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Aristotle on the Nature of Community by Adriel M. Trott (review)

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becomes the fulfilment of his potential (120). With this explanation, Alexander not only produces a plausible naturalistic account of the human *telos* without invoking supernatural or theological principles; he also incorporates the main insights of Stoic and Epicurean rivals (119–21).

Ethics after Aristotle succeeds on many fronts. It provides a quick and accessible survey of a neglected chapter of the history of philosophy and, as such, reveals new avenues for further study. It also brings to life an active tradition of engagement with a set of philosophical ideas and problems, demonstrating positions and moves that may be worth pursuing in contemporary ethical debates. Admittedly, Inwood's discussion of certain topics and philosophers is rushed or incomplete, as he himself admits, but here I think the vice actually becomes a virtue of the text: it invites us to inquire more deeply into these matters in our own research.

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Adriel M. Trott. *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xiv + 239. Cloth, \$95.00.

This is a fresh, substantial, and engaging contribution to the ongoing Aristotle revival in political philosophy and theory. Trott's project, like that of other works in this newish tradition, is not simply to interpret Aristotle but to advance an interpretation that has practical (in Aristotle's sense) significance, one that employs Aristotle-interpretation as a starting point for calling into question key elements of the modern Western political imaginary. The book is as much a contribution to democratic theory as it is to Greek philosophy. This is not at all to say that Trott's approach to the Greek texts lacks rigor. To the contrary, she presents an interpretation of the *Politics* based on careful close reading of key passages informed by a thoughtful and plausible overall sense of Aristotle's apparent intention.

Trott's take on the *Politics* starts with her claim that we cannot understand the central assertion of the *Politics*—that human beings are political animals, and that the *polis* itself exists by nature and not by mere convention—without examining what Aristotle means by 'nature,' something he does not discuss in the *Politics*. But in the *Physics*, he clearly opposes *avant la lettre* the modern Western way of treating "nature" as a system of necessity, as Kant's "heteronomy of efficient causality," as a system that opposes human reason and freedom, one that our reason strives to overcome. For Aristotle, however, nature is not such a system or a process at all—but a class of beings marked by internal causality: "I turn to Aristotle for a refreshingly distinct sense of *physis*" as "the internal source of change whereby the natural thing fulfills its end" (41). Her approach to Aristotle on nature builds on the work of other current scholars, notably Aryeh Kosman and Christopher Long.

But Trott is not interested in defending Aristotle's conception of nature against modern ones, nor in showing that the two natures are somehow compatible. Instead, she uses Aristotle on nature as a key to understanding what he means by saying that human beings are *naturally* political animals: "Being an apologist for Aristotle is not my goal . . . this project attempts to offer a better way to think about political life that comes out of understanding Aristotle in a new light in order to encourage a better way of living politically. Against a view of community that is individualist, instrumentalist, or communitarian, where each position is, in its way, exclusionary, Aristotle offers a view of community needed at this time" (13). On her reading, Aristotle understands the *polis* as a natural entity, one that contains its own end (*telos*), and whose work (*ergon*) is continuously actualizing that end. She is not saying that the *polis* is a living thing, nor that it is separate from and superior to the citizens who compose it: "The citizen and the *polis*, in contrast to the organ and the body, have the same end . . . the happiness of each human being is the same as that of the happiness of the *polis*"

(67). Political activity is natural because it coincides with human nature: “By making the active fulfillment of the human being that which makes us political, Aristotle points to the active nature of being human and being a political community. I argue in this book that the activity that makes us human is also the activity that manifests the political community in its activity: deliberating over living well, the activity of *logos*” (57).

If asked the liberal (Millian) question of which comes first, the individual or the state, Trott’s Aristotle answers “neither.” What makes us human is continuous activity of political deliberation about the meaning of living well, not adherence to any fixed law, or principle, or set of institutions; and the good Aristotelian *polis* encourages such deliberative activity (136–37, n. 2). In the context of modern democratic theorizing, her position is closer to that of agonistic politics of an Arendtian sort, than to liberal democracy, or republicanism, or even deliberative democracy of the Habermasian or Rawlsian variety—all of which she considers and criticizes from her Aristotelian perspective: “My argument hinges strongly on this point: Aristotle’s view of community keeps in view the question of whether it is achieving its end and whether the end it seeks is best” (165).

As this brief summary of a complex, nicely written, and especially well-organized book should make clear, readers of Aristotle will find much to challenge in *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*. Given its ambition and scope, Trott’s work cannot possibly deliver a fully persuasive case for her reading of the *Politics*. But this is admirable; while never fully persuasive (how could it be?), Trott’s interpretation of Aristotle’s *Politics* is plausible throughout, sharpening questions that badly need sharpening, opening the way to further discussion, both theoretical and practical.

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William E. Mann, editor. *Augustine’s Confessions: Philosophy in Autobiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xiv + 223. Cloth, \$65.00.

This collection of eight essays on Augustine’s most widely read work focuses, as William Mann says in his introduction, on Augustine as a philosopher. Not every reader will agree that Augustine did indeed philosophize. Many would insist that whatever speculation Augustine engaged in, it was solely as a theologian. Yet each of the authors in this superb volume approaches Augustine in the context of the philosophy of the late Roman world, especially Neoplatonic philosophy. Their success in showing how the themes of the *Confessions* resonate with the language of philosophers of the time—Plotinus chief among them—and wrestle with many of the same issues vindicates Mann’s claim. Anyone interested in understanding the *Confessions* will have to confront these eight essays and ponder their philosophical analysis of Augustine’s thought.

Mann has arranged the essays in the order of the part of the *Confessions* with which they principally deal. Partly as a result, the subject of each essay is often related most closely to that of the piece it follows or precedes. The reader can therefore profitably peruse the essays in just the order in which they are presented, with a cumulative argument building from one to the next. The first three pieces demonstrate how important for Augustine was the notion of an active God, intervening directly into the world. Peter King argues that Augustine drew from the Platonic tradition his vision of an ascent of the mind toward the divine. Yet in contrast to the Platonists, Augustine saw sexuality as the primary obstacle to the mind’s efforts to rise beyond itself, and he thought God’s intervention, through grace, was necessary for the enterprise’s success. According to Tomas Ekenberg, Augustine’s view of the will also borrows heavily from the philosophers, though Augustine never finally lands on a single theory of will. Again, God’s grace is necessary to set the will aright. Nicholas Wolterstorff shows how for Augustine the aim of living is the philosophers’ “good life” (*eudaimonia*). But Augustine views the good life not as the “estimable life” but rather as one that is happy or joyful. And here again, it is fully attainable only in God’s presence, after death.