Introduction

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Few contemporary cosmologists feel the need to take into account Thales' speculation that all is water, nor do modern medical researchers survey Galen before starting their own experiments. But there are aspects of ancient thought that retain more than an historical interest. (This is not meant, of course, to diminish the intrinsic importance of being of historical interest.) Accompanying the resurgence of work in metaphysics from the 1970s onwards, there has been renewed interest in Aristotle's metaphysics. In epistemology, quite recently the *Meno*'s old question of what, if anything, makes knowledge more valuable than true belief has sparked new inquiry.

But it is in ethics that the relevance of ancient philosophy is greatest and has longest been recognized. G. E. M. Anscombe's justly famous 1958 article "Modern Moral Philosophy" convinced many philosophers that ancient virtue ethics can be a competitor of, or at least teach valuable lessons to, modern moral philosophy.[1] Virtue ethics, drawing primarily on Aristotle, is now a flourishing contemporary research program. So we hope that this volume will be of particular interest to philosophers working on contemporary ethics, along with those more focused on ancient philosophy.

So far I have mentioned Plato and Aristotle as inspiring contemporary interest, but there is a great deal to ancient philosophy besides these two towering figures. Since the 1970s, there has been an explosion of work on the Hellenistic philosophers (the Epicureans, the Skeptics, and the Stoics) as well as the Neo-Platonist tradition, and research on the Pre-Socratics has grown ever more philosophically sophisticated. A primary aim of this volume is to acquaint the reader with the full breadth of ancient philosophical ethical thinking and recent research on it. Thus we have included chapters on the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Stoics, the Skeptics, and the Neo-Platonist tradition, especially its greatest figure, Plotinus.

We begin with a chapter by André Laks on the Pre-Socratics (Chapter 1). It has sometimes been thought that it was Socrates who first made ethics, as opposed to the study of nature, a matter of philosophical reflection. In this chapter, Laks focuses on the relations between ethics

and physics in Pre-Socratic thought and distinguishes three relevant pos-
sibilities: correspondence, separation, and tension. Correspondence thin-
kers believe that we can read off, using the natural world as a model, how
we are to behave. Separation theorists deny that knowledge of the world
can give us any practical knowledge. Finally, theorists who see a tension
between ethics and physics find various complex difficulties for humans
in trying to base their lives on the order of the cosmos.

This chapter also raises two more general issues that will turn up
in several of our other contributions. First, what counts as part of ethics?
Is ethics simply concerned with how we treat each other or is it broader
in scope? Do its requirements go beyond various sorts of self-
improvement in character to include knowledge of the natural world?
Second, if the study of nature is part of ethics, broadly construed, what
does this suggest about the kind of knowledge needed by a good person?
As we shall see, even on views that keep ethics and natural philosophy
more widely separated, an important issue is the relation between the
kind of knowledge needed to succeed in the study of nature and the kind
of knowledge needed to be a good person.

In Chapter 2, David Conan Wolfsdorf considers our evidence for
the views of the historical Socrates. Careful examination of these sources
leads Wolfsdorf to the conclusion that we can only establish some "gen-
eral features of Socrates' ethics but not its details." We have good
grounds for thinking that ethics and political philosophy were central
to Socrates' philosophy, that it was informed by his experience of the
divine, and that argumentation was fundamental to it. More specifically,
we also have good reason to think that Socrates' ethics was eudaimonis-
tic and that he held that knowledge was responsible for living well. But,
Wolfsdorf argues, our evidence will not take us beyond this point.

The next set of chapters consists of essays on virtue and happiness,
ethical psychology, and love and friendship first in Plato (see Chapter 3
by Daniel Devereux, Chapter 4 by Rachana Kamtekar, and Chapter 5 by
Frisbee Sheffield) and then in Aristotle (see Chapter 6 by David Charles,
Chapter 7 by Jessica Moss, and Chapter 8 by Corinne Gartner). They are
followed by chapters on Epicurean ethics in general (see Chapter 9 by
Raphael Woolf), the Stoics on virtue and happiness (Chapter 10 by Katja
Maria Vogt), and the Stoics on ethical psychology (Chapter 11 by
Margaret Graver). Given their topical overlap, I shall focus on some of
the common philosophical issues that our authors discuss. Virtue and
happiness are the two central notions in Greek ethics. Although different
thinkers and schools have different conceptions of them, the following is

a rough first approximation. A virtue (*aretê*) is an excellent feature or characteristic and things other than humans can have them. Virtues are the features that make something a good instance of the kind of thing it is: a knife possessing the virtues of a knife (say, sharpness and durability) is a good knife and a horse possessing the virtues of a horse (say, speed and endurance) is a good horse. Moreover, being a good instance of the kind of a thing one is involves performing well the activities that are characteristic of one's kind; for example, a good horse runs well and a good knife cuts well. Thus one basic way that virtue makes its possessor good is by enabling it to perform its characteristic activities well. So some central questions here include the following.

(1) What features (e.g. of reason, of the emotions and of the desires) make a human being a good human being; that is, what virtues are there? What are the characteristic activities of human beings and how do the virtues enable their possessors to perform them well?
(2) Since virtue is an excellence, does it require the excellence of our rational capacity, that is, knowledge? If so, what kind of knowledge is required? Practical or theoretical? Might some appropriate form of true belief suffice for a lower grade of virtue?
(3) How many virtues are there and what are the relations among them? In particular, is it possible to have one virtue without having the rest? Or do the virtues come in a package such that if one has one virtue, one has them all? If one cannot have one virtue without having them all, is this because all the virtues are identical or are they interentailing without being identical?

The exact details of various philosophers' conceptions of happiness (*eudaimonia*) are often intricate, but etymologically and in its earliest uses, being happy (*eudaimôn*) meant being well off with respect to divine forces (*daimones*). In philosophical writers, being happy is understood as living a kind of life that is overall best for the person in question. A number of important questions arise here.

(1) What is the relation between being virtuous and acting virtuously and being happy? Greek philosophers differ over the precise relations between happiness and virtue, but agree that they are intimately connected. Is virtue necessary for happiness, sufficient for happiness, or is it identical with happiness?
(2) Are the virtues and virtuous activity only instrumentally good insofar as they bring about the distinct end of happiness? (As we shall see, this

is the Epicurean position.) Or are they good in themselves insofar as they are constituents of happiness and thus are aimed at with no further end in view? Does this capture what we mean by the idea that virtue is good in itself? Is virtue more or less valuable than virtuous activity?

(3) If happiness is not identical with virtue, then happiness will have other constituents. What are these constituents? Do they include, for example, (at least some kinds of) pleasures? Do they include the happiness of some other people? What is the place of philosophical contemplation?

(4) It is often thought that Greek ethicists are rational eudaimonists; that is, they think that insofar as I am rational, I pursue everything else for the sake of my own happiness while I always pursue my own happiness for its own sake. As we shall see, some of our authors reject this assumption. But if Greek ethics is eudaimonist, is it too egoistic to be an acceptable ethical theory? This issue is relevant to the chapters on love and friendship as well as those by Julia Annas (Chapter 14) and Richard Kraut (Chapter 15).

The chapters on ethical psychology are a reflection of the fundamental role that psychology plays in Greek ethical philosophy. Perhaps the most famous question in Greek ethics is "How should I live?" (e.g. Plato, *Gorgias* 500BC). This includes, but is much broader than, the question of what actions I should perform. Deciding how I should live requires determining not only what goals I should adopt, but also what desires and emotions I should have (including what sorts of attitudes I should have to family, friends, and fellow citizens). Some of the main questions that arise here include the following.

(1) What are the basic kinds of human motivations and can they be divided into rational and non-rational kinds? What distinguishes rational and non-rational motivations? What are desires and emotions? What is the nature of reason and how do theoretical and practical reason differ?

(2) Can desires and emotions overcome reason so that the agent acts contrary to her rational judgment of what is best?

(3) What are good sorts of desires and emotions to have and what is it that makes them good? Does their value lie only in being instrumentally productive of right action and avoiding psychic turmoil or can they have some further non-instrumental value?

(4) What is pleasure and what role does it play in the happy life?

As I have noted above, one's attitudes towards others are an important part of what kind of person one is, and the notions of love (*eros*) and friendship (*philia*) play a much more significant role in ancient ethics than in modern morality. Some of the questions that our authors explore here include the following.

(1) What is friendship and what does it involve? Does it, for example, require aiming at the happiness of my friend for her own sake? Does it require that I have a correct conception of her happiness?
(2) If rational eudaimonism is true, then cultivating and maintaining friendships will only be rational if doing so optimally conduces to my happiness. Does the requirement that my friendship with you benefit me undermine the idea that I should aim at your happiness for its own sake? What are the benefits of friendship? Do they accrue to the one who loves, the one who is loved or to both equally?
(3) Is friendship such a demanding relationship that I can only have a few friends? Or might it extend more widely, say, to my fellow citizens? What, if any, is the relation between friendship and my general attitudes of concern for other people?

As we shall see, *eros* plays a much larger and more significant role in Plato's ethics than in Aristotle's. Insofar as Plato thinks of *eros* as a desire for the beautiful or the fine (the *kalon*) that is ultimately to be identified with our desire for our own happiness, its relation to interpersonal love seems problematic. One of the central questions pursued in Sheffield's chapter is how *eros*, so understood, is compatible with, or even requires, friendship understood as interpersonal love.

We have also included chapters on two philosophical schools, the Skeptics and the Neo-Platonists, who are less frequently seen as essential parts of the Greek ethical tradition. These chapters, by Luca Castagnoli (Chapter 12) and Dominic J. O'Meara (Chapter 13), demonstrate why such an omission is a mistake. Castagnoli explores the argumentative strategies used by Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics in ethics, the sorts of conclusions they reached, and the relation between the skeptics' views on ethics and the rest of their skepticism. Ancient skepticism, as the reader will see, aimed to undermine not just knowledge, but also belief, and Castagnoli shows how the skeptics tried to reply to the "inactivity" charge that such a life without beliefs would lead to paralysis or random or inhuman behavior. Finally, at least in the Pyrrhonian tradition, skepticism was seen as a way of life that answers the old ethical question of how I should live. In particular, skepticism

seemed to the Pyrrhonian to be the only way of life capable of giving a person what we are all seeking, that is, tranquility (*ataraxia*). Castagnoli examines why the Pyrrhonians think this, what a skeptical way of life would be like, and what problems a skeptic would face in trying to live her skepticism.

It has sometimes been thought that the Neo-Platonist tradition in late antiquity had little concern with the sorts of ethical issues that occupied their predecessors. Its focus on metaphysics and the goal of achieving some sort of union with the transcendental principle of the One or the Good might seem to leave little room for day-to-day practical ethical issues or even substantial concern for others. In his chapter, Dominic J. O'Meara (Chapter 13) argues that this is a misconception. In particular, he shows that, although some of their answers are quite different, the Neo-Platonists engaged deeply with the sorts of questions about the nature of happiness and of virtue, their relation, and the roles of pleasure and concern for others that are so important to previous philosophers.

The volume closes with several thematic chapters on central topics that cut across philosophical schools. In Chapter 14, Julia Annas considers the relations between the eudaimonism of ancient ethical systems and modern morality. Annas focuses on some of the main contrasts that scholars have seen between ancient eudaimonism and modern morality. In particular, she examines two of the most fundamental criticisms of ancient eudaimonism made from the point of view of modern moral theories: that is, that eudaimonism is too egoistic and that it does not provide enough action guidance to agents. In answering these objections, Annas shows how eudaimonism's response depends not just on one or two of its characteristic claims, but on some of its deep and systematic features. The result, Annas argues, is that eudaimonism is radically distinct from modern moral theories and that recent attempts to graft part of eudaimonism onto such modern theories are likely to fail.

In Chapter 15, Richard Kraut sees greater agreement between ancient theories and modern morality, at least on the key issue of impartiality. It is a central feature of much modern moral thought that morality requires some sort of impartiality in one's dealings with others. It has also often been held that ancient ethics attaches little importance to impartiality. Kraut argues that this view about ancient ethics is mistaken. He holds that the Stoics endorse an extremely robust form of impartiality, as does Plato. Aristotle endorses a strong form of

impartiality with respect to one's fellow citizens and may, arguably, be open to its extension in the direction of Plato and the Stoics. The Epicureans, however, are an exception and extend a sort of impartiality only to their friends. Such impartiality is enabled by the fact that, according to Kraut, most ancient ethical philosophers were not rational eudaimonists. (The reader will notice that Kraut disagrees here with Annas and several other contributors to this volume.)

In Chapter 16, I examine the old complaint that ancient ethics is too elitist; that is, it restricts the possibility of virtue and happiness to too narrow a group of people. I argue that we do find a radical form of elitism in middle-period Plato (around the time of the *Republic*). Plato here restricts the possibility of virtue and happiness to philosophers; non-philosophers cannot be either virtuous or happy and their lives are deeply undesirable. The fundamental problem of non-philosophers is that they cannot grasp basic value properties and thus cannot value what is good or fine because it is good or fine. This inability is grounded in Plato's middle-period epistemology, metaphysics, and psychology. I argue that these views change in his later period and that Plato thus comes to think that non-philosophers are capable of doing significantly better with respect to virtue and happiness. Turning to Aristotle, we find that at times he claims that any normal Greek male is capable, with the appropriate habituation and education, of becoming virtuous and happy. I consider some ways in which other of Aristotle's views may lead him to restrict this thesis.

In Chapter 17, David Sedley argues that Plato and Aristotle share a common goal for human life, that is, "becoming godlike." But in becoming like god, what, exactly, is it that we become? Sedley argues that for both Plato and Aristotle (although the story for Plato is more complicated) the relevant respect in which we are to become godlike is by leading a purely intellectual life. For both, the purely intellectual life is happier than any life devoted to ethical or political activity. Even if the contemplative philosopher engages in ethical activity, such ethical activity does not form any part of what it is to lead a godlike life. Aristotle's gods lack the ethical virtues, but as Sedley shows the question is more complex for Plato. The other important respect in which humans can become godlike is immortality and Sedley explores the relation for both Plato and Aristotle between contemplation and attaining, in some way, immortality.

In "Horace and Practical Philosophy" (Chapter 18), Terence Irwin takes up, in the case of Horace, what is a general and highly practical

problem facing the student of ancient ethics (including, perhaps, some of the readers of this volume): ancient philosophers offer advice about how to live one's life, but can an individual actually profit from it? Irwin focuses on three worries. First, schools differ in the advice that they give. So we have to make decisions about basic matters of philosophy, but few of us have the ability to weigh all the relevant arguments. Second, the recommendations of these philosophers often differ radically from common sense. Thus by adopting them, we run the risk of alienation from our society. Third, if these ethical philosophies require constant self-examination, we may find them too demanding or simply unattractive. Horace, Irwin argues, deals with these questions implicitly even if not explicitly. Irwin considers what Horace's answers to these worries might be and how these answers relate to Horace's claim not to adhere to any of the philosophical schools, but to follow different schools in different circumstances.

Although the authors of these chapters disagree on many points, it is our common hope that they do not fully satisfy your curiosity about ancient ethics, but rather that they encourage you to go back to the ancient texts themselves.

NOTE

1. Anscombe (1958). This article has been reprinted in many places.