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the Nicomachean Ethics: Books VIII & IX

Geoffrey Percival

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ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

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ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

Being an expanded translation
of the

NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

BOOKS VIII & IX

by

GEOFFREY PERCIVAL



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PREFACE

The aim of this edition is to present in as complete a form as possible the argument of Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The method of the edition is explained in the second section of the Introduction.

I give a brief bibliography of those works which have been of assistance to me: these deal in the main with the literature bearing on friendship in the life and thought of Greece before Aristotle. The published literature on the *Ethics* is, in the main, public property: and a complete bibliography is to be found in the Teubner edition of Apelt. Mr Rackham gives a brief account of the more recent editions which have appeared in English, in the preface to his Loeb edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

I owe a good deal to the careful analysis to which Mr Rackham has submitted the text: and also to the translation of Dr Ross. My thanks are due to Professor Cornford, who supervised my research: his kindly consideration, and the stimulus of his conversation, have been of great help to me. Mr L. H. G. Greenwood, of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, has always been ready to give me the benefit of his advice: and no work of mine would be complete without an acknowledgement

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PREFACE

of the inspiration which I have derived from his
teaching and his encouragement.

My thanks are also due to the Syndics of the
University Press, who have generously undertaken to
bear the cost of publishing this work.

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1939

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¹ Since the controversy is now concluded, I do not give references to those articles which discuss the relative dates of *E.E.* and *E.N.*

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INTRODUCTION

Of the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle devoted two to the discussion of friendship: and the attentive reader is at once inclined to ask the reason for so lengthy a treatment of this subject. Two reasons may be given. First, the concept of ‘friendship’ which he is discussing is a great deal wider than that which a modern reader would normally attach to the term: and second, Aristotle is dealing, even more than is his wont, both with problems which have been raised by other thinkers and with questions which arise out of his own observation of the daily life of his time. A short summary of the part played by friendship in Greek life, and of the treatment of friendship by other thinkers before Aristotle, will therefore be necessary for the full understanding of the material which he brings forward in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Further, the method adopted in this edition is new: and it will therefore be necessary to state the reasons which have led me to adopt this method of exposition, and the difficulties which it is intended to meet. The second section of this introduction will deal with this topic.

I. FRIENDSHIP IN GREEK LIFE AND THOUGHT BEFORE ARISTOTLE

The term which Aristotle analyses in his treatment of friendship in the *Ethics* is an adjective.¹ This adjective

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may be active or passive in sense, and is usually translated 'friendly' or 'dear to' accordingly. When it is used as a noun, it is practically equivalent to the English 'friend', and the abstract noun¹ which is formed from it is accordingly equivalent to the English 'friendship'. The verb² which is formed from the same root means 'to treat as a friend', and may usually be rendered 'love' or 'like'. An analysis of the objects and persons to whom these terms are applied throws light on the part played by friendship in Greek life.

Our knowledge of Greek life may be said to begin with Homer, and the Heroic Age which he describes: and, in fact, the concept of friendship, which a Greek of the fourth century took for granted as a normal part of his life, was largely dominated by ideas which he had inherited from the Heroic Age. When Homer makes Odysseus speak not only of his 'dear wife', but also of his 'dear heart' and his 'dear hands', it is clear that this is not merely a freak of language. Philologists are agreed that the adjective is in origin possessive: and its application to objects as well as persons must indicate a regard that is possessive rather than affectionate in origin.

This is confirmed by the use of the noun: a Homeric Greek meant by his 'friends' all those upon whose assistance he could rely—all those who, in the English phrase, were 'his men'. Now the Homeric society was

¹ *φιλία* does not appear until the fifth century, and occurs mainly in prose writings. The earlier term is *φιλότης*, which never dies out of the usage of verse writers, and in later works is mainly applied to sexual love.

² *φιλέω*.

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organized in groups, whose individual members were bound to the support of one another and of the group. In the days when piracy was an honourable profession, and every stranger was therefore a potential enemy, it was essential that a man should know upon whom he could rely. The Homeric society is indeed beginning to emerge from the primitive state of organization, in which the family or the clan stands as the only group to which the individual owes allegiance: but in its practice of friendship it reflects clearly the practices of that state.

Thus friendship in the Heroic Age denotes primarily the solidarity which exists between the members of the family: and the ‘comrades’¹ who form the other class of friends are bound to one another in a group whose solidarity is similar to that of the family. The essence of friendship lies in the duties of mutual support and assistance which it imposes. The ‘comrades’ of war or adventure in the Heroic Age are bound to aid, succour or avenge one another: and the tie which binds them to these duties is exactly analogous to the tie of blood which binds the members of the family to the same duties.

There is a danger that in dealing with the Heroic Age we may be misled by the splendid example of Achilles and Patroclus into supposing that friendship would in every case be accompanied by an emotional attachment as strong as that which existed between these two. The truth is, rather, that Achilles in all that

¹ ἑταῖροι.

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he does for Patroclus is merely carrying out the duties which were due to his comrade: and the intense emotional feeling, which leads Achilles into excesses, is extraneous to the normal idea of friendship between two comrades. Theseus and Pirithous, who formed their celebrated friendship by agreement after Pirithous had been caught in the act of stealing Theseus' cattle, and who seem simply to have joined together for their various enterprises, are a far better example of the ideal friendship of the Heroic Age: once their agreement is formed, they are loyal to the uttermost, but the beginning of their alliance at all events was due not to personal affection but to an overt agreement. Affection, in fact, may exist between friends in the Heroic Age, and sometimes does; but it is no essential part of friendship. The essence of friendship is its duties.

This 'group-concept', if we may so call it, is clearly to be seen in one institution of Greek life, which persists unchanged from the Heroic Age throughout the classical period: this is the institution of 'guest-friendship',¹ by which the guest, having come under the protection of the sacred hearth, and been assimilated to the family through the partaking of a meal, is bound to his host for the remainder of their respective lives. This bond is mutual: from thenceforth, each is bound to render hospitality to the other whenever it is required. In an age in which travelling was highly dangerous, the utility of this institution is obvious: it is a constant feature of Greek life. The guest-friends transmitted the

¹ ξενία.

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bond in many cases to their descendants: who could renew the guest-friendship simply by meeting and acknowledging one another's claims. So Glaucus and Diomedes, meeting on the field of battle, renew the pact of hospitality which has existed between their houses. Further, in later times at any rate, the friends of one of a pair of guest-friends could rely on the hospitality of the other: and so the wealthy Crito, in the Platonic dialogue which bears his name, can offer Socrates shelter and hospitality with his guest-friends in Thessaly. The 'hereditary guest-friend'¹ occupies an especially honoured position among the friends of a fourth- or fifth-century Greek: and while it does not seem that the analogy between the tie of guest-friendship and the tie of blood was consciously recognized by the Greeks themselves in later times, it is clear that in its origin the tie actually consisted in the creation of a factitious blood-relationship between host and guest.

A similar conception is to be seen in the ceremony of reconciliation: it would appear that in origin this ceremony, like the meal of guest-friendship, resulted in the admission of the former combatants into the same family. The underlying idea is clearly that the former enemy can only become a friend by being admitted into the group of his friend-to-be. Normally, however, the reconciliation has only its minimum strength: and, though Homer speaks of it as 'friendship', it means to him no more than an agreement

¹ ξένος πατρικός (πατρῶος).

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between the parties that each will refrain in the future from encroaching upon the other's rights. Homer can speak of the relationship existing between Odysseus and the relatives of the dead suitors, when Zeus has decreed that they be reconciled, as 'friendship'.

But this is really a peculiarity of the Heroic Age, at least in so far as it concerns the relations between individuals: although classical Greece does use very similar language of the relations of states. The Greek of the classical age does not put into practice the ideas of the Heroic Age without some modifications, due to changed conditions of society, and this is true of the Heroic Age idea of friendship. The broad outlines, however, can be recognized: in particular, the relationship of blood never ceases to lie at the centre of the theory and practice of friendship in Greek life.

If we compare the conditions of the fourth or fifth century with those of the Heroic Age, one difference stands out immediately. Friendship between persons who are not related by blood no longer implies the common membership of a group: it is determined by personal choice. 'Comradeship', in fact, has come to mean something far closer to personal friendship in the sense in which we know it. This does not mean that the group-concept has disappeared from Greek life: apart from the tie of blood, the Greeks never lose their feeling that the tie which unites the members of any group is friendship. It must be remembered in this connection that the Greek city included in itself a number of groups, ranging from the ancient clan

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divisions, which in Attica in classical times had only a religious significance, to purely social clubs.¹ It is the standing assumption of Greek political thought that the tie which unites the members of any state is friendship: and inscriptions (dating, it is true, mainly from the second and third centuries B.C.) not only testify to the number and variety of the clubs which existed both at Athens and throughout the whole of Greece, but also in a surprising number of cases expressly claim for the members the title of ‘friends’.

But alongside the ‘group-concept’, there has also grown up the idea of a close personal friendship, based on a mutual esteem and affection. It is a fascinating study to watch the growth of this idea in the literature that has come down to us. In the lyrics of the seventh and sixth centuries, the tie of friendship is, on the one hand, based on personal companionship, and, on the other, it is dominated by the strict conception of duty which we saw in the Heroic Age. Archilochus calls down a curse upon the man who ‘has wronged him, and has trampled on his pledges, though he was a former comrade’: and it is an attractive assumption that the ‘pledges’ are the same thing as the ‘mighty oath—the salt and the table’, which his defaulting father-in-law-to-be, Lycambes, broke. Sappho, too, shows that ‘comradeship’ was coming to mean something close to personal friendship, as we know it: she

¹ The restored democracy at Athens prohibited the formation of political clubs: it appears that it was in these *ἐταίρειαι* that the oligarchical movements, which occurred toward the close of the Peloponnesian War, were organized.

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can say that 'Leto and Niobe were very dear comrades'. Sappho further affords the sole instance of which I know in Greek literature, of a lady consoling a rejected suitor with the words 'But be my friend . . .'. Such freedom of choice was not allowed to the women of the mainland in classical times.

When we come to the Megarian Theognis, however, the 'salt and the table' are no longer a 'mighty oath', and he can warn his young friend that 'many men are comrades in food and drink, but in serious action are of poorer stuff'. Theognis, together with Hesiod, the moralist of the Heroic Age, is important because his utilitarian counsels, while they also reflect the spirit and the particular conditions of his own days, were used as a text-book for the education of children throughout Greece of the classical period. Hesiod is 'legal' in his outlook on friendship: and Theognis, while he no longer regards the wrath of the gods as guaranteeing the bond of friendship, insists time and again upon the necessity of loyalty to one's friends. Both regard friendship as a means to the protection of one's interests.

Utilitarianism, in fact, is the key-note of most of the popular thought and practice of friendship in fifth-century Greece. Friendship has become a matter of personal alliance: but it is still an alliance made with a view to furthering the interests of the parties. This utilitarianism becomes explicit when friendship, in common with the other moral ideas of the Greeks, is subjected to systematic criticism by the sophists of the

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fifth century. We also find that the familiar distinction of 'nature' and 'convention', which was applied by the sophists to the other moral ideas of Greece, was applied to friendship as well: in general, it is accepted that it is the tie of blood which exists 'by nature', other forms of friendship existing 'by convention'.

But the enquiry into ethical ideas was carried further than this point, to the attempt to find some fundamental explanation of the attraction of one individual for another. Two views are put forward: that friendship is based on likeness, and that it is based on opposition. These views appear not only in the ethical thought of the fifth century, but in the physical speculations of the pre-Socratic philosophers. When we meet them first in the teaching of Anaximander, it is clear that they are not used with any conscious ethical bearing: his assumption that like is drawn to like is conceived as a natural law of the physical universe, and his doctrine of the warfare of the unlike elements, though ultimately it is drawn from the notion of sexual opposition and union, is not put forward with any conscious reference to human conduct. Heraclitus, again, who maintained that it was the balanced opposition of opposed elements which produced the harmony of the universe, drew on the analogy of sexual love: but his fragments do not lead one to suppose that he applied his principle of 'union in opposition' as an ethical speculation with direct reference to human affairs. Empedocles, however, though he still assumes as a law of nature that like things are attracted to like, did apply his physical

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theories in some sense to human conduct. The parallelism between the two parts of his work may not be exact in every detail: but it is clear that the ‘Reign of Love’ in his physical scheme, when the unlike elements are mingled together, is meant to correspond to the ‘Reign of Aphrodite’ in the Purifications—a golden age of peace in which there was no hostility between man and beast.

This aspect of Empedocles’ work may be due to the influence of the Pythagoreans of Magna Graecia, with whom he is known to have been in contact. The Pythagoreans, indeed, attached great importance to friendship. In contrast to the physical philosophers of Ionia, Pythagoras attempted to establish a correspondence between his physical and his ethical teaching. We have not a great deal of trustworthy information concerning early Pythagoreanism: but the influence of the school upon Plato, and through him upon Aristotle, makes what we do know of high importance. The school seems to have been organized as a close corporation, between whose members ‘friendship’ existed as a matter of course: and the proverbs ‘friends share their goods’ and ‘friendship is equality’—both of which are ascribed to the invention of Pythagoras—seem to have been used as a justification of some form of communism within the order. I believe that the interpretation of the second proverb varied during the history of the school; and that the ‘arithmetical’ equality of the early period gave place to a ‘geometrical’ equality, which justified the existence of grades within the order

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by the appeal to proportion as an essential principle of the universe.

In any event, the ideas of the philosophers are taken from their purely physical context, and applied to the problems of human conduct. So we find that Hippias, in Plato's *Protagoras*, represents that the present company, since they are alike, are bound together by the strongest ties of friendship: he does not, however, make clear wherein their 'likeness' consists, nor does he develop his theme. Generally speaking, the sophists do not develop popular thought to its logical conclusions, but they do present it in a systematic form. They do not relate it to a reasoned valuation of human life: and Plato's objection to their teaching is precisely this: that if it is developed to its logical conclusions it leads straight to anarchy.

Socrates, on the other hand, if we are to believe the evidence of Xenophon, was thorough-going in his utilitarianism. But the man in the street, in Greece as elsewhere, was given to a rather muddled form of 'noble inconsistency': and therefore the memory of Socrates could be attacked by the sophist Polycrates, on the ground that he threw scorn on the ties of family and friendship. Xenophon's defence is easy: Socrates did teach that one should not rely on the tie of blood alone, but he also taught that one should merit the attachment of one's kinsfolk and friends by the services which one renders to them. It would appear that Socrates regarded both blood relationship and the friendship of persons otherwise unrelated as simple

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alliances of mutual service, differing only in the fact that we choose our personal friends, whereas our parents confer the benefit of birth and nurture upon us without any action on our part. Both alliances are called into being by the doing of services, and exist for the mutual benefit of the parties concerned. The fragments of Democritus show a somewhat similar utilitarianism.

Socrates was remarkable in democratic Athens for his connection with the philo-Laconian aristocrats: and he appears to have held a doctrine of love¹ which was parallel to, if not founded upon, the Spartan view of homosexual love. In Sparta, and likewise in Dorian Crete, homosexual love was a public institution: while the actual practices of paederasty were regarded with scorn and disapproval, it was believed that the love of a young man for a youth could have the most beneficial results. The ‘beloved’² was to be filled with the manly qualities of his ‘lover’: and this form of friendship was regarded with public approval. Now in Athens, and apparently in most of the other non-Dorian states, homosexual love was condemned altogether: it was not believed that any good result could come of it. The difference between Athens and Sparta is simply that while in both cities the actual gratification of homosexual passion was condemned, at Sparta there existed the belief that the homosexual attachment could be spiritualized, and should issue in the development of the highest personal qualities.

¹ ἔρως.

² The Spartan terms mean ‘listener’ and ‘inspirer’ respectively.

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Now Socrates, as is well known, distinguished sharply between the body and the soul, and believed the soul to be the more important part of us: in contrast to the common view of his day, he appears to have attributed to the soul most of the functions and attributes which we understand by the ‘personality’. Thus he held that love could be directed not to the body but to the soul: and he appears to have regarded this ‘love of the soul’ in much the same light as the Spartans regarded their higher form of homosexual love. Unfortunately, we have no Socratic psychology which could support this doctrine: and it is better to accept the fact that Xenophon, if he knew of one, did not see fit to describe it, and to rest content with the knowledge that Socrates did believe in the possibility of a ‘love of the soul’. For Socrates’ belief reappears in a developed form in the dialogues of his younger friend, Plato.

The Platonic theory of love has attracted perhaps more attention than any other of the Platonic doctrines: but I believe that its importance is greater for the understanding of Plato’s metaphysics than for the understanding of his ethics. Plato devoted only one dialogue, the *Lysis*, to friendship: and the *Lysis* has been somewhat neglected, while attention has been focused on the brilliant pictures of love given in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. The *Lysis* gives a sober analysis of attraction, as it occurs between two human beings: and passes from that to the consideration of the object of attraction in its most general terms. Two conclusions emerge from the dialogue. The first is that

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friendship is possible only between the good: the base are bound to quarrel. This is not metaphysics, but practical ethics, a clear statement of what has been current in Greek thought (sometimes explicitly stated, sometimes not) since the days of Theognis: a good moral character is necessary before friendship can be satisfactory. The second conclusion, which belongs to psychological theory, is that the cause of attraction is desire: and that the object of this desire is something that is good absolutely, not merely good as a means to some further good. Further, desire is a sign of imperfection, since it implies need.

The *Symposium* makes clear what it is that forms the object of desire: it is the eternal Form, the knowledge of which the soul lost on her entry into the body, and which she must regain if she is to regain her former perfection. Beauty appears to occupy a special position in the hierarchy of Forms, in that it is beauty, more than any other quality, which awakens in man the desire which is, as it were, the mainspring of his energy. This desire should be turned away from the beloved person, who is only one example of many beautiful things on this earth, to the eternal Beauty itself: but man may, of course, rest content with the beauty that is of this world, and find a purely sensual satisfaction. The importance which Plato attaches to Love¹ is that it represents for him the source of energy which man needs if he is to carry out his philosophic quest. The highest form of friendship is that between two persons who are

¹ ἔρως.

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united in the pursuit of virtue: and Plato condemns the love of the body, though he sympathizes to some extent with those persons who are neither completely sensual nor in full control of their bodily desires.

Plato seems to regard the highest form of friendship as occurring most frequently between an older and a younger man. He had constantly before his mind the example of Socrates; and, in his own experience, his friendship for Dion, the Sicilian to whom he owed his unsuccessful entry into the politics of Sicily, seems to have been of this type.

At the end of his life, Plato expresses in the *Laws* his considered verdict on friendship: and his doctrine is unaltered, although his practical provisions show an increase in austerity. The highest type of friendship is to be encouraged in the state, but the 'mixed' type, and the purely sensual type, are to be banned. Friendship also appears to have occupied the attention of his pupils during this time: and the pseudo-Platonic *Clitopho*, written probably very soon after his death, presents a doctrine of friendship which receives a good deal of attention from Aristotle in the *Eudemean Ethics*. This is the distinction between one true form of friendship, and others, such as the friendships of children and animals; these, because they are harmful in their effects, whereas true friendship is not, are not to be called friendships at all. Aristotle's triple division of friendship, based on his distinction of three objects of desire, enables him to deal satisfactorily with this doctrine: and his opponents in the logical quarrel seem

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to have given him best, for he does not mention the matter in the later *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The *Eudemian Ethics* need not be discussed here: for their essential teaching is reproduced in the developed treatment of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is clear in both treatises that Aristotle is assuming in his hearers some knowledge of Plato, and of the questions which he raised. It is noteworthy, however, that he does not mention, even implicitly, the Platonic doctrine of love. No doubt he felt it to be unnecessary: for since his abandonment of the belief in the transcendent Form as the foundation of reality, his rejection of the Platonic doctrine which was based on that belief follows automatically. To Aristotle, the highest type of friendship is still that between two good men: but the good which is the object of their friendship consists in their characters, and is immanent, not transcendent.

With one question raised by Plato, however, Aristotle must deal at some length. Plato had laid down that a perfect being will be sufficient to itself, and having no needs will therefore have no need of friendship: this doctrine Aristotle accepts. He has therefore to make clear in what sense he believes that friendship is necessary for the good life. This he can do by his doctrine of friendship as the extension of self-consciousness. This problem, which appears in the *Eudemian Ethics* with a clear reference to the Academy, is stated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* without any such reference. So also is the problem of self-love, which is handled in a manner that betrays its Platonic origin, but without any ex-

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PLICIT reference to Plato. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle draws very fully upon previous thought, and upon contemporary life: but his tone is independent. He speaks as the master of his own school: and his teaching may be allowed to stand as the original construction of his accurate mind.

II. THE METHOD ADOPTED IN THIS EDITION

It may appear that a new edition of a part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to say the least unnecessary: and a glance at the bibliography contained in Apelt's Teubner edition certainly tends to confirm that impression. Moreover, since the appearance of the Oxford translation of Dr Ross and the Loeb edition of Mr Rackham, it would seem that enough has been done not only for classical scholars but also for those who read the *Nicomachean Ethics* for their intrinsic interest, and to whom the knowledge of the ancient world is of little or no consequence. I therefore feel that this edition, which I hope will appeal to both sets of readers, needs a special apology.

A careful reading of even one page of Aristotle's text, and the collation of the notes which have been published on that page, together with the translations, leaves the reader with a feeling not far from despair. He will have been introduced to the Aristotelian doctrines which underlie the thought of the passage: he will be able to turn the passage into elegant and forceful English: and he will know something of the bearing which the thought expressed in his passage has on the

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general structure of Aristotle's thought. But if he is to be satisfied that he has mastered the passage, he must still do some hard thinking. He must know not only what each word means, but why it has been introduced at that particular point: and to discover that, he has generally to rely upon the guidance of his own wits.

This difficulty seems to me to be peculiar to Aristotle among ancient writers: and I do not believe that it is possible, by a simple translation, to surmount it. Abrupt turns in the argument, and syllogisms of which only one premise is expressed, are as mystifying in English as they are in Greek. It may seem, therefore, that the course of the argument should be indicated by means of notes: and this is indeed possible. When I commenced work upon *E.N.* viii and ix, I intended to do this: and I constructed a full commentary upon the first seven chapters of Book viii. This commentary is still in my possession: its bulk makes it quite unreadable. There is hardly a line which does not call for explanation of some sort. The question which must constantly be answered is not only 'What does Aristotle say here?' but 'Why does he say this particular thing at this particular point?'

It seemed to me that Stewart was on the right lines, when he prefixed to his commentary upon each chapter a paraphrase of the chapter. But to Stewart's paraphrase there is one weighty objection: it is frequently almost impossible to see how the sense which he gives is to be extracted from Aristotle's Greek. This is in-