

**WISHING FOR FORTUNE, CHOOSING ACTIVITY:
ARISTOTLE ON EXTERNAL GOODS AND HAPPINESS**

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I. Introduction

In Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*),¹ Aristotle seeks to identify the human good, which he also calls *eudaimonia*² or happiness (I 4, 1095a14-20) and which he explains as that for the sake of which one should do everything one does (I 7, 1097a22-24 and 1097a25-b21). After introducing the idea (in chapters one through three) and surveying some received accounts of it (in chapters four through six), he seems to give his definition in the seventh chapter, where he appeals to the human function and concludes that "the human good is activity of the [rational] soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are multiple virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue" (I 7, 1098a16-18).³ This account is sketchy, as Aristotle admits (I 7, 1098a20-22): he needs to say what virtuous activity is, how many virtues there are, and whether some one virtue is best and most complete. But the account has enough content to suit Aristotle's initial purposes (I 7, 1098a22-b8) and to court interpretive controversy.

Perhaps the most obvious controversy is this: Does Aristotle really mean that the human good is just virtuous rational activity? Are health and wealth, not to mention friends and lovers, *not* part of the goal for the sake of which one should do everything one does? Many readers think that Aristotle does not intend such a narrow account. Some point to what he says about happiness before he comes to the human function argument, or to what he says about the good

human life outside of Book One in, say, his discussion of friendship. But others point to what he says about happiness in Book One *after* he produces his apparently narrow definition. In *EN I 8-12*, Aristotle tests his account against what is commonly said about happiness, and he affirms that goods external to the soul—"external goods"⁴—are necessary for happiness. Some readers insist that in these chapters he also expands his definition of happiness to include the external goods.

In this essay, I tackle just this last part of the question: my exegetical thesis is that Aristotle sticks by his narrow account of happiness from its introduction in *EN I 7* through the rest of Book One. What I propose to show is restricted: I leave aside concerns from Book One that precede the function argument and those from outside Book One.⁵ Moreover, what I propose to show is unoriginal: the debate over Aristotle's definition of the human good is well established, and others have supported the claim that he sticks to a narrow definition of happiness as virtuous rational activity.

But I do have three exotic fish to fry. First, I support my exegetical thesis by providing a map of *EN I 8-12* as a whole. The thorny and much-discussed passages that directly pertain to the relation between external goods and Aristotle's account of happiness are contestable, but I argue that the transitions throughout *EN I 8-12* make Aristotle's intentions plain. Second, to uphold my exegetical thesis, I maintain that in *EN I 8-12* Aristotle claims that external goods are necessary for happiness only because they are necessary for virtuous rational activity, and to defend this, in turn, I offer a new account of why he thinks that external goods are necessary for virtuous rational activity. My account innovates by attributing to Aristotle the view (roughly) that virtuous people have a psychological need for certain external goods. Third, I develop my account in terms of Aristotle's distinction between wish and choice. On my view, he wants us to

choose activity while we merely *wish for* good fortune and the external goods that good fortune brings. But as I shall argue, Aristotle also believes, first, that choosing virtuously requires wishing for external goods that cannot be chosen, because virtue is partly constituted by the correct appreciation of value, and second, that our capacity to choose virtuously is diminished when we do not get what we wish for. These previously unacknowledged claims about the relation between wish and choice help to explain why Aristotle believes that external goods are necessary for virtuous activity and thereby happiness.⁶ They also seem to me both striking and quite possibly true. My primary purpose here is to bring them to light.

II. "In a complete life" (*EN I 7, 1098a18-20*)

I start, though, with my exegetical thesis. I maintain that Aristotle sticks by his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity after he introduces it in *EN I 7*. There is a challenge to this thesis even before *EN I 8-12*. Upon completing his function argument and concluding that happiness is virtuous activity, Aristotle immediately adds, "And in a complete life" (*EN I 7, 1098a18-20*). It is possible to hear in these words a reference to the need for external goods in addition to virtuous activity, and thus to hear in them an emendation of the narrow account of happiness.⁷ Thus, before I turn to *EN I 8-12*, I must counter this possibility and show that *EN I 7* concludes with the narrow definition intact.

This I will let Aristotle do, for he explains what his appendix means. He says, "And in a complete life, *for* one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day, and in this way neither one day nor a short time makes a man blessed and happy" (*EN I 7, 1098a18-20*, emphasis added). Aristotle's point concerns *time*.⁸

There is good reason for Aristotle to be making a chronological point. Once one realizes that happiness just *is* virtuous activity, one might wonder, "Can I wholly instantiate happiness in one burst of virtuous activity?" To answer this question, Aristotle clarifies that happiness is only partly instantiated by a day's worth of virtuous activity.

This might seem too obvious to be Aristotle's point: surely it is obvious that the pursuit of happiness is a lifelong project, that happiness is wholly instantiated only by a lifetime of virtuous activity. In fact, it is not obvious, and Aristotle should have said more about it than he does. First, there is room for confusion about what constitutes a "complete life" of virtuous activity: is it a completed lifetime or some shorter span?⁹ But second, and more importantly, some Greeks, including Stoics, Epicureans, and quite possibly some of Aristotle's contemporaries, thought that happiness *is* wholly realized by a short period of virtuous activity.¹⁰ These philosophers might have wanted to see an argument. Still, what Aristotle might have argued is a topic of another paper. For my purposes here, it is enough to see that Aristotle's insistence on "a complete life" concerns time and not external goods.¹¹

III. A Map of *EN I 8-12*

External goods enter in *EN I 8-12*. Scholars usually turn right to the most relevant passages, but I first want to establish a map of the five chapters. The reason for this is simple. The most relevant passages are particularly thorny, which opens them to multiple interpretations, but the transitions that structure *EN I 8-12* reveal Aristotle's intentions much more straightforwardly. A map of *EN I 8-12* shows that Aristotle means to defend his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity.¹²

At the start of these chapters, Aristotle announces the need to test his account of happiness (*EN* I 8, 1098b9-12): "We must examine happiness not only from my conclusion and premises, but also from the things that are said about it, for all facts harmonize with what is true and the truth quickly conflicts with what is false." So the question is, does Aristotle take himself to confirm or reject his narrow definition of happiness? A glimpse at his next major transition, at the start of chapter thirteen, suggests that Aristotle takes himself to have *confirmed* his definition. For he turns to his next topic by saying, "Since happiness is a kind of activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue, we must inquire about virtue" (*EN* I 13, 1102a5-6).¹³ Now, this appearance could be deceiving; Aristotle's transition at the start of chapter thirteen might be the telescoped expression of a more complicated truth. But if it were, then we should expect to see very clear indications of that *within* chapters eight through twelve. Let us look.

In chapter eight, Aristotle considers five things said about happiness: that (1) the goods of the soul are more properly goods than the goods of the body and the goods external to the soul and the body, that (2) the happy man lives well and fares well, and that happiness seems (3a) to some to require virtue, (3b) to others to require pleasure in addition, and (3c) to still others to require external goods, too. He makes quick work of the first two. He explains that the first (*EN* I 8, 1098b12-16) confirms his account, since he locates happiness in actions and activities and thereby among goods of the soul and not among external goods (*EN* I 8, 1098b16-20). This would be especially perverse if he had a broad definition of happiness in mind. Then he asserts that the second point harmonizes with his account or definition (λόγῳ, 1098b20), since his definition practically makes happiness living well and faring well (*EN* I 8, 1098b20-22). So he insists that both of the first two views harmonize with his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity.

Aristotle then works through the next three views more patiently. He introduces them together and concedes some truth to them, but he explicitly backs away from saying that they are unqualifiedly true, asserting that "it is reasonable that none of these people err entirely, but are right in at least one respect or even for the most part" (*EN* I 8, 1098b28-29). Thus, when he considers the view that happiness is a kind of virtue, he draws out its harmony with his definition (*λόγος*, 1098b31), but he also explains how his definition improves on the received view by insisting on virtuous activity and not the mere possession of virtue (*EN* I 8, 1098b30-1099a10). And when he considers the view that happiness requires pleasure, Aristotle argues that each person finds pleasure in what he loves and the virtuous agent loves virtuous activity (*EN* I 8, 1099a7-31). This allows him to conclude that pleasure "belongs to the best activities, and these, or the single best of these, is what we said happiness is" (*EN* I 8, 1099a29-31). He argues, in other words, that both the third and fourth views harmonize with the narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity. The fifth view—that happiness needs external goods—brings us to one of the thorny passages that I am temporarily setting aside. For now, it is enough to say that this passage concerns one of five views that are considered, and the other four are all made to harmonize with the narrow definition of happiness.

Aristotle's clear strategy in treating these four points is also on display in chapter nine, where he considers an old puzzle about the acquisition of happiness: is happiness acquired by practice and effort, by divine providence, or by luck (*EN* I 9, 1099b9-11)? The broad contours of his solution to this puzzle are clear. He rules out the possibility that happiness comes through luck; he insists that it comes through effort; and he allows that the achievement of happiness through effort might *also* be considered providential, although he backs away from a full discussion of this possibility (*EN* I 9, 1099b11-18). For my purposes here, the most important

point is that Aristotle fits his solution to his narrow definition of happiness. After insisting that happiness is not acquired by luck, he notes, "[The solution to the puzzle that] we seek is also perfectly clear from my definition [λόγου], for happiness was said to be a kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (*EN I 9, 1099b25-26*).

Then, in chapter ten, Aristotle tackles a second puzzle. Solon used to say that he would not judge any living person happy, because changes in fortune could render his judgment false (*Herodotus I 30-32*). So Aristotle asks whether we have to wait until a man¹⁴ is dead to declare him happy. His response is complicated.¹⁵ He does not agree that one has to wait until the very end of a person's life (*EN I 10, 1101a14-16*), though he acknowledges that happiness is not entirely impervious to changes in fortune (*EN I 10, 1101a8-13*). To make room for judging a living person happy without courting error, Aristotle insists that happiness is not easily subject to change. As he puts it, "The current puzzle also bears witness to my definition [λόγῳ], for stability belongs to none of the human products in the way that it belongs to virtuous activities" (*EN I 10, 1100b11-13*).

This way of putting the point suggests that Aristotle means again to confirm his narrow account of happiness in chapter ten. Toward the end of the chapter, however, Aristotle puts his point in another way that suggests to some readers a broadened account of happiness.¹⁶ He asks (*EN I 10, 1101a14-16*), "What, then, prevents one from calling happy a man who is active in accordance with complete virtue and is supplied sufficiently with external goods, not for just any length of time but for a complete life?" It is important to keep this question in its context. Aristotle is not seeking a definition of happiness. He is in the middle of testing the old, narrow definition to which he has just referred (λόγῳ, 1100b11), and thus far he has given no explicit indication that this definition is unsatisfactory. More specifically, he is completing his response

to the test posed by the Solonic puzzle concerning whether we can call a person happy when he is alive. Having explained that happiness is especially stable because virtuous activity is especially stable, Aristotle insists that one is justified in calling a living man happy if he acts virtuously and has a sufficient supply of external goods. This does not require that one define happiness in terms of both virtuous activity and external goods. It is equally well explained if one defines happiness as virtuous activity and thinks both that happiness requires a complete life and that virtuous activity requires external goods.

Allow me to explain. If one thinks that virtuous activity requires external goods, it would be redundant to tack the question 'Does he have enough external goods?' onto the question 'Does he act virtuously?' But Aristotle's question demands that one consider whether the man's external goods are sufficient "not for just any length of time, but for a complete life." It is *not* redundant to tack the question 'Does he have enough external goods?' onto the question 'Does he act virtuously?' when one wants to know whether he will continue to act virtuously for a complete life. To know whether a man will continue to act virtuously for a complete life, one needs to know not just whether he is now acting virtuously (which includes consideration of whether he has enough goods to act virtuously now) but also whether he now has sufficient resources to make virtuous activity possible into the indefinite future, all the way to the point of having lived a complete life.¹⁷

So, despite the suggestions of scholars to the contrary, Aristotle's rhetorical question at the end of chapter ten is not in the service of defining happiness, and its answer does not require a broadened definition of happiness. The tenth chapter does indeed carry out the same strategy that we found in the previous two: it tests and confirms the narrow definition of happiness.

Aristotle digresses a bit in chapter eleven to address a puzzle that does not directly challenge his definition of happiness. He does this to pick up some residue of his discussion of the Solonic puzzle. In chapter ten, he had noted that Solon's position might be extended. One might think that one should wait until well after a man's death before saying that he had been happy, since the fortunes of his descendants might matter (*EN I 10, 1100a18-27*). But Aristotle bracketed this extended version of the puzzle by declaring that it would be absurd if one's happiness were to be changed by events after one's death (*EN I 10, 1100a27-29*), though he allowed that it would also be absurd if ancestors were in no way affected by what happens to their ancestors after they themselves had died (*EN I 10, 1100a29-30*). Thus, in chapter eleven, Aristotle returns to the question of what effect posthumous events have. Note, however, that he does not return to the question of whether a man's *happiness* can fluctuate after his death.¹⁸ He has put that suggestion aside as absurd, and he never returns to it. Thus he recognizes no challenge here to his narrow account of happiness. He merely concedes that there are some posthumous effects on a man without admitting that there are posthumous effects on his happiness (*EN I 11, 1101b1-9*).¹⁹

Finally, in chapter twelve, Aristotle returns to testing his narrow account of happiness as virtuous activity. He asks, Is happiness something merely to be praised, or is it something to be honored with *encomia*? He explains that good dispositions and potentialities are fit for praise, but better things are fit to be honored with *encomia*. So virtue is fit to be praised, virtuous activity fit to be honored (*EN I 12, 1101b31-34*). Accordingly, Aristotle's conclusion that happiness should be honored with *encomia* supports his definition of happiness as virtuous activity against those who would identify it with virtue (for whom see *EN I 8, 1098b23-25* and *b30, and 1099b8*).

The consistency of Aristotle's resolve in these chapters is remarkable. He regularly goes out of his way to link the truth in some received view or puzzle to his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity,²⁰ and what is perhaps more impressive, he nowhere makes any explicit declaration that takes back or alters his narrow definition. This strongly supports the natural reading of the words that begin and follow *EN I 8-12*. Aristotle wants to concede the importance of external goods without giving up on his claim that the human good is just virtuous activity. It is time to see whether he can actually do this.

IV. The Central Argument (*EN I 8 1099a31-b8*)

A. Four Inferences

Aristotle's most direct argument concerning the relation between happiness and external goods comes in the thorny passage at the end of chapter eight. He has introduced the ordinary view that happiness requires external goods, and he has conceded some truth to it (*EN I 8, 1098b26-29*). Now he offers his analysis:

[A] Nevertheless, it is apparent that happiness also needs external goods, as we said,²¹ for [B] it is impossible or not easy to do fine actions if one is not equipped. For, on the one hand, [C] many are done by means of friends and wealth and political power as if by tools, and on the other hand, [D] men who lack some things such as good birth, good children, and beauty soiled by blessedness; for [E] the man who is very ugly in appearance or of low birth or solitary and childless is not

entirely happy, and [F] moreover, he would perhaps be even less so if he had thoroughly bad children or friends, or if his children or friends, though good, had died. Thus, as we said, [G] happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition, and that is why [H] some people identify happiness with good fortune, while others identify it with excellence. (*EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8)²²

This passage is so thorny that controversy extends even to its translation. Patience is required.

I start with the explicit logical relations among the claims. In (A), Aristotle announces his thesis that happiness requires external goods. In (B), he introduces a reason for his thesis (*γάρ*, 1099a32): it is impossible or difficult to do virtuous activities without external goods. (Call that inference one.) Then, in (C) and (D), he introduces two explanations (*μὲν γάρ... δέ*, 1998a34 and 1099b2) of why it is impossible or difficult to do virtuous activities without external goods: on the one hand (*μὲν*, 1998a34), some external goods are tools for virtuous activities, and on other hand (*δέ*, 1999b2), some external goods affect our blessedness. (These are inferences two and three.) Finally, in (E) and (F), Aristotle offers reason (*γάρ*, 1099b3) for supposing that external goods affect our blessedness (inference four).²³ In sum, (E) and (F) are reason for (D); (C) and (D) are reasons for (B); and (B) is a reason for (A). Aristotle concludes his discussion by reiterating in (G) that his thesis follows from the whole chain of inferences, and by noting in (H) that the whole chain leads some people to mistaken characterizations of happiness.²⁴

This logical structure is quite clear in Aristotle's Greek, but it is frequently misrepresented in English. In particular, many interpreters construe (D) not as a second reason for (B), but as a second direct reason for (A).²⁵ This matters to my exegetical thesis. If (D) is a

second reason for (B), then Aristotle affirms that (A) external goods are necessary for happiness precisely because (B) they are needed for virtuous activity. But if (D) is a second direct reason for (A), then it would be natural to say that happiness includes both virtuous activity (B) and the external goods that bring blessedness (D).²⁶

As I say, the Greek's logical conjunctions tell in favor of my reading and thereby support my exegetical thesis. But there might be reason to overlook the explicit import of the Greek. First, if there were no good defense of the four inferences that Aristotle explicitly marks, as he marks them, then charity would summon forth a looser construal of his words. Second, Aristotle might offer later textual parallels that require a looser reading of this one. To defend my exegetical thesis, I shall show that these reasons do not hold. In the rest of this section, I defend the plausibility of Aristotle's four inferences, one by one, and in the next section, I consider the two important textual parallels from *EN* I 9-12. Of course, this work will also develop *why* Aristotle thinks that virtuous activity requires external goods, and thus it will introduce the relation between wishing and choosing that I am especially eager to explore.

B. Inference One

Aristotle first infers (A) that happiness needs external goods from the claim (B) that it is difficult or impossible to do virtuous activities without external goods. There is a valid inference in the offing if Aristotle is assuming the narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity:

(Definition) Happiness is virtuous activity.

(B) Virtuous activity needs external goods.

Therefore, (A) Happiness needs external goods.

Unfortunately, this does not exactly capture Aristotle's words. His premise (B) is weaker. He says that virtuous activity is impossible *or not easy* without external goods. This weaker premise can sustain only the weaker conclusion that happiness is impossible *or not easy* without external goods. So either Aristotle is fallaciously inferring a strong conclusion from a weaker premise or his apparently strong conclusion is actually commensurate with his weaker premise.

One does not need much charity to see why the second option provides the better reading. On Aristotle's view, necessity is said in many ways (*Metaphysics* Δ 5), and so, then, is the sentence 'Happiness needs external goods'. In fact, according to one, relaxed way in which one might reasonably say that happiness needs external goods, one means only that happiness is difficult or impossible without external goods. Consider: it is perfectly reasonable to say that a person *needs* a car in order to get to campus even though a person *could* bike or jog the ten miles. In a case like this, one says that a person needs *x* for *y* because we recognize that *y* is impossible or not easy without *x*. Reasonable reflection of this sort secures Aristotle's inference. Now charity can kick in. If Aristotle's inference is valid, as charity demands, then he must mean that happiness needs external goods with a relaxed sense of 'needs'. He must mean, as he very reasonably can, that happiness is impossible or not easy without external goods.

There is a broader lesson here. The meaning of Aristotle's claim that happiness needs external goods is not fixed independently of his development and defense of the claim, and his argument requires that happiness needs external goods only in a relaxed sense of 'needs'.

C. Inference Two

Aristotle next gives his first of two reasons why virtuous activity is "impossible or not easy" without external goods: some external goods are needed as tools for virtuous activity. The Socrates of Plato's *Euthydemus* or some other proto-Stoic could quibble here, for it is surely possible to insist that virtuous activity is whatever activity the virtuous person would do in the circumstances, where the circumstances can be whatever you like. But Aristotle has a different position on virtuous activity, and it makes his second inference perfectly reasonable. On his view, virtuous activity must live up to aristocratic ideals, and for that reason, it needs some of the aristocrat's tools.²⁷

D. Inference Three

The next inference is not so clear. Aristotle introduces external goods that are not instruments for virtuous activity, and he insists that they affect the blessedness of life. This might seem to say that some external goods make a direct contribution to happiness and thus are to be included in the definition of happiness. But according to the logical structure of the passage, the dependence of blessedness on external goods (in [D]) is not a direct reason for supposing that (A) happiness requires external goods. Rather, it is a reason for supposing that (B) virtuous activity needs external goods. Why should that be?

Here is a possibility: (B) virtuous activity needs external goods because (D) blessedness needs external goods, (ii) blessedness is happiness, and (iii) happiness is virtuous activity. But this reading, too, fails to make sense of Aristotle's inferences as he marks them. Aristotle clearly

wants to get from (D) to (B) to (A). This reading, by contrast, gives him (A) already with (D) and (ii); it has no use for (B) at all. In fact, any reading that treats 'blessedness' and 'happiness' as interchangeable will have no need of (B) to get from (D) to (A). Aristotle says that (D) is a reason for (B), which is, in turn, a reason for (A). We should at least try to understand this.

John Cooper provides a better explanation of the move from (D) to (B). He points to a passage in Book Seven where Aristotle says that the lack of external goods impedes virtuous activity (*EN* VII 13, 1153b17-19), and so he attributes to Aristotle some assumptions about the causal necessity of non-instrumental external goods for the capacity to act virtuously.²⁸ This, I think, is along the right track, and what remains is to make sense of the causal mechanism that links non-instrumental external goods and the capacity to act virtuously and to explain why Aristotle puts the point in terms of blessedness.

For Cooper, the causal mechanism is mainly social: the possession of certain non-instrumental external goods confers enhanced social standing and thereby the opportunity to exercise the standard Aristotelian range of excellent actions. According to Aristotle's examples of non-instrumental external goods, our virtuous activity requires that we be well-born, good-looking parents of good children. Cooper explains, "Some external conditions (being good-looking, having good children, coming from a good family), while not used by the virtuous person as means to achieve his purposes (as, e.g., his money or personal influence might be), put him in the position where the options for action that are presented to him by his circumstances allow him to exercise his virtues fully and in ways that one might describe as normal for the virtues" (Cooper 1999, 298-299).

Some critics have flatly rejected Cooper's idea (see, e.g., Botros 1986, 113). Controversy partly focuses on his concrete suggestion that ugly people do not have as many opportunities for

sex and thus are capable of less grand temperance than beautiful people. But this is a needless distraction. Cooper's general position is perfectly plausible, and it does not require that every possible virtuous action (or omission) be straightforwardly dependent upon non-instrumental external goods. It is enough for Cooper to illuminate the ways in which the reach of excellent activities is expanded by the opportunities afforded by good looks, good birth, and good children, for this demonstrates that without these external goods, one would find it more difficult to act in excellent ways. That is already enough, since Aristotle's conclusion, as I argue above, does not insist that external goods are *strictly* necessary for virtuous activity. But in fact, Cooper's general analysis is still more powerful in light of an especially aristocratic conception of virtuous activity. To act as a paradigmatic aristocrat, one must be recognized as a superior, which requires at least nobility if not beauty, and one must extend one's family honor with good children. One who lacks these goods is simply incapable of acting up to the standards of aristocratic excellence, and so, on the aristocratic conception, these external goods are straightforwardly, robustly necessary for virtuous activity.²⁹

But this does not fully explain Aristotle's third inference, for two reasons. First, Cooper's analysis does not explain Aristotle's particular locution that "men who lack some things such as good birth, good children, and beauty soil blessedness" (*EN* I 8, 1099b2-3). It explains neither why the men, and not the lack of non-instrumental external goods *per se*, are somehow responsible for soiling blessedness, nor why the point is expressed in terms of soiled *blessedness*.³⁰ Second, the social mechanism that Cooper highlights does not exhaust Aristotle's reasons why non-instrumental external goods are needed for virtuous activity.

To fill the second gap first: there is also a psychological mechanism. The difficulties posed by lacking what our society esteems lie not merely in the diminished opportunities

afforded us by others, but also in our dashed hopes. At least, this is what Aristotle says in a chapter ten passage that is clearly relevant to the text currently under consideration. He says, "When many great events occur badly, they oppress and spoil blessedness, for they bring pains and impede many activities" (*EN* I 10, 1100b28-30). Cooper's social mechanism might be suggested by the mention of impeded activities, but Aristotle also clearly mentions a role for *pain* (or grief, as we might render λύπη). So according to the passage in chapter ten, there are two ways in which the loss of non-instrumental external goods soils blessedness. What do these ways tell us about the third inference in the chapter eight passage? One way clearly provides support: when the loss of non-instrumental external goods soils blessedness by impeding activities, it is also diminishing virtuous activities. Cooper's social mechanism specifies how this might be so.³¹ But the other way in which chapter ten reports that the loss of non-instrumental external goods soils blessedness also supports the third inference in chapter eight if the pain or grief that soils blessedness also diminishes virtuous activity. This is quite plausible, for pain cuts into the pleasure of acting well. In fact, to the extent that virtuous activity requires taking pleasure in it, pain makes it more difficult to act virtuously, and to the extent that perfectly virtuous activity requires taking wholehearted, pain-free pleasure in it, pain makes perfectly virtuous activity impossible.³² Thus, non-instrumental external goods are psychologically necessary for the capacity to act virtuously, in addition to being socially necessary.³³

To develop the psychological mechanism that Aristotle invokes and to explain his claim that "men who lack" non-instrumental external goods "soil blessedness," I turn to his distinction between "wish" and "choice."³⁴ This might seem odd. Aristotle distinguishes between wish and choice only later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Book III, chapter two, when he is trying to explain what choice is, and he does not explicitly invoke wish at all in Book One. But wish is

surely relevant, because it is the attitude one has toward any good one would like to possess.³⁵

As Aristotle explains in *EN* III 4, the good without qualification is the object without qualification of wish, and what appears good to someone is an object of wish in relation to him.³⁶

So whenever we are talking about goods that one might like to possess, including external goods, we are talking about objects of wish. For example, one can wish for a friendship (*EN* VIII 3, 1156b29-31), and one can wish for one's friend to enjoy a good, just for the sake of one's friend (*EN* VIII 2, 1155b31).³⁷

The distinction between wish and choice suggests, moreover, that some discussions of external goods are about what I call *mere* wish. Here is how Aristotle distinguishes:

But neither is choice wish, though it seems near to wish. For [1] there is no choice of impossible things, and if someone should say that he chose something impossible he would be thought silly; but there is wish <even> for impossible things, e.g., for immortality. And [2] wish can also concern things that could in no way be done by one's own efforts, e.g., that a particular actor or athlete should win in a competition; but no one chooses such things, but only the things that he thinks could come to be by his own efforts. Further, [3] wish is more for the end, choice for what promotes the end;³⁸ for instance, we wish to be healthy, but we choose the things by which we will be healthy, and we wish to be happy and say that we do, but it does not sound right to say that we choose to be happy. For [4], in general, choice seems to concern the things that are in our own power. (*EN* III 2, 1111b19-30)³⁹

I take this last point to sum up Aristotle's contrast: [4] choice concerns only the things in our power but wish ranges more broadly. The first three points spell this out: [1] one can wish for but cannot choose what is impossible; [2] one can wish for but cannot choose what is possible but not under one's control; and [3] one can wish but cannot choose to enjoy the goal of one's endeavors.

The third point calls for a slight digression because it might seem obscure or, worse, a threat to my exegetical thesis.⁴⁰ Aristotle's point is that our activity often aims at a goal whose coming about the activity itself cannot ensure. This can happen in either of two ways. First, I might act so as to bring about a state of affairs even though my activity by itself will not suffice to bring that state of affairs about. For example: I eat well and exercise so that I will continue to enjoy good health, but eating well and exercising cannot ensure that I will be healthy. Alternatively, I might act so as to begin a temporally extended action whose completion my current activity cannot guarantee. For example: I might set words to paper to write a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, but my setting words to paper today cannot ensure that I will write a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴¹ The second kind of case is especially relevant to explaining why happiness cannot be chosen though virtuous activity can be chosen, and Aristotle's insistence that happiness is a *complete life* of virtuous activity is crucial (cf. section II above). When a man acts virtuously for the sake of happiness, he partly instantiates happiness, but he cannot guarantee the full instantiation of happiness because his acting virtuously here and now cannot guarantee a complete life of virtuous activity.

The first two points about what we can wish for but cannot choose—what, as I say, we *merely* wish for—are relevant to the argument at the end of *EN* I 8. To judge by his examples in that argument, Aristotle has objects of mere wish in mind as the non-instrumental external goods

needed for blessedness. Good birth is obviously beyond our power to choose. Physical beauty is also reasonably thought to be beyond our control—there is only so much that exercise, hygiene, cosmetics, and the like can do (cf. *EN* III 5, 1114a23-25). Good children might seem to be a different matter, but there is reason to think that Aristotle would not think so. It is not just that some people are infertile or that death in childhood was a common feature of the ancient world, though these points go some distance toward making good children objects of wish rather than choice. Rather, even when children can be chosen, *good* children cannot. Socrates registers this to query the teachability of virtue: he points out that great Athenians have had ne'er-do-wells for children (*Meno* 92d-95a, *Protagoras* 319e-320b). Aristotle, we can be certain,⁴² knew of Socrates' challenge, and it provides good reason to think of good children as something to be wished for and not chosen.⁴³

Of course, Aristotle need not think that all non-instrumental external goods are objects of mere wish.⁴⁴ It is significant enough if Aristotle does not shy from the fact that some important examples of them are. For if this is so, then even *mere* wishes are relevant to Aristotle's case for claiming that non-instrumental external goods are necessary for virtuous activity. This suggests that what is often called idle wish because it does not give rise to action is not entirely idle, insofar as its satisfaction (or not) affects one's ability to act virtuously.⁴⁵ It also raises questions about why one would not simply jettison one's wishes for objects one cannot choose. I return to these questions in the last section.

The distinction between wish and choice can be used to articulate more fully the mechanisms by which external goods are necessary for virtuous activity. The distinction illuminates the psychological mechanism by highlighting unfulfilled wishes (and, in part, unfulfilled *mere* wishes) as the source of pain and difficulty. It also deepens the account of the

social mechanism by making possible the idea of shared wishes (and even shared *mere* wishes): many of the opportunities for the good-looking well-born who have good children are available because members of society converge in thinking that good looks, good birth, and good children are features of the aristocratic ideal worth wishing for (and even *merely* wishing for).

Indeed, these are just the points that Aristotle could make by saying that men who lack some external goods soil blessedness. On the one hand, Aristotle's odd suggestion that the deprived men (and not the lack of external goods *per se*) are responsible for soiling blessedness is unexplained by Cooper's social mechanism and, in fact, widely ignored by the translators.⁴⁶ But the role of unfulfilled wishes helps to explain Aristotle's meaning by highlighting why he would assign responsibility to men's attitudes or diminished capacities. On the other hand, Cooper's social mechanism does not adequately explain why Aristotle expresses the importance of non-instrumental external goods by saying that "blessedness" is soiled in their absence. But if one has wishes in mind, the reference to "blessedness" suggests the ideal life that is the summation of what can be wished for, and thus offers a way of understanding Aristotle's premise about blessedness without assuming his ultimate conclusion about happiness.

These points deserve more careful consideration. Recall that Aristotle argues that (D) blessedness' need for external goods is a reason why (B) virtuous activity needs external goods, which is a reason why (A) happiness needs external goods. So Aristotle cannot mean by "blessedness" exactly what he means by "happiness" without begging the question. What does he mean by "happiness" in (A)? According to the first inference, he means happiness as he has defined it, the temporally complete life of virtuous activity that is the goal for the sake of which we should do everything we do. What does he mean by "blessedness" in (D)? It must be something different. This much is required by the logic, and suggested by Aristotle's shift in

terms.⁴⁷ It should be something closer to the commonsense view of a happy life, too, because in this passage Aristotle is testing his technically derived definition of happiness against ordinary views. I suggest that the role of wishes offers a helping hand here. I suggest that Aristotle invokes "blessedness" as the ordinarily conceived life that optimally realizes all that one might wish for.⁴⁸

This construal obeys the constraints Aristotle faces: he needs to infer (A) from (B) and (B) from (D) without begging the question, and he needs to test his theoretical account of happiness in (A) against ordinary views about happiness. It also highlights the wishes that help to explain the inferences. Obviously, if blessedness is a life that optimally realizes everything one might wish for, then the lack of some non-instrumental external goods that one might wish for soils blessedness. That is the basic idea of premise (D), though Aristotle recasts the point so as to bring out the role that men's attitudes or capacities play.⁴⁹ By casting the point in this odd way, Aristotle hints at the mechanisms by which the lack of non-instrumental external goods *also* impairs virtuous activity: when I do not enjoy what I wish for, I experience pain, which adversely affects my capacity to act virtuously, and when I do not enjoy what *we* wish for, I experience diminished social opportunities, which adversely affects my capacity to act virtuously. So the role of wishes helps to explain the premise (D), the curious way in which Aristotle states that premise, and the inference from the premise to the claim that virtuous activity needs external goods.

To sum up a long discussion, I want to emphasize three claims about Aristotle's third inference at the end of *EN* I 8. First, Aristotle means to derive from an ordinary notion of happiness some support for his theoretical definition of happiness. This is plain from the logic, which requires that "happiness" in (A) be distinct from "blessedness" in (D), and it is plain from

the general context of the chapter, in which Aristotle is testing his theoretical account against ordinary views of happiness. The distinction between the two conceptions of happiness can be put this way: on Aristotle's theoretical account, the goal of living is not what is ordinarily recognized as happiness but something shown by analysis to be the practical aim that structures and makes possible what is ordinarily recognized as happiness. Second, Aristotle assumes that there are two mechanisms by which non-instrumental external goods are needed for virtuous activity: they are needed for the enhanced social standing that makes possible the full range of virtuous activity, and they are needed for the avoidance of psychological pain that would adversely affect the virtue of one's activity. Third, my first two points can be cast intelligibly in terms of fulfilled and unfulfilled wishes, with even a role for *mere* wishes for things that cannot be chosen. To recast the first point: on the ordinary view, happiness is the optimal fulfillment of wishes, and on Aristotle's view, the practical aim of virtuous activity makes possible the optimal fulfillment of wishes. To recast the second point: Aristotle also recognizes that unfulfilled wishes undermine our capacity for virtuous activity because our failure to enjoy what society wishes for adversely affects our opportunities for virtuous activity and because our failure to enjoy what we wish for adversely our capacity to act with painless excellence.

Recasting Aristotle's argument in terms of wishes is permitted by Aristotle's account of wishing and choosing, though he himself does not do it. There are two reasons to recast the argument: first, to provide a richer explanation of Aristotle's position in *EN* I 8-12, and second, to make more explicit some challenges latent in that position. I pursue the second line in section six. First, there is more work to do to secure the explanation of Aristotle's position in *EN* I 8-12.

E. Inference Four

Thus far, I have tracked three of Aristotle's inferences in *EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8. He argues that happiness needs external goods because virtuous activity needs external goods, and then he argues that virtuous activity needs external goods first because it needs some external goods as instruments and second because it needs other, non-instrumental external goods (some of which are objects of mere wish), for social and psychological reasons. Now he backs up his claim about non-instrumental external goods with a final inference as follows:

...and on the other hand, [D] men who lack some things such as good birth, good children, and beauty soil blessedness; for [E] the man who is very ugly in appearance or of low birth or solitary and childless is not entirely⁵⁰ happy, and [F] he would perhaps be even less so if he had thoroughly bad children or friends, or if his good children or friends had died. (*EN* I 8, 1099b2-6)

Is this final inference intelligible and defensible as Aristotle presents it?

Again, it is tempting to suppose that Aristotle is simply asserting that happiness simply includes the non-instrumental external goods like good looks, good birth, and good children. On the assumption that happiness and blessedness are the same thing, that would make ready sense of the relations among (D), (E), and (F). But as we have seen before, it would also ignore the earlier inferences that Aristotle explicitly marks. According to his logical conjunctions, he is trying to show that non-instrumental external goods are necessary for happiness *because* they are necessary for virtuous activity. That inference would be utterly unnecessary if Aristotle were

assuming that non-instrumental external goods are necessary as constituents of happiness.

Again, we should construe all of Aristotle's inferences as he explicitly marks them, unless we cannot otherwise make sense of them that way.

As it happens, we *can* make sense of the last inference. The last inference's conclusion is the premise of the third inference. As a premise, it is essentially a commonsense thought. How could Aristotle support the essentially commonsense claim that men who lack good looks, good birth, and good children soil blessedness? Essentially, by asking his audience to check their commonsense intuitions. Aristotle does not give *independent* reasons to suppose that the ordinary view of happiness requires non-instrumental external goods. Rather, he calls to mind commonsense intuitions about how good looks, good birth, and good children are fundamental to the ordinary view of the happy life, by suggesting that being ugly, low-born, or childless would make our lives less happy and that being deprived of some external goods by death might ("perhaps," ἴσως) make our lives even worse off. If we assent to these judgments, then we should agree to the more general claim that the lack of non-instrumental external goods soils blessedness.

The fourth inference backs up my analysis of the third inference in two additional ways. First, it is easily recast into the vocabulary of fulfilled and unfulfilled wishes. In these terms, Aristotle is securing the claim that fulfilled wishes are necessary for blessedness as the optimal fulfillment of wishes, and he does this by isolating the significance of some particular unfulfilled wishes. Second, it again demonstrates Aristotle's penchant for expressing an ordinary point in extraordinary ways. In (D), Aristotle describes the importance of non-instrumental external goods in such a way as to highlight the responsibility of men's attitudes and capacities for soiled blessedness. In (E), he expresses the ordinary thought that non-instrumental external goods are

necessary for happiness with an unusual word for 'happy', εὐδαιμονικός, instead of the more common εὐδαίμων. Insofar as εὐδαιμονικός suggests that one "tends to be" or "is likely to be" happy rather than someone who flatly *is* happy, Aristotle's choice might suggest further that the lack of non-instrumental external goods does not necessarily undermine happiness, but only tends to. That would serve his purposes very well, whether it accurately reflects the ordinary view or not.

The fourth inference also finishes off a brilliant argument. Aristotle's initial premises (E) and (F) are commonsense claims that motivate the thought that blessedness or happiness, the ordinarily conceived state in which our wishes are optimally fulfilled, requires external goods such as good birth, good looks, and good children. These are the very claims that *challenge* Aristotle's narrow definition of happiness; they make it seem implausible to say that happiness is merely virtuous activity. Aristotle shows his genius by arguing, through a series of careful inferences, that the ordinary thoughts actually *support* his narrow definition. He is able to do this because the external goods fundamental to the commonsense claims also make a difference to our capacity for virtuous activity, or, as I would like to put it, the fulfillment of the wishes that are fundamental to the commonsense claims also makes a difference to our capacity for virtuous activity.

V. Parallel Texts in *EN I 9-12*

Some readers will no doubt resist my reading of Aristotle's treatment of external goods at the end of *EN I 8*. In spite of the logical structure of that argument and in spite of the intentions that litter the transitions of *EN I 8-12*, they will continue to insist that his distinction between two

kinds of external goods differentiates between those external goods that are tools for virtuous activity and those that are constituents of happiness as Aristotle understands it. For support within *EN I* 8-12, they will point to two texts that parallel the argument at the end of *EN I* 8. So I now consider both of these texts briefly.

The first occurs in chapter nine, where Aristotle is discussing the puzzle about how happiness is acquired. He notes, "Of the remaining goods [viz., the external goods], some belong necessarily [viz., to the happy man], and others are naturally useful and cooperative as tools."⁵¹ This, taken all by itself, might suggest that some external goods are necessary as *constituents* of happiness (cf. Irwin 1985, 95). But the sentence does not occur all by itself. It immediately follows a sentence in which Aristotle repeats his definition of happiness as "a certain sort of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (*EN I* 9, 1099b25-26). So Aristotle should not be taken to deny or alter his definition of happiness by referring to those external goods that belong necessarily to happiness. He can and should be taken to claim that some non-instrumental external goods are necessary conditions of happiness because they are necessary conditions of virtuous activity.

The second parallel passage occurs in chapter ten, where Aristotle is trying to oppose Solon's advice without denying that fortune has an impact on happiness. I have already made use of this passage in part:

When many great events occur well, they will make a life more blessed (for they naturally add adornment, and the use of them comes to be fine and excellent), and conversely when many great events occur badly, they oppress and spoil

blessedness, for they bring pains and impede many activities. (*EN I 10, 1100b25-30*)⁵²

The explanation of good fortune's effects might again be taken to assume that some external goods are parts of happiness independently of virtuous activity. Again, though, the context tells against this reading, for Aristotle is about to say, "If activities are controlling for life, as we said, then none of the blessed could become wretched" (*EN I 10, 1100b33-34*). It is possible to understand this as follows: goods of fortune matter, but in the right circumstances, virtuous activity makes the decisive contribution (see Irwin 1985, 102). But Aristotle does not say that virtuous activity makes the decisive contribution in the right circumstances. He says that activities are controlling on the heels of insisting that virtue shines through in terrible circumstances (*EN I 10, 1100a30-33*), and he reminds us ("as we said") of his earlier discussion of how virtue is controlling.

In the earlier discussion—earlier in the same chapter—Aristotle argues against following a man's fortunes to assess his happiness:

Or is it not at all right to follow his fortunes? For "the well or badly" is not in these things; rather, human life needs them in addition, as we said, and activities in accordance with virtue are controlling for happiness, while opposite activities are controlling for the opposite. (*EN I 10 1100b8-11*)

Here Aristotle clearly refers back again ("as we said"), this time to the passage at the end of chapter eight in which he argues that external goods are necessary for happiness because they are

necessary for virtuous activity. So he is saying that one should look to virtuous activity, and not to the goods of fortune, to determine whether a man is happy. As if his insistence on the narrow definition of happiness were unclear, Aristotle's next point is that "the current puzzle also bears witness to my definition [λόγῳ], for stability belongs to none of the human products in the way that it belongs to virtuous activities" (*EN* I 10, 1100b11-13).

In its context, then, Aristotle's allowance that external goods make a difference to happiness cannot without serious inconsistency say that they make some difference to the final goal independently of their effect on virtuous activity. His allowance can and should be taken in either of two ways. Aristotle might have the ordinary notion of happiness in mind, for that is the idea of a life that optimally fulfills our wishes and such a life requires external goods for reasons independent of their effect on virtuous activity. Alternatively, Aristotle might trust his audience to recall the analysis of external goods he has already given, in chapter eight. If one does this, then one will know that external goods make a difference to the final goal because some of them are tools for virtuous activity, others are crucial to social opportunities for virtuous activity, and all are objects of wish whose absence causes pain and thereby diminishes virtuous activity.⁵³ Either way, there is nothing in chapter ten to require that Aristotle adds external goods to his conception of happiness, and plenty of explicit evidence that he stands by his narrow definition.

Once again, then, Aristotle's point is that although external goods are constituents of happiness as it is ordinarily conceived, they contribute only as necessary conditions for—not as constituents of—the practical goal that makes life worth living. In the terms I used earlier, external goods are part of the blessedness (or happiness) that sums up all our wishes, but not of happiness as Aristotle understands it, for happiness as Aristotle understands it is the more limited

practical goal of any agent who has a chance to enjoy the blessedness that sums up all our wishes.

VI. Wishing Well

This ends the defense of my exegetical thesis. I have argued that Aristotle stands by his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity when he tries to accommodate the ordinary thought that external goods are needed for happiness. On my account, Aristotle's reasoning is readily intelligible in terms of wishes. The ordinary thought rests on an account of wishes in a very straightforward way: we wish for a range of external goods, and if we do not enjoy these goods, then, quite obviously, we fail to live the life of optimally fulfilled wishes. Aristotle wants to accommodate this thought with his narrow account of happiness, and so he explains that when we fail to enjoy the objects of our wishes, our capacity for virtuous activity is diminished, by psychological and social mechanisms. In this way, Aristotle's narrow definition of the human good delivers the same result that ordinary reflection on happiness does, by taking account of the causal significance, both social and psychological, of wishes.

But the reasoning about wishes that I attribute to Aristotle might seem to leave him open to two serious objections, and before I conclude I want to defend the merits of Aristotle's position as I interpret it. To do this, I will state the objections and develop responses that an Aristotelian might give.⁵⁴

One problem with Aristotle's account of wishes—at least as I present it here—is that our wishes range beyond the goal for the sake of which we should do everything that we do. We wish for friendship, wealth, good looks, good children, and the rest, but our goal is simply

virtuous activity. How can this be? If virtuous activity is the goal, we are supposed to do everything for the sake of it. Why, then, would a virtuous person wish for these other goods?⁵⁵ Another problem concerns some of the particular goods that Aristotle identifies as objects of wish. Some of them are objects of *mere* wish; they are beyond our power. Why should these matter at all to a life of virtuous activity? Why should we not change our wishes to lessen the impact of fortune? The two problems are related, and one might capture the underlying worry that they share as follows: on what grounds would Aristotle identifying some wishing as wishing well?

The Stoics provide an excellent counterpoint.⁵⁶ This is perhaps obvious in the case of the second problem. The Stoics think of wish as Aristotle thinks of wish without qualification: wish is reasonable desire for the good.⁵⁷ Moreover, they are restrictive about what things are good: only virtue is, strictly speaking, good. So, for the Stoics, wishes are not risky; any wisher wishes for what cannot be easily lost.⁵⁸ But the Stoics do not think that wishes exhaust our reasonable "pro attitudes." On their account, we can and should recognize other things, like health and wealth, as valuable, and we can and should prefer to have them. But a preference is a weaker attachment than a wish, and it is not subject to the same psychological ramifications or the same social ramifications (should we all decide merely to prefer health and wealth instead of wishing for it).⁵⁹ So although the Stoic agent can share many preferences with the Aristotelian, the Stoic's preferences are mere preferences and not the risky wishes of the Aristotelian. That is one central way in which the Stoic lessens the impact of fortune.

The Stoics also provide a counterpoint to Aristotle on the first problem.⁶⁰ They explain that we have preferences for things other than the good because we naturally develop preferences before we can have any notion of the good. Most of us, unfortunately, also develop preferences

in unnatural ways because we are corrupted by the teachings of our society and by the misleading appearances of things. But were we to ward off corruption and develop our preferences in a purely natural way, we would come to a correct apprehension of the good, and we would see that desire for the good does not *replace* our earlier preferences. The good is rational harmony, in the cosmos as a whole and in the mind of a human sage, and so one who has developed naturally and has apprehended the good desires the rational harmony of her own preferences and commitments as her good. She faces no choice between the good—the rational harmony that is her knowledge and virtue—and her preferences; to seek harmony is to seek to maintain and act on the preferences that are parts of a harmonious set.

Nothing prevents the Aristotelian from adopting the Stoic's response to the first problem. Why do we wish for things other than virtuous activity? We just do. We acquire these wishes in childhood, when we are (hopefully) learning "the that" of virtue before we have any grasp of "the because."⁶¹ Why *should* we wish for things other than virtuous activity? We should not, except insofar as our wishing for them is a necessary constituent of our virtue. Just as a Stoic needs to have certain preferences for certain states of affairs in order to enjoy psychological harmony, so too an Aristotelian needs to have certain wishes for certain goods other than virtuous activity in order to be virtuous. The point here is *not* that the Aristotelian needs certain external goods for virtuous activity and so had better wish for them. Rather, the Aristotelian needs to have certain *attitudes* in order to have the psychological makeup required for virtue because, after all, the virtuous agent has the correct appreciation of what things are valuable.

This is an important point. Much of the scholarly debate over Aristotle on external goods has been predicated on what I call the thesis of independent external value, the claim that at least some external goods have at least some value independent of virtuous activity. Scholars on all

sides agree about the import of this thesis. If there is independent external value, then it seems that it must make an independent contribution to happiness, and if external value makes an independent contribution to happiness, then it cannot be right to say that happiness is simply virtuous activity. So if Aristotle accepts the thesis of independent external value, he must reject the narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity. But this is a mistake. The thesis independent external value is compatible with the narrow definition, because the person who acts solely for the sake of virtuous activity still needs to wish for things that he values independently of virtuous activity in order to be psychologically capable of virtuous activity. I distinguish: there are the wishes—some wishes are necessary for the sake of virtuous activity—and there are the objects of wishes—these objects need not be valued for the sake of virtuous activity.⁶² Indeed, we must wish for some objects for their own sake, independent of our virtuous activity, in order to be virtuous, and we do this even though, as it happens, our wishing for these objects has an effect on our capacity for virtuous activity.

The picture here is of an agent who *wishes* for all sorts of goods for their own sake (and for some goods for instrumental reasons, as well), but who always *chooses* activity. The agent's wishes are complicated, and they include mere wishes. Otherwise, the agent would not be appreciating value correctly; he would not be virtuous. These wishes might suggest to the agent a huge range of possible activities, each for the sake of some object of wish. One of them, for example, might be to bake a cake for a friend, because the agent wishes good things for his friend, just for his friend's sake (see *EN VIII 2*, 1155b31). But the agent *chooses* one action out of the many possible actions by recognizing the right thing to do in his particular circumstances. So he chooses a virtuous action for its own sake, though the action he chooses might be aimed at an object of wish for *its* own sake.⁶³

But what about the second problem facing Aristotle's treatment of wish? How would an Aristotelian justify having *these* wishes for *these* objects? Why should we not simply restrain our wishes, and adopt weaker pro attitudes towards so-called "goods of fortune?" The initial reply might be that the Stoics misrepresent what things are valuable. Physical beauty, say, just is a good, and anyone who does not see that is mistaken. But this reply is unlikely to be persuasive. Is there no account the Aristotelian can give to bolster her claims about what things are to be wished for?

A lazy Aristotelian might try to insist that the Stoic alternative is psychologically impossible and Stoic ethics mere bluff. Such a maneuver is very weak. The presence of any Stoically minded agent threatens it, and any smart fan of Stoicism will concede that the Stoic ideal is difficult. Indeed, to refute the lazy Aristotelian, one could concede that the Stoic ideal is, practically speaking, *impossible* in the current environment, so long as one insisted that reformed institutions could make the ideal possible.⁶⁴

A cleverer Aristotelian might try to meet the challenge meta-philosophically. If philosophical ethics is a search for reflective equilibrium and if our pre-theoretical intuitions strongly take health, wealth, and the rest to be *goods*, then the Aristotelian position is favored. Indeed, some might invoke this sort of commitment to explain Aristotle's actual position: because Aristotle is so keen "to save the appearances" and the appearances take health, wealth, and the rest to be goods, he takes the position he does. But this approach does not bode well for Aristotle, since he strove for equilibrium only in a small, culturally insulated pocket of possibilities. Worse, the meta-philosophical assumptions will get no grip on those who suspect that most people are about as well off in practical knowledge as they are in theoretical

knowledge. Stoics, for example, think that most people are deeply mistaken about what things are good.

I think that the Aristotelian has a better justification available if she simply meets the Stoics head on. The Stoics say that psychological harmony requires having certain preferences. This might seem easy to reject. Multiple sets of preferences could be coherent, and so a coherent psychology does not seem to require any particular preferences. But the Stoics insist that human nature constrains the possibilities: we are naturally such as to have certain preferences. So if you want to know what preferences a person with a coherent psychology must have, you should study human nature and particularly natural human development. The Aristotelian can and should say that the Stoics are wrong about human nature, can and should argue that human nature requires stronger attachments to goods other than virtuous activity.⁶⁵

This response, too, isolates something important about Aristotle's treatment of wish. Many of the external goods that lead people to say that happiness depends in large measure on good fortune are objects of mere wish, not available for choosing. An ethics aimed at action rightly focuses on choosing activities. But Aristotle does not believe that we can surrender our mere wishes, and he recognizes that what we wish for matters for what we can choose. That is, we must wish for certain things as human beings; otherwise, we will not be capable of choosing actions in accordance with human excellence. And as we wish for certain things, we must have our wishes fulfilled; otherwise, our capacity for choosing actions in accordance with human excellence will be diminished, by both a social and a psychological mechanism. We can disagree with both sides of Aristotle's claim, about what wishes are required for a good human life and about the impact of unfulfilled wishes. But the important point is that the disagreement is over broadly empirical questions that cut to the heart of our chances of living well.⁶⁶

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Notes

For providing the initial stimulus to revisit this question and for much discussion, I thank Matthew Cashen. I am also grateful to the audience at the Tenth Annual Conference of Philosophical Collaborations at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale for their feedback to the contrasting interpretations Matthew and I presented there. More recently, I learned much from working through EN I with Matthew, Kevin Kalish, and Clerk Shaw, and I received helpful comments from an audience at Washington University, including especially José Bermúdez, Marilyn Friedman, Bob Lamberton, and Eric Wiland. Finally, for comments on a penultimate draft, I thank Santiago Amaya, Matthew Cashen, Margaret Graver, Casey Perin, and Clerk Shaw; for discussion at and after the BACAP, I thank the audiences at Holy Cross, and especially Christopher Dustin, Wes DeMarco, Joe Lawrence, Michael Pakaluk, Casey Perin, May Sim, and Karsten Stueber; for his commentary, I thank Gary Gurtler; and for additional clarifications, I thank an anonymous referee.

- ¹ Unless otherwise noted, I cite the text of Bywater 1894, and all translations are mine, though I have borrowed freely from the renderings by Ross-Urmson in Barnes 1984, Irwin 1999, and Rowe 2002.
- ² I treat the transliteration of εὐδαιμονία as an English word, and I also occasionally render it 'happiness' or 'flourishing'. All of these should be understood as terms of art for an objectively flourishing human life, which is the universally recognized goal.
- ³ I add the word 'rational' because the context demands it: this is the conclusion of an argument whose premises locate the good of a thing in performing its function well and locate the

function of a human being in the activity of the rational soul (as opposed to the nutritive, sensitive, or locomotive soul).

- ⁴ Throughout, I use the phrase 'external goods' in this broad way, so that it encompasses goods of the body (e.g., health) in addition to goods that are external to both the soul and the body (e.g., wealth). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle more commonly uses the phrase "external goods" in contrast to goods of the body (see esp. I 8, 1098b12-14 and VII 13, 1153b17-18), but he seems to invoke the broader conception in the central passage I will be considering (*EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8), since he there treats "good looks" as an "external good." See also Cooper 1999, 295.
- ⁵ If I am right about the second half of Book One, however, then Aristotle should not, on pain of inconsistency, rule out the narrow definition of happiness before he derives and defends it, and he should not, on pain of inconsistency, take back the narrow definition outside of Book One. I believe, in fact, that he does not, or at least that it is easier to understand the whole of *EN* with the narrow definition intact than it is to force a broad definition on *EN* I 8-12. Obviously, I cannot argue for that in this essay, but there are arguments I find congenial in Kraut 1989, Lawrence 1997, and Lear 2004.
- ⁶ To my knowledge, no one has brought the distinction between choice and wish to bear on the question concerning the relation between external goods and happiness—this includes all the works I cite—but even apart from the appeal to wishing and choosing, my appeal to a psychological mechanism to explain virtuous activity's need for external good goes beyond the existing literature on *EN* I 8-12. It is possible to accept my claim about a psychological

mechanism but reject my development of that claim in terms of Aristotle's distinction between wish and choice.

- ⁷ Cf. Broadie 2002, *ad* 1098a18 and 1099a31-32, and Irwin 1985, 94n9 and 105, for the insistence that a long time is needed to accumulate the resources and skills that virtuous activity requires. This is true enough, but I see no evidence that it is relevant to Aristotle's point here. As I argue in this section, Aristotle needs only to make a simple point about time, and his breezy, quick way suggests that he is only making a simple chronological point.
- ⁸ This is bolstered by later passages in which Aristotle links 'a complete life' to a length of time: see *EN* I 10, 1101a16 ("not for just any length of time but for a complete life [μὴ τὸν τυχόντα χρόνον ἀλλὰ τέλειον βίον]") and *EN* X 7, 1177b25 ("a complete length of life [μῆκος βίου τέλειον]"). I discuss the former passage in section three. Concerning the latter, Gurtler insists in his comments that "the emphasis of the passage remains on the word 'complete'," and he claims that 'a complete life' depends for its meaning on the non-temporal completeness of happiness. I see no indication that Aristotle emphasizes the word 'complete' here—there is no emphasizing particle, for example—and in any case, the word modifies 'length of life' and not 'happiness'. Gurtler's reading depends upon his more general understanding of Book Ten, for which see Gurtler 2003. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to engage Book Ten or Gurtler's reading of it.
- ⁹ If a "complete life" is a completed lifetime, then it would seem that no one can fully instantiate happiness while still alive. This is the Solonic position that Aristotle puzzles over in *EN* I 10, and I discuss it more fully below. For now, notice that Aristotle rejects Solon's view, most clearly when he says that Priam was flourishing until misfortunes rendered him

unhappy (*EN I 9, 1100a5-9*; cf. *I 10, 1101a6-8*). That might be enough to tempt one to conclude that "a complete life" cannot be a temporal notion at all, since it does not refer to a temporally completed lifetime. But this would be overhasty. There is space for a "complete life" to be temporal without referring to a completed lifetime. Note Aristotle's use of the phrase 'complete time' at *I 10, 1101a12-13*, with discussion by Irwin 1985, 105.

- ¹⁰ I switch from the precise 'instantiate' to the vague 'realize' to accommodate the Epicureans, who see happiness (i.e., the absence of physical pain and psychological trouble) as a consequence of virtuous activity. (See Brown 2002.) For the view that happiness does not require a chronologically complete life, see especially Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines* 19-20, and Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis adversus Stoicos* 1061f.
- ¹¹ Those who wish to deny this might refer to *EN I 8, 1099a32* or *EN I 9, 1100a5*. At *EN I 8, 1099a32*, Aristotle introduces his claim that external goods are necessary for happiness with the phrase 'as we said'. Some readers (e.g., Broadie 2002, *ad loc.*) take this to refer to 'in a complete life' in chapter seven. There is no good reason to do this. Earlier in chapter eight, Aristotle records the received view that happiness requires external goods (*EN I 8, 1098b26*), and he insists that there is something right about the received views (*EN I 8, 1098b27-29*). It is quite natural to read 'as we said' at the end of chapter eight as a reminder of this concession. At *EN I 9, 1100a5*, Aristotle uses the phrase 'a complete life', and he might be taken to refer to external goods. But again, there is no good reason to do so. In this passage, Aristotle insists on *both* complete virtue *and* a complete life, and he explains that *both* good fortune *and* a long life are required. These doublets make great sense if good fortune is required for complete virtue and long life is required for a complete life.

- ¹² In this section, I agree with Kraut 1989, esp. 251-266, among others, but my map-making procedure is different. Compare Owen 1970 and Burnyeat 2001.
- ¹³ The phrase 'complete virtue' might well refer to *all* the virtues (Ackrill 1980, 27-29), but I have to set aside the questions about the relation between this and 'the best and most complete virtue', which is sometimes taken to refer to theoretical wisdom, because I set aside questions about Book Ten's account of the human good.
- ¹⁴ To add 'or woman' or to alter the masculine pronoun would misrepresent Aristotle's position, and it is well worth recognizing what Aristotle's position is, warts and all. Cf. Kleingeld 1993.
- ¹⁵ The concluding lines of the chapter provide special complication. After arguing against Solon and capping off his argument with a rhetorical question that insists that nothing prevents us from calling a man happy while he is alive (*EN* I 10, 1101a14-16, discussed below), Aristotle appears in the last lines (*EN* I 10, 1101a16-21) to side with Solon. I assume, with many other scholars, that these concluding lines do not undercut the preceding ones. Divergent strategies to explain this away are offered by Irwin 1985, 106n24, and Broadie 2002, *ad loc.*
- ¹⁶ See Nussbaum 1986, 330, and Cooper 1999, 293.
- ¹⁷ I thank Casey Perin for discussion of this point.
- ¹⁸ This is noted by Kraut 1989, 151, and Scott 2000, 218-220. As Scott says, "There are in fact five separate places where he mentions the possibility of posthumous effects, two in 1.10 and three in 1.11 [1100a18-19 and a29-30; 1101a22-23, b1-2, and b5-6]; in not one of them does he talk of the person's *eudaimonia* as what is affected: where this is specified, it is always

simply the person himself. With ample opportunity to say that *eudaimonia* can be posthumously affected, he pointedly fails to do so" (Scott 2000, 219).

- ¹⁹ But, *how*, we might ask, can posthumous events affect one if they do not affect one's happiness? Aristotle does not say, because it is enough for his purposes in *EN* I 11 to be concessive toward the received view without giving up his narrow account of happiness. But Scott (2000) provides an excellent reckoning of what Aristotle could say. The distinction between production and activity (ποίησις and πράξις) is crucial. A man's activities include productive undertakings aimed at goals such as the good of his children and friends, and the success of these efforts (as productive undertakings) is affected by the way his children and friends fare after his death (even though the success of these same efforts as virtuous activities is not). To illuminate this with an obvious case of production, consider an architect (call him "Frank Lloyd Wright") who produces (i.e., designs and engineers) a striking building ("Fallingwater"). If, after the architect's demise, the building started showing signs of significant structural instability at a young age, should this not affect our judgment about the architect, even if we continue to think that his actions in producing Fallingwater were the right actions at the right time, etc.? Scott does not note that the productive goals are objects of wish, whereas the activity itself is chosen, but this additional distinction further cements the Aristotelian bonafides of the account and explains why the ordinary conception of happiness as the optimal fulfillment of every wish might lead one to insist that there can be posthumous effects on happiness (as it did in chapter ten for those who contemplate extending the Solonic puzzle). I say much more below about the wish-choice distinction and

the ordinary conception of happiness (as opposed to Aristotle's account of that for the sake of which we should do everything we do).

- ²⁰ See especially λόγος at *ENI* 8, 1098b20 and 1098b31; *ENI* 9, 1099b25; and *ENI* 10, 1100b11; but also *ENI* 8, 1099a29-31, and *ENI* 10, 1100a13-14.
- ²¹ Earlier in chapter eight, at 1098b26-29, where he introduced this claim and affirmed that it is at least partly true. Some (e.g., Broadie 2002, *ad* 1099a31-32) take him to be referring back to a claim in chapter seven, at 1098a18-20, but I argued against that reading above, in section two.
- ²² [A] φαίνεται δ' ὅμως καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀγαθῶν προσδεομένη, καθάπερ εἶπομεν· [B] ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τὰ καλὰ πράττειν ἀχωρήγητον ὄντα. [C] πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ πράττεται, καθάπερ δι' ὀργάνων, διὰ φίλων καὶ πλούτου καὶ πολιτικῆς δυνάμεως· [D] ἐνίων δὲ τητῶμενοι ῥυπαίνουσι τὸ μακάριον, οἷον εὐγενείας εὐτεκνίας κάλλους· [E] οὐ πάνυ γὰρ εὐδαιμονικὸς ὁ τὴν ἰδέαν παναίσχης ἢ δυσγενῆς ἢ μονώτης καὶ ἄτεκνος. [F] ἔτι δ' ἴσως ἦπτον, εἴ τω πάγκακοι παῖδες εἶεν ἢ φίλοι, ἢ ἀγαθοὶ ὄντες τεθνᾶσιν. [G] καθάπερ οὖν εἶπομεν, ἔοικε προσδεῖσθαι καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης εὐημερίας· [H] ὅθεν εἰς ταῦτὸ τάπτουσι ἔνιοι τὴν εὐτυχίαν τῇ εὐδαιμονίᾳ, ἕτεροι δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν.
- ²³ I take (F) to reinforce (E)'s support for (D) rather than providing independent reason for (D); on my view, (E) and (F) together ground one inference instead of constituting grounds for two separate inferences. Aristotle uses the word ἔτι to introduce (F)—I clumsily over-translate here as "moreover"—and this transition might have ushered in a completely distinct reason for (D). But ἔτι does not have to introduce a completely distinct reason for (D); Aristotle is very fond of using the word to mark any transition to another in a list of points

(almost as though it were a bullet point). My justification for treating (F) as mere support for (E) comes in my discussion of inference four, below.

²⁴ It would be a mistake to suppose that (G) is inferred (οὐν, 1099b6) from (D-E-F) directly and not from the whole chain of (B)-(F). First, (A) is clearly inferred from (B) (and thus ultimately from [B]-[F]), and (A) and (G) are identical. (We cannot suppose that (D) is *both* a reason for (B) and thus (A) *and* part of an independently sufficient reason (D-E-F) for (G), which is the same as (A): that renders Aristotle's expression quite confused.) Second, the explanation for (H) must be the whole chain of reasoning.

²⁵ See, e.g., Irwin 2005, 95. For the crucial point of my reply, about the μὲν-δέ construction, see Kraut 1989, 254. Broadie 2002, *ad loc.*, notes the construction, but nevertheless construes (D) as a direct reason for (A). This is a mistake unless there is strong independent reason for overlooking Aristotle's chosen construction. After all, if Aristotle meant (D) as an independent reason for (A), then he should have introduced (B) with μὲν γάρ, and not (C). Thanks again to Casey Perin for discussion.

²⁶ This would be natural, because there needs to be some way of explaining why an agent who does everything for the sake of happiness would value the external goods that he needs, and there does not seem to be any such explanation if happiness is merely virtuous activity and some of the external goods he needs are not necessary for virtuous activity. Santiago Amaya and Wes DeMarco have pressed insightful questions at this juncture, worried that I am smuggling in some disputed and un-Aristotelian assumptions about what is to *define* happiness. But the reasoning that I here employ is common among those who think that

Aristotelian happiness is an inclusive end, comprising external goods alongside virtuous activity, and it turns on the nature of practical rationality, not definition.

- ²⁷ For this, see especially Aristotle's accounts of generosity, magnificence, and magnanimity (*EN* IV 1-3). There can be reasonable dispute about how aristocratic Aristotle's conception of the good human life is, but I have no need of settling this question. I do think, however, that those who are embarrassed by Aristotle's class interests should not cite *EN* X 8, 1179a1-5 (as they often do). That passage occurs in a discussion of the philosophical life, and the philosophical life is praised in terms of a more austere conception of self-sufficiency than the conception that recommends the political life. See Brown 2005.
- ²⁸ See Cooper 1999, 297-301, and compare Nussbaum 1986, 328, and Kraut 1989, 254-255. For a different take, see Reeve 1995, 163-164.
- ²⁹ Again, I leave it to others to decide how closely Aristotle's ethics is wed to an aristocratic ideal. If one decides that it is not so closely wed—if one thinks that Aristotle can plausibly show only that non-instrumental external goods make virtuous activity difficult while instrumental external goods are necessary for virtuous activity—then one might be tempted to distribute the disjuncts in his conclusion that "it is impossible or not easy to act virtuously without external goods" (*EN* I 8, 1099a32-33, i.e., (B) above) over the two kinds of goods, the instrumental goods of (C) (impossible) and the non-instrumental goods of (D) (not easy).
- ³⁰ The second of these shortcomings is noted by Irwin 1985, 96n12, but the first is excused by all the main translations (including those by Ross-Urmson in Barnes 1984, Irwin 1999, and Rowe 2002), which ignore the masculine plural pronoun subject and render the clause as though the lack of goods soils blessedness. These translations might capture what Aristotle

means, but they fail to capture what he says, and it is plainly preferable to have an interpretation that takes him to mean what he says. I am grateful to Bob Lamberton and Michael Pakaluk for insisting that I not let this point slide.

³¹ It might be denied that the social mechanism could be meant in the chapter ten passage. That passage asserts that blessedness is spoiled by misfortune in two ways, but it also follows on the heels of the claim that good fortune makes life happier in two ways "for [great events that go well] naturally add adornment, and the use of them comes to be fine and excellent" (*EN* I 10, 1100b26-28). The parallel between 'use of them' and impeded activity suggests that misfortune impedes activity by diminishing one's *tools* and not by diminishing one's social opportunities. This might be right. Everything hangs on how broadly one understands 'use [$\chi\rho\hat{\eta}\sigma\iota\varsigma$]' and, as I show below, on how one understands the talk of happiness and blessedness in the chapter ten passage. I revisit the chapter ten passage in section five, after I have clarified the talk of happiness and blessedness in chapter eight. But I want to record that I need not answer this particular objection. The chapter ten passage is not needed to support the presence of a social mechanism behind the third inference, and the objection does not tell against the use of the chapter ten passage to support the presence of a psychological mechanism behind the third inference.

³² The gist of this point is in the neighborhood—see *EN* I 8, 1099a17-21—but for development, see especially *EN* II 3 and VII 13. Though Aristotle does not claim that virtuous activity is strictly impossible for those in pain, he still sees grounds for preferring virtuous activity done by a pain-free agent to virtuous activity done by a (partly) pained agent, and I see no reason to deny that he would characterize the former as more in accord with the excellence of the

rational part of the soul (i.e., as more virtuous). This characterization is in tension with the ordinary thought that activity is sometimes more virtuous for being done with some struggle, but Aristotle rejects this thought when he distinguishes between temperance and continence and insists that the virtuous person does not struggle to act temperately (in *EN VII*). So the psychological mechanism is like the social mechanism in its effects: the absence of some non-instrumental external goods makes virtuous activity more difficult and diminishes virtuous activity (by eliminating the possibility of some kinds of virtuous activity—social mechanism—or by making the activity less painlessly virtuous—psychological mechanism), and only the absence of very many non-instrumental external goods would so seriously undermine a man's capacity to act virtuously as to destroy his happiness. Again (see note 29), because the psychological mechanism, like the social mechanism, does not show that non-instrumental external goods are strictly necessary for particular virtuous activities, one might be tempted to distribute the disjuncts in his conclusion that "it is impossible or not easy to act virtuously without external goods" (*EN I 8*, 1099a32-33, i.e., (B) above) over the two kinds of goods, the instrumental goods of (C) (impossible) and the non-instrumental goods of (D) (not easy). I thank Clerk Shaw for discussion of the ideas in this note.

³³ Cooper (1999, 297 and 299-300n14) considers and rejects the idea that Aristotle takes non-instrumental external goods to be psychologically necessary for virtuous activity. He reasons that the psychological mechanism would work only if the agent "allows the way things have gone for him actually to affect his character for the worse, but Aristotle clearly has it in mind that the disfigurement should be something that happens although one's character remains intact and unaffected" (Cooper 1999, 299n14). In fact, the evidence supports 'intact' but not

'unaffected'. Cooper cites the example of Priam, who becomes unhappy "though he remains a noble and fine person, and takes what happens to him gracefully and acts nobly and virtuously in the circumstances" (presumably Cooper has 1100b30-33 in mind) because "his activities, or many of them, are ([Aristotle] repeats) 'impeded' (1100b29)" (Cooper 1999, 299n14). There are two problems with this. First, if Priam can continue to act nobly though his opportunities to act virtuously are impeded, then why can he not continue to act nobly though the pain he suffers impedes the virtue of his activities? To handle Aristotle's treatment of Priam, one need only recognize that both the social and the psychological mechanisms can reduce one's capacity for virtuous activity without eliminating it. Second, in the very same breath that Aristotle records that virtuous activities are impeded by many great misfortunes, he says that the misfortunes also bring pains. Cooper simply ignores this evidence of a psychological mechanism. So, too, does Irwin 1985, 96. I want to take this evidence of a psychological effect seriously and bring it to bear on the argument at the end of chapter eight.

³⁴ I use scare quotes because these traditional renderings can be misleading. The words 'choice' and 'wish', henceforth without scare quotes, should be treated as terms of art to be defined in what follows.

³⁵ As an anonymous referee has rightly insisted, there are goods that one might not wish for, for example, gods. Nonetheless, wish is an attitude one takes towards a wide range of goods, including external goods, and so it is relevant to the discussion of external goods in Book One. It might seem disturbing that Aristotle himself does not invoke wishing and choosing to explain his position on external goods. But this is not entirely unusual. Often enough, a

philosopher's work contains significant points of connection that he or she does not make fully explicit, and a historian can illuminate that work by making the points of connection explicit. Compare, for example, Scott (2000)'s appeal to Aristotle's distinction between production and activity (ποίησις and πράξις) to illuminate EN I 11, discussed in note 19 above.

³⁶ *EN* III 4, 1113a22-24. This is a question that I take to be merely rhetorical. By rejecting the two possibilities with which he starts the chapter, he affirms the protasis of the conditional question ("they are not pleasing" [1113a24-25]), and then he uses this rhetorical question to introduce his own position on unqualified wish and qualified wish, a position he discusses throughout the rest of the chapter.

³⁷ I mention these examples to suggest the range of possible objects of Aristotelian wish, and to make it obvious that Aristotle encourages a man to wish for some goods that lie beyond his control. An anonymous referee insists, "Aristotle says explicitly at 5.1 1129b4-6 that people should not wish for goods of fortune." But Aristotle says no such thing. He says that people should not pray for and pursue the things that are good without qualification as if they were good for them. Instead, he says, people should pray that things that are good without qualification be good for them, and they should choose the things that are good for them. Aristotle here notes that unjust people greedily pursue things (e.g., wealth) that are good without qualification even when these things are not good for them. His advice is not to restrict one's wishes, but to restrict one's choices. For all that he says here, the virtuous person continues to wish for wealth and a range of external goods.

- ³⁸ Much dispute has enveloped the interpretation of this requirement that choice be of what promotes the end (πρὸς τὸ τέλος). Some readers have assumed that Aristotle is limiting choice to *instrumental means* that promote the end, but I side the more recent insistence that Aristotle is more generous about what promotes the end, to include at least what is a constituent of the end (cf. *Metaph. Z 7*, 1032b27). Discussion of the earlier, Humean reading and the start of a response can be found in Allan 1953, but see especially Wiggins 1980.
- ³⁹ ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ βούλησις γε, καίπερ σύνεγγυς φαινόμενον· [1] προαίρεσις μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι τῶν ἀδυνάτων, καὶ εἴ τις φαίη προαιρεῖσθαι, δοκοίη ἂν ἡλίθιος εἶναι· βούλησις δ' ἔστι <καὶ> τῶν ἀδυνάτων, οἷον ἀθανασίας. [2] καὶ ἡ μὲν βούλησις ἔστι καὶ περὶ τὰ μηδαμῶς δι' αὐτοῦ πραχθέντα ἂν, οἷον ὑποκριτὴν τινα νικᾶν ἢ ἀθλητὴν· προαιρεῖται δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐδεὶς, ἀλλ' ὅσα οἴεται γενέσθαι ἂν δι' αὐτοῦ. [3] ἔτι δ' ἡ μὲν βούλησις τοῦ τέλους ἔστι μᾶλλον, ἢ δὲ προαίρεσις τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οἷον ὑγιαίνειν βουλόμεθα, προαιρούμεθα δὲ δι' ὧν ὑγιανοῦμεν, καὶ εὐδαιμονεῖν βουλόμεθα μὲν καὶ φαμέν, προαιρούμεθα δὲ λέγειν οὐχ ἀρμόζει· [4] ὅλως γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ προαίρεσις περὶ τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι.
- ⁴⁰ I thank Matthew Cashen for pressing the objection.
- ⁴¹ See Anscombe 1963, §§21-26: sometimes we act for the sake of some state of affairs or some broader action that lies beyond the break that marks the furthest extent of our causal power. See also Thompson forthcoming.
- ⁴² He cites the *Meno* by name in the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* (at II 21, 67a21 and I 1, 71a29, respectively) and surely has it in mind at *Politics* I 13, 1260a30. *EN* VII 2, 1145b23-27 suggests that he has read the *Protagoras*, too. (Why would he not have? Surely not on grounds of insufficient curiosity.)

⁴³ Eric Wiland has raised an important objection: if Aristotle thinks that good children are not objects of choice, then why is he optimistic about habituation? I reply: is he that optimistic about habituation? Habituation is necessary for the development of virtuous activity, but does Aristotle suggest that parental control over habituation is sufficient? His remarks about the importance of laws and social institutions in *EN X 9* might explain why some parents in unfortunate circumstances fail to raise good children while other parents in fortunate circumstances would have cause for optimism.

⁴⁴ Again, I am grateful to a tenacious anonymous referee.

⁴⁵ For idle wish, see Anscombe 1963, §36.

⁴⁶ See above, note 30.

⁴⁷ "Blessedness" is sometimes thought to be a superlative kind of "happiness." This view, which can be extracted from Joachim 1951, 59, where he is discussing the apparent contrast between being happy and being blessed at 1101a6-8, is criticized by Nussbaum 1986, 329-333, who argues that Aristotle uses 'blessed' and 'happy' interchangeably. I take no stand on the lexicographical question. Rather, I maintain that there is a difference for Aristotle between the pre-theoretic notion of a happy or blessed life and his theorized notion of happiness or blessedness as the practical goal that makes a (pre-theoretically) happy or blessed life possible. Let it be the case that Aristotle can and does use 'blessed' and 'happy' to refer to either notion; nonetheless, the two notions are distinct and he might occasionally shift from one word to the other when shifting from one notion to the other. So, in the paragraph presently under examination, Aristotle begins by using the word 'happiness' to refer to his theorized notion and goes on to use the word 'blessedness' to express the pre-

theoretic idea, but once he has shifted to the pre-theoretic notion, he can and does use 'happy' to represent it (see the discussion below, in the next section).

⁴⁸ The anonymous referee rejects this suggestion, in part because he or she does not think that a life of optimally fulfilled wishes is a commonsense view of a happy life. It is true that I use the word 'optimally' to take note of the fact that no life can fulfill *every* wish, which might or might not be a commonsense thought. I am not going to thump the table here about what common sense really says (or said in antiquity). I have no stake in what is or is not commonsensical. I claim only that Aristotle must be putting *some* ordinary notion of a happy life in play in (D), and that he must be putting it in play so as to infer (B) from (D). In light of these claims, I offer what could specify an ordinary notion of happiness in a way that explains Aristotle's inference from (D) to (B). Moreover, I argue below that the fourth inference, from (E) and (F) to (D), gives further support to my specification.

⁴⁹ This should not be surprising. Aristotle's expression is frequently compressed—that is to say, he does not break every possible sequence of thoughts into all its sequential constituents—and he often partly recasts another's point to suit his own purposes—compare, e.g., his use of his own specialized vocabulary to explain the views of Presocratics. Nor should his recasting of (D) obscure two facts: he must mean by "blessedness" something other than his technical notion of happiness as virtuous activity, and he should use 'blessedness' to appeal to an ordinary notion of a happy life.

⁵⁰ The Greek phrase οὐ πάνυ is notoriously ambiguous, sometimes best rendered as "not at all" and sometimes as "not entirely." I opt for the latter in this context only because the former would seem to leave insufficient room for the lower level of unhappiness recorded in (F). I

do not think that anything much hangs on the point, at least for my present purposes. On either reading, everyone can agree that (D) all the special external goods are needed for blessedness, that (E) absence of a special external good decreases one's standing on the scale of happiness, and that (F) real deprivation of a special external good might ("perhaps," ἴσως) decrease one's standing on that scale even further. Of course, the rendering of οὐ πάνυ does matter to the question of how restrictive and aristocratic Aristotle's ideals are.

⁵¹ EN I 9, 1099b27-28: τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖον, τὰ δὲ συνεργὰ καὶ χρήσιμα πέφυκεν ὀργανικῶς.

⁵² τὰ δὲ μεγάλα καὶ πολλὰ γινόμενα μὲν εὖ μακαριώτερον τὸν βίον ποιήσει (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὰ συνεπικοσμεῖν πέφυκεν. καὶ ἡ χρῆσις αὐτῶν καλὴ καὶ σπουδαία γίνεται). ἀνάπαλιν δὲ συμβαίνοντα θλίβει καὶ λυμαίνεται τὸ μακάριον· λύπας τε γὰρ ἐπιφέρει καὶ ἐμποδίζει πολλαῖς ἐνεργείαις.

⁵³ It is unimportant to me which of these two explanations is better, and reasonable people could easily disagree. For the record, though, I believe that Aristotle deals in ordinary ideas throughout *EN I 10*, 1100b22-1101a13. Note "it is clear that" (1100b24) and "we think" (1101a1). Note, too, that he does not draw on his theoretical claims except when he refers (at 1100b34-35) back to *EN I 10*, 1100b8-11, where in turn he refers back to the argument in chapter eight. These references should remind us that Aristotle thinks his theory explains what is true in the ordinary claims he considers. In accord with my judgment about *EN I 10*, 1100b22-1101a13, I incline to think that *EN I 10*, 1100b28-30 does support Cooper's social mechanism, *contra* the objection I mention in note 31.

⁵⁴ I am less concerned at this point with exegesis and more concerned with bare possibilities within the general space of Aristotle's ethics. I do this because I think that Aristotle does not

actually address the problems I pose here, and so there is no direct textual support for any account of his responses. No doubt it is possible to count his silence on these problems against the interpretation I have offered, but I do not much worry about this objection, because it seems to me that Aristotle is far from addressing all the problems that his ethics suggests to us. He is worried about a different audience and a different set of problems.

⁵⁵ See Irwin 1985, 96n12.

⁵⁶ 'The Stoics' names a vast and heterogeneous class of persons, but the sweeping claims I make here are just to motivate some more thinking about Aristotle on wish.

⁵⁷ See Stobaeus II 7.9a 87,21-22 Wachsmuth; Diogenes Laertius VII 116; and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* IV 12. Cicero says in addition that wishes require knowledge and are available only to sages, and Diogenes and others record that wish is a "good feeling" (εὐπάθεια), which only sages can have (see, e.g., Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 1038a). So all non-sages experience only unreasonable desire, which is identified by Diogenes and Cicero as appetite (ἐπιθυμία; *libido*). I speak imprecisely insofar as I suggest that the Stoics could attribute wishes to non-sages.

⁵⁸ According to Diogenes Laertius VII 127, Cleanthes thought that virtue cannot be lost at all, but Chrysippus thought that either drunkenness or mental illness could cause one to lose virtue.

⁵⁹ Not that the social ramifications matter as much to the Stoics: virtuous activity does not require special opportunities or aristocratic standing. For more on the distinction between desires for the good (whether reasonable [wishes] or unreasonable [appetites]) and mere preferences, see Menn 1995, esp. 12-13.

- ⁶⁰ I develop and defend the account in this paragraph at length in chapter three of Brown 2006.
- ⁶¹ See Aristotle, *EN* I 4, 1095b3-8, with discussion by Burnyeat 1980. The point is borrowed Plato's *Republic*: see *Rep* III, 402a1-4, with discussion in Brown 2004.
- ⁶² This is not to deny the points I make above. Given a set of wishes, the objects of those wishes are needed for the sake of virtuous activity, for psychological and social reasons. I am here addressing a different question, trying to explain why the agent does or should wish for things in the first place.
- ⁶³ This might seem puzzling: how can I value some external good for its own sake and also always act virtuously for its own sake? But Aristotle is clearly committed to it, independent of my claims in this paper. For he clearly thinks that I can benefit a friend virtuously, and that if I do this, I must do so by aiming to benefit the friend for her sake *and* by aiming to do a virtuous action for its own sake. I suggest here that the contrast between wishing and choosing might help to show how one action might have two independent aims, each of which is valued for its own sake. But the fundamental point is that action is chosen under a particular description. See Korsgaard 1996, 216: "When we say that the courageous person sacrifices himself in battle for its own sake, we need not be denying that he sacrifices himself for the sake of his country. It is the whole package—the action along with its purpose, sacrificing your life for the sake of your country—that is chosen for its own sake." I again thank Casey Perin for discussion.
- ⁶⁴ This is not a move most Stoics would make, however, as they tend to think that human beings have the resources within them to live well even in deeply unfortunate circumstances.

But the move underwrites much of Plato's *Republic*, and its appeal to the perspective of the statesman is never far from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁶⁵ Aristotle surely does appeal to the idea of human nature frequently, including the notion of a political animal and the schematic thoughts about the function of human beings.

⁶⁶ I say "broadly empirical" to avoid giving the impression that I think the questions are immediately tractable to modern social science. Indeed, what kind of empirical tractability they have is a philosophical puzzle.