

CRITERIA FOR HAPPINESS IN *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* I 7 AND X 6–8

In I 7 Aristotle lays down criteria for what is to count as human happiness. Happiness for man is self-sufficient (*autarkes*), complete without qualification¹ (*teleion haplos*), peculiar to humans (*idion*), excellent (*kat' aretēn*), and best and most complete (*aristēn kai teleiotatēn*). Many interpreters agree that in X 6–8 Aristotle uses these along with other criteria to disqualify the life of amusement and rank one happy life above another.²

In several ways Aristotle, himself, suggests that he uses the I 7 criteria in X 6–8 to determine what happiness is. For example, he uses the term 'self-sufficiency' in X 6–8 (1176b5–6, 1177a27, 1177b1, 1177b21–2), repeats part of the I 7 definition of completeness (1176b1–5, 30–1), and directly refers back to I 7 (1177a18–19). Nevertheless, I shall argue that the criteria he uses in X 6–8 are very different from the criteria he lays down in I 7. When he describes his I 7 account of happiness as a rough, provisional outline (1098a20–2), he means that the criteria as well as the description of happiness are inaccurate as well as incomplete.

The task of showing that the criteria in I 7 and X 6–8 are different is complicated by the fact that there are two competing interpretations of each criterion in I 7. An *inclusivist* interpretation of a passage takes the passage to imply that Aristotle's supremely happy life ultimately aims at a composite good which includes at least moral action as well as contemplation. Similarly an *intellectualist* interpretation of a passage takes the passage to imply that Aristotle's supremely happy life ultimately aims at contemplation alone.

The most obvious evidence of the difference between the I 7 and X 6–8 criteria is that, on both the intellectualist and the inclusivist interpretations, the criteria in I 7 imply that there is only one activity which is happiness and one happy life, but in X 6–8 Aristotle asserts that there are two happy lives and, therefore, two activities which meet the criteria of happiness. The I 7 criteria, on both the intellectualist and the inclusivist interpretations, imply that moral action by itself is not happiness, yet in X 6–8 Aristotle asserts that the life ultimately aimed at moral action is a happy life

¹ *Teleios* could mean 'final' or 'perfect' as well as 'complete'.

² This view is accepted not only by interpreters who read I 7 and X 6–8 as consistent, but also by those who read them as *inconsistent*. And it is accepted by both intellectualists and inclusivists. J. Cooper, 'Contemplation and Happiness: a Reconsideration', *Synthese* 72 (1987), 187–216, p. 205; R. Heinaman, 'Eudaimonia and Self-sufficiency in the *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Phronesis* 33 (1988), 31–53, pp. 32, 47; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 379; A. Kenny, 'Aristotle on Happiness', *Articles on Aristotle: Ethics & Politics*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield and R. Sorabji (London, 1977), 25–32, p. 30; A. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics* (Oxford, 1978), p. 205; D. Keyt, 'Intellectualism in Aristotle', *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. J. P. Anton and A. Preus (Albany, 1983), 364–87, p. 376; S. Klein, 'An Analysis and Defense of Aristotle's Method in *Nicomachean Ethics* i and x', *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988), 63–72, p. 65; J. D. Monan, *Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle* (Oxford, 1968), p. 110; R. Sullivan, *Morality and the Good Life* (Memphis, 1977), p. 172; N. White, 'Goodness and Human Aims in Aristotle's Ethics', *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Washington, 1981), 225–46, pp. 239–42; J. Whiting, 'Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 68 (1986), 70–95, p. 89.

(1178a9). Moreover, the inclusivist interpretation implies that contemplation by itself is not happiness, yet in X 6–8 Aristotle asserts that the life ultimately aimed at contemplation is a happy life.³

Self-sufficiency

At a very general level ‘self-sufficient’ means something like ‘needing nothing from outside’. But this can be fleshed out in different ways. A casual glance reveals that the I 7 and X 6–8 criteria of self-sufficiency are different. In I 7 Aristotle says

(a) [T]he self-sufficient we define as that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be; and further we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others – if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods ... (I 7 1097b14–18)⁴

There is some dispute about how to interpret this passage. Inclusivists emphasize the phrase ‘lacking nothing’ in passage (a). Since happiness, by itself, makes life lacking in nothing, inclusivists say that happiness must include all intrinsic goods. The second half of passage (a) provides an argument for the same conclusion: if

³ Keyt and Cooper try, in different ways, to rescue the inclusivist interpretation. Keyt claims that Aristotle uses ‘life’ (*bios*) to mean ‘aspect of a life’. An aspect of a life might have a simple ultimate aim, but the total life ultimately aims at a composite good consisting of the ultimate aims of the aspects. In I 7 Aristotle’s claim is that the ultimate aim of the total happy life is inclusive while in X 6–8 it is that happiness is contemplation. Thus, there is no contradiction between I 7 and X 6–8 because, although happiness is the ultimate aim of the happiest aspect of the total happy life, it is not the ultimate aim of the total happy life (Keyt, pp. 372–4). There are three problems with this. First, many passages in book I equate happiness with the ultimate aim of the total happy life. Second, even if happiness and the ultimate aim of the total happy life are different, the I 7 criteria seem to be characteristics of happiness rather than of the ultimate aim of the total happy life. Third, Cooper has argued that Aristotle always uses the term ‘*bios*’ to mean ‘total life’ rather than ‘aspect of a life’ (Cooper (1987), p. 207 n. 14). In a follow-up article Keyt defends his use of *bios* by citing three passages from the *Politics* (D. Keyt, ‘The Meaning of BIOS in Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*’, *Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1989), 15–21, p. 16). Cooper has already addressed 1256a40–b6. In 1324a10–17 and 1308b20 Aristotle mentions the life of an alien (*xenikos bios*) and the private life (*idiōtikos bios*) of a person. Keyt asserts that an alien also leads some other type of life and that a person can have a public life as well as a private life. However, ‘private life’ and ‘alien life’ are not types of life, but rather are general terms meaning ‘some apolitical life’. The philosophical life is a species of alien life rather than an alternative type of life (1324a25–9). Just as Aristotle did not lead both a good life and a philosophical life, but instead led a single life which was both good and philosophical, so Aristotle did not lead both an alien life and a philosophical life, but instead led a single life which was both alien and philosophical. Thus the three passages Keyt cites do not show that Aristotle uses *bios* to mean ‘aspect of a life’ rather than ‘total life’.

Cooper tries to rescue the inclusivist interpretation by distinguishing between happiness and complete happiness. Happiness is the ultimate aim of the supremely happy life. Complete happiness is whatever best satisfies the I 7 criteria. Complete happiness turns out to be only one of the components of happiness. Thus, there is no contradiction between I 7 and X 6–8 because in I 7 Aristotle is saying that happiness is a conjunction of activities while in X 6–8 he is saying that complete happiness is contemplation (Cooper (1987), pp. 204–6). There are two problems with this. First, the supremely happy life is, by definition, the life ultimately aimed at the activity which best satisfies the I 7 criteria. But Cooper claims that the activity which best satisfies the I 7 criteria is not the ultimate aim of the supremely happy life. Second, if complete happiness is whatever best satisfies the I 7 criteria, then Aristotle must be talking about complete happiness rather than happiness in I 7.

⁴ All quotations from Aristotle are taken, with a few modifications, from *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, revised by J. O. Urmson, *The Complete Works of Aristotle Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton, 1984).

happiness lacked some intrinsic good, G, then the composite of happiness plus G would be more desirable than happiness alone. But happiness is the most desirable thing. Therefore, happiness cannot lack any intrinsic goods.⁵

Intellectualists claim that the inclusivists are mistranslating or at least misinterpreting passage (a): rather, the phrase 'when isolated' means approximately 'when not combined with other goods'. Thus the first part of passage (a) says that happiness alone is enough to make life desirable. The second part says that happiness is a simple (i.e. non-compound) good which is more desirable than any other good, though happiness plus some other goods would be more desirable than happiness alone.⁶

In X 6–8 when Aristotle says that contemplation is more self-sufficient than moral action, he means that contemplation requires fewer external goods than moral action.⁷

(b) And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative activity. For while a wise man, as well as a just man and the rest, needs the necessities of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly...but the wise man, even when by himself, can contemplate...(1177a27–34)

The liberal man will need money for the doing of his liberal deeds, and the just man too will need it for the returning of services...and the brave man will need power if he is to accomplish any of the acts that correspond to his excellence, and the temperate man will need opportunity...(1178a28–33)

In I 7 'self-sufficient' describes the nature of happiness, but says nothing about what it takes to achieve happiness. Aristotle does not suggest in I 7 that happiness will require fewer external goods than other goals. Indeed he stresses that happiness needs external goods at 1099a31–2. In X 6–8, however, 'self-sufficient' describes what it takes to achieve happiness, but says nothing about the nature of happiness. Aristotle makes no attempt in X 6–8 to show that contemplation is simple or compound or that contemplation is more valuable than any or all other goods. In I 7 self-sufficiency is a property of happiness, but in X 6–8 it is a property of the happy person.

Moreover, self-sufficiency in I 7 is all or nothing; a good either is or is not self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency in X 6–8, however, is a matter of degree. Some goods are more self-sufficient than others.

According to the inclusivists, a good is self-sufficient if and only if it consists of all goods, and there is obviously only one such good. According to the intellectualists, a good is self-sufficient if and only if it is more desirable than every other good, and there is obviously only one such good. Thus, according to both interpretations, the

⁵ J. L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), 15–33, pp. 21–3; J. Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), p. 121; D. Devereux, 'Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness', in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Washington, 1981), 247–60, pp. 249–50; W. F. R. Hardie, 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics', *Aristotle*, ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik (New York, 1967), 297–322, p. 300; Irwin (1985), p. 407; T. Irwin, 'Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 89–124, p. 93; Keyt, pp. 365–6; J. Moline, 'Contemplation and the Human Good', *Nous* 7 (1983), 37–53, p. 37; M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 376; Whiting (1986), pp. 74, 93.

⁶ S. R. L. Clark, *Aristotle's Man* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 153–4; Heinaman, pp. 42–3; Kenny (1978), pp. 204–5; Wedin, 'Aristotle on the Good for Man', *Mind* 90 (1981), 243–62, pp. 257–61.

⁷ Heinaman remarks that it cannot 'be said that Aristotle must be operating with a different concept of self-sufficiency in X 7, for in ch. 6, one page prior to X 7's discussion, Aristotle repeats the definition of I 7, 1097b14–15' (Heinaman, p. 46). But although Aristotle does restate part of the I 7 criterion of self-sufficiency at 1176b5–6, (1) it seems suspiciously out of place, and (2) the criterion of self-sufficiency he actually *uses* in X 6–8 is different.

I 7 criterion of self-sufficiency implies that there is only one self-sufficient good. But in X 6–8 Aristotle says that there are two happy lives. Since a happy life ultimately aims at happiness and happiness is self-sufficient, it follows that in X 6–8 there are two self-sufficient goods; contemplation and moral action.

The inclusivists have an additional problem. On the inclusivist interpretation of the I 7 self-sufficiency criterion, the self-sufficient good is a combination including at least contemplation and moral action. But this combination requires more external goods than contemplation alone. Thus, by the X 6–8 self-sufficiency criterion the combination is less self-sufficient than contemplation alone.

Thus, Aristotle uses different concepts of self-sufficiency in I 7 and X 6–8. Indeed, he himself distinguishes the two concepts implicitly, for he says in I 7

(c) Now by self-sufficiency we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens... (1097b8–11)

But in X 6–8 self-sufficiency clearly does mean ‘that which is sufficient for a man by himself’ as passage (b) shows.

Completeness

Aristotle states the I 7 completeness criterion in the following passage.

(d) [I]f there is only one complete end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most complete of these will be what we are seeking. Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more complete than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more complete than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and we call complete without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else. Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be... (1097a28–34)

In this passage Aristotle says that there are three degrees of completeness. (1) Some goods are desirable merely for the sake of other goods, (2) some are desirable for their own sake and also for the sake of other goods, (3) and some are desirable solely for their own sake. A good of this last sort is called ‘complete without qualification’. Happiness is such a good.

Unlike the X 6–8 criterion of self-sufficiency, the X 6–8 criterion of completeness is not obvious. Aristotle begins X 6 with an account of completeness.

(e) [I]f some activities are necessary and desirable for the sake of something else, while others are so in themselves, evidently happiness must be placed among those desirable in themselves, not among those desirable for the sake of something else... (1176b2–5)

Here Aristotle seems to distinguish only two classes: activities which are complete without qualification, and the rest.⁸ Why has he retreated from his I 7 threefold classification of completeness levels? One possibility is that he ignores the distinction between (1) goods of lowest completeness and (2) goods of intermediate completeness because this distinction is irrelevant to his present purpose, the I 7 threefold classification being more complex than he needs. My own suggestion is that he realizes that his I 7 threefold classification is too simple. Hence in X 6–8 he uses, but

⁸ Thus, Aristotle later says contemplation ‘alone would seem to be loved for its own sake’ (1177b1–2) and moral actions ‘are not desirable for their own sake’ (1177b18). If he had been working with his I 7 threefold completeness classification he would have said that contemplation ‘alone would seem to be loved *solely* for its own sake...’ in order to distinguish contemplation from goods of intermediate completeness. And he would have said that moral actions ‘are not desirable *solely* for their own sake’ in order to distinguish moral actions from goods of lowest completeness.

does not bother to spell out, a more complex version. I shall approach the X 6–8 completeness criterion by looking at relative ‘completeness levels’ of amusement, morally virtuous action, and contemplation.

In X 6–8 Aristotle maintains that the life of amusement is not a happy life because amusement is not complete without qualification. It is a good of intermediate completeness, a good desirable both for its own sake (1176b9ff.) and also for the sake of some other good (1176b34–1177a1). Moral action is also said to be a good of intermediate completeness (1177b1–4). Yet unlike the life of amusement, the life which ultimately aims at moral action is not disqualified from being a happy life by its aiming at a good of intermediate completeness, since it is said to be the secondarily happy life. Moral action must somehow be more complete than amusement even though both are in the class of intermediate completeness.⁹ Thus, in X 6–8 Aristotle abandons the I 7 view that there are only three degrees of completeness.

In X 6–8 Aristotle says that contemplation is ‘the pleasantest of virtuous activities’ (1177a23–5), but also that ‘nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating’ (1177b2). It is not clear how to interpret these statements without making Aristotle contradict himself, for he seems to be maintaining that pleasure both does and does not arise from contemplation. But at least we can say that in X 6–8 he abandons the I 7 view that a good which is complete without qualification is straightforwardly desirable solely for its own sake.¹⁰

In I 2 Aristotle says,

(f) If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), ... this must be the good and the chief good. (1094a18–22)

Passage (f) says that there is a good for the sake of which all other goods are, partially or wholly, desirable. Call such a good ‘universal’. Together passages (d) and (f) imply that there is only one good which is complete without qualification. (Proof: Let A be universal, and let B and C be complete without qualification. Everything is desirable for the sake of A, so B is desirable for the sake of A. But B cannot be desirable for the sake of anything except B. Therefore, A = B. By similar reasoning A = C so B = C.) This good is happiness. Thus, there can be only *one* happy life. But in X 6–8 Aristotle says that there are *two* happy lives. Moral action cannot be complete without qualification. Yet at the beginning of X 8 Aristotle says moral action is the ultimate aim of one kind of happy life. Therefore, moral action is happiness, and happiness according to the I 7 completeness criterion is complete without qualification.

Inclusivists have additional problems. First, they say that contemplation and moral action, like other simple intrinsic goods, are desirable for the sake of the composite good, happiness. It follows that the lives ultimately aimed, respectively, at contemplation and at moral action are not happy lives because they aim at goods which are not complete without qualification. But in X 6–8 Aristotle claims that both of these lives are happy.

Second, according to the I 7 completeness criterion, a good which is complete without qualification is happiness. But in X 6–8 Aristotle indicates that contemplation alone is desirable solely for its own sake (1177b1–2, 19–20). That is, contemplation is complete without qualification. Thus, contemplation is happiness, an unwelcome conclusion for an inclusivist.

⁹ Perhaps moral action is more complete than amusement because amusement is a means to moral action, but not vice versa (1176b32–4).

¹⁰ Even though contemplation is not desired for the sake of pleasure, the pleasure mixed with contemplation makes it more *desirable*.

Thus, Aristotle uses different criteria of completeness in I 7 and X 6–8.¹¹

The *ergon* argument

After Aristotle discusses self-sufficiency and completeness in I 7 he turns to a consideration of the human *ergon*. As I read the *ergon* argument (1097b33–1098a18) he tries to specify what happiness is through three winnowings.¹² First, he picks out the human *ergon* (rational activity) and dismisses from consideration all other activities. Second, he picks out excellent, rational activity (virtuous action) and dismisses from consideration all other rational activities. Third, he picks out the ‘best and most complete’ kind of excellent, rational action (contemplation or complete virtuous action) and dismisses from consideration all other kinds of excellent, rational action. Thus, the *ergon* argument introduces three characteristics of happiness, three criteria. Happiness is an activity which is (1) peculiar to humans, (2) excellent, and (3) ‘best and most complete’.

Peculiarity

Aristotle says that human happiness is to be understood in terms of the human *ergon* and that the human *ergon* is peculiar to humans.

(g) What can [the human *ergon*] be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. We must exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle... (1097b33–1098a4)

The two basic interpretations of the peculiarity criterion correspond to the two popular translations of *ergon*, ‘function’ and ‘characteristic activity’. (F) X is peculiar to humans if and only if X is an activity which only humans can do or which humans can do best. But this interpretation has a problem. Many things which only humans can do or humans can do best are not components of the human *ergon*. Flute playing and prostitution are Whiting’s examples.¹³ An alternative interpretation is (CA): X is peculiar to humans if and only if X is an activity which exercises essential human abilities (whether or not humans are the only or the best exercisers of these abilities). There are several versions of (F) and (CA).

(1) Some interpreters take Aristotle to be proposing (F) at a very general level. According to this version, what is peculiar to humans, the human *ergon*, includes a wide variety of activities involving reason. Gomez-Lobo says, ‘It would be idle to try to pin Aristotle down to some specific form of thought at this stage of the game.’¹⁴

¹¹ Aristotle does restate part of the I 7 criterion of completeness in X 6 (1176b1–5, 30–1), but as I have shown, the criterion of completeness he *uses* in X 6–8 is different.

¹² This interpretation of the *ergon* argument is drawn largely from A. Gomez-Lobo, ‘The *Ergon* Inference’, *Phronesis* 34 (1989), 170–84, pp. 172, 182. See also D. Achtenberg, ‘The Role of the *Ergon* Argument in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*’, *Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1989), 37–47, p. 40.

¹³ J. Whiting, ‘Aristotle’s Function Argument: A Defense’, *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988), 33–48, pp. 36–8.

¹⁴ Gomez-Lobo, p. 174. See also Ackrill, p. 27; Hardie, p. 301; H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 1951), p. 48; J. McDowell, ‘The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s Ethics’, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), 359–76, pp. 366–7; K. Wilkes, ‘The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle’s Ethics’, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), 341–57, p. 354.

On this 'general level' interpretation, Aristotle does not state or use the I 7 peculiarity criterion in X 6–8. The I 7 peculiarity criterion separates rational from non-rational activities, leaving it for other criteria to take the further step of choosing among the rational activities. But in X 6–8 Aristotle does not separate rational from non-rational activities at all. He begins by arguing that happiness is an excellent activity, and then argues that happiness is the best excellent activity, contemplation (1177a12–13).

(2) Irwin attributes an inclusivist version of (F) to Aristotle. He says,

If x can do A, B, and C, and nothing else can do C, but other things can do A and B, we might describe x's peculiar function either as 'doing A, B, and C' or as 'doing C.' Now it is fairly clear that Aristotle understands the peculiar activity of man in the first, inclusive way.¹⁵

(3) Whiting rejects (F) in favour of (CA). But since Aristotle believes that a human being is a compound of many abilities including theoretical as well as practical reason, (CA) leads Whiting to agree with Irwin that the peculiarity criterion implies that the human *ergon*, and therefore happiness, is a conjunction of activities including at least contemplation and moral action.

On these inclusivist versions of both (F) and (CA) Aristotle does not state or use anything like the I 7 peculiarity criterion in X 6–8. Indeed, he clearly abandons the peculiarity criterion in X 6–8 by maintaining that contemplation is happiness and moral action is happiness.

(4) Kenny holds an intellectualist version of (F). Unlike Irwin, he does not take what is peculiar to humans to be a combination of activities including at least one activity which only humans can do or which humans can do best. Instead, he takes what is peculiar to humans to be a single activity which only humans can do or which humans can do best. That is, Kenny believes that Aristotle understands the peculiar activity of man in the second way mentioned by Irwin above (i.e. as 'doing C'). Thus, according to Kenny the peculiarity criterion implies that happiness is contemplation alone.¹⁶

On this intellectualist version of (F) Aristotle abandons the I 7 peculiarity criterion in X 6–8. For he explicitly denies that contemplation is peculiar to humans when he observes that God contemplates better than humans (1178b21–3).¹⁷

(5) Although everyone agrees that Aristotle thinks a human being is a compound in I 7,¹⁸ some interpreters think that in X 6–8 he switches to the view that a human

¹⁵ T. Irwin, 'The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics', *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980), 35–53, p. 49. See also Keyt, pp. 366–7; T. Roche, 'Ergon and Eudaimonia in *Nicomachean Ethics* I: Reconsidering the Intellectualist Interpretation', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988), 175–94, pp. 180–2.

¹⁶ Kenny (1977), pp. 27, 30–1.

¹⁷ Kraut tries to rescue the intellectualist interpretation by modifying (F). He denies that the I 7 peculiarity criterion implies that the happy life is a distinctively human life: 'Aristotle is not saying that our function must consist in some activity that distinguishes us from *all* other living beings. Rather, it consists in what sets us off from all lower form of life, i.e. animals and plants... In *Topics* I 5 Aristotle distinguishes two ways in which a property can be peculiar to a group: absolutely (*haplos*), or relatively, i.e. with respect to something (*pros ti*)... We cannot simply assume that Aristotle has absolute peculiarity in mind. For he nowhere says that whenever *idion* is unaccompanied by either *haplos* or *pros ti*, the former must be supplied. We must let the context decide' (R. Kraut, 'The Peculiar Function of Human Beings', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 9 (1979), 467–78, pp. 474–5). I must disagree. If Aristotle wanted the reader to take *idion* as relative to something, then he would have specified which something. Since he did not do so, we must take *idion* in an absolute sense.

¹⁸ An exception may be G. Anagnostopoulos, 'Aristotle on Function and the Attributive Nature of the Good', *The Greeks and the Good Life*, ed. D. Depew (Indianapolis, 1980), 91–137, pp. 109–11.

being simply is his or her *nous*.¹⁹ These interpreters might claim that Aristotle shifts from a general or an inclusivist view of happiness in I 7 to an intellectualist view of happiness in X 6–8 not because he abandons the I 7 peculiarity criterion, but rather because he retains the (CA) version of the peculiarity criterion while changing his view of human nature. If a person is his or her *nous*, then contemplation exercises the only essential human ability.

But there are serious objections to the claim that in X 6–8 Aristotle switches to the view that a human being simply is his or her *nous*. First, as Devereux notes, ‘Aristotle’s very tentative suggestion that the individual might be identical with his intellect [1178a2] is effectively canceled a few lines later’²⁰ when Aristotle says that ‘intellect more than anything else (*malista*) is man’ (1178a7). Second, there are several other passages in X 6–8 in which Aristotle implies that a human is not merely his or her *nous* (1177b26–9, 1178b5–7, b33–5). Third, the claim that Aristotle switches his view is based on a passage (1177b33–1178a7) in which he equates the person with his or her ‘authoritative part’. Elsewhere Aristotle explains that a person is his or her authoritative part in the same way that a city is its authoritative part (1168b31–3, cf. 1166a10–23). But a city is its authoritative part only figuratively.

Moreover, an interpretation which makes Aristotle consistent with respect to the peculiarity criterion, but inconsistent with respect to human nature is certainly no improvement over my claim that Aristotle is inconsistent with respect to the peculiarity criterion, but consistent with respect to human nature.

Thus, on the general, inclusivist, and intellectualist versions of interpretations (F) and (CA) of the I 7 peculiarity criterion, Aristotle never mentions or uses the peculiarity criterion in X 6–8. In particular, he does not infer that happiness is compound or that happiness is contemplation from the thesis that happiness is peculiar. In fact, he argues that happiness is not compound. And he argues that happiness is contemplation on the grounds that it is *not* peculiar to man, but shared with God.

Excellence

Of course, in both I 7 and X 6–8 Aristotle says that happiness is an excellent type of activity. But this statement means different things in these different contexts.

In I 7 he first finds the human *ergon*, and then specifies that happiness is the human *ergon* performed well. Here the excellence criterion has to do with degrees of excellence of a certain type of activity.

(h) [I]f we say a so-and-so and a good so-and-so have a function which is the same in kind ... (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well) ... and we state the function of man to be ... activity or actions of soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these ... (1098a8–15)

The idea is that for each type of activity there is a standard of performance which one uses to evaluate different versions of that type of activity. So in I 7 when Aristotle says that happiness is excellent, he means that it is an excellent (rather than mediocre or poor) performance of a certain already determined type of activity. The excellence criterion in I 7 is actually the standard for evaluation of rational activity.

In X 6–8, however, Aristotle does not first determine what the human *ergon* is and then specify that happiness is the excellent performance of that type of activity. He

¹⁹ Cooper (1975), pp. 174–6; R. Sullivan, ‘Some Suggestions for Interpreting *Eth. Nic.* 10.7–8’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1977), 129–38, pp. 133–6; White, p. 240.

²⁰ Devereux, p. 259; Keyt, p. 379.

begins X 7 with the assertion that happiness is an excellent type of activity, indeed the best type of activity, and goes on to argue that happiness must be contemplation because, for various different reasons, contemplation is the best type of activity. Aristotle is not trying to determine which version of a certain type of activity is best. He is, instead, trying to choose the best type of activity from among a variety of different activities. The excellence criterion in X 6–8 is not the standard for evaluation of some already determined type of activity. It is, instead, a collection of reasons for ranking one type of activity above others.

Best and most complete

In a notorious passage at the end of the *ergon* argument Aristotle says,

(i) [H]uman good turns out to be activity of the soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete. (1098a16–18)

Inclusivist interpreters take this passage to be merely a restatement of the completeness criterion. They read passage (i) in the light of passage (d). Ackrill observes that Aristotle uses the phrase ‘most complete good’ in passage (d) to refer to a good which is complete without qualification. Ackrill argues that a good which is complete without qualification must be a comprehensive good which includes several individual goods. By analogy, the phrase ‘most complete excellence’ must refer to a comprehensive excellence which includes several individual excellences.²¹

But Aristotle cannot mean this. On the inclusivist interpretation he is committed to the plurality of excellences, but in passage (i) he expresses uncertainty about whether there is one or more than one excellence. Moreover, the contested phrase is not just ‘most complete’, but rather ‘best and most complete’. As Devereux says, ‘The use of “best” implies that we should rank the virtues and single out the one which is first or highest.’²²

Anyhow, I have already shown that the I 7 completeness criterion is not the X 6–8 completeness criterion. So if passage (i) merely restates the I 7 completeness criterion and does not introduce a new criterion, then it poses no threat to my main thesis that the criteria Aristotle uses in X 6–8 are very different from those he lays down in I 7.

The intellectualists pose a more serious challenge. They take passage (i) to be introducing a new ‘best and most complete’ criterion, different from the preceding four criteria, which reemerges in X 6–8 when Aristotle says

(j) If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us. (1177a12–13)

²¹ Ackrill, pp. 27–8. See also Keyt, pp. 366–7; Nussbaum, p. 376; Roche, pp. 178–84; Whiting (1986), p. 77 n. 20.

²² Devereux, p. 253. Cooper draws a different conclusion. He says, ‘Aristotle says quite plainly (1097a30–4) that the predicate “most complete” means chosen always for itself alone and never for the sake of anything else. The most complete virtue will therefore be the virtue that is chosen always for itself alone and never for the sake of anything else. And... Aristotle does precisely argue at some length (1177b1–4, 12–18) that the single virtue of philosophical wisdom is chosen for its own sake alone and not, like the practical virtues, chosen also for further goods it brings us’ (Cooper (1987), pp. 199–200). Now at 1177b1–4 and 1177b12–18 Aristotle argues that *contemplation* is chosen always for itself alone and never for the sake of anything else. But he does not say that the excellence of philosophical wisdom has this property. Indeed just after he defines ‘most complete good’ in I 7 and only a page before he uses the phrase ‘most complete excellence’ he says, ‘[H]onour, pleasure, reason (*nous*), and every excellence we choose indeed for themselves... but we choose them also for the sake of happiness’ (1097b2–4). Therefore, the phrase ‘most complete excellence’ cannot mean ‘the excellence chosen always for itself alone and never for the sake of anything else’ as Cooper suggests, for there is no such excellence.

In both passages Aristotle is saying that happiness is the best one of a variety of different types of activity.

There are several problems with the intellectualist interpretation of passage (i), however. On the intellectualist interpretation the 'best and most complete' criterion does not follow from the *ergon* argument, but is just awkwardly tacked on to the *ergon* argument's conclusion.²³ Moreover, the phrase 'best and most complete' is cryptic. Aristotle makes us wait hundreds of pages before he tells us how to go about determining what satisfies the new criterion.²⁴ In I 7 he says that happiness is the best excellent activity, but gives no account of how to separate the best from the rest until passage (j) in X 7.

The similarities in language and content between passages (i) and (j) are not overwhelming. Notice, for example, that the crucial phrase in (i), 'best and most complete', does not appear in (j). In (i) happiness is the best and most complete excellence while in (j) happiness is simply the highest (*kratistēn*) excellence. I shall argue that these passages have very little to do with each other. The attempt to read them together distorts their meaning. In particular, it is not the case that passage (i) lays down a criterion of happiness which passage (j) picks up and uses.

Cooper calls passage (j) a curious and unargued for assertion; Moline calls it a fallacious argument.²⁵ A more charitable interpretation can be obtained by combining passage (j) with the somewhat neglected passage which comes shortly before it.

(k) And we say that serious things are better than laughable things and those connected with amusement, and that the activity of the better of any two things ... is the better; but the activity of the better is *ipso facto* superior and more of the nature of happiness. (1177a3–6)

I propose the following analysis of the argument in passage (k). (1) Serious things are better than things connected with amusement. (2) The activity associated with the better of two things is the better activity. (3) (from 1 & 2) Therefore, the activity associated with serious things (excellent activity) is better than the activity associated with things connected with amusement (non-excellent activity). (4) The better of two activities is more of the nature of happiness. (5) (from 3 & 4) The activity associated with serious things (excellent activity) is more of the nature of happiness than the activity connected with amusement (non-excellent activity).

Passage (j) becomes clearer when viewed as a continuation of passage (k). The argument in passage (j) is as follows. (6) The best thing in us (the highest excellence) is, of course, better than anything else in us (including other excellences). (7) (from 2 & 6) Therefore, activity in accordance with the highest excellence is better than activity in accordance with any other excellence. (8) (from 4 & 7) Activity in accordance with the highest excellence is more of the nature of happiness than activity in accordance with any other excellence.

Notice that (2) and (4) are the general principles which underlie not only the claim that happiness is an excellent activity in passage (k), but also the claim that happiness is the highest excellent activity in passage (j). When serious things are compared with things connected with amusement, principle (2) says that the activity associated with serious things is better than the activity associated with things connected with amusement, and when the highest excellence is compared with other excellences,

²³ Ackrill, pp. 27–8; Heinaman, p. 37.

²⁴ Clark p. 156; Cooper, (1975), pp. 99–101; Devereux, pp. 251–3; T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 105–7; Hardie, p. 301; Kenny (1978), pp. 203–6.

²⁵ Cooper (1975), p. 156; Moline, p. 40.

principle (2) says that the activity associated with the highest excellence is better than the activity associated with other excellences. Similarly, when excellent and non-excellent activity are compared, principle (4) says the excellent activity is more of the nature of happiness, and when the highest excellent activity is compared with other excellent activity, principle (4) says the highest excellent activity is more of the nature of happiness. Now principles (2) and (4) may be dubious, but on my interpretation passage (j) is not an unargued for assertion or fallacious. Thus, the way to understand passage (j) is to read it as a continuation of the argument in passage (k) rather than as picking up a criterion laid down in passage (i).

Let us turn to passage (i). My somewhat heretical suggestion is that passage (i) does not present a new 'best and most complete' criterion at all. Instead 'best' refers to the self-sufficiency criterion and 'most complete' refers to the completeness criterion. The best excellence is the one associated with the self-sufficient good. And the most complete excellence is the one associated with the good which is complete without qualification. Of course, the self-sufficient good and the good which is complete without qualification are the same (1097b20), so there is a single excellence which is best and also most complete. Thus, on my interpretation what is happening in passage (i) is this. Aristotle has already determined that happiness is an excellent, rational activity. Now he uses the criteria of self-sufficiency and completeness introduced earlier in I 7 to do the final winnowing.

Admittedly, my interpretation would be cleaner if Aristotle had said that happiness is the best and most complete *end* or *good* rather than the activity in conformity with the best and most complete *excellence*. But the competing interpretations are also not free from drawbacks. Intellectualists and inclusivists have advanced various telling arguments against each other's interpretations of passage (i) which I shall not recapitulate. I shall merely mention several advantages of my interpretation. First, on my interpretation Aristotle is not presenting the reader with a new, cryptic and unargued for criterion, but rather he is applying the results achieved in the first part of I 7. Second, on my interpretation neither 'best' nor 'complete' is ignored, but rather both terms play a role. Third, on both the intellectualist and inclusivist interpretations the criteria of self-sufficiency and completeness seem superfluous, for the *ergon* argument, by itself, determines what happiness is. But on my interpretation the criteria of self-sufficiency and completeness combine with the criteria of peculiarity and excellence to determine what happiness is. Fourth, the structure of I 7 provides some evidence for the interpretation. In the first part of I 7 Aristotle lays out the self-sufficiency and completeness criteria using the terms 'most desirable' (1097b16–17)²⁶ and 'most complete' (1097a28–30). Then, after the *ergon* argument, he presents a sketch of happiness which includes the phrase 'best and most complete [excellence]'. The intellectualist and inclusivist interpretations miss the parallel to the self-sufficiency criterion, and they miss or botch the parallel to the completeness criterion. But on my interpretation I 7 gains coherence.

If my interpretations of passages (i) and (j) are correct, then it is clear that, despite superficial similarities of language, the two passages are making very different points. In particular, passage (j) does not mention or use a 'best and most complete' criterion allegedly found in passage (i) but relies on the internal logic of X 6–8.

²⁶ The parallel would have been perfect if Aristotle had used the term 'best', but 'most desirable' is pretty close.

CONCLUSION

I have shown that the criteria Aristotle uses in X 6–8 are very different from those he lays out in I 7. Once the relevant passages are laid side by side, the difference between the self-sufficiency criteria is obvious. The X 6–8 completeness criterion is not explicitly stated, but its use shows that it is more complex than the I 7 criterion. The I 7 peculiarity and excellence criteria do not appear in X 6–8. And there is no ‘best and most complete’ criterion in either passage.

Recognition that the I 7 and the X 6–8 criteria are different should reshape the debate over Aristotle’s conception of the supremely happy life by undermining various presently popular lines of argument. In addition, the difference between the I 7 and the X 6–8 criteria lends support to the thesis that X 6–8 is a reconsideration rather than a mere continuation of book I’s investigation of happiness. As usual, however, the evidence is not conclusive.

Texas Tech University

HOWARD J. CURZER