
This book usefully collects twenty-three essays of which two are previously unpublished while the others are reprinted or slightly revised. They are devoted exclusively to ethics, with seven articles on Socrates and Plato, twelve on Aristotle and four on Hellenistic Philosophy. With so much scholarly work being published on ancient philosophy during the last couple of decades, one sometimes wonders how much of it will still be read one hundred years from now. Will it disappear from view in the way in which, for example, so much published in nineteenth century German periodicals is now largely ignored? The writings of John Cooper probably have a better chance than most of still being read at the end of the present century. These essays are characterised by clarity, philosophical rigour, and thorough knowledge of the texts and secondary literature. They present reasonable and stimulating interpretations of the texts that deserve the closest consideration. Altogether they represent what should be an enduring contribution to the study of ancient philosophy.

While, as I said, the writing is usually lucid, it occasionally expands into needless verbosity. Consider the following sentence: ‘this knowledge is necessarily a single, comprehensive theory of human nature and human life, unattainable except when a permanent, unshakable shift takes place in the state of one’s mind — in one’s overall grasp of the value of everything that actually is of value for a human being’ (p. 97, my italics). As far as I can see, all of the italicised words and phrases in this sentence could have been omitted without losing anything of importance. Likewise, Cooper has a penchant for using pairs of synonyms or near synonyms as adjectives when one would be quite enough, as in ‘permanent, unshakable’ above.

On another point of language, I find it very puzzling that Cooper (or anybody) translates Aristotle’s use of ‘*theoria*’ as ‘study.’ He says at one point that, for Aristotle, the happiness of the gods consists in ‘excellent contemplative study’ (233), thereby bringing out how inappropriate the translation is. Does Aristotle’s god *study*? I think not.

The translation is also unsatisfactory for the *theoria* of human beings. To study is to labour to acquire knowledge, not, as Aristotle uses it, to think of what you already know for its own sake. A student studying for an

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examination or a scholar who is said to be studying the French Revolution or mathematics studies in order to attain knowledge. If a scholar retires and gives up his scholarly work in mathematics he may well be able to think of what he has come to know, but we no longer say that he is studying mathematics.

Granted, a student can study by reviewing what she already knows well enough, but even in this case one studies for the purpose of reinforcing one’s knowledge, and so in order to achieve an end distinct from the studying. Even if there are cases where a person studies merely for the sake of studying and not for the sake of acquiring knowledge or deciding whether to accept a proposal, it is still different from what Aristotle means by ‘theoria.’ To think of what one already knows with no further cognitive end in view — the referent of ‘theoria’ for human beings (1177b19–20, for example) — is not to study. For Aristotle, the highest level of intellectual attainment for a person is not a movement towards the possession of a potentiality, a quality, but the contemplation of what is already known, the actualization of potential knowledge. It is not a movement towards some further goal, as study is a movement towards a further goal, even if the person engaged in studying does not do it for the sake of that goal.

In the remainder of this review I will discuss some points of interpretation on which I am not convinced by Cooper’s arguments for his position, paying special attention to his paper ‘Contemplation and Happiness in Aristotle: A Reconsideration’ which revises the account of Aristotle’s views on happiness found in his well known book, Reason and Human Good in Aristotle.

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Cooper correctly points out that ancient ethical theories devoted themselves to the examination of moral psychology and virtues of character much more than contemporary ethics. But he exaggerates his case. He says (x):

Ethics meant more than, indeed something different from, rules of behavior. Ethics was good character and what that entailed... Ethical theory was the philosophical study of the best way to be, rather than any principles for what to do in particular circumstances or in relation to recurrent temptations... Ancient moral philosophy... investigated the human person first and foremost. It studies the specific capacities and powers, the different interests and desires, that human beings by nature develop or are born with, and how one ought to limit, arrange, and organize those for the best. [my italics]

When applied to Aristotle (as Cooper does in his paper ‘Remarks on Aristotle’s Moral Psychology’) this is misleading. Cooper says that Aristotle sees ‘moral theory [as] based on the virtues, rather than on moral rules or other principles of behavior’ (237). Of course, Aristotle does study virtues and vices of character, but it is false to say that this is something completely different from the discussion of rules of behaviour. Aristotle’s general explanation