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Source:
Rhizai. A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science (Rhizai. A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science), issue: VII.2 / 2010, pages: 221-238, on www.ceeol.com.

CONTEMPLATION AND SELF-AWARENESS IN THE *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

Matthew D. Walker

In this paper, I explore Aristotle's account in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) of how agents attain self-awareness through contemplation. In Part I, I examine Aristotle's views from Book IX on how contemplating friends elicits self-awareness, and point out two limitations that friends have in this respect. I argue, however, that on Aristotle's view, theoretical contemplation of the divine provides agents another source of self-awareness free from these limitations, and that Aristotle's account of contemplation's role in self-awareness concludes in Book X, not in Book IX. In Part II, I offer an account of how theoretical contemplation of the divine elicits self-awareness. I argue that Aristotle's remarks on how agents attain self-awareness through contemplating friends provides a model for how agents attain self-awareness in contemplating the divine.

I. In *NE* IX.9, Aristotle defends the view that since the blessedly happy agent has limited powers to contemplate his own virtuous actions directly, 'the blessed [agent] will be in need of friends, if indeed he chooses to contemplate actions [that are] decent and his own' ($1170^{a}2$–3).[1] After presenting an initial argument for this conclusion at $1169^{b}28$–$1170^{a}4$, Aristotle offers a more detailed (and more metaphysical) argument for the same general view at $1170^{a}14$–$^{b}10$. According to this latter argument, the active being of the virtuous agent is good and pleasant for the virtuous agent (when the virtuous agent perceives it) ($1170^{a}14$–$^{b}5$). But the friend is, in some relevant sense, 'another self' (ἕτερος αὐτός) ($1170^{b}5$–7). Thus, the active being of the friend is good and pleasant for the virtuous agent (when the virtuous agent perceives the friend's active being). But what is good and pleasant for the

[1] I have benefitted from consulting various translations, but translations in this paper are my own.

virtuous agent (when the virtuous agent perceives it) possesses final value — i.e., is choiceworthy for its own sake — for the virtuous agent. So, the friend's active being (when the virtuous agent perceives it) is choiceworthy for the virtuous agent — and indeed, nearly as choiceworthy as the virtuous agent's own active being is for himself (1170^{b}7–8). Therefore, the blessedly happy virtuous agent should have (virtuous) friends.[2]

Thus, friends for Aristotle play a role in our attaining a certain sort of self-awareness, which the parallel discussions of friendship in *Eudemian Ethics* VII.12 and *Magna Moralia* II.15 describe as a sort of self-knowledge.[3] Aristotle's thought that friends can elicit such self-awareness (or self-knowledge) is a puzzling one, but one can get a clearer sense of how friends perform this role if one pays closer attention to how these various works describe them: the friend is 'another self' (ἄλλος αὐτός: IX.4 1166^{a}31–32, IX.9 1169^{b}6–7; ἕτερος αὐτός: IX.9 1170^{b}6–7), a 'separate self' (αὐτός διαρετός: *Eudemian Ethics* VII.12 1245^{a}35), a 'different I' (ἕτερος ἐγώ: *Magna Moralia* II.15 1213^{a}13; ^{a}24). I recognize the (virtuous) friend as αὐτός and ἐγώ to share a likeness of thought and character with me, a likeness that we possess by virtue of sharing and having actualized well the same underlying, generically identical human essence.[4] Yet this is only half the story, for I do not see *only* myself in my friend. Rather, I recognize the friend as διαρετός, ἄλλος, and ἕτερος—again, as a separate source of virtuous agency in the world. Aristotle says that children are 'other selves by being separated' (ἕτεροι αὐτοὶ τῷ κεχωρίσθαι: *NE* VIII.7 1161^{b}28–29) from their parents, initially perhaps by simply constituting distinct, embodied human forms. *Magna Moralia* I.33 1194^{b}15–17, however, suggests that we are 'separate' in a fuller sense insofar as we develop our powers for rational self-direction: a son 'is separated' (χωρισθῇ) from his father upon

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[2] Although Aristotle's first argument refers explicitly to contemplation (1169^{b}33; 1170^{a}2), and his second argument refers to perceiving, I take Aristotle's second argument to elaborate on the first. That is, the sort of perceiving with which the second argument is concerned is a contemplative beholding of the friend and his activity.

[3] For the purposes of this paper, I do not explore the question of how self-awareness and self-knowledge are related, other than to assume that the latter is at least a type of the former.

[4] See Rorty (1980), 390. According to *NE* IX.4, likeness between virtuous agents is possible also because such agents possess internal psychic coherence and stability. Thus, they differ from vicious and incontinent agents whose souls are rent by internal faction, and who are unable to make friends because 'they differ from themselves' (διαφέρονται… ἑαυτοῖς: 1166^{b}7; ^{b}25–29; cf. Plato, *Lysis* 214c-d).

attaining mature adulthood, a time at which the son no longer remains under the father's rational direction and authority.[5]

In contemplating a virtuous friend, then, I take intrinsic pleasure in contemplating a being *like* me, but also *different* and *separate* from me; and in this contemplation, I come to be aware of, or to know, myself. In perceiving a friend who is like me, but distinct and separate from me, I sense *my* likeness, but also my distinctness and separateness, from my friend. And I can get clearer about these features of *my* agency just insofar as I *do not* view my other self simply as part of me, or as a tool of mine, but rather, take pleasure in my friend and his independent, virtuous activity for their own sake.[6]

As sources of self-awareness, however, friends have two significant limitations. The first limitation of friends is an *in-practice* one. Although I attain awareness about my soul and its powers in contemplating the friend, my friend is incapable of exercising *nous* (intellect) all the time, continuously; in particular,

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[5] See Sherman (1987), 607. The significance of the friend's *difference* in one's obtaining self-awareness is noted in various ways by Cooper ([1977] 1999), 342–343; Nussbaum (1986), 355; Price (1989), 121; Brink (1999), 264; Pangle (2003), 152–154.

[6] One might question the value of friends as sources of self-awareness on the following grounds: either I am aware that my friend is like me because I am aware of myself (in which case, I do not need a friend to be aware of myself), or else I am unaware that my friend is like me because I lack self-awareness (in which case, I shall not know whom to contemplate if I wish to be aware of myself). In either case, the thesis that we will need friends as sources of self-awareness seems problematic. (I owe this worry to an anonymous referee and Jennifer Whiting.)
Yet this objection rests on a false dichotomy. The agent's options are not restricted to possessing self-awareness sufficient to identify, and to carry on without, 'other selves' (on the one hand) and to being utterly lacking in self-awareness without friends, and so, to being unable to identify the 'other selves' in contemplation of whom one attains awareness of oneself (on the other hand). Rather, Aristotle could allow that we do possess some degree of self-awareness without friends and that this low-grade self-awareness enables us to identify other selves when we encounter them. After all, Aristotle thinks (at *NE* IX.9 1170^{a}29–31) that a kind of self-awareness pertains to all of our action, so that not all self-awareness requires friends. While a basic level of self-awareness may suffice *for recognizing friends* (insofar as it provides one enough awareness of one's agency and character to recognize the agency and character of certain others as relevantly akin to one's own), such self-awareness may nevertheless be too limited to suffice either *for adequate self-awareness* or *for being happy*. Given the impediments that Aristotle thinks that such low-grade self-awareness faces, such basic self-awareness is too incomplete to be satisfying in itself.

my friend is incapable of continuously exercising contemplative *nous* in accord with the virtue of *sophia* (contemplative wisdom). Hence, in contemplating the friend, I am bound to have a less-than-perspicuous view of the psychic power that Aristotle says (at *NE* X.7 1178^{a}7) that I am 'most of all.' Although friends are accessible, readily available sources of self-awareness, Aristotle gives us hints of how hazy our grasp of contemplative *nous* in the friend is apt to be. At *NE* IX.12 1172^{a}3–5, Aristotle mentions drinking, playing dice, practicing athletics, hunting, and philosophizing as the sorts of activities that friends share together. To be sure, these are activities in which contemplative activity can arise; as one commentator notes, they provide the dramatic backdrops for various Platonic dialogues.[7] Nevertheless, only in the last activity, philosophizing together, would contemplative *nous* come fully to light.[8]

The second limitation of friends is an *in-principle* one. Even if we could somehow overcome the practical obstacles to cognizing contemplative *nous* in friends, Aristotle has reason to believe that our grasp of contemplative *nous* will remain obscure if we observe *only* the contemplative *nous* of other human beings. In other works, Aristotle upholds the view that to obtain the best grasp of some function F, one needs to grasp F in its best or most fully realized form or state. For instance, if one wants to understand the power for touch in, say, river crocodiles, Aristotle thinks that one requires some grasp of that power as human beings exercise it. For on Aristotle's view, human touch is the best realized *kind* of touch: it possesses a level of discrimination and power that other kinds of touch simply lack (*De Anima* II.9 421^{a}16–23; *History of*

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[7] Burger (2008), 187–188. While Aristotle identifies us at *NE* IX.4 1166^{a}22–23 and IX.8 1168^{b}34–1169^{a}3 'most of all' (μάλιστα) with our power for *nous*, Aristotle is unclear in Book IX whether he means to identify us with practical or contemplative *nous*. As for the question of what sort of *nous* Aristotle is claiming here that we 'most of all' are, the most conservative—and to my mind, defensible, reading—would deny that Aristotle is necessarily referring in these passages to either of the two kinds of *nous* that he has distinguished in *NE* VI.1. Rather, one would do best to see Aristotle referring in Book IX to a general power for intellect that has both practical and contemplative aspects. Ultimately, *NE* X.7–8 will refine the account of *NE* IX and argue that since contemplative *nous* is ultimately higher and more complete than practical *nous*, we are ultimately 'most of all' contemplative *nous*. Cf. Kraut (1989), 128–131, who nevertheless thinks that Aristotle refers to practical *nous* in *NE* IX.

[8] The above points assume that one, in fact, can find friends in one's community capable of exercising *sophia*; given the difficulty of developing *sophia*, one should not necessarily expect this to be an easy task.

Animals I.15 494^{b}16–17. Thus, if there exists some other kind of contemplative *nous* that is more perfect or complete (or more continuous and active) than the contemplative *nous* of human beings, then Aristotle should hold that by studying this kind of contemplative *nous*, we will actually obtain a better understanding of human *nous*.

These two considerations give rise to a question: does Aristotle think that we possess a source of self-awareness free from the inherent limitations of friends? Or does he think that we are simply 'stuck' with these inherently limited resources for self-awareness? In what follows, I argue that Aristotle believes that we do have a better resource for self-awareness, one whose role is both analogous to, yet importantly different from, that of friends. Hence, I argue that Aristotle does not think that we are limited to the sort of self-awareness that we attain through contemplating friends.

First, there is evidence that Aristotle does not intend his account of contemplation's role in self-awareness to conclude by the end of *NE* IX's discussion of friendship. For in *NE* X.7–8, Aristotle defends the view a certain refined sort of contemplation—which I shall call *theoretical contemplation*—constitutes our 'complete happiness' (*teleia eudaimonia*). Such contemplation—the exercise of contemplative *nous* according to its proper virtue of *sophia*—has its own proper objects, viz., 'noble things and divine things' (X.7 1177^{a}15). For Aristotle, these objects include the divine first principles of the cosmos (see *NE* VI.7 1141^{a}35–^{b}3; *Metaphysics* A.1–2, esp. 983^{a}5–10), and especially the so-called Prime Mover (*Metaphysics* Λ.10 1075^{a}11–19). Thus, the theoretical contemplation that Aristotle identifies as complete happiness in Book X differs from the sort of contemplation that he discusses in Book IX (at least) by virtue of its respective objects. Nevertheless, both types of activity remain modes of *theôria*. And Book X's arguments for the supreme value of theoretical contemplation echo points about contemplating friends made in Books VIII-IX: (i) just as Aristotle calls attention to the pleasantness of contemplating the friends with whom we engage in virtuous action (e.g., at VIII.5 1157^{b}25–28; IX.9 1169^{b}30–1170^{a}4; 1170^{b}1–12), Aristotle describes theoretical contemplation in X.7 as the most pleasant (ἡδίστη) of activities according to virtue (1177^{a}22–27); (ii) Aristotle argues in IX.9 that the contemplation of friends is required for the happy person's self-sufficiency (1169^{b}8–21); in X.7, Aristotle argues that self-sufficiency exists 'most of all' in theoretical contemplation (1177^{a}27–^{b}1); (iii) whereas Aristotle argues in Books VIII-IX that we love and contemplate the (virtuous) friend for his own sake (ἐκείνου ἕνεκἀ) and not primarily for instrumental reasons (VIII.2 1155^{b}31; VIII.3 1156^{a}10–12, 1156^{b}7–12; VIII.4.

1157[a]16–20; VIII.7 1159[a]9–10; IX.4 1166[a]2–5; IX.9 1169[b]33, 1170[a]2), Aristotle argues at X.7 1177[b]1–4 that only theoretical contemplation seems to be loved (altogether) for its own sake (δι᾽ αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶσθαι); and (iv), as we have seen, Aristotle identifies the activities that friends enjoy together (and in which they contemplate each other) as leisured activities (IX.12 1172[a]1–8); yet at X.7 1177[b]4–15, Aristotle describes theoretical contemplation as the most leisured activity (since it is loved altogether for itself and not for any higher ends).[9]

So, even if we do not know the relative dates of composition for the various books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, commentators have noted that the placement of Books VIII-IX before Book X nevertheless makes good structural sense, for VIII-IX's account of friendship (and of contemplation's role in friendship) prefigures and paves the way for Aristotle's remarks on *theôria* in X.7–8.[10] More precisely, X.7–8 extends and refines claims that Aristotle makes about contemplation's value in IX.9: X.7–8 suggests that while the value of theoretical contemplation is like the value of contemplating friends in various respects, theoretical contemplation is more complete in those respects. Thus, given Book IX's emphasis of contemplation's capacity to elicit self-awareness as one of contemplation's valuable features, and given the various ways that X.7–8 extends and completes Book IX's views on the value of contemplation, it is *prima facie* reasonable to expect X.7–8 also to extend and complete IX.9's account of contemplation's role *as a source of self-awareness*.

One might allow that the parallels between Aristotle's remarks on contemplation of friends in IX.9 and his remarks on theoretical contemplation in X.7–8 are suggestive. Is there, however, any specific evidence that X.7–8 *in fact* extends IX.9's account of contemplation as a source of self-awareness, and calls attention to a source of self-awareness free from the inherent limitations of friends? Yes. In the relevant period, an intellectual resource of the right sort—the Platonic *Alcibiades*—suggests a way to overcome these

[9] Additionally, in IX.9, Aristotle argues that friendships make our activity more continuous (συνεχεστέρα: 1170[a]6–8); in X.7, however, Aristotle maintains that theoretical contemplation is the most continuous (συνεχεστάτη) activity (1177[a]21–22). While it is unclear whether Aristotle believes that friendships promote continuity of activity in virtue of their contemplative aspects, it seems possible that he could.

[10] See, e.g., Rorty (1980), 378; Kahn (1981), 27; Miller (1991), 112; Pangle (2003), 199–200.

limitations.[11] According to the view that appears in the *Alcibiades*, while we obtain a certain awareness of ourselves through contemplating other human souls, we complete our self-awareness (which the *Alcibiades* speaks of in terms of self-knowledge) in contemplating god. But the *Alcibiades* shows its influence in *Magna Moralia* II.15, which adopts the *Alcibiades*' metaphor of the friend as a mirror, and it is natural to find a similar view of friends as something *like* mirrors in *NE* IX.9.[12] Further, the sort of contemplation that *NE* X.7–8 identifies as complete happiness invites comparison with the sort of contemplation that the *Alcibiades* thinks completes our self-knowledge: both types of contemplation include god among their objects.[13] Finally, multiple textual parallels between the *Alcibiades* and *NE* X.7–8 provide evidence that Aristotle is engaging with Platonic views in passages of X.7–8 that mirror passages from the *Alcibiades*. Thus, to see whether X.7–8 develops and refines IX.9's views on the role of contemplation in self-awareness by making the extension that the *Alcibiades* does—viz., that contemplating god completes our self-awareness—I examine the relevant passages of the *Alcibiades* and compare them against what Aristotle says about theoretical contemplation of the divine in X.7–8.[14]

In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates proposes to Alcibiades that whoever bids us to come to know ourselves bids us to come to know (γνωρίσαι) our souls (130E7–8). To explain how self-knowledge is possible, Socrates introduces an ocular metaphor. An eye, he says, will see itself in contemplating (θεώμενος) 'the best part' of another eye (133A6–7), 'that region (ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον) in which happens to occur the virtue of the eye'—viz., sight (133B2–5). In looking upon

[11] While the authorship of the *Alcibiades* is a controversial matter, these controversies do not affect the claims that I make here. For even commentators who remain unconvinced that Plato was the author of *any* of the *Alcibiades* have been willing to admit that the *Alcibiades* is a work by an Academic philosopher, dating to the 350s—a period during which Aristotle was still at the Academy. See, e.g., Hutchinson (1997).

[12] On the *Alcibiades* and the *Magna Moralia*, see, e.g., Wilkins (1917), 85; Cooper ([1977] 1999), 343n12; and Annas (1985), 117n23. Like Cooper ([1973] 1999), I assume that the *Magna Moralia* is a reliable source of Aristotelian views, even if it is not by Aristotle.

[13] As argued above, I take it that the divine Prime Mover is among the objects of theoretical contemplation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cf. Aristotle's remarks on 'the contemplation of god' in *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.3.

[14] Some of the parallels I discuss are also noted by Pépin (1971), 80–84 and Gill (2006), 4–9, 352–355.

this region—the pupil—one sees one's eye, and indeed one's face, as though in a mirror (132E-133A). By parity of reasoning, Socrates suggests that for a soul to know itself, it must look at a soul—'and most of all (μάλιστα), that region of it in which occurs the virtue of the soul, *sophia*' (133B7–10). According to Socrates, there is no 'more divine' region of the soul than the noetic region, i.e., 'where there is knowing and understanding' (τὸ εἰδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν: 133C1–2). And since that region of the soul 'bears resemblance (ἔοικεν) to god,' Socrates concludes that 'someone looking at this and knowing all the divine (πᾶν τὸ θεῖον)—god and understanding (θεόν τε καὶ φρόνησιν)—thus also would most of all (μάλιστα) know himself' (133C4–6).[15]

Since the writing in this part of the dialogue is especially crabbed and the argument proceeds quickly, the exact relation Socrates sees between (i) looking at the noetic region of the soul and (ii) knowing the divine (and especially god) is unclear. Yet on any interpretation of 133C, the main point is the same: by contemplating god (either directly or indirectly), we would best know ourselves and would see our humanity in the 'brightest' or 'most visible' (ἐναργέστατα) way (132C7).

Now, compare this section of the *Alcibiades* against Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. First, like *Alcibiades* 132E-133C, *NE* X.7 identifies our *nous* as divine: Aristotle maintains that the noetic aspect of the human soul is either 'divine or the most divine of the things in us' (1177^{a}15–16; ^{b}27–32). Second, just as *Alcibiades* 133B-C claims that human *nous* and *sophia* resemble god's, Aristotle says that contemplative *nous* and its activity in accord with *sophia* are 'most akin' (συγγενεστάτη: X.8 1178^{b}24; 1179^{a}26) to the gods and their eternally active—and superlatively happy—contemplation (see 1178^{b}7–24). This point suggests that divine *nous* is *nous* paradigmatically and that our exercise of contemplative *nous* approximates the divine exercise. And, third, whereas *Alcibiades* 133^{b}8 says that *nous* is 'most of all' where one should look for oneself, Aristotle says that contemplative *nous* is 'most of all' (μάλιστα) oneself (X.7 1178^{a}7).[16]

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[15] Although Olympiodorus omits θεόν τε καὶ φρόνησιν in c5, and although some editors propose emending θεόν to νοῦν or θεάν (perhaps to avoid the suggestion that god is in the soul), all the manuscripts include it; hence, I see no independent reason for emendation.

[16] Other parallels deserve mention. (a) Echoing *Alcibiades* 134D, Aristotle says in *NE* X.8 that by attending to the activity of *nous* in accord with *sophia*, one becomes 'most god-beloved' (θεοφιλέστατος: 1179^{a}24; 1179^{a}30). (b) In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates repeatedly emphasizes the need to exercise ἐπιμέλεια, which he says is necessary for success in ordering oneself and one's city (e.g., at 119A9; 120C8–D4;

But if (i) one attains awareness of oneself by contemplating a kindred 'other self' in shared activity, if (ii) *nous* is one's 'most divine' psychic power and the power that is 'most of all' oneself, and if (iii) god exercises this 'most divine' power of *nous* in a paradigmatic way (so that god is structurally similar to 'another self'), then (iv) contemplating god would provide one a source of self-awareness free from the limitations of friends.

Given the textual similarities between the *Alcibiades* and *NE* X.7–8, it is reasonable to think that in X.7–8, Aristotle is intentionally borrowing Academic views that appear in the *Alcibiades.* He is borrowing either directly from the *Alcibiades* or from an original source—e.g., discussions in the Academy—to which he and the author of the *Alcibiades* shared access. And given Aristotle's reasons to think that friends have the limitations in eliciting self-awareness discussed earlier, Aristotle is (intentionally, I argue) giving us everything but an explicit statement of the view presented in the *Alcibiades*, viz., that one completes one's self-awareness in contemplating god. Thus, just as Aristotle's account of contemplation's value extends beyond Book IX and completes itself in Book X, Book IX's account of how we attain self-awareness through contemplation extends beyond Book IX's remarks on contemplating friends and completes itself in Book X's remarks on theoretical contemplation of the divine.

At this point, my proposal faces a worry. If Aristotle is intentionally committed to the view that one completes one's self-awareness in contemplating

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123D4–E1; 124B2–3; 132B6–C2). Similarly, Aristotle claims that all things being equal, *eudaimonia* is open to anyone 'through a certain learning and care' (διά τινος μαθήσεως καὶ ἐπιμελείας: I.9 $1099^{b}19$–20). For other relevant references to ἐπιμέλεια in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see also X.9 $1180^{a}1$–4; $1180^{b}23$–25; $1180^{b}25$–28. In a separate context, Schwarzenbach (1992), 263n24 notes references to ἐπιμέλεια in the *Politics* at $1263^{a}27$; $1293^{b}13$; $1299^{a}20$; $1300^{a}5$; $1325^{a}7$; $1328^{b}12$; $1335^{a}7$. (c) In *NE* X.8 $1179^{a}25$–29 (which echoes *Alcibiades* 134d1–2), Aristotle maintains that the gods have reason to return benefit to theoretical contemplators 'as caring for (ἐπιμελουμένους) the things loved by them and acting both correctly and finely' (ὀρθῶς τε καὶ καλῶς). (d) Like *Alcibiades* 134D1–2 (which refers to acting 'correctly and well'), Aristotle believes that acting 'correctly and finely' requires the performance of just and temperate actions: Aristotle prefigures this point, after all, at *NE* IX.9 $1168^{b}25$–26, which identifies the true lover of self, the person who shows favor for the most authoritative aspect of his soul ($^{b}30$), as apt always to perform just and temperate actions. (e) Annas (1985), 117n23 argues that Aristotle's account of *homonoia* in the city at *NE* IX.6 shows Aristotle's familiarity with *Alcibiades* 124D-127D.

god, then why is Aristotle not more explicit about this point in X.7–8? After all, one might expect Aristotle to want to call attention to this conclusion, given how striking it is.

Yet Aristotle might have reasons of presentation not to foreground theoretical contemplation's role in eliciting self-awareness. After all, X.7–8's remarks on the valuable features of theoretical contemplation allude to IX.9's earlier remarks on the valuable features of contemplating friends, yet X.7–8 never makes explicit reference to IX.9. So while Aristotle never explicitly says in X.7–8 that he is picking up on his earlier remarks about the value of contemplating friends—perhaps because that would complicate X.7–8's discussion of complete happiness—he nevertheless implicitly (and intentionally) performs just this task. Similarly, Aristotle may think that it suffices *implicitly* to present the view that theoretical contemplation completes the sort of self-awareness that IX.9 addresses. For Aristotle may find it difficult enough to defend the controversial claim that theoretical contemplation constitutes our complete happiness without *also* having to argue (explicitly and at the same time) that contemplating the divine completes our self-awareness. Explicitly returning to contemplation's role in self-awareness may simply interfere with Aristotle's immediate purposes in X.7–8.

Nevertheless, given what Aristotle says about theoretical contemplation in X.7–8, the conclusion that contemplating god is a source of self-awareness is a natural one to draw. Aristotle's defense of contemplation as complete happiness identifies theoretical contemplation of the divine as the most godlike activity (e.g., at $1177^{b}26$–$1178^{a}2$). But in other works—e.g., *Metaphysics* Λ 9—Aristotle maintains that the god's eternally active, happy life consists in a kind of self-contemplation. If so, then theoretical contemplation would stand to be godlike insofar as it enabled theoretical contemplators also to contemplate themselves. Theoretical contemplation, in other words, would approximate god's activity (in part) by providing agents opportunities for self-awareness.[17]

II. One might be surprised that Aristotle should think that contemplating god completes an agent's self-awareness, for at first glance, Aristotle's Prime Mover may appear too impersonal an object of contemplation to be useful for this end. Most pressingly, one might wonder how god could possibly count as

[17] Although the aim of this paper is not to argue that self-awareness possesses an important place in *eudaimonia*, one can nevertheless understand how Aristotle could accept this point. If theoretical contemplation constitutes our complete happiness insofar as it is godlike, and if theoretical contemplation is godlike (in part) insofar as it approximates the self-contemplative activity that god enjoys, then self-awareness would seem to be constitutive of complete happiness.

anything like 'another self.' After all, god is not a friend of the contemplator, and Aristotle explicitly denies that god needs friends (*Eudemian Ethics* VII.12; *Magna Moralia* II.15). Further, Aristotle is clear that gods and mortals are too unequal with respect to goods to establish close friendships with each other (*NE* VIII.7 $1158^{b}33$–36; $1159^{a}4$; cf. *Magna Moralia* II.11 $1208^{b}27$–32).

Yet since one is most of all *nous* and since god is *nous* in its paradigmatic form, god would stand to be at least *structurally analogous* to a human 'other self.' For god most actively manifests what is 'most of all' the contemplator—viz., the contemplator's power for *nous* and its proper virtue of *sophia*. Hence, it is reasonable for Aristotle to hold that one can obtain self-awareness in contemplating god in a manner generally *analogous* to the way one obtains self-awareness in contemplating a virtue-friend, even if god is, strictly speaking, neither a friend nor 'another self.'

How, then, can contemplating god elicit self-awareness? On the account provided earlier, when I contemplate a friend, I recognize my friend as another *self* by virtue of his sharing a *likeness* of thought and character with me, a likeness that I come to perceive through shared virtuous activity. But as I have argued, I do not see only myself in a friend, for if I am to love my friend for his own sake, I must recognize my friend not as a part of me, but as *another* self, which is to say, as a *different* or *separate* self. In recognizing, contemplating, and taking intrinsic pleasure in the friend as a similar, but separate, embodiment of the human form actively and excellently at work in the world, I obtain an understanding of myself, viz., in a discriminating awareness of the friend as like, but different, from me (and so, of myself as like, but different, from my friend).

The same point about how self-awareness arises in the contemplation of the friend's likeness and difference also elucidates how one can obtain self-awareness in contemplating god. While I obtain self-awareness through contemplating a friend by perceiving the similarities and differences that obtain between my friend and myself insofar as we are members of the same biological kind, Aristotle would seem to allow that I can obtain self-awareness through perceiving the similarities and differences that obtain between *another kind* of living being—viz., a god—and myself. To explain why, I turn to some relevant passages from the *Topics*. Although these passages focus on definition, they are nevertheless useful for elucidating Aristotle's views on (i) the general role that a grasp of likeness and difference across kinds plays in knowing things and (ii) the specific ways in which human beings are similar to, but distinct from, the gods.

In *Topics* I.18, Aristotle explains the utility of recognizing likeness and difference in coming to recognize what things are. On the one hand, the

contemplation of likeness (ἡ τοῦ ὁμοίου θεωρία) is useful if one is to offer a definition in the case of 'things widely separated' (τοῖς πολὺ διεστῶσι) (108^{b}23–24)—for instance, the 'calm' of the sea and the 'calm' of the wind. On the other hand, the discovery of differences (τὸ … τὰς διαφορὰς εὑρεῖν) is useful in coming to know what a certain individual is (τὸ γνωρίζειν τί ἕκαστόν ἐστιν: 108^{a}37–^{b}1): to discover what distinguishes one thing from another is useful for separating out (χωρίζειν) 'the proper *logos* of the being (τῆς οὐσίας) of each' (108^{b}4–6). These points spell out claims that Aristotle already makes in *Topics* I.16 and I.17. In the former (107^{b}38–108^{a}6), Aristotle says that *differences* (τὰς…διαφορὰς) are to be contemplated (θεωρητέον) both within a kind and from one to another (ἐξ ἄλλου πρὸς ἄλλο). In the latter (108^{a}7–17), he says that *likeness* is to be investigated (τὴν … ὁμοιότητα σκεπτέον) both in things belonging to different kinds (τῶν ἐν ἑτέροις γένεσιν) and in things belonging to the same kind (τὰ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γένει ὄντα).

One can now begin to see how contemplating god could elicit a certain kind of self-awareness. The contemplator who exercises his 'most divine' capacity in accord with the virtue of *sophia* would have special *kinship* with god; after all, he would be attending to that 'most divine' of human activities and would be engaged in an activity *like* god's. The contemplator would also be exercising the capacity that was 'most of all' himself, a psychic power possessed by god in the most perfect way—viz., as eternal activity. In contemplating god as fully manifesting the *nous* which is 'most of all' himself, then, the philosopher would be in the best position to be aware of, or recognize, that power which is 'most of all' himself.

Yet in contemplating god, the contemplator would be in a position to recognize his relative weakness and limitation as compared with god. Hence, in contemplating, the contemplator would be aware of the superiority of god's contemplation to his own: 'And the property of the better is better than the [property] of the inferior, as that of god [is better] than that of the human being; for in respect of what is common (τὰ κοινὰ) in both, there is no difference between them, but in properties the one is superior to the other' (*Topics* III.1 116^{b}13–17). While to be human is to be a 'mortal living being receptive of knowledge' (V.1 128^{b}35–36) and while it is correct to call both the human being and the god a 'living being sharing in knowledge' (V.4 132^{b}10–13), Aristotle thinks that the immortality of god differentiates god (III.2 123^{b}37–38).

Aristotle thus provides reason for thinking that in contemplating god as both superior to them and their finite and perishable kind of noetic activity, theoretical contemplators would simultaneously achieve the sharpest grasp of the boundaries that delimit, yet constitute, their own human identity. That is to say, theoretical contemplators would be in a position best to recognize what

demarcates their mortal, enmattered sort of noetic life from the divine, immaterial sort. Contemplators would simultaneously be in a position to recognize what distinguishes their form of life from other mortal, enmattered forms of life. Like the self-awareness agents obtain in virtue-friendship, such awareness would arise incidentally (and not necessarily directly). To see how Aristotle suggests these points in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I turn to X.8's remarks on the place of the human good relative to the good of gods and non-rational animals.

On the one hand, in contemplating god and in discovering our similarity to the divine, we would recognize that we are higher than plants and non-rational animals. And we thereby become aware of our *lower limits* as human beings. For 'the life [pertaining] to human beings, as far as it shares in a certain likeness (ὁμοίομά τι) of [god's contemplative] sort of activity, [is blessed]; but of the other animals, none is happy, since in no way does it share in contemplation' (X.8 1178^{b}25–27; cf. *Eudemian Ethics* I.7 1217^{a}20–29). Human beings, unlike non-rational animals, are capable of contemplating god. In, or at least through, such contemplation—which would bring to light our 'certain likeness' to god—we would recognize our kinship with the divine. Hence, we would recognize that the human form is not restricted to the powers of nutrition and growth, sensation and locomotion.

On the other hand, in contemplating god, we would become aware of our relative finitude and recognize our *upper limits* as human beings. We would recognize about ourselves that 'the best of the things in the cosmos is not the human being' (*NE* VI.7 1142^{a}22) and that above the human being, other things exist 'far more divine in nature' (*NE* VI.7 1141^{b}1–2; cf. VIII.6 1158^{b}36). As Aristotle insists in the passage from X.8 1178^{b}25–28 just quoted, the life of human beings is blessed as far as a 'certain likeness' of god's activity pertains to it. Although this passage highlights the resemblance of the human life to the divine life, this passage simultaneously suggests that the two lives are different, and that the former approximates the latter. Contemplators would thus recognize that even if contemplative *nous* is 'most of all' what we are, it nevertheless remains (for beings of *our* kind) dependent on other psychic powers—viz., the nutritive-reproductive and locomotive powers. Hence, contemplators recognize that they 'will be in need also of the external goods, being human; for the nature [of the human being] is not self-sufficient with respect to contemplating, but it is necessary also to be healthy in body and to possess nutriment and the other services' (X.8 1178^{b}33–35).[18]

[18] In this paper, I argue that contemplating god for Aristotle (a) completes our self-awareness and (b) is a source of self-awareness free from the limitations of

Therefore, in contemplating god, and in thereby grasping one's intermediate place in the cosmos, one would obtain a grasp of how one's good as a human being is demarcated from the good of other kinds of living beings. While the ethical mean is not a simple intermediacy between divine and bestial behaviors, awareness of one's intermediate place between the divine and the bestial would still be pertinent to grasping the ethical mean.[19] For our noetic powers (which we share with gods) possess a value for human beings that they lack for beasts, i.e., perishable life forms whose activity is governed by perception and non-rational desire. Likewise, non-rational desires (which we share with beasts) possess a value for human beings that they lack for gods, i.e., disembodied forms of life whose activity does not depend on the fulfillment of nutritive needs. Hence, guided by an awareness of one's intermediate status between beast and god, one will grant special weight to one's noetic powers (on the one hand), without repressing or ignoring one's non-rational desires (on the other hand).[20]

On this basis, one can understand why Aristotle (in *Metaphysics* A.2 982^{b}28 ff) defends the pursuit of *sophia* against the likes of Simonides, who argue that such pursuit implicates us in *hubris* and infringes on the sphere of the jealous divinities. Against Simonides and the poets, Aristotle insists that the gods are not jealous (for nothing can affect them). Hence, while Aristotle breaks with his predecessors by defending the piety of contemplative wisdom, he makes this break because he thinks traditional belief to be impious itself.

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friends. I do not argue that, on Aristotle's view, human agents can, or should, do without contemplating friends. Consider Aristotle's protreptic to natural scientific investigation in *Parts of Animals* I.5: while contemplating the divine is in some way the best or most complete mode of contemplation, the objects of such contemplation are difficult to behold. Hence, the objects of the natural world offer certain compensating advantages. Similarly, contemplating the divine completes our self-awareness, but this is a difficult activity for us; hence, the contemplation of friends, while incomplete and inherently limited in its way, has certain compensating advantages, and such activity remains choiceworthy for its own sake.

[19] As Brown (1997) argues, Aristotle intends 'the mean relative to us' to be 'the mean relative to us as human beings.' On my account, Aristotle can agree with *Alcibiades* 134D1–2 that reference to the divine can guide our acting temperately and justly without having to accept the claim that the gods constitute (immediate) paradigms of ethical perfection (a claim that might seem to conflict with X.8 1178^{b}7–21). For the gods illuminate the nature of the human good in the indirect manner for which I argue here.

[20] Aristotle's views on the place of the human good between the divine and the bestial are discussed in different ways by Nussbaum (1995); Achtenberg (1995), 29–36; Long (1999), 121–124.

The poets speak falsely about the nature of the gods (and so fail to grant proper honor to the gods) because the poets actually fail to contemplate the gods adequately. Rather than displaying ignorance of one's station as a human being, then, a diligent form of theoretical contemplation would forestall such *hubris* by bringing to light not only the similarities, but also the deep differences, between the divine and the human.

Conclusion

There is more to be said about how exercising contemplative wisdom would provide the contemplator with self-awareness as I have described it in this paper. But if the interpretation I have sketched is right, Aristotle is committed to the view that the contemplation of god, like the contemplation of friends, is a source of self-awareness. In getting clear that we are neither beasts nor gods (*Politics* I.2 1253^{a}3–4; ^{a}29), Aristotle thinks, we would realize most perspicuously that the kind of activity proper to us is neither superhuman nor subhuman (*NE* VII.1 1145^{a}23–27). We would recognize that while there may be a kind of life and *eudaimonia* superior to human life and *eudaimonia*—viz., god's life and *eudaimonia*—human beings find their good in a way of life that is itself superior to that of horses, birds, and fish (*Eudemian Ethics* I.7 1217^{a}20–29). Thus, aside from its other intrinsic pleasures, the exercise of contemplative wisdom would disclose most fully how the human essence and good is delimited, bounded, or defined by the good of beings above us and below us.[21]

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[21] For comments and discussion, I would like to thank John Hare, D.S. Hutchinson, Brad Inwood, Gabriel Richardson Lear, Jennifer Whiting, two anonymous referees, and an audience at St. Thomas University (Fredericton). For additional support, I am grateful to the University of Miami (where I worked on this paper as a post-doctoral fellow) and the American Council of Learned Societies (for a New Faculty Fellowship). Finally, special thanks to Verity Harte for her detailed, and always helpful, comments and suggestions.

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