
Knight's book traces the role of Aristotelian philosophy in early medieval theology, the Restoration, the Enlightenment, and the twentieth century, leading up to what its author describes as Alasdair MacIntyre's 'Revolutionary Aristotelianism' (pp. 102ff.), a political ethics of resistance and change. As such, it is both a scholarly exercise in the history of ideas and an accurate explanation of MacIntyre's position. Well-structured and tightly packed without being impenetrable, it should prove vital to contemporary work on Aristotelianism and MacIntyre and more generally useful to advanced students of political theory.

Knight's focus is on differences between what Aristotle and later Aristotelians say about action. He argues: a) that Aristotle does not separate practical philosophy from theoretical philosophy, whereas some later Aristotelians have done so; and b) that Aristotle distinguishes an activity (*praxis*) from a process of production (*poiesis*), whereas some later Aristotelians have denied that distinction. In chapter 1, we see that Aristotle's justification for the notoriously elitist and exclusive political community—the *polis*—is, on Knight's account, rooted in metaphysical biology. In order to flourish, humans require certain goods that are external to them, such as wealth, but these goods are instrumental to their flourishing, not an integral part of it. Analogously, a good political community may need producers such as slaves and child-bearers, but these individuals' being externally necessary to the *polis* does not make them internal constituents. Rather, their being 'good-for-the-sake-of' the *polis* is, for Knight's Aristotle, that which denies them citizenship and justifies their subjugation (pp. 35-36).

Chapter 2 looks at Christianity's developing theology and social philosophy under Aristotle's influence. St. Paul, for example, echoes Aristotle's communalism in urging that in order to live well, people should form local communities. Yet he differs in conceiving this kind of Christian community—the *ekklesia*—as more egalitarian and inclusive than Aristotle's (pp. 43-44). Augustinian doctrine bears a closer affinity to Aristotle's hierarchical *polis*, appealing to Christians' position in a political order that reflected the increasing institutionalization of the church (pp. 47-48).

Chapter 3 takes Aristotle into Germany via the Reformation, citing his rejection by Martin Luther—then his partial rehabilitation by Luther's colleague Phillip Melanchthon—as prefiguring the Enlightenment's departure from Aristotelian philosophy. For example, Kant sees rational contemplation of the moral law as the source of autonomous action, whereas Aristotle had subordinated practical action to the highest and divine activity of intellectual contemplation (*theoria*). By contrast, Hegel is interpreted as re-embracing a form of Aristotelianism by extending teleology—meaning here something like 'self purpose'—from individuals to history ('temporal actuality as a whole' [p. 77]), and claiming that human action upon external objects in the world is a necessary step towards self-consciousness. For Hegel, only within the structure of the institutions of civil society and the State can particular individuals act in this way (i.e. act and work effectively with others) and discover themselves as universal actors within a social whole.

Knight then tracks German Aristotelianism after Hegel along two very different routes. The first is revolutionary. The most famous of the 'left-Hegelians', Marx, collapses Aristotle's
production/activity distinction, as did Hegel. Crucially for Marx, however, the distortion of productive activity into wage labour makes workers into the means for capitalism’s ends, alienating productive workers from: a) the product that is now made for others’ profit; b) the capitalist class for which they now produce things; and c) their own nature as productive and social human beings. Unlike Hegel, Marx—more specifically the early Marx—holds that only with the abolition of these material conditions, i.e. the abolition of this division of labour, could productive activity again become the actualization of characteristically human potential. The second route is conservative. Heidegger most conspicuously wrested Aristotle’s practical philosophy from theory, taking the discovery of ‘the most authentic mode of being human’ (p. 90), Dasein, to be a praxis. Knight sees in this the beginnings of an anti-theoretical Aristotelianism which he attributes to, among others, Hans-Georg Gadamer. This post-Heideggerian ‘German neo-Aristotelianism’ (p. 100) is inherently conservative, argues Knight. Firstly, it denies theory’s part in disclosing truth as something other than the prevailing convention; and secondly, it justifies the already existing hierarchy of institutions and labour.

The fourth and concluding chapter, comprising half of the book, puts MacIntyre nearer to Marx than to Gadamer. Some have interpreted MacIntyre as a nostalgic conservative, or as a young Marxist who has since moved on entirely from radical philosophy. Endorsing neither of these interpretations, Knight’s MacIntyre has long been, and still is, resistant to the power structures embodied in the institutions of capitalism or justified by that which he sees, and rejects, as ‘mechanistic’ pseudo-Marxism (p. 105). MacIntyre does not try to obviate the theoretical aspect of Aristotelianism, as did Heidegger and Gadamer, but replaces Aristotle’s metaphysical biology with historical sociology. The notion of a human telos—of humans as they could be—is, on this account, now freed from the workings of individual human bodies and minds, and placed in the world of social activity. MacIntyre’s idea of traditions is one of plural, rival, and self-questioning schools of rationality. Far from being monolithic and conservative, this idea presupposes rather than suppresses the possibility of revision and revolution. In keeping with this critical ethos, MacIntyre’s Dependent Rational Animals (1999) sees him embrace the biological aspects of Aristotle’s naturalism, though as complementing rather than superseding sociology.

If MacIntyre’s philosophy is one of social resistance, who is supposed to resist what, and how? MacIntyre’s ‘practices’ are cooperative, social activities; engagement in which enables discovery of the goods internal to that practice, which accordingly develops ‘excellences’, or virtues (p. 147). Practices are seen by MacIntyre as a source of resistance to the corrupting influence of institutions. For example, the practice of healthcare is one in which the practitioner can find goods internal to her practising healthcare. In so practising, she fosters the necessary excellences—virtues of compassion, empathy, practical judgment, and justice. The healthcare institution in which she works is necessary to sustain the practice, but it typically evolves into an agent of bureaucratic management, concerned more with the goods external to practice; e.g. of finance, or meeting targets. MacIntyre sees the manipulation of workers and practitioners by institutions and their managers as a fetter on humans’ teloi. He sees practices as parents of the virtues and an opposition to this fetter.

It is worth noting that MacIntyre endorses Knight’s account of his own philosophy. MacIntyre has called an earlier prototype ‘accurate and perceptive’ (‘Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good’, in K. Knight [ed.], The MacIntyre Reader [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998], p. 235). More recently he has spoken of the corrupting and ‘illusory’ desires...