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RESEARCH ARTICLE

HU Xinkai

Complete Virtue and the Definition of Happiness in Aristotle

Abstract In this paper, I challenge the standard reading of complete virtue (ἀρετή τελεία) in those disputed passages of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. I argue that, for Aristotle, complete virtue is neither (i) wisdom nor (ii) a whole set of all virtues. Rather, it is a term used by Aristotle to denote any virtue that is in its complete or perfect form. In light of this reading, I offer a pluralist interpretation of Aristotelian happiness. I argue that for Aristotle, the life-long exercise of a predominant virtue—as long as it is exercised in its complete or perfect form—will suffice for human happiness. The so-called inclusivist and intellectualist notions of Aristotelian happiness, thus understood, are merely two forms (viz. the composite and the non-composite form) of the pluralist notion of Aristotelian happiness. And if I am right, my pluralist interpretation provides an alternative, if not better, solution to the long-standing problem of "dual happiness" in Aristotle.

Keywords Aristotle, complete virtue, happiness, inclusivism, intellectualism

1 Introduction

Aristotle's notion of happiness (εὐδαιμονία), alongside his notion of substance, is probably the most controversial notion in Aristotelian scholarship.[1] No consensus has ever been reached on what a happy life is or

[1] However, the ancient controversy is not the same as the modern one. For Aspasius, the opposition is between a weak inclusivist notion of happiness and a strong inclusivist notion of happiness (*Aspasii in Ethica Nicomachea Quae Supersunt Commentaria*, 8.25–30), whereas in the modern day, the opposition is between a strong inclusivist notion of happiness and an intellectualist notion of happiness. (I thank Marco Zingano for drawing my attention to this point.)

HU Xinkai (✉)
Department of Philosophy, Southeast University, Nanjing 211189, China
E-mail: xkhu@connect.hku.hk

consists of for Aristotle: the inclusivists argue, for example, that, for Aristotle, a happy life is a life mixed of both moral and theoretical activity,[2] while the intellectualists believe that the Aristotelian happy life is to be identified with pure theoretical activity.[3] Leaving aside the text, both answers seem to be intuitively unsatisfactory. The inclusivist notion of happiness is too comprehensive. If one identifies the highest human good with the exercise of all of the moral and intellectual virtues, the lack of one single virtue would suffice to make someone unhappy. As a result, even the alleged "happy Socrates" can be unhappy.[4] The intellectualist notion of happiness, on the other hand, is too narrow. If one limits happiness only to the realm of theoretical contemplation, happiness would be something unattainable for most people, which is against Aristotle's intention.[5]

In this paper, I wish to propose a pluralist interpretation of the Aristotelian happiness. I argue that to attain Aristotelian happiness, one is not obliged to devote oneself solely to contemplation (as is maintained by the intellectualist reading), nor is one obliged to practice all of the Aristotelian virtues together (as is maintained by the inclusivist reading). Aristotelian happiness, on my reading, can be attained through the exercise of *any* predominant virtue as long as it is exercised *in its complete or perfect form*. As a result, there can be a happiness for the courageous man, a happiness for the generous man, a happiness for the theoretical man—in short, different kinds of happiness for different kinds of virtuous people. By maintaining this, however, I do not wish to dismiss either the inclusivist or the intellectualist notion of Aristotelian happiness. I argue that both the inclusivist and the intellectualist notions can be understood within a pluralist explanatory framework, that is, as two *forms* of a pluralist notion of Aristotelian happiness.

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[2] The "inclusivism" under discussion is a narrow inclusivism or a virtue-inclusivism (see Walker's [2018] classification of the multiple uses of the term "inclusivism," 22–23). The relationship between external goods and the Aristotelian happiness will thus not be considered within the discussion. For a critique of the broad inclusivism, see Heinaman 2007, 221–53.

[3] The interpretations that advocate such an intellectualist reading include but are not limited to, Clark 1975, 145–62; Cooper 1975; 1987, 187–216; 2004, 302–08; Kenny 1992; Kraut 1989; Cleemput 2006, 127–57.

[4] Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.6.14. Cf. Plato, *Crito* 43b6–9; *Phaedo* 58e3–59a1.

[5] Cf. *NE* 1099b18–20: it would also be something common to the multitude (πολύκοινον), for it is possible for it to be available, through a certain learning and care, to all who have not been rendered defective in point of virtue.

2 The Disputed Passages

Let us begin at the heart of the inclusivist/intellectualist debate—the three disputed passages:

P1: Happiness is a certain activity of soul in accord with complete virtue (ἀρετὴν τελείαν).[6] (*NE* I.13.1102a5–6)

P2: [Happiness] then becomes an activity of soul in accord with virtue, and if there are several virtues, then in accord with the best and most complete one (τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην). (*NE* I.7.1098a16–18)

P3: If happiness is an activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable that it would be in accord with the mightiest virtue (τὴν κρατίστην), and this would be the virtue of what is the best (τοῦ ἀρίστου). (*NE* X.7.1177a12–13)

All of these three passages agree that happiness is an activity in accord with virtue (κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια). But they differ, at least in expression, with regard to what the "virtue" is: P1 identifies the virtue with "complete virtue" (ἀρετή τελεία) (Cf. *NE* 1100a4, 1101a14–15, *EE* 1219a38–39, *MM* 1125a25). P2 identifies the virtue with the "best and most complete virtue" (ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην), and P3 the "mightiest and best virtue" (τὴν κρατίστη καὶ τὴν ἀρίστην). The interpretative controversy consists in whether, in those three passages, Aristotle is referring to one and the same virtue or different virtues. The intellectualists hold that in all three passages Aristotle is talking about the one and same virtue, wisdom (σοφία) (Cf. *NE* 1177a22–25).[7] The inclusivists, by contrast, argue that there is at least one passage among the

[6] In this paper, I will not limit myself to discussing Aristotle's usage of ἀρετή τελεία in one single work (e.g. the *Eudemian Ethics* or *Nicomachean Ethics*), for I hold Aristotle's usage of ἀρετή τελεία to be consistent throughout his works. I am unconvinced by the argument that Aristotle adopts an "inclusivist" usage of ἀρετή τελεία in his early works (e.g. in the *Eudemian Ethics*), but turns away from it to an "intellectualist" one later (e.g. in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) (see Cooper 1987, Kenny 1992). First, Aristotle himself never indicates that such a change exists. Second, an "intellectualist" reading of ἀρετή τελεία cannot explain why magnanimity and justice are ἀρετή τελεία in *NE*. Third, the use of ἀρετή τελεία in the *Politics* (viz. a late work) also does not follow the "intellectualist" pattern (Cf. *Pol*. 1260a14–24, 1276b31–35).

[7] Cf. Kraut 1989, 244–51; Kenny 1978, 205.

three in which Aristotle is talking about a virtue other than wisdom.[8] This virtue is "all virtues" or a whole set of virtues, as they call it.

In the following section, I shall challenge both the inclusivist and the intellectualist readings. I argue that Aristotle's ἀρετή τελεία refers neither to "wisdom" nor to "all virtues." It can refer, in fact, to *any* Aristotelian virtue as long as the virtue is *in its complete or perfect form*.

3 Complete Virtue

As we have noted, the interpretation of complete virtue in P1 is a crux in the inclusivist/intellectualist debate. In what sense is happiness an activity in accord with "complete virtue"? The intellectualists hold that complete virtue is identical to the best and most complete virtue, and therefore identical to wisdom; the inclusivists, by contrast, believe that complete virtue contains a whole set of virtues. I think that both readings are false: the intellectualist reading is opposed to what Aristotle says about complete virtue in the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the inclusivist reading is contradicted by how Aristotle uses the term elsewhere.

Let us first look at *EE* 1219a35–39—the only place where Aristotle elaborates what he means by "complete virtue" before giving his official definition of happiness.[9] Aristotle writes that

> Since happiness was something complete (τέλεόν), and life is both

[8] Cf. Hardie 1965, 277–95; Ackrill 1980, 15–34. Some intellectualists also admit that complete virtue in P1 has not yet been specified by Aristotle as wisdom, see Cooper 1987, 220–24.

[9] The intellectualists interpret Aristotle's complete virtue in the light of his discussion of the hierarchy of ends in *NE* I.7. According to them, since the "complete end" is for Aristotle the highest end among the hierarchy of all ends (1097a25–34), complete virtue must be the highest virtue among the hierarchy of all virtues. I doubt, however, that there is a semantic relationship between the two terms. For Aristotle's introduction of the "complete end" in *NE* I.7 aims to prove the supremacy of happiness to other kinds of end (e.g. wealth, health). But there is no indication in *NE* I.7 that Aristotle's introduction of complete virtue aims at something similar, such as proving the supremacy of wisdom to other kinds of virtue (note that the distinction between virtues is not even introduced in *NE* I.7). Indeed, when Aristotle refers to the "most complete virtue" (τὴν τελειοτάτην) at *NE* 1098a17–18, he seems to have the hierarchy of virtues in mind. But if so, the highest virtue among the hierarchy of all virtues is then not "complete virtue," but the "most complete virtue" instead.

> complete and incomplete (καὶ τελέα καὶ ἀτελής), and virtue likewise—for virtue is both a whole on the one hand and a part on the other (ἣ μὲν γὰρ ὅλη, ἣ δὲ μόριον), and the activity of incomplete things is incomplete, happiness would be an activity of complete life according to complete virtue (ἀρετὴν τελείαν).[10]

Aristotle distinguishes between two pairs of things: (1) complete and incomplete life, and (2) complete and incomplete virtue. Complete virtue (ἀρετὴν τελείαν) is said to be the virtue that is itself a whole (ὅλη), and the incomplete is said to be a part (μόριον).[11] If the intellectualist reading is right, that is, complete virtue refers to wisdom, then wisdom would be expected to be a whole of which other virtues are parts.[12] But this certainly cannot be true. How could courage exist for the sake of wisdom?[13] Further, if one takes into account Aristotle's explicit statement in *NE* VI.12 that wisdom is itself a part rather than a whole (1144a5), it is even more unlikely that wisdom is the "complete virtue" that Aristotle has in mind here. The intellectualist reading of ἀρετή τελεία, therefore, fails.

The inclusivist reading, on the other hand, seems to fit well with the *Eudemian* account. It can be argued favorably that being a whole set of virtues, complete virtue is a whole of which other virtues are parts. But such an inclusivist reading, as we shall see, is contradicted by many other passages in the Aristotelian corpus. Consider first the passage from the *Pol.*I.13:

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[10] All translations are borrowed from Barnes 1984, with modifications.

[11] An alternative reading would be: "for the complete [life or virtue] is a whole, and the incomplete [life or virtue] is a part." But if this is what Aristotle means, it is strange to consider what this sentence might amount to.

[12] The intellectualists may reject the most natural reading of the part-whole relationship by interpreting it as a perfect-imperfect relationship. That is, wisdom is whole because it is perfect, while other virtues are partial because they are imperfect. But if so, they would have to interpret the contrast between the complete life and incomplete life as being between the contemplative life and some other kind of life (e.g. political life). But this is simply against what Aristotle says thereafter about the complete life and the incomplete life: "a man is not happy for a single day nor a child nor at every age, whence that thing too of Solon is beautifully said, not to call a living man happy but when he reaches his end. For nothing incomplete (ἀτελὲς) is happy, for it is not whole (ὅλον)" (*EE* 1219b5–8).

[13] For the part exists for the sake of the whole (Cf. *PA* 639b12–15, 640a34–36). But it is certainly in conflict with Aristotle's words that morally virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake (Cf. *NE* 1144a20; *EE* 1216a2, 1248b35–36). Also, it is important to note that what we called "intellectual courage" is not courage for Aristotle, for Aristotle limits the realm of courage to that of warfare. See *NE* 1115a24–32.

> It is to be supposed that the same necessarily holds concerning the virtues of character: all must share in them, but not in the same way, but to each in relation to his own function. Hence the ruler must have complete virtue (τελέαν ἀρετήν) of character (for his function is in an absolute sense that of a master craftsman, and reason is a master craftsman); while each of the others must have as much as falls to him. It is thus evident that there is a virtue of character that belongs to all these mentioned, and that the moderation of a woman and a man is not the same, nor their courage or justice, as Socrates supposed, but that there is a ruling and a serving courage, and similarly with the other virtues. (1260a14–24)

In this passage, Aristotle is in line with Gorgias against Plato who holds that virtue is one and the same for everyone, e.g. the ruler and the ruled (1260a27–28).[14] Aristotle's point, therefore, is not whether the ruler and the ruled shall have different *amounts* of virtue, but whether they shall have different *forms* of virtue. That the emphasis is on the *form* rather than the *amount* is reflected in what Aristotle says thereafter: "the moderation of a woman and a man is not the same, nor their courage or justice … but that there is a ruling and a serving courage" (1260a21–23). There is nothing, in Aristotle's view, to prevent man and woman having the same sort or amount of virtue (e.g. courage, moderation, justice), but the virtue they possess must be of a different form. That is, the man has the *complete form* of a virtue (e.g. the "ruling courage," a complete form of courage), and the woman has the *incomplete form* of a virtue (e.g. the "serving courage," an incomplete form of courage).

In *Politics* III.4, we see that Aristotle continues to use ἀρετή τελεία in a way different from what the inclusivists suggest. Aristotle writes:

> If, then, there are many forms of regime, it is clear that it is not possible for the virtue of the good citizen (σπουδαίου πολίτου) to be one (μίαν), or the complete virtue (τὴν τελείαν). [But the good man (ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα) we assert is so in accord with one virtue (μίαν), the complete virtue (τὴν τελείαν)]. That it is possible for a citizen to be good yet not possess the

[14] Plato, *Meno* 71dff.

> virtue in accord with which he is a good man, therefore, is evident. (1276b31–35)

There is no indication in this passage that Aristotle thinks that good citizens cannot have "complete virtue" because they cannot have "*all* virtues." Indeed, the whole point of the passage is not that the good citizen can have *all* the virtues, but that the good citizen can have the complete *form* of virtue, or a virtue *in its complete or perfect form*. For as Aristotle says, while the virtue of a good man is virtue unqualifiedly (ἁπλῶς), the virtue of a good citizen is always said with reference to the regime (1276b30–31) and to the profession (ἔργον) (1276b38–40). As a result, the virtue of the good citizen in City A cannot be the same as that of the good citizen in City B, provided that City A and City B have different regimes. It follows that the virtue of the good citizen cannot be virtue *in its complete or perfect form*. For virtue *in its complete or perfect form* is one (μίαν), but the virtue of the good citizen must be as many (πλείω) as the *forms* of regimes and professions.[15]

If my reading is right, the foregoing examples have clearly shown that Aristotle's complete virtue is not the inclusivists' "all virtues." Rather, it refers to a certain complete or perfect *form* of virtue, or as I shall call it, virtue *in its complete or perfect form*. Now there are many passages in the Aristotelian corpus that can lend support to such a reading of ἀρετή τελεία. First, in the philosophical lexicon (Book Δ of the *Metaphysics*), Aristotle explains one of the central usages of "the complete" (τέλειον) as follows:

> We call "complete" (τέλειον) … that which with respect to the virtue and the goodness cannot be excelled in its kind (γένος), e.g. a doctor is complete and a flute-player is complete, when they lack nothing with respect to the form (εἶδος) of their own proper virtue. And thus we transfer the word to bad things, and speak of a complete scandal-monger and a complete thief; indeed we even call them good, i.e. a good thief and a good

[15] Complete virtue or virtue in the complete form can even be a vice in a certain kind of regime or profession. In the *Pol*. III, for example, Aristotle mentions how an excess of virtue can be a vice in a democratic city: "If there is one person so outstanding by his excess of virtue … such persons can no longer be regarded as a part of the city … [because] for this sort of person there is no law—they themselves are law. It would be ridiculous, then, if one attempted to legislate for them" (1284a3–17).

> scandal-monger. And the virtue is certain completion (τελείωσίς τις); for each thing is complete and every substance is complete when with respect to the form (εἶδος) of its own proper virtue it lacks no part of its natural magnitude. (1021b12–23)

A complete doctor, according to this passage, is one who has the complete virtue of a doctor, and a complete flute-player one who has the complete virtue of a flute-player. Here we see that the "completeness" of a virtue is always said with respect to the *form* of its own proper virtue (κατὰ τὸ εἶδος τῆς οἰκείας ἀρετῆς). That is, if one says that the virtue of Doctor X is complete, one means that the virtue of Doctor X lacks nothing with respect to the virtue that is proper to a doctor. One does not mean by this statement that Doctor X possesses "all the virtues." Similarly, when one says that the virtue of a courageous Man Y is complete, one means that the virtue of Y lacks nothing with respect to the complete form of courage. The same applies to other kinds of virtues and virtuous people—as long as their virtues lack nothing with respect to the *form*s of their own proper virtues, their virtues are complete in their own right. So it turns out that complete virtue is nothing but the complete or perfect *form* of a virtue for Aristotle. Any virtue can be a complete virtue as long as it lacks nothing with respect to its own *complete or perfect form* (εἶδος).

In the *Magna Moralia*,[16] Aristotle further explicates what this "complete or perfect *form*" of a virtue is. He says:

> I mean, for instance, that there exist virtues that arise in individuals also by nature, as that *there are in each of us impulses without reason toward the courageous things and the just things and so on in the case of every virtue*. But virtue is by custom and choice, and so the ones with reason, being completely virtues (τελέως ἀρεταί), are objects of praise when they supervene. *Natural virtue* (φυσικὴ ἀρετὴ), *then, the one that is without reason, is a small thing when separated from reason and falls short of being praised, but when it is added to reason and choice it makes virtue*

[16] The authenticity of the *Magna Moralia* and its relation to the other two ethical treatises are much disputed. There is no universal agreement as to whether the *MM* was written by Aristotle or not. It is, however, generally agreed that the content of the *MM* is Aristotelian. For a recent reflective discussion of the dispute, see Simpson 2014, ix-xxxvii.

> *complete* (τελείαν ποιεῖ τὴν ἀρετήν). (1197b37–1198a6, emphasis added)

> In the case of the natural virtues (φυσικαῖς ἀρεταῖς), we said that the impulse without reason toward the beautiful (καλὸν) need alone be present. But, where there is choice, it lies in reason and in what has reason. *Consequently as soon as the act of choice is present, complete virtue* (τελεία ἀρετὴ) *will be present, which we said was with prudence* (μετὰ φρονήσεως), though not without the natural impulse toward the beautiful (καλόν). (1199b38–1200a4, emphases added)

Two observations are in order. First, there are in all of us natural impulses toward courageous things, just things, and *every* other virtuous thing. Second, all of those natural impulses or natural virtues (ἀρεταὶ φυσικαὶ) can be "complete virtues" as long as a particular kind of reason, prudence (φρόνησις), is added.[17] Aristotle thus clarifies two things. First, "complete virtue" (τελεία ἀρετὴ)—it is also named "virtue in the strict sense" (κυρίως ἀρετή) elsewhere (*NE* 1144b14; 16–17)—is the name he gives to the virtue that accords with prudence. The complete or perfect *form* of a virtue is thus for him the form of virtue that is accompanied by prudence. Second, any virtue can be "complete virtue" (ἀρετή τελεία) or "virtue in the strict sense" (κυρίως ἀρετή) as long as the virtue is accompanied with "correct reason" (ὀρθὸς λόγος), i.e. prudence. There is no reason to think that only some virtue can develop into "complete virtue," while others cannot. For Aristotle clearly states that all virtues have their proto-forms, viz. the natural virtues that grow out of our natural impulses (*NE* 1198a1–2).

At this point, the inclusivists may argue that if the *complete or perfect form* of a virtue is the virtue accompanied by prudence, it is then already

[17] Kraut (1989) suggests that "complete virtue" here is meant to be the use of natural virtue as theoretical wisdom (250). But I see no reason to accept this "intellectualist" reading whatsoever. For in the first place, theoretical wisdom makes no appearance in text. Kraut intends to equate wisdom and prudence by saying they are both intellectual virtues, but Aristotle clearly distinguishes between wisdom and prudence (*NE* VI), and emphasizes that they contribute to two different sorts of happiness. Second, even if we grant that it is a broad notion of "intellectual virtue" that is at play here, nowhere does the text state that natural virtue becomes "complete" by being assimilated into intellectual virtue (viz. as the manifestation of the wisdom or prudence). Rather, the text says clearly that natural virtue *itself* becomes "complete" by the addition of prudence.

equivalent to "all virtues," for Aristotle famously states in *NE* VI.13 that "when the one virtue, prudence, is present, all the virtues will be present" (*NE* 1145a1–2). While the argument is quite straightforward, the force of the argument depends on how we understand Aristotle's statement.[18] If we do not take the prudence in question as one single state, such an inclusivist implication can be avoided. In fact, as Aristotle himself enumerates in *NE* VI.8, there are many kinds of prudence (1141b29–33), and they differ from each other—individual prudence, for example, is said to be totally different from political prudence (1141b33–1142a2). If the meaning of prudence is not fixed for Aristotle, πᾶσαι in 1145a2 then cannot be a fixed collection of virtues (like the inclusivists' "all virtues").[19] Rather, it must be related to the specific kind of prudence in question. For example, if the kind of prudence one has is military prudence, the virtues one has, then, are all those related to military prudence, such as courage and moderation.[20] Indeed, on the highest level, there is certain kind of prudence that requires "all virtues" as understood by inclusivists—such as the one possessed by the magnanimous man or just man—but as we shall see in the next section, this does not contradict my reading of ἀρετή τελεία in Aristotle.

To summarize, then, complete virtue is neither (i) wisdom nor (ii) a whole set of virtues for Aristotle. Rather, it is a term used by Aristotle to denote the end state of a virtue—virtue *in its most complete or perfect form* or, as

[18] The unity of virtue doctrine (UV) in Aristotle is a large and disputed topic. Some commentators think that the statement is very unsatisfactory, whereas others think that it can be reconciled with Aristotle's other doctrines (Cf. Halper 1999, Telfer 1989). This is certainly not a forum in which I can give an adequate response to the entirety of the issue. But one point seems quite clear to me—viz. that if we hold a strict reading of UV, it would produce inconsistency in Aristotle's theory of virtue (See, for example, the debate between Irwin 1988 and Kraut 1988 on the issue of the "largescale virtues," such as magnificence and magnanimity).

[19] This way of reading Aristotle's UV creates certain flexibility on Aristotle's part. On the one hand, Aristotle can maintain the unity of virtues in the case of complete virtues in opposition to natural virtues; on the other hand, the level of the unity is not fixed, which means acquiring complete virtue/prudence will no longer be a zero-sum game—one where the absence of one virtue entails the absence of every virtue—for different kinds of people (Cf. the contrast between private man and politician in *NE* 1142a1–2).

[20] This means that though some other virtues—regardless of whether they themselves are complete virtues or not—are not ingredients of a complete virtue, a complete virtue may presuppose them. Take the soldier as an example. A perfect soldier is, by definition, the man who possesses the complete or perfect form of courage; but he still needs some other relevant virtues (e.g. moderation), because the complete or perfect form of courage presupposes them.

Aristotle sometimes calls it, "virtue in the strict sense" (κυρίως ἀρετή), in contrast to the incomplete form of virtue, "natural virtue" (φυσικὴ ἀρετὴ). Any virtue can be a complete virtue as long as it is accompanied by prudence, which, in Aristotle's view, accomplishes every virtue by bringing it into its own completion (τελείωσίς).

4 Three "Complete Virtues": Gentlemanliness, Magnanimity, and Justice

In the previous section, I showed how, for Aristotle, complete virtue is neither wisdom nor a whole set of virtues. In this section, I shall examine more closely those passages in which Aristotle seems to imply that only those virtues having within themselves "all virtues" are complete virtues. Those virtues are three in number: gentlemanliness, magnanimity and justice. I shall examine them in order. I hope it will be clear by the end of the examination that none of those virtues contradicts my previous reading of ἀρετή τελεία.

The first virtue to be examined is gentlemanliness (καλοκαγαθία). Aristotle concludes in *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.3 that gentlemanliness (καλοκαγαθία) is a complete virtue (*EE* 1249a16). But right before this, at the beginning of the chapter, he states that the gentlemanliness is a virtue that embraces all of the other virtues (*EE* 1248b8–16). Is there a causal connection, in Aristotle's view, between gentlemanliness being a complete virtue and gentlemanliness being an all-embracing virtue? Let us look at how Aristotle arrives at his conclusion. In the first place, Aristotle distinguishes between three sorts of men: the multitude, the good man, and the gentleman. The multitude are those for whom the things naturally good are not simply good, for they are not able to use the goods well due to the lack of virtue (*EE* 1248b30–34, 1249a11–13). The good man and the gentleman, by contrast, are both those for whom the things naturally good are simply good. For they possess virtue and are able to use the goods through virtue. Yet, as Aristotle then articulates, there is a huge difference between the virtue of the gentleman and that of the good man: the virtue of the gentleman is for the sake of the noble or virtue, while that of the good man is only for the sake of external goods (*EE* 1248b34–36, 1249a13–16). This difference in aim or end (τέλος), in Aristotle's view, marks a huge difference in their "completeness":

> For every motion (κίνησις) occurs in time and is bound up with some end (τέλους τινός)—for example, the building of a house—and is complete (τελεία) when it accomplishes what it is aiming at, either in the whole of the time in question or at that moment [of completion]. (*NE* 1174a19–21; Cf. *Phys*. 207a14–15)

For Aristotle, the completeness of any motion—and therefore any action—is always said described with respect to its own proper end.[21] The virtue of the good man is not complete because the good man's action is not aimed at its proper end (*EE* 1249a14–15). There is no indication on Aristotle's part that the virtue of the gentleman is complete because the gentleman has all the virtues. Rather, as Aristotle makes clear here, the virtue of the gentleman, the gentlemanliness, is a complete virtue because all of the virtues it embraces are complete, that is, aimed at their proper end—what is noble.

The same can be said about another "complete virtue," magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχία). In *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.3, Aristotle indicates that magnanimity is a complete virtue (ἀρετὴν τελείαν) by calling it an *all-complete* virtue (ἀρετῆς παντελοῦς). There is a delicate difference between the two expressions, which is understandable: magnanimity is a virtue based on the gentlemanliness (καλοκαγαθία) (1124a4), and gentlemanliness, as we have said above, is a virtue that embraces all of the other virtues that are themselves complete. As a result, the magnanimity must be a virtue that embraces *all* of the other *complete* virtues—an *all-complete* virtue. Hence by calling magnanimity an "all-complete virtue," Aristotle clarifies what he previously means by "complete virtue": complete virtue is not a virtue that embraces *all* the other virtues, but rather it is a virtue that is complete in its own right. Magnanimity and gentlemanliness are complete virtues because they are all-complete virtues, and they are all-complete virtues because all of the virtues they embrace are complete virtues, viz. virtues *in their own complete or perfect forms*.

What remains to be discussed, then, is justice (δικαιοσύνη). In *Nicomachean Ethics* V.3, Aristotle claims vigorously that justice has every other virtue as an ingredient (1129b29–30), and is "complete virtue most of

[21] Cf. *Metaph*. 1021b23–25: "We call 'complete' … the things which have attained a good end are called complete; for things are complete in virtue of having attained their end."

all" (τελεία μάλιστα ἀρετή). Yet just like magnanimity and gentlemanlines, the "completeness" of justice does not result from its "comprehensiveness," since, for Aristotle, justice is a complete virtue because it is the use of complete virtue (τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς χρῆσίς) (1129b31). That is, it is complete because it is able to use every other virtue *in its complete or prefect form*. Take the example of courage. When in danger, many courageous people, according to Aristotle, are able to use courage to protect those that are close to them. But when the danger comes to other people, they are often unable to do so, for the courage they possess is incomplete. But the just person, by contrast, is able to use their courage in relation to others, and not only with regard to themselves or someone close, for the courage a just man possesses is complete—justice is the use of every virtue *in its complete or prefect form*. So again, we see that the reason why justice is a complete virtue for Aristotle is not that it has within itself *all* the virtues, but that all of the virtues that it embraces are *in a complete or perfect form*.

So far I have examined those well-known passages that suggest that only those having within themselves "all virtues" are complete virtue for Aristotle, ultimately rejecting the suggestion. I have affirmed that (i) complete virtue is nothing but the *complete or perfect form* of a virtue for Aristotle; and that (ii) gentlemanliness, magnanimity and justice are for Aristotle complete virtues (ἀρετὴν τελείαν) because they are all-complete virtue (ἀρετῆς παντελοῦς), that is, virtue that embraces *all* of the other virtues in their *complete or perfect forms*.

5 Aristotelian Happiness Reconsidered

So far, I have managed to show that the "complete virtue" in P1 is not a collective term for Aristotle. It can refer to any virtue (e.g. courage, moderation) as long as the virtue is *in its complete or perfect form*. And if I am right, the traditional understanding of Aristotelian happiness will have to change accordingly.

For Aristotle, happiness is the activity of complete life according to complete virtue (*NE* 1102a5–6, *EE* 1219a38–39). Now if complete virtue, as I have suggested, can refer to any virtue that is in its complete or perfect form, we will arrive at a new pluralist definition of Aristotelian happiness:

Happiness is the life *activity* of *any* virtue that is *in its complete or perfect form*.

There are three key elements in this pluralist definition of happiness. First, the virtue required for happiness is not specified. It can be *any* virtue as long as the virtue is an Aristotelian one; second, the virtue in question shall be complete *in its own right*, viz. *in its own complete or perfect form*; third, the virtue in question must be *in activity* (ἐνεργεῖ), viz. must be exercised. There is no requirement, according to this pluralist interpretation, for (a) any particular virtue (e.g. wisdom) or (b) multiple virtues (e.g. the "all virtues") to be present. The life-long exercise of one complete virtue alone would suffice for human happiness.

But some qualification or explanation is, of course, needed here. For by saying that happiness can be achieved by exercising one single complete virtue alone, I do not mean that other virtues are thus not involved. For any virtue that is in its complete or perfect form, as we have discussed before, must be accompanied by some other virtues—as is required by prudence. But those virtues themselves need not to be complete virtues, and are only *means* to the given complete virtue, just as external goods are to virtuous activity.[22] They contribute to one's happiness, but only in an indirect way—without them the life activity of the given complete virtue will be impeded.[23] Think of a perfect soldier who has the complete form of courage: the soldier must be somewhat moderate in order to keep healthy and fit, otherwise they would not be able to exercise courage properly. Their moderation, however, exists only for the sake of their courage, and thus contributes to his happiness only

[22] It is debated whether external goods are constituents of happiness for Aristotle. Some scholars hold that external goods make a direct, as well as an indirect, contribution to Aristotelian happiness, while others think that external goods only supply means to the exercise of the virtues (for the debate, see Roche 2014, 38–39). The same may be disputed in terms of the relationship between the given complete virtue and the other related virtues. My position on this is that the other related virtues, like those external goods, are not constituents of one's happiness, because they contribute to happiness not directly, but only in an indirect way, insofar as they provide the means, contexts, or opportunities for the activity of the given complete virtue.

[23] It follows that in the extreme case, a happy person can have some complete virtue while having some vice—as long as the vice would not impede the exercise of his complete virtue. For example, an illiberal philosopher, on my interpretation, may have happiness, but an immoderate soldier certainly cannot. For illiberality does not impede contemplative activity, but immoderation affects potential acts of courage greatly.

in an indirect way. In this sense, the soldier's happiness is still the exercise of their single complete virtue or the predominant virtue, viz. courage.[24]

Now the pluralist interpretation we have seen has three advantages over both inclusivist and intellectualist interpretations. First, by maintaining that happiness can be attained through the exercise of *any* virtue that is *in its complete form*, it helps to explain those texts that cannot be explained by both inclusivist and intellectualist interpretations.[25] Second, the pluralist interpretation alleviates the elitism of both the inclusivist and the intellectualist interpretations, for it allows human happiness to be what Aristotle originally supposes it to be, viz. "more common" and "more divine"—"more common (κοινότερον) because something more people can share in, and more divine (θειότερον) because laying down happiness for those who make themselves and their deeds to be of a certain sort" (*EE* 1215a17–19). Finally, while the inclusivist interpretation and the intellectualist interpretation are mutually exclusive,[26] the pluralist interpretation is compatible with both interpretations. It can be explained within the pluralist explanatory framework why human happiness, in Aristotle's view, can have both a composite and a non-composite form. That is, human happiness can be maximized or prompted by either (i) devoting oneself simultaneously to as many complete virtues as possible, or by (ii) devoting oneself solely to the most complete virtue among others. In what follows, I shall attend to the last point in a more detailed way. I will explain why the tension between the inclusivist interpretation and the intellectualist interpretation can be reconciled by adopting the pluralist interpretation of

[24] The relationship between complete virtue and happiness is like that between function (ἔργον) and way of life (βίος). A person who lives a certain way of life, in Aristotle's view, does not perform only one single kind of function. But his way of life to some extent is determined by the one single kind of function, the predominant function, through which we distinguish one way of life from another.

[25] For instance, it cannot be explained by both inclusivist and intellectualist readings why, in Aristotle's view, a soldier can be happy (εὐδαιμονίαν τῶν φυλάκων) by exercising his sole virtue, "courage" (ἀνδρεία) (*Pol*. 1264b16), and "the more [the soldier] is possessed of the virtue [viz. courage] in its entirety, the happier he is" (ὅσῳ ἂν μᾶλλον τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔχῃ πᾶσαν καὶ εὐδαιμονέστερος ᾖ) (*NE* 1117b9–11).

[26] That is, one cannot be committed to both interpretations: if one accepts the inclusivist interpretation that human happiness is the life activity of both moral and intellectual virtues, one must reject the intellectualist thesis that the life in accord with wisdom is the happiest. On the other hand, however, if one adheres to the intellectualist interpretation, one must reject the inclusivist thesis that moral virtues are essential elements of human happiness.

Aristotelian happiness.

At first sight, the inclusivist interpretation is exactly the opposite of the pluralist interpretation of Aristotelian happiness. This is so, for the main inclusivist thesis is that happiness can only be the result of the total activity of "all virtues" of the soul. Yet a second thought suggests that the inclusivist thesis may not be wholly incompatible with the pluralist thesis. For while insisting that happiness can be attained through the exercise of one single complete virtue, the pluralist interpretation does not deny that human happiness can be maximized or prompted by the co-exercise of complete virtues. Consider the following example. A perfectly generous person, by definition, is one who possesses the complete or perfect form of generosity (ἐλευθερία). This person cannot be happy, however, by simply possessing the perfect form of generosity. This perfect form of generosity must be exercised. But here then comes a problem: if the happiness of the perfectly generous person depends on the actual use of generosity, then that person is probably not happy most of the time, for the exercise of generosity requires the possession of adequate wealth, and depends on a careful selection of its recipients (*NE* 1120a34–b6). It simply cannot be a "continuous activity" (συνεχῶς ἐνεργεῖν). The same can also be said about other moral virtues,[27] and perhaps, courage (ἀνδρεία) most of all. For the happiness of a soldier depends on the exercise of courage in warfare (*NE* 1115a30), and that means the soldier probably may not be happy during peacetime (*Pol*. 1334a37–40).

So, in Aristotle's view, the exercise of moral virtue is largely conditioned by external things (*NE* 1178a24–34). It is simply not possible for one to devote every minute of one's life to a single moral activity alone. Additional complete virtues are thus preferred. Human happiness, on this ground, can surely have a *composite* form. But Aristotle never goes so far as to say that the possession of multiple or even *all* complete virtues is thus a necessary condition for happiness. The gods, in Aristotle's view, have no other complete virtue except the virtue of the intellect (νοῦς), but that does not prevent them from being the happiest and most blessed being of all (*NE* 1178b8–9), for the gods exercise their sole virtue (viz. wisdom) continuously

[27] In Aristotle's view, moral activity cannot be a continuous activity because "moral virtues are characteristically human" (*NE* 1178a20–21) and "the thing that is characteristically human cannot engage in continuous activity" (*NE* 1175a4–5).

and eternally (*Metaph.* 1072b24–30). It seems, therefore, that Aristotle is not at all bothered by the question that has bothered us so much—viz. whether happiness is the activity of one single complete virtue, multiple complete virtues, or all complete virtues. As long as virtuous activity exists, happiness subsists. On the pluralist interpretation, therefore, human happiness can surely have a *composite* form for Aristotle, but not for the reason the inclusivists hold that human happiness depends on the co-exercise of multiple or even of all complete virtues. Rather, it is because moral virtue *qua* virtue has its limitations: moral virtue lacks both the self-sufficiency and the continuity that perfect Aristotelian happiness would require (*NE* 1177a19–1177b4).[28]

It is this limitation of human moral virtue, and thus human moral activity in general, that leads Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* X to give an intellectualist or, as I call it, a *non-composite* account of happiness. This account most clearly shows what has been maintained here so far—viz. Aristotelian happiness does not require the exercise of *multiple* complete virtues. The need for multiple complete virtues is only a matter of expediency for Aristotle: if there is one complete virtue whose activity is both self-sufficient and continuous, there would be no need for other complete virtues. *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7–8, in this sense, is an introduction of such a complete virtue, that is, the "most complete virtue" (ἀρετὴν τελειοτάτην) of all complete virtues, the wisdom (σοφία)—the activity in accord with it is said to be the happiest (1178a7–8), for this is the sole activity that the gods enjoy (*NE* 1178b21–22). But again, Aristotle does not mean by the statement that the activity of moral virtue(s) is thus not happiness. It is still happiness, though "in a secondary manner" (δευτέρως) (*NE* 1178a9). Here the term δευτέρως should be interpreted carefully. It cannot mean anything like "in an inferior or second-best way,"[29] for happiness is the best (*NE* 1097b22; *EE*

[28] Cf. Thomas Aquinas three criteria for perfect Aristotelian happiness: finality, self-sufficiency and continuity (*SLE* 1.9–1.10).

[29] Interpreting the life in accord with moral virtues as the "second-best" life seems to be a common practice. For example, see Cooper 1975, 1987; Kraut 1989; Yu 2001, 125; Cleemput 2006, 127–57; Bush 2008, 49–75; Curzer 2012, 388–425. I do not wish to deny that Aristotle conceives of intellectual happiness as a pure and divine happiness, and as such something superior to the moral happiness. But I do not think that this is the direct message that Aristotle intends to convey here. Cf. S. Broadie's objection to reading the adverb Δευτέρως (adverb) as if it is Δευτερός (adjective) (Broadie 1991, 438, n.72).

1217a21–22; *MM* 1184a11–14). A better way of interpreting the term, I suggest, is not to understand it as a value expression, but to understand it in relation to its counterpart, the πρώτως.

According to Aristotle, there are many senses of being prior (πρότερος) or primary (πρῶτος). One thing can be prior or primary to another thing (a) in definition (λόγῳ), (b) in substance (οὐσίᾳ), (c) in knowledge (γνώσει), and (d) in time (χρόνῳ) (*Metaph*. 1028a31–34; 1049b5, 10–12). In what sense is Aristotle able to say that intellectual happiness is primary to moral happiness? The major difficulty in answering the question seems to be that if one understands the two happinesses as two different *kinds* of happiness, in no sense is intellectual happiness primary to moral happiness, for the definition of moral happiness does not involve the definition of intellectual happiness. Going further, the existence of moral happiness does not depend on the existence of intellectual happiness; the knowledge of moral happiness does not require the knowledge of intellectual happiness; and the acquisition of moral happiness does not follow the acquisition of intellectual happiness.[30] Fortunately, however, there is an alternative way of understanding the two happinesses which can avoid this difficulty. On this understanding, Aristotle is not making a contrast between two different *kinds* of happiness, but between the exemplars of two *forms* of happiness. By the two *forms* of happiness, I mean the *composite* and the *non-composite* forms of happiness. As I mentioned before, Aristotelian happiness, on the pluralist reading, can have both a *composite* and a *non-composite* form: the non-composite form of happiness is the happiness attained by devoting oneself solely to the most complete virtue among others, whereas the composite form of happiness is the happiness attained by devoting oneself simultaneously to as many complete virtues as possible. When Aristotle claims that intellectual happiness is primary to moral happiness, he is possibly conceiving of the two happinesses in a broader sense, that is, as the *composite* and the *non-composite forms* of happiness.

This is evidenced by what Aristotle says right after stating that moral happiness is only happiness *in a secondary manner*:

[30] Seeing the difficulties in maintaining a focal reading of the primary-secondary distinction, Charles and Scott 1999 suggest that the distinction should be interpreted in terms of analogy or similarity, see 213–18, 226–27.

> Being also knit together with the affections, these [moral] virtues would be concerned with the composite (τὸ σύνθετον). But the virtues of the composite are characteristically human (ἀνθρωπικαί). So too, then, are both the life and the happiness that accord with these [moral] virtues. But the happiness of the intellect is separate (κεχωρισμένη). (*NE* 1178a19–22)

Life in accord with moral virtue(s) is happy in a secondary manner (1178a9) because it is concerned with "what is characteristically human," the composite. In Aristotle's view, happiness, in the primary sense, is non-composite.[31] The composite form of happiness is only an expedient form of happiness available to human being *qua* human being: for human being is a composite being. Hence the contrast between intellectual happiness and moral happiness is ultimately a contrast between the non-composite and the composite, i.e. between "what is divine" and "what is characteristically human." And if so, then, the primacy of intellectual happiness over moral happiness shall be evident, for the non-composite is always prior or primary to the composite (*Metaph*. 1076b18–19). Intellectual happiness as the exemplar of the *non-composite* form of happiness, therefore, must be prior or primary to moral happiness as the exemplar of the *composite* form of happiness.

In this way, the inclusivist and the intellectualist notions of Aristotelian happiness finally converge on the pluralist notion of Aristotelian happiness. The inclusivist/intellectualist debate, thus understood, is essentially not a debate between two *kinds* of happiness but a debate between two *forms* of one single notion, the pluralist notion of happiness in Aristotle's corpus. The pluralist notion of happiness is therefore the most fundamental notion of happiness for Aristotle. Either the inclusivist notion or the intellectualist notion of happiness is derived from this notion that happiness is the *activity* of any virtue that is in its complete or perfect form. The emphasis on the *activity* rather than the *amount* or *kind* of virtue(s) is also reflected by the fact that though Aristotle recognized that not everyone has the same capacity to

[31] For happiness, in the primary sense, is a full actuality, and only the non-composite exists as a full actuality—for if the non-composite has potentiality, it would be a composite of both actuality and potentiality, and, thereby, not be non-composite (*Metaph*. 1051b28–30). Cf. also Cleemput 2006, 154–55, where he argues that "the thrust of *NE* 1 seems to be that happiness is not a composite."

acquire virtue—some are able to acquire complete virtue, or a certain kind of complete virtue, better than others (to wit, he never denies happiness to those who have little access to virtue). In *Politics* VII.8, Aristotle writes that,

> Since happiness is the best, and it is an actuality (ἐνέργεια) and a certain complete exercise (χρῆσίς τις τέλειος) of virtue, and since it happens that *some people are able to partake of it [happiness] while others only to a small extent or not at all*, it is clear that this is the cause of there being more than one kind of city and variety of regime (πολιτείας). *For different people chase this [happiness] in a different way and by means of different things*, and so make for themselves different ways of life and regimes. (1328a37–1328b2, emphases added)

Happiness is an *activity*, a *complete exercise* of virtue(s). There is no word on Aristotle's part concerning the specific amount or kind of complete virtue that is required for happiness, for it varies from person to person. Some may have access to multiple or all complete virtues at once, while others some or only one; some may have complete virtue X without complete virtue Y, while others complete virtue Y without complete virtue X. But all of this, in Aristotle's view, will not prevent them from attaining their own happiness, for "different people chase happiness in a different way and by means of different things" (a41–b1). As long as they are exercising their virtue(s) in the most complete and perfect form, they are happy, according to Aristotle, in their own right.[32]

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[32] One may object by raising the case of the Spartans: the Spartans, according to Aristotle, are not happy by possessing and exercising their *sole* military virtues (e.g. courage and endurance). But this, in fact, does not contradict my pluralist interpretation. First, Aristotle says that the Spartans are not happy because they lack the virtues of leisure (e.g. moderation, justice, and philosophical wisdom) (*Pol*. 1334a34–40). And this is exactly the same point I made when arguing that additional virtues are needed for Aristotle if happiness can be achieved by exercising only one single virtue (cf. the happiness of the soldier in Section 5). Second, Aristotle says that the Spartans are not happy because their courage is not aimed at nobility, but at the acquisition of the goods (*Pol*. 1334a41–b4). This is, in effect, the same as saying that the Spartans are not happy because their courage is not genuine courage or the courage *in its complete or perfect form*. For a contrast between the courage of the Spartans and genuine courage, see *EE* 1248b37–1249a2.

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