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EUDAIMONISM AND EGOCENTRICITY IN ARISTOTLE

A. W. Price

I

It is a familiar fact that Greek moral psychology is typically *eudaimonist*: human actions are taken to be oriented towards, and focused upon, a success in life that is identified with *eudaimonia*, inevitably (if misleadingly) translated as ‘happiness’. It is taken for granted that this *eudaimonia* is the agent’s. Morality enters the picture because most Greek philosophers have a conception of such success that is at least partly moralized: to succeed in life is not simply to achieve whatever one’s goals may happen to be, but to live and act *well*, where this connotes acting at once rationally and virtuously.

Within our present culture, there is less danger than there used to be of respecting this too readily. Rather, we can see that it risks constituting a bad combination of two things already questionable: first, in a phrase of Bernard Williams, ‘lethal high-mindedness’, and secondly egocentricity. It appears that every agent is really oriented, perhaps not consciously, towards a display of his own virtue – as if virtues were assets that lent themselves to conspicuous consumption. One may suppose that a more congenial conception of human ends would be wider and more relaxed: plausibly, these are varied, and not infrequently a goal of one’s actions without forming part of one’s life (as when one donates at a distance to a charity or a political campaign); most often they are not themselves ethical, even if no decent person would wish to achieve them unethically. There are answers to such complaints, I believe; but they require care.

II

Traditionally, *eudaimonia* retained a connection with its etymology: ‘the condition which indicates the goodwill of a supernatural being’.¹ This in turn connected with material prosperity, which in ancient times, with its greater insecurities, was still more subject to good and bad luck than it is now. Often, in poetry and oratory, *eudaimonia* and its cognates precisely connote wealth. Aristotle is not attacking a straw man when he objects, ‘Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else’ (*Nicomachean Ethics* [NE] I.5 1096a6-7).

More securely in human hands, but not those of the agent, was another common specification of *eudaimonia*: honour. Aristotle counts this as pretty well the end of the political life (1095b23), but Herodotus is evidence that its appeal was wider. He has Solon reject the claim by the wealthy Croesus to be the most blest of men on the ground that, the whole of man being chance, no man can be called happy until he is dead (i. 32). He prefers the posthumous claims of two Greeks not exceptionally well off: Tellus of Athens, who left behind prosperous

¹ I quote, and then draw on, K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, Blackwell: 1974), 174.

grandchildren when he died routing the Eleusinians (i. 30), and Cleobis and Bion, who laid down their lives in the temple of Hera at Argos after drawing their mother's waggon there for a festival (i. 31). Striking for us is that Solon presents as the climax the glory they won: the Athenians gave Tellus a public funeral and greatly honoured him, while the Argives set up statues of Cleobis and Bion. Yet Aristotle also rejects this conception of *eudaimonia*, on the ground that honour 'seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honour rather than on him who receives it' (I.5 1095b23-5).

Distrusting traditional conceptions, Aristotle needs rational grounds for advancing his own. He ascribes to *eudaimonia* certain abstract features that constrain acceptable specifications of its content. One of these is 'autarky', or *self-sufficiency*. As we read in Ross's classic translation,

The self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be; and further we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others – if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods; for that which is added becomes an excess of goods, and of goods the greater is always more desirable (NE I.7 1097b14-20).

So translated, the passage glosses the requirement that *eudaimonia* be 'lacking in nothing' as meaning not merely that a life that achieves *eudaimonia* is not needy, i.e. marred by unsatisfied needs, but that no good is to be found outside it. However, this is itself ambiguous. It might mean that no life counts as *eudaimōn* if it could have been improved by adding some extra good. Which would be insane: Stephen Clark nicely mocked that by imagining as the missing good a chocolate cream. Alternatively, it might just mean that any good that a *eudaimōn* life contains counts as falling within its *eudaimonia*. Which would be sane, and indeed itself leave entirely open how good a life has to be to count as *eudaimōn*. (Compare this: that every vote cast for a successful candidate contributes to his election says nothing about how many votes he needs in order to succeed.)

Both these conceptions, sane and insane, take an *all-inclusive* view of the value of *eudaimonia*. They suppose that the *eudaimonia* of a life is a collection of goods, ethical, intellectual, gustatory or whatever. Some of these goods may take on an extra value from the context within which they find themselves: perhaps the enjoyment of a chocolate cream is enhanced if it comes at the end of a healthy meal. Yet many of the goods will have a value independent of context – a value that they bring to, and do not derive from, the life that they help to constitute. But how does this relate to another abstract aspect of *eudaimonia*, that of 'finality' or 'perfection' (*teleios*, I.7 1097a25 ff.)? Aristotle counts *eudaimonia* as 'final without qualification', being 'always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else' (a33-b1). In an influential paper, John Ackrill supposed a perfect fit: valuing an ingredient of *eudaimonia* for the sake of *eudaimonia* is compatible with its being good in itself, for *eudaimonia* is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves.² Now it is certainly possible that some good might be valued *both* for itself, *and* for the sake of a wider whole that it helps to constitute. But it does not follow from its being valued for itself that it is valued for the sake of that wider whole, for this might simply be a ragbag – a collection that adds nothing to the sum of its constituents. Whereas it would seem that, if the good in question is valued for

² 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (California, 1980), 19 of 15-33.

itself, then the collection that contains it is partly valued for its sake. In which case *eudaimonia*, interpreted as such a collection, would *not* count as ‘final without qualification’.

Thus a claim that *eudaimonia* is both a collection of goods, and yet valued only for its own sake, requires a thesis that the values of its parts derive *exclusively* from the value of the whole to which they contribute.³ (They would then possess value only and precisely *qua* parts.) Such a relationship is most plausibly illustrated by an instrumental good such as a tool: a hammer consists of a handle and a head that have a use – and, indeed, are identifiable as such – only when they are so attached together as to form a hammer. And certain works of art may have an analogous unity: a piece of conceptual art may consist of ready-made elements that take on aesthetic value solely in serving to present a single concept. Such, however, is not the conception of inclusivists who suppose that an instance of *eudaimonia* is a whole whose parts include things good in themselves.

To escape from this quandary we need to attend to how Aristotle actually conceives of *eudaimonia*. All men, he says, agree in identifying it with ‘living well and doing well’ (I.4 1095a18-20). Yet that wording is itself polysemous, and permits conflicting specifications such as pleasure, wealth, or honour (a22-3). ‘Do well’, like its Greek equivalent (*euprattein*), is indeterminately active or passive: we talk of ‘winning honour’, and yet (as Aristotle will complain) honour is a good that one man receives from another. As I noted, he intuits that for this reason it is implausible to make *eudaimonia* depend upon honour; but what is his argument? It appears to be one that follows on discussion of finality and self-sufficiency within *NE* I.7. This is the famous so-called *function argument*. In search of distinctive human activity, it identifies the human good, which can only be *eudaimonia*, with ‘activity of soul in accordance with virtue’ (1098a16-17), through a train of reasoning that makes it clear that this virtue governs *rational* behaviour, in a sense of ‘rational’ that may extend to vicious agents but not to non-rational animals. ‘Actions with a *logos*’ (a14) is a phrase that applies to doing things for reasons, whether this be in practical operations, or in theoretical reflection. Now ‘activity in accordance with virtue’ is a variant upon the familiar ‘act well’ that clarifies that what is in question is indeed *activity*. It identifies an abstract value that is achieved when reason operates well. This is *the good of rational activity as such*, which can be realized in very different ways, intellectual or practical, in different contexts. Crucially, this is an *abstraction* that is not to be confused with the various concrete determinations that it takes on from occasion to occasion.

What I take to be Aristotle’s conception has been restated by Anselm Müller:

An overall aim would be one I could not but have ... All my striving would be towards this aim, whatever my particular purpose in a particular action, somewhat as the tendency of a body under the influence of gravitation is towards a state of equilibrium, whatever the direction of its particular movement, and very much as the tendency of someone having a question on his mind is for truth whatever the content of the particular judgement he is about to form ... It would not be up to me not to tend towards this aim; for *any* option I took would already be inspired by *it*.⁴

³ I defended such a view, not wisely but too well, in ‘Aristotle’s Ethical Holism’, *Mind* 89 (1980), 338-52.

⁴ ‘Absolute Requirement: A Central Topic in Wittgenstein’s *Lecture on Ethics*’, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 43 (1989), 236 of 217-48.

Such an aim is a pure object of the will that is constant between different situations of action; in this it differs from ‘any *particular* aim’, which ‘is, so to speak, adulterated by limiting conditions which are not objects of my wanting’ (238). The overall aim is neither contingent upon circumstance, nor optional: ‘It is an aim I do not *set* myself. It is there as soon as I am there; it is as little of my choosing as my existence is; it is somehow set before me’ (ibid.). Yet for better or worse, this orientation is only *somewhat* like the force of gravitation: to achieve its end it is not enough to let oneself go. Whereas ‘the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards’ (II.1 1103a20-1), agents can be habituated to become virtuous or vicious; and it is only virtue that enables an agent to achieve his natural aim.

In Aristotelian terminology, any choice, or chosen action, *ipso facto* aims at *eudaimonia*. *eudaimonia* is *the* good of choice and action upon choice. It is ‘a first principle’ (*archē*), ‘for it is for the sake of this that we do all else that we do’ (I.12 1102a2-3). While all agents pursue this, they conceive of it very variously: everyone equates *eudaimonia* with ‘living well and doing well’ (I.4 1095a18-20), but this gloss is ambiguous between getting what one wants, and acting as one should. Yet Aristotle surmises that all creatures ‘pursue not the pleasure they think or would allege, but the same pleasure; for by nature all things have something divine’ (VII.13 1153b31-2). There is a true and unqualified object of desire that is not itself ambiguous, and constitutes the natural goal even of agents who appear benighted (X.2 1173a4-5). This he identifies with *eudaimonia* as he abstractly conceives of it, which is as *acting well* (*eupragia* or *eupraxia*, Pol. VII.3 1325a22-3, NE I.8 1098b20-22, VI.2 1139b3-4). Acting well is the final end of human action (which subsumes production) and the target of rational desire. So construed (and not, say, as identical to something ‘concrete or easily recognizable’, such as pleasure, wealth, or honour, I.4 1095a22-3), *eudaimonia* isn’t a reason for doing one thing rather than another, since whatever one did would be done for its sake. Analogously, truth isn’t the reason for judging one way rather than another, since whatever one judged one would judge to be true. Yet *eudaimonia* is the inherent goal of action, just as truth is the inherent goal of judgement. Reasons for action are *eudaimonia*-regarding, just as reasons for belief are truth-regarding.

On this interpretation, we can make good sense of the unqualified finality of *eudaimonia*. Take an instance of courage on the field of battle. For all kinds of reasons, it may not count as courage if a soldier stands his ground in the face of the enemy. Yet, in context, it may well be that in standing his ground he acts *bravely*; which guarantees, given the unity of the virtues, that he thereby acts *well*. It makes sense to say that he stands his ground in order to act bravely, and that he acts bravely in order to act well. It would make no sense to say that he acts well in order to act bravely, or that he acts bravely in order to stand his ground. As ends, acting bravely is more final than standing one’s ground (even when this is brave), but only acting well is unqualifiedly final.

We can also make sense of *eudaimonia*’s self-sufficiency – but only if we permit ourselves a variant translation of a crucial sentence (I.7 1097b16-18). Earlier, I cited Ross’s rendering: ‘Further we think it [*eudaimonia*] most desirable of all things, not a thing counted as one good thing among others – if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods.’ On an insane inclusivism, such an addition is impossible since any life that achieves *eudaimonia* is unimprovable. On a sane inclusivism, such an addition involves double counting, since any good that a man enjoys, however trivial it may be, automatically falls within his *eudaimonia* (just supposing that he is *eudaimōn*), and so cannot be added to it. In either case, Aristotle’s train of thought comes out as intelligible, if contorted.

However, the Greek is ambiguous, and may not be counterfactual. The last clause may equally, and more easily, be read as follows: ‘When it is so counted it is clearly made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods.’ This is a simple thought that invites easy illustration: if I accompany my courage by popping a chocolate cream into my mouth, the result is a complex experience that goes towards constituting a totality that – by Aristotle’s simple (too simple?) arithmetic of value – contains just a tiny bit more value than acting well on its own.⁵ Acting well is then self-sufficient in that such additions are not necessary for really worth-while action: acting well, when it is achieved, is not everything – but it is enough.

Of course, there is unfinished business. Aristotle needs to make it plausible that acting well constitutes an unparalleled good that is indeed the richest reward of the ethical life. He will make suggestive appeals to the value of acting *finely* or *nobly* (*kalōs*). One would welcome more than the suggestive – and interpreters have tried to flesh out his meaning in overlapping ways. That one acts bravely in order to act well, and not *vice versa*, mustn’t simply rest upon the relation of the more specific to the more general: it is equally true that one can paint a wall scarlet in order to paint it red, but not paint it red in order to paint it scarlet. It must rather be that, while virtue is displayed in different ways in different contexts, what is best about the exercise of any virtue is that it *exercises virtue*. Aristotle can still allow that not all instances of acting well are equally fine or noble. I may act yet better on one occasion than on another, not because I could have acted better on the second occasion, but because it offered less scope for displaying nobility of character than the first.

On this conception, how does Aristotle stand in relation to the two complaints with which I opened, those of ‘lethal high-mindedness’, and of egocentricity? The second question will occupy us for most of the rest of this paper. A full answer to the first would need to address what I have just admitted to be inchoate, but two things may be said briefly. Relevant to both is that Williams’s complaint was in fact directed not against Aristotle, but against the Stoics – and rightly. First, it is not Aristotle’s belief that one can act well in *any* situation. He discusses this at several points within *NE I* (notably the end of I.8, and I.10). Most memorably, there is this statement in the common books: ‘Those who say that a man who is being broken on the wheel and has suffered terrible calamities is happy if he is a good man are willy-nilly talking nonsense’ (VII.13 1153b19-21). Hence he does not hold that having a good character is a sufficient condition of acting well. If, as on some conceptions, the *moral* is a sphere impervious to luck, we cannot view Aristotelian nobility as a purely moral value. Secondly, *acting finely* is not just an ethical value even in a wider sense. Aristotle thinks that this is also achieved in contemplating truth, and not because that is voluntary (as we would say, subject to the will), but just because it is active (being an exercise of our intellectual powers, *Pol.* VII.3 1325b16-21). Indeed, it is debated whether his high evaluation of theoretical contemplation towards the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not imply that true *eudaimonia* is contemplative, and not practical. There is nothing in the *structure* of Aristotle’s theory to preclude us, if we wished, from proposing aesthetic contemplation as a source of value higher at least than obligations that are practical but mundane. The Stoics, by contrast, in insisting that the human mind is free even when the body not, and in emphasizing the practical value of scientific understanding, gave primacy to moral values in independence of contingent freedoms

⁵ It has to be conceded that Aristotle’s wording (as also at X.2 1172b27-8) is slightly careless: the presence of the chocolate cream does not enhance the value of acting well, to which it is irrelevant; it creates a new complex that contains (minutely) more good than acting well taken by itself.

and resources, and in priority to intellectual achievements. Aristotle's high evaluation of actions that display virtue of character is, by that comparison, modest.

III

And yet Aristotle's eudaimonism may still appear egocentric: an agent's ultimate end is always that *he* act well. How does this relate to the requirement, which Aristotle evidently endorses, that one wish one's friend well *for his own sake* (VIII.2 1155b31)? It is true that wishes can be idle, either contingently (as when one wishes some actor or athlete to win a contest, III.2 1111b23-4, cf. IX.5 1166b34-1167a2), or necessarily (as when one wishes to be immortal, 1111b20-3) – but that is hardly a satisfactory reconciliation. We must rather hope that an agent may *at once* pursue his own good, and his friend's. Yet there must be an inequality of status here; for Aristotle views the agent's *eudaimonia* as a unique goal for him in that it alone is pursued for its own sake, and never for the sake of anything else (I.7 1097a34-b1).

When I first reflected upon this, I tried to make the most of two passages where Aristotle allows some of a friend's actions to count, in a way, as one's own:

- (i) 'Possible acts are those that could come about through ourselves. For things done through our friends are in a way done through us; for the starting-point is in us' (III.3 1112b27-8).
- (ii) 'The blessed man needs such [i.e., good] friends, if he chooses to contemplate acts that are good and his own – as are the acts of a good man who is a friend' (IX.9 1170a2-4).

These passages, taken together, suggested to me the following possibility: one may initiate a friend's action with the intention that it should count simultaneously as *his acting well* and *one's own acting well*. I now think that this confuses contributions that Aristotle lucidly, if not altogether attractively, holds apart: 'It is possible to sacrifice acts to a friend, and for it to be finer to be responsible for a friend's acting than to act oneself. For in all praiseworthy things the good man evidently assigns more of the fine to himself. This is the way in which one ought to love oneself' (IX.8 1169a32-b1). This exploits a distinction of role whereby, of a pair of friends, *A* and *B* say, *A* chooses *not* to act in order to allow *B* an opportunity to act. Here the action of *B* is owed to the inaction of *A*; but we make no sense of the possibility that, in certain contexts, *A*'s inaction may be finer than *B*'s action if we count the action as *both* in action.

A more intelligible reading of such a case, I now think, is the following. Suppose that *A* and *B* are each able to help *C*, who needs the help of one but not of both. Either may then count as generous if he provides help. If *A* abstains from action, this may count as generous if it is in order to allow *B* an opportunity for action for which both *B* and *C* will be grateful. If Aristotle allows us to count the act as 'possible' from *A*'s point of view (1112b27), this is because it is one that *B* can owe to *A*. If he allows us to say that, if *B* performs it, the action is then also *A*'s 'own' (*oikeios*, 1170a3), this may just mean that *B* owes his action to *A*. In such a context, *A* counts as acting well in refraining from an act that *B* counts as acting well in performing. It will depend on such variables as the cost of acting, the pleasure of acting, the credit that *C* and others may attach to the action, whether *A* or *B* counts as the more generous. Aristotle perceives here the happy possibility of an ascending sequence, so long as *C* is glad to be helped, *B* glad to help, and *A* glad to let *B* help: the more benefit *C* gets as recipient of the help, the more pleasure and credit *B* gets out of providing it; and the more *B* gets out of providing it, the more *A* gets out of *not* providing it – so long as this is in order to let *B* act. What *C* gains ethically is indirect: through being helped, we may suppose, he is enabled to help

others in future. Both *A* and *B* gain directly, since each counts as acting well, *A* in abstaining, *B* in acting.

I used to think this self-contradictory, and worse: if it is better of *A* to let *B* act, isn't it equally better of *B* to let *A* let *B* act, and so on through an infinite sequence? We could then take over a complaint that Anselm Müller once made of a different but analogous case: 'One could thus (by using a recursive definition) construct an unending list of incompatible advantages. But unfortunately a theory dies of one single irremediable contradiction.'⁶ However, David Reeve later persuaded me that this is not so: the thought is only that it *may* be finer of *A* to let *B* act. In a case where their situations are symmetrical, so that *A* can let *B* help *C*, or *B* can let *A* help *C*, it should be indifferent how they act. They might spin a coin, or, if the situation recurs, take turns. More uncertain is whether, even without incoherence, Aristotle is guilty of a distortion. One may still share Müller's 'suspicion that my (morally) good conduct has nothing to do with that which is good for me in the sense of "advantageous".'⁷ However, that may be unjust. Aristotle's thought is a relation of Democritus' Maxim, famous in early Plato: it is worse to do wrong than to be wronged, that is, worse *for* the agent, of *from his point of view*. Aristotle infers that it is better, for the agent, to benefit another than to be benefited himself: thus, if *A* benefits *C*, this is good for *C*, but better for *A*. I think we parody this if we take it to mean that *A* is *advantaged* more than *C*. Yet it is better *of A* than it is *of C*, and – at least within an ethical perspective – we have more upon which to congratulate *A*, at the end of the day, than to congratulate *C*. This doesn't entail that *A* is not being generous: one form of generosity involves material loss; yet we should not demand of any act of generosity that it be a sacrifice all things considered. Certainly Aristotle supposes that heroes in war find *their own* greatest good (either absolutely, or in the circumstances) in laying down their lives for others (IX.8 1169a18-26). To measure their generosity by their loss, so that only if they lose overall do they count as generous overall, would itself be *ungenerous*. A man may expect a real friend to find, and not to forfeit, happiness in being of help.

Thus if *A* enables *B* to act well, so that *B* owes his acting well to *A*, we should not say (as I once suggested) that *B*'s acting well is at the same time an instance of *A*'s acting well – though indeed *both* agents count as acting well. Rather, *A* acts well in providing *B* with an opportunity of acting well. We may say, applying a technical term, that *A*'s acting well *supervenes* upon *B*'s acting well, which is its precondition (even if *A*'s action or omission temporarily precedes *B*'s action). We have thus to respect two distinctions: we must distinguish what *A* does from what *B* does; and we must distinguish *what* each does (whether it be benefiting *C*, or enabling another to benefit *C*) from the acting well that he thereby achieves. In a sense, each achieves acting well *by* and *for* himself – that is of nature of acting well; but one often achieves that *in* or *through* cooperating with another, or making way for him.

IV

Let me return to our general problem: can we find a sense in which, especially but not only within friendship, an agent may succeed in acting *generously* and *well* in benefiting another, even when his one ultimate goal is that *he* act well? What becomes crucial is to hold the levels

⁶ 'Radical Subjectivity: Morality versus Utilitarianism', *Ratio* 19 (1977), 128 of 115-32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

of motivation apart, so that one supports another without confounding it. Let us take Aristotle's hero. It is only because his act of self-sacrifice in battle is at least *such as to* benefit his friends or fellow-citizens that it counts as courageous, and not as rash (cf. IX.8 1169a18-20). Losing one's life may be simply a misfortune. Even if there is something fine about losing it carelessly, to lose it *virtuously*, which is requisite if losing it is to count as *acting well*, and so achieving *eudaimonia*, requires that one lose it reasonably, and *for the sake* of friends or country – that is, for the sake of some beneficiary whom it has a good enough chance of benefiting. Here we must not muddle the levels. Adding that one *acts well for the sake of friends or country* would reiterate the same motivation with nothing gained except confusion. If one were so motivated even in acting well, it should follow that one not only acts well, but also acts *better than well*, since one is acting well out of a noble, because altruistic, motive. But then even acting better than well should be enhanced if *it also* is generously motivated. Which really would yield an infinite sequence of bootstrapping achievements, each item of generosity making possible a further one at a higher level (within a structure parallel to the infinite regress of Plato's Third-Man Argument). A safer rule is that motivation cannot thus be reduplicated one level up: the altruistic motive attaches to the act of sacrificing his life *whereby* the brave man acts well, but not to acting well itself. Acting well is not the sort of thing to be enhanced in this way. It itself *cannot* be other-interested – which absolves it of the charge of being self-interested.

We can thus see that what imposes the way of speaking that the hero dies for his friends in order to act well, and excludes us from saying that he acts well in order to benefit his friends, is *not* that he loves to act well, and also to benefit his friends – but happens, through a residual egoism characteristic of human agents, to value the first above the second. It is rather that, if he is to count as acting well, he has to *start* by desiring to benefit his friends so keenly that, if it comes to it, he will die for them. Aristotle is aware that this generates a kind of paradox:

Death and wounds will be painful to the brave man and against his will, but he will face them because it is noble to do so or base not to. And the more he possesses the whole of virtue and is happy, the more he will be pained at the prospect of death; for life is most valuable to such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest goods, which is distressing. Yet he is brave none the less, and perhaps even more so, because he accepts nobility in battle at this cost (III.9 1117b7-15).

This illustrates that an agent may be willing to sacrifice his own *eudaimonia*, in the sense not of failing but of ceasing to act well, in order to benefit others. It is true that his willingness makes him count as brave *par excellence*, so that, ethically speaking, there is a loss that is also a ground of gain. If it is objected that it remains a kind of egocentricity that he would never be willing to disgrace himself, whatever the benefit to others, it can be replied that, if it is ever good to incur disgrace, this must be because, more justly viewed, one is doing something *of a kind* to be disgraceful that, in context, is not shameful, but noble. Any *radical* self-sacrifice, of one's real moral standing for the sake of another's welfare, is excluded not because it is too much to ask for, but because real moral standing is not something that *can* be sacrificed ethically. What might have seemed a limit to generosity is rather a conceptual necessity.

For us, such points are nicely illustrated in a well-known piece by Jorge Luis Borges titled 'Three Versions of Judas'. Borges imagines a Judas who betrays Christ knowing that Christ has to be betrayed if he is to die for us. In so acting, he makes a sacrifice of which Christ is incapable: 'The ascetic, for the greater glory of God, degrades and mortifies the flesh; Judas did the same with the spirit. He renounced honour, good, peace, the Kingdom of Heaven, as

others, less heroically, renounced pleasure ... He thought that happiness, like good, is a divine attribute and not to be usurped by men.' And yet if, like Aristotle, we identify happiness with acting well, this Judas cannot have intended to renounce it: rather, he takes upon himself the appearance of infamy in order to achieve a noble reality. I have argued that one cannot act well out of an egoistic motive, since acting well cannot be anything but good. By contrast, it is perfectly possible to act badly out of an altruistic motive, since any motive can mislead. Yet Borges's Judas illustrates that one cannot act badly in a way that is altruistic and well-judged; for acting badly cannot be anything but bad.

Indeed, far from being defectively egocentric, eudaimonism captures in its own way an essential feature of morality. Any ethical agent must be centrally concerned, as he or she acts, to be acting well and not badly. This is what it is to take responsibility for one's own actions – a responsibility that one *cannot* have for the free actions of others. Such a concern was manifested by Socrates when he preferred to risk his own life than to join in causing the death of an innocent man (*Apology* 32c4-e1). He did *not* reason that, since in all likelihood an innocent man would die anyway (and why not then one rather than two?), he was free to save his own skin. Instead, he decided *to act justly*, where 'acting justly' denotes a way of acting open to him that he ranked incomparably above other ways. The thought that evil may come into the world, but *must not through me*, is not culpably egocentric. It places my agency, where it must be for each agent, at the centre of my life. What it precisely does *not* do, which would indeed be egocentric, is to displace that concern by another that is focused upon personal pleasure or advantage. To love one's neighbour as oneself is not to be indifferent whether *I* do wrong, or *he* does. Such an attitude would be not impartial, but irresponsible. To take responsibility for one's action is not to suppose, insanely, that it matters more from some non-agential point of view (say God's, or – less intelligibly – Sidgwick's point of view *of the universe*) if I act badly, than if someone else does. *That* is not the reason why one kicks oneself if one has acted badly oneself, and not if another has acted badly – which rests rather upon the logic of *kicking oneself*. Personal responsibility is inescapable, and inescapably first-personal. Aristotle's moralized eudaimonism is one way of conceptualizing this.

Should we conclude that Aristotle's eudaimonism is an ethical position that we ought seriously to consider embracing? This is a more difficult question: it is one thing to see that it is not fairly liable to certain complaints, and that it coheres with some essential truths, and another to accept it as a real option. To test whether we can really think like Aristotle, we might turn to a passage on courage alluded to above, which contrasts with the passage that I quoted earlier (III.9 1117b7-15):

It is true of a good person, moreover, that he does many things for the sake of his friends and his fatherland, even, if necessary, dying for them, since he will give up money and honours and, in a word, the 'fought-over' goods, acquiring what is noble for himself. For he would prefer to enjoy himself intensely for a brief while rather than slightly for a long time; and to live nobly for a year, rather than as chance may have it for many years; and to do one noble and great action rather than many insignificant ones. This presumably happens with those who lay down their lives for others: they choose, then, some especially noble thing for themselves (IX.8 1169a18-26).

We needn't, I think, be troubled by any apparent inconsistency *between* the two passages. I take Aristotle to be drawing a broad distinction between the courage of a Greek hoplite, which (even if he be motivated by true nobility, and not by external honours or penalties, cf. III.8 1116b17-29) must be more painful than pleasant, and the heroism of a Homeric hero, which

(he supposes) can be more pleasant than painful. For the former, the dangers of war are necessary but regrettable; for the latter, they are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And yet it appears that he claiming less than is necessary about the first, and more than is credible about the second. How can a brave hoplite die ‘against his will’ (*akōn*, 1117b8), if he knows that he is acting well – given that acting amounts to *eudaimonia*? And can a noble hero who dies with a spear through his midriff really console himself that, at least for him, to die so is to ‘enjoy himself intensely for a brief while’ (1169a22)? These questions may articulate doubts as to whether Aristotle is either plausible or consistent.

And yet to dismiss him on such grounds would be unjust. One way of understanding his project (which he inherits from Socrates and Plato) is as aiming to reconcile morality and rationality within a wide focus sensitive to the goods that are relevant to human action, or achieved within it. He takes for granted a kind of *internalism* that is not subjective, and draws rather on real benefits than on sets of motivations: what an agent has best reason to do is what is *best for him*. And yet morality can well demand of an agent that he make what looks like a sacrifice of his own good. Aristotle supposes that there can be a consolation: in acting well, an agent achieves his *best* good, one towards which he is oriented by nature. Yet he still rejects the evident absurdity of supposing that a man who (like Giacomo Cenci) faces being broken on the wheel with fortitude is thereby achieving the greatest of human goods (VII.13 1153b19-21). While he doesn’t there spell out why, I take him to intend a thought that becomes explicit within *Pol.* VII.13 (1332a7-25): as we may restate it, doing what virtue requires can fail to amount to acting well, if the action is not of a kind that a virtuous agent would wish to be performing. Thus an agent is not, in the full sense of ‘act well’ that connotes achieving *eudaimonia*, acting well when he imposes a punishment, even a just one. As the agent’s wishes are themselves ethically informed, this does not mark an intrusion into the ethical of the blankly non-ethical; and yet, by refusing to reduce acting *well* to acting *as one should*, it makes the identification of acting well with the human good less implausible. If we take the hoplite of *NE* III.9 to be reluctant *all things considered*, we must suppose that he achieves ‘nobility in battle’ (1117b14) without counting as acting well.⁸ When heroism does really amount (through a special context or motivation) to acting well, it would be implausible to count it *against* a man’s success in life – even if Aristotle’s attempt to ground this hedonistically is itself a misplaced piece of heroism. His doubts in I.8 (1099b3-6) whether we can really count as happy the man who has no children, or bad children, or good but dead ones make parenthood central to *eudaimonia* in a way that keeps in mind that a good agent is a *human being*. It is also important that Aristotle’s virtues of character are ethical in that they relate to choice and action, but are sensitive to *all* good reasons, and not to some subset that we might privilege as ‘moral’. What is distinctively central for him in human life is *action*, in a sense that takes in intellectual as well as practical activity. Falling, in its own way, between a utilitarian embrace of pleasures of all kinds, and a deontological emphasis upon action out of duty, this is a focus upon nothing more or less than our humanity.

⁸ We can still explain his action: if he proved a coward, he would achieve the *opposite* of *eudaimonia*, which is *kakodaimonia*; as it is, he can escape the latter even if he cannot achieve the former. However, there is an alternative interpretation that draws no line between achieving nobility and acting well: just as Aristotle supposes that the soldier’s *aim* (the fine) is pleasant, but obscured by the attendant circumstances (1117a35-b2), so it may be that his reluctance attaches to the pain and loss considered *in themselves*, and not as a price of nobility that he is willing to pay (on such ‘mixed actions’, cf. III.1 1110b1-5.)