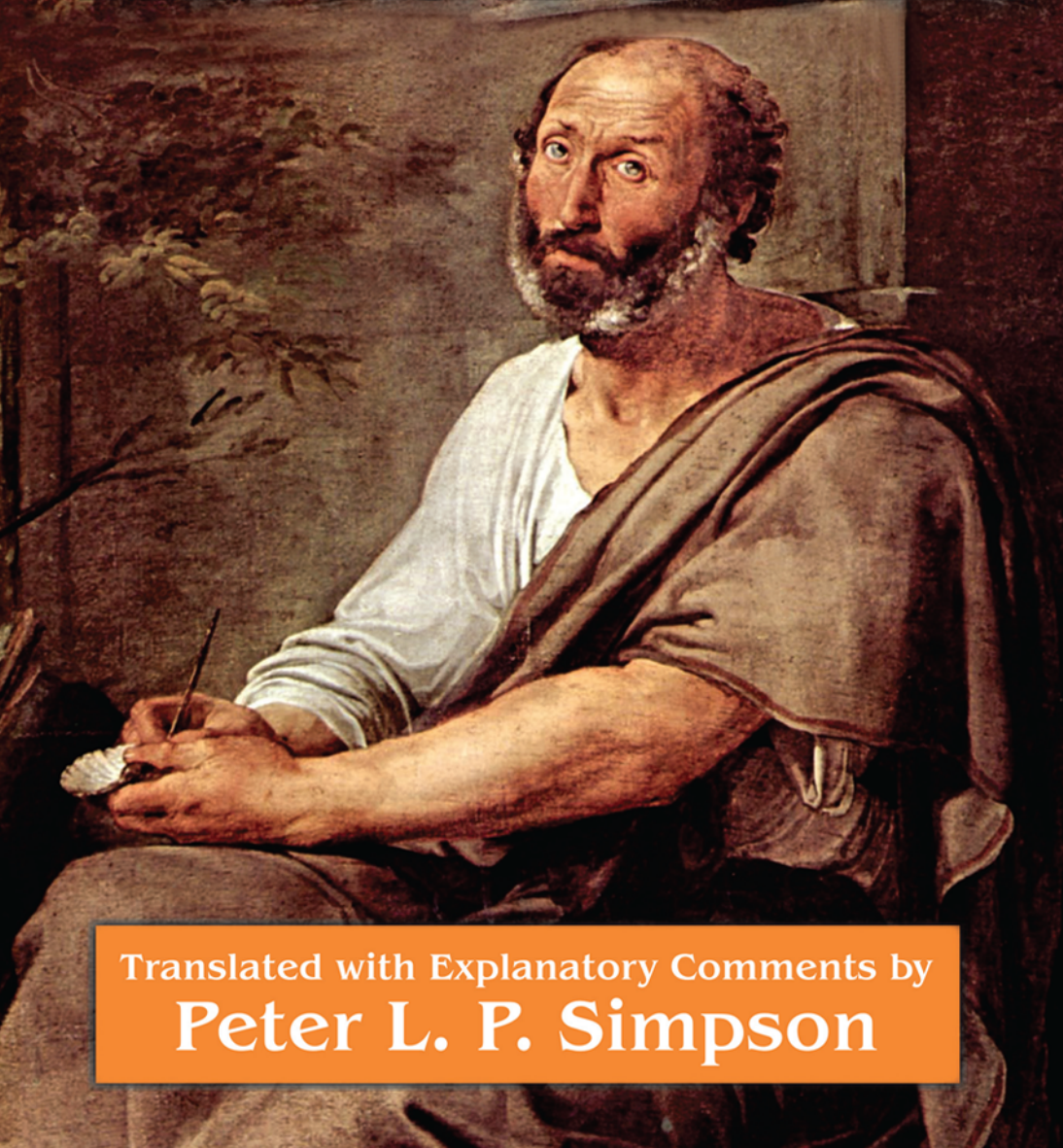


The GREAT ETHICS *of* ARISTOTLE



Translated with Explanatory Comments by
Peter L. P. Simpson

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To lovers of good character and of Aristotle everywhere



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Introduction

The Great Ethics: Character and Value

In the Aristotelian corpus of works, as it has come down to us from antiquity, there are found four works on ethics: the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Great Ethics* (or *Magna Moralia*),¹ and the short *Virtues and Vices*. Of these the best known and most read and studied, by scholars as well as by general readers, is the first. The *Eudemian Ethics* has, at least in recent years, come to be read and used as a useful support and confirmation (and sometimes foil) for the *Nicomachean*, but the *Great Ethics* continues to languish in obscurity. The reason is not surprising. It seems to add nothing to what we know of Aristotle's theory from the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian*. In fact it lacks things that they have (such as an explicit and coherent account of intellectual virtues). Further it seems marred by confusions of doctrine, by a formalistic love of syllogisms, and by sometimes tedious repetition. If there are three ethics in the Aristotelian corpus, and if they say more or less the same thing, and if even the *Eudemian* is of secondary value and interest, why study one that is of even less value and interest?

A first answer is that this judgment about the relative merits of the three works is not based on an equal knowledge of them all but on an already existing preference for the *Nicomachean* over the other two, since the *Eudemian* is still little read and the *Great Ethics* hardly read at all. Yet, second, if our aim is to understand the basics of Aristotelian moral doctrine, as the definition of happiness, the nature and kind of the virtues, pleasure, and friendship, the other two ethics would do just as well as the *Nicomachean*, and perhaps the *Great Ethics* would be best of all. For as a first introduction to Aristotelian ethical thinking it has a number of distinct advantages. It is simpler and clearer in its formal argumentation (its notorious love of syllogistic presentation). Certain matters, for example, the intellectual virtues, it deals with briefly, such that these can be made suitably secondary in terms of the work's immediate practical utility, which is, perhaps, its most obvious value. The teaching about the moral virtues comes through with a simplicity and

directness that the other *Ethics* have dispensed with.² Its syllogistic formalism gives it a transparency and accessibility that the other *Ethics* almost entirely lack. That it is thus more repetitious, especially for scholars long familiar with Aristotelian ethical teaching, only makes it more suitable to beginners: *bis repetita docent*. It is, moreover, not without its own vigor and charm, being, in comparison with the other two, more open, transparent, and intelligible in the way it covers the same ethical ground. Without it scholars would lose little of substance from the Aristotelian theory, but they, and especially non-scholars, would lose another and more instructive way of approaching it and appreciating it. Even those already familiar with the theory, if they will not gain knowledge of new things from it, should gain new insight into old things.

For such reasons the *Great Ethics*, even if it is not by Aristotle himself, is deserving of study. Should it be by Aristotle, it will deserve study for that reason too and perhaps more so if its difference from the other *Ethics* is traceable to what things Aristotle thought it appropriate to say to which audiences. It would thus give us insight, not into Aristotle the theoretician, but into Aristotle the pedagogue. Perhaps, indeed, such insight into Aristotle the pedagogue may be the most important and necessary benefit that the *Great Ethics* can confer upon scholars. It may open up needed, fresh perspectives on the question of the character, provenance, and relationships of the Aristotelian ethical writings.

Such are the convictions with which the following translation and commentary or explanatory comments have been written. If the *Great Ethics* is to be appreciated for what it is, and if it is to make its contribution to the study of Aristotle and his ethics, a new presentation of it is desirable. The work has been relatively neglected by scholars, and less has been done to make its content plain or to clear up its obscurities or to expose its inner structure. Because it is so little known, the lack of well-marked pathways through it hinders exploration by hindering access. Some sort of map is required that lays out the terrain, traces its general character, shows the main points of interest, and marks any special or unique features. For this reason the translation that follows is prefaced by an analytic outline of the whole, and the several sections of it are prefaced by brief summaries. The separate explanatory comments are meant to supply fuller descriptions and analyses, to sort out puzzles, to remove misunderstandings, and to resolve doubts of meaning and intention; they are not meant to be critical. The *Great Ethics* is not well understood, and just getting right what it says, prior to critical comments, is in special need of being done first. Much of the critical commentary directed against it fails because it does not attack positions or arguments that the work really holds or endorses.³ Criticism is wasted if it is not directed properly at the target. The aim of the explanatory comments is to help ensure as far as possible that the *Great Ethics* is accurately understood. The other and secondary task of criticizing what it says has been left to one side (except here and there).

The preface to the translation itself needs a preface. To resume the metaphor, is the *Great Ethics* even part of Aristotelian territory at all? Have not previous explorers marked its borders with signs saying “Warning: No Man’s Land”? Such explorers have allowed that it is neighboring land, sharing features in common with the home country, even having some of the latter’s streams flowing into it, but they have insisted nevertheless that it is foreign. Other explorers, by contrast, have declared it not foreign, though also not skillfully managed, betraying the immature workmanship of a youthful hand. Still others have said it is neither foreign nor poorly managed but rather a separate port of entry for visitors and immigrants, who must spend time there to get acclimatized and learn the customs before being allowed to progress further into the country. Something must first be said, therefore, about these rival accounts of the philosophical topography of the *Great Ethics* so as to reach, if possible, a fair adjudication between them.

Aristotle’s Ethical Works Then and Now

Of the ethical works in the Aristotelian corpus mentioned at the beginning (the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Great Ethics*, and the *Virtues and Vices*) all four were accepted in the ancient and medieval worlds as being by Aristotle. Today only the first two are confidently agreed to be so, while the third is controverted, and the fourth is almost universally dismissed as spurious. How the transformation in scholarship from the past to the present came about is a curious and instructive story, and although it has been told many times,⁴ a summary of its important points may usefully be given here.

The only doubts expressed about the authenticity of the ethical works in the ancient world were that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was attributed hesitantly to Aristotle’s son Nicomachus by Cicero and positively by Diogenes Laertius, and that the *Eudemian Ethics* was hesitantly attributed to Eudemus by Aspasius.⁵ The *Great Ethics*, by contrast, was never doubted but whenever mentioned was attributed to Aristotle.⁶ Doubts first began again to be cast on the authorship of some of them during the Renaissance, when scholars puzzled over why Aristotle, notorious otherwise for his brevity, could have gone to the trouble of writing three major works on ethics that all covered pretty much the same ground in the same way. Their suggested solution was to say that one or two of them were written by someone else, and since by then the *Nicomachean Ethics* had achieved canonical status as *the* ethics of Aristotle, it was the *Eudemian* and *Great Ethics* that they cast into doubt.⁷

These doubts, while not altogether allayed, ceased to attract much attention until Schleiermacher raised them again in the early nineteenth century by propounding the controversial thesis that only the *Great Ethics* was by Aristotle. Schleiermacher argued for his thesis on the philosophical ground that only the *Great Ethics* was consistent and coherent because, unlike the

Nicomachean and the *Eudemian*, it downplayed or ignored the so called intellectual virtues and located morality where it properly belonged in the moral virtues.⁸ Schleiermacher was challenged by Spengel, who responded with philological and historical arguments, such as references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* in other genuine works of Aristotle, that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was the only genuine ethics of Aristotle.⁹ Spengel's view became the norm for most of the nineteenth century, though a few dissenting voices could be heard here and there.¹⁰

The next major stage in the controversy occurred in the early twentieth century when Jaeger popularized the developmental or chronological thesis about all Aristotle's works (and not just his ethical ones),¹¹ and this developmental thesis is still accepted by many scholars today. The thesis says that Aristotle's works as we have them are a compilation of disparate writings from different stages in Aristotle's career and reflect different stages in his intellectual development. About the ethical works, Jaeger held that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was Aristotle's mature ethics and that the *Eudemian* was a less mature version from his younger years. The *Great Ethics*, he thought, was a work by a later follower of Aristotle, dating from after Aristotle's death. Jaeger's thesis was immediately challenged by von Arnim, who said that the *Great Ethics* was also an early work of Aristotle's,¹² and the controversy between these two scholars was continued by their students.¹³ Despite these differences in details, and despite the severe criticisms that Jaeger's work in particular has been subject to,¹⁴ scholars are still inclined to think that Aristotle's writings reflect different periods of his career, and that, with respect to the ethical works, both the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* are certainly by Aristotle (with doubt as to which is earlier), and the *Great Ethics* is perhaps not by Aristotle, but if it is by him, it is roughly contemporaneous, at least in its origin, with the *Eudemian*.¹⁵

Arguments about Authenticity

Passing on from this overview of scholarly opinions, the next thing to consider is the reasoning on either side about the authenticity of Aristotle's ethical writings, or rather of the *Great Ethics* in particular. These reasons are many and a full treatment of them would be a volume in itself. There are also two ways, at least, to approach them: either as a whole, according to the legitimacy of the method of reasoning adopted, or severally, according to the particular facts the arguments rely on. For instance, there are, in the case of the *Great Ethics*, certain uses of words that are said not to be Aristotelian, and to assess the truth of such claims, we need to examine both the relevant word use and the method of reasoning whereby it is deduced that such use is not something Aristotle could or did adopt. Both approaches will be pursued in what follows but primarily that to do with legitimacy of reasoning, since scholars have not paid much attention to it.

There are two problems to consider with respect to legitimacy of reasoning: the first concerns what conclusions may rightly be drawn from what evidence, and the second concerns the way rival hypotheses about the evidence are accepted or rejected.¹⁶ To take the first point first, there are, as a general rule, two basic kinds of evidence to use in arguments about authenticity: either (1) those intrinsic to the text or (2) those extrinsic to it. By the latter I mean information about the texts from other authors or from other works of the same author or from the actual material on which the original texts (or at least early copies thereof) are written (their archaeological date or location or their physical composition and the like, as in the case of Oxyrhynchus Papyri or the Dead Sea Scrolls). By the former, I mean evidence within the texts themselves, which will be either (1.1) those based on its matter or content or (1.2) those based on its words or its verbal form. By the matter or content, I mean either (1.1.1) the actual statements and arguments of the text or (1.1.2) the references present in these statements and arguments that go outside these statements and arguments, either to historical facts or to statements and arguments elsewhere in the same or other texts of the same or other authors. By the verbal form (1.2), I mean the style of the writing, such as its word use, its phraseology, its sentence structure, and so forth, although I should properly exclude from this division and add under 1.1.2 any verbal data, such as technical or novel or foreign vocabulary or meanings, that contain an implicit reference to external facts, say, of first invention or discovery. Arguments based on the matter we may call philosophical if they regard the statements and arguments, and historical if they regard the references. Arguments based on the verbal form we may call literary or philological.

So we have four kinds of argument, one extrinsic (2) and three intrinsic, namely the philosophical (1.1.1), the historical (1.1.2), and the literary (1.2). If we compare these kinds, it can be shown that no compelling argument about authenticity can be made on either philosophical or literary grounds alone. Such arguments, to be persuasive, must rely instead or additionally on extrinsic and historical grounds. The reason is as follows: Arguments about authenticity based on philosophical or literary grounds, in order to be successful, must say that the work said to be inauthentic contains philosophical statements or arguments or uses words or phrases or sentence structures that are foreign to the author whose work it is said to be. But in order to know that these statements or arguments or verbal forms are foreign to the author, we must first know which works the author actually wrote, since it is only from his works that we could know what was or was not foreign to him. But in order to know which works he actually wrote, we would have to know that the works said to be inauthentic are indeed inauthentic. In other words we would have to know that he did not write these works in order to be able to assert the premise on which the proof rests that he did not write these works—a manifest begging of the question.

In order to make this point as clear as possible, for it may seem too quick, we can illustrate it by means of the following argumentative schemata:

1. Author A could not have written any text with properties XYZ, say philosophical ones (like incoherence, contradictions, or falsehoods) or literary or philological ones (like certain words, sentences, phrases, and so forth).¹⁷
2. Text T (for example, the *Great Ethics*) has properties XYZ.¹⁸
3. Therefore author A could not have written text T.

Or, in another form (which includes reference also to questions of relative dating):

1. Author A could not have written both text S, which has properties ABC (sophistication, intelligence, and so forth), and text T, which has properties XYZ (the opposite or different qualities), either simply or at the same period of development.¹⁹
2. Author A wrote text S (for example, the *Nicomachean Ethics*).
3. Therefore author A could not have written text T (for example, the *Great Ethics*) either simply or at the same period of development.

The problem with both these argumentative schemata is the first premise. For that premise must be either an empirical claim or some sort of non-empirical or a priori claim. If it is an empirical claim, it presupposes the truth of the conclusion. For we could not know that author A could not write a text with properties XYZ or write both text T and text S, which have different or opposed qualities, if we did not already know that author A did not in fact write those texts. For if he did write them, which, if the claim is empirical, must at least be possible, then premise 1 is false. So, to rule out this possibility and to be able to assert premise 1, we would have to know in advance that he did not write them, which is to say we would have to know in advance that the conclusion was true, which is to beg the question. If, however, premise 1 is a non-empirical or a priori claim, then it is false. There is no telling, before the event, what texts a given author could or could not write. A clever writer, who was master of several styles (as we know Aristotle was), could, if he chose, write a bad book or a worse book than some other he also wrote, or he could write one book in one style and another in another style and do so at the same period.

An illustration of the force of this argument can be given from a remark by Rowe, who, while accepting the authenticity of the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*, rejects that of the *Great Ethics*. He writes: "It can fairly be said that if *MM* [the *Great Ethics*] is genuine, then no internal criterion, literary or philosophical, is valid for the judgment of any work."²⁰ We could accept, with Rowe, the truth of this conditional statement, but we would nevertheless

be free to accept the antecedent because, as the argument just given shows, we could accept the consequent (if we deny the consequent, we would have to deny the antecedent). Rowe, by contrast, has to deny the antecedent because he denies the consequent (his denial of it forms the basis of his approach to Aristotle's ethical writings). Note that this argument applies only to questions of authenticity and dating, to questions about whether the same author wrote certain texts, and whether, if he did, he wrote them at the same period. It does not apply to other features of such texts. On the contrary, the conclusions that scholars have reached through extensive and painstaking research about the literary and philosophical qualities of given works can stand as firmly as they did before.²¹ They can still serve as guides to understanding those works and their authors. What they cannot do, which is all the argument insists on, is tell us anything *by themselves* about the authenticity or dating of those works.

Dating, as well as authenticity, is at issue because arguments about dating based on development and on style must beg the question in the same way. They will assume that no author, or at least not this author, could develop in this way rather than that or write in two styles at the same time or write in this style after writing in that or something else of the sort. But no such assumptions could be known without first knowing how in fact the author did develop, if he did, and which styles he used when, which would beg the question.

Perhaps, however, arguments of development and style are appealing for their conclusions about dating to extrinsic or historical features of the text. If so, then either these features tell us when the author wrote what and which style he used when or they do not. If they do, the arguments, being extrinsic or historical, will not fall foul of the criticism. If, on the other hand, the features do not tell us when the author wrote what in which style, then arguments of development and style are not in fact relying on these features for their conclusions about dating but are assuming on their own what the author could write when and how, which will beg the question. Or if those arguments are meant to be *a priori*, independent of empirical facts about what the author wrote when, and to hold as matters of principle about how any author must or can develop or how any author must use this or that style, then they will be false. There is no telling in advance how any author must develop or which styles he must use in what order. The human intelligence is too resourceful and the human psyche too unpredictable to be so pinned down.²²

Such is the general form of the reasoning against arguments about authenticity based on literary and philosophical features. But there are objections we can make to it. A first and weak objection is that we know that a poor writer could not write a good book (except perhaps by some lucky chance), and the author of the *Great Ethics* was a poor writer, so he could not also be the author, say, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Perhaps, but the question is not whether a poor writer could write a good book; it is whether a good writer

could write a poor book. Besides, we could not know before knowing what other books the author of the *Great Ethics* wrote whether he was just a poor writer, a good writer going through a bad patch, or a writer experimenting with a new style. We do know from texts universally acknowledged to be Aristotle's, and from ancient sources, that he was not a poor writer and that he was a master of several styles (Cicero uses phrases in praise of Aristotle's writing that can hardly fit the style of his surviving treatises).²³

A second objection is that we could know from other sources that, say, a certain word use or grammatical construction or technical terminology or philosophical idea postdates the author in question, so that any work containing such words or constructions or terminology or idea could not be by the author.²⁴ True, but first, if this fact can be definitively known independently of the work in question, then it would fall under the heading of extrinsic or historical arguments (divisions 2 and 1.1.2), and these are not my current focus. For instance, it has been alleged that the *Great Ethics* betrays the influence or contains elements of Stoicism, which, if true, would definitely date the work to after Aristotle's death. This claim, then, is of the right sort for settling the question of authenticity, but it has been shown by scholars to be false (the supposed Stoic elements predate the rise of Stoicism proper and are already found in Aristotle's day).²⁵ If, second, the alleged fact cannot be thus definitively known independently of the work itself, then we would need to know that this work was not by the author so as to know that the said word usage or grammatical construction or terminology or idea was of later date, which would beg the question again.

A third and more compelling objection is that the conclusion of the reasoning is altogether too strong.²⁶ For even if it is true that no argument based on philosophical or literary criteria could show definitively that a given work was or was not by a given author, such arguments could surely show certain probabilities or likelihoods of authorship. For example, while Aristotle could write a poor work in a poor style, would he have kept it or would his friends have allowed him to keep it rather than persuading him to throw it out and start again? And if he did throw it out, could it have survived to be included among his works? We would be hard pressed to maintain such a thing. Accordingly, as this example shows, as well as others that might be constructed along the same lines, philosophical and literary criteria must be able to decide or help decide questions of authenticity.

There are two problems with this objection. First, it forces us back on matters where fineness of literary judgment and skill in interpretation become dominant. Such judgment and interpretation are necessary in assessing the quality of works, but where they are relied on wholly or predominantly, the room for mistake and for the subjectivities of taste is greatly increased. Consequently, as scholars have themselves sometimes complained,²⁷ decisions of dating and authenticity, instead of being based on what can be objectively

or independently assessed, get based on subjective impressions or personal predilections or failure to notice different interpretative possibilities.²⁸

The second problem with this objection is that it also works the other way round. For if we can assume, had Aristotle written a poor work in a poor style, that he or his friends would have got rid of it (or something else of the sort), then this text, which we know from the extrinsic and historical criteria to be his, cannot, despite appearances, be a poor work in a poor style. On the contrary, it must really be a clever work in a clever style and we should look at it again, and with much more care, to find out what is really going on. This reverse way of taking the objection differs from the initial one because it does not accept that the apparent literary and philosophical evidence against the authenticity of the work in question could in fact be what it appears to be. The initial way, by contrast, does. Which way, then, is right or more reasonable? We cannot answer by appealing back to the apparent literary and philosophical evidence itself—by saying that the appearance is real or that it is not—because that would beg the question on one or the other side. So if we are going to say anything about authenticity, we will be forced to appeal to other or nonliterary and nonphilosophical evidence.

The point deserves further emphasis. Suppose we found that a text attributed to Aristotle, as the *Great Ethics*, was not only very different in style and content from other works known independently to be his, but also that it was similar in style and content to the work of some much later author, as Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus or Sextus Empiricus. The example is fanciful, for the differences between the *Great Ethics* and the known works of Aristotle are not of such kind or degree. But it is an example worth considering because, were it true, would we would not thereby be forced to deny that work to Aristotle? The answer of course is yes, but then the evidence relied on would not be simply literary and philosophical but also extrinsic and historical. For we would have the extrinsic and historical facts about Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and Sextus Empiricus to rely on, together with the equally extrinsic and historical facts that such and such a style, or such and such a philosophical position, belongs to this date and school of thinking and not to some other and earlier one. If we did not have such extrinsic facts to hand, if all we had were facts about style and content and no independent way of determining when and by whom such style and content were adopted and also when and by whom they could *not* have been adopted, we would be in no position to say, on these grounds *alone*, that the work in question could not have been written by Aristotle.

This example naturally introduces the second problem with the legitimacy of reasoning in arguments about authenticity: the exclusion of rival hypotheses. Suppose that certain writings attributed to the same author show significant divergence in terms of literary and philosophical features, and further suppose that this divergence is sufficient to call for special explanation. In

order to know which explanation to adopt, we would need first to consider which explanations are possible or plausible (for we need not consider outlandish possibilities, such as that the author wrote one of the works while under hypnosis by Martians). In the case of the *Great Ethics*, there are several possibilities (briefly mentioned in the cartographical metaphor earlier). The first and most obvious, if not indeed the most popular, is that the divergences between it and known works of Aristotle are to be explained on the hypothesis that it is not by Aristotle but by a different (and inferior) author. Another and perhaps equally popular one is that it is by the same author but at an earlier stage of development. A third and related one is that it is by the same author but as mediated through some editor or redactor or student reporter. A fourth, and least popular, is that it is by the same author but as directed to a different audience.²⁹

The question arises about how to decide between the truth or likelihood of these options (or of any others that might plausibly be suggested). Scholars have devoted very little attention to this question, and not surprisingly because, if we confine ourselves to the literary and philosophical evidence, it has no answer. For either each of the options explains this evidence or it does not. If it does not, the option is not an option but a mistake. It purports to explain but fails to do so. We must confine our attention to those options only that do explain. But among options that do explain there can be no good reason, on these grounds, to prefer any as more true or likely than another. For *ex hypothesi* they do explain, and since explanation is the only criterion we are supposed to be using here to judge between them, all are successful. Therefore all are, to this extent, equally true or likely. One of these options might be simpler than another or more elegant or easier to handle or more in accord with our tastes, but it would not, on that account, be shown to be truer. The choice of one option over another, which is supposed to be a choosing of the true account over false accounts, cannot, if made on literary or philosophical grounds alone, be anything of the kind. The evidence is *ex hypothesi* not historical or extrinsic and so cannot contain any indication of facts outside the text (as time of writing or manner of transmission), but it is only by reference to such facts that we could determine, as regards options all presumed successful as explanations, which of them was truer or more likely than which other.

This conclusion is again very strong, but it is also very limited. It concerns only one sort of evidence (literary and philosophical evidence) and only one set of options (those that do explain this evidence). If some of this evidence contains, whether implicitly or explicitly, extrinsic or historical data, or if some of these options turn out not to be very good at explaining, then this conclusion will no longer apply. There will now be good reason, reason based on *further* evidence, to prefer one or more options as truer or more likely, namely those that do a better job of explaining and that better save the extrinsic or historical data. Scholars do typically rely on such further data

when making a judgment of authenticity. But no less typically they slide, sometimes unconsciously, from such data to literary and philosophical data and think that their preferred explanation of this latter data provides *independent* support for their judgment, when in fact it does not. All their preferred explanation can do is show that the judgment about authenticity is compatible with such data and not that it is required by it or favored over others by it.

The Authenticity of the Great Ethics: Intrinsic Evidence

The argument so far has been to the effect that we must rule out, or at any rate be very suspicious of, the drawing of conclusions about authenticity or dating on philosophical and literary grounds. But it does not rule out the drawing of such conclusions altogether. It specifically allows that we may do so if we use other grounds, namely those referred to above as extrinsic and historical grounds (numbered 2 and 1.1.2). All those grounds in the case of Aristotle's ethical writings (as mentioned at the beginning and referenced in the notes) speak in favor of authenticity and none of them against it.³⁰ The point is of some importance, so it deserves direct treatment. In addition, since the argument against basing judgments of authenticity on considerations of literary and philosophical data is so strong, there is need to review such data in the case of the *Great Ethics* (more detailed examination is given in the commentary), so that the correctness of the argument as applied to the *Great Ethics* can be properly assessed.

The sort of literary or stylistic features that distinguish the *Great Ethics* from the rest of the Aristotelian corpus and are said to show that it cannot be authentic are the following:³¹ the extensive use of *hyper* instead of *peri* to mean "about" or "on"; the use of non-Attic forms of verbs, as in the case of *eidenai* (to know); the exclusive use of *hopōs*, and never also *hina*, to mean "so that"; frequent use of plural verbs with neuter plural subjects (classical or Attic Greek normally has a singular verb for a neutral plural subject); the use of *holon* or *to d' holon* to mean "in general"; the use of *phēsi* "it says" without specification of subject; the frequent use of the "you" and "I" forms of verbs and the more dialogical or question and answer style of several passages of argument; the absence of any use of the dual (the form of words when the subject is two things or persons); the infrequency of the use of the optative mood of verbs; a whole list of words, or special meanings for words, that appear for the first time in the *Great Ethics* and are otherwise known only from authors later than Aristotle; the frequent and repetitious syllogistic form of much of the reasoning; the illogicality or incompleteness of several of these syllogisms; the frequent use of words of inference, as "therefore," "thus," "so," and of other particles (as *nun* "now," *ēdē* "already" or "precisely," *ouketi* "no longer," *oupō* "not yet") in their logical and not temporal meanings; tedious pleonasm or unnecessary repetition of words and phrases; the adoption of

philosophical positions that are in tension with, if not outright opposition to, positions adopted in Aristotle's other works;³² open contradictions of the author with himself (notoriously over whether prudence and wisdom are praiseworthy and virtues); and the fragmentary nature and disordered presentation of much of the content.³³

In addition to these literary and philosophical features, there are also historical references in the *Great Ethics* that have attracted attention. The following personages are mentioned: a certain Mentor (1197b21), most likely as already dead, and the likely Mentor died about 337 BC; a tyrant called Clearchus (1203a23), who ruled from about 364–352 BC; a certain Neleus (1205a19–23), who is most likely the Neleus who inherited Theophrastus' library on the latter's death in 285 BC; Darius of Persia (1212a4), most likely Darius III who was defeated by Alexander and died in 330 BC; a certain Archicles (1189b20–21), and the best known Archicles was a trierarch who fought in a battle in 334/3 BC.³⁴

So much, then, for the data; the question is what to make of them. The historical references, if they are correct,³⁵ require a dating of the *Great Ethics* in the form we now have it to a period not much earlier than the 330s or 320s, or toward the end of Aristotle's life (he died in 322 BC). Since those scholars who favor the authenticity of the *Great Ethics* judge it to be an early or juvenile work (because of its relative lack of philosophical sophistication), they are forced to suppose that the *Great Ethics* underwent some revision or reworking by an editor or student near or after the time of Aristotle's death.³⁶ Such a supposition is not impossible, but it complicates rather than simplifies the theory that the work is authentic. There is, on the other hand, one reference in the *Great Ethics* that embarrasses partisans of the view that it is not authentic, namely the assertion by its author that he is also the author of the *Analytics* (1201b25), a reference almost certainly to the *Analytics* of Aristotle,³⁷ and there are few more direct ways an author could indicate to readers his own identity.

The historical references of the text are compatible with Aristotelian authorship, if of relatively late Aristotelian authorship. The literary or philosophical elements are also compatible with Aristotelian authorship, if untypical Aristotelian authorship (they all appear, though not with the same frequency, in others of his writings).³⁸ For those elements show that the *Great Ethics* has marked differences of style and content from Aristotle's other known works. The question is what to make of those differences. Some explanation is necessary, but more than one explanation is possible. The hypothesis of difference of author is only one such explanation, and there are others, namely those mentioned before, that hypothesize difference of time of writing or medium of transmission or audience addressed. It is necessary to show with respect to these explanations that they do each succeed as explanations, for if any do not, they can be dismissed on that ground alone. Do they succeed? Scholars

over the years have argued for or against all of them except the last mentioned, which while often briefly noted, is as often briefly dismissed. Its plausibility as an explanation, since it has been so little attended to, needs elaboration.

The hypothesis of difference of audience has, first, no problem explaining any of the literary or philosophical features of the *Great Ethics*. The hypothesis is that the work is an exoteric one directed to a popular audience outside the school. We would not expect it, therefore, to display all the philosophical elaboration or sophistication of a work intended for those within the school (such as the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* are). We would not expect it to contain all the doctrines of a work of the school. We would even expect it, where necessary, to hide such doctrines if, for some reason, an exoteric audience would be puzzled by them or have an instinctive, if unfounded, prejudice against them. We would also expect it to follow the speech patterns and terminology common and familiar to an exoteric audience, and not, say, the more careful and nuanced style that an author might prefer in a formal work of philosophy; hence in particular we should not be surprised to find, as we do find, many Hellenistic elements in the language of the *Great Ethics*, for these would reflect the speech of its intended audience.³⁹ We would, further, expect it to make its arguments and process of reasoning easy to note and follow for an exoteric audience that would be unlikely to be practiced in argumentative subtleties⁴⁰ (so, for instance, it would be more likely, where it gives lists, to make the lists simple and without much elaboration or nuance).⁴¹

The hypothesis also explains the division among scholars about the quality of the *Great Ethics*, which some think is a poor work,⁴² while others think it a fine or at least respectable work.⁴³ Both views can be correct. The work is indeed simple and heavy handed and undeveloped,⁴⁴ but it is also subtle and sophisticated and provocative (as is discussed more fully in the commentary); indeed even the simplicity has an imposing vigor and the serried arguments a compelling directness.⁴⁵ That the same book could have such divergent characteristics is readily explicable on the hypothesis that the *Great Ethics* is an exoteric work, written for the wider public outside Aristotle's school. The other ethics, the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian*, will be meant for those within the school. The *Great Ethics*, therefore, will not display the philosophical qualities of the other ethics, which would be too much for a general audience, but it will, besides the expected simplicity and directness, contain invitations and hints (the subtlety and sophistication and provocation of the work) to pique the interest of the more curious and intelligent so as to attract them, if they prove themselves otherwise worthy, into joining the school.⁴⁶ The hypothesis is thus in principle better qua explanation. The other explanations, even those that accept authenticity, account well for one side only of the character of the *Great Ethics*, the side of unsophisticated directness and repetition. They do not explain, or not as well, the side of obliqueness and subtle indirection. The former side is what has been almost universally

noted and stressed by scholars, while the latter has been almost universally missed.⁴⁷ But an explanation, if it is to be successful, must explain both. The hypotheses of a younger Aristotle or of an author later than Aristotle, if this other author and younger Aristotle are judged, as they always are judged, to be philosophically inferior or immature, only explain well one side of the *Great Ethics*: the directness and repetition. The hypothesis that the *Great Ethics* is an exoteric work by a mature Aristotle successfully explains both sides.

The same hypothesis has no trouble dealing with any of the historical references. For it posits no special date within Aristotle's life for the work's composition. Whether Aristotle was writing it in his last years, or whether he wrote it first in his younger years and continually updated it, makes no difference to the hypothesis qua explanation. By contrast the hypothesis that it is a juvenile work is embarrassed by the historical references, and the hypothesis that it is not a work of Aristotle's at all is embarrassed by the claim the author makes to be Aristotle, as well as by the universal witness of the ancient tradition, noted earlier, that Aristotle is the author. There are shifts we can make, as have been noted, for saving the hypotheses from such embarrassment, but those shifts do have to be made.

There is another consideration, which favors all hypotheses that say the *Great Ethics* is authentic. It is taken again from Rowe, a prominent opponent of Aristotelian authorship, who writes: "the onus lies with the opponents of authenticity, since it is only reasonable to accept the tradition if no case can be made against it."⁴⁸ This statement is correct and, taken with what has just been said, should require us to conclude that the *Great Ethics* is authentic. Rowe himself, however, does not entirely follow his own counsel; for speaking of von Arnim and Dirlmeier, perhaps the two most distinguished proponents of the authenticity of the *Great Ethics*, he writes that "they have not made their case."⁴⁹ But if we are to follow Rowe's counsel, they did not need to make their case. All that they or anyone needed to do was show that no case, or at least no sufficient case, can be made against the authenticity of the *Great Ethics*, which has assuredly been done, for they at least have shown that none of the arguments against the *Great Ethics* (as its language, its thought, its style, its references, and so forth) is at all compelling.⁵⁰

The upshot, then, is that the hypothesis that the *Great Ethics* has the features it has because it is an exoteric work of Aristotle's is at least as good as an *explanation*, if it is not also better, than the others that scholars have offered. It deserves at least to take its place besides those other explanations as one of the live or viable options about what the *Great Ethics* is and who wrote it.

The Authenticity of the Great Ethics: Extrinsic Evidence

So far only the intrinsic evidence for the authenticity of the *Great Ethics* has been considered. But there is the extrinsic evidence also to consider,

especially the evidence from other writers about Aristotle's ethical writings. The hypothesis says that the *Great Ethics* is an exoteric work meant for an audience outside the school, so extrinsic evidence of two sorts is relevant: that relating to the character of an ancient exoteric audience and that relating to the character of the *Great Ethics*.

As for the audience, there is first a speech attributed to Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* (484c–486d) that praises the value of philosophical study and practice, provided it is indulged in moderately and at an early age. If it is pursued beyond that limit (in the way Socrates has done), it will ruin a man and prevent him being a good and decent citizen. Persons with Callicles' view would be likely to value the limited treatment of the subject found in the *Great Ethics* but not the more elaborated and developed treatment found in the *Nicomachean*, especially if the effect of the *Nicomachean* was to draw men away from the active life of the citizen into the contemplative life of the philosopher, which, of course, the *Nicomachean* notoriously does in its last book (and the *Eudemian* arguably does the same).⁵¹

Socrates in the *Republic* (497e–501a) gives voice to a like opinion with the *Nicomachean Ethics* about the pursuit of philosophy, and criticizes the existing contrary practice in cities, which practice he describes as being what Callicles said it was and should be. Socrates notes further that most people are prejudiced against extensive philosophic learning. He also admits, in the passage about philosophers needing to rule, which opens his praise of the philosophic life (473c–74a), that there is need to be careful about praising such life before an audience of decent citizens, at least until they have been brought, if they can be brought, to see that philosophy is not what they think it to be.

The conversation in Plato's *Meno* (90a–94e) between Socrates and Anytus, who is a classic example of a decent citizen prejudiced against philosophy, shows on Anytus' part a similar pattern of regard for learning in moderation but an angry fear of learning very much, especially if the learning comes from intellectualists like the Sophists. Notoriously Anytus, who was one of Socrates' accusers at his trial, could not or did not distinguish sophistry from philosophy.

If decent citizens in Aristotle's day were anything like Plato's portrayal of them in Socrates, there would be reason for Aristotle to be circumspect when giving lectures to an exoteric audience. That they were similar, both during Aristotle's day and after, can be shown not only by what happened to Aristotle himself (that he had to flee Athens toward the end of his life when prosecuted, like Socrates, on a charge of impiety) but also by other ancient sources. A first such source is Isocrates in the *Antidosis* (written 354 or 353 BC), where the aged orator writes: "I do not think it right to call philosophy what is of no help in the moment either for speaking or for doing, but rather I would call such a pastime a gymnastic of the soul and a preparation for philosophy; more manly, to be sure, than what boys in school do but for the

most part very similar . . . I would advise the young to pass a certain time in such education but not to allow their nature to get all dried up on these matters. . . . For I think that such verbal quibbles are like jugglers' tricks which, though of no benefit, attract crowds of senseless people, and that those who want to do something valuable must remove from all their pastimes vain words and acts with no bearing on life" (sections 266–69).⁵² A second is a work attributed to the ancient Sicilian lawgiver Charondas (sixth or fifth century BC), though perhaps dating much after his time.⁵³ "Let each citizen make profession rather of moderation (*sôphronein*) than of wisdom (*phronein*), since profession of wisdom is significant evidence of pettiness (*smikrotêtos*) and lack of experience with what is fine (*apeirokalias*)." These sentiments nicely mirror those of Callicles and Anytus referred to above. A third such source is Tacitus (first/second century AD), who says of his father-in-law (*Agricola* 4.4–5): "He used to relate that in his early youth he would have engaged with more fervor in the study of philosophy than was permitted to a Roman and a senator had not the prudence of his mother kept his ardent and burning spirit in check: for his lofty and upright mind sought the beauty and splendor of great and exalted glory with more eagerness than discretion. Reason and age soon tempered him, and from wisdom he retained what is most difficult: moderation."

We perhaps find it difficult nowadays to appreciate how prejudiced the civilized and cultured classes could be against philosophy and speculation and science. But that it was so the sources quoted attest. Consequently, when considering an ancient philosophical text directed to an ancient citizen audience, as the *Great Ethics* is here hypothesized to be, we should not expect its author to have the same easy unconcern about telling the audience what he thinks as a modern author might. An exoteric audience will typically be made up of two sorts of people: There will be those, on the one hand, who are interested in learning more about the treated subject, but who, like Anytus and Callicles and Isocrates and Charondas, would not want to take philosophical study very far and who might be puzzled or offended by some of the things that such study, if pursued further, would teach. There will, on the other hand, be those who would very much want to pursue philosophy further (like the young *Agricola* before his mother restrained him). From the latter would come, after proper testing and preparation, those worthy to join the school and whom Aristotle would want to attract. We should expect Aristotle, therefore, to be both bluntly direct and puzzlingly oblique, to use plain speaking in some things and indirection in others. But we should also expect, if we have the corresponding esoteric text from the school, that we will find plain and open in it what in the other is hidden and obscure.

So much for the extrinsic evidence as regards an exoteric audience, what must follow next is extrinsic evidence about the exoteric character of the *Great Ethics*. The first such evidence comes from Aulus Gellius who, when

speaking of the two classes or kinds that Aristotle's works were said to fall into, the exoteric and the acroatic,⁵⁴ writes:

Those were called exoteric that had to do with rhetorical reflections and the ability to argue and knowledge of civil matters, but those were called acroatic in which more remote and subtle philosophy was handled and which pertained to the study of nature and dialectical disputations. To the exercise of this latter discipline, the acroatic, he would devote time in the Lyceum in the morning and would not admit anyone rashly, but only those whose intelligence and foundation in learning and attention to teaching and hard work he had tested. But the exoteric lectures and exercise in speaking he used to give in the same place in the evening, and he offered them to the young openly and without distinction, and he used to call them "evening walk" but that other earlier one "morning walk,"⁵⁵ for he used to discourse on each occasion while walking. He divided up his books too, his treatises on all these things, so that some were called exoteric and part acroatic.

Note that the *Great Ethics* is properly described as "knowledge of civil matters" (*civilium rerum notitiam*), for it significantly omits the reflections on philosophy and legislation (the "more remote and subtle philosophy," *philosophia remotior subtiliorque*) that mark the other two ethics and that make them rather more than merely "knowledge of civil matters." Also note that the *Great Ethics* can be viewed as a suitable vehicle for testing the "intelligence and foundation in learning and attention to teaching and hard work" of potential hearers of the acroatic lectures, since its arrangements and syllogisms, with their directness in some respects and indirectness in others, might well serve to show which hearers had the capacity and will to learn enough from the first to sort out the second, and so accordingly had the capacity and will to enter the school.

To this evidence we can add that of Cicero who says, speaking of Aristotle and Theophrastus:⁵⁶

About the *sumum bonum*, because there are two kinds of books, one popularly written which they called exoteric, the other more carefully composed (*limatius*), which they left in their treatises (*commentariis*), they do not always seem to say the same thing; there is not, however, any variation in the sum itself (*in summa ipsa*) of what those at least whom I have mentioned say, nor any internal disagreement with themselves.

Note again that the *Great Ethics* does seem not to say the same thing as the other ethics yet, in the end or in sum, it does say the same (as will be discussed in some detail in the commentary).

It might seem that the *Great Ethics* could not be an Aristotelian exoteric work because the exoteric works are supposed to have been his lost dialogues, and the *Great Ethics* is not a dialogue. But, as scholars have pointed out, especially in view of the *Protrepticus*, which was exoteric and not a dialogue,⁵⁷ there is no good reason to suppose that only his dialogues counted as exoteric for Aristotle. Note, further, that among the references Aristotle makes in other works to exoteric discussions, there are several that could be to passages in the *Great Ethics*, among other works (the *Great Ethics* itself never refers to any exoteric discussions).⁵⁸ They are *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13.1102a23–28 with *Great Ethics* 1.4–5.1185a13–b8 (recalled at 1.34.1196b13–15) about exoteric discussions of the division of the soul; *Politics* 4/7.1 and *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1.1218b32–35 with *Great Ethics* 1.3.1184b1–6 about exoteric discussions on divisions of goods; *Ethics* 5/6.4.1140a1–6 with *Great Ethics* 1.34.1196b37–7a13 about exoteric discussions on the difference between doing and making; and *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8.1217b19–23 and *Metaphysics* 13.1.1076a26–29 with *Great Ethics* 1.1.1182b5–3b8 about exoteric discussions on the Platonic ideas.⁵⁹ No great stress should perhaps be laid on these parallels, for by themselves they do not show that there is reference in them to the *Great Ethics* or that the *Great Ethics* is an exoteric work. They do nevertheless show that the hypothesis of its being exoteric is consistent with Aristotle's own evidence, and such consistency, if not much, is also not nothing.

Some further and stronger support for the hypothesis that the *Great Ethics* is exoteric (although it is not a dialogue) comes from the passage of Cicero just quoted. This passage immediately precedes the one where Cicero speculates that the *Nicomachean Ethics* could be by Aristotle's son Nicomachus (as mentioned earlier), and from such a circumstance we can construct an argument that Cicero must have been aware of at least three ethics by Aristotle. For first he speaks (in the passage just quoted) of an exoteric ethics as opposed to a different and non-exoteric one found among the treatises. Then he speaks (a few lines later) of an ethics that could be by the son because it is like another ethics⁶⁰ that Cicero already attributes to the father and because Cicero does not see that the son could not, in this respect, be like the father. But the ethics that could be by the son could not be either of the first two ethics mentioned, for then Cicero would not have two separate ethics by Aristotle to contrast as exoteric and non-exoteric. Therefore it must be a third ethics.⁶¹

Now if this third ethics, the one that could be by the son, is the *Nicomachean*, then the ethics, which Cicero says the *Nicomachean* is like, and which he judges definitely to be by the father, will be either the *Eudemian* or the *Great Ethics* or something else. But of the *Eudemian* and *Great Ethics*, only the latter could plausibly be judged an exoteric text. So either the *Great Ethics* is the exoteric ethics Cicero is thinking of (in which case the ethics that he thinks is definitely by the father will be the *Eudemian*),⁶² or one or more of Aristotle's other works now lost is (as the *Protrepticus*, or precisely