The Peter Martyr Library
Volume Nine

Commentary
on Aristotle’s
Nicomachean Ethics
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COMMENTARY ON
Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

Peter Martyr Vermigli

Edited by
Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland
with introduction and annotations by Joseph C. McLelland

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The Peter Martyr Library presents a series of annotated translations from Latin into English of the writings of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562). Previous volumes featured a variety of works: dogmatic, polemical, and biographical. Only one was a biblical commentary, although exegesis was Vermigli’s chief role as lecturer in three centers of Reform: Strasbourg, Oxford, and Zurich. The present volume is a translation of his only nonbiblical commentary, his Strasbourg lectures on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. As such, it presented new challenges both in subject matter and vocabulary for the translators and editors. Much more than in the previous volumes, this was a team effort: eleven scholars on two continents worked on it in various ways.

This volume makes available a significant work of Vermigli’s, displaying both his usual thoroughness and another dimension of his erudition. It also confirms something often overlooked, that the study and influence of Aristotle in university education did not go into sharp decline with the age of Erasmus and Luther. It offers our readers valuable information about Vermigli’s own attitude to the relation between nature and grace, as well as the way philosophy was handled by a leading Reformer. Our series aims at providing the basic and essential tools to show the worth of this neglected scholar. Therefore, we hope this latest volume, a solid work reflecting a dimension of Reformed theology little recognized among us, will serve to stimulate further research on the nature of Reformed Aristotelianism, as well as Vermigli’s own kind of philosophical theology.

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J.
Editors’ Preface

Peter Martyr Vermigli was a biblical exegete, but also an Aristotelian in philosophy, so his commentary on the philosopher’s moral treatise holds special significance among his writings. It provides crucial evidence of two aspects of his thought. One is his commitment to the “practical Aristotle” familiar from his student days in Padua. Indeed, his knowledge of the philosopher is noteworthy: in this book he quotes from almost every work of Aristotle, from *Categories* to *Poetics*. The other is the evidence on view concerning the question—still moot—of “Reformed Scholasticism.” This work suggests that this was no rigid system or sacrifice of scripture to philosophy. The nature of Scholasticism in both Roman and Reformed traditions should rather be understood as a pedagogical mode of organizing doctrine in behalf of clarity and interior logic.

This volume represents the collaboration of a scholarly team. Leszek Wysocki and Joseph McLellan of McGill University began a collaborative effort some years ago to translate the introduction and the first six chapters. Kenneth Austin (St. Andrews, Scotland) completed book 1. Stephen M. Beall, associate professor of classics at Marquette University, translated the remainder (the commentary breaks off at book 3.2). J. P. Donnelly (Marquette University) provided a translation of the dedication. The task of collating these translations was taken up by Roland Diethelm, then Emidio Campi’s assistant in the *schola Tigurina*, with help from Luca Baschera, Esther Schweizer, and philologist Philipp Wälchli. J. P. Donnelly and Michael Silverthorne (formerly head of classics at McGill) read the whole for accuracy of translation. Emidio Campi’s ill health forced him to hand over the final editing, including the introduction and footnotes, to Joseph McLelland; this process occasioned the delay in publication. Thus we have an international cooperative effort, linking Europe and North America in a significant contribution to scholarly research in early modern Europe. Its inclusion in the Peter Martyr Library is of great importance in approaching our Reformer in the proper light as both commentator and philosophical theologian.

Emidio Campi, Zurich
Joseph C. McLellan, Montreal
November 2005
A PERIPATETIC REFORMER

Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) was Aristotelian by both training and disposition. After his novitiate (1514–18) as an Augustinian canon at Fiesole in Italy, he spent eight years at the University of Padua studying philosophy and theology. His theological studies concentrated on Thomas Aquinas and Gregory of Rimini, introducing the young scholar to Thomism and late medieval Augustinianism. Padua’s school of philosophy, made famous through the Italian philosopher Pomponazzi who taught there a generation before, built the foundation of Vermigli’s lifelong dedication to Aristotelianism.\(^1\) When Vermigli studied there, Padua was famous for its studies in Aristotle; this provided Vermigli with a context for his theology, which could be described as “man in an Aristotelian world.”\(^2\) At that time, Padua was already notorious for its tendency to Averroism, which implied a double truth dividing philosophy and theology, and its daring speculations on the human soul.

The University of Padua’s brilliant array of philosophers included Juan de Montesdoch, who specialized in Aristotle’s *De anima*; Branda Porro, who used Vermigli as his favorite foil in debate; and Marcantonio de’ Passeri, called Genua, who dominated the school. Genua’s support of Averroism—still concentrating on *De anima*—was important in going back from Averroës to the Greek commentator Simplicius, thus breaking the monopoly of Averroism in the study of Aristotle.\(^3\) From Genua, Vermigli learned to mistrust the Latin translations of Aristotle, studying Greek so he could read the Philosopher in the original. Beginning with Boethius (ca. 480–524 CE), scholars were preoccupied with Aristotle’s logical works, gathered in the collection known as *Organon*, rather than with his metaphysics and ethics. Numerous medieval Latin translations became available based on Graeco-Arabic editions

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\(^2\) John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 15, 53. Aristotle (394–22 BCE), Greek philosopher: born at Stagira in Macedonia; became Plato’s pupil in 365; after Plato’s death in 347, was associated with Theophrastus in Lesbos, collecting biological data; tutored Alexander the Great in Macedonia; on returning to Athens, taught in the Lyceum, where the walking places (*peripatoi*) gave his followers the name “Peripatetics.”

\(^3\) Vermigli mentions Simplicius (a sixth-century Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle) only once in his commentary on *Ethica Nicomachea*: “Simplicius non parum Platonis addictus in multis locis ait” [150]. See Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 21.
as well as some directly from the original Greek. The latter included the noteworthy translations of William of Auvergne and William of Moerbeke in the thirteenth century. The preoccupation with logic or dialectic persisted until Renaissance humanism revived interest in cosmology and ontology, including Aristotle’s anthropology. Thus at Padua, the study of Aristotle emphasizes “the unity of the agent intellect and the immortality of the soul” rather than moral questions.

Vermigli’s career while still in Italy (until 1542) saw his rise in the Augustinian order through the ranks of preacher and lecturer, abbot of St. Pietro ad Aram in Naples (1537–40), visitor and finally prior of S. Frediano in Lucca (1541–42). Besides the honor of enjoying quasi-episcopal authority over half the city, his brief term in Lucca allowed him to gather a prestigious group of teachers for his Academy, which Philip McNair has called “the first and last reformed theological college in pre-Tridentine Italy—a miniature but brilliant university with Martyr as its Rector.”

As an evangelical Catholic during this period, Vermigli honed his exegetical skills, using both Hebrew and Greek, through biblical sermons and lectures, without dampening his philosophical bent. By 1541 he was clearly Protestant and a marked man. Leaving Lucca one step ahead of the Inquisition in August 1542, he made his way north in company with Bernardino Ochino, the famous Capuchin preacher and vicar-general. Vermigli sought a teaching position in Zurich where none was available, but at last was called by Martin Bucer to the College of St. Thomas in Strasbourg. Here he lectured on the Old Testament, until in 1548 he joined others who heeded Archbishop Thomas Cranmer’s appeal for continental divines to assist the new reformation in England. As regius professor of divinity at Oxford, he lectured on 1 Corinthians and Romans, participated in the eucharistic controversies surrounding the revision of the prayer book, notably the Oxford Disputation of 1549, and was engaged in the reform of ecclesiastical laws when forced to leave England by the death of Edward VI and accession of Mary Tudor.

The practice of commenting on Aristotle to complement biblical lectures was common in Reformed seminaries in the sixteenth century. When Vermigli returned to Strasbourg in October 1553, he took up the custom of lecturing on Aristotle begun by John Sturm and Martin Bucer, selecting Ethica nicomachea, while his friend and disciple Girolamo Zanchi lectured in alternate weeks on Aristotle’s Physica. The lectures on Aristotle were cut short after only two and a half years by the divisive quarrel between Lutheran and Reformed scholars over subscription to the

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6McNair, Peter Martyr in Italy, 221.
7Josiah Simler, Vermigli’s first biographer, states that Zanchi “undertook to interpret Aristotle’s
Augsburg Confession. In July 1556, Vermigli moved to Zurich to spend the happy remainder of his life, lecturing on the books of Samuel and Kings until his death in 1562. Peter Martyr Vermigli was thus a Peripatetic in both senses of the word—a follower of Aristotle and a wandering scholar.

In Zurich, Konrad Gesner was already teaching philosophy, leaving Vermigli free to concentrate on the Old Testament. Vermigli’s lecture notes on Aristotle, some in his own hand and some in a student’s, remained unrevised at his death. His colleagues resolved to have them published, engaging Guilio Santerenziano as editor and the local Froschauer press as publisher. With the unfinished manuscript being 436 pages long, one can only imagine its length had Vermigli completed the commentary through book 10. It is indeed a detailed and verbose commentary, sometimes to the point of exhausting both subject and reader. In this it resembles the commentary of Thomas Aquinas, similarly detailed and faithful to the text. Neither one is strongly critical of Aristotle, although Vermigli concludes each chapter by appealing to scripture as the ultimate criterion for truth and showing where Aristotle’s views do not agree.

VERMIGLI’S SOURCES

Vermigli’s work belongs to the tiny group of sixteenth-century Protestant theologians who wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s Ethica nicomachea. Five were published before his Strasbourg lecture series was given in 1553 through 1556. Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) published a pair of volumes: In Ethica Aristotelis commentaries (Books I–II) was published in Wittenberg in 1529, and In I, II, III et V Ethicorum commentarii was published in Wittenberg in 1530. Both of Melanchthon’s works are more paraphrase than commentary. Two works were published in Basel: In Libra Ethicorum by Otto Werdmuller (1545) and In X Libros Ethicorum commentarius by Jacobus Schegkius (1550). Werdmuller was professor of philosophy in Zurich (1541–52). Andreas Hyperius (1511–64) published Ad X Libros Ethicorum scholia in 1553 in Marburg; in 1598, he republished Vermigli’s commentary along with his own on the rest of Aristotle’s text as Meditationes Ethicae (Lich: Nicholas Erbenius). Vermigli does not refer to any of these authors in his own work.

These scholars were able to use the Aldine editio princeps of Aristotle’s complete works printed in Venice between 1494 and 1498. In 1497, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étapes (1450–1536) published his influential edition of Aristotle’s Ethics. Vermigli’s own copy of the Erasmus edition in Greek (Aristotelis… Opera… omnia. Basel: J. Bebel, 1531), now in the library of the University of Geneva, contains marginalia in two hands, one presumably of Benedetto Cusanus, Vermigli’s fellow

student and close friend in Padua with whom he purchased the book. Vermigli's own comments are more frequent in later chapters than in the first three on which he wrote his commentary. He may well have used the Greek edition (without notes or translation) prepared by John Sturm as a textbook for the Strasbourg Academy.

We noted that at Padua, Vermigli had come to distrust the Aristoteles Latinus of medieval tradition, which did not include ethical works. By the twelfth century, all of Aristotle's works had been recovered and Alexander of Hales (an English theologian and philosopher) was able to use most of the Aristotelian corpus. With both the Aldine editio princeps and Lefèvre d'Étapi's edition, Vermigli had the necessary tools for studying the original texts. He acquired the Erasmus edition of the Opera Omnia while in Italy (and had it with him at Oxford), as well as the commentary of Iacobus Strebaeus on the first three books of Nicomachean Ethics, the same passages he covered in his Strasbourg lectures. Jill Kraye states, "The Scholastic Aristotle commentary was part of the legacy bequeathed to the Renaissance by the Middle Ages," and was either "literal" or consisting of quaestiones with arguments pro and con, leading to solutio (the Greek terms are aporiai and luseis). Both types were adopted; Vermigli follows the former style, while incorporating elements of the latter.

Vermigli's chief resource for his commentary on the first book of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics was the Byzantine philosopher-theologian Eustratius, metropolitan of Nicaea (ca. 1050–ca. 1120), whose defense of Platonic ideas and Aristotelian logic provoked the monks and brought about his condemnation by the Synod of Constantinople in 1117. His commentary is noteworthy for its frequent reference to scripture and for "concentrating on the meaning of individual words and expressions and ignoring larger issues raised by the text." His In Ethica

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8See Donnelly, Calvinism and Scholasticism, 211.
11Iacobus Strebaeus, In tres priores libros Aristotelis HΘIKIN NIKOMAXEIΩN commentaria (Paris: Viscosan, 1549). Donnelly (Calvinism and Scholasticism, 211, 216) notes that the Opera contain references to "Martyr's dearest monastic friend, Benedetto Casanus de Vercelli, who died at Naples in 1540." He also states, "That Martyr took the trouble to have these books shipped [to England] indicates that he by no means saw his conversion to Protestantism as a rejection of philosophy."
13Kraye, "Renaissance Commentaries," 107–9. Unfortunately, Kraye thinks Santerenziano was Vermigli's son and locates the lecture series in the "philosophical faculty" rather than his College of St. Thomas (106).
14Donnelly, Calvinism and Scholasticism, 59. He notes that Vermigli cites Eustratius forty-six
TEXT AND TRANSLATION

The text used for this translation is the first edition, *In primum, secundum et tertii libri Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum, Clariss. & doctiss. Viri D. PETRI MARTYRIS Vermiliij, Florentini, Sacrarum literarum in Schola Tigurina Professoris, Commentarius doctissimus*, published in August 1563 by Christoph Froschauer of Zurich. This edition consists of 436 pages and measures approximately 14.5 cm by 22.5 cm. The gatherings are a4 A–Z, Aa–Zz, AA–OO4. The 1563 edition includes a prefatory letter from Giulio Santerenziano, Vermigli’s *famulus* and student, to Edwin Sandys, bishop of Worcester (a2–4), and an index of “Rerum et Verborum” (II3–OO4). The preface by Santerenziano states that the written lectures are based partly on Vermigli’s notes and partly on those of his hearers. Difficulties in the text no doubt relate in part to this provenance.

After Vermigli’s death in 1562, his Zurich colleagues decided to publish the unfinished work; at his departure from Strasbourg, he had reached only book 3, chapter 2. To edit the work, they chose Santerenziano, who was later employed as printer’s devil by Froschauer. The second edition, published by Froschauer in 1582, deviated from the first edition only in minor grammatical terms, as indicated in the translation. Nicholas Erbenius of Lich published a third edition in 1598, titled *Meditationes Ethicae sive Aristotelis Ethicorum NIKOMAXEIWN explicatio per D. Petrum Martyrem Vermilium…et D. Andream Hyperium*. The third edition consists of 598 pages, with Vermigli’s text appearing on pages 1 through 337 followed by sections from the commentary of Andreas Hyperius (1511–64). There is evidence that another edition of the Vermigli/Hyperius commentary was published at Lich in 1602.1

Peter Martyr used the Greek text of *Ethica nicomachea* edited by Erasmus, *Aristotelis… Opera… Omnia, Per Des. Erasmus* (Rotterdam and Basel J. Bebel: 1531), which corresponds well with the 1894 Greek edition by Ingram Bywater (*Aristotle’s Ethica Nicomachea* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894]),2 generally accepted as the most accurate Greek edition of Aristotle. Vermigli also possessed a copy of Iacobus Strebaeus, *In tres priores libros Aristotelis HEIKON NIKOMAXEION commentaria* (Paris: Vascosan, 1549), but does not quote from it. In book 1, Vermigli quotes frequently from Eustratius’s commentary on Aristotle, *Enarratio in Primum Aristotelis Moralium ad Nicomachum*. It seems likely that he owned the

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2See also Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 211.
copy now in the Geneva Library that is part of *In Ethica Nicomachea commentaria*, Aldine edition (Venice, 1536).


Three sections of this translation have already been published. Vermigli’s introduction appeared as “Philosophy and Theology” in *Philosophical Works* (ed. McLelland, 6–17). Chapter 1.4 was published under the title “Human Happiness” and 2.4 under the title “Moral Virtue” in *The Peter Martyr Reader* (ed. Donnelly, 93–105, 207–19). The 1576 anthology of Vermigli’s scholia, *Loci communes*… (London: R. Masson, 1576), did not use any passages from Vermigli’s commentary, but Anthony Marten used selections in his expanded translation of this work titled *Common Places* (London, 1583). Vermigli’s commentary 1.9.235–36 and 1.10.239–56 appear in *Common Places* 1.15 and his introduction in 2.3.5–11, with some twelve shorter passages in other sections.

The translation begins with Santerenziano’s dedication, followed by Vermigli’s introduction. The text of the commentary consists of a passage from Aristotle (which Vermigli had translated into Latin) followed by Vermigli’s discussion of the passage. Following each passage from Aristotle, the editors have inserted the section and line numbers used in modern editions of his works. Numbers in brackets appearing in the text indicate the page number in the original edition of Vermigli’s commentary. Glosses of the original Latin or Greek have been placed in brackets. In making the translation, the editors attempted to retain Vermigli’s writing style as much as possible, while adapting sentence structure and punctuation for the modern reader.
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