

## BOOK REVIEW

*Courage in the Democratic Polis: Ideology and Critique in Classical Athens.* By RYAN K. BALOT. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xiv + 408. Hardcover, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-19-9928215-8.

In this carefully argued monograph, Ryan Balot deepens our understanding of ancient democratic thought through an exploration of courage, or *andreia*. While Balot draws on his earlier work, the book's new material and comprehensive scope are significant developments. Athenian democracy, he argues, transforms courage into a "cognitively richer, more deliberate, and more purposive [virtue] than the courage of nondemocrats... In substance, courage was newly recognized as the virtue that enabled Athenians to flourish as humans beings, or to achieve *eudaimonia*" (3). Balot details the "anatomy of democratic courage" (15 *et passim*) in Pericles' funeral oration and then pursues evidence of the ideal in an impressively wide range of texts, including drama, historiography, oratory, and philosophy. This investigation connects democracy's distinctive view of courage with three linked concepts: deliberative practices, proper emotions, and eudaimonism. Balot weaves modern political theory into the work and makes an effort to connect his study to contemporary issues. The book successfully provides a holistic study of the how and why of courage in classical Athens. After an introductory chapter, the book's other fifteen chapters are divided into three main sections.

In Part I: The Periclean Ideology and its Critics, Balot lays out the contours of democratic courage as outlined in Pericles' funeral oration. As Balot convincingly argues, democratic courage is inextricably linked to freedom and deliberation (chapters 2–3). He shows that Athens converts an archaic, heroic virtue into its distinctive democratic form not in spite of, but because of the deliberative context of Athenian institutions and ideologies. Pericles' deployment of a self-reflective shame to motivate courage and his appeal to *eudaimonia* as a proper goal are important to Balot's account.

While Balot fleshes out his claims with numerous citations from ancient authors, I found his in-depth readings of individual sources particularly profitable, such as the focus on the funeral oration. In chapter 4, his careful analysis of a passage in Herodotus (7.139.5–6) is an example of the book at its best. Balot pinpoints Herodotus' use of the participle *helomenoi* as linking “deliberative desire” to Athenian success and courageous action (91–97). Rather than accept traditional modes of courage and warfare, the Athenians deliberate upon the means and ends of courage. Balot shows that this flexibility ultimately allows Athens to create an effective strategy against the Persians. This example also illustrates the practical result of democratic courage and its deliberative aspect. Unfortunately, almost no Greek is provided in the discussion of such passages, with the exception of transliterated key terms (e.g. *helomenoi*), and some sources are compromised by too much summary and too little quotation and unpacking.

In the second half of Part I, Balot explores three critics of the Periclean ideal of courage: Thucydides, Plato, and Isocrates. He argues in chapter 5 that Thucydides criticizes Athenians for not achieving the ideal and actually being motivated by a more conventional courage, which fuels imperialism and works against itself. Next, Balot offers a reading of Plato's *Laches* (chapter 6). In his view, Plato argues that democracy is unable to accomplish the necessary unification of opposites and thus undercuts itself. Finally, in chapter 7 he turns to Isocrates and his interesting revisionist history of Agamemnon and Sparta. Balot demonstrates that Isocrates reinterprets Athenian imperialism in a more positive light while still interacting with the Periclean ideal of courage.

Part II: Equality, Emotion, and Civic Education is a bit sprawling compared to the tightly argued Part I. Chapter 8 brings equality to bear upon courage and the military. Balot then introduces emotions in chapter 9, using traditional and foreign forms of courage as comparanda. Chapters 10 and 11 present challenging, but ultimately successful, attempts to rescue anger and shame from association with baseness through appealing to the proper training of emotions. He argues that what separates democratic shame from a base emotion is that “citizens played a key role in fashioning, shaping, modifying, interpreting, and communicating these emotions, along with the ideals on which they were based” (242).

Chapters 12 and 13, which delve further into the emotional education imparted by theater, provide excellent close readings of passages from comedy and tragedy. In chapter 12, Balot analyses Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* as an examination of democracy's fusion of courage and *sōphrosunē*. In the following chapter, he weighs in on the current debate of tragedy's relationship to Athenian democracy, arguing that tragedy does not function as a direct influence on political decisions but encourages self-reflection as a "theater of self-knowledge" (278).

Part III: Athens' Ideology of Eudaimonism is the shortest section and feels somewhat tacked on. In order to examine the ends of democratic courage, Balot returns in chapter 14 to the Athenians' eudaimonistic framework. In the next chapter, he judiciously raises two modern objections to courage as an intrinsic good in order to highlight the uniqueness and, in his opinion, superiority of the Athenian outlook. Both the "egoistic" and "altruistic" challenges presuppose a rigid distinction between self and community. Balot responds by focusing on the Athenian understanding of the self as essentially embedded within the community, adopting M. Ostwald's concept of citizenship as "sharing in" (*metechein*) the *polis*<sup>1</sup> and filling it out with the modern notion of relational autonomy (citing J. Nedelsky).<sup>2</sup> He then looks at Herodotus' story of Tellus the Athenian to work out how such ideas were expressed in antiquity. The final chapter answers three challenges to the democratic conception of courage and reconsiders modern democracy and courage in light of the foregoing arguments.

There are a few more typos than one expects from Oxford University Press. Most are minor, but a few are more serious. These include a missing header for a section on Euripides' *Trojan Women* (291) and incomplete bibliographical references (page xi refers to Balot "forthcoming c,"

<sup>1</sup> Ostwald, M. 1996. "Shares and Right: 'Citizenship' Greek Style and American Style." In Ober and Hendrick, *Dēmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, 49-61.

<sup>2</sup> Nedelsky, J. 2011. *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy, and Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Balot does not use the term 'autonomy' in the book, but he seems to be engaging with the idea.

which is not in the bibliography; page 254 n. 24 refers to Osborne 1985, but 1985 a, b, and c are listed; page 256 notes 3-4 cite Miller 2000, but do not specify whether a or b).

Balot's book is a thoughtful and well-researched contribution to democratic scholarship. It will be useful for scholars and graduate students thinking about courage, democratic ideology, historical perspectives on political theory, shame, and the development of Platonic and Aristotelian thought.

NAOMI T. CAMPA

*Oberlin College*, [ncampa@oberlin.edu](mailto:ncampa@oberlin.edu)