

*Rationality, Eudaimonia and Kakodaimonia in Aristotle**

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“For while it is clearly best for any being to attain the end, yet, if that cannot be, the nearer it is to the best the better for it.” – Aristotle, *De Caelo* 292b17-19

“Always for each person that is most worthy of choice which is the highest he can achieve.” – Aristotle, *Politics* 1333a29-30

“For eudaimonia does not consist in relief from evil, it seems, but in not possessing evil to begin with.”
– Plato, *Gorgias* 478c

No student of Aristotle’s ethics can fail to realize the central part played in it by the concept of eudaimonia. Specification of the content of eudaimonia is the fundamental issue for Aristotle’s ethical theory and his answer affects most other topics addressed in the ethical works. But I believe that the imposition of an excessively teleological framework on Aristotle’s views has resulted in commentators inflating the role of eudaimonia beyond anything ever intended by Aristotle himself. This extremely common view, based in large part on *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, is often expressed by saying that Aristotle is a “eudaimonist”: somebody who believes that

1. An action is rational only if the agent does it in order to promote his eudaimonia.¹

* I would like to thank Malcolm Schofield and Bob Sharples for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ For (1), see e.g. W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London, 1966), p. 230; J. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 81; and “Contemplation and Happiness in Aristotle: A Reconsideration”, *Synthese* 72 (1987), p. 192; T. Irwin, “Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy III* (Oxford, 1985), p. 115; “The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness”, *Ethics* 102 (1991), p. 383; R. Audi, *Practical Reasoning* (London, 1989), p. 179. Cf. G. Vlastos, *Socrates* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 203, 224-5.

Richard Kraut says that the eudaimonia aimed at need not be the agent’s own (*Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton, 1989), p. 145), but the present paper only

Phronesis 1993. Vol. XXXVIII/1 (Accepted October 1992)

This claim is linked with several others about value, desire, deliberation, and the explanation of action which are also commonly attributed to Aristotle. For example:

2. A desire is rational only if it is for eudaimonia or for what promotes eudaimonia.
3. A practical reason for action is rational only if it is based on the belief that the action promotes eudaimonia.
4. Practical deliberation is rational only if its immediate or ultimate aim is eudaimonia.
5. Eudaimonia is intrinsically valuable and anything else is valuable only if it promotes eudaimonia.
6. An action is morally good only if it promotes eudaimonia.
7. Everybody desires eudaimonia and desires anything else only if they believe it promotes eudaimonia.
8. Every action an agent performs is done in order to achieve eudaimonia.
9. The explanation of an action must show how the action is believed by the agent to promote eudaimonia.²

considers the egoistic version of eudaimonism. I explain below (n. 58) why I think Kraut's alleged examples of a rational agent aiming at the eudaimonia of others while not aiming at his own highest good rest on a misunderstanding. On my interpretation Aristotle is a kind of egoist though not of the eudaimonist variety: one should always do what maximizes one's own good. While this may be too weak to be properly called 'egoism,' I will not try here to pin down the precise sense in which Aristotle is an egoist.

² In (1)-(6) 'eudaimonia' refers to the specific content which Aristotle gives to that concept while in (7)-(9) it refers to whatever content an agent may give to it.

Some examples of attributions of the listed theses to Aristotle:

- 2: J. Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness in Aristotle", pp. 195-96; G.E.M. Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle", in R. Bambrough (ed.), *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1965), p. 155. Cf. G. Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 203.
- 3: T. Irwin, "The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness", p. 384.
- 4: R. Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue", in A. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (London, 1980), p. 207.
- 6: J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 24.
- 7: J. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, p. 92.
- 8: W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 230.
- 9: R. Audi, *Practical Reasoning*, p. 36.

These positions naturally fit the interpretation of Aristotle's notions of *choice* (προαίρεσις) and *action* (πράξις) as events that necessarily aim at eudaimonia.

I will argue, in part on the basis of evidence outside of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that Aristotle accepts none of these claims and has been saddled with a much less plausible position than the one which he actually believes. The present paper will begin by attacking (1) and (5), but if I succeed in showing that Aristotle did not hold these views that should suffice to discredit the others as well.

- (1) and (5) are connected by the assumption that
(9) An action is rational only if it aims at a good.³

Given (5) – what I will call “axiological eudaimonism”⁴ –, it is plausible to say that any rational action aims at a good only if, directly or indirectly, it aims at eudaimonia. Hence (1).⁵ It also follows that if Aristotle rejects (5), attributing (1) to him will be much less attractive. For if it is not the case that an item is intrinsically good only if it promotes eudaimonia, then even (9) allows that a *rational* action may aim at a good⁶ which does not promote eudaimonia.

So before considering (1) I will address (5) and argue that Aristotle is not an “axiological eudaimonist”. Section II's argument against (1) depends in part on the consideration of cases where eudaimonia is impossible for an agent. But I further argue, in Section III, that nothing in the texts excludes Aristotle's allowance of cases where a happy man and an agent capable of eudaimonia act rationally without acting for the sake of eudaimonia. This will be based on taking seriously a neglected passage on eudaimonia from Aristotle's *Politics*. Finally, section IV applies this *Politics* passage to

³ Cf. J. Cooper, “Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune”, *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985), p. 178: “Anything one aims at producing or getting through one's action will, if the decision to aim at it is a correct one, be something good in one way or another for oneself.”

⁴ A version of what Robert Audi calls “axiological foundationalism.” See R. Audi, “Axiological Foundationalism”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 12 (1982), pp. 163-83; *Practical Reasoning*, p. 36.

⁵ While (5) and (9) do not *entail* (1) they seem to provide the basis for the eudaimonist interpretation. Cf. R. Audi, *Practical Reasoning*, p. 36: “Aristotle's eudaemonistic version [of axiological foundationalism] is the thesis that whatever is good is either good in itself, and hence identical with either happiness or some constitutive means to it, or instrumentally good by virtue of making a suitable contribution to happiness... On the assumption that it is reasonable to act in pursuit of the good, Aristotle thus provides a eudaemonistic framework... for judging the reasonableness of actions.”

⁶ Here, and in most later occurrences, ‘good’ means ‘intrinsic good.’

courage, and explains how, on the interpretation offered here, an alleged difficulty in Aristotle's account of courageous action disappears. For similar reasons a common objection to intellectualist interpretations of Aristotle's view of eudaimonia can be answered.⁷

I

The weakest formulation of axiological eudaimonism says:

- (5) Eudaimonia is intrinsically valuable and anything else is valuable only if it promotes eudaimonia.⁸

⁷ Strictly I would only claim my account applies to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but I believe that everything I say is consistent with the *Eudemian Ethics*.

A convincing attack on the eudaimonist interpretation of Aristotle can now be found in T. Roche, "In Defense of an Alternative View of the Foundation of Aristotle's Moral Theory", *Phronesis* 37 (1992), pp. 46-84. He examines passages in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I which have been the basis for the eudaimonist interpretation and argues that they fail to support it. But while he clearly rejects (8), I am not sure about his attitude to (1). He says that he is only attacking the idea that Aristotle's identification of the highest good with eudaimonia rests on eudaimonist views (p. 49), and he appears to accept that Aristotle believes (1)(p. 53, n. 13): "everyone (given the appropriate circumstances) should act for the sake of true or genuine happiness." But I do not know what the parenthetical qualification means.

⁸ See, for example, D.J. Allan, "The Practical Syllogism", *Autour d'Aristote* (Louvain, 1955), p. 337; J. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, pp. 16, 98, 105-6; and "Aristotle and the Goods of Fortune", pp. 188-92; R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, pp. 202, 300-311; S. Broadie, *Ethics With Aristotle* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 11, 13, 23, 27, 28, 32.

"Comprehensivist" commentators give Aristotle the stronger claim: eudaimonia is intrinsically valuable and anything else is valuable only if it is a constituent of eudaimonia. This is based largely on the self-sufficiency requirement for eudaimonia (*EN* 1097b6-21). I have argued elsewhere ("Eudaimonia and Self-Sufficiency in the *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Phronesis* 33 (1988), pp. 31-53) that the self-sufficiency requirement does not support the comprehensive interpretation, and in so far as (5) rests on that support I believe that the arguments in that paper also undermine (5).

In response, Stephen A. White argues that self-sufficiency requires not every good but every good essential for a choiceworthy life to constitute eudaimonia ("Is Aristotelian Happiness a Good Life or the Best Life?", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* VIII (1990), p. 134, n. 42). But apart from his unacceptable reliance on the *Magna Moralia* to interpret the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he has not removed all the problems for the comprehensive interpretation. Even if eudaimonia does not include all goods it is clear that virtue (a state) and friends (external goods) are essential to a choiceworthy life. Since (i) the self-sufficiency requirement could prove that eudaimonia comprises every good essential to the choiceworthy life only if it showed that it comprises *these* intrinsic goods and (ii) Aristotle emphatically denies that states and external goods constitute eudaimonia (*EN* 1095b29-1096a2, 1098b31-1099a7, 1100a13-14, 1101b10-12, 1169b28-31,

One problem with (5) is its utter implausibility. We know that for Aristotle there are goods which must be possessed if virtuous activity is to count as eudaimonia. These include: (i) goods instrumental for the exercise of virtue whose absence will impede virtuous activity; and (ii) non-instrumental goods which “must necessarily pre-exist as conditions of eudaimonia” but whose absence need not impede virtuous activity.⁹ Into the first class will go such items as money, power and opportunity; into the second such things as good birth, good children, and the absence of pain and extreme ugliness. Some things, such as friends, may fall into both.

Suppose you accept Aristotle’s views on eudaimonia and realize that you lack some of the goods necessary for eudaimonia. Suppose, for example, that, born of an undistinguished family, you were once a soldier, were crippled in a battle and suffer frequent bouts of pain as a result. Suppose also that your two sons have turned out badly. (Suffice it to say that they are both in jail). These evils cannot be rectified, their presence puts eudaimonia out of reach and you know it.

Does the fact that eudaimonia is impossible for you mean that *nothing can* have any value for you; that now there can be *no* goods worth pursuing since they cannot result in your possessing eudaimonia? Surely the fact that the best thing in life is beyond reach does not mean, and *obviously* does not mean, that such things as intellectual research, listening to music, enjoying the company of good friends and relatives or watching your grandchildren grow up are completely worthless.

Few defend this position but Broadie says the following:

... it may seem intolerably artificial to hold that if we make one good central in our lives, then *every* other is viewed in relation to it. However, the position does not imply that we can never, for instance, admire, delight in, something else just for what it is.

... a person may pursue many things for themselves, and yet there may be just one thing in his life without which pursuing the others would lose all interest.¹⁰

1173a14-15, 1176a33-b2; *EN* 1098b12-20, 1099a29-b8, 27-28, 1153b10-25), the self-sufficiency requirement cannot show that eudaimonia comprises every good essential to a choiceworthy life.

⁹ *EN* 1099b27-28; cf. 1099a31-b8, 1100b26-28, 29-30 (n.b. ‘καί’), 1101a14-16, 1153b1-3, 17-25, 1178a25-b7, 33-1179a17; *Pol.* 1295b3-21.

The distinction is clearly drawn by Aristotle and John Cooper’s attempt to make the class (ii) goods relevant to eudaimonia only in so far as they affect virtuous activity is unpersuasive (in J. Cooper, “Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune”, pp. 180-88). For an effective reply to Cooper see T. Irwin, “Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon”, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰ *Ethics With Aristotle*, p. 32.

Broadie tries to reconcile (5) with Aristotle's recognition of intrinsic value in things other than eudaimonia. But while her point in the second paragraph is no doubt often true, it is certainly not *always* true that the loss of the best thing in a person's life results in a loss of interest in everything else the person used to value. In any case, Broadie is making a psychological claim about people's reaction to misfortune when the real issue for the interpretation of Aristotle concerns objective value: is an item of no value to me if it does not promote my eudaimonia? Aristotle does not believe that the fact that I do not value my health means that it is not a good thing for me to be healthy.

On the eudaimonist view, the impossibility of eudaimonia means that nothing in my life can have any value. In that case it cannot be worth living. So on the eudaimonist view Aristotle should say that the impossibility of eudaimonia makes life not worth living. But, on the one hand, Aristotle says that the good man will endure with nobility the misfortunes that destroy eudaimonia,¹¹ and he does not suggest that this does not hold in those cases where the misfortune is severe enough to render future eudaimonia impossible. Why should I strive to do what is fine if nothing has any value? And on the other hand, when Aristotle talks about misfortunes that destroy the value of life they are much more drastic than the impossibility of eudaimonia.

At the beginning of the *Eudemian Ethics*¹² Aristotle says that life would not be worth living in the following circumstances: if one suffered excessive pain, or had to lead a childlike life,¹³ or lacked all intrinsic goods, or if one could enjoy the pleasures of eating and sex but none of the pleasures of the senses or knowledge. The *Protrepticus* (B74 and 99) says that life is valueless if our capacity for sense perception and thought are destroyed.

These passages show that Aristotle does indeed believe that the value of any good for a person depends on possession of the faculties of sense and intellect. But of course these faculties can be preserved when the possibility of eudaimonia is gone.

Conclusive textual evidence that Aristotle rejects (5) is provided by his account of *intrinsic good*. Time and time again Aristotle unambiguously explains that by an intrinsic good he means something worth choosing for its own sake *entirely independently of its consequences*.¹⁴ This means that the

¹¹ *Pol.* 1332a19-21; *EN* 1100b35-1101a8.

¹² I.5 1215b15-1216a10.

¹³ Cf. *EN* 1174a1-3.

¹⁴ *Prot.* B42, 70, 72; *Top.* 106a1-8, 116a29-39, 117a2-4, 118b20-26, 149b31-39; *EN* 1096a7-9, b13-19, 1097a30-b6, 1144a1-6, 1145a2-4, 1172b20-23, 1174a4-6, 1176b6-7;

value of the item, in so far as it is intrinsically good, does not derive from a relation to something else or from being a means to a further end.¹⁵

Nor does Aristotle believe that the intrinsic value of a good is independent of its promotion of any good other than the highest good but dependent on its promoting eudaimonia. In *Nicomachean Ethics* I (the eudaimonists' bible) at 1097b2-4, after mentioning honor and pleasure as intrinsic goods (1096b16-19), Aristotle says: "We choose honor and pleasure and intelligence and every virtue also for their own sakes (for *we would choose each of them even if nothing resulted from them*), but we *also* choose them for the sake of eudaimonia." The reference to eudaimonia together with the parenthetical remark shows that the intrinsic goods mentioned would be worth choosing even if eudaimonia did not result from them.¹⁶ Since in that circumstance they could be worth choosing only if they were still *goods*, their intrinsic value cannot depend on their promoting eudaimonia.

Aristotle distinguishes what is good or bad simply from what is good or bad for a particular person.¹⁷ As in the case of other living things, what is good or bad simply for a human being is objectively determined by the

EE 1248b16-25; *Rhet.* 1362a21-22, b26-27, 1363b13-14, 1364b23-24.

P. Stemmer has argued that Aristotle recognizes no intrinsic goods other than eudaimonia ("Aristoteles' Glücksbegriff in der *Nikomachischen Ethik*", *Phronesis* 37 (1992), pp. 85-110). This is based on an examination of *EN* 1097b2-5 and a contentious reading of *EN* 1097b16-20. But whatever the last passage implies, the passages cited above show that it cannot entail that there are no intrinsic goods besides eudaimonia. They cannot be dealt with in the way Stemmer deals with I.7, 1097b2-5, by saying that pleasure, honor and intelligence are considered intrinsic goods only by the people referred to in *EN* I.5 who identify them with eudaimonia. For example, from *EN* I.6, 1096b16-19 and other passages it is clear that Aristotle considers sight an intrinsic good even though he denies it is eudaimonia (*EN* 1098a1-3). And among other problems, Stemmer does not explain why 1097b2-5 says that we would choose pleasure, etc. even if we did not do so for the sake of eudaimonia. In that case they would not – on his interpretation – be considered intrinsic goods, so why would we still choose them for their own sake? (Also see n. 28).

¹⁵ *De An.* 406b8-10.

¹⁶ I disagree with the view that Aristotle occasionally *explains* the notion of *being valuable* in terms of *being desired*, and likewise I would disagree with an explanation of *worthy of choice* in terms of *being chosen*. I take 1097b2-4 to assume that the fact that we would choose the items in question when nothing resulted from them suffices to show that they are worthy of choice simply because of what they themselves are (cf. *EN* 1170a25-27, 1172b36-1173a1).

¹⁷ *Top.* 116b8-10; *Soph. El.* 180b13-15; *De An.* 431b10-12; *Meta.* 1029b5-7; *EN* 1113a25-33, 1129b1-6, 1137a26-30, 1138a35-b5, 1152b26-32, 1155b21-22, 1157b26-28, 1170a14-16, 21-22, 1180b7-23; *EE* 1228b17-35, 1235b30-1236a6, 1236b26-1237a30, 1248b26-34. Cf. *Pol.* 1296b7-12.

nature of human beings, and will also be good or bad for most people.¹⁸ What is good or bad simply is *intrinsically* good or bad for human beings – worth having or avoiding because of what it itself is. Goods (and evils) are hierarchically ordered and the practically wise man knows general truths regarding goods and evils for human beings and their relative values.¹⁹ For example, he knows that surgery is bad for a human being. But *for an individual* who is ill surgery may be good because, although intrinsically bad, it is necessary to achieve some intrinsic good whose value outweighs the evil of the surgery.

What is good and evil for a person may still be a general fact concerning a general policy for a person which rests on long-term conditions of the individual. If Smith suffers from diabetes, then a certain medicine is good *for Smith* even though it is bad for men in general. Nevertheless, it may not be good for Smith to take the medicine *here and now* because he has just taken his dose or because he has eaten a certain kind of food, etc.²⁰ So while a rational agent (or at least the practically wise man) should come to a particular situation with knowledge of what is intrinsically good and evil and what is good and evil for the people involved, he should also take account of the specific circumstances of an individual situation to decide what is good or evil then and there.

Now when Aristotle says, in 1097b2-4, that certain items would be worth choosing even if they did not promote eudaimonia, it is not clear at what level of generality the possibility is being envisaged. That is, it is not clear whether the supposition is that the intrinsic goods mentioned always fail to promote eudaimonia, fail to promote eudaimonia for an individual, or fail to promote eudaimonia in a particular situation. But it should be clear that, whichever possibility holds, Aristotle cannot believe that the intrinsic value of a good depends on its promoting eudaimonia.

I do not dispute that Aristotle accepts (5) in that he believes any intrinsic good *generally* promotes eudaimonia, and in so far as it does so has extrinsic value with regard to that further good. But when commentators appeal to the hierarchy of value in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I and the fact that the goods below eudaimonia are for the sake of that highest good, they disregard the point that Aristotle is speaking at the most general level. The same relation of goods to eudaimonia need not exist in particular cases.²¹

¹⁸ *EN* 1178a5-6; cf. 1148b3; *EE* 1228b17-26; *Pol.* 1325b8-10.

¹⁹ Aristotle's ethical writings are full of assertions of the relative value of different goods and evils. See e.g. *EN* VII.6; 1127b9-13, 1138a28-35.

²⁰ See *Soph. El.* 180b13-14; *EN* 1152b29-31.

²¹ Cf. Roche, "In Defense of an Alternative View", p. 67.

Although – in general – any intrinsic good promotes eudaimonia and has extrinsic value for that reason, the intrinsic value of a good is independent of its promotion of eudaimonia. Thus, in the *Rhetoric* (I.6), when Aristotle explains why certain items are valuable he repeatedly mentions two considerations, one concerning intrinsic value independent of consequences, the other concerning extrinsic value:

The virtues are good because “(1) it is by possessing these that we are in a good condition, and (2) they tend to produce good works and good actions.”²²

Health and beauty are good because they are “(1) excellences of the body and (2) productive of many things.”²³

A friend is a good because “(1) he is choiceworthy in himself and (2) productive of many things.”²⁴

Intrinsic goods have value in part because of what they themselves are. Therefore even when, in particular circumstances, they fail to promote any further good – including eudaimonia – they can retain that inherent value despite the fact that their overall (intrinsic + extrinsic) value is less than it could be.

The non-instrumental goods (such as children and good birth) which are necessary pre-conditions of eudaimonia are, I believe, needed precisely because Aristotle thinks they have such great *intrinsic* value that eudaimonia cannot exist without them.

Further evidence that Aristotle rejects (5) is provided by his account of chance. Aristotle believes that many natural phenomena must be understood through teleological explanations which are based on the presupposition that certain things are naturally and objectively good for different kinds of living thing. The teleological explanation of an item x must begin by positing that something y is good and then assert that x exists for the sake of y.

When a chance event x occurs it is the *sort* of thing which could but in the particular case does *not* occur for the sake of the resulting good y. Nevertheless, when x occurs by chance and is an instance of *good* luck, the effect y is *good*.²⁵ Only a being capable of choice can experience good luck, and by this Aristotle means to rule out non-humans and children.²⁶ There is no

²² *Rhet.* 1362b3-4. Cf. *EN* 1106a15-24, 1144a1-3, 1153b1-3.

²³ *Rhet.* 1362b15.

²⁴ *Rhet.* 1362b19-20; cf. 1362b25-27.

²⁵ If the effect is not good it is bad and then x is a case of bad luck. *Phys.* 197a25-26; *EE* 1247b2-4.

²⁶ *Phys.* 197b1-9.

reason to think he means to rule out adults incapable of eudaimonia. So when such an adult experiences good luck something *good* happens to that person even though it does not promote eudaimonia. Then the value of that good is independent of its promotion of eudaimonia.

More evidence against the eudaimonist interpretation can be found in *Politics* 1332a19-25: After saying that the good man will deal finely with misfortune but cannot achieve eudaimonia in such circumstances, Aristotle says that the good man is he for whom the things that are good simply (τὰ ἀπλῶς ἀγαθὰ) are good. Evidently, then, these goods remain valuable for the good man even when they do not promote eudaimonia. Indeed, how could he remain a *good* man when his state of character fails to promote eudaimonia, if to be virtuous is to be in a good state only if the virtue promotes eudaimonia?

I conclude that Aristotle does not believe (5) and that he is not an axiological eudaimonist. As a general rule, any *type* of intrinsic good promotes eudaimonia, but its particular instances may fail to do so without ceasing to be of value.

II

While it is indisputable that Aristotle rejects the Humean view that the rationality of action is independent of the agent's goals, does Aristotle believe that an action is rational only if its ultimate goal is the greatest good available to human beings – eudaimonia? 'Eudaimonia' refers here not merely to whatever concept of eudaimonia an agent happens to have but to the specific content Aristotle gives to it – the exercise of virtue of character or intellect *in the presence of all the necessary conditions for eudaimonia*. On my view, Aristotle thinks, rather, that an action is rational only if it aims at the greatest overall good available in the circumstances *or* aims at the smallest overall evil threatening in the circumstances.²⁷

The eudaimonist claims

1. An action is rational only if the agent does it in order to promote his eudaimonia.

The eudaimonist need not, of course, claim that the rational agent was

²⁷ Assuming no difference in probability among the various options and where the relevant circumstances include features of the agent. The first disjunct applies when all options are overall good, or some are overall good and others overall evil; the second when all the options are overall evil. The "overall" good or evil is what is (or would be) good or evil *here and now*, and need not correspond to an intrinsic good or evil. See *EN* 1131b20-23; *EE* 1237b37-38; *Pol.* 1333a29-30; *Rhet.* 1369b23-26.

consciously thinking of the goal of eudaimonia before or during the act. It is enough when the agent, if asked, could produce a reason or chain of reasons to justify or explain his action which would ultimately end in a desire for eudaimonia.

I will not distinguish rationality and ideal rationality. Eudaimonists understand the promotion of eudaimonia as the maximal promotion of it.

The first problem with (1) is that it is as implausible as axiological eudaimonism. Suppose that, for whatever reason, eudaimonia is impossible for me and I know it. Now if I know that a certain good is unattainable then it is *irrational* to try to achieve it. Even more clearly, if a good is unattainable then it is irrational to make it the *central* goal of my life for the sake of which I do everything else. So in the present case it is irrational for me to act so as to promote eudaimonia. But if being done with the intention of promoting my eudaimonia is a necessary condition for the rationality of my actions, then in the present circumstances I cannot act rationally at all. And that is incredible.

Even if it could be shown that, for some reason, the impossibility of eudaimonia is consistent with the rationality of acting for the sake of eudaimonia, there would still be no reason to think that in such circumstances an agent acts rationally *only if* he acts for the sake of that goal. As we saw, the fact that the greatest human good is beyond my reach does not mean that all human goods are unattainable, and consequently I may rationally act so as to secure – as my ultimate goal – the best good available.²⁸

²⁸ Kraut argues, on the basis of *EN* 1102a2-3 (where Aristotle says we always do everything for the sake of eudaimonia) that Aristotle believes that an agent acts for the sake of eudaimonia even when he knows that he is incapable of it (*Aristotle on the Human Good*, pp. 87-89). If so, Aristotle presumably believes that one can act rationally for the sake of eudaimonia even when one knows it is unattainable. To support his claim Kraut points out that we can say that an incurably sick person does various things for the sake of his health – an impossible goal.

Kraut ignores the point others have made that if *EN* 1102a2-3 is meant to apply to all human actions, then we know that Aristotle does not really believe it. The akratic agent does what he believes does not promote his eudaimonia (cf. *EN* 1136a32-33, 1166b8-9; *EE* 1223b8-9, 1229b37-38). The alternative is to construe 1102a2-3 as applying only to *praxeis* in the sense in which they are opposed to productions. If so, then there is no passage where Aristotle says that all contemplation and non-chosen voluntary action are done for the sake of eudaimonia.

Kraut has nothing to say about the passages where Aristotle says quite plainly that some people do *not* aim at eudaimonia (*EN* 1166b10-11; *Pol.* 1257b40-1258a3, 1278b20-30, 1280a31-34; *Rhet.* 1389b26-27; *Prot.* B103; cf. *EE* 1215a25-32, 1229b37-1230a4, *Pol.* 1315a25-31; *Prot.* B53). Nor does he address the fact that the chapter on deliberation in

Likewise it does not mean that it may not be rational to avoid evils. Just as the fact that eudaimonia is impossible does not mean that nothing of value can remain, so it does not mean that nothing *bad* can happen to me because, in those circumstances, no evil can obstruct eudaimonia. And it is surely just as rational to flee evils as to pursue goods when eudaimonia is not possible. For example, the fact that I cannot achieve eudaimonia does not mean I cannot rationally act so as to avoid severe pain. If I have had an unhappy life and am dying of a painful disease am I failing to act rationally when I take pain killers?

Again, the eudaimonist interpretation attributed to Aristotle is committed to a “maximax” policy of always going for the greatest good – eudaimonia – regardless of risks and regardless of the probability of achieving that goal. But it is not difficult to imagine cases where the two options open

EN III.3 says that if a certain goal is impossible for us to achieve we give it up, and aim for what appears to be possible (1112b24-27); and presumably Aristotle considers such a procedure the rational one to follow. If Aristotle thought that it is rational to pursue *as an end* of action a goal which we regard as unobtainable but view as a *guide* to action, then he should not say that we ought to abandon an unobtainable goal as an end of action. Aristotle criticizes the Platonists for speaking of a good unattainable by men (1096b32-35). Are we to think that he too recommends most people to aim for an unattainable goal?

Kraut’s example of the incurably ill who act for the sake of their health simply plays on an ambiguity. ‘Health’ may mean *either* (1) *soundness* of body or (2) general condition of the body, good, bad or indifferent (as in “How’s your health?”). The incurably ill patient who knows his situation acts, if he is rational, for the sake of his health in sense (2).

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle is proceeding on the assumption that his audience is composed of the small class of people of leisure who do not have to provide for their daily needs (*Pol.* 1269a34-36) and can live “according to their own choice” (*EE* 1214b7): only for such people is eudaimonia a possibility.

The above reasons for thinking Aristotle rejects eudaimonist thesis (8), i.e. that everyone aims for eudaimonia in every action, would be part of my reply to Stemmer’s criticism of my interpretation of *EN* 1097b16-20 according to which there are intrinsic goods distinct from and not a part of eudaimonia (“Aristoteles’ Glücksbegriff”, p. 92). His objection is that Aristotle believes (1) *we pursue eudaimonia in all our actions*. But if (2) *eudaimonia is entirely distinct from other intrinsic goods A and B (e.g.) so that {eudaimonia + A + B} is more valuable than eudaimonia alone*, then in some cases we’ll pursue eudaimonia while (3) *in other cases we’ll pursue B (e.g.) without pursuing eudaimonia*, since only thus will we achieve the most valuable good – {eudaimonia + A + B}.

Apart from my rejection of (1), (3) does not follow from (1) & (2). Even if (1) and (2) are both true there is no reason why we cannot always pursue each intrinsic good for its own sake, for the sake of eudaimonia, and for the sake of {eudaimonia + A + B}.

to an agent are (1) to go for the only chance one will ever have for eudaimonia where the probability of success is extremely small and the probability of losing most of the goods one has is extremely high; and (2) to refrain from taking an extreme risk and securely retain the goods one has. In at least many such situations the rational option is (2). But the eudaimonists must disagree since they hold the agent “is rationally committed to doing always whatever (he thinks) best promotes his ultimate end”, viz. eudaimonia.²⁹ And in the above sort of case only (1) promotes eudaimonia. But any plausible view of rational action must consider the risks presented by a course of action and the probability of different outcomes for different options, factors disregarded by the eudaimonists.

Here is a final case. Suppose it is chilly outside and I put on my sweater before leaving the house to take out the garbage. I put on the sweater to keep warm but there is no further chain linking keeping warm to eudaimonia. Keeping warm was my *ultimate* goal in putting on the sweater. It was not so cold outside and I was not going to stay out so long that there was any risk that not putting on the sweater would have resulted in illness or anything else that would have obstructed eudaimonia. So while I put on the sweater to keep warm I did not keep warm for the sake of eudaimonia. There is no reason why I wanted to keep warm beyond the desire itself.

The eudaimonist must say that in that case I did not act rationally in putting on the sweater. And that is absurd. Not every rational action needs to be linked by a chain of reasons to the ultimate goal in one’s life.

So as a philosophical thesis the eudaimonist view is false. Does Aristotle hold this unacceptable position?

In the previous section I noted that Aristotle distinguishes what is intrinsically good, what is good for an individual, and what is good for an individual in a particular situation. (The same distinctions apply to evils).

Matching these different levels of the good are different levels of what is *worthy of choice* (αἰρετόν),³⁰ where what is good at a certain level of generality determines what is worthy of choice at the corresponding level.³¹ Similarly in the case of evils and what is worth avoiding. I assume that, for Aristotle, we determine what is rational to do now by determining what is worthy of choice here and now.

Given the conclusion of section I – that Aristotle does not believe that an

²⁹ Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, p. 81.

³⁰ Cf. *EN* 1110a12-13, 19, b3-4.

³¹ *EN* 1131b22-23, 1157b26-27, 1172b10-11, 1173a10, 1175b24-25; *EE* 1236b36-1237a2, b37-38; *Pol.* 1325a40. Note the close association between the two in *Top.* 116a1ff.

intrinsic good's value depends on its promotion of eudaimonia – this independence of value will often exist here and now. Hence, here and now there may be a number of intrinsic goods I can aim at even if they do not promote eudaimonia. So when intrinsic goods are available and no evils threaten Aristotle can accept that

(10) An action is rational only if it aims at an intrinsic good³²

and still maintain that here and now I can act rationally by doing what does not promote eudaimonia.

For Aristotle, eudaimonia consists in the exercise of virtue of character or intellect in favorable circumstances. The achievement of eudaimonia requires that one be able to acquire virtue of character.³³ Such virtue can be acquired only by one possessing both the natural capacity and the opportunity to be trained in the appropriate way. But Aristotle believes that many kinds of people – embracing *the great majority of mankind* – are unable to achieve eudaimonia because they lack one or the other or both of these pre-requisites – natural slaves, women, farmers, laborers and tradesmen.³⁴ Does Aristotle believe that, nevertheless, people incapable of virtuous action should aim for it? No. Such virtuous activity is rationally pursued only by “those who are *able* to attain” it.³⁵ If Aristotle had accepted eudaimonism he would have believed that the majority of the human race is incapable of acting rationally since they could not rationally aim at an impossible goal. But it is hard to believe that a farmer or shoemaker who was living the best life that (by Aristotle's lights) he could would be deemed by Aristotle to be incapable of ever acting rationally.

Again, Aristotle believes that there are circumstances where the rational thing to do is to commit suicide.³⁶ Since Aristotle understands eudaimonia to be *living* in a certain way, such rational action is not done to promote eudaimonia.

Again, we have already noted that Aristotle believes that even a virtuous person can suffer misfortune which destroys the possibility of eudaimonia

³² But since intrinsic goods may be unavailable and evils may threaten Aristotle could not accept (10) in general. ‘Intrinsic’ would have to be deleted and ‘good’ understood to cover the lesser evil and the removal of evil. Cf. *EN* 1096b8-13, 1129b8-9, 1131b20-21, 1154a12-13; *EE* 1237b37-38; *Rhet.* 1362a34-b1, 1369b23-26; *Pol.* 1325a40.

³³ As to why the philosopher needs such virtue, see the end of the paper and n. 76.

³⁴ *Pol.* 1278a20-21, 40-b5, 1280a31-34, 1328a37-40, b39-1329a2, 17-26; cf. 1254b20-23, 1260a12, 1331b39-1332a2; *EN* 1177a8-9; *EE* 1214b6-11.

³⁵ *Pol.* 1333a28-29.

³⁶ *EN* 1155a5, 1166b11-13; *EE* 1215b18f.; cf. *EN* 1110a26-27.

by removing one or more of the necessary conditions for eudaimonia.³⁷ But Aristotle says that in such circumstances the virtuous agent still acts as “*finely*”³⁸ as he can. Since the fine is the chief end for the sake of which the virtuous agent acts, Aristotle evidently means that the virtuous agent in such misfortune still acts virtuously to the extent that he can. As many of the conditions necessary for eudaimonia are not necessary for virtuous activity, the virtuous agent will often retain the ability to act virtuously after his misfortune. And even when the opportunities for virtuous action are reduced they need not be reduced to zero.

III

It might now be said that even if the preceding arguments are correct, Aristotle still believes that the happy man and the man for whom eudaimonia is possible act rationally only if they act for the sake of eudaimonia. I will now argue that in the sense in which eudaimonist interpreters typically understand the notion of *acting virtuously for the sake of eudaimonia*, such people may rationally act virtuously without doing so for the sake of eudaimonia. And if that notion is construed differently, there is no evidence that Aristotle believes that a person capable of eudaimonia acts rationally only if he acts for the sake of eudaimonia; although there is also no evidence I know of *against* that view.

According to at least many eudaimonist interpreters of Aristotle, when an agent *acts virtuously* for the sake of *eudaimonia*, the virtuous action is either identical with or a part of the eudaimonia for the sake of which the

³⁷ *EN* 1095b33-1096a2, 1099a31-b8, 1100a4-9, b3-1101a13, 1153b19-21; *EE* 1246a24-25; *Pol.* 1332a19-21. Aristotle is quite dismissive of the view that one suffering great misfortune can be happy. It is “nonsense” (*EN* 1153b21), the sort of claim nobody would make “unless he were maintaining a thesis at all costs” (1096a2).

Broadie, commenting on *EN* 1100b22-33, claims that “even under severely diminished circumstances the good person’s life may count as happy, if he, even by living it as best he can (1101a1-5), endorses it as a good and worthwhile life” (*Ethics With Aristotle*, p. 52). But the reference to Priamic misfortune which destroys eudaimonia at 1101a8 with 1100a5-9 – “nobody” would consider someone suffering Priam’s misfortunes happy – proves that 1101a1-5 means the opposite of what Broadie claims: the person suffering such misfortune cannot be happy although he can remain good, continue to act virtuously and thus avoid viciousness and vicious actions, i.e. avoid the worst. *Pol.* 1332a19-21 also contradicts Broadie. Of course, the degree of misfortune needed to destroy eudaimonia is imprecise.

³⁸ *EN* 1100b35-1101a3; *Pol.* 1332a19-20.

agent acts.³⁹ But as we'll see, the kinds of case in which virtuous activity constitutes eudaimonia are narrower than commentators have realized. Even the virtuous action of a happy man may not be eudaimonia and so may rationally be done without being done for the sake of eudaimonia in that sense. (I will not consider the question of whether there are other cases where those who can be happy act rationally without acting for the sake of eudaimonia).

We saw that several factors are necessary for eudaimonia. Some make virtuous activity possible, others are needed if virtuous activity is to count as eudaimonia. Both types of condition are usually at least somewhat long-term features of the agent – good birth, having children, virtue, etc. When all are present then virtuous activity on a particular occasion may be eudaimonia. Eudaimonia, as Aristotle emphasizes, is an *occurrence* or *activity*, something that happens at particular times, not a state or condition. If enough such virtuous activity occurs in the life of a man who has the other required goods, then both the man and his life may be happy. But Aristotle also attaches hitherto unmentioned conditions to the nature of virtuous activity and its immediate surroundings which must be met if the activity is to count as eudaimonia.

First, the virtuous activity must be pleasant or at the very least not painful.⁴⁰ This means not merely that one must take pleasure in the fact that one is acting virtuously but that the specific action by doing which one acts virtuously is pleasant. Pain is intrinsically bad and nobody who is suffering is living well.⁴¹

Secondly, eudaimonia requires *successful* virtuous activity.⁴² Suppose someone of the stature and abilities of Pericles convinces his city to pursue a policy that makes eminent sense given his unavoidably incomplete knowledge but which, through bad luck, leads to disaster for the city. Then that leader's political activity could not be considered an example of *living well*. We will not "eudaimonizein" that person any more than we will congratulate Priam.

Thirdly, any activity counts as eudaimonia only if it is something that is intrinsically valuable, something worth doing for its own sake. This means not only that an individual activity must be an example of an intrinsic good

³⁹ See, for example, J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia", in A. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle* (London, 1980), pp. 18-20.

⁴⁰ *EN* 1099a7-31, VII.13, 1177a22-23; *EE* 1214a7-8; *Pol.* 1338a1-6.

⁴¹ *EN* 1153b1-3.

⁴² *EN* 1099a3-7, 1101a9-13; *EE* 1219b8-10.

but also that it must *not* be an example of an intrinsic evil. This requirement for eudaimonia is clear from *Politics* VII.13, 1332a7-21:

We say (and have determined in the *Ethics*...), that eudaimonia is the perfect actuality and use of virtue, and this not conditionally (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) but simply. I mean by 'the conditional' the necessary, by 'simply' finely.⁴³ For example, just actions. Just punishments and chastisements are exercises of virtue, but necessary, and are fine only through necessity (for it is preferable (αἰρετώτερον) that neither a man nor a city need anything of the kind). But those aiming at honor and successful thriving simply are the finest actions. The other is the choice⁴⁴ of an evil, but such actions are the opposite. They are the construction and creation of good. The good man would behave finely in poverty and disease and in other terrible misfortunes, but blessedness exists in the contrary circumstances.

As a judge I may exercise my virtue of justice by meeting out punishment to a criminal. But *punishing somebody* is not something we would choose to do for its own sake. It is not an intrinsic good but an intrinsic evil. It would be better if it could be avoided altogether. Likewise for some of the consequences of the punishment. So the exercise of retributive justice is not a simple but a conditional exercise of virtue: the virtue must be exercised only because the punishment is *necessary in the circumstances* to remove an evil or prevent a greater evil. It is not worth doing for its own sake and so it is not eudaimonia.⁴⁵

While the action⁴⁶ might be said to exemplify an intrinsic good – *acting*

⁴³ Cf. *EE* 1238b5-9.

⁴⁴ Retaining the manuscripts' ἀίρεσίς.'

⁴⁵ The act of retributive justice is a case of exercising virtue even if it is such conditionally. But if it is not worth doing for its own sake, how can Aristotle say in *EN* II.4 that the virtuous agent will perform virtuous actions for their own sake?

EN II. 4 is talking about the motive with which an action is done: for the judge's action to be a case of virtuous action he must do what is just *because it is just or for the sake of the fine* (cf. *EN* 1115b10-13, 1169a31-32; *EE* 1230a28f.) or both, and not merely to cut an impressive figure or stay out of jail, etc. But according to *Pol.* 1332a, at times the practically wise man will choose to do what is just for its own sake only when it is necessary to remove an evil, and it would be better if it could be avoided. If *exercising retributive justice* is an intrinsic good, any example of it will also be an instance of an intrinsic evil, and it is this last factor which, according to *Pol.* 1332a, excludes the act as a case of eudaimonia. Because the particular act which exemplifies the intrinsic good also exemplifies an intrinsic evil it is not "worth doing for its own sake" in the way *Pol.* 1332a requires of an example of eudaimonia. It is worth doing for its own sake only insofar as it is acting justly.

⁴⁶ I assume that 'punishing' and 'acting justly' name the same action, but the assumption is not essential to the argument. Although I am concentrating on the intrinsic good and evil of the action, I don't mean to suggest that the evil of an action's consequences is unimportant. There could well be cases of the conditional exercise of virtue where the action itself is good but has intrinsically evil results.

justly (or *exercising retributive justice*) – the point is that a simple as opposed to a conditional exercise of virtue must *both* exemplify an intrinsic good *and not* instantiate an intrinsic evil.

Pol. 1332a7-21 also shows the closely connected point that eudaimonia occurs only when the *immediate circumstances* of the action are favorable. At the end of the quoted passage Aristotle mentions two longer-term unfavorable conditions – poverty and disease. Because of such relatively permanent conditions of the agent the immediate circumstances of an action will often be unfavorable.⁴⁷ In the example of retributive justice the immediate surroundings disqualify the virtuous act as an instance of eudaimonia. Because *here and now* the situation is bad, the judge's exercise of virtue is not a case of eudaimonia even if he is a happy man.

The immediate situation is bad because, apart from the fact that an injustice has been committed, people are suffering because of it, etc., *all* the options open to the judge require him to do something which is intrinsically bad. What he actually does is an instance of *punishing*. His only other option (let's suppose) would have been to refrain from punishing the wrongdoer. But that would have meant *acting unjustly* – an example of acting viciously, the sort of activity characteristic of the opposite of eudaimonia – kakodaimonia. Since that is a greater evil than punishment, the judge rationally chooses to punish the criminal.⁴⁸

To count as eudaimonia, then, the exercise of virtue must occur in circumstances which are *good*, circumstances of the sort which the practically wise man would *wish* to find himself in. Such circumstances exist only if at least one of the options open to the agent is to perform an act that is not intrinsically evil.

⁴⁷ For example, if I am impoverished justice may demand that I take food from my hungry child and give it to a neighbour – a virtuous act but not a case of eudaimonia.

⁴⁸ Cf. *EN* 1136b34-1137a4. To avoid complexity I am not mentioning all the goods and evils in the different alternatives which would obviously have to be considered in a case such as the present one, but I am again concentrating on the value of the actions themselves. It is important to remember that for Aristotle the greatest goods and evils are actions and things people do: “activities are what give life its character” (εἰσὶν αἱ ἐνέργειαι κύριαι τῆς ζωῆς, *EN* 1100b33).

Bob Sharples has pointed out to me that Aristotle's notion of an unconditional or simple use of virtue may help to explain later Peripatetic definitions of eudaimonia as activity of virtue “in primary circumstances” (ἐν προηγουμένοις). For references, see his translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Ethical Problems* (London, 1990), p. 64, n. 220. Cf., e.g., Aristotle's definition – ἐνέργειαν ... καὶ χρῆσιν ἀρετῆς τελείαν, καὶ ταύτην οὐκ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς (*Pol.* 1332a9-10) – with that found in Stobaeus – Ἀριστοτέλης [says that the end is] χρῆσιν ἀρετῆς τελείας ἐν προηγουμένοις (*Anthologium*, Bk. II, 50, 11-12; ed. Wachsmuth).

The conditional exercise of virtue is an example of “mixed” action which Aristotle discusses in *EN* III.1 and *EE* II.8. In any mixed action as in the conditional exercise of virtue, it is done to prevent greater evil but the action performed is merely a lesser evil rather than a positive good.⁴⁹ It will exemplify an intrinsic evil which is not worth choosing for its own sake and is, in itself or “simply”, done involuntarily.⁵⁰ So all the options are for evils and the immediate circumstances of mixed actions are bad, ones we would prefer not to find ourselves in. And no mixed action is a case of *living well*.

Furthermore, in Aristotle’s mind compulsion is closely connected to pain,⁵¹ and for that reason too rational activity which is a mixed action cannot be eudaimonia.

So in “mixed action”: (1) the agent finds himself in circumstances he would prefer did not exist, (2) the agent performs an action of a type which is intrinsically evil, (3) the action is typically unpleasant, (4) the agent performs the type of action in question involuntarily. These characteristics of an action and its surroundings are incompatible with its being an instance of eudaimonia, even if it is an exercise of virtue.

Returning to the judge who exercises retributive justice, suppose that he is happy or has a chance to become so. The virtuous activity which is his act of retributive justice is not an instance of eudaimonia. On the eudaimonists’ understanding of how virtuous activity is done for the sake of eudaimonia this is not a case of acting virtuously for the sake of eudaimonia. For on the eudaimonists’ view the virtuous action is identical with or a part of the eudaimonia for the sake of which the virtuous action is done. The eudaimonists should concede, then, that on their understanding of “acting for the sake of eudaimonia”, the man who can be happy may rationally engage in virtuous activity without doing so for the sake of eudaimonia.

Since eudaimonia is the absolute exercise of virtue in conjunction with certain goods, if the act of retributive justice is done for the sake of eudaimonia but cannot *be* the eudaimonia for the sake of which it is done, it should be a means for bringing about either absolute virtuous activity or one of the attendant goods. I cannot see why the punishment *must* be a means for achieving any of these things in order to be rational. It certainly need not promote any further absolute virtuous activity on the part of the judge. Nor, at the very least, must it be a means for achieving good

⁴⁹ *EN* 1110a4-5; *EE* 1225a18-19.

⁵⁰ *EN* 1110a18-19, b3, 5; *EE* 1215b28-29; cf. *EN* 1117b7-8, *EE* 1228a14-15, *Rhet.* 1369b20-23.

⁵¹ *EN* 1110b11-12, 1111a32, 1117b8, 1119a21-22; *EE* 1225a4.

children, a long life, health, good looks, noble birth, or any of the other goods Aristotle deems necessary for eudaimonia.

The only way in which it would have any plausibility to claim that the judge's act of punishment *must* promote his eudaimonia would be by indirection. If the judge did not punish the criminal then he would act unjustly, and thereby secure for himself a great evil the possession of which is incompatible with eudaimonia. So it is only by punishing the criminal that he preserves the possibility of eudaimonia for himself. Hence, in order for the punishment to be rational the judge must act for the sake of eudaimonia in this weak sense.

It might be that the avoidance of evil for himself and the promotion of his own eudaimonia did not enter into the judge's calculations in deciding what to do, and it may be that no such factors would be mentioned by him if he were asked to explain or justify why he acted as he did. Suppose the judge were to reply that he punished the criminal because he had fairly been found guilty in a court of law and it was his responsibility, as a judge, to sentence the man and thereby do what is just; and suppose that if we ask the judge if there were any other reasons for his action he mentioned nothing more than benefiting the community or the criminal. I submit that the judge's action would in that case have been perfectly rational. As we saw with the sweater example in section II, an action does not have to be linked by a chain of reasons to one's ultimate end in order to be rational.

Suppose even that the judge acts rationally only if he punishes the criminal in order to avoid acting unjustly and securing a great evil for himself. The avoidance of evil is not rational only if it is done for the sake of eudaimonia, so the judge could rationally punish the criminal in order to avoid evil without doing so in order to promote eudaimonia.

There is no textual evidence that Aristotle believes otherwise. The only passage I know of where Aristotle speaks of acting virtuously for the sake of eudaimonia where the eudaimonia in question is something beyond the virtuous activity itself is *EN* 1177b12-15 where eudaimonia is contemplation in circumstances of leisure. There is no reason why the judge must act for the sake of eudaimonia in *this* sense in order to act rationally since he may not have theoretical virtue. If Aristotle believed that everybody acts for the sake of eudaimonia in every voluntary action, then it would be plausible to think that the judge's act must be for the sake of that end in order to be rational. But I have already argued that Aristotle does not believe this (n. 28). In the absence of evidence, then, that the eudaimonist sorts of reason mentioned above are considered by Aristotle to be necessary for the conditional exercise of virtue to be rational, I conclude that

there is no evidence that Aristotle thinks that the happy man and the man who can be happy act rationally only if they act for the sake of eudaimonia.

IV

In this final section I will argue that at least some cases of courageous action are examples of the conditional exercise of virtue. The explanation of why the courageous man who sacrifices his life for others acts rationally will remove a charge of inconsistency that has often been levelled at Aristotle, and similar considerations can be used to answer an objection to intellectualist interpretations of Aristotle's understanding of eudaimonia.

Courage is typically exhibited in military battle.⁵² If the circumstances in which retributive justice is called for are unfortunate they hardly compare with this. Courage is exercised in painful and dangerous circumstances where one faces death and wounds, i.e. circumstances where one is threatened with great evils.⁵³ Often bravery will be exercised in hopeless situations where one knows that something horrible is about to happen to oneself.⁵⁴ What Aristotle said about retributive justice is even truer here: "It is preferable that neither a man nor a city need anything of the kind."

The circumstances in which bravery is displayed are unfortunate because, besides the danger, all the options – in Aristotle's view – require one to do what is intrinsically evil. One option is to stand your ground and fight the enemy. Of course one will thereby (let's suppose) exercise the virtue of courage but that no more makes what one is doing *worth doing for its own sake* in the sense needed than the judge's exercise of justice is worth doing for its own sake. Nor are *standing and fighting* and *killing* valuable in themselves. On the contrary, Aristotle says that military actions, though fine, are not intrinsically worthwhile: no sane person would choose to go to war for its own sake.⁵⁵ The fact that those who die in battle for the sake of the fine thereby secure for themselves the great good of a noble death⁵⁶ does

⁵² EN 1115a28-31.

⁵³ EN 1116a1: ἐν ταῖς λύπαις; 1103b16, 1104b1-3, 1115a8-9, 24-26, 30-31, 1117a32-33, b7-9, 1178b12-13; EE III.1.

⁵⁴ EN 1115b2.

⁵⁵ Pol. 1325a5-7; EN 1177b9-12; EE 1229a1-4.

Another problem arises here for the comprehensivists who make every intrinsic good a constituent of eudaimonia if they count the exercise of courage as an intrinsic good: then a person can be happy only if at some time in his life he participates in a military battle. But at the end of Pol. VII.2 Aristotle does not rule out eudaimonia for an isolated city that never engages in war (cf. 1264b17-19, 1325b14-27).

⁵⁶ EN 1169a18-b1.

not make engaging in battle *worth choosing for its own sake*.

And the alternative is even worse. Instead of standing and fighting one can flee and act with cowardice. *Acting with cowardice* is an intrinsic evil, and the evil which the coward thereby obtains for himself is worse than the evil in the first option. To voluntarily act with cowardice is to show that one is wretched, the worst state a human being can be in. Such will be the coward who believes that he ought to save himself at all costs and wishes to do so. If, instead, he flees despite the fact that he believes that he ought to act in the opposite manner and wishes to do so, then in Aristotle's opinion he should at the same time realize that "flight is disgraceful and death is preferable (*αἰρετώτερος*) to safety on those terms;" that "the transgressor could never make up later for the deviation from virtue he has already committed."⁵⁷ This is not how one promotes eudaimonia. This is how one promotes kakodaimonia. Eudaimonist interpreters of Aristotle who believe that his insistence on standing and fighting conflicts with the pursuit of eudaimonia think that it would be by fleeing and saving one's life that one would promote eudaimonia. For one would thereby preserve at least the possibility of achieving eudaimonia later on. But Aristotle does not agree. In his view, to act with cowardice is to be burdened with evil that puts eudaimonia out of reach.⁵⁸

While the end which the brave man aims at is pleasant, Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics* III. 9⁵⁹ that the exercise of courage is painful both

⁵⁷ *EN* 1116b19-23, *Pol.* 1325a36-b7 (see *EN* 1129a34-b1). Cf. *EN* 1124b6-9, 1128b18-33, 1166b5-29, 1100b34-35, 1119a27-30, 1130a16-18, 30; *EE* 1228a5-7. I take these passages to show that, for Aristotle, not only is cowardly action worse than death but that *overall* the option of standing and fighting is less bad than the option of cowardice. So the goods achievable by surviving in the second option fail to compensate for the evil it contains. I think that commentators have failed to appreciate the harshness of the evil secured, in Aristotle's opinion, by the agent who acts viciously.

⁵⁸ For similar reasons I do not accept that Richard Kraut's examples of ostracism, sharing power, scarcity and of the man who gives up contemplation to help his father (in *Aristotle on the Human Good*, chapter 2) are not – when just – cases of the agents promoting their own maximal good: if they acted otherwise they would be acting viciously and they could not thereby promote their greatest good. In assessing the relative value of courses of action Kraut neglects the evil which, in Aristotle's view, an agent suffers by acting unjustly. This neglect also vitiates part of Kraut's discussion of egoism in the second chapter of his book.

⁵⁹ See also *EN* 1117a32-34; *EE* III.1.

Broadie denies that courageous action is painful (*Ethics With Aristotle*, pp. 319-20), but the texts are not ambiguous. When Aristotle says that courageous action is pleasant in so far as it attains its end he is not referring to the end of nobility which will be attained even in death but, as in the athletic analogy, to the "crown and honors" of victory (*EN* 1117a35-b4; cf. 1094a6-9, 1097a18-20, 1147b29-31).

because of the exertion involved and because to think of the evils threatening one is unpleasant, and the better off one is the more painful the thought of losing what one has will be. This is all in addition to the mayhem that the enemy endeavours to inflict on the brave man. While he will sometimes be without fear, the courageous man can also experience fear to a certain extent⁶⁰ and in so far as he does so he is in pain.⁶¹ Of course, even the pleasant end at which the courageous man aims may fail to be realized and such lack of success will be one more reason to disqualify an exercise of courage as an instance of eudaimonia.⁶²

So at least in many standard cases the exercise of courage will be a *conditional* exercise of virtue which will not be an instance of eudaimonia. This is confirmed by the fact that shortly after *Politics* 1332a Aristotle explains at length that a distinction must be made between (a) the sorts of actions that occur in war and business and (b) the sorts of actions that occur in peace and leisure. And 1332a's distinction between necessary actions which are not instances of living well and fine actions which are reappears with necessary actions assigned to (a) and fine actions assigned to (b) (1333a16-1334a40).

It does not follow that the conditional exercise of courage cannot rationally be done for the sake of eudaimonia as long as the latter is understood to be distinct from the courageous action.⁶³

But is there any reason to accept, as eudaimonists claim, that the courageous agent can act rationally in acting bravely only if his ultimate goal is such a distinct eudaimonia? No. First of all, the courageous agent who lacks long-term goods necessary for eudaimonia may know that it is irrational to

⁶⁰ Cf. *EN* 1104a20-22, 1115b11-12; *EE* 1221a17-19, 1228a33-34, 1229b17-18.

⁶¹ *Rhet.* 1382a21-22.

⁶² Good temper and endurance are two other virtues whose exercise is often conditional. (1) Good temper is typically exercised in circumstances where one has been insulted and treated with contempt (*EE* III.3; cf. *EN* 1135b28-29, 1149a32-33) – hardly circumstances one *prefers* to find oneself in. (2) If a great outrage has been committed then the virtue of good temper is exercised in getting very angry. Presumably Aristotle does not think *being angry* is intrinsically valuable. (3) To be angry is to be in pain (*EN* 1117a5-6, 1126a22, 1149b20-21; *EE* 1231b5-7). As for endurance, it is exercised in resisting pain.

Those who cannot believe that I am right will either have to say that *Pol.* 1332a expresses a view which Aristotle rejects in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (although Aristotle attributes that view to “the *Ethics*”), or explain why the reasons *Pol.* 1332a gives for refusing to classify acts of retributive justice as eudaimonia fail to apply to some cases of courageous action and anger.

⁶³ Cf. *EN* 1177b12-15.

aim for eudaimonia. But even the courageous agent who is happy may see the possibility of future eudaimonia destroyed by the immediate circumstances he finds himself in. This will be so if his situation is hopeless and without escape. But it will also be so if survival requires cowardly action. If he stands and fights for the sake of the fine or the noble then, as we saw, this action which actualizes the virtue of courage is not an instance of eudaimonia. Nor could he rationally act for the sake of a future eudaimonia since that consists in *living* in a certain way and he is now doing what ensures that his life will end.⁶⁴ And Aristotle believes that if he instead runs away and acts with cowardice he will secure an even greater evil for himself. None of the man's options include the possibility of eudaimonia so the man acts irrationally if he acts for the sake of that end. He has been unlucky enough to find himself in a particular situation where the possibility of achieving or retaining eudaimonia no longer exists.

It hardly follows that Aristotle cannot explain why it is rational for such an agent to stand and fight. One acts rationally not merely when one acts so as to secure the greatest available good but when one acts so as to avert the greatest threatening evil: "for the lesser evil is more worthy of choice than the greater evil."⁶⁵ Of the two options available to the courageous man who must die or flee we have seen that Aristotle believes that the evil of cowardice exceeds the evil of death. So, in Aristotle's view, the brave man who stands and fights acts rationally because he acts so as to avoid the greater evil.

It is commonly said that Aristotle's belief that the courageous man should be willing to sacrifice his life conflicts with his belief that eudaimonia is the end of all rational action.⁶⁶ On the present interpretation the conflict disappears. Eudaimonia is not always the end of rational action, and no matter what the chances of the courageous man's surviving a battle may be he will not be acting rationally to secure eudaimonia by running away.

⁶⁴ There is no evidence that Aristotle accepts the strange view which eudaimonists sometimes give him according to which the courageous man who sacrifices his own life acts for the sake of his own eudaimonia. How could it be that one acts to *promote* one's *living* well by doing what ensures that one is not living at all? (Cf. *EN* 1100a11-14). If the happy man's self-sacrifice requires him to give up "the *greatest* goods" (*EN* 1117b12), how can his action be a means for achieving the greatest good? At best, the happy man's self-sacrifice can be a means for ensuring that he *has had* a happy life.

⁶⁵ *EN* 1131b22.

⁶⁶ Cf. W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 328-33; D.J. Allen, "The Fine and the Good in the Eudemian Ethics", in P. Moraux and D. Harlfinger (eds.) *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik* (Berlin, 1971), p. 69; M. Woods, *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics* (Oxford, 1982), p. 188.

Aristotle repeatedly says that the virtuous agent is concerned not merely to attain the good but to avoid evil,⁶⁷ and he believes that cowardly action is a greater evil than death; an evil, moreover, which destroys the possibility of eudaimonia. Hence, however his chances of obtaining eudaimonia may be affected by the long-term and immediate circumstances he finds himself in, it will always be rational for the courageous man to stand and fight. Even if he cannot achieve the greatest human good he may still act rationally to avert the greatest evil. So in all the circumstances of life it remains true that courage benefits the agent who possesses it and acts accordingly.

Virtue of character is not justified only if it promotes eudaimonia. Even when virtue fails to promote eudaimonia in specific cases it is justified by its prevention of wretchedness (*kakodaimonia*). The truly virtuous man who has lost eudaimonia due to great misfortune will never suffer the worst and become wretched “for he will never do what is hateful and base.”⁶⁸

To conclude, I would like to point out that the present account can also answer a criticism of the intellectualist interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* which says that Aristotle considers the best life to be the theoretical life; a criticism which is sometimes thought to expose an inconsistency between Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the rest of that work. The objection is that if contemplation is more valuable than, e.g. acting justly, then in a situation where the happy man must choose between the two it will be rational for him to retreat into contemplation rather than do what is just.⁶⁹ As Aristotle puts it when considering a similar line of reasoning in the *Politics* (1325a36-41): “a father should take no account of his children nor children of their father nor a friend of his friend nor consider anything but this: the best is most worthy of choice and living well is best.”

“There might be some truth in such a view if we assume that robbers and plunderers attain the chief good.”⁷⁰ This view ignores the point that in such a situation, to refrain from doing what one knows to be just will be to act *unjustly*,⁷¹ and to choose to perform an act which is vicious is not a method

⁶⁷ *EN* 1100b33-35, 1115a10-14, 1116a10-12, 28-29, b20-23, 1117b7-9, 1120a11-13, 1123b31-32, 1128b18-26, 1129b19-24, 1130b23-24, 1143a8-9; *EE* 1236b37. Cf. *EN* 1104b30-32, 1110a4-5, 1112a1-4, 1139a21-22; *EE* 1225a17-19, 24-25; *Pol.* 1260b11-12; *Top.* 118b27-36.

⁶⁸ *EN* 1100b34-35.

⁶⁹ Cf., e.g., J. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, p. 106.

⁷⁰ Jowett's slightly inaccurate, but effective, translation of *Pol.* 1325a41-b2. Kraut notes this passage (*Aristotle on the Human Good*, p. 100, n. 31), but instead of considering the positive evil which the unjust agent obtains, focuses on the unjust man's distancing himself from the good of virtuous action.

⁷¹ *EN* 1113b8-10; *EE* 1228a5-7. Cf. *Rhet.* 1375a13-15.

by which eudaimonia can be promoted. As Aristotle says in *EN* III.1, in situations where values and evils conflict one has to decide what to do *at what cost*.⁷² In the present case the two options are (1) to contemplate and act unjustly or (2) to act justly and refrain from contemplation. (1) involves acting viciously and it is not by choosing to perform actions characteristic of kakodaimonia that one promotes eudaimonia. Just as an agent who performs a virtuous act thereby secures a great good for himself, so an agent who performs a vicious act thereby secures one of the greatest evils for himself, and it is not by attaining the greatest evils that one achieves the greatest good. While the good of contemplation will be obtained by this option, that hardly means that the good of eudaimonia is secured by this option. Virtuous activity qualifies as eudaimonia only in favourable circumstances where great evils are absent. But here the contemplation occurs in the presence of what Aristotle considers to be the greatest of evils and so it could not possibly qualify as eudaimonia.

(2) requires one to refrain from contemplation but to do so would not be to act viciously. Unlike *refraining from acting justly*, *refraining from contemplation* does not burden an agent with a positive evil. And since just action is one of the greatest goods – a kind of eudaimonia – by doing (2) I would promote my eudaimonia while by doing (1) I would promote kakodaimonia, the worst affliction that a human being can suffer. So the rational thing to do in the present case is to refrain from contemplation and perform the just action. And that fact is entirely consistent with the general superiority in the positive value of contemplation over virtuous action.⁷³

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⁷² *EN* 1110a30, b7. I am not saying that for Aristotle the only good reasons for action are self-regarding, nor that self-regarding reasons take priority over other-regarding reasons. It is because others have claims to certain goods which should be given consideration that for me to act without attention to them is to act unjustly and thereby secure evil for myself.

⁷³ This is one reason why even the philosopher needs virtue of character in order to be happy. While it is possible for a philosopher to be born with natural virtue (*EN* VI.13) and, consequently, never act viciously, that would be an unusual case. Another reason why the philosopher may need virtue of character to be happy is that contemplation qualifies as eudaimonia only when one possesses certain important goods. And given the value Aristotle accords virtue of character and its exercise, it is plausible to suppose that he believes its possession is necessary for eudaimonia. A third reason why virtue of character is required is that friends are needed for eudaimonia, and the sort of friendship needed is clearly that based on virtue of character.