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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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