

Action and Character According to Aristotle: The Logic of Moral Life. By Kevin L. Flannery. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013. Pp. 344. \$59.95 (hardback). ISBN 978-0813221601.

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Flannery's volume looks in two directions. On the one hand, as Flannery announces in the book's introduction, the chapters in the volume were intended to shed light on three specific 'background' issues in contemporary ethics and the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas, namely, Aquinas' notion of ethical theory (as articulated especially in *Summa Theologica* 1-2.6-21), the ramifications of physical actions on moral evaluation in contemporary ethics (for instance, whether the fact that an abortion consists specifically in the crushing of a fetus' skull rather than some other form of terminating the fetus has moral relevance), and the understanding of Aquinas' 'principle of double effect' (*Summa Theologica* 2-2.64.7). On the other hand, the eight chapters (and two appendices) are all devoted to the exegesis of passages in Aristotle's corpus (primarily the ethical treatises, but with substantial discussions of passages from the *Prior Analytics*, the *Physics*, and the *Metaphysics* insofar as they shed light on passages in the ethical corpus). Although the exegetical chapters are motivated by contemporary and Thomistic background issues, the exegesis appears entirely grounded in Aristotle's (rather than Aristotelian) texts.

Flanner organizes the volume into two halves. The first four chapters look at what Flannery calls 'singular acts', or what might equally be called the philosophy of action. The first chapter looks at the relationship between a specific human act ('Tom hits Bob') and the so-called 'practical syllogism' (which according to the *Posterior Analytics* is not concerned with singular terms). The second chapter draws upon the notion of actualization from the *Physics* to understand the 'physical' structure of an individual human action. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the notion of responsibility for actions in *NE* iii 1 and *EE* ii 6-9, first from the perspective of physical force and second from the perspective of ignorance.

The second half of the book moves from individual acts or the philosophy of action to 'ethics proper', namely, the nature of ethical character types and their connection to specific actions. Chapter 5 unpacks the *per se/per accidens* distinction in several different passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to elucidate the intelligibility of human actions. Chapter 6 juxtaposes human actions (*praxeis*) and movements (*kinēseis*) in order to understand how practical wisdom and pleasure are related specifically to actions. The seventh chapter extends the discussion of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in order to understand its relationship to the

practically wise person (*phronimos*). The final chapter moves from an examination of the practically wise person to considerations of the weak-willed person (the *akratēs*) and the wholly deprived person (the *akolastos*).

Flannery brings to bear upon many technical and complicated discussions exactly careful and learned interpretation that is often informed by works throughout Aristotle's corpus and from the ancient Greek commentary tradition. Scholars struggling with those passages will find much to ponder. At the same time, the volume occupies a rather unusual space within Aristotle scholarship. First, I think a Thomistic orientation of Aristotle's texts is inevitable in a volume that originates in Thomistic background concerns or problems. Just because Flannery does not interpret Aristotle through say Aquinas' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not insulate his interpretation of Aristotle from Thomistic presuppositions. The very notion that Aristotle had something like a philosophy of action per se seems at odds with the practical orientation of the ethical works. Second, although the volume engages some of the landmark scholarship on Aristotle's ethical works, most of it is from the last century. Indeed, Flannery engages much more with the writings of Alexander of Aphrodisias than he does with say those of Jessica Moss (although neglect of recent scholarship may also reflect the facts that several of the chapters in the volume originated in papers written in the last decade and this reviewer's tardy submission of his review).

The careful student of Aristotle's ethical treatises will find much to learn from and struggle with in Flannery's volume. Although the problems with which it struggles do not immediately connect with the practical problems of ethics, solutions to those problems shed light on the deeper metaphysics of action (and thus will be especially interesting to scholars whose interests overlap between Aristotle and the philosophy of action). Its general insulation from recent mainstream Aristotle scholarship affords the volume a fresh perspective that is largely based in Aristotle's texts (even if its orientation originates outside of Aristotle per se).

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