G. J. HUGHES: *Aristotle on Ethics* (Routledge Philosophy GuideBooks). Pp. x + 238. London: Routledge, 2001. Cased, £35 (Paper, £8.99). ISBN: 0-415-22186-2.

In general, Hughes meets the tough but attractive challenge of introducing Aristotle's ethics to the uninitiated with success in this clearly written and usefully organized volume. After an introduction on Aristotle's life and work, the book gets under way with a chapter on the structure and aim of the (Nicomachean) *Ethics*. A selection of the main topics of the work are then presented in the seven central chapters, and the whole is rounded off by a treatment of 'Aristotle's moral world and ours'. A major omission is justice; otherwise the choice of topics is good, if not revolutionary: *eudaimonia* ('fulfilment'), virtues, *phronesis*, 'responsibility', *akrasia* ('moral failure'), *philia* ('relationships with others'), pleasure, and the good life. A feature of the book are H.'s transpositions, rather than translations, of terms into modern English. Here, as throughout, H. is motivated by the proper desire to make Aristotle accessible in familiar terms. One trouble is that while we may think of our lives in terms of fulfilment or of relationships with others, the terms must bear an unfamiliar load in an Aristotelian context. 'Fulfilment', for example, in a modern context means self-fulfilment, in terms of what one wants as an individual, rather than the fulfilment of aims rooted in one's nature, as in fact H. makes clear Aristotle thinks.

The term 'moral' is used for the subject of the *Ethics*, a common use in discussions of Aristotle, justified in that to some extent we understand what the word means, and to some extent it covers the same ground as what Aristotle is discussing. H. notes this, but his use of the term as a catch-all grates. A discussion of what we mean by 'ethics' and 'moral', and of the different philosophical projects involved with the subject, would have been helpful. One may agree with H. that Aristotle's arguments have the 'same recognisable shape as one's own patterns of moral thinking' in contrast to Mill's or Kant's—but Aristotle's project is to develop our thought about the way we lead our lives, in order to lead those lives better; and neither of these other authors thought that to be the primary aim of a philosopher's treatment of ethics. When discussing *phronesis*, H. says that it tells us what we 'should do' in view of living our lives as a whole, and this use is 'something which comes close to a moral use'; here it is painfully clear that, in H.s view, there is something more—or perhaps less—to morals than Aristotle's ethics allows. Hence it cannot be the case that Aristotle begins his ethics with a discussion of the 'connection, if any, . . . between living a fulfilled life and living as we should—as we *morally* should' (H.'s italics), as H. claims.

H. is a reliable and lively guide to Aristotle, as are his translations of the text. The forays into high-resolution textual exegesis are appropriately rare, but not entirely absent, as in his detailed argument for the view that the acratic is 'capable of thinking and still chooses to act contrary to what he thinks would be best'. One area, however, where one may doubt that what he gives us is Aristotle is on the distinction between the practical and the theoretical. In his main account, he quite correctly restricts theory to 'changeless and perfect things', but he sometimes slips into a slacker understanding and treats the two in something close to the intuitive modern understanding of them, such that one can also have 'a theoretical grasp of morals'. But, of course, understanding ethics (that is, how in general to live one's life) is the task of *phronesis*. This looseness has repercussions for his discussions of the latter term: 'The principles we use in our moral decision making are theoretical'. Yet it remains unclear quite how theoretical understanding is built into Aristotle's understanding of the 'moral' life. This remains so even in the discussion of the relation between theory and practical affairs in the good life. Here H. makes the attractive suggestion that neither of the usual contenders—the dominance of theory vs. the inclusion of the relevant activities—is right; rather 'both *theoria* and the life of a morally admirable member of the community are explained by the fact that a fulfilled life involves using our minds, on both levels so far as is possible'. For such a suggestion to gain acceptance, we need to know more about the use of our minds common to both areas.

In his closing discussion of 'Aristotle's moral world and ours', H. argues that Aristotle can be seen either as representative of the main tradition of western thought or as quite strange, depending on the texts one selects; and, after sketching some of the odder reaches of Aristotle's 'moral thought', goes on to give his view of Aristotle's answer to relativism: a general defence of his view of rationality, based on his 'metaphysical' view of a person as a 'rational bodily agent by nature equipped to function in a community'. The account of the good life Aristotle gives is consistent with 'pre-reflective' beliefs, and can explain why some of these beliefs are true and

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other false. This seems fair enough; rather more problematic is the contention that Aristotle would allow for pluralism within the limits of his concept of human nature.

Pitched a little lower than David Bostock's introduction (Oxford, 2000), and rather more detailed if narrower in the treatment of topics than J. O. Urmson's (Oxford, 1988), with useful references to the literature, glossary, index, and index of texts, the book is a helpful guide for that unaristotelian creature, the inexperienced reader of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

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F. ALESSE: *La Stoa e la tradizione socratica*. Pp. 387. Rome: Bibliopolis, 2000. Paper. ISBN: 88-7088-379-5.

The inside flap of Francesca Alesse's *La Stoa e la tradizione socratica* promises a work of solid doxographical research: 'Questo saggio si prefigge di individuare quante e quali fonti socratiche furono disponibili al fondatore nella Stoa sul finire del IV secolo a.C, e quali furono le relazioni che gli Stoici di III e II secolo ritennero di poter instaurare tra le proprie dottrine e la tradizione socratica.' This bald summary accurately encapsulates the precise contents of the book; what it fails to convey is how illuminating the endeavour proves to be, not only for the Stoa, but for Hellenistic ethics generally.

A.'s chosen task is not a simple one. Ancient hairesiographers, A. makes clear, frequently succumb to a diadochistic temptation to excessive simplification, projecting rigid dogmatic orthodoxies back onto the formative and philosophically fluid early years of the various schools, and erroneously treating amorphous entities as well-defined institutions endowed with a stable succession of scholarchs.

The first section of A.'s book sets out to redraw the map of this well-worn philosophical terrain. Rather than focusing upon a linear succession of proto- and quasi-Stoic thinkers, A. spends the first half of her work documenting the variety of philosophical influences to which Zeno would have been exposed during his intellectual career. As the title of her book indicates, A. is particularly interested in the relationship between Zeno's thought and post-Socratic writings. The chief reference points here are, of course, Plato and Xenophon, but the contributions of such lesser-known figures as Antisthenes and Aeschines of Sphettos are also considered in detail. The picture that emerges from A.'s investigation is of a nascent Stoa born not as a bastard offshoot of Cynicism but from sustained engagement with Socratic ethical ideas and critical debate with alternative interpretations of the Socratic legacy.

The second section of A.'s book traces the continually evolving response of the Stoics to the thought of other post-Socratic schools down to roughly the time of Chrysippus. A. here focuses her attention on three apparently disparate topics, Chapter 5 addressing the Stoa's interpretation of the doctrine of Forms, Chapter 6 its criticisms of Platonic conceptions of the nature of virtue and the psyche, and Chapter 7 the Stoic reaction to the Aristotelian disjunction between virtue and knowledge. In each case the Stoa is represented as defending Socratic doctrines against subsequent refutation or invalid extension by other philosophical schools. Throughout this section A. shows herself adept at winkling hidden nuance from well-explored territory, deftly analysing not only those issues which divide the schools, but also those concerns that unite them.

The third and final section of A.'s work is composed of two chapters. The first charts the influence of Socrates upon what was later to be thought of as the Stoa's characteristic discursive mode, dialectic. The second provides a broad overview of some of the central themes of Stoic and Socratic ethics, the most important of which A. identifies as the identity of virtue and *phronesis*, and the absolute supremacy of the ethical 'good' over every other kind. As in the second section of A.'s work, the Stoics here emerge as the philosophical school most concerned to maintain fidelity to original Socratic doctrines, with other schools rather more ready to revise and reinterpret Socratic theses.

A. is frequently inclined to discuss these theses in extremely broad terms, and her readiness to locate most Stoic teachings within a highly expansive definition of 'Socratism' may appear excessive to some readers. A.'s highly contextualizing approach, however, is of singular value with regard to the ancient Stoa, the unusual and often counter-intuitive axioms of which become far more explicable when situated within the broader Hellenistic intellectual milieu. Those who disagree with A.'s sometimes ambitious conclusions will at any rate find no difficulty in assessing

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