

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's ethical and political writings have held the attention of students and scholars in most times since antiquity; but recent investigations have emphasized the exploration of topics in some ways qualitatively different. In contrast to what the modern ethical tradition has generally sought to do, we have become increasingly interested in applied and contextual ethics, a turn of concern that has resulted in dissatisfaction with monistic theories like those of Kant and Mill, and a determination that Aristotelian ethical and political theory is fundamentally more accommodating to the vagaries of experienced dilemmas. Some commentators have perceived a breakdown of the Christian ethical system, possibly to be remedied by a return to the study of Aristotle's pre-Christian virtue ethics; others perceive a failure of the ethical and political project of modern philosophy, to be diagnosed (at least) by a return to the classical roots of that project. Many ethical and political philosophers today take the text of Aristotle either as a major player in the ongoing philosophical dialectic, or as a potential source of fresh solutions leading out from current philosophical aporias, or as an important original source to recast those same aporias.¹

All of that assumes that the ethical and political theories of Aristotle are transparently available to contemporary thinkers; at the same time, a great many arguments have been advanced that would imply that Aristotle's philosophical (and other) theories should, in principle, be intellectually opaque to us. If there have been epistemological revolutions at the time of the French Revolution, in the Renaissance, in the High Middle Ages, at the end of antiquity, and between the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods, it should follow that we are situated about five revolutions away from the practical and intellectual world of Aristotle; it would require a particularly intense form of archaeological reconstruction to reach any reliable understanding of the text.

The authors represented by their essays in this collection are all classical scholars, professionally committed to the view that it is possible to recover a defensible account of the content of the text. These essays do not necessarily state directly how they may serve as contributions to ongoing debates in ethical and political theory, since they are for the most part concerned primarily with reconstructing the meaning of the text and with identifying the elements that either secure or undermine the coherence of the embedded doctrines. That surely is a desirable first step toward assessing Aristotle's contribution to contemporary ethical and political theory.

Some of the papers included here were invited by the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy and were presented at joint meetings with the American Philosophical Association and with the American Philological Association; others were contributed to the annual joint meeting with the Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science. For the most part scholars could have chosen to speak on any topic in ancient philosophy; the liveliness of interest in Aristotle's ethical and political thought is demonstrated by the large number of outstanding scholars who have decided to present papers on these topics. No doubt they did so because these texts remain fresh and challenging.

The essays printed in this volume have been selected from a much larger set of papers on Aristotle's ethics, presented before the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy during the past decade. We find that these papers represent an important range of the topics occupying the attention of students of Aristotle's ethics. The essays are arranged (rather roughly) according to several unifying themes. Certainly the issue of Aristotle's methodology in the ethics is one which runs through a majority of the papers, since it is an essential starting point; the papers by Robert Bolton and Lawrence Jost, both well-known Aristotelian scholars, introduce that issue in a way that sets a context for many of the other papers. Both these papers are published here for the first time.

For Aristotle himself, a major starting point in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the argument whether a human being has, qua being human, a function or distinct *ergon*. Alfonso Gomez Lobo and Deborah Achtenberg approach the issue in partially complementary, partially contrasting ways, giving students an opportunity to see a range of interpretations of the same passage. One of the questions arising from an examination of the *ergon* passage is whether the ethical theory which results is purely egoistic, or allows for an altruistic interpretation. Arthur Madigan, relying on a passage in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, attempts to defuse that debate, and in the process sheds some light on the implications of Aristotle's starting points in ethics.

Certainly one of the most famous aspects of Aristotle's ethical theory is the emphasis which he put upon moral virtue. W. W. Fortenbaugh sets a context for the theory of virtue by bringing in for comparison passages in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* which also touch on the question. This essay is printed here for the first time in English. Charles M. Young and Ronna Burger take up specific issues arising in Aristotle's treatment of the virtues, especially in *Nicomachean Ethics* 3 and 4, and their respective essays contrast in several ways. Young analyzes Aristotle's views on temperance; yet what Aristotle says about righteous indignation, as analyzed by Burger, might seem to allow for a form of intemperance. One may also notice that Young's approach to the text belongs to the more analytic type of interpre-

tation, while Burger's owes more to the hermeneutic tradition. As has been demonstrated by Charles Griswold (1988), the field of classical scholarship is one on which these two philosophical traditions can meet amicably and productively.

One of the Aristotelian subjects which has received considerable attention in recent years is the character and place of moral reasoning in Aristotle's thought. Admittedly, this topic is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the one which we earlier called "methodology," but here we are looking particularly at what Aristotle in fact says about the mental processes of those who are acting to attain *eudaimonia*. We include essays by a range of scholars, from one of the oldest still actively working in the field, Joseph Owens, through three younger scholars, Robert Loudon, Deborah Modrak, and Thomas Tuozzo. With the exception of the paper by Loudon, these essays are all first printed here. All of these essays concern what Aristotle says about the role of reason in the good life. In a sense, they all are inspired or instigated by an ongoing controversy in which John Cooper (1975) has played a leading role.

In the final section we have two essays which treat issues which intersect between Aristotle's ethical and political writings; in fact both essays deal in different but complementary ways with Aristotle's concept of justice. The essay by Fred Miller is printed here for the first time; the essay by Preus has been slightly revised for this publication.

Although this volume does serve as a record of some of the papers presented to the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy over the past ten years or so, it is the hope of the editors that it can also serve as a useful source of recent interpretations of Aristotle's ethics, not only for scholars but also for graduate and undergraduate students. It is our belief that the essays are written with clarity and concern and are consequently quite accessible to everyone who has read Aristotle's ethical and political writings. A general bibliography and indexes have been added in order to maximize that accessibility.

Note

1. For a more detailed reading of the current interest in Aristotle's ethical and political writings, see Benhabib 1989.