

Outline of NICOMACHEAN ETHICS, Book I

Book I--Dialectical discussion leading to Aristotle's definition of happiness: activity in accordance with virtue or excellence (arete) in a complete life

Chapter 1--the good is the goal--distinctions and relations among actions, choices, arts, and sciences, and their goals--the better is the more ultimate goal, which is the goal of the more universal activity--the best is the most ultimate goal, which is the goal of the most universal activity

The good of an art, inquiry, action, or choice (activity) is that at which it aims-- i. e., its end or goal.

The end or goal of an activity is either the activity itself or its product.

Arts, sciences, actions, and choices are subordinated to each other as parts to wholes (species to genera). Example: bridle-making to horsemanship, and horsemanship to generalship (strategike).

There is a subordination of goals to other goals, such that the goal of the whole (the genus) is superior to or more ultimate than the goal of the part (the species). (Continued example: military victory is a more ultimate and ruling goal than that of the equestrian art, and the goal of the equestrian art than that of the bridle-making art.)

Since the goal as such is a good, the more ultimate goal, or goal of a goal, is better, or more good, than the less ultimate.

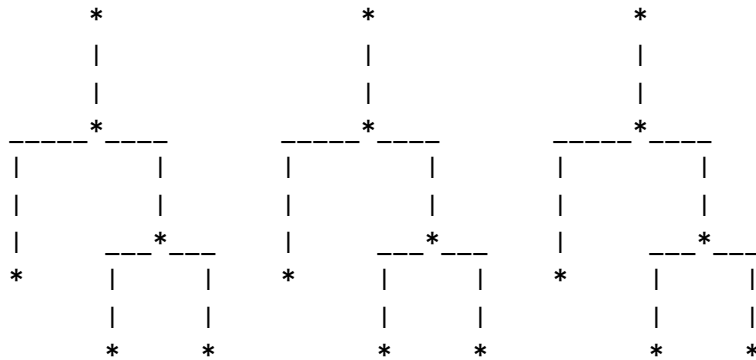
Thus the goal of the genus of activity is better than the goal of the species.

NOTE: Aristotle has thus posited three relation-structures and correlated them-- first, the subordination of species to genera, secondly the subordination of less ultimate to more ultimate goals, and thirdly the order of less to more good, or worse to better. This is just the result of conceptual analysis of the concepts of "good," "better," "best," along with the notion that the part is for the sake of the whole.

genera and
species of
activity

more and less
ultimate goals

better and worse



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Chapter 2--the supreme good for man co-incides with the goal or end of the political art

There must be an ultimate goal or end-- otherwise ends would go to inifinity and our desire would be vain.

The ultimate end is that which is desired for its own sake.

Knowing it will help us achieve it.

The ultimate end is the end of the most authoritative art.

The most authoritative art is the political art (politike), since it determines what other arts there shall be in the city-state.

Therefore the goal of the political art is identical with the ultimate good for the human being.

Chapter 3--That the political art is a practical one implies (1) that it is probabilistic and (2) that it is worthwhile only to the experienced and self-controlled.

Because the fine and the noble and the good vary with individual circumstances, the political art, which is concerned with realizing these things, can attain an accuracy only to the degree of "for the most part" (probabilistic results). NOTE: I think this is at root because it is a practical art rather than a theoretical science, since theory concerns the universal, whereas practice concerns the particular.

Youth will not profit from being taught the political art, both because they lack experience and because they follow their passions instead of thought in desires and actions. ("Rational principle" = Gk. logos = thought.) This is true also of those who are not young in years but who are of youthful character. NOTE: These traits do not prevent learning, but they prevent using knowledge well in the practical sphere of life.)

Chapter 4--All agree that "happiness" is the highest achievable good--all do not agree what happiness is--our starting point, the data of good action, will make sense only to those with good habits.

It has been established that the highest of all goods achievable by action is the end of the political art.

All agree verbally that this is happiness (Gk. eudaimonia),

but they disagree on what happiness is.

The many do not give the same account as the wise.

The many think happiness is some

obvious thing like pleasure, wealth, or honor. But they do not agree either among each other or with themselves in different

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circumstances.

Some (of the wise) thought that

apart from the many good things there is the Good Itself, which causes all other good things to be good. NOTE: He is referring here to the Platonic Idea of the Good.

We will consider, not all views, but only those that are most popular or most reasonable. NOTE: this accords with Aristotle's statement in the TOPICS that the premises of dialectical arguments must be propositions believed by either the majority or the wise (either the majority of them or the wisest, etc.).

We must keep in mind whether we are on the road to or from first principles, as Plato

used to say. [Since we are going to first principles, we must have data, and that data, since it concerns good action, makes sense only to those with good habits.]

We must start from the well known ("familiar"), but there is a distinction between what is well-known simply and what is well known for us.

first principles,

the phenomena to be explained by first principles.]

appears in a number of Aristotle's works. There are two roads in knowledge--formulating first principles from the data and deducing the data (accounting for the data) in terms of first principles.

to us.

With respect to good or bad action, what is well-known is well-known only for those with good habits (text: habits-- Gk. singular ethos).

Thus (once again) only those who have been brought up with good habits are qualified to hear [lectures] concerning the noble, just, and the political art in general.

Quote from Hesiod.

Chapter 5--The opinions of the many with respect to happiness--that it is pleasure, honor, or wealth--are false.

There are three main types and one lesser type of life

Enjoyment leading to pleasure
A political life leading to honor
The contemplative life
(Lesser:) the money-making life leading

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to wealth

Evaluation

The life of enjoyment is that of the

[What is well known simply are

what are well known for us are all

NOTE: this is a distinction that

beasts [and thus is not aimed at the highest good, for humans are superior to beasts (probably by the possession of a more divine faculty, thought) and therefore the human good is superior to the mere animal good].

Honor is not an end in itself, but is sought for the sake of being assured of one's virtue.

Even virtue is not the highest good, for it can be possessed without being exercised, and this is inferior to its exercise.

The contemplative life we shall leave until later.

Wealth is not an end in itself, but only a means to something else.

Chapter 6--The theory of the Good Itself is of no use in finding the highest achievable good.

We must discuss the universal [good] and oppose the [intelligibility and usefulness of] the Idea of the Good even though it was introduced by our friends.

Arguments that there is no good which is a universal over all good things.

The Platonists themselves did not admit universals over classes internally ordered according to priority and posteriority. (Example: they did not posit a universal number.) But there are goods in each category, and among the categories there is a relation of priority and posteriority [and therefore among the goods in these categories]. Therefore, according to their own principle, there is no good which is a universal over all goods.

[A similar but not identical argument:] Things are called good in as many ways [as many senses] as they are called beings. But things are called beings in as many senses as there are the various categories. Examples: good substances, god and mind; good quality, the virtues; good quantity, measure; good time, opportunity; good place, the right

place, etc. Therefore there is no single universal good (because the good is said in many ways).

Of a single universal there is a single science (episteme). Yet even with respect to the goods contained within a single category there are multiple sciences. [Therefore even more so are there multiple sciences of goods in different categories.] Thus there is no

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single universal good.

Question for Aristotle: why doesn't

"that at which a thing aims" qualify as a universal over all goods? Answer: "that at which a thing aims" is a relative concept which merely establishes a function from things to their goods, which are still, as classes, different for each kind of thing. Even though it may be a universal, it is a universal in the category of relative and does not contain the quality that is good in each case, but only the mapping from things to their goods.

Arguments attacking the coherence of the notion of the Good Itself (the Idea of the Good). The Platonists maintain that the good itself is both of the same definition as the many goods and also the cause of the goodness of all the others (thus implying that it is the highest good, more good than other goods), and also the common basis of the imposition of the name "good" for the many goods.

The Platonists maintain that the

human being itself and each of the many human beings have the same definition. Thus, the good of the human being itself and of each of the many humans will also have the same definition [because it will be derived in the same way from the same definition, as definitions of

accidents include the definitions of their subject substances]. Thus the human good itself will not differ in nature from particular human goods. NOTE: a simplification of this reasoning seems to be Aristotle's main objection in general to the Ideas: that each Idea must have both the same and a different definition from that of its many instances.

If they reply that it is not

different in definition, but is different by being eternal, then we reply that then it will not be a higher good because being eternal does not increase goodness, just as a long lasting white is no whiter than one that perishes in a day.

Platonists' reply to the argument that because there is no universal good the theory of the Good Itself is false.

We make a distinction between the intrinsic and the instrumental good. The

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Good Itself is only universal over intrinsic goods.

Objections to this

Some things are both intrinsic and instrumental.

only thing about which that can't be said is the Good Itself [because it is the only unconditioned good].

[On the Platonists' theory, the

"empty"--i. e., it will be a universal over itself alone, since it is the only purely intrinsic good.

But then the Good Itself will be

If the theory of the Good Itself is false, then what is the common basis for the imposition of the name "good"? Answer: goods are so named by analogy (i. e., because they have the same relation to a set of things.

Even if the Good Itself existed, it would not be attainable by humans.

Objection: Because of the common pattern, knowing the Good Itself enables us to know the attainable goods.

Reply: This is not how the arts and sciences work in practice. None study the Good Itself. NOTE: to me this indicates merely that Aristotle was much more comfortable with human existence as he found it than were Socrates and Plato.

Chapter 7--The highest attainable good is happiness, which is activity in accordance with the good state (virtue) of the specifically human capacities, which are the capacity to think and to understand thought.

The highest good will be the goal of all that we do, just as it is separately for each art. Whether there be one such goal or more than one.

Some ends are for the sake of others--the less complete (or perfect--Gk. teleios) for the sake of the more complete. Therefore the most complete end or class of ends are the highest achievable good, and if a class, the most complete of these. The maximally complete end is that which is never sought for the sake of something else, but always for itself alone, and therefore if this exists, it must be the highest attainable good. (What does he mean by complete or perfect?)

The universal opinion is that what is desired for itself alone is only happiness--all other things, such as pleasure, honor, wealth, though they may be desired for themselves, are also desired as a means to other things.

Happiness is also the only self-sufficient (autarkeios) good--that the possession of

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which makes life desirable and lacking in nothing. All other goods can be supplemented so as to increase one's amount of good, but nothing can supplement happiness with respect to goodness.

Happiness is therefore the complete and self-sufficient good and is the end of action.

What happiness is determined from the function or work (Gk. ergon) of the human being. NOTE: this argument is based on Aristotle's theory of the soul and life, which he expounds in the DE ANIMA.

The various artisans have functions, and the organs. What about the human being (anthropos) as such?

Life, but not vegetative life or animal life, but the life of that in the soul that has thought--either by actively thinking or by understanding thought.

Of each kind of life there are two senses--the capacity (potentiality) and the activity (actuality, Gk. energeia).

Since the capacity or potentiality exists for the sake of the actuality, it is the actuality which is the function of the human being.

If the function of the human being is a certain kind of activity, then the function of a good human being is that activity done well, i. e., done according to virtue or excellence.

Thus happiness, the end of the human being, is good activity in respect of its unique capacities--i. e., activity in accordance with the virtue (good state) of these capacities, and if there is more than one such virtue, in respect of the most excellent and complete one.

We must add "in a complete life." For one day does not a summer make.

This is the outline of the good.

It is easier to fill in the rest than to have gotten this far--i. e., what has been done so far is the most fundamental. In filling the rest in

demands for more precision than the subject allows.

cause, for first principles have no cause.

in the most appropriate way for the

We must not be sidetracked by

We must not always ask for the

We must determine first principles

investigation--induction, perception, habit, or in some other way. NOTE: A science is a deductive theory (i. e., a set of propositions logically derivable from a set of premises), and as

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such it must have a set of premises. These are at least part of what Aristotle calls "first principles". They seem to be conceived of as the immediate links in chains of concepts. More on this later.

Chapter 8--(Chapters 8 through 12 check the account which has been given of happiness against the sorts of things that are generally said about it.) NOTE: ON PAGE 1736 THERE IS A LINE MISSING IN OUR "CORRECTED" TEXT. AT APPROXIMATELY LINE 1098B23 THE SENTENCE WHICH BEGINS "The characteristics that are looked for..." SHOULD CONTINUE "in happiness seem also, all of <them to belong to what we have defined happiness as being. For some identify happiness with> excellence, some with practical wisdom...", etc. THE WORDS IN ANGLE BRACKETS CONSTITUTE THE MISSING LINE.

People say that goods are in three classes-- external, of the body, and of the soul, and that the last are most properly and truly goods. But happiness on our account is activity, which is something that belongs to the soul--hence our account agrees with the common view in this respect.

People say that one is happy who lives and fares well--but we have nearly identified happiness with living and faring well. Check.

What people generally think happiness is roughly agrees with happiness as we have defined it--excellence, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, with or without pleasure and external prosperity. From the perspective of our view, none of these opinions is wholly wrong.

Happiness indeed relates closely to virtue, but it is activity (actuality) as opposed to virtue that brings success (and thus

happiness).

Happiness as we have defined it includes pleasure, as most people think happiness does: Pleasure is a state of the soul, and whatever one loves is pleasant for one. The happy person is a lover of virtuous actions, and thus loves what is pleasant by nature, whereas most people love what merely happens on occasion to be pleasant. Thus others' pleasures are often in conflict with each other, whereas the happy person's pleasures are not. Thus most people are constantly seeking pleasure, whereas the happy person has a life is pleasurable in itself. (This seems to presuppose the theory of pleasure as a feeling that accompanies excellent activity as set forth in Book X.) Thus, the best, noblest, and most pleasant co-incide.

Some kinds of prosperity--sufficient material wealth, good birth, good children, beauty--

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seem necessary for happiness, for without these one cannot actualize one's good capacities.

Chapter 9--Happiness comes from learning and training, as is plausible.

Where does happiness come from--people think it is from learning, training, divine gift, or chance. Answer: learning or training, as required by our definition.

This agrees with some of these views and disagrees with some:

It is divine in the sense of blessed.

It seems more appropriate for it to come about from learning and training than by chance.

It agrees with our earlier conclusions: In this way it is a good of soul, which matches what we have said.

Thus it is susceptible of being brought about by the political art, as we have said it should be.

Thus happiness cannot be ascribed to those who cannot have completed such training and learning--animals and children. The happiness

we ascribe to children is through hope of the fulfillment of their abilities, which may not occur. This is also consistent with saying that happiness as the sort of activity that has been described must occur in a complete life (such as Priam missed having because of the sack of Troy). (What exactly does Aristotle mean by a complete life? I suppose it must be the complete fulfillment of one's potential.)

Chapter 10--Can a person ever be called happy while they live?

What about Solon's statement that one can call a man happy only after death?

Difficulties:

only then do we know that he did not suffer great misfortune, but it is also absurd to say that only the dead are happy.

are known to have been happy, but even so, it seems absurd to be able to predicate an attribute of someone when they no longer possess it.

one's descendants? Do they affect one's happiness? If so, one can never be called happy.

what we have called happiness, namely excellent activities.

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but not totally destroy it.

never become miserable, although he may not attain blessedness.

and will continue to be in the future good and wise and active in accordance with these qualities in a complete life. (He cannot agree with Solon, because that would be

It is plausible in a way because

Perhaps he means that only the dead

And what about the fortunes of

Resolution:

The most durable thing in life is

Misfortune can maim this happiness,

Therefore the good and wise man can

Thus the happy are those who are

tantamount to saying that the end of human action is never realized.)

Chapter 11--The fortunes of one's descendants and friends after one is dead can affect one to an extent, but never enough and in the right way to destroy one's happiness. (The ruling insight here seems to be that whatever the state of the dead may be, they are beyond the reach of the nexus of causality that operates in this life.)

Chapter 12--Virtue is praised, while happiness is prized, and this agrees with our analysis, for that which is praised is for the sake of what is prized, and virtue (good potentiality) is for the sake of virtuous activity (good actuality).

Chapter 13--From the analysis of soul it follows that there are two kinds of human virtue--intellectual and moral.

The student of politics must study the soul, for happiness, the end of politics, is an activity of soul.

The soul has two elements with thought and one without ("rational" and "irrational").

is wholly without thought.

that in a way have thought:

animal soul?) that understands thought and obeys it in the temperate and just and continent (self-controlled) person, though not in the incontinent. This is the appetitive part of the soul. (NOTE: the distinction of the parts of the soul by the fact that they have opposite impulses is from REPUBLIC Bk 4 (right book?). But Aristotle is not finding the same set of elements in the soul that Socrates found. For Socrates they were intellectual, spirited, and appetitive, whereas for Aristotle they are

The nutritive element in the soul

There are two elements in the soul

there is an element (the

intellectual, appetitive
(encompassing both Socrates'

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spirited and his appetitive),
and nutritive. As was stated
earlier, this analysis of the
soul occurs in the DE ANIMA.)

there is another element

that
actively reasons.

There is one kind of virtue for each
element of the soul that has thought:

pertaining to it moral virtue.

The appetitive element has

pertaining to it intellectual
virtue (for we praise wisdom, and
we saw that what is praised is
virtue.) END OF BOOK ONE.

The intellectual element has