How Virtuous Actions are a Means to Contemplation

0. Introduction

In a number of passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* [NE], Aristotle seems to suggest that ethically virtuous actions are an instrumental means to contemplation. But, as many scholars have worried, this view appears to be both implausible on its face, and in tension with other commitments Aristotle has. The difficulty in understanding the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation is part of a larger puzzle about the structure of value in Aristotle's ethical theory. Does Aristotle countenance a plurality of independently valuable ends for human beings? Or, is the value of all other ends for human beings ultimately reducible to the value of the highest human good? In this paper, I explore what it would mean to accept the face value reading: virtuous actions really are 'for the sake of' contemplation because they instrumentally promote contemplation. Specifically, I argue, virtuous actions are for the sake of the noble insofar as they promote conditions of peace, security and freedom from necessity, and these are precisely the conditions under which contemplation is possible. On the interpretation I defend, we find in Aristotle a sophisticated theory of value that demonstrates the possibility of being a pluralist while still maintaining that every good is hierarchically organized around some one highest good.

This paper proceeds in three parts. In §1, I set up the problem, and consider existing solutions. I divide attempts to construe the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation into two camps on the basis of the axiology they attribute to Aristotle. Pluralist views identify a range of distinct and incommensurably valuable goods including both virtuous actions and contemplation. Monist views claim the goodness of all human goods for Aristotle is reducible in some way to the goodness of contemplation. I argue that at the heart of the debate is a dilemma. Pluralist views can capture common sense views about virtuous actions, but they struggle to explain how human goods are all for the sake of contemplation. Monist views can capture how all goods are hierarchically ordered under contemplation, but they face the challenge of explaining how the value of paradigmatically virtuous actions is explained by reference to contemplation.

In §2, I diagnose the source of the difficulty in making sense of the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation. I argue that, to make progress, we need to understand how virtuous actions are always instrumental to other, more valuable ends without it being the case that the goodness of acting virtuously is reducible to the goodness of contemplation. I'll argue that the goodness of acting virtuously depends on the goodness of virtuous *actions*, and the goodness of virtuous *actions* depends on the goodness of the external ends at which they aim, and ultimately, on the goodness of contemplation.[1] However, the goodness of acting virtuously is not reducible to the goodness of virtuous *actions*, and so is also not reducible to the goodness of contemplation.

[1] In §2.1 I introduce 'acting virtuously' as a technical term that refers to performing a virtuous action from a virtuous character.

In §3, I propose a principled way in which virtuous actions are instrumentally for the sake of contemplation that does not result in either textual inconsistency or implausible consequences. I do this by appeal to a distinction between virtuous actions and acting virtuously. I will argue that virtuous actions, insofar as they are for the sake of the noble, are instrumentally for the sake of bringing about conditions of peace and leisure, and these are precisely the conditions under which contemplation is possible.[2] I clarify that Aristotle is offering us a standard for virtuous actions without offering a decision procedure or a principle of action. Virtuous actions are for the sake of contemplation because they promote the sorts of goods that are *such as to provide* the conditions necessary for contemplation even if they do not *in fact* always bring about more contemplation. Acting virtuously, by contrast, is its own end, insofar as it is the excellent accomplishment of the human function. I conclude with some reflections on what we can learn from Aristotle about the relationship between an ethical life and a life devoted to philosophy.

1.

1.1

[2] This is, I will argue, a somewhat broader notion of instrumentality than the one that has often been assumed. Roughly, something is instrumental to an end when it produces, or otherwise promotes the existence of, some end.

What is the evidence for thinking that, for Aristotle, virtuous activity is an instrumental means to contemplation (θεωρία)? Perhaps the clearest evidence comes from two commitments Aristotle seems to explicitly endorse: first, everything that is not the highest human good is choice worthy for the sake of the highest human good, and second, the highest human good is contemplative activity. If everything that is not the highest human good is choice worthy for the sake of the highest human good, and the highest human good is contemplation, then ethically virtuous actions, along with everything else other than contemplative activity, must be choice worthy for the sake of contemplation.[3]

We see evidence of the first commitment from the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the opening lines of the text, Aristotle notices that every craft, inquiry, action and decision seem to aim at some good (NE 1094a1-2). Moreover, he observes, there is a hierarchy amongst the ends we pursue: some ends are pursued for the sake of higher-level ends, and these higher-level ends are more choice worthy than the lower-level ends (1094a2-18). Aristotle continues in NE 1.2 to suppose that, if there is some one end that is choice worthy for its own sake, and for the sake of which all other ends are ultimately chosen, this end will be the best good, or εὐδαιμονία (hereafter, translated as happiness) (1094a18-23). Aristotle resumes the discussion in NE 1.7, arguing that, whatever happiness turns out to be, it must be the most end-like or end-like (τέλειόν) end: an end that we always choose because of itself and never because of

[3] I will not defend any particular view about what contemplation consists in although Aristotle seems to conceive of it as a remarkably narrow activity, involving the active understanding of eternal objects in the realm of the divine and unchanging. See M. D. Walker, *Aristotle on the Uses of Contemplation* [Uses] (Cambridge, 2018), 24-42 for a good discussion of the proper objects of wisdom (σοφία) and contemplation.

anything else (1097a25-b6). Every good that is not happiness, Aristotle insists, is chosen at least in part for the sake of happiness.

A brief note on language. There are a two different phrases typically translated as 'for the sake of', and they are generally taken to be functionally equivalent for Aristotle: χάριν + genitive (as at NE 1094a15, 1097a15, 1097a18, 1097b4-6), and ἕνεκα + genitive (as at 1097a21); another phrase, διὰ + accusative (as at NE 1094a19), picks out the end for the sake of which an agent acts.[4] Aristotle does not offer an explanation of this relation other than through examples: medicine is for the sake of health, generalship is for the sake of victory, and building is for the sake of a house, and so on (NE 1097a19-21). A very natural reading of this relation, given the examples, is as instrumental or productive. For example, in arguing that happiness is the most end-like end, Aristotle claims that we choose other ends including pleasure, honor, and other virtues in part 'for the sake of happiness because we judge that, through them, we will be happy' (αἱρούμεθα δὲ καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας χάριν διὰ τούτων ὑπολαμβάνοντες εὐδαιμονήσειν) (NE 1097b4-6). Here, the thought seems to be that happiness is commonly considered to be a result of, or instrumentally promoted by, these other goods.[5] I will note that, by the end of this paper, the instrumentality relation I think we find in Aristotle is broader than a straightforwardly means-ends relationship. I will argue

[4] For discussion see S. S. Meyer, *Ancient Ethics*. (Abingdon, 2007), 89 n. 8, as well as R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* [*Human Good*] (Princeton, 1991), 200-203.
[5] I understand the instrumentality relation here as existing when one good produces or promotes the existence of some end. And, Aristotle thinks, when this relation holds, the value of the means depends on the value of the end.

that, when x is 'for the sake of' y in this sense, it is because x is the sort of thing that promotes y.[6]

Turn now to the second commitment, that the highest human good is contemplative activity. In NE 1.7, shortly after the passage above where Aristotle identifies happiness as the most end-like end, Aristotle argues that we locate human happiness in the characteristic work or function of human beings. He argues that this characteristic work or function is the activity of the rational part of the soul, and concludes that happiness is the activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with virtue (1097b24-1098a18). In NE 10.7, he appears to resume the discussion, arguing that if happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with what is most excellent, this being the virtue of the best element, namely, understanding. He concludes that complete happiness consists in contemplative activity (1177a12-19).[7]

---

[6] Although this is broader than a pure means-ends relationship, it is much closer to a face value reading of instrumentality than the alternatives I will discuss.

[7] In this paper, I take as the face value reading of the text that Aristotle uses the language of the highest good and happiness (εὐδαιμονία) interchangeably, and that contemplation is the highest good. For commentators who have maintained that Aristotle's discussion in 10.7-8 is in tension with the rest of the NE, see for example, J. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia' ['Eudaimonia'], in Rorty, A. O. (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, (Berkeley, 1980), 15–33; A. W. Adkins, 'Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Republic', *Classical Philology*, 73 (1978), 297–313.; J. M. Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* [*Reason*] (Cambridge, MA, 1975), 156-64; W. F. R. Hardie, 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics' ['Final'], in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London, 1967), 297– 322; W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*, [English trans.] trans. by R. Robinson (Chicago, 1948), 439-440; W. D. Ross (trans.), *Aristotle Ethica Nicomachean* (Oxford, 1915), 233-4; N. P. White, 'Goodness and Human Aims in Aristotle's Ethics' ['Goodness'], in D. J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, DC, 1981), 242-3, and K. Wilkes, 'The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics', in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1980), 341–358 at 341 and 351-2. For attempts to render 10.7-8 consistent with the rest of the NE see, for example, J. M. Cooper, 'Contemplation and Happiness: A Reconsideration' ['Contemplation'], *Synthese,* 72 (1987), 187–216; D. T. Devereux, 'Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness' ['Essence'], in D. J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, DC, 1981),

To sum up: Aristotle seems to be committed to two claims: i) every good that is not itself the highest human good is choice worthy at least in part for the sake of the highest human good, and ii) contemplation is the highest human good. These two commitments, taken together, imply that ethically virtuous actions are a means to contemplation.

Further evidence for thinking that virtuous activity is an instrumental means to contemplation comes from an analogy Aristotle draws between practical wisdom and the medical art in Book 6 of the NE. As a prelude to his discussion of the virtues of the rational part of the soul, Aristotle acknowledges that to say that one ought to choose what is intermediate and what is in accordance with right reason is true, but uninformative. To advise someone to choose what is intermediate, or what right reason dictates, would be like simply telling a patient to do what the medical art prescribes, or what someone who possessed the medical art would do, without filling in the content of what the medical art prescribes. In order for this advice to be informative or action-guiding, one needs to fill in the content of what the intermediate consists in, or what right reason is: 'it should be determined what right reason is and what is the standard that fixes it (ἀλλὰ καὶ διωρισμένον τίς ἐστιν ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος καὶ τούτου τίς ὅρος)' (NE 6.1 1138b34-35).

247–60; D. Keyt, 'Intellectualism in Aristotle' ['Intellectualism'], in J. P. Anton and A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (Albany, 1983), 364–87; and J. Whiting, 'Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle', *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 68 (1986), 70–95. Commentators who have embraced an 'intellectualist' reading of Aristotle according to which, strictly speaking, *eudaimonia* consists in contemplation alone include: Devereux, 'Essence', 260; R. Heinaman, 'Eudaimonia and Self-Sufficiency in the Nicomachean Ethics', *Phronesis,* 33 (1988), 31–53 at 45; A. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship Between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1978), 209; G. R. Lear, 'Happiness and the Structure of Ends' ['Structure'], in G. Anagnostopoulos (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle* (Malden, 2009), 385–403; and White, 'Goodness and Human Aims in Aristotle's Ethics' ['Goodness'], 225-45.

In the analogy that Aristotle is drawing here, practical wisdom is likened to the medical art. Although Aristotle does not say so explicitly in this passage, it is clear that the standard (ὅρος) of the medical art is health; health is what the medical art is for, and the standard that determines what sorts of treatments are appropriate, and in what amounts. Aristotle returns to this analogy in NE 6.13 in considering the question of how practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and contemplation (θεωρία) are related. He insists that practical wisdom is 'not authoritative over wisdom i.e. over the best part of us, just as the art of medicine is not over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being; it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it (ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ κυρία γ' ἐστὶ τῆς σοφίας οὐδὲ τοῦ βελτίονος μορίου, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τῆς ὑγιείας ἡ ἰατρική· οὐ γὰρ χρῆται αὐτῇ, ἀλλ' ὁρᾷ ὅπως γένηται· ἐκείνης οὖν ἕνεκα ἐπιτάττει, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκείνῃ).' (NE 6.13 1145a6-9).[8] In the case of medicine, medicine is not superior over health; instead, the medical art is for the sake of health because it provides for its coming into being. Likewise, on the most straightforward way of reading the analogy, practical wisdom is not superior over theoretical wisdom instead, practical wisdom is for the sake of wisdom because it provides for its coming into being.

Aristotle appears to make this point even more explicitly in *Eudemian Ethics* [EE] 8.3. I do not want to lean too heavily on this passage here given the much-discussed textual difficulties in the passage, as well as the broader question of the relevance of the EE for understanding Aristotle's views in the NE.[9] However, it is worth noting that the passage bears a strong

[8] Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Greek text from Aristotle. (1894). *Aristotelis: Ethica Nicomachea*. Bywater (Ed.). (Oxford Classical Texts). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2020)

[9] See C. J. Rowe, 'The Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics: A Study in the Development of Aristotle's Thought' [Development], *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary*

resemblance to Aristotle's discussion in NE 6.1. Aristotle again draws an analogy between practical wisdom and health, noting:

> Since even the doctor has a principle of determination by referring to which he decides what is healthy for a body and what is not, and how far each thing ought to be done and is good for health, while if done less or more it is no longer so; so also the morally good person must in doing and choosing things that are naturally good but not praiseworthy have a principle for determining his possession and choice and avoidance both in quantity, great and small, of money and in things distributed by fortune. In the preceding discussion we said [this principle of determination] is 'as reason directs'. But this is just as if someone with regard to food should say 'As medicine and its principles direct.'[10]

> ἐπεὶ δ' ἐστί τις ὅρος καὶ τῷ ἰατρῷ, πρὸς ὃν ἀναφέρων κρίνει τὸ ὑγιεινὸν σώματι καὶ μή, καὶ πρὸς ὃν μέχρι ποσοῦ ποιητέον ἕκαστον καὶ εὖ ὑγιαῖνον, εἰ δὲ ἔλαττον ἢ πλέον, οὐκέτι· οὕτω καὶ τῷ σπουδαίῳ περὶ τὰς πράξεις καὶ αἱρέσεις τῶν φύσει μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐκ ἐπαινετῶν δὲ δεῖ τινα εἶναι ὅρον καὶ τῆς ἕξεως καὶ τῆς αἱρέσεως καὶ [περὶ] φυγῆς <καὶ περὶ> χρημάτων πλήθους καὶ ὀλιγότητος καὶ τῶν εὐτυχημάτων. ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς

Volume, 3 (1971) for a sustained, albeit controversial, discussion of the relation between these texts.

[10] Translation from Cooper, Reason, 135-6 with minor changes. Aristotle. (1991). Greek text from Aristotelis: *Ethica Eudemia*. R. Walzer & J. M. Mingay (Eds.). (Oxford Classical Texts). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2020)

πρότερον ἐλέχθη τὸ ὡς ὁ λόγος· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὴν τροφὴν εἴπειεν ὡς ἡ ἰατρικὴ καὶ ὁ λόγος ταύτης. (EE 8.3, 1249a21- b5)

Aristotle goes on to argue that a human being should live by reference to its governing principle, insisting that just as medicine is for the sake of health, so also:

> [T]his holds for the contemplative faculty. For god[11] is not a ruler in the sense of issuing commands, but he is that for the sake of which[12] practical wisdom issues commands' so that 'whatever choice and possession of things good by nature will most produce the contemplation of god — whether goods of the body, or money or friends or the other goods — this is best, and this is the finest principle of determination; but

[11] Commentators disagree over what 'the god' refers to here. See M. Woods (ed.), *Eudemian Ethics Books I, II, and VIII* (Oxford, 1992), 180 and J. M. Cooper, Reason, 142 n. 56 for discussion. Settling this question is not important for our purposes: on either interpretation, the sense of the passage is that the activity of contemplation provides the standard for the choice and possession of natural goods.

[12] Here as elsewhere, Aristotle distinguishes between two senses of 'that for which.' The distinction is typically understood as between 'the purpose for which' and the 'beneficiary for whom.' On this way of interpreting the distinction, it is clear that Aristotle has the latter in mind. For a recent challenge to this standard interpretation of the distinction, see J. Gelber, 'Two Ways of Being For an End', *Phronesis*, 63 (2018), 64-86. Gelber proposes the distinction picks out on the one hand the relation between 'something and the aim or objective it is in the business of producing', and on the other hand the relation between an instrument and the user of that instrument. On this version of the distinction, 'Aristotle is denying that the orders *phronêsis* makes are for the sake of god as tools for any use gods could put them to' (p. 74). The general sense of the passage is clear enough and the details are not important to settle for my purposes here. For other passages that appear to draw the same distinction, see Physics 2 194a35, De Anima 2 415b2, Metaphysics Λ1072b2.

whatever hinders the service of god by contemplation, whether by being deficient or by being excessive, this is bad.

οὕτω δ' ἔχει κατὰ τὸ θεωρητικόν. οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτακτικῶς ἄρχων ὁ θεός, ἀλλ' οὗ ἕνεκα ἡ φρόνησις ἐπιτάττει (διττὸν δὲ τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα· διώρισται δ' ἐν ἄλλοις), ἐπεὶ κεῖνός γε οὐθενὸς δεῖται. ἥτις οὖν αἵρεσις καὶ κτῆσις τῶν φύσει ἀγαθῶν ποιήσει μάλιστα τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρίαν, ἢ σώματος ἢ χρημάτων ἢ φίλων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν, αὕτη ἀρίστη, καὶ οὗτος ὁ ὅρος κάλλιστος· ἥτις δ' ἢ δι' ἔνδειαν ἢ δι' ὑπερβολὴν κωλύει τὸν θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν, αὕτη δὲ φαύλη. (EE VIII 3 1249a21-b23)

Just as health is the standard for medicine, so also Aristotle seems to claim here, the standard for practical wisdom is contemplation; just as the doctor should guide her actions with a view to what best promotes the patient's health, so also the person with practical wisdom should direct her actions to what best promotes contemplation.[13]

To be sure, many commentators have hoped to resist reading the NE 6.1 passage in light of what Aristotle says in EE 8.3; instead, commentators argue that the EE 8.3 passage either provides us with a rather different ethical view than what we find in the NE, or that it simply addresses a different question from what is at issue in NE 6.1. So, for example, Jaeger interprets the EE passage as claiming that 'our most pressing duty is to choose all the

[13] See for example M. Scharle, 'Elemental Teleology in Aristotle's Physics 2.8', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* 34 (2008), 147–183 at 158 for whom practical wisdom is for the sake of the god insofar as the god is identical with theoretical contemplation that is promoted by the commands of practical wisdom. Lear, instead, takes practical wisdom to be for the sake of 'god' insofar as god is the object of approximation of practical wisdom (G. R. Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* [*Happy*] (Princeton, 2004), 79).

occupations and activities and goods that further the knowledge of God'; on this reading, Aristotle defends a version of the 'theonomic ethics' found in late Plato,[14] one that is not found in the NE. Cooper and Ackrill, instead, argue that the EE 8.3 does not bear on the question raised in NE 6.1. Ackrill argues that Aristotle is not, in the EE, addressing the question of what makes actions good or virtuous; his answer to this question is that these actions are done for their own sake by good men. Instead, Ackrill argues, the EE passage addresses the distinct question of how and to what extent we should pursue natural goods.[15] As I'll argue in §2, I do not think these are distinct questions: what makes actions virtuous is, in part, the sorts of ends at which they aim, and choosing a virtuous action for its own sake is not inconsistent with choosing it for the sake of the good result or consequence at which it aims. It will be an upshot of the view I defend that the EE 8.3 passage can be read as reflecting the very same ethical view we find in the NE.

1.2

Given the evidence above for thinking that Aristotle conceives of virtuous activity as an instrumental means to contemplation, why have commentators resisted this conclusion? There are two serious problems that seem arise for Aristotle if this is his view.

[14] Jaeger, *Aristotle*, (Chicago, 1948).242-243.
[15] Ackrill, 'Eudaimonia', p. 30-31. See Cooper, *Reason*, 140-142 for a similar line.

The first problem is that the view that virtuous actions are instrumentally valuable for the sake of contemplation seems to be at odds with Aristotle's insistence in a number of passages that virtuous actions are ends, choice worthy for their own sakes (see NE 10.6 1176b6-9, NE 6.4 1140a26). As Gauthier and Jolif wonder, 'on ne voit pas…comment les actions morales, dont c'est la nature d'être à elle-mêmes leur propre fin, pourront ultérieurement être ordonnées à autre chose pour former une série hiérarchisée (we do not see how virtuous actions whose nature is to be their own end could ultimately be ordered to something else to form a hierarchal ordering)', calling this one of Aristotle's 'incohérences foncières (fundamental incoherences)', wondering how 'au lieu d'être sa fin à elle-même, l'action morale devient un moyen de *faire* autre chose qu'elle-même, le bonheur (instead of being itself an end, virtuous action becomes a means of achieving something other than itself, happiness)'.[16] The apparent textual inconsistency reflects the deeper philosophical question of what the source of value of virtuous actions is. Are virtuous actions ends, choice worthy for their own sake, or are they choice worthy because of the more valuable ends — like contemplation — that they instrumentally promote? Otherwise put, is the value of virtuous actions explained by the value of contemplation, or are virtuous actions valuable independently of the way they might promote contemplation?[17] Part of the worry here is that, if virtuous actions are instrumental

[16] R. A. Gauthier and J. Y. Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque* (Louvain, 1958), 6-7. Translations are my own.

[17] For some important discussion of the relationship between virtuous actions and their ends see J. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on Action' ['Action']; D. Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (Cornell, 1986), especially 65-66, R. Heinaman, 'Activity and Praxis in Aristotle' ['Activity'], *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy,* 12 (1996), 71–111; Keyt, ['Intellectualism'], Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good* [*Happy]*; Lear, 'Happiness and the Structure of Ends' ['Structure'], and J. Whiting, 'Eudaimonia, External Results and Choosing Virtuous Actions for Themselves' ['External'], *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 65 (2002), 270–290. A

to something further, this appears to trivialize or undermine the way in which virtuous actions are supposed to be ends in themselves.

We might think that it is easy to dismiss the problem by noticing that goods can be valuable in more than one way. It is, after all, easy enough to imagine cases where a just or generous action might be choice worthy for its own sake and instrumentally promote contemplation. The challenge, however, is to give a principled explanation for how it is true of the *nature* of virtuous actions that they are valuable in these two different ways. How is it true in some non-accidental way that just, generous or courageous actions are both ends in themselves and instrumentally promote contemplation?

The second main challenge for the view that virtuous activity is an instrumental means to contemplation is understanding how such a view captures anything like the common sense conception of virtue. Aristotle does not appear to be offering a revisionary account of what sorts of actions count as virtuous: the sorts of actions he describes as virtuous — paying one's debts, giving money to worthwhile projects, fighting just wars — line up with ordinary Greek conceptions of morality from the period. But, if virtuous actions are the sorts of actions that promote contemplative activity, it is not obvious how actions like paying one's debts or fighting just wars turn out to be virtuous. Some commentators have worried that, if contemplation really is the ultimate end of human life, Aristotle's view might license us to

---

great deal has been written about whether Aristotle's claims in NE 10.7-8 are consistent with what has come before. I am not here directly concerned with this controversy, though I think it is a desideratum of a successful account of the relationship between virtuous actions and their ends that it render Aristotle's discussions in 10.7-8 consistent with the rest of the NE. See also note 10.

perform heinous or intuitively immoral actions for the sake of contemplation; indeed, Aristotle's view might generate the result that these actions are actually virtuous.[18]

It might seem like a possible solution is to appeal to an inclusivist conception of happiness. On this sort of view, famously defended by John Ackrill, various ends are 'for the sake of' happiness not because they instrumentally promote happiness, but because they are constituent parts of happiness. So, for Ackrill, both contemplation and ethically virtuous activity turn out to be 'for the sake of' happiness by being constituents of happiness. In fact, although an inclusivist conception of happiness helps with some of the worries for understanding how virtuous actions can be both ends and for the sake of ends beyond themselves, the view does not help with the deeper question of how to understand the proper relationship between virtuous activity and contemplation. Even if both are constituents of *eudaimonia*, contemplation is supremely more valuable. If virtuous activity is not simply an instrumental means to contemplation, to what extent should we pursue it if we are also able to pursue contemplative activity? Indeed, Ackrill acknowledges this worry in his paper, suggesting that Aristotle simply gives us no satisfying story for how to combine virtuous activity and contemplation in a happy life. If Aristotle thinks that we should give absolute priority to contemplation such that we only engage or promote other goods when contemplation is unavailable to be engaged in or promoted, Aristotle can avoid any potential conflicts between virtuous activity and contemplation. However, he would do so at the expense of a deeply revisionary and implausible ethical theory. If, on the other hand,

[18] For discussions of this worry, see for example Ackrill, 'Eudaimonia'; Hardie, 'Final'; Cooper, *Reason*, 149-50, Keyt, 'Intellectualism', 368; G. Lawrence, 'Aristotle and the Ideal Life' [Ideal], *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993), 1–34.

contemplation is not given absolute priority over ethical virtue — if instead, Aristotle intends there to be some compromise between the two in a happy life — it is difficult to see what principled, coherent story is possible for Aristotle about when and how to engage in virtuous activity over contemplation given the supreme value of contemplation. Ackrill himself is pessimistic, concluding that Aristotle is 'in the company of all philosophers who hold that one element in man is supremely valuable, but are unwilling to embrace the paradoxical and extremist conclusions about life that that view implies'. [19]

Another initially plausible solution is to try and explain how virtuous actions can be 'for the sake of' contemplation at the level of an agent' psychology, in terms of what it means to pursue something as an ultimate end. Meyer, for example, defends a view according to which virtuous actions are 'for the sake of' contemplation insofar as they take place in the 'space of permissions' left open by our ultimate commitment to contemplation.[20] On this view, a life devoted to the pursuit of contemplation may still leave open the pursuit of a wide variety of other goals that are valued and pursued for their own sakes, so long as their pursuit is limited or regulated by the agent's commitment to contemplation. A view like this is useful for understanding how an agent coherently conceives of her ends but I do not think it fully addresses the prior question of what the objective structure of value is. As I understand Aristotle, the agent with practical wisdom appropriately responds to mind-independent facts about value. To have a fully satisfying account of how virtuous actions are 'for the sake of' contemplation we need not only a description of the agent's psychology, but an explanation

[19] Ackrill, ['Eudaimonia'], 33.
[20] S. S. Meyer, 'Living for the Sake of an Ultimate End', in J. Miller (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2011), 47–65.

for why she is getting things right about the world when she conceives of the role of contemplation as she does. It is this question about the objective structure of value that I am interested in here.

1.3

There are a lot of moving parts in the debate over the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation, and I cannot do justice to the diversity and sophistication of views that scholars have proposed. In this section, I want to broadly outline two kinds of strategies that scholars have adopted, and identify in general terms the challenges faced by each approach.

I suggested in the last section that an inclusivist conception of happiness does not immediately resolve the question of how virtuous actions and contemplation are properly related. However many goods are components of happiness, we need to make sense of how to select amongst these goods given the superior value of contemplation. Rather than carving the debate along inclusivist versus intellectualist lines, I want to suggest a more helpful division is between those views that are pluralist about value, and those that are monist about value. Pluralist views assert that, for Aristotle, there are a range of human goods, including virtuous actions, that are valuable independent of any relation they bear to contemplation. Monist views, by contrast, assert that the value of all other human goods, including virtuous actions, is ultimately explained by some relation those goods bear to contemplation.

Consider first pluralist approaches. As we saw in the last section in the discussion of Ackrill's view, Aristotle's picture looks either unsatisfying or implausible if his view is that

virtuous actions and contemplation are valuable in distinct ways, contemplation is immeasurably more valuable than virtuous actions, and there is nothing further to be said about when or whether to choose virtuous actions if they conflict with the pursuit of contemplation. Defenders of a pluralist approach have hoped to find ways to explain how our pursuit of contemplation should be regulated or constrained to avoid implausible scenarios in which we are permitted to act in unethical ways in order to maximize our own contemplation.

Keyt, following Cooper, defends what he calls a 'superstructure' view.[21] The superstructure view says that theoretical activity is the primary component of the best life, and that moral activity is a secondary component. Keyt's idea is that the moral life sets certain minimal requirements that must be satisfied before one is free to engage in theoretical activity. It may be sometimes permissible to shirk a trivial duty in order to contemplate, but it is not permissible to do any action, however base, to maximize contemplation. Keyt suggests it is up to the man of practical wisdom to determine what to prioritize in cases where there is a potential conflict between virtue and contemplation.

I'm sympathetic to Keyt's picture and indeed the view I will propose bears some resemblance to his. As it stands however, Keyt's picture does not help explain the passages from NE 6.1 and EE 8.3 where Aristotle suggests that virtuous actions are in some sense for the sake of contemplation. On Keyt's picture, there is simply no relationship between what makes virtuous actions good and what makes contemplation good.

Kraut defends a somewhat different pluralist view on which contemplation sets a limit on our pursuit of other goods including virtue. Kraut supports an intellectualist reading of

[21] D. Keyt, 'Intellectualism in Aristotle', *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 87 (1978), 1-20.

eudaimonia according to which the ultimate aim of human life for Aristotle is to use reason well, and this goal can be accomplished in two ways: ideally by living a contemplative life and, if that option is unavailable, then developing and exercising the practical virtues in the political arena.[22] For Kraut, contemplation serves as the ultimate aim of human life by being a way of organizing these subordinate ends into a coherent system: contemplation sets the limit for our pursuit of these other lower goods. So, although, like Keyt, Kraut understands Aristotle as recognizing a variety of goods that are valuable independent of their contribution to contemplation, Kraut is able to capture the idea that all other goods other than contemplation are choice worthy, at least in part, for the sake of contemplation, by instrumentally promoting contemplation.

On the face of it, Kraut's view seems poised to respond to both of the challenges we saw §1. On Kraut's view, virtuous actions are ends, but they are also for the sake of contemplation both by instrumentally promoting contemplation, and because contemplation regulates or guides our pursuit of these actions. Kraut's view seems to capture both the pluralism of Aristotle's theory, and the role contemplation plays in structuring and guiding our ends. On his view, although the best life for an individual is one with the most contemplation possible, we are not, on Kraut's interpretation, licensed to perform heinous actions for the sake of maximizing our own happiness; Kraut rejects an egoistic form of *eudaimonism*.

I think there is much to like about Kraut's view, but it is ultimately unsatisfying. A central worry for his view is how to make sense of the way contemplation is supposed to regulate our pursuit of other intrinsically valuable goods. Again, on Kraut's view, goods like virtuous

[22] Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* [Human], 7.

actions are choice worthy both in themselves — independent of the way they promote contemplation — and as instrumentally valuable for contemplation. Kraut is not an egoistic eudaimonist — he does not think that we are only rationally justified in performing actions that promote our own contemplation. But, once we reject an egoistic form of *eudaimonism* , it is unclear why we should accept that the virtuous agent should in general only pursue virtuous actions to the extent they instrumentally promote contemplation.[23] Kraut argues that the person whose life is devoted to contemplation will still have prudential reasons to perform virtuous actions insofar as being virtuous is generally conducive to contemplation. And indeed, the fact that virtuous actions can promote our contemplation explains why we have *some* reason to perform virtuous actions if we want to be happy. But it seems plausible that many — indeed the best — virtuous actions take away from our ability to engage in contemplation. Moreover, as Kraut himself acknowledges, it might be that sometimes, the action that would best promote contemplation is a vicious one.[24] Kraut suggests such cases of conflict between what would promote one's own happiness and what virtue demands will be rare. This seems to me overly optimistic. It is a contingent matter, on Kraut's picture, whether virtuous actions will in fact promote contemplation, and it is easy enough to imagine cases where they will not. Kraut's view is, as such, ultimately unable to respond to the second challenge we saw in §1; it

[23] T. H. Irwin, 'The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness' [Structure], *Ethics,* 101 (1991), 382-391.

[24] As Kraut argues, 'I do take him to be assuming that *for the most part* unjust actions become known to others, and that when this is taken into account it will be more in a philosopher's interest to have the virtue of justice rather than the vice of injustice' (Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* [Human]' 181). This strikes me as a highly defeasible reason for the philosopher to be just.

leaves open the possibility that the life devoted to contemplation might turn out to be a deeply unethical one.[25]

The problem that Kraut's view faces for capturing the commonly held views about virtuous actions arises from the way he responds to the first challenge, how to make sense of how virtuous actions are both ends and for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Kraut's strategy is to identify two apparently unrelated sources of value for virtuous actions: virtuous actions have what we might now think of as a kind of intrinsic moral value, and they have instrumental or prudential value for the agent insofar as having the virtues of character helps an agent contemplate. The deeper problem for Kraut's view is just the familiar problem of reconciling prudential and moral reasons, a problem that arises because of his rejection of *eudaimonism*; on his view, there is no one ultimate rational aim that is meant to accommodate all our ethical concerns.

Consider now monist strategies. Gabriel Richardson Lear defends a picture on which the value all other goods in ethical domain is ultimately explained by the value of contemplation. Her view is meant to explain how we get the sort of structure of value described in NE 1.2 and NE 1.7 where there is a hierarchy of ends with one good, happiness, at the top. Lear argues that the way in which other goods are 'for the sake of' the highest good is not instrumental, but rather a relation of teleological approximation. Roughly, her idea is that, when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, she aims at grasping practical truth, and so

[25] The conclusion that the philosophical life is a deeply unethical one has struck most commentators as an untenable position for Aristotle to have held, though it is conceptually possible, and not, as far as I can tell, strictly ruled out by anything in the text. However, I assume here that it is philosophically and interpretively unattractive to attribute this view to Aristotle if there is a viable alternative.

in a way aims at contemplation insofar as theoretical truthfulness sets the standard of success for practical truthfulness.[26] Specifically, Lear thinks that virtuous actions express an agent's understanding of her own highest good as lying in contemplation. But, by choosing virtuous actions for the sake of contemplation, the virtuous agent is also in a way choosing virtuous actions for their own sake because of the way that they approximate, and therefore inherit the intrinsic value, from contemplation. So, to take an example, when a virtuous agent performs a courageous action, she expresses her care about the excellent use of reason in leisure, and this orientation towards the excellent and leisurely use of reason is what makes her virtuous actions fine. And, because the most excellent and leisurely use of reason is contemplation, the virtuous person's sense of the fine is implicitly guided by the value of contemplation.

Despite its virtues, I worry that Lear offers an implausible explanation of the source of value of virtuous actions. As Lear says, 'courageous actions are fine because, in being ordered, proportioned, and bounded just as they are, they make clear the agent's commitment to the human good, which he conceives as the excellent, rational use of a peaceful, political life. The appropriateness of his actions to a person committed to the excellent rational use of a leisurely citizen's life is what makes them fine.'[27] Here, Lear relies on the way in which virtuous actions aim at the noble, and the noble seems to track what is noble where this is understood as being opposed to what is necessary.

Even if Lear's story works for courage, it seems less plausible in the case of other virtues. Take generosity. Lear's view suggests that generous actions are fine because they express the

[26] See Lear, Happy*,* 4-5.
[27] Lear, Happy, 149.

virtuous agent's commitment to the excellent and leisurely use of reason. But how does giving wealth away express this commitment? After all, wealth is valuable for an agent precisely because it provides for leisure. Lear's view would make sense if she had a non-egoist picture like Kraut's where virtuous actions are valuable in part because they promote the happiness of others. But given her embrace of *eudaimonism*, it is difficult to see how an agent's giving wealth away could express her appreciation of her *own* leisurely use of reason.[28]

Tuozzo defends a somewhat different monist picture.[29] Tuozzo argues that virtuous actions have a nature and worth that is, in part, dependent on their relation to contemplation. On his picture, choosing a virtuous action for its own sake involves choosing it because of its relation to contemplation. So far, this is much like Lear's view. However, for Tuozzo, virtuous actions are related to contemplation not by a relation of teleological approximation, but instead by a kind of instrumental relation. For Tuozzo, virtuous actions are those actions that best promote the internal psychic conditions necessary for contemplation. In this way, contemplation serves as an indirect standard for virtuous actions. So, for example, self-indulgence is the state in which a person values bodily pleasures more than they are worth, and the self-indulgent person is driven to endlessly pursue this bodily pleasure. The virtue of

[28] For a view that shares some similarities with Lear's, see D. Charles, 'Aristotle on well-being and intellectual contemplation', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume,* 73 (1999), 205–223; and D. Charles, 'Eudaimonia, Theoria, and the Choiceworthiness of Practical Wisdom', in P. Destrée and M. Zingano (eds.), *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics* (Leuven, 2014)., 89-109. Charles, however, argues that these other goods are ends because of the way they resemble the 'focal' good of contemplation. In explaining the value of these goods by the resemblance they bear to contemplation, Charles' view is similar to Lear's and, I think, inherits some of the same problems.

[29] T. Tuozzo (1995), 'Contemplation, the Noble, and the Mean: the Standard of Moral Virtue in Aristotle's *Ethics*.' *Apeiron* 28.4 (1995): 129-154.

temperance allows an agent to be freed from the pain of unsatisfied desire, and so to direct her attention to loftier pursuits, and to contemplation in particular.

I find unpersuasive the suggestion that the *way* virtuous actions instrumentally promote contemplation is by furnishing us with certain psychic states. It is difficult to fully evaluate Tuozzo's proposal in the absence of more discussion of the particular virtues. Certainly, many vices will involve psychic states that detract from an agent's ability to contemplate. And certainly particular virtues, like temperance, are likely to create psychic conditions conducive to contemplation. But it is less obvious how the worth of other paradigmatic virtues is explained in this way. Virtues like courage, justice and generosity do not seem to have as their principal function creating psychic leisure. Indeed, they are virtues that, insofar as they aim to achieve external ends, seem involve a lack of leisure. In many cases, the exercise of these virtues appears to be in tension with our ability to contemplate.

To be clear, I do not take myself to have offered decisive reasons for rejecting any of the above interpretations. Instead, what I have hoped to do is show how the question of the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation illuminates a broader philosophic question for Aristotle: how to understand the structure of value in his ethical theory. The challenge for understanding his axiology can be thought of as a kind of dilemma. On one horn, Aristotle is a pluralist about value: there are a range of goods — including virtuous actions — that are choice worthy for their own sakes, independent of the way they are related to contemplation. The worry for this cluster of views is how to explain how there exists a hierarchy of ends with contemplation at the top: how is it that the goods that are choice worthy independent of the way they are related to contemplation are also reliably choice worthy for the sake of contemplation? On the other horn, Aristotle is a monist about value: the value of

all goods, including virtuous actions, is reducible to, or explained by, the value of contemplation. On this horn, what *makes* an action good or virtuous is, at least in part, the way they are appropriately related to contemplation. The worry for this cluster of views is how to capture the reputable opinions about virtue: paradigmatically courageous, just, and generous actions are not obviously good or choice worthy because of the way they are related to contemplative activity.

2.

2.1

In §1, I identified two apparent challenges for the view that virtuous actions are an instrumental means to contemplation. The first challenge is to make sense of how virtuous actions can be instrumental to contemplation if they are also supposed to be ends, and chosen for their own sakes. The second challenge is to square this account of virtuous actions with common sense opinions about virtue: it isn't obvious how just, generous or courageous actions are ultimately a means for us to promote our own contemplative activity. In this section, I want to focus on the first challenge. Once we avail ourselves of some of the available resources for addressing this challenge, we will be in a position to address the second challenge.

The question of how to square a virtuous action's being instrumental to contemplation with its being an end and chosen for its own sake is of a piece with a broader question that

has itself received much attention from scholars.[30] In some passages, Aristotle appears to characterize virtuous actions as ends (see NE 10.6 1176b6-9, NE 6.4 1140a26-b7). In other passages, he characterizes them as being for the sake of ends beyond themselves (see NE 10.7 1177b1-4, 1177b16-20). This apparent tension in the way Aristotle describes virtuous actions reflects what appears to be a deeper tension in his ethical theory. On the one hand, Aristotle wants to maintain, for much of the NE, that ethically virtuous activity is one of the components of happiness. For this to be true, ethically virtuous activity must be an end, or choice worthy for itself. On the other hand, Aristotle seems to characterize virtuous actions in part in terms of the good external results at which they aim; what makes virtuous actions worth performing seems to be in part that they make some positive difference to the world. If Aristotle wants to maintain that virtuous actions are both ends and for the sake of ends beyond themselves, we need a principled explanation for how this can be the case. More strongly, we need an explanation that holds in virtue of the nature of virtuous actions.

In the face of these worries, a number of scholars have proposed solutions that rely on a distinction between what we might think of as the internal end and the external end of an agent's performing a virtuous action.[31] So, the strategy goes, virtuous actions are worthwhile

---

[30] For some important discussion of the relationship between virtuous actions and their ends see Ackrill, ['Action']; Charles., *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, esp. 65–66; Heinaman, ['Activity']; Lear, [*Happy*]; Lear, ['Structure']; and J. Whiting, ['External'].

[31] See S. Hirji, 'Acting Virtuously as an end in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy,* 26 (2018), 1006-1026 for the distinction between virtuous actions and acting virtuously. See Keyt, 'Intellectualism in Aristotle' (1978), 14-15 for the distinction between the internal and external end of an action. Whiting offers an extended discussion of how virtuous actions can be ends and also aim at an external result ('External'). For a similar distinction between virtuous actions and acting virtuously to the one I prefer, see M. Jimenez, 'Aristotle on Becoming Virtuous by Doing Virtuous Actions', *Phronesis*, 61 (2016),

in part for their own sake, and in part because they bring about, or aim to bring about, good results or consequences in the world. On this type of view, in passages where Aristotle talks about virtuous actions as having ends outside of themselves, he is referring to the external end of the action. In passages where he describes performing a virtuous action as an end, he is referring to the internal end. This sort of strategy is not only helpful for resolving the apparent textual inconsistencies in how Aristotle describes virtuous actions, it is also helpful for seeing how Aristotle's ethical theory is not objectionably egoistic. Even though virtuous actions are ends, and promote an agent's own happiness, their worth is not reducible to the way they promote an agent's own happiness. Instead, they also often promote external results that benefit the political community more generally, such as security, or an even distribution of wealth.

On the interpretation I prefer, Aristotle distinguishes between what we might think of as 'virtuous actions' and 'acting virtuously'. In passages like in 10.7, when Aristotle seems to claim that virtuous actions are not ends but rather are for the sake of actions beyond themselves, Aristotle is referring to the particular political or military actions, analogous to the just or temperate actions in NE 2.4 and NE 6.12, that can be performed even by a non-virtuous agent and that count as virtuous because of certain features of the actions themselves. As scholars like Whiting (2002) have also argued, these actions count as virtuous because of the good ends they aim to realize: this the sense in which they are choice worthy for the sake of ends beyond themselves. In these passages, Aristotle is expressing the intuitive idea that

---

3-32 at 4, 15-18, 21-22. See also S. S. Meyer, 'Aristotle on Moral Motivation', in I. Vasiliou (ed.), *Moral Motivation: A History* (Oxford, 2016), 44-64 for a similar distinction between virtuous actions and virtuous agency, or acting virtuously.

what makes an action appropriate or called for in a given circumstance is something about the goodness of the end it aims to achieve.[32] That is, in these passages, he is referring to the *virtuous actions* themselves, which have an external end. Notice that, on this sort of picture, the way that an action is 'for the sake of' an end is not explained by the fact that it is the agent's goal or intention in the action. It is in this way that an action can be virtuous – because of the kind of end it aims at – even if it is not performed from virtuous motives.[33]

Compare this with the 10.6 (1176b6-9) passage where Aristotle seems to claim that virtuous actions are ends. Here, Aristotle argues that the actions on the basis of virtue (αἱ κατ' ἀρετὴν πράξεις) appear to be the sorts of things from which nothing beyond the activity is sought, explaining that doing fine and good actions (τὰ καλὰ καὶ σπουδαῖα πράττειν) is choice worthy for its own sake. Both of these formulations – the κατά followed by accusative, and the infinitive phrase – are plausibly picking out the *acting* rather than the action, which is to say the activity that is the exercise of virtue, rather than the particular fine or good action that is

[32] For discussion of the doctrine of the mean, see L. Brown, 'What is "the mean relative to us" in Aristotle's Ethics?', *Phronesis*, 42 (1997), 77–93 and L. Brown, 'Why is Aristotle's Virtue of Character a Mean? Taking Aristotle at his Word', in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014), 64–80; H. J. Curzer, 'A Defense of Aristotle's Doctrine that Virtue is a Mean', *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), 129–138; W. F. R. Hardie, 'Aristotle's Doctrine That Virtue Is a Mean', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 65 (1964), 183–204; and S. Leighton, 'The Mean Relative to Us', *Apeiron*, 28 (1995), 67–78. For discussion of the way that virtuous actions are for the sake of the noble, see T. H. Irwin, 'Aristotle's Conception of Morality [Conception]', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1985), 115-143; Lear, *[Happy]*; and K. Rogers, 'Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόυ [Τὸ Καλόυ]', *Ancient Philosophy,* 13 (1999), 355–371.

[33] That being said, when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, they should aim at the features that make the action good. This means that their goal or intention should line up with the end of the action, at least at some level of description (the agent need not, I think, have a fully articulable appreciation of exactly why the action type in question is good or virtuous; it is enough I imagine that they have some sense of what the end is and why it is worthwhile).

successfully realized.[34] Likewise, in the NE 6.5 (1140b4-7) passage where Aristotle contrasts a πρᾶξις with a ποίησις, his explanation for why a πρᾶξις has no further end beyond itself is that εὐπραξία is an end. Here again, plausibly, Aristotle has in mind by εὐπραξία the acting rather than the action; we can read εὐπραξία as equivalent to the other adverbial phrases that pick out *acting virtuously*, rather than a virtuous action: this acting well or 'acting virtuously' has an internal end.

On this view, there is a qualified way in which virtuous actions are both ends and for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Specifically, virtuous actions are for the sake of ends beyond themselves because what makes them good or choice worthy, what makes them the kinds of actions they are, is the external ends they aim to realize. 'Acting virtuously' is an end because it is an excellent accomplishment of the human function: it is the full expression of practical wisdom and character virtue working in harmony. In some passages, Aristotle is focusing on the value of the particular actions themselves, and in other passages he is focusing on the value of the *acting*.

Again, the exact details are not important for the purposes of this paper. Here is what matters. First, there is a sense in which, when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, she does something that is both an end and for the sake of some end beyond the action itself.

---

[34] My suggestion here is that the phrase αἱ κατ' ἀρετὴν πράξεις picks out not just actions that conform to what virtue demands, but actions that are the exercise of one's virtuous character; if this is right, then these actions are instances of 'acting virtuously.' See Irwin, 'The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness', 390-1 for a discussion of different readings of the kata plus accusative phrase in Aristotle. See Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* and Lawrence, 'Ideal' for defenses of the view that an activity can only be κατά some virtue if it is the exercise of that virtue. I do not mean to endorse this stronger claim here; it is enough for my purposes that we can read the κατά locution this way and that the context of the passage invites us to do so here.

Second, the value of her acting depends on the value of her action, which in turn depends on the value of the external end at which the action aims. But again, this is not to say that the value of her acting is in any way *reducible* to the value of her action. Third, the explanation for what makes a virtuous action good is not an egoist one; although in performing a just action the virtuous agent promotes her own happiness, the just action itself is good because it benefits the political community more generally.

2.2

On the view I have defended so far, virtuous actions are good because they promote good external ends, and when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, she engages in the excellent practically rational activity partly constitutive of her own happiness. Notice that on this picture, insofar as virtuous actions aim at ends beyond themselves, virtuous actions are *always* a means to other, more valuable, goods: a just action is good because of the good external results it aims to realize. Contemplation is one of the goods achievable in action; indeed, it is the best very good achievable in action. There is, then, a straightforward way in which virtuous actions might be a means to contemplation.

This, however, is not strong enough to capture what we are after. Again, Aristotle conceives of the structure of value as a hierarchical ordering with contemplation at the top of a chain of ends; all goods other than contemplation are choice worthy at least in part for the sake of contemplation. What we need to explain is not simply how virtue is *sometimes* an instrumental means to contemplation, but how it is *always* instrumentally for the sake of contemplation. I've argued that virtuous actions aim to bring about a variety of goods or

states of affairs: health, security, a just distribution of wealth, and so on. The question then is how, in bringing about these ends, virtuous actions also instrumentally promote contemplation.

Here is what I want to suggest. Virtuous actions are instrumentally for the sake of contemplation because, by bringing about other valuable goods in the ethical domain, they bring about the conditions under which contemplation is possible. Specifically, virtuous actions aim to ultimately bring about conditions of peace, leisure, and freedom from necessity, and these are precisely the conditions under which we are free to engage in contemplation, an activity that has no practical benefit beyond itself.

Why think virtuous actions necessarily aim to bring about the conditions under which contemplation is possible? Some evidence comes from Aristotle's discussion of the noble. Aristotle makes clear throughout his ethical works that when the virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, she acts 'for the sake of' the καλόν or noble (see NE 1115b11-13, 23-4, 1120a23-4, 1122b6-7, EE 1216a25-6, and NE 1116b30-1, 1168a33, EE 1229a4). There is no consensus amongst scholars about how exactly to understand the concept of the noble in Aristotle's works.[35] It is clearly related to the way in which virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake, and the way in which they are good. Moreover, the noble seems to be related to notions of proper arrangement and fittingness (*Topics* 135a13-14, 2.91109a26-29).

The noble also seems to be strongly associated with freedom from necessity, and this is the aspect of the noble relevant for our purposes. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains that the noble is 'whatever is praiseworthy, being choice worthy for its own sake, or whatever, being

[35] See for example Irwin, 'Conception'; Lear, *'Happy'*; Rogers, 'Τὸ Καλόν'.

good, is pleasant because it is good (καλὸν μὲν οὖν ἐστιν ὃ ἂν δι' αὐτὸ αἱρετὸν ὂν ἐπαινετὸν ᾖ, ἢ ὃ ἂν ἀγαθὸν ὂν ἡδὺ ᾖ, ὅτι ἀγαθόν)' (1.9, 1366a33-34).[36] He goes on to describe various virtues of character, claiming that actions are more noble where the reward is honor rather than money, or where the action is chosen for someone else's sake, and not to further an individual's own interests (1366b34-1367a17). Victory and honor, Aristotle explains, are noble because they are desirable despite not yielding anything beyond themselves. Similarly, in *Rhetoric* 2.13, Aristotle contrasts the useful with the noble, arguing that the 'useful is what is good for oneself, and the noble is what is good absolutely (τὸ μὲν γὰρ συμφέρον αὐτῷ ἀγαθόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ καλὸν ἁπλῶς)' (1389b37-1390a1). In all these cases, the noble is contrasted with what is necessary or useful; what is noble need not have some immediate practical benefit to the agent herself.

Aristotle associates the noble with freedom from necessity again in NE 10.6 1176b2-b7 where he draws a contrast between actions that are chosen for the sake of other things and 'necessary', and activities that are chosen for their own sake, explaining that doing noble and excellent actions is one of the things choice worthy for its own sake. Moreover, he connects a good's being noble and desirable for own sake to the idea of self-sufficiency, one of the features of happiness.

More evidence of the association of the noble with freedom from necessity comes from *Politics* 7.13 (1332a7-28) Here, Aristotle distinguishes between what he calls the 'conditional' and the 'unqualified' exercise of virtue. He illustrates the distinction with two kinds of actions that are both 'from virtue': on the one hand there are actions that are necessary, while on the

[36] Here I translate both αἱρετὸν and ἐπαινετὸν normatively rather than indicatively: the idea, I take it, is that whatever is noble wouldn't be noble simply if it was praised or chosen for own sake when it was not *in fact* praiseworthy or choice worthy for its own sake.

other hand there are actions that aim at honors and advantage. The former actions are noble merely 'in a necessary way' since it would be more choice worthy if these actions weren't needed, whereas the latter actions are unqualifiedly noble. Aristotle goes on to explain that the former actions destroy bad things while the latter supply and are productive of good things. Putting this all together, the distinction between the complete and conditional exercise of virtue is as follows: the former involve actions that are most noble and unqualifiedly so, and supply and produce good things, whereas the latter involve actions that are necessary and the nobility they have is 'of necessity'; they are actions that destroy bad things. The best virtuous actions are preparatory and productive of good things, and in *Politics* 7.14 (1333a30-37), Aristotle suggests these good things are ultimately peace and leisure.

So far, I have been suggesting that one important aspect of the noble is its association with freedom from necessity, and in particular conditions of peace and leisure. To the extent that virtuous actions aim at the noble, they aim at such conditions where possible. This picture is, I think, borne out by Aristotle's discussion of particular virtues. Consider courage, one of the virtues most clearly associated with the noble. Aristotle tells us that courage is displayed in determining which dangers are most fine to withstand, and that the courageous person acts for the sake of the fine (NE 1115b12, b20-24, 1116a11, a15, b3, b31). Aristotle insists that many of the situations that inspire fear do not involve exercises of courage because the actions in these situations are not chosen for the sake of the fine (see NE 1116b2-3, b22, 1117a7-8, a15-17). So, for example, actions that we choose under compulsion or to avoid something shameful are not courageous. Likewise, exhibiting the appropriate response to disease or the threat of death at sea falls short of being courageous, because death in these circumstances is

not fine (see NE 115a2809, a35-6). Instead, courage is best expressed in situations like war where an individual faces the greatest and noblest dangers. What makes war different from these other circumstances appears to be the sort of end available to a virtuous agent: in war, a courageous agent is able to act for the sake of victory and the security of her political community.[37] As Aristotle repeatedly tells us, the proper end of war and courageous action is peace (Pol 7.14, Pol 1333a30-b3, 1334a14-16, NE 10.7 1177b4-12).

Return now to the question of how virtuous actions are instrumentally for the sake of contemplation. Here is what I propose: insofar as virtuous actions aim at peace and leisure, they aim at the conditions under which contemplation is possible. Aristotle makes clear that peace is valuable for the sake of leisure (Pol 1334a14-16, NE 1177b4-6), and that the political community makes possible the pursuit of leisure activities (Pol 7.14 1333a35-6, 1334a4-5, 7.15 1334a14-16).[38] However, Aristotle insists, leisure is only valuable if it can be used well (Pol 7.15 1334a36-40).[39] So for example in 10.6, Aristotle argues that pleasant amusements and relaxation are for the sake of activity, and in particular the activities in accordance with virtue which constitute happiness. Of these activities, Aristotle goes on to say, the best is contemplation. In *Metaphysics A*, Aristotle makes clear that philosophy is only made possible because of the conditions of leisure afforded by a well-functioning political community, insisting that philosophy only began to be sought 'when almost all the necessities of life and the things that make for comfort and recreation were present (σχεδὸν γὰρ πάντων ὑπαρχόντων τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ πρὸς ῥᾳστώνην καὶ διαγωγὴν ἡ τοιαύτη φρόνησις ἤρξατο ζητεῖσθαι)' since

[37] See Lear, *Happy*, 153.
[38] See Lear, *Happy,* 159.
[39] Here, I follow Lear's discussion closely, esp. at 159-161.

'we do not seek it for the sake of any advantage (δῆλον οὖν ὡς δι'οὐδεμίαν αὐτὴν ζητοῦμεν χρείαν ἑτέραν)' but rather 'we pursue this as the only free science, for it alone exists for itself (ἐλεύθερος ὁ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα καὶ μὴ ἄλλου ὤν, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὴν ὡς μόνην οὖσαν ἐλευθέραν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν)' (A.2 982b22-28).

It should be no surprise that leisure is required for contemplation. After all, contemplation aims at nothing beyond itself; it has no practical benefit beyond the activity itself.[40] That is, when we are living under conditions of serious physical insecurity or material scarcity, we do not have the freedom to engage in an activity that cannot improve these conditions.[41] This is another way to put the point that Aristotle makes in 10.8 1178b8-18, that it would be absurd to think that the gods engage in virtuous actions since they do not have a material existence, and so have no need of virtuous actions.

3.

3.1

[40] Though, see Walker, *Uses* for a defense of the view that, despite Aristotle's apparent insistence to the contrary, contemplation does in fact have practical benefits for humans.
[41] Aristotle's position becomes even more attractive and plausible if we are expansive about what counts as contemplative activity. We might think that virtuous actions promote conditions under which some kind of contemplative activity is possible, even if it is not contemplation in the strict sense of being an exercise of wisdom. So for example, we might include as activities that have a contemplative dimension things like going to the theatre, enjoying literature and music, appreciating art, and so on. I have hoped to show the plausibility of Aristotle's view even on a strict contemplation of contemplation, but I am sympathetic to the idea that other intellectual activities we do in leisure might share some of the value of contemplation. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for making this suggestion.

I suggested in §1 that there were two worries for interpreting Aristotle as saying that virtuous actions are instrumentally a means to contemplation. The first challenge was to explain how this does not undermine the way in which acting virtuously is also an end, and something chosen for its own sake. We wanted some principled explanation of how it can be true of the nature of virtuous actions both that they are valuable in themselves, and that they instrumentally promote contemplative activity. The second challenge was how to capture common sense views about which sorts of actions are ethically virtuous. The actions that Aristotle treats as paradigmatically virtuous – just, generous, courageous actions – do not obviously seem to be the actions best suited to promoting contemplative activity.

To address the first worry, I pointed to a qualified way in which a virtuous action can be both an end and for the sake of an end beyond itself. Virtuous actions are good because of the good ends they aim to achieve, but when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action, she also fully expresses her practically rational nature, and this activity is itself an end. The value of her acting depends on, but is not reducible to, the value of the end of her action. To address the second worry, I argued that the goods ends at which virtuous aim – ends like security, health, equal distributions of goods – are ends that make possible the conditions under which we are free from necessity, and these are precisely the conditions under which contemplative activity is possible. So, insofar as virtuous actions aim at the conditions under which contemplation is possible, virtuous actions are instrumentally for the sake of contemplation.[42]

[42] What about actions that fall between bringing about the conditions necessary for contemplation (peace, leisure, and so on) and contemplation itself? For example, what about

The view I have defended shares important elements with both the pluralist and monist approaches. Ultimately, it is a pluralist view: the value of all goods in the ethical domain is not reducible to the value of contemplative activity. Again, I distinguished between 'virtuous actions' and 'acting virtuously' and argued that what makes 'acting virtuously' an end and choice worthy for its own sake is not that it promotes contemplative activity, but that it is the full expression of our practically rational nature. Its value depends on, but is not reducible to, the value of virtuous actions, and the value of virtuous actions is in turn explained in terms of what promotes contemplation. What this means is that, although the exercise of virtue is valuable independent of the way it promotes contemplation; there is also a non-contingent way in which it *does* instrumentally promote contemplation, because virtuous actions are the sorts of actions that instrumentally promote contemplation. In this way the view shares important similarities with a monist picture: the exercise of virtue, and the ends that virtuous actions aim to achieve – health, peace, leisure and so on – all help to bring about the conditions under which contemplation is possible. If something like this account is right, Aristotle has a remarkably sophisticated axiology, one that shows the possibility of having a plurality of independently valuable goods that are still hierarchically ordered under some one most valuable good.[43]

---

teaching in conditions of peace and leisure in a way that equips students to contemplate? Would this count as a virtuous action, even though it does not bring about conditions of peace and leisure? I think it is plausible that there are actions that don't bring about the conditions of peace and leisure, but still promote contemplation in some more general sense, and as such as 'for the sake of' contemplation. However, there will also be actions that are instrumental to contemplation that do not count as virtuous actions (teaching might be such an example). Not every action that is 'for the sake of' contemplation will be virtuous, even if every virtuous action will, in some way, be 'for the sake of' contemplation. I am grateful to the editor for encouraging me to clarify this.

It will be helpful with a view to clarifying the details of my account to contrast it with some of the accounts I considered in §1.3. Consider first how it compares with the sort of pluralist view defended by Kraut. Again, on Kraut's picture there are a variety of intrinsically valuable goods in the ethical domain, but contemplation sets a limit on our pursuit of other goods, including virtue. So, on Kraut's view, virtue is choice worthy for the sake of contemplation because it instrumentally promotes contemplation, and our pursuit of it is regulated by contemplation. That being said, Kraut thinks there are clearly instances where we ought to sacrifice some measure of our happiness in the form of contemplation for the sake of virtue. I suggested that Kraut's view doesn't give us a principled story for why virtuous actions aimed at the good of the *polis* also reliably promote our own contemplation. The possibility of conflict between the actions that benefit the *polis* and the actions that best promote an agent's own contemplation seems to be much more expansive than Kraut acknowledges.

Like Kraut, I think there is a non-egoistic explanation for the goodness of virtuous actions. On my view, we should understand virtuous actions in terms of the good ends they aim to bring about in a political community. However, unlike Kraut, on my view, the way that virtuous actions benefit a political community is also the way in which virtuous actions are instrumentally for the sake of contemplation; by bringing about conditions of peace and leisure, virtuous actions allow for the conditions under which contemplative activity is possible. What this means is that it is not merely a contingent matter, as on Kraut's view, that just, generous, or courageous actions instrumentally promote contemplation. The mistake that scholars like Kraut have made is to assume that the way virtuous actions are other-directed, or

benefit the political community, cannot be the same as the way in which they instrumentally promote contemplation.

Now compare my account with the monist views we saw in §1.3. On Lear's view, goods other than contemplation are 'for the sake of' contemplation by being teleological approximations of contemplation. On Tuozzo's view, virtuous actions are 'for the sake of' contemplation because they instrumentally promote contemplation by providing the kinds of psychic states necessary for contemplation. The worry I raised for both views is that they ill-positioned to explain how many paradigmatic instances of virtuous action are for the sake of contemplation in the ways they describe. Like Lear and Tuozzo, I locate the way that virtuous actions are for the sake of contemplation in the way they are for the sake of the noble, and I understand the noble as being closely related to conditions of peace and leisure. However, unlike both, I offer what I take to be a more straightforward explanation of how virtuous actions, by being for the sake of the noble, are for the sake of contemplation: they bring about the conditions necessary for contemplative activity. This more straightforward reading is unavailable to both Lear and Tuozzo because they assume the way that the exercise of virtue benefits the agent herself is by promoting her own contemplation. On my view, because of the distinction between virtuous actions and acting virtuously, we need not assume this. Instead, the external ends of virtuous actions are the conditions under which contemplation is possible more generally in a political community. And, in performing the actions that bring about these conditions, the virtuous agent fully expresses her practical rationality and so accomplishes an aspect of the human function.

3.2

The view I have defended here is, by necessity, exploratory: I have hoped to offer the strongest possible case for something like a face-value reading of the way that virtuous activity is for the sake of contemplation. I want to close by considering three possible worries for my account. First, we might question whether the relation I have identified between virtuous actions and contemplation is in fact an instrumental one. Second, we might wonder whether my account actually resolves the apparent conflicts between virtue and contemplation that it purports to solve. Third, we might be concerned that the account does no better than competing accounts at accommodating the common or reputable opinions; we might worry that any moral theory that uses contemplation as the standard for moral action is prima facie implausible.

Take the first worry first. Again, as I set up the paper, passages like the in NE 6.1 and EE 8.3 strongly suggest that virtuous actions are for the sake of contemplation by being instrumentally a means to contemplation. One of the virtues of my account is supposed to be that it does justice to this face value reading. However, we might wonder whether the account I've given strains the instrumental relation we hoped to capture. Again, on my view, it is not the case that virtuous actions directly aim at maximizing or producing contemplative activity. Instead, they are for the sake of contemplation insofar as they aim at freedom from necessity, and this freedom from necessity is what is required for contemplative activity to be possible. Virtuous actions do not always directly promote contemplation. They do not even always directly promote the conditions *necessary* for contemplation. We might worry that the relationship between virtuous actions and contemplation is too indirect to be thought as an instrumental one.

I think this worry is misplaced. It assumes too narrow a conception of instrumentality to capture what Aristotle himself seems to have in mind. Consider again the analogy with medicine and health. Aristotle clearly thinks that medicine is instrumentally for the sake of health. However, it is not the case that everything a doctor does as an exercise of the medical art is aimed at maximizing health in any particular patient. After all, a doctor might have to consider how to distribute scarce resources amongst a number of patients; it might be better, all things considered, to stabilize the conditions of a number of patients rather than to bring any one patient into full health.[44] Moreover, sometimes a doctor might try her best to make a patient healthier and fail through no fault of her own. Other times, it might not even be appropriate for a doctor to aim to make a patient healthy; an illness might have progressed so far that all a doctor can do is minimize the patient's pain, or prevent the illness from spreading. Still, it is appropriate to describe the goal of medicine as health, and to say that medicine is instrumentally for the sake of health. One way to think about this is that any condition the doctor aims to bring about is a step in the direction of health. A doctor might prescribe a diet to lower blood pressure, or amputate an infected limb, or run a range of tests to identify the cause of a set of symptoms. These are all actions that are *such as* to promote health, even if in some particular case they do not in fact bring about health in the patient. Health is the ultimate goal of the art in general, even if it is not realizable in particular cases. So also, I want to suggest, the freedom from necessity required for contemplation is the ultimate goal of ethical

[44] It is tempting to assume that if we ascribe to Aristotle a consequentialist picture, that it must be a maximizing one. But I take Aristotle to have a broadly consequentialist picture that is neither impartialist or maximizing. In this way, his ethical theory represents an important alternative to the way that contemporary consequentialist theories have developed.

virtue even if it is not always realizable. A generous action might involve giving money to someone in need such that they do not have to work a humiliating or exploitative job. A just action might take the form of creating laws that guarantee workers are fairly compensated for their labor. These actions are, I want to suggest, such as to promote conditions of peace and leisure in a political community; these actions all serve to ameliorate conditions of compulsion or material necessity. As such these actions are all, in the sense relevant here, also 'for the sake of' contemplation.[45]

I suspect one source of confusion in thinking about how virtuous actions are instrumental to other ends is in identifying the level at which the instrumental relation is supposed to apply. When Aristotle makes claims about medicine being for the sake of health, or virtuous actions being for the sake of contemplation, I take him to be making claims about the natures of things, or about the objective structure of value. Claims made at this level of abstraction are consistent with medicine not always producing health and virtue not always producing contemplation. One way to think about this is in terms of the distinction often made in contemporary ethical theory between a decision procedure and a standard of rightness.[46] Aristotle famously does not give us a clear decision procedure or principle of

[45] To be sure, there are limits to the analogy with medicine. Medicine is for the sake of health in the sense that aims to produce health. Virtue is for the sake of contemplation in the sense that it aims to produce the conditions necessary for contemplation, rather than contemplation itself. In a way it is not surprising that the analogy runs out here. Contemplation is not the end of a process or a craft, but instead is the kind of activity that is itself an end.

[46] For this distinction, see for example C. A. Stark, 'Decision Procedures, Standards of Rightness and Impartiality', *Nous*, 31 (2002), 478-495. As she describes it, a decision procedure is a method for deliberation, whereas a standard of rightness is an answer to the question, 'What kinds of actions are morally right?'. Offering a decision procedure makes sense when there is an answer to the prior question of what the standard of rightness is.

action. Instead, he exhorts us to act as the virtuous agent does. Some have understood this to be a deficiency or oversight of his view, but I think more charitably Aristotle was just not principally interested in the question of how we ought to act in some particular instance. He was interested in the prior question of what *makes* certain kinds of actions ethically virtuous, which is to say, what the goods are in the ethical domain that virtuous actions aim to bring about. That is, Aristotle was interested in offering us a kind of standard of rightness.

Turn now to the second worry, about potential conflicts between the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of contemplation. There are actually a few different concerns here to untangle. One sort of worry we might have is that, even if virtuous actions promote the conditions under which contemplation is possible, they are not the sorts of actions *best* suited to bringing about those conditions. After all, there are, in many cases, actions that would more directly bring about contemplation than actions aimed at fighting just wars, or equitably distributing material resources. Here, there are two things useful to point out about my account. First, it is a mistake to assume that, just because contemplation is the standard for virtuous actions, all virtuous actions must be aimed at *maximizing* contemplative activity. I've argued that Aristotle is giving us a standard of rightness not a principle of action. What this means is that although just, generous, or courageous actions are the sorts of actions that aim to free us from material necessity and promote peace and leisure, they may not always be the best actions in some particular context to bring about these conditions; the claims Aristotle is making are at the level of the natures of these actions and the kinds of ends that characterize them.[47]

[47] One might have a related worry here that the account I am proposing does not adequately explain the non-instrumental value of ethical activity. On the view I am defending, acting virtuously is an end because it is an excellent exercise of our intellectual capacities, and virtuous actions are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. But, so the worry goes, we

Second, I've argued that Aristotle is a pluralist about value. Even though the ends of virtuous actions instrumentally promote contemplation, this need not exhaust their value. Indeed, it seems to me plausible that the goods virtuous actions aim to achieve – peace, leisure, health and so on – are worthwhile in important ways independent of how they allow for contemplation. What this means is that there is no simple story for what goods we ought to prioritize in particular cases. This question of how to navigate conflicts between values in particular instances is a question that finds itself at the center of contemporary moral theories, but I believe was simply not the sort of question that Aristotle meant to answer. Instead, I have hoped to show that there is no conflict or incoherence at the level of the objective structure of value that Aristotle describes.

A different sort of worry we might have is how to adjudicate conflicts between the actions that best promote my own contemplative activity, and the actions that best promote the conditions for contemplation in the wider political community. What does my account say in a case where an agent is choosing between prioritizing her own leisure time to contemplate, and fighting for a just political cause? In fact, these sorts of conflicts are inevitable on my account. I do not take Aristotle to have the form of *eudaimonism* on which an agent ought only

---

might think when we perform a just action, the fact that it is just is enough of a reason to do so; we ought to do the just action simply because it is what justice requires, not because it benefits us by being an excellent accomplishment of the human function, or simply because of its consequences. In fact, my hope is that, by seeing the instrumental nature of virtuous actions at the level of a standard of rightness, not a principle of action, my account does not make the value of virtuous actions purely instrumental. The thought here is that a just action is good even if in some particular instance it does not have the desired result. It is good because it is the sort of action that is such as to promote conditions that are valuable for human beings. What this means is that the fact that the action is just is a good enough reason to perform it. However, if we want to spell out *what justice is* we will need to make reference to the ends that just actions are such as to promote. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection.

do whatever best promotes her own happiness. It is true that when an agent performs a virtuous action, she benefits herself by engaging in an instance of acting virtuously. But it is not the case that doing so *best* promotes her own happiness in cases where she could instead engage in contemplation. Many of the paradigmatic virtuous actions are other directed, aimed at promoting happiness in the political community more generally. Not only are these conflicts inevitable, I do not think Aristotle has a general rule for determining when we ought to prioritize our own happiness and when we ought to prioritize the good of the political community. This might seem unsatisfying but again I think this is more a reflection of the narrow focus of contemporary ethical theories than a deficiency in Aristotle's own view. Moreover, it seems to reflect the complexity of these decisions in our own lives.

Consider a final worry. Suppose you are convinced by the interpretation I have defended. You still might wonder to what extent I have been successful in vindicating Aristotle's ethical theory. After all, it might seem hopelessly elitist and deeply self-serving for Aristotle to insist that our ultimate ethical aim should be the promotion of philosophy, an activity enjoyed by so few. In closing, I want to emphasize what the view gets right, and what Aristotle himself, to some degree, failed to see about his own commitments. To notice that virtuous actions, by promoting conditions of peace and leisure, promote the conditions under which contemplation is possible, is to notice the enormous degree of privilege required to be able to engage in philosophy. This is hardly an elitist position. Instead, it is a recognition that people are not free to engage in an activity like philosophy, an activity that rarely yields any practical benefit, until their basic needs are met. Aristotle's ethical theory enjoins us to bring

about the conditions of peace, security and freedom of necessity that make philosophy accessible to those who would otherwise not be able to participate.[48]

[48] I am grateful to audiences at the University of Pennsylvania, NYU, Columbia, Indiana University, the University of Toronto, Washington University in St. Louis, and Princeton. Special thanks to feedback from Eric Brown, Patricia Marechal, Katy Meadows, Susan Sauvé Meyer, Benjamin Morison, Jessica Moss, and Claudia Yau. I am also grateful to the referees and Editor at the Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy for their helpful comments.

Works Cited

Ackrill, J., 'Aristotle on Action', *Mind,* 87 (1978), 595–601.

Ackrill, J., 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia', in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1980), 15–33.

Adkins, A. W., 'Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Republic', *Classical Philology*, 73 (1978), 297–313.

Aristotle. (1991). Aristotelis: *Ethica Eudemia*. R. Walzer & J. M. Mingay (Eds.). (Oxford Classical Texts). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2020)

Aristotle. *Aristotelis: Ethica Nicomachea*. Bywater (Ed.). (Oxford Classical Texts). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2020)

Brown, L., 'What is "the mean relative to us" in Aristotle's Ethics?', *Phronesis*, 42 (1997), 77–93.

Brown, L., 'Why is Aristotle's Virtue of Character a Mean? Taking Aristotle at his Word', in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014), 64–80.

Charles, D., *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (Cornell, 1986).

Charles, D., 'Aristotle on well-being and intellectual contemplation', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume,* 73 (1999), 205–223.

Charles, D., 'Eudaimonia, Theoria, and the Choiceworthiness of Practical Wisdom', in P. Destrée and M. Zingano (eds.), *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics* (Leuven, 2014), 89–109.

Cooper, J. M., *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

Cooper, J. M., 'Contemplation and Happiness: A Reconsideration', *Synthese,* 72 (1987), 187–216.

Curzer, H. J. 'A Defense of Aristotle's Doctrine that Virtue is a Mean', *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), 129–138.

Devereux, D.T., 'Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness', in D. J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, DC, 1981), 247–60.

Dirlmeier, F., *Aristoteles*, *Magna Moralia, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Berlin, 1962).

Dirlmeier, F., *Aristoteles*, *Eudemische Ethik*, *übersetzt und kommentiert* (Berlin, 1969).

During, I., *Aristoteles* (Heidelberg, 1966).

Gauthier, R. A. and J. Y. Jolif, *L'Éthique àNicomaque* (Paris and Louvain, 1958).

Gelber, J., 'Two Ways of Being For an End', Phronesis, 63 (2018), 64-86.

Hardie, W. F. R., 'Aristotle's Doctrine That Virtue Is a Mean', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 65 (1964), 183–204.

Hardie, W. F. R., 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics', in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.) *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London, 1967), 297– 322.

Heinaman, R., 'Eudaimonia and Self-Sufficiency in the Nicomachean Ethics', *Phronesis,* 33 (1988), 31–53.

Heinaman, R., 'Activity and Praxis in Aristotle', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy,* 12 (1996), 71–111.

Hirji, S., 'Acting Virtuously as an end in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy,* 26 (2018), 1006-1026.

Irwin, T. H., 'Aristotle's Conception of Morality', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1985), 115-143.

Irwin, T. H., 'The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness', *Ethics,* 101 (1991), 382-391.

Jaeger, W., *Aristotle* [English trans.] trans. by R. Robinson (Chicago, 1948).

Jimenez, M., 'Aristotle on Becoming Virtuous by Doing Virtuous Actions', *Phronesis*, 61 (2016), 3-32.

Kenny, A., *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship Between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1978).

Keyt, D., 'Intellectualism in Aristotle', *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 87 (1978), 1-20.

Keyt, D., 'Intellectualism in Aristotle', in J. P. Anton and A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (Albany, 1983), 364–87.

Kraut, R., *Aristotle on the human good* (Princeton, 1991).

Lawrence, G., 'Aristotle and the Ideal Life', *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993), 1–34.

Lear, G. R., *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton, 2004).

Lear, G. R., 'Happiness and the Structure of Ends', in G. Anagnostopoulos (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle* (Malden, 2009), 385–403.

Leighton, S., 'The Mean Relative to Us', *Apeiron*, 28 (1995), 67–78.

Meyer, S. S., *Ancient Ethics* (Abingdon, 2007).

Meyer, S. S., 'Living for the Sake of an Ultimate End', in J. Miller (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2011), 47–65.

Meyer, S. S., 'Aristotle on Moral Motivation', in I. Vasiliou (ed.), *Moral Motivation: A History* (Oxford, 2016), 44-64

Roche, T. D., 'The perfect happiness', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (1988), 103–125.

Rogers, K., 'Aristotle's Conception of Tò Καλόυ', *Ancient Philosophy,* 13 (1999), 355–371.

Ross, W. D. (trans.), *Aristotle* Ethica Nicomachea (Oxford, 1915).

Rowe, C. J., 'The Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics: A Study in the Development of Aristotle's Thought', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary Volume*, 3 (1971).

Scharle, M., 'Elemental Teleology in Aristotle's Physics 2.8', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* 34 (2008), 147–183

Tuozzo, T., 'Aristotle's Theory of the Good and Its Causal Basis', *Phronesis,* 40 (1995), 293–314.

Tuozzo, T., 'Contemplation, the Noble, and the Mean: The Standard of Moral Virtue in Aristotle's Ethics', *Apeiron*, 28 (1995), 129–154.

Verdenius, W. J., 'Human Reason and God in the *Eudemian Ethics*', in P. Moraux and D. Harlifinger (eds.), *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik* (Berlin, 1971), 295–298.

Walker, M. D., *Aristotle on the Uses of Contemplation*, (Cambridge, 2018).

White, N. P., 'Goodness and Human Aims in Aristotle's Ethics', in D. J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, DC, 1981), 225–246.

Whiting, J., 'Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle', *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 68 (1986), 70–95.

Whiting, J., 'Eudaimonia, External Results and Choosing Virtuous Actions for Themselves', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 65 (2002), 270–290.

Wilkes, K., 'The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics', in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1980), 341–358.

Woods, M. (ed.), *Eudemian Ethics Books I, Ii, and Viii* (Oxford, 1992).