed 19 September 2016.