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Policraticus (Book Review)

G. Scott Davis

University of Richmond, sdavis@richmond.edu

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John of Salisbury. *Policraticus*. Edited and translated by Cary J. Nederman. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. 237. \$44.50 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Pupil of Abelard, confidant of Becket, finally bishop of Chartres, John witnessed many of the key political and cultural events of the twelfth century. Antedating both, he stands between Aquinas, with his emphasis on the common good and the prince as good shepherd, and Machiavelli, with his interest in history and the machinations of the court; the *Policraticus* is an excellent window into the moral and political ideals of the twelfth century.

Nederman provides somewhat less than half the text in a translation for the most part readable and accurate. His editing, however, is suspect for eliminating much of the uniquely medieval quality of John's text, notably the whole of book 2, with its discussions of providence, astrology, and dreams. Also unfortunate is the absence of chapter 7 of book 3, with its vision of political life as a cosmic comedy. Throughout, Nederman seems insensitive to the biblical and patristic background, failing to note, for example, that John

follows the passage from Terence (p. 145) with an allusion to Psalm 137, an important political text for Augustine, or that “thrones toward the north” (p. 218) refers to Isaiah 14:13, a text on the fate of tyrants. More help for the student befits a text in this series.

S. D.