VIRTUE, ACTIONS, AND ENDS IN ARISTOTLE’S ETHICS

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Abstract

Are ethically virtuous actions ends in themselves, choiceworthy for their own sake? Or, instead, are they the sorts of actions choiceworthy for the good ends or consequences they aim to realize? In the Nicomachean Ethics (NE) Aristotle seems committed to both claims. Whether Aristotle is in fact inconsistent on this point is no trivial matter; the relationship between virtuous actions and their ends bears directly on the central question of the NE, the nature of human happiness. My dissertation argues that in order to understand the way in which virtuous actions are related to their ends, we need to get clear on what it means, in the first place, for an action to be an end. It is often thought that actions are ends by being what agents aim at, or ought to aim at, in their deliberations. This, I argue, is a mistake. The notion of ends at play in Aristotle’s descriptions of virtuous actions is the same one found throughout his theoretical philosophy: certain actions are ends in much the same teleological sense in which an oak tree is the end of an acorn, and health is the end of the medical art. Appreciating how Aristotle’s metaphysical conception of ends is at work in his ethical theory can shed new light on old debates about the nature of virtuous actions and their relationship to eudaimonia.
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to daniel

here’s to a lifetime more of adventure and encouragement
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0.1 Overview

The end of an eye is the activity of seeing, the end of an acorn is an oak tree, the end of the art of medicine is health. These are, for Aristotle, examples of genuine metaphysical ends. That they are ends is a permanent feature of the way things are, independent of any facts about human goals or motivations. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes various goods in the ethical domain as ends of our actions, and claims that *eudaimonia*, or human happiness, is the most end-like or *teleion* of these ends. What do these goods share in common with the ends that Aristotle countenances in his theoretical works? What can the teleology we find in Aristotle’s natural science and metaphysics tell us about the nature of happiness and what its constituents are?

In this dissertation, I argue that rational activity, the sort of activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*, is the end of certain types of actions not unlike the way in which the activity of seeing is the end of an eye, and an oak tree is the end of an acorn. And, I argue, understanding the way in which Aristotle’s metaphysical conception of ends underlies his ethical theory can help illuminate the structure of this theory, and shed
new light on old debates about the relationship between ethical virtue and human happiness.

It is natural to interpret Aristotle’s talk of ends in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a more intuitive way, as the ends or goals that feature in an agent’s deliberations when she acts. However, Aristotle strongly suggests that, even in the ethical context, what it is for something to be an end is not *simply* for it to be an object of desire. Rather, ends are *appropriate* objects of desire. I argue that Aristotle’s metaphysical conception of an end, properly understood, helps explain why it is ends, rather than states or processes, that are the primary bearers of value in the ethical domain. Further, I argue, understanding how certain activities can count as ends helps explain why the excellent rational activity constitutive of happiness is the most end-like of ends that human beings can achieve in action. It turns out, on the view I defend, that *eudaimonia* is the ultimate end by being the activity that is the complete fulfillment of an aspect of our essential nature; engaging in the excellent rational activity constitutive of *eudaimonia* is a way for human beings to fully be what they essentially are.

Understanding the nature of *eudaimonia* in this way has wide-ranging consequences. It absolves Aristotle’s ethical theory from the familiar charge of egoism. It gives us a principled explanation for why two, and only two, activities that human beings can engage in are genuine forms of happiness. It allows us to explain the necessary role of external goods in a happy life without building them into the definition of *eudaimonia*, and allows us to interpret the arguments for the relative superiority of contemplation over ethically virtuous activity in a way that preserves the consistency between Book 1 and in Book 10. Finally, it establishes that Aristotle’s theory is informed by, and consistent with, the theoretical commitments he defends elsewhere, even if his goals in the NE differ from those in his theoretical treatises.

The view I defend here has not, as far as I know, been defended in the literature before. That being said, the view is also not wholly original: I take this project to
be largely inspired, in different ways, by the work of John Ackrill, Ursula Coope, John Cooper and Gabriel Richardson Lear. The view I defend here is also far from comprehensive. I will not weigh in on every relevant interpretive debate, nor will I attempt to respond to every possible objection. My hope is rather to offer a viable sketch or outline of how different aspects of Aristotle’s ethical theory are tied together through a certain metaphysical conception of what it is to be an end.

1.0.2 Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, I develop a novel account of the distinction Aristotle draws throughout his corpus between the sorts of actions that are ends, and the sorts of actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Common strategies to interpret this distinction — in terms of an agent’s intentions, in terms of available action descriptions, or in terms of the way particular ends structure the processes leading to them — fail to make sense of Aristotle’s examples in a principled way. I argue we should interpret the distinction in terms of the relationship between a power or potential (dunamis) and what it is that is the realization or actuality (entelecheia) of this potential. Every potential is, essentially, for the sake of a single determinate end that is its realization. Some potentials are fully realized in a product that results from an action: the potential for housebuilding is, for example, fully realized in a house. By contrast, some potentials are fully realized in actions themselves: the potential for theoretical rationality is, for example, fully realized in the activity of contemplating itself. On the view I defend, contemplation is an end by being the way for a human being to fully realize her potential for theoretical rationality, to fully be theoretically rational. If this metaphysical account is right, whether an action is an end or not is a permanent feature of the way things are, independent of the goals of any particular agent performing the action or of various possible descriptions of the action.
In Chapter 3, I employ this account to solve a familiar puzzle about how Aristotle conceives of virtuous actions. On the one hand, Aristotle appears to affirm, at least until 10.7 and 10.8, that virtuous actions are ends in themselves, the sorts of actions constitutive of an agent’s own happiness. On the other hand, Aristotle seems committed to the idea that virtuous actions are not ends but, rather, are choice-worthy for the sake of the good results or consequences they aim to realize independent of the agent’s own happiness. It is difficult to see how Aristotle can coherently maintain both of these commitments. I argue that Aristotle’s claims about virtuous actions are not in fact inconsistent but rather express the peculiarly practical nature of ethical virtue. Ethically virtuous activity is, like contemplation, the sort of activity that is an end but, unlike contemplation, it depends for its realization on actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Whereas theoretical knowledge is directed at eternal and unchanging truths in the intelligible domain, virtue of character and phronesis are capacities directed at facts about value in the material world. What this means is that in order for a human being to engage in ethically virtuous activity — in order for her to fully realize her nature as a practically rational agent — she must act with respect to goods in the ethical domain. On the view I defend, virtuous actions are good because of the good ends or consequences at which they aim. However, when a virtuous agent performs these good actions with the right reasoning and desiring, she is also, at once, engaging in the sort of activity that is itself an end; she is fully realizing her potential for practically rational agency, fully being virtuous.

If my solution to this puzzle is right, there are two significant interpretive upshots. First, my view absolves Aristotle’s ethical theory from the familiar charge of egoism. On my metaphysical account of the way in which ethically virtuous activity is an end, Aristotle’s theory is not egoistic either in its explanation of the value of virtuous actions, or in its description of a virtuous agent’s motivations when she performs these actions. Second, my view advances the long-standing and persistent debate about the
nature of *eudaimonia* by making available a position midway between “intellectualist” and “inclusivist” interpretations. My view is “intellectualist” or “monistic” by taking at face value Aristotle’s repeated and explicit identification of *eudaimonia* with a single good — excellent rational activity. However, my view is also “inclusivist” by establishing ethically virtuous activity as a genuine form of happiness alongside contemplation.

In Chapter 4, I address a familiar problem for non-inclusivist conceptions of *eudaimonia*, namely, that they cannot explain the status of “mid-level goods”, which is to say, goods that choice-worthy both in themselves and for the sake of *eudaimonia*. In NE 1.7, Aristotle claims that *eudaimonia* is the most *teleion* of ends; it is the only good that is always choice-worthy for its own sake, and never for the sake of anything else. However, Aristotle also makes clear in this discussion that *eudaimonia* is not the only good choice-worthy for its own sake. Aristotle seems to affirm in this passage that the goods often mistaken for happiness itself — honor, pleasure, understanding and virtue — are in fact goods that are choice-worthy in part “in themselves” and in part for the sake of *eudaimonia*. If *eudaimonia* really is, as non-inclusivists maintain, a single good rather than an ordered composite of intrinsically valuable goods, why is Aristotle entitled to assume that various goods we value in themselves are also choice-worthy for the sake of *eudaimonia*? And, if these goods have two distinct sources of value, what accounts for their unity?

I argue that the value of mid-level goods in the ethical domain can be explained in terms of the way in which these goods depend ontologically on human nature. Mid-level goods are choiceworthy in part for their own sake and in part for the sake of *eudaimonia* because they count as ends, but only in a qualified sense: they are only partial or incomplete realizations of aspects of human nature. Goods like knowledge and virtue are ends by being complete fulfillments of a corresponding potential, but only insofar as this potential remains potential. They are for the sake of *eudaimonia*
as a potential is for the sake of its actuality. Pleasure and being honored are parts or aspects of the activity that is constitutive of *eudaimonia*. They are for the sake of *eudaimonia* by being parts of the activity that is constitutive of *eudaimonia*.

In Chapter 5, I position my account of the nature of *eudaimonia* between the extremes of inclusivist and intellectualist interpretations. I suggest how we should understand the self-sufficiency condition and the role of external goods in a happy life if *eudaimonia* really does lie in excellent rational activity alone. On my view, the exercise of virtue depends on performing discrete virtuous actions which, in turn, depend on there being circumstances that make these actions appropriate, as well the resources and other individuals that make these actions possible. I argue that, when Aristotle asserts that contemplation is more self-sufficient than the exercise of ethical virtue, he is not claiming that ethically virtuous activity is less able than contemplation to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing, but rather is drawing attention to the fact that ethically virtuous activity is less able to do so *on its own*, in isolation from other goods. Because of its essentially practical nature, fully realizing one’s potential for practically rational agency depends, to a much greater extent than fully realizing one’s potential for theoretical rationality, on the contingencies of the material world. More generally, I offer some suggestions for how to interpret the superiority of contemplation over virtuous activity, and what the consequences are for how, according to Aristotle, we ought to live our lives.

1.0.3 Methodology

There is, I will assume, no prima facie reason to think we cannot draw insight from Aristotle’s theoretical works for understanding his ethical theory. Of course, it is important to proceed with caution. It is plausible that Aristotle’s ethical theory is chiefly directed at a different, less philosophically sophisticated audience, than his theoretical works. This has consequences for what sorts of questions Aristotle is
chiefly interested in the ethical works as opposed to the theoretical works. Likewise, it has consequences for how Aristotle goes about answering these questions: how much technical vocabulary he employs, what sorts of justifications he offers for views, and so on. However, even if Aristotle is not principally concerned to elucidate the metaphysical underpinnings of his ethical theory, this is not in itself a reason to think there isn’t a metaphysical basis for his ethical theory.

I will argue that we can indeed find insight into Aristotle’s ethical theory by thinking about his natural science and metaphysics. To be clear, however, I do not mean to suggest that, in general, Aristotle’s ethical theory admits of the precision of scientific domains. What we learn from Aristotle’s theoretical works is helpful principally for understanding what we might think of as Aristotle’s metaethical views: we better understand how he conceives of the goodness of actions and of the nature of the human good more generally. A consequence is that there are some truths relevant to the ethical domain that hold universally and necessarily in virtue of the natures of things. However, nothing in my dissertation is meant to suggest that there is some law-governed method of determining, for example, which an agent ought to perform in any given situation. Much of ethical theorizing lies in the realm of contingency, and even if it is possible to have scientific knowledge of some of the truths relevant to the ethical domain, the virtuous person need not have this in order to act well. Rather, what the virtuous person needs to determine how to act in any given situation is the judgement provided by practical wisdom.

I will also be assuming that it is a desideratum of an interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that it render Aristotle’s discussions in Books 1 and 10 consistent with each other. All things being equal, if we can find an interpretation of the nature of *eudaimonía* that coheres with Aristotle’s discussion in both books, we should prefer it. I do not, in the dissertation, rely on passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* with a view to interpreting passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I do not directly address
the relationship between the two texts although I believe, as many commentators do,
that the Eudemian Ethics is an earlier work, and that many of the views defended
there are different from views he defends in the Nicomachean Ethics.

1.0.4 Aristotle’s Ethical Theory and Contemporary Ethics

My dissertation is, primarily, a work in ancient philosophy. Its principal aim is to
clarify the details of Aristotle’s ethical theory with a view to resolving a number of
interpretive debates about the relationship between ethical virtue and human happi-
ness in the Nicomachean Ethics. However, given the enormous influence of Aristotle’s
ethical theory on discussions in contemporary ethics, I want to say briefly what conse-
quence the interpretation I defend has for thinking about Aristotle’s view in relation
to contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

One of the enduring attractions of Aristotle’s ethical theory is its supposed ability
to explain why it’s always in an agent’s own interests to be ethically good. According
to Aristotle, having a virtuous character and performing virtuous actions is necessary,
and very nearly sufficient, for living a happy life. However, the way Aristotle conceives
of the relationship between virtue and happiness is often misunderstood in discussions
in contemporary ethics. According to a highly influential strand of contemporary
virtue ethics, inspired by Aristotle, what makes certain character traits count as
virtues is the fact that they tend to promote a happy or flourishing life. What
makes certain actions count as good or virtuous is, in turn, the fact they express
these virtuous character traits. This analysis of the concept of virtue in terms of the
concept of happiness establishes a tight connection between being ethically good and
being happy, but it does so at the cost of the theory’s being fundamentally egoistic:
what explains why a character trait or action is virtuous is, ultimately, the way in
which it contributes to an agent’s own happiness.
A consequence of the interpretation of Aristotle that I defend in my dissertation is that this strand of contemporary virtue ethics has the structure of Aristotle’s own ethical theory almost entirely backwards. Aristotle’s theory, as I reconstruct it, gives us a way of understanding the necessary connection between being virtuous and being happy without being vulnerable to the charge of egoism.

According to the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, we can analyse the concept of virtue in terms of the concept of happiness. We begin with a naturalistic conception of a well lived or flourishing human life, and from this observe what sorts of character traits are necessary components of such a life. These character traits will count as virtues or excellences of a human being; they are “good character traits” because they are required for a human being to live a good or happy life. Actions will, in turn, count as virtuous if they are such as a virtuous agent would perform; they are “good actions” because they are the sorts of actions that result from a good character. On this sort of view, the connection between being virtuous and being happy turns out to be pretty straightforward: we have reasons to acquire virtuous character traits and perform virtuous actions because doing so will reliably make our lives go well. Typically, the defenders of this style view think that the character traits and actions that turn out to be virtuous correspond pretty closely with what we conventionally take to be morally good. Where the virtue ethicist fundamentally disagrees with other prominent moral theories is not about what actions count as good, but rather about what explains the value of these actions.

1 Rosalind Hursthouse explains what grounds evaluative claims about character traits and actions in the following way: when the Aristotelian naturalist says “this is a virtue, this is a good reason for doing so and so, such and such is a type of good/right action” they are claiming “that the appropriate justification for such evaluations is like that of the corresponding justifications of other living things. If true, they are true because we — we human beings — need this character trait, need to count these sorts of considerations as reasons for acting in this sort of way, need to do these sorts of actions, in order for our lives to go well. And, the further justification of the ‘because’ clause appeals to putative facts about human life — about how it goes, what goods are available within it, how they are obtained, and what obstacles there are to obtaining them just as it is in the case of other living things.” (Hursthouse, R. 2013. Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism. The International Encyclopedia of Ethics)
There are two parts to this analysis of the goodness of actions that are not, I will argue, features of Aristotle’s own view. First, Aristotle does not intend to define what it is for an action to be virtuous in terms of what it is for a character to be virtuous. Rather, the explanatory direction runs the other way: a virtuous character is the excellent state of a capacity that equips an agent to reliably recognize and choose to perform good actions for their own sake. What it is for an action to count as good or virtuous can be specified independent of reference to a virtuous character. Second, Aristotle does not intend to explain the value of virtuous actions entirely in terms of their ultimate contribution to an agent’s own eudaimonia. At least part of the value of virtuous actions — part of what makes these actions count as good — can be specified independently of any reference to an agent’s own well-being.

I argue that, for Aristotle, what makes an action virtuous is the goodness of the ends or results it aims to realize independent of an agent’s own happiness. What makes certain character traits count as virtues is, in turn, the way they equip an agent to reliably identify and be moved to perform virtuous actions with a full appreciation of their goodness: virtue of character, on the interpretation I defend, should be understood as an in part rational capacity for a certain kind of practical agency.

If this is the right — if, for Aristotle, virtue of character is not analyzed in terms of the concept of eudaimonia — the connection between being virtuous and being happy is more complicated, and comes via the way Aristotle conceives of the value of rational activity. I argue that it falls out of Aristotle’s natural teleology that there is something deeply valuable about organisms developing and exercising the natural capacities that are distinctive or characteristic of their essential nature: when an organism develops and exercises its most characteristic capacities, it is most fully realizing the sort of thing it essentially is. The most characteristic and distinctive capacities that human beings have are their rational capacities, specifically, their capacities for theoretical and practical reason. When human beings perfect and then exercise these capacities,
they are most fully realizing the sorts of beings they essentially are, namely, rational beings. And, I take it, this is precisely the way in which their excellent rational activity is the highest end and best good for them.

On the view I defend, recognizing and being moved to perform virtuous actions because of the good ends they aim to realize is an exercise of the developed state of an agent’s practical rationality. And, for Aristotle, when a human being exercises the developed state of her practical rationality, she is engaging in the sort of activity characteristic of her essential nature; she is, quite literally, most fully being the sort of thing she most properly is. The upshot is that virtuous actions are good because of the good ends or consequences at which they aim. However, when a virtuous agent performs these good actions with the right reasoning and desiring, she is also, at once, engaging in the sort of activity that is itself an end; she is fully realizing her potential for practically rational agency.

A consequence of this interpretation is that Aristotle is not centrally interested in the question of what morality consists in but, rather, why we should care, in the first place, about being moral. It is a mistake to assume that what we get from Aristotle is a distinct normative theory alongside deontology and consequentialism. Likewise, we are bound to be disappointed if we look to Aristotle for a worked out view about how to determine the content of morality. Rather, the chief insight of Aristotle’s view is how prudential and moral value might come to be aligned through a certain conception of human agency.

Even if my interpretation of Aristotle’s ethical theory is correct, we might wonder how plausible is the view we are left with. Even if we don’t buy Aristotle’s teleology wholesale, I think there is something in the vicinity of his view we might find plausible. We might, for example, be willing to accept that one of the essential components of a good life is successfully exercising one’s capacities and that, amongst these capacities, one of the most important is a certain kind of capacity for human agency. That is,
we might find plausible the idea that one of the chief components of a good life is being able to correctly identify and appropriately respond to genuine value in the world, including genuine moral value. If we find this plausible, and if we are realists about moral value, we are well on our way to thinking, as Aristotle does, that being virtuous is an essential component of being happy.
Chapter 2

Aristotle on Complete & Incomplete Actions

Introduction

Throughout his corpus, Aristotle distinguishes between actions like building, learning and walking that are “incomplete” or *ateles*, and actions like seeing and understanding that are “complete” or *teleion*. The former actions take time in order to be complete “in form”, have ends beyond the actions themselves, and can occur quickly or slowly. The latter are complete at any moment, are or have present within them their own ends, and cannot be qualified with the adverbs “quickly” or “slowly”. Despite its pervasiveness and the enormous amount of scholarly attention it has received, the distinction between these two kinds of actions is far from clear: what makes it the case that actions like walking and building are for the sake of ends beyond themselves, while seeing and understanding are themselves ends? In this chapter, I argue that common strategies to interpret the distinction fail to capture its metaphysical significance. The distinction between incomplete and complete actions is, fundamentally, a distinction between the ontological status of two ways of being active.
In §2.1, I review the distinction as it is found in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 and 8 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 7 and 10 and outline some of the problems faced by common interpretive strategies. In §2.2, I turn to Aristotle’s account of change in *Physics* III.1-3 to help clarify the way in which certain actions are “incomplete”. On an independently attractive interpretation of Aristotle’s definition of change or *kinēsis*, actions like walking and building are incompletely realized potentials for the *being* of some end state. A consequence, I argue, is that these actions are necessarily for the sake of their ends *because* they depend ontologically on their ends. In §2.3, I turn to consider the ontological status of complete actions. Though the passage is commonly misunderstood in connection with this distinction, I argue that we learn something important from DA 2.5 about the way in which actions like seeing and understanding are ends. Specifically, these actions are ways in which living organisms essentially constituted by the capacities for sight and understanding fully realize their own essential nature. Like in the case of incomplete actions, the *dunameis* exercised in these actions are for the *being* of some end but, unlike in the case of incomplete actions, the being in question is not the being of some result or product beyond the action, but rather the being of what exercises the *dynamis*, in respect of that *dynamis*. Seeing is an end for a sighted organism because, when a sighted organism exercises its capacity for sight, it is most fully *being* what it essentially is, *qua* sighted.

### 2.1 The Distinction

#### 2.1.1

The locus classicus for the distinction between incomplete and complete actions is the infamous and textually fraught “Passage” in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 (1048a18-36). I will be proceeding on the assumption that this passage was written by Aristotle but nothing I will argue for in this chapter depends on the passage being properly part of the
Metaphysics, or indeed, authentically Aristotelian.\footnote{Admittedly, “actions” is an awkward and potentially misleading rendering of what is being distinguished: Aristotle, so I argue, is distinguishing between two “ways of being active” and in different texts, he uses different terms to make this apparent. The distinction extends more widely than what human beings do either intentionally or unintentionally but, on the side of incomplete actions, includes all events or processes that are changes while on the side of complete actions includes both the psychic activities engaged in by non human organisms, and divine activity that is not the exercise of any 
\textit{dunamis}. For ease, I limit my discussion to what human beings “do”: the actions or activities they engage in as the exercise of a \textit{dunamis}.} Though the terminology differs, the same distinction clearly appears in some form in Metaphysics Θ 8 (1050a23-2) and in Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure in Books 7 and 10 of the NE (1153a7-12, 1173a29-b4 and 1174a14-31). These are the passages I will take to be relevant for the distinction; I set aside texts where the question of whether the same distinction is being invoked is more controversial.\footnote{The distinction is also referenced in De Sensu 6 (446b2-6) and the Sophistici Elenchi 22 (178a9-28). Arguably the distinction is also being invoked in Physics III.1-3, DA 2.5, NE 1.1 (1094a3-6), EE 2.1 (1219a8-18) and in the distinction between praxis and poiesis in NE 6. I will be proceeding on the assumption that the same distinction is being referred to in Metaphysics Θ 6, Θ 8 and in the NE 7 and 10 passages, despite Aristotle’s non-standard use of the terms \textit{energeia} and \textit{kinēsis} in Θ 6. I will have much to say about the texts in Physics III and DA 2.5 and in what way they bear on the distinction. I will not discuss the other ethical works in the body of this chapter but in the next chapter I argue that the distinction we find amongst ends in NE 1.1, EE 2.1, and in Book 6 of the NE is indeed the same distinction between actions I discuss in this chapter, and that this has important consequences for understanding the nature of human happiness and its relationship to virtuous action. I include a brief discussion of these passages here, for reference.}

In the opening lines of the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle draws a distinction between ends that are activities (\textit{ἐργα}) and ends that are works or products (\textit{ἐργα}) apart from the activities that produce them: “Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at something good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth.” (NE 1094a1-9) And, he claims, when there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. He gives the following as examples of ends that stand outside the actions that produce them: health is the end of the medical art, a vessel is the end of ship building, victory is the end of strategy, and wealth is the end of the art of economics. He doesn’t give any examples of ends that are activities themselves, presumably because his interest in the passage is in illustrating how productive arts and sciences are hierarchically ordered on the basis of the ends they aim at.

Aristotle seems to refer to the same distinction in the Eudeman Ethics, when describing the nature of different sorts of \textit{ἐργα}. He claims that the \textit{ἐργα} of each thing is its end or \textit{τέλος}, and that \textit{ἐργα} of each thing is better than its corresponding state or disposition (\textit{διάθεσις} \textit{τελειός}). I take it that Aristotle is using the term \textit{ἐργα} in the technical sense we find throughout his corpus: typically when Aristotle describes the \textit{ἐργα} of some X he means to pick out that for the sake of which X, qua X, exists or has being. For further evidence of this reading, see De Caelo II.3 (286a8-9): “Everything that has an \textit{ἐργα} exists for the sake of its \textit{ἐργα}” and Politics VII 8 (1328a33): “the housebuilder’s art exists for the sake of a house”, and we can, by extension, talk of the \textit{ἐργα} of the housebuilder.
It will be helpful going forward to quote the key passages in full.

In Metaphysics Θ 6, Aristotle claims:

Since of actions which have a limit none is an end, but all belong to the class of means to an end, e.g. slimming in the sense of the slimming process considered in itself, and since the things themselves one is slimming, when one is slimming them, are in process of changing in this sense, that the results aimed at in the change are not yet present, these are not cases of action, or not at any rate of complete action. For none of them is in itself an end. It is in that former thing that the end and the action are present e.g. at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood, are thinking and have thought: but it is not true that at the same time we are learning and have learnt, or are being cured and have been cured. At the same time we are living well and have lived well, and are happy and have lived. Of these processes, then, we must call the one set movements, and the other actualities. For every movement is incomplete — making thin, learning, walking, building; these are movements and incomplete movements. For it is not true that at the same time we are walking and have walked, or are building and have built, or are coming to be and have come to be — it is a different thing that is being moved and that has been moved, and that is moving and that has moved; but it is the same thing that at he same time has seen and is seeing, or is thinking and has thought. The latter sort of process, then, I call an actuality, and the former a movement.

"Επεί δὲ τῶν πράξεων ὅν ἦστι πέρας οὐδεμία τέλος ἀλλὰ τῶν περὶ τὸ τέλος, οἰον τὸ ἰσχυνεῖν ἡ ἰσχυσία [αὐτῷ], αὐτὰ δὲ ὅταν ἰσχυνεῖν οὔτως ἐστὶν ἐν κυνήσει, μὴ ὑπάρχοντα ὅν ἐνεκα ἡ κύνησις, οὐκ ἦστι ταῦτα πράξεις ἢ οὐ τελεία γε (οὐ γὰρ τέλος) ἀλλὰ ἐκείνη <ἡ> ἑνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος καὶ [ἡ] πράξεις. οἰον ὅρα ᾗμα <καὶ ἑώρακε,> καὶ φρονέι <καὶ πεθάνηκε,> καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νεφύσκεν. ἀλλ' οὐ μανθάνει καὶ μεμάθηκεν οὐδ' ὑγάλεται καὶ νύκται εἰ δῇ καὶ εἶ ἐξήκεν ᾗμα, καὶ εἰδάμονε καὶ εἰδάμονήκεν. εἰ δὲ μή, ἔδει αὖ ποτε παύσει οὕσπερ ὅταν ἰσχυνεῖ, νῦν δ' οὐ, ἀλλά ἥ τέκνη καὶ ἐξήκεν. τοῦτων δὴ <δεῖ> τὰς μὲν κυνήσεις λέγειν, τὰς δ' ἑνεργείας. πάσα γὰρ κύνησις ἀτέλης, ἰσχυσία μάθησις βάδισμις οὐκοδόμησις αὐτὰ δὴ κυνήσεις, καὶ ἀτέλεις γε. οὐ γὰρ ᾗμα βαδίζει καὶ βεβάδικεν, οὐδ' οὐκοδομεῖ καὶ οὐκοδόμηκεν, οὐδὲ γέγονε καὶ γέγονεν ἡ
κανείται καὶ κεκάνηται, ἀλλ’ ἐτερον, καὶ κινεῖ καὶ κεκάνηκεν ἑώρακε δὲ καὶ ὤρα ἄμα τὸ αὐτό, καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νευόμενε. τὴν μὲν οὖν τοιαύτην ἐνέργειαν λέγω, ἐκείνην δὲ κάνησαν.
(Metaphysics Θ 6, 1048b18-b36)

In Metaphysics Θ 8:

And while in some cases the exercise is the ultimate thing (e.g. in sight the ultimate thing is seeing, and no further product besides this results from sight), but from some things a product follows (e.g. from the art of building there results a house over and above the act of building), yet none the less in the former type of case the exercise is the end, and in the latter more of an end than the potentiality is. This is because the act of building is in what is being built, and it comes to be, and is, simultaneously with the house. Where, then, what comes to be is something apart from the exercise, the actuality is in the object being produced, e.g. the actuality of building is in what is being built and that of weaving in what is being woven, and similarly in other cases, and in general the change is in what is being changed; but where there is no further product apart from the actuality, the actuality is in the subjects themselves, e.g. the seeing is in the one who sees and the theorizing in the one who theorizes, and life is in the soul (which is why happiness is too; for it is a certain sort of life).

ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ τῶν μὲν ἐσχατον ἡ χρήσις (οἶνον ὄφεος ἡ ὄρασις, καὶ οὐθὲν γίγνεται παρὰ τάυτην ἔτερον ἀπὸ τῆς ὀφεως), ἀπ’ ἐνόων δὲ γίγνεται τι (οἶνον ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκοδομηκῆς οἰκία παρὰ τῆς οἰκοδόμησιν), ὅμως οὐθὲν ἔγερτο ἡθα μὲν τέλος, ἐνθα δὲ μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεως ἐστιν ἡ γὰρ οἰκοδόμησις ἐν τῷ οἰκοδομημένῳ, καὶ ἁμα γίγνεται καὶ ἐστι τῇ οἰκίᾳ. δοσιν μὲν οὖν ἐπεν τι ἐστι παρὰ τὴν χρήσιν τὸ γεγονόμενον, τοὺς τῶν μὲν ἡ ἐνέργεια ἐν τῷ ποιημένῳ ἐστίν (οἶνον ἢ τε οἰκοδόμησιν ἐν τῷ οἰκοδομημένῳ καὶ ἡ ὑφανσις ἐν τῷ ὑφανωμένῳ, ὑμιὸς δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ ὅλως ἡ κάνησις ἐν τῷ κατασκευασμένῳ) δοσιν μὴ ἔστιν ἀλλὰ τι ἔγραφαν παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἐν αὐτοὺς ὑπάρχει ἡ ἐνέργεια (οἶνον ἢ ὄρασις ἐν τῷ ὑρώνι καὶ ἡ θεωρία ἐν τῷ θεωροῦντι καὶ ἡ ἵκη ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, διὸ καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία Ἰωὴ γὰρ ποιά τίς ἐστιν). (Metaphysics Θ 8, 1050a23-b2)

In NE 10.3:

Again, they assume that the good is complete while movements and comings into being are incomplete and try to exhibit pleasure as being a movement and a coming into being. But they do not seem to be right, nor does it seem to be a movement. For speed and slowness are thought to be proper to every movement, if not in itself (as e.g. that of the heavens) then in relation to something else; but of pleasure neither of these things is true. For while we may become pleased quickly as we may become angry quickly, we cannot be pleased quickly, not even in relation to some one else, while we can walk, or grow, or like, quickly. While then, we can change quickly or slowly into a state of pleasure, we cannot quickly exhibit the activity of pleasure, i.e. be pleased.
And, in NE 10.4:

Seeing seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form; and pleasure also seems to be of this nature. For it is a whole, and at no time can one find a pleasure whose form will be completed if the pleasure lasts longer. For this reason, too, it is not a movement. For every movement (e.g. that of building) takes time and is for the sake of an end, and is complete when it has made what it aims at. It is complete, therefore, only in the whole time or at the final moment. For the fitting together of the stones is different from the fluting of the column, and these are both different from the making of the temple; and the making of the temple is complete (for it lacks nothing with a view to the end proposed), but the making of the base or of the triglyph is incomplete; for each is the making of a part. They differ in kind, then, and it is not possible to find at any and every time a movement complete in form, but if at all, only in the whole time. So, too, in the case of walking and all other movements. For if locomotion is a movement from here to there, it, too, has differences in kind — flying, walking, leaping, and so on.

dokei γὰρ ἢ μὲν ὁρᾶσις καθ’ ὀντυφών χρόνου τελεία εἶναι ὥσπερ ἕστων ἐνδείξεις οὐδένος ὧν ἐστιν ἐνδείξεις οὐδένος ὑπ’ ὑπότροπον γενόμενον τελείωσεν αὐτῆς τὸ εἶδος τοιοῦτον ἢ ἐσκε καὶ ἡ ἱδρον. ὃλον γὰρ τι ἐστί, καὶ κατ’ οὐδένα χρόνον λάβοι τις ἂν ἱδρον ἢ ἐπὶ πλείω χρόνον γενομένης τελειωθήσεται τὸ εἶδος. διόπερ οὐδὲ κάνησις ἐστὶν. ἐν χρόνῳ γὰρ πάσα κάνησις καὶ τέλους τυός, ὁδόν ἢ οἰκοδομική, καὶ τελεία ὅταν ποιήσῃ οὐ ἐφείται. ἢ ἐν ἀπάντι δὴ τῷ χρόνῳ ἢ τούτῳ. ἐν δὲ τοῖς μέρεσι καὶ τῷ χρόνῳ πάσαι ἀτελεῖς, καὶ ἐπεραὶ τῷ εἴδει τῆς ἄλης καὶ ἄλληλων. ἢ γὰρ τῶν λίθων σύνθεσις ἐτέρα τῆς τοῦ κόσμος ῥαβδώσεως, καὶ αὕτη τῆς τοῦ ναοῦ ποιήσεως καὶ ἢ μὲν τοῦ ναοῦ τελεία (οὐδένος γὰρ ενδείξεις πρὸς τὸ προκείμενον), ἢ δὲ τῆς κρυπτός καὶ τοῦ τριγλύφου ἀτελῆς μέρους γὰρ ἐκατέρτα. τῷ εἴδει οὐν διαφέρουσι, καὶ οὐκ ἔστων ἐν ὑπότροπῳ χρόνῳ λαβέων κάνησις τελεία τῷ εἴδει, ἀλλ’ εἶπε, ἐν τῷ ἀπάντᾳ. ὠμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ βαδίσεως καὶ τῶν λυπῶν. εἰ γὰρ ἔστων ἢ φορά κάνησις πάθεν ποτι, καὶ ταυτίς διαφοράς κατ’ εἴδη, πτήσεως βάδισως ἀλοισι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. (Nicomachean Ethics X.4, 1174a14-1174a31)
2.1.2

Despite the enormous amount of scholarship on the distinction and the various traditions it has inspired, there is no consensus amongst commentators either about what the distinction is meant to classify, or about what the basis for the classification is supposed to be.\(^3\) Until recently, much of the critical attention paid to the distinction has concerned the temporal features that Aristotle ascribes to each of these two kinds of actions in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 and NE 10.3 and 10.4. In *Metaphysics* Θ 6, in what was once commonly referred to as the tense test, Aristotle explains that, while in the case of incomplete actions, “it is not the case that at the same time we are walking and have walked, or are building and have built, or are coming to be and have come to be”, in the case of complete actions, “at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood.” (*Metaphysics* Θ.6 1048a18-36)\(^4\) In NE 10.3, he claims that while incomplete actions can be qualified by the adverbs “quickly” and “slowly”, the same is not true for complete actions: “while we may become pleased quickly as we may become angry quickly, we cannot be pleased quickly, not even in relation to someone else, while we can walk, or grow, or like, quickly.” (NE 10.3 1173a340b4) But, as Ackrill and others have argued, these temporal features do not seem to consistently hold for the examples Aristotle offers. In both Met Θ 6 and NE X, Aristotle offers walking as an example of an incomplete action and yet it seems unproblematic to think that, when I am walking, I have also walked, which is to say, I have engaged in the action of walking. Why then is walking classified as an incom-

\(^3\)There is, however, widespread agreement amongst commentators that the distinction is not, as was once commonly thought, a merely linguistic one. See Ryle (1966) and Kenny (1963) for this “linguistic” reading of the distinction, and Ackrill (1997), Graham (1980), Mourelatos (1978), Penner (1971), Pickering and Potts (1965) for some problems that arise on this reading. For some more recent non-linguistic treatments of the distinction, see Beere (2009), Bostock (1988), Burnyeat (2008), Heinaman (1994) and Kosman (1969, 1984), Liske (1991).

\(^4\)This temporal feature is often described as an entailment relation between the present and perfect tense: in the case of incomplete actions, “X is ϕ-ing (present tense)” entails that “X has not ϕ-ed (perfect tense)” whereas in the case of complete actions, “X is ϕ-ing (present tense)” entails that “X has ϕ-ed (perfect tense).”
plete action? Ackrill considers a possible solution suggested by Aristotle in the NE passage: walking is always moving from one location to another, and the temporal features Aristotle ascribes to incomplete actions are meant to hold of any particular instance of walking only when described in terms of the “whence” and “whither”. This solution resolves the initial difficulty — if I am walking to Nassau Street, I have not yet walked to Nassau Street — but, as Ackrill notices, it in turn creates problems for Aristotle’s examples of complete actions. The solution in the case of walking depends on describing the action in question at a certain level of specificity, but if we do the same in the case of a supposedly complete action like seeing, we again run into problems: it is not the case, for example, that if I am seeing a film, I have seen it. Not only is this solution ultimately unsuccessful but, in fact, we should be suspicious of the general strategy. Nowhere, in his discussions of the distinction, does Aristotle make reference to the particular circumstances or intended goals under which an action is performed. Without any suggestion from Aristotle about how and when to do so, resolving these apparent difficulties by positing some implicit reference to such particularities seems ad hoc.

Increasingly, commentators have turned their attention away from these temporal features considered on their own and towards what appears to underlie and explain these features. It is now widely appreciated that the so called “tense test” is actually meant to draw out the difference in aspect between the Greek present and perfect tense: the fact that the present does not entail the perfect in the case of actions like building and walking reflects the intrinsic incompleteness of these actions. More generally, the difference in the internal temporal structure between incomplete and complete actions reflects a difference in the way these two kinds of actions are supposed to be related to their ends. Actions like walking, building and learning are for the sake of ends beyond themselves and it is for this reason that they necessarily take time in order for their ends to be accomplished. By contrast, actions like seeing and
understanding are, or contain, their own ends and it is for this reason that, though they may take place over time, they are complete or *teleia* instantaneously and at every moment.

If the relationship between actions and their ends is indeed what is fundamental to the distinction, this is helpful for explaining the various features Aristotle ascribes to each kind of action but we are still left with the question of why Aristotle classifies various actions the way he does. What makes it the case that actions like building and walking are for the sake of ends beyond themselves, while actions like seeing and understanding are themselves ends?

Consider briefly two broad interpretive strategies and the problems faced by each. The first strategy is a normative or evaluative interpretation of the distinction according to which the end of an action is determined by the goals an agent has when she performs an action, or, on a more sophisticated version of this interpretative strategy, the value or choiceworthiness of the action. This type of interpretation is invited by the presence of this distinction in ethical contexts, and also by the ambiguity of the term *telos*. However, neither version of this strategy is ultimately successful in explaining why Aristotle classifies actions the way he does. Consider the first version of this interpretive strategy: an instance of housebuilding is for the sake of an end beyond itself when the builder performing the action does so in order to realize some end beyond the action itself, whereas an instance of contemplation is an end when a philosopher chooses to engage in it for its own sake, with no further end in mind. Though this is a temptingly intuitive way to think about the distinction, especially in the ethical context, it seems unlikely to have been what Aristotle had in mind. First, none of Aristotle’s discussions of the distinction make reference to an agent’s goals or motivations in performing actions; if an agent’s goals were supposed to be central to the distinction, Aristotle’s failure to say as much would be a remarkable oversight. Second, relatedly, Aristotle uses the same examples throughout his corpus
to illustrate each side of the distinction, and with no suggestion that these examples
admit of exceptions: this suggests that certain actions are always for the sake of ends
beyond themselves, whereas others are not. And while Aristotle might well think that
certain actions are nearly always performed with particular goals in mind — agents
rarely engage in acts of building without the goal of realizing some finished product
— this doesn’t seem a plausible explanation of other examples Aristotle offers, such
as walking and seeing. It is easy enough to imagine walking aimlessly, with no clear
goal or purpose in mind. Likewise, it is surely common for agents to engage in an
instance of seeing with a further goal in mind. We should be skeptical of any solution
that makes the classification of actions depend on features of circumstances or an
agent’s goals.

Different problems face the second version of this interpretive strategy. On this
version, ends play a certain normative role for the actions leading up to them: ends
are what structure or guide actions, and are the standards by which we judge the
success of various actions. A house is what structures and guides the process of
housebuilding, and is the standard by which we judge the success of any instance of
building.\(^5\)

\(^5\)See Lear (2004) for a sustained defense of this interpretation of Aristotelian ends. Lear argues,
rightly I think, that the relevant notion of telos is not a mere psychological one, and is not defined
as an object of actual or appropriate desire. Likewise, she rightly argues that the natural telos of
a thing is intimately associated with a thing’s essence or form. I think Lear goes wrong in offering
an account of what it is to be an end as what sets the normative standard for the processes leading
up to it. Lear argues, “[A]ccording to Aristotle’s technical understanding of a telos as presented
in the Physics, an end is a normative standard for the activity undertaken for its sake. The end
determines what counts as success in the activity. For this reason, it is closely associated with the
nature of that thing whose end it is. As Aristotle says, ‘What a thing is and what it is for are
one and the same’” (Physics II.7 198a25-6) (Lear 12-13) She candy this idea out with the example
of housebuilding: “carpentry aims at houses, and houses are what make carpentry a good skill to
employ”. Likewise, she argues: “an end is the good of an activity that determines its form and what
it is to be a successful instance of that activity. So for example a doctor may treat patients not
because he wants to make them healthy but simply because he wants to make a buck. Nevertheless
we judge the quality of his care not by whether it causes the patient to give him money [...] but
by whether the patient is cured.” (33-34) Her account of what it is for something to be an end —
something that sets a normative standard, and structures and guides the processes leading to it —
seems to me to pick out a feature that all ends have, but fall well short of a satisfying account of
what it is to be an end in the natural teleological sense she wants. It is certainly true that ends
set normative standards for the things that are for the sake of them, but this is a consequence, not
By contrast, on this interpretation, it is the perceiving or understanding itself rather than any end realized beyond these activities, that structure these activities and make them choiceworthy. There is, I think, something right about this suggestion: the ends at issue in the distinction are the sorts of ends that play a normative role for Aristotle and cannot be reduced to facts about an agent’s occurrent goals or desires. However, the fact that ends play this normative role is, I think, insufficient as an explanation of why any given action has the end that it does, at least as this distinction appears in theoretical contexts. Again, seeing is supposed to be itself an end, but Aristotle claims in DA 3.12-13 that seeing has a necessary function for organisms equipped with the capacity for sight: seeing allows organisms to perceive and pursue food at a distance, as well as to perceive and avoid danger. It is not that seeing simply happens to be useful for organisms, but rather that it has, for Aristotle, a certain function for sighted organisms that explains its presence in these organisms. This function appears to play just the kind of normative role that, on this interpretation, is supposed to characterize ends. Why then, if this interpretation were right, would seeing be an end rather than for the sake of this end, namely, securing food and avoiding danger? This example suggests that, more generally, any strategy that appeals to the normative role ends play in structuring or guiding actions will not be sufficient to carve the distinction in the right way. Whereas the first version of this interpretive strategy invokes the wrong sense of telos, the second version gives an inadequate account of what it is for something to be a telos.

The second broad interpretive strategy is a metaphysical one inspired by Aristotle’s distinction between first and second actuality in DA 2.5. Here, Aristotle explains an account, of what it is for something to be an end. Many things, including processes and vicious goals, are such as to structure and the guide the processes leading to them, but wouldn’t count as ends in the sense at play in Aristotle’s theoretical works. Moreover, her view doesn’t have the resources for a distinction between the way in which a subordinate end can be for the sake of a higher end, and the way in which something that is not an end (a potential or a process) can be for the sake of an end. These are, I take it, two different kinds of “for the sake of” relations, but they appear to collapse on her view.
that the transition from having knowledge to exercising that knowledge in understanding is not an alteration or change in quality, and compares this fact with the way in which a builder is not altered when she exercises her technē in building. Aristotle is often interpreted here as claiming that neither building nor understanding are changes and, so the interpretation goes, what explains this is that they are second actualities, which is to say, the exercises of acquired hexeis or first actualities. There are, I think, important things that this reading gets right. As I will argue, the distinction is indeed a metaphysical one between the sorts of actions that fall under the class of changes, and the sorts of actions or activities that do not. Likewise, I will argue, we learn something important from DA 2.5 about the nature of complete actions; the passage, contrary to what Ackrill, Burnyeat, and others have argued, is in fact relevant for understanding the distinction.6

However, as these commentators have worried, the interpretation as it stands has the obvious problem of rendering housebuilding a complete action when, throughout Aristotle’s corpus, it is a paradigmatic example of an incomplete action. And, the typical response in the face of this worry — to distinguish between the builder’s exercise of her building art and the change that is the building of the house — goes against Aristotle’s straightforward identification of the action the agent performs and the change undergone by the patient in ordinary cases of change.

In what follows, I will be assuming, along the lines of the second interpretive strategy, that the distinction is indeed a metaphysical one about action types, and that while incomplete actions like walking and building are changes, actions like

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6Ackrill, for example, in discussing DA 2.5, insists that the distinction between acquiring a first actuality and exercising it is “utterly different from that drawn elsewhere between energeia and kinesis”, explaining that “the distinction between acquiring and using an ability can itself be applied to (say) house building as to (say) knowledge of mathematics. When a skilled man builds a house, this will not, according to the De Anima distinction, be a kinesis, but an energeia; for the man is not changing but expressing his nature, not acquiring, but exercising a perfection.” (1965 161-62). Burnyeat endorses Ackrill’s insistence that there is no clear relationship between the discussion in DA 2.5 and the distinction between complete and incomplete actions in other texts (2008 272 n. 130; 2002 49 n. 56).
seeing and understanding are not. If this is right, we might hope to get insight into the nature of incomplete actions by thinking about the nature of change more generally. In what follows, I argue that the sense in which actions like walking and building are incomplete should be understood in terms of the way in which all change is an “incomplete actuality of that which potentially is, *qua* such.”

### 2.2 Incomplete Actions and Change

Change, Aristotle claims in *Physics* III.1, is “the actuality of that which potentially is, *qua* such (ἡ τοῦ δύναμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἡ τοιούτον, κάνησις ἔστω).” (201a10-11)

Needless to say, Aristotle’s definition is not immediately perspicuous. In what sense is change the actuality of a potentiality, and what role does the “*qua* such” qualification play in the definition? Matters are only made more obscure when Aristotle offers his revised definition of change in terms of both the agent and patient of a change: “the actuality of what potentially acts and what potentially is acted upon *qua* such, both simpliciter and also in each particular case, e.g. building or healing (ἐπὶ δὲ γνωριμώτερον, ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ποιητικὸν καὶ παθητικὸν, ἡ τοιούτον, ἀπλῶς τε καὶ πάλιν καθ’ ἑκαστον, ἡ οἰκοδόμησις ἡ ἱάτρεια).” (III.3 202b26-8) How is change the actuality of *both* the agent and patient “*qua* such”?

On a common interpretation of the first definition Aristotle is claiming that change is the actuality, or the being actual, of a potential for *changing*. On this interpretation, the bricks and wood that have the potential to be a house are changing when

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7Aristotle spells out the *qua* clause as follows: “by *qua* I mean this. The bronze is potentially a statue but nevertheless it is not the actuality of bronze *qua* bronze that is change.” (201a29-31) Aristotle’s point, as Coope (2004, 2012) argues, is that the actuality of the bronze *qua* bronze is different from the actuality of the bronze *qua* potentially a statue, and it is the latter that is at issue in the definition of change.

8I will not consider another possible interpretation according to which change is the *actualization* of that which potentially is, *qua* such. The objections against this interpretation are, I think, decisive. First, the definition requires translating *entelecheia* as actualization rather than actuality, a translation that is linguistically suspect given its use elsewhere in Aristotle’s corpus. Second, the definition turns out to be not only uninformative but needlessly complicated. See Kostman (1987) for a defense of this interpretation, and Waterlow (1982) and Coope (2004, 2012) for objections.
the potential that they have to undergo change is made actual. These materials have various potentials and the “qua such” clause functions to picks out this potential, the potential for changing, as the relevant one. This interpretation of the potential in the definition as a potential for change seems to be supported by claims Aristotle makes in the subsequent discussion: he claims that alteration is the actuality of the “alterable qua alterable” (201a11-12) and that change is the actuality of what potentially is “qua changeable” (201a27-9). It is natural to interpret the terms “alterable” and “changeable” as potentials for undergoing a change. This interpretation is also helpful for understanding the revised account of change in terms of both the agent and patient. On this interpretation, the bricks and wood becoming a house is the actuality of their potential for being made into a house, qua such, and the builder’s making a house is the actuality of his potential for making a house, qua such. The former is the actuality of a potential for changing in the sense of undergoing a change, and the latter is the actuality of a potential for changing in the sense of changing something else.

In addition to apparent textual support, this interpretation has the additional virtue of being fairly intuitive. It is natural to think that the potential the builder has qua builder is a potential for building. Likewise, it is natural to think that the relevant potential the bricks and wood have is to be built. There are, however, problems with this interpretation. First, Aristotle’s “definition” of change turns out to be remarkably uninformative; on this interpretation, Aristotle is giving an account of change in terms of the potential for changing. A second problem is that it doesn’t seem to explain the way in which change is only an incomplete actuality of a potential. If the potential in question is a potential for changing, it looks as though this potential is made fully actual or complete in the process of changing itself. If change is an

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9cf Heinaman (1994)
incomplete actuality of the potential, what would be the complete actuality of this potential, qua such?

An alternative, and what I take to be more attractive interpretation defended in some way by Kosman (1969), Waterlow (1982) and Coope (2004, 2007, 2009), is that the potential referred to in the first definition is the potential for the being of some new state that is the result of a process, rather than a potential for changing or becoming. However, there are two ways for this potential to be made actual: the potential can be made actual “qua potential”, and the potential can be made actual without qualification. Change is the actuality of such a potential but only qua potential; it is in this sense that change is only an incomplete actuality. Consider again the example of the bricks and wood that have the potential to be a house. On this interpretation, the change that the bricks and wood undergo when they are becoming a house is an incomplete actuality of the potential they have to be a house: the change is the actuality, or the being actual, of this potential but only insofar as it remains potential. Once the potential that the bricks and wood have to be a house has been made fully actual — once this potential has been fully realized — the process of becoming has come to an end. This interpretation explains the revised definition in a similar manner: just as the potential that bricks and stones have is, ultimately, a potential for the being of a house, so also the potential that the builder has is, ultimately, a potential for the being of a house. This is, admittedly, an unintuitive way of thinking of the skill or ability that the builder has; it is much more natural to think that the potential she exercises is a power or potential for building. However, it starts to seem more plausible as an interpretation of Aristotle’s own view when we recall that, strictly speaking, the builder’s skill consists in her having the form of a house in her soul; the ability she has really is, for Aristotle, a potential that is realized in an actual house.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\)See for example *Metaphysics* Zeta 9 1034a24, cf. 1032b23
Unlike the first interpretation, this second interpretation makes Aristotle’s definition of change genuinely informative. Change is not defined in terms of changing or becoming, but rather in terms of the being of some new state that is the result of change. Insofar as this is true, the interpretation also captures one of the motivations behind Aristotle’s account of change. Aristotle’s account of change in the Physics III.1-3 is aimed in part at responding to Parmenides’ insistence that, if it is impossible for something to come to be from what is not, there can be no such thing as change. In response to Parmenides, Aristotle offers an account meant to capture the way in which change is amongst the things that are, but also the way in which it is closely related to privation and what is not. On this second interpretation of Aristotle’s account, change has a limited kind of being as only an incomplete actuality of a potential that is ultimately for the being of some new state: it is this new state, the result of a change, that is the complete fulfillment or actuality of the potential in question.\footnote{Aristotle, in fleshing out the way in which change is an incomplete kind of actuality or activity, explains that “the potential, of which it is the actuality, is incomplete.” (201b32-3) What does it mean for a potential to be incomplete? Coope suggests “the potential is incomplete in that it is only retained for as long as it is not completely fulfilled”.

This relates to a further virtue of this interpretation: it captures Aristotle’s considered view that what is posterior in genesis is prior in being. We learn in Metaphysics Θ 8 that \textit{energeia} is always prior in being to its corresponding \textit{dunamis}, where the term \textit{“energeia”} is being used to cover both the actions that are the exercises of \textit{dunameis}, and the ends that result from these actions in the case where there is some result or product beyond the exercise of the \textit{dunamis}. Setting aside the details, what we learn from this passage is that both the building art and the exercise of this art in the action of building depend ontologically on a house. More generally, what we seem to learn is that every change depends ontologically on that which it is for the sake of, its end.
The second interpretation of Aristotle’s definition of change in *Physics* III.1-3 captures this ontological dependence in a way the first does not. On the first interpretation, the *dunamis* that the bricks and wood have for being a house is different from the *dunamis* they have to undergo a change or to be built into a house. And, it is unclear on this interpretation how these two *dunameis* are related. By contrast, on the second interpretation, what it is for the bricks and wood to have the passive potential for the being of a house is for them to *be* potentially a house by being the proximate matter that can be enformed into a house. Likewise, what it is for the builder to have an active potential for the being of a house is for her to possess the form of a house in the builder’s soul. And, what it is to be for the exercise of both these potentials in the process of building is to be the actuality of these potentials so long as they remain potential. The upshot is that both the *dunameis* and the action that is the exercise of these *dunameis* depend for the kind of being that they have on the same end state; this end state is the complete fulfillment of both these *dunameis*.

Suppose this interpretation of Aristotle’s account of change is right. Return now to our initial problem. We wanted an explanation of why, for Aristotle, certain actions are for the sake of ends beyond themselves while others are themselves ends. Aristotle’s account of change gives us a way of understanding the incompleteness at issue on one side of the distinction: what it is for any change to be incomplete or *ateles* is for it to be only a partial fulfillment of the end of some corresponding *dunamis*. What explains why every change is for the sake of some end is that every change depends ontologically on some determinate end that is the complete fulfillment of the *dunamis* being exercised. My suggestion then is that this ontological dependence on some end beyond itself will characterize all incomplete actions, which is to say, all actions that fall under the class of changes.

We have already seen how this works in the case of housebuilding. What about other examples Aristotle offers of actions that are for the sake of ends beyond them-
In every one of Aristotle’s examples, I want to suggest, what it is to be for the action in question will be to be the incomplete fulfillment of the end of some corresponding potential: every *dunamis* exercised in a change is, essentially, for the being of some end, and every change is the incomplete fulfillment of the being of this end; it is the fulfillment only *qua* potential. In the case of any productive action, which is to say, any action that is the exercise of a *technē*, the metaphysical end will be some state of affairs or product beyond the action itself: flute-making is for the sake of the being of a flute, medical treatment is for the sake of the being of a healthy state of the body, learning and teaching will be for the sake of the being of a knowledgeable state of the soul, and so on. A similar account will also hold for the sorts of incomplete actions that are not the exercises of *technē*, such as walking. Walking, on the view I am proposing, is for the sake of the walker’s being in a new location: walking is always a movement from one location to another because the what it is to be of walking is the incomplete fulfillment of the potential for being in a new location.\(^{12}\)

If this is the right way to think about Aristotle’s account of change, and how this account explains the end-directedness of all actions that are changes, consider two consequences. First, the fact that a particular kind of action has a single, determinate end is a permanent feature of the way things are, independent of the circumstances under which that action is performed, and of an agent’s motivations in performing that action. On the view I am defending, every action is the exercise of some corresponding *dunamis*, and every *dunamis* has a single determinate end that is its complete fulfillment or actuality. This also means that whatever the metaphysical end of an action is has fairly limited normative consequences: the fact that a house is

\(^{12}\)Though, to be clear, this is not a complete specification of the what it is to be of walking; a complete specification would differentiate walking from other forms of locomotion. The different forms of locomotion will, presumably, be differentiated on the basis of the different mechanisms by which an organism moves; though the different forms of locomotion are similar in that they are all for the sake of the organism’s being in a new location, walking accomplishes this end by means of the legs, whereas flying accomplishes it by means of wings, and so on.
the end of housebuilding tells us what counts as a successful instance of housebuilding, but it doesn’t tell us why or when we should be interested in making houses.

A second consequence of the view I’m defending is that, although every possible action has a determinate metaphysical end, not every action achieves this metaphysical end. That is, although every *dynamis* has a single determinate end that is its complete realization, a *dynamis* can be exercised in all kinds of ways in actions that will not lead to the complete fulfillment of the *dynamis*. A builder can use her skill to write an architectural manual or build doll houses; indeed, she can even use it to intentionally build faulty houses. Likewise, a human being can exercise her capacity for locomotion to walk on a treadmill; she will not, in doing so, arrive at a new location, and so the metaphysical end of her action will not be achieved. The upshot is that we need not posit a distinct *dynamis* for every possible action we can describe; rather, various possible actions will be explained in terms of the same *dynamis*, and so also in terms of the same metaphysical end. I take this to be an attractive feature of the view; although many of the details would need to be spelled out, it in principle allows us to explain the numerous possible events or changes in the world in terms of a more limited set of more fundamental ontological entities.

### 2.3 Complete Actions and Soul Capacities

So far, I’ve defended an interpretation of what it is for change to be an incomplete *entelecheia*, and appealed to this notion of incompleteness to explain the way in which, according to Aristotle, certain actions are incomplete, or for the sake of ends beyond themselves. How does this account extend to the case of complete actions, the sorts of actions that are themselves ends? I argued in the previous section that, in the case of change, the potentials exercised in any given change are only incompletely realized during the change itself, and fully realized once the change is over. If we extend this account to the case of complete actions, we can infer that these actions, unlike the
actions that fall under the class of changes, are themselves the complete fulfillments of some corresponding \textit{dunameis}. So, for example, seeing and understanding are the complete fulfillments of their corresponding potentials, namely sight and reason.

This is not yet a satisfying account of the distinction. What we want is an explanation of \textit{why} certain actions are themselves the complete fulfillments of their corresponding \textit{dunameis}, rather than being for the sake of ends beyond themselves. What is supposed to be special about actions like seeing and understanding such that they are not examples of change?

\textbf{2.3.1}

I suggested in §2.1 that a common strategy to interpret the nature of complete actions is inspired by a misreading of Aristotle’s discussion in DA 2.5. In the passage at issue, Aristotle makes various distinctions amongst potentiality and actuality using the example of “knowing”:

\begin{quote}
But we must make distinctions concerning potentiality and actuality; for at the moment we are speaking of them in an unqualified way. For there are knowers in that we should speak of a man as a knower because man is one of those who are knowers and have knowledge; then there are knowers in that we speak straightaway of the man who has knowledge of grammar as a knower. (Each of these has a capacity but not in the same way – the one because his kind, his stuff, is of this sort, the other because he can if he so wishes contemplate, as long as nothing external prevents him.)
\end{quote}

There is thirdly the man who is already contemplating, the man who is actually and in the proper sense knowing this particular A.

\begin{quote}
\textit{διαπρέπειν δὲ καὶ περὶ δυνάμεως καὶ ἐντελεχείας νόν γὰρ ἀπλῶς ἐλέγομεν περὶ αὐτῶν. ἢστι μὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἐπιστήμων τι ὡς ἃν εἶπομεν ἄνθρωπον}
\end{quote}
A human being, in virtue of falling within the class of essentially rational beings, counts as potentially a knower. This potential that a human being has in virtue of her essence for being a knower has two progressive stages of fulfillment. The *dunamis* for “knowing” or understanding is fulfilled in the first instance in the human being who has acquired knowledge; she counts as being a knower in some stronger sense than she did when she was ignorant. The *dunamis* for knowing is fulfilled in a second, further way in the individual who is actively exercising the knowledge she has acquired in the activity of knowing; it is this individual who counts as being a knower in actuality and in the most authoritative sense.

Aristotle describes the transition to the first stage of fulfillment — the transition from ignorance to the possession of knowledge — as a special case of ordinary change: although it is a change in the category of quality, it should not be thought of simply in terms of privation because it is a change “to a thing’s dispositions and to its nature (τὴν τε ἐπὶ τὰς στερητικὰς διαθέσεις μεταβολὴν καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τὰς έξεις καὶ τὴν φύσιν).” (417b15-6) The transition to the second stage of fulfillment — the transition from having but not exercising one’s knowledge to exercising it in the activity of knowing — is “either not an alteration at all (being in reality a development into its true self or actuality) or at least an alteration in a quite different sense (θεωροῦν γάρ γίνεται τὸ ἔχον τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὅπερ ἡ ὑπὸ ἑστων ἀλλοιούσθαι (εἰς αὐτὸ γὰρ ἡ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν) ἡ ἑτέρον γένος ἀλλοιώσεως).” (417b5-7) Like the first transition, this second transition is a development of a human being’s nature *qua* rational. However,
Complete Actions and Soul Capacities  Aristotle on Complete & Incomplete Actions

unlike the first transition, this second transition is not a change in the category of quality nor is it, strictly speaking, a change at all. Rather, Aristotle explains, the wise man is not altered when he uses his wisdom, anymore than the builder is when he exercises his skill in building a house.

Some commentators have concluded, on the basis of this comparison between the wise man and the builder, that both the exercise of the builder’s skill and the exercise of knowledge are complete activities: they are the sorts of *energeiai* that are not changes. Not only does this conclusion give us the wrong result in the case of housebuilding, but it is not warranted by what Aristotle actually says. The comparison Aristotle draws between building and knowing is merely to make the point that the knower is not altered when she exercises her knowledge, just as the builder is not altered when he builds. Aristotle is not here denying that building itself is an example of change; the fact the builder is not altered when he builds is perfectly compatible with thinking that building is itself a change because, as we have seen, in the case of building the builder is the *agent* of a change and it is the *patient*, the bricks and stones, that are altered in the process of building. The same is not true, however, in the case of knowing: the *dunamis* that the knower has is a *passive* potential, namely, to receive intelligible forms. The crucial difference between building and knowing that Aristotle does not explicitly identify is that, in the case of knowing, *neither* the agent nor the patient undergoes a change; again, in the case of knowing, the transition from merely having knowledge to actively grasping intelligible forms is not a change at all.

What then, if not its being the exercise of an acquired *hexis*, explains why knowing is not a change? There is another difference between knowing and building that Aristotle does not make explicit that, I will suggest, is crucial for appreciating why knowing is not a change. Specifically, the *dunamis* that a human being has for knowing is an aspect of her essential nature. This is significant given what we have
learnt earlier in the DA. Aristotle has argued that the soul of a living organism is its form or ousia, and that every soul is constituted by various dunameis that equip the organism in question to engage in the sorts of activities characteristic of its species. And, Aristotle explains, when a living being is engaging in these activities, living the life that is definitory or characteristic of its species, it is achieving its end. What this means, in the case of human beings, is that when a human being acquires and then exercises knowledge, she is fully realizing her rational nature, fully being the sort of thing she essentially is. Indeed, throughout Aristotle’s discussion in DA 2.5, he describes the potentiality and actuality at issue in terms of an individual’s being a knower in potentiality and in actuality.

How is this helpful for explaining why, when a learned individual exercises her knowledge in knowing, her activity is not an instance of change? Recall that the analysis of change I defended in §2.2 depended on thinking that the dunamis exercised in any change is, strictly speaking, the dunamis for the being of some end beyond the change itself. On this interpretation, all dunameis, and likewise all changes, depend ontologically on what it is that is their metaphysical end; the complete fulfillment of these dunameis is in the being of some F that results from change. I want to suggest that, like in the case of incomplete actions, in the case of complete actions the dunameis that are exercised are only completely fulfilled in the being of some F. That is, like in the case of incomplete actions, dunameis depend ontologically on what it is that is their actuality. However, unlike in the case of incomplete actions, the being that is realized in a complete activity is not something external to the agent and patient but rather the possessor of the dunamis in respect of that dunamis. In the case of knowing, both the initial dunamis that an agent has in virtue of her rational soul, and the first actuality of this dunamis in the form of a settled state of knowledge depend ontologically on the same end, namely, the being in actuality of an essentially knowing organism.
2.3.2

To test the account I have offered, consider how it helps us interpret Aristotle’s discussion of this distinction in *Metaphysics Θ 6* and 8, beginning with Θ 6. This passage is notoriously problematic both for textual and interpretive reasons. The text is omitted from several manuscripts, and even in those manuscripts where the text appears, it is extremely corrupt. Alongside these difficulties, Aristotle’s discussion in this passage seems out of place and indeed at times inconsistent with what comes before and after in *Metaphysics Θ*. I accept Burnyeat’s extended defense of this passage as genuinely Aristotelian. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to weigh in on the question of whether the passage ought to be placed where it currently is. I want only to suggest that, despite a non-standard use of certain terminology, everything Aristotle says in this passage is consistent with the view I have put forward.

As we have seen, in the passage, Aristotle draws a distinction between two sorts of actions. One sort of action has a limit and is not itself an end but rather a means to an end. The other sort of action is one in which the end is present. He illustrates the difference between the two sorts of actions by noting that, for example, “at the same time one sees and has seen, and one is wise and has been wise, and one understands and has understood, but it is not the case that <at the same time> one is learning <something> and has learned <it>, or that <at the same time> one is being cured and has been cured.” I take Burnyeat’s suggestion here that, for Aristotle, when we describe actions that are means to ends in the present tense, this does not entail the true application of the perfect tense to the same action. By contrast, in the case of actions that are themselves ends, the present tense description of an action entails the accuracy of the perfect tense description. And, crucially, this is true because the aspect of Greek perfect verbs signifies the fulfillment of the end of an action. This is in line with everything I have said so far. In the case of actions like housebuilding
that are means to an end, the fact that a housebuilder is building a house does not entail (and indeed is incompatible with) the claim that the housebuilder has built the very same house. The house, the ergon of his action, is only fully realized when the process of housebuilding has come to an end. In the case of actions like seeing or contemplating, the end of the action is fully realized in the activity itself. Just so long as a sighted organism is engaged in the activity of seeing, it has accomplished its ergon qua sighted organism.

Surprisingly, Aristotle goes on in the passage to label the first sort of actions as kinesis and the second sort as energeia. In the EE, Aristotle describes both actions like housebuilding and actions like seeing as energeiai. In the Physics and De Anima, it appears that while actions like housebuilding are clearly processes, actions like seeing are not, strictly speaking, processes. We should expect on the basis of these texts that kineseis are a subclass of energeiai: both seeing and housebuilding are energeiai, but only housebuilding is the sort of energeia that counts as a kinesis. However, in this passage, Aristotle seems to contrast kineseis and energeiai, implying that actions like housebuilding are kineseis rather than being energeiai. I take it Aristotle is using the term energeia in a narrower sense, to contrast with kinesis; it is not uncommon for Aristotle to use the same term to refer to both the genus and one member of a species of that genus.\textsuperscript{13} Despite the fact he is using the term energeia in a non-standard, restricted way, the distinction he is pointing to is the very same distinction we have seen throughout his corpus.

Turn now to Metaphysics Θ 8. Being, for Aristotle, is said in many ways. In Metaphysics Θ, Aristotle is interested in examining being as it is said with respect to potentiality and fulfillment (κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ ἐντελέχειαν καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔργον). (1045b33-4) He proposes first to discuss potentiality in its authoritative sense and then to turn to the sense he is ultimately interested in for the purposes of elucidating the nature of

\textsuperscript{13}We see this, for example, in his use of both dunamis and praxis. Both can refer to a genus, or a species within a genus depending on the context.
being. He explains the first, authoritative sense as \textit{dunamis} said in accordance with change. This is the \textit{dunamis} a thing has when it is capable of initiating or undergoing a change. The other sense of \textit{dunamis}, the one Aristotle wants ultimately to elucidate, is the sense of capacity that underlies our talk of things being in capacity. Aristotle does not define this sense of \textit{dunamis}, explicitly, but rather seeks to clarify its nature through analogy with the first case. The analogy between the two senses of \textit{dunamis}, is meant to show how the way in which substance is the \textit{energeia} of matter is relevantly similar to the way in which change is the \textit{energeia} of a capacity.

To establish the relevant similarity between the change-capacity relationship and the substance-matter relationship, Aristotle offers a series of examples in Metaphysics \(\Theta\): (i) as what is building to the capacity to build, (ii) what is awake stands to what is asleep, (iii) what is seeing to what has eye-sight but has shut its eyes, (iv) what has been separated out of the matter to the matter, (v) what has been worked up from what has not been worked up. Each of these examples is meant to contrast activity with what is capable. The first three sorts of examples are familiar: each involves the exercise of some potential in activity: there is some thing that is actually engaged in an activity as opposed to merely having the potential to engage in an activity. Of these three cases, the first involves a productive action, whereas the second and third seem to involve activities Aristotle describes in the DA as not, strictly speaking, changes. Despite this difference, Aristotle is comfortable describing all of these as \textit{kineseis} in a broad sense of the term: they all involve some sort of doing or activity. The fourth and fifth example are meant to illustrate the relationship between substance and matter that Aristotle is ultimately interested in.

I have argued that a thing has a potential that can be employed in an activity in virtue of having, in the first place, a potential that is ultimately for the sake of the being of some end. With this analysis in mind, it becomes easier to see what analogy Aristotle wants to draw among the five cases: although the first three examples involve
a *kinesis*, all five examples are similar in contrasting the actuality or fulfillment of
a thing to its potential. As we have seen, the building that a builder engages in is
an actuality of his potential, albeit incomplete; it is an actuality of his potential qua
potential. Waking and seeing are both fulfillments of potentials that are themselves
*erga* or ends. Aristotle extends what we know from these cases - that a *kinesis* is a
fulfillment of a *dunamis* - to the relationship between substance and matter where
a completed substance fulfills the capacity of some matter. In describing each of
these cases as an example of an *energeia* in contrast to what is potential, Aristotle
is expanding the concept of an *energeia* from the cases we are familiar with, where
there is an exercise of some potential, to the substance-matter case. What is relevantly
similar about all of these cases is that the *energeia* he describes is an *entelecheia* of
a *dunamis*.

Consider a potential worry. I have argued that housebuilding and seeing are
relevantly different actions; the former is incomplete whereas the latter is complete.
Despite this importance difference, Aristotle seems to treat the case of building and
seeing as relevantly similar: both are the actualities of corresponding *dunameis*. In
fact, when Aristotle returns to the examples of sight and housebuilding in Θ 8 he
makes claims that seem to conflict with what I’ve said so far about the nature of
these actions. In the context of arguing for the view that *energeia* is prior to *dunamis,*
in the case of being, he insists that “everything that comes to be moves towards a
principle, i.e. an end. For that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and
the becoming is for the sake of the end; and the actuality (*ēnēργεια*) is the end, and
it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired.” (1050a6-10) He offers as
examples that animals have sight in order to see and that men have the art of building
in order that they may build. Aristotle seems to be claiming that both in the case
of building and in the case of seeing, it is the *energeia* that is the end. And yet,
throughout his corpus we have seen that the end of the *dunamis*, of housebuilding is
a house, not the activity of building. Indeed, he goes on to repeat the claim that the
energeia is the end and ergon in both sorts of cases: “For the ἐργον is the end, and
the ἐνέργεια is the ἐργον.” (1050a21-2)\textsuperscript{14}

In fact, I think Aristotle’s claims in Θ 8 do not threaten but indeed confirm the
view I have put forward. Aristotle, in the passages I’ve just quoted, is speaking
somewhat loosely, and immediately goes on to qualify the claim:

And while in some cases the exercise is the ultimate thing (e.g. in sight
the ultimate thing is seeing, and no other product besides this results
from sight), but from some things a product follows (e.g. from the art
of building there results a house as well as the act of building), yet none
the less the act is in the former case the end and in the latter more of an
end than the mere potentiality is. For the act of building is in the thing
that is being built, and comes to be and is at the same time as the house.

(1050a23-29)

In some actions, Aristotle claims, a product results from the exercise of a potential,
whereas in some cases the exercise itself is an end. Then, crucially, he qualifies the
claim he has just made that the energeia is the end in every case. He says rather
that the energeia in both sorts of cases is more an end than the mere potential. This
is perfectly in line with what we have seen elsewhere: the energeia in the case of
housebuilding is a fulfillment of the potential, but it is only a partial or incomplete
fulfillment. It is more end-like than the mere potential, but both the potential and
the energeia are ultimately for the sake of the house itself.

Aristotle continues:

Where, then, what comes to be is something apart from the exercise, the
actuality is in the object being produced, e.g. the actuality of building is

\textsuperscript{14}This seems to flatly contradict what we learn in the EE, that sometimes the ἐνέργεια is the end
and ἐργον and sometimes the end or ἐργον is a product outside of the ἐνέργεια.
in what is being built and that of weaving in what is being woven, and similarly in other cases, and in general the change is in what is being changed; but where there is no further product apart from the actuality, the actuality is in the subjects themselves, e.g. the seeing is in the one who sees and the theorizing in the one who theorizes, and life is in the soul (which is why happiness is too; for it is a certain sort of life).

όσων μὲν οὖν ἕτερόν τι ἐστι παρὰ τὴν χρήσιν τὸ γεγυμένον, τούτων μὲν ἡ ἐνέργεια ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ ἔστιν (οἶνον ἢ τε οἰκοδόμησιν ἐν τῷ οἰκοδομουμένῳ καὶ ἡ ύφανσις ἐν τῷ ύφανθημένῳ, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ ὅλως ἡ κάνης ἐν τῷ κυνομένῳ) ὃσων δὲ μὴ ἔστων ἄλλο τι ἐργον παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑπάρχει ἡ ἐνέργεια (οἶνον ἢ ὀρασία ἐν τῷ ὀρώντι καὶ ἡ θεωρία ἐν τῷ θεωροῦντι καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, διὸ καὶ ἡ εἰδαμονία ἡ γὰρ ποιά τὸς ἔστων).

(1050a26-b2)

In this passage, in the context of arguing for the priority in being of energeia over dunamis, Aristotle compares the case of actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves with that of actions that are themselves ends. In the case of the latter, he claims, the energeia is in what is being made or produced, although he goes on to qualify that while the change or becoming is more of an end than the corresponding dunamis, it is what results from the change that is, strictly speaking, the end. By contrast, in the case of actions like seeing and understanding, the energeia or actuality lies in the subject itself. The comparison reveals that, while in the case of change what is made “actual” is some new thing that is brought into being, in the case of complete actions, what is made “actual” is simply the subject itself, in respect of the dunamis that is exercised. As I read this, the fact that no product results in the case of actions like seeing and understanding is not what explains the fact that the actuality is in the subject; on the contrary, it is this fact — that the action is a way
for the subject to be actual — that explains why there is no further *ergon* beyond the action.

What I have argued so far is compatible with, and indeed illuminates, Aristotle’s claims about this distinction in both *Metaphysics* 6 and 8.

2.3.3

My suggestion so far is that, in the sublunar world, what is special about complete actions is explained by the peculiar fact that, for living organisms, being takes the form of living, which is to say, engaging in the activities that are exercises of *dunameis* that constitute an organism’s soul or essence. In fact, in some ways it should come as no surprise that certain actions count as ends *because* they are ways of being for the organisms that engage in them. After all, this is consistent with two motivations we might think Aristotle has for wanting to maintain that some actions, or ways of being active, are not changes. First, on one, admittedly controversial, way of reading the DA, Aristotle wants to explain how it is possible for the soul to be the proper subject of psychological events without itself being changed. The soul is what sees or knows — it is what is “acted on” by sensible and intelligible forms — but unlike the passive agents in the case of ordinary change, the soul is not itself altered when it is acted on in this way. Rather, when the relevant objects are present, the *dunameis* that constitute the perceptive and rational soul are simply fully realized or made fully actual.

Second, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle wants God’s activity to be the best, most fully realized being in his ontology; it is what underlies and explains the possibility of being for other things. On this way of understanding complete actions, we see how God’s activity is supposed to be related to ways of being for living organisms in the sublunar world. Again, complete actions are the ways that ensouled organisms fully realize their own being. What differs between God’s activity and the complete actions
of ensouled organisms is what this being depends on for its realization. God’s activity depends on nothing: it is continuous and eternal. Ensouled organisms depend, at the very least, on the possession of the relevant \textit{dunamis} that can be exercised, in addition to there being nothing external that prevents this exercise. Actions other than understanding depend on still more besides: material objects, bodily organs, and so on. The fully realized being of ensouled organisms is, as we should expect, less continuous and less self-sufficient than that of the divine.

If this account of complete actions is right, consider briefly two consequences. First, like in the case of incomplete actions, not all exercises of the relevant \textit{dunameis} will achieve their end. This is clear in the case of the \textit{dunamis} for knowing. Before an individual has acquired knowledge, the \textit{dunamis} for knowing is exercised in the action of learning, which as we know, is an incomplete action: it is the destruction of ignorance and the replacement with knowledge. It is only after this knowledge has been acquired that the \textit{dunamis} for knowing, now in a settled, excellent state, can be exercised in the complete action of knowing or understanding. However, even here, we can imagine someone exercising his knowledge in other ways that are not complete actions: a wise man can exercise his knowledge in teaching, or indeed, in making the weaker argument the stronger. Again, we have a way of explaining numerous possible actions in terms of a more limited set of more fundamental entities.

Second, relatedly, the set of actions that count as complete is in fact much narrower than has been commonly supposed. On the view I am defending, not all mental events will be complete actions, nor even all the exercises of mental powers. Rather, at least in the case of living organisms, the only actions that count as complete are the exercises of \textit{dunameis} that are parts or aspects of an organism’s essential nature. Indeed, it is not even clear that the exercise of every \textit{dunameis} that is a part or aspect of an organism’s essential nature will be complete. It is clear that perceiving and understanding are complete activities, but what about the exercise
of the nutritive capacity? The individual actions that are exercises of the nutritive capacity seem to be processes: growth and restoration of various parts of the physical body. Perhaps there is some more general activity, such as bare living, that these individual actions support, that is the complete fulfillment of the nutritive capacity. I leave this question for future work. What matters for my purposes here is at least some actions that are the exercise of soul capacities are complete. I suggest in the next chapter that, in the case of human beings, eupraxia and eudaimonia are also complete actions. And, in Chapter 4, I discuss the relationship between pleasure and complete activity.

2.4 Consequences

I have argued that we should understand the distinction between complete and incomplete actions in terms of their different ontological status. Incomplete actions are incomplete or partial realizations of some end state; they are actualities of things only qua potential. Complete actions, by contrast, are ways in which ensouled organisms fully realize their own being. If this is right, it has consequences for understanding the role the distinction is meant to play in various contexts: in the ethical works in the discussions of pleasure and the relationship between virtuous actions, contemplation and happiness; in the natural sciences in the discussion of the nature of the soul and its proper activities; and in the metaphysics in establishing the priority of energeia, and the relationship between substance and matter.

15This activity might also be what Aristotle is referring to in NE 7.12 in his discussion of the pleasures associated with the restoration of our physical bodies. Aristotle claims that the pleasures associated with resotration are pleasant only coincidentally, and that “the activity in the appetites belongs to the rest of our state and nature.” (1153a11-15) The thought might be that the pleasure is associated with the complete activity of the nutritive capacity, as opposed to the individual discrete processes on which this activity depends. The locomotive soul and reproductive soul do not, I expect, issue in complete actions. After all, the locomotive soul issues in actions like walking which we know are incomplete actions. Similarly, reproduction is closely analogized with production and so seems would also count as an incomplete action. This is perhaps explained by the fact that the locomotive soul is nested within the perceptive soul, while the reproductive soul is nested within the nutritive soul.
Chapter 3

Virtuous Actions, Acting

Virtuously & Eudaimonia

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I defended a metaphysical account of the distinction we find throughout Aristotle’s corpus between actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves, and actions that are themselves ends. The former are incomplete or partial realizations of some end state; they are actualities of things only qua potential. The latter are the complete fulfillments of the end of some corresponding potential; they are ways in which ensouled organisms fully realize their own being. In this chapter, I apply this distinction to Aristotle’s ethical theory. I argue that it helps resolve various puzzles about the nature of virtuous actions, and their relationship to human happiness.

Consider a familiar puzzle about the nature of virtuous actions. Sometimes, in the Nicomachean Ethics (NE), Aristotle appears to describe virtuous actions as the sorts of actions that are ends; this is important if Aristotle wants to maintain, as he seems to at least until Book 10, that virtuous actions are a constituent of eudaimonia. At other times, he seems to be committed to the claim that virtuous actions are the sorts
of actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves; after all, no one would choose to go into battle or give away a significant portion of their wealth if it did not achieve some good result. Whether Aristotle is in fact inconsistent on this point is no trivial matter. Understanding how, for Aristotle, virtuous actions are supposed to be related to their ends bears on the central question of the NE, the nature of human happiness. In this chapter, I review the familiar problem raised by Aristotle’s discussion of the nature of virtuous actions, offer a solution to this problem on the basis of Aristotle’s metaphysics of action, and sketch the significance of this solution for understanding the relationship between virtue and human happiness.

In §3.1 I introduce the puzzle. Aristotle seems committed to the idea that virtuous actions are ends in themselves, the sorts of actions constitutive of an agent’s own happiness, but also to the idea that virtuous actions are not ends, but rather are choice-worthy for the sake of the good results or consequences they aim to realize, independent of the agent’s own happiness. It is difficult to see how Aristotle can coherently maintain both of these commitments. In §3.2, I defend a solution to this puzzle by appeal to Aristotle’s metaphysical conception of ends. I argue that, once we properly understand the way in which actions or activities can count as ends, it turns out that the exercise of ethical virtue is an activity that is an end, but that this activity depends for its realization on actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Aristotle’s claims about virtuous actions are not in fact inconsistent but rather reflect the peculiar nature of ethical virtue as essentially practical. In §3.3, I develop two significant interpretive upshots of this solution. First, the view I defend allows us to take at face value Aristotle’s repeated and explicit identification of eudaimonia with a single good — excellent rational activity — while also establishing ethically virtuous activity as a genuine form of happiness alongside contemplation. Second, the view I defend helps absolve Aristotle’s ethical theory from the familiar charge of egoism. On my interpretation of the way in which eudaimonia is an end, Aristotle’s theory is not
egoistic either in its explanation of the value of virtuous actions, or in its description of a virtuous agent’s motivations when she performs these actions.

3.1 The Puzzle

In the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle draws a distinction between the sorts of ends that are actions and the sorts of ends that are works or products apart from the actions that produce them.\(^1\) The distinction can be reframed as one between two kinds of actions: actions that are ends and actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves.\(^2\) Though Aristotle offers little by way of elaboration of the distinction in the NE, it plays a significant role in his ethical theory. Aristotle appeals to the relationship between actions and their ends throughout the text, including in his discussion of intellectual virtues in Book 6, his defense of pleasure in Book 7 and 10, and in his arguments for the superiority of contemplation over ethically virtuous activity in 10.7 and 10.8. And yet, despite the prevalence and apparent importance of this distinction in Aristotle’s ethical theory, it is unclear what role it is supposed to play in answering one of the central questions of the NE: the relationship between ethical virtue and human happiness.

Consider four claims Aristotle seems to endorse at various points in the NE:

(i) *Eudaimonia* consists in the sort of activity that is itself an end

(ii) *Eudaimonia* consists in part in ethically virtuous activity\(^3\)

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\(^1\) “But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them (τὰ μὲν γὰρ εἴσοδοι ἐνέργειαι, τὰ δὲ παρὰ αὐτῶν ἐργα ταῦτα). Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities (τὸλη τωὰ παρὰ τῶς πράξεως).” (NE 1094a1-9)

\(^2\) As I argue in my first chapter, I take this to be the same distinction we find throughout Aristotle’s corpus, and most famously in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 as well as in NE 10.4, between an *energeia* and a *kinesis*. For the purposes of this paper, I avoid this terminology. It isn’t obvious that Aristotle, when he employs the term *energeia* in the NE, is always using it in the narrow sense in which it is contrasted with a *kinesis*, and moreover, no part of my argument depends on how we understand the usage of the term in the NE.

\(^3\) In this chapter, I use the terms “action” and “activity” interchangeably. Were it not for the awkwardness of translating activities like contemplation as “actions”, I would prefer to use “action”
(iii) Ethically virtuous actions are ends

(iv) Ethically virtuous actions are not ends, but rather are for the sake of ends beyond the actions themselves

On the face of it, it looks as though Aristotle cannot consistently maintain all four of these claims. In particular, (iii) and (iv) look incompatible. And, if (iii) is false, then either (i) or (ii) must also be false. In the following section, I review the evidence for thinking Aristotle endorses each one of these four claims, and sketch the interpretive costs of denying any one of them.

3.1.1

Consider first the heart of the difficulty, the tension between (iii) and (iv). In 10.6, Aristotle appears to explicitly affirm (iii), the claim that virtuous actions are ends. In this chapter, Aristotle resumes the discussion of human happiness that he began in Book 1. He argues once more that happiness, the end of human nature, cannot consist merely in being in a certain state or else one could be said to have achieved happiness while being asleep or suffering great misfortunes. Rather, as in 1.7, Aristotle asserts here that happiness must lie in activity. And, he reminds us, we must distinguish between two different kinds of activities, namely, those that are choice-worthy for the sake of “other” ends and those that are choice-worthy in themselves. If happiness lies in activity, it must lie in the sort of activity that is an end, choice-worthy in itself, rather than in the sort of activity that is choice-worthy for the sake of some end beyond itself. In what immediately follows, Aristotle seems to affirm that ethically virtuous actions are the sorts of actions or activities that are choice-worthy in themselves, thereby implying that ethically virtuous actions are constitutive of eudaimonia:

throughout to translate both energeia and praxis. When I use “activity” rather than “action” it is for purely stylistic reasons and does not reflect anything about how I understand the nature of the energeia in question.
Now those activities are desirable in themselves from which nothing is sought beyond the activity. And of this nature excellent actions are thought to be; for to do noble and good deeds is a thing desirable for its own sake. (NE 10.6 1176b1-9)

Further evidence for (iii) is found in Book 6. Here, Aristotle distinguishes between the sort of action that is a poiēsis, or “production”, and the sort of action that is a praxis or “action”. Aristotle appears to distinguish poiēsis and praxis on the basis of their respective ends: “poiēsis has its end in something other than itself, but praxis does not since its end is acting well itself.” (NE 6.5 1140b6-7) Paradigmatic examples of productions are actions like housebuilding or flute-making which are for the sake of products, houses and flutes respectively. Paradigmatic examples of praxeis are virtuous actions; in fact, the way in which praxeis are ends is meant to be explained by the fact that “acting well” or eupraxia — acting on the basis of ethical virtue and thought — is an end.

Although Aristotle affirms (iii) in 10.6 and in Book 6, he also seems committed to (iv), and (iv) seems to straightforwardly contradict (iii). That is, although Aristotle claims that ethically virtuous activity is choice-worthy in itself and that virtuous actions are praxeis, the sorts of actions that are ends, he also seems committed to the idea that virtuous actions are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Indeed, in 10.7, Aristotle seems to deny what he has affirmed in the previous chapter. In comparing the activity of contemplation with the exercise of ethical virtue in political action, Aristotle claims that contemplation or theoria “seems to be liked because of itself alone, since it has no result beyond having studied (δόξαι τ' ἐν αὐτῇ μόνῃ δι' αὐτῆν ἀγαπᾶσθαι οἷδέν γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτῆς γίνεται παρὰ τῷ θεωρήσασι)” whereas “from virtues concerned with action we try to a greater or lesser extent to gain something beyond the action itself (ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν πρακτικῶν ᾗ πλεῖον ᾗ ἐλαττῶν περιποιούμεθα παρὰ τὴν
πράξεων.” (NE 10.7 1177b1-4)⁵ Likewise, a few lines down, he notices that “among actions in accord with the virtues those in politics and war are preeminently fine and great; but they require trouble, aim at some [further] end, and are not choice-worthy for themselves (τέλους τινὸς ἐφένται καὶ οὐ δὲ αὐτὰς αἱρέται εἶσον)” whereas the activity of the intellect in contemplation “aims at no end apart from itself (παρ’ αὐτήν οὐδενὸς ἐφέσθαι τέλους).” (NE 10.7 1177b16-20)⁶

The problem with denying either one of these claims goes beyond the fact that there seems to be clear textual support for both. Aristotle’s seeming indecision about whether virtuous actions are ends or for the sake of ends beyond themselves is reflective of what looks like a deeper tension in Aristotle’s ethical theory itself. On the one hand, Aristotle appears to want to maintain, at least until 10.7 and 10.8, that ethically virtuous activity is one of the components of eudaimonia. And, for this to be the case, ethically virtuous activity must be something that is itself an end. If a virtuous agent’s acting justly or generously is supposed to be a constituent of her own happiness, it must be the sort of thing that is valuable or choice-worthy for her in its own right rather than as a means to other ends. On the other hand, however, Aristotle appears to be committed to the idea that virtuous actions are characterized in terms of the good results or consequences at which they aim. That is, Aristotle seems committed to the idea that what makes virtuous actions good or worth performing is the way in which they tend to make a positive difference to the world, including in ways that do not directly benefit the agent herself; indeed, in 10.7, Aristotle is expressing the intuitive idea that many ethically good actions are at some cost to the

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⁵ Translations are my own. I generally follow the Hackett text by Irwin.

⁶ The most natural way to read this passage is as affirming that virtuous actions are not ends. However, it is possible to read the passage as instead affirming that virtuous actions are not merely ends, but that they are the sorts of actions that are both ends in themselves, and for the sake of ends beyond themselves. There is, after all, nothing prima facie inconsistent about such a view. The trouble is to make sense of such a view in light of Aristotle’s distinction between these two different kinds of actions. The goal of this chapter is to make sense of Aristotle’s different descriptions of virtuous actions while doing justice to his distinction between actions that are ends and actions that are for the sake of ends.
agent performing them — no one would willingly go into battle, for example, unless doing so was demanded by the circumstances. Paradigmatically generous actions aim at the external result of benefitting others, paradigmatically just actions aim at distributing harms and benefits so as to secure the stability of the polis, paradigmatically courageous actions aim at the security of one’s friends and fellow citizens, and so on. In each case, the results or consequences seem to be part of what makes these virtuous actions what they are.

The apparent tension in the way Aristotle conceives of virtuous actions is rooted in the difficulty of understanding the source of value or choice-worthiness of these actions. Suppose a virtuous agent builds a house for someone in need, and that her action counts as a generous one. What makes this action valuable or choice-worthy for her to perform? A natural answer, and one that Aristotle seems to endorse in the 10.7 passage quoted above, is that the action is choice-worthy because of the good result or consequence at which it aims, namely, providing shelter for someone in need. This interpretation captures the intuition that just, generous or brave actions are good because of the ways they aim to make a positive difference in the world. But, if this interpretation is right, in what way is a virtuous action an end in itself, constitutive of the agent’s own happiness?

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7 As will be clear in §3.3, I do not think all virtuous actions are for sake of benefitting others. Many of the virtuous actions a virtuous agent performs will be for her own benefit, but the way in which they benefit her is distinct from the way in which they are constitutive of her own happiness.

8 This seems clear in Aristotle’s descriptions of virtuous actions in Books 3 and 4. Virtuous actions are always a response to circumstances in the world, and are always changes in the relevant sense. See Whiting (2002) for a defense of the claim that virtuous actions are characterized in terms of their external results.

9 This is compatible with Aristotle’s characterization of virtue of character as a mean. Consider the example of generosity. Aristotle describes generosity as “a mean concerned with the giving and the taking of wealth” and explains that the generous person “will both give and spend the right amounts for the right purposes, in small and large matters alike, and do this with pleasure” (1120a25-30). What makes generosity a mean is that it is a settled disposition to respond appropriately to circumstances concerning the giving and taking of wealth.

10 After all, on this interpretation, the action derives the choice-worthiness that it has from its intended or expected good results, and not from any facts about the agent’s own virtuous character or happiness.
An alternative answer to the question what makes the generous action choice-worthy is as follows: the generous action is an end, choice-worthy in itself, because it is the way for a virtuous agent to engage in the ethically virtuous activity constitutive of her own happiness. On this interpretation, what explains the value of the generous action performed by a virtuous agent is, ultimately, how it relates to her own happiness. This interpretation captures the tight connection Aristotle seems to want between virtuous actions and happiness by analyzing the choice-worthiness of virtuous actions ultimately in terms of the agent’s own happiness. Moreover, there is apparent textual support for this interpretation. As we have seen, Aristotle identifies eudaimonia as the ultimate end and “that for the sake of which” for human beings. He is standardly interpreted as meaning that eudaimonia is that for the sake of which an agent ought to do all that she does. On this standard reading, an agent’s own eudaimonia is the ultimate source of value or choice-worthiness for her decisions and actions. If this overall interpretation is right — if Aristotle does mean to explain the value of virtuous actions in terms of an agent’s own happiness — then his ethical picture looks objectionably egoistic. It looks as though what makes the generous action choice-worthy is, ultimately, the way in which it allows the agent to engage in the sort of activity in which her own eudaimonia consists, and not the way in which this action benefits someone in need of shelter. Not only is this a philosophically unattractive view, it seems to be at odds with with the way Aristotle characterizes virtuous actions in terms of their intended good consequences.

3.1.2

The apparent incompatibility between (iii) and (iv) has important consequences for understanding the relationship between ethical virtue and human happiness. If (i) and (ii) are true, then (iii) must also be true. Given this, if (iii) is false, (i) and (ii)

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11 See Barney (2004) for a discussion of the worries about inappropriateness of this kind of self-reference in a virtuous agent’s motivations, and Barney’s response to this worry.
cannot both be true. In fact, many commentators, persuaded by the falsity of (iii), deny either (i) or (ii). However, denying either one of these claims carries a significant interpretive cost.¹²

Consider (i) first. Denying the claim that *eudaimonia* consists in the sort of activity that is itself an end makes it easier to accept (ii) even if (iii) turns out to be false. If goods other than activities can be components of *eudaimonia* then it is easier to see how goods that are not themselves ends can also be components of *eudaimonia*: even if virtuous actions are not ends, they may still be partly constitutive of an agent’s own happiness. Despite the interpretive upshots of this style of “inclusivism” about the nature of *eudaimonia*, any view that denies (i) is faced with the challenge of explaining away Aristotle’s repeated and explicit identification of *eudaimonia* with a single kind of good, namely, excellent rational activity. For example, in 1.7, in offering his substantive account of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle explains that we can identify the nature of human happiness by looking to the human ergon. If, he argues, each thing is accomplished well on the basis of its proper virtue, then “the human good turns out to be an activity of the [rational part of the human] soul on the basis of virtue, and if there are more virtues than one, on the basis of the best and most end-like virtue.” (1098a16-18)¹³ Not only does Aristotle seem to affirm in 1.7 that *eudaimonia* is itself an activity, he repeats his identification of *eudaimonia* with activity throughout the treatise.¹⁴ And, if *eudaimonia* really does lie in excellent rational activity alone, this activity must itself be an end. In 1.7, Aristotle insists that *eudaimonia* must be something that is *teleion* or “end-like”, and indeed more strongly, it must the most

¹² For commentators who deny (i), and defend some version of “inclusivism”, see Ackrill (1974), Cooper (1987), Crisp (1994), Irwin (1991), Devereux (1981), Keyt (1978), Price (1980), Whiting (1986), Roche (2014); for commentators who deny (ii) and defend (or have defended) a strong “intellectualist” position, see Cooper (1975), Kraut (1989); for moderated “intellectualist” positions, see Lear (2004), Cooper (2004), Scott (1999).

¹³ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ἰσχὺς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ’ ἀρετήν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τελειοτάτην

¹⁴ See, for example, NE 1098b13-18, 1098b32-1099a3, 1009b25-28, 1177a11-13. See also Heimann (2007) for a vigorous defense of this claim
end-like of ends, and a good that is *teleion* without qualification (NE 1.7 1097a18-b5). Likewise, as we have seen in 10.6, Aristotle explicitly identifies *eudaimonia* with the sort of activity that is an end, choice-worthy in its own right. *Eudaimonia*, if it is a single precise kind of good, cannot be the sort of good that is for the sake of some end beyond itself.\(^\text{15}\)

Given the strong textual support for (i), some commentators choose to deny (ii) instead. Commentators who deny this claim — that *eudaimonia* consists in part in ethically virtuous activity — lie at the other extreme of interpretations of the nature of *eudaimonia*: on these “intellectualist” views, *eudaimonia* lies, strictly speaking, in contemplation alone. Commentators who defend this interpretation of *eudaimonia* are motivated by Aristotle’s claims in 10.7 and 10.8, including his apparent denial of (iii). However, the conclusion that *eudaimonia* lies in contemplation alone is, as defenders of “inclusivism” have been quick to point out, profoundly unsatisfying. If this really was Aristotle’s considered view, why devote the majority of the NE to the study of ethical virtue? Not only does Aristotle’s focus on ethical virtue for the majority of the NE seem in tension with his ultimate endorsement of contemplation but if, strictly speaking, *eudaimonia* lies in contemplation alone, it becomes hard to see just what place ethical virtue has in a happy life. In the best case, virtue looks like a mere approximation of or derivative form of contemplation; in the worst

\(^{15}\) It is admittedly initially odd to talk about happiness as being *identified* with an activity, rather than with a certain kind of life. This identification is less odd if we are sensitive, as non-inclusivists insist we must be, to the distinction Aristotle seems to draw throughout the NE between “happiness” and a “happy person” or a “happy life”. The distinction first appears in NE 1.5 where Aristotle distinguishes between various conceptions of the highest human good, and the lives people lead on the basis of their conceptions of the good. Non-inclusivists take the concept of *eudaimonia* to be the more precise, more fundamental concept by appeal to which we can explain the other features that need to be present in a life in order for it to count as *eudaimon*. I will have more to say about this in Chapter 5. What about Aristotle’s claim that happiness is excellent rational activity “over a complete life”? One interpretation available to non-inclusivists is that happiness “is” a certain activity, so long as it is enjoyed over a sufficient length of time. That is, happiness is excellent rational activity of a certain amount. In any case, it is clear that a happy life will require a sufficient amount of activity enjoyed over the course of a life, in addition to other goods that make this activity possible. Little seems to me to be at stake in whether we build the completeness of a life into the definition of *eudaimonia* itself.
case, it looks like it is wholly subordinate to the end of contemplation.\textsuperscript{16} In addition to being philosophically unsatisfying, the denial of (ii) is difficult to square with Aristotle’s apparent affirmation at various points in the NE, including in the 10.6 passage quoted above, that ethically virtuous activity \textit{is} a form of eudaimonia.

On the question of whether virtuous actions are themselves ends or for the sake of ends beyond themselves, Aristotle appears to be downright inconsistent. And, if Aristotle does indeed contradict himself, this is a serious mistake. As is clear in the 10.6 and 10.7 passages, whether or not virtuous actions are themselves ends bears on the central question of the NE: the nature of human happiness. If, as Aristotle seems to say in 10.6, ethically virtuous actions are indeed ends, they, like contemplation, are the right sorts of actions to be constitutive of \textit{eudaimonia}. If however, as Aristotle seems to assert in 10.7, virtuous actions are not ends, then contemplation would seem to have the sole claim to the title of human happiness.

\section*{3.1.3}

To sum up: Aristotle appears to be committed to four claims the conjunction of which threaten his ethical theory with inconsistency:

(i) \textit{Eudaimonia} consists in the sort of virtuous activity that is itself an end

(ii) \textit{Eudaimonia} consists in part in ethically virtuous activity

(iii) Ethically virtuous actions are ends

(iv) Ethically virtuous actions are not ends, but rather for the sake of ends beyond the actions themselves

\textsuperscript{16} There are, of course, many sophisticated attempts on the part of defenders of “intellectualist” interpretations of eudaimonia to work through the apparent problems generated by this conclusion. I do not here directly engage with these views. What I aim to do in this chapter is to make available an interpretation of \textit{eudaimonia} that is “monistic” but on which we do not need to explain the value of ethically virtuous activity in terms of contemplation. For intellectualist responses of the above problems, see, for example, Lear (2004), Cooper (1987), Charles (1999).
Aristotle seems to endorse all four of these claims at various points in the NE. Moreover, denying any one of these claims carries significant interpretive costs. However, (iii) looks incompatible with (iv), and if (iii) turns out to be false, then so does either (i) or (ii). If we want to resolve the apparent inconsistency between (iii) and (iv) — and, more generally, resolve the apparent tension in Aristotle’s ethical theory — we need a principled explanation for how both (iii) and (iv) can turn out to be true. We want to preserve the idea that virtuous actions, like the just action in the example above, are choice-worthy because of the good results or consequences at which they aim. However, we also want to preserve the idea that ethically virtuous actions are, in some sense, ends, and so also the right sorts of things to be constitutive of an agent’s own *eudaimonia*. That is, we want to explain how engaging in virtuous actions is a way for a virtuous agent to achieve her own happiness without having to define the value of the actions she performs ultimately in terms of their contribution to her own happiness.

There are, I want to suggest, two further desiderata of an account of the nature of virtuous actions. First, a successful account should explain not just how (iii) and (iv) can both be true, but also how these two claims are supposed to be related. If Aristotle does think virtuous actions are in a way ends, and in a way for the sake of ends beyond themselves, we should expect this to be true in such a way that there are not simply two distinct and potentially competing sources of value. We want an explanation of the relationship between, on the one hand, the way in which just actions are good because of the benefits they tend to provide their recipients and, on the other hand, the way in which they are good because, when performed by a virtuous agent, they are the sort of activity constitutive of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*. A second desideratum of an account of virtuous actions is that it doesn’t collapse the distinction between actions that are ends and actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Again, this distinction plays an important role throughout the
NE, and indeed, throughout Aristotle’s corpus. We should be skeptical of any account that resolves the tension between (iii) and (iv) in such a way that any action, under the right description, can count as an end.\footnote{This is a problem for views according to which what makes the action an end is some feature of the agent rather than the action, for example, views according to which an action is an end if it is chosen for its own sake, or if it is the exercise of an ability. Views such as this all face the problem that actions like housebuilding, which Aristotle insists are not ends, will turn out to be ends in some contexts (if they are chosen for their own sake, or are the exercise of an ability).}

In what follows, I defend a view on which all four of the above claims turn out to be true. I argue that, once we properly understand what it means for an action to be an end, we see that the exercise of ethical virtue is an activity that is an end, but that it depends for its realization on actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Aristotle can, on the view I develop, coherently maintain that ethically virtuous activity is a genuine form of eudaimonia without having to be committed to an egoistic explanation of the value of virtuous actions.

### 3.2 A Solution

So far, I’ve raised a puzzle about the nature of virtuous actions: at certain points in the NE Aristotle appears to affirm that virtuous actions are ends whereas at other points he appears to deny this claim, and insist that virtuous actions are the sorts of actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. To resolve this puzzle, we need to take a step back and consider what it means, in the first place, for an action either to be an end, or to be for the sake of an end beyond itself. In what follows, I argue that once we properly understand this distinction, we are in a position to explain Aristotle’s apparently inconsistent claims.

#### 3.2.1

Aristotle’s distinction between actions that are ends and actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves is not unique to his ethical theory. Indeed, the
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distinction plays an important role throughout his theoretical philosophy including in
his discussion of the nature of the soul and its proper activities and in his explanation
of the relationship between form and substance. This distinction as it is found in
Aristotle’s theoretical works is notoriously difficult to interpret.\textsuperscript{18} In light of various
interpretive problems, I defended, in the previous chapter, a novel account of this
distinction. I argue that whether an action is an end or for the sake of an end
beyond itself is not explained by an agent’s motivations or goals in performing an
action, nor in terms of the value or choice-worthiness of that action, nor in terms of
the different ways in which particular ends structure the processes leading to them.\textsuperscript{19}
Rather, I argued that we should understand the relationship between actions and their
respective ends in terms of the relationship between a power or potential (\textit{dunamis})
and its corresponding realization or actuality (\textit{entelecheia}).

Every \textit{dunamis} is, on my view, essentially a potential for the being of some single
determinate end that is its actuality.\textsuperscript{20} In the case of actions that are for the sake
of ends beyond themselves, what this means is that the potential exercised in such
an action is only fully realized, made fully actual, in some state or product beyond
the action itself. Consider the action of housebuilding, one of Aristotle’s favorite
examples of an action that is for the sake of an end beyond itself. On my view, the
\textit{dunamis} that a builder has that she exercises in building — the art or \textit{technē} for

\textsuperscript{18}On standard interpretations of the distinction, there are worries about the coherence and con-
sistency of Aristotle’s various discussions. For one, the examples Aristotle employs as illustration
of the distinction seem remarkably poorly chosen. Moreover, although Aristotle seems to reference
the same distinction in various texts, he describes the distinction in very different ways, and it isn’t
clear how these various descriptions are supposed to be consistent with each other.

\textsuperscript{19} On my view, it is certainly true that ends structure and guide the processes leading to them,
but it is not built into the account of what it is for them to be ends that they do so. Building this
into the account of what it is for them to be ends creates difficulties for distinguishing between, on
the one hand, how ends are related to the processes that are for the sake of them and, on the other
hand, how subordinate ends are related to higher ends.

\textsuperscript{20} The view I defend in the first chapter of my dissertation is an extension of the interpretation of
Aristotle’s account of change defended by Coope (2004) and (2007), according to which there is a
single \textit{dunamis} that is exercised in building and fully realized in a house. I argue that this account
can be developed to shed new light on the nature of “complete” actions, which is to say, actions that
are not processes or changes.
building — is a potential for the being of a house.\footnote{Indeed, Aristotle thinks that the art of building is, strictly speaking, the form of a house in the builder’s soul.} A house counts as the end of the \textit{technē} of building because the potential exercised in the action is only fully realized in an actual house. The action of housebuilding, by contrast, is only a partial or incomplete realization of this end. It is in this sense that the action of building is essentially for the sake of a house.\footnote{One way to put this is that the action owes the limited being that it has to its end, a house.} If this account is right, an important consequence is that the metaphysical end of any \textit{dunamis} sets a normative standard for the various possible exercises of that \textit{dunamis}. The art of building, for example, may be employed for various purposes including building doll houses, writing architecture manuals, or even intentionally building faulty houses, but only an actual, functional house will count as the accomplishment of the end of this \textit{dunamis}.

Turn now to the case of actions that are ends. In what sense are seeing and contemplating, two of Aristotle’s frequent examples, themselves ends? Again, on my view, every \textit{dunamis} is a potential for the being of some determinate end which is its actuality. What this means in the case of actions that are ends is that the potential exercised in this sort of action is fully realized, made fully actual, in the action itself. Take as an example the activity of contemplation. In the \textit{De Anima} (DA), we learn that every human being is by nature potentially a “knower”, in the sense that all human beings, in virtue of their essentially rational nature, are equipped with some initial \textit{dunamis} for acquiring and then exercising knowledge. This initial \textit{dunamis} has two progressive stages of fulfillment. The first stage of fulfillment is the settled state of knowledge that an individual acquires through instruction; a human being who has acquired knowledge counts as a “being a knower” in some stronger, more realized sense than she did when she merely had the potential to acquire knowledge. However, a human being only counts as a “being a knower” in the authoritative or governing sense of the term when she is actually exercising the knowledge she
possesses in the activity of “knowing” — in the case of theoretical knowledge, in the activity of contemplation.\textsuperscript{23} It is in this sense, on my view, that contemplation is an end: it is itself the complete fulfillment or realization of the corresponding \textit{dunamis} that human beings have by nature for knowing or understanding. Just as a house is the way in which the potential contained in the building art comes to be fully actual, contemplation is the way in which the rational capacity that human beings have by nature comes to be fully actual.

Suppose this is the right way to understand the distinction between these two kinds of actions as Aristotle draws it in his theoretical philosophy. How does this account help resolve the puzzle about virtuous actions in the NE? I will argue that the solution lies in distinguishing between two metaphysically distinct actions that coincide in the same event when, and only when, a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action. There is, on the one hand, the just, generous or temperate action that a virtuous agent performs, that is the for the sake of some end or result beyond the action itself. There is, on the other hand, the way in which a virtuous agent performs such an action, with a full rational appreciation of its goodness, and with desires in line with the judgements of her reason. It is the latter, what I will call “acting virtuously” or “acting well”, that is the metaphysical end of virtue of character. When, in the NE, Aristotle appears to affirm (iii) — the claim that virtuous actions are ends — he is describing the activity of acting virtuously. When, however, he appears to affirm (iv) — the claim that virtuous actions are not ends, but are rather for the sake of ends beyond themselves — he is describing the discrete virtuous actions on which acting virtuously depends.

Before fleshing out this solution, a methodological clarifications is in order. With a view to better understanding the relationship between virtuous actions and their ends, the potential that I am ultimately interested in is not virtue of character where

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{De Anima} II.5 (417a10-417b7)
this is understood as the excellence of our non-rational desiderative states, but rather
the complex constituted by virtue of character and practical wisdom (phronesis) taken
together. From here on, I will refer to the potential constituted by these two virtues
as “practical virtue”. Though Aristotle treats virtue of character and phronesis sepa-
rateably, it becomes clear by Book 6 that both are exercised, and moreover work in
concert, when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action. Aristotle makes clear that
these two states, in their fully realized form, cannot exist without each other.24 I will
proceed on the assumption that these two virtues are in some sense unified in the
fully good person, and directed towards a common goal.25

3.2.2

What do I mean by insisting on a distinction between virtuous actions and what I
have called “acting virtuously”? To get clearer on what this distinction amounts to,
it will be useful to consider in some detail Aristotle’s discussion in NE 2.4. Here,
Aristotle addresses a worry about the acquisition of virtue: on Aristotle’s view, we
are meant to acquire a virtuous character by performing virtuous actions but, so the
worry goes, it is unclear how we can perform virtuous actions before we are in fact
virtuous. In responding to this worry, Aristotle compares technē — the virtue of the
rational part of the soul concerned with production — with virtue of character in
order to establish that, although a non-virtuous agent can perform a virtuous action,
there is something importantly different about the performance of such an action by
a virtuous agent.

Aristotle first considers a similarity between virtue of character and technē, using
grammatical knowledge to illustrate the latter. Specifically, he points out that some-

24 As he insists in 6.13, “we cannot be fully good without phronesis, or phronimos without virtue
of character (δέλον οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι οἷς οὖν τε ἄγαθον εἶναι καρδίᾳ ἄνευ φρονήσεως, οὐδὲ
φρόνημαν ἀνεύ τῆς ἐθικῆς ἀρετῆς)" and “one has all the virtues if and only if one has phronesis, which
is a single state (άμα γὰρ τῇ φρονήσει μᾶς ὑπαρχούσῃ πᾶσα ὑπάρξοντα)” (1144b30-1145a2).
25 I mean to remain neutral, or as neutral as possible, on the question of how virtue of character
and phronesis are related.
one without grammatical knowledge can produce intelligible sentences, but does not, by doing so, display the corresponding excellence; what she produces is not representative of any excellence she herself possesses.\(^{26}\) Similarly, someone can perform the same action a virtuous agent performs without her action being an exercise of virtue. In both the case of grammatical knowledge, a kind of *technē*, and the case of virtue, something has to be true about the agent herself, not just what she does, in order for her action to be an expression of the relevant excellence.

However, Aristotle goes on to insist that, despite this similarity, there is also an important disanology between the case of a *technē* and the case of ethical virtue. Ethical virtue and *technē* are different in that, in the case of a *technē*, producing a grammatical result without the grammatical *technē* still results in something that has been “produced well”: “for the products of a craft determine by their own qualities whether they have been produced well (υπὸ τῶν τεχνῶν γνώμενα τὸ εὖ ἔχει ἐν αὐτοῖς); and so it suffices that they have the right qualities (πως ἔχοντα) when they have been produced.” The same is not true in the case of virtue because, Aristotle explains: “for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities.” Rather, Aristotle claims, for an action to count as having been “done well” — justly or temperately — the agent performing the virtuous action must be in the right state when she performs the action: she must perform the action with knowledge, choose to perform it “for its own sake” and she must perform it “from a firm and unchanging state.”\(^{27}\) For the purposes of our discussion, we can set aside what, precisely, these three conditions amount to.

Aristotle’s point in the case of a *technē* seems to be that, so long as the product

\(^{26}\) But surely actions are not enough, even in the case of crafts, for it is possible to produce a grammatical result by chance, or by following someone else’s instructions (γὰρ γραμματικῶν τι ποιήσαι καὶ ἀπὸ τύχης καὶ ἄλλου υποθεμένου). To be grammarians (ἐστι γραμματικός), then, we must both produce a grammatical result (γραμματικῶν τι ποιήσῃ) and produce it grammatically (γραμματικός) - that is to say, produce it in accord with the grammatical knowledge in us (τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ γραμματικήν).” (1105a21-26)

\(^{27}\) NE 2.5 (1105a27-1105b1)
has the features it should have, it has been produced well, regardless of whether the
producer in fact possessed the relevant *technē* herself. We can imagine, for example,
that a skilled furniture maker and an amateur following detailed instructions can both
produce the same result, a well-made table, even though only the former is exercising
a *technē* she in fact possesses. By contrast, in the case of virtue, Aristotle seems to
be insisting that an action might have the qualities that make it count as virtuous
but the action does not thereby count as having been “done well”.

What are we supposed to learn by comparing the evaluative judgements we make
in the case of *technē* and the case of virtue? Again, we have already learnt that
*technē* and virtue are similar in that it is possible for someone to effect the relevant
result or product without herself possessing the corresponding potential; just as an
unskilled hobbyist can successfully make a table, so a non-virtuous agent can perform
a genuinely just action. I want to suggest that Aristotle’s appeal to our differing
evaluative judgements is supposed to reveal something about the proper ends of these
respective capacities.\(^{28}\) Every *technē* is essentially for the sake of a certain product.
And, insofar as this is true, the relevant basis for evaluation in the case of *technē* is
the quality of the product made rather than anything about the productive act itself.
So long as the product is well formed, the end of the *technē* has been accomplished.
When we judge that an action has the qualities that make it just, but that it has
not been “done well”, we are judging that what the agent has done falls short of
the normative standard set by virtue of character, even though the action the agent
performs has the qualities that make it count as virtuous. What is lacking is not
something about the action itself but about the *acting*, which is to say, about the

\(^{28}\) To forestall a potential worry: although in the NE Aristotle often compares virtue of character
with both knowledge and *technē*, he also seems to explicitly deny that virtue of character is a *dunamis*
in NE 2.5. Here, he insists that virtues are not *dunamis* because “we are neither called good nor
bad, nor are we praised or blamed, insofar as we are simply capable of feelings” and that “while
we have capacities by nature, we do not become good or bad by nature (ἐτι δυνατοὶ μὲν ἐσμεν φύσει,
ἀγαθὸν δὲ ἢ κακὸν ὡς γνώμονα φύσι)” (1106a6-10). In fact, Aristotle is not here denying that virtue
of character is a *dunamis* in the broad sense of the term, but rather is only denying that virtue of
character is a *mere dunamis*. Rather, like *technē*, it is a *hexis*, a developed state of a *dunamis*. 

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way in which the agent performing the action is related to her action. What we learn from NE 2.4, I want to suggest, is that the end of virtue of character is an activity, rather than a result or product beyond the activity itself, as in the case of technē. Specifically, the end of virtue of character is acting virtuously: performing a virtuous action with the right reasoning and desiring.\(^{29}\)

The idea that virtue of character — or, more precisely, the complex constituted by virtue of character and phronesis — is for the sake of acting virtuously is further supported by Aristotle’s discussion in 6.12. Here, Aristotle is responding to various concerns about the role of phronesis in performing virtuous actions. Like in NE 2.4, Aristotle distinguishes between, on one hand, performing virtuous actions without being virtuous and, on the other hand, performing these same actions in the state that makes one a good person. Although we can perform virtuous actions without phronesis, we cannot do so in the way or manner of a virtuous person, which is to say, “because of decision and for the sake of the actions themselves”, unless we possess both phronesis and virtue of character. As Aristotle explains, whereas “virtue makes the goal correct”, phronesis makes correct “the things promoting the goal.” (NE 1144a7-9) As in NE 2.4, Aristotle seems to be expressing the thought that practical virtue is not simply for the sake of performing virtuous actions, but rather performing them in a certain way or manner, with the right rational and desiderative states.

### 3.2.3

Recall our initial problem. At times in the NE, Aristotle describes virtuous actions as ends. At other times, he describes virtuous actions as the sorts of actions that are not ends, but are rather for the sake of ends beyond themselves. The tension between these two ways of thinking about virtuous actions is, I suggested in §3.1,

\(^{29}\)I mean to be vague about what, precisely, virtue of character and phronesis contribute to eupraxia. For the purposes of my argument, all that matters is that there is some correct rational grasp and corresponding motivational state that the virtuous agent, and only the virtuous agent, has.
reflective of what appears to be a deeper tension in Aristotle’s ethical theory. On the one hand, having a virtuous character and performing virtuous actions is supposed to contribute in some way to an agent’s own happiness. On the other hand, virtuous actions appear to be good or virtuous because they tend to realize good ends or consequences in the world, and these good consequences are often independent of an agent’s own happiness.

To appreciate how the distinction between virtuous actions and acting virtuously helps with this puzzle, consider how the exercise of virtue in acting virtuously turns out to be both like and unlike contemplation. Again, on my view, what it means for contemplation to be an end is that the potential contained in theoretical knowledge is fully realized in contemplation itself rather than in some result or product beyond contemplation. When an agent who possesses theoretical knowledge exercises it in actively grasping intelligible objects in the theoretical domain, she is fully realizing the end of this capacity; she is fully being a knower. It turns out that something similar holds in the case of practical virtue. The potential contained in virtue of character and phronesis, taken together, is completely realized in a certain activity, namely “acting well” (eupraxia) or “acting virtuously”. When an agent who possesses virtue of character and phronesis is correctly responding to goods and bads in the ethical domain, she is fully realizing her potential for virtue; she is fully being virtuous.

However, contemplation and acting virtuously turn out to be disanalogous in what they depend on for their realization. In order to engage in the activity of contemplation, which is to say to fully realize the end of theoretical excellence, all that is needed is for an agent to actually possess theoretical knowledge, and for the exercise of this knowledge not to be interfered with; so long as an individual is able to grasp the eternal and unchanging objects in the intelligible domain she is able to fully achieve the end of her capacity for theoretical contemplation. By contrast, ethical virtue is essentially practical. It is the developed state of a capacity directed at truths
about value in the ethical domain. What this means, I have suggested, is that in order to act virtuously a virtuous agent needs to perform discrete virtuous actions which are for the sake of ends or results beyond themselves. To get a clearer idea of what this amounts to, return to the example in §3.1 of a virtuous agent building a house for someone in need. Suppose this is an example of a generous action. The practically virtuous agent, in performing this generous action is responding to the fact that someone deserving in the polis can be benefitted by having access to shelter; if there wasn’t someone in need of shelter who stood to be benefitted, then this particular generous action would not be appropriate or called for in the circumstances. However, by deliberating about and deciding to perform this action with a full appreciation of its goodness, and desires in line with her reasoning, she is exercising an aspect of her virtuous nature. That is, by performing a particular generous action for the sake of the good ends it realizes, she is also, at once, engaging in an instance of acting virtuously — she is fully being generous, fully realizing her generous nature. And, notice, her acting generously depends on her performing a generous action.

If the view I have sketched is right, Aristotle’s claims about virtuous actions are not in fact inconsistent but rather reflect the peculiarly practical nature of practical virtue. Virtuous actions are good because of the good ends or consequences they aim to realize in the world. However, by recognizing and correctly responding to goods in the ethical domain, a virtuous agent performing a virtuous action engages in the sort of activity that is itself an end.

3.2.4

I suggested in §3.3 that a desideratum of an account of virtuous actions is that it resolve Aristotle’s apparently inconsistent claims in a way that doesn’t collapse altogether the distinction between actions that are ends and actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. On the view I have defended, virtuous actions are
in a way ends, and in a way for the sake of ends beyond themselves, but this is true because there are two metaphysically distinct actions that come into being when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action. If this suggestion is right — if the agent’s just action and her “acting justly” are metaphysically distinct actions that coincide in the same event — we can not only do justice to Aristotle’s distinction between actions that are ends, and actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves, we can also better understand how this distinction works in Aristotle’s contrast between poiēsis and praxis in Book 6 of the NE. Here, as we have seen, Aristotle distinguishes between the sort of action that is a poiēsis, or “production”, and the sort of action that is a praxis or “action”, and claims that the states concerned with them differ and “one is not included in the other; for praxis is not production, and production is not praxis.” (1140a4-5) He distinguishes the two kinds of actions on the basis of their respective ends: “poiēsis has its end in something other than itself, but praxis does not since its end is acting well itself.” (NE 6.5 1140b6-7) And, he explains, acting well requires both virtue of character and phronēsis since decision, the principle of action, “requires understanding and thought, and also a state of character; for acting well or badly requires both thought and character.” (NE 6.2 1139a33-4)

Commentators typically assume that, when Aristotle insists on the distinctness of praxis and poiēsis, he means to imply that the two are mutually exclusive events such that if an action is a praxis it cannot also be a poiēsis. But, if this is Aristotle’s view, it raises a version of the problem we have already seen about virtuous actions. If just actions, like other virtuous actions, are praxeis, then they are actions that are ends. And, if the distinction between a praxis and a poiēsis is mutually exclusive, then if a just action is a praxis, it cannot also be a poiēsis. But, intuitively, just actions can involve, or take the form of, a poiēsis. Consider the example above, of a virtuous agent building a house for someone in need. Is the agent’s action a praxis insofar as

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30 τῆς μὲν γὰρ ποιήσεως ἔτερον τὸ τέλος, τῆς δὲ πράξεως ὁυκ ἄν εἰγ ἐστι γὰρ αὐτῇ ἡ ἐυπραξία τέλος
31 διὸ οὐτ’ ἀνεν νοῦ καὶ διανοίας οὐτ’ ἀνεν ἔθνης ἐστίν ἔργως ἡ προαίρεσις.
it is a virtuous action? Or is it a *poiesis* insofar as it is the exercise of a *technē*, and realizes a product beyond the productive action? Commentators have worried that Aristotle has no principled basis on which to decide this question.\(^{32}\)

On the view I have defended, this sort of example does not raise a problem for the coherence of Aristotle’s distinction. The agent’s action is a *praxis* insofar as it is an exercise of practical virtue in acting virtuously. It is a *poiesis* insofar as it is the exercise of a *technē* that issues in a product. When Aristotle insists that *praxis* and *poiesis* are not included the one in the other, his point is not that *praxis* and *poiesis* must be mutually exclusive events. Rather his point is that *praxis* and *poiesis* are different in being even if, at times, they are the same in number. They are different in being, which is to say metaphysically distinct; what makes it the case that they are different in being is that they have essentially different ends and, correspondingly, are the exercises of different *dunameis* — practical virtue and *technē* respectively. This is true even in cases where a *praxis* and *poiesis* coincide in the same event.

In fact, the idea that a *praxis* can involve or take the form of a *poiesis* in this way is suggested by comments Aristotle makes in 6.2. Here, he explains:

> “Thought by itself moves nothing; what moves us is goal-directed thought concerned with action (διάνοια δ’ αὐτής οὐθέν κυνεῖ, ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐνεκά τοῦ καὶ πρακτικῆ). For this thought is also the principle of productive thought (αὐτή γὰρ καὶ τῆς ποιητικῆς ἁρέχει); for every producer in his production aims at some [further] goal, and the unqualified goal is not the product (ἐνεκα γὰρ τον ποιεῖ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν, καὶ ὁ̇ τέλος ἀπλῶς (ἀλλὰ πρός τι καὶ τινός) τὸ ποιητόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρακτόν), which is only the [qualified] goal of some [production], and aims at some [further] goal. [An unqualified goal is] what we achieve in action, since acting well is the goal, and desire is for the goal.” (NE 1139a35-1139b4)

\(^{32}\)See, for example, David Charles’ discussion of this type of example (1986), and Robert Heinaman’s response (1996).
Aristotle’s suggestion here seems to be that the productive intellect is in some way subordinated to the practical intellect: the ends of production are qualified and relative to something in that we make products in order to use them for particular purposes, in the pursuit of further ends. And, the suggestion seems to be, the use to which we put these products, and so also what products we decide to make at particular times, is determined by practical reason not technē. If this is right, when a virtuous agent engages in a productive action in order to realize some good end in the ethical domain, she will also, at once, be engaging in an instance of acting virtuously: she will be engaging in both a poiēsis and a praxis.

3.3 Two Consequences

If the view I have sketched is right, there are two important consequences. First, my view allows us to take at face value Aristotle’s repeated and explicit identification of eudaimonia with excellent rational activity while establishing ethically virtuous activity as a genuine form of eudaimonia alongside contemplation. Second, my view absolves Aristotle’s ethical theory from the charge of egoism; eudaimonia is the ultimate end for human beings without it being what agents ought to aim at in all their deliberations and actions.

3.3.1

In §3.1.2, I claimed that there is strong textual evidence for thinking that Aristotle means to identify eudaimonia with a single good, excellent rational activity. And, I claimed, if eudaimonia is an activity, it must be the sort of activity that is itself an end. Many commentators persuaded by the evidence that eudaimonia lies in excellent rational activity alone conclude that eudaimonia must lie in contemplation alone. This conclusion is largely a response to Aristotle’s claims in 10.7 and 10.8
including his apparent insistence that virtuous actions are not ends. On the view I have defended, we can make sense of Aristotle’s description of virtuous actions as being for the sake of ends beyond themselves without having to conclude that the exercise of virtue of character is, in no way, itself an end. The exercise of virtue is an end, though it depends for its realization on actions that are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. Moreover, the exercise of practical virtue is, in part, a rational activity. It is the exercise of both the excellent state of our desiderative capacities which, though not themselves rational, are obedient to reason, and practical reason itself.\textsuperscript{33} If this is right — if the exercise of practical virtue is a kind of excellent rational activity that is itself an end — then acting virtuously is the right sort of activity to be constitutive of \textit{eudaimonia}. Its place in a happy life need not be explained in terms of the way it promotes, or approximates, contemplation.\textsuperscript{34} Rather this activity has value in its own right, distinct from the value of contemplation.

Of course, much more needs to be said about Aristotle’s discussion in 10.7 and 10.8 to fully defend this interpretation of the nature of \textit{eudaimonia}. In Chapter 5, I argue that my account of the dependence of “acting virtuously” on performing virtuous actions has significant explanatory power for interpreting Aristotle’s arguments for the relative superiority of contemplation over the exercise of virtue in 10.7 and 10.8. Much of Aristotle’s discussion in these chapters should be understood as a comparison between what theoretical excellence and practical virtue require for their realization in action, rather than as a comparison of the respective value of contemplation and “acting virtuously” once realized.\textsuperscript{35} That is, contemplation turns out to be superior to

\textsuperscript{33}In fact, more strongly, Aristotle in 1.7 seems to operating with a broad notion of reason which includes the appetitive and spirited desires as aspects of human reason (1098a3-5, 1098a7-8). If this is right, the activity of practical virtue is \textit{wholly} rational, under this broad conception of reason.

\textsuperscript{34}For views that explain the place of virtue in a happy life in terms of its relationship to contemplation, see for example Lear (2004), Scott (2014), Charles (2014)

\textsuperscript{35}This is helpful for seeing why, if my account is right, Aristotle doesn’t compare “acting virtuously” and contemplative activity directly in 10.7 when he asserts that contemplation is an end and virtuous actions are not even though it is this activity, not the discrete virtuous actions on which it depends, that is at least prima facie a candidate for happiness. Aristotle’s intention here is not to compare the quality of these two activities — “acting virtuously” and contemplation — directly,
virtuous activity in part because of how much less an individual requires to actually engage in the activity in addition to having the capacity to do so.\textsuperscript{36} As we’ve seen, the exercise of ethical virtue depends on performing particular virtuous actions. Insofar as this is true it also depends to a much greater extent than contemplation on external goods. I will argue that this is what Aristotle means in 10.7 and 10.8 by asserting that contemplation is more self-sufficient than the exercise of virtue, and by asserting that virtuous actions require other people — as partners and recipients of virtuous actions — as well as external goods and resources beyond the mere necessities of life.\textsuperscript{37}

Not only is my view well positioned to explain Aristotle’s arguments for the relative superiority of contemplation in 10.7 and 10.8, it also gives us a principled way of explaining why no other rational activities are candidates for human happiness. Consider two particularly problematic cases for other views on which \textit{eudaimonia} lies in excellent rational activity: that of a highly intelligent criminal, and that of a skilled craftsman.

Take the first case. If happiness lies in excellent rational activity, one might worry that when a highly intelligent criminal performs vicious actions, she is engaging but rather to compare what each activity depends on for its realization. As we’ve seen, the exercise of ethical virtue, unlike the exercise of theoretical wisdom, depends on much more for its realization than contemplation, including on actually performing discrete virtuous actions for the sake of ends beyond themselves.

\textsuperscript{36} Of course, Aristotle \textit{does} think that contemplative activity is also superior, in itself, to the exercise of virtue of character. However, I argue in the third chapter of my dissertation, the way in which it is superior need not undermine the status of “acting virtuously” as a genuine form of happiness.

\textsuperscript{37} The right way to understand the claim that contemplation is more self-sufficient than the exercise of virtue is, I argue, that it is more able to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing \textit{when taken on its own}. Part of what it is to be self-sufficient, I argue, is to be the sort of good that can make a life count as valuable \textit{in isolation from other goods}. And, I claim, it is precisely this aspect of self-sufficiency that is the basis of comparison between contemplation and ethically virtuous activity in 10.7 and 10.8. That is, Aristotle is not, in 10.7 and 10.8 asserting that ethically virtuous activity is less able to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing. Rather, he is asserting that ethically virtuous activity is less able to play this value conferring role in a life \textit{in isolation from other goods}. Both ethically virtuous activity and contemplation, when actually present in a life in activity, are such as to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing in the requisite sense. However, in order for them to actually be present in a life in activity, and not merely in potentiality, ethically virtuous activity needs more in the way of external goods than contemplation. This is because, as I’ve suggested, the realization of ethically virtuous activity depends in a stronger way on the external world than the realization of contemplation.
in the sort of excellent rational activity that is itself an end. My view gives us an explanation for why the intelligent criminal’s actions are not instances of the sort of excellent rational activity constitutive of eudaimonia. Recall the analogy between theoretical excellence and virtue of character. The initial rational capacity we have when young can be exercised and developed in many ways, including in acquiring false beliefs, and developing a settled state of ignorance. Although these are genuine exercises of reason, they are not excellent exercises of reason. There is a normative standard built into the capacity for theoretical reason, and this normative standard is relative to the proper end of the capacity. The proper end of this rational capacity is engaging in contemplation, which is to say, actively grasping intelligible objects in the theoretical domain. Likewise, the initial capacity human beings have to perform actions on the basis of decision can be exercised and developed in many ways, including by performing vicious actions and developing a vicious character. Although these are genuine exercises of this initial capacity, they are not excellent exercises of this capacity. As in the case of the capacity for theoretical reason, there is a normative standard built into the capacity for virtuous activity, and this normative standard is relative to the proper end of the capacity. And, I’ve argued, the proper end of this capacity is “acting well” or “acting virtuously” relative to human goods in the practical domain, where this means identifying and choosing to perform good actions with a full rational appreciation of their value, and desires in line with the judgements of reason. A highly intelligent vicious agent might demonstrate a certain degree of intellectual prowess in her actions, but she has failed to grasp the proper ends of action, and this failure is, in part, a rational failure. She might be a highly skilled reasoner in the same way that a sophist might be highly skilled at making the weaker argument seem to be the stronger argument, but neither of them are “getting things right” about the proper objects of their respective rational capacities.
Now consider the second case. If eudaimonia is identified with rational activity on the basis of virtue then, one might worry, the exercise of technē, which is to say, the virtuous state of the productive intellect, should also have a share in eudaimonia. This would be a surprising result. Not only does it seem implausible that productive activity would share the status of being the highest human good, alongside virtuous activity and contemplation, but Aristotle does not say anything to this effect in the NE. Rather, in the NE and elsewhere, he seems to think of production as having a relatively lowly status.

Again, my view gives us a principled reason for ruling out the exercise of technē as a form of eudaimonia. Whether a particular action counts as an end or for the sake of an end beyond itself is a metaphysical fact, a permanent feature of the way things are. Every dunamis, on my view, is defined in terms of its proper end. Some dunameis are for the sake of, or teleologically directed towards ends beyond their corresponding actions; in these cases, the dunamis is fully realized in a product beyond an action. Other dunameis are for the sake of, or teleologically directed towards, their own exercise; in these cases, the dunamis is fully realized in the action that is its exercise. The reason “acting virtuously” counts as an end is because it is the exercise of a capacity that is teleologically directed towards its own exercise; the complete fulfillment of a fully developed virtuous character just is “acting virtuously”. By contrast, Aristotle is unambiguous in his insistence that the end or ergon of any capacity for production is a product. Productive action is always for the sake of and teleologically directed towards a product. And, if eudaimonia is an activity, it must be the sort of activity that is itself an end, rather than being for the sake of an end beyond itself. As such, the exercise of technē cannot be the sort of excellent rational activity constitutive of eudaimonia. Of course, one might press the worry further: if “acting virtuously” can count as an end despite depending on virtuous actions that are for the sake of further ends, why not think that the same is true in
the case of productive actions? Why not think that, for example, exercising one’s housebuilding art can itself be an end that depends on an action for the sake of a product? On this picture, building a house, like “acting virtuously”, would be an end insofar as it is the exercise of a fully developed rational state. I do not think this objection is successful. To make the same move in the case of production that I made in the case of acting virtuously would require finding some other capacity that is teleologically directed towards the action of producing itself. We would need some capacity that was for the sake of producing, but that depended on performing acts of production that were themselves for the sake of products. It is hard to see what this could be. And, again, Aristotle’s point in Book 6.2 seems to be that the capacity to which the productive intellect is subordinated is the practical intellect. If there are cases where an action that is an end depends on an act of production that is itself for the sake of an end beyond itself, these would, I think, be exactly the cases we have considered: they would be cases of acting virtuously. As we saw, the exercise of virtue of character may well be realized in a productive action: a virtuous agent might exercise her justice, for example, in the productive action of building houses. In this sort of case, the agent exercises a technē in the action of housebuilding, but it is the exercise of her virtuous character, not the exercise of her technē, that is itself an action that is an end.

3.3.2

I want to close by considering a final upshot of my account of the nature of virtuous actions and the interpretation of eudaïmonia it supports. Specifically, it allows us to establish that Aristotle’s ethical theory is not, in fact, objectionably egoistic. On my view, we can distinguish between the motivational goals that an agent has — the goals about which she deliberates and which she seeks to realize in her actions — and the metaphysical ends of her actions. The deliberative goal that an agent has in
her action may, but need not, align with the metaphysical end of her action. Both contemplation and the exercise of virtue in acting virtuously are ends for an agent in a metaphysical sense; they are ends by being themselves the complete fulfillment or realization of a corresponding potential. Moreover, these activities are constitutive of eudaimonia because they are the fulfillments of potentials that are the best, most characteristic aspects of a human being’s essential nature. It is in this way that these activities are ends for a human being as a whole.

The upshot is that, when Aristotle describes eudaimonia as the end of all things achievable in action, and as the most end-like of ends, we need not interpret him as thinking that the virtuous agent treats as her ultimate goal in all her deliberation and action her own eudaimonia. That is, we can avoid the common interpretation of the way in which eudaimonia is an end according to which the virtuous agent chooses to perform virtuous actions because they are a means to, or constitutive of, her own eudaimonia. As we saw, the problem with this interpretation is that it makes the virtuous agent look objectionably self-interested and self-regarding. She reliably performs just and generous actions but she seems to be motivated by the wrong reason, namely, her own self-interest.

On the view I have defended the virtuous agent is not always motivated to perform virtuous actions chiefly out of a concern for her own eudaimonia. In fact, more strongly, the virtuous agent, if she is to engage in right sort of activity to count as eudaimonia, cannot always be motivated chiefly by a concern for her own eudaimonia. Part of what it is for an agent to successfully engage in activity on the basis of ethical virtue is to choose good actions with a full rational appreciation of their goodness. When a virtuous agent chooses to perform a generous action that will benefit someone in need, she recognizes that benefitting that person is good independent of her own happiness, and chooses to perform the action precisely because of this good end it realizes. We can distinguish between the way in which this action is good in virtue
of the good results at which it aims, and way in which it is good because it is an instance of a virtuous agent’s acting virtuously, and therefore a way for the agent to engage in the sort of activity constitutive of her own *eudaimonia*. These two different ways in which the virtuous agent’s action is good are related, but distinct.

A few clarifications are in order. The view I have sketched does not require that a virtuous agent cannot be motivated in part by her own self-interest to perform actions that are for the sake of ends that are good independent of her own good. A virtuous agent recognizes that by performing a virtuous action on the basis of her ethical virtue, she will be engaging in the sort of activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Moreover, this thought may well be part of her motivation for performing the action. All that the view I have sketched requires is that, where appropriate, the virtuous agent also recognizes and is motivated, and motivated chiefly, by the way in which the action is good independent of her own good.

Likewise, the view I have sketched does not require that every virtuous action a virtuous agent performs is for the sake of ends that are good independent of her own good. For example, when a virtuous agent exercises her temperance in choosing a salad over a donut, her goal is to preserve the health of her own body. In performing this action with the correct reasons and desires, she engages in the sort of activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Notice however that even in this example the way in which the action of eating a salad, considered as a virtuous action, is good for the virtuous agent is different from the way in which her exercise of virtue in “acting virtuously” is good for her. The action of eating a salad benefits the virtuous agent because it promotes the health of her body; the activity that is the exercise of her temperance — an activity that depends on performing this action but is not identical to it — benefits the virtuous agent by being an instance of *eupraxia*.

Finally, notice that on the view I have sketched, a non-virtuous agent may well have purely self-interested motives for trying to acquire virtue of character. That is,
a non-virtuous agent might come to learn that it is only by actually acquiring virtue of character that she can come to be happy. She might, with a view to becoming virtuous, perform the sorts of actions that virtuous agents perform with the goal of ultimately being happy. This is in fact what we should expect. Aristotle thinks there is a very real practical benefit to identifying the nature of happiness; he thinks once we learn what happiness is, we are in a better position to achieve it. The non-virtuous agent who learns that she can achieve the best human good by becoming virtuous may well perform virtuous actions with this as her chief goal. However, as she acquires the excellence of her practical reason and her non-rational desiderative states through the process of habituation, she will come to have a full rational appreciation and corresponding desires for the good ends that her virtuous actions realize. Indeed, it is only by doing so that she will be engaging in right sort of virtuous activity to actually be happy.
Chapter 4

Eudaimonia as the Most Teleion of Ends

Introduction

In NE 1.2, Aristotle insists that, amongst the things achievable in action, there must be at least one that is choice-worthy “in itself” or for its own sake, rather than for the sake of something else, or else desire would turn out to be empty and limitless. In NE 1.7, Aristotle claims that eudaimonia is the most teleion of ends; it is the only good that is always choice-worthy for its own sake, and never for the sake of anything else. However, Aristotle also makes clear in this discussion that eudaimonia is not the only good choice-worthy for its own sake. Aristotle seems to affirm in this passage that the goods often mistaken for happiness itself — honor, pleasure, understanding and virtue — are in fact goods that are choice-worthy in part “in themselves” and in part for the sake of eudaimonia.

It is often thought that non-inclusivist interpretations of eudaimonia have a special problem making sense of these “mid-level goods”, goods that are choice-worthy both in themselves and for the sake of eudaimonia. If eudaimonia really is, as non-inclusivists maintain, a single good rather than an ordered composite of intrinsically
valuable goods, why is Aristotle entitled to assume that various goods we value in themselves are also choice-worthy for the sake of eudaimonia? And, if these goods have two distinct sources of value, what accounts for their unity?

In §4.1 I review the problem of mid-level goods for non-inclusivist interpretations of eudaimonia. In §4.2, I offer a suggestion for thinking about the value of various goods in the ethical domain in terms of their ontological dependence on human nature. In §4.3 I respond to some methodological worries my account invites, and then consider the consequences for thinking about the goodness of actions and the nature of deliberation for Aristotle.

4.1 The Puzzle About Mid-Level Goods

Aristotle begins 1.7 by observing that different actions and arts have different ends, and that if we are trying to locate the end of any specific art, we should consider that for the sake of which “the other things” are done. One way to determine the end of any specific craft is to look at whether the actions and decisions of the practitioner of a craft reveal some one goal for the sake of which they are done. So, in the case of medicine, health is that for the sake of which everything in medicine is done, and it is the end and the good of medicine. Likewise, victory is the end and good of generalship, and a house is the end and good of architecture.¹

¹Aristotle’s discussion here recalls his discussion at the beginning of NE 1.1 where he claims that “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (1.1). He proceeds in 1.1 to draw a distinction between two kinds of ends, those that are activities, and those that are works or products apart from the activities that produce them. He goes on to claim that, when there are ends apart from the actions, it is in the nature of the products to be better than the activities, and offers the following as examples of ends that stand outside of the actions that produce them: health is the end of the medical art, a vessel is the end of ship building, victory is the end of generalship and wealth is the end of the art of economics. Taking the two passages together, we learn that arts like generalship, health, architecture and economics each have a particular end for the sake of which everything in the art is done, and in each case this end is not only better than the activity that produces it, but indeed is the good of the art in question. As in 1.1, Aristotle suggests that if there is an end for the sake of which we perform all actions, this will be the good achievable by action, or, if more than one end, the goods achievable by action (όσιτ’ ε’ τι των πρακτικών ἀπάντων ἐστι τέλος, τούτ’ ἄν εἶ ν’ το πρακτικ’ ἄγαθον, ε’ δὲ πλείο, ταύτα.). The thought then is that the way
Aristotle goes on in 1.7 to distinguish between two kinds of ends. Some ends, such as wealth, flutes and instruments in general, are chosen for the sake of something further (τούτων δ’ αἱροῦμεθα τινα δι’ ἕτερον) while some ends are not chosen for the sake of something further, but rather are teleion. And, he insists, whatever the chief good is, it must be something that is teleion or, if there is more than one end that is teleion, the most teleion of these: “therefore, if there is only one teleion end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most teleion of these will be what we are seeking (ὁστ’ εἰ μὲν ἐστιν ἐν τι μόνον τέλειον, τοῦτ’ ἂν εἴη τὸ ζητούμενον, εἰ δὲ πλείω, τὸ τελειότατον τούτων).” He goes on to explain the standard by which goods count as more or less teleion:

Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more teleion than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more teleion than things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call teleion without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.

τελειότερον δὲ λέγομεν τὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ διωκτὸν τοῦ δι’ ἕτερον καὶ τὸ μηδέποτε δι’ ἄλλο αἱρετὸν τῶν <καὶ> καθ’ αὐτὰ καὶ δι’ αὐτὸ αἱρετῶν, καὶ ἀπλῶς δὴ τέλειον τὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ αἱρετὸν ἂν καὶ μηδέποτε δι’ ἄλλο. (1097a25-34)

Aristotle presents his claims about the relative value of various goods in the ethical domain as though they will be fairly uncontroversial to his audience based on how they in fact tend to value things. However, it is also clear Aristotle thinks there is some standard of correctness for the value of these goods outside of how well-brought up citizens tend to value them; he thinks people can be, and often are, in which eudaimonia is an end of all our actions, and therefore the good achievable by action, is somehow analogous to way that health is an end of all the actions a doctor performs, and the good of medicine.
mistaken about the relative value of various goods in the ethical domain.\textsuperscript{2} There are
two things Aristotle seems to be presupposing in this and other discussions about
the value of practicable goods. First, there is some truth about the value of these
goods that is mind-independent. Goods are not constituted as valuable, for Aristotle,
by what citizens of a political community do in fact desire. Rather, citizens desire
appropriately when they desire what is in fact valuable. Second, there is some truth
about the value of the goods in question that holds non-contingently of these goods, in
virtue of the nature of the goods in question. Goods like wealth, health, understanding
and virtue are good in themselves, in virtue of what they are, even if they are not
always good in any amount for a particular person at a particular time.\textsuperscript{3}

What Aristotle is establishing in 1.7 then is not simply that we tend to pursue
other goods, at least in part, for the sake of happiness but that these goods really
are valuable, at least in part, for the sake of happiness. He is assuming that the way
we value these goods tends to reliably track the actual value of these goods. What
explains the way in which various goods, by nature, are valuable at least in part for
the sake of happiness? Otherwise put, what explains how \textit{eudaimonia} is the most
\textit{teleion} of ends?

Commentators tend to interpret this passage in line with their more general com-
mitments about the nature of \textit{eudaimonia}. On an inclusivist reading, a good is \textit{teleion}
if it is complete in the sense of containing all other intrinsic goods or ends: a good
that is \textit{teleion} without qualification is one to which no further goods can be added
to make it more worthy of choice. As Keyt argues, “if two ends are each chosen for

\textsuperscript{2}As is clear in the discussion in NE 1.5, most people are mistaken in their conception of the good.

\textsuperscript{3}In NE 10.9 Aristotle insists that “what is good by nature is good and pleasant in itself for the
virtuous person” and, a few lines down, “What is good by nature is also good for the decent person.”
In NE 7.4 he describes various goods such as wealth, profit, victory and honor as “naturally choice-
worthy” and “fine and excellent.” (1148a23-24) They are the sorts of goods that are choice-worthy
“in their own right” (\textit{αἰτετῶ \\ δὲ καλὸν \\ αὐτῶ)} though they can be taken to excess. I take it Aristotle
is not distinguishing in this passage between instrumental and non-instrumental ends here as he
does in NE 1.7 (1147b29). Rather, I take it, the “in their own right” is meant to capture the idea
that these goods are choice-worthy in virtue of what they are, even though not all these goods are
choice-worthy finally rather than instrumentally. I will have more to say about this in §4.3
their own sake but both together are more worthy of choice than either separately, then there is a compound end that embraces both to which each end is subordinate” (Keyt 1983 p. 365-366). Defenders of an inclusivist picture disagree over whether all or only some intrinsic goods are components of *eudaimonia*. However, they agree that the “for the sake of” relationship that holds between various intrinsic goods and *eudaimonia* is that of a part to a whole. These goods are valuable in themselves, and it is only by being valuable in themselves that they are also components of the highest good.4

I do not think the inclusivist reading of this passage can be right because, as I have argued in my third chapter, there is overwhelming textual evidence against an inclusivist reading of the nature of *eudaimonia*. Even if the inclusivist has a coherent reading of this passage, it is not supported by what Aristotle says about the nature of *eudaimonia* throughout the rest of the NE. If there is an available, coherent, non-inclusivist reading of this passage, we should prefer it.5

Defenders of a non-inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* reject the inclusivists’ rendering of *teleion* as “complete” in the sense of “having all its parts”. Rather, they claim that Aristotle’s use of the word *teleion* is meant to invoke the guiding or ordering role that our conception of *eudaimonia* should play in our lives.6 Aristotle claims early in the NE that it is important to identify the nature of happiness so that, like archers with a target in sight, we will be better able to achieve it. If *eudaimonia* is the ultimate object of rational desire then, so non-inclusivists have supposed, it must

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5Aside from this independent consideration — that the inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* squares badly with what Aristotle says outside of this passage — there are also problems with the coherence of the inclusivist interpretation of this passage itself. See, for example, Heinaman “*Eudaimonia* and Self-Sufficiency” (1988 p. 35-41)

be the most *teleion* end by being the ultimate end or goal for the sake of which the
happy person acts; on this interpretation, the virtuous person evaluates the goodness
of other ends by reference to this ultimate end or goal. As Cooper (2004) insists:

“[A] good that is unqualifiedly *teleion* is such that it really is in the
strongest possible way an *end* of action: it is always choice-worthy for
itself, as ends must be, and in being choice-worthy it is never referred in
any way to anything else — whether as a productive means to something
further, or some sort of constituent in a larger whole, or in any other way
owing any part of what is choice-worthy about it to any relationship it
might bear to something else...if we are to be faithful to Aristotle’s own
explication of this criterial term, think of it not in terms of completeness
or perfection but, indeed, as I have been doing, in terms of finality.” (p.
280)\(^7\)

The main challenge for this interpretation is to explain what the “for the sake of”
relationship is that holds between ends choice-worthy in themselves and *eudaimonia*.
Again, on the inclusivist interpretation, the relationship is that of a part to a whole.
On the non-inclusivist interpretation, there is no whole with parts: *eudaimonia* is
identified with a single good. The most natural alternative is that the “for the sake
of” relationship is an instrumental one: goods like virtue, pleasure and reason are
choice-worthy in part in themselves and in part as instrumental to happiness. Though
this is a natural way to read the “for the sake of”, it raises puzzles about the status
of these sorts of ends.\(^8\)

\(^7\)See also, for example, Lear who claims that Aristotle “envisions the happy life as a life of
devotion to a single supremely valuable thing (or kind of thing)”, that “happiness is the single kind
of good for the sake of which the happy person acts” and that “in conceiving of happiness as the
practical goal of the happy life, Aristotle implies that things contribute to the flourishing of a life in
virtue of their teleological relationship to happiness. All goods other than the highest are relevant
to our well-being and find a place in the happy life because they are worth choosing for the sake of
*eudaimonia*” (p. 1-3)

\(^8\)In response to these and other worries, defenders of a non-inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia*
have proposed other readings of the “for the sake of” relation that holds between these goods
Consider two problems. First, this interpretation on its own offers no explanation for why goods that are choice-worthy as ends are also instrumentally valuable for eudaimonia. That this is so looks merely coincidental but, again, Aristotle seems to be making claims about the value of these goods in virtue of their natures; that goods like pleasure, honor and virtue are choice-worthy in part for the sake of happiness is not meant to be a merely contingent fact. It looks as though, then, these goods must have two distinct, apparently unrelated sources of value. What entitles Aristotle to suppose that all goods we value in themselves are choice-worthy for the sake of happiness?

and happiness. Kraut (1989) proposes that there are various goods that are valuable independent of eudaimonia, but that they are also choice-worthy “for the sake of” eudaimonia in the sense that eudaimonia places a constraint on their being pursued. Irwin (1991) offers what I think is a persuasive and comprehensive discussion of problems for this view. Lear (2004) proposes that the relation is one of approximation: moral virtue grasps truth about action as exactly as possible, and in this way is a teleological approximation of the project of grasping truth embodied in the exercise of theoretical wisdom. The exercise of theoretical wisdom sets the standard for “the excellent practical truthfulness of morally virtuous action”; virtuous action is choice-worthy for the sake of contemplation because it approximates theoretical truthfulness, and choice-worthy for its own sake because it “succeeds in approximating the more perfect exercise of theoretical reason” (p. 3-4). I cannot do justice to Lear’s view here. The view I will offer bears some similarity to hers, but I think there are a number of problems her view faces. First, her account of what it is for something to be an end — something that sets a normative standard, and structures and guides the processes leading to it — seems to me to pick out a feature that all ends have, but fall well short of a satisfying account of what it is to be an end in the sense we find in Aristotle’s natural teleology. Many things, including processes and vicious goals, are such as to structure and guide the processes leading to them, but wouldn’t count as ends in the sense we find in Aristotle’s theoretical works. Moreover, her view doesn’t have the resources for a distinction between the way in which a subordinate end can be for the sake of a higher end, and the way in which something that is not an end (a potential or a process) is for the sake of an end. These are, I think, two different kinds of “for the sake of” relations, but they appear to collapse on her view. Second, the evidence she offers for interpreting the “for the sake of” relation as one of approximation is weak. Third, as I have argued in my second chapter, there are good reasons to think that the exercise of ethical virtue is a genuine form of happiness; much of Lear’s book is devoted to explaining how moral virtue can be valuable for its own sake despite the fact that the exercise of virtue isn’t a genuine form of happiness. If the exercise of ethical virtue is indeed a genuine form of happiness, we need not attempt to explain the value of virtuous activity as somehow derivative from that of contemplation. Rather, the value of both is explained by the way in which they are fulfillments of aspects of a human being’s rational nature.

9There is a related problem that faces non-inclusivist interpretations on which happiness consists in contemplation alone. On these views, there is a worry that the value of contemplation might conflict with the value of virtuous actions, and that this may lead to unpalatable result that a happy person could be vicious. I will have more to say about this possibility in the next chapter, although it should be clear this worry does not face my view in the same way it faces other interpretations of eudaimonia because, on my view, both contemplation and ethically virtuous activity are genuine forms of eudaimonia. Lear describes this problem as follows: “Aristotle claims that the happy philosophical life includes morally virtuous activity (NE X.8 1178b5-6). But morally virtuous actions,
A second problem is about how to understand the logic of the argument on this interpretation. Aristotle’s hope in the discussion is to establish that, although there are a variety of goods we value for themselves in the ethical domain, we should value *eudaimonia* above all the others. But it is not obvious why establishing that a good is choice-worthy in part as instrumental to some other good is evidence for its being *less* valuable than a good that is only choice-worthy in itself. Again, it looks like on this interpretation, goods like honor, pleasure, knowledge and virtue have two distinct sources of value. Why is this, on its own, a reason to think these goods are less valuable than goods choice-worthy for their own sake alone?

Notice that the reason the inclusivist interpretation is able to avoid these worries is because, on the inclusivist reading, the way in which goods are choice-worthy in themselves is closely related to the way in which they are choice-worthy for the sake of *eudaimonia*. As Everson (1998) explains, “the point is that the constituents of happiness do not *derive* their value from the role they play in the achievement of happiness: rather, they are able to play that role just because they are worth pursuing for themselves.” (p. 85) On the non-inclusivist interpretation, it looks like there are two distinct sources of value for these mid-level goods, one of which is *eudaimonia*.

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10It is difficult not to be reminded of Plato’s threefold division of goods in Book II of the *Republic* where Socrates distinguishes amongst goods (i) we welcome for their own sake e.g. harmless pleasures; (ii) goods we like for their own sake and for the sake of what comes from them e.g. knowledge and health; (iii) goods that are themselves not desirable but that we like for what comes from them e.g. medical treatment and money-making. Socrates claims that the best goods are those that fall under (ii); the thought, it seems, is that they are valuable in two ways and so count as more valuable than those goods merely desirable in themselves, but not productive of anything further. Commentators have wondered why Socrates and Aristotle disagree about which class of goods is best. Why doesn’t Aristotle, like Socrates, suppose that the very best goods are those that are choice-worthy both for their own sake and for the sake of what results from them? This worry faces any interpretation of Aristotle according to which these mid-level goods really do have two distinct sources of value.
By contrast, on the inclusivist reading, the value of happiness is, as Everson explains, “parasitic on the value of its constituents, despite the fact that it is the final end of action.” (p. 85)

So far, I have presented the problem of “mid-level” goods as a challenge to non-inclusivist interpretations of *eudaimonia*. Elsewhere in the NE, there is strong textual evidence in favor of a non-inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia*. However it is unclear how the non-inclusivist can make good sense of these “mid-level goods” and the way in which *eudaimonia* is the most *teleion* end. The problem of “mid-level goods” is more than just an interpretive one. It raises more general philosophical questions about how to understand the nature and structure of value in the NE. Where does value “get into” the ethical domain? What constitutes things as valuable? What explains how various valuable things are related? Understanding how the value of various goods in the ethical domain is related is especially important if one wants to maintain — as I have argued we should — that the goodness of actions is explained by reference to the goodness of the ends they aim to realize.\(^{11}\) If virtue of character is the developed state of a capacity to appropriately respond to value in the ethical domain, we want to know something about the valuable things that virtue responds to.\(^{12}\)

### 4.2 Value and Ontological Dependence

In this section, I’ll outline some relevant features of the interpretation of *eudaimonia* I have offered in previous chapters, and suggest how this interpretation is helpful

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\(^{11}\)This is in contrast to views according to which what makes virtuous actions count as virtuous is the character of the agent performing them. I have insisted that we distinguish, as Aristotle does, between the virtuous action, and its being performed virtuously. Only the latter depends on the character of the agent performing the action. We still need an explanation for what makes the action virtuous such that it can be performed virtuously.

\(^{12}\)After all, for Aristotle, we are meant to understand the nature of capacities in terms of the nature of their activities, and understand these activities in turn in terms of the nature of their proper objects.
for understanding both the status of *eudaimonia* as the most *teleion* of ends, and the status of mid-level goods relative to *eudaimonia*. To be clear, my intention is to explicate how Aristotle’s subsequent, substantive, account of *eudaimonia* meets the *teleion* criterion he lays out in 1.7. I do not intend the discussion that follows to be principally an elucidation of the structure or goal of the passage itself. I take it that Aristotle’s goal in the passage is largely dialectical: he is preparing the way for his substantive account by asking his audience to reflect on the way in which they in fact value various goods, assuming that the way we in fact value various goods roughly tracks their actual value. As I will argue in §4.3, this is compatible with there being some deeper explanation for why these goods are in fact valuable in the ways that they are, such that when we desire them, we are responding appropriately to the value they have. What I hope to do is show that a non-inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* can make good sense of the way in which certain goods are, by nature, choice-worthy both for their own sake and for the sake of *eudaimonia*.

### 4.2.1

I have argued that *eudaimonia* is the end of human action by being the activity that is the most complete fulfillment of the most essential aspect of our nature, our rationality. And, I have argued, *eudaimonia* comes in two forms for human beings: the exercise of theoretical wisdom in contemplation, and the exercise of the complex of *phronesis* and ethical virtue in *eupraxia*, or ethically virtuous activity. The former is the activity of grasping intelligible objects in the domain of the eternal and unchanging. The latter is the exercise of one’s practical agency in correctly identifying and appropriately responding to value in the domain of what is achievable in action.

The view depends on understanding the way in which *eudaimonia* is the end achievable in human action in the sense of “end” we find in Aristotle’s natural teleology. On my view, what it is for *eudaimonia* to be the end for human beings is not
Value and Ontological Dependence  Eudaimonia as the Most Teleion of Ends

unlike the way in which an oak tree is the end of an acorn.  

What it is to be an end in this sense is, I have argued, to be a fully realized being. Excellent rational activity counts as the end for human beings by being the way in which a human being fully realizes its own being qua rational. The essence of a living organism is its soul, and the soul is constituted by various capacities. When an organism develops and exercises the capacities essential to its nature, I have suggested in my second chapter, it is fully realizing the sort of thing it essentially is. As such, when a human being fully develops and then exercises its capacities for theoretical and practical rationality, it is most fully realizing its rational nature, most fully being a rational being.

How does this way of understanding how eudaimonia is the end achievable in human action relate to its being the best good for human beings? In the ergon argument, it seems that Aristotle wants to derive the fact that excellent rational activity is the highest human good from the fact that it is the best accomplishment of the human end or ergon. Aristotle argues that we should locate the human good in the human ergon, identifies the human ergon, and then concludes that the highest human good will the best accomplishment of this ergon. He seems to be arguing from the fact that rational activity is the end or ergon for human beings to the conclusion that excellent rational activity is the highest human good.

How is all this helpful for interpreting the claim in 1.7 that eudaimonia is the most teleion of ends? I want to suggest that what we get in the ergon argument is an explanation for why excellent rational activity is the most teleion end for human beings.

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13I say “not unlike” because there are important differences between the two cases: in the case of acorn, the oak tree is the final cause of the development of the acorn, whereas in the case of a mature human being, eudaimonia is a second entelecheia, a way in which the human being is more fully what it is without its coming into being in the sense of a becoming or process.

14I am assuming that we can treat the ergon of a thing as the final cause, end or “that for sake of which of the thing.” For evidence, see EE 1219a7-18 and De Caelo 286a8-9.

15It is a familiar point that the end of a thing and its good are tightly connected. How the end and the good of a thing are related in general is, I think, a deep and difficult question I set aside. What is important is that Aristotle isn't trying to establish the value of excellent rational activity independent of reference to human nature, and then using this as an argument for its being the ultimate end for human beings.
beings: it is the best accomplishment of the end of our nature, the fullest or most complete expression of our essence as rational. The suggestion is that “being rational” is the end for human beings and that this end is most “teleion”, most fully realized, in excellent rational activity; it is the activity in which human beings are most fully realizing this end, most fully being rational.\textsuperscript{16} Otherwise put, there is no other state a human being can be in, or activity a human being can engage in, that more fully realizes its nature. And, we learn in the ergon argument, this status excellent rational activity has as the complete fulfillment of our nature explains why it is the highest good for human beings.\textsuperscript{17}

So far, I have been suggesting that we find in the ergon argument an explanation for why excellent rational activity is the most teleion end for human beings, and therefore also the best, most valuable thing for human beings. If this is right, we shouldn’t treat Aristotle’s claim prior to the ergon argument — that an end is teleion to the extent it is choice-worthy for its own sake — as a definition of what it is for something to be teleion.\textsuperscript{18} Rather, I take it, he is pointing out a true feature that teleion ends have, a feature that we tend to pick up on in the ways we in fact value things.

What I hope to show in what follows is that, just as we can explain the sort of value excellent rational activity has by seeing how it is the complete fulfillment of the most essential aspect of human nature, so also we can explain the sort of value mid-level goods have by seeing how they are only partial or incomplete fulfillments of the most essential aspect of human nature. I will suggest that it falls out of

\textsuperscript{16}It is important that “being rational” is not simply an end, but the authoritative end for human beings, given their nature.

\textsuperscript{17}Presumably Aristotle is making a fairly minimal, and I think fairly plausible, assumption that the being or nature of a thing is good for it. He expresses this sentiment in NE 10.7 in explaining why the benefactor loves the beneficiary more than the reverse: “The reason for this is that being is choice-worthy and lovable for all, and we are insofar as we are actualized, since we are insofar as we live and act.” Likewise in 10.9 he explains “living is also choice-worthy, for a good person most of all, since being is good and pleasant for him.”

\textsuperscript{18}After all, this is not how Aristotle uses the term in the subsequent ergon argument, or indeed elsewhere in the NE or elsewhere in his corpus.
the metaphysical status these ends have with respect to human nature that they are always choice-worthy in part for their own sake and in part for the sake of eudaimonia.

4.2.2

Aristotle offers four examples in 1.7 of mid-level goods: honor, pleasure, virtue and understanding. Presumably the list is not exhaustive. In NE 6.12, in a passage that closely echoes the language of the 1.7 passage, Aristotle makes clear that both phronesis and sophia are the sorts of goods choiceworthy both for their own sakes and for the sake of eudaimonia; we would choose them even if nothing further resulted, but something further does result, namely eudaimonia. (1144a1-10) In 1.7, Aristotle hasn’t yet clearly differentiated between phronesis and sophia, but given how often he uses nous to refer to phronesis later in the NE, we might suppose he has in mind phronesis in this passage too. Arguably, friendship also has the status of a mid-level good for Aristotle.

I won’t deal exhaustively with each of these goods. Rather, I want to make a suggestion for how to think about goods like sophia, phronesis and virtue, and then make a somewhat different suggestion for how to think about honor and pleasure. If friendship is indeed a mid-level good for Aristotle, which I think it likely is, I think the explanation will be more like the former than the latter; to make good on this suggestion however is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Consider the case of theoretical knowledge first. We learn in DA 2.5 that there are three ways in which a human beings counts as “being a knower”. A human being, in virtue of falling within the class of essentially rational beings, counts as potentially a knower. This potential that a human being has in virtue of her essence for being a knower has two progressive stages of fulfillment. The dunamis for “knowing” or understanding is fulfilled in the first instance in the human being who has acquired knowledge; she counts as being a knower in some stronger sense than she did when
she was ignorant. The *dunamis* for knowing is fulfilled in a second, further way in the individual who is actively exercising the knowledge she has acquired in the activity of knowing; it is this individual who counts as being a knower in actuality and in the most authoritative sense.

Knowledge, I have argued, has an interesting ontological status. It is a partial or incomplete realization of the potential human beings have by nature to be knowers. It is a state that is in a way actual, insofar as it is the fully developed state of the potential for knowing, and in a way potential, insofar as it is still a potential for some further end, the activity of knowing.

I want to suggest that the way in which knowledge is choiceworthy both for its own sake and for the sake of *eudaimonia* mirrors its ontological status with respect to human nature. It is choiceworthy for its own sake to the extent it is a realization of the end of human nature: it is a way in which a human being counts as actually being a knower. However, it is also choiceworthy for the sake of *eudaimonia* because it is still only a partial or incomplete realization of the end of human nature: it is a potential the exercise of which is the complete realization of the end of human nature.¹⁹

Notice three things about this strategy for explaining the mid-level status that knowledge has as a good. First, the “for the sake of” value that knowledge has is not accurately described as instrumental. It is true that knowledge is “productive” of contemplation, and so also of *eudaimonia*, insofar as contemplation is the activity that is the exercise of knowledge. But knowledge is not for the sake of happiness

¹⁹Aristotle’s discussion in 6.12 (1143b18-1144a6) supports this picture. Aristotle here is considering the worry that *phronesis* appears to be useless both for making us ready to act well, and for becoming good. He responds: “First of all, let us state that both practical wisdom and wisdom must be choiceworthy in themselves, even if neither produces anything at all; for each is the virtue of one of the two [rational] parts [of the soul] (ἀρετής γε ὤνας ἔκατέρων ἔκατέρων τοῦ μορίου, καὶ εἰ μὴ ποιοῦσιν μηδὲν μηδὲντά ἄντων).” (1144a1-3) The explanation Aristotle offers for why *phronesis* and *sophia* are choiceworthy in themselves is that they are virtues of the rational parts of the soul. And he goes on to explain they are choiceworthy for the sake of happiness by being states that we possess and exercise, presumably in the excellent rational activity that happiness consists in.
in the same sense that, for example, a hammer is for the sake of the production of houses, or sight is for the sake of knowledge. Rather, knowledge is for the sake of happiness in the sense that sight is for the sake of the activity of seeing. Knowledge is for the sake of contemplation not by being instrumental to the production of some end outside of itself, but rather by being a less fully realized version of contemplation.

Second, as on the inclusivist interpretation, so also on this interpretation, the “in itself” and “for the sake of” value that knowledge has are related. However, whereas on the inclusivist interpretation, what explains the “for the sake of” value of knowledge is the fact that knowledge is, in the first place, valuable “in itself”, on this interpretation, the way in which knowledge is valuable “in itself” is actually derivative from the way in which it is valuable for the sake of its corresponding activity, knowing or contemplating. That these two ways of being valuable are related captures one of the virtues of the inclusivist strategy: it is not merely accidental that knowledge is valuable in two ways, nor is it true that knowledge has two distinct ends in such a way that its unity is called into question. Rather it is built into its nature as a first entelecheia that knowledge is choiceworthy in part for its own sake and in part for the sake of its exercise. This resolves the apparent problem that these mid-level goods appear to be valuable in two entirely distinct ways. Rather, the two ways in which these goods are valuable are related, and are both explained in terms of the way in which these goods are a partial realization of the end of human nature.

A third upshot of this interpretation is that we can better understand the logic of Aristotle’s argument in 1.7. Specifically, we are in a position to see how Aristotle is arguing for the claim that eudaimonia is more valuable than “mid-level goods”. The comparison between the value of a good like knowledge and the value of eudaimonia is not meant to be a comparison between two distinct goods. Rather, Aristotle is making the point that a good like knowledge is only a partially realized form of the good that is constitutive of eudaimonia; knowledge is in a way like and in a way
Unlike the activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Knowledge can’t be more valuable than *eudaimonia* because it derives the limited value that it has — both the “in itself” and “for sake of” value — from the activity that is its complete realization.

What about other the “mid-level” goods that Aristotle mentions? If what I’ve argued in the previous chapters is right, what holds true of knowledge will also hold true of ethical virtue. Like knowledge, ethical virtue is a first *entelecheia*: it is the excellent state of a *dunamis* we have by nature that is, ultimately for the sake of activity. And, like knowledge, the exercise of ethical virtue is a form of the excellent rational activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Like knowledge then, ethical virtue is choice-worthy both in itself, insofar as it is a fully realized end, albeit qua potential, and for the sake of *eudaimonia* insofar as it is related to *eudaimonia* as a potentiality to an actuality.

### 4.2.3

So far the strategy I have proposed is to explain how certain mid-level goods such as knowledge and virtue are choice-worthy both for their own sake and for the sake of *eudaimonia* by pointing out that they are fully developed states of potentials that are, essentially, for the sake of their exercise in the excellent rational activity constitutive of *eudaimonia*. This strategy won’t work for all mid-level goods. Honor and pleasure are not the fully developed states of potential in the way that knowledge and virtue are. What explains why they are choice-worthy both for their own sake and for the sake of happiness?

Consider pleasure first. Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure in the NE is notoriously difficult to parse. Aristotle has two separate discussions, in NE 7.11-14, and NE 10.1-5. Neither seem to make reference to each other, nor do they clearly present the same view. The first is found in the books that are common to the EE and, as such, is often thought to be an earlier, less developed account of pleasure than the one
we find in 10.1-5. In fact, the two discussions aren’t obviously in tension with each other. Rather, they seem to have somewhat different focuses. Aristotle’s discussion in NE 7.11-14 is largely negative: he wants to respond to arguments that deny that pleasure is a genuine good. One of the main attacks on pleasure that he considers is that pleasure cannot be a good because it is not an end, but rather a coming into being. He and his opponent are both assuming that ends are the primary bearers of value, and that something that is not an end will only count as good in a way that is derivative on the end that it is for the sake of. Aristotle distinguishes between pleasures that restore us to our natural state, and that involve pain, and those in which our nature lacks nothing. The former are pleasant only incidentally, whereas the latter are pleasant by nature and without qualification. And, Aristotle insists, at least some pleasures are not becomings, but rather the sorts of activities that are ends:

Further, it is not necessary for something else to be better than pleasure, as the end, some say, is better than the becoming. For pleasures are not becomings, nor do they all even involve a becoming. They are activities, and an end, and arise when we exercise, not when we are coming to be. And not all pleasures have something else as their end, but only those in people who are being led toward the completion of their nature.

\[ \text{ēti oúk ánáγγη éterón ti eínaí béltioν tῆς ἕδωνῆς, ὠσπερ τινές φασὶ τὸ τέλος tῆς γενέσεως oú γὰρ γενέσεις εἰῶν oúde méta γενέσεως πᾶσαι, ἀλλὰ ἐνέργειαι καὶ τέλος oúde γνομένων συμβαίνουσιν ἀλλὰ χρωμένων καὶ τέλος oú πασῶν éterón ti, ἀλλὰ τῶν eis tῆν τελέωσιν ἀγομένων tῆς φύσεως.} (1153a8-a13) \]

At least in the case of activities like contemplation, which is to say the sort of activities that are not the restoration of a person’s nature and are not mixed with pain, the pleasure is an end, rather than a coming into being. Insofar as these sorts
of pleasures are ends, they are the right sorts of things to be genuine goods, even the highest human good. After all, Aristotle goes on to explain, if happiness is the unimpeded activity of one or more states, then some unimpeded activity must be the most choice-worthy. If at least some pleasure is unimpeded activity, then pleasure is at least a candidate for being the highest human good.

In 10.1-5, Aristotle addresses this possibility directly. In 10.3, he argues that the value of pleasure depends on its source; not all pleasure is valuable. Likewise, there are many things that are by nature pleasant, such as seeing, remembering, knowing and having the virtues, but we would choose these even if they brought no pleasure: at least some of the value these have is independent of the pleasure that accompanies them.

In 10.4, Aristotle considers in more detail the nature of pleasure. He begins by likening pleasure to seeing. Just as seeing is complete at any time, so pleasure is also like this, being “some sort of whole” and not the sort of thing that “will have its form completed by coming to be for a longer time.” Aristotle goes on to try and make precise the relationship that pleasure has with the activities like thinking and perceiving that it accompanies. On the one hand, Aristotle does not want to identify pleasure with these activities themselves; pleasure is not the exercise of the capacity of thought or perception itself. On the other hand, Aristotle wants to maintain that pleasure necessarily accompanies these activities when the relevant object and capacity are in good condition. For each capacity, Aristotle explains, the best and most complete activity will be the activity of the subject in the best condition in relation to the best object of the capacity.\(^{20}\) And, Aristotle goes on, this sort of activity will also be the most pleasant, and pleasure “completes the activity (λειτουργάντα τήν ένέργειαν ἢ ἡδονή).” (1174b23) However, Aristotle explains, the way in which pleasure completes the activity is not the way in which the activity is completed by

\(^{20}\)The capacity is “most completely active” in this case, and “this above all seems to be the character of complete activity.”
the object and capacity being in the best condition. Rather, pleasure completes the activity “as a sort of consequent end, like the bloom on youths (ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐπιγνώμενόν τι τέλος, ὅλον τοῖς ἄκμαίοις ἦ ἄρα).” (1174b33-34)

What do these two discussions teach us about the nature of pleasure? It is natural to conclude, on the basis of the two discussions, that Aristotle wants to identify pleasure with a certain kind of activity. In fact, I think we need to be cautious in assuming this. When Aristotle talks about pleasure in NE 7, he is very plausibly talking about the object of pleasure, rather than the nature of the experience of taking pleasure or enjoyment in some object. When Aristotle identifies pleasure with activity in NE 7, he seems, at least plausibly, to be talking about the activities like seeing and contemplating that we take pleasure in, rather than saying that pleasure is itself some activity distinct from these activities.21 By contrast, in NE 10, Aristotle seems clearly interested in the nature of the experience of taking pleasure or enjoyment in something. Here, Aristotle does not explicitly identify “taking pleasure” with an activity. Rather, he makes clear that pleasure should not be identified with the activities that it accompanies; it is something distinct from the activities that it accompanies, even if each activity has its own unique pleasure. It is true that Aristotle likens pleasure to the activity of seeing, but it isn’t obvious how far the comparison is meant to go. He doesn’t actually identify pleasure here with activity, but rather compares the way in which both pleasure and seeing are complete in form. In fact, if pleasure were identified with an activity, it is hard to see what it would be an activity of. Pleasure is not identified with the activity it accompanies, nor does there seem to be some distinct capacity of which pleasure is the exercise. Rather, pleasure

21This is a suggestion made by Verity Harte (2014 p. 310), ”cautiously” influenced by Owen’s discussion (1971). Owen notices that the Greek term for pleasure is ambiguous between that in which I take pleasure, and the pleasure I take therein. He argues that in NE 7 Aristotle is focused on the nature of the pleasure as that which is enjoyed, whereas in NE 10 he if focused on the nature of the enjoyment itself. Harte defends the application of the distinction in this context though she does not endorse the arguments Owen himself offers in defense of his thesis.
seems intimately related to the distinct activity that it accompanies. How should we understand this relationship?

Again, Aristotle says that pleasure completes the activity it accompanies, and in some different way from the way in which the object and capacity in good condition complete the activity. He compares the relationship between pleasure and the activity it completes with the “the bloom on youths”. Aristotle is suggesting that we can make a conceptual distinction between the completeness that characterizes an activity in virtue of the relevant object and capacity being in good condition, and the completeness that characterizes an activity in virtue of the accompanying pleasure. The activity of seeing is complete if the sense and object are in good condition; we can understand the completeness of the activity independently of the pleasure that accompanies it. However, this activity is necessarily accompanied by a pleasure that completes or perfects it in some way: the pleasure is additional to the activity in the sense that we can separate it out in thought. And, the pleasure has the character that it does by being pleasure in the activity; the pleasure could not occur independently of the activity it accompanies and does not have some independent existence.

To get a better idea of the relationship between a complete activity, and the pleasure that completes it, consider the case of the pleasure that accompanies temperate actions. This is a particularly useful example because Aristotle clearly distinguishes between the continent agent who performs temperate actions without a temperate character and the temperate agent who performs the temperate action temperately; the former does not take pleasure in her temperate action while the latter does.

Ursula Coope (2012) considers the difference between the continent and temperate agent with respect to pleasure in her discussion of why Aristotle seems to think that an agent cannot have practical wisdom without ethical virtue. Coope focuses on the difference between the agent with mere continence and the virtue of temperance. The difference between the temperate and continent agent is supposed to be
that, although both reliably judge what they should do, and act in accordance with this judgement, the continent agent experiences strong conflicting desires to do the opposite of what his reason judges best. The continent person, unlike the temperate, has strong and bad appetites, and experiences pain in acting in accordance with his rational judgement, and against his strong and bad appetites.

What Coope wants to explain is why, for Aristotle, the merely continent agent lacks practical wisdom. Again, this agent seems able to reliably judge what he ought to do, and moreover, reliably acts in accordance with this judgement. And yet, insofar as he is not virtuous, he must lack practical wisdom. Why, according to Aristotle, does the fact that the continent agent has strong and bad appetites entail that he lacks practical wisdom? Coope suggests that the difference lies in the rational pleasures that each take. Specifically, she argues that the temperate agent takes a distinct kind of rational pleasure in the fineness of his virtuous action. The continent agent does not, and this failure to experience a rational pleasure is a failure to fully appreciate the fineness of his action.\(^{22}\)

Building on Coope’s argument, I want to suggest that taking pleasure in the fineness of an object is part of fully grasping its nature (as a fine thing), and fully grasping its nature is part of fully realizing the end of the capacity in question. If this is right, pleasure completes the activity by being an aspect of its completeness.

How does all this help with the initial puzzle, namely, to understand how pleasure is choice-worthy in part for its own sake and in part for the sake of something further? If something like this account of pleasure is right then, in the case of activities like contemplating and acting well, pleasure is a part or aspect of the complete activity

\(^{22}\)Aristotle closely associates pleasure with a grasp of the fine in his discussion of self-love as well. He describes the courageous person as someone who sacrifices money and honors in order to keep the fine for himself, and in so doing, chooses a short period of intense pleasure over the mild pleasure for a longer time. The pleasure the courageous person takes in the fineness of his action far surpasses the pleasure afforded by the use of various external goods that the courageous person sacrifices. Again, it is plausible that the pleasure is part of the courageous person’s grasp of the fineness of the action he performs, and not just some consequent benefit.
as a whole: pleasure plays a role in grasping the fineness of the object of the activity. Perhaps then pleasure is both an end and for the sake of a further end because it is a part of the complete activity as a whole. It is an end, and choice-worthy for its own sake, to the extent it is a part of the realization of the capacity as a whole. But, insofar as it is only a part of the realization of the capacity, it is for the sake of the activity as a whole. Again, it depends for its nature on the activity that it accompanies, and its value is parasitic on the value of the object that the activity is directed towards.\textsuperscript{23}

This might seem unsatisfying both as a metaphysical account of the nature of pleasure and, relatedly, as an account of how pleasure counts as a mid-level good. The suggestion I am offering for the metaphysical nature of pleasure is, admittedly, vague: pleasure is not, strictly speaking, an activity, but rather a part or aspect of an activity. Pleasure, I have suggested, is a way of appropriately responding to the fineness of the object of an activity. The suggestion I am offering for how pleasure counts as a mid-level good will be unsatisfying for a different reason: it is significantly different from the suggestion I gave about goods like virtue and knowledge. We might have hoped for a more unified account of the nature of mid-level goods.

In response to the first worry, while it is true that the metaphysical account of pleasure I have offered is vague, this is reflective of the vagueness of Aristotle’s own discussion in the NE. Aristotle wants to position pleasure as an entity that is not a coming-into-being, but that is also not identified with the complete activities that it necessarily accompanies. While Aristotle is clear about what he thinks pleasure is not, he is less clear in articulating his positive account of the nature of pleasure. In response to the second worry, it is true that my account of how pleasure is a mid-level

\textsuperscript{23}It is important that, on this picture, the way in which pleasure is a partial realization of the end of the relevant capacity is not by being an intermediate stage on the way to the realization of the end. It is not a partial realization of the end in the way that housebuilding is the partial realization of a house. Rather, it is a part of the complete realization in the sense of being a part of the whole of the activity, rather than a stage in a temporally realized process of completion.
good is not the same as my account of goods like virtue and knowledge. Should this concern us? I want to suggest that, although the two accounts are different, they are relevantly similar in that what explains the way in which the goods in question are choice-worthy both for their own sake and for the sake of happiness is something about their metaphysical status. Specifically, in both the case of knowledge and virtue, and in the case of pleasure, the good in question is in a way an end, a fully realized being, and in a way dependent ontologically on some end beyond itself. Virtue and knowledge are fully developed potentials that are, essentially, for the sake of their exercise. Pleasure is the realization of some part of an activity as a whole. Although we don’t have the same explanation in the case of virtue and knowledge as we do in the case of pleasure, we do get explanations that are relevantly similar.

4.2.4

What about honor, the last of the goods Aristotle describes in 1.7 as choice-worthy both for its own sake and for the sake of eudaimonia?

Some commentators actually want to deny that, for Aristotle, honor is a genuine end. Although Aristotle describes it as a good that is choice-worthy in itself (1096b16-18, 1097b1-5), he also suggests that those take themselves to be pursuing honor as an end are actually interested in honor only because it is a sign of power or virtue.\(^{24}\) Crisp for example argues that honor is one of those external goods, like good looks, the absence of which “mars our blessedness.” Honor has instrumental value, according to Crisp, by promoting the self-confidence of the virtuous person, and allowing him “to reach ever greater heights of excellence in his activities.” (Crisp 1994 124-5)

\(^{24}\)For the many enjoy being honored by powerful people because they expect to get whatever they need from them, and so enjoy the honor as a sign of this good treatment. Those who want honor from decent people with knowledge are seeking to confirm their own view of themselves, and so they are pleased because the judgment of those who say they are good makes them confident that they are good.” (NE 8.8 1159a22-7)
In fact, Aristotle seems to want to distinguish between the kind of honor that is choice-worthy in itself, and the kind that is sought incidentally. Honor is choice-worthy for its own sake when it is in the form of benefits, rewards or appraisal that are actual indicators of a person’s worth; honor that accords with a person’s worth is a genuine end. By contrast, rewards, benefits and appraisal that are sought merely as a sign of virtue are not choice-worthy for their own sake.

In NE 4.3, Aristotle discusses the virtue of magnanimity, or megalopsychia. He describes magnanimity as the disposition to want the right external goods in the right way as a reward for one’s excellence; it is a virtue concerned principally with one’s understanding of oneself as worthy of honor. As such, magnanimity is a disposition to want the greatest honors because one deserves them: as Aristotle describes him, the magnanimous person is one who “thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them (δοκεῖ δὴ μεγαλόψυχος εἶναι ὁ μεγάλων αὐτῶν ἄξιος ἄξιος ὀν).” (1123b1-2) Aristotle contrasts the magnanimous person with the person who thinks he is worthy of great things but is not, and the person who is worthy of great things but does not know this.

It is not possible to be magnanimous, according to Aristotle, unless one is in fact virtuous: “For in every case, the better person is worthy of something greater, and the best person is worthy of the greatest things; and hence the truly magnanimous person must be good.” (1123b26-29) This is partly because, in order to deserve the honors that the magnanimous person deserves, an individual must be good. However, Aristotle also seems to think that being magnanimous — correctly assessing one’s own worth — makes one act better. The magnanimous person only pursues genuinely good ends, because only these ends are good for him, worthy of his excellence.25 He will not, for example, flee in battle because no other end could be as good for him as doing the courageous thing, and achieving a fine end. As such, Aristotle insists,

25See Lear (2004 p. 168-174) for a very helpful discussion.
magnanimity is a kind of “adornment” of the virtues, explaining that it “makes them greater” and “does not arise without them” (μεῖζονς γὰρ αὐτὰς ποιεῖ, καὶ οὐ γίνεται ἀνεύ ἐκείνων. (1124a2-3)

The magnanimous person then is concerned with honor, but not the sorts of honors that people typically pursue. Rather than seeking money or power or praise, the magnanimous person assigns himself the best kinds of virtuous actions because these are the actions appropriate to his own greatness. He seeks to be honored by excellent men who are of a high rank, presumably because these are the only men in a position to recognize and appreciate his excellence. (1124a6, b18-19)

What we learn from the discussion of the magnanimous agent is that the virtuous person is always concerned, in the exercise of each of his virtues, with his actions being worthy of the honor. That is, it is a part or aspect of his acting virtuously that his actions be honorable. The suggestion seems to be that there is something missing about the quality of one’s acting if it is not both honorable and in fact honored. Perhaps then, like pleasure, being honored is a part or aspect of the fulfillment of virtuous actions; it is part of the full recognition of a virtuous action as good. However, like pleasure, the value of honor is also parasitic on the value of the virtuous actions it accompanies. Not just any honor is valuable, but only the honor that recognizes the goodness of the best kinds of actions.

My suggestion then is that being honored, like pleasure, will be one part or aspect of the best instances of acting virtuously: it will be a part or aspect of the activity that is the fullest expression of ethical virtue. It is in this way that honor is both an end, choice-worthy for its own sake, and also for the sake of eudaimonia.

4.2.5

So far, I have suggested that goods like knowledge, virtue, honor and pleasure are choice-worthy in part for their own sake and in part for the sake of eudaimonia.
because of the way they are ultimately related to *eudaimonia*. The upshot is that these sorts of goods derive both ways of being valuable from the relationship they bear to *eudaimonia*.

On this interpretation, it is not built into the account of what it is for something to be an end that it is choice-worthy. Rather, we explain the sort of choiceworthiness these goods have in terms of the sorts of ends that they are, and the way in which they are essentially related to human nature. I take this to be a virtue of the account. It allows us to read Aristotle’s discussion of ends in the NE as consistent with his talk of ends in his theoretical works while equipping us to explain why goods like knowledge and virtue are valuable for humans beings and so count as appropriate objects of choice and desire.

The picture is one according to which *eudaimonia* is the most *teleion* end by being the complete fulfillment of the human end or *ergon*. *Eudaimonia* is the activity that is the complete fulfillment of the most essential aspect of human nature, our rational capacity. Other goods are more or less *teleion* in virtue of the way in which their being is related to the fulfillment of human nature. Specifically, virtue and knowledge are partial fulfillments of the most essential aspects of our nature: they contain the human end, but only as a fully developed potential. As such they count as *teleion*, but not haplos *teleion*. Likewise, honor and pleasure are parts or aspects of virtuous activity; they are related to this activity as parts to a whole.

If this is right, we get a explanation of the value that these goods have, by nature, in the ethical domain while employing a conception of what it is to be an end that is entirely continuous with Aristotle’s treatment of ends in his theoretical philosophy. The explanation we get of the value of these goods is at the level of their metaphysical being. It is an explanation of their value *haplos*, in virtue of what they are, and independent of the way any human beings in fact value them. Lastly, we get an
4.3 Clarifications and Consequences

4.3.1

Consider two methodological worries one might have about my interpretation, one localized to the discussion in 1.7, and one more general.

The localized worry is that, in the discussion in 1.7, Aristotle is not making an appeal to theoretical commitments that he has. Rather, he means to establish that eudaimonia is the most teleion end dialectically, by appeal to how we in fact value various goods in the ethical domain. And yet, in the interpretation I have offered above, I have helped myself to a variety of commitments Aristotle defends in his theoretical philosophy. If Aristotle doesn’t appeal to these commitments himself, why think such an appeal is appropriate? If these resources are available to Aristotle, why doesn’t he make use of them in the passage?

I think the worry is misguided. The discussion is, I agree, meant to be persuasive largely based on the way in which well-educated, well-brought up people value various goods in the ethical domain. Aristotle presents the conclusion that eudaimonia is the most teleion of ends as an intuitive one, not needing justification outside of the way we tend to value goods. But notice this is compatible with thinking that Aristotle can offer a deeper justification of his claim at the level of the nature of the goods in question. This is similar to the way in which, in his theoretical philosophy, Aristotle might present the claim that housebuilding is for the sake of a house as an intuitive one. This is compatible with his being able to offer a deeper justification, at the level of the nature of housebuilding and houses, for this claim.
One might, at this point, want to press a more general methodological worry. Specifically, one might object that metaphysical claims about the natures of things are inappropriate to the ethical domain. After all, Aristotle famously insists that we should not expect the same degree of precision from ethics that we can expect from other sciences. Indeed, Aristotle at various points in the NE deliberately sets aside metaphysical questions as unnecessary for the purposes of ethical theorizing. One common way to read these claims is to think that, for Aristotle, there is no justification for ethical truths lying outside of the ethical domain. This is, on this reading, why it is so important for the audience of the NE to be mature and well-brought up; if the audience is not already persuaded by the truth of important ethical claims, there is nothing outside of the ethical point of view that one can appeal to in order to persuade them.

There is, I think, no reason to interpret Aristotle’s claims in this way; to see why, consider an analogy with medicine. The medical art is for the sake of health. The doctor, when she is exercising her art, seeks to produce and preserve the health of bodies. The doctor, to succeed in achieving this end, needs to know various things about bodies. She needs to know what state a body must be in to count as healthy. This includes knowing what function various organs in the body have, and what state they need to be in to function optimally. She also needs to know various ways the body can fall away from a healthy condition, and how to treat these various states of ill-health so as to restore the body to a healthy condition.

Notice three things about the case of medicine. First, what health is – what it is for a human body to be in a healthy condition – is a scientific truth. It is the sort of truth that holds necessarily in virtue of what human beings essentially are, and the sort of truth about which a biologist could have episteme. Likewise, what the function is of various organs is a scientific truth about which a biologist has episteme. Second, the goal of the medical art is practical: the doctor aims to produce and
preserve a healthy condition of the body. To achieve this end, the doctor needs to have settled true beliefs about what health is, and what the function of various organs are. However, the doctor does not need *episteme* of these truths. The propositions about which she has true *doxa* may well be the very same propositions about which the biologist has *episteme* but she does not grasp these truths in the way that the biologist grasps. That is, she need not grasp the structured explanatory relationships that hold necessarily in virtue of the nature of the relevant objects; all she needs are true beliefs that track these explanatory relationships. Third, in order to achieve this goal, the doctor needs to know a good deal more than what holds universally, in virtue of the natures of things. The doctor deals with enmattered beings subject to contingency. The doctor needs to know not only what a healthy body is, but also how to treat a particular, imperfect body in a particular circumstance.

The same, I want to suggest, is true of the ethical domain. What happiness is, and likewise what other practicable goods are, such as health, wealth, houses, virtue, knowledge and pleasure, are scientific truths. They are the sorts of truths about which a natural scientist will have *episteme*. However, as in the case of medicine, the goal of ethics is practical. It is to discover what the human good is such that we can achieve it both in our individual lives and in the political community as a whole. The propositions about which the *phronimos* has true *doxa* — happiness is excellent rational activity, pleasure is an end, virtue is such and such — are truths about which a natural scientist will have *episteme*. However, it is sufficient for the *phronimos* to have mere true beliefs that track deeper explanatory relationships that hold in virtue of the nature of the things in question. And, like the doctor, much of what the *phronimos* deals with is subject to contingency. The *phronimos* needs to know not only what is good in general but also what is good for this particular person at this particular time.
4.3.2

Consider now the upshots of the view I have defended. First, we have a solution to the problem that mid-level goods present for a non-inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia*. We are in a position to understand the logic of the argument in NE 1.7; that is, we have an explanation for why a good’s being choice-worthy both for its own sake and for the sake of something further should imply that it is less valuable than a good that is choice-worthy entirely for its own sake. Likewise, we have an explanation for why certain goods are necessarily, in virtue of their nature, “for the sake of” *eudaimonia* in addition to being choice-worthy for their own sake; on the view I have defended, we have an explanation for how these two ways of being valuable are necessarily related. What is special about all mid-level goods, on the view I have defended, is that they are in a way ends — in a way realizations of the end of some *dunamis* — and in a way not yet complete realizations of the end of this *dunamis*. Goods like knowledge and virtue are first actualities, which is to say, complete realizations of a *dunamis* only in so far as that *dunamis* is still a potential; it is built into the nature of first actualities that they are, essentially, for the sake of some further end. They are “for the sake of” some further activity in the way that a potential is for the sake of some actuality. Goods like pleasure and honor are parts or aspects of some activity that is itself an end; they are ends insofar as they are realizations of some aspect of the activity in question, but are for the sake of ends beyond themselves insofar as they are still only *parts* of this activity. They are “for the sake of” this activity as parts are for the sake of a whole.

A further upshot of the view I have been defending is that it fills in a part of the structure of Aristotle’s ethical theory. I argued in the previous chapter that what makes actions good or virtuous is the goodness of the ends they aim to realize. That is, what makes various kinds of actions just or temperate or courageous is not
the character of the agent performing them, but something about the action itself, specifically, the end it is directed towards. What makes an agent virtuous is, in turn, that she is such as to perform virtuous actions with the right reasoning and desiring. Likewise, I argued, we need not think that the explanation of the value of virtuous actions is egoistic: we need not think that what makes virtuous actions good or virtuous is that they promote an agent’s own happiness. Rather, an agent achieves her own happiness by performing virtuous actions from a virtuous character, fully realizing her capacity to act well or virtuously; we have an explanation for why having a virtuous character and performing virtuous actions reliably promotes an agent’s own happiness without it being built into the explanation of what makes actions virtuous that they promote an agent’s own happiness. On the view I defended in the previous chapter, acting well or virtuously is one of the two most valuable goods achievable by human beings, but this activity presupposes that there are other things that are valuable in the ethical domain, and that these other things count as valuable independent of their being desired and chosen as such. Again, what it is to fully realize one’s capacity for virtue is to reliably identify and appropriately respond to facts about value in the ethical domain. In the same way that perceptible objects are prior to and explanatory of the capacity and activity of perception, so also the value of various goods in the ethical domain is prior to and explanatory of the capacity and exercise of virtue.

In this chapter, we better understand the nature of virtue because we better understand some of the “proper objects” of virtue. Specifically, we have an explanation for what makes ends like honor, pleasure, knowledge and virtue count as good; so, in turn, we have an explanation for why the actions that aim to realize or promote these ends count as good. The explanation for what makes these ends good is a metaphysical one, at the level of the natures of the things in question; that ends like pleasure, knowledge and virtue are good is metaphysical fact that holds necessarily
of these ends in virtue of what they essentially are. Of course, it is not the case that these ends are always good for a particular person at a particular time. As such, it is not the case that the actions that aim to realize these ends are always the best actions to perform in some particular circumstance. The phronimos needs to know what ends are good as such and in general, but also needs to be able to determine whether and to what extent these ends are good for particular individuals in particular circumstances. This seems to me a plausible and intuitive way of thinking about the goodness of actions: the explanation is not wholly contingent, but nor are there rules or principles that will hold universally and in all cases. Rather, what makes particular actions good is a matter of how metaphysical truths interact with contingent facts about a circumstance. Honor, for example, is good in an unqualified way, in virtue of what it essentially is, but its goodness is qualified in various ways by contingent features of a circumstance: for example, honor may not be good for someone who is not worthy of being honored.
Chapter 5

Self-Sufficiency, External Goods, & the Choice of Lives

Introduction

I have been defending a view according to which *eudaimonia* lies in excellent rational activity alone, and this activity comes in two forms: the exercise of theoretical knowledge in contemplation, and the exercise of ethical virtue in ethically virtuous activity or “acting well”. The view, in some ways, carves a position midway between an inclusivist and an intellectualist interpretation of the nature of *eudaimonia*. The view is “inclusive” insofar as not only contemplation, but ethically virtuous activity too, is a way of being happy. The view is “intellectualist” or “monist” insofar as there is only one kind of good constitutive of happiness, namely excellent rational activity, and that what explains the status of both contemplation and ethically virtuous activity as forms of human happiness is the fact that they are both activities that are the complete fulfillments of aspects of a human being’s rational nature.

Neither inclusivist nor intellectualist interpreters will, at this point, be satisfied. Inclusivists will agree that ethically virtuous activity needs to be included in an account of happiness but they will insist that much more, besides contemplation and
ethically virtuous activity, needs to be included as well. My view captures one of the chief motivations for an inclusivist picture, namely finding a place for ethical virtue in a happy life that is not merely instrumental to, nor derivative from, the value of contemplation. But so far, I have not said enough to address one of the other chief motivations, namely that Aristotle describes eudaemonia in NE 1.7 as a good that is self-sufficient, or “lacking in nothing”. Aristotle goes on in the subsequent chapters to insist on the necessity of various goods other than virtuous activity in a happy life. Inclusivists read the self-sufficiency condition, and subsequent discussion of external goods, as establishing the inclusion of other goods, in addition to virtuous activity, in the fully filled-in account of happiness. The challenge for non-inclusivist interpreters is two-fold: (i) to offer an account of how happiness can be self-sufficient or “lacking in nothing” without including all the goods that are choice-worthy for humans as parts of happiness, and (ii) to explain, in a plausible way, the necessity of external goods in a happy life without building these into the account of happiness itself. I address these two challenges in §5.1 and §5.2 respectively.

Intellectualists will be unsatisfied with the account so far for a different reason. Intellectualists will agree that happiness consists in excellent rational activity, and may well agree that, up until Book 10, Aristotle has in mind an expansive conception of rational activity that includes the exercise of both theoria and ethical virtue. However, intellectualists will insist, in 10.7 and 10.8, Aristotle is determined to argue for the superiority of contemplation over ethically virtuous activity. Indeed, Aristotle is explicit: complete happiness lies in contemplation, not ethically virtuous activity. According to intellectualists, what Aristotle is establishing in Book 10 is that, strictly speaking, happiness consists in contemplation alone; ethically virtuous activity counts as a form of happiness only in some derivative way. In §5.3, I offer some suggestions for thinking about the comparison between contemplation and virtuous

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activity, and for thinking more generally about the practical upshot of Aristotle’s account of happiness for how we ought to live our lives.

5.1 Self-Sufficiency

One of the challenges for non-inclusivist interpretations of eudaimonia is to make sense of the claim that eudaimonia is self-sufficient, which is to say, it is a good that, taken on its own, makes a life choice-worthy and lacking in nothing. How can eudaimonia count as “lacking in nothing” if it, in fact, lacks a great deal of what is valuable. As we saw in the previous chapter, Aristotle seems to recognize a variety of goods that are choice-worthy in themselves in addition to excellent rational activity. Surely, inclusivists insist, if happiness doesn’t include these other goods, it will fall short of being “self-sufficient”. In what follows, I review Aristotle’s discussion of self-sufficiency in NE 1.7, and in Book 10, and defend an interpretation that is compatible with non-inclusivism, and moreover, that renders the discussions in Book 1 and Book 10 consistent with each other.

5.1.1

Aristotle concludes the discussion of the teleion condition in NE 1.7 by affirming that we hold happiness to be something that is always choice-worthy for itself and never for the sake of something further, unlike goods like honor, pleasure, reason and other virtues that, although choice-worthy in themselves, are also chosen for the sake of eudaimonia. Aristotle appeals to the apparent self-sufficiency of eudaimonia as further evidence of what he has argued:

The same conclusion also appears to follow from self-sufficiency; for the complete good seems to be self-sufficient [...] the self-sufficient we set down as that which when isolated makes life choice-worthy and lacking
in nothing; and such we think happiness to be (τὸ δ’ αὐτάρκες τίθεμεν δ’ μονοΐμενον αἴρετόν ποιεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ μηδενὸς ἐνδεῖα); and further we think it most choice-worthy of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others - if it were so counted it would clearly be made more choice-worthy by the addition of even the least of goods (ἐτι δὲ πάντων αἴρετωτάτην μὴ συναρμομενήν — συναρμομενήν δὲ δήλον ὡς αἴρετωτέραν μετὰ τοῦ ἐλαχίστου τῶν ἀγαθῶν); for that which is added becomes an excess of goods, and of goods the greater is always more desirable. Happiness, then, is something complete and self-sufficient, and is the end of action. (NE 1.7 1097b6-21)

Commentators diverge widely over how to interpret Aristotle’s discussion here, and on how the substantive account he goes on to give in fact meets this condition. Aristotle’s discussion of self-sufficiency is vague and under-described, and has been read as militating in favor of either an inclusivist or non-inclusivist reading.

On an inclusivist reading, when Aristotle describes the self-sufficient as “that which when isolated makes a life desirable and lacking in nothing” what it is for a good to be “lacking in nothing” is for it to include all intrinsic goods. If happiness is self-sufficient, it must be a composite of all intrinsic goods. Inclusivists typically read the rest of the passage as an argument for this conclusion: if happiness did lack some intrinsic good, then the composite of happiness plus this intrinsic good would be more desirable than happiness alone. But, happiness is, by stipulation, the most desirable good, therefore happiness cannot lack any intrinsic goods.¹ On this reading, a good counts as self-sufficient if it cannot be improved by the addition of any intrinsic goods; eudaimonia meets the self-sufficiency condition because it includes all intrinsic goods.²

¹Curzer 1990
²What it means for eudaimonia to “include” all intrinsic goods is the subject of some disagreement within the inclusivist camp. Some commentators have argued that eudaimonia can meet the above
Non-inclusivists resist this interpretation. Cooper (2004) for example argues that when Aristotle says what is self-sufficient “makes life choice-worthy and lacking in nothing”, we should not take “lacking in nothing” to mean lacking in nothing at all. Rather, we should interpret Aristotle as meaning that what is self-sufficient is what, taken on its own, makes a life choice-worthy and lacking in nothing needed for choice-worthiness. Likewise, Cooper interprets what Aristotle goes on to say in this passage as that happiness, taken on its own, is more desirable than any other good taken on its own, although it is of course true that happiness, when combined with other goods, is more desirable than happiness on its own. On this reading, happiness counts as self-sufficient because it is enough, on its own, to make a life count as desirable. Happiness, when considered on its own, as a non-compound good, is more desirable than any other good although, in a way that is trivially true, happiness plus additional goods would be more desirable than happiness taken on its own.

The interpretation of the 1.7 discussion of the self-sufficiency requirement is further complicated by Aristotle’s corresponding discussion of self-sufficiency in Book 10. Although Aristotle references a previous discussion of self-sufficiency when he takes it up again in Book 10, and describes what is self-sufficient in much the same language, it is not obvious how to square the details of his discussion with what he says in 1.7. Aristotle first mentions self-sufficiency in 10.6, in resuming his discussion of eudaimonia:

[W]e must rather class happiness as activity (ἄλλα μᾶλλον εἰς ἐνέργειάν τυπα θετέον), as we have said before, and if some activities are necessary and choice-worthy for the sake of something else, while others are so in themselves, evidently happiness must be placed among those choice-

condition without its containing all possible goods, a requirement that seems impossibly demanding. Rather, Price (1980) for example argues that we can understand eudaimonia as all-inclusive without its being entirely unimproveable because, when an individual is living a happy life, every good that is contained in his life will be a constituent in, or contribute to, his eudaimonia; when a man is living a eudaimon life, all of the goods in his life will contribute to his eudaimonia.
worthy in themselves, not among those choice-worthy for the sake of something else; for happiness does not lack anything but is self-sufficient (οὐδὲνὸς γὰρ ἐνδεῖς ἐπὶ ἐπιθέμων ἄλλ' αὐτάρκης). Now those activities are choice-worthy in themselves from which nothing is sought beyond the activity. And of this nature virtuous actions are thought to be; for to do noble and good deeds is a thing choice-worthy for its own sake. (NE 10.6 1176b1-9)

In this passage, as in 1.7, Aristotle seems to think there is some close relationship between a good being teleion and its being self-sufficient. He uses similar language in describing self-sufficiency, saying that it is what is “lacking in nothing”. Here, however, it is happiness itself that is lacking in nothing, rather than the life in which it is present. Significantly, Aristotle seems to be attributing self-sufficiency here to happiness understood as activity on the basis of ethical virtue.

In 10.7 and 10.8, Aristotle returns to the self-sufficiency requirement, comparing theoria and ethically virtuous activity on the extent to which they are self-sufficient:

And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative activity (περὶ τῆν θεωρητικὴν μάλιστ' ἂν εἴη). For while a wise man, as well as a just man and the rest, need the necessaries of life (τῶν μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκαῖον), when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards and with whom he shall act justly (ὁ μὲν δίκαιος δεῖται πρὸς ὅσον δικαίοπραγμάτει καὶ μεθ᾽ ἀνν.), and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others is in the same case, but the wise man, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do so better if he has fellow-workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient. (1177a27-34)
A little later, in 10.8, having asserted that “complete happiness” is contemplative activity, Aristotle returns to the discussion of self-sufficiency:

But being a man, one will also need external prosperity (Δείσει δὲ καὶ τῆς ἐκτὸς εὐημερίας ἀνθρώπων ἀντὶ); for our nature is not self-sufficient for the purpose of contemplation (οὐ γὰρ αὐτάρκης ἡ φύσις πρὸς τὸ θεωρεῖν), but our body also must be healthy and must have food and other attention. Still, we must not think that the man who is to be happy will need many or great things, merely because he cannot be blessed without external goods, for self-sufficiency and action do not depend on excess, and we can do noble acts without ruling earth and sea; for even with moderate advantages one can act excellently (this is manifest enough; for private persons are thought to do worthy acts no less than despots - indeed even more); and it is enough that we should have so much as that; for the life of the man who is active on the basis of virtue will be happy (ἐσται γὰρ ὁ βίος εὐδαιμον τοῦ κατὰ τήν ἀρετήν ἐνεργοῦντος). (NE 10.8 1178b32-1179a9)

The discussions in 10.7 and 10.8 appear similar enough. In 10.7, Aristotle is concerned with the extent to which a contemplative person and an ethically virtuous person need other individuals, whereas in 10.8, he is concerned with the extent to which these individuals need external goods and prosperity more generally. By contrast, these discussions of self-sufficiency in Book 10 appear to differ significantly from the discussion in 1.7. In Book 1, a good is self-sufficient if it is a good that, taken in isolation, makes a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing; Aristotle seems concerned here with the extent to which a good, if present in a life, can make that life count as valuable. By contrast, in 10.7, a good is more self-sufficient if it needs less in the way of other people or, in 10.8, if it needs less in the way of external goods more generally. Here, self-sufficiency does not seem to be a matter of how much value
a good can confer in a life, but rather about how much a good is in need of other things - people or resources - in order to be realized.

5.1.2

Given that Aristotle references a previous discussion of self-sufficiency in his discussion in Book 10, it seems reasonable to assume that the discussion in Book 10 is meant to be continuous with the one in Book 1.7. And, given how little Aristotle tells us about self-sufficiency in 1.7, I propose to start backwards, trying to get clear on the discussion in Book 10 to see if it can shed light on the one in 1.7. Again, I’ve suggested the discussions in 10.7 and 10.8 appear closely related. In 10.7 Aristotle compares the extent to which the wise person and the virtuous person need other people in order to engage in their proper activities. Both the wise man and the virtuous man need the necessaries of life but, Aristotle says, the virtuous man needs people with whom and towards whom to act virtuously whereas the wise person does not, although his contemplation may indeed be improved by the presence of others. In 10.8, Aristotle compares the extent to which the wise person and the just person need external goods more generally. As in 10.7, he makes clear that an individual does need some external goods in order to contemplate. Specifically, the wise man needs food, a health body, and other things in order to contemplate. The discussion here seems to recall what Aristotle has said earlier in 10.8; although he does not use the language of self-sufficiency, he seems to be making a similar point:

Moreover, [the virtue of understanding] seems to need external supplies very little, or [at any rate] less than virtue of character needs them (δόξειε δ' ἄν καὶ τῆς ἐκτὸς χαραγήσας ἐπὶ μικρόν ἢ ἔπι ἐλαττον δεῖσθαι τῆς ἡθικῆς). For let us grant that they both need necessary goods, and to the same extent, (τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀναγκαῖων ἀμφότερον χρεία καὶ ἔξ ἵσου ἐστω) for there will be only a very small difference, even though a politician labors more
about the body and suchlike. Still, there will be a large difference in [what is needed] for the [proper] activities (πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας πολὺ διοίσει). For the generous person will need money for generous actions (πρὸς τὸ πράττειν τὰ ἔλευθερα); and the just person will need it for paying debts, and since wishes are not clear, and people who are not just pretend to wish to do justice. Similarly the brave person will need enough power, and the temperate person will need freedom, if they are to achieve anything that the virtue requires (εἰπέρ ἐπιτελεῖ τι τῶν κατὰ τὴν ὀρετήν). [...] But someone who is contemplating needs none of these goods, for that activity at least (τῷ δὲ θεωροῦντι οὐδενὸς τῶν τοιούτων πρὸς γε τὴν ἐνέργειαν χρεία).

(NE 10.8 1178a24-33)

In this passage, Aristotle gives a more detailed explanation for why contemplation needs less in the way of external goods. Specifically, Aristotle distinguishes between two ways in which the activities need external goods. On the one hand, contemplation and virtuous character differ little in the way in which they need the necessities of life, such as food and a healthy body. On the other hand, contemplation and virtuous activity differ greatly in the way in which they need external goods for their activity (πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας πολὺ διοίσει). In fact, more precisely, it is not the activities that need these external goods for their exercise, but the corresponding states: Aristotle is talking here about what the virtue of the intellect and virtue of character respectively need for their corresponding exercise. What we learn from this passage then is that there is some important difference between the way in which a wise or generous man needs food or a healthy body, and the way in which a generous man needs money for his generous actions. Again, the way in which the generous man needs money for his generous actions is for the activity itself, and as Aristotle goes on to insist, the man who is contemplating does not need any goods in this respect, for the activity itself (τῷ δὲ θεωροῦντι οὐδενὸς τῶν τοιούτων πρὸς γε τὴν ἐνέργειαν χρεία). Aristotle
is distinguishing between what a wise and generous person need to stay alive, and to remain in a condition such that they can exercise their respective virtues when the circumstances are appropriate, and what the wise and generous person need, in addition to their respective virtues, in order to actually engage in activity. The ethically virtuous agent, unlike the wise agent, needs external resources and other people in order to actually exercise his virtuous character in virtuous activity.

We learn a number of things about self-sufficiency from the discussions in Book 10. First, as is clear in passage quoted above from 10.6, self-sufficiency seems to be a genuine attribute of eudaimonia understood as ethically virtuous activity; it is not a quality that holds of theoria alone. Second, the self-sufficiency that is attributed to both contemplation and ethically virtuous activity is a matter of degrees, and contemplation is better than ethically virtuous activity with respect to self-sufficiency not by being unqualifiedly self-sufficient, but only by being more self-sufficient than ethically virtuous activity. Third, the precise way in which contemplation is more self-sufficient than ethically virtuous activity is by needing less in the way of external resources in order to be realized; the contemplative person, unlike the just, temperate or brave person, does not need external resources in order for his virtuous state to be fully realized in activity so long as the exercise of his capacity is not being prevented.

5.1.3

How is what we learn about self-sufficiency in Book 10 helpful for interpreting the formal requirement as Aristotle describes it in 1.7? Is there a way to read the discussion in 1.7 as consistent with the discussions in Book 10? Recall in 1.7, Aristotle spells out the self-sufficiency requirement in the following way: “the self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes a life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such a thing we think happiness to be (τὸ δ’ αὐτάρκης τίθεμεν ὁ μόνονεν αἵρετον ποιεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ μηδὲν ἐνδεῖ τοιούτον δὲ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν οἰόμεθα εἶναι). In fact, I
want to suggest we can see how the two discussions are related by appreciating two different aspects of Aristotle’s account of self-sufficiency in 1.7. A good that is self-sufficient is one that: (i) makes a life desirable and lacking in nothing, however we should understand this, and (ii) does this “when isolated”. That is, I want to suggest, self-sufficiency has to do not just with the power a good has to confer a certain kind of value on a life, but the power a good has to do this *when taken on its own*, in isolation from other goods.

Consider the first aspect. Aristotle does not tell us what it means for a good to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing. Indeed, perhaps Aristotle does not have a precise notion in mind at all. After all, at this point in the argument, he is still appealing to *endoxa* to provide a rough outline of the conditions a substantive account of *eudaimonia* must meet. Presumably, what it means for a life to be “lacking in nothing” is relative to something, and not without any limit. In the first place, as many commentators have noted, it seems implausible Aristotle could really have in mind that *eudaimonia* lacks nothing at all of any value; such a view would seem to entail absurd consequences. Another reason to think that what it means for a good to be “lacking in nothing” has some limit is suggested by Aristotle’s discussion of self-sufficiency in the *Politics*. In Book 7.5 of the *Politics*, Aristotle uses the language of self-sufficiency to describe aspects of the ideal state. He argues that the ideal size of territory of a polis should be one that is self-sufficient, and explains that the self-sufficient territory will be one “which can produce everything necessary for to have all things and to want nothing is self-sufficiency (ποιούσσα τὰ ἐναρκτάτα ἡνα τὴν παντοφόρον τὸ γὰρ πάντα ύπάρχειν καὶ δεῖξαντες μηθενὸς αὐτάρχεσ”) (1326b25-30). By “lacking in nothing” here Aristotle does not mean lacking in nothing needed merely for survival, but neither does he mean lacking in nothing at all of any value. Rather, he seems to have in mind something intermediate between these two possibilities. He

\[^{3}\text{cite}\]
explains that the size and extent of the territory should be “such as may enable the inhabitants to live at once temperately and liberally in the enjoyment of leisure”; that is, it should be big enough to provide what the citizens need, but not so big that it encourages excess in the citizens. What makes a territory count as self-sufficient seems to be that it can provide what it is meant to provide in the context of a state, namely, the resources citizens need in order to do well. This, I take it, is evidence in support of Cooper’s suggestion that, by “lacking in nothing”, Aristotle means something like “lacking in nothing needed to count as a well-lived human life”.

Perhaps then, in 1.7, Aristotle has in mind that a good will be self-sufficient in the context of a life as a whole if it plays some central role in constituting that life as 

*eudaimon*. Perhaps “lacking in nothing” in this context means, as Cooper suggests, a life “lacking in nothing” needed to count as a well-lived human life.

Whatever Aristotle has in mind by this first aspect of his account of self-sufficiency, we are not required, and indeed have good reason not to, interpret him as meaning that a good is self-sufficient only if it is a composite containing all other intrinsic goods. Rather, he seems to have in mind, roughly, that a good will count as self-sufficient if it plays some central role in making a life as a whole count as well-lived. If this reading is right, one consequence is that there need not be only one good that can properly count as self-sufficient in a human life. If more than one good can play the relevant value-conferring role in a life, then more than one good may well count as self-sufficient. Again, self-sufficiency is a matter of degrees, and presumably there is some threshold above which a good counts as self-sufficient even if, beyond this threshold, goods can more or less fully instantiate this property.

I suggested above that there was a second aspect of Aristotle’s account of self-sufficiency, namely, that a good is self-sufficient if it can make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing _when taken on its own_. Part of what it is to be self-sufficient, I am suggesting, is to be the sort of good that can make a life count as
well-lived in isolation from other goods. In fact, I think it is precisely this aspect of self-sufficiency that is the basis of comparison between *theoria* and ethically virtuous activity in 10.7 and 10.8. That is, Aristotle is not, in 10.7 and 10.8 asserting that ethically virtuous activity is less able to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing. Rather, he is asserting that ethically virtuous activity is less able to play this value conferring role in a life *in isolation from other goods*. Both ethically virtuous activity and *theoria*, when actually present in a life in activity, are such as to make a life count as choice-worthy and lacking in nothing in the requisite sense. However, in order for them to actually be present in a life in activity, and not merely in potentiality, ethically virtuous activity needs more in the way of external goods than *theoria*. This is because, as Aristotle suggests, and as I will discuss in more detail in the next section, the realization of ethically virtuous activity depends in a stronger way on the external world than the realization of *theoria*.

On this interpretation of the self-sufficiency condition, we can see how the discussions in Book 1.7 and Book 10 are consistent with each other. In 1.7, Aristotle is focused on the power a good has to make a life count as well-lived. In Book 10, he is interested in the power a good has to do this when taken on its own, in isolation from other goods. This way of understanding the self-sufficiency condition is also helpful for seeing why Aristotle thinks that a good’s being self-sufficient is a sign of its being final or end-like. As I’ve argued, the degree to which a good is final or end-like is the degree to which it is a fully realized instance of what it essentially is. And, I’ve suggested, a good that is not unqualifiedly final has not fully realized the value that is has potentially by nature. The self-sufficiency of a good picks out the degree to which it needs other things outside itself in order to be fully realized, and so also, in order to fully realize the value that it has.
5.2 External Goods

Even if what I have said so far is a plausible reading of the self-sufficiency condition, inclusivists will point to the subsequent discussion of external goods in NE 1.8-11 as further evidence for their view. According to inclusivists, Aristotle’s goal in these chapters is to fill in his account of happiness so that, by the end of the discussion, Aristotle has revised his definition of happiness to include certain goods other than virtuous activity. I will argue, in what follows, that Aristotle’s discussion in NE 1.8-11 does not militate in favor of an inclusivist position. Indeed, it looks as though, throughout the discussion, Aristotle’s goal is to provide support for the definition of eudaimonia as excellent rational activity by pointing to the explanatory power it has in capturing the endoxa, at least in some qualified way. I will review in some detail Aristotle’s discussion of external goods and fortune, and explore the resources that non-inclusivists have for explaining the necessity of external goods in a happy life without their being included in the definition of happiness itself.

5.2.1

After Aristotle gives his substantive account of eudaimonia in NE 1.7, he tests his account against the endoxa about happiness and a happy life. He begins NE 1.8 by distinguishing three different kinds of goods: external goods, goods of the body and goods of the soul. He claims that the account of happiness so far accords with the endoxon that the goods of the soul are goods “most of all”. After all, Aristotle explains, he has argued that the highest human good lies in the “actions and activities of the soul” and these are goods of the soul rather than external goods.4 He continues by affirming that the account of happiness also agrees with the belief that “the happy

4'νενεμιμένων δὴ τῶν ἀγαθῶν προχή, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἐκτὸς λεγομένων τῶν δὲ περὶ ψυχῆν καὶ σῶμα, τὰ περὶ ψυχῆν κυριότατα λέγομεν καὶ μάλιστα ἀγαθά, τὰς δὲ πράξεις καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τὰς ψυχικὰς περὶ ψυχῆν τίθεμεν. (NE 1.8 1098b13-16)
person lives well and does well” since, on the view he has defended, happiness is, roughly, a kind of living and doing well.\(^5\) With both of these common beliefs— that the best goods are goods of the soul, and that the happy person fares well— Aristotle seems to showing how his account of happiness as excellent rational activity can explain the truth behind the endoxa.

Aristotle goes on to consider other features that people ascribe to happiness: that it seems to be virtue (either phronesis or wisdom); that it involves pleasure or requires pleasure added; and that it must have external prosperity added. In what follows, Aristotle considers how his account captures each of these endoxon, at least in some qualified way. His account “agrees with those who say happiness is virtue” but only in a qualified sense: happiness is not virtue itself but the rather the exercise of virtue.\(^6\) Likewise, his account captures the belief that happiness must involve pleasure because the person who loves virtue will take pleasure in activity on the basis of virtue. However, here again, Aristotle qualifies the way in which his account agrees with the endoxon. The pleasure enjoyed by the virtuous person is not just any pleasure, but something that is pleasant “in itself” and by nature. The pleasure the virtuous person enjoys is not incidental to his virtuous activity.\(^7\)

Aristotle turns then to consider the common opinion that external goods must be added to happiness. As with the other endoxa, he argues that his view captures this belief. However, given his discussion of virtue and pleasure, we should be prepared for the possibility that it is only in a qualified way that his account of happiness agrees with the endoxon that external goods must be added. He begins by affirming that:

“ Nonetheless, happiness evidently also needs external goods to be added

\[(φαίνεται δ’ ὁμοιός καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀγαθῶν προοδεομένη), \text{ as we said, since}\]

\(^5\)“Since we have virtually said that the end is a sort of living well and doing well (συνάδει δὲ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τὸ ἔθνος καὶ τὸ ἔθνος πράττειν τὸν εὐδαιμόνα σχέδου γὰρ εὐδαιμία τις εὑρήκαται καὶ εὐπραξία (1098 20–22))”

\(^6\)“it matters quite a bit whether we suppose that the best good consists in possessing or in using it — that is to say, in a state or in an activity” (NE 1.8 1098b30-1099a7)

\(^7\)NE 1.8 1099a7-25
we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack resources (ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ οὐ βάδιον τὰ καλὰ πράττειν ἀχρηστόν ὄντα). For, on the one hand (μὲν), in many actions we use friends, wealth, and political power just as we use instruments (καθάπερ δὲ ὀργάνον). On the other hand, deprivation of certain [externals] — for instance, good birth, good children, beauty — mars our blessedness (ἐνίον δὲ τητόμενοι ῥυπαίνουσι τὸ μακάριον). For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary or childless; and we have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died. And so, as we have said, happiness would seem to need this sort of prosperity added also (οὐ πάνω γὰρ εὐδαιμονικός ὁ τῆς ἑαυτός παναιχής ἢ δυσγενής ἢ μονώτης καὶ ἀτεκνός, ἢ τῇ ἔσω ἦπτον, εἰ τῷ πάγκακῳ παῖδες εἶν ἢ φίλοι, ἢ ἄγαθοι ὄντες τεθνάμεν. καθάπερ οὖν εἴπομεν, ἓοικε προσδείσθαι καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης εὐημερίας).” (NE 1.8 1099a31-1099b6)

It is not immediately clear what Aristotle means by claiming that happiness “needs external goods to be added”. However, he offers as an immediate explanation of this claim that we cannot act well without resources; the explanation for why external goods need to be added seems to be that they are necessary in order to engage in virtuous activity. He then offers what seem to be two subsidiary explanations for why external goods are necessary for virtuous activity. On the one hand, he claims, goods can serve as instruments for virtuous action. On the other hand, the absence of certain goods can “mar” our blessedness. It is not entirely clear what this latter explanation amounts to, but given the structure of the argument, it seems plausible that it is one way in which external goods make possible fine action.\(^8\) As with the previous two endoixa, Aristotle seems to be explaining why, if happiness lies in virtuous activity,

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\(^8\) The structure of the argument is less clear in translation than in the Greek: Aristotle claims that happiness needs external goods added, offers an initial explanation introduced by a γὰρ clause, then offers two subordinate explanations introduced by a μὲν and a δὲ respectively.
these external goods are necessary. There is no clear indication that Aristotle means to be revising or filling in his definition of happiness. Aristotle concludes the chapter by repeating that “happiness would seem to need this sort of prosperity added also” and that this is why “some people identify happiness with good fortune.”9 Aristotle’s language here is again ambiguous between claiming that external goods are part of happiness itself, and that external goods are necessary for happiness to be realized.

Aristotle goes on in the beginning of 1.9 to consider the puzzle about how happiness is acquired. Amongst other possibilities, he asks whether happiness is the result of fortune; presumably, he is picking up on the conclusion of 1.8, and the idea that some people are moved to think happiness is closely tied to good fortune because of the necessity of goods of fortune. He explicitly denies that happiness is a result of fortune, insisting ‘it would be inappropriate to entrust what is greatest and finest to fortune (τὸ δὲ μέγιστον καὶ κάλλιστον ἐπιτρέψαι τύχῃ λινὸν πλημμέλες ἄν εἶ)” , and explaining:

The answer to our question is also evident from our account. For we have said that happiness is a certain sort of activity of the soul on the basis of virtue. Of the other goods some are necessary conditions of happiness, while others are naturally useful and cooperative as instruments.10

Again, Aristotle seems to be explaining the common belief that happiness requires good fortune by reference to his account of happiness as virtuous activity. And, again, he doesn’t seem to be simply accepting the view that good fortune is actually a part of happiness. Rather, he denies that happiness is acquired through good fortune, and again explains the role that goods other than goods of the soul play in making

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9 καθάπερ ὃν εἶπομεν, ἐνοεῖ προσδέσθαι καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης εὐμερίας ὃθεν εἰς ταύτα τάττονσαν ἐνιοῦ τῆν εὐτυχίαν τῇ εὐδαιμονίᾳ. (1099b6-9)

10 συμφανές δ’ ἔστι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ λόγου τὸ ζητούμενον εἴρηται γάρ ψυχής ἐνέργεια κατ’ ἀρετὴν ποιά τις τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν ὑπάρχον ἀναγκαῖον, τὰ δὲ συνεργά καὶ χρήσιμα πέφυκεν ὀργανικῶς. (1.9 1099 25-28)
possible virtuous activity. His point seems to be that although happiness depends on good fortune, it should not be identified with good fortune.

The dependence of happiness on good fortune raises a new puzzle that Aristotle considers at the end of 1.9 and beginning of 1.10. Aristotle claims that “happiness needs a complete life” explaining:

[L]ife includes many reversals of fortune, good and bad, and the most prosperous person may fall into terrible disaster in old age, as the Trojan stories tell us about Priam. If someone has suffered these sorts of misfortunes and comes to a miserable end, no one counts him as happy (τῶν δὲ τοιαύτας χρησάμενον τύχας καὶ τελευτήσαντα ἄθλιος ὑδεῖς εἰδαμονίζει). (NE 1.9 1100a8-9)

On the face of it, this passage might seem to pose problems for the non-inclusivist interpretation of the role of external goods. If happiness consists in virtuous activity alone, why should bad fortune threaten Priam’s happiness? Why should the loss of his family and city prevent Priam from engaging in the virtuous activity constitutive of happiness? I will have more to say about this issue, and what prominent commentators have said in response, in the next section, but for now, it is important to appreciate that Aristotle, again, goes on to qualify what he has just said in the following chapter. In 1.10, he considers a puzzle that seems to arise from the view that happiness requires a complete life: it looks as though, as Solon seems to claim, we cannot call anyone happy until he is dead, but it also seems absurd to ascribe happiness to someone who is dead, since dead people cannot engage in activity and “we say that happiness is an activity.”

Aristotle argues that we should interpret Solon’s claim as an epistemological one. Solon is not claiming that an individual is only in fact happy when he is dead, but that it is not safe to make a judgement about whether his life was happy or not until after he had died. Solon’s point is not that happiness only belongs to an individual once dead,
but rather that “when a human being has died, we can safely pronounce [that he was] blessed, on the assumption that he is now finally beyond evils and misfortunes (μηδὲ Σῶλων τούτο βούλεται, ἀλλ’ ὅτι τιμικαὕτα ἂν τις ἀσφαλῶς μακαρίσειν ἄθρωτον ἕκτος ἢδη τῶν κακῶν ὄντα καὶ τῶν δυστυχιμάτων). (NE 1.10 1100a15-18)” A few lines, down, Aristotle explains that that when we call someone blessed when they are dead, we do not mean that they are now “being blessed” but rather that they were blessed. It would be absurd, Aristotle insists, to fail to ascribe to someone happiness during the time that they are in fact happy. In fact, Aristotle explains, we are only cautious about ascribing happiness to the living because “we take our cue from fortunes” but that “it is wrong to take our cue from someone’s fortunes.” Rather, Aristotle insists, a human being’s doing well or badly “does not rest on them.” Though a human’s life needs goods of fortune added, it is activities in accord with virtue that “control happiness.” (NE 1.10 1100b7-11)\footnote{αὐτὰ προσδεῖται τούτων ὁ ἄθρωτος βίος, καθάπερ ἐπομεν, κύρια ἀλλ’ εἰσὶν αἱ κατ’ ἄρετῆν ἐνέργειαι τῆς ἐυδαιμονίας}

Going forward, there are a few features of this discussion of fortune that are important to keep in mind. First, the discussion is meant to demonstrate that Aristotle’s account of happiness agrees with the *endoxa*. His goal seems to be to explain various *endoxa* about happiness and a happy life in terms of his account of happiness. It is at least not obvious that he aims to fill in or revise his account of happiness so much as flesh out its consequences. Second, although he argues that his account of happiness agrees with the *endoxa*, in each case this turns out to be true only in some qualified sense. Aristotle is not vindicating the various *endoxa* wholesale, but rather explaining how they turn out to be in a way true and in a way false. When Aristotle claims that happiness needs external goods “to be added”, we need to be careful in interpreting precisely what he means. Third, much of the discussion in 1.8-1.12 is actually aimed at distancing Aristotle’s view from views according to which happiness is, or directly results from, fortune. Although he is concerned to explain why fortune is necessary
for happiness, the way he does so does not obviously vindicate the view that fortune is part of happiness itself. The discussion does not, at least, militate in favor of an inclusivist picture. The challenge for non-inclusivists then is to explain in a plausible way why, given the account of happiness as virtuous activity, external goods and goods of fortune turn out to be necessary for a happy life.

5.2.2

Again, both inclusivists and non-inclusivists agree that, for Aristotle, various external goods are necessary components of a happy life. What the two sides disagree about is the explanation for why these goods are necessary for a happy life. According to inclusivists, at least some of these goods are parts or constituents of happiness itself. Non-inclusivists disagree, arguing that for Aristotle, no external good is a component of happiness itself. Non-inclusivists insist we need to be sensitive to the distinction between happiness itself, and the happy person or happy life: external goods are necessary parts of a happy life without being parts of happiness itself. It is important to appreciate, however, that the disagreement between the two sides over the role of external goods is not merely a conceptual one. The two sides disagree about something more substantial than just what, strictly speaking, the term “eudaimonia” refers to (whether it refers to a life filled with both virtuous activity and the goods that are necessary to engage in this activity, or whether instead it refers to just the activity itself). The more fundamental and substantive disagreement about the role of external goods is over what explains their necessary inclusion in a happy life. For inclusivists various external goods are necessary for happiness because they are valuable in a way independent of excellent rational activity, and happiness, if it is to be the best good, cannot lack any, or at least not the most important, goods. For inclusivists, “happiness” and “a happy life” turn out to be roughly interchangeable concepts. Non-inclusivists, by contrast, take “happiness” to be the more precise,
fundamental concept. It is by reference to this good, excellent rational activity, that Aristotle seeks to explain the presence and role of other goods in a happy life. As such, non-inclusivists want to explain the necessity of various external goods in a happy life in terms of how they facilitate or make possible excellent rational activity.

The challenge for non-inclusivists then is to offer a plausible explanation for why the various goods Aristotle describes are in fact necessary for a happy life given his definition of happiness as excellent rational activity. This is challenging in part because Aristotle seems to think these goods are necessary for a happy life in a way that is not exhausted by their instrumental use for virtuous activity. In the passage from 1.10 quoted above, Aristotle explains that some goods are useful as instruments for action, whereas others are necessary because, without them, our blessedness is “marred.” Likewise, in 1.9, he claims: “we have said that happiness is a certain sort of activity of the soul in accord with virtue. Of the other goods, some are necessary for happiness, while others are naturally useful and cooperative as instruments.” (1.99b26-28)\textsuperscript{12} In both of these passages, he seems to distinguish between goods that are instrumental to action, and goods that are necessary for happiness in some other way; in the 1.10 passage, he elaborates that some goods are necessary for happiness because without them, we are not fully blessed, and “we do not altogether have the character of happiness.”

What resources are available to the non-inclusivist for explaining the necessity of external goods in a happy life? We have already seen part of the explanation in the discussion of self-sufficiency: for non-inclusivist interpreters, external goods are necessary for a happy life, in part, because they provide the resources and conditions that make excellent rational activity possible. Kraut, for example, argues: “[Aristotle] equates happiness with virtuous activity, and treats other goods not as components of the ultimate end but as the equipment one needs to attain it.” (1989, p. 260).

\textsuperscript{12} ὃς τι δὲ λοιπῶν ἁγαθῶν τὰ μὲν ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖον, τὰ δὲ συνεργά καὶ χρήσιμα πέφυκεν ἀργανκάιοι.
Likewise, Cooper argues, external goods do not have value for the virtuous agent other than insofar as they make virtuous activity possible: “[a]ny value goods other than virtuous action itself might have just for their own sake is denied.” (1985, p. 189). As we saw in §5.2 contemplation and excellent virtuous activity need the bare necessities; a human being needs enough to sustain his life in order to engage in either activity. Ethically virtuous activity needs, in addition, resources with which to perform virtuous actions, as well as people with whom and towards whom she can perform these actions; as Aristotle claims in 10.8, “the liberal sort of person needs money to do liberal things, and the just sort of person, too, to make returns on the benefits he receives.” (17778a31)

But again, it seems that this instrumental role external goods play in realizing excellent virtuous activity does not exhaust their necessity in a happy life. There are two related worries. First, Aristotle seems to suggest that even in a life where it is possible to engage in virtuous activity, the absence of certain external goods would prevent the life from counting as happy. This is suggested by the example of Priam, whose loss of his family and city robs him of his happiness. Second, this instrumental explanation doesn’t make good sense of why goods like noble birth, good children and physical attractiveness should affect one’s happiness; it doesn’t seem as though any of these goods are instruments or resources that an agent needs in order to engage in virtuous activity. Inclusivists maintain that a more plausible explanation for the necessity of these goods is that they are just parts of what a happy life consists in; any attempt to explain their necessity in terms of virtuous activity will be hopelessly strained, and fail to capture the endoxa that are motivating Aristotle’s discussion.

In response to these sorts of worry, both Kraut and Cooper have suggested further ways in which external goods help to realize virtuous activity. Kraut suggests that the role external goods play in making virtuous activity possible is often less direct: one’s health, social status and relationships can limit one’s options and influence in society,
thus constraining one’s opportunities to act virtuously. So, for example, Kraut argues that when Priam’s son is killed, Priam’s happiness is impacted because he is robbed of the opportunity to express his virtue as a father. Kraut insists: “the loss of a [loved one] is not in itself a decrease in happiness. Such misfortunes diminish and destroy happiness indirectly, because they impede virtuous activity” (1989, 256). Likewise, Cooper explains that the virtuous agent who lacks good looks “may in fact develop all the virtues in their fully perfected form and actually exercise them in ways that respond appropriately to his circumstances; but the circumstances are restricted by his ugliness and the effects this has on others, so that his virtue is not called upon to regulate his responses and choices in all sorts of circumstances that the more normally attractive person would face, and so its exercise is not as full and fine a thing as that more normally attractive person’s would be.” (182-3)\(^\text{13}\)

So far, we have roughly two different kinds of explanations that non-inclusivists can offer for the role these goods play in realizing excellent rational activity. The first kind of explanation is an instrumental one: certain goods provide the resources and materials that make virtuous activity possible. This is helpful for explaining why a sufficient amount of wealth and political power is necessary for happiness. The second kind of explanation is more general, at the level of what we might think of as the background conditions or opportunities for exercising virtue. External goods are not only directly involved in action, but also indirectly, by providing an agent with the

\(^{13}\)Some inclusivists have found implausible the suggestion that a happy life needs external goods only to the extent that the absence of such goods impedes virtuous activity. Julia Annas (1993) for example argues that, in the case of having or losing children, “we feel that sterility is in itself frustrating, if one wants children; and we especially feel that losing children is a terrible thing in itself, and not just because it deprives us of the chance to help our children on their careers and to look after their grandchildren” (p. 380). Inclusivists insist that, unless we want to saddle Aristotle with an implausible view that fails to capture the endoxa, this cannot be the complete explanation for why the absence of external goods prevents someone from being happy. At least on the version of non-inclusivism I want to defend, this sort of criticism misses the mark. A non-inclusivist need not think that the value of various external goods is reducible to the role they play in realizing happiness. We don’t need to read Aristotle as denying that the absence of these goods is frustrating in itself, independent of the way they contribute to happiness. But what explains their necessity in a happy life is the way they promote excellent rational activity.

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sort of life and circumstances where there are frequent opportunities for the exercise of virtue. External goods can broaden the range of circumstances and opportunities in which the virtuous agent is able to exercise her virtue in action. This is helpful for seeing why goods like one’s social status, relationships and looks can affect one’s happiness.

I think these two explanations are plausible, so far as they go. The first is explicitly offered by Aristotle at various points in the NE: we need a moderate supply of external goods in order to perform fine actions. The second is independently plausible: it seems plausible that we cannot exercise the full range of virtues over the course of a life without being situated in one’s community in a certain way, especially given how many of the virtues are concerned with our relationships to others. But notice, these explanations on their own still don’t make clear why external goods are necessary for happiness. These explanations are helping for seeing why the best kinds of actions, or the fullest range of actions, require a moderate amount of external goods. But if happiness really does lie in virtuous activity alone, and if an agent engages in virtuous activity by performing virtuous actions, it looks as though one could engage in virtuous activity under almost any circumstances. Imagine a virtuous agent who has been wrongfully imprisoned. His circumstances are wretched; he is surely not, for Aristotle, equipped with a moderate or “adequate” amount of external goods. And yet, we can imagine, he is frequently confronted with opportunities to exercise his virtue. He exercises his courage standing up to unjust guards or other prisoners, he exercises his temperance in resisting opportunities for sexual pleasures that would be degrading or shameful, and he exercises his generosity in sharing what little he has with other inmates. If he is frequently exercising his virtue, and if happiness consists in virtuous activity alone, what prevents him from being happy? And, if he does turn out to be happy on Aristotle’s view, the threshold for what counts as a sufficient supply of external goods is much lower than the way Aristotle describes it. If it is
a consequence of Aristotle’s account that a virtuous person imprisoned in wretched conditions can be happy, Aristotle is surely failing to do justice to the *endoxa* he set out to capture.\textsuperscript{14}

Again, I think it is an underlying assumption of the kinds of explanations offered by Kraut and Cooper that the sort of virtuous activity constitutive of happiness is made possible by the *best* kinds of virtuous actions, rather than any virtuous actions at all. The virtuous prisoner is not prevented from performing virtuous actions, but he is prevented from performing the finest kinds of actions, over a full range of properly human circumstances. If we want to explain why the virtuous prisoner can perform virtuous actions but cannot thereby be happy, we need to explain why the actions he performs in prison — the ones that fall short of being the finest kinds of actions — are not sufficient for him to realize his own happiness.

I want to suggest that external goods make possible *unqualifiedly good* actions, and it is only these actions that make possible the complete fulfillment or realization of an agent’s capacity to act well. On the view I have defended, two things happen when a virtuous agent performs a virtuous action. First, she engages in a process or action for the sake of some end beyond itself; specifically she performs an action that realizes some good in the world. Second, she engages in an in-part rational activity that is itself an end, the complete fulfillment of her capacity to act well. This latter activity depends on the former action: it is precisely by performing a virtuous action with a full appreciation of its goodness, and desires in line with the judgements of her reason, that she is engaging in the ethically virtuous activity that is itself an end. And, as we have seen, what makes the virtuous action good is the goodness of the end it aims to realize. A courageous action seeks to realize security and stability in the polis. A temperate action seeks to preserve the health of one’s body. A generous action seeks to provide wealth and resources for others.

\textsuperscript{14}In fact, in NE 7.3 1153b20, Aristotle seems to explicitly deny that someone in wretched circumstances could be happy.
How is this picture helpful? I want to suggest that it is only when a virtuous agent performs an action that is unqualifiedly good that she engages in the sort of activity that is the complete fulfillment of her capacity to act well. Again, it is part of my view that there are many ways in which a capacity can be exercised, but only one will count as the complete fulfillment of that capacity. The art of building can be exercised to make doll houses, or faulty houses, or in writing architecture manuals. However, the art of building is, essentially, for the sake of the being of a house; it is only this end that counts as the complete fulfillment of the capacity. Likewise, theoretical knowledge can be exercised in teaching, or writing textbooks, or even spreading false beliefs but the capacity is, essentially, for the sake of actively knowing; it is only this activity that counts as the complete fulfillment of the capacity. I want to suggest the same is true of virtue. The capacity is essentially for the sake of “acting well”, for appropriately responding to goodness or value in the ethical domain. It is possible to exercise this capacity in other ways, but these other exercises will not count as the complete fulfillment of the end of the capacity.

The clearest evidence for this view is a passage from the Politics 7.13 (1332a8-26) where Aristotle recalls the discussion of the nature of happiness in the NE with a view to identifying the best form of government:

We say, and we have given this definition in our ethical works (if anything in those discussions is of service), that happiness is a complete activation or use of virtue, and not a qualified use but an unqualified one. By “qualified uses” I mean those that are necessary; by “unqualified” I mean those that are noble. For example, in the case of just actions, just retributions and punishments spring from virtue, but are necessary uses of it, and are noble only in a necessary way, since it would be more choiceworthy if no individual or city-state needed such things. On the other hand, just actions that aim at honors and prosperity are unqualifiedly noblest. The
former involve choosing something that is somehow bad, whereas the latter are the opposite: they construct and generate goods. To be sure, an excellent man will deal with poverty, disease, and other sorts of bad luck in a noble way. But blessed happiness requires their opposites. For according to the definition established in our ethical works, an excellent man is the sort whose virtue makes unqualifiedly good things good for him. Clearly, then, his use of them must also be unqualifiedly good and noble.\(^\text{15}\)

Aristotle begins by explaining that happiness is not just any exercise of virtue, but the complete exercise. He seems to treat this claim as equivalent to the claim that happiness is the unqualified rather than conditional exercise of virtue. He explains that what is unqualified is good in itself, whereas what is conditionally good is what is necessary, presumably given the circumstances. So, he goes on, some just actions like punishment will not be unqualifiedly but only conditionally good; they are necessary given imperfect circumstances but they are not as good as actions that aim at what is unqualifiedly best, namely honors and advantage.

How should we understand the difference between actions that are only good in some qualified way and those that are unqualifiedly good? Aristotle’s description of the actions that are only conditionally good is reminiscent of his discussion of mixed actions in NE 3. In the NE discussion, he explains that, amongst the actions that are voluntary, some are not choice-worthy without qualification but only given particular circumstances, when the chosen action is less bad than the alternatives. It is clear from this discussion that these actions are good, and even sometimes praise-worthy, but they are not the best instances of virtuous action, even if they are the best action available to an agent in some particular circumstance.

\(^{15}\)trans. CDC Reeve (1998)
On the view I have been defending, the goodness of virtuous actions is explained by the goodness of the ends they aim to realize. If this is right, one plausible explanation for why some virtuous actions are not unqualifiedly good is that they aim at ends that are themselves not unqualifiedly good. We saw in the last chapter that Aristotle distinguishes between goods like honor, and pleasure that are good in themselves and by nature, and goods that are merely good for a particular person at a particular time (such as an unpleasant medical treatment). Perhaps Aristotle’s thought is that it is only actions that aim to achieve the former that count as unqualifiedly good, as the sorts of actions that fully express our capacity to act well.

The upshot then is that external goods are necessary not just to make possible the exercise of virtue, but to make possible the unqualified exercise of virtue: they provide both the resources with which and the objects towards which the very best actions are possible. This is helpful for seeing why someone under wretched circumstances can exercise virtue but cannot achieve happiness. The virtuous prisoner can exercise generosity with the minimal possessions he has or can acquire through his commissary; he can for example share clothing or food or books with other prisoners who have less than him. However doing so will come at a significant cost to his own well-being given the scarcity of these goods; it will also make little difference to the scarcity experienced by others in the prison. The action of sharing these goods might be choice-worthy given the circumstances — given the hardship experienced by others — but it is hardly choice-worthy without qualification which is to say, if the circumstances weren’t so miserable. Under these circumstances, the generous agent is not able to fully realize or express his generosity in action; he is not able to engage in the activity that is the complete fulfillment of his capacity to act well.

If this is right, it supplements the explanations offered by Kraut and Cooper. External goods are needed not just as instruments and background conditions for

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16 Indeed, Aristotle might have the unqualified exercise of virtue in mind when he defines happiness as activity on the basis of virtue.
performing virtuous actions, but for performing the best kinds of virtuous actions, the one’s that fully realize one’s capacity to act well, which is the say the ones that are the unqualified exercise of virtue. This is helpful for seeing why, for Aristotle, the virtuous person can never be miserable, but nor can he be fully blessed unless he enjoys a sufficient amount of good fortune. As he explains in 1.10, “many major strokes of good fortune will make [life] more blessed; for in themselves they naturally add adornment to it, and his use of them proves to be fine and excellent.” If the virtuous person suffers from major misfortune, this will impede his blessedness “since they involve pain and impede many activities” but this person will still never be miserable because “he will never do hateful and base actions”. The virtuous person will be blessed if he enjoys good fortune, because this good fortune will reflect in the quality of his activity. The vicious person will be miserable regardless of his fortune and, presumably, may be more miserable if he is well-equipped with goods to perform vicious actions. The virtuous person in wretched circumstances falls between these two extremes. He is as virtuous as possible given the circumstances he finds himself in, but his activity still falls short of being unqualifiedly excellent, so he is prevented from being fully blessed.

5.3 10.7 and 10.8

So far, I have been defending my interpretation of *eudaimonia* against inclusivist objections. In particular, I have hoped to offer a plausible account of the self-sufficiency condition on happiness, as well as a plausible explanation for the necessity of external goods in a happy life, while respecting Aristotle’s identification of *eudaimonia* with excellent rational activity. In what follows, I want to say something in response to the other extreme of interpretations of happiness in the NE. Specifically, I want to consider in some detail the arguments Aristotle offers in 10.7 and 10.8 for the superiority of contemplation and ethically virtuous activity, and suggest that nothing
Aristotle says undermines the status of ethically virtuous activity as a genuine form of happiness. I conclude by considering the practical upshot of Aristotle’s account of eudaimonia for how we ought to live our lives. If happiness consists in excellent rational activity in the form of either contemplation or ethically virtuous activity, what sort of life should we seek to live?

5.3.1

Aristotle begins 10.7 by claiming that complete happiness lies in theoría:

“If happiness is activity on the basis of virtue (Εἰ δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐυδαίμονία κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια), it is reasonable for it to accord with the supreme virtue (κατὰ τὴν κρατίσσην), which will be the virtue of the best thing. The best is understanding, or whatever else seems to be the natural ruler and leader, and to understand what is fine and divine, being itself either divine or the most divine element in us. Hence complete happiness (ἡ τελεία ἐυδαίμονία) will be on the basis of its proper virtue; and we have said that this activity is the activity of study (θεωρητική).” (NE 1.7 1177a13-17)

He goes on to offer what seem to be a series of arguments or pieces of evidence in favor of thinking that theoría is “complete happiness.” First, he explains, “this activity is supreme, since understanding is the supreme element in us, and the objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge.” This is consistent with what Aristotle has told us previously. We know that happiness lies in excellent rational activity, and we know that theoría is the best kind of rational activity that humans can engage in: it is the exercise of the best, most divine capacity we have and, relatedly, its proper objects are the best, most divine objects.

It is, Aristotle continues, the most continuous activity (“since we are more capable of continuous study than any continuous action” (1177a21-23)); the most pleasant
activity (“philosophy seems to have remarkably firm and pure pleasures” (1177a23-27)); the most self-sufficient activity, as we have seen (1177a27-b1); the activity most liked for its own sake (whereas “from the virtues concerned with action we try to a greater or lesser extent to gain something beyond the action itself” (1177b1-6)); and, finally, the activity that most expresses what we are (“each person seems to be his understanding, if he is his controlling and better element […] what is proper to each thing’s nature is supremely best and pleasant for it; and hence for a human being the life in accord with understanding will be supremely best and most pleasant if understanding, more than anything else, is the human being” (1178a1-5)).

Roughly, there seem to be two different kinds of considerations Aristotle is pointing to in asserting the superiority of theoria over ethically virtuous activity. The first kind of consideration has to do with what these two activities depend on, outsides of themselves, in order to be present in a human life. The second kind of consideration is about the value each of the activities has in virtue of what it is. I want to say something about each of these kinds of consideration, and what they establish about the comparative value of theoria to ethically virtuous activity.

Take the first kind of consideration. I have in mind by this the claim that theoria is more continuous, more self-sufficient, that it is liked more for its own sake, and that it doesn’t require trouble. The way in which ethically virtuous activity is worse than theoria in each of these respects is explained, I think, in terms of the way in which ethically virtuous activity depends for its realization on discrete virtuous actions that aim at ends beyond themselves. Virtuous activity is less continuous because the virtuous actions on which it depends have built into them, in virtue of being processes, some determinate end point. By contrast, a person can engage in contemplation any time, just so long as nothing is impeding her exercise of knowledge, and there is nothing about the nature of contemplation itself, or its objects, that determines when this activity has to stop. Virtuous activity is less self-sufficient, as
we have seen, because it requires the presence of external goods for the actions on which it depends.

This relates to the way that ethically virtuous activity is liked less for itself alone than *theoria*. For an agent to engage in virtuous activity, she must perform discrete virtuous actions that aim at ends beyond themselves. Even if the activity itself is choice-worthy for its own sake, as the complete fulfillment of an aspect of a human being’s rational nature, it depends on actions that are not choice-worthy regardless of the end they aim at, but rather precisely in virtue of the end they aim to realize. The realization of virtuous activity then depends on the value of goods outside of excellent rational activity. Indeed, to some extent even the value of excellent virtuous activity depends on the value of goods outside of excellent rational activity. As we have seen, the exercise of virtue in performing mixed actions will not be the sort of activity that is the *unqualified* fulfillment of an agent’s capacity to act well; only the best actions, which is to say the actions performed in relation to the best kinds of goods, will be the kinds of actions through which an agent engages in the excellent ethically virtuous activity constitutive of happiness. Moreover, as Aristotle goes on to explain, the very best actions are ones that require “trouble” and deny the agent herself leisure. He uses as examples the actions performed in war and a politician’s actions. These actions are preeminently fine and great, presumably because they aim at the security and well being of the political community as a whole, a supremely fine object of action. However, although these actions achieve the best kinds of ends, they are not themselves choice-worthy for the agent to perform. Generals and politicians must sacrifice the time they could otherwise spend in leisure in order to secure these goods.

Again what seems to be similar about all these considerations is not what they reveal about the value of each of these activities taken on their own, but rather about what they depend on, outside of themselves, to be present in a life. Aristotle’s thought
seems to be that the happiest possible life will be the one with the most excellent rational activity and, for the various reasons above, *theoria* is a better candidate to “fill up” a life than ethically virtuous activity because it depends less on what is contingent and temporally limited. Even if *theoria* and ethically virtuous activity were equally valuable taken on their own, *theoria* would be a better candidate for guaranteeing the happiest life because it is better suited to being reliably present in a life in that it is less subject to contingency than ethically virtuous activity.

Of course, Aristotle, doesn’t think that *theoria* and ethically virtuous activity are equally valuable, taken on their own. The second set of considerations points to the way in which *theoria* is a better, more valuable activity than ethically virtuous activity in virtue of what it is. *Theoria* is, Aristotle explains, the activity of the best, most divine part of our nature, and it is active towards the best objects. It follows from this activity being the activity of the best part of us and being directed towards the best objects that it is also the most pleasant activity. He also claims, at the end of 10.7, that it is *malista* what we are, concluding that a life in accordance with understanding is supremely best and most pleasant for us.

Aristotle is often taken here to be asserting that *theoria* is, strictly speaking, what happiness consists in. But I don’t think this second set of considerations warrants that conclusion. Again, in 1.7, human happiness is defined in terms of the human *ergon*, and Aristotle is not here denying that ethically virtuous activity is a genuine, and excellent, accomplishment of this *ergon*. All he seems to be asserting is that *theoria* is a better accomplishment of this *ergon*. When Aristotle claims that human beings are *malista* their understanding, we need not interpret him as meaning that, strictly speaking, we are essentially our understanding. Rather, I take it, Aristotle is claiming that understanding best exemplifies what we essentially are, namely rational beings. Consider a parallel. In DA 3.3 (429a2-3), Aristotle claims that sight is *malista* perception. He is in no way denying that hearing, smell and touch are genuine forms
of perception. Presumably, he has in mind that sight best exemplifies what perception does; it is best suited to gathering information about perceptible objects. In De Sensu 1.1 he explains that sight is more valuable “in itself” than the sense of smell or hearing “as far as the needs of life are concerned”, explaining that the “characteristics are many and various which the faculty of sight reports, because all bodies are endowed with color; thus by this sense especially are perceived the common sensibles (by these I mean figure, magnitude, motion, and number).”

We might think a similar explanation holds for why theoría is malista what we are, which is to say, malista what it is to be rational. The various rational capacities are alike in grasping the nature of intelligible objects, and the explanatory relationships that hold amongst them. It seems reasonable to suppose that theoría does this best of all insofar as the intelligible objects it is directed towards are those that admit of a full rational grasp: the objects of theoría are metaphysically fundamental, the eternal and unchanging objects that are unmixed with matter. By contrast, the human goods that are the objects of virtue are enmattered, and as such subject to coming into being and passing away, and to contingency more generally. Even if it is possible to have a metaphysical grasp of the natures of objects in the practical domain, this is not the sort of knowledge that the phronímos has, or needs, in order to act well. The goal the phronímos seeks to achieve is, ultimately, a practical one; it is not enough to be able to grasp the natures of human goods in general. Rather, the phronímos needs to know how to realize the goods in question in particular circumstances. The phronímos needs to know which things are good in the ethical domain, but also needs the ability to, amongst other things, adjudicate amongst competing goods, judge when she ought to realize some good in a particular circumstance, and determine when something that is good by nature is good for a particular person at a particular time.17

17Likewise, the explanatory relationships that the phronímos grasps need not be the ones that hold at the level of the natures of the things she seeks to realize. She need not know, for example,
5.3.2

So far, I have been suggesting that Aristotle’s arguments for the superiority of *theoria* over ethically virtuous activity need not undermine the status that virtuous activity has as a genuine form of happiness. Indeed, at the beginning of 10.8, Aristotle seems to affirm its status as a form of happiness: “The life on the basis of the other kind of virtue is [happiest] in a secondary way, because the activities on the basis of this virtue are human (Δεντέρως δ’ ὁ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἀι γάρ κατὰ αὐτὴν ἐνέργειαι ἄνθρωπως) [...] since the virtues of the compound are human virtues, the life and happiness in accord with these virtues is also human (καὶ ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία).” (10.8 1178a9-22) Aristotle goes on to qualify this claim later in 10.7: “a human being’s complete happiness will be this activity, if it receives a complete span of life, since nothing incomplete is proper to happiness.”18 If what I have said so far is right, what does Aristotle mean by claiming that “complete happiness” will be *theoria* over a complete life?19

In the previous chapter, I argued that we should understand the degree to which something is *teleion* in terms of the degree to which it depends ontologically on other things. And, I argued, the relative choice-worthiness of various goods will be explained in terms of their ontological status. I also suggested that *eudaimonia* is the most complete end by being the complete fulfillment of the human end or *ergon*.

That wealth and houses depend ontologically on human nature. What she needs to know is that they are instrumentally valuable for human beings as such and in general; even if there is a deeper metaphysical explanation for why this is the case, this is not helpful for her to act. Rather, the sorts of explanatory relationships she needs to know are practical ones: for example, what amount of wealth will promote happiness for other members of the political community.

18 ἡ τελεία δὴ εὐδαιμονία αὐτῆς ἄν εἰ ἄνθρωπος, λαβοῦσα μῆκος βίου τελείων ὀδὸν γὰρ ἀτελές ἐστι τῶν τῆς εὐδαιμονίας. (1177b24-26)

19 There isn’t a single translation of *teleion* that naturally captures the different uses in this discussion while showing how the different uses are connected. No one word conveys the sense of being “fully realized” that modifies both happiness and the span of a life. I use the word “complete” even though it risks suggesting an inclusivist reading. I would prefer a word that conveys the sense of being “end-like” or “final” but neither of these terms are natural in English in describing the span of a life. I prefer to use the word “complete” here than to translate the different uses of *teleion* with different words, thus obscuring the way in which they are connected.
eudaimonia is the activity that is the complete fulfillment of the most essential aspect of human nature, our rational capacity. Other goods are more or less teleion in virtue of the way in which their being is related to the fulfillment of human nature. But if this is right — if eudaimonia is the complete fulfillment of the human ergon — how can it be more or less teleion, and why is it only complete when it is in the form of theoria over a complete life?

Set aside for the moment the “complete life” qualification and consider just the comparison between theoria and ethically virtuous activity. Both activities are, I have argued, themselves complete; they are the sorts of activities that are themselves ends. However, ethically virtuous activity depends on actions that are not themselves ends, but rather are for the sake of ends beyond themselves. This seems to be what Aristotle is appealing to in 10.7 in claiming that “theoria is liked because of itself alone (δι’ αυτῆν ἀγαπᾶσθαι)” because it has no result beyond “having studied (τὸ θεωρῆσαι)” whereas in the case of the virtues concerned with action, we try to “gain something beyond the action itself.” Virtuous activity is choice-worthy for its own sake, but its choice-worthiness is not exhausted by the value it contains in itself; some of the way in which virtuous activity is choice-worthy is in virtue of the ends the actions on which it depends aim to realize. To the extent virtuous activity depends, for its being, on ends outside of itself, it is plausibly less teleion than theoria. It is teleion, but not teleion without qualification in the way theoria is.

What about the idea that this activity needs to take place over a complete life? Again what makes excellent rational activity the highest human good is that it is a way for human beings to fully realize their nature. But, as embodied beings, we cannot continuously engage in this activity; we cannot continuously be rational in the fullest sense. It is no surprise then that the best, most fully realized happiness will be this activity when it fills as much of a temporally extended life as possible. That is, the very best, most fully realized form of happiness would be a human being fully
realizing the best aspect of its rational nature continuously, throughout its temporally extended life.

It is important however that, though this would be the best, most fully realized happiness for a human being, it is also impossible for a human being to achieve. Aristotle seems to affirm this in what immediately follows: “[S]uch a life would be superior to the human level. For someone will live it not insofar as he is a human being, but insofar as he has some divine element in him.”\(^{20}\) It is true that Aristotle advises us to try and live this life as much as is possible for us, but he also goes on, in 10.8, to recognize that, insofar as we are human — embodied and social beings — we also need ethical virtue: “we do just and brave actions, and the other actions on the basis of the virtues, in relation to other people, by abiding by what fits each person in contracts, services, all types of actions and also in feelings; and all these appear to be human conditions.”\(^{21}\) His thought here seems to be that because we live in political communities, we need the virtues that regulate our interactions with others. Likewise, later in 10.8, he explains that “happiness will need external prosperity also, since we are human beings; for our nature is not self-sufficient for study, but we need a healthy body, and need to have food and other services provided.”\(^{22}\) We cannot, as human beings, spend our lives continuously in contemplation because, in order to contemplate, we need to secure the goods that are necessary for this activity. And, it is the ethical virtues that regulate and guide our pursuit of these goods. This is not to say that the ethical virtues are merely instrumental to supporting theoretical contemplation. Rather, it is to say that the ethical virtues are necessary to live well as embodied and social beings. Much of our lives is, necessarily, devoted to securing

\(^{20}\)ο δὲ τοιοῦτος ἄν ἐὰς βίως κράττων ἡ κατ’ ἄνθρωπον· οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἄνθρωπος ἐστιν οὕτω βιώσεται, ἀλλ’ ἡ θειόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει 1177b26-28

\(^{21}\)δέκαια γὰρ καὶ ἄνθρεια καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τὰ κατὰ τὰς ἀρετὰς πρὸς ἄλληλους πράττομεν ἐν συναλλάγμασι καὶ χρείαις καὶ πράξεις παντοτεῖς ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι διατηροῦντες τὸ πρέπον ἕκαστον· τούτα δ’ εἶναι φαίνεται πάντα ἄνθρωπικά. (10.8 1178 10-14)

\(^{22}\)δεύτερο δὲ καὶ τῆς ἔκτης εὐθύμειας ἄνθρωπος ἄντι ὧν γὰρ αὐτάρκης ἡ φύσις πρὸς τὸ θεωρεῖν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἐγκαίνει καὶ τροφὴν καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν θεραπείαν ὑπάρχειν. (1178 33-35)
goods other than contemplation. If we do not have ethical virtue we will, necessarily, spend much of our lives failing to achieve the highest human good.

5.3.3

What, we might wonder, is the practical upshot of all this? Aristotle makes clear that, once we identify what happiness is, we will be in a better position to achieve it. How should we live our lives once we know that happiness lies in excellent rational activity, the best form of which is *theoria*?

It is, I want to suggest, a mistake to think that Aristotle is advising us in NE 10.7 and 10.8 to choose a life devoted solely to theoretical contemplation over a life devoted to ethical virtue. Given that, on the one hand *theoria* is the best activity we can engage in, and on the other hand, we are embodied and social beings, it seems clear that the best possible life we can *actually* live is a life filled with both *theoria* and virtuous activity. This may not be the best possible life we can imagine for ourselves, given what we essentially are, but it is the best possible life we can actually realize. One way to think about what Aristotle is doing in describing what complete happiness for human beings would look like is engaging in a kind of thought experiment. Based on his account of the highest human good as the best accomplishment of the human *ergon*, he is describing the best happiness that is conceptually possible even if it is not physically possible. This is philosophically useful in the way many thought experiments are. By identifying the ideal case, we are better able to determine what to aim to realize in less than ideal circumstances. What we learn from identifying the nature of “complete happiness” is that we should, ability permitting, not neglect the pursuit of theoretical knowledge for the sake of political pursuits alone. If we have theoretical knowledge, in addition to ethical virtue, we can engage in the best, most complete kind of rational activity when circumstances permit, which is to say, when the demands of material existence don’t impose on us.
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