

**Review of David Roochnik's  
"Retrieving Aristotle in an Age of Crisis"  
New York: Suni Press, 2013**

**AMERICA DISCOVERING ARISTOTLE**

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This new publication on Aristotle is not simply another scholarly monograph, but rather a truly epoch-making event in contemporary Aristotelian studies, overall cultural history and, particularly, in the post-modern philosophical tradition of Anglo-American scholarship.

Given the centuries of the cult of Plato, genuine fear of Aristotle's wisdom and misrepresentation of his works, Professor David Roochnik has accomplished in his latest book a really mammoth intellectual task of virtually re-writing European philosophical history and setting the record straight. Aristotle has been living in the shadow of his mentor Plato for millennia, often expunged from the curriculum of the major Anglo-American Universities. From the very start of his skillfully, accessibly and engagingly written book, Prof. Roochnik brings the wonder of Aristotle's genius, mediating his regret over the long misinterpretation of the wisdom of the ancient sage which have actually diminished the statue of Aristotle and pushed him to the discursive margins.

Already on page 14 of his book, Prof. Roochnik reminds that, contrary to the prevailing view, "Aristotle does a better job than the Germans in giving the logos of the phenomenon, bringing the world of ordinary experience to light." In other words, the post-modern American scholar takes an absolutely novel independent stand, ably arguing that none of the later philosophers could either surpass, or match the genius of Aristotle. The American author is in awe of the ancient Greek sage who had made the world eternally understandable, the search for knowledge exciting, the discourse simple and philosophy relevant to human life. Prof. Roochnik excitingly rehabilitates Aristotle and his teaching precisely from the firm Aristotelian ground. Having a sound background in European philosophy, Prof. Roochnik comes to a mostly striking post-modern conclusion that none of Aristotle's contemporaries, nor any thinkers, that followed him millennia afterwards, had the genius of his vision, the brilliance of his insight into the future scientific inquiry and the mysteries of nature.

Despite his personal erudition, vast knowledge of the ancient and modern philosophy, Prof. Roochnik has the humility of making Aristotle visible, letting the reader get acquainted with him on his own terms. Unlike many post-modern scholars,

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this American scholar allows Aristotle to speak freely and sufficiently, without personally influencing the reader with his own commentary. Quotations from Aristotle do not drown in the more customary exegesis. Prof. Roochnik believes that, despite the distance in time, Aristotle was and still is right and clear about many things, made unnecessarily obscure by the later thinkers. He was right about cosmos in many ways and about the approach to the study of nature, and the author successfully proves this point about Aristotle.

It is very seldom that one encounters a scholarly work written from a highly ethical perspective. This book revives Aristotle's ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, making it applicable for the modern times and circumstances. For Aristotle, thinking and asking questions, useful for daily life, was the task of philosophy. Roochnik, an American intellectual, reminds the students of philosophy that the postmodern playful logos for the sake of play would have been very disturbing to Aristotle, who insisted on practical wisdom and applicability of knowledge to daily life. Having rehabilitated Aristotle's wisdom and its relevance to the technologically advanced modernity, Prof. Roochnik dismantles its idols and sacred icons. He shows how desperately our technocratic age, lost in the cave of its barbaric digital habitat, needs the Aristotelian wisdom. He not only sets the historical record straight, but he proves that Aristotle is more than relevant to the current reality – he is urgently needed to lead us away from the pathway of our own destruction.

“Aristotle may be in an even better position to offer comment that the twentieth century- philosophers,” he cautions, with quite Aristotelian simplicity and with his axiomatic eloquence, arguing that the modern science, quite literally, imposes **dehumanization** (p.15). Observing the post-modern mode of Being, treatment of humans, nature and cosmos, Aristotle would have been horrified. And Prof. Roochnik writes to this effect:

*The bombs are waiting to be exploded. In our age, an age of crisis, Aristotle offers a great philosophical resource, for the world he illuminates so brilliantly is humanly sealed and [made] inhabitable. And it is the one which we, actually, find meaning in our lives. For this very reason, it is both easy and commonly for today's intellectual to hold Aristotle in contempt. But this would be a terrible mistake (217).*

The author summarizes a rising concern about the negative impact of today's dehumanized playful science, the product of playing scientists and technomaniacs.

On the whole, the monograph is not only a timely contribution to the overall history of ideas, bringing afore Aristotelianism and unearthing Aristotle's wisdom, but it is also a specimen of highly ethical and moral discourse in the Humanities. In addition, it is a very creatively constructed narrative which combines knowledge of antiquity, love for Aristotle and the appreciation of the wisdom of others. Roochnik uses Tom Sheppard's contemporary play *Arcadia* as a narrative frame and a point of cultural reference for his own monograph. He begins with the playwright's catchy

oneliner, “There is no rush for Isaac Newton. We were quite happy with Aristotle’s cosmos,” (p.xi) and ends with the following, “A great philosopher is in urgent need.” (p.217). The fact that the play delivered Aristotle to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Americans via the theatrical stage is the testimony not so much of the ripe moment, but to the nature of American culture. Paradoxically, not the intellectual but the playwright has made the discovery or made the intellectual analysis possible. At any rate, Aristotle, finally, came to America. He came at the right moment when the civilization is in danger being destroyed, and when we are experiencing a true fatigue after the century of finding nothing of significance in art and cultural history.

Prof. Roochnik’s unearthing of the greatest mind of antiquity, the unsurpassable, towering, and eternally relevant and wondrous Aristotle, is a truly remarkable event in the current discourse. Given the general climate of disinterest in culture and matters of civilizing humanity, it is an accomplishment of great elegance, creativity and human concern. The author asks and answers the proverbial Aristotelian “WHY”, implying that we have lost our way. His *Retrieving Aristotle* gives a glimmer of hope that cosmos and we in it could be saved with the wisdom of the forgotten and misunderstood distant sage. Millennia have passed and we are still Aristotle’s pupils. He teaches us to take the world and our actions seriously and critically. He raises the question of ethics of knowing and thinking, not for the sake of play, but for making human life truly human and civilized. Aristotle appears to be a better guide for the modern dark ages, showing the more intelligent way of praxis, not in senseless activity, accumulation of things, and endless counting them, but in enjoying Thought and Being, the Whole of Cosmos. If Plato and Aristotle, had been living today, they would have been total strangers – Plato on the side of the mindless technomaniacs, and Aristotle with the thoughtful and caring intellectuals. And this is the point which Prof. Roochnik delivers timely and elegantly.