

THEORIA VERSUS PRAXIS IN THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS AND THE REPUBLIC*

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1. ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF *theoria* AND *eudaimonia*, *EN* 1176a30–1179a32

The subject of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is *eudaimonia* (1095a14 ff., etc.).¹ The discussion of the *aretai*, which occupies most of the work, is justified by the definition of *eudaimonia* (1098a16 ff.) as “an *energeia* (activity) of the *psuche* in accordance with *arete*, and if the *aretai* are several in number, in accordance with the best and most perfect.” Aristotle explicitly makes the point that study of the *aretai* will give a clearer picture of *eudaimonia* (1102a5 ff.). It is not surprising that, having studied the *aretai*, he should return to the subject of *eudaimonia* in Book 10.²

At 1177a12 Aristotle takes up the definition of 1098a16, and adds that the best *arete* must be the *arete* of the best part of us, so that the *energeia* of that part in accordance with its own *arete* must be *eudaimonia*. He also adds (1177a17): “That this activity is ‘theoretic’ has been said.”³

Theoria is best because *nous*, the part of the *psuche* concerned with *theoria*, is the best part of us, and the objects of contemplation are the best knowable objects. (*Theoria* is not research, but the contemplation of [certain kinds of] knowledge already possessed.)

Aristotle then (1177a27) praises the life of *theoria* to the detriment of practical *arete*.⁴ all men need the necessities of life, but the wise man can engage in *theoria* by himself (though it may be better to have colleagues); whereas the just man, the brave man, and the rest need people to whom they may behave justly or bravely. The *theoretikos* is more *autarkes* (self-sufficient).⁵ Aristotle is not commending self-reliance, which might enable one to help others in need, but a self-sufficiency which enables the *theoretikos* to isolate himself from others.

The life of *theoria*, in Aristotle's eyes, is superior to any other. In fact

* This article is based on a paper which I read to a joint classics-philosophy seminar at Princeton on April 15, 1975. Both the paper and I benefited considerably from the experience.

1. Unless otherwise identified, all Aristotelian references are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

2. The subject has been little mentioned since Book 1. (*Eudaimonia* appears at 1129b18, 1144a5, 1152b6, 1153b11 ff., 1169b29; *eudaimonismos* at 1127b18; *eudaimon* at 1117b10, 1143b19, 1153b14 ff., 1169b3 ff., 1177a2; *eudaimonein* at 1111b28, 1169b30, 1170b18.)

3. Precisely where Aristotle said it earlier is unclear. J. A. Stewart, *Notes on the “Nicomachean Ethics”* (Oxford, 1892), ad loc., suggests 1. 5. 2; A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1885), ad loc., suggests 9. 3. 1; 1. 13. 20; 1. 5. 7. There is nothing on the subject in Book 6.

4. Since *arete* denotes and commends “excellence,” not “virtue,” and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* specifically “human excellence,” to speak of a “theoretic” *arete* involves no straining of Greek.

5. For the importance of self-sufficiency, see my *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960), index, s.v. “Independence”; and *From the Many to the One* (London and Ithaca, 1970), index, s.vv. “*Autarkeia*” and “Self-sufficiency.” These works are hereafter abbreviated *MR* and *FM*.

(1177b26) it is higher than human. Human beings are able to live it in virtue of some divine principle within, whose *energeia* surpasses that of the rest of *arete* by as much as that divine principle surpasses the composite nature of the rest of our being. Accordingly, we should *athanatizein* (play the immortal) so far as in us lies and do our best to live in accordance with the best part of us. Aristotle adds (1178a2): "Indeed, each one of us would appear to *be* this element in us, since it is the authoritative and the best part of us. It would be strange, then, if a human being were to choose not its own life but that of some other creature."

The life of practical *arete* achieves *eudaimonia* only in a secondary sense (1178a9 ff.). Material goods are necessary for the life of practical *arete* as Aristotle understands it;⁶ whereas (1178b3) the *theoretikos* does not need material goods, at all events for the exercise of his *theoria*. Such goods may indeed impede his *theoria*. However, inasmuch as he is a human being and lives with others, he chooses to perform the actions of practical *arete*, and will need material goods in order to function as a human being (*anthropeuesthai*).

Perfect *eudaimonia*, as enjoyed by the gods, must be theoretic (1178b7 ff.). Aristotle ridicules the idea of the gods' being just, brave, or liberal; for (as Aristotle interprets the matter here) justice is displayed in business dealings, self-control presupposes base desires, and liberality necessarily involves the use of money.⁷ We cannot, accordingly, suppose that the gods *prattein* (engage in ethico-political activity); and still less may they *poiein* (manufacture).⁸ Only *theoria* is left to the gods. The gods *theorein* constantly, and enjoy perfect *eudaimonia*; human beings enjoy it insofar as they *theorein*; animals never enjoy *eudaimonia*, since *theoria* is impossible for them.

Theoria and *eudaimonia* in the primary sense of the terms, then, are co-extensive and co-variable.

2. *Theoria* VERSUS *praxis* IN *Nicomachean Ethics* 1 AND 10

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, I now inquire whether an Aristotelian *theoretikos*, while actually engaged in *theoria*, can be offered any sufficing reason for interrupting his contemplation in order to perform a moral or political action.

Not all editors and commentators notice this question.⁹ J. A. Stewart¹⁰

6. For the reasons, see *MR*, pp. 333 ff.

7. That the gods might be liberal to mankind is not considered. (Aristotle is alluding critically here to the gods of popular Greek belief.)

8. Manufacture is to be forbidden to the citizens of Aristotle's ideal *polis*, *Pol.* 1328b33 ff., 1329a17 ff. A fortiori it is unthinkable for Aristotle that the gods should engage in it, as, e.g., Hephaestus was popularly believed to do. Aristotle's deities are remote from popular belief: see *Met.* 1069a19 ff.

9. For example, the question is not discussed by P. Betbeder, "Ethique et politique chez Aristote," *RSPh* 54 (1970): 453-88, though he writes, "Il y a différentes façons de travailler à ce bonheur; il y a différents domaines constitutifs de ce bonheur qui ont une autonomie relative les uns par rapport aux autres" (p. 482), an observation which might well have suggested the problem. It is touched on in passing by W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 332 f. J. Léonard, *Le bonheur chez Aristote* (Brussels, 1948), does not directly discuss the matter, but in his contrast of Aristotelianism and Catholicism (p. 187), he indicates what he finds lacking in Aristotle. G. Ramsauer, *Aristotelis "Ethica Nicomachea"* (Leipzig, 1878), sees clearly that there is a problem.

10. *Notes*, ad 1178a10.

does, and gives a vigorous, if not entirely clear, answer. He argues that Aristotle, though apparently contrasting the lives of the just and the wise, is "really contrasting man in the concrete and reason, the form of man." This form, "[Aristotle] would tell us, is realised in the concrete life of the just man as well as in the concrete life of the savant." The exhortation to live an immortal life so far as in us lies "is addressed to the bulk of mankind," since anyone who is not damaged in respect of his *arete* is able to contribute "if not in some brilliant way, as politician, or soldier, or leader of fashion, or athlete—at least as honest man, to the *eudaimonia* of a city in which savants are produced and held in honour." Stewart also argues¹¹ that the life of *theoria* is not separate from the life of politics, that *theoria* is a spirit which penetrates and ennobles politics. He contrasts the life of the ordinary politician with that of the "good man," whose leisure "consists in the quiet of a well-regulated mind, not in an impossible immunity from the interruptions of practical life"; for "unless we understand Aristotle in this sense [my emphasis], we must suppose that in the *Ethics* the life of the good man is depicted as a more or less unsatisfactory public career . . . ending, if he is to reach the highest kind of happiness, in withdrawal from social activity. . . . Nothing could be more opposed to this than Aristotle's view of life, which is social from beginning to end."

This is a vigorously expressed view of the good life. Whether Aristotle held it is another question. Stewart apparently contrasts two forms of the political life, the one practiced by the run-of-the-mill politician, the other by the "good man"; though his words could be interpreted as a contrast between the life of the politician and the private practical life of the good man. But Aristotle says:

The life of the *politikos* is lacking in leisure; it is a life which, apart from the political action itself, aims at power and status, or in any event at *eudaimonia* for the *politikos* and his fellow-citizens, a goal which is different from the practice of political skill. . . . Now if, of the activities in accordance with [practical] *arete*, the political and the martial ones are pre-eminent in *kallos* and stature, but are lacking in leisure, aim at some further goal, and are not choiceworthy in themselves, whereas the *energeia* of *nous*, which is "theoretic," is thought to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no goal beyond itself . . . [1177b12 ff.]

Aristotle is concerned with two kinds of *politikos*: one aims merely at power and status, the other at *eudaimonia* for himself and his fellows. The latter is, or includes, if *eudaimonia* is appropriately interpreted, the "ideal politician" of Aristotle and Plato.¹² In Stewart's view, the latter enjoys a life informed by *theoria*, and possesses true leisure; but Aristotle explicitly states that the life of *both* kinds of *politikos* is lacking in leisure. Furthermore, it is evident, here and throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that the life of practical *arete* in politics is more *kalon*, and hence more choiceworthy, than the life of practical *arete* of the private individual.¹³ *Theoria* is most choiceworthy; then the public life of *arete*; then the private life of *arete*.

11. *Ibid.*, ad 1177a27.

12. E.g., 1095a14 ff., and Plato *Rep.* 433A ff. See pp. 308 ff.

13. 1177b6 ff. treats "politics and war" as the sphere of the practical *aretai*.

Again, *pace* Stewart, the injunction that a man "should live an immortal life so far as in him lies" cannot be addressed to the average man as an inducement to be honest. Aristotle immediately adds, ". . . and do everything with a view to living in accordance with the best element in him" (1177b33 f.); that element, for Aristotle, is plainly theoretic *nous*. When a man is being honest, his activities are merely human, *anthropika* (1178a14); the absurdity of supposing that the gods engage in such activities is emphasized (1178b10 ff.).

Nor can Stewart claim that Aristotle is "really contrasting man in the concrete and reason, the form of man."¹⁴ Aristotle possesses a philosophical vocabulary which would enable him to make this point explicitly; his language suggests rather that he is thinking of different types of life.¹⁵

Here we may turn to an Aristotelian confusion of language and thought. At 1178a2 ff., as we have seen,¹⁶ Aristotle identifies human beings with their theoretic reason, so that to choose *theoria* is to choose the life peculiarly appropriate to human beings. Yet at 1177b26 ff.,¹⁷ Aristotle says that the life of *theoria* is "higher than human; for one will not live in this manner in virtue of being a man, but in virtue of the presence within of some divine principle."

The clash here is not merely verbal. At 1177b26 ff. Aristotle acknowledges that human beings are embodied *nous* (though without drawing what seems to be the appropriate conclusion);¹⁸ at 1178a2 ff. he claims that they are simply *nous*. In either case, however, the *nous* is to engage in *theoria*; and its objects are to be "the best," i.e., objects far removed from human concerns (1177a20).

The whole of active life is set on a lower level than the theoretic; no distinction is drawn between types of moral and political activity so far as concerns their inferiority to *theoria* in terms of *eudaimonia*; and there is no mention of the form of man and man in the concrete. It seems impossible to furnish an adequate reason why an Aristotelian *theoretikos* should willingly interrupt his *theoria* in order to perform any moral or political action. It is possible to furnish a reason why the *theoretikos* should sometimes engage in moral or political activity: he cannot engage in *theoria* all the time, for he becomes weary;¹⁹ and, when the best *eudaimonia* is not available, he should choose the best that is available. But it is not possible to supply a reason why the *theoretikos* should at a particular moment choose the second-best when he could have the best kind of *eudaimonia*, since he is (a) a person capable of *theoria*, and (b) intellectually fresh and unweary. It is useless to say to a

14. Reason is not *the* form of man for Aristotle, at all events in his more careful moments. The human *psyche* as a whole stands to the body as form to matter.

15. The "three lives" picture was evidently current; cf. 1095b17 ff.

16. P. 298.

17. Pp. 297-98.

18. I.e., that they cannot live as if they were disembodied *nous*, and must acknowledge the necessity of all the *aretai* of the embodied totality as constituents of *eudaimonia*. See pp. 301 ff.

19. Indeed, too much *theoria* may be bad for the health (1153a20), so that one must sometimes pursue other activities. Aristotle gives no reason why a man should abandon *theoria* when he is fit and able to pursue it.

Greek of this period, "That way lies *eudaimonia*, or more *eudaimonia* than elsewhere, or better *eudaimonia* than elsewhere; but you ought nevertheless to go the other way." Aristotle tells us (1095a17) that *eudaimonia* is generally agreed to be the goal of life; and a survey of late fifth- and fourth-century Greek usage confirms his statement.²⁰

The *theoretikos* will indeed possess all the *aretai*: they are needed to render him a good specimen of human being (1144a1 ff.), and an absence of well-established moral dispositions would distract him from his *theoria*. However, any *arete* can exist in a state either of *hexis* or of *energeia*;²¹ one cannot exercise both *theoria* and any practical *arete* at the same time; and for the well-being of the *theoretikos* it suffices that he possess the other *aretai* in a state of *hexis* for so long as he is able to exercise his *theoria* uninterruptedly.

In Book 10 Aristotle gives no reason why the *theoretikos* should choose *praxis* so long as *theoria* is possible. Aristotle does indeed say that the *theoretikos* chooses, but offers no reason, and does not tell us *when* he chooses: he may well mean "chooses when *theoria* is not available" (1178b6). Furthermore, the gods approve of *theoria* in men more than of any other kind of activity (1179a24 ff.). In his discussion of *theoria* Aristotle gives no valid and sufficing reason why the *theoretikos* when actually engaged in *theoria* should abandon the pursuit in order to perform any practical moral or political action.

3. *Theoria* VERSUS *praxis* ELSEWHERE IN ARISTOTLE'S ETHICAL THOUGHT

Throughout Books 2–9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* there is little mention of *eudaimonia*, or of *theoria* in the technical sense of Book 10.²² In fact in Books 2–9 there are statements which *prima facie* arise from a quite different view of human action. For example, in Book 6 Aristotle treats *prallein*, the activity of the moral and political agent, as an end in itself (1139b1 ff.), links *praxis* with *prohaeresis* (deliberate choice), and adds that what is capable of deliberate choice is a human being.

Now the idea that *praxeis* are ends does not appear for the first time in Book 6: it occurs on the very first page of the work (1094a6 ff.). But when Aristotle also says that "what is capable of *prohaeresis* is a human being," he is saying—and he believes—that the only living creature capable of *praxis* is a human being. In 1097b23 ff. Aristotle is searching for the *ergon*, the "function," of the human being, since *ergon*, *praxis*, and the *agathon* (and hence *eudaimonia*) are always related, the *agathon* being "in" the *ergon*. Aristotle resorts to his division of *psuche* into plant, animal, and human. He rejects any *ergon* residing purely in the plant or animal aspects of the human *psuche*, since any such *erga* would be common to plants and animals, while he is searching for something *idion* (peculiar) as the *ergon* of the human being. He concludes (1098a3): "There is left the practical

20. *MR*, chaps. 10–16.

21. See, e.g., 1098b31 ff.

22. *Theorein* in 1139a6 ff. is wider in usage, including as its objects both what can change and what cannot; but the *theorein* of Book 10 includes only the latter.

life of the part that has reason . . . and since this [i.e., practical life] is used in two senses, we must stipulate a practical life expressed in activity."

The editors and commentators have noted the reminiscence of Plato here. In *Republic* 1 the *ergon* of anything is stated to be "that which only it or it better than anything else can perform" (353A); and it is agreed (353D) that the *psuche* has "an *ergon* which one could not accomplish with anything else in the world, as for example management, rule, deliberation, and the like." (Plato is evidently thinking of human *psuche*.) Plato continues by saying that the *ergon* of the *psuche* is also life (since only *psuche* endows living creatures with life). The reference is now to *psuche* in general, but the proposition is as true of human *psuche* as of any other; so that, for Plato, it seems not to be the case that everything that has an *ergon* can have only one, and that, too, an *ergon* that can be simply defined. If Plato were more precise here, he would distinguish between *psuche* in general and human *psuche* in particular, and exclude "life" from his account of the human *psuche*'s *ergon* on the grounds that it is not *idion*.²³ Nevertheless, the course of his argument shows that he does not rule out the possibility that a creature or a tool may possess two functions "which only it or it better than anything else could perform." Aristotle, unlike Plato, has excluded simply "being alive" from his account of the *ergon* of the human being, along with the characteristic activity of the plant and animal *psuchai*. But if, for Aristotle as for Plato, the *ergon* of anything is that which it and it alone can do, and if the life of practical moral and political activity is *also*²⁴ something in which only human beings can participate, then the life of practical moral and political activity ought to be the *ergon* of man just as much as *theoria* is, and accordingly just as much the *agathon* of man, and just as conducive to his *eudaimonia*. After all, the reason for refusing to ascribe *eudaimonia* to cattle, horses, and children (1099b32 ff.) is that they are incapable of a life of practical moral and political activity.²⁵

It follows that man is properly regarded as being not merely *nous* but embodied *nous*; so that the *eudaimonia* of man should consist in performing both the functions of his *nous* and those of his "embodiment," which renders him a human being among other human beings. The definition of man expresses his *ousia* (*Met.* 1037b25 ff.); and that definition cannot exclude the "embodiment." Accordingly, one might expect that the *eudaimonia* of man would not be graded into better and worse, first and second class, but be treated as the *eudaimonia* of an embodied *nous* which is one entity.

If his *eudaimonia* requires the appropriate performance of all these functions, the *theoretikos* will have to make difficult decisions; but Aristotle

23. His argument at 352D ff. would be considerably hampered if he did, however, since "living" is essential to it in 352E.

24. Indeed, it is strictly the *sole* activity in which only human beings can participate, since *theoria* is shared with deity; and this strengthens the argument I am offering here, to the point, indeed, where practical *arete* should be given precedence.

25. Note that in 1178b27 ff. *eudaimonia* is denied to all other living creatures on the ground that they do not participate in *theoria*; again the emphasis of Book 10 is different.

does not suppose moral decisions to be easy:

Similarly, anyone can become angry, or give and spend money. That is easy. But to know to whom to give it, and how much, and when, and for what purpose and how—that is not something that anyone can do, and it is not easy; and so to do this well is rare, praiseworthy, and *kalon*. [1109a26 ff.]

Such passages emphasize the importance in ethical action of the appropriate behavior in the circumstances. Aristotle's discussion of the mean is evidently relevant. I need not consider here the more vexed aspects of the doctrine.²⁶ I merely state—what I believe to be generally agreed²⁷—that Aristotle holds that the *meson pros hemas*, the *meson* in relation to ourselves, varies in accordance with the characteristics of the agent: what would be an act of generosity for a poor man (giving *n* obols to a good cause) would be an act of great meanness for a rich one; and what would be an act of courage for Milo the wrestler might be an act of foolhardiness for a physically feeble person.

It is evident that there can be ethical problems concerning how to apportion one's time among different practical moral and political activities, and what to do while engaged in them. The *agathoi* citizens of Aristotle's ideal *polis*, like anyone else, will need to know how to decide matters of this kind. A *phronimos* will know, presumably, how to divide his time between the needs of one friend and the needs of another; and (a) he will see the problem and the solution in terms of "how much, when, how, to whom" (as in 1109a26 ff.); and (b) what he can do, the resources other than his time which he has to divide, will depend on his own mental, physical, and material goods. No one can avoid making decisions of this kind.

There seems to be no reason *prima facie* why *theoria* should not take its place in this scheme. *Phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *prohaeresis* (deliberate choice) will then be of the utmost importance. (*Prohaeresis*, though not actually employed in *theoria*, can of course be employed in deciding whether to engage in *theoria* or not at any time.) A man will then take into account his own characteristics, which will include the presence or absence of the ability for *theoria*: if he cannot *theorein*, he will engage in the exercise of the practical *aretai* as much as possible; while if he can *theorein*, he will aim at the *meson* in the amount of time allotted to *theoria*,²⁸ bearing in mind that man is not disembodied *nous* but embodied *nous*.²⁹ In behaving thus, he is performing his function, or rather functions, his *idia erga*, and thereby securing his true *agathon*, his *eudaimonia*.

This answer would suit many of Aristotle's philosophical views; but it

26. Some of which I discuss in *FM*, pp. 184 ff.

27. As for example by Grant, *Ethics*; Stewart, *Notes*; and H. H. Joachim, *The "Nicomachean Ethics"*, ed. by D. A. Rees (Oxford, 1951).

28. *Theoria* itself, not being an *ethike arete*, is not a mean between extremes.

29. After all, Aristotle analyzes *dikaiosune* primarily in terms of the appropriate distribution of resources (1131a10 ff.), a procedure which I am suggesting that the *theoretikos* should use with respect to his *theoria* and his other activities, "appropriate" being defined in terms of the "embodiedness" of his *nous* and his three-dimensional existence as a social animal.

seems not to be Aristotle's answer. I have discussed the relevant passages in Book 10. We may consider also a passage from Book 6:

It is strange if anyone supposes *politike* or *phronesis* to be the most important kind of knowledge, unless man is the most *agathon* object in the universe. [1141a20 ff.]

And Aristotle does not accord such a status to man. Further on, speaking of *phronesis*, he says:

But *phronesis* does not have authority over *sophia* or the better part of the *psuche*, any more than medicine has authority over health; for it does not use it, but ensures that it comes into existence. Accordingly, it gives orders in its interest; it does not give orders to it. It is just as if someone were to say that *politike* rules the gods, because it gives orders about everything in the city.

If the answer I have suggested for Aristotle were Aristotle's answer, *phronesis* would sometimes have to give orders to *sophia* (or *nous*), or in other words say to the *theoretikos* that this is an inappropriate time to engage in *theoria*.³⁰ But evidently Aristotle's answer is different. The function of *phronesis* is simply to ensure that *theoria* and *sophia* can occur; and the most obvious way of ensuring this occurrence is by ensuring the absence of disturbing "non-habituated" desires: the *akrates* (or *enkrates*) will find his contemplations much more distracted than will the *sophron*.

The closing words of the *Eudemian Ethics* (1249a21 ff.) express essentially the same view. There Aristotle uses as an analogy a medicine that deals with the human being as a whole; and since the good man should have "a standard of disposition and choice," one might perhaps expect that he will choose his courses of action in the light of his being a whole human being, embodied *nous*. But there too Aristotle sets up as the goal of man a particular good, a good which is less than the good of the whole human being, but which is held to be more important than anything else: the contemplation of God. It is true that Aristotle counsels that choice of friends which will most produce the contemplation of God; and one might argue that the *theoretikos* must so act as to preserve his *philia* with friends of this kind. And since all *philia* requires reciprocal benefits, the *theoretikos* will sometimes have to confer those benefits upon appropriate persons, possibly at the expense of an opportunity for *theoria*, in order to make them his *philoi* or maintain them in that state. True; but (a) the friends are merely means to an end, and a theoretically possible answer to the question, "What friends will be most conducive to my contemplation of God?" is "None." (b) In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle presents it as an advantage of *theoria* that it is possible even without colleagues. (c) The problem that concerns us here is not that of persuading the *theoretikos* to perform some moral acts—for

30. It is true that, in terms of my answer, it is difficult to explain precisely how the *phronimos* will "see" that this is an appropriate time for moral action rather than for *theoria*; but no more difficult than to explain how he will "see" that the present moment is appropriate for devoting himself to the needs of his friends rather than to those of the city. As Aristotle himself says, such matters are not easy; and so to do them well is "rare, praiseworthy, and *kalon*."

Aristotle should have no difficulty in persuading him to do that³¹—but of persuading him, at a particular moment when *theoria* is possible, to give up his *theoria* in order to help someone practically. The difficulty is more acute in the case of helping human beings in general; but, even in the case of this special kind of *philia*, it is hard to see how the argument is to proceed, if we bear in mind the meaning which *theoria* has for Aristotle. We cannot argue thus: "*Theoria* is the highest good. If I help this *philos* now, I shall lose an opportunity for *theoria*. But if I help him, I shall also increase my opportunities for *theoria* in general, and thus increase my possession of the highest good. Therefore I will help him." In a modern scientific research team, loss of a valued colleague might seriously hamper research, so that a modern Aristotelian might find that his researches benefited in general from his interrupting them at a particular moment to help that colleague. But there were no research teams of this kind in the ancient world, and *theoria* does not mean research. It is difficult to see how one's contemplation of God could be impeded by the loss of a colleague.

In fact, I suspect that, when Aristotle mentions the possession of suitable friends in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he is not thinking of colleagues, but of associates in daily living whose behavior will not impede one's contemplation of God by encouraging the irrational part of the *psuche*.³² Since their assistance in contemplation is of a more indirect kind, it would be much more difficult to argue that, by abandoning one's *theoria* now to help one of them, one will increase one's opportunities for *theoria* in general. If abandoning *theoria* in order to benefit one's *philo*i does not ultimately enhance one's own *theoria*, it will not increase one's possession of the highest good, which is the goal of action.

We should consider also 1097b6 ff.:

The same conclusion seems to follow from considerations of *autarkeia*; for the perfect *agathon* is thought to be *autarkes*. We mean by *autarkes* not merely sufficient for himself alone, living an isolated life, but also for parents and children and wife and generally for *philo*i and fellow-citizens, since man is *phusei* a *politikon* creature. . . . And we mean by *autarkes* that which, taken by itself, makes life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing; and we believe *eudaimonia* to be such.

Stewart³³ speaks of Aristotle's view of life as "social from beginning to end." Such passages as this (especially the statement that man is by nature [*phusei*] *politikon*), and much of the *Politics*, where Aristotle's analysis begins with the city, support such a view; but it does not follow that Aristotle has harmonized every aspect of his ethical and political doctrines.³⁴ Other presuppositions and values may be—and, I shall argue at the end of

31. When he is too weary intellectually for *theoria*, practical *arete* will furnish *eudaimonia* as nothing else available will.

32. Note the manner in which the mention of the possession of friends and other goods is set in the discussion of the appropriate functions of the different parts of the *psuche*, *EE* 1249b16 ff.

33. P. 299.

34. Even in the *Politics* (see 1325b14 ff.), where Aristotle again expresses the view of *EN* 10.

this paper, are—in conflict with the analysis in terms of the *polis*. Indeed, if we compare what is said of the *autarkes* here with the ascription of *autarkeia* pre-eminently to *theoria* in 1177a27, the possibility of conflict becomes immediately apparent; for there *theoria* is in effect said to be “that which taken by itself makes life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing.”

But perhaps failure to exercise the moral *hexeis* by actualizing them regularly will cause them to fade away. If Aristotle held such a view, he would have to take it into account when considering the roles of *theoria* and *praxis* in the life of the *eudaimon*; for the absence of a good moral *hexis* would impede the contemplation, and hence diminish the *eudaimonia*, of the *theoretikos*.

In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find:

No human activity has the same consistency as have the *energeiai* in accordance with *arete*; for they seem to remain more surely with a person than even the knowledge of the sciences. And the most prized of these themselves remain more surely because the fortunate occupy their time most of all and most continuously upon them; for this seems to be the cause of their not being forgotten. The *eudaimon* will accordingly have the characteristic for which we are seeking [i.e., stability], and he will be *eudaimon* throughout his life; for always, or by preference, he will *prattein* and *theorein* the things in accordance with *arete*. [1100b14 ff.]

Hexis here is notably absent; and A. Grant³⁵ holds that the words are “a sort of contradiction of Aristotle’s own philosophy,” since it is *hexis*, not *energeia*, that is abiding. The emphasis on *energeia* is, it seems to me, to be explained by the context. Aristotle is trying to demonstrate the stability of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia*, he has argued, is an *energeia* of the *psuche* in accordance with *arete* (1098a16). If such *energeiai* are consistently active, *eudaimonia* should be stable; and Aristotle argues that they are consistently active, for the reasons given. The goal of the demonstration may have induced Aristotle to state his position in a somewhat misleading manner; but if “the most prized of these themselves” refers to the *aretai* rather than the sciences,³⁶ Aristotle is remarking almost in passing that regular practice of an activity is necessary if one is not to forget it. If Aristotle believes ethical activity to require regular practice in this manner, the belief evidently affects the problem I am discussing here.

Usually Aristotle is concerned primarily or solely with the establishment of the *hexis* (1103b14 ff.):³⁷ when the *hexis* is established, he treats it as a datum. He specifies as the characteristics of an action in accordance with *arete* (1105a30 ff.) that the agent should act with knowledge, that he should deliberately choose the action for its own sake, and that his action should proceed from a firm and settled character. There is no suggestion that the character will not remain firm and settled unless the action is performed. Nor can we say that the *agathos* will “inevitably” perform a just act when a

35. *Ethics*, ad 1100b14 ff.

36. So Stewart, *Notes*, ad loc.

37. Cf., e.g., 1103b6 ff., 1104a20 ff.

just act is possible:³⁸ deliberate choice is necessary, and *eudaimonia* is the criterion of choice, as we have seen.

Again, elsewhere (1095b32) Aristotle seems to suppose it possible that an individual with a good *hexis* already developed could thereafter sleep throughout his whole life while possessed of *arete* as a *hexis*; and, though this supposition is admittedly a philosopher's hypothetical extreme case, even such cases should not contradict the philosopher's own views. Once again it would appear that activity of the type which constitutes an actualization of the *hexis*, though necessary to create the *hexis* in the first place, is not necessary in order to maintain the *hexis* in being.³⁹

It seems likely, then, that Aristotle's remarks in 1100b14 ff. do not represent his considered position, and that the context is responsible for the phrasing there used. But even if the words there found express his considered position, they do not in themselves solve the problem. Regular activation of the moral *hexis* can occur at such times when the *theoretikos* is too tired to continue with his *theoria*, and needs a change. One would have to add the requirement that *not* performing a moral action at a particular moment when one is engaged in *theoria* is immoral, and therefore likely to weaken one's good *hexis*; and this Aristotle does not say. Indeed, how are we to render that "immoral" into Aristotelian Greek? *Theoria* is the exercise of an *arete*, a human (or superhuman) excellence, the best of which human beings are capable (1177a12 f.); and nothing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that it can be *aischron* or *adikon* to activate the best human *arete* at any time. It is difficult for us to envisage an "ethics" in which moral and non-moral excellences are alike *aretai*, and choice between them is made on non-ethical grounds; but that is Aristotle's position.⁴⁰ The best *arete* is the *arete* of the best part (1177a12);⁴¹ and Aristotle suggests no grounds for choosing to actualize an inferior *arete* when one might actualize a better one.

I conclude that Aristotle, though his general ethics contain much that would permit him to do so, does not satisfactorily integrate the life of *theoria* with the life in accordance with practical *arete*; for his ethics taken as a whole also contain much to prevent such integration.

4. A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION OF ARISTOTLE'S POSITION

There is an analogous curiosity elsewhere in Aristotle. He usually treats *psuche* as the form, body as the matter, and the living creature as "something endowed with *psuche*" (*empsuchon*, *De an.* 414a14 ff.); and he holds that the *psuche* cannot exist without a body. But in *De anima* 430a10 ff., his

38. The *arete* of a human being does not resemble that of an eye or a horse (taken as examples, 1106a17) in this manner: the analogy is not complete.

39. *Phronesis* is not forgotten, 1140b28-30.

40. Pp. 297 f. Furthermore, in 1100b14 ff. *theoria* in the sense of Book 10 seems not to be in Aristotle's mind. He uses *theorein* as in 1139a6 ff. (n. 22 above). Stewart, however (*Notes*, ad loc.), interprets "most prized" in 1100b14 ff. of "theoretic" activity—in which case the problem is lurking here, too, since "the fortunate" spend most of their time on it.

41. See p. 297.

discussion of what is generally termed the "active intellect," he asserts that there is one aspect of the human *psuche*—*nous*—which can exist without a body. One can ascribe the discrepancy to "the Platonism of Aristotle." But Aristotle seems to have little motive for the retention of this aspect of Platonism (insofar as it resembles Platonism),⁴² which disrupts his own view of the *psuche* as expressed at, e.g., *De anima* 414a14 ff., and which is not evidently demanded by any other views which he holds about the *psuche* or about the conditions of the possibility of human knowledge. A human *psuche* which is simply the form and entelechy of its body, and perishes with it, could, so far as I can discern, perform all the tasks that Aristotle requires of it. I propose tentatively to suggest a more general reason for his treatment of *nous* in the light of other phenomena of the period—a reason linked with the status of the intellect in the eyes not only of Aristotle, but of a remarkably varied group of late fifth- and fourth-century Greeks.⁴³

In *Republic* 519D ff. Plato faces the problem of inducing the philosopher-kings to return to the prisoners in the cave to take their turn in government rather than spend all their time in intellectual activity. The response is immediate: "Shall we *adikein* (commit injustice against) them, and compel them to live more *kakōs* when it is possible for them to live more *eu*?" (519D8). That there is a problem is evident from the language used. We might perhaps expect Plato to refer back to the discussions of *Republic* 4, where *dikaiosune* is certainly an important *arete*, and argue that *dikaiosune* requires that they return to the cave. Surely Plato can draw aid for his argument from this. We shall see.

In 433A ff. Socrates "discovers" that *dikaiosune* in the city exists when each of the citizens *ta hautou prattein*, discharges his own function. Such behavior is one of the characteristics that render the city *agathe*, "good," in the sense of flourishing and efficiently functioning; and it is this contribution which is the ground for terming *dikaiosune* an *arete* (excellence) of the city. It is with excellences of the city that we are concerned here: it would require further demonstration, which is not forthcoming, to show that behavior which brings the city into its best possible condition (and is therefore an *arete* of the city) must also bring every individual citizen into his best possible condition and render him *agathos*. The proof, accordingly, does not demonstrate that *dikaiosune*, even in the sense in which Plato is using the term, is an *arete* of the individual.

For such a demonstration we must presumably turn to the discussion of the *dikaiosune* of the individual (441E1 ff.). Here, as in the discussion of political *dikaiosune*, Socrates says that *ta hautou prattein* constitutes *dikaio-*

42. On the general difficulties of using the phrase "the Platonism of Aristotle," see G. E. L. Owen's article of that title in *PBA* 51 (1965): 125–50. In *De anima*, in fact, the resemblances to the Platonic *psuchai* are less striking than the contrasts; for Platonic *psuchai* retain their memories after death, are rewarded and punished for their deeds in this life, and are capable in life of recollection of important intellectual events ("seeing the Forms") which occurred while they were disembodied.

43. For the resemblances between the presuppositions of Plato and Aristotle, those of the characters in the Platonic dialogues, and those of contemporary Greeks of whom we have any knowledge, see *MR*, chaps. 10 ff.

sune; but individual *dikaiosune* exists when each of the parts of the soul *ta haulou pratein*: "It befits the *logistikon* to rule, since it is wise and can exercise forethought for the whole *psuche*; and the *thumoeides* to obey and be its ally, does it not?" (441E4). That those who are fitted to rule should rule the city, and the rest perform their appropriate tasks, is an *arete* of the city; but it has not been demonstrated to be an *arete* of the individual. The *dikaiosune* of the individual requires that the individual's *logistikon* rule over his own *psuche*, but not necessarily over anything else:

In truth . . . [individual] *dikaiosune* is not concerned with one's external activities, but with one's internal ones, in the full sense with oneself and one's parts; it means not allowing any of the "kinds" of the *psuche* . . . to meddle with the activities of another. [443C9 ff.]

Individual *dikaiosune* requires the maintenance of one's psychic harmony; civic *dikaiosune* requires that the city be ruled by those most capable of so doing. But it is not proved that individual *dikaiosune*, an unqualified *agathon* since it is necessary for the individual's *eudaimonia*, must be harnessed to the production of *dikaiosune* in the city—and it is unproved in the crucial case. Certainly, as Plato says (442E ff.), the individual *dikaioi* will not commit crimes, for to do so would upset his psychic harmony; but can one philosophize too much, in such a manner as to upset it? Plato does not say so.

We may now return to the problem of inducing philosopher-kings to return to the cave (519D ff.). Plato says (519E ff.):

- (1) The *nomos* is not concerned that one class in the city shall *eu pratein* outstandingly, but tries to secure *eudaimonia* for the city as a whole. It uses persuasion and compulsion to link the citizens and to cause each of them to make the contribution to the common good of which he is capable. The *nomos* brings about the existence of such men as these in the city, not so that they may behave as they please, but so that it may use them to create civic unity.
- (2) The city has produced these philosophers deliberately and at the cost of much effort, so the city is justified in asking them to help in return.
- (3) It is a good thing that rulers should rule reluctantly.

Now I have argued elsewhere⁴⁴ that, though Plato represents this argument as successful in persuading Glaucon and Adeimantus (Thrasymachus' attention seems to have wandered), it should not have persuaded any of them, since Plato has not satisfied their criteria for a choiceworthy action.

For what can Plato reply, not merely to Thrasymachus but also to Glaucon and Adeimantus, if they ask why the philosopher-kings should not be as *eudaimon* as possible? If we suppose that Plato has persuaded Thrasymachus that the avoidance of *adikia* in an "ordinary language" sense is necessary for *eudaimonia*,⁴⁵ then Thrasymachus will have to abandon his intention of exploiting his fellow-citizens in an unjust manner, since to do so would upset his psychic harmony and render him less *eudaimon*. But it is never

44. *MR*, pp. 287 ff.

45. Thrasymachus should not have been persuaded. *MR*, pp. 288 ff.

suggested that an excess of philosophizing would upset one's psychic harmony; and in the passages discussed here, and elsewhere, the manner of conducting the argument suggests precisely the opposite. There is no reason why Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus should accept less *eudaimonia* than they can get. And, if Plato suggested that it would be unjust for the philosopher-kings not to go back into the cave, he would be merely equivocating about the word; for the only injustice that has been shown to be bad for the individual, and hence inimical to his *eudaimonia*, is that which upsets his psychic harmony, not that which upsets the harmony of the city.

If we suppose Glaucon and Adeimantus to be susceptible to the demands of other important Greek values, they might return to the cave because they supposed their action to be *kalon*; but the philosopher-kings are not to suppose this (540B4). Again, in the manner of the ordinary Athenian,⁴⁶ they might be willing to confer *agatha* on the city in order to receive *agatha* in return; but the only *agathon* that the city can confer upon the philosopher-king is to permit him to return to his philosophy—and he would not need this benefit if he were not to engage in government in the first place.

True, Plato (as in the *Crito* much earlier, 50D ff., 51C6 ff.) argues that the city has conferred very great *agatha* on the philosopher-kings, so that they "owe" it to the city to confer benefits on it in exchange. This argument might appear to be a promising mode of approach, but it rarely appears in philosophical ethical argument in Greek, and therefore presumably was not found to be very cogent.⁴⁷ In any case, even if the argument were acceptable in general to philosopher-kings, it does not solve Plato's problem. Plato expressly contrasts with philosopher-kings produced deliberately by a city those philosophers who spring up without the benefits of the educational system sketched in the *Republic*. The first generation of philosophers who might become philosopher-kings must always appear "spontaneously . . . and against the wishes of their society" (520B2; cf. 502A3 ff.); and Plato himself says that there is no compulsion for such philosophers to take part in politics.

This problem is very like Aristotle's; and like Aristotle, Plato has created it for himself. He had merely to state that, human beings being not merely intellect but embodied intellect, a life of unremitting philosophy *would* upset one's psychic harmony, and that the *psuche* of the philosopher-king in particular needs to rule as well as to philosophize for its well-being. Forthwith, the refusal to rule would be an act of injustice in the sense in which the term is used of the individual in the *Republic*, and so detrimental to one's *eudaimonia*. But Plato, like Aristotle, seems unable to give precedence at any time to any activity which is intellectually less respectable than any available alternative.

Problems arising from a preference for intellectual respectability are not at this period confined to Plato and Aristotle. In many ways Thrasymachus

46. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

47. I would say—as I do on pp. 311–13—that the rarity of this argument is a further indication of the self-centeredness, or *oikos*-centeredness, of Greek values.

and Callicles are diametrically opposed to Plato and Aristotle; but not in this respect, as we see in *Republic* 340B6 ff. There, when Thrasymachus has entangled himself, or been entangled by Socrates, over "the interest of the stronger," Cleitophon endeavors to rescue him, claiming that Thrasymachus means by the interest of the stronger what the stronger thinks to be in his own interest. But Thrasymachus will have none of this: "Do you think that I call stronger one who makes a mistake, when he is making the mistake?" (340C6). Similarly in the *Gorgias* Callicles is not primarily a hedonist. He insists that the *agathos* is *phronimos* (491B, etc.); and, when there is an apparent conflict between being *phronimos* and pursuing pleasure, it is the pursuit of pleasure that is abandoned (499A ff.).

All these phenomena, it seems to me, form part of a pattern, a pattern comprehensible in the context of the historical circumstances of the later fifth and fourth centuries in Greece. Socrates, Callicles, Thrasymachus, Plato, Aristotle—and many others—have a characteristic in common, in addition to many differences: all are excited by the powers of the human intellect, so suddenly come to flower in Greece at this time, however different the ways in which they wish to employ it⁴⁸ and however various the goals to which, in the guise of *eudaimonia*, they wish to attain. And all, given the choice between activities that are *intellectually* more and less respectable, will choose the intellectually more respectable. So Thrasymachus insists on the expert status of the unjust man, even though his insistence renders it easier for him to be refuted, or apparently refuted, by Socrates; and Callicles behaves similarly. So Plato and Aristotle adopt views of human *eudaimonia* which pose problems for them; and Aristotle—I would suggest—is so excited by the powers of the "active intellect" that he puts forward a view of it which disrupts his general account of *psuche*.

In these circumstances, that the life of *theoria* should attain a position of unchallengeable superiority over the life of moral and political activity in Aristotle's eyes is not surprising. I do not, however, suggest that the admiration for intellectual powers was the sole cause. Traditional Greek values have a part to play. From Homer onward, the goal of the *agathos* Greek is the attainment of well-being, prosperity (which brings increased leisure with it), and self-sufficiency if possible, for his household, his *oikos*. *Aretai* are the qualities deemed most likely to produce that result, *eudaimonia* the result itself. There is no obvious reason why the attainment of *eudaimonia* should demand, for example, just behavior in cooperation with one's fellow-citizens. What it does require is an experimental issue: if Thrasymachus believes that *adikia* is a more reliable means to the desired goal, he is justified, in terms of Greek values, in terming *adikia* an *arete*. There is no expectation that moral action will be a necessary means to, or constituent of, *eudaimonia*; but there are certain criteria which any state of affairs claimed to be *eudaimonia* will be expected to satisfy.

Let us consider the terms in which Aristotle commends *theoria* in Book 10

48. Callicles and Thrasymachus did not wish to devote their lives to contemplation, or to philosophy in general; see *Gorg.* 484C4 ff.

of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: *autarkeia* (1176b5 f., 1177a27, 1177b21); pleasantness (1177a23); and *scholē*, leisure (1177b4). *Theoria* affords more *autarkeia* and *scholē* than does the life of practical *aretē*, and it affords a superior kind of pleasure. Furthermore, it is a divine, or quasi-divine, activity. That *theoria* pre-eminently possesses these characteristics is unlikely to have occurred to the Greek in the street; but if such a Greek is to value any activity most highly, these are the characteristics that it must possess. And, if one is commending anything most highly to anyone, one must try to demonstrate that it in fact possesses those characteristics which he himself admires most highly. (I do not suggest that Aristotle takes a cynical view: he seems to me to value the same characteristics himself.)

Now none of these characteristics is moral; all are self-centered, or at most *oikos*-centered. If we take traditional Greek values into account, there too the same self-centeredness or *oikos*-centeredness appears.⁴⁹ This *oikos*-centeredness, too, poses problems for Plato and Aristotle. Both are political philosophers, and Plato in particular is trying to solve urgent practical problems.⁵⁰ In their analysis of the needs of the city, they naturally place the needs of the city first: consider Plato in his account of *dikaíosunē* in the city, and Aristotle in much of the *Politics*,⁵¹ where his discussions for the most part form the basis of Stewart's judgment that Aristotle's view of life is "social from beginning to end."⁵² But when Aristotle and Plato have to commend behavior to others (or even to themselves), they must use the value terms available (*aretē*, *eudaimonia*, etc.); and they must accept certain implications of these terms, which are inadequately "civic" for their purposes. When this necessity is added to their own preference for theoretical intellectual activity, it is not surprising that neither can successfully persuade a *theoretikos* at a time when he is engaged in *theoria* that he should perform some moral or political action instead.

Some final questions: Did Plato and Aristotle notice these problems? If not, why not? Would they have minded if the problems were insoluble? Or am I merely imposing on Plato and Aristotle a question which seems important in the light of the emphases of a different ethical system?

In Plato's case, the answer is clear: Plato did notice, and was deeply concerned to solve the problem, for the well-being of the city of his *Republic* rests upon the willingness of the philosopher-kings to govern it. About Aristotle I am less certain. The schematic arrangement of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which separate discussions of *aretai* are set one after the other, makes it possible for such problems as these to escape notice, though the discussions of the two grades of *eudaimonia* are so juxtaposed, and so expressed, as to render failure to notice rather unlikely. However, the difficulty I am discussing involves a decision at a point in time; and such a decision, while characteristic of much more recent ethics, is not characteristic of ancient Greek ethics, where attention, in philosophical and nonphilo-

49. *MR*, *passim*.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 238 ff.

51. But see n. 34.

52. P. 299.

sophical writings alike,⁵³ tends to be directed rather to the nature of *arete* and *eudaimonia* and the identity of the *agathos*. For this reason, too, the problem might be overlooked. Nor am I certain that Aristotle would have been deeply concerned about the question: for him the *theoretikos* was not *qua theoretikos* uniquely well qualified to govern his city. The average *agathos/phronimos* could govern, and Aristotle's problem in the *Politics* is rather to give an opportunity for ruling to all who are qualified⁵⁴ than to compel the few who are qualified to do so. And as to saving someone from a burning building, we have no right to demand that Aristotle agree with us about such matters. He might well have replied, as did the younger Pliny⁵⁵ on being informed by his uncle that Vesuvius was erupting and that he was going to bring what help he could, *studere me malle*: “I had rather get on with my studies.”

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53. *MR*, pp. 179 ff.

54. *Pol.* 1332b12 ff.

55. *Epist.* 6. 16.