

## Introduction

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was born in the small city of Stagira in northern Greece, studied with Plato in Athens, did pioneering work in biology on Lesbos and elsewhere, and founded his own school, the Lyceum, again in Athens.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that he wrote for upper-class men, and denigrated women, slaves, and artisans, his general theory about the happy life for human beings is applicable to all.<sup>2</sup> Reading Aristotle in this more inclusive way is conducive to “fair-mindedness” (*epieikeia*), a trait praised by Aristotle himself as justice, but superior.

Aristotle was a prolific writer, composing works on logic, metaphysics, psychology, biology, aesthetics, rhetoric, ethics, and politics. There are three Aristotelian texts about ethics: the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*), the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*), and a work of controversial authorship, the *Magna Moralia* (*MM*).<sup>3</sup> There is also the *Protrepticus*, a work that Aristotle probably wrote early on when he attended Plato's Academy.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Aristotle's *Politics* contains material on the happy life that overlaps with Aristotle's ethical works.

I focus on the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most famous of Aristotle's ethical works, and has received the lion's share of attention, having clearer manuscripts, and generally being considered the superior and therefore more mature work.<sup>5</sup> In 1978, Anthony Kenny sparked controversy by arguing on stylometric and philosophical grounds that the *Eudemian Ethics* is in fact the superior and later work.<sup>6</sup> Since then there has been the publication of an Oxford Classical Text by Walzer and Mingay (1991) as well as a spate of new translations and commentaries,<sup>7</sup> but there has also been dissatisfaction with the Oxford Classical text. In an unprecedented move,

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of his life and school, see Natali (2013). Visit youtube for “Aristotle's lagoon,” a series on his studies on Lesbos.

<sup>2</sup> See too Ober (2013) and Keyt (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Dirlmeier (1958) argues that the *Magna Moralia* is an authentic work by Aristotle, preceding the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Irwin (2019, xv) agrees. Cooper (1999, 195–211 [1973]) disagrees, arguing that the *Magna Moralia* was written by a student of Aristotle who attended a course of lectures before the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Rowe (1975) argues that it is a work by a later writer. (Pace Simpson [2013], a further work, *Virtues and Vices*, is considered to be inauthentic.) For more on Aristotle's ethical treatises, see Bobonich (2006).

<sup>4</sup> See Hutchinson and Johnson (2017).

<sup>5</sup> For earlier history and reception of the *Eudemian Ethics*, see Jost (2014) and Rowe (forthcoming). Commentaries and translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* include, most recently, Natali (1999), Crisp (2000), Sachs (2001), Broadie and Rowe (2002), Taylor (2006), Ross edited by Brown (2009), Reeve (2014), Irwin's third edition (2019), and Beresford (2020). Ross (1923) can be found free on the web.

<sup>6</sup> Stylometry is a method of statistical analysis of the Greek terms in each work.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Woods (1992), Kenny (2011), Inwood and Woolf (2013), and Simpson (2013), translating Bekker's (1831) text, and Dalimier (2013) with her own text. The Oxford translation of the *Eudemian Ethics* has been revised to include the common books (Barnes and Kenny 2014).

Oxford University Press is publishing a new Oxford Classical Text, edited by Christopher Rowe.<sup>8</sup>

The chronology of the two works is disputed. Where the author of the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to be correcting problems in the *Eudemian Ethics*, it may be reasonable to suppose that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the later work, although further examination may show that the two works are quite consistent after all. Sometimes one work is more expansive on a given topic than the other. Here it is hard to tell whether the shorter treatment was written later, summarizing the longer one, or whether it was written earlier, before a longer treatment was provided. One work may have arguments that the other lacks. This could be for opposing reasons, for example, that they were later found deficient, or because they were added later.

Compounding these difficulties, the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* have three books in common, a surprising fact that I explain further at the beginning of my section on justice, the topic of the first of the common books. (After this introduction I use the terms “*Nicomachean*” and “*Eudemian*” to refer only to the books outside these “common” books.)

It is usual to assume that whichever work has the superior treatment must have been written later. However, while it is heartening to think that authors improve with age, there is no a priori or empirical reason to accept this view. Indeed, in his latest reconsideration of his seminal work on the two treatises, Kenny argues that the similarities and differences between the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* may not be chronological after all, although he rejects the idea that they were written for different audiences (Kenny 2016, 294).<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this Element is not to solve these historical problems, but to highlight important philosophical similarities and differences between the two works, including the common books that may give us greater insight into Aristotle’s thinking and serve to provoke further thought.<sup>10</sup> Given the length of this Element, I have not attempted to give a comprehensive account, but I have paid special attention to Aristotle’s treatment of virtues of character and thought and their relation to happiness, the reason why Aristotle is considered to be the forefather of modern virtue ethics. The virtues of character have not received the attention they deserve in most discussions of the relationship between the two treatises.

<sup>8</sup> For a full explanation of the need for a new Oxford Classical Text, listen to Rowe (2020).

<sup>9</sup> On the issue of different audiences, see the first footnote to the conclusion to this Element.

<sup>10</sup> For an edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with parallel passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* (which the editor considered a commentary by a student of Aristotle, Eudemus), see Burnet (1900).

A comment on the texts and translations: I use the Oxford Classical text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* edited by Bywater (1894) and the Oxford Classical Text of the *Eudemian Ethics* edited by Rowe (forthcoming a) (supplemented by Bywater's texts of the "common" books). According to convention, I refer to passages in Aristotle by book, chapter (Roman numerals in the *Nicomachean Ethics*), and Bekker numbers (page, column, and line numbers from Bekker's edition [1831]), with the caveat that the chapter numbers are much later than Aristotle. Translations are my own, although influenced by the translations of others.<sup>11</sup> There is a glossary of key terms following the conclusion.

## 1 Happiness

Aristotle is often called a eudaemonist because of the importance of *eudaimonia*, or happiness, in his ethics. The term "*eudaimonia*" in Greek suggests that one has a good guardian angel, a *daimōn*, looking after one, and so is simply a matter of luck. In English the term "happiness" usually means "feeling good." Aristotle, by contrast, argues that happiness is not simply a matter of luck, nor is it merely subjective. In Aristotle's view, happiness is up to us to a considerable extent, and people can think that they are happy when they are not. This is important. If the point of studying the *Eudemian* or *Nicomachean Ethics* is to lead a happy life and learn how to bring up others so that they have a happy life too, then happiness must be something that is up to us to a considerable extent, and it cannot be purely subjective.

It has been objected that "*eudaimonia*" should be translated as "flourishing" or "well-being" rather than "happiness" to point out the difference between Aristotle's conception and our own. However, if moderns have merely changed the subject, there would be no disagreement with Aristotle's view, and there is. Aristotle would think it wrong to consider happiness as merely a subjective feeling, although he does not deny that happiness is pleasant.

According to Aristotle, happiness is not just a private matter, but it is also the purview of the art of politics (*politikē*). An individual can achieve happiness only in the context of a society or polis, and an individual cannot achieve happiness by being selfish and aiming to take more of his or her own fair share. According to Aristotle, only virtuous people can be happy, and greed (*pleonexia*) is the motive for the vice of injustice.

I shall first discuss Aristotle's introduction to happiness found in *Nicomachean Ethics* I, and then highlight some similarities and differences to be found in *Eudemian Ethics* I and II. I shall argue that in the bulk of *Nicomachean Ethics* I Aristotle presents three converging approaches to happiness. The

<sup>11</sup> On the difficulty of translating Aristotle's ethics, see Gottlieb (2001b).

first approach is a teleological approach, showing that happiness is the highest good or goal (*telos*) of life. The second approach is to examine current views about happiness and those that have something to be said for them (*EN I 4*), known as the method of *endoxa*. The third approach is that of the biologist, examining how happiness is related to the human psyche, the topic of Aristotle's famous function argument (*EN I 7*).

### 1.1 The Method of *Endoxa*

I shall begin with the second approach, since, as Aristotle says, we should start with what is familiar to us. According to Aristotle, people get their view of happiness from their own way of life. Thus, the *hoi polloi* think that it is a life of gratification (like the stereotypical life of a tyrant such as Sardanapallus), while others think it is a political life aiming at honor.<sup>12</sup> Yet others think it is a life of contemplation, and still others think that it is the life of money-making aiming at wealth (*EN I 4*).

Aristotle criticizes all the lives except the life of contemplation. He complains that the *hoi polloi*'s life would be a slavish one, only suitable for nonhuman animals. He argues that politicians aim to be honored for their virtue, and so honor is not the ultimate aim. (In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he is more cynical, claiming that most politicians do just aim at honor, and only true statespeople would aim at virtue.) Nevertheless, virtue alone cannot be the whole story, since being virtuous and asleep would not count as a happy life. Nor would being virtuous but suffering the worst misfortunes. Finally, Aristotle argues that the goal of the money-maker's life, wealth, is not choiceworthy for its own sake, but only for the sake of other things.<sup>13</sup>

Aristotle's criticisms of the different ways of life are instructive, presupposing ideas to be found in his two other approaches to happiness, as well as ideas discussed elsewhere in *Nicomachean Ethics I*. Aristotle's criticisms of the life of pure gratification presuppose that autonomous thought is important for the happy life, and that there is something special about a human life that nonhumans lack, assumptions of Aristotle's function argument. The criticisms of the political life presuppose the importance of activity, a crucial aspect of the function argument. They also point to the importance of external goods in

<sup>12</sup> "Sardanapallus" is a garbled name for Ashurbanipal, who ruled over the Assyrian empire with ruthless efficiency in the seventh century BCE. He thought of himself as a scholar king, amassing a library of cuneiform tablets which included the epic of Gilgamesh. However, to the Greeks and to the authors of the biblical story of Jonah, his home, Nineveh, was a city of unrivalled debauchery.

<sup>13</sup> In his *Politics*, Aristotle argues that wealth is necessary up to a point, but not beyond (*Pol. I 9, 10*).

addition to virtue, an idea central to the discussion of Solon at the end of the book. Finally, Aristotle's criticisms of wealth as a final goal presupposes a hierarchy of goals, an assumption of Aristotle's teleological approach to happiness.

It is unclear whether these ways of life are supposed to be mutually exclusive or exhaustive. On the face of it, nothing Aristotle says here rules out the view that the different ways of life might be combined, so that a person could enjoy physical pleasure, contemplation, virtuous activity, honor, and money-making, all to a certain degree. We might think that the way of life of the military, artists, musicians, physicians, sportspeople, those who care for others, and the like should be included. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle puts artisans with the money-makers. In Aristotle's time, some of these would have been slaves. We shall see that while Aristotle treats the professions of music, medicine, and sport as analogous to being virtuous, in a common book he draws a sharp distinction between these skills (*technai*) and thoughtfulness, the virtue of thought that is required for virtue of character. As for a life of caring for others, Aristotle devotes two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and a separate book in the *Eudemian Ethics* to friendship, including family relationships. Again, it is unclear why some combined ways of life would not be possible. Modern scholars debate whether happiness includes a variety of goods and activities and if so, which ones, and whether happiness and the happy life are the same thing.

### 1.1.1 Aristotle on Plato's Views

Aristotle now turns abruptly to the views of Plato, specifically Plato's discussion of his form of the good and the view that everything that is good is so because of its relationship to just one thing, the form of the good. (Perhaps a student of Plato in the class has had his hand up for all of the preceding lectures.) Even though the Platonic form of the good was introduced by his friends, Aristotle devotes several pages to criticizing it out of reverence for the truth (*EN* I 6). Aristotle's discussion of Plato makes best sense if treated as a dialogue with the master, with Plato's responses understood. Aristotle's first objections to the form of the good rely on his categories, a division of things in the world into ten categories (substances, quantities, qualities, relatives, places, times and more, as explained in an early work, the *Categories*).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I follow Ackrill (1972, 17–24) and Irwin (1988, 53), for example, in thinking that Aristotle intends to classify different types of things, not merely different linguistic predicates. The medieval nominalists interpreted the *Categories* differently. See too Frede (1987) and Menn (1995). The Boethian interpretation best fits the present passage. Otherwise, Aristotle's argument against Plato here would be beside the point.

The first argument is rather obscure but is based on the view that the Platonists treat the form of the good as the number one. Since they do not think that there can be forms of members of a series, they should not think that there can be a form for all the numbers either, presumably because each number has essentially the place that it has and this would not be captured by a general form of, say, the number one. Now it follows that there cannot be a form of the good either, according to Aristotle's categories, because good comes in each category, and relatives relate to substances as if in a series.

Aristotle's next argument is easier to follow. According to his account of the categories, what it is to be a substance differs from what it is to be a quality, which differs from what it is to be a quantity, and so on. According to Aristotle, since what makes something good depends on what type of thing it is and so will differ from category to category, there cannot be one thing, "the form of the good," which makes all types of things – a good substance, an opportune moment, the right quantity, and so forth – good. Yet this is precisely what the form of the good is supposed to be.<sup>15</sup>

We must now assume that the Platonist replies that Aristotle's previous arguments are inapplicable because the form of the good refers to something different from a common or garden universal, and this difference is signified by the term "itself" in "the good itself." Aristotle retorts that the term "itself" adds nothing to "good," because (a) the definition of F and the F itself is the same and (b) "eternal" does not add anything to good. For example, a longer-lasting white is no more white than an ephemeral one.

Next Aristotle suggests that a Platonist might reply to his previous criticisms by distinguishing two sorts of goods: those that are good in themselves and those that are (merely) useful. The Platonist is imagined saying that the form of the good only applies to goods in themselves. Aristotle therefore poses the following dilemma: If pleasures, practical wisdom, and so on are goods in themselves, these have different accounts and so cannot partake in one form of the good, but if only the form of the good is a good in itself, it will be useless, presumably because it will not help us understand anything else.

Aristotle now concedes that different goods are not called "good" merely by chance but may derive from one good or be good by analogy. Here the Platonist might respond that if they derive from one good, that must be the form of the good, or if things are analogously good, there must be some aspect according to which they are analogously good, and that will be the form of the good.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For the view that Aristotle intends not just to list examples of goods in each category, but also to show what it is to be good in each category, see Ackrill (1972) and Irwin (1985, 302).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Shields' Platonist who tries to escape Aristotle's arguments by concocting a higher-order account of goodness that will fit everything (Shields 1999, 208).

He might also object that Aristotle's earlier account of a long-lasting form rests on a misunderstanding of the abstract and timeless nature of the forms. However, Aristotle presumably thinks that if the Platonist makes any of these replies, he will have committed himself to a form of the good too abstract and general to be of any use. Hence his final arguments, making the case that even if there were such a form of the good, it would be useless for action. First, according to Aristotle, present-day craftsmen do not use or even seek the form of the good to help with their work. Second, the doctor is interested in particular cases, not universals. In fact, the physician is interested in the health of *this* human being.

Aristotle's final comments may appear particularly unfair to Plato. After all, in Plato's *Republic*, it is only the rulers who know the form of the good, not every individual. However, perhaps Aristotle could say that if the form of the good is supposed to relate to everything good, Plato is committed to its relevance for shoemaking and other crafts too.<sup>17</sup>

While Aristotle here clearly rejects Plato's form of the good, and the mathematical view of ethics that accompanies it, the broader implications of the argument are controversial. Suffice it to say that at least four clear points emerge from Aristotle's discussion of Plato. First, the good must be something practical, within our ken and power. Aristotle later emphasizes the practical nature of ethical thinking. Second, whereas Plato is sensitive to the similarities between different things, Aristotle is more sensitive to the differences between objects and the concreteness of particular things. This sensitivity is nowhere more evident than in his doctrine of the mean. Third, Aristotle thinks that things may be good by analogy. Analogies play an important role in Aristotle's own arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially analogies with medicine and dietetics.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, to understand whether *x* is good, we need to know what kind of thing *x* is. This last point is crucial for Aristotle's argument from the human function. There, though, he adapts a Socratic argument from the first book of Plato's *Republic* that does not depend on Plato's forms.

## 1.2 The Teleological Approach

Chapters 1–2 and 7 in *Nicomachean Ethics* I present the teleological approach. The validity of the arguments here have been challenged, but

<sup>17</sup> Penner (1987, 40–41) cites Plato's *Cratylus* in arguing that on Plato's view, *knowledge* of the tools of one's craft *does* ultimately depend on knowledge of the Form of the good. General responses to Aristotle on Plato's behalf are beyond the scope of this Element, but see Santas (1989) and Yount (1998).

<sup>18</sup> On these, see Jaeger (1957) and Lloyd (1968).

the main point is that Aristotle is presenting a picture of how things are organized in the polis, with goods/goals and activities arranged in a hierarchy with the best good, the final *telos*, happiness, at the top. For example, the activity of bridle-making produces bridles used by the cavalry whose horsemanship and activities fall under generalship, which along with economics and rhetoric fall under the art of politics, which has as its aim the best good. Aristotle goes on to assume that if our own desires are structured in the same way, then if there is something that we wish for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else, that will be the best good.

In chapter 7, Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of goods/goals: those that are choiceworthy only for the sake of other things, for example, wealth, flutes, and instruments in general; those that are choiceworthy for their own sake and for the sake of happiness, for example, honor, pleasure, understanding, and every virtue; and those that are always chosen for their own sake and never for the sake of anything else, whose only member is happiness (*EN I 7 1097a25-1097b6*). The second category is controversial. Aristotle says that we would choose each of those goods even if it had no further result, but we also choose them for the sake of happiness.<sup>19</sup>

Here Aristotle is trying to establish that happiness is the final goal. He presents another argument for this conclusion from self-sufficiency. Aristotle rejects the view that someone living alone, independent of other human beings, is self-sufficient. Instead, what is self-sufficient is what suffices for someone in the context of family, friends, and society (*EN I 7 1097b8-11*). To put it simply, in order to be self-sufficient, we need other people. This fact is clearest in infancy, but it remains so in adulthood. A truly rugged individualist would not be self-sufficient or lead a happy life. According to Aristotle, happiness is self-sufficient because it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing, and it makes a life choiceworthy because it is the most choiceworthy good.

The argument for this conclusion, which I shall call “the counting argument,” contains an interesting grammatical construction in italics next.<sup>20</sup>

We think it <happiness> is most choiceworthy, *not being counted together with <other goods>*, <for> counted together with <other goods>, it is clear that it is/would be more choiceworthy with the <addition of the> least of goods. (*EN I 7 1097b16-18*)

<sup>19</sup> See Gottlieb (2009, 134–150; 2021, 138–139).

<sup>20</sup> Compare the beginning of the second amendment of the US Constitution: “*A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed*” (my emphasis).



The italicized construction could mean “since it is not counted together with <other goods>” or “when it is not counted together with <other goods>.” For example, Irwin (2019) has “since,” and Reeve (2014) has “when.” Those accepting the first reading think that happiness must include all goods already. That is why one cannot add any other goods to it. Those accepting the second reading think that happiness is just the activity of contemplation. Other goods can be added to it, but when it is not counted together with those other goods, it is the most choiceworthy good.

There are problems with each reading. On the first, types of goods must be at issue, as it is implausible that happiness should include all token goods, but then it is puzzling what Aristotle means by the addition of the least of goods. On the second reading, there can be something more choiceworthy than happiness, namely, happiness plus other goods, and that seems to contradict the idea that happiness is the ultimate goal. My suggestion is that happiness cannot be counted together with other goods, because happiness is more like our notion of “quality of life” and not a quantitative notion at all. In *Categories* 14, Aristotle illustrates the distinction between a change in quantity and a change in quality with the example of a square that can increase in size with the addition of a gnomon, but will remain a square. (Here the gnomon is the L-shaped area that makes the difference between, say, a square with a 2-foot base and one with a 3-foot base.) If happiness is like a square, the addition of the least of goods (assuming, with Aristotle here, that it does not mar the symmetry) is like the addition of a gnomon. This interpretation has an important consequence. If Aristotle does not consider happiness a quantity, then it also makes no sense to speak of “maximizing happiness” on his view.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3 The Biological and Psychological Approach

Aristotle then presents his third approach to happiness, the approach from a biological and psychological perspective. The argument has come to be known as the “function argument.” Briefly, Aristotle argues that what counts as doing well for something, for example, an artisan, a musician, or a part of the body, depends on what it does, its function (*ergon*). So if human beings have a characteristic function, distinguishing them from other animals, and plants, doing well for a human being will depend on that. Aristotle argues that the characteristic function of humans has to do with the part of the human psyche that thinks and also desires and feels in response to thought, and so doing well for human beings, or happiness, must be carrying out the function of that part of the psyche well. Aristotle describes the parts of the human psyche in more detail

<sup>21</sup> This argument is derived from Gottlieb (2001a).

in the last chapter of the book, in preparation for his account of virtues of character.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.4 The Method of *Endoxa* Again

Applying the method of *endoxa*, Aristotle continues by arguing that his sketch of the good also harmonizes with what people think (*EN* I 8): The best kinds of good belong to the psyche.<sup>23</sup> They are not external goods, but external goods are required for happiness. Aristotle notes that his view is consistent with those who think happiness is virtue, or thoughtfulness (*phronēsis*), or some sort of wisdom, or pleasure. If so, the conclusion of the function argument must have been indeterminate enough to accommodate all these views. However, Aristotle says that pleasure comes from loving virtuous actions, not the type of gratification that he mentioned as one of the three ways of life he discussed earlier, and that the inscription at Delos (birthplace of Apollo) which says that what is most just is what is most beautiful, that being healthy is most beneficial, and that what is most pleasant is to get what one loves, is wrong in not recognizing that it is happiness that is best, most beautiful, and most pleasant. These are all stark reminders that the method of *endoxa* is not a method of deduction from what people think.

In fact, the method best aligns with Aristotle's earlier discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* I 4, where he describes Plato's puzzlement about whether arguments go from origins or to origins, just as on a racecourse one may go from the starting line to the end and also back again. Aristotle says that we should begin with what is familiar to us, not what is known without qualification. I take it that Aristotle thinks that we should start with what is familiar to us, move on to what is known without qualification, and then return to what is familiar to us now seen in a new light. We were clued in to the origins all the time, but through a glass darkly. Aristotle's teleological and function arguments clarify what is right and what is wrong in people's ideas. We have run the racecourse to the end and are back where we started, with the original views clarified and revised.

#### 1.4.1 Solon, Luck, and External Goods

Next Aristotle examines Solon's view about luck in *EN* I 10–11. According to Herodotus, Solon claimed that "a human being is entirely chance," depending

<sup>22</sup> On the function argument, see Gottlieb (2001a; 2009, 66–70; 2021, 18–20). The secondary literature is growing exponentially; see the bibliographies attached to these discussions, Rorty (1980) and Kraut (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Kraut (2018) takes this as the starting point for his revised account of Aristotle, where the goods of the soul are experiential in nature.