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From the Selected Works of Julie E Ponesse

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"Aristotle on Time: A Study of the Physics" Review

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Tony Roark. *Aristotle on time: A Study of the Physics*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xiii + 232. Cloth, \$82.00.

It is 10:01 a.m. In a moment, it will be 10:02, and so on. Time moves steadily onward, transforming the future into present moments and, eventually, relegating them to the fixed past. Clocks may lag, some moments drag while others pass by in a flash, but we tend to hold the substantial belief that time exists independently of our perception of it, and of the events that take place in it. Aristotle understood time quite differently, defining it as “a number of motion [*kinêsis*] with respect to the before and after” (*Phys.* 219b1–2). But this definition has been criticized as being inescapably circular on the ground that the terms in the definiens are themselves temporal. Roark’s *Aristotle on Time*, an elegantly conceived and concisely executed examination of the thorny last chapters of *Phys.* IV, aims to rescue Aristotle’s account from the circularity charge by showing that Aristotle thought of time as a hylomorphic compound: motion is the matter (*hylê*) of time while perception is its form (*morphê*).

Roark’s book is divided into four parts. Part 1 sets up the hylomorphic analysis by aiming to demonstrate Aristotle’s indebtedness to Plato’s account of time as the imposition of the appropriate form (number) upon the relevant raw material (motion). The unified project of Part 2 is to develop the material aspect of time, and ultimately to show that Aristotle had a distinctly kinetic sense of “before and after,” which provides the basis for temporal order. For Roark, motion is “the actuality of what is potentially” (201a10 and b4), namely a telic property compound (or *kinoumenon*). Roark suggests that “before” and “after” denote “kinetic cuts,” states of *kinoumena* specified in terms of spatial location: one kinetic cut is “before” another if the spatial interval specified in the latter is included in that specified by the former. This is a clever move, though I worry that the potentiality-actuality distinction, itself, can only be understood diachronically. While actuality is prior *in substance* to potentiality (*Met.* 1050b6–7), potentiality is prior *in time*: e.g. the embryo proceeds *from* the state of being a potential human *to* the state of being an actual human (*Phys.* 225b16–25).

Part 3 is devoted to the formal aspect of time: perception. Because time is an “evident proper feature of motion” (58), Roark needs to explain how perception (*aisthêsis*) creates temporal order. His view is that time is constituted by percipient acts, which “carve up” spatial magnitudes into determinate segments, which are then numbered (hence “time is a number of motion”). Since number is a common perceptible, the perception of which requires imagination (*phantasia*), *phantasia* is ultimately responsible for ordering kinetic cuts, and hence perceiving time. Though a bit of a digression from the main argument, chapter 9 (on the common perceptibles) shows how Roark’s reading can be fruitfully applied to issues in Aristotle’s moral psychology, such as *akrasia*. On Roark’s view, the *akratic* is unable to resist present objects of desire because he cannot form counterfactual *phantasms*, and hence is unable to anticipate the negative consequences that *will* happen if he yields to temptation.

In Part 4, Roark uses the hylomorphic interpretation to address several potential problems for Aristotle’s theory of time, such as simultaneity and temporal passage. Stylistically, it appears less unified with the first three parts, but Roark makes clear how the earlier analysis of time as an evident proper feature of motion forestalls worries about the “flow” of time by showing how “‘time’s arrow’ is essentially a metaphysically gussied-up version of ‘motion’s arrow’” (210).

The great strength of Roark’s book is its nuanced attentiveness to the way Aristotle did philosophy: Roark does not employ hylomorphism merely as a heuristic device, asking us to imagine time, analogically, *as though* it were a combination of matter and form. Rather, he elegantly shows that time, for Aristotle, like individual substances, really is “a variety of hylomorphic compound” (1). While Roark’s argument falls at times into territory with which many ancient scholars will not be entirely comfortable, this may be inevitable given its aim to draw Aristotle into engagement with contemporary theories of time. The book teems with an impressive array of textual engagement, and Roark reveals some of the rockiest

passages in Aristotle's corpus to be more fertile than they appear. The progression of the argument is careful and logical, the depth and breadth of Roark's analysis is courageous and penetrating, and some tracts of the argument are deliciously incisive (the section in chapter 5 on kinetic cuts jumps to mind). While not everyone will agree with Roark's novel reading, it will no doubt inspire further debate on this important, but under-examined, aspect of Aristotle's natural philosophy.

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Louis Mackey. *Faith, Order, Understanding: Natural Theology in the Augustinian Tradition*. Foreword by Robert Sweetman. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011. Pp. xxiii + 170. Cloth, \$80.00.

I begin by declaring that Louis Mackey was my doctoral mentor a number of decades ago. The declaration is not meant to forestall charges of hidden bias (or deferred animus). I make the declaration because my memories of Mackey's teaching led me to place "this little book" somewhat outside the frame prepared for it by Robert Sweetman.

The book comprises four chapters, one each devoted to proofs for the existence of God in Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Scotus. Throughout, Mackey argues against settled conceptions of proof. He remarks at one point that "it is even somewhat misleading to think of Anselm's argument as a proof of God's existence" (61). The remark applies to all four authors. Mackey puns on the notion of proof, which means a testing or proving of the inquirer rather than a deduction. These proofs vary in their procedures and addressees, but they share in an "Augustinian" tradition of dialectical rhetoric that wants to motivate hierarchical ascent. The four proofs illustrate modes of a tradition, but also episodes in its development, with Scotus's formulation of order the "crowning achievement" (164).

Each of the chapters proceeds by commentary on carefully selected texts. Mackey fills out arguments or tabulates them for clarity; he raises and answers likely objections; he collates enigmatic passages with their parallels elsewhere in a corpus. Although he acknowledges some other exegeses (medieval, modern, contemporary), he is mainly concerned to make sense of the texts for himself and his intended reader. This is not a book anxiously engaged with current scholarly interpretations. Most of the scholarship mentioned in it would be considered dated. The book's theoretical interlocutors are also older figures with whom Mackey was engaged over decades. Readers who know his interest in "deconstruction" will be astonished to see how little of it appears here. Compare this reading of Anselm with that (re-)published in *Peregrinations of the Word* (1997). In *Peregrinations*, the understanding of language is developed in conversation with Kenneth Burke and Northrop Frye, but it ends with Jacques Derrida. In the present book, reading Anselm does not bring Derrida to mind—or, at least, to the page.

This manner of commentary was characteristic of Mackey's classes when I attended them in the mid-1970s. He was then preoccupied with questions of hierarchy, and he had in hand at least one collection of Augustinian studies, to be called *Lumen de lumine*. This was before he had read much or any Derrida: I remember his excitement in 1976 when he finished *Of Grammatology*. So there is no need to speculate, as Sweetman does, about the sequence of Mackey's interests. The substance of these chapters had been worked out before Mackey encountered Derrida, who came as late, dialectical confirmation of rhetorical concerns that Mackey had earlier pursued through English-speaking literary critics—and, of course, his medieval exemplars (compare *Peregrinations*, vii).

I mention this not so much to clarify an intellectual biography as to conclude something about the purposes of "this little book." Its authorial voice is Mackey's lecturing voice, the one he used to enrapture large classes of Texan undergraduates. The book's simplicity and directness echo his classroom. They are not best explained either as sobriety in the