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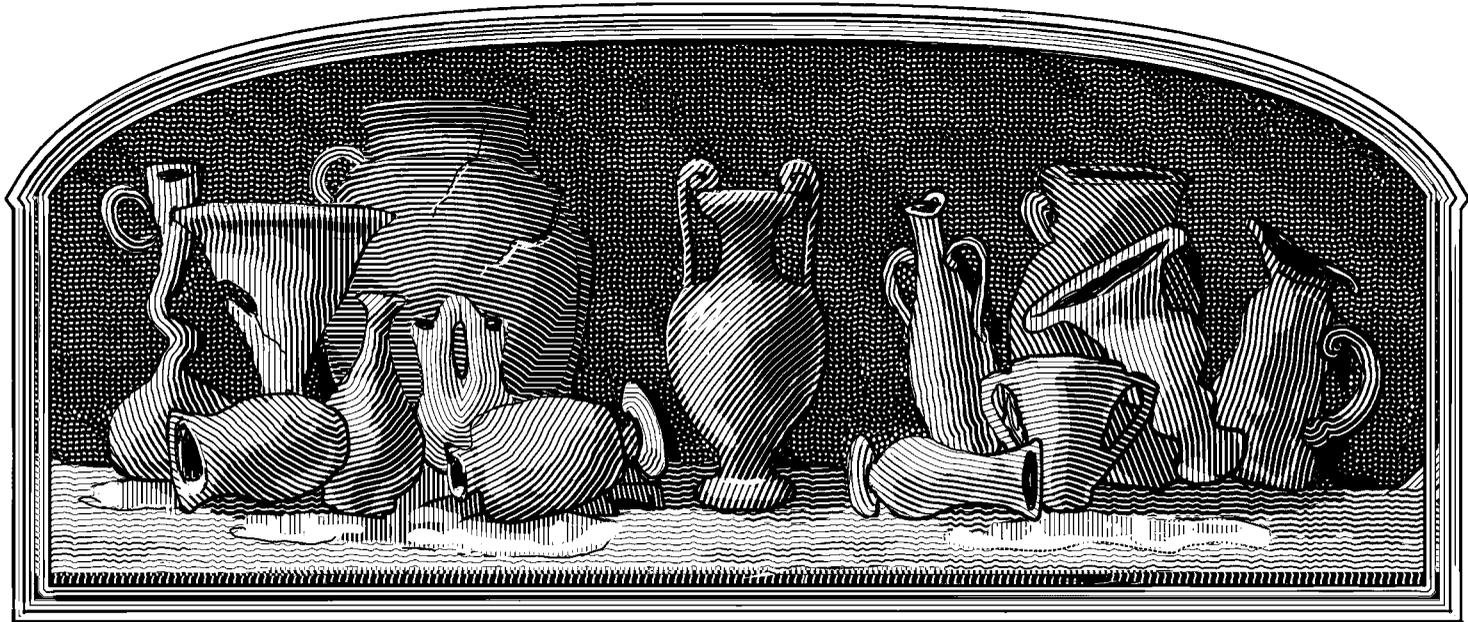
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HAPPINESS AND HONOR

Reason and Character: The Moral Foundations of Aristotelian Political Philosophy, by Lorraine Smith Pangle.
The University of Chicago Press, 336 pages, \$40



ARISTOTLE'S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* offers a compelling view of human excellence. Decent people everywhere recognize, and are inspired by, its description of good character, friendship, and happiness, and by Aristotle's own display of intellectual acumen. The *Ethics*, nonetheless—or consequently—presents significant obscurities. Intelligent commentaries are therefore always welcome.

Lorraine Pangle's *Reason and Character* is a thoughtful guide through the *Ethics*'s first six books and most of its seventh, with a brief epilogue that touches on the discussion of philosophy in its final (tenth) book. This unconventional truncating of what Aristotle presents is not meant to be arbitrary, or a testament to scholarly exhaustion in the face of his complexity. "The final three books leave the moral life behind," Pangle explains, to discuss pleasure, friendship, and "in seriously incomplete form...the life of philosophic contemplation." These discussions "venture beyond the scope of political philosophy." By political philosophy Pangle, who teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, apparently means here the prudent or rhetorical defense to gentlemen of the philosophic life, although

one might think that discussions of pleasure, friendship, and intellectual virtue would also help serve this purpose.

Her theme is "the relation between reason and moral virtue" in the *Ethics*, or "the standard true reason looks to in guiding human life." Aristotle attempts to give full weight "to the most inclusive understanding of happiness as consisting of goods of every kind" while also "educating" his reader's hopes and guiding him "to place his happiness almost entirely in moral virtue." At the same time, Aristotle is "preparing for his claims in Book 10 that the life of philosophy satisfies better the standard of serious and intrinsically fulfilling activity that has guided the examination of moral virtue."

ONE NEED NOT AGREE WITH PANGLE'S emphases to benefit from her commentary. It is elaborate and complex, and makes significant points about each topic she discusses. Her analysis is especially useful in exploring Aristotle's discussion of courage in Book 3, and his account of voluntary choice in Book 3 and of self-control in Book 7. Pangle follows Aristotle's fine distinctions scrupulously. And it is in these last two analy-

ses especially that her inclination or intention to narrow the ostensible gap between Socrates and Aristotle—Socrates' apparent reduction or inflation of lack of self-control to ignorance and Aristotle's seeming rejection of this view—is most telling. Pangle's Aristotle displays in rich detail the sober guise of the serious gentleman while step by step revealing the underlying substance of the manic philosopher. Aristotle and Plato are not very far apart.

Pangle's extensive exploration of Book 6, which discusses science, intellect, wisdom, prudence, and art is also notable. Here as elsewhere sections of her analysis depart from usual or rival interpretations. She is especially concerned with what appears to be a missing account of the element of the intellect we would associate with knowing natural or living beings such as man and other animals. I should point out, however, that her translation of *phronesis* as "active wisdom" rather than the familiar "prudence" or "practical wisdom" is jarring. "Active" suggests a contrast with "passive." Contemplation (or philosophy), however, which involves wisdom, is not passive. Indeed, Aristotle does not tire of informing us that contemplation is an activity.



Although Pangle's discussion is surely one of the few to which serious students of the *Ethics* should turn, I do have several questions about it. For one, prudence is not merely a discovery of means to the end of virtue, as is sometimes said. It is also or primarily a discovery of instances of virtuous actions. Prudence looks from inside the activity in which one is engaged and the choice one is about to make. Pangle indicates, but does not sufficiently examine, this element of practical wisdom.

Her exploration of what Aristotle means by the noble as virtue's end displays a related issue, or limitation. A problem exists with "defining 'well' or 'nobly' at all except as measured by some specific goal or goals," she writes. But the noble is not measured by an external goal. Nor does it stand apart from other goods. Aristotle does not see the noble as an entity that is separate from virtuous choice. Rather, to choose a noble action is to choose a proper, measured, outstanding experience or enjoyment of wealth, honor, or other goods.

Indeed, I wondered at times whether Pangle separates ethical virtue too much from happiness, understood as enjoying goods beautifully. "A great deal depends on the extent to which acting morally is experienced as intrinsically satisfying," she notes. "The more important honor and other rewards are to the virtuous, the more this becomes doubtful." But we cannot separate virtue from enjoying goods nobly. Virtuous actions do not float apart from the goods or "rewards"

with which they deal, although they are not simply measured by these goods. In general, in fact, it is unclear that Pangle's understanding of the relation of universal and particular or her notion of activity (*energeia*) is the same as Aristotle's.

Related to this is her excessive concentration on passions or on human needs, as if exercising our powers is best understood in terms of need and want. But we cannot reduce what is good or noble to what meets our needs. One sees this even in the arresting immediacy of our pleasure in encountering something beautiful or admirable. More generally, I do not believe Pangle has made evident what Aristotle means by the natural or the simple.

PANGLE IS CONCERNED THAT ARISTOTLE does not show us to be deliberating about ends (as opposed to about means), or using reason to select (or deduce) ends. This concern is common among those who study Aristotle. Yet, one might ask what more Aristotle should be saying about ends in the *Ethics*, given his remarks about the comprehensiveness of the virtues of greatness of soul and justice; his careful examination of the varieties of pleasure; his elaboration of the scope of friendship and of habituation; his study of intellectual virtue; his discussions of self-sufficiency, completeness, work, activity, and happiness; and his connecting of choice to one's own circumstances and not to abstractions. Given all this, one wonders what theoretical deliberation, based as Pangle would

have it on human needs and wants, would add to practical choice.

I also believe that in her wish to suggest that the philosophic life satisfies the needs we see at play in ethical virtue she downplays Aristotle's understanding of the attraction of honor. She doubts the good of honor, and thinks of justice too much from the standpoint of service. At times her interpretation borders on an account that steps too far from Aristotle's view of the gentleman. Aristotle "adopted precisely the spirit of the *spoudaios*, which is to say: what your job is almost does not matter—there are thousands of jobs that need doing, thousands of ways you can contribute that are worthwhile. The point is to do it well or nobly." But Aristotle's *spoudaios*—his serious, mature, or virtuous man—does not in fact believe that there are thousands of jobs that one can do nobly. The great bulk of them are too ordinary to be noble and insufficiently leisured to be free.

My questions are meant to spur discussion, not to end it. Neither they nor my summary do justice to Lorraine Pangle's many subtle discussions or to her overall theme. *Reason and Character* is a challenging, searching, and meticulous examination of a classic text. It should be read by everyone who wishes to understand the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Mark Blitz is the Fletcher Jones Professor of Political Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, a fellow of the Claremont Institute, and the author of *Plato's Political Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

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