

Nicolaus Taurellus. *Philosophia Triumphus, hoc est, Metaphysica Philosophandi Methodus.*

Trans. Henrik Wels. Editionen zur Frühen Neuzeit 3. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2012. xlv + 596 pp. €248. ISBN: 978-3-7728-2374-9.

After the drudgery of Melanchthonian philosophy textbooks, the physician and natural philosopher Nicolaus Taurellus (1547–1606) was one of the first Lutherans who embarked on more ambitious metaphysical projects. The somewhat immodest title of his first and arguably most important book, published in 1573, refers directly to the aim of this work: to provide a metaphysical underpinning for some central doctrines of biblical theology such as the doctrine of creation. Pursuing such a project involves an explicit rejection of the double-truth doctrine. In fact, the first of the three treatises that constitute this work deals with the nature of knowledge and its prospects in the postlapsarian state of humans. There, Taurellus defends a unified conception of philosophical and theological knowledge as well as the view that, in spite of the fall, the human mind possesses innate knowledge that can be actualized through methodologically ordered thought.

In the second treatise, Taurellus tries to put such a conception of knowledge to work through a highly critical discussion of some principles of Aristotelian natural philosophy, especially of the doctrine of prime matter. Although he rejects the reality of prime matter, Taurellus defends the view that the generation and decay of all natural things is due to the composition and separation of parts (256) — a view that played a crucial role in the formation of medieval and early modern corpuscular matter theory. He gives this view a particularly radical turn because he denies that composites ever could be genuine unities. In particular, he argues that a human being, like every other composite, is not truly a single being (110) — a view taken up in a milestone of early modern atomism, David Gorlaeus's *Exercitationes Philosophicae* (1620). The similarity with some aspects of Gorlaeus's thought makes it tempting to understand Taurellus as a proponent of physical atomism as well.

However, as one reads on in *Philosophiae Triumphus*, one finds some indications that, for Taurellus, the basic constituents of the compositional structure of the world are not physical atoms but rather immaterial forms (see 276–80, 300). These share some characteristics with material atoms: they are extended, indivisible, and do not undergo change through composition. But they also differ from material atoms because, even if a particular form is indivisible, due to the agency of another form it can change into a form of a different kind (258, 268). This is a characteristic closely similar to the capability of a particular Aristotelian element of changing into another element. What is more, Taurellus ascribes the origin of qualities that we ordinarily regard as corporeal — such as being capable of being moved or touched — to immaterial forms (348).

Finally, in the third treatise it becomes clear that these metaphysical considerations are motivated by a specific theological aim, namely, to exclude

the doctrine of the world as an eternal divine accident (426). In Taurellus's view, a theory of immaterial forms can fulfill this task because once one gives up the assumption that the existence of forms depends on the existence of prime matter, and vice versa, forms can be understood as substances in the sense of being independent of any other natural entity (376). In this way, rejecting a theory of natural beings as eternal, divine accidents provides rational support for the view that natural beings owe their existence to a divine act of creation.

Taurellus's immaterialist conception of the compositional structure of the world as well as its theological motivations are genuinely fascinating and deserve to be studied much more closely than they have been so far. Henrik Wels's fine German translation will provide excellent assistance for this purpose. It follows remarkably closely the syntactic structure of the Latin original. This certainly does not make for easy readability or even for a particularly idiomatic style. But, at least as far as the present reader is concerned, Wels's decision to keep as closely as possible to the original helped me greatly in getting a grip on some passages that seemed almost impenetrable to me before.

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