

Zitierhinweis

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R. POLANSKY (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xii + 474 pp. \$36.99 - 23.99 £ (pb). ISBN 978-0-521-12273-3.

This *Cambridge Companion* contains a lively introduction by Professor Roland Polansky, from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, which deftly sets his own version of an agenda for the volume as a whole. The contributors, from both sides of the Atlantic, respond by contributing no fewer than twenty further papers covering most of the major topics raised by the *Ethics*. The standard of the papers gives a good picture of the lively and detailed work currently lavished upon the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The papers are arranged more or less in the order in which the topics appear in Aristotle's text, and they witness to the enormous progress made over the last fifty years or so to explore the details of Aristotle's arguments. The technical level of many of the contributions would be appreciated by postgraduate students who are already well acquainted with the *Ethics*, but would, I suspect, present the ordinary undergraduate with a more detailed and technical challenge than they would normally be able to cope with.

The notion of εὐδαιμονία is subjected to a rigorous re-examination by C. D. Reeve. He concludes, reasonably enough, by stressing Aristotle's general account of the good life, the life in which a person exemplifies all the moral virtues surely will be a happy life, in comparison with which the attractiveness of the purely contemplative life seems to pale. So it remains somewhat puzzling that Aristotle nonetheless insists that it is θεωρία which is the characteristic feature of the fulfilled life for anyone. I wonder whether Aristotle has in mind not so much high-powered academic research and insight, but rather the quiet ability to reflect back on one's life, and discover that it really has made good sense. Be that as it may, Reeve's lucidly argued paper is an attractive introduction to the volume as a whole.

Lesley Brown in a brief but persuasive piece argues that the various virtuous dispositions of character are defined in terms of the actions which those dispositions in normal conditions will lead an agent to perform. We can more easily have a discussion to determine whether an action in response to a particular situation was the right thing to do, and then then claim that it is by repeatedly doing that action that one gradually develops the habit of judging such situations correctly. I suppose this is to say that it is easier, or more productive or more useful, even for three experienced surgeons, say, to discuss what ought to be done for a particular patient and then to act on that

consensus, than it is for them to discuss the precise nuances of their initial feelings about it. Years of experience would enable them to assess many complex cases accurately in virtue of their considerable experience. The point Leslie Brown would wish to make is that the virtue is dependent upon the cumulative effect of the individual cases, in contrast to at least some versions of virtue ethics which would suggest that the moral virtue is the primary indicator, and what it would be appropriate to do is to be decided on the basis of that emotive response.

Giles Pearson offers a carefully nuanced of the virtues of Courage and Temperance. He tidies up some of the ambiguities in Aristotle's account of fear. Thus, the brave person is not fearless when faced with the likelihood of death; but in a different sense of 'fear' he is he is nonetheless confident, and will not flee precisely because of his awareness of the nobility of the cause. Pearson also tidies up ambiguities in A's account of fear, iii.8 1115b—1116a; the brave person is not fearless – for while he will naturally be afraid when believes that his death is likely, he is aware of the nobility of cause and so is confident that he will not disgrace himself by running away. A brave person, however, might be afraid of death from an illness – which is not 'for sake of a noble end', or in fighting for an allegedly noble cause; whereas someone who is merely optimistic will be fearless while everything is going well, but not at all when things turn against him. But can dying in battle for a noble cause contribute to one's εὐδαιμονία? The remark at 1117b10, 'One swallow does not make a summer' might suggest not; but it occurs to me to wonder whether the brave man, reflecting on the imminent certainty of death, might nonetheless see even that misfortune as 'fitting', and so something to be proud of?

Temperance, Pearson argues, like courage, is more important than it might at first sight appear, since it provides an essential foundation for practical wisdom, preventing us from enjoying the wrong things, or the right things too much, or from enjoying the right things in the wrong way.

In addition to his introductory remarks, Ronald Polansky also contributes an excellent paper on Aristotle's treatment of Justice, with the focus on justice as a moral virtue rather than as a description of various actions. As he rightly says, remembering that this is Aristotle's focus here, as also in the case of the other moral virtues, avoids many problems of interpretation. Justice is a disposition whereby a person is inclined to favour fulfilled lives for others. This disposition will affect a person's attitude and conduct in all areas of community life. We can think of justice as fairness with regard to property, or in the law; but the virtue of justice is one, even though the actions which exemplify it will be very different from one another. Polansky does not suppose that Aristotle eventually arrives at a single clear criterion for deciding which actions are just. On the contrary, the complexity of the attempts which Aristotle makes in approaching all the problems involved in identifying just or unjust actions, suggests that there is no simple decision procedure.

An original and refreshing treatment of the social virtues – notably the odd ones which Aristotle mentions, magnificence, magnanimity, and quick-wittedness, is offered by Helen Cullyer. She manages to make them seem considerably less odd than they often do; and Daniel C. Russell writes a very balanced essay on the complementarity of virtues, clearly put and giving an outline of the problems he takes to be involved. Jessica Moss ‘Was Aristotle a Humean?’ goes to the heart of several modern controversies both in ethics and in the interpretation of Aristotle. She argues clearly, and to my mind persuasively, that Aristotle is not a Humean, despite the fact that he does indeed wrestle with some of the questions which Hume tried to answer, and that he would have had some sympathy with the line Hume took. But practical reason, although intimately connected with our emotions, is epistemologically and practically prior to those emotions when it comes to moral training and, in particular, to making moral decisions. Aristotle had no aspirations to be what some of our contemporaries would call a ‘Virtue Ethicist’.

Hendrik Lorenz gives a careful account Aristotle’s analysis of akratic action, but does not accept the suggestion made by Austin and Bostock among others, that people are able deliberately and explicitly to decide to do what they clearly know they ought not to do.

There is also a very good discussion by Kirsten Inglis on the extent to which all citizens would be expected to have been assisted in their efforts to have a fully rounded moral development. She thinks they would not; instead, in a well-run city, citizens might expect to have a very all-inclusive moral code as a result of the extent to which they are sensitive to public disapproval, via a sense of shame. It may be only a minority of citizens who can fully comply with the Grand End of morality. But they can set a tone which affects the attitudes of others whose lives are coloured and characterised by adherence to standards which they themselves do not have in a personal sense, but which they nonetheless accept and value.

Verity Harte, Patrick Lee Miller and Thornton Lockwood offer three different, but mutually fascinating, accounts of Aristotle’s view of friendship, pleasures, and of our final contemplative end. Pleasure can characterize a life of debauchery ‘fit only for beasts’. But it will also accompany the virtuous life and indeed is a feature whereby one can recognise a truly virtuous life. By and large Aristotle agrees with Plato; there are different types of pleasure. But we need to be careful with some arguments which would relate our pleasures to the pleasures of brute beasts; and indeed the contrary position according which the higher form of pleasure is that which we can share with god.

The *Companion* concludes with an invaluable topical Bibliography.

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