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## Nicomachean Ethics: Text and Doctrine

*This article argues that the structure of Nicomachean Ethics reproduces the structure of Aristotle's ethical theory, consisting of three parts: the doctrine of the highest good, the doctrine of the virtues, and the doctrine of the three types of life. We show that the last four books successively analyze three concepts of happiness: the sensual (book VII), the practical (books VIII and IX), and the contemplative (book X).*

**Keywords:** *the highest good, happiness, ethical virtues, dianoetic virtues, pleasure, justice, friendship, contemplative activity, first and second Eudaimonia*

The structure of *Nicomachean Ethics*, which basically coincides with the structure of Aristotle's two other works on ethics, poses a number of unsettled issues directly related to understanding the ethical doctrines presented there. It is tightly structured until the sixth book: Aristotle begins by examining the highest good as the ultimate goal of human striving and which he, in agreement with established tradition, calls happiness, then he examines the virtues that represent man's possible path to happiness as well as its most important component. At this point the ethical doctrine in its originally given Eudemonian logic appears systematically complete. We nevertheless face

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Translated by Brad Damaré.

another four books whose place in the overall work and their doctrine require further analysis. The first questions are whether these four books constitute something whole in themselves, what kind of logic unites them, and how to relate them with the previous sections of the work overall. There are also more specific questions linked to the general ones: How do we understand the presence of two treatises on pleasure, in books seven and nine? Why does Aristotle return to the problem of happiness in book ten when he already discussed it in book one? What is the conceptual content of his two books on friendship, which he describes as “a kind of virtue,” or at least as “relevant to virtue,” even though Aristotle does not apply to it the “deficiency–mean–excess” model that is fundamental to the ethical virtues?

Researchers have long studied whether *Nicomachean Ethics* is an integrated whole. Their opinions diverge to such an extent that some believe the work is a collection of previously existing, poorly interconnected scraps, while others see a conceptually unified work.<sup>1</sup> In both cases the conclusions draw from authoritative analysis of the text, but we would suggest that this kind of analysis is not in itself sufficient to address this problem, given that it has provided evidence for entirely opposite arguments. In our opinion, the way to overcome difficulties associated with comprehending the structure of this Aristotelian work of ethics lies in understanding the structure of its ethical doctrine.

The general characteristics of Aristotle’s ethics most often reproduce the division proposed by Hegel into the doctrine of the highest good and the doctrine of the virtues.<sup>2</sup> If we are limited to this kind of understanding, then the content of Aristotle’s ethical doctrine is laid out in the first six books of *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>3</sup> and the remaining four books provide some additional essays on specific, ethically significant issues. This picture changes substantially if we expand our view of Aristotle’s ethics and include his doctrine of especially prominent types of life to the doctrines listed above. That Aristotle directed his attention to this issue in both describing and theoretically generalizing the different types of life has long been known, beginning with ancient commentators.<sup>4</sup> We intend to analyze his views on this topic as a substantial and organic part of his ethical doctrine, without which both the doctrine itself and the works in which it is described will lose their cohesiveness.

Our proposal consists of the following: the last four books of *Nicomachean Ethics* examine different kinds of life from the perspective of their relevance to the understanding of happiness and virtuous behavior that is argued in the first six books. The rational and spiritual tradition of ancient Greece identified three kinds of life long before Aristotle (their classification is usually credited to Pythagoras, as “he compared life to the

Great Games, where some went to compete for the prize and others went with wares to sell, but the best as spectators”).<sup>5</sup> These different life strategies were actually practiced in society, including in demonstrative and edifying kinds (for example, the contemplation of Thales, the hedonism of Aristippus, and the political activity of Pericles were well-known models). Aristotle could not, of course, avoid special examination of this topic due to his overall sensitivity to the real morals and values adopted in society, but this is not the only reason. This kind of examination was required for the logic of his ethics, the core of which is the idea of unity between the good and the virtue.

After describing the good as the goal of activity, showing that he is talking about human, achievable good rather than the idea of good in general, examining a variety of goals to identify the highest good, which is a sort of end of ends (the final, self-sufficient end, valuable in itself and which can never be a mean for anything else), and further stressing the existence of happiness as a conventional designation of the highest good, Aristotle emphasizes that people may come together in the name of the highest good, its role, and its place in activity, while differing in their understanding of happiness, its content. Noting that the majority understands happiness as a life full of pleasure, Aristotle states, “there are, we may say, three prominent types of life—that just mentioned, the political, and thirdly the contemplative life.”<sup>6</sup> Because qualitatively different understandings of happiness (the highest good) exist, the issue of uniting the good and the virtues requires a solution that can take into account these differences. The initial ethical investigation plan itself required an answer to the question of what human qualities each of the three kinds of life is associated with and which of these kinds of life is realized through the means and experience of the ethical virtues. Thus, after a comprehensive analysis of the ethical virtues in contrast to the vices and in distinction to the intellectual virtues, Aristotle needed to examine the specific kind of life in which these virtues could find embodiment. The last four books of *Nicomachean Ethics*, which set out the final (concluding) part of Aristotle’s ethical theory, are devoted to this issue. Here, he successively examines the life of pleasure (seventh book), of activity (eighth and ninth books) and of contemplation (tenth book).

Aristotle begins with an examination of the hedonistic concept of happiness, which is traditionally considered the first of the three kinds of life. The investigation of this kind of life in its specific content, which differs from the other two, is connected with the difficulty that happiness in all its forms is associated with pleasure: “the happy life is pleasant.”<sup>7</sup> To overcome this difficulty, we have to highlight the feature showing how the

desire for pleasure prevails among forces governing human behavior. Aristotle calls this wickedness, which we should distinguish from incontinence. The cases of wickedness and incontinence alike refer to an imbalance between reason and the passions in favor of the passions. In the case of incontinence, following the passions may be and generally is accompanied by the awareness that such behavior is unacceptable, and does not preclude subsequent remorse. Wickedness is something different. It is chosen consciously and is often not even related to strong craving. It is self-confidence and an augmented attitude toward pleasure, above all bodily pleasure related to necessities like food and love: “the man who pursues the excesses of things pleasant, or pursues to excess necessary objects, and does so by choice, for their own sake and not at all for the sake of any result distinct from them, is self-indulgent.”<sup>8</sup> The wicked (*anaisthetos*) are not inclined toward repentance and are therefore hopeless. They are bellicose in their wickedness. It (wickedness) is organic in person who has chosen this kind of life, and it is an expression of the corruption of character. It is like a chronic illness such as dropsy or consumption, whereas incontinence could be compared with epileptic attacks. Wickedness or vice (*kakia*) should not be equated with incontinence (*akrasia*). The common factor between the wicked and the incontinent is that they both seek out bodily pleasures, “the latter, however, also thinking that he should do so, while the former does not think this.”<sup>9</sup> Because wickedness is at its core, the sensual kind of life is the exact opposite of virtue, and not only the opposite factually, but it is formed as a result of destroying virtue. Wickedness does not recognize the idea that reason should rule, or that correct judgment should be followed. “For virtue and vice respectively preserve and destroy the first principle, and in actions the final cause is the first principle, as the hypotheses are in mathematics.”<sup>10</sup> “The wicked man is like a city that uses its laws, but has wicked laws to use.”<sup>11</sup> Such a vicious (*kakos*) person may even be worse than an animal, since he can “do ten thousand times as much evil as a brute.”<sup>12</sup> Wickedness is a special type of commitment to pleasures that sets out its own kind of life, its own understanding of happiness. It cannot be equated with incontinence and especially not with the desire for pleasure. Aristotle states that, first, we should not equate pleasure with the bodily pleasures that allow us to overcome suffering and satisfy some lack (thirst, hunger, and so forth). There also exist pleasures unrelated to cravings and sufferings, such as the pleasure of contemplation. Pleasure itself, therefore, is correctly identified as unimpeded, active manifestation of one’s soul disposition. Given this understanding, pleasure is included in the concept of happiness, “for no activity is perfect when it is impeded, and happiness is a perfect thing.”<sup>13</sup> Second, the pleasures of the body are bad not in

themselves, but only when one tends toward an excess of them. Vicious wickedness does not recognize the reason's claim to dominance, and thereby takes the place of a ruling authority in the soul in such a way that the passions begin to rule instead of the reason. This occurs not only because of an evil nature, but partly because the pleasures of the body are associated with eliminating suffering, it seeming as if excessive pleasure eliminated suffering more quickly and effectively. In addition, bodily pleasures "are pursued because of their intensity by those who cannot enjoy other pleasures."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the sensual kind of life cannot be regarded as a special form of eudaimonia, since it cannot lead to happiness as it is based on a vicious wickedness. There remain two other kinds of life: the practical (political) and the contemplative. These are associated with the ethical and dianoetic virtues, respectively. "For it is manifest that these are the two modes of life principally chosen by men most ambitious of excelling in virtue, both in past times and at the present day—I mean the life of politics and the life of philosophy."<sup>15</sup>

The practical mode of life, according to Aristotle, primarily is political (*polis*-oriented) activity. When people act virtuously in the sense of ethical virtues, *polis* is the result of their activity. The virtuous individual is at the same time a citizen of the *polis*, and the reasonable character of individual behavior is summarized in the reasonable character of political existence. The unity of the virtuousness of individuals with the good-naturedness of the *polis* is provided by justice. Justice is the projection of virtue onto the *polis*, while at the same time a criterion of the fact that government exists for the good of its citizens.

Justice unites citizens in their desire for the perfect (virtuous) life, for the good, thereby transforming their union into a community of friends. Friendship (friendliness) thus acts as the spiritualizing basis for and ultimate task of justice. "Friendship seems to hold states together, and law-givers to care more for it than for justice; for concord seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality."<sup>16</sup>

For several reasons, justice in itself is insufficient as an ethical sanction of political life that attests to the *polis*' focus on the good. Justice generally means following the law, but laws themselves can be unjust. Laws lay out general rules and norms, while virtue is individualized. Moreover, there is something hostile to good-naturedness that is inherent in politics

(management of the polis). Neither the physician nor the ship captain, Aristotle says, aims at forcing those the former would treat and the latter transport. “Yet most peoples seem to think that despotic rule is statesmanship, and are not ashamed to practice toward others treatment which they declare to be unjust and detrimental for themselves.”<sup>17</sup> The ethical function of justice, its mission as a moral and critical authority in relation to the specific laws and circumstances of life in the polis is secured by friendship (friendliness).

Aristotle interprets the political system in its variety of forms and most important manifestations as a form of friendly relations. “Friendship and justice seem ... to be concerned with the same objects and exhibited between the same persons. For in every community there is thought to be some form of justice and friendship too ... and the extent of their association is the extent of their friendship, as it is the extent to which justice exists between them.”<sup>18</sup> “Each of the constitutions may be seen to involve friendship just in so far as it involves justice.”<sup>19</sup> Without friendliness, the primary function of justice to equalize the unequal is impossible; “equality and likeness are friendship, and especially the likeness of those who are like in virtue.”<sup>20</sup> We might say the state represents a school of friendliness; it cannot be otherwise, since “such organization is produced by the feeling of friendship, for friendship is the motive of social life; therefore, while the object of a state is the good life, these things are means to that end.”<sup>21</sup> Friendship is so organic to the polis communication in its ethically appropriate forms that, as Aristotle says, if someone is misled by the fact that someone pretended to be his friend, “he will complain with more justice than one does against people who counterfeit the currency.”<sup>22</sup> This comparison of friendship with fully valued money that provides for fair exchange is very significant. Friendship represents the standard of justice.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not construct a social and political utopia. He did not, however, identify polis as explicated (embodied) virtue with actually existing city-states. In constructing a generalized image of the best government system, a kind of ideal polis, Aristotle identified the friendly nature of relations essential for that system as its most important characteristic. The doctrine of friendship is an ethical program embodying an active kind of life. Why friendship in particular? And what is friendship? — “[I]t is not only necessary but also noble.”<sup>23</sup> Friendship is one of the external factors of happiness: the existence of friends is the most essential among these factors. At the same time, friendship in itself is something morally perfect. The combination of these two characteristics is the distinguishing feature of friendship, determining its highly unique, irreplaceable place in the polis’ system of ethical institutions. “Perfect friendship is the

friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue.”<sup>24</sup> Friendship is necessary, namely as a form of virtuous relations. Its very necessity and stability is guaranteed by the virtuousness of friends. “And each is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful to each other. So too they are pleasant; for the good are pleasant both without qualification and to each other, since to each his own activities and others like them are pleasurable, and the actions of the good are the same or like.”<sup>25</sup> If virtue is a quality of the individual taken as itself and irrespectively of anything else, and justice is the same virtue but in its reference to other persons, then friendship is both simultaneously. Friendship is the kind (the only of its kind) of external (necessary) relationship that remains within the area of individually responsible behavior of the individual. Justice also expresses the interests of the polis as a whole; to understand its nature, we must proceed not only from the individual to the state, but also from the state to the individual; the individual’s behavior falls under external control to a certain extent. Friendship is something else. It is completely under the control of the acting subject, and in friendship, the social nature of man and his reason receive direct expression. Friendship is a necessary feature of bliss, an expression of the virtuous perfection of the individual. Being a friend is fully like being a good person. Moreover, “friendly relations with one’s neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man’s relations to himself.”<sup>26</sup>

Friendship in its truest content is the kind of communication immanent for a virtuous person and is included in the notion of happiness. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship: for the sake of pleasure, for the sake of utility, and for the sake of itself. The first two are inferior and are not friendship in the strict sense of the word. Their objective is not friendship itself, but some utility or pleasure with which it is associated. These kinds of friendships are short-lived, easily broken, and unreliable, and evil people are also capable of them. The perfect form of friendship is the third: friendship between good, equally virtuous people. The friendship itself or the good of friends is central rather than the benefits associated with that friendship. It is more durable, trustworthy, and free from chance.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* we find parallels between the types of friendship and the types of justice.<sup>27</sup> For example, military alliances between states are compared with friendships of utility,<sup>28</sup> and joint festivals with friendships for the sake of pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Friendship for the sake of virtue, or friendship proper, is correlated with general justice. Both of these are based on like-mindedness. “Concord also seems to be characteristic of friendship.”<sup>30</sup> Here we are referring to like-mindedness not on whatever random or



private issues arise, nor on scientific topics like the heavenly bodies, but on important issues relating to community life in the polis: “a city is in accord when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common.”<sup>31</sup> This is the kind of like-mindedness when neither pleasure nor benefit but a general idea of the good becomes the basis for a unified community. Living together, since we are talking about both friendship and the state, is also formed on the basis of “sharing in discussion and thought.”<sup>32</sup> With unique, polemically sharpened sentiment, Aristotle emphasizes that the human space of living together differs from cattle feeding in the same place.<sup>33</sup> “Concord seems, then, to be political friendship as indeed is commonly said to be ... now such concord is found among good men; for they are in accord both in themselves and with one another, being, so to say, of one mind ... and they wish for what is just and what is advantageous, and these are the object of their common endeavor as well.”<sup>34</sup> The matter is entirely different when it involves people who are evil and united in selfish desires. Even if like-mindedness is possible among them, it is possible only at the most insignificant level as well as people can only be friends to the smallest degree, “since they aim at getting more than their share of advantages, while in labor and public service they fall short of their share; and each man wishing for advantages to himself criticizes his neighbor and stands in his way; for if people do not watch it carefully the common weal is soon destroyed. The result is that they are in a state of faction, putting compulsion on each other but unwilling themselves to do what is just.”<sup>35</sup>

Just as gold does not cease to be a noble metal with unique properties that can be used for the intended purpose when it becomes loose change, friendship, despite being a standard for good-naturedness in polis life, does not fully coincide with justice and keeps its independent significance as virtuous practice or as its own kind of pure, virtuous life. This dialectic of friendship and justice is clearly visible in the specific case of the number of friends. If we are discussing friends as fellow citizens, their number may be large, approaching or coinciding with the total number of fellow citizens. In that case we are speaking of quasi-friendship or superficial contact unrelated to human perfection: “in the way proper to fellow citizens, indeed, it is possible to be the friend of many and yet not be obsequious but a genuinely good man.”<sup>36</sup> However, this is friendship in the name of virtue rather than friendship in the name of friends! “But one cannot have with many people the friendship based on virtue and on the character of our friends themselves, and we must be content if we find even a few such.”<sup>37</sup> The number is so few that friends can spend their days with one another, and the friend not only becomes a second I, but when the friend’s virtuousness becomes his sole dimension of being, to be and to be a

friend are one and the same thing. Only with this kind of understanding does friendship become an ethical authority that gives civil and political life the dignity of eudaimonia while simultaneously designating the secondary nature of this eudaimonia.

The most important feature of friendship for the sake of friends is that, being free from the motives of benefit or pleasure, it is at the same time a pleasurable pastime in itself. It is the kind of activity that contains its own end in itself. Aristotle asks who we should love more: ourselves or another. He rejects the usual answer that the moral man forgets himself and cares for others: "he is his own best friends and therefore ought to love himself best."<sup>38</sup> If we proceed from the experience of the majority of people who strive to obtain more wealth, honor, or bodily pleasure, then the word "egoist" takes on disgraceful meaning. However, there are also virtuous people who really are "selfish" because they love wisdom; that is, they desire not minor things like glory or money, but the most beautiful and best things. The virtuous man is selfish because he is ready to give all the minor things to another—money, glory, other goods—but saves the very best for himself—moral virtue—since it is good to do anything for the sake of a friend. "In all the actions, therefore, that men are praised for, the good man is seen to assign to himself the greater share in what is noble. In this sense, then, as has been said, a man should be a lover of self; but in the sense in which most men are so, he ought not."<sup>39</sup>

The two aforementioned perspectives from which Aristotle analyzes friendship, on the one hand building a parallel between friendship and justice, and on the other hand examining friendship as an appropriate form of individual ethical virtue (ethical self-love), are interrelated. Friendship acts as an ethical standard for justice and as the core of a practical (active) image of the happy life. It represents the kind of practice that, as a consequence of ethically virtuous deeds, has no other purpose, as if it is their source. Here, virtue itself is a good. If we consider that Aristotle believes the good is an end and virtue the means, then in friendship, at least in its highest form, the means becomes the end, and the end the means. This form of friendship, where relations with a friend become a form of self-sufficiency for the virtuous individual and of his relationship to himself, is already a point of transition toward the first eudaimonia.

Happiness, according to Aristotle, is an activity of the soul performed in accordance with the virtue. Political communication, including friendship for the sake of friends as the most valuable in it, fits with this understanding, since it represents an activity in accordance with the ethical virtues. This is not, however, the sole type of activity that leads to

happiness. After all, the ethical virtues exist alongside the dianoetic virtues associated with contemplative activity. Contemplative activity is also a form of happiness, moreover a higher form across all the criteria that people usually associate with the idea of happiness and that Aristotle himself highlights in revealing the concept of the Supreme Good.

Above all, it is higher on the criterion of pleasures. The desire for pleasure is inherent in man and people understand happiness as completeness, as the fulfillment of that desire. Aristotle again returns to the question of pleasures: in the first treatise (seventh book) he showed that we cannot understand pleasure only or primarily as the pleasures of the body, and that the latter deserve this name least of all. There, the basic task was to uncover the vicious foundation for the life of sensation. Now, in the second treatise, he provides a detailed analysis of pleasures associated with virtuous forms of activity. Any activity, of course, is linked with enjoyment. At the same time, enjoyment is a stimulus for activity: without the inherent nature of human desire for pleasure and aversion to suffering, no activity would take place. Ethical activity is intended to moderate enjoyment, to lend it a perfect form, to draw a line between pleasure and suffering, and to subject them to the voice of reason. Although ethical activity rises above nature in that respect, it simultaneously depends on it, because the danger always remains that pleasure may overflow its borders and go beyond reasonable limits. Contemplative activity severs the umbilical cord to man's animal nature. It is its own source of pleasure among the special pleasures that are in themselves good and cannot be otherwise nor become excessive: "for there are actually pleasures that involve no pain or appetite (e.g., those of contemplation), the nature in such a case not being defective at all<sup>40</sup> ... the pleasures arise from thinking and learning will make us think and learn all the more."<sup>41</sup> Pleasure is considered a replenishment of some deficiency, an overcoming of suffering; this opinion may arise in relation to certain bodily states where, for example, the pleasure of eating is considered an overcoming of suffering related to hunger. Many pleasures are unrelated to suffering: "for the pleasures of learning and, among the sensuous pleasures, those of smell, and also many sounds and sights, and memories and hopes, do not presuppose pain."<sup>42</sup>

Pleasures are associated with activity; they appear in it along the way, giving it perfection and fullness. In this sense, people are drawn to pleasure for the same reason that they are drawn to life, for life is a kind of activity. Since pleasure arises from action itself, there are as many different pleasures as there are activities associated with them; the higher the activity in the hierarchy of values, the higher the pleasure it delivers. Different things may pleasure or torment different people, and not every pleasure is worthy

of selection, but only a few, and the virtuous man is the measure in this. Pleasure that provides fullness and perfection to the actions of a person perfect in his virtuousness is pleasure in the truest sense of the word. The pleasures of sight, hearing, and smell are higher in purity than the pleasures of touch and taste. Highest of all are the pleasures related to thought, which are associated with contemplative activity: it is widely believed “to offer pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness.”<sup>43</sup>

Contemplative activity also has an advantage in comparison to practical activity in terms of self-sufficiency, the main criterion and sign of happiness. It is self-sufficient in the sense that it is chosen for its own sake, and in the case of ethical acts the person obtains something in addition to the act itself. Moreover, one can practice it on one’s own, without anybody else. As the subject of contemplative activity, the wise man certainly still requires everything necessary for life, no differently than the just man as the subject of political practice, but he nevertheless has an advantage beyond this: the just one also requires those toward whom he can direct his activity, while the wise man can contemplate even when he is alone. “He can perhaps do so better if he has fellow workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient.”<sup>44</sup>

Contemplative activity is more prolonged than activity related to acts. It exists only in the space of leisure, and in that respect it differs favorably from practical activity. It also requires less outside support. In a word, it embodies the characteristics commonly associated with the idea of bliss and included in the doctrine of the Supreme Good. “So if among virtuous actions political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are unpleasurable and aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake, but the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the complete happiness of man, if it be allowed a complete term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is incomplete).”<sup>45</sup>

As we have already noted, happiness in addition to the virtues also depends on favorable external conditions; this dependence (in the case of both the wise and the just) is easily satisfied, since an average income is sufficient for one to be virtuous: “and we can do noble acts without ruling earth and sea.”<sup>46</sup> However, contemplative happiness depends less on external good than active happiness; the wise man, for example, has no need of the kind of wealth that the generous require, nor the strength of the courageous. The issue of fortune is more complicated, since good fortune

is also a feature of external good. In this case, however, the wise man has an advantage, at least to the extent we are discussing divine involvement.<sup>47</sup> It is logical the gods will give preference to what is best and most alike to them, namely, the mind. He who is happy through contemplative happiness (the philosopher, the sage) “is the dearest to the gods. And he who is that will presumably be also the happiest; so that in this way too the wise man will more than any other be happy.”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, both happiness from practical activity associated with polis communication and happiness from contemplative activity are associated with the theoretical, historically specific content that Aristotle outlined as the second and first eudaimonia<sup>49</sup> when analyzing the concept of the Supreme Good at the very beginning of his doctrine and text. The two eudaimonia are connected to each other as the lower and higher (penultimate and ultimate) steps in the two-step staircase of happiness. Just as the active life is happiness in its aspiration to self-sufficiency, which is achieved at the stage of pure contemplation, so does contemplative activity continue the preceding stage of friendly interaction: “but in so far as he is a man and lives with a number of people, he chooses to do virtuous acts.”<sup>50</sup> The truly human form of happiness is practical (polis-oriented) activity as activity in accordance with the ethical virtues. As for contemplative happiness, which represents pure activity of the mind, it exceeded human capabilities and is superethical in nature.

Aristotle proceeds from the concept of man, already well established in ancient thought, as a being who occupies the middle position between animals and gods. The truly human life is characterized by a unity of characteristics from both. The human shares with other living beings an irrational part of the soul, which in its sensuous sub-part is able to follow reason. He shares reason with the gods. Human activity finds its perfect expression in this unity of senses and reason in which the mind represents the command center and the senses follow its orders, just as a child follows his father’s orders. A person’s goodness is expressed in his ethical virtuousness, and both the ethical virtues and their expression in political practice characterize human life alone: they are impossible both in the case of animals, who lack the reason for this, and in the case of gods, who lack irrational impulses.<sup>51</sup>

The contemplative life represents an active state of the mind, the first and best aspect of man. It is the happiest life itself. This is the first and highest eudaimonia; man participates in this not because he is man, but because there is something of the divine in him. In its true sense, the contemplative life is organic to the gods. After all, Aristotle says, it is ridiculous to attribute acts to the gods and consider them generous (as if

they cared about money or giving it out), just (funny to imagine them signing contracts and so forth), or temperate (as if they could be evil in inclination). If you reject assigning them these actions, and even creation itself seems unworthy of the gods, and if you consider them active, what remains is only contemplation. That is why the gods are thought to spend all their life in bliss. "Therefore the activity of god, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative, and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness. This is indicated, too, by the fact that the other animals have no share in happiness, being completely deprived of such activity."<sup>52</sup>

The first and second eudaimonia are identical as eudaimonia, or varieties of happiness, but they differ in that one happiness is incomplete and lower, while the other is complete and higher. The incomplete version, secondary in terms of happiness, matches the ethical virtues, while the complete version, first in terms of happiness, matches the dianoetic (intellectual) virtues. Contemplative happiness is beyond ethical virtues and vices; it denotes a level of human perfection that is above and beyond ethics, a superethical level. It does not represent a path to the Supreme Good, which belongs to practical happiness, but is the Supreme Good itself. This difference might be compared to the difference between a man climbing to the peak of a mountain and the same man who has already achieved it. If active happiness requires one to make efforts, to exhibit determination, to make choices, and to perform acts, then contemplative happiness requires nothing, for the person himself has become his own best aspect, achieving identity with himself. Of course, we cannot continually remain in this blessed state, because we must also support the body and leave the mountain peak from time to time since there is nothing edible there, but while we are in such a state, we are completely self-sufficient. "But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him."<sup>53</sup>

Aristotle's ethics begins with the Supreme Good as an end desirable in itself, an ultimate state that initiates and makes human activity in its desirable form possible. His study ends with an analysis of contemplative bliss, which represents desirable action perfected, this ultimate state itself. His ethical system thus acquires an internal wholeness, and his ethical writings become compositionally complete.<sup>54</sup>

## Notes

1. See A. Kennedy, *The Aristotelian Ethics. A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1978); Aristotle,

*Nicomachische Ethik*, trans. and ed. Franz Dirlmeier, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960).

2. “He also addressed the specific individual; he wrote his *Ethics*, which is partially an examination of the highest good or the absolute goal, and partially a study of individual virtues.” Gegel’ [Hegel], *Leksii po istorii filosofii*, book 2 (St. Petersburg: “Nauka,” 1994), p. 261.

3. The Supreme Good (Book I); general characteristics of the ethical virtues (Book II and the first half of Book III); an analysis of the ten ethical virtues (second half of Book III, and Book IV); justice (Book V), which “αὕτη μὲν οὖν ἢ δικαιοσύνη οὐ μέρος ἀρετῆς ἀλλ’ ὅλη ἀρετὴ ἐστίν” (“Justice in this sense then is not a part of virtue, but the whole of virtue”: 1130b); and dianoetic virtues (Book VI).

4. According to Aristotle, “Of three kinds of life, the contemplative, the practical, and the pleasure-loving life, he gave the preference to the contemplative.” Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972; first published 1925). Book 5, p. 32.

5. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, book 8, p. 8.

6. EN I.5, 1095b15. All citations of *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth cited as EN) from Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

7. EN VII.13, 1153b15.

8. EN VII.7, 1150a10–20.

9. EN VII.9, 1152a5.

10. EN VII.8, 1151a15.

11. EN VII.10, 1152a20.

12. EN VII.6, 1153b15.

13. EN VII.13, 1153b15.

14. EN VII.14, 1154b1.

15. Pol. 7 1324a. All citations of *Politics* from: Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 21, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1944).

16. NE VIII, 1155a20–25.

17. Pol. 7, 1324b.

18. EN VIII.9, 1159b.

19. EN VIII.12, 1161a10.

20. EN VIII.8, 1159b1.

21. Pol. 3 1280b.

22. EN IX.3, 1165b10.

23. EN VIII.1, 1155a25.

24. EN VIII.3, 1156b5.

25. EN VIII.3, 1156b10–15.

26. EN, IX.4, 1166a1.

27. Aristotle makes a more specific correlation in *Eudemian Ethics* (EE 7, 1242–44).

28. EN VIII.4, 1157a25.

29. EN VIII.9, 1160a20.

30. EN IX.6, 1167a20.

31. EN IX.6, 1167a25.
32. EN IX.10, 1170b10.
33. See EN IX.9, 1170b10.
34. EN IX.6, 1167b1.
35. EN IX.6, 1167b10.
36. EN IX.10, 1171a15.
37. EN IX.10, 1171a15.
38. EN IX.8, 1168b10.
39. EN IX.8, 1169a35.
40. EN VII.12, 1152b35–53a1.
41. EN VII.12, 1153a20.
42. EN X.3, 1173b15.
43. EN X.7, 1177a25.
44. EN X.7, 1177a30.
45. EN X.7, 1177b15–25.
46. EN X.9, 1179a1–5.

47. In *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle identifies two kinds of good fortune: “there are two kinds of good fortune—one divine, owing to which the fortunate man’s success is thought to be due to the aid of God, and this is the man who is successful in accordance with his impulse, while the other is he who succeeds against his impulse. Both persons are irrational. The former kind is more continuous good fortune, the latter is not continuous” (EE 8, 1248b).

48. EN X.8, 1179a30.

49. We will leave aside the issue of the normative status of these concepts of happiness. They can hardly be regarded as specific programs of action. Aristotle is more of a researcher than a moralist in his ethics. The position of the well-known Aristotle expert A. Kenny seems clear and appropriate; his analysis of the various versions of Aristotelian doctrines on happiness ends with these questions (which we hope are not rhetorical): “But does Aristotle provide any moral guidance? Does he provide anything more than a framework into which different and incompatible sets of norms and values can be fitted? Can one accept his ethical system? Would anyone be able genuinely to adopt the supreme values of Aristotle or endeavour to practise the moral virtues described in the *EE* or *NE*?” See A. Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford, 1992), p. 112.

50. EN X.8, 1178b5.

51. “For as a brute has no vice or virtue, so neither has a god” (EN VII.1, 1145a25); a god is higher than virtue, since he does not have passions, while a beast is lower than vice, since it has no reason: “while a man who is incapable of entering into partnership, or who is so self-sufficing that he has no need to do so, is no part of a state, so that he must be either a lower animal or a god” (Pol. 1 1253a).

52. EN X.8, 1178b20.

53. EN X.7, 1177b25.

54. Commenting on the beginning of the second treatise on happiness in the final book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Russian translator writes, “Thus, the compositional circle of *NE* comes to a close: Aristotle proceeds to explain the working definition of happiness he gave in the first book.” N.V. Braginskaia, “Kommentarii 37 k desiatoi knige,” in *Aristotel’. Sochineniia v 4-kh tomakh*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Mysl’, 1983), p. 749.