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**ARISTOTLE'S
NICOMACHEAN
ETHICS**

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or that the text is discontinuous with what precedes it. The *Nicomachean Ethics* exhibits aspects of ring composition both within the work as a whole and within book 10.³ In *NE* 1 5 Aristotle introduces his rendition of a trope that he inherits (most immediately) from Plato – namely, that the problem of the good can be considered like a contest between three different kinds of life – the life of enjoyment (*apolautistikos*), the life of politics (*politikos*), and the life of contemplation (*theōrētikos*).⁴ *NE* x 6–8 returns to that contest, rendering a verdict about which life takes first, second, and third place. As the opening lines of *NE* x 6 note, that verdict presupposes central claims articulated between the first and last books of the *Ethics*, specifically about the nature of the virtues, the nature of friendship, and the nature of pleasure. *NE* 1 5 and x 6–8 thus serve as “bookends” that encase arguments and propositions located between them.

Book 10 exhibits a similar ring composition.⁵ *NE* x opens with methodological reflection on the gap between the theoretical positions that thinkers articulate and the way they live their lives (especially in the case of scolds who simultaneously criticize pleasure on a scientific level but seek it on a practical level [1172a33–b8]). Chapter 8 concludes with an explicit reiteration of the methodological point, a reiteration that underscores how Aristotle’s treatment of the contest of lives incorporates central aspects of the discussion of pleasure in *NE* x 1–5. Aristotle’s reiteration of the problem of a gap between theory and practice also draws attention to the centrality of his treatment of pleasure in his adjudication of the three lives. Although the life of pleasure takes a distant third in the contest of lives, the contemplative life wins the contest in part because it itself is the most pleasant form of life.

³ On the phenomenon of ring composition in Plato’s *Republic* and elsewhere in Aristotle’s corpus, see Barney 2010 (esp. at 36–37); on the phenomenon more generally in ancient literature, see Douglas 2007.

⁴ For the trope of the three competing ways of life, see July 1956; Lawrence 1993, 33–34; Crittenden 1996; and Brown 2013. Nightingale 2004, 17–26, shows [contra July] that fourth-century thinkers may be projecting aspects of the competition on to their predecessors (like Pythagoras) for rhetorical effect; see further Gottschalk 1980, 23–26, for the case of Heraclides of Pontus. On the relationship between the trope and Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*, see Hutchinson and Johnson in this volume. Morrison 2001 considers the notion of politics as a way of life. Aristotle makes reference to the contest of the best life in *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) 1 4–5 and *Politics* (*Pol.*) vii 1–2, albeit with far less conclusive results than in *NE*.

⁵ In discussing ring composition in *NE* x, I sidestep the place of x 9 – a chapter that prepares for the transition between the *NE* and the *Politics* – and focus on the structure within x 1–8. But x 9 is itself a part of the ring composition of the *Ethics* as a whole, since it revisits the claim that ethics is a part of political science, a claim made in the first three chapters of *NE* 1.

16 Competing Ways of Life and Ring Composition (*NE* x 6–8)

The closing chapters of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* x are regularly described as “puzzling,” “extremely abrupt,” “awkward,” or “surprising” to readers.¹ Whereas the previous nine books described – sometimes in lavish detail – the multifold ethical virtues of an embodied person situated within communities of family, friends, and fellow citizens, *NE* x 6–8 extols the rarified, godlike, and solitary existence of a *sophos* or sage (1179a32).² The ethical virtues that take up approximately the first half of the *Ethics* describe moral exempla who experience fear fighting for their communities, are sensitive to the esteem and recognition of others, and feel desire to live together with a wide variety of kinds of friends. Such good people take pleasure in prudently expending sums to improve their communities – communities in which they exchange goods and participate in ruling and being ruled in a cooperative fashion. The exemplum of x 7–8, by contrast, is a person whose activity consists almost entirely in exercising his or her mind (*nous*) – a part of one’s soul that Aristotle explicitly notes is disconnected from human emotions and that can be exercised, insofar as one is wise, in a wholly solitary fashion (1178a15–16, a19–20; 1177a33–34).

Although Aristotle’s claim that a “life in accord with the mind” is best and most pleasant (1178a6–7) may jar the intuitions of many people – he himself endorses Anaxagoras’s claim that the happy person will appear as “someone who is absurd” (*atopos*, 1179a15) to most people – it is false to claim that his conclusions in *NE* x 6–8 are unexpected or unanticipated,

I am grateful to David Reeve and Eric Brown for providing me copies of their forthcoming works on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I am especially grateful to Ron Polansky for the invitation to contribute this chapter to his volume and his helpful discussion of it.

¹ Such claims are legion. Among recent exclamations, Pakaluk 2005, 316, characterizes parts of the account as “puzzling”; Long 2011, 109, characterizes the account of contemplation as “extremely abrupt”; and Brown 2013, 137, claims the disconnect between *NE* 1 5 and x 6–8 is “awkward” and “surprising.”

² Parenthetical references within the text unaccompanied by abbreviations refer to the OCT Greek text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bywater 1894). Translations of the Greek text are my own, although much indebted to the translations of Reeve forthcoming; Broadie and Rowe 2002; and Irwin 1999.

I proceed in two parts. In the first part I examine what I will call the "outer" ring of the *Ethics*, namely the relationship between the contest of lives proposed in *NE* i 5 and its overall resolution in x 6–8. I show how i 5 and x 6 establish the framework for the contest, how x 7 adjudicates that contest in large part by relying upon premises articulated in the interim between books i and i0, and how x 6 and x 8 determine the second and third place positions in the contest. In the second part I focus on what I will call the "inner" ring of *NE* x. More than half of *NE* x struggles with the nature of pleasure, its role in a happy life, and the methodological problems of examining pleasure within a practical science. I show how x i and x 8 are "bookends" that underscore the methodological problem of examining pleasure and how the contest of lives draws upon the proximate conclusions concerning the nature of pleasure in *NE* x i–5.

I. CONTEMPLATION AND THE OUTER RING OF *NE* I AND X

Although the argument for the highest good in *NE* x 6–8 clearly makes use of the framework of the contest of lives articulated in i 5, it remains to say what Aristotle's use of ring composition adds to his argument. Chapters i 5 and x 6 are "bookends" of a sort, each of which sheds light on the ultimate conclusion of the argument.¹⁰ In i 5 Aristotle makes use of the contest of lives to consider possible candidates for the good, but in doing so, he alters the traditional slate of contestants. The preliminary analysis of i 5 also underscores central concepts – such as that intrinsic choiceworthiness is a characteristic of any possible candidate for the good and that the victor of the contest needs to explain how the good "belongs" (*oikeion*) to its possessor. In x 6 Aristotle reformulates the framework of the contest in a more sophisticated fashion, drawing upon several of the central discussions that have taken place between the first and tenth books but also echoing aspects of the original formulation in i 5. Thus i 5 is proleptic – it problematizes the question of the highest good initially in anticipation of a solution to the problem at the end of the

¹⁰ Pakaluk 2005, 320–322, argues that it is wrong to view *NE* x 6–8 as proposing a comparison of lives that is continuous with the contest presented in i 5. His main arguments are that (1) the depiction of the lives in i 5 and x 6–8 are inconsistent (e.g., the life of pleasure in i 5 is the life of bodily pleasure, whereas in x 6 it is the life of amusement), (2) by the end of i 5 there is no further reason to consider the lives of pleasure and practical activity, and (3) the lives depicted in either section are fragmentary (e.g., the political life fails to recognize the superior nature of wisdom described in vi 13 while the contemplative life is potentially unjust). I think (1) and (2) are rare instances of Pakaluk misreading Aristotle's text (which I hope to show in the remainder of part I of the chapter); (3) is a more general problem about the integrity of a way of life, one that I address briefly in my conclusion.

The central philosophical problem looming behind Aristotle's treatment of the contest of lives concerns the relationship between the notion of activity (*energeia*) and the notion of a way of life (*bios*).⁶ In the past four decades, much of the scholarship on *NE* x 6–8 has sought to address the question of what activities a certain way of life includes or excludes. "Monistic" or "dominant" end interpretations of the best life have viewed it as including only contemplative activities, whereas "inclusivist" end interpretations of the best life have viewed it as including noncontemplative activities.⁷ Although this chapter largely sidesteps this debate – partially because there are ample recent first-rate introductory treatments of the debate, partially because I have addressed the question elsewhere in my own writing⁸ – I argue that focusing solely on the contest between the two best ways of life overshadows the way that Aristotle incorporates insights from the third way of life into the best way of life.⁹ Although the notion of a contest among different kinds of lives presupposes that the lives are mutually exclusive, Aristotle has no problem saying that the contemplative life trumps the life of pleasure because the contemplative life is more pleasant.

⁶ Reeve 2012 notes that two Greek words – *zōē* and *bios* correspond to the English word "life." Although Aristotle does not always distinguish them (consider *EE* ii 1.1219a38–39 or *NE* x 1.1172b3–7), Reeve suggests that *zōē* often refers to the sort of "life processes studied by biologists, zoologists, and other scientists," whereas *bios* "refers to the sort of life a natural historian or biographer might investigate – the life of the otter, the life of Pericles" (239). Stewart 1982, ii 443–445, and Cauthier and Jolif 1970, ii 862, argue that in x 6–8, by *bios* Aristotle meant "aspects" of a life; in response, Cooper 1975, 160, argues that *bios* "means always 'mode of life,' and in any one period of time one can only have one mode of life. One cannot be said to have both a religious *bios* and a social *bios* . . . as we might say someone has an active religious life and an interesting social life" (compare Keyt 1989). Critically building on Hadot 1995 and 2002, Cooper 2012 expands on the notion of ways of life both in Aristotle and in other ancient philosophers.

⁷ Literature on interpretations of the highest good is formidable. Hardie 1965 initiated the debate and occasioned Ackrill 1980, which remains the preeminent defense of the inclusivist position (although Keyt 1983; Whiting 1986; Crisp 1994; and Cooper 1999 provide noteworthy variants). Prominent defenders of the dominant end interpretation include Hardie 1979; Kraut 1989; Heinaman 1988 and 2007; Charles 1999; Scott 1999; and Lear 2004 provide a compromise position of sorts that explains noncontemplative goods as approximations of the highest good. For a bit of a backlash against the interpretive problem in general, see Bush 2008 and Long 2011.

⁸ Recent surveys of the debate between inclusive and dominant end interpretations include Irwin 2012 and Lear 2009; I have addressed the question in light of Aristotle's account of the need for friendship in Lockwood forthcoming.

⁹ For instance, I take it that Reeve in this volume is mistaken to say that the life of enjoyment is "set aside" or that the contest is really one between two different lives. Scholars who discuss the contest of lives sometimes seem to omit discussion of x 6 entirely. For instance, Cooper 2012 entitles his chapter on Aristotle "Philosophy as Two Ways of Life"; he claims that as early as i 5, "Aristotle immediately sets aside the life of pleasure as not worth taking seriously as a candidate for the happy life" (95).

Ethics.¹¹ A closer examination of the bookends illustrates the transformation that takes place between them.

NE i provides a preliminary examination of the good, and i 5 contributes toward that examination by considering what objects or *telé* (1095b31, 1096a80) people have valued according to the way people have lived their lives. There are three most favored lives – the lives of enjoyment (*apolaustikos*), political activity (*politikos*), and “contemplation” (*theōrētikos* [1095b17–19]).¹² Although the first two lives are articulated clearly in the chapter – the first takes bodily pleasure as the good and the second takes honor (*timē*) or excellence (*aretē*) as the good – Aristotle fails to characterize the *theōrētikos bios* (or its object) in i 5, except to note that it will be examined subsequently (1096a4–5). Aristotle uses the term *theōria* (and its cognates) rather broadly in the *Ethics* – sometimes capturing its etymological sense of “viewing” and “beholding” (*theōreō*) or being a spectator (*theōros*) – but also in the “mundane” sense of considering one’s own interest (for which he reports Pericles was famous [vi 5.1140b7–10]).¹³ Terms such as *theōria* and *philosophia* were contested in the fourth century – Aristotle’s contemporary Isocrates, for instance, offered a different and competing take on both terms – and its use in i 5 is cautiously neutral, anticipating its discussion in x 7–8.¹⁴

Although it would be incautious to burden the term *theōrētikos* with too much meaning in i 5, all three lives and objects that Aristotle identifies as possible candidates for the good stand in contrast to the life of money making (*chrēmatistēs*) and its object – wealth – which

Aristotle dismisses as unworthy of consideration (1096a5–8). Aristotle’s predecessors – most immediately Plato – had joined the life of money making and pleasure into a single life and presented as a contestant for the best way of life one characterized by consumption and material gain.¹⁵ But Aristotle refashions the slate of candidates and replaces the life of money making with the life of enjoyment. The move is a critical one on his part and draws attention to the new candidate that Aristotle includes in his contest, namely the life of enjoyment. Aristotle’s initial description of it is unpromising: its advocates are characterized as “most vulgar,” and “utterly slavish”; the life itself is likened to that of grazing cattle (1095b16, b19–20). And yet, he notes that proponents of such a life have some “argument” (*logos*)¹⁶ in their defense since many people in power feel similar to the legendary Assyrian king Sardanapallus (Ashurbanipal) – a ruler whom Athenaeus reports as having said “eat, drink, and play (*paize*), since all else is not worth the snap of the fingers” (see Stewart 1892, i 63–64). Aristotle’s revision of the candidates for the best way of life reflects his belief that it is a “fact of life” (or more accurately, a fact about the way people lead their lives that cannot be dismissed by practical philosophy) that pleasure is a central component of happiness, a topic upon which I will elaborate in the second part.

Aristotle’s discussion of the three lives and their requisite objects also underscores and anticipates two criteria that he will use in his adjudication of the best way of life in x 6–8. The first criterion emerges when Aristotle dismisses wealth as a good because it is not desired for its own sake but chosen for the sake of something else, whereas pleasure, the object of the political life, and the object of the *theōrētikos bios* are intrinsically desirable (*dī’ hauta agapatai* [1096a8–9]). The second criterion emerges because determining the object of the political life is problematic: initially, its proponents believe it is honor. Yet since honor

¹⁵ The closest parallel to the contest of three lives in Plato is *Republic* 587c, which asserts that there are three primary classes of human beings: the wisdom-loving, the victory-loving, and the gain-loving (*philokerdēs*). But in the subsequent contest between them, Socrates twice characterizes the lover of gain as a moneymaker (*chrēmatistikos* [587d1, 583a9]). *Phaedo* 68b–c contrasts three lives and places the *philochrēmatos* alongside the *philosophos* and the *philotimos*. *Philebus* 21d–22b envisions a contest between the life of pleasure (*hēdonē*), the life of wisdom (*phronēsis*), and the life that combines the two (the *koinos*), but that contest seems radically different from the “three lives” contest found in the *Ethics*. Aristotle’s identification of the third candidate as the life of enjoyment and his dismissal of the life of money making are his own innovations to the trope. For the relationship between Plato and Aristotle on this question, see Joly 1956, 114–115.

¹⁶ Burnet 1901, 20, notes that *tugchānousi de logou* [1095b21] has the sense of “they get a hearing”; he writes that the “whole passage is dominated by the metaphor of the *diadikasia*,” or suits among several persons.

¹¹ The proleptic anticipation that Kahn 1996 locates within the early and middle Platonic corpus, I suggest, also takes place within the *Ethics* (both with the work as a whole and within [at least] the tenth book).

¹² Although I use the term “contemplation” to translate *theōria* (and its cognates), the activity that the term represents is very different from modern notions of scientific discovery or research. As Kraut 1989, 16n2, observes, to “contemplate” in its narrow sense “is not to be seeking knowledge but to be bringing to mind the knowledge one already has.” Larmore 1992, 189, claims that Aristotle’s use of the term *theōria* is “very different from how we understand theory today. It meant going over what is already known, beholding it and appreciating it. Learning was no part of Aristotelian *theōria*, except as a precondition. I am not sure that we today can attach much sense to valuing this sort of activity. It has no role in modern science, which learns, not in order to contemplate, but to learn more. Perhaps the idea of *theōria* still resonates with certain kinds of religious experience.”

¹³ For elaboration of the breadth of Aristotle’s use of *theōria* in the *Ethics*, see Rorty 1980 and Roochnik 2008. Nightingale 2004, 40–71, chronicles the original sense of the *theōros* as one who visits oracular centers, goes on pilgrimages to religious festivals, or journeys abroad for the sake of learning.

¹⁴ See Nightingale 2004, 20–21, 232–235, and Broadie and Rowe 2002, 76–77, for the cultural context of the late fourth-century debates with respect to characterizations of *theōria*.

depends on the person giving the honor rather than the honored, it cannot be the good of the political life for the good is "oikeion ti" or "something belonging" or "akin" to the good person (1095b25-26). Aristotle infers that the real object of the political life is "virtue" (*aretē*) since that is the reason why practically wise people (*phronimoi* [1095b28]) honor its possessors. "Belonging" and "intrinsic desirability" thus emerge as preliminary criteria of the good in i 5.

NE i 5 explores different ways of life to elucidate happiness and the good; x 6 commences with the claim that "since we have discussed the subjects of virtue, friendship, and pleasure, it remains to treat of happiness in outline . . . our account will be more concise if we first take up what was said earlier" (1176a30-33). Aristotle's list of previous subjects is not random: central premises in x 6-8 derive from NE vi, ix, and x, as I will articulate. Chapter x 6 establishes the framework for setting up and adjudicating the contest, but the framework ultimately derives from the core criteria of i 5. The account of happiness in outline establishes two claims that will guide the choice of candidates: first, happiness is an activity rather than a state (*hexis*), since a state might be possessed by someone asleep or suffering the greatest misfortunes (1176a33-35). Although the distinction between *energeia* and *hexis* is something that Aristotle elaborates upon later in the *Ethics*, the core insight - that happiness is "activity" - is first stated in i 5 (using precisely the counter-examples of sleep and great misfortune [1095b32, 1096a1]).¹⁷

Aristotle's second claim that sets up the contest is that happiness is one of the activities chosen for its own sake (*tōn kath' hautas hairetōn* [1176b4]), which he further characterizes as meaning that it lacks nothing, is self-sufficient (*autarkēs* [1176b5-6]), or is an activity "from which nothing is sought beyond the activity" (1176b6-7). Aristotle elaborates upon criteria of the good - especially that of self-sufficiency - elsewhere (especially in 1.1097b6-21), but the formulation of self-sufficiency in x 6 seems explicitly indebted to the preliminary formulation of intrinsic desirability in i 5.¹⁸ Both ground rules - that happiness is an activity

¹⁷ In i 5 Aristotle criticizes the claim that *aretē* is the good because it is "too incomplete" (*atelestera* [1095b32]); he subsequently goes on to argue that one can possess *aretē* while being asleep, being inactive, or suffering great evils. At i 5, Aristotle has yet to identify *aretē* as a *hexis*, but his argument in i 5 presupposes such a claim (a claim Aristotle will ultimately argue for in 1106a10-12). In 1.1098b31-1099a7, Aristotle elaborates on the claim that happiness is an *energeia* rather than a *hexis*. In x 6.1176b1-2, he notes that it has previously been said that happiness is an *energeia*; the reference may be to i 8 or to 1.1098a5-7 (within the "function" argument).

¹⁸ Scholars have queried whether Aristotle uses criteria of the good consistently in NE i and x; see Curzer 1990 and Brown 2013. Regardless of inconsistency, the core notion at play in x 6 - that something is chosen or desired for its own sake - is the same as that articulated in i 5.

and that it is intrinsically choiceworthy - ultimately derive from the initial formulation of the contest of lives in i 5. Further confirmation that x 6-8 is indebted to i 5 can be found in the candidates for happiness that the two ground rules pick out: actions in accord with virtue, namely doing noble and fine things (*ta kala kai spoudaia prattein* [1176b7-8]), pleasant amusements (*tōn paidiōn hai hēdeiai* [1176b9]), and contemplative activity (1177a18).¹⁹ Having thus established the ground rules and slate of contestants, the remainder of x 6-8 consists in adjudication of the contest started in i 5.

The overall structure of the adjudication of the contest is as follows: the rest of x 6 rejects the claim that happiness consists in amusements, substantially drawing upon the premise that the good person is the standard for what is truly pleasant (an argument that derives from the discussion of pleasure in x 5). NE x 7 stipulates that contemplative activity is in accord with its own virtue (*kata tēn oikeian aretēn* [1177a17]); defends the superiority of contemplative activity by explicitly drawing upon premises that derive from the prior discussions of friendship, virtue, and pleasure; and marks the crucial transition from showing what is the highest activity to showing what is the best way of life. NE x 8 confirms the superiority of the contemplative life over the practical life through three comparisons between them; but it also renders the verdict that the practical life is nonetheless a happy life, even if it is one that is second behind the contemplative life. Although substantial elements of the contest were on the table in a preliminary fashion in i 5, an examination of the arguments at each stage in x 6-8 shows that the adjudication of the contest requires premises that derive from intermediate discussions in the *Ethics*, specifically those concerning the nature of the self, the psychic nature of intellectual and ethical excellences, and the nature of pleasure - which is precisely what Aristotle claims in the first line of x 6 (1176a30-31).²⁰ Let me highlight the "borrowing" at each stage of the adjudication of the contest to underscore the textual integrity of what is discussed between i 5 and x 6-8 and its relationship to the overall conclusions of NE x.

¹⁹ Although Aristotle does not mention contemplative activity in the initial list of intrinsically chosen activities in x 6 (it emerges for the first time in x 7), it too follows from the two criteria. One is reminded that the chapter break between x 6 and x 7 is the result of editorial decisions made over a millennium after the text was composed.

²⁰ Brown 2013, 137, insists that there is "awkwardness in the way that Aristotle touches on the traditional choice of lives, postpones his treatment of that choice, and then articulates a surprising position." Aristotle's extensive borrowing from NE vi, ix, and x in his adjudication of the contest shows that he is in no position to resolve that contest prior (at least) to his accounts of self-love and pleasure.

In the first stage of the adjudication, Aristotle shows that although pleasure is an integral part of a happy life, it is nonetheless wrong to claim that a life of pleasant amusement or "play" (*paidia*) is the happiest life.²¹ In i 5, Aristotle claimed that proponents of pleasure deserved a hearing for whether a life devoted to eating, drinking, and play includes the most valuable activities, and x 6 presents such a hearing. Arguments in favor of a life of amusement seem to take the form of "people in power pursue amusing activities, people in power know what most contributes to happiness, therefore happiness consists in amusing activities." Aristotle presents several clusters of arguments against such a claim, but most of them are grounded in a premise that Aristotle points out has been repeated numerous times (1176b25), most recently in the account of pleasure in x 5, namely that "what is honored and pleasant is what is so to the decent person and for each type of person, the most desirable activity is the one that accords with his own state; for the decent person as well, then, the most desirable activity is one that is in accord with that person's excellence" (1176b25-27). Aristotle uses wordplay throughout x 6 to underscore the point: it is childish (*paidikon* [1176b33]) to point to the example of children (*paides* [1176b22]) to ground the claim that the activity of amusement (*paidia*) is best; rather, the pleasures that appear to the decent person will be pleasures, and the things he delights in will be pleasant (1176a17-19).²² Aristotle quotes the sage Anacharsis – presumably such a decent person – who claims that one should "amuse oneself (*paizein*) so as to engage in serious matters" (1176b33). Pleasant amusement is a form of recreation (*anapausis*) and thus valuable in a well-ordered life; but x 6 concludes that the happy life (*ho eudaimōn bios*) seems to be in accord with excellence, and that involves serious matters; it does not consist in amusement (1177a1-3).

The second stage of the contest, in x 7, rather seamlessly picks up on the conclusion of x 6 by stating that "if happiness is in accord with excellence, it is quite reasonable that it should be in accord with the one that is best, and this will be the virtue of the best element" (1177a12-13). But rather abruptly, Aristotle now stipulates not only that *theōretikē* is just such an activity but that such a point has already been stated (1177a18).²³ If such a claim has not been made with sufficient

²¹ Aristotle's account of pleasant amusement as a *diagōgē* (or intellectual pastime) is usefully compared with his account of music as a preeminent educational *diagōgē* in *Politics* viii.

²² The claim that the *spondaios* or "decent person" is the measure of what should be honored or pleasing is also stated at iii 4.1113a25-33, ix 4.1166a12-13, and ix 9.1170a14-16.

²³ As commentators note, there is no passage that explicitly states that theoretical activity of the divine part within a person consists in complete happiness; nonetheless,

explicitness, nonetheless Aristotle is quite right to state that such a conclusion seems to agree with what has been said previously and with the truth (1177a18-19). *NE* x 7 presents six arguments in support of the claim that contemplative activity is activity "in accord with that virtue that belongs to one" (1177a17), and thus is complete happiness. All six of the arguments are based on premises articulated in the books on virtue, friendship, and pleasure. The arguments can be succinctly stated:

1. Since mind is the highest part of us, its activity is best (1177a19-21).
2. Since we can contemplate more than acting, the activity of contemplation is more continuous (1177a21-22).
3. Activity in accord with *sophia* is the most pleasant of activities in accord with virtue (1177a22-27).
4. The activity of contemplation is most self-sufficient because it is least dependent upon others (1177a27-77b1).
5. Contemplative activity is the only activity that seems to be intrinsically desirable (1177b1-4).
6. The activity of contemplation is most leisurely (1177b4-6).

The claim that mind is highest within us derives from Aristotle's discussion of self-love (ix 8.1168b28-1169a3, 1169a15-18); that contemplation is the most continuous activity follows the claim that it is divine (since the interruptions of activity are the result of human elements [x 4.1175a3-5]); the superlatively pleasant nature of contemplation follows from the analysis of *sophia* as an intellectual virtue and the claim that activities are perfected – and thus most pleasant – when they are directed at the highest objects (vi 7.1141a20-22, x 4.1174b20-23); and that the activity of contemplation is most self-sufficient and desired for its own sake follows from the account of self-sufficiency as lacking nothing in x 6 (1176b5-6). Although x 7 is the first place that Aristotle takes up the relationship between leisure (*scholē*) and contemplation (and thus it receives the most extended discussion in x 7), the other five arguments have firm bases in previous discussions. The result is a sort of crescendo: *NE* i 5 identified the contest's candidates, crucial passages in *NE* vi, ix, and x establish the premises for adjudicating the contest, and the first half of x 7 pulls all these pieces together to show that contemplative activity will be the "complete happiness of a human being, if it receives a complete

that the contest of lives in i 5 provides no criticism of the contemplative life may imply a preliminary endorsement. In numerous places in *NE* vi (e.g., 1141a18-b3, 1143b33-1144a6, and 1145a6-11) Aristotle makes clear that both the object and the activity of *sophia* is higher than *phronēsis*. As Burnet 1901, 461, aptly puts it, the claim about *theōretikē* "follows at once from the proof given in book VI that *sophia* is the highest form of goodness."

span of life" (I177b24-25). The remainder of x 7 considers the claim that a life based in such activity is itself the best life.

The second half of x 7 presents a somewhat otherworldly account of the divine nature of mind – a substance that elsewhere in his writings Aristotle identifies with the divine.²⁴ Whereas the arguments in x 6 and x 7 previously had been concerned almost entirely with the question of what is the best activity, Aristotle's discussion of the divine nature of mind addresses the question of what is the best form or way of life.²⁵ He begins by noting that a "complete life" including the activity of contemplation will be superior (*kreitton* [I177b26]) to one lived in accord with the human element since it is not insofar that one is human that one will live such a life (*biōsetai* [I177b27]); rather, insofar as the divine element is superior to the compound, to that degree will its activity, too, be superior to that in accord with the other sort of virtue. Aristotle concludes: "If, then, mind is something divine in comparison with the human, so also is a life in accord with that divine in comparison with human life" (I177b30-31). Implicitly recollecting the discussion of self-love, he asserts that each person would seem to be that divine part (I178a2; cf. ix 8.I168b28-I169a6) and that it would be absurd if a person chooses "not his own life" but that of something else (I178a3-4). Explicitly recollecting the discussion of pleasure in x 5,²⁶ Aristotle concludes that since what properly belongs (*oikeion* [I178a5]) to each thing by nature is best and most pleasant for it, the life of the mind (*ho kata ton noun bios* [I178a6-7]) is best and most pleasant for humans, given that a human is mind most of all; such a life will be superlatively happy.

It is difficult to address succinctly all the philosophical challenges raised by Aristotle's discussion of such a divine life.²⁷ But it is clear that the account is grounded in previous texts and thus brings together familiar material now cast in an unfamiliar light. The account of a divine life of happiness for the life in accord with the mind applies to the contest of lives, the claims that *sophia* is mind of the highest objects (NE vi 7), that we are most what is best in us (NE ix 8), and that the highest pleasures are those that most "belong to" or are akin to us (NE x 5). Such a life may

²⁴ For a recent review of the relationship between mind and the divine in Aristotle's philosophy, see Long 2011. Mind is divine, but Polansky 2007, 466-467, rejects identifying mind with God.

²⁵ Lawrence 2004, 130-137, distinguishes between "activity monism" and "life monism." The second party of x 7 ground the transition from one to the other.

²⁶ to *lexthea proteton* (I178a4-5) is most plausibly construed as a reference to x 5.I176a3-9, where Aristotle discusses *hēdonē oikeia*, namely the claim that creatures and activities have pleasures that "belong to" them. See further Stewart 1892, ii 449; cf. Burnet 1900, 464.

²⁷ For sustained discussion and criticism, see Lawrence 2004, 146-156, and Lawrence 2006, 64-73.

appear "strange" (as Anaxagoras put it), but it should not appear strange to one familiar with these central tenets from the major discussions of virtue, friendship, and pleasure.

If x 7 is a heavenly ascent of sorts, the final stage of the contest in x 8 returns to earth both to identify the life of human virtue as happy in a secondary way and to contrast it with the best life. Structurally, x 8 presents three comparisons between the divine life of contemplation and what the chapter calls the happiness of a life "in accord with all the other virtues the activities of which are human" (I178a9-10);²⁸ the chapter concludes with a more general reflection about the relationship between happiness and external goods (an issue first raised problematically in NE i 10-12).²⁹ The first contrast (I178a9-23) elevates the activities of the mind over those of the other virtues because the former is separable from the human compound (including connections to *pathēmata* or "emotions") whereas the latter are necessarily connected to the body and nonrational parts of the soul – an argument that draws heavily on the account of soul division in NE vi 1-2.³⁰ The second contrast (I178a23-b7) grounds the claim that contemplative activities require fewer external goods than the activities of the other ethical virtues. In this contrast, Aristotle invokes the examples of the political person (*ho politikos*), the generous person (*ho eleutheros*), the just person (*ho dikaios*), the brave person (*ho andreios*), and the temperate person (*ho sōphros*) as contrasts to the sketch of the person who leads the life of the mind in x 7. The argument is hardly rigorous, although its rhetorical strength derives from the force of the examples that Aristotle has fleshed out in his account of the individual virtues and the contrast they offer to the divine life fleshed out in x 7. Like the first comparison, Aristotle's examples derive from

²⁸ Aristotle calls such happiness "secondly" (*deuteros*), a term he uses elsewhere in the *Ethics* in contrast with *kuriōs* (at x 5.I176a20) and in contrast with *prōtōs* (at viii 7.I158b31). Lawrence 1993, 7-15, argues persuasively that the difference between the two lives is that the first is an ideal or utopian life under perfect condition whereas the second is a "however circumstanced ideal." Although Lawrence does not invoke the distinction, it is very similar to that which Aristotle makes between the best regime as a "city of one's prayers" and as "the most universally practically one" (*Pol.* iv i.1288b21-24, b37-40).

²⁹ The final lines of x 8 (I179a22-32) take up the claim that the wise person (*sophos*) is most loved by the gods. As Broadie 2003 argues, the passage has troubled commentators since it seems out of place. Plausible are her claims that the passage is meant to articulate Aristotle's notion of piety. See also Broadie and Rowe 2002, 447-449.

³⁰ The argument also presupposes something like the account of *nous* in *De Anima* iii 4-5 – an account that x 8 explicitly sidesteps on the grounds that such metaphysical accuracy is not germane to the argument at hand. As Ron Polansky has pointed out to me, such remarks [a similar one can be found in i 13.I102a28-33] suggest that although Aristotle's analyses in the *Ethics* are compatible with his more rigorous theoretical treatises, they are not dependent upon them to establish the truth of the *Ethics*.

earlier passages in the work (namely, the illustrations of individual virtues in iii-v).

The third and final passage (1178b7-23) contrasts the lives of the gods – which exemplify happiness – with the lives of beasts, which have no share in happiness. Since the only activity it is plausible for the gods to perform is *theōria*, it follows that humans will be most happy insofar as they have the most affinity (*suggenestatiē* [1178b23]) with the gods. The passage concludes that happiness itself is a sort of *theōria* and that other activities are happy insofar as they possess something similar (*homoionia ti* [1178b27]) to *theōria*.³¹ Just as in the first two comparisons in x 8, the structure of the argument presupposes that the contest for the best life is solely between two mutually exclusive forms of life, namely, the life of contemplation and that of practical activity. But the concluding passage on the problem of external goods blurs the contrast between the two forms of life. On the one hand, even while Aristotle elevates the contemplative life over the practical life in x 8, he acknowledges that “the one who is happy will also need external prosperity, insofar as he is human” (1178b5). Indeed, Aristotle claims that “insofar as such a person is a human being and shares his life (*suzē(i)*) [1178b5] with others, he chooses to do deeds that accord with excellence” [1178b5-7].³² Worries that Aristotle’s contemplative sage is potentially an “evil genius” – namely, someone who devotes his or her life to contemplation at all costs, including doing terrible actions – seems unwarranted.³³ On the other hand, the concluding passages of x 8 also claim that the demands of external goods are minimal, since private individuals (*idiōtai* [1179a6-7]) seem to perform decent actions no less than those with political power, and “a person’s life (*bios*) will be happy if he is active in accordance with excellence” (1179a8-9). It is possible to do fine things and live a happy life without embracing (at least) the explicitly political existence of the *politikos*. Although the contest of lives adjudicates between lives as mutually exclusive ideal types, the contest also provides for a continuum of happy lives, including the divine contemplative life, the human political life, and the private life of activity in accord with virtue.

³¹ As Broadie and Rowe 2002, 78, notes, “resemblance is the key to the fact that both [lives] are forms of happiness.” The claim that other activities can resemble *theōria* is the basis of the analyses in Charles 1999 and Scott 1999: the former locates an analogical likeness between primary and secondary forms of happiness whereas the latter locates the likeness in terms of a paradigm and its copies.

³² Aristotle’s use of *suzēn* or “communal living” invokes his discussion of communal living as a necessary condition of friendship in *NE* ix 12.1171b33 ff.

³³ Keyt 1983, 368, most forcefully raises the problem of whether the contemplative life may be “immoral”; see also Lear 1988, 314-316. Lawrence 1993, 30, aptly dissolves the concern.

Although the contest presupposes mutually exclusive lives, the text also makes clear that there is overlap between lives. As noted earlier, Aristotle holds without contradiction that the contemplative life is superior to the life of amusement but that the contemplative life also includes the pleasure that belongs (*oikeion*) to it. Although the best life clearly includes pleasure, pleasure is not its goal or aim. Aristotle’s claim that the contemplative life includes action in accord with ethical excellence (1178b6) makes a similar point. There is no contradiction in claiming that the contemplative life is superior to the life of practical activity and that the contemplative life includes actions in accord with excellence. The contemplative life can include pleasure and practical activity without being defined by those activities.³⁴ But the parallel between the subordinate inclusion of pleasure and practical activity is obscured when the contest is presented as solely between two contestants.

II. PLEASURE AND THE INNER RING OF NE X

The “outer ring” of *NE* i 5 commences with Aristotle’s observation that it is not unreasonable to apprehend what is the nature of the good and happiness “from people’s lives” (1095b14-15). But the tenth book of *NE* as a whole exhibits an inner ring that concerns a related question, namely the relationship between the way people live their lives and philosophize about practical matters. In numerous places throughout the *Ethics*, Aristotle makes clear that the aim of the work is eminently practical rather than theoretical.³⁵ The practical consideration of pleasure poses a dilemma for the account of the best way of life: on the one hand, Aristotle believes that since humans are especially inclined toward the entitlements of pleasure, they must proactively guard against pleasure in ethical habituation. But on the other hand, the best way of life is a happy life, and a happy life must include pleasure. Aristotle uses a ring composition at the beginning and the end of *NE* x to underscore the textual integrity of the tenth book and highlight a desideratum for his own account – namely, that it be consistent with the way people in fact do live their lives. Having surveyed the main arguments in *NE* x 6-8, it is unnecessary to reexamine all of that terrain. Instead, I would like to analyze two intersecting threads running through the tenth book – namely the methodological problem of keeping practical thought consistent with the way people live and the problem that pleasure poses for such consistency.

³⁴ Is the position I am ascribing to Aristotle inclusivist or dominant end? Like Curzer 1991, I would suggest that both interpretations miss something in the claims about the good that they ascribe to Aristotle.

³⁵ That ethics is practical rather than theoretical is the subject of the last chapter of *NE* x (1179a35-b4). See also ii 2.1103b26-31.

Warrant for yoking together the nature of pleasure and the contest of the best life is provided in Aristotle's remarks reflecting on the nature of practical truth that serve as "bookends" framing the entire discussion of book 10 (leaving aside x 9, which is its own bookend of sorts to the discussion of ethics and politics in *NE* i 2-4). In x 1, Aristotle notes that some thinkers claim that it is better to regard pleasure as a bad thing with respect to how we live [*pros ton bion* 1172a30]³⁶ – even if pleasure is not bad – since they believe people are inclined toward it and are slaves to pleasure [1172a29-32].³⁷ Aristotle cautions that

surely it is not fine to say that. For the accounts that people give of things in the sphere of feelings and actions carry less conviction than the facts (*tōn ergōn*). . . True accounts (*hoi alētheis tōn logōn*), then, are what seem to be most useful not only with regard to knowledge, but also with regard to how we live (*pros ton bion*). For since they are in tune with the facts (*tois ergois*), they carry conviction, and so they encourage those who comprehend them to live (*zēn*) in accord with them. [x 1.1172b3-7]

Aristotle closes x 8 with a very similar sentiment. After reporting the *endoxa* of Solon and Anaxagoras supporting the view that the happy person requires minimal external goods, Aristotle notes that although their opinions carry some conviction [*pistis*]

in the practical sphere, the truth is determined from the facts of one's life [*ex tōn ergōn kai tou biou*], for that is decisive. When we examine what has been previously said, one must bring it to bear on the facts of one's life [*ta erga kai ton bion*], and if it is in harmony with the facts, accept it, but if it clashes, we should suppose it mere arguments. [1179a18-22]

Both passages – with their references to the way people live their lives – seem to echo the contest of lives in i 5.1095b15. What is the purpose of such a ring composition?

I submit that Aristotle uses such a nonargumentative literary device in the tenth book to underscore a deeper tension in the work as a whole about the nature of ethical thought. Speusippus's antihedonistic views about the good are hardly an outlier; at the end of ii 9.1109b7-12, Aristotle himself had counseled that "in everything, we must guard against the pleasant and pleasure itself; for we are already biased in its favor when we come to judge it. We must react to it as the elders reacted

³⁶ Aristotle's use of *pros ton bion* or "with respect to how one lives" echoes the same use of the phrase in i 2.1094a22, where Aristotle asks whether knowledge of the good promotes such a thing.

³⁷ *NE* x 1-3 rhetorically situates its account of pleasure between those of Eudoxus (who praises pleasure as the good) and Speusippus (who denied that it was a good), almost as if it were a Platonic dialogue between Aristotle and two members of the Academy. For the rhetorical sophistication of the passage, see Warren 2009.

to Helen, and on each occasion repeat what they said." Among other things, the Trojan elders said of Helen, "beauty, terrible beauty. . . Ravishing as she is, let her go home in the long ships and not be left behind" [*Iliad* iii 156-160, Fagles trans.] And yet, as I have shown in my analysis of the outer ring of the *Ethics*, Aristotle argues that contemplation is the best activity, the basis for the best way of life, and what is best and most pleasant because it most completely belongs to us [x 7.1178a5-8; cf. 1177a22-27]. *NE* x straddles this dilemma, and Aristotle's use of ring composition signals his sensitivity to it.

Aristotle is clear that the good is not reducible to pleasure. Although taking pleasure in the proper objects is crucial for ethical habituation, Aristotle believes that most people lack a sense of such pleasures and instead live by emotions and pleasures more suited to beasts [1179b8-16]. What Aristotle wants to avoid is the hypocrisy he ascribes to the anti-hedonist who dismisses pleasure as bad for purposes of propaganda, as it were, for the many. Aristotle notes about such a project that "if someone who puts the blame on pleasure is ever seen seeking it, he is taken to be inclining towards it on the supposition that to him every sort of pleasure is worth seeking" [1172b1-3]. As noted earlier, Aristotle himself had chastised pleasure (ii 9) but then gone on to endorse the purity and supreme pleasure of philosophy and contemplation. Why is the *Nicomachean Ethics* not guilty of a similar hypocrisy?

I submit that the answer is found in the way that the contest of the best way of life draws liberally from the account of pleasure in the first half of the tenth book and takes seriously the life of amusement as a candidate in the contest of lives. For instance, Aristotle's displacement of the life of material gain for the life of pleasure in the traditional formulation of the contest reflects his belief that the way people live their lives in search of pleasure indicates the fundamental importance of pleasure as a good, even if pleasure is not the good.³⁸ The defeat of the life of amusement was grounded in the claim that the decent person is the measure or standard of what is truly pleasant [x 6.1176b24-27], a claim made earlier in the account of pleasure in x 5.1176a15-19. Finally, the claim that the life of the mind is that which by nature "properly belongs" (*oikeion*) to a person and is most pleasant for such a person [x 7.1178a4-8] is grounded in the claim that activities and ways of life have their own "proper pleasures" (*oikeia hēdonē* [1176a3-5]), which is another claim of x 5. The adjudication of the contest in x 6-8 incorporates the account of pleasure in x 1-5 into an understanding of the best way of life as the most pleasant life. Discussions of the contest that focus on only two ways

³⁸ Compare Aristotle's treatment of the Eudoxan argument that pleasure is the good because all people seek it [x 2.1172b9-15].

of life fail to notice the important role that pleasure plays in the contest – both methodologically and in its adjudication.

The bookend discussions on keeping accounts consistent with actions appears to be Aristotle's way of highlighting the difference between his own position and that of the hypocritical antihedonist described in x 1. Aristotle agrees with the antihedonist that a life of bodily pleasure is slavish and something more suited for cattle than humans – points made in the adjudication of the contest of lives both in its original formulation and in the critique of the life of amusement (i 5.1095b19–22, x 6.1177a6–9). But Aristotle's decision to give the life of enjoyment a fair hearing and his qualified endorsement of hedonistic amusements as sources of relaxation (i 5.1095b21, x 6.1177b33–1177a1) distinguish him from the hypocritical antihedonist. Aristotle and the antihedonist may ultimately share the same qualified endorsement of pleasure as a good – namely, one according to which not all pleasures but only those that the excellent person feels are truly pleasant are good – but when Aristotle applies such a view to the contest of lives, his account is consistent with the way that people live their lives. In everyday life people express preferences for different things, exercise delayed gratification, and seek what they really enjoy rather than just any old pleasure. The account of pleasure in x 1–5 is able to make sense of such “facts of life” and the adjudication of the best way to live draws upon the account repeatedly. By the close of x 8, Aristotle has clearly distinguished himself from the hypocritical antihedonist in x 1, albeit an antihedonist with whom Aristotle shares some concerns.

III. CONCLUSION: MODERN PROBLEMS WITH ANCIENT LIVES

More jarring, of course, is the gap between the way people live their lives and the quasi-divine life that x 6–8 elevates as the pinnacle of human happiness. Anaxagoras is indeed correct to say that a person living such a life is *atopos* or “a strange sort” to most people (x 8.1179a15). One is reminded, in the *Symposium* 175a5, of Agathon's claim that Socrates also was “strange” (*atopon* [cf. 221d]) – that he was someone who stops in midconversation or in the middle of a journey to stand still and contemplate for hours. The very notion of a way of life – a mode of existence singularly focused on one sort of activity – is an affront to modern tastes that in practice enact a balancing act of multiple aspects of life – family life, work life, social life, civic life, and so forth. But that there is a gap between our lived experience of aspects of life and Aristotle's presentation of singular ways of life does not by itself offer an argument against his view. Aristotle might respond that the modern view of life as comprising an unending balancing act is a bit chaotic (if not downright Sisyphian).

Adjudicating between ancient and modern views of the integrity of a life goes beyond my scope. But regardless of what we think of Aristotle's awarding victory to the *bios theōrētikos* as the most happy form of life, the careful use of ring composition and the synthesis of previous arguments into the adjudication of lives in NE x 6–8 supports the claim that the *Nicomachean Ethics* exhibits an artistic and philosophical unity.³⁹ Developmental readings of Aristotle have treated the account of the contemplative life in x 6–8 as the outgrown vestige of an earlier Platonic stage in Aristotle's intellectual biography.⁴⁰ Nussbaum (1986, 376–377) went so far as to claim that NE x “seems to be oddly composed, giving rise to suspicion that chapters 6–8 are not originally part of the same whole” and that “there is no reason to rule out forgery” in the case of those sections, since they do not fit in the argument of the *Ethics* (and indeed she claims that they “represent a line of ethical thought that Aristotle elsewhere vigorously attacks”).⁴¹ My discussion should show that scholars who wish to excise x 6–8 from the *Ethics* will need to excise other significant passages as well.

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³⁹ My study thus augments the arguments that Pakaluk 2011 gives for the textual unity of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole; it also responds to a problem with the unity of the text raised in Pakaluk 2005, 320–322.

⁴⁰ The grandfather of such readings is Jaeger 1948, which treats the account of a divine life in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as remnants from Aristotle's youthful Platonism (articulated most clearly in the *Protrepticus*).

⁴¹ Labarrière 2002 presents an alternative to Nussbaum based on the possibility of *nous* in x 7 being practical.

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