



Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy (SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy)

Thomas W Smith

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Revaluing Ethics criticizes the notion that the Nicomachean Ethics is a moral textbook written for an indeterminate audience. Rather, Smith argues that the Ethics is a pedagogy and so must be read in light of the demands imposed by teaching and learning about politics in a tradition. Smith claims that the Ethics initially seeks common ground with ambitious, virile young citizens of ancient city-states who valorize honorable action and competition. Their love of honor can be a spur to virtue, but the competitive character of its pursuit also leads to despotic and factional politics. The drama of the Ethics lies in the dialectical engagement and transformation of a valorization of prestige and power. Aristotle shows how these commitments are paradoxically sterile when pursued in practice. In turn, Aristotle's strategy for reforming political life is to argue for the reorientation of his audience's desires away from the non-shareable external goods of political power and honor to shareable good. His strategy for reforming personal life is to argue for the reorientation of his audience's desires away from honor to a love of contemplation."

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