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Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics (review)

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(Review)

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comparison to the more popular Elizabethan and Jacobean playtexts, thereby lending the legitimacy of the Bard to the French plays. One wonders if the introduction had been written by a scholar of French Renaissance theater, would the plays have been championed for their own sake rather than for connections to much-studied English Renaissance dramas? Hillman does attempt a certain amount of this, but ultimately falls back on the English connection, somewhat ironically stating that "scholars inevitably remain imprisoned within the myths they reject" (17). These are minor points; Hillman's translations are delightful, and make this edition a useful discussion text for a course in the history of France or the Reformation, as well as theater history or literature.

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Peter Martyr Vermigli. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*.

Ed. Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland. The Peter Martyr Library 9. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 73. Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2006. xxxii + 440 pp. index. append. bibl. \$48. ISBN: 1-931112-55-0.

Though research in recent decades recognizes the phenomenon of Renaissance Aristotelianism and its place in early Reformed theology, few examples of sixteenth-century Protestant appropriations of Aristotle have been accessible. Fortunately, this new volume illustrates not only that Aristotle was important within the Reformed academy, but also illustrates how Reformed theologians could engage the philosopher without abandoning the core of their tradition. Vermigli's commentary provides a concrete specimen of the phenomenon of Protestant scholasticism and validates newer interpretations of the movement that view scholasticism as a method of academic theology, not as reliance on medieval dogmatic assertions, elevation of reason, or uncritical devotion to Aristotle. Rather than using Aristotle as an authority, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) dissects, explains, summarizes in syllogistic form, and ends each section by comparing the *Nichomachean Ethics* to scripture. He does not simply use biblical proof-texts to defend Aristotelian propositions, but offers critical engagement with an ancient ethical system in order to cultivate virtue in his own context.

The commentary derives from Vermigli's lectures at Strasbourg from 1553 to 1556, and is unique within his primarily theological corpus. For professional reasons, he was unable to move beyond the first two chapters of Aristotle's third book. However, the value of the work rests in Vermigli's combination of skills developed at the University of Padua, Ciceronian style, and Reformed theology, which finds sufficient expression within each section. Despite a few references to Aquinas, and one to John Duns Scotus, there is little medieval influence. Instead, references to classical figures and their writings are abundant. Vermigli is far more concerned with translating Greek terms or explaining logic and grammar from ancient sources than he is with medieval controversies.

Joseph C. McLelland's fine introduction rightly notes that Vermigli maintained a theological allegiance to Augustine, but favored Aristotle's *a posteriori* epistemology and dialectic ("the only correct method of dispute" [129]), and that in this way he "maintained his two loves" of "scripture and philosophy" (xvi). Vermigli's own explanation rests on the distinction between revealed and acquired knowledge: the former derives from biblical theology, while the latter is the domain of philosophy. Philosophers, he says, "would not have strayed from the truth" had they "discussed only what creaturely knowledge has revealed about God and nature" (13). To the extent that "pagan" philosophers stay within their bounds, Vermigli considers them useful sources. He never apologizes for indulging the life of the mind, and argues that "nobody can find excessive enjoyment and undue satisfaction in the contemplation of truth or in studying physics, mathematics, or theology" (105). In the context of ethics, Aristotle's approach is useful as long as Christians recognize that virtue does not arise from the law but only as a Spirit-empowered response to the Gospel. Similarly, Vermigli is not content with Aristotle's view of happiness for mortal life, arguing that happiness in this life is always incomplete, and awaits the restoration of all things at the eschaton.

In addition to ethical discussions, Vermigli's digressions provide fascinating examples of his thought in other areas. For example, one sees the importance of Aristotelian final *telos* to later Reformed explanations of predestination, the use of Aristotle to support magisterial Protestant claims that civil government should support and defend the church and Christian piety, and the quaint scientific views of the sixteenth-century academy such as spontaneous generation, humor-based anatomy, and the notion that an Ethiopian's dark skin (something "caused by heat") can "deeply affect the soul" (334).

This volume is technically superb, and reflects a consistent team effort. Though the original Latin text contains obscure terms and phrases, and often indulges in extended detours, the English translation is clean, lucid, and allied with the best interdisciplinary research. For example, when discussing the difficulty of establishing ethical rules in a concrete context, Vermigli says that one should seek a course that is *quod nos* (366): this is translated "relative," a rendering that is sensitive both to the original text and also to modern ethical discourse. This, along with a good index and a measured use of enriching footnotes, represents the Peter Martyr Library admirably.

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Sascha Salatowsky. *De Anima: Die Rezeption der aristotelischen Psychologie im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.*

Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie 43. Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 2006. xiv + 408 pp. index. bibl. \$150. ISBN: 90-6032-374-2.

The present volume, which is the revised version of the author's PhD dissertation at the University of Berlin, deals, as the title indicates, with the reception of