

Book Review

A REVIEW OF *REASON AND HUMAN GOOD IN ARISTOTLE*

John M. Cooper's *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) is an important book and one that typifies the current renaissance in the study of Greek philosophy. Cooper's thorough training in classical languages and textual criticism and his sensitivity to philosophical issues qualify him to attempt to work out "the over-all theory" behind Aristotle's separate treatments of happiness, virtue, moral intelligence, and so forth. "I have not hesitated to risk following out Aristotle's ideas considerably beyond the point at which conventional interpretations leave off." Cooper's technique is dialectical: in the course of articulating and assessing divergent lines of interpretation, he continually challenges Aristotle's assertions. For those regarding Aristotle as a live philosopher rather than a stuffed museum-piece or, worse, a fabrication out of scattered scraps of text, Cooper's book is exhilarating. In tearing away at the weak or questionable in Aristotle, he frequently uncovers hidden strengths. Even the reader who indignantly disagrees with Cooper is forced to rethink the issue on new levels. Of course, the virtues of the book do not recommend it to every reader, and beginners may find they do not possess the linguistic skills or the background in Aristotle and the secondary literature presupposed by Cooper. At the very least, the reader must always have copies of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* close at hand.

The book has two foci. Chapter 1, "Deliberation, Practical Syllogisms, and Intuition," attempts to reconstruct Aristotle's views about moral reasoning on the basis of his characterization of prudential and technical reasoning. Since I discuss this chapter elsewhere, I shall not have more to say about it here. (See my "The Rational Basis for Social Planning in Aristotle" [Paper delivered at a Liberty Fund conference, Reason, Values, and Political Principles, Pomona, Calif., March 1977]). I will be concerned instead with the focus of the other two chapters: happiness, or "human flourishing" (Cooper's translation of *eudaimonia*), which is the ultimate end of human action for Aristotle.

Chapter 3, "Intellectualism in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," examines Aristotle's case, in the tenth book of that work, for the life of theoretical wisdom. It is obvious to every reader of Aristotle that the theoretical life of contemplation is "the best life." But it is unclear whether Aristotle means by this that our happiness consists *exclusively* of contemplative activity or that contemplation is the most important among many compo-

nents of the best life. For example, does the exercise of moral virtues such as courage, temperance, moral ambitiousness, friendliness, etc., form a part of happiness? Cooper concludes that Aristotle is led to the narrow intellectualist conception of happiness, a view that conflicts with the preference of Cooper and many twentieth-century readers for the development of the "whole person." This interpretation is supported with an interesting discussion of parallel developments in Aristotle's later psychology, where Aristotle sharply distinguishes between the highest intellectual powers, especially the so-called active intellect: "Strictly it is a man's intellect that makes him what he is and . . . therefore any choice of ideal for self-realization other than the maximum development and exercise of the mind would be low and unworthy" (Cooper, pp. 176-77). The reader should, however, be alerted to the fact that Cooper's remarks about "the late and technical psychological theory of the *De Anima*" presuppose a particular interpretation of a highly controversial text. As D. W. Hamlyn cautiously remarks, "The part of the soul which is said to be eternal is a rather abstract entity which has only a metaphysical role to play as a necessary condition of the functioning of the soul" (*Aristotle's "De Anima" Books II and III* [Oxford, 1968], p. 142). It is hard to see how such an entity could serve as the subject of a *complete* life as envisioned by Cooper, even if it were a "different kind of soul" because separable.

The second chapter, "Moral Virtue and Human Flourishing," will be of special interest to those who are concerned with assessing the contribution to moral philosophy of Ayn Rand and of other philosophers such as H. B. Acton, Robert Nozick, and Eric Mack. Cooper pursues a line of inquiry into the *Ethics* begun by W. F. R. Hardie, J. L. Ackrill, and others. When Aristotle speaks of happiness as an ultimate end, he thinks of it not as a "first-order end," as one specific goal competing with other specific goals, but as a "second-order end." To pursue a second-order end is "to attempt to put into effect an orderly scheme for the attainment of [the exercise of one's sexual, intellectual, and social capacities], or other such, first-order ends" (Cooper, pp. 96-97). This helps explain how Aristotle can view an ultimate end as a *standard* of value, but it leaves open a further question: Is happiness an "inclusive" standard that admits a number of ends as intrinsically valuable or a "dominant-end" standard that admits only a single end, such as theoretical wisdom, as intrinsically valuable? (Unfortunately, Cooper follows Hardie's misleading use of "dominant," which is not strictly a contrary of "inclusive." I can include two values and still let one be dominant in the sense that I always prefer it to the other when I have to choose between them: this is called a "lexical ordering" of goods.)

Either way, Aristotle's theory leads to difficulty. Does happiness include, as an independently valued first-order end, the practice of a moral virtue such as justice toward others? If it includes *both*, say, theoretical

activity and moral practice as primary values, what does one do if there is a possible conflict between them? Suppose the philosopher could expand his or her library or could gain more leisure time by committing some gross injustice for which there is scant chance of requital. What is the "trade-off" to be between justice and mind expansion? Must one fall back on some version of subjectivism to decide between them? On the other hand, if only theoretical activity is included as an ultimate value, one will be totally ruthless in pursuing this goal. Whenever considerations of justice might interfere, they will simply be brushed aside.

As I understand Rand's position in "The Objectivist Ethics," she slices through this Gordian knot with a distinction between two types of moral principles: the principle that you should treat yourself as an end, rather than as a means for the ends of others, corresponds to the Aristotelian notion of an ultimate end; but the principle that you should treat others as ends in themselves, rather than as means to your ends, does not set up another ultimate end competing with the first. (Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* [New York, 1964], pp. 27, 94). Rather, in Nozick's terminology, Rand's theory of rights sets forth *side constraints* within which one is to pursue one's ultimate ends. One can have integrity and be uncompromising, in the sense of never subordinating one's primary values to something else, without being ruthless, in the sense of violating moral constraints toward others.

Cooper's own sympathies lie with an inclusive second-order end, and he believes that Aristotle himself favors such a view in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the earlier books (excluding the tenth) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Specifically, Aristotle will hold a "bipartite end, consisting jointly of morally virtuous activity and excellent theorizing" (Cooper, p. 112). The exercise of moral virtue consists in regulating one's actions and emotions in accordance with a mean (thus, courage represents a mean between cowardice, which is too much fear and too little meeting danger, and rashness, which is too little fear and too much meeting danger). But Cooper wants to argue that the bipartite end leaves room for many other first-order goods, because "exercising moral control entails the realization of values of many other kinds besides moral value itself" (p. 120). It is hard to see that Cooper has established this entailment. On his interpretation, "to flourish is not actually to possess a full portion of all the basic good things, but rather to be living in accordance with principles which are rationally calculated to secure them" (p. 125). The virtues involve "a comparative evaluation of the worth of various kinds of good things," i.e., first-order goods such as wealth, honor, and physical pleasure. Even if one assumes, with Cooper, that one will ordinarily achieve some of these, it is hard to see how "the full realization" of such goods will belong "in the best life" (cf. p. 132). On Aristotle's account, a flourishing life is a life "lacking in nothing" (1097b15); if the flourishing life consists of the bipartite end, how can achieving other goods add anything to it?

A "not the quarry but the chase" theory cannot have it both ways. This sort of difficulty is, again, avoided by Rand's theory, as I understand it, in that, for her, "virtue" pertains to the manner in which one pursues values (just as in Aristotle), but she emphasizes the unique character of life as a value: "Metaphysically, *life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value *gained and kept* by a constant process of action" (Rand, p. 17). In the case of *this* value, one cannot drive a wedge between its pursuit and realization.

Cooper also comes to grips with the question of what *criterion* could be used for finding the mean in the case of moral virtues if their exercise is not to be totally subordinated to the pursuit of a single goal like theoretical wisdom. He concludes (correctly, I think) that Aristotle never explains what criterion is, in fact, to be used, but conjectures that Aristotle "means to appeal to the notion that the principles of the moral virtues are such as will, under normal conditions and for normal persons, lead to the achievement of the maximum combination of first-order goods" (p. 135). This maximum is understood in entirely *subjective* terms: "on some absolute scale the total amount of satisfaction [of the desires one happens to have] in the intemperate life, even at its best, is less than that in another kind of life, also originally available to the intemperate man" (p. 131; cf. p. 120). This is bad philosophy, and it is doubtful whether Aristotle could accept it. For he recognizes the existence of wantonly self-indulgent, brutish, perverted, and malicious types who quite consistently pursue and satisfy the desires they happen to have. Perhaps it will be replied that such people are not "normal." This will be plausible only if we understand by "normal" people those with the *right* sorts of desires, by some *objective* standard. Surely, then, an objective standard of value is needed in order to define a criterion of virtue.

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