

**Fiona LEIGH (ed.),** *The Eudemian Ethics on the Voluntary, Friendship and Luck. The Sixth S.V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Leiden–Boston: E.J. Brill, 2012 (Philosophia Antiqua 132), XXIX + 197 pp., ISBN: 978-90-042-2536-7, €108.00.

Compared to its better known (and by universal agreement younger) sister, the *Eudemian Ethics* appears not to have fared well in modern scholarship: even in spite of the torrid discussions concerning the so called common books<sup>1</sup> it remains, at least in the eyes of a considerable number of Classicists (and historians of philosophy), “the other” ethical work by Aristotle, the poor relation of that masterwork of ethical thought that came to exercise such an enormous influence on later philosophical thought, namely the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Due to its corrupt manuscript tradition, and to the problem of “common books” which often caused the *Eudemian* to be transcribed only partially, with only necessary reference to the *Nicomachean* left to clarify the situation, the resulting work as we know it is difficult, sometimes convoluted and at other times merely repetitive. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that we are accustomed to depreciate or ignore it, comfortable in the firm belief that it suffers in comparison with its twin both in content and in formal execution. And yet – yet, for an Aristotelian scholar, the *Eudemian* is a trove of immense worth, a litmus paper by which to judge the complexity and development of the Stagirite’s thought, but also a work of considerable interest in itself: after all, its considerations of the voluntary, of friendship and of the concept of autonomous actions prove to be of considerable interest in their own right, not only as the poorer counterparts of the masterly discussion in the *Nicomachean*.

The volume, a product of the highly regarded S.V. Keeling Colloquia, comprises five studies, their content briefly outlined by Brad INWOOD and Fiona LEIGH in an Introduction which also emphasizes the vagaries of transmission (pp. I–XIX). The sequence in which the actual studies appear reflects – to a certain degree – the arrangement of matters in the work itself: starting with David CHARLES’ discussion of the voluntary as presented in Book Two, it concludes with Friedemann BUDDENSIECK’S consideration of *eutychia*, thus relating to Book Eight. The essays vary in length, the longest being Jennifer WHITING’S comprehensive analysis of VII 12 (pp. 77–154). They also display considerable differences of approach: from the impressive formalisations of CHARLES, through the imaginative and erudite extrapolations of McCABE and the detailed close reading and textual criticism in WHITING, to the hermeneutic proficiency of BUDDENSIECK. The result is a varied and fascinating collection illustrative both of the methodological variety of modern approaches to the philosophical (or Aristotelian) text and, at the same moment, of the complexity of issues related to the interpretation of the Aristotelian work.

Opening the sequence, CHARLES’ essay on the *Eudemian* understanding of the voluntary improves on KENNY’S interpretation<sup>2</sup> in clearly delineating the differences which separate the account in the *Eudemian Ethics* from that known from the *NE*, but also in highlighting the importance of nature (*physis*) in the respective definition: as a result, the *EE* account emerges as the less legalistic and more “Kantian” in its outline, providing in its turn an additional argument for the transmission and fates of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with its characteristic emphasis on knowledge and act of choice (the middle way would be attested by V 8, the “common books” account).

Next, Christopher ROWE seeks to outline the *Eudemian*’s concept of love: this is a rare case of a nearly total absence of comparisons with the *NE* account – this has the interesting result of portraying the *Eudemian* as a self-standing philosophical treatise. His actual focus is on the love of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. KENNY, *The Aristotelian Ethics. A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, Oxford 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. KENNY, *Aristotle’s Theory of Will*, London 1979, pp. 1–68.

things as present in the concept of *philia*, the argument drawing on the earlier studies of PRICE and BROADIE<sup>3</sup>. It must be said that this essay leaves the reader with a profound appetite for more – it is indeed to be hoped that true to his promise, ROWE will continue to work on the *Eudemian*.

Both McCABE and WHITING focus on *EE* VII 12 (the self-sufficient and his/her friends). Both, interestingly, refer to a Platonic context: yet, where McCABE sees the possible parallels in the *Symposium* (or in the Aristophanic image of entity divided), WHITING goes for the Socratic discussion of a pleasant life in the *Philebus*. The resulting interpretations are radically different, yet each proves in a way persuasive. Thus, the image painted by McCABE is of tragically maimed humanity, of even the most perfect of us being forced to seek companionship by the very imperfection of our nature. Meanwhile, the reading of WHITING offers the complex image of intellectual pleasure stemming from the contemplation of the object most perfect, all the while coloured by the Aristotelian remark concerning the peripheral nature of our self-perception. WHITING'S is an impressive and carefully woven argument: based on the careful reconstruction of the Aristotelian text (VII 12 remains extremely unclear and riddled with textual problems related to the original form of the text with its accumulation of pronouns, a fact obscured by the necessary fluency of any translation), it argues for the pleasure element as crucial in a self-sufficient man's need for a friend. In relying on parallels with the *Philebus* and *Metaphysics* Lambda, her argument rests upon the perfection of the object of perception as essential to the worth of the latter as well as on the peripheral nature of human self perception – contrary to divine intellect, we are capable of perceiving ourselves only peripherally, while our intellect, a fact well known from the *De anima*, assumes in a way a form of the actual object of perception. Incidentally, even if one remains unmoved by the beauties of the *Eudemian Ethics* itself, WHITING'S contribution, often going for the original *lectio difficilior*, constitutes a valuable lesson in the importance of textual research and a persuasive warning against interpreting Aristotle without keeping a close eye on his text. In fact, it is easy to think that any future inquiry into VII 12 will have to account for her reading.

Finally, BUDDENSIECK'S discussion of luck as a component of human affairs provides a study of the notion of *eutychia* as discussed in the *EE*. The complexity of the subject and its elusiveness, not to mention the elliptical nature of Stagirite's treatment in the *EE*, provide incentive enough for an in-depth consideration. Unfortunately, they also put very unusual demands on the exegete, who is in a way forced to rely on assumptions that cannot be supported with textual references. As a consequence, the resulting essay is difficult and – one may say – very Aristotelian in tone: one almost wishes for a separate commentary on BUDDENSIECK on Aristotle.

To conclude: this is a worthy volume, a welcome addition to Aristotelian studies in general, to the studies on the Stagirite's ethics in particular, and also, incidentally, a reminder of the development undergone by Aristotelian ethical thought, which because of the *Nicomachean* we tend to view as homogenous. It is also a testimony to the multiplicity of approaches to philosophical works that are characteristic in modern scholarship. And while not a work for an uninitiated Classicist (or, for that matter, for an uninitiated historian of philosophy), it offers considerable rewards to those acquainted with the intricacies of Aristotelian philosophy. Stanley KEELING would be pleased.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. PRICE, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, Oxford 1997; S. BROADIE, Ch. ROWE, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford 2002.