Aristotle’s Explanation for the Value of the External Goods

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ABSTRACT

An interpretation of how Aristotle explains the value of worldly goods within the terms of his ethical theory in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle claims that to live in a worthwhile and subjectively satisfying way—that is, to achieve *eudaimonia*—one needs such things as honor, wealth, friends, and political power. He groups these things together as the external goods, since they are all external in a spatial sense from the perspective of any given person. It is clear that people almost always attach value to such things, but it is less clear why Aristotle should. My aim is to explain why Aristotle regards these things as important, and—in a more formal sense—how far his definition of *eudaimonia* explains their value. On Aristotle’s formal theory, the external goods ought to gain value through some relation to excellent rational activity, but fleshing out the details of this relation raises problems. Chapter 2 assesses Aristotle’s formal argument for the value of such goods at *NE* I.1099a31-b8, chapter 1 develops an account of Aristotle’s method in order to support this assessment, and chapter 3 considers the kinds of explanations for the value of the external goods available to Aristotle in terms of his account of action. Chapter 4 draws on the results of the earlier chapters to assess Aristotle’s position on moral luck—that is, how Aristotle regards his various categories of value as depending upon factors outside of the agent’s control. My aim throughout is to consider how successfully Aristotle draws on his formal theory in order to explain the value of the external goods as well as external things in the broadest sense.
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Introduction

In *Nicomachean Ethics* I, Aristotle first defines *eudaimonia* as the highest practical good before going on to offer a more conceptually specified, formal account of what it is. Part of this more specified account consists in two criteria that *eudaimonia* must satisfy—finality and self-sufficiency. This good must be final, in the sense that it is chosen for its own sake and all other goods are chosen for its sake. And it must be self-sufficient in the sense that it is a complete good that is not improved by the addition of any other goods. In the well-known function argument, Aristotle then further identifies *eudaimonia* with the purpose or function of man, and determines this function to be a certain exercise or activation of the intellect in accord with excellence. At this point, then, Aristotle has worked out a partly but incompletely specified definition of the highest human good as a certain kind of excellent rational activity that is both final and self-sufficient. Since it is final and self-sufficient, it must in some sense subsume other genuine goods—they must be choiceworthy for its sake (since it is final) and if they are goods at all, they must not be entirely separate from it (since it is self-sufficient).

To take a relatively neat case of the part that another good plays within *eudaimonia*, Aristotle explains in *NE* I that pleasure is contained within the life of excellent activity, since the man of excellence is a lover of the fine (*philokalos*) and therefore takes pleasure in performing fine actions (1099a7-21). Aristotle here regards his theory as explaining something that most people already believe—that pleasure is part of what makes a man *eudaimôn*—which is to say, living in a happy, flourishing, and worthwhile way. Aristotle also offers this account of how pleasure is included within *eudaimonia* in a section of the
NE that explicitly deals with the views of others and tries to explain their relation to the formal definition of eudaimonia (1098b9-1099b8). And it seems clear that he regards himself as having offered a plausible explanation of how pleasure satisfies the formal criteria of finality and self-sufficiency. Thus Aristotle remarks here that the life of the lovers-of-the-fine (philokaloi) does not need pleasure “as some kind of additional appendage” (ὡσπερ περιάπτου τινός) but contains pleasure “in itself” (ἐν ἑαυτώ) (1099a16-16). Likewise, the lover-of-the-fine’s love of fine actions seems prior to the pleasure that accrues to such actions for him, so that such pleasure can be said to derive from the fineness of such acts, rather than the other way around. In this sense, then, such pleasure also satisfies finality—being choiceworthy because of excellent activity. The major wrinkle is that there are other kinds of pleasures (i.e., bodily or appetitive pleasures) that are less easily subsumed within Aristotle’s scheme. But what matters for my purposes here is that Aristotle is fairly successful at explaining how his formal definition of eudaimonia accommodates pleasure, and also that he regards himself as being successful at explaining this.

Aristotle’s treatment of the external goods is more strained, and it is his argument for why eudaimonia needs the external goods that forms the immediate impetus for this dissertation. The external goods are defined spatially—as those goods physically outside of the agent’s body or soul (Aristotle seems to alternate on this point), and they include such things as wealth, honor, political power, and even one’s friends. Since people quite obviously ordinarily ascribe so much value to these things, giving an account of what kind of value they have in terms of his theory is a pressing matter for Aristotle. This is especially so, because Aristotle’s theory is in a sense a theory of value—that is, of how
value is to be correctly assigned to different kinds of things by a person with perfected practical reason, as well as perfected appetitive and emotional tendencies.

After discussing several non-philosophical views about *eudaimonia*, and explaining how they support his definition of *eudaimonia*—including the view that *eudaimonia* involves pleasure that I have just discussed—Aristotle then turns to the external goods. At this point, he remarks that *eudaimonia* “evidently has a further need of the external goods” (φαίνεται...τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀγαθῶν προσδεομένη) (1099a31-32). What is striking here, is that Aristotle calls this view “evident,” which suggests a stronger source of authority than the other views he has just been surveying. Furthermore, Aristotle calls this a *further* need (προσδέομαι), using the Greek prefix pros-, where he had previously said of pleasure specifically that it is *not* needed as something additional, using the same Greek verb (1099a15-16). This suggests a violation of self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Aristotle offers an argument that seems intended to explain the value of the external goods in terms of the promotion of excellent activity, but which falters. Thus on the surface Aristotle seems to be insisting on the value of a certain conventional class of goods, and on *eudaimonia’s* need for these things, while at the same time failing to explain how his formal definition of *eudaimonia* can accommodate such value. Examining this fault line in Aristotle’s theory is the chief motive for this dissertation.

Part of the interest in Aristotle’s theory is that it promises a middle ground between the Socratic and Stoic view that virtue is sufficient for or even identical to a satisfying and worthwhile existence, and the more commonplace view that such human flourishing or well-being rests primarily in the hands of fortune, wealth, and other worldly goods that
are not always in our control. In particular, the Socratic view seems to have a trace of asceticism that may seem inhumane given the evident value that all or almost all of mankind does attach to such things. Aristotle, then, may seem to be offering an ethical theory that goes further toward accommodating people as they really are. But, as I have begun to indicate, when one tries to determine what kind of value Aristotle assigns to the external goods in a more fine grained way, things become murky. My aim throughout will be to try to clarify how Aristotle supposes value should be distributed between excellent activity, the external goods, and the broader class of external things that lie outside of an agent’s control.

**Significance**

This dissertation will open up a series of interpretive problems in the *Nicomachean Ethics* through a focused examination of how Aristotle’s formal theory comes to grips with the externals goods. While the driving motivation of this thesis will be to clarify how successful Aristotle’s theory is in explaining the value of the external goods in particular, in the course of this examination, I shall consider a number of closely related problems that bear on this question, each of which has some independent interest of its own.

1 See, for example, Herodotus I.32.4, where Solon remarks that “man is wholly an accident” (Hdt. I.32.4). Achilles also famously describes Zeus as giving out goods and ills to mortals from two urns (*Iliad* 24.527-533), suggesting at any rate an external source for those things that matter most in life.
Thus one question raised by examining Aristotle’s argument for the value of the external goods is the degree to which Aristotle’s definition of *eudaimonia* should be taken as an exceptionless and finalized explanatory principle. That is, does it explain all of the data that Aristotle uses it to make sense of? In particular, Aristotle’s formal definition of *eudaimonia* ought to be reflected in the subjective evaluative attitude of the ideal practical agent. There are some limitations on what kind of evaluative attitudes can plausibly be ascribed to any person whatsoever (no matter how excellent), so these must also function as limits upon what kind of theory Aristotle can plausibly advance. Furthermore, Aristotle recognizes a variety of goods as goods, and one can test to what degree his theory succeeds in explaining the value of these various goods. While I cannot pursue these questions exhaustively in this dissertation, my contention that Aristotle fails to offer a fully successful explanation for the value of the external goods in terms of his formal theory could serve as a starting point for further investigation of the limits of the explanatory power of Aristotle’s theory. This dissertation thus also raises the often-ignored question of whether Aristotle himself regards his theory as completely successful. As I discuss below, interpreters often take charity to demand extracting a maximally consistent and successful theory. I suppose, instead, that the true interest of Aristotle’s theory lies in identifying its weaknesses as well as its explanatory power.

The external goods can also be differentiated from a number of other goods that play a part in *eudaimonia*. Here, I engage in the work of this differentiation for two reasons: first, to clarify the definition of the external goods, and secondly to help determine the kind of value that should be ascribed to the external goods in contradistinction to these various other related goods. In particular, I argue that the external goods should be
differentiated from good luck, because each individual external good carries some particular conception of value with it. Thus honor, for example, is defined as a favorable evaluation by others, and if it is reckoned to be a good, it is reckoned to be a good in this particular way—that is, as good reputation. What kind of luck counts as good luck, on the other hand, waits upon some particular account of goodness, or at least upon the specification of some particular respect in which something may be good or bad. This is significant because if each external good presupposes some particular kind of value, then the external goods as a whole pose an explanatory challenge for Aristotle’s theory, since the particular kind of value presupposed by each external good must be separately reckoned with. Recognizing this distinction between the external goods and good luck would help to form a fuller picture of the kinds of value that Aristotle ascribes to the range of things outside of the agent’s control.

The results or consequences which ensue from an action have also sometimes been taken to belong to the external goods. But this too must be wrong. The virtuous agent must specify the results at which his action aims, so those results have a closer relation to his own practical reason than the external goods—which are things that stand outside of the agent and in relation to which he may choose to act in a certain way or not. But the external goods are not goods created by him, in the way that the consequences of actions are. Differentiating the external goods from the consequences of action in this way raises a further interpretive question about Aristotle’s account of action, and the degree to which he regards action as internal or external—that is, as a bare process within the soul, or instead also as a series of bodily motions and the results that issue from them. In chapter 3, I offer strong evidence that Aristotle regards results or consequences as partly
determining the worth of actions. While I pursue this question in order to reach a more precise view about how Aristotle’s theory explains the value of the external goods, it is clearly fundamental.

In particular, better determining how Aristotle would evaluate results or consequences in terms of his own theory would allow the historian of philosophy to situate Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* more precisely in relation to other ethical theories. Thus Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* denies that consequences or results have any moral significance at all. And Utilitarian moral theories, on the other hand, suppose that *all* value in questions of ethics and politics derives from the well-being of others—a particular kind of consequence. While my concern here is not to position Aristotle in relation to Kantian and Utilitarian moral theories, my discussion in chapter 3 about the role of results and consequences in action has direct implications for any scholar seeking to do so. Furthermore, it has implications for how Aristotle should be situated along the traditional division between virtue, deontological, and Utilitarian ethical theories.

My final chapter also has a particularly clear interest, since here I pursue the question of how to evaluate Aristotle’s position on an idea in contemporary moral philosophy—namely, moral luck. Moral luck consists in whatever moral value lies outside of the agent’s control. This is a particularly important notion, because if moral luck exists, it undermines the possibility of the moral as a category of value that is equally within the reach of all human agents. The idea of the moral as a category of worth insulated from luck might seem appealing, because it offers a kind of moral democracy, but (as Thomas Nagel and Bernard Williams argue) it is also implausible. Since the notion raises
fundamental questions for any ethical theory, and has stirred such interest among scholars, it is useful to be able to offer a clear account of Aristotle’s position on moral luck. Furthermore, since the external goods play a part in both *eudaimonia* and also in particular kinds of virtuous actions, this chapter offers another angle from which to view many of the arguments and problems dealt with in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. Here, in the fourth and final chapter, I argue that earlier attempts to reckon with Aristotle’s position on moral luck have been flawed, insofar as they assume that one can ignore the question of what moral value is, and how it relates to Aristotle’s own categories of value. After debunking these previous approaches, I draw on the work of the first three chapters in order to assess the degree to which Aristotle regards his own categories of value as resting within the control of the agent.

**The Politics and the External Goods**

Now that I have introduced the general problem that drives this dissertation, I shall consider a few selected topics that form a background for this study, before explaining what I plan to do in each of the individual chapters. While this dissertation aims only to interpret Aristotle’s account of the external goods within the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself, nevertheless the *Politics* raises some problems explicitly that are implicit in the *NE* treatment, and which are relevant to this investigation. It also provides alternative treatments of some of the positions that Aristotle works out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which are nevertheless informed by some of the same concerns that drive the *NE* (as well
as some distinct concerns). Thus throughout this dissertation it will occasionally be useful to look at an \textit{NE} view in relation to a similar view set forward in the \textit{Politics}. Accordingly, I shall comment briefly here on what the \textit{Politics} has to say about the external goods and some related issues.

Thus, for example, Aristotle’s accounts of certain particular virtues in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} presuppose that the ideal moral agent possesses private property, but the institution of private property is never discussed in any systematic way in the \textit{NE}. In the \textit{Politics}, on the other hand, Aristotle explicitly deals with the question of whether property should be redistributed or leveled in order to create wealth equality—as Plato argues in the \textit{Republic}—or whether, instead, the more familiar institution of private property should be retained. And in fact, Aristotle argues that private property (as well as private marriage) can be defended partly on the basis of the virtues that such institutions facilitate. Thus Aristotle remarks that those who try to make the city excessively unified, “clearly destroy the deeds of two virtues, for the work of temperance is in respect to women…and [the work] of generosity [is] in respect to property…for the work of generosity lies in the use of property \(\varepsilonν\ \tauη\ \gammaαρ\ \chiρησει\ \tauων\ \kτημά\tauων\ \tauο\ \tauη\ \ελευθερι\οτη\το\ς\ \εργον\ \εστι\nu\)” (II.1263b7-14). Thus Aristotle defends private property, and hence differences in wealth, partly on the basis of its value for the promotion of virtue. As a more general point, this means that Aristotle thinks that forms of social organization can be defended by their role in optimizing or promoting the activities of excellence of certain individuals—where a modern political philosopher might be more likely to emphasize the just distribution of material resources. Nevertheless, Aristotle also offers more pragmatic arguments for private property—such as that the ills blamed upon
private property are actually due to vice, that those sharing property are more likely to quarrel than those possessing it privately, and that such a life of shared property is “impossible” (ἀδύνατος) (1263b15-29).

Aristotle also remarks—in the same discussion—that pleasure depends upon holding property in private, since love of oneself is natural, and since men take pleasure in doing good things for their friends. Aristotle seems to regard this as a somewhat separate point from the one he makes immediately after it about the dependence of temperance and generosity upon private marriage and private property, respectively (1263b7-14). The idea here can perhaps be linked to a discussion in NE IX that likewise joins enlightened self-love with virtuous activity. Aristotle here argues that the one who loves himself most will aim to distribute “the fine” (τὸ καλὸν) to himself rather than “money, honor, and all those goods men fight over” (χρήματα καὶ τιμᾶς καὶ ὀλῶς τὰ περιμάχητα ἀγαθά) (1169a17-29). Such a person “distributes the greater good to himself” (1169a28-29). Thus Aristotle insists on carving out a place for a self-love that he regards as natural, and which is expressed (in part) through the use of one’s own property to perform voluntary acts that one regards as one’s own, and which accordingly augment one’s worth. Without private property, there are no private actions, and without private acts there is no room for the expression of enlightened self-love.

In the Politics, Aristotle not only situates value in excellent practical activity, but he also regards the slaves (δοῦλοι) and vulgar craftsmen (βάναυσοι) who perform “what is necessary” (τὰ ἀναγκαῖα) as standing outside of the city-state, and only indirectly supporting it, but not directly instantiating the good life of excellent activity at which it aims. Thus Aristotle regards the slave as “animate property” (I.1253b30-33), and as a
“tool for action” (δραγανον πρακτικου) (I.1254a17). This entails that slaves possess an instrumental worth that derives more or less entirely from the excellent activity that they make possible. And Aristotle praises cities that do not make a citizen of the “vulgar craftsman” (βαναυσος), arguing that citizens should hold off from “necessary tasks” (III.1278a8-13). Thus in the Politics, Aristotle draws a hard and explicit distinction between the worth of different kinds of men in terms of their place in the social hierarchy and their realization of excellent activity in terms of a socially specific definition. One may legitimately set aside these troubling features of Aristotle’s political and ethical thought and work out a sanitized neo-Aristotelian position, but at the same time it is important for the interpreter to see Aristotle’s view for what it is. The question of who, exactly, Aristotle regards as capable of excellent activity is especially pertinent to chapter 4, where I assess Aristotle’s position on moral luck. In particular, if a woman, slave, or vulgar craftsmen is judged unable to engage in such activity fully, then this might be thought to be a kind of moral luck (though I will point out problems with analyzing Aristotle’s position this way).

The Text and Transmission of the Nicomachean Ethics

A thorough examination of the text of our Nicomachean Ethics and the evidence for how it was transmitted to us is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet insofar as any interpretation of the NE rests on some view about the nature of the text being interpreted, it is important to venture some brief observations here. First, scholars do not agree on
whether Aristotle himself is responsible for the *Nicomachean Ethics* in roughly the form that it has been handed down to us. Thus Jonathan Barnes remarks in a detailed study of the transmission of the Aristotelian corpus, “That our *EN* is not a unity is beyond controversy—the existence of two treatments of pleasure is enough to prove the fact. The only questions concern who invented our text, and when, and from what materials, and for what motives.”² In fact, his claim is highly controversial; many scholars who set out to interpret the *Nicomachean Ethics* do simply assume without comment that it can be read as a unity. After all, most scholars see the *NE* as Aristotle’s classic work of moral theory, and is often referred to simply as the *Ethics*.³ It is also often included in survey courses in western intellectual thought as well as surveys of moral philosophy.

The evidence for the origin of our *Nicomachean Ethics* can be divided into two main categories—ancient testimony outside the text of the *NE*, and internal evidence. External evidence would include, for example, ancient references to the content of the *NE* that refer to it by name. The internal evidence in turn may be divided into cross-references within the text of the *NE*, the style of the work, and finally the degree of consistency between the various philosophical positions set forward. One difficulty that arises immediately in the case of internal evidence, however, is that it is not at all clear what standard should be applied to determining whether the work is sufficiently consistent to have been edited by Aristotle himself. And, making matters still more delicate, this question blurs into the question of Aristotle’s method. Thus an interpreter who attributes a dialectical method to Aristotle, in which Aristotle need not endorse all of the conclusions of his arguments, might be able to explain away inconsistencies as perfectly

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² Barnes (1997) 59 n. 252.

³ Despite Kenny’s (1978) attempt to reclaim ground for the *Eudemian Ethics*. 
natural in that context. Other scholars, meanwhile, might offer a textual rather than methodological explanation for such inconsistencies—supposing that doublets or inconsistencies resulted from Aristotle’s way of composing his treatises, according to which he might have revised a given work over a period of years. Apart from these different ways of explaining inconsistencies when they do arise, there is also little agreement about exactly what qualifies as a genuine inconsistency of the sort that cannot be reasonably attributed to Aristotle. Ideally one would be able to rely on a fixed standard from outside of the *NE* itself in order to judge whether the substance of the views being advanced therein is sufficiently consistent or coherent to count as the product of Aristotle’s own authorship or editorship. But it is hard to know where to look for such a standard, and views that appear baldly contradictory to one scholar, are reckoned by others simply to belie a more subtle underlying view that has not been expressed explicitly and directly.

Despite the difficulty of reaching agreement upon a single standard against which to judge a text ascribed to Aristotle as genuine or not on internal grounds, there are at any rate good grounds for skepticism that Aristotle intended our *Nicomachean Ethics* to be read as a unity, even if a definitive answer here is not possible. I shall briefly offer

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4 Burnet (1988) xvi-xvii identifies Aristotle’s *NE* method as dialectical in this specific sense—of posing solutions to problems without committing himself to those conclusions. Dialectical is used by other scholars, however, to describe a method that arrives at fixed conclusions.


6 This is particularly evident in Aristotle’s two apparently disparate treatments of pleasure in the *NE*. Strohl (2008) 7 n. 7 & 33 ff. does not even countenance the possibility of a genuine inconsistency arising from a textual problem, instead arguing for an interpretation that encompasses characterizations of pleasure that baldly contradict one another, at least if they are read literally. Barnes (1997) 59 n. 252, on the other hand, regards the two different accounts of pleasure as strong evidence that our *Nicomachean Ethics* is the work of an editor other than Aristotle himself.
evidence in support of this skepticism, without aiming to prove that our NE was not intended by Aristotle—perhaps an impossible task given the evidence. The most glaring problem is that the Nicomachean Ethics shares three books with the Eudemian Ethics—the so-called common books. Many scholars now suppose that these so-called Common Books (NE V-VII = EE IV-VI) were originally part of the Eudemian Ethics, and that Aristotle edited them for inclusion in the Nicomachean Ethics. While this solution is, of course, possible, if scholars are in agreement that the books were originally Eudemian, but seem to have been edited for the Nicomachean context, it remains to be shown that Aristotle himself did the editing. An equally plausible explanation is that part of the NE was lost and replaced by a later editor with books from the Eudemian Ethics that covered similar subject matter. Here, cross-references and philosophical consistency come into play, and more detailed analysis than I can present here is required even to approach reaching a firm conclusion. But I will venture a few observations about the evidence for the place of the common books.

The evidence of Aristotle’s commentator Aspasius from the second century AD is interesting. His commentary on the NE, which survives only in parts, deals continuously with the text across the boundary between the Common Books and the exclusively Nicomachean books. Thus it is taken as an important piece of evidence for the existence of something more or less resembling our Nicomachean Ethics at least by the time of his commentary. Nevertheless, things are more complex than this. Aspasius interprets a cross reference at NE VIII.1155b15-16 to an unidentifiable passage as a reference to “the lost parts of the Nicomachean Ethics” (ἐν τοῖς ἐκπεπτωκόσι τῶν Νικομαχείων) (CAG 19.1).

7 See, for example, Cooper (1981).
Of course, Aspasius might simply be inventing an *ad hoc* explanation for the dead-end cross-reference. On the other hand, this remark might rest on greater knowledge of the textual tradition than we now possess. These “missing parts” to which Aspasius refers do not necessarily coincide with all three Common Books, so they do not necessarily resolve the question of why those Common Books were placed in the *NE*. On the other hand, the reference does come near the beginning of *NE* VIII, and thus near the beginning of where the common books leave off and the exclusively *Nicomachean* material returns—lending some plausibility to the interpretation that Aspasius is referring to the section of the *NE* that has been replaced with three books of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

In reference to *NE* VII.1153b1 ff., Aspasius also comments on the differences in different accounts of pleasure as suggesting that the passage in question may belong to Eudemus rather than Aristotle. The two remarks together—about “the lost parts of the Nicomacheans” in a comment on early *NE* VIII, and about inconsistent accounts of pleasure between a passage from the Common Books and other parts of the *NE*—shows that Aspasius was doubtful about whether the text that he was commenting on was exactly what Aristotle had written and edited. Since Aspasius may have known more about the history of the text than we do, this seems to provide good reason to be cautious about assuming that Aristotle himself edited the text that we have.

Setting aside Aspasius, one can turn to the substance of Aristotle’s treatments of different subjects within the text of the *NE* as we have it. Considering the two distinct discussions of pleasure in *NE* VII and *NE* X shows just how varied critical assessments of the *NE* are. Thus at least one scholar takes the two discussions to be a sufficient reason by

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9 As Kenny (1978) 34 suggests that it does.
itself to regard the *Nicomachean Ethics* as the work of a later editor,\(^\text{10}\) while another simply takes the apparently conflicting definitions of pleasure as the starting point for a charitable interpretation that reconciles the two, without so much as addressing the question of the textual transmission or unity of the *NE*.\(^\text{11}\) *NE VII* defines pleasure as “an unimpeded activity” (1153a12-15; 1153b9-12), whereas *NE X* defines pleasure as something that supervenes upon activity and perfects it (1174b31-1175a1). At issue, of course, are what exactly Aristotle means by these definitions.\(^\text{12}\) But it should be clear that a style of interpretation which assumes textual unity, and then favors the interpretation of any view that renders it compatible with another view on that topic found in the same text is hopelessly flawed. And the further point that one can make, is that neither discussion of pleasure shows any explicit awareness of the other, so that aside from the problem of the philosophical substance of the two treatments of pleasure, the lack of cross-references to different discussions of the same subject is surprising.

*NE III* poses problems as well—which again depend upon how great of a gap one sees between two different philosophical positions, and thus here too textual questions are intertwined with interpretive ones. Thus the argument offered at *NE III.5* that virtue and vice are “up to us” seems to conflict with Aristotle’s repeated insistence on the importance of rearing to habituation and (thereby) to the correct development of character throughout *NE I-II* (I.1095b4-6; II.1103b22-25; II.1104b1.). It seems a bit odd that if Aristotle had worked his way through the subjects of *NE I-III* one by one, or even if he

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\(^\text{10}\) Barnes (1997) 59 n. 252.

\(^\text{11}\) See the recent dissertation of Strohl (2008).

\(^\text{12}\) Thus Strohl (2008) 7 n. 7 & 33 ff. argues that the *NE VII* definition of pleasure as an unimpeded activity should be taken as an account of “that which is pleasant” rather than pleasure itself.
had revised the *NE* I-III to form a continuous text, that he would not have had this very major tension in mind as he developed the position that he sets out in *NE* III.5. Furthermore, the *NE* II.1105a31-33 definition of excellent practical activity requires that an action be done “knowingly,” rather than requiring that it be “voluntary”—seemingly ignoring *NE* III at just that point where it would be most relevant to defining virtuous action. After all, the *NE* III account of the voluntary contains a detailed discussion of the role of knowledge in rendering action voluntary. Finally—to point out a slightly more subtle tension—in *NE* I, Aristotle argues that the good man “will never do anything hateful and wicked” (1100b34-35), but the *NE* III discussion of action that is involuntary because of ignorance seems to identify just such a case where the virtuous man would perform an act of this kind. And, in turn, the *NE* III discussion is also silent on how mixed and involuntary actions influence the *eudaimonia* of the man who commits them. And, setting aside the internal evidence, there is at least some external evidence that corroborates suspicion about a separate origin. Namely, two of the ancient catalogs list a single-volume work titled, “on the voluntary,” suggesting the *possibility* that our *NE* III.1-5 was originally a separate Aristotelian treatise.

While conclusions of this kind wait upon a far more exhaustive study than I can offer here, the evidence I have sketched is sufficient to support caution about the assumption that the *Nicomachean Ethics* represents a treatise intended by Aristotle to be read as a unity. And in any case, Sarah Broadie, independently of textual concerns, has already shown that reading Aristotle’s extant ethical writings together rather than focusing on the

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13 Though one catalogue has the title singular, and the other plural. See Barnes (1997) 57-59 for a discussion of the evidence of the catalogs for the transmission of the ethical treatises.
interpretation of either the NE or EE exclusively can be very fruitful. Here, I shall examine certain ideas and arguments set forward in the NE as it has been handed down to us. But I shall not assume from the start that it offers a fully consistent or fully coherent system, both because of my skepticism about its status as a unity created by Aristotle, and also for some of the reasons that I shall put forward now in a critical discussion of the principle of charity.

Charity as an Interpretive Principle

The principle of charity is often associated with Donald Davidson’s 1973 paper, “Radical Interpretation,” which proposes a method for making sense of written statements or utterances in the imagined absence of any prior knowledge of their meaning (this is the sense in which “radical” is meant, drawing on Quine’s use of the same term in the phrase “radical translation”). Davidson proposes interpreting statements in a way that renders them true, “as often as plausibly possible,” arguing that doing so facilitates interpretation by constraining interpretation in the direction of the truth and intelligibility, as it were. Davidson further claims that such a style of interpretation does not depend upon the presumption of rationality, since a thinker may reasonably be judged irrational if his views simply cannot be interpreted as “largely consistent and true by our own

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14 See Broadie (1991) vii for an extremely brief comment on this approach.
15 See Quine (1960) esp. 26 ff.
16 Davidson (1973) 324.
standards.” Yet while Davidson thus \textit{claims} that his interpretive method does not depend upon the presumption of rationality, he seems to view the failure to reach an interpretation yielding true and consistent claims as exceptional. And elsewhere he does in fact speak of himself as advocating “the principle of charity.” Yet if one formulates some idealized rationality, and favors interpretations that preserve \textit{that} kind of rationality, then this ascribes some particular exercise of rationality to a thinker in advance, whereas there might well be failures of rationality that can only be detected if such assumptions are set aside.

Historians of ancient philosophy, at any rate, tend to invoke the principle of charity to justify favoring interpretations that yield valid deductive or syllogistic arguments, or consistency among a set of claims. Thus, in the name of charity, they tend to favor interpretations that yield successful exercises of \textit{certain aspects} of reason. And whereas Davidson thinks that the principle of charity can ground ascriptions of true statements, historians of ancient philosophy often defer the question of truth, and instead rely on charity to justify interpretations that preserve consistency and deductive validity in particular. But this is to assume \textit{a priori} success in exercising certain aspects of rationality. Yet given the extreme demands of the kind of idealized rationality against which charity can in principle be used to measure any possible interpretation, there do not appear to be any \textit{a priori} grounds for preferring an interpretation that preserves one

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Davidson1973} Davidson (1973) 324.
\bibitem{Davidson2001} Davidson (2001) 148.
\bibitem{Brown2006} For an example of an interpretation that invokes charity to extract a valid deductive argument, see Brown (2006) 233.
\bibitem{Vlastos1991} See Vlastos (1991) 236 for a defense of the principle of charity as a justification for favoring consistent interpretations.
\end{thebibliography}
particular feature of such an idealized rationality over another—consistency over truth, for example. Or, to give another example, there is no a priori reason to suppose that a philosopher favors deductive rationality over less formal argument.

Furthermore, Michael Frede has argued that the historian of philosophy will ask, “not whether the view is true or the reasons are adequate, but rather whether the view would have seemed to be true or plausible at the time, whether at that point in the past the reasons offered would have been taken to be adequate or conclusive.”21 This, itself, runs contrary to Davidson’s notion of radical interpretation, which supposes that an interpreter ought so far as possible to interpret views as true and consistent according to his own standards. Frede is advocating something like historically specific charity, where the arguments a philosopher makes for some view should be taken seriously in terms of the standards of philosophy at the time they were worked out. Furthermore, while Frede favors interpretations that take a philosopher’s own arguments seriously on their own terms, he nevertheless admits that at times historically specific “extra-philosophical” considerations may offer the best explanation for why a philosopher held some view—if, for example, the argument offered for that view is one that would not have been persuasive according to the canons of that time.22 It is hard to see on what grounds someone would prefer Davidson’s approach to interpretation over Frede’s, given that historical factors quite clearly play a role in the kinds of arguments that are found convincing. (To see this, simply imagine how interpreters would regard the NE if it had been written today.)

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Setting aside the more abstract questions about the principle of charity, applying the principle of charity to Aristotle in particular raises some specific problems. There are in fact some grounds for supposing that Aristotle regards deductive or syllogistic argument and consistency as marks of rationality. I shall take consistency first. It is true that Aristotle himself argues for the principle of non-contradiction (PNC)—that something cannot both be true and false at the same time and in the same respect (*Metaphysics* IV.4). Thus one might suppose that there are particularly good grounds for interpreting Aristotle’s own views as avoiding contradiction with one another. Nevertheless, some mental labor is required for any speaker or writer to satisfy the demands of PNC, especially when that writer is a philosopher working through dense and difficult problems, and advancing claims that require considerable reflection to grasp fully or to see what they imply. And given some economy of mental effort, the strict demands of PNC upon a series of related propositions may not always get the full attention that some historians of ancient philosophy might suppose them to deserve. Furthermore, it has been plausibly suggested that the extant treatises of Aristotle as we have them were the product of a process of continuous revision extending over a period of time.\(^{23}\) If this hypothesis is accurate, then inconsistent beliefs held by Aristotle at different times might make their way into a single treatise. Thus the question of the origin of a text cannot be separated from the justifiable principles of its interpretation.

Charity is also sometimes used to justify a style of interpretation that yields deductive or syllogistic arguments, in which premises are meant to guarantee the conclusion, and in

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\(^{23}\) See, for example, Barnes (1995) 15-22.
which that particular standard of inferential certainty is assumed.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, charity is sometimes used to defend a style of interpretation that not only yields deductive or syllogistic arguments, but \textit{valid} deductions where the premises do indeed guarantee the conclusion.\textsuperscript{25} While it is true that Aristotle supposes scientific knowledge to be structured deductively,\textsuperscript{26} this is hardly sufficient to show that this is the kind of reasoning that he actually uses in the extant treatises. In any case, scholars generally agree that the \textit{Topics} was originally ignorant of syllogistic, so that at one point in his intellectual biography, at any rate, Aristotle apparently did not yet know syllogistic.\textsuperscript{27} And furthermore, many scholars have observed that in practice Aristotle rarely argues in syllogisms.\textsuperscript{28} What distinguishes deductive or syllogistic inference is that the premises \textit{by themselves} guarantee the conclusion. Yet clearly not all arguments are of this kind. In particular, it is quite possible for a certain thesis to have some plausibility prior to any explicit argument made on its behalf, and for the considerations given in its defense to be offered because they seem to provide some \textit{additional} support for that conclusion \textit{over and above} the intuitive or prima facie plausibility of that thesis. Such considerations might support rather than guarantee the thesis that they are used to defend, or even seek to offer a

\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, Ackrill (1978) and Ott (2000) 99, both of whom seem to find a deductive inference at \textit{NE} III.1113b3-7, taking διὰ as “therefore” rather than the less inferential “in fact.” Neither of them explicitly describes themselves are relying upon charity, but Ott refers to the argument as possessing “the form of a syllogism” and then finds the argument to be invalid as it stands. In the end, Ott (2000) 106 concludes that Aristotle is arguing against Plato, and that an unstated premise from the \textit{Laws} can resolve the “syllogism.” Thus, relying upon the ambiguous evidence of a single particle, and the unstated presumption that Aristotle argues in valid syllogisms, Ott works out his entire interpretation of the argument.

\textsuperscript{25} See Brown (2006) 233, who explicitly invokes charity in order to justify the non-literal interpretation of a word in order to interpret an argument from the \textit{NE} as a valid deduction.

\textsuperscript{26} See \textit{Posterior Analytics} 71b8 ff.

\textsuperscript{27} As Ross (1939) 251-252 observes.

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, Barnes (1969) 124 and Zingano (2007) 300.
tentative and hypothesized explanation for a thesis already known to be true. Thus there is good reason to be skeptical of interpretations of Aristotle that rely on the presumption that all explicit arguments are meant to be syllogistic or deductive. Furthermore, arguments may sometimes be offered to explain why something is true, which is already known to be true, rather than to prove that it is true. And while explanation and proof need not be mutually exclusive aims of argument, at least the aim of explanation does not seem to imply the aim of offering a deductively valid proof.

Some have, in fact, tried to explain why Aristotle rarely offers deductive arguments. Barnes suggests that Aristotle’s theory of scientific knowledge is intended to explain a didactic procedure for presenting finalized knowledge about some subject, whereas the extant treatises aim to inquire rather than to instruct. And Reviel Netz observes that Aristotle’s habit of argument is to state a thesis first, and then provide considerations that support that thesis. Of course, simply because Aristotle tends to state a thesis first, this does not at all guarantee that he regards the thesis as plausible by itself apart from the argument that follows it. And a syllogism is of course still a syllogism, even if it is presented conclusion-first. Nevertheless, Netz has tried to show that when Aristotle’s backward-facing arguments are rearranged with the premises put first and the conclusion stated later, the arguments look weaker—and the premises do not seem to guarantee the conclusion. Netz explains this by claiming that Aristotle’s order of presentation puts the reader’s primary attention on the thesis, and puts less weight on the argument which follows. To an interpreter looking for a deductive inference, this may seem like a disingenuous way of presenting arguments. On the other hand, if Aristotle is aware that

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he is not always in a position to offer deductive proofs, then this style of argument can be defended as correct for his position as an inquirer working through problems rather than as a master presenting a finalized axiomatic science.

To make the point more general, consistency among a set of propositions and a deductive style of argument from known or hypothesized premises to conclusions guaranteed by those premises, are two possible features of an idealized rationality among a number of others, and there is no prima facie reason to suppose that Aristotle’s extant texts adhere more strictly to these two aspects of such rationality than others. And one is not necessarily justified in appealing to Aristotle’s own view of rationality as a final authority here either, since his practice of argument and his theory of knowledge need not coincide with one another. Indeed, adhering rigidly to a theory or definition when other evidence contradicts that theory is surely a mark of irrationality. Of course, in this case, the rational thing might be to examine such evidence more closely, reject the theory, or modify it in some way that accounts for the new evidence. But this would already presuppose that consistency were itself favored over other aims in an economy of mental effort—such as developing interesting theories that explain some or most of the data.

Chapter 1

Now that I have discussed some of my underlying views about how one is justified in interpreting Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, I shall briefly describe the aims of my chapters, as well as the overall plan of this dissertation. The aim of the first chapter is to
draw some conclusions about Aristotle’s method, which I shall use later, in order to better make sense of the difficult argument that Aristotle offers at \textit{NE} I.1099a31-b8 for the value of the external goods. Thus in the first chapter, I consider Aristotle’s own accounts of his method, as well as his actual, on-the-ground practice of method in \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} I. First, I try to get clear on the right way to think about Aristotle’s method—emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between Aristotle’s own account of his method, and how he actually forms arguments, rather than simply assuming that his theory and practice of method coincide. Next, I consider Aristotle’s own accounts of three different methods that scholars have often supposed are general, in the sense that they are not limited to use in a single treatise—the scientific, dialectical, and endoxic methods. Then, I consider Aristotle’s own remarks on method within in \textit{NE} I—and whether these remarks justify viewing his method as adhering to one of these general methods. Finally, I examine Aristotle’s own on-the-ground method of arguing for conclusions in \textit{NE} I. Rather than trying to develop a comprehensive account of Aristotle’s theory and practice of method in \textit{NE} I, however, I focus both on how he regards himself as drawing upon the views of others, and also on how he actually does so. The aim here is to draw some general conclusions that can be used in chapter 2 in order to assess whether Aristotle is relying on the beliefs of others to justify his assertion that \textit{eudaimonia} needs the external goods.

In an appendix to the first chapter, I then extend the work of the chapter proper into a detailed consideration of the endoxic method and its application in \textit{NE} VII. In the second part of the appendix, I then consider Aristotle’s treatment of Solon’s dictum that no man can be reckoned happy until he has died (\textit{NE} I.1100a10 ff). My examination of
Aristotle’s *NE VII* application of the endoxic method to *akrasia* supports some of my earlier chapter 1 conclusions about the importance of distinguishing Aristotle’s own accounts of method from his practice of method. Thus I show that attempts to find a general statement of Aristotle’s philosophical method at *NE VII.1145b2-7* are baseless. Indeed, even when Aristotle enumerates a series of *endoxa* initially at *NE VII.1145b8-20*, they seem to be shaped by his own view of the subject, as he works it out elsewhere without any explicit reliance upon *endoxa*. And throughout his inquiry into *akrasia*, Aristotle draws upon his own views from elsewhere. But if both the data, and the process for developing a view from that data, are informed by Aristotle’s own view of the question at hand, then the endoxic procedure described at *NE VII.1145b2-7* does not seem to constrain Aristotle’s argument much. In the second part of the appendix, this suggestion is confirmed by an analysis of Aristotle’s treatment of Solon’s dictum—which shows Aristotle’s willingness to reinterpret a particular *endoxon* in a way that reduces its tension with his own theory.

**Chapter 2**

In the second chapter, I apply my observations about Aristotle’s method to examining his argument for the claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods—the “external goods requirement,” as I call it. In particular, I ask why Aristotle regards such goods as necessary for *eudaimonia*, since his argument at 1099a31-b8 is notoriously obscure. Is Aristotle able to defend the external goods requirement strictly in terms of his formal
definition of *eudaimonia*? Or is the belief that such things are necessary for *eudaimonia* itself an *endoxon*—a reputable opinion potentially forming the premise of a dialectical syllogism? Or does Aristotle have some stronger reason for supposing that such things are good—which cannot be explained either in terms of his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as a kind of rational activity, or in terms of his dialectical or endoxic method?

Aristotle does several things to reveal how he regards the external goods requirement. For one thing, Aristotle’s introduction of the external goods, and his formal argument for *eudaimonia*’s need for such goods, both occur within an examination of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle describes as “not only from our conclusion, but also from what has been said about happiness” (1098b9-11). And not only does Aristotle frame this whole section of *NE* I in this way, his formal argument for the external goods requirement also occurs as the final element in a series of brief discussions of *legomena* about *eudaimonia*, each of which he either uses to support his definition of *eudaimonia*, or, failing that, rejects. Thus the context for the argument leads one to expect Aristotle to treat the external goods requirement as a *legomenon*, which he will either use to support his definition of *eudaimonia* or set aside.

Yet despite this seemingly endoxic context, the external goods requirement itself is not stated in the manner typical of *endoxa*. After rejecting the separation of different goods expressed in the Delian epigram, and saying “all of these belong to the best activities,” Aristotle then shortly declares: “But nevertheless there is evidently also further need of the external goods, just as we have said” (φαίνεται δ’ ὃμως καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ἄγαθῶν προσδεοµένη, καθάπερ εἶπομεν) (1099a29-32). Yet Aristotle has not
said this, despite what he claims here, and more importantly for my purposes, *endoxa* are subject to modification or rejection, yet something that is “evident” is apparently not provisional in this way.

One might suppose that Aristotle is simply relying upon the (unstated) universal agreement that such goods are needed for *eudaimonia*. Yet, as I show in chapter 1, Aristotle normally relies upon universal agreement only to support a schematic and pre-philosophical claim, not in order to support a claim about the substance of his own theory in its fully worked-out specificity. Why then, does Aristotle, at least initially, give an argument that draws on his formal definition of *eudaimonia*? This seems to imply that the initial statement that the need for such goods is evident is also made in terms of that formal definition. Yet Aristotle in fact vacillates between theory-specific and theory-independent justifications for the initial claim, creating some confusion about the precise authority on which it rests. This is the puzzle I work on in chapter 2. At stake here, is the general question of how Aristotle justifies ethical claims, and more specifically what authority he attaches to his own theory versus the views of others.

**Chapter 3**

While in chapter 2 I consider the nature of the argument that Aristotle actually advances at *NE* 1099a31-b8 for the claim that *eudaimonia* “has further need” for the external goods, in chapter 3 I consider the *kind of argument* available to Aristotle at 1099a31-b8
in terms of the account of action that he works out in the books that follow. Thus this chapter at points goes beyond Aristotle’s own text in ways that chapter 2 does not.

Chapter 2 argues that Aristotle recognizes a non-instrumental contribution of the external goods to *eudaimonia*, and—furthermore—that he recognizes that their value cannot be explained strictly in terms of promoting excellent activity. In chapter 3, I ask instead just how far Aristotle’s account of action can go in explaining how things beyond the control of an agent can impinge upon the worth of his activity. In particular, I ask, is there room for some non-instrumental contribution of things outside an agent’s control to his excellent practical activity?

If *eudaimonia* consists in excellent practical activity, and if *eudaimonia* is both a final and self-sufficient good, then the external goods seemingly can only contribute value to *eudaimonia* if that contribution is in some way mediated through activity. The aim of this chapter, then, is to interpret Aristotle’s account of action with a view to explaining what role those things outside the control of the virtuous agent play in determining the worth of such action. Thus here, especially, I draw on a distinction between the external goods on Aristotle’s usage, and the external things in a broader sense—including all those things that lie outside of an agent’s full control and yet impinge upon his ability to realize excellent practical activity or *eudaimonia*. While Aristotle never explicitly acknowledges a broader category of this sort within his philosophical terminology, nevertheless he does occasionally seem to have something like this broad category in mind as a concern—as, for example, when he remarks that the blessed man will never become “wretched” (ἀθλιος) (1.1100b34). That is, this remark seems to amount to the claim that nothing beyond the control of the blessed man can render him wretched, and thus implicitly refers
to this broader category of those things beyond the control of a person and what influence they can have upon his life.

In chapter 3, then, I try to work out answers to several distinct questions—first, what kinds of external things (in the broad sense) does Aristotle reckon excellent practical activity to rely upon? Second, why does Aristotle regard virtuous action as relying upon such things? Namely, what value do these kinds of things have to contribute to such activity? Third, how do the external goods in particular contribute worth to virtuous action? It is this final question that in essence provides a solution to the problem posed earlier—of what kind of explanation for *eudaimonia*'s need for the external good is available to Aristotle in the terms of his own account of action.

**Chapter 4**

In my fourth chapter, I assess the *NE*’s position on moral luck—a notion developed by Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel in a pair of papers delivered jointly in 1976. Moral luck picks out whatever area of moral worth is subject to luck, in the specific sense that it falls outside of an agent’s control. Nagel and Williams argue that moral luck is in tension with the very idea of morality, since morality is normally defined as a category of value that is both supremely valuable and also equally accessible to all. They regard this aspiration as attractive, but ultimately unfulfilled and unfulfillable. If correct, their analysis of moral luck exposes the impossibility of moral worth to realize its pretension to offer a category of value that is at once supreme and equally accessible to all. In
particular, if moral worth depends upon forces outside of one’s control, then it cannot be equally accessible to all.

Aristotle, however, has no such category of value that aspires to be both equally accessible to all and at the same time of supreme worth. He regards *eudaimonia* as supreme, but he does not suppose it to be equally accessible to all—excluding women, children, and slaves from realizing the excellent rational activity that brings about *eudaimonia*, and furthermore requiring that an agent possess external goods in order to realize various particular kinds of excellent practical activity. Thus one may only speak loosely of Aristotle as having a position on moral luck at all. And, accordingly, asking about Aristotle’s position on moral luck amounts to posing a broad question, about the degree to which Aristotle supposes his various categories of value to stand outside of the agent’s control. One must, then, examine Aristotle’s categories of value on their own terms.

Several scholars have already tried to assess Aristotle’s position on moral luck. Yet each of these attempts is marred by a failure to begin from Aristotle’s own categories of value. After a critical examination of previous studies of Aristotle’s position on moral luck, I turn to examining the different kinds of value that Aristotle distinguishes, and ask both how closely each approximates moral worth, and to what degree Aristotle regards each as depending upon factors that are outside of a person’s control.
Chapter 1: Aristotle’s Theory and Practice of Method in NE I

How to Think About Aristotle’s Method

Developing a picture of Aristotle’s method in the NE is crucial for my project, since often the content of a particular theory is inseparable from the argument used to defend it. In particular, when I turn to a more focused examination of the external goods in the next chapter, it will become clear that it makes a great deal of difference whether Aristotle (1) derives the content of the external goods from his definition of *eudaimonia* as virtuous activity, (2) adopts some kind of conventional or endoxic view of their content, or (3) tries to fuse an explanation of their value derived from his own theory of *eudaimonia* together with an extra-theoretical account of their value. Thus it is important to think about Aristotle’s method for drawing on *endoxa* and *legomena*, and the views of others more generally, before proceeding to try to give an account of his view about the role of the external goods in his theory of *eudaimonia*. I shall begin by considering how one ought to develop an account of Aristotle’s method before attempting to do so. There are several different questions one can ask, which are sometimes conflated in work on Aristotle:

1) How does Aristotle justify particular claims that he puts forward? (Aristotle’s own explicit explanation for why he holds specific views.)
2) What unexpressed assumptions, motives, and arguments explain why Aristotle puts forward particular claims? (Scholarly interpretation of why Aristotle holds certain views.)

3) How does Aristotle explain his own method? What kind of truth and accuracy does Aristotle claim to attribute to particular kinds of arguments and data? More broadly, how does Aristotle explain his approach to solving problems and developing theories? (Aristotle’s own account of his method of argument.)

4) What patterns actually occur in Aristotle’s technique of argument? To what extent does he actually depend on particular kinds of data? How does Aristotle tend to form arguments? What kinds of things does he tend to assume? What kind of status does he grant to the views of other philosophers? To poets? To common wisdom? (Scholarly account of Aristotle’s method of argument.)

These questions are not always fully separable, but it is worth distinguishing them whenever possible, since an answer to one question does not necessarily indicate an answer to another. In this way I shall work to avoid what I take to be a common scholarly error in assuming that an answer to one question (e.g., Aristotle’s own theory of method) automatically answers another (e.g., Aristotle’s actual practice of method). Now, I shall expand on what I have in mind with each of these questions, using the numbering that I just introduced to refer back to the compressed formulations above.

(1) Much of the time, Aristotle gives an explicit justification for a thesis that he puts forward, and when he does I shall look at this argument before trying to give second-
order explanations for his view.\textsuperscript{31} If one looks at Aristotle’s actual arguments on their own terms, his actual philosophical technique in the \textit{NE} seems to be more varied than his remarks about method would suggest.\textsuperscript{32} Thus relying on Aristotle’s own remarks on method might lead one to misinterpret Aristotle’s explicit arguments so as to make them follow his stated method. For example, it is often observed that Aristotle rarely ever presents his own arguments in syllogistic form.\textsuperscript{33} The apparent absence of such syllogistic reasoning ought to raise a question about whether, when Aristotle argues for a particular thesis, he means to give a deductive proof of that thesis, rather than something weaker—namely, supporting considerations.\textsuperscript{34} Close attention to Aristotle’s use of language—especially particles such as adverbs indicating logical relations—is crucial here. Thus the particle \textit{δη}, for example, can mean “therefore,” thereby indicating that a conclusion is being drawn from what precedes; on the other hand, it can also mean something more like “indeed,” indicating that the remark it qualifies confirms or corresponds to what that precedes it, not that it offers a syllogistic conclusion of what precedes.\textsuperscript{35} To whatever extent is possible, one must take Aristotle’s arguments on their own terms in the language in which they are expressed, and remain agnostic about their relation to his theory of method until there is at least some reason to suppose the two

\textsuperscript{31} I take this approach to coincide roughly with Michael Frede’s (1988) 671 claim that the historian of philosophy ought, “to explain philosophical views or positions, as far as possible, in terms of the philosophical considerations that were taken to support them.” Frede, however, does not here insist on a distinction between theory of method and practice of argument, as I do.

\textsuperscript{32} As Barnes (1981) 510-11 observes.

\textsuperscript{33} For this observation, see, for example, Barnes (1969) 124, Clearly (1994) 62, or Zingano (2007) 300.

\textsuperscript{34} Netz (2001) 223 endorses the latter possibility, that Aristotle almost always offers considerations in support of a thesis, rather than a syllogistic proof of it.

\textsuperscript{35} See Denniston (1954) 238-240 for a discussion of connective \textit{δη} as logical, temporal, or an intermediate between the two.
coincide. This is especially true when there is no explicit textual warrant for supposing that Aristotle means to adhere to a particular theory of method in a given treatise.

(2) In some cases, however, when Aristotle is putting forward a particular thesis, he either fails to give an explicit justification for it at all, or such justification as he provides seems inadequate to explain fully why he accepts it—and no other relevant view expressed by Aristotle seems to complete the argument. In such cases it is reasonable to suppose that Aristotle might have some unexpressed motive or argument for holding that thesis. This is how Wolfgang Mann understands Aristotle’s *Categories*.³⁶ Although Aristotle does not refer explicitly to the views of other philosophers in that work, Mann proposes that it is best understood as a critical engagement with his predecessors, and especially with Plato’s metaphysics. It is also possible that the reason a philosopher holds a particular view is not a philosophical reason at all. Thus Michael Frede speaks of cases in which the reasons that a philosopher offers explicitly to justify a view are inadequate even by the standards of the philosophy of his own time, and a historian of philosophy is thus justified in explaining that view as being held for “extra-philosophical” reasons.³⁷ To give a particularly obvious example, Aristotle probably reached the conclusion that some men are slaves by nature partly or entirely under the influence of the prejudices of his own age, rather than purely because of the force of his own arguments.

(3) Aristotle also gives his own accounts of different ways that a philosopher can acquire or grasp knowledge, though interpretations of what such accounts amount to remain disputed. I shall use the term “method” broadly, since the English word normally implies a procedure of inquiry rather than a manner of grasping perfected or finalized

knowledge—and it is sometimes disputed whether a particular account of method that Aristotle offers is of the first or the second type. First, Aristotle offers methods not intended to describe his approach to any one subject or inquiry. Thus within the texts comprising the *Organon*, the *Posterior Analytics* describes a scientific method, and the *Topics* a dialectical method. And, outside of the *Organon*, at *NE VII.1145b2-7* Aristotle describes a method for using *endoxa* to develop a view and then uses that method to investigate *akrasia*, weakness of the will. It is disputed, however, whether this endoxic method coincides with the dialectical method that Aristotle describes in the *Topics*. Thus in working with Aristotle’s remarks on method the scholar faces several problems: interpreting these remarks; determining the relation between Aristotle’s theories of method that are not specific to any one inquiry (scientific, dialectical, endoxic), and those that are (the theory of method of the *NE*); and then finally figuring out what Aristotle’s remarks on method tell us and what they fail to tell us about how Aristotle actually argues in any particular work.

(4) Scholars may also try to draw their own conclusions about Aristotle’s method of argument throughout his writings, which may or may not coincide with Aristotle’s own formal accounts of method. Thus Reviel Netz, for example, observes that Aristotle usually puts forward a thesis first, and then proceeds to offer a justification for that thesis. This is a habit of argument that Aristotle himself never comments upon directly, so that if a scholar confined himself to Aristotle’s remarks on his method, he would have to be silent on this. I shall also argue here that throughout *NE* I Aristotle often relies upon universal agreement to defend an as-yet-unspecified form of some claim. And, while this

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habit partly corresponds to a remark that Aristotle makes about the reliability of universal consensus at NE X.1172b36-1173a1, it is still separable from that remark. Thus, Aristotle might have some habits in how he draws upon universal consensus that can only be detected by observing specific arguments of this kind that he advances, which are passed over completely in his own characterization of his method. In this way, the scholar’s understanding of Aristotle’s technique of argument and Aristotle’s own account of his method are likely to be mutually illuminating, but it is misguided to assume a simple identity between the two and then to interpret particular arguments according to this alleged identity.

There are, of course, cases in which the distinction between theory and practice of method is less hard than others. In some cases, for example, it is clear that Aristotle is self-consciously using a method that he has described, in which case it is reasonable to consider Aristotle’s theory and practice of method together. Thus the well-known NE VII inquiry into *akrasia*, for example, states a method, and then very clearly follows at least some features of that method. And the NE I “things said” section (1098b9 ff.) says that it will inquire into its subject using the views of others, and it in fact does so. Furthermore, it is sometimes impossible to reach a satisfactory interpretation of an unclear argument or a vague remark on method without seeking some corroborating support in actual argument. Thus in such cases, when I think the independent evidence is inadequate, I shall interpret a remark on method with reference to an argument, or an argument with reference to a remark on method. But this kind of interpretation runs the risk of circularity.
This discussion so far has set aside the question of the nature and origin of Aristotle’s texts, but this adds another important consideration for how best to interpret Aristotle’s treatises. Unfortunately, their origin is obscure, and must be judged largely on the basis of the internal evidence of the texts themselves. But if they are understood as “working drafts” in which Aristotle thought through a series of connected problems, then this tends to presuppose a certain method too. While historians of philosophy are often hesitant to engage in this line of thinking, from this point of view, Aristotle’s day-to-day habits of writing and constructing his treatises might have played just as important a role in determining the nature of those texts and his arguments, as his own theory of method. Furthermore, if certain individual treatises were unified by a later editor, then this too changes how one should understand the train of argument in a given text, and the degree of consistency one should expect between different parts of a treatise. If, on the other hand, they are supposed to be relatively polished treatises joined together by Aristotle himself, then this justifies a different kind of interpretation. I very briefly dealt with the problems posed by the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the introduction. But a fuller study of the textual transmission of the *Nicomachean Ethics* would be useful in determining how it is best to be interpreted.

This examination into Aristotle’s method in the first chapter will ultimately serve as a means to understanding his view about the role of the external goods in *eudaimonia* more clearly. Aristotle remarks that it is “evident” that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods

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39 As Barnes (1995) 12-15 suggests, against the supposition that the texts are “lecture notes.”

40 See Barnes (1997) 64-6 for the conclusion to a long argument, in which he expresses skepticism for the view that Aristotle’s works were consolidated by editors over time, with the exception of at least the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*, which he does regard as being joined together by later editors.
(1099a31-2). But why is it evident? Does this mean that Aristotle is simply borrowing a received view here? This suggestion is made more reasonable, of course, by the obvious fact that most people do in fact regard such things as valuable. If this is right, does the strength of this received view provide the sole authority for Aristotle’s endorsement of this claim? Aristotle also first introduces the tripartite division of goods at 1098b12-14 within a section of the *NE* that considers *eudaimonia* “from the things that are said” beginning just prior at 1098b9, strengthening the impression that he regards the alleged value of the external goods as resting upon the views of others. For this reason, it is crucial to determine both how Aristotle sees himself as relying upon the views of others, and how—in his practice of argument—he actually does draw upon such views. Thus my chief aim here is to delineate more clearly the relation between Aristotle’s theories, and the views of others. When, if ever, do the views of others help to form the substance of Aristotle’s own theories? If this does happen, does Aristotle’s formal account of his own method leave room for such integration of the views of others into his theories? Or does he suppose himself to be drawing his conclusions independently of such views? It is beyond the scope of this chapter to undertake a general examination of Aristotle’s practice of method. Thus—after considering Aristotle’s own account of his method, both within the *Organon* and also the *NE*—I shall consider specifically how Aristotle draws on the views of others in order to develop the substance of his own theories.

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41 This is how Broadie interprets Aristotle’s qualification “clearly” in her commentary, in Broadie & Rowe (2002) *ad loc.* = pg. 280.
Aristotle’s Own Accounts of the Scientific, Dialectical, and Endoxic Methods

Scholars often suppose that Aristotle’s investigations follow one of three methods that he himself describes. Thus, treatises are often identified as following either the scientific method of the *Posterior Analytics*, or the dialectical method of the *Topics*. And, since G. E. L. Owen’s well-known 1961 article on the method described in the beginning of *NE* VII, scholars have also sometimes identified treatises as following this method, which is sometimes understood as a particular type of dialectical method, sometimes not. The nature of each of these three methods—scientific, dialectical, and endoxic—is a subject of debate in contemporary Aristotle studies.

Scholars also disagree about whether Aristotle intends each of these methods to describe a method that he pursues in his extant investigations, or rather an ingredient or aspect of such investigation, or even simply a theory of how one grasps a body of knowledge that has already been acquired. Yet very often it is simply assumed that the extant Aristotelian treatises must adhere to one of these methods. Thus Burnet, for example, takes the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be a dialectical work. And likewise another recent scholar insists that it is not dialectical, but rather patterned off of the method described in the *Posterior Analytics* (often dubbed the scientific method)—thus implicitly assuming that the *Topics* or the *Posterior Analytics* provides the model for Aristotle’s method in a particular treatise.

In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle describes a science as an axiomatic body of knowledge consisting in a set of explanatory syllogisms (that is, deductions from known

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43 Natali (2007). See also Karbowski (2009) for similar conclusions.
premises) known as demonstrations (sing., \(\text{ἀπὸδειξις}\)). This body of knowledge corresponds to a state of knowledge—i.e, scientific knowledge. Several criteria distinguish the demonstration from other syllogisms: the premises must be true, primary, immediate, better known than, prior to, and explanatory of the conclusion (\(\text{συμπρασμα}\)) \((PA \ I.71b18-22)\). Aristotle supposes that reason (\textit{nous}) may directly grasp such premises through induction \((PA \ II.100b3-5)\).

Scholars disagree on whether Aristotle means the \textit{Posterior Analytics} to describe his method in his extant philosophical investigations. Jonathan Barnes, for example, has repeatedly argued that demonstration is meant to describe the perfected state of knowledge that results from a completed investigation, rather than the process of investigation itself.\(^44\) If Barnes is right, then there is an explanation for why syllogistic reasoning generally and demonstration in particular seem to be absent from the extant treatises. A general solution to this issue lies well beyond the scope of the present project. My concern in the next section, rather, will be to examine Aristotle’s remarks on method in the \textit{Nicomachean Method} and to assess whether his own account of his method in the \textit{NE} correspond to the scientific, endoxic, or dialectic methods, or whether instead Aristotle describes himself as using a method peculiar to the \textit{NE}. This approach is similar to that taken by some recent scholars who, for example, have argued that the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} approximates the method of the \textit{Posterior Analytics}.\(^45\)

Aristotle undertakes a systematic treatment of dialectic in the \textit{Topics}, and refers to dialectic throughout his writings. He describes dialectic as able to argue about any topic and deal with any subject matter \((I.101a1-3)\). He also remarks that it is unable to offer the

\(^{44}\) See Barnes (1969) and Barnes (1994) xii, and xviii-xx n. A.

\(^{45}\) In particular, Natali (2007) and Karbowski (2009).
same definitive proof appropriate to philosophy proper (I.105b30-31). In both the Topics and the Sophistic Refutations, Aristotle says that dialectic argument is “from reputable opinions \(\varepsilon\xi\ \varepsilon\nu\delta\varepsilon\zeta\omega\nu\).”

Just as there is a scientific syllogism (i.e., demonstration or \(\alpha\pi\omicron\delta\epsilon\iota\xi\)), so too there is a kind of dialectical syllogism. While a demonstration is from true and primary premises (\(\varepsilon\xi\ \alpha\lambda\nu\theta\varepsilon\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \pi\rho\omicron\omicron\tau\omega\nu\)), a dialectical syllogism is from reputable opinions (\(\varepsilon\xi\ \varepsilon\nu\delta\varepsilon\zeta\omega\nu\)). One major difficulty in understanding Aristotle’s notion of a dialectical syllogism, however, is that Aristotle presents no theory of syllogistic in the Topics—that is, of the formal features that make syllogisms into valid deductions, which are worked out in the Prior Analytics. And scholars generally agree that when Aristotle uses \(\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\iota\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\) in the Topics, he does so either not in the technical sense developed in the Prior Analytics, or that (if it does carry such a technical sense) these instances are later additions to the Topics rather than part of its deep fabric. But if Aristotle does not rely upon a theory of deductive inference in the Topics, then it is unclear what standard of validity he has in mind. (Aristotle also mentions dialectical induction at Topics I.105a10-19, but this is generally taken to be a less important aspect of his theory of dialectic.)

One specific aspect of Aristotle’s account of dialectic that is useful for thinking about his own practice of method is that of pressing one’s interlocutor to reformulate his views (Topics I.101a33-4). This remark falls within Aristotle’s discussion of the third of three different uses of dialectic—encounters with people (the other two being intellectual exercise and philosophy). The idea seems to be that in encountering people in debate, the dialectician can press his interlocutors to clarify their views, and can then use these

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47 Ross (1939) 251-2.
refined or reformulated views in order to form arguments for the sought-after conclusion. Aristotle thus formalizes a basic technique of Socratic dialectic. Even though this aspect of dialectic falls within its use for encounters with people rather than philosophy, one might suppose that these boundaries need not be completely hard. Thus one might suppose that even if an interlocutor is not actually present—as when a philosopher is composing a treatise—the dialectician might clarify the views of his opponents in a similar way, though of course without the absent party’s permission. And in fact Aristotle does often reformulate and reinterpret others’ views in this way. Thus, for example, after describing Solon’s view about the need to judge happiness after death, Aristotle reinterprets his position, saying “Solon does not intend this,” of one formulation of Solon’s claim (NE 1100a15). This feature of Aristotle’s practice of method is important, since if he does in fact reinterpret legomena in order to use them to argue for his own theories, then it might compromise their status as at least partially independent from such theories.

Just as scholars debate the relevance of the Posterior Analytics for Aristotle’s treatises, so too they debate whether Aristotle means his own account of dialectic to describe the method of some of his extant treatises. Thus, as Salmieri has recently pointed out, it is not clear that Aristotle thinks that there is such a thing as “dialectical inquiry,” in the sense of an inquiry conducted exclusively dialectically.48 Salmieri’s suggestion is vindicated by the Topics itself. Here Aristotle remarks that dialectic is useful for philosophical knowledge (πρὸς τὰς κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμας), first of all since it allows one to work through puzzles and see what is true and false “more easily” (ῥᾴδιον)

(I.101a34-36). But the comparative qualification “more easily” suggests that it does not offer the final word, and thus might serve as one method among others for advancing an inquiry. Aristotle also offers a second use of dialectic for philosophical knowledge, for reaching the first principles of the particular sciences (I.101a36-b4). Again, this seems to leave open the possibility of relying upon some other method for working out the implications of those principles after they have been grasped—perhaps demonstration, if one follows the Posterior Analytics view.

Thus Aristotle may not intend any given treatise to be exclusively dialectical, or not, since he appears to regard this as one possible aspect of an inquiry. This possibility is supported by the fact that Aristotle never characterizes his general method of inquiry in any treatise as being dialectical (as far as I know), despite frequent remarks on how he intends to pursue some particular inquiry. Nevertheless, scholars very often assume that Aristotle’s treatises should be assessed as following either the dialectical method or the scientific method. Thus (exemplifying this assumption) one recent scholar insists that the NE is not dialectical, but rather patterned off of the method described in the Posterior Analytics (usually dubbed the scientific method)—as if these were mutually exclusive alternatives.49

Scholars who do characterize the NE as dialectical also often mean this in different senses—as I remarked in the introduction. (And at any rate it is clear that the Topics VIII account of dialectic as an exchange between a questioner and an answerer, where the questioner poses yes-or-no questions to the answerer cannot describe the substance of

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49 Natali (2007).
Aristotle’s treatises.\textsuperscript{50} Thus in his well-known commentary, Burnet supposes the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} to be a dialectical work, in the sense that it is an aporetic investigation offering tentative solutions rather than a body of finalized doctrine.\textsuperscript{51} Meanwhile, Terence Irwin’s \textit{Aristotle’s First Principles} posits something he calls “strong dialectic” which he regards as able to discover the first principles in any field of inquiry whatsoever, and thus as able to ground the claims regarding the function and essence of man that undergird the whole argumentative structure of the \textit{NE}.\textsuperscript{52} And others regard the \textit{NE} as dialectic in a sense influenced by Aristotle’s \textit{NE VII} methodological introduction to his inquiry into \textit{akrasia}—to which I will now turn.\textsuperscript{53}

In addition to Aristotle’s own theory of dialectic as developed in the \textit{Topics}, scholars have also shown great interest in the so-called endoxic method of \textit{NE VII}. Thus, in his 1961 article, Owen begins by pointing out that the \textit{Posterior Analytics} fails to explain the actual method of investigation that we find in the \textit{Physics}, and his solution to this puzzle is that Aristotle’s \textit{Physics} instead follows more closely the endoxic method described at \textit{NE VII.1145b2-7}. The brief account of the endoxic method at \textit{NE VII.1145b2-7} is also mirrored by \textit{Physics IV.211a7-11}. I shall say more in a moment about the support that scholars offer for understanding the endoxic method as a general method that Aristotle relies upon throughout his writings. It might or might not be misleading to describe the procedure so briefly described at \textit{NE VII} as “the endoxic method,” given that scholars do not agree whether Aristotle even regards this as a general method of investigation. Thus I

\textsuperscript{50} As Mann (2009) 1-2 points out.
\textsuperscript{51} Burnet (1988) xvi-xvii.
\textsuperscript{52} See Irwin (1988a) 476-480 = §257-258 for a summary of his view about strong dialectic and its role in the \textit{NE}.
\textsuperscript{53} See, for example, Bolton (1991).
do this simply for convenience, rather than implying any prior view about whether Aristotle regards himself as using this method once (in the NE VII inquiry into akrasia) or hundreds of times throughout his treatises.

Aristotle introduces the endoxic method at NE VII.1145b2-7 (= EE VI) before using it to examine different endoxa about akrasia (“weakness of will”). The method consists of a few stages: setting out the endoxa, raising puzzles about them, and then showing all or some of them to be correct.\(^{54}\) In the Topics, Aristotle also describes two different ways that dialectic can serve philosophy. The first of these resembles the endoxic method. Aristotle remarks that, “If we are able to work through the puzzles on both sides of a question in each case, we will be able to see what is true and what is false in it more easily” (I.101a34-36). The verb διαπορ/uni1F73ω (“to work through puzzles”) is also found in Aristotle’s account of the endoxic method. And even though there is no mention of endoxa here, Aristotle has already remarked that dialectic draws on endoxa as premises, so that it is reasonable to suppose that they are assumed to play a role in creating the puzzles referred to here too. The methods differ, however, in a few respects. For one thing, Aristotle presents the endoxic method as complete, at least for certain purposes, remarking that the matter has been “sufficiently proven” when certain endoxa remain. The remark at Topics I.101a34-36 on the other hand implies that by solving puzzles dialectic can aid an inquiry of which it is only one part. Thus (to synthesize the NE and Topics passages) one might even suppose that only if Aristotle’s aim were a relatively

\(^{54}\) It is worth clarifying one point about Aristotle’s use of terminology in this passage. When he first mentions the data of the inquiry, he refers to them as φαιν/uni1F79µενα (“apparent things”), but then he says that the inquirer proves either most or the most authoritative ἐνδοξα, apparently referring to a subset of the initial data points (φαινόμενα) mentioned earlier, and thereby equating φαινόμενα and ἐνδοξα in this passage.
low degree of precision, would he regard an endoxic examination of a subject by itself as adequate.

When describing the endoxic procedure, Aristotle also qualifies it with the remark, “just as in other cases” (ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλλῶν) (VII.1145b3). Thus evidently he is describing what he sees himself as doing elsewhere. Yet this remark is ambiguous between two possible interpretations: “just as in [certain] other cases,” and “just as in [all] other cases.” One scholar has accordingly understood Aristotle in the latter sense, as describing the philosophical method here that he uses throughout all of his writings,55 while another has taken him to be describing his method for ethics.56 But it has recently been pointed out that Aristotle uses this same phrase to qualify other, different remarks on method, some of which are clearly not intended to describe a universal method for investigating any subject whatever.57 Despite this strong philological argument against reading absolute generality into this casual phrase, it is sometimes further supposed that if Aristotle intends to describe his method here, his actual method must follow it,58 although this can of course only be shown by separately examining Aristotle’s remarks on his method, and his actual practice of method, and then comparing the two.

Thus there is little reason to suppose either that Aristotle intends the endoxic method as a general account of his method in all his extant philosophical investigations, or that he

55 Nussbaum (2001) 240 n.1 interprets ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλλῶν (“in other cases”) to mean “in all other cases” (emphasis added). She claims that “what appears” (τὰ φανόμενα) forms the basis for all kinds of knowledge for Aristotle, and that, since the endoxic method relies upon such appearances, Aristotle is therefore describing his general method. She also supposes that the endoxic method describes Aristotle’s general method, rather than the scientific or dialectical method in particular.
57 See Salmieri (2009) 313 n. 3.
actually adheres to such a method consistently throughout all his writings. Aristotle neither says this in his own account of the endoxic method at *NE* VII.1145b2-7, nor does his reference to working through puzzles (διαπορεῖν) as one of the uses of dialectic imply this (*Top*. I.101a34-36), nor in any case would his own account of his method by itself show anything about his actual practice of method.

**Aristotle On His Method in the *NE*: Foundational Knowledge**

How does Aristotle view his method in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Does he see himself simply as using the scientific method of the *Posterior Analytics*, the dialectical method of the *Topics*, or the endoxic method of *NE* VII? Or, instead, does he develop an account of his own method that is in some way distinctive to the treatise at hand? It should be stated clearly from the start that Aristotle never directly answers this question. That is, he offers no general characterization of his *NE* method in terms of the dialectic, endoxic, or scientific methods—either as following one of these methods, or as failing to do so. And, as I have already remarked, he in any case gives no direct indication that the scientific, dialectical, or endoxic method are intended to describe his procedure within the investigations of his treatises. There is thus no good reason to assume from the start that Aristotle sees himself as adhering to any of these three methods; rather, this must be

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59 That is to say, he does not use the terms ἐπιστηµονικός or διαλεκτικός in describing the *NE* method. Nor does he define the *NE* method using all of the same features and terms that define the scientific method of the *Posterior Analytics* or the dialectical method of the *Topics*. 
determined by examining his more specific remarks in the *NE* about his method, and considering them in relation to his characterization of these three methods.

In *NE* I, after mentioning (but not explaining) the distinction between what is familiar to us (γνωρίων ἡμῖν) and what is intelligible without qualification (γνωρίων ἀπλῶς), and remarking that the inquiry begins from “what is familiar to us,” Aristotle then says, “perhaps then we must begin from what is familiar to us” (1095b3-4). But what does this mean in an ethical inquiry? In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle develops a distinction between things more familiar to us and more familiar without qualification (71b33-72a5). He says that what is familiar to us is prior in respect to us, closer to perception, and more particular, while what is knowable without qualification is prior in nature, further from perception, and more general. Aristotle again uses this terminology in his preface on method in both the *Physics* and in this passage of the *NE*, in each case remarking that the inquiry begins with what is familiar to us.60 And yet, what is “closer to perception” in physics and ethics cannot be the same. In physics those things closer to perception would seem to be simply observable facts, although this is an epistemic category that Aristotle often does not clearly distinguish (his phainomena can include things that we would not class as observable facts, such as ethical endoxa).61 In ethics, however, what is closer to perception cannot be merely or straightforwardly a matter of sense perception.

And in fact Aristotle does give us an indication of how what is “familiar to us” in ethics might not merely be what is closer to sense perception. After saying that one must begin, “from what familiar to us” (ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμῖν γνωρίων), he states its implication:

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60 In *Physics* A, Aristotle says: “Therefore it is necessary in this way to progress from what is less clear in nature and more clear to us to what is clearer and more familiar in nature” (184a18-21).

61 But Aristotle does sometimes refer to “what is apparent in respect to perception,” a category that seems to mean basically observed facts (Arist. *De Caelo* III.4.303a22-23; III.7.306a16-7).
“Therefore the one who is going to listen adequately about fine and just things and political matters in general must have been raised well” (1.1095b4-6). Thus when Aristotle writes familiar “to us” (ἡμῖν), he evidently means ἡμῖν to refer to both himself and also those listeners who are correctly habituated to respond to his lectures. This is, then, a crucial refinement of the term “familiar to us” from its meaning in Aristotle’s other writings. Aristotle does not seem to have been as preoccupied with the difference between ethical knowledge and other kinds of knowledge as moderns are, nor as aware as we are of the full range of the problems of developing ethical knowledge on the model of other areas of knowledge. In particular, Aristotle does not seem to be primarily addressing the relation between ethical knowledge and different cultural systems, as one might be tempted to suppose, but rather seems to assume that the Greek conception of refinement or excellence is the only one that matters for his readers.

After saying that the inquiry must begin with what is familiar to us, and that this in turn requires that the receptive student has been raised properly, Aristotle goes on to explain: “For the fact that [τὸ ὅτι] is the starting point [ἀρχή], and if this should be sufficiently apparent, there will be no further need of the reason why [τοῦ διότι]. For such a person either has or easily would grasp starting points [ἀρχάς]” (1095b6-8). So what are “the fact that” and “the reason why,” exactly? The “fact that” must be a starting point in the straightforward sense of something we begin with rather than in the technical sense usually translated as “first principle” or “explanatory principle,” since Aristotle here contrasts τὸ ὅτι (= ἀρχή) with τὸ διότι. But this still leaves the question of what kind of foundational knowledge and what kind of explanatory knowledge Aristotle has in mind.
At 1098a33-b4, Aristotle once again refers to “the fact that,” and once again insists that it is “a first thing and a starting point,” showing that he is thinking of the same concept that he was dealing with earlier at 1095b6-8. Switching to the plural, he then says that some starting points may be grasped through induction, some through perception, some through “some kind of habituation [ἐθισµὸς τινὶ],” and still others through other means (1098b3-4). It is only “habituation” that Aristotle qualifies with the indefinite pronoun, which he often uses when he has not yet fully worked out a concept, and sometimes specifically when he plans to elaborate that concept later in a work. The indefinite pronoun thus leaves Aristotle free to further specify what kind of habituation he means. And, in fact, Aristotle does go on to detail the important role of habituation in acquiring the virtues in NE II, so that he may well be anticipating this part of his project when he indicates that knowledge of certain starting points derives from “some kind of habituation.”

Thus Aristotle’s remark that one must begin “from what is known to us,” in the sense of knowledge shared by correctly reared listeners, and his remark that one way to grasp facts (in the sense of starting points) is through “some kind of habituation,” where this perhaps anticipates the work of NE II, together strongly suggest that Aristotle thinks of the substance of his ethical theorizing as being constructed at least in part on the basis of foundational knowledge acquired through being habituated in the right kind of political and ethical life. It thus seems justifiable to abstract from these two passages to a more

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62 Thus, for example, at NE I.1098a3-4, in the course of the function argument, but before reaching his conclusion that eudaimonia is some form of excellent rational activity, Aristotle identifies the human good as “some kind of practical [life] of that [part of the soul] possessing reason” (πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγου ἔχουσα). And, likewise, at NE I.1102a5-6, Aristotle summarizes his conclusion so far by saying: “And since eudaimonia is some kind of activity of the soul (ψυχής ἐνέργεια τις κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν) in accord with complete virtue…”
general Aristotelian notion of foundational ethical knowledge acquired through habituation.

The first question is what the content of such knowledge might be. In the second passage, in which Aristotle remarks that some starting points may be grasped “through a type of habituation” (ἐθισμῶν τινί) (1098b3-4), he perhaps has in mind knowledge of the initial definition of eudaimonia reached through the function argument, since this passage comes within a methodological discussion appended to the well-known function argument.

The first passage expands on what is familiar to us, by remarking that the listener must be correctly reared “about fine and just things and about political matters generally” (περὶ καλῶν καὶ δικαίων καὶ ὀλίγως τῶν πολιτικῶν) in order to be receptive to his treatise. This seems, then, to refer to knowledge about specific kinds of fine and just actions. This interpretation is supported by an earlier passage in the NE, which remarks that “the arguments are from [actions] and concerning [actions]” (1095a3-4). And throughout the accounts of the particular virtues (NE III.6 to NE IV), Aristotle often defines specific virtues as “for the sake of the fine,” so that it makes sense to think of knowledge of “the fine” as playing an important role in specifying the content of particular virtuous actions. In fact, at one point, Aristotle even remarks that a friendly act should be performed “in reference to the fine and the advantageous” (ἀναφέρων δὲ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ συμφέρον) (IV.1126b28-30), further supporting the idea that the fine specifies action. Aristotle also remarks at one point that the fine and the just “possess wandering and variation” (I.1094b14-22), which might also help to explain the

63 As Burnyeat (1980) 72 argues.
64 As Burnyeat (1980) 71-72 argues.
importance of knowledge acquired through habituation, since apparently propositional knowledge is inadequate for ethical purposes.

One question that arises at this point is what relation there is between *endoxa* (“reputable views”) and “those things familiar to us” in the *NE*. Both kinds of data seem in some general way to be commonsense views. And if these data resemble *endoxa*, one might suppose the method that Aristotle describes here to approximate the endoxic method of *NE* VII. What qualifies something as an *endoxon* are the features of those who believe it to be true, however, while what qualifies something as “known to us” is its closeness to perception and its degree of particularity—even if the *Posterior Analytics* account of what is familiar to us must be refined for the *NE*. But even if the formal criteria that distinguish *endoxa* and those things familiar to us are distinct, would these two sets of data coincide? Those things which are familiar to us will probably always also qualify as reputable opinions, since if the fairly broad group that Aristotle takes to be receptive to his lectures can agree on something, then they would qualify it as an *endoxon* according to the definition of *endoxa* offered at *Topics* I.100b21-3 where the beliefs of “most” are included. But not all *endoxa* are “closer to perception,” and therefore not all *endoxa* are “familiar to us”; some of them are, rather, views that result from speculative philosophical thinking.\(^{66}\)

\(^{65}\) Kraut (2006) 88 supposes that those things familiar to us at *NE* I.1095a30-b4 simply coincide with the *endoxa* of the endoxic method. Irwin (1988a) 66 likewise interprets “what is familiar to us” in the methodological prologue at the beginning of *Physics* I as indicating that Aristotle sees himself as undertaking a dialectical investigation.

\(^{66}\) For example, the view ascribed to philosophers that forms the very first *legomenon* considered within the “things said” section—that the goods of the soul are best (I.1098b12-22). And see also the *Topics* definition of *endoxa* according to which they include the beliefs of the wise (I.100b21-3).
Perhaps more importantly, though, *endoxa* and those things familiar to us in ethical matters (facts acquired through habituation) would seem to possess different kinds of authority, and hence result in a different kind of method for drawing on each type of data. According to the *NE* VII endoxic method, at least, *endoxa* are subject to reinterpretation and rejection, whereas it is not clear that the shared ethical knowledge that Aristotle ascribes to the correctly-reared listeners would be tentative in this way. The idea seems to be, rather, that such shared beliefs are incomplete in some way and perhaps subject to explanation, generalization, or refinement—not that they might simply be rejected in the same way that Aristotle rejects the *endoxon* that the temperate man (σοφρον) and the self-controlled man (ἐγκρατής) are the same in his endoxic inquiry into *akrasia*.\(^{67}\) It is also not clear that such foundational knowledge acquired through correct habituation has propositional form,\(^{68}\) in the way that *endoxa* clearly do. Such knowledge might, for example, deal with the question of just what actions are right under just what different circumstances. Thus there are strong reasons to doubt that such foundational ethical knowledge shared by the correctly reared listeners can be assimilated to *endoxa*.

This, then, suggests the possibility that Aristotle might draw on the foundational knowledge shared through correct habituation, and *endoxa* to serve distinct roles in advancing his inquiry. In fact, as I shall show shortly, Aristotle also draws a contrast between *legomena* (“the things said”) and “the argument” (ὁ λόγος). Thus Aristotle’s *NE* seems to rest on a more flexible method than is sometimes supposed, attributing different degrees of reliability and perhaps even different kinds of formal content (propositional, non-propositional) to different sources of knowledge about ethical questions.

\(^{67}\) Belief stated: 1145b15-17; Belief refuted: 1146a9-17, 1150a34-1150b1.

\(^{68}\) As Burnyeat (1980) 72 argues.
Aristotle On His Method in the *NE*: The Argument and What is Said

Aristotle twice explicitly draws a distinction between two ways of approaching his inquiry: between drawing conclusions (συμπεραίνεσθαι) or inquiring “from our conclusion and from those things from which our argument results” (ἐκ τοῦ συμπεράσματος καὶ ἔξ ὁ λόγος) and inquiring from what is said (τὰ λεγόμενα). I am treating these methodological remarks separately, because Aristotle uses this distinction to mark a specific section of his inquiry. This raises several questions. What kind of premises are used to “draw conclusions” if not *legomena*? And what criteria does Aristotle use to accept and reject things that are said? Does this process of accepting the things that are said correspond to dialectic, or the endoxic method, or is it something else again? And is the distinction between the two approaches to his inquiry as hard in practice as Aristotle’s remarks seem to suggest, particularly when he says he is shifting to an inquiry “from what is said”?

First I shall consider whether an inquiry from *legomena* is dialectical, endoxic, or something else. And the first question here is whether the *legomena* of *NE* I can be identified with *endoxa*. In *NE* VII, Aristotle describes a method involving the examination of *endoxa*, then enumerates a series of views about *akrasia*, and finally summarizes by referring back to them as τὰ λεγόμενα (1145b20). Thus at least sometimes he uses these two terms interchangeably. Nevertheless if one follows the bare

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69 Aristotle draws this same distinction at both 1094b19-23 and 1098b9-11. The latter passage is where he announces a shift to an inquiry “from the things said about [happiness].”
meaning, there are clearly legomena that would not qualify as endoxa ("reputable opinions"), in the way that they are defined in the Topics as the views held by either the many, most of the wise, or the most respected of the wise (I.100b21-3). Thus (one might ask) does Aristotle limit legomena to endoxa in NE I? Indeed, he seems to. For one thing, before the so-called “things said section” introduced at NE I.1098b9, Aristotle has already remarked earlier on the importance of examining “the most obvious opinions or those seeming to have some sense,” rather than any and all views unselectively (1095a28-30). While these criteria for which legomena are worthy of consideration are different than the Topics criteria for endoxa, in both cases Aristotle shows selectivity about which views merit consideration. Furthermore, in the things said section itself, he considers one opinion that he attributes to the wise (1098b16-18). And when he enumerates a series of views about what the good life is, he explains their relevance by saying that many people from previous generations and a few respected people have believed different sets of them (I.1098b26-29)—groups whose views would also certainly count as endoxa according to the criteria given at Topics I.100b21-3.

Not only does Aristotle say that he is shifting from an inquiry from “the conclusion” and “from those things from which the argument comes” to an inquiry “from the things said,” but he also continues to draw a contrast between “the argument” and other views throughout the section that follows. Thus to this extent, at least, his practice of method matches his remarks on method. And “the argument” (ὁ λόγος) must refer specifically to the function argument.⁷⁰ He draws this contrast between “our argument” (ὁ λόγος) and

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⁷⁰ At 1099b25-28, Aristotle refers to “our argument” (ὁ λόγος) in order to show that “the greatest and finest thing” (i.e., eudaimonia) cannot be turned over to luck, and then explicitly summarizes the conclusion of the function argument to justify how his argument can show this.
another view four times.\textsuperscript{71} So unlike the endoxic procedure of \textit{NE} VII.1, Aristotle describes himself as relying on two different kinds of considerations.\textsuperscript{72} This self-conscious integration of a method that draws on \textit{legomena} within a supposedly non-endoxic treatment of the same subject distinguishes the \textit{NE} I method from the endoxic or dialectical methods—at least, if the dialectical method is understood as an \textit{exclusively} dialectical method. Within the endoxic treatment of \textit{akrasia}, Aristotle does rely upon conclusions that he has drawn elsewhere, but he does not do so in the same formalized way that we find here—where Aristotle regularly draws a contrast between τὰ λεγόμενα and ὁ λόγος. In the exception—the natural digression—Aristotle seems to regard this as a supplement or digression to the rest of the discussion rather than an essential part of it (\textit{NE} VII.1147a24-25).\textsuperscript{73}

In two such cases when Aristotle contrasts his argument with specific \textit{legomena}, he uses the metaphor of harmony to describe this relation.\textsuperscript{74} Though exactly what this metaphor means is unclear, I shall venture a few suggestions. First, harmony is inherently relative. Two notes that were flat to the same degree or two correctly pitched notes would equally be in harmony, and likewise within some subject domain a pair of similarly

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\textsuperscript{71} Aristotle uses ὁ λόγος to refer to his own argument, in contrast with the views expressed by others, at 1098b20-1, 1098b30-1, 1099b25, and 1100b11.

\textsuperscript{72} Aristotle does at one point depart from the endoxic inquiry into \textit{akrasia} to engage in a “natural” inquiry into the same subject (1147a24ff.), but this is a brief digression, and Aristotle does not develop the contrast between these two ways of approaching a single subject matter in the same way in this case. And elsewhere Aristotle also refers to a view he has shown (1146a8), but in \textit{NE} VII he does not remark in a general way on his method as a fusion of a theory and \textit{endoxa} or \textit{legomena}.

\textsuperscript{73} As Bolton (1991) 22 also supposes, arguing that Aristotle regards the discussion preceding this digression as “sufficient for practical purposes.”

\textsuperscript{74} In \textit{NE} I, Aristotle uses the metaphor of harmony to talk about the relation between his own argument and a conventional view at 1098b20-21 and 1098b30-31. At 1098b20-21, the conventional view is not explicitly marked as such, but the context (that is, the introductory remarks at 1098b9-11) makes it clear that this is how Aristotle views it.
mistaken views or a pair of similarly correct views would equally be in harmony. Thus if one takes the metaphor seriously, harmony is a remark on the coherence or consistency of two views rather than on the absolute justification or grounding of either view. Second, if the two elements that Aristotle claims to be in harmony depended on the same argument or the same source of authority, then this harmony would be trivial; it would not serve as support for Aristotle’s argument. Thus Aristotle presumably believes that “the argument” (ὁ λόγος) and the views of others against which he is testing it are at least partly independent of one another. I shall consider this problem in more detail when I examine Aristotle’s use of the views of others in the final section of this chapter.

After Aristotle says that he is turning his inquiry to “the things that are said” at *NE* I.1098b9-12, one might expect all of the commonsense views that follow to have an equal kind of status as *endoxa* or *legomena*. Yet in practice things are more complex. Thus, for example, the view “that the happy one lives and does well” (1098b20-21) might count as something that is said, as an *endoxon*, a fact acquired through habituation, a universally agreed upon view, or some combination of these. Rather than assuming all such views have equal status then, by instead examining Aristotle’s actual handling of a given view ascribed to others, anything else he might say about that claim elsewhere, and any methodological remarks he makes regarding it, I shall try to give an account of what kind of epistemic status he grants to the views of others.
Aristotle’s Practice of Method in *NE* I: Aristotle’s Use of The Views of Others

It is possible to isolate several features of Aristotle’s actual practice for drawing on the views of others in *NE* I. In some cases, Aristotle may deal with some such view twice in slightly different ways. In other cases, Aristotle might use two of the features that I identify to analyze a single such view in a single go. I use this broad term “view” to avoid making a judgment about whether Aristotle is treating a particular datum as an *endoxon*, a fact acquired through habituation, or in some other way, since here my concern is primarily with Aristotle’s practice of argument. Furthermore, since sometimes the view in question belongs to a poet or philosopher, as opposed to being a widely shared view, I will not use the term commonsense or everyday view unless I mean specifically that.75 Scholars have sometimes characterized the *endoxa* that Aristotle draws upon in *NE* VII as conventional views, but there is good reason to be skeptical of this—as I shall argue in the appendix to this chapter.

Some features of Aristotle’s treatment of the views of others involve Aristotle’s handling of the content of a given view: in certain cases he reinterprets the meaning of such a view, and in at least one case Aristotle does not specify whether he understands a word that is part of an allegedly widely shared view in its everyday meaning or in its meaning within his own technical philosophical vocabulary. Other features have to do with how Aristotle explicitly talks about the relationship between a view that he ascribes to another and his own theory: sometimes he says that a view “harmonizes” with his

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75 In the so-called “things said” section, Aristotle refers to a view held by “those who philosophize,” so it is clear that the *legomena* here are not limited to popular or conventional views (Arist. *NE* 1098b16-18). *Endoxa*, however, may include both conventional views held by the many, as well as views held by the wise (*Topics* I.100b21-3).
theory, at other times, he says that his own theory explains another person’s view, and in at least one case he says both things about a single view. Still other features have to do with how Aristotle justifies a view without reference to his own theory: often, particularly when making a negative claim, Aristotle argues for a view from universal or near universal consensus on that view; Aristotle also relies on rhetorical questions and the claim that a particular view would be absurd, both of which in some cases may be reduced to the claim that no one would disagree with a given proposition.

First, I shall consider features of Aristotle’s handling of the content of other people’s views. Perhaps the most striking such feature is Aristotle’s willingness to reinterpret others’ views. When he does this, he sometimes also attributes his reinterpreted version of the view to the party who expressed the original version. So, for example, he thinks that Solon did not mean that a man counts as happy after he has died, but rather that we can only judge a man to have been happy during his life after he has died: “nor does Solon intend this” (μηδὲ Σόλων τοῦτο βούλεται) (NE I.1100a15). And Aristotle’s argument for modifying Solon’s view is that it would be absurd to call a person happy at the time after he has died—regardless of whether one believes that happiness is an activity or not. So Aristotle claims that his clarification of Solon’s position does not depend specifically on his theory about the nature of eudaimonia, but instead that any reasonable person would interpret Solon’s view as he does. If Aristotle is correct that his interpretations of Solon’s view is reasonable and would be agreed upon by others, then this does not seem to compromise its status as a datum partly independent of his own

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76 At 1098b30-31 Aristotle says that the view that happiness is virtue harmonizes with his argument; at 1099b7-8 Aristotle says that his own theory that happiness is virtuous activity with the further addition of good luck explains the mistaken views that happiness is virtue or that it is good luck.
theory. On the other hand, if he is reinterpreting the view to fit his own theory, but still thinks that he can treat it as basically representing another’s view, and as partly independent of his own theory, then this would pose a problem for him.

Another problem arises with Aristotle’s handling of the content of views that he supposes are held generally—namely, Aristotle seems to favor conceptually unspecified forms of such views. Thus Aristotle says that the view that “the happy man lives well and acts well [εὖ πράττειν]” harmonizes with his argument (I.1098b20-22), but the meaning of εὖ πράττειν is ambiguous.77 In the language of the NE, πράττω means to act, where action is understood to be its own end, in contrast with production (ποιήσις), which derives its value purely from an end outside of itself (VI.1139b1-4). And if πράττω is understood in this particular sense, then this view about the happy man clearly coincides neatly with Aristotle’s view. But the everyday meaning of εὖ πράττειν includes both acting well and faring well—in the sense of succeeding, prospering, or having good luck. And, while Aristotle does include some role for such prosperity and external success in eudaimonia, the role for such good luck in eudaimonia is less clear than the way that it figures in εὖ πράττειν in the idiomatic sense. And Aristotle possibly excludes certain kinds of good luck that do not augment or facilitate virtuous activity in any way, but in its everyday sense εὖ πράττειν would not exclude such passively experienced good luck—such as, perhaps, a gift that is received but not used for any particular virtuous action, or receiving an affectionate gesture.

77 There is a similar problem for εὐπραξία, which Aristotle uses in the same passage at 1098b22. Elsewhere Aristotle uses the term both to mean success dependent on luck (1100a21), and in the more technical sense of excellent action (1139a34).
Aristotle also gives this claim in slightly different language when he reiterates it in the latter part of what he says here: “the fact that the happy man lives well [ἐὖ ζην] and acts well [ἐὖ πράττειν] harmonizes with our argument, since happiness has been said to be roughly some kind of good-living [εὐζωια τις] and success [εὐπραξια]” (1098b20-22). In the reiterated version, he uses the qualification “some kind” (τις) in order to avoid conceptually specifying the two terms that he uses to characterize this allegedly widely shared view. That is, he seems intentionally to render the everyday view in a particularly open and uncontroversial form. By so doing, he leaves himself room to maneuver and to argue in precisely what sense eudaimonia is “some kind of good living and success.” And Aristotle does something similar to this elsewhere in NE I, when he remarks that ὄνοματι μὲν οὖν σχεδὸν ὑπὸ τῶν πλείστων ὀμολογεῖται (“So it is roughly agreed by most men in name”) (I.1095a17-18), arguing that happiness is the highest good on the basis of common agreement, but acknowledging that this is an agreement about the word used for the highest good, rather than an agreement on the precise content of that concept.

It is worth distinguishing this kind of view from endoxa. In such cases, Aristotle treats a view as universally agreed upon, or nearly so, and therefore as uncontradictable. But this is decidedly not the process that he outlines for treating endoxa or legomena in his NE VII.1145b2-7 preface on method, where endoxa are subject not only to reinterpretation but also to outright rejection. The idea seems to be that Aristotle believes that a claim which commands universal agreement is beyond contradiction, regardless of whether those who agree to it have a precise understanding of the concepts embedded in that claim. So, even if people have a mistaken understanding of what εὐζωια or εὐπραξια is, Aristotle still believes that he can rely on their agreement as support for a
conceptually unspecified form of the claim that *eudaimonia* is “some kind of good living and success.”

Still, this does not resolve whether Aristotle—after he has drawn on a universally agreed upon view in a conceptually unspecified form for support—whether after that point he puts aside the commonsense conceptions relating to that view and then proceeds to examine the question on his own. This is a much thornier issue. In fact, Aristotle seems to use *ευπραξία* both as deriving its meaning from the technical concept of *πράξις* and also in its more commonsense meaning of success. Thus one finds Aristotle giving *ευπραξία* and *τὸ ἐναντίον ἐν πράξει* as opposites (1139a34), where he is clearly thinking of *ευπραξία* as a kind of *praxis* in the technical sense. But he also treats *ευπραξία* and *δυστυχία* as opposites, which suggests that he is thinking of *ευπραξία* in the broader sense of success that depends on prosperity (1100a21). This slippage between the use of the root *εὖ πράττω* in its technical and everyday senses is a bit problematic, since it may suggest that Aristotle in his own thought does not ever develop a clarified and stable conception of *ευπραξία* that entirely does away with the connotations of its everyday use, but that he instead alternates between a technical and everyday meaning, without ever rejecting the everyday meaning or fully explaining how the technical meaning might be able to subsume the everyday meaning. It also suggests a more fundamental question—namely, does Aristotle really suppose that what one suffers bears on one’s *eudaimonia* exclusively insofar as it influences what he does?

Now I shall turn to Aristotle’s explicit remarks about the relation between another’s view, and his own theory-bound claims about the same subject. First, I shall consider cases in which Aristotle describes his own view of some subject as in harmony with the
view of another. And second, I shall consider cases in which Aristotle describes his view as explaining the view of another. Thus, in at least two cases, Aristotle describes the relation between another’s view and his own theory as one of harmony. What is interesting about the metaphor of harmony is that it does not seem, in itself, to give either pair of the harmonizing elements epistemic priority. That is, in principle if two things harmonize with one another and neither is specifically marked as providing a standard for the other, they have a kind of equal status. But in fact, Aristotle’s intention seems to be to give further support for his theory by showing that it harmonizes with conventional wisdom. And, as we shall see, two views need not coincide or be fully consistent in order to be in harmony; they merely need to share some common feature.

Aristotle also uses the metaphor of harmony in a passage from NE X. This instance does not count as a case for my purposes, since here the harmony is between theories and facts (πράγματα) rather than between theories and conventional views. But looking at the passage may still yield some insight into how Aristotle thinks about harmony as a justification for a view more generally. Aristotle writes: “So true arguments not only seem extremely useful for knowing, but also for life. For by being in harmony with what people do [τοῖς ἔργοις] they are believed. Therefore they urge those who understand them to live in accord with them” (NE X.1172b3-8). In both the passages from NE I describing a harmony relation and also here the harmony is between an argument (λόγος) and something else. In NE I, this something else is someone else’s view; here it is “what people do” (ἔργα). In both cases Aristotle uses harmony to describe the relation between his argument and something separate from that argument, in order to support to

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78 At 1098b20-22 and 1098b30-31.
it. The idea seems to be that it bolsters a philosophical argument if that argument harmonizes with some pre- or non-philosophical piece of evidence, because such evidence is in some sense independent from a theoretical understanding in the relevant arena; a danger of such theorizing is the neglect of facts and opinions that partially get at the truth. But these facts themselves may not tell the whole story, and may be open to multiple interpretations and explanations, so they are also not adequate by themselves either.

I have already discussed the first instance of the harmony metaphor in the so-called “things said section” of *NE* I earlier (1098b20-22). In the second such instance, Aristotle says “our argument harmonizes with those who say that [eudaimonia] is virtue or some kind of virtue, since the activity in accord with virtue belongs to virtue” (1098b30-31).79 He then goes on to comment about the importance of distinguishing between happiness as possession and happiness as use. Here, the harmony is not exact, and Aristotle actually rejects the endoxon in question, yet he still thinks that he can rely upon it as a way of giving support to his own argument. Some believe that eudaimonia is virtue, while Aristotle thinks, rather, that virtue plays a part in eudaimonia. Thus the rejected commonsense partially matches Aristotle’s view and therefore harmonizes with Aristotle’s view, and lends it some support insofar as Aristotle supposes this view to be a likely bearer of truth.80 It should be clear that such a practice of argument cannot support the idea that Aristotle uncritically adopts endoxic views, or even that he limits his views

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79 Aristotle also mentions the view that eudaimonia is virtue once before and once after this passage (1098b23-24; 1099b7-8).
80 Compare also Aristotle’s belief that people do not entirely miss the truth, expressed, for example, at *Rhetoric* I.1355a15-8.
to *endoxa*, as has sometimes been suggested.\(^81\) That is, Aristotle is quite willing to claim support from *endoxa* that only approximate his theory, without modifying his theory in the direction of such *endoxa*, as it were. Furthermore, Aristotle himself (quite obviously) is both the authority on the content of, and the arbiter of the truth of such *endoxa*. Thus if one were to claim that Aristotle’s use of *endoxa* genuinely constrained his findings, one would also need to show a certain degree of impartiality in handling the content of *endoxa*—a topic that I take up in the appendix to this chapter, in regard to Aristotle’s use of *endoxa* in his treatment of *akrasia*.

Next, I shall consider another way that Aristotle describes the relation between his own view of some subject and that of another—namely, those cases in which Aristotle thinks that his own view about some subject can itself explain such a view.\(^82\) Often Aristotle makes sense of quotations from poets in this way, perhaps because he considers them to be a weak form of evidence.\(^83\) And often Aristotle takes the *legomenon* that his own theory explains to be a partially mistaken approximation of that theory. The implicit view seems to be that people have aimed at, but failed to reach the correct theory that Aristotle himself describes, so that the mistaken view can be explained by its partial correspondence to Aristotle’s theory. Aristotle remarks in the *Rhetoric* that people have a general tendency to come close to the truth (*Rhet.* I.1355a15-18), but he also says that it is not characteristic of people to make distinctions (*NE* X.1172b3). Thus it makes sense

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\(^{81}\) Thus White (1992) 23 regards the *endoxa* as setting “constraints” on what Aristotle may claim.

\(^{82}\) Cases in the *NE* in which Aristotle seems to think that his view can explain a popular view: *eudaimonia* is honor (1095b22-30), *eudaimonia* is good luck or virtue (1099b7-8), people call children happy (1100a3-4).

\(^{83}\) For example, Aristotle equates barbarians with slaves and then claims that this equation explains the poets’ claim that Greeks deserve to rule over barbarians (Arist. *Pol.* 1252b7).
that he would explain a partially correct view as a bungled groping at the truth, drawn to it, but not skilled enough to grasp it securely, despite its pull.

Sometimes Aristotle reformulates the partly mistaken view that he thinks his theory explains, sometimes not. Thus Aristotle thinks that, “there also seems to be some further need for such good season, because of which [ἀθεν] some take good luck to be the same as happiness, others virtue” (NE 1099b6-8). Aristotle’s view fails to coincide with either of these mistaken views, nor does Aristotle reinterpret them, but nevertheless he thinks that his own view explains why people hold these mistaken views.

In other cases, Aristotle thinks that his own view can explain another’s view, but in the course of considering that view, he clarifies that view, supposedly revealing what it actually amounts to. Thus, for example, Aristotle thinks that certain people consider honor to be happiness and the good because of the value that they attach to the virtue on which honor depends: they want to believe that they are good, so they value honor, which gives them the evidence they sought that they are in fact good (I.1095b22-30). Thus Aristotle seems to think that their mistaken view that eudaimonia is honor results from the value that they correctly attach to virtue, and that even according to them virtue is actually better than honor. This explanation is a little problematic, however, since Aristotle elsewhere says that different accounts must be given for the goodness of honor, practical wisdom, and pleasure (1096b23-25), but here he seems to want to derive the value of honor directly from virtue. It may be that because Aristotle’s aim is to refute the position that honor is the good he is more critical about its value here than elsewhere, as when he calls it the greatest of the external goods (IV.1123b20-21). That is, his refutation might be dialectic in the sense that its purpose is to refute the view rather than to put
forward his own view. Or otherwise, Aristotle might simply be favoring an explanation here that draws specifically on his theory that eudaimonia consists in virtuous activity, and putting aside his remarks on the nature of the good.

Aristotle likewise argues that when people call children happy, they do so “because of the expectation” (διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα) that the child will one day be happy (Arist. NE 1100a3-4). What is interesting, is that this remark is both an interpretation and an explanation at the same time—as is also the case with Aristotle’s response to the claim that eudaimonia is honor. Thus one may ask here, as in the case of honor, whether those who call children happy would accept Aristotle’s interpretation-cum-explanation of why they say what they say and what they mean when they say it—even after being pressed by Aristotle in an imagined verbal exchange. One might easily object to Aristotle, for example—in a different, but still Aristotelian vein—that the happiness of a child consists in his realization of his own admittedly partial capacity for rational activity and virtue. But Aristotle tends to adhere to an absolutist conception of eudaimonia throughout the NE rather than such a capacity-relative conception. Thus, he favors the interpretation of a common-sense view that his theory can explain. This strategy of modification-cum-explanation casts doubt upon the degree to which Aristotle’s reliance upon the views of others actually constrains his theory, since any number of interpretive variants of a given view are then available as explananda, so that in principle Aristotle would be free to select the one from these that yields to his explanatory resources most easily. This rests, of course, on how plausible one finds his specific interpretations.

To turn to almost the reverse relation between the views of others and Aristotle’s theory, Aristotle also argues in the other direction—from the views of others to his own
ethical theories. And this should not be surprising, considering that he has announced that he is going to conduct his inquiry from “what is familiar to us” (1095b3-4), and certain views of others may fit this description. When Aristotle does argue from the views of others toward his own theory, he tends to do this on the basis of universal or nearly universal consensus about some thesis. And I have already dealt with a few such arguments from universal consent, especially in considering how Aristotle relies upon conceptually unspecified and allegedly universally held views. Thus I will make only a few brief additional remarks.

To cite one such example already considered, Aristotle says of the highest good that “it is agreed upon by most people in name” (NE 1095a17-18). This claim is both widely agreed upon, and—in the form given—conceptually unspecified. Aristotle evidently takes this kind of justification to be powerful; indeed, he gives no other justification for the identity between eudaimonia and the highest human good. Likewise Aristotle relies on a rhetorical question in the course of the function argument that seems functionally very similar to positing a universal consensus—asking if (given that the cobbler and the carpenter have a function) man is by nature functionless (I.1097b28-30). And indeed at one point in the NE Aristotle directly asserts the authority of universal consent: “those things which seem to all [to be the case], we say these things are” (X.1172b36-1173a1).

In addition to arguing from universal belief, Aristotle also argues from universal behavior. Thus he argues, for example, that happiness is more end-worthy. And one of the arguments that he puts forward is that “no one chooses happiness for the sake of [things other than happiness itself]” (Arist. NE I.1097b5-6). This might be Aristotle’s way of referencing facts acquired through habituation or at any rate something similar.
Now that I have examined these specific features of Aristotle’s engagement with others’ views, I shall offer a tentative characterization of how Aristotle draws on such views in the NE. One part of this section has dealt with how Aristotle handles the conceptual content of the views of others. It should now be clear that Aristotle sometimes reformulates such views without trying to preserve the originally intended force of their language, the context of the utterance, or the full range of possible meanings of the view. Indeed, Aristotle does not even seem to treat the person who expresses a given view as the authority on what that view amounts to. In certain cases, particularly when Aristotle is describing a universal belief, he seems to consider a view in a conceptually unspecified form; indeed, sometimes he explicitly marks it as thus unspecified.\(^{84}\) Thus, to make the point with a greater degree of generality, Aristotle does not seem to be very concerned about preserving the intended meaning of a view that he draws upon in order to justify his own views.

Another part of this section has dealt with how Aristotle sees the views of others as relating to his theories. In some cases, Aristotle uses the metaphor of harmony to describe the relation between such a view and his own theory, and in other cases Aristotle tries to show that his own view explains what he takes to be a mistaken view. These relations of harmony and explanation need not require that an endoxon and Aristotle’s theory be particularly close to one another. Thus while Aristotle thinks that he can explain why some people mistakenly believe that eudaimonia is good fortune (1099b7-8), his own view about the role of luck in playing some kind of auxiliary role in happiness is rather different. This is not to say that Aristotle’s method fails to lend credibility to his theories;

\(^{84}\) See 1095a17-18, 1098b20-22.
it certainly does make his arguments more persuasive and grounds them in certain aspects what others believe. But he gives himself considerable latitude for reinterpretation and re-explanation of others’ views. Still, he regards such views as requiring interpretation and explanation, and if possible confirmation in some form. How compelling one finds Aristotle’s method of drawing on the views of others will ultimately depend upon how reasonable one finds his reinterpretation, conceptual clarification, and re-explanation of such views, and whether one agrees that such theories as he develops harmonize with such views in the way that he claims.
Chapter 1 Appendix: Two Case Studies in Aristotle’s NE Method

In this appendix I shall consider how Aristotle draws on the views of others in two different parts of the Nicomachean Ethics and to what extent such views form the substance of his considered understanding of the subjects into which he is inquiring in each case. First, I shall consider the NE VII inquiry into akrasia, where Aristotle first describes a procedure for inquiring from “appearances” (φαινόμενα) then enumerates opinions about akrasia, and finally uses these opinions in the process of developing his own theory of akrasia. Then, I shall consider how, in NE I, Aristotle draws on Solon’s view that “one must look to the end of a life” to judge its happiness. Here, I shall pay special attention to Herodotus’ version of this story, arguing that this is likely to have been Aristotle’s source, and consider how Aristotle’s treatment differs from Herodotus’ story as a way of drawing his own method into sharper focus. Throughout this appendix, as in the preceding chapter, I shall distinguish between Aristotle’s theory and practice of method, considering where they coincide and fail to coincide. One of my chief aims here is to show the limits of Aristotle’s own remarks on method for giving a full and accurate account of his actual practice of method, particularly the remarks on method at NE VII.1145b2-7.
The NE VII Endoxic Method

I would like to begin by considering Aristotle’s description of his so-called endoxic method of inquiry. Much attention has been given to this passage, and I discussed it briefly in chapter 1, but I shall examine it in greater detail here. Aristotle writes:

δεῖ δ’, ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ πρῶτον διαπορήσαντας οὕτω δεικνύναι μάλιστα μὲν πάντα τὰ ἐνδοξά περὶ ταύτα τὰ πάθη, εἰ δὲ μὴ, τὰ πλείστα καὶ κυριώτατα· ἐὰν γὰρ λύηται τε τὰ δυσχερή καὶ καταλεῖπται τὰ ἐνδοξά, δεδειγμένου ἂν εἰ ικανῶς.

And it is necessary, just as in other cases, setting out the appearances and—after first going through the puzzles—in this way if possible to confirm all the reputable views about these pathē, and if not all, the majority and the most authoritative. For if the difficult ones are refuted and the reputable opinions remain, it would have been made clear enough.

Arist. NE VII.1145b2-7

One major problem that arises in making sense of these remarks is whether to understand them as describing a certain procedure for approaching a given topic, or more ambitiously as making a claim about the degree of reliability to be granted to endoxa and phainomena, and perhaps thereby also indicating a manner or style rather than a procedure of inquiring into a subject. Interpretations about the significance of this method divide along these lines. Thus G.E.L. Owen takes Aristotle to be giving an account of a style of inquiry by which he builds up a view from phainomena in the sense of those things that seem to be true on the basis of others’ opinions.85 Owen scrupulously

85 Owen (1961), esp. 87.
compares Aristotle’s remarks on method at *NE VII.1145b2-7* and *Physics IV.211a7-11*, and his actual practice of method in the corresponding parts of each treatise, and finds Aristotle practicing what he preaches. Nussbaum draws broader conclusions, writing of Aristotle’s *NE VII* remarks on method that he, “declares that his aim, in science and in metaphysics as well as in ethics, is to save the appearances and their truth…”\(^86\) But Barnes takes the method to be doing something far more modest, as primarily procedural, remarking, “the restrictions imposed by the Method are minimal,” and, “The Method is not formally vacuous; but it has, in the last analysis, very little content.”\(^87\) Barnes’ point is that the method gives the inquirer a wide berth for assembling *endoxa*, interpreting or reformulating them, and culling them, in the process of doing so making use of arguments and considerations as he sees fit. In the course of this appendix, I shall try to determine to what extent the method should be interpreted as procedural, and to what extent as offering more ambitious claims about the dependability of certain kinds of data.

Whether *NE VII.1145b2-7* is understood as describing a general method, or one limited to specific inquiries also depends in part upon how one resolves this initial question. Thus, if the endoxic method is meant simply as a procedure, it is fairly straightforward to assess when Aristotle is using it—one can simply look for the steps that he describes. On the other hand, if the endoxic method in fact amounts to an assertion about the reliability of different kinds of data, and how such data support a philosophical argument, then it is harder to discern when Aristotle is using this method—since it might in that case explain how Aristotle reaches conclusions, without ever rising to the surface of explicit argument.


\(^{87}\) Barnes (1981) 510.
One prominent scholar, understanding the endoxic method in this latter, not merely procedural sense, has understood the phrase ωσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ("just as in other cases") to mean "just as in all other cases"—meaning just as when we inquire into any subject.\(^{88}\) It should be emphasized, however, that "all" does not occur in the Greek phrase. Another scholar interprets τὰ ἄλλα as referring to "other issues in practical philosophy."\(^{89}\) But it is worth pressing the point of what exactly Aristotle intends with the simple phrase ωσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων. Indeed, Aristotle uses almost exactly the same phrase to describe a feature of his method in the Politics: ωσπερ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸ σύνθετον μέχρι τῶν ἀσυνθέτων ἀνάγκη διαιρεῖν ("For just as in other cases, one must divide what is joined together until one reaches what is not") (I.1252a18-19).\(^{90}\) And while Aristotle does often consider the parts that compose a whole in the course of an inquiry, this is certainly not his only way of approaching a problem. At most, this is an aspect of any inquiry that he engages in. Thus the parallel with the Politics gives good textual grounds for doubting that Aristotle intends to describe the general method that he pursues throughout his writings.

Furthermore, in the terms set out in the beginning of the first chapter, even if NE VII.1145b2-7 were intended to describe his general method, this would not by itself show much about his actual practice of argument. As Barnes has put it, “From time to time, Aristotle thought about his feet; and he produced one or two odd theories of running. But,

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\(^{88}\) In particular Nussbaum (2001) 240 n.1., who defends translating “just as in all other cases.”

\(^{89}\) Barnes (1981) 494. And see Bolton (1991) 8, for a similar conclusion about the intended scope of the endoxic method described at NE VII.1145b2-7.

\(^{90}\) As pointed out by Salmieri (2009) 313 n. 3.
like any good athlete, he forgot about theorizing when it came to the race.”

Accordingly, it is crucial to distinguish between Aristotle’s theory and practice of method—there is simply no good reason to assume that the two coincide prior to an examination of them in relation to one another.

Thus, to give one case that shows the difficulty of taking the endoxic method to apply to all of the *NE* or to philosophical inquiry in general, throughout most of the *NE* I “things said” section, Aristotle uses *endoxa* to give confirmation to his definition of *eudaimonia* as a kind of excellent rational activity. Thus, for example, Aristotle remarks that the view that *eudaimonia* is virtue “harmonizes” with his own theory (I.1098b30), without modifying his theory in the direction of this view, which he rather regards as an approximation of his own correct view. Aristotle formalizes this contrast between endoxic data and his own argument by distinguishing between “the argument” (ὁ λόγος) and “the things said” (τὰ λεγόμενα) as two different and at least partly independent sources of understanding of the subject in question (*NE* I.1098b9-11). It would be hard, then, to claim that Aristotle’s position arises from the *endoxa*.

And if one turns to Aristotle’s other writings, it is again difficult to see them as consistently adhering to the endoxic method of *NE* VII. Thus in the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle remarks that unlike in other subjects, where he has built on the work of his predecessors, in the subject matter of reasoning and fallacy, nothing had been accomplished before him, and he had to begin from scratch (183b17-184b8). Thus Aristotle seems to regard his findings as novel and original in a way that the endoxic procedure described at *NE* VII.1145b2-7 could not support.

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Now I shall turn back to the one unambiguous application of the endoxic method—the inquiry into *akrasia*. At 1145a8-20 Aristotle enumerates the *endoxa* about *akrasia*. And after he finishes enumerating these views, he summarizes them as *legomena* (1145b20). And, each particular view that he lists is introduced either by δοκεῖ (“it seems…”) or φασίν (“they say…”)—language that at least indicates that Aristotle is not yet taking a position on whether they are true when he first states them—with some views being set forward in contradictory pairs held by different unnamed parties. While the use of δοκεῖ seems motivated by a judgment about the plausibility of a view, rather than its origin, this does not exclude the plausible proposition in question from being a view borrowed from another. One might then ask exactly whose views Aristotle is enumerating here. In particular, are these the views of everyday Greeks? Or are they, rather, the views of other philosophers? Furthermore, if these *endoxa* or *legomena* are in fact the views of others, does Aristotle accurately capture the view of the party from whom he is borrowing it? And does he really regard the views that he enumerates with an impartial eye at the outset?

Despite the fact that the *Topics* allows that *endoxa* may include the views of the wise (I.100b21-3), it has nevertheless often been supposed that Aristotle is simply, in a detached and impartial way, laying out the relevant views of ordinary Greeks. In his well-known article, Owen characterizes the views that Aristotle actually enumerates at *NE* VII.1145a8-20 as “common conceptions on the subject.”92 He seems to take a similar

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92 Owen (1961) 85. This, despite the fact that in the very same article Owen (1961) 87 takes a more subtle view about the variously theoretical and non-theoretical nature of a series of views considered by Aristotle in *Physics* IV.208b1 ff. Owen’s different evaluation of the two Aristotelian enumerations is particularly striking, since he regards him as using the same basic method in each case.
view about the nature of the language that Aristotle uses to express these views, claiming that the views that he enumerates, “turn out as so often to be partly matters of linguistic usage”—for Owen, *ordinary Greek* rather than philosophical linguistic usage. It need hardly be said that Owen’s view has been influential. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed without argument that the views Aristotle gives here are actually borrowed from ordinary Greeks and then reported by Aristotle in a roughly accurate and disinterested way. Indeed, it is not clear that his method would require this.

For the most part, Aristotle does seem to describe the *endoxa* in fairly neutral terms that do not reveal his view of their accuracy. In one case, however, he seems to betray a prejudgment about the plausibility of an *endoxon*. He writes: “And some say…that the self-indulgent man is akratic and that the akratic man is self-indulgent, mixing them together [συγκεχυµένως], but others say that they are different” (1145b14-17). The adverb συγκεχυµένως is derived from the passive particle of συγχω (“pour together”) so that it literally means “in a poured together fashion.” But it would seem that combining those things which belong together is not strictly speaking mixing at all, so Aristotle’s use of this adverb perhaps implies an error of conflation on the part of the group advancing this view. Furthermore, Aristotle elsewhere uses this adverb to draw a contrast between views expressed clearly (σαφές) and those expressed confusedly (EE 1216b32-35). Finally, Aristotle does end up distinguishing between the ἄκόλαστος and

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93 Owen (1961) 85, where Owen explains the value of these *endoxa* for, “the conceptual structure revealed by language,” referring back to his earlier reference to the actual enumerated views as embodying “common conceptions on the subject.”

94 Thus Nussbaum (2001) 240 takes Owen’s view one step further, characterizing the views that Aristotle enumerates here as, “some of our most common beliefs and sayings about akrasia.”

95 This contrast between σαφές (“clearly”) and συγκεχυµένως (“confusedly”) is also found in Hermogenes (*On Style*, 1.11).
the ἀκρατής, rather than “mixing them together,” so that he might be anticipating that distinction.

Furthermore, while not all of the language of the *endoxa* coincides with Aristotle’s own technical philosophical language—as with ἀκρατής and ἀκόλαστος—much of it clearly does. Thus Aristotle pairs ἀκρασία with μαλακία, and ἐγκράτεια with καρτερία in two *legomena*—as if each pair of words consisted of pure synonyms (VII.1145b8-10 & 1145b14-15). But in each case, exactly one of the terms comprising the pair represents the true Aristotelian technical term, while Aristotle uses the other more loosely. This tends to render these *endoxa* less conceptually specified than Aristotle’s theory, even for a reader already familiar with that theory. And in another *endoxon*, Aristotle similarly uses φρόνιμος and δεινός as if they were synonyms. This case is different, since Aristotle has elsewhere defined each of these terms in relation to the other—distinguishing mere cleverness (δεινότης) from practical wisdom (φρόνησις) (*NE* VI.1144a28-29). Thus in this case the reader familiar with Aristotle’s formal terminology is forced to interpret this *endoxon* as less conceptually specified than Aristotle’s own theory.

These observations suggest that Aristotle might be generating a list of possible views in relation to his own views, rather than enumerating actual views. Or perhaps the *endoxa* that he enumerates represent some kind of combination of actual views and possible views generated by way of contrast to his own views. This interpretation is supported by his use of not only verbs of speaking, but also δοκεῖ to express the *endoxa* that he enumerates. And, indeed, in the *Topics*, Aristotle at one point advises the dialectician to generate propositions not only from those views actually held, but also “those that are like these” (*Topics* I.105b5). While technically such views would not count as *endoxa* on
the *Topics* definition (I.100b21-3), which seems to define *endoxa* as actual beliefs, nevertheless Aristotle still regards these views as serviceable for dialectic.

Some of the language is also clearly originally Plato’s.\(^96\) Thus, for example, Plato defines the ἄκραστος at one point as the opposite of the temperate (*Gorgias* 507a-c). And this is exactly what the term means for Aristotle, and what it presumably must mean for the party that claims that the ἄκραστης and the ἄκόλαστος are distinct from one another (1145b17). The plural subjects of φασί (“they say”) then might be explained by supposing that Aristotle is referring to Academic debates,\(^97\) rather than Plato’s dialogues in particular, but the basic point is the same: the views enumerated by Aristotle at *NE* 1145b8-10 clearly include views expressed in philosophical language that either were expressed by actual philosophers, or that are the sort that philosophers would express.\(^98\) Thus both the language and substance of Aristotle’s and Plato’s views play some role in determining the *endoxa* that Aristotle enumerates here. Thus Aristotle cannot simply be reporting commonsense views about *akrasia*, as has sometimes been supposed, but is perhaps instead giving a combination of philosophical views, and views he regards as possible, which he has generated in contrast to his own theory.

Now that I have considered the content of the *legomena*, the next questions are how Aristotle actually proceeds from the initial set of *endoxa* to his own view. My main concern is, apart from the initial set of *endoxa*, what kind of arguments and evidence does Aristotle use to advance the inquiry? The main problem here is that depending upon

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\(^{96}\) As Mann (2009) 19 observes.

\(^{97}\) Mann (2009) 20 offers the suggestion that the views enumerated here may represent Academic debates.

\(^{98}\) Bolton (1991) 9-10 also supposes that some of the views are philosophical, trying to distinguish one subset of popular *endoxa* and another set of philosophical *endoxa* among the views that Aristotle enumerates at *NE* VII.1145b8-20.
exactly what views and arguments are brought to bear on the endoxic inquiry, its content will differ greatly. Thus Barnes supposes that Aristotle’s initial account of the endoxic method allows him to rework the initial set of endoxa into a new form.\textsuperscript{99} But depending upon how much latitude Aristotle gives himself for this reformulation, the degree of restriction that is being imposed upon his actual practice of method might be fairly great, or fairly slight.\textsuperscript{100} Furthermore, as I have already pointed out, Aristotle’s own views already seem to play some part in how he goes about setting out the endoxa at VII.1145b8-20. Thus if Aristotle’s own views play an important role in generating the set of endoxa, and if Aristotle grants himself wide latitude for drawing on his own theory to reformulate these endoxa and arriving at a subset of his initial set of endoxa, then the method does not seem to limit Aristotle as much as has sometimes been supposed.

In the course of \textit{NE} VII, Aristotle introduces distinctions between different uses of a given word. Thus, Aristotle says that “we speak of knowing [\(\tau\o\ \varepsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\i] in two senses [\(\delta\iota\chi\omega\varsigma\)]” (1146b31), distinguishing between knowing as mere having and knowing as both having and using knowledge. And what is initially a linguistic clarification between two senses of knowing, leads quickly into what seems difficult to avoid characterizing as a technical, philosophical idea—of the two different premises used to form the practical syllogism (1146b36-47a10). In his endoxic reading of the inquiry into \textit{akrasia}, Bolton tries to argue that the practical syllogism is not a technical doctrine at all, since Plato had already expressed some form of the view that there is a universal and particular aspect of moral reasoning, but his references are not convincing

\textsuperscript{99} See Barnes (1981) 493 for his interpretation of the procedure that Aristotle describes.
\textsuperscript{100} As Barnes (1981) 510 suggests.
parallels for Aristotle’s theory. After raising this issue, Aristotle goes on to discuss the practical syllogism in more detail in his digressive natural inquiry into cause, which seems also to show that Aristotle considers the subject of the practical syllogism as at least subject to a technical treatment that goes beyond endoxic inquiry. But Aristotle already has drawn on the idea of the practical syllogism prior to his natural digression, so that its presence within NE VII cannot be explained purely in terms of a digression that reaches outside of the endoxic inquiry itself.

Within the endoxic inquiry in NE VII, Aristotle also argues from universal or near-universal consensus. In respect to the endoxon that the phronimos can be akratic, Aristotle reasons: “But it is absurd. For the same one will be at the same time practically wise and akratic, but no one would say [φησει δ’ οὐδ’ ἀν εἶξ] that doing the basest things involuntarily is characteristic of the practically wise man” (1146a5-7). Insofar as Aristotle considers such universal consensus to be the final word, not subject to conceptual clarification or rejection, it cannot be a raw endoxon or legemonon. As I argued in chapter 1, often when Aristotle relies upon an argument from universal consensus, he does so in order to defend a conceptually unspecified form of a claim. This argument from universal consensus, however—or more precisely from universal denial—

101 Bolton (1991) 20. He points to Phaedrus 270a-272b, where Socrates discusses the importance of understanding rhetoric in theory, as well as how to make speeches in specific situations about specific topics, but this combined requirement for theoretical and particular knowledge forms only the roughest parallel to Aristotle’s theory of the practical syllogism. Bolton also points to Meno 77a and Republic 392e for some of the terminology Aristotle uses here, but if the concept is not Platonic, some shared language does not make Aristotle’s remarks on the practical syllogism at 1146b35-1147a10 endoxic. Aristotle often draws on Plato’s terminology, but this does not always indicate that he is being unoriginal.

102 The digressive natural inquiry into cause here also seems to show that Barnes’ remark (1981) 495 that Aristotle “nowhere suggests that any other method will lead to results which conflict with, or go beyond, the results achieved by the Method of Ἐνδοξα” is wrong.
apparently relies on attributing some roughly Aristotelian notion of φρόνησις to the
deniers. After all, one of the initial endoxa at 1145b8-20 advances roughly the claim that
Aristotle denies on the basis of an allegedly universal denial—that the phronimos can be
akratic—except that in its initial endoxic formulation it is rendered conceptually
unspecified by the pairing of δεινός and φρόνιμος. Here, however, Aristotle uses only the
term φρόνιμος and seems to understand it in roughly his own sense. This does not
necessarily invalidate the argument—Aristotle’s thought might be something like: those
who use such-and-such a word in my sense would universally deny… The trouble,
though, is that Aristotle’s notion of φρόνησις is a technical one, and some might well
deny that the kind of practical wisdom Aristotle ascribes to the man of true excellence is
even possible. In particular, one might claim that man with great political talent, who had
an exceptional ability to see the good for man, might at the same time be akratic in
relation to matters of sex and appetite.103 Thus there is some question about whether this
argument supports viewing Aristotle as working out his position from the views of
others—as the endoxic method has sometimes been understood.

Twice in the inquiry into akrasia, Aristotle also refers directly to what “has been
established” (δεικται) about the nature of φρόνησις and the φρόνιμος (VII.1146a7-9;
VII.1152a6-14), where NE VI seems to be meant. In one of these passages, he remarks,
“it has been proved earlier” (δεικται πρότερον) that the practically wise man is
capable of action (πρακτικός) and possesses the other virtues (τὰς ἄλλας ἔχων ἀρετάς)
(VII.1146a7-9). Again, since Aristotle’s formal account of the φρόνησις has such thick

103 Following Aristotle’s (admittedly somewhat provisional) use of Pericles as a paradigm case of
φρόνησις (VII.1140b7-10).
substance and is hardly mere commonsense, I think his reliance upon it here supports viewing the endoxic method as more procedural than substantive.

I think, then, one is justified in adopting the position of Barnes, who remarks both that the letter of Aristotle’s own account of his endoxic method at NE 1145a2-7 does not restrict Aristotle greatly in the pursuit of an inquiry, and—further—that it is not even clear that Aristotle was terribly concerned about adhering strictly to his own stated methodological procedure.104 Examining NE VII shows both that the *endoxa* Aristotle enumerates seem to be shaped partly by his own views, and also that Aristotle is quite willing to rely upon views he has argued for non-endoxically elsewhere—in particular his account of *φρόνησις*.

**Aristotle and Herodotus**

Now that I have offered some observations about the NE VII inquiry into *akrasia*, I shall return to NE I to look at another instance of an inquiry that Aristotle makes which purports to rely upon the views of another. Within the so-called “things said section” of NE I, at NE I.1100a10 ff., Aristotle appears to draw on an argument that Herodotus gives to Solon in order to develop his view about the relation of luck, the end of a life, and a complete life to happiness. Aristotle does not, however, give Herodotus’ name at any point in the passage. Nonetheless, there are good reasons for supposing that he is referring specifically to Herodotus as opposed to some other lost source that described

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the same story or to an orally transmitted version of this story. First I shall consider the
evidence that Aristotle is in fact drawing on Herodotus, and then I shall consider how
Aristotle uses Solon’s wisdom to shape his own theory.

In Herodotus’ story, Solon says that to judge the happiness of a life one must “look to
the end,” and Aristotle gives Solon’s view in similar language. Aristotle twice says “it is
necessary to look to the end,” once reporting Solon’s view, and in the second case using
this as the protasis of a conditional in order to consider the consequences of this view. He
uses similar language in each instance: χρε/uni1F7Cν τ/uni1F73λος /uni1F41ρ/uni1FB6ν (1100a11) and τ/uni1F78 τ/uni1F73λος /uni1F41ρ/uni1FB6ν
dεϊ (1100a33) (“it is necessary to look to the end”). In Herodotus’ story, Solon says the
same thing in slightly different language from Aristotle, expressing the view in a more
general form, as though it were a principle for reckoning any event, not just a human life:
σκοπ/uni1F73ειν δ/uni1F72 χρ/uni1F74 παντ/uni1F78ς χρ/uni1F75µατος τ/uni1F74ν τελευτ/uni1F74ν (“And it is necessary to look to the
end of every affair”), and Herodotus sums up Solon’s advice Croesus by saying: τ/uni1F70
παρε/uni1F79ντα /uni1F00γαθ/uni1F70 µετε/uni1F76ς τ/uni1F74ν τελευτ/uni1F74ν παντ/uni1F78ς χρ/uni1F75µατος /uni1F41ρ/uni1FB6ν /uni1F10κ/uni1F73λευε
(“having set
aside the present goods, he commanded him to look at the end of each matter”) (Hdt.
I.33). While Aristotle uses τ/uni1F73λος instead of τελευτ/uni1F75, the language in the two writers is
quite similar.

There are some more general verbal echoes that may be merely coincidental, but may
show that Aristotle was thinking of Herodotus. Both use the verb τελευτάω (“to die”) with
an adverb to describe the quality of someone’s life at the point of his death. Though
this idiom itself is not unique to Herodotus and Aristotle, here both are using the same
idiom to discuss the same question: the relevance of the way a life ends to reckoning
whether it counts as happy.\textsuperscript{105} And \(\text{ἀποθνῄσκω}\) may likewise be used with an adverb to indicate the quality of someone’s death, so the subject matter itself does not require the use of this particular idiom. And both writers also use the verb \(\muακαρίζω\) (“to judge blessed”).\textsuperscript{106} There are also some differences. Aristotle never uses the words \(\deltaλβος\) (“blessedness”), \(\deltaλβιος\) (“blessed”) found in Herodotus, for example.

Writers after Aristotle also seem to treat Herodotus’ version of the story as the standard one, though this gives us only a \textit{terminus ad quem} for when Herodotus’ version became fixed (by him, or perhaps by someone else telling a very similar version of the story). Plutarch in the first century AD and Diogenes Laertius in the second or third both appear to follow his version, though neither mentions Herodotus by name. Plutarch’s narrative of the conversation follows almost exactly: Croesus shows Solon his treasures, Solon is unimpressed, Croesus asks him who the happiest man is, Solon responds first Tellus then Kleobis and Biton, Croesus is incensed, Solon explains, Croesus ignores his explanation and finally punished when his city is sacked (Pl. \textit{Solon} 28-9). Diogenes’ version is very short, but his Solon gives the same answer to Croesus that we find in Herodotus: “Tellus and Kleobis and Biton.”\textsuperscript{107} Further, he ends this quotation from Solon with the phrase \(κα\  ν\  \tau\ \alpha\  \theta\rhoυλούμενα\) (“and the things repeated”). This last phrase could refer either to words repeated through oral transmission or to a written account. Since, however, Diogenes likely lived in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century AD—some six hundred years after Herodotus died—it seems unlikely that this story was simply being repeated orally, and

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\textsuperscript{105} Herodotus: \textit{τελευτήσατα καλως} (I.32.5), \textit{τελευτήσει εὐχαρίστως τὸν βήσιν} (I.32.9).

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\textsuperscript{106} In Aristotle at 1100a16, 1100a33, 1100a27; in Herodotus at I.31.3. Aristotle uses \(\muαραρίζω\) and other words from the same root fairly often when writing about ethical matters, however.
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we know of no other text earlier than Herodotus that would have transmitted it. Further, Plutarch reports that even in his time the authenticity of the story was in doubt, which suggests that the original source was not, say, a now lost bit of Solon’s own verse.

There are also more general reasons to suppose that Aristotle is referring directly to Herodotus. Aristotle clearly knew Herodotus’ writings. He refers to him directly by name in a number of different works, including the *Poetics*, *De Generatione Animalium*, *Historia Animalium*, and in the *Eudemian Ethics*.108

Aristotle also appears to draw on Herodotus in a rather similar way to what we find in *NE* I in his discussion of pity at *Rhetoric* B.8. Here, Aristotle alludes to a story about Psammenitos which we know only from Herodotus (III.14), but he does not use Herodotus’ name, instead remarking ὡς φασίν (“as they say”) (1386a21). Although this attribution of the story might seem odd if Aristotle were drawing on Herodotus, Herodotus himself often ascribes his stories to others and here in particular he interjects at one point ὡς δὲ λέγεται ὑπ’ Αἰγυπτίων to explain the source of a detail. So given Herodotus’ tendency to ascribe stories to others, attributing a story from Herodotus as ὡς φασίν would make some sense. Aristotle also refers to ὁ Ἀμασίς in the manuscripts rather than Ἀμασίος (“the son of Amasis”), which is the emendation made by Spengel in order to match Herodotus’ story, so he might have recalled this story from memory rather than directly consulted a text, such as Herodotus’. There are also two words in common between the passages, though neither is so unusual as to provide a definite confirmation that Aristotle drew directly from Herodotus: the verb προσαίτω (‘to beg’) describing Psammenitos’ friend where the uncompounded αἰτέω would have carried a very similar

108 *Poetics* 1451b2; *De Generatione Animalium* 736a10, 756b6; *Eudemian Ethics* 1236b9; *Historia Animalium* 523a17.
force, and the verb δακρύω used to describe Psammenitos’ crying upon seeing this friend where Aristotle might have used a more generic word such as κλαίω (“bemoan”). So the limited evidence suggests that Aristotle was thinking of Herodotus’ version of the story.

I shall briefly consider how Aristotle draws on Herodotus in the Rhetoric, before turning to his use of the Solon story. In Aristotle’s understanding the terrible is what men feel for those closest to them, to whom they react “just as to themselves,” while pity is something men feel for those who are at least some distance from themselves. Aristotle supposes that his distinction can explain why the dethroned Egyptian king Psammenitos cries in one case (for his friend who has been reduced to begging) and shows no outward sign of emotion in another case (when his son is being lead to his death).\(^\text{109}\) Aristotle explains the first case as an instance of pity, and supposes that in the second case the dreadful (τὸ δεινὸν) must drive out pity. In the text of Herodotus, Psammenitos is never described as feeling pity for his friend, but Aristotle thinks he can explain Psammenitos’ external behavior (i.e., crying) by supposing that Psammenitos felt pity. That is, Aristotle supposes he can explain Psammenitos’ behavior if he describes it in a particular way. This redescription of a story is in a way very similar to the reinterpretation of endoxa that Aristotle engages in when he is drawing on the views’ of others.

There is no other known extant earlier source for the stories about Solon and Psammenitos, yet Aristotle does not mention Herodotus when referring to these stories, referring directly to Solon and the son of Amasis, apparently as historical figures. In some other such cases when Aristotle refers to a character in a text, he cites the particular

\(^{109}\) I take this to fit the general pattern of Aristotle trying to explain data that fall outside of his own theoretical views—in which I include both stories, non-philosophical ideas, and the ideas of other philosophers—by means of his own theories.
author and work—as he does when he refers to Plato’s Republic at Politics 1261a6. But there are also other instances when he refers directly to a character from a text without citing the author or the text that seems to be his source. Thus, for example, in NE VII.1145b21-27, Aristotle refers simply to Σωκράτης, though he is almost certainly paraphrasing lines from Protagoras 352c that deal with akrasia. This parallel reference without a direct mention of the author or text gives some further support to the interpretation that Aristotle is thinking of Herodotus, but failing to reference him by name at Rhetoric B.9 and NE 1100a10-18. This kind of reference to a character without the author or title of the text could be explained if Aristotle had assumed his audience to be very familiar with Plato and Herodotus, as he probably would have, or simply by a greater concern with the content than the source of the story. Another possibility here is that the topos of “looking to the end” in order to reckon someone eudaimón was re-oralized from the Herodotean version in academic debates. This would provide a different explanation for the lack of any direct reference to Herodotus.

If it is right that Aristotle is drawing directly on Herodotus’ version of this story, how then does he draw on Solon’s view? First, he tries to interpret it. He suggests two alternatives: either Solon means that someone may only be happy while he is dead, or we can only judge him to have been happy while alive once he is dead. The first possibility he judges to be absurd—“both otherwise and also to us who say that happiness is some kind of activity.” Here he concludes that “this is not what Solon intended” (μηδὲ Σόλων τούτο βούλεται) (Arist. NE I.1100a15), justifying his interpretation by appealing to common sense. It is interesting that Aristotle is treating Solon’s view as an endoxon or a

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110 This is Wolfgang Mann’s suggestion.
legomenon, but he draws on common sense and consensus in order to correctly interpret that view. So Aristotle seems to take Solon’s words and common sense to be separate sources of understanding that can be used in conjunction but in different ways.

A very un-Nicomachean view is, however, embedded in Herodotus’ version of the story about Kleobis and Biton, which Aristotle neglects. Their mother asks the god to give them whatever is best for them and they then die, which Solon interprets by saying:

διέδεξε τε ἐν τούτοις ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἀμεινον εἴη ἀνθρώπως τεθνάναι μᾶλλον ἦ ζωεὶν

(“And in these matters the god showed that it is better for man to die than to live”). Thus, while Tellus dies in the course of defending his city, the death of Kleobis and Biton is not understood by Solon as a result of their strenuous trip to the festival, but rather as god-given. So it is clear that a fairly radically different and perhaps rather counter-intuitive idea of the good-for-man is at work here. That Aristotle was familiar with some form of this view is apparent from the Silenus fragment, in which Silenus tells Midas that it is best for man never to have been born, and second best for him to die quickly (Rose frag. 44). But this view does not ever appear to surface in the Nicomachean Ethics, which instead optimistically supposes that an activity largely controlled by man constitutes his chief or primary good. Aristotle says that they are brave for whom “a defense or death is fine” (ἀλκὴ ἦ καλὸν τὸ ἀποθανεῖν) (1115b4-5), but he seems to see fine death as an accidental good—something that is good because it is the best possible thing under less-than-good circumstances. Herodotus’ Solon, however, evaluates a fine death rather as an escape from a perilous and uncertain life and as such possibly more desirable than life itself. And Aristotle does not try to come to terms with this extra-Nicomachean view
here. So the limited scope of Aristotle’s interest in Solon’s stories about Tellus and Kleobis and Biton seems clear—if, indeed, Herodotus was Aristotle’s source.

In addition to referring to Solon’s view—and to common sense—in order to correctly interpret that view, Aristotle also refers to the function argument during his treatment of Solon’s dictum. From 1100a31-1101a17, Aristotle is dealing specifically with the problem of how happiness can be both stable and also dependent on fortune. At one point during this discussion, he writes: “But the current puzzle also supports the argument” (µαρτυρεῖ δὲ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τῷ νῦν διαπορηθέν) (Arist. NE 1100b11-12). The puzzle that he is referring to here must be that happiness is stable, but does have some further need of good fortune and the external goods—a view he has already expressed at 1099a15-16 and 1099b17-18. And Aristotle’s point seems to be that “the current puzzle supports the argument” because it explains how happiness can be stable but depend on fortune at the same time—or, as he explains it himself: περὶ οὐδὲν γὰρ οὗτως ὑπάρχει τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἔργων βεβαιότης ὡς περὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τὰς κατ’ ἀρετήν· (“For in no human endeavor is there such great stability as there is for the activities of excellence”) (Arist. NE 1100b12-14). For this claim about the relation of the function argument to this puzzle to make sense, I believe there have to be three at least partially independent claims: (1) happiness is stable, (2) yet it needs external things, and (3) happiness consists in virtuous activity, where (1) and (2) form a puzzle, and (3) at least partially ameliorates that puzzle.111 (1) seems to come from some kind of intuitive process. It is either identical to or very closely related to the claim we find justified

111 Broadie & Rowe (2002) 286-7 treat the function argument and the claim about the stability of happiness as the same, but I think Aristotle means to separate these claims here, since he repeatedly refers to the claim that happiness is stable, and to “the argument” (ὁ λόγος), but does not seem to have a way of referring to both these claims together as a single claim.
earlier: τάγαθον δὲ οἰκεῖον τι καὶ δυσαφαίρετον εἶναι μαντευόμεθα (“And we divine that the good is something personal and difficult to take away”) (1095b25-26). The source of (2) will be the central question that I consider in this dissertation, but it does not seem to be something that is simply derived from (3), and Aristotle first begins to talk about the external goods in the *legomena* section of *NE* I (1098b9ff.). Furthermore, Aristotle seems to think of Solon’s claim that one must look to the end (itself an *endoxon* or *legomenon*) as closely connected to this additional requirement for external things. And (3) of course is shown by the function argument.

**Conclusions**

The scope of this appendix is limited to the inquiry into *akrasia*, Aristotle’s treatment of Solon’s dictum, and some comparisons drawing on the preceding discussion to the *NE* I method. But some general conclusions within the limited scope of the passages considered here are possible. First, I have shown that across several passages of the *NE*, Aristotle treats common sense and universal consensus as different sources of authority from *endoxa*. This is not to say that there is no relationship at all between the grounds for relying on these different sources of understanding for a given subject, but Aristotle does not seem to treat *endoxa* as having exactly the same kind of authority as universal consensus, or his own arguments. Thus Aristotle rejects or reinterprets *endoxa* in at least two cases, because they conflict with universal agreement (1146a6-7, 1100a13-14), showing that these two sources of authority are functionally distinct for him. Furthermore
Aristotle also seems consistently to differentiate between the status of *endoxa* and of his own arguments and theories—both within the endoxic inquiry into *akrasia*, and throughout the so-called things-said section of *NE* I. Thus, although there is more work to do, I think these two case studies show the advantages of a synoptic study of Aristotle’s methods and the limitations of relying on the methodological preface at *NE* VII.1145b2-7 to unlock Aristotle’s methods of ethics.
Chapter 2: Aristotle’s Argument for the External Goods Requirement

Now that I have examined Aristotle’s theory and practice of method in NE I, I shall apply some of these observations to the main subject of my dissertation: Aristotle’s view about what the external goods are, why they are genuine goods, and how they contribute to eudaimonia. Since it is unclear to what extent the external goods are a technical category of goods that is intended to help to develop the core substance of Aristotle’s theory, I shall first try to assess their exact role in his inquiry. I shall then consider whether Aristotle offers an argument for eudaimonia’s need of the external goods strictly in terms of his formal definition of eudaimonia or on some other grounds. If his explicit argument is not made strictly in terms of his formal definition of eudaimonia, I shall consider possible explanations for why. Finally, I shall interpret his assessment of what kind of value the external goods do have.

First it is worth clarifying a point of Aristotle’s terminology. Initially in the NE, Aristotle uses a threefold division of goods, distinguishing the external goods, the bodily goods, and the goods of the soul. At times, however, he implicitly adopts a twofold division between the external goods and the goods of the soul. In this twofold division, the external goods are understood in a broader sense, so that they are distinguished only from the goods of the soul, and include anything external to the soul, namely, the bodily goods. Since the argument that particularly concerns me in this chapter uses the external goods in this broader sense, for simplicity I shall use the term in this sense in this chapter, and throughout the dissertation as a whole.
While Aristotle does not offer a definition of the external goods, he does illustrate what he means by the external goods with examples—such as good looks, wealth, and political power. Yet the exact content of these goods is still a puzzle, since the different goods that Aristotle names are subject to different possible specifications, but Aristotle does not directly indicate how they are to be specified. Good looks, for example, might be defined as just those looks that are most conducive to virtuous action, or in a more conventional way, as those looks that are most pleasurable to look at. The way in which an external good is defined, also entails a certain specification of what exactly counts as that good. Or, to put it simply, definition entails specification. Thus, for example, if wealth is defined as that which is good or useful for exchange with others in return for various goods, then those things that do this count as wealth, and those that fail to do not. If it fails to be thus useful, it also fails to be good—as, for example, wealth held in a currency that is no longer circulating and no longer exchangeable.

While Aristotle does not directly define the sense in which the external goods are goods, his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as final, self-sufficient, and consisting in some kind of excellent rational activity is often taken to provide all the information that is needed in order to determine what he must mean about why the external goods are good. If this is so, then the external goods derive their value strictly from virtuous activity. Many scholars have accordingly tried to explain the value that Aristotle grants to the external goods strictly in terms of some contribution to virtuous activity.\(^\text{112}\)

There is an alternative way of getting at this problem. That is, Aristotle might be seen as offering either a theory specific or a theory independent explanation for the value of

\(^{112}\) See, for example, Cooper (1985), Crisp (1994), and Brown (2006).
the external goods. A theory specific explanation of their value would have to explain their worth strictly in terms of some kind of contribution to *eudaimonia*, on its formal definition as virtuous activity. A theory independent explanation of their value might simply acknowledge the explanatory limitations of the formal definition of *eudaimonia*, and explain their value on independent grounds. Aristotle’s own remarks about the relative precision of ethics compared to other subjects of inquiry lend support to the possibility that he might assign value to something outside the strict terms of his own theory.

If, then, the external goods are not defined as good by virtue of some kind of contribution to *eudaimonia*, they might be conventional goods in the way that the examples that Aristotle gives suggests. If the external goods were defined in their own terms in this way, then a particular kind of relation to *eudaimonia* would result. Namely, the external goods would make an accidental, rather than essential, contribution to virtuous action. While Aristotle never considers the problem of the value of the external goods in these terms, it creates a useful standard against which to clarify his own remarks and arguments about the kind of value such goods actually have.

**What Part Do the External Goods Play in Aristotle’s Inquiry?**

First I shall consider the role of the external goods within *NE I*. Aristotle begins *NE I* with an inquiry into goods and the good. In the course of doing so, he alleges that it is generally agreed upon “in name” that the highest practical good is *eudaimonia*, though
the specific content of this highest good is disputed (I.1095a14-30). *Eudaimonia* then
turns out to be the focus of the entire first book. A little further, Aristotle rejects the
relevance of Plato’s form of the good for his inquiry, since it is not predicable of various
particular goods, and since it is no aid to the practitioners of particular arts, and does not
form the end of action (1096a12-1097a14).

At this point, Aristotle goes on to establish what is generally regarded as his official
or formal definition of *eudaimonia*. First, he establishes that it is a final and self-
sufficient good (1097a15-b21). Then, saying that a clearer account is needed, he argues
that it consists in a characteristically human function—namely, some kind of rational
activity in accord with virtue (1097b22-1098a20). Aristotle next explains that this is an
outline account with a precision appropriate to the subject matter (1098a20-b8). After this
formal and official treatment, Aristotle shifts his approach to his subject, writing: “it is
necessary to investigate happiness not only from the conclusion and premises, but also
from the things that are said about it.”[113] And it is within this so-called “things said”
section that the two crucial passages concerning the external goods occur.[114] I shall spend
the first part of this chapter looking at these two passages.

It is immediately after announcing this shift in method that Aristotle first refers to the
external goods:

νενεμημένων δὴ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τριχῇ, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἐκτός
λεγομένων τῶν δὲ περὶ ψυχῆν καὶ σώμα, τὰ περὶ ψυχῆν

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[113] σκεπτέον δὲ περὶ αὐτῆς οὐ μόνον ἐκ τοῦ συμπεράσματος καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ λόγος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκ
tῶν λεγομένων περὶ αὐτῆς (1098b9-11). I translate περὶ αὐτῆς here as “about happiness.” The
most recent feminine singular noun is actually ἀρχή “starting point,” but Aristotle seems to mean
to refer to εὐδαιμονία “happiness,” as Broadie & Rowe (2002) ad. loc. note.

κυριώτατα λέγομεν καὶ μάλιστα ἁγαθά, τὰς δὲ πράξεις καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τὰς ψυχικὰς περί ψυχήν τίθεμεν. ὡστε καλῶς ἂν λέγοιτο κατὰ γε ταύτην τὴν δόξαν παλαιῶν οὐσῶν καὶ ὁμολογουμένην ὑπὸ τῶν φιλοσοφοῦντων.

Indeed, given that the goods have been divided in three ways—into those called external, those of soul, and those of body—we claim that the goods of soul are good in the strictest sense and are the most good, and we reckon the actions and activities of soul to belong to these, so that our argument would be finely made in accord with this old opinion agreed upon by the philosophers.

Arist. NE I.1098b12-18

Aristotle does several things here that seem to indicate that he does not regard the threefold division of goods as properly part of his theory. First, and most obviously, this threefold division is introduced in the legomenon section of NE I.8-12. Aristotle’s purpose throughout NE I.8-12 is usually to defend his narrow definition of eudaimonia, drawing on legomena in order to do so, rather than to refine or develop his formal position further.\footnote{This is how Brown (2006) characterizes Aristotle’s purpose throughout NE I.8-12. It is, however, often difficult to know whether a particular argument simply confirms what Aristotle has already concluded, or whether he is subtly shifting or refining his position. One might also wonder if this whole way of approaching the problem is wrong, and if perhaps Aristotle is not instead simply working through problems rather than attempting to come up with a consistent theory. For defenses of this latter view, see Burnet (1988) xvi-xvii and Smith (1994).} Here too Aristotle uses the division in order to show the similarity between his own theory and “the old opinion agreed upon by the philosophers.”\footnote{Since Plato uses a similar threefold division in the Laws to distinguish the goods of the soul as the most valued within his division, Aristotle is almost certainly thinking in part of Plato here (697b). And likely he has Socrates and Diogenes in mind as well, since Socrates was known to have admonished Athenians to care for their souls before wealth and reputation (Apology 29d7-e5).} Thus Aristotle is not using the division in order to articulate or refine some aspect of his theory, but rather as a way of giving further support to it.
Second, Aristotle marks the external goods themselves as “spoken of” (λεγομένων)—using the same word that he uses to describe the data of *NE* I.8-12 in his brief methodological remarks introducing this part of *NE* I. At times Aristotle uses *legomenos* as an adjective simply to mark an unusual use of language, with roughly the meaning of the English phrase “so-called.” This probably partly explains its use here, since it immediately follows the term ἐκτός which has the least obvious meaning of the three kinds of goods mentioned here, since it must be external in relation to something, but what this is is not specified. Since, however, Aristotle has just indicated a shift in method toward “the things spoken of” using the same Greek word, he may be indicating that the external goods, and perhaps the entire threefold division, are borrowed and do not properly belong to the substance of his own view, as, for example, *eudaimonia*, virtue, action, activity, and similar concepts clearly do.

In fact, this division seems to borrow from a similar threefold division found in Plato’s *Laws* (697a-b), consisting of the goods of the soul, the goods of the body, and the goods “in respect to money.” But the origin of Aristotle’s term τὰ ἐκτός (“the externals”) is more difficult to determine. No use of this phrase in the sense of “worldly things” can be definitely established as preceding Aristotle. Cicero tells us, however, that a similar threefold division of goods was shared by Peripatetics and Academics of Plato and Aristotle’s day, using the Latin phrase *externa bona*. Thus Aristotle may be using

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117 As at NE 1118a31 to refer to the “so-called things-of-Aphrodite” (i.e., matters relating to sex”), or at NE 1107b23 to refer to “some kind of so-called sponginess” (χαυνότης τις λεγομένη) (i.e. vanity).


119 *Academica* I.19-22. See *Tusculan Disputations* V.30/85 for the phrase *externa [bona]*.
legomenos here to mark “the externals” for worldly things as a term that arose in contemporary Academic and Peripatetic discussions. The evidence, however, makes it impossible to determine this with certainty.

There is also a third way in which Aristotle seems to mark this division as tentative or not fully his own. Aristotle places the division of goods in a genitive absolute using a perfect passive participle with no expressed agent, so that the goods are simply divided, but the reader is given no indication as to who has thus divided them. Furthermore, the Greek circumstantial participle, which is found here, may have a conditional force. When it does have a conditional force, the assertion in the main clause of course depends upon this conditional, so that this assertion is not being advanced without qualification. If the force is conditional here, then Aristotle is not endorsing the threefold division, but merely making use of it to state a position that follows from assuming this division.

Curiously enough, Aristotle puts the threefold division of goods in a very similar genitive absolute expression in a passage in the Politics, where the main clause states that no one would disagree that the blessed require all these goods (VII.1323a22-27). Aristotle even uses the phrase “at least in respect to one division” (προς γε μίαν διάρεσιν) to qualify this allegedly universal consensus, thus explicitly indicating that this is not the only way to divide the goods. This parallel supports interpreting the NE passage as avoiding a full endorsement of this threefold division as forming part of the fabric of the developing theory, since the handling of the division is similar in both texts.

Thus in the NE, Aristotle introduces the threefold division of goods within the legomenon section of NE I.8-12, initially uses them to provide further support for his theory rather than to articulate a feature of it, marks the external goods as “spoken of”—
perhaps to indicate that the term itself is borrowed—and he places the division itself within a genitive absolute that may have a conditional force.

The Context of the Main Argument for the External Goods Requirement

There are two passages about the external goods in the so-called “things said” section of *NE* I.8-12. Now that I have discussed the first, I shall turn to the second. This second passage is the more important of the two for my purposes, since Aristotle directly states that *eudaimonia* needs such goods, and then argues for this claim. Here, I shall consider the context of the claim, and in the following section, I shall consider the argument itself.

After introducing the external goods in the first passage, discussed above, Aristotle goes on to anticipate the second passage by briefly surveying several different opinions about *eudaimonia*. The final of these is about the external goods, and it is the context of this treatment that concerns me here. He writes: it seems “to be excellence [*άρετή*] to some, practical wisdom to others, wisdom to others, and to others still these or one of these things with pleasure or not without pleasure. And others also include external good season [*τήν ἐκτὸς εὕετηρίαν*]” (1098b23-26). After this brief survey, he then goes on to consider a subset of these *legomena* in more detail, following the order in which he initially surveyed them. First he deals with the relation of *eudaimonia* to excellence, then to pleasure, then to external good season. To be precise, however, it is a discussion of the
external goods that corresponds to the reference in the initial survey to external goods season.\textsuperscript{120}

It will be useful to examine briefly how Aristotle deals with the views concerning excellence and pleasure for the sake of comparison to his treatment of the view that \textit{eudaimonia} needs the external goods. Turning first to the view that \textit{eudaimonia} is excellence, he says that his own view is “in harmony with those who say that \textit{eudaimonia} is excellence or some kind of excellence” (1098b30-31). He then goes on to clarify that his view is that \textit{eudaimonia} is an activity of excellence, in implicit contrast to the claim that \textit{eudaimonia} is simply excellence itself. Finally, he offers some fresh evidence to support his claim that it is an activity rather than a state. Thus the initial \textit{legomenon} can be sharply distinguished from his actual view, but Aristotle nevertheless takes it to provide some kind of support for that view.

Next, Aristotle returns to the view that pleasure accompanies \textit{eudaimonia}. Rather than attributing the \textit{legomenon} under consideration to a third party, however, as he has just done in the case of excellence, he simply states what turns out to be his own view, that the life of the virtuous is “sweet in itself” (καθ’ αὑτῶν ἴδυς). He then defends this claim in terms of his own theory, giving a seamless argument that fine actions are pleasurable for the lovers-of-the-fine (φιλόκαλοι), and that their life therefore contains pleasure in itself.\textsuperscript{121} Interestingly, he also says that the life of the virtuous does \textit{not} “have further need” (προσδεταῖ) of pleasure (1098a15-16), since pleasure is contained within

\textsuperscript{120} I discuss the distinction between the external goods and good luck below.

\textsuperscript{121} When I say that the argument is seamless, I mean that Aristotle gives the impression of regarding it as such, not that the argument is completely successful. Most obviously, base and fine things other than his own actions—in particular, the actions of his fellow citizens—also seem to be potential sources of pleasure and pain for the virtuous agent.
such a life. This is important, since it turns out to be precisely the opposite of what he will say about the relation of the external goods to eudaimonia. According to this argument at least, pleasure also quite neatly avoids interfering with eudaimonia’s self-sufficiency and finality, since it is simply part acting virtuously to take pleasure in that action, and thus presumably such pleasure is chosen along with that action by a virtuous agent, as part of the package as it were.\footnote{122 Elsewhere Aristotle indicates that this relationship is not quite so neat, saying that generous actions are done “with pleasure or not without pain” (IV.1120a26).} Thus, although Aristotle makes no explicit mention of his definition of eudaimonia as virtuous activity, he is able to take a position that subsumes the view that eudaimonia is something “with pleasure or not without pleasure” (1098b25), and argue for it in terms that are wholly consistent with this definition.\footnote{123 I say wholly consistent, but there is some slippage. In the function argument, Aristotle defines eudaimonia as “activity” (ἐνέργεια) in accord with virtue, whereas he later freely alternates between πρᾶξις (“action”) and ἐνέργεια (“activity”), treating the two as synonyms.}

Aristotle then turns to a related topic, which helps to form the transition to his shift to a discussion about the external goods. Here, Aristotle rejects a Delian epigram’s definition of the best, the finest, and the sweetest as separate, and asserts that all these things in fact belong to activity, referring back to the conclusion of the function argument. Although this epigram is not anticipated in the brief survey of legomena earlier (1098b23-26), its reference to what is sweetest seems natural after the discussion of pleasure. And it serves as a kind of legomenon par excellence here, insofar as it is a word for word quotation of an attempt to describe how different kinds of value are to be distinguished. After this, Aristotle then returns to the external goods: “Nevertheless it is
evident that there is also further need of the external goods, just as we have said” (1099a31-32).

There are two important things that structure Aristotle’s transition here. First, Aristotle positions the discussion of the external goods in response to the immediately preceding treatment of the Delian couplet. He writes that “nevertheless [διωζ] it is evident that there is also [καὶ] an additional need [προσδεομένη] of the external goods” (1099a31-32). Both the prefix προσ- and the Greek word “also” (καὶ) very clearly indicate that something additional is needed. It is also pretty clear that what Aristotle actually means is something additional to activity—since he has just insisted that the finest, sweetest, and best all belong to activity and can therefore all neatly be subsumed under his definition of eudaimonia, thus allowing him to reject the division and proposing a unified good in its place. The transitional word “nevertheless” (διωζ) also indicates a contrast, apparently acknowledging that while activity (ἐνεργεία) can subsume the sweetest, finest, and best, it cannot subsume the external goods—at least not in quite the same way. The other important thing that structures Aristotle’s transition to the external goods here, is that this discussion corresponds to the final legomenon about eudaimonia that Aristotle had so briefly surveyed earlier at 1098b22-29, that others “also include external good season” (καὶ τὴν ἐκτὸς ἐυεπτηρίαν συμπαραλαμβάνουσιν), so that the order in which he considers excellence, pleasure, and the external goods follows the order in which these legomena are initially surveyed. This is important, because it suggests that he sees himself as examining a legomenon when he reaches his discussion of the external goods here.
Is The View that Eudaimonia Needs the External Goods a Legomenon?

The context strongly supports interpreting the claim that eudaimonia needs the external goods as a legomenon—because of the initial declaration of a shift to an inquiry “from what is said” at the beginning of NE I.8-12 (1098b9-12), because this claim corresponds to one of the legomena briefly surveyed earlier, and finally because of the actual method Aristotle has been pursuing in treating the views about excellence, pleasure, and the Delian couplet as legomena subject to refinement or rejection. Despite this expectation, Aristotle remarks that eudaimonia “evidently has a further need” for the external goods, thus qualifying this claim with much stronger language than that he uses to express endoxa and legomena. This creates a puzzle, since the argumentative context suggests interpreting this as a legomenon, but the language that Aristotle uses to express the claim does not.\(^{124}\)

Indeed, Aristotle typically describes endoxa or legomena that he regards as subject to modification or rejection using tentative language—such as δοκεῖ, or passive or generic active forms of λέγω or φημί, or substantive forms of φαίνω such as φαίνομαι (“the things that appear”).\(^{125}\) The verb φαίνεται with the participle, however, means “it is evident,” and is thus distinguished from the infinitive construction “it seems.” Bonitz’s Index Aristotelicus as well as a survey of the instances of φαίνεται throughout NE I

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\(^{124}\) Broadie (2002) ad loc. supposes that Aristotle’s use of φαίνεται with the participle in this passage suggests that this is a “received view,” although in fact Aristotle typically uses less forceful expressions such as δοκεῖ with the infinitive or λέγεται to express legomena and endoxa that he regards as subject to modification or rejection.

\(^{125}\) For examples of λέγω, φημί, and δοκεῖ to describe endoxa that are subject to modification or rejection see: NE VII.1145b8-20.
confirms that Aristotle maintains this distinction in usage between the participle and infinitive constructions, so that the distinction in meaning is no mere grammarian’s invention.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, for example, at NE I.1097b22-24 Aristotle uses the construction to draw a contrast between what is established—that is, what is evident—and what remains to be established in the course of his inquiry. And Bonitz likewise offers an example where an observation that is close to pure perception is expressed with φαίνεται and the participle—that animals have been encased in amber.\textsuperscript{127}

Describing something as evident amounts to treating it as established, yet this is very clearly not the status that endoixa generally or the legomena in NE I.8-12 have for Aristotle. For one thing, Aristotle has stated earlier in the “things said” section of NE I that popular consensus is not likely to be entirely wrong, but to get at least one thing or perhaps most things right (1098b28-29)—which clearly implies that some such views may simply have to be rejected, and thus corresponds to the view that Aristotle takes on endoixa in NE VII.1145b2-7, where he indicates that some views may be discarded. For another thing, Aristotle in fact goes on to reject the view that eudaimonia consists in excellence, as well as the claim that he mines from the Delian couplet—that the finest, sweetest, and best things are distinct (1098b30-1099a7; 1099a24-31). And the legomena that eudaimonia is wisdom (σοφία) or practical wisdom (φρόνησις) are implicitly rejected, since these are states rather than activities (1098b24).

Aristotle’s treatment of the legomenon that eudaimonia involves pleasure is different. When Aristotle comes to pleasure, he states directly that the life of the virtuous is sweet in itself (1099a7). Here, however, Aristotle clearly does not regard this statement as a

\textsuperscript{126} Bonitz (1955) \textit{ad loc.}

\textsuperscript{127} Meteorologica 388b21.
legomenon, but rather as his own view, which simply corresponds to the earlier legomenon about the role of pleasure in eudaimonia. There is no need to say that this view is evident, because the argument demonstrates it unproblematically in terms of Aristotle’s formal definition of eudaimonia as virtuous activity. Thus Aristotle’s treatment of the view that eudaimonia needs the external goods here is unusual, since he regards it as evident, and thus not as subject to rejection, and yet at the same time his argument fails to demonstrate it unproblematically in terms of his formal definition of eudaimonia as virtuous activity—as I shall show in the next section. Furthermore, it amounts to an important substantive refinement or development of his position, rather than mere endoxic testing of an already established position. Thus the formal methodological context differs from his actual on-the-ground treatment of a claim.

It is true that Aristotle often regards a schematic, pre-philosophical view of some kind as universally agreed upon, and therefore as beyond dispute. But this does not seem to apply to Aristotle’s declaration that eudaimonia evidently has further need of the external goods. Such allegedly universally agreed upon views are generally schematic, and used to outline or confirm a general position, rather than extending, refining, or developing the substance of a theory that Aristotle is working out. Thus, for example, Aristotle regards it as universally agreed upon that eudaimonia is the highest good “in name” (ονόματι), but makes it quite clear that the substance of eudaimonia remains to be specified. And

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128 At least, this is how Aristotle regards this argument. It is certainly possible to wonder whether fine actions and pleasure are as neatly joined as Aristotle supposes here—even according to his own theory. For example, at one point Aristotle himself remarks that the pleasure of a virtuous action depends upon its reaching its end (NE III.9.1117b15-16). It is not necessary to pursue this question here, however.

129 See, however, Aristotle’s claim at NE VII.1146a7-9 that no one would claim that the phronimos is the same as the akratic—where Aristotle is perhaps ascribing his own technical definition of φρόνησις to those who agree to this.
indeed, at one point Aristotle uses φαίνεται and the participle to express that this agreement is evident (1097b22-24). One might, of course, ask whether in this case, too, Aristotle is presenting a schematic, pre-theoretical view about the relation between eudaimonia and the external goods, where eudaimonia is meant in the pre-technical sense established early in his inquiry as agreed upon “in name” as the highest practical good. Yet the argument that follows this statement at least initially presumes the technical definition of eudaimonia, so that Aristotle seems to be trying to refine or develop his theory rather than merely describing a pre-theoretical consensus about eudaimonia.

Thus this claim cannot be regarded as reflecting a pre-theoretical consensus, because the argument for it that immediately follows is made in terms of the formal definition of eudaimonia. Nor can it be regarded as a legomenon, because it is described as evident rather than something that is said or seems to be the case. Thus its status is unique.

**How Does Aristotle Argue for the External Goods Requirement?**

Now that I have contextualized the claim that eudaimonia needs the external goods within NE I, and shown that the language that Aristotle uses to express this view implies that it relies upon some stronger authority than legomena or endoxa, I shall examine the argument itself. The very fact that Aristotle states the view, then advances an argument for it, rather than simply testing it against his theory and making a remark about the relation between the two, however, suggests that it has a special status. Looking at the argument itself will help to clarify exactly how Aristotle regards the claim. Before I begin
my analysis of Aristotle’s argument, however, it is important to consider a problem about what Aristotle is trying to accomplish in the course of this argument.

The difficulty concerns the relation between the argument that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods, and the central claims about *eudaimonia* that Aristotle has already advanced in *NE* I. Aristotle has defined *eudaimonia* as a final and self-sufficient good consisting in excellent activity; he then *de facto* specifies this activity as excellent practical activity, or virtuous action, in the discussion that follows. *Eudaimonia* is final in the sense that all other goods are chosen for its sake, and it is not chosen for the sake of anything else (1097a15-b6). And it is self-sufficient in the sense that it cannot be improved by the addition of any other good (1097b6-21). In order to prove that *eudaimonia* has an as yet unspecified need for the external goods, Aristotle merely needs to show that in some cases an agent must rely upon some such goods in order to engage in virtuous activity. This is very easy, of course, and it is sufficient to point out, for example, that generous and magnificent acts require wealth. But if *eudaimonia* is a final good—and all other goods are chosen for its sake—then the external goods too must be chosen for its sake, and thus something further must be shown. To make this as clear as possible, if the external goods are chosen for the sake of *eudaimonia* in the particular sense that they contribute something to virtuous activity, and if this contribution turned out to be necessary for the kind of virtuous activity that constitutes *eudaimonia*, then *eudaimonia* would have a particularly clear need for the external goods—Aristotle’s

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130 The finality criterion may also be understood to indicate some less straightforward relation between other goods and virtuous activity. According to Richardson Lear (2004) 85-92, teleological approximation of one good for another good is sufficient to satisfy the finality criterion. On this interpretation, one good need not contribute to another good in order to be understood as chosen for its sake.
argument and the view that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods would fold together. That is, in this case the external goods’ value would be defined in terms of a concrete contribution to virtuous activity, and the kind of excellent activity that amounts to *eudaimonia* would depend upon the external goods in order to be actualized. The question, then, is whether Aristotle relies upon this latter line of reasoning in order to both defend his claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods and also at the same time preserve his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as a final good consisting in virtuous activity.\(^{131}\)

Now that I have made this point, I shall look at the specific argument that Aristotle actually gives here:

A. Happiness evidently also has a further need \[προσδεοµένη\] of external goods \[τῶν ἐκτὸς ἄγαθῶν\], just as we have said (1099a31-32)
B. For \[γὰρ\] it is impossible or not easy to do \[πράττειν\] fine things without resources \[ἀρχὴ γητος\] (1099a32-33)
C. For many things \[πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ\] are done \[πράττεται\] just as through instruments \[καθὰπερ δι’ ὀργάνων\]—through \[διά\] friends, wealth, and political power (1099a33-1099b2)
D. But when men lack certain other things \[ἐνίων δὲ\], their blessedness \[τὸ μακρίου\] is tarnished—such as good birth, the blessing of children, and beauty (1099b2-3)
E. For \[γὰρ\] the one who is ugly in looks, or ill-born, or lonely and childless is not a happy sort \[εὐδαιμονικός\] (1099b3-4)
F. And still less so if his children or friends should be wicked, or—although good—if they have died (1099b5-6)
A’. Thus just as we have said, there seems to be need \[ἐοικέ προσδεῖσθαι\] also of such good season (1099b6-7)

\(^{131}\) Cooper (1985) and Brown (2006) both interpret Aristotle as depending upon this line of reasoning.
Here, Aristotle advances a thesis (that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods) (A), offers an initial justification in terms of his formal definition of *eudaimonia* (that is impossible or not easy to do fine things without the external goods) (B), and then different subjustifications for this (C-F) that variously seem to be made in terms of his definition of *eudaimonia* as virtuous activity, and not in such terms. Finally, he restates his thesis in a slightly different form (A’).

The initial claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods is straightforwardly justified by the immediately following γάρ clause, which states that “it is impossible or not easy to perform fine actions without resources.” A person “without resources” (ἄχορήγητος) is evidently a person lacking the external goods, and the justification is made in terms of Aristotle’s formal definition of εὖδαιμονία as consisting in activity (ἐνέργεια) or action (πράξις). Thus Aristotle begins the argument by offering a justification for the claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods transparently in terms of *eudaimonia’s* formal definition. It is also worth emphasizing that χορηγεῖν literally refers to performing a particular kind of socially sanctioned public service—namely, financing a chorus, where the chorus is then able to use this money to do something—namely, to play their part in a drama as a chorus. Thus the very term χορήγητος implies lacking the resources to do something, an implication that is made explicit in Aristotle’s initial justification that for such an χορήγητος “it is impossible or not easy to perform fine actions.”

It should, however, be immediately clear that depending on how this initial justification (B) is construed, it may nevertheless fail to offer a secure proof of the initial claim that such goods are needed (A), since this initial justification is given as a
Thus if it is impossible to perform fine actions without the external goods, then such goods are needed for *eudaimonia*. But if instead it is not easy (i.e., possible but difficult) to perform fine actions without the external goods, then they do not seem to be necessary at all. If Aristotle regards the initial claim as evident, however, then he does not necessarily have to offer a secure proof of it. He may, instead, regard this argument as supporting rather than proving the initial claim. The sub-justifications for this first argument (C-D)—which are offered in the lines that follow using a μέν γάρ...δέ construction—may help to resolve the ambiguity in the disjunction of the initial claim—

that is difficult or not easy to perform fine actions without the external goods.

While the μέν γάρ subjustification (C) might be able to support a stricter specification of the initial justification (B)—that fine actions are impossible rather than merely difficult without the external goods—the latter part of the argument introduced by the δέ clause (D-F) does not support a stronger construal of that initial disjunctive justification (B), since it says nothing about how action depends upon the external goods, which is what the initial disjunctive justification depends upon. And, as I have pointed out, a stricter construal of this argument would be required in order to prove the initial claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods.

And not only does the latter part of the argument (D-F) fail to support a stricter construal of the initial justification (B), but it also seems to be made outside of the terms

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132 Brown (2006) 233 argues that needs here should be understood in a relaxed sense, on the basis of charity, but Aristotle is consistent on *eudaimonia*’s need for good luck and the external goods throughout *NE* I.

133 That is, as long as doing fine actions is all that is required for *eudaimonia*, which is the implication here. If one considers the later accounts of particular virtues, however, something more than fine action is apparently required—the full range of determinate types of fine action corresponding to the particular virtues.
of Aristotle’s own theory, so that it fails to offer a theory specific explanation of the value of the external goods for *eudaimonia* at all. First, Aristotle makes no reference to action or activity throughout the second part of the argument (1099b2-8). Second, in place of giving explanations in the technical language of this work, he instead uses metaphorical language to describe how certain conditions affect the quality of a person’s life (D), and the vague *εὐδαιμονικός* (“a happy sort”) (E). Third, he refers to blessedness rather than happiness at one point in this section (D) and not before, even though the initial thesis is about *eudaimonia*. Finally, in the latter part of his argument, he considers the influence of loss rather than mere lack upon happiness (F), which perhaps raises a new question.

Scholars have debated whether Aristotle uses “blessedness” [τὸ μακριόν] as a synonym for *eudaimonia*, or to mean something different and—in violation of his own theory—better than *eudaimonia*. Yet the fact that this alternation coincides perfectly with Aristotle’s alternation from an argument made in terms of action, to an argument that makes no reference to action and instead uses vague and metaphorical language, strongly suggests that the word means something distinct from *eudaimonia* here. The evidence thus suggests that Aristotle is using “blessedness” here to mean something other than *eudaimonia* as he has formally defined it.

Furthermore, Aristotle is quite capable of making an explanation for something in terms of his theory when he chooses. Thus, for example, he argues that the view that honor is the good can be *explained* by the value that men attach to virtue, since they want to be honored for virtue (I.1095b23-30). Yet although he has defined *eudaimonia* as activity, and initially defends his claim that it needs the external goods in just these terms,

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134 Nussbaum (2001) 329, for example, insists that Aristotle is using the terms interchangeably. Joachim (1951) 58-59, on the other hand supposes the two terms to have distinct meanings.
he makes no reference to activity or action in the latter part of his argument here, instead relying on language that is not part of his technical philosophical apparatus.

The failure of Aristotle to offer a theory specific explanation for how the external goods contribute to *eudaimonia* suggests that he regards them as making an accidental rather than essential contribution to virtuous action—perhaps despite himself. That is, if they were reckoned as external goods by virtue of contributing to virtuous activity, and indeed as choiceworthy for its sake (a type of teleological relation), and if *eudaimonia* were supposed to depend upon this contribution in order to be realized, the argument would not be difficult to make, and there would be no need to remark that the need for such goods is *evident*—the argument itself would make it so, just as Aristotle regards his argument about the role of pleasure in *eudaimonia* as doing.

**How Are the External Goods Defined?**

As I have argued, Aristotle seems to treat the external goods as standing at least partly outside his formal theory. When he first introduces the external goods within the *legomenon* section of *NE* I.8-12, he uses them as one of several endoxic confirmations of his formal definition of *eudaimonia*, rather than to elaborate a new feature of his theory. Later in this same *legomenon* section, when Aristotle says that *it is evident* that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods, he is using language atypical of his treatment of *endoxa* to assert the manifest need for such goods. And in his argument for this claim he seems to try, but fails, to explain how such external goods contribute to *eudaimonia* in
terms of his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as action. Thus, he seems to regard *eudaimonia*’s need for such goods neither as a *legomenon*, nor subject to justification strictly in terms of his theory. Thus the status of this claim is somewhat unique.

Not only does Aristotle treat the value of the external goods for *eudaimonia* as having some extra-theoretical plausibility, he also gives examples of the external goods that seem very conventional. Thus, all of the examples that Aristotle offers are the kinds of things that people ordinarily attach value to, and no such ordinarily valued external good seems to be intentionally excluded from his list. Accordingly he mentions wealth, beauty, political power, friends, and honor all among the external goods.\(^{135}\)

Thus Aristotle both treats the external goods as having some special status in the course of constructing his argument, and at the same time the examples of external goods that he offers seem conventional. This suggests that Aristotle may recognize them as being good and contributing to *eudaimonia* simply because of their conventional or intuitive value, rather than for theory-specific reasons.

One way to object to this view would be to claim that even if the external goods consist of a set of things conventionally regarded as good, all of these goods nevertheless have some value specifically for excellent activity. In this case, a theory-specific and conventional evaluation of their value could actually result in an identical set of goods, even if perhaps each mode of evaluation would select that identical set as good for different reasons. In this case, the virtuous happy man and the wicked man might desire the same set of external goods, but for different purposes.

\(^{135}\) Honor, however, is not mentioned among the examples used in the “official” argument for the claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods at 1099a31-b8.
Thus for each specific external good that Aristotle names as an example, however conventional it might seem, a theory-specific explanation of its value might be offered. Along these lines, John Cooper has suggested that beauty is valuable for the happy life by making the beautiful one more sexually appealing, thereby generating more temptation and greater opportunity for temperance.\textsuperscript{136} Scholars have been skeptical of this suggestion on intuitive grounds, since there seems something at any rate unusual about valuing beauty for its temperance-facilitating power.\textsuperscript{137} Yet there is a deeper problem. If one insists that the essential property of each external good is some potential or actual relation to virtuous activity, then any given external good must be defined in terms of some such relation. And, if this is so, an unconventional set of goods must result.

Thus, for example, if one defines beauty (κάλλος) as precisely the appearance in face and body that best facilitates excellent activity over the course of a person’s life, this picks out certain appearances as good and rules out other appearances. But if one defines beauty as just those looks that are most pleasurable to look at, this selects a different set of looks. Perhaps in many cases, for many people, conventional beauty will facilitate greater virtuous action, but it is unlikely in the extreme that conventional beauty will in every case most effectively facilitate virtuous action over the course of that person’s life—even if virtuous action is defined in terms of an aristocratic social life. For example, in combination with a particular sort of personality, ears that stick out to the side might set others at ease in social situations, because they are somewhat amusing, and thus facilitate the virtue of friendliness, though they might not be regarded exactly as beautiful.

\textsuperscript{136} Cooper (1985) 182.

Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists* 66, records a criticism advanced by Ariston against the Stoic category of the preferred indifferents along these lines. Ariston claims that what is preferred or dispreferred can only be determined in relation to a particular situation. He then offers the example of a tyrant who chooses only the healthy for his army, releasing the sick—showing that in this situation, it is sickness that is preferred and health that is dispreferred. Against this sort of critique of his account of the external goods, Aristotle might argue that he is simply identifying the set of those things that *tend* to be useful for virtuous activity. Even this argument, however, is unsustainable.

If, in fact, the essential property of the external goods were *tending* to make some kind of contribution to excellent activity, then even those things conventionally regarded as evils would have to turn out to be external goods. Thus things such as bloody wars that provided the opportunity for bravery, or a plentiful supply of physically attractive and inexpensive prostitutes that provided the opportunity for temperance, or poverty that could be alleviated by generosity, would all also have to be reckoned as external goods. Such an evaluative scheme is clearly highly unconventional, and Aristotle’s very conventional examples of external goods do nothing to suggest that he embraced such a scheme. Many things both facilitate virtue and have some other feature that is conventionally regarded as bad, but this is the whole difficulty. If the external goods are just those things that facilitate virtue, regardless of how they might be evaluated on some more conventional scheme, then the examples themselves seem suspiciously conventional.

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138 Interestingly, in *Politics* II.1263b5-14, Aristotle defends inequality in property and the traditional institution of marriage in terms of their value for generosity and temperance. He is not, of course, categorizing these things as external goods, however.
One way to try to explain this difficulty would be to suppose that it is a sufficient supply of external goods, with some hardship mixed in, that would most effectively facilitate virtuous activity. On the face of it, this seems very reasonable. Yet if this combination were what effectively facilitated virtuous action, and if the external goods were indeed defined as good strictly by virtue of their contribution to virtuous activity, then this blend of favorable and difficult circumstances would form the true set of external goods. Yet Aristotle does not define the external goods in this way. He does say at one point that the happy man needs a sufficient supply of the external goods (NE I.1101a14-16). But there is a crucial difference between requiring a sufficient supply of the external goods, and saying that whatever things are sufficient for the exercise of virtue are the external goods. These considerations help to explain why Aristotle tries, but fails, to give a theory specific explanation for the value of the external goods, and why the external goods cannot be understood as choiceworthy for the sake of eudaimonia in any straightforward sense—as the finality criterion seems to require.

Defining Good Luck and the External Goods in Relation to Eudaimonia

There is, however, one passage in NE VII where Aristotle comes close to directly confronting the problem that I have just considered in the previous section—of whether

139 As Cooper (1985) 188 suggests.
140 Broadie (1991) 31-32 makes the interesting suggestion that the “for the sake of” relation might be interpreted broadly, to include situations where eudaimonia acts as a constraint upon the choice of something, rather than actually forming the end for the sake of which it is chosen. If this is what Aristotle had in mind, however, his struggle to explain why eudaimonia needs the external goods (I.1099a31-b8) would be inexplicable.
the external goods are defined as good in reference to *eudaimonia* or in some other more conventional way. In this passage, Aristotle approaches this question in reference to good luck, however, and not in reference to the external goods. In fact, he actually defines good luck in reference to *eudaimonia* here. It will be useful to look carefully at this passage to consider whether the view that he briefly touches on here should be used to interpret his view of the external goods.

Here, Aristotle first points out that Εὐδαιμονία and Εὐτυχία are not equivalent. Then, as evidence for their distinctness from one another, he says that excessive good fortune impedes happiness (*NE* VII.1153b21-25). But apparently seeing something odd in the idea that good fortune could interfere with *eudaimonia*, he revises his definition of good fortune, saying that such excessive good fortune does not count as good fortune at all, since good fortune itself must be defined in relation to happiness. This, of course, has the odd consequence of narrowing the distinction between good fortune and *eudaimonia* that Aristotle initially insisted on here, but his train of thought is clear.

Before considering the implications of the view itself, it is important to point out first that Aristotle gives the impression of stumbling upon this problem. This is clear from the fact that he initially says that excessive good fortune impedes *eudaimonia*, then reconsiders, redefines good luck in terms of *eudaimonia*, and finally rejects his initial view that excessive good luck can interfere with *eudaimonia*. Thus this passage gives the impression that Aristotle had not thought very carefully about the problem of whether good luck, at any rate, is independently good, or whether instead its value arises purely from some teleological relation to virtuous activity—even though the finality and self-sufficiency criteria that he develops in *NE* I seem to require him to take the latter
position. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether the view that he ultimately takes here can be applied to his view of the external goods or not.

The implications of the view seem clear. If good luck is defined in terms of *eudaimonia*, and Aristotle is using *eudaimonia* to mean virtuous activity (as in his formal definition of it), then the idea must be that luck which promotes such activity is evaluated as good luck, while luck which interferes with such activity is bad luck. (The context in *NE* VII, a discussion of pleasure as unimpeded activity, also reinforces this interpretation.) Thus, this redefinition of good luck seems to result in a kind of consequentialist evaluative framework according to which the value of any luck that befalls a moral agent arises strictly from its contribution to *eudaimonia*—that is, its contribution to his virtuous activity. As with the redefinition of the external goods that I imagined above, this would result in a rather unconventional notion of good luck, regardless of whether the virtuous activity of some aggregate of agents were considered, or one individual moral agent. Thus again, a very unconventional consequentialist evaluative scheme results from taking this idea seriously.

There is, however, a crucial difference between defining good luck in respect to virtuous action, and defining the external goods in this way. In particular, good luck by its very nature must consist in luck that is judged to be good against some particular standard. Without such a standard, good luck is a meaningless category. Thus defining good luck in terms of its contribution to some particular fine action, is unconventional, but does not create any formal or conceptual problems; it must always be defined in relation to some standard of what is good.
Redefining the external goods in this way, on the other hand—to return to the subject of the previous section—is much more difficult. The particular examples of the external goods that Aristotle offers appear to have stable definitions. Thus wealth seems to count as wealth and to be reckoned as a genuine good by virtue of being useful in exchange. And beauty seems to count as beauty and to be reckoned as a genuine good by being fine or pleasant to look at. Yet as long as particular external goods are defined in this way, as possessing stable definitions and as *prima facie* goods apart from any particular circumstances, they will not necessarily make any contribution to virtuous action. To put the matter in another way, they make an accidental contribution to virtuous activity, but not an essential one.

As I have argued here, the external goods cannot simply be assimilated to good luck. Whereas good luck is whatever luck counts as good, according to some as-yet unspecified account of what is good, the particular external goods presuppose particular kinds of value that are not obviously reducible to one another. This crucial distinction between good luck and the external goods also seems to me to provide a good reason for avoiding the term “goods of fortune” that has become popular in recent scholarship on the external goods.\footnote{As far as I have been able to tell, this term is originally introduced by Cooper (1985).} While this term need not be taken to entail the formal identity of good luck and the external goods, it has been used to support a broader interpretation of the external goods—according to which things such as the achievement of aimed-at consequences, and opportunities favorable to excellent activity would be counted among the external goods.\footnote{Cooper (1985) & Brown (2006).} Nevertheless, as I have argued, it is not at all clear that these things can simply be subsumed within the class of the external goods—in particular, because
they are defined in terms of some relation to excellent activity or deliberation in a way that the external goods do not seem to be.

Of course, it is true that Aristotle sometimes refers to good fortune and the external goods interchangeably in the *NE*. And it is also true that the external goods very often will be due largely to luck. Nevertheless, Aristotle offers two separate explanations for why *eudaimonia* needs the external goods (1099a31-b8) and good luck (1100b18-1101a14). And while these explanations are quite similar, Aristotle’s choice to deal with them separately suggests that he sees them as at least somewhat distinct. Thus the conceptual difficulty of identifying the external goods and good fortune is not the only objection to treating them as identical to one another—Aristotle himself, even as he sometimes treats them interchangeably, nevertheless never entirely assimilates them to one another.

Despite all this, I think in certain contexts, there is a good case for treating the external goods and good luck together, which may explain why Aristotle does so, and which will prove to be important for the final section of this chapter. Namely, the external goods and good luck are both things that stand outside of the agent in some sense, and yet at the same time are judged by Aristotle to make some contribution to his *eudaimonia*. Thus in those cases where Aristotle’s primary concern is the somewhat broader question of how the full range of things outside an agent generally may contribute to his *eudaimonia*, it would be quite natural for him to group them together.

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143 As, for example, in his reformulation (1099b7-8) of the thesis that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods (1099a31-32).
How Does Aristotle Evaluate the Contribution of the External Goods and Luck to

_Eudaimonia_?

Now that I have considered the difficulties of Aristotle’s argument for _eudaimonia_’s need for the external goods, as well as the reasons why this argument turns out to be strained, I shall turn to examining exactly how he describes the contribution of the external goods to _eudaimonia_. In fact, Aristotle offers separate discussions explaining first why _eudaimonia_ needs the external goods (I.1099a31-b8), and then why it needs good luck (I.1100b18-1101a14). Thus despite the fact that Aristotle sometimes treats the external goods and good luck as interchangeable, these two separate arguments suggest that he regards good luck and the external goods as distinct. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that the full range of those things outside of an agent would contribute to _eudaimonia_ within some restricted range of value, given their shared characteristics. After all, these things at least have in common the fact that, from the perspective of any particular agent, they are not the activation of _his_ soul. Furthermore, even if the external goods are not obtained exclusively through good luck, good luck is very often this source—so that at any rate they would seem to have kinds of value that overlap. These reasons for suspecting that Aristotle would assign a similar value to the external goods and good luck is given some confirmation in the similar language that Aristotle uses in his arguments about the value of the external goods and good luck for _eudaimonia_. Thus while my main interest here is in Aristotle’s argument about the external goods, I shall look to his remarks on good luck to help resolve some potential obscurity in this argument.
As I have argued above, when Aristotle puts forward his official justification for the claim that *eudaimonia* evidently has further need of the external goods, that explanation breaks down into two basic parts: a theory-specific explanation in terms of action, and a second explanation that does not seem to be made in terms of the narrow definition of *eudaimonia* as virtuous activity. It is this so-called second explanation that I am interested in here. When Aristotle makes this second explanation he says that when men lack certain external goods “they soil [ῥυπαίνουσι] their blessedness [τὸ μακάριον]” (1099a33-b3).

Although this language is metaphorical, it is nevertheless possible to try to extract some underlying meaning from it. The verb used here, ῥυπαίνω, comes from the noun ῥύπος meaning “dirt, filth,” so its literal meaning is “to dirty, to soil.” There must be some underlying good in order for something to be dirtied or tainted; dirt itself cannot be made dirty. And the taint cannot be so severe as to destroy this underlying good; if it is so severe, the taint simply becomes destruction or corruption. Thus presumably it is sullied specifically in the sense that the underlying or primary good is at least partly preserved, while the primary good is diminished or some secondary good is removed. This suggestion is supported by Aristotle’s claim elsewhere that τὸ καλὸν (“the fine”) is retained even when misfortune removes *eudaimonia* (1100b30-34). Since it is blessedness rather than *eudaimonia* that is being tainted—a term that Aristotle first introduces here when he finds it difficult to explain the value of the external goods in terms of action—perhaps Aristotle means that this secondary good consists of whatever

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144 Aristotle does not explicitly say here that such misfortune can remove *eudaimonia*, but it is implied by his claim that such misfortune cannot render a man “wretched” (ἄθλος), and elsewhere he explicitly indicates that misfortune can remove *eudaimonia* (I.1100a8-9).
does not contribute to eudaimonia according to its narrow definition as virtuous activity. In this case, the taint might amount to a removal of the independent and conventional value of the external goods which cannot be entirely subsumed within eudaimonia. This suggestion is supported by Aristotle’s implicit admission of cases in which τὸ καλὸν is retained but eudaimonia is not at 100b30-35.

When describing how serious good luck makes life more blessed, as in the other cases considered here, Aristotle once again gives two distinct explanations for its value. Aristotle explains: “for they provide a further natural ornament to happiness, and the use of these is a fine thing and a matter of virtue” (1100b26-28). The latter explanation here seems to correspond closely to the use explanation that we encountered earlier, although here Aristotle does not specify that such events are useful specifically as instruments. The former explanation seems to match closely the so-called “second explanation” for how lacking the external goods and suffering bad luck contribute to happiness. But here, Aristotle is giving a description for how something outside a moral agent contributes to, rather than detracts from, the quality of his life, so it may shed some additional light on his remarks on the external goods.

In this description of the positive contribution of good luck to eudaimonia here, Aristotle says that many great pieces of fortune make life happier, “because they themselves contribute a further natural adornment to life” (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὰ συνεπικοσμεῖν

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145 Stewart (1892/1999) v. 1, 146 understands these as two distinct explanations. Against my interpretation, however, an anonymous scholiast, understands the second explanation (“the use of them is a fine and serious thing”) as an explanation of the first (“they provide a further ornament”).

146 Stewart (1892/1999) 129 & Botros (1987) 113 also assume this correspondence between Aristotle’s “second explanation” of the influence of the external goods on happiness and this part of his explanation for how good events contribute to happiness.
Aristotle uses the emphatic nominative form αὐτά here, and these things—the events constituting good luck—are the subject of the verb (πέφυκεν), as though they were acting on an agent from the outside, and as if that agent were simply passively affected by these events. Grammar does not always indicate a deeper meaning, but it is suggestive. It is also interesting that Aristotle alludes to nature here—apparently an altogether different form of authority, which perhaps indicates that even apart from any sophisticated framework for ethical appraisal certain kinds of events have some unquestionable worth.

The Greek word that Aristotle uses here to describe the contribution of great good luck to life is κοσμέω, meaning to ornament or decorate. (This word group is often used specifically to describe women’s cosmetics.) As Aspasius already recognized in his commentary to the NE, a κόσμος means an addition: an ornament does not make beautiful bodies beautiful; beautiful bodies are already such and, to quote Aspasius, the ornament is rather something added or “placed around” (περιτεθειμένος). And Aristotle’s use of the prefixes συν- “together with” and ἐπι- “on top of” to form συνεπικοσμέω emphasize further that the ornament is additional to something. So the metaphor of further ornamenting a life seems to be a kind of inverse reflection of the sullying metaphor: in one case something secondary is taken away, in the other case it is added. Furthermore, it strongly suggests that some distinct good is being added to a pre-existing good, an idea that would explain Aristotle’s reluctance to offer an explanation for the value of the external goods for eudaimonia strictly in terms of their contribution to

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147 Aspasius, In Ethica Nicomachea Commentaria = CAG 19.1 ad. loc.

148 Aristotle uses this exact compound (συνεπικοσμέων) in a similar sense in the Topics to describe improving an argument by non-essential means (157a12-14).
activity. Thus this language provides strong evidence for the interpretation that Aristotle is admitting that things outside of an agent can contribute directly to his *eudaimonia*—without somehow making his activity more excellent.

Aristotle’s use of language suggesting addition or subtraction, without direct reference to virtuous activity, thus amounts to an admission that the external goods and fortune have some independent value, which cannot be fully explained in terms of making activity more excellent. I have also shown that Aristotle is responding to some kind of intuitive or conventional pull in his argument for the external goods requirement, when he claims that their absence taints life—without explaining a mechanism for that contribution and without directly referring to activity.\textsuperscript{149}

The inconsistency between Aristotle’s formal definition of *eudaimonia*—according to which it consists strictly in some kind of excellent activation of the soul—and his recognition that both the external goods and good luck may contribute to *eudaimonia* directly, unmediated through such activity, thus raises an interpretive problem. The principle of charity if often taken to require the interpreter to extract a single position from the philosopher that he is interpreting.\textsuperscript{150} But, in fact, Aristotle’s argument for *eudaimonia*’s need for the external goods is made outside of the terms of his formal definition of *eudaimonia*. And his reference to makarios hardly resolves this problem, even if he uses it to reference a more conventional notion of the good life, since he originally sets out to say something about *eudaimonia* at 1099a31ff. What it does seem to

\textsuperscript{149} In one case, when Aristotle says that serious bad luck taints blessedness, he does justify this in reference to impeding activity, but he also mentions pain here, leaving it unclear whether this taint is really entirely a matter of activity (1100b28-30).

\textsuperscript{150} See Brown (2006) for an interpretation that makes use of this notion of charity, in order to interpret the arguments for the value of the external goods as being made strictly in terms of Aristotle’s formal definition of *eudaimonia*. 
show, however, is Aristotle’s willingness to take a small step back from the formal theory that he is working out, to respond to the pull of a consideration that does not neatly fit within the terms of his own theory, and to try to mount an explanation of that consideration—even when doing so requires him to veer away from strict adherence to his own theory. If Aristotle himself is willing to approach his own theory in this spirit, it would seem odd for interpreters to insist on adhering to it in its strictest formulation. The substantive point, then, is that Aristotle recognizes that his formal definition of *eudaimonia* fails to fully explain the value of good luck or the external goods for *eudaimonia*.

Here, rather, I suggest that Aristotle develops a formal theory, acknowledges the imperfect precision of that theory in some of his methodological remarks, and continues to respond to the intuitive or conventional pull of the value of the external goods—apparently regarding his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as lacking final and total authority over the subject of his inquiry.¹⁵¹ This view would also offer an alternative way to approach many of the problems of interpretation that motivate the debate about whether *eudaimonia* should be understood as a monistic or inclusive good—though pursuing those implications would be beyond the scope of the present project. Here, I propose that Aristotle regards his formal definition of *eudaimonia* as a powerful but approximate account of the human good.

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¹⁵¹ As Aristotle perhaps indicates himself at *NE* I.1098a20-b8. See Annas (1993) 368 for a similar argument that Aristotle’s view that *eudaimonia* requires both virtuous activity and the external goods is a response to both “the theoretical pull and the intuitive requirement in our commonsense views about happiness.”
Chapter 3: The External Goods Within Aristotle’s Account of Action

In the last chapter, I argued that Aristotle offers an argument that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods that is made outside the terms of his formal definition of *eudaimonia*. Thus Aristotle in essence admits that the external goods can contribute to *eudaimonia* either by promoting excellent practical activity, or in some more direct way—violating the strict requirements of his own definition of *eudaimonia* as a form of activity that is at once self-sufficient and final. Here, I turn to Aristotle’s account of action in order to examine to what extent the value of the external goods can be explained by their contribution to excellent practical activity. That is, I try to push Aristotle’s account of action, to see just how far it can go in explaining the value of the external goods—while at the same time recognizing that my conclusions in the previous chapter indicated that there is some point at which the external goods’ value cannot be explained in terms of the promotion of excellent activity.

To make this point more concrete, one might well imagine action pairs that differ only in respect to the external goods that one possesses. Thus, it may be that the temperate consumption of a delicious meal is more enjoyable and renders one’s life better than the temperate consumption of several day old porridge that is growing mold. This is just one example, but imaginary action pairs of this kind seem to vary not so much in terms of the degree of excellence of the activity being exercised, as in the degree of value being conferred upon the agent by something external to that activity. Even if the activity mediates or gives access to that value in some way, it does not seem that it is the sole source of value. This example illustrates the general problem that interests me here.
Thus while in the last chapter my aim was to examine how Aristotle actually does argue for eudaimonia’s need for the external goods, my aim here is to examine what kind of explanation for the value of the external goods is available to Aristotle in terms of his own account of action as it is developed especially in NE II-III, and also in the accounts of the particular virtues that follow. Thus while the second chapter is more strictly interpretive, this chapter will explore, in ways that go beyond Aristotle’s text at points, how the external goods might contribute to the value of virtuous action in terms of Aristotle’s account of action.

I shall set aside NE X here, and treat Aristotle’s original tentative formulation, defining the human good as, “an activity [ἔνεργεία] of the soul in accordance with virtue” (I.1098a16-18), to mean virtuous action in particular (i.e., πράξις). This is in fact his operating assumption for more or less all of NE I-IX, and is the assumption that underlies Aristotle’s argument for eudaimonia’s need for the external goods at I.1099a31-b8, so it is this view that concerns me here—since what I am doing in this chapter is in essence considering the kinds of arguments that are available to Aristotle at I.1099a31-b8 in terms of the account of action that he works out in the books that follow.

While my ultimate aim is to assess the contribution of the external goods to excellent action, this task is impossible without first engaging in a different task of somewhat broader scope—namely, assessing where Aristotle sets the boundaries of action, and whether its value arises purely within the soul or also outside of it. That is, does the value of an action arise entirely from excellence of character, deliberation, and correct choice—that is, from things internal to the agent? Does Aristotle’s account of praxis thus justify classifying it as a pure good of the soul? Or does the value of an action also depend upon
the achievement of some result external to the agent’s soul—such as executing certain bodily motions, achieving military victory, or helping a friend? If so, then excellent action would confound the distinction between goods of the soul and the external goods.

For the purposes of this chapter, especially, it will be useful to isolate the broad class of all those things that lie beyond an agent’s control, which nevertheless potentially impinge upon the value of his activity in some way. While Aristotle offers separate arguments for eudaimonia’s need for the external goods (I.1099a31-b8), and its need for good luck (I.1100b22-1101a13), these two categories of goods outside of the full control of the agent do not exhaust those things outside of him that contribute something to his excellent activity. The most obvious such good that belongs in this broader category, and which at the same time Aristotle does not himself classify as luck or an external good, is the accurate knowledge of relevant particulars upon which excellent action depends.

While an agent is responsible for doing everything within reason to acquire such knowledge, there are situations in which it will elude him, and to this extent this knowledge lies outside of his control. The external results at which an action aims also perhaps fall in this category, although it will require argument to decide whether they contribute worth to excellent practical activity at all.

Although Aristotle does not consistently link together this broader set of valuable things that lie outside the boundaries of the agent’s soul and outside of his full control, at times he does show an interest in the general question of to what degree eudaimonia lies within the agent’s control—in particular, at NE I when he remarks that the good man “will always do the finest available things” (1101a2-3), and in some similar remarks in this same discussion. Thus there is some explicit textual warrant to grouping together the
full range of things that lie beyond the agent's control and yet impinge upon his ability to realize eudaimonia and excellent practical activity. It will thus be convenient for me to consider what kind of value Aristotle attributes to such things collectively, using the simple term “external things,” to differentiate this broader class of things from the narrower classes of goods that they contain, which Aristotle more explicitly recognizes— the external goods and good luck. While there is no reason to think that all those things in this broader class will have exactly the same kind of value, nevertheless insofar as they share the negative feature of not being excellent activity, they must at least fall within some range of value that coincides with this restriction.

Now that I have laid out some general points, I shall describe the general questions that I intend to address in this chapter:

1) Is excellent action dependent upon things outside of the agent who acts? If so, upon which kinds of external things, exactly, does it depend?

2) If excellent action depends upon things outside of the agent who acts, in order to realize its full worth, why is it thus dependent? In particular, what kind of value do things that are external to the agent contribute to the worth of his virtuous action?

3) How do the external goods in particular contribute value to excellent action? Are there distinct kinds of value that different external goods can contribute to virtuous action—for example, as instruments, or as facilitating conditions for action?
The first question asks broadly what kinds of external things action needs. I avoid using the term external goods here, because at this point I am interested in the full range of external “things” that Aristotle reckons as ingredients in the success or perfection of an action—thus not only Aristotle’s category of external goods, or good luck. For one thing, an agent must have accurate knowledge of the particulars relevant to his action, in order for that action to count as virtuous.\footnote{As Aristotle indicates in his definition of virtuous action at \textit{NE} II.1105a28-33 and, indirectly, in \textit{NE} III. See below for a discussion of these passages.} Yet the accuracy of such knowledge in some circumstances will elude the agent, and thus lies outside of his full control. And since Aristotle repeatedly insists that the correct action can only be defined in relation to the relevant particulars, this requirement that an agent possess accurate knowledge is in some sense embedded deeply within his theory, rather than being a merely superficial feature. While in principle Aristotle might simply have made virtuous action consist in doing the right thing in respect to one’s beliefs about the relevant particulars, rather than the actual particulars themselves, this is not what he does. An examination of this particular kind of contingency will occupy the first part of this chapter.

The second question asks why Aristotle supposes that virtuous action depends upon external things for its value. Aristotle claims that \textit{eudaimonia} is an ultimate and self-sufficient good, and that its substance consists in excellent rational activity. How, then, can external things that are not themselves activities contribute worth to such activity? Put simply, external things such as good luck, the external goods, and the accuracy of one’s knowledge of relevant particulars, all might contribute value \textit{either} to the purely internal features of a given action, such as deliberation and choice, \textit{or else} they might...
contribute both to these internal features and also to the achievement of a consequence or result aimed at by that action. One must choose between these two lines of interpretation—either the achievement of an aimed at consequence contributes something to the worth of an action as its end, or it does not. In reference to Aristotle’s argument for *eudaimonia*’s need of the external goods, Julia Annas has aptly dubbed the former kind of explanation, according to which other goods contribute to the worth of an action only on its internal dimensions—such as excellence, deliberation, and choice—as the “internal-use view.”

On such an interpretation the virtuous man uses everything else for the sake of the excellent processes and states within his own soul. In an influential article, John Cooper has advanced such an internal-use view of the value of the external goods—without, of course, using Julia Annas’ term to describe his interpretation. But if the achievement of the consequence aimed at by an act has value as part of its end, then the pure internal-use view collapses.

The third question applies the findings of the more general inquiry in the first part of the chapter to trying to determine how the external goods, in particular, might contribute value to virtuous action. To this end, I consider different ways in which the external goods might contribute to the worth of virtuous action. Aristotle himself only clearly delimits one kind of contribution that the externals can make to action—as instruments. But he also seems to indicate a second way in which the external goods can contribute worth to action, without defining exactly what kind of contribution this

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154 Cooper (1985).
155 I do not count the reference to the goods other than excellent activity as either instrumental or necessary goods, since this reference to necessary goods contains no comment on why such goods are necessary or what for (I.1099b27-28).
would be. As I have argued in the second chapter, it is clear that this second kind of contribution that the external goods make to *eudaimonia* is not merely instrumental, and may not even contribute to *eudaimonia* through improving or promoting activity. But the exact nature of this non-instrumental contribution must be worked out. In this latter part of the chapter, I draw on Aristotle’s theory of action in order to determine whether Aristotle’s theory of action accommodates some non-instrumental contribution of the external goods to excellent action.

**Upon Which External Things Does Excellent Activity Depend?**

Excellent activity clearly depends upon a number of things that can be broadly classed as external, in the straightforward sense that they are separate from that activity itself, and in the less straightforward sense that they are not fully within the agent’s control. In grouping these dependencies together, I am to some extent going beyond anything that Aristotle himself says and attempting to draw some more general conclusions about his position on the dependency of excellent activity upon such things than Aristotle ever states directly. Nonetheless, I think the question is justified by the fact that Aristotle at times comes close to considering it (for example, in his *NE* I discussions of the dependency of *eudaimonia* upon the external goods and luck, which he treats as connected to one another). Nevertheless, it is worth keeping in mind that the aims of this chapter are synthetic and work to define a position for Aristotle that he does not directly
express, but which clarifies and explains the views that he does offer us explicitly in his text.

I shall begin by sketching out those external things upon which virtuous action depends. Thus Aristotle requires that excellent action be performed in full knowledge of the relevant particulars. In order for an agent to possess such knowledge, his beliefs about certain relevant features of the world must correspond to those actual underlying features. In certain situations such knowledge will elude the agent, even when he has taken whatever measures are reasonable to acquire such knowledge given the situation and the cost of ignorance in that situation. (It is important to emphasize that Aristotle does not describe such knowledge as depending upon τοῦχη (“luck”) in his NE III discussion of the voluntary, however.) Second, Aristotle makes eudaimonia dependent on the external goods, and explains this at least partly in terms of virtuous action’s need for the external goods (I.1099a31-b8). Considering this argument was the aim of my last chapter. Third, Aristotle makes eudaimonia dependent on good luck, offering separate arguments for eudaimonia’s need for luck (1100b18-1101a14) and the external goods (1099a31-b8). Fourth, and finally, Aristotle perhaps makes the achievement of certain kinds of external results a partial determinant of the worth of virtuous action—a question I shall consider at some length.

Here, in this first section of this chapter, I shall focus on the way in which virtuous action depends upon knowledge, since this seems to me to offer the clearest evidence that

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156 This interpretation is actually a synthesis of (1) the requirement that virtuous action be performed knowingly, at NE II.1105a31, and (2) the discussion of the voluntary in NE III.

157 As Halliwell (1988) 315 remarks critically of Martha Nussbaum’s assumption that NE III takes mixed actions to be a matter of luck. Nussbaum’s supposition that ignorant and mixed actions arise from luck seems to owe more to Bernard Williams’ work on moral luck than to Aristotle’s own use of the Greek term τοῦχη.
Aristotle regards virtuous action as dependent upon what lies outside the agent’s control. Indeed, virtuous action seems to depend upon knowledge of the relevant particulars to count as virtuous activity at all—not merely for its optimal realization. Bad luck and the loss of the external goods rarely make virtuous action impossible, more often diminishing its range and magnitude of exercise. And the role of consequences in giving value to virtuous action is debated by Aristotle scholars. But Aristotle seems to offer a pretty clear and direct view that excellent action is not merely made less excellent when it is involuntary because of ignorance; rather, it is pushed out from the domain of the excellent activity altogether.

Initially, in *NE* I, Aristotle seems to ignore this problem, saying at one point that the blessed man will never become wretched, because he will “always do the finest possible things” (ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αεὶ τὰ κάλλιστα πράττειν) (I.1101a2-3). This remark (and the supporting context) implies an exclusion of the possibility of terrible or at least non-fine and non-virtuous ignorant actions, such as, for example, those of Oedipus. But elsewhere Aristotle makes it clear that he regards excellent activity as depending upon the agent acting knowingly. In *NE* II, Aristotle remarks that virtuous action must be done knowingly, but does not offer an account of what it means for it to be done knowingly. One may draw on *NE* III for a more detailed account of what Aristotle means.

Thus, according to *NE* II.1105a28-33, virtuous action must be chosen, and according to *NE* III.1111b6-10, choice is a species of the voluntary. Synthesizing these two remarks, one can conclude that, since virtuous action must be chosen, and since choice is a species of the voluntary, virtuous action must therefore be voluntary. This line of reasoning justifies drawing upon Aristotle’s *NE* III analysis of the voluntary and the
involuntary in order to develop a fuller account of virtuous action. That is, whatever restrictions Aristotle places upon voluntary action can be applied to virtuous action too, since he requires that it be done knowingly and from choice.

One may now consider the implications if the *NE III* constraints on the voluntary are taken to apply to virtuous action. In order for an action to count as voluntary, Aristotle requires that the agent have accurate knowledge of the particulars that are relevant to a given action—in his words knowing, “the particular things in which the action lies” (τὰ καθ’ ἐκαστὰ ἐν οἷς ἡ πράξις) (III.1111a23-24). This requirement that a virtuous action be done with knowledge of the relevant particulars makes such action dependent upon external circumstances, since there are situations in which a person will fail to have accurate knowledge of such relevant particulars. I shall defer to a later section the question of why Aristotle insists on the knowledge requirement. At this point, I am only interested in showing that virtuous action is outside of an agent’s full control in this particular way. After all, it would certainly be possible to evaluate an action undertaken blamelessly in ignorance of a relevant particular as a fully excellent action, insofar as such action exercises deliberation and choice correctly—at least in relation to an agent’s actual beliefs. But this is not the position that Aristotle takes.

The Results and Consequences of Excellent Practical Activity

Determining whether Aristotle regards excellent activity as depending upon the achievement of external results will help to answer two of the basic questions that I posed
at the beginning of this chapter—first, what external things (in the broadest sense) does excellent activity depend upon for its perfection, and, second, why does it depend upon such external things? That is, if the results or consequences at which an excellent action aims turn out partly to determine the worth of that action, then this would be one clear kind of dependence on an external thing (which addresses my first question). Furthermore, if the result or consequence at which an action aims is valued as its end, or more precisely as part of its end, then this would explain the value of other things too, since certain external things would then gain value by promoting not only bare activity itself but also the consequences at which that activity aims (which helps to address my second question about why activity needs external things). The consequences or results of an action might then help to explain part of how the external goods themselves contribute to the worth of an action (which addresses my third question).

It is important to make one distinction before I turn to considering the evidence for the role of results in excellent practical activity. As far as I know, no scholar has directly considered the problem of whether consequences are a kind of external good, though this has sometimes been assumed.\footnote{Brown (2006) 240 ff. and Cooper (1985) 189 both assume that the results that ensue from excellent actions are a kind of external good, without considering the problems that such an identification creates.} Nevertheless, there are strong reasons to doubt this. While results are physically outside of the soul of the agent, and thus might be thought to be external goods—since the external goods are also defined as external by being physically outside of the agent—this assimilation poses difficulties. In particular, results are specified by the deliberation and choice of the virtuous agent, and thus must have a
more intimate relationship with his practical reason than the external goods. Thus the aimed at consequences of virtuous actions seem like candidates for goods in a strong or unqualified sense, whereas the external goods appear to be defeasibly good, in that they are assumed to be good in general, but are not necessarily good or choiceworthy in any one particular case.

In an important passage from *NE V*, Aristotle seems to describe the kind of value that he ascribes to the external goods, without actually using the term “external goods” to describe the class of goods that he is considering. Thus Aristotle remarks that those goods that are a matter of fortune and misfortune are “always good in general, but to a particular person not always” (ἀπλως ἀει ἀγαθα, τινι δ’ ουκ ἀει) (1129b1-5). The point seems to be to distinguish the goods that are correctly chosen by an agent in some particular case, and the goods as they stand prior to a particular instance of the exercise of practical reason. But if this is the division between the external goods as such, and those things that are strictly the correct objects of choice, then it should be evident that the aimed at results of excellent action come much closer to the latter kind of value, and are thereby good in a different and stronger sense than the external goods.

The importance of external aims or consequences for particular virtues also seems clear. As scholars have noted, Aristotle often indicates that particular kinds of virtuous

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159 It is controversial, of course, whether ends or only means are subject to deliberation, since Aristotle repeatedly and notoriously remarks that agents deliberate not about the end, but about what bears on the end (see especially, *NE III* 1112a30-b8). See the well-known article, Allan (1955) 337 ff., for the argument that *NE III* gives Aristotle’s less developed theory of deliberation as the selection of *means* rather than ends, which is then superceded by *NE VI*. See Wiggins (1980) esp. 222-227, however, for a defense of the view that—even according to *NE III*—it is possible to specify an end through deliberation.
action aim at and in fact typically also bring about certain states of affairs. Thus friendliness, for example, aims at the pleasure of another person (NE IV.1126b28-30), the correct love of honor desires honor in just the right way (NE IV.1125b7-8), and complete justice “does what is advantageous for another, whether for the ruler or for the community as a whole” (NE V.1130a4-5). And at one point Aristotle also distinguishes the generous from the spendthrift (ἀσωτος) by relying upon the criterion of benefiting others (NE IV.1120a27-30). Aristotle also refers to vicious actions, using conventional terms that presuppose the success of the action at achieving some result or consequence—adultery, stealing, and murder (μοιχεία κλοπή ἀνδροφονία) (II.1107a9-12). None of this evidence resolves the question by itself, but it is suggestive.

Aristotle’s general account of action is, however, more often taken to be the core evidence for this question. Thus Aristotle’s distinction between action (πραξις) and production (ποιησις) is often taken to indicate that the results or consequences of actions cannot be partial determinants of their worth. What Aristotle actually says, however, is ambiguous. Aristotle says that action and production are different, because the end of production is different from the production itself, whereas the end of action is not—the end of action is simply acting well (εὐπραξία) (NE VI.1140b6-7). The process of producing thus apparently gets its worth purely from the product that it aims to produce, whereas this is not true of action. But Aristotle does not define what qualifies an action as

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160 See, for example, Ackrill (1980a) 93 ff., who sees the particular aims that Aristotle ascribes to the virtues to be in tension with his distinction between action and production.

161 For this line of argument, see: Charles (1986) 132 and Politis (1998). Politis (1998), however, acknowledges an exception—that virtuous action may derive value from bringing about further virtuous action, since he supposes the finality of eudaimonia as virtuous activity to allow this.
εὐπραξία ("acting well"). Acting well thus might or might not depend upon achieving certain kinds of aimed at consequences or results.

To put the matter as clearly as possible, there are two possible interpretations of the distinction:

1. Production is only for the sake of its result, while action is only for the sake of the bare process of acting or aiming at some end.

2. Production is only for the sake of its result, while action is both for the sake of the process of acting and also for the sake of the result or consequence at which that process aims.

The way that Aristotle draws the distinction does not by itself resolve this interpretive problem. It is worth saying, too, that a further problem (even apart from which of the two above interpretations one follows) is where exactly to draw the line between the "bare process of acting or aiming" and "the result or consequence." Thus, for example, if one construes acting as a purely internal and mental process, then any enacted bodily motions might count as results or consequences—but clearly this is not the only place that one can draw the line between the bare process of acting and the result or consequence that issues from such bare action. Furthermore, there are clearly more and less immediate results of one’s actions—both judged in terms of causal directness, and in terms of the time that passes between an agent’s action and those results that ensue from it. And (although Aristotle says nothing about this) one can clearly draw the line in different places as to

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162 See Whiting (2002) 281 for a defense of the latter interpretation—that eupraxia ("acting well") depends upon the achievement of a certain result or consequence, and that what distinguishes action from production is that such consequences are separable products of production, whereas they are part of what defines action and thus eupraxia.
what counts as a consequence of an action. Here, I have in mind mainly causally direct and predictable consequences.

In antiquity, Alexander of Aphrodisias already saw clearly the potential contradiction in Aristotle’s distinction between action and production, and his ascription of characteristic aims or consequences to certain kinds of excellence.\textsuperscript{163} In order to raise the problem, he points out a parallel between a type of production, housebuilding (οἰκοδομική), and the virtues. The virtues, like housebuilding, seem to aim at certain results. Alexander then points out that bravery aims at the moderation of fear and boldness, temperance at the moderation of bodily pains, and justice at the preservation of the community.\textsuperscript{164} Alexander also sees that this seems to make the virtues similar to productions, and that in this case, the virtues and their activities would not be chosen for their own sake. His solution is interesting: “For it is just as if—if housebuilding were a house, for the sake of which it were choiceworthy, it would be choiceworthy for itself. It is the same way for each of the virtues—if it is the same thing as that for the sake of which it is choiceworthy, then it would be choiceworthy because of that” (\textit{Ethical Questions} 281.12-15). The house can be taken as an example meant to stand in for any consequence or result of excellent activity. Thus Alexander’s solution is to suppose that conducting oneself in a just way and preserving the community together make an act just. Thus when one chooses a virtuous action for its own sake, one also chooses its consequence or result—whether that involves moderating one’s emotions, or an external

\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Ethical Questions} 24.

\textsuperscript{164} Charles (1986) 137-9 draws a distinction between internal results and external results, supposing that actions can be chosen for the sake of internal, but not external, results. Alexander treats both kinds of results together as posing the same problem for Aristotle’s action production distinction.
end such as preserving a community. On this interpretation, an action and its result together form a unity.

Alexander develops an interpretation constrained by: (1) the action/production distinction, (2) the requirement that virtuous action be chosen for its own sake, and (3) the particular ends that Aristotle ascribes to particular virtues. He takes a position that accommodates all of these aspects of Aristotle’s theory. Thus apparently he develops his interpretation of Aristotle’s position on the basis of a kind of principle of charity requiring that Aristotle’s position be both consistent and coherent—without, of course, explicitly identifying charity as constraining his interpretation. I believe that a further examination of the evidence supports Alexander’s interpretation, however.

While Aristotle’s requirement that excellent activity be chosen for its own sake (NE II.1105a31-33) is often taken in connection with the action/production distinction as meaning that it is the bare activity (rather than its consequences) that are chosen, this line of reasoning also needs scrutiny. As Ackrill has pointed out, the meaning of Aristotle’s remark that excellent practical activity is chosen for its own sake waits upon a definition of exactly what it is that is chosen for its own sake. Thus Aristotle’s distinction between action and production, according to which the end of action is eupraxia

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165 Whiting (2002) and Callard (2010) also argue for this basic view—that choosing an action for its own sake simply includes choosing the end of that action, although they are more explicit than Alexander in supposing that results in particular are partial determinants of the worth of a virtuous action. Korsgaard (1996) 216 remarks that: “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,” but she makes no attempt to distinguish between the purpose or aim and the achievement of that aim, so that her exact position is somewhat obscure. Her remarks elsewhere, pg. 203 and 205, that the value of action arises simply from the process of choice or its motivational structure, suggest that she would not accept the inclusion of aimed at results as partial determinants of the worth of virtuous action.

166 Ackrill (1980a) 94-96.
Further Evidence for the Role of Results of Consequences in Excellent Practical Activity

In at least two cases, Aristotle describes things that are clearly states of affairs that can only result from excellent practical activity as fine—the same term that he uses to describe excellent practical activity itself. Thus Aristotle defines the brave man strictly so called as, “fearless in respect to noble death” (III.1115a32-35). Yet if nobility inheres in a certain kind of death, that is, a certain state of affairs defined in part as resulting from a certain kind of action, then apparently results can share the same kind of value with the process that aims at them. Aristotle likewise remarks at one point that, “long lasting” (πολυχρονία) works of magnificence are “finest” (καλλιστα) (IV.1123a6-9). It is very difficult to explain away these kinds of remarks, which attach the same kind of value (i.e., nobility) to virtuous actions and the works that they produce. One might counter that these expressions are in fact intended to describe the process of action rather than its result. Yet if it is only the action that achieves its characteristic result that deserves to be characterized as fine, then this amounts to nearly the same thing.

The discussion of deliberation also seems to presume that anything that can occur may be the object of deliberation and thus of action—and results clearly fall within the realm of the possible. Thus in his NE III discussion of deliberation, Aristotle writes, “If
something seems possible, men try to do it [πράττειν]. And what is possible [δυνατά] is that which could come about through us. For the things through friends [τὰ γὰρ διὰ τῶν φίλων] are in some sense through us. For the moving principle [ἀρχή] is in us” (III.1112b26-8). Aristotle here supposes that the whole range of possible things may be the objects of action—whether they are accomplished by a person directly or through the aid of his friends. He even supposes that the moving principle of something brought about with the help of friends can be regarded as being in the agent who brings it about. Yet “the things through friends” clearly cannot refer to the bodily movements of the agent himself, or his mere internal will or choice, but must instead here refer to consequences of some kind that lie beyond the physical agent, so that Aristotle here clearly regards such consequences as properly deliberable and thus doable. Aristotle likewise at one point here remarks that deliberation has as its object things that “come about through us, but not always in the same way,” and this description seems to have a wide extension, including things that are physically outside of the agent and thus not fully in his control (III.1112b2-8). Indeed, it seems likely that the imperfect predictability of the external world explains Aristotle’s characterization of such things as coming about through us “but not always in the same way.” After all, Aristotle regards the excellent man’s own appetites, emotions, and choices as under his control and thus predictable—so that this remark seemingly could not characterize any such things.

Aristotle’s definition of the voluntary (in respect to action) gives further support for including the achievement of the result or consequence as a feature of action. In addition to requiring that the moving principle be in the agent who acts, in order for that action to be voluntary, Aristotle also requires that the agent act knowing the particulars in which
the action lies (III.1111a22-24). This tentative definition is the fruit of a discussion in which Aristotle enumerates types of particular knowledge, as well as offering examples of involuntary actions that violate the knowledge requirement. In the course of enumerating the kinds of particular knowledge, however, Aristotle mentions knowledge of “that for the sake of which, for example safety” (ἐνεκα τίνος, οἶον σωτηρίας) (III.1111a5). Finally, after offering examples of involuntary action, he goes on to make knowing “that for the sake of which” (οὐ ἐνεκα) decisive for voluntary action (III.1111a18-19).

Aristotle’s inclusion of knowledge of “that for the sake of which” among different kinds of particular knowledge at 1111a5 seems difficult, however. For one thing, strictly it is knowledge of something that has yet to occur at the moment one begins to act. And it is also more abstract and less particular—at least in the example that Aristotle offers at 1111a5—for the sake of saving someone. Certainly it sticks out alongside the other types of knowledge that Aristotle mention, which are much more clearly particular—such as “whom” is acted upon, or what instrument is being used to perform the action (1111a3). This can perhaps be partly explained, however, by the contrast that Aristotle develops before introducing his requirement that an agent have particular knowledge. In particular, when Aristotle introduces the requirement for particular knowledge, he is drawing a contrast with a general ignorance of what one ought to do or abstain from (1110b28-1111a1), so that a higher order knowledge of “that for the sake of which” might still be reckoned particular in contrast to this kind of knowledge or ignorance of general principles of action—for example, saving Agathon from succumbing to a deadly fever, versus the knowledge that one ought to save one’s friends. Still, knowing “that for the
sake of which” one acts is undoubtedly a higher order kind of knowledge than the other kinds of particular knowledge that Aristotle lists.\textsuperscript{167}

It is also worth clarifying that particular knowledge need not be prospective factual knowledge of what lies beyond the agent’s control and beyond his physical body—knowledge which one possesses only at the outset of the action. Thus Aristotle also mentions among the kinds of particular knowledge, knowing “how [one acts], such as calmly or forcefully” (πῶς, οἶον ἢρέμα ἢ σφόδρα). This is knowledge of a feature of an ongoing action, which is internal to the physical body of the agent and ordinarily under his control and direction. Thus one can reasonably speak of Aristotle as requiring that one know what one is doing. This somewhat narrows the gap between the other kinds of particular knowledge and knowledge of “that for the sake of which.”

What is interesting about knowledge of “that for the sake of which” is that it forms a kind of middle ground between the other kinds of particular knowledge and purpose or intention. It shares the same \textit{form} as purpose or intention, but it is not orectic. Thus it can help to explain how Aristotle can include among his examples of involuntary action: intending to touch (θὰξαι βολόμενος) but striking, and offering a drink “for the sake of saving” (ἐπὶ σωτηρία) but killing (III.1111a13-15). Aristotle refers to intention or purpose in his descriptions of these involuntary actions, yet intention and purpose do \textit{not} figure in Aristotle’s own definition of the voluntary at \textit{NE} III.1111a22-24. Nevertheless, if one takes Aristotle’s requirement that a voluntary act be performed in knowledge of

\textsuperscript{167}This difficulty in assimilating knowledge of “that for the sake of which” to Aristotle’s requirement for particular knowledge seems not to have been much noticed. Thus, for example, Irwin (1980a) 122 glosses Aristotle’s knowledge requirement as: “if and only if…he knows the particular facts of the case,” citing 1111a22-4, but ignoring the requirement of “that for the sake of which” within the preceding discussion. And Broadie (1991) 148 glosses the requirement that one know “that for the sake of which” as knowledge of “results,” and continues to refer to Aristotle’s requirement for particular knowledge.
“that for the sake of which” seriously, then he has a higher-order explanation for why such actions count as involuntary.

What is especially important for my purposes, however, is that if Aristotle requires that an agent act with knowledge of “that for the sake of which,” then an action seemingly must achieve its aimed at result in order to count as voluntary. That is—in conjunction with the requirement that the moving principle of a voluntary act rest in the agent who acts—the further requirement that voluntary action be performed with knowledge of “that for the sake of which” seems to be violated in cases where the result that an agent actually brings about does not coincide with what the agent believed himself to be doing. Even if one sets aside the requirement that an agent act with knowledge of “that for the sake of which,” the various particular kinds of knowledge that Aristotle enumerates seem at any rate to guarantee or nearly guarantee that a voluntary act achieve the result at which the agent was aiming. Thus even though Aristotle does not directly require that a voluntary action achieve its intended result, this does seem to follow from his account of voluntary action. Perhaps (to speculate briefly) Aristotle’s reason for excluding intention from his definition of the voluntary is that intention is still more obscure than knowledge and cause, and thus makes it somewhat easier to reckon an act voluntary and thereby to assign responsibility to the agent who performed that act.
Why Does Excellent Practical Activity Depend Upon External Things?

If excellent practical activity depends upon achieving a certain result or consequence in order to realize its full worth, and if such a result has value as its end—as I have argued—then this also serves to explain certain other aspects of action’s dependence on external things. Thus it is quite hard to explain why Aristotle requires that an agent know the relevant particulars in order for his action to count as excellent—unless it is for the sake of achieving the result that the agent believed himself to be bringing about. After all, if Aristotle supposed that the value of practical activity consisted purely in aiming excellently at some consequence or result, then it would be quite difficult to explain why this aiming would have to be done with accurate knowledge of the relevant particulars. After all, one might well do everything within reason to attain accurate knowledge about some situation, and then aim excellently in relation to what one believes, even if one’s beliefs were false. One might posit some psychological need to feel successful in one’s efforts, but this is simply to admit the value of results through the back door, as it were.\footnote{168} Furthermore, it is very hard to explain what an agent would regret about having performed an involuntary action because of ignorance—unless he is regretting the unintended result.\footnote{169} (Aristotle does not say what is regretted, of course.)

Finally, while it is certainly possible to place all the value in aiming at some consequence and none in achieving that aim—as the Stoics do—this requires

\footnote{168}{On which see further below.}

\footnote{169}{See NE III.1110b18-25 for the requirement that an action performed involuntarily because of ignorance be regretted.}
distinguishing two different kinds of aims in a way that Aristotle does not do.\footnote{For a lucid discussion of the Stoic position, see Striker (1986).} Thus for the Stoics, there is the reference point for action (an external outcome or consequence), as well as the end from which the action derives all or virtually all of its worth (aiming excellently). These two ends are different from one another, and they have distinct kinds of worth. But Aristotle does not seem to split value in this way—he often remarks that actions are performed “for the sake of the fine” throughout his accounts of the specific excellences of character, in one case he makes the fine serve as the reference point for how benefits ought to be conferred upon one’s friends (IV.1126b28-30), and in two instances he describes aimed at consequences of excellent practical activities as fine (III.1115a29-35, IV.1123a7-9). Thus Aristotle seems to suppose that a single kind of worth is spread over the bare activity and the consequences specified by and aimed at by the agent. Interestingly, one might even suppose that the internal aspect of action is prior in time, as the efficient cause of the bodily motions that ensue from it, but that the bodily and material realization of that action is prior insofar as it is an instantiation of the fine (τὸ καλὸν), which in turn has an independent life from any particular agent, act, or exercise of deliberation. Nor does all of this turn Aristotle into a Utilitarian. Simply because he ascribes some value to the result at which excellent practical activity aims, this does not require him to suppose that the same state of affairs if unconnected with purposeful activity would retain that kind of worth, or any kind of worth for that matter. But in the context of an excellent activity, he does seem to suppose that a particular result can share the same kind of worth with the activity itself.
This conclusion helps to answer the second question that I posed earlier—Why does excellent practical activity depend for its value upon a range of the external things—namely, the consequences at which an action aims, the accuracy of one’s knowledge of the relevant particulars, good luck, and the external goods? At this point, it is possible to offer at least a tentative answer. It depends upon the consequences at which it aims as partly constituting its end. Thus a generous act is both for the sake of excellent activity itself, as well as for the sake of conferring a benefit. This, in turn, can explain why an agent must know the relevant particulars—in order to help realize the external aim. The internal process of realizing one’s excellences through deliberation and choice might equally well be exercised in ignorance or knowledge of the relevant particulars. But if such excellent activity depends upon the consequences at which it aims in order to realize its worth, then this explains why the agent must know the relevant particulars and “that for the sake of which” he is acting. In fact, the way that Aristotle construes such knowledge seems virtually to guarantee that voluntary activity achieves the consequences at which it aims—that is, the requirement that excellent activity be performed in knowledge of “that for the sake of which” seems actually to require that an agent’s beliefs about what he is bringing about coincide with what he actually does.

If Aristotle understands the consequences at which excellent practical activity aims as sharing the same basic kind of value as the activity itself, this also helps to explain the value of the external goods. Thus the internal-use view, according to which the external goods derive their worth purely from their contribution to an agent’s activity of the soul can be set aside. Cooper argues for the internal-use view, supposing that the external goods help to secure such internal goods as the “normal exercise of the virtues,” and that
they offer “particular challenges that his virtue responds to with its correct assessments and right decisions.”\footnote{171} Christine Korsgaard likewise seems to offer an internalist account of the value of virtuous action, although she does not comment directly on the problems concerning external goods or external results. She thus characterizes Aristotelian action as deriving its worth purely from “the way that [it is] chosen,” or from “the fact that it is chosen for its intrinsic rightness.”\footnote{172} But if the results at which an action aims give that action value \textit{as part of its end} along with the process of aiming itself, then certain external goods may derive their value from their contributions to both aspects of this end—the bare activity of soul, as well as the consequence being aimed at. On this understanding, money, for example, would derive its worth not merely from the bare exercise of generosity, but also from its contribution to certain benefits in accord with the fine.

\textbf{The External Goods as Instruments for the Exercise of Activity}

Now that I have shown the evidence that supports the interpretation that the results of actions are partial determinants of their worth, as the ends of excellent activities, I shall turn to my third question—how can the external goods contribute value to action? That is, within the terms of Aristotle’s own understanding of what action is, what possible kinds of value are available to external goods? The only such contribution that Aristotle

\footnote{171} Cooper (1985) 182-184.

\footnote{172} Korsgaard (1996) 213 & 205. She is trying to show the similarity between Aristotle and Kant’s accounts of the source of virtuous action’s value.
himself explicitly and clearly distinguishes is an instrumental one. Thus I shall begin by considering what it means for an external good to serve as an instrument to excellent rational activity.

There are some considerations that in fact support understanding the external goods as gaining their value purely as instruments to excellent practical activity. Indeed, if one supposes that excellent practical activity is a pure good of the soul—consisting in the exercise of practical wisdom and of the character excellences, and thus in deliberation and choice—and if this activity is indeed a final and self-sufficient good, then other goods must gain their value through some relation to such an activation of the soul. That is, if *eudaimonia* really rests here, and here alone, and if some kind of teleological relation obtains between every other good and such an activation of the soul, it seems quite hard to explain other goods as serving as anything more than instruments to such an activation of the soul. To press this point further, most scholars recognize three different teleological kinds of value—instrumental, constitutive, and final. If one takes this threefold division as exhaustive, goods other than *eudaimonia* must gain their value either as constituents of *eudaimonia* or as instruments to it. Furthermore, if *eudaimonia* is strictly an activation of the soul, and nothing else, it is very hard to see how other goods could ever be constituents of this activity. This seems, then, to force a merely instrumental evaluation upon the external goods, as well as all the things outside of an agent that impinge upon the worth of his acts.

And when one turns to Aristotle’s text, this is, indeed, the only kind of contribution to *eudaimonia* that Aristotle clearly and directly recognizes for the external goods. Thus he

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173 See, for example, the discussion of Korsgaard (1983).
writes: “For many things are done, as if through instruments—through friends, wealth, and political power” (πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ πράττεται, καθάπερ δὲ ὀργάνων, διὰ φίλων καὶ πλούτου καὶ πολιτικῆς δυνάμεως) (NE I.1099a31-b8). Aristotle is not necessarily distinguishing a class of external goods that have an exclusively instrumental value, however—as he makes clear by including friends both among the instrumental goods and those goods that soil a life when absent.

Aristotle clearly goes on to recognize a non-instrumental value for certain external goods in the course of the argument that he makes here, and in fact even recognizes that the external goods have a value that cannot be mediated by excellent activity. Nevertheless, one does find the view that the external goods are valuable just as instruments—both in Aristotle himself, outside of the NE, and among the commentators to the NE. Thus in a passage from the Politics, Aristotle refers to the external goods generally as instruments, remarking that there is a limit to the quantity one needs, just as with other instruments, whereas there is no such limit upon the goods of the soul (VII.1323b7).174 And at one point Alexander of Aphrodisias explains the requirement that eudaimonia consist in an activity “under preferred circumstances” (ἐν προηγουμένωι) by remarking simply that this is “because the preferred and desired activities need instruments” (διὰ τὸ δεῖσθαι ὀργάνων τὰς προηγουμένας τὲ καὶ βουλητὰς ἐνεργεῖσι).175 Alexander thus supposes that all favorable circumstances serve as

174 Aristotle does not mention friends in this context, however, and a remark just before—at Politics VII.1323a36-38—lists wealth and power, but not friends or family. And Aristotle’s reference to the threefold division between goods of the body, external goods, and goods of the soul (VII.1323a24-26) also suggests that he is using the external goods in the narrower sense, meaning those things external to the body, and thus not including the goods of the body. These factors, then, might also explain the difference between the evaluation of external goods at NE I.1099a31-b8 and Politics VII.1323b7.

175 Ethical Problems 25 = 285.2-5 = CAG suppl. 2.1, pg. 148.
instruments to virtuous activity—and includes the external goods among such preferred circumstances. Among more recent interpreters, John Cooper attempts to distinguish external goods as possessing two possible kinds of value—facilitating conditions and instruments of virtuous activity. But this distinction seems to be merely terminological, for ultimately he ascribes an instrumental value to all external goods: “In each case the value to the happy man consists in what the external goods make it possible for him, as a result of having them, to do,” where “do” is meant in a strictly internalist sense.¹⁷⁶

The point to press here is whether interpreting Aristotle’s definition of eudaimonia as consisting strictly in the activation of one’s own soul is really tenable. Whiting, in her paper on the role of results in actions, sensibly points out that if states-of-affairs other than further excellent activity are excluded from counting as ends, then this results in a “virtuous circle,” in which virtue gains its value merely by advancing itself, never by recognizing the value of anything else.¹⁷⁷ Of course, to give the objector a chance to respond, even if eudaimonia were to consist strictly in an activity of the soul, excellent activities might still gain value by aiming at certain specific ends, just not by achieving those ends, which seems to ascribe at least some kind of value to such ends. But if, as I have argued here, the character excellences collectively amount to a scheme of value, which indeed recognizes the achievement of ends as possessing value beyond what accrues to the bare activation of the soul, then other goods need not contribute to excellent activity merely by promoting such activation. If the interpretation that I have advanced here is correct, then this opens up the way to granting some further value to

¹⁷⁶ Cooper (1985) 189.
things outside of the virtuous agent’s control—insofar as they advance not only the activation of the soul, but also its success at achieving those ends at which it aims.

**Can External Goods Contribute Value to Activity as Parts Thereof?**

As I have remarked, philosophers generally, as well as interpreters of Aristotle, often distinguish three kinds of teleological value—instrumental, constitutive, and final.\(^{178}\) An instrumental good gets its value purely from its contribution to some other good; a constitutive good has value in itself but is also chosen for the sake of some larger good of which it is a part; and a final good is both chosen for its own sake and at the same time other goods are chosen for it—either as constituents of it, or as instruments to it. Interpreters of the *NE* often attribute an implicit notion of constitutive value to Aristotle in order to explain how he can claim that any given specific excellent activity can both be chosen for its own sake and yet also be chosen for the sake of *eudaimonia*.\(^{179}\) This notion of constitutive value is especially useful here, because a good that contributes constitutively to *eudaimonia* can satisfy the finality criterion and the self-sufficiency criterion at the same time—since it is both chosen for the sake of *eudaimonia*, and at the same time is not something separate from it.

Accordingly, some have also made use of a similar notion of constitutive value in order to explain how the external goods can be both intrinsic goods and at the same time

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\(^{178}\) See, for example, Korsgaard (1983) 172, who distinguishes “contributive” and “instrumental” value as two different kinds of goodness that derive their value from the promotion of an end. The difference in her terminology makes no difference.

\(^{179}\) See Ackrill (1980b) 18-20.
be chosen for the sake of virtuous activity. If they are right, then the interpreter (and Aristotle) can have his cake and eat it too—the external goods are both choiceworthy for their own sakes and for the sake of *eudaimonia*. Self-sufficiency is satisfied, since certain external goods are contained within the various specific forms of virtuous activity, rather than being separate goods needed in addition to such activity. And finality is satisfied, since such goods are thought to be chosen for the sake of the activities in which they figure. Thus when one chooses an activity one also chooses whatever external goods are contained within that activity. And, at the same time, one need not abandon the intuitively plausible proposition that certain external goods have value in themselves.\(^{180}\)

This line of reasoning is not always given so directly as I have put it here, but this seems to describe accurately the motives of those scholars who argue that certain external goods may be parts of virtuous actions. Thus Martha Nussbaum says of love: “The other person enters in not just as an object who receives the good activity, but as an intrinsic part of love itself.”\(^{181}\) Nothing other than the formal constraints of Aristotle’s theory would be able to motivate so odd a claim. Crisp makes a similar but more general claim, calling his position “aretic inclusivism,” because it supposes that all other intrinsic goods can be included in virtuous (that is, aretic) activity in some way. He writes that *eudaimonia* is “not improvable, since excellent activities themselves include or involve all intrinsic goods.”\(^{182}\) The “intrinsic good” qualification is important here. Crisp sidesteps some difficulties by denying that honor, beauty, or offspring are among these intrinsic goods.

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\(^{180}\) As Aristotle says of honors at *NE* I.1096b16-18.

\(^{181}\) Nussbaum (2001) 344.

\(^{182}\) Crisp (1994) 119.
goods, and considering friendship rather than friends per se. Thus he plausibly includes the activities of philia as partly constituting excellent activity, but avoids remarking on the value of philoi as such, even though Aristotle includes philoi rather than philia among his examples of the external goods at NE 1099a31-b8. If Crisp had reckoned with loved ones directly, presumably he would have had little choice but to admit that they are intrinsic goods and thus (like all other intrinsic goods in his paper) partly constitute activity, and thus cannot improve eudaimonia, since they are already found within it. Nevertheless, one can set aside these frustrating moves within Crisp’s paper and reckon with the implications of his more basic claim that all intrinsic goods help to constitute excellent activity (as Heinaman, for example, does in a paper provoked in part by Crisp’s arguments).

A critique of this inclusion of external goods within excellent rational activity can thus be advanced in terms of Aristotle’s own metaphysics of activity and action. Robert Heinaman has made such an argument against aretic inclusivism, interpreting the position “to mean what it says,” that “other intrinsic goods that constitute eudaimonia should be understood to constitute virtuous activity itself.” One line of argument that Heinaman makes is that Aristotle’s Categories distinguishes substance (οὐσία) from suffering (πάσχειν) and making (ποιεῖν). Thus substances such as friends or loved ones should not be able to partly constitute activities. Heinaman also offers a second line of argument, interpreting the activity (ἐνέργεια) and action (πρᾶξις) of the NE as corresponding,

183 Crisp (1994) 120.
184 Heinaman (2007).
186 See Heinaman (2007) 234-235. For the passage from the Categories that divides substance from doing and suffering, see Cat. 1b25-2a10.
respectively, to the activity (ἐνέργεια) and change (κίνησις) of the *Metaphysics*. On this line of argument, a πράξις/κίνησις or an ἐνέργεια would itself have to be made up of like entities, rather than entities different from itself—such as external goods or states of character. Whether or not one accepts Heinaman’s attempt to use Aristotle’s metaphysical views from outside of the *NE* in order to try to clarify the nature of action and activity within the *NE* itself, the basic point that an action or activity cannot be literally composed of elements that are not themselves actions, activities, or events itself seems reasonable.

The exception that proves the rule are the examples of fine results or consequences ensuing upon excellent activity that Aristotle offers us—a fine death, or the long-enduring product of a magnificent act (*NE* ΙΙΙ.1115a29-35; ΙV.1123a6-9). Such results are not strictly external goods—as I have argued—since they are subject to the specification of the agent and arise from his excellent deliberation, choice, and action. Nevertheless, a noble death, or the fine long-enduring product of a magnificent act resemble external goods, in that they occur physically outside of the agent, and as such they are not fully under his control. Yet at the same time, such goods help to define the acts that correspond to them, and as such can be reckoned parts of such actions in a way that the external goods (in the strict sense) cannot. Thus it is fair to reckon this kind of external good (in the broad sense) as properly a part of excellent activity, since the perfection of such an activity apparently depends upon the consequence or result that ensues from it.

Furthermore, the wealth that magnificence uses to produce certain results seems to have a particularly intimate connection to those results, that perhaps cannot be plausibly

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reduced to a strictly instrumental relation. Thus “long enduring monuments” (πολυχρόνια) that are judged “finest” (κάλλιστα) depend both upon magnificence and also upon the use of wealth (IV.1123a6-9). And likewise with a house that the magnificent man “outfits decorously using wealth” (κατασκευάσσομαι πρεπόντως τῷ πλούτῳ), and which Aristotle reckons an “ornament” (κόσμος) (1123a6-7)—presumably meaning an ornament for the virtue of the houseowner. While Aristotle for the most part insists that wealth has an instrumental value, one might well question whether this insistence holds up here. Is not wealth plausibly understood as part of what a nice home is? Indeed, it would seem to retain monetary value, and if it is valued qua fine home, must it not be valued partly in respect to such worth? Along these lines, one might ask whether the great man takes pleasure in his tastefully outfitted home strictly as an ornament to his own worth, rather than simply enjoying those comforts—of which he happens to be worthy—in the same way as anyone else would? Since evaluation always has a subjective element, one might ask whether the subjective evaluation that Aristotle is implicitly ascribing to the virtuous man seems plausible. And here, I think, there is some real room for doubt.

This also raises a more serious and more pervasive problem for Aristotle—which is whether the kind of psychic harmony that he praises, where excellent activity and pleasure coincide, is even possible outside of a narrow aristocratic context, where people have the resources to exert control over the world, and thus practical wisdom gets some real causal grip in the consequences at which it aims—and furthermore, where they have the opportunity to feel ownership for such consequences, in a way that they might not if their efforts were more systematically subverted by conditions less favorable for action.
The aristocratic paradigm might be viewed as a kind of incidental and separable feature of Aristotle’s system—as those who try to detach magnificence and magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχα) from the other virtues perhaps regard it. But it plays a suspicious role in making many of the exercises of the virtues likely to achieve success, convenient, and relatively low cost for the man of excellence—with the major exception of bravery, according to which Aristotle regards a fine death as both choiceworthy and a greater good than the external goods (IX.1169a16-1169b2). This point might even be pushed further to claim that the kind of psychic harmony that Aristotle ascribes to the man of excellence rests upon the restriction of his activity to a particular type of environment. One might ask, then, whether Aristotle can plausibly situate value squarely on activity itself, or whether, rather, he can be read as at the same time implicitly acknowledging the value of circumstances of life for which almost all hope.

**Objects Virtuously Acted Upon or Correctly Valued**

Another role that the external goods might play in excellent practical activity is as objects acted upon. Certain external goods that Aristotle lists—such as children and true friends—seem to enter into action in this way. And Aristotle says, for example, that a friendly act may aim at the pleasure or lack of pain at another person “in accord with what is advantageous and fine” (IV.1126b28-30). In his books on friendship he also

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188 See, for example, Gardiner (2001) 281, who supposes the “non-basic virtues” of magnificence and magnanimity to be excluded from the reciprocity of the virtues, according to which Aristotle requires that to have any single virtue, a person must possess every other virtue.
remarks that since it is more characteristic of friendship to benefit than to be benefited, “the good man needs those who will benefit from his acts” (IX.1169b10-13). So far, however, I have only commented on the role that loved ones might play as the recipients of excellent activity. What is needed, however, is to go further and explain whether being a worthy recipient of such activity contributes some particular kind of worth to that activity. Thus one might suppose that somehow an excellent activity acting upon an excellent object is improved by the object upon which it acts. So far, this seems intuitive enough, but it threatens the self-sufficiency of excellent activity by improving it through the addition of more numerous or more worthy objects upon which to act.

Another major difficulty, however, is that a virtuous agent may just as well act upon an object of aversion as one of affection. Thus an angry act correctly regulated by the virtue of mildness might aim at the displeasure of an enemy, just as a friendly act in fact aims at the pleasure of a friend. Both acts would be similarly virtuous, and both acts would depend upon the object being acted upon in some way. Yet comparing an angry act to a friendly act clarifies the problem of whether both kinds of action depend upon the object acted upon for their value in the same way. A transgressor provides an appropriate object upon which the virtue of mildness might be exercised. Yet this does not make such a transgressor good in any conventional sense, though good for virtuous activity. This shows the difficulty in trying to insist that the sole criterion of value is the promotion of virtuous activity—it is exactly the same problem that I raised in chapter 2 in critiquing the attempt to explain the value of external goods exclusively in terms of virtuous activity promotion. One might counter that both objects of affection and aversion are required in order for the virtuous agent to engage in the full range of virtuous activities; this,
certainly, is true. Yet if one supposes that a loving act derives value from an object of love, and that this explains how such an object of love figures in eudaimonia, one must explain why an angry act does not lose value from the object of aversion against which it is directed. That is, there would have to be some kind of asymmetry in how objects of affection and aversion contribute worth to the action that acts upon them. And as soon as this asymmetry is admitted, then seemingly worthy objects of love contribute value to the excellent man as more than merely convenient objects upon which to exercise one’s excellence. Thus this line of thought seems to fail to explain the value of the objects upon which one acts strictly in terms of their virtue-facilitating power.

One might suppose, then, that the virtuous agent is in some way more receptive to the positive value of intrinsic goods through action, than he is receptive to the negative value of intrinsic ills. Indeed, the mild one (προδος) aims, at least in part, to be “undisturbed” (ἀτάραχος) and not moved by emotion (IV.1125b33-1126a). One might go beyond the letter of the text here and suppose that the idea here is that the virtuous man resists being pained by even a legitimate object of anger. It might be, then, that the virtuous man virtuously resists being affected by the badness of the vicious men or vicious, yet somehow gains from the worth of the good men he helps. Yet if this were so, it still poses a problem for self-sufficiency, since then helping good men would be more productive of eudaimonia than harming of evil men—a life of helping good men would be better than a life of harming evil men. At the same time, I have already argued in the last chapter that Aristotle’s difficulty in formulating an argument strictly in terms of his definition of eudaimonia at 1099a31-b8 points to an admission that excellent activity is not completely self-sufficient.
At this point, I shall turn briefly to the problem of whether goods can contribute worth to the agent by being correctly evaluated. Thus the possession of some good, whose worth the possessor has correctly evaluated, might also be supposed to confer some value on him. Magnanimity seems to involve, among other things, the correct evaluation of honors (NE IV.1124a16-17). Yet this too is problematic, because even if such evaluation is taken to be a kind of activity, excellent evaluation is itself separable from the value of the thing being evaluated—both evils and goods alike may be correctly evaluated, and if value should arise purely from correct evaluation, then the external good itself would add no value. Again, one might argue for an asymmetry, but again if there is such an asymmetry, and if correctly evaluating good possessions is better than correctly evaluating bad ones, then the external goods themselves seem more or less directly to be conferring value upon the life of the agent in question, and the self-sufficiency criterion is violated. Again, this is perhaps part of what Aristotle’s own difficulty at 1099a31-b8 points to.

The Value of Loved Ones (Φιλοι)

One can develop a similar line of reasoning about loved ones. For Aristotle, the best kind of friendship is between two men of excellence (VIII.1156b7 ff.). The idea is that friendship, in an analogous way to honor, can be understood as something that is either deserved or not deserved, and that excellent activity is the most important element in rendering someone worthy. At times, Aristotle also describes friendship itself as “some
kind of excellence” (ἀρετῆς τῆς) or “with excellence” (μετ’ ἀρετῆς) (VIII.1155a3-4; 1159a34-b2). Thus one might suppose that the friendship of the virtuous man is simply an exercise of excellence joined with the correct assessment of one’s worthy friend. In this way, friendship might simply be assimilated to the other excellences, and its value might be more or less continuous with that of the other excellences. Yet the friend remains external in a sense, since the two friends are separate and their activity is separate. And insofar as a perfect friendship depends upon the existence of the object of one’s love, and this object of love is more essential to the activities that develop around it, than, say, wealth is to generosity, it does seem difficult to simply reduce a friendship to the activities that partly characterize it. Aristotle somewhat enigmatically remarks that the friend is “another self” (IX.1170b5-7), however. And this might be taken to indicate that the virtuous man regards his own excellent activity and himself as somehow continuous with his friend. If this idea is taken seriously, then it might be taken to resolve Aristotle’s remark that eudaimonia must not be understood as self-sufficient for one man alone, but for a man with his family, wife, and fellow-citizens (I.1097b8-11). In this case, one might suppose that a perfect friendship of excellent men amounts simply to some kind of accumulation of a greater sum of excellent activity, which each of them regards as to some extent shared between the two.

But this account of friendship poses some difficulties. Aristotle often remarks that a friend desires the good of his friend “for his sake” (ἐκείνου ἔνεκα) (IX.1166a2-5), which seems to recognize the separateness and value of the friend, perhaps as a unique individual, rather than as a mere vehicle of virtue. But, as Vlastos correctly points out, this formulation is ambiguous, since it does not specify which feature or features
motivate a man’s desire for his friend’s good.\textsuperscript{189} In this way, they are similar to Aristotle’s remark that excellent action is chosen “for its own sake” (II.1105a32), the meaning of which likewise waits upon an account of the salient features of an action that render it choiceworthy in this way. There are passages, however, in which Aristotle makes it quite clear that, in perfect friendship at any rate, goodness or excellence is the reason why each friend is loved by the other (VIII.1157b3). Thus Vlastos supposes Aristotle to risk reproducing what he takes to be “the cardinal flaw” of Platonic love: regarding the best love as being of properties rather than persons.\textsuperscript{190} If Aristotle does in fact conceive of perfect love in this way, then it is a love of an excellence that remains separable from the persons in whom it is instantiated. In this case, particular objects of love (i.e., particular people) would be substitutable for one another, and would function as mere bearers of excellence. Aristotle’s repeated emphasis that the cause of perfect friendship is the excellence of each friend lends support to this possibility.

Bernard Williams criticizes Aristotle’s account of perfect friendship on similar grounds, although instead of interpreting perfect love as love of properties, Williams criticizes it as love of whatever excellence the virtuous lover regards himself as possessing. Thus Williams characterizes such friendship as a, “three-dimensional mirror,” in which one looks for a friend that offers him his own “duplication.”\textsuperscript{191} Whether one sees Aristotle’s perfect friend as loving his own duplicate (as Williams argues), or as a lover of properties (as Vlastos suggests), the problem is more or less the same; he does not seem to be properly a lover of persons. The critiques offered by Vlastos and Williams

\textsuperscript{189} Vlastos (1973) 33 n. 100.
\textsuperscript{190} See Vlastos (1973) 31-32 and 33 n. 100.
\textsuperscript{191} Williams (1981) 15.
both depend upon the reasonable supposition that actual human relationships are driven in part for a love of a unique person. While this kind of critique might be dismissed as arising from a peculiarly modern interest in the individual as instantiating a set of unique and irreproducible characteristics, surely to some extent uniqueness is simply a product of the inevitably various circumstances, inclinations, and choices that characterize people.

Aristotle does, however, at points seem to come close to acknowledging attachment as something with at least a partly independent life from the love of excellence. Thus, for example, he remarks that people especially love those things that they have labored over or suffered for (IX.1167a18 ff.), which acknowledges a motivation for love other than the excellence of the loved one, and thus a kind of attachment—though admittedly this kind of attachment still has a connection to excellence, but the excellence of the lover rather than the beloved. Aristotle also repeatedly emphasizes the importance of familiarity in perfect friendship, and this also might be taken to indicate some appreciation for the importance of attachment in relationships. But the explanation that he offers for its importance is made pretty strictly in terms of the theory—familiarity serves the purpose of assuring the good man that his friend is as good as he first appears (VIII.1156b25-32). Aristotle also discusses what happens when a perfect friendship is ruptured through the descent of one party into vice or less perfect virtue, finishing his discussion with a rhetorical question that seems to admit retaining at least some favor for one’s former friend, as well as “a memory of the previous familiarity” (μνείαν ἔχειν τῆς ἑκομένης συνηθείας) (1165b32-36). Nevertheless, he remarks at one point that there is nothing odd about a man breaking off a friendship with someone who has descended into incurable
vice, “since he was not a friend to a man of that sort” (1165b20-22). This implies that the kind of person someone is can be reduced to his intellectual virtues and character virtues. Indeed, the discussion as a whole seems to set aside the possibility that even the excellent man might find features of another person loveable that could persist despite vice.

Nevertheless, despite much in Aristotle’s account of perfect friendship that suggests the virtuous man is a lover of excellences rather than a lover of persons, Aristotle never quite explicitly resolves the ambiguity in his formulation of loving another for his own sake. If, in fact, he did have some notion of attachment to persons, this would go a long way to explaining why the loss of loved ones, or their turning out to be vicious, would “soil” his life. And, as I have pointed out, Aristotle does seem to offer an explanation for attachment to those for whom one has toiled, at least, that falls outside of love-of-excellence. And it would in principle be possible to extend this class of beloved-beneficiaries to many of those the excellent man knows, since he will often work for the interest of the people to whom he is connected (as the accounts of generosity and friendliness show).

**Conclusion**

My argument here has shown that it is impossible to use Aristotle’s account of action to give a full explanation for the value of the external goods. This chapter thus vindicates the conclusions of chapter 2 that Aristotle’s argument for *eudaimonia’s* need of the external goods at *NE* I.1099a31-b8 acknowledges that the external goods have some
value for *eudaimonia* apart from their role in making excellent activity more excellent. My chapter 2 analysis of that argument showed both that Aristotle attempts to explain the value of the external goods strictly in terms of the promotion of excellent activity, and also that his attempt fails. That is, Aristotle (at least initially) expects himself to be able to explain the value of other goods straightforwardly in terms of the promotion of excellent activity, but he does not succeed in doing so. This suggests that he takes the finality requirement seriously, and that he regards his theory as demanding all other goods to be chosen for the sake of virtuous activity, in the sense that they derive their value from a contribution to such activity. Aristotle’s handling of this argument thus runs contrary to the suggestion of one scholar that the for-the-sake-of relation between certain goods and *eudaimonia* should be understood loosely, as a constraint upon which other goods should be chosen, but not requiring all goods to derive their worth from the promotion of excellent activity.\(^{192}\) It also seems to count against looking for more subtle explanations of how this for-the-sake-of relation is to be understood—such as Gabriel Richardson Lear’s teleological relation of approximation.\(^{193}\)

One of the aims of this chapter has been to show just how far Aristotle’s account of action can go in explaining the value of various other goods. In particular, I have argued that Aristotle’s requirement that excellent practical activity be performed knowingly—in particular with knowledge of “that for the sake of which” some action is performed—implies that such activity generally succeeds in bringing about its aimed at results or

\(^{192}\) Broadie (1991) 31-32.

\(^{193}\) See Richardson Lear (2004) 61 n. 2, for an explicit comment on the value of the external goods, which does not, however, attempt to explain their value in terms of teleological approximation. See also p. 88, where she comments on how the teleological relation of approximation can explain the relation between middle-level goods and *eudaimonia*. 
consequences. Contrary to what is often supposed, my analysis of Aristotle’s action/production distinction has also shown that this distinction does not necessarily exclude aimed at and achieved results from partly determining the value of virtuous action. This interpretation goes some distance to explaining how external things play a part in the value of action. Thus, for example, wealth seems to have a more than purely instrumental relation to the ends for which the magnificent man uses it. Furthermore, even if the results or consequences at which an action aims are not themselves external goods (as I have argued) they are clearly more akin to the external goods than the internal goods of deliberation and choice. This line of interpretation, then, opens up a larger role for external goods and external things more generally within excellent practical activity than has sometimes been supposed. Nevertheless, even on this interpretation, Aristotle’s theory cannot fully explain the value of the external goods—as I have tried to show in the latter part of this chapter.

At this point, I shall offer a suggestion for the source of Aristotle’s difficulty. While it is trivially true that the activity of one’s own soul must always mediate access to any value offered by other goods, this by itself does not guarantee that all such goods derive their value from improving such activity—at least, not by improving it in the way that Aristotle seems to have in mind. In NE I Aristotle contrasts the way in which excellent activity brings about eudaimonia, with how the opposite sort of actions brings about the opposite condition (1100b9-11)—where a later remark supports interpreting this to mean that vicious actions make a man miserable (1100b33-35). This remark seems to imply that the salient feature of activity (ἐνέργεια) for reckoning a man eudaimōn or athlīos
(“wretched”) is the degree of excellence that it exhibits—that is, its actualization of intellectual or character excellence.

This point raises what seems to me a fundamental interpretive problem—whether Aristotle regards activity as improvable exclusively by being made to exhibit a greater degree of excellence, or in other ways also. It seems to me that such formulations as “complete activity” and “excellent activity” are ambiguous, in that they do not specify precisely what conditions render such activity perfected, and whether it is exclusively the degree to which excellence is actualized in some activity that determines its worth. This is a problem that I have already discussed in relation to anger and friendly actions, both of which express specific character excellences, but one of which seems to have a kind of value that the other does not and cannot—a value which furthermore seems to accrue to it partly from the worthy person in respect to which it is exercised. If the value of the activities of the various excellences can be distinguished from one another in this way, and some of these activities are receptive to valued external goods—such as friends or honors—then activities of the latter sort would be improvable not only by being made more excellent, but also through such receptiveness. My preceding discussion about the difficulty of Aristotle’s evaluative scheme for making sense of people’s attachment to one another is particularly important here.

These kinds of considerations also raise a problem for Aristotle’s claim that eudaimonia, defined as a kind of excellent activity, can be self-sufficient—that is, lacking in nothing. It is clear that Aristotle does not intend the self-sufficiency criterion to mean that excellent activity literally can stand alone as the sole good, since various other supporting goods must always be present in order for it to be actualized—such as
intellectual and character excellence, for example, life, and some degree of health. And in any case, there would be no scope for other goods to be chosen for their own sake if excellent activity were not (in a sense) choiceworthy along with those goods. On a more plausible reading, Aristotle means that excellent activity is self-sufficient taken with whatever goods are necessary to support that activity, or taken with whatever ends it seeks.

Yet this latter interpretation also poses problems. In particular, Aristotle himself admits that *eudaimonia* is not self-sufficient for one person alone, but for a man along with his family and fellow citizens (1097b8-11). If he means that one’s community supports one’s activity, then this can be made to square with the self-sufficiency criterion. But if (as I have just suggested) Aristotle leaves it to some degree ambiguous whether activity is improvable only by being made to exhibit a greater degree of excellence, or in addition in other ways, then there is a major question left open. If one interprets Aristotle to take perfected activity in the latter sense, as improvable both by exhibiting a greater degree of excellence and also in other respects, then this seems to risk trivializing the self-sufficiency criterion by allowing all other goods some role in improving activity, and removing the special standing of activity *qua* realization of excellence. Furthermore, this interpretation is also at odds with Aristotle’s close identification of noble activity with *eudaimonia* (e.g., 1099a22, 1101a2), since such nobility seems to arise from activity’s realization of excellence, rather than through its being improved in other ways—for example by means of its contact with external goods. And, furthermore, such a broad conception of what improves or perfects activity would threaten Aristotle’s characterization of the good he is looking for as something δυσαφαίρετον (“difficult to
take away”) (I.1095b26). On the other hand, if Aristotle insists that activity is improvable
only by more perfectly realizing excellence, then various goods that have a strong claim
to value seem to be excluded. This ambiguity about how exactly excellent activity can be
improved and perfected, and what kinds of goods can play a role in bringing about such
perfection, would help to explain Aristotle’s equivocation about whether external things
affect eudaimonia simply as instruments to excellent activity—or, instead, by tainting it
or ornamenting it.
Chapter 4: Aristotle’s NE on Moral Luck?

The Notion of Moral Luck

In the first three chapters, I interpret Aristotle’s view in the NE about how the external goods contribute to *eudaimonia*—in the first chapter, examining Aristotle’s method in NE I, then in the second chapter applying my observations about his method to an analysis of his argument that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods. Finally, in the third chapter, I look at his theory of action in order to evaluate how things outside or partly outside of action contribute value to that action—whether as external results, as instruments, or in some other way. The collective aim of the first three chapters, then, is to identify Aristotle’s position in the NE on the question of how the external goods, as well as external things in the broadest sense, bear on the ability of a man to achieve the human good.

Here, I shall extend this work and apply these findings to a fresh question. In a pair of papers delivered jointly in 1976, Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel coined the term “moral luck,” and examined the philosophical problems that this idea raises.\(^{194}\) Moral luck is a concept that describes the factors outside of an agent’s control, which nevertheless impinge upon the moral assessment of him or of his actions (whether positive or negative). This notion is subject to different possible specifications, depending upon how exactly “moral” and “luck” are defined. Thus whatever both counts as moral

worth (on some definition) and yet at the same time depends upon what is outside of an agent’s control (on some definition) counts as moral luck. Debates about whether moral luck exists at all, or what kind of moral luck exists, thus naturally depend upon how each of these two definitions is worked out—and thus in which cases (if any) success or failure at realizing moral worth is judged to lie at least partly beyond an agent’s control.

Nagel and Williams take Kant to be the chief exponent of the moral, and thus for the most part follow his concept of it. For their purposes, what matters most is that Kant insists upon a category of value that is both supreme and at the same time universally accessible to all humans as rational beings.\(^{195}\) Williams accordingly remarks that for Kant morality is, “open not merely to the talents, but to a talent which all rational beings necessarily possess in the same degree.”\(^{196}\) The term “talent” may be used by Williams here to avoid ruling out the possibility that while a rational potentiality is an essential human trait, it nevertheless requires cultivation in order to be brought to full fruit.\(^{197}\) The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* does not distinguish between potential and fully cultivated reason in this way. Indeed, here Kant seems to ascribe rationality to human beings without distinction.\(^{198}\) In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, however, Kant specifically discusses moral instruction, which at least suggests that he sees fully fledged practical reason as contingent upon circumstance, and thus not necessarily equally

\(^{195}\) See, especially, Williams (1981) 20-22, for a brief discussion of Kant’s claim that moral worth is both supreme and universally accessible to all rational agents.


\(^{197}\) As pointed out by Prof. David Johnston at the author’s thesis defense.

\(^{198}\) In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant consistently treats humans as a subset of the superset of rational creatures—implying that humans are always rational. For a typical example, see *Groundwork* 4:408.
accessible to all.\textsuperscript{199} Here, I shall follow Kant’s position in the \textit{Groundwork}, since the analysis of moral luck developed by Nagel and Williams presupposes an interpretation of the moral consistent with what Kant sets out in the \textit{Groundwork}, but not necessarily in his other ethical writings. Nagel and Williams’ view does not necessarily depend upon Kant in particular, however. Thomas Nagel also works out his own notion of the moral as equally accessible to all by restricting moral worth to what falls within an agent’s control (without offering a technical definition of control, but rather illustrating it through examples).\textsuperscript{200} I shall not be especially concerned to distinguish between Kant’s view and Nagel’s here, since what I take to be most important is their shared contention that the moral is a good that is both supreme and at the same time equally accessible to all people.

Some examples of moral luck should clarify what Nagel and Williams have in mind. In regard to the results of actions, Nagel insists on the “morally significant difference between rescuing someone from a burning building and dropping him from a twelfth-storey window while trying to rescue him.”\textsuperscript{201} By positing two imaginary actions here, that differ only in respect to the result which lies beyond the agent’s control, Nagel thus isolates the role of this external factor in influencing the moral worth of an act. Nagel and Williams also both suppose that the will itself, which realizes moral worth through choice, is not independent of forces that act upon it from outside. Thus they coin the term “constitutive moral luck” to refer to the specific kind of moral luck that determines one’s ability to act in such a way as to realize moral worth. As Nagel claims, “Someone who

\textsuperscript{199} Kant, \textit{Metaphysics of Morals} 6:477-6:484.

\textsuperscript{200} See Nagel (1979) 26-27, for his insistence that the principle of control cannot be abandoned—so that only what is in the control of the agent can be correctly subject to moral judgment.

\textsuperscript{201} Nagel (1979) 25.
was an officer in a concentration camp might have led a quiet and harmless life if the Nazis had never come to power in Germany.”202 Thus Nagel and Williams reject Kant’s view that moral worth is equally within the reach of all rational beings through the exercise of their rational faculty.

All of this should make it pretty clear what Nagel and Williams have in mind. But there is also a note of dissatisfaction or even distress that characterizes their work—both find the idea of a category of moral worth, which is at once supreme and equally accessible to all human beings through the exercise of the will, both attractive and untenable. They find it attractive, because it is a kind of moral democracy—where the greatest good is equally within the reach of all. But they find it untenable, because they insist that certain things that fall outside of an agent’s control either themselves have moral significance (such as consequences) or influence the exercise of the will (one’s rearing; the opportunities for moral and immoral action). Moral luck thus uncovers the failed pretension of moral worth to lie equally within the reach of all, and at the same time to possess supreme value. Nevertheless, Nagel and Williams themselves are sympathetic to the aspirations of morality.

All of this has the somewhat odd result that the very idea of moral luck destabilizes the underlying notion of the moral upon which it depends. If moral luck exists, then moral worth cannot truly be equally accessible to all humans. But if morality did not have this pretension, then there would be nothing interesting or surprising about the existence of such moral luck. As Nagel and Williams themselves insist, the very idea that a category of value is equally accessible to all implies that it cannot be influenced by

factors outside of agency itself—and hence that moral luck is impossible. Thus Nagel dubs the idea of moral luck “paradoxical,”\textsuperscript{203} and Williams has remarked that he originally, “expected it to suggest an oxymoron.”\textsuperscript{204} Strictly, then, one cannot both accept the possibility of moral luck, and insist upon the category of the moral. Nevertheless, while both Nagel and Williams see their work as casting doubt upon the plausibility of the moral, neither seems entirely satisfied with the alternative either—that the idea of a universally accessible and supreme moral good must simply be dispensed with. As Williams puts it, the “allure” of Kantianism is that it offers, “an ultimate form of justice,” and a “solace to a sense of the world’s unfairness.”\textsuperscript{205}

**Moral Luck in Aristotle**

Now that I have given a sketch of what moral luck is, I shall begin to assess Aristotle’s position on the possibility of moral luck. Two issues arise immediately. Aristotle has no notion of the moral, so strictly speaking one cannot assess his position on moral luck at all, since this notion presupposes that of the moral. Secondly, does luck in Nagel and Williams’s sense coincide with a Greek notion?

Luck is the easier of the two points, so I shall consider that first. Since Nagel and Williams think of luck negatively, as what is outside of the agent’s control, it is useful to begin by looking at how they see that domain of control. Nagel regards with suspicion the

\textsuperscript{203} Nagel (1979) 27, 38.
\textsuperscript{204} Williams (1993) 251.
\textsuperscript{205} Williams (1993) 21.
claim that any particular act is actually within the control of an agent (and hence free of luck). After considering the many forces that press upon the agent from outside, he goes so far as to conclude: “Eventually nothing remains which can be ascribed to the responsible self…” Aristotle’s position could hardly be more different from Nagel’s skepticism. Indeed, he assigns responsibility to an agent for almost anything that he physically causes, including the so-called mixed actions undertaken under non-ideal conditions of choice, in which the agent chooses something undesirable and something choiceworthy together in a single act.

Nevertheless, there are certain kinds of action that Aristotle regards as outside of an agent’s control, and hence involuntary—in particular, involuntary acts due to force or ignorance. At the same time, Aristotle does not explicitly ascribe such force or ignorance to luck (τύχη). Thus Aristotle’s notion of responsible agency does not necessarily have the same neat relation to luck that one finds in Nagel and Williams—for whom responsible agency and luck are defined in relation to one another as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Aristotle’s explicit discussion of how luck influences eudaimonia in NE I (at NE I.1100b18-1101a21), however, does seem to take the notion of luck expansively, in a way that seems similar to the way that Nagel and Williams use it. Such a conception of luck would seem in principle to be inclusive of force or ignorance. Thus Aristotle remarks that the good man “always or most of all will do and will see those things that accord with virtue” (1100b19-20) and, a few lines later, that he “will never perform hateful and wicked acts” (οὐδέποτε γὰρ πράξει τὰ μισητὰ καὶ τὰ φαύλα) (1100b34-35). By

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206 Nagel (1979) 37.
making this latter categorical assertion that the good man will never perform acts of a particular sort, within a discussion of luck’s effect on eudaimonia, Aristotle implicitly assumes a very broad understanding of luck as including anything that would create an exception to that claim. In any case, I shall not be particularly interested in Aristotle’s conception of luck here. Instead, I shall focus my work here on assessing the various ways in which Aristotle regards virtuous action as depending upon forces outside of the control of the agent. Thus I shall use luck in Williams and Nagel’s sense throughout, while following Aristotle’s own distinctions between the different ways in which excellent activity depends upon what lies outside the full control of the agent.

The moral poses a more significant problem. Aristotle knows nothing like the modern category of the moral—at least in the form that it takes in Nagel, Williams, or in Kant himself. That is, Aristotle has no category of value that is both equally accessible to all human agents and at the same time of supreme worth (to set aside some of the other distinguishing criteria of the moral). Thus assessing Aristotle’s position on moral luck amounts to asking a broad question about the degree to which he regards each of his own categories of value as depending upon factors outside of the agent’s control. And if one takes moral in the strict sense, Aristotle has no position on moral luck at all. Aristotle reckons eudaimonia the supreme good for man—and to this extent it does resemble moral worth in Kant’s sense. But it is also defined in at least formally egoistic terms, whereas Kant insists upon a division between happiness and moral worth. And furthermore Aristotle sometimes identifies eudaimonia with contemplative rather than practical activity, in which case it is clearly not a specifically moral good. But most importantly for my purposes, throughout the NE Aristotle supposes that only free adult
men can fully realize the rational activity in which such *eudaimonia* consists, so that he clearly does not regard it as equally accessible to all humans. In this way, *eudaimonia* fails to satisfy one of the main two criteria of the moral that concern Nagel and Williams (equal accessibility to all humans), even as it satisfies the other (supremacy).

In the *Politics* this limitation of *eudaimonia* to certain people is worked out more explicitly, with Aristotle notoriously reckoning some men to be natural slaves, incapable of the full use of reason, and therefore incapable of exercising practical wisdom (*NE* I.1253b15-55b15). Aristotle furthermore claims that the slave entirely lacks the deliberative part of the soul (τὸ βουλευτικόν), while for the woman it is “lacking authority” (ἄκυρον), and for the child it is “unfinished” (ἀτελές) (I.1260a12-14). And he goes on to argue that the virtue (ἀρετή) of each accordingly differs (I.1260a14-24). Thus while slaves and women can exercise practical excellence to some degree, it is of a limited and imperfect kind. Accordingly, Aristotle goes on to characterize the virtue of the ruler as “complete” (τελεός), while for the others there is only “as much as belongs to them” (ὅσον ἐπιβάλλει αὐτοῖς).

And apart from restricting the raw ability to exercise excellent rational activity to free adult men, Aristotle also sets what are in effect circumstantial restrictions. Thus in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines certain virtues in a way that would make it impossible for anyone but an *advantaged* adult free man able to exercise them. Thus magnificence consists in giving large sums of money—making this virtue accessible only to the wealthy—and magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχικόν) depends upon the mere possession of

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207 For evidence that Aristotle has in mind men, not women, see: *NE* I.1097a8-11, where Aristotle sets a limit to self-sufficiency, which allows for one’s dependence upon a wife (γυναῖκι). For the exclusion of children from *εὐδαιμονία*, see *NE* I.1100a1-5. For the exclusion of slaves, see *NE* X.1177a6-11.
worldly goods. Furthermore, if the virtues are mutually entailing, including magnificence and magnanimity, then one must be wealthy in order to have any virtue whatsoever in the strict sense.\footnote{But see Gardiner (2001) for an argument that Aristotle does not require a man to possess the so-called “non-basic virtues” of magnificence and magnanimity in order to possess the other virtues.} These circumstantial restrictions serve to distinguish Aristotle’s notion of virtuous activity still further from the moral. But while Aristotle regards it as unproblematic that certain people are (on his lights) simply incapable of fully realizing excellent rational activity, he seems actually concerned about, and one might even say disappointed by, the contingency that the dependency upon resources injects into \textit{eudaimonia}.

The \textit{Politics’} emphasis on the householder’s role as the manager of wealth as well as of his wife, children, and slaves also assumes that the householder will be in something like the position of power and advantage on which excellent practical activity is predicated in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}. Thus Aristotle makes a limited type of wealth acquisition part of household management (in contrast to another kind that has no limit that he deems unnatural) (I.1256a1-1256b38). And such limited wealth acquisition might support the \textit{NE} excellences of generosity and magnificence. And Aristotle also regards the householder’s slaves specifically as tools for action, rather than production (I.1254a5-17). Although slaves are not directly mentioned as tools for the exercise of the particular excellences in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, the accounts of certain practical excellences presuppose that the excellent person will be a mature man in a position of some power. The crucial similarity, then, is simply that power is concentrated in the hands of both the householder of the \textit{Politics} and also of the virtuous man of the \textit{NE}, and that his virtue can
only be exercised effectively from such a position of power and advantage, as a manager of other goods and even (in the Politics) of other people.

Interestingly, at one point in his account of generosity Aristotle does flirt with what might be termed a resource-relative conception of virtue, remarking: “Indeed, nothing prevents the one who gives less from being more generous, if he gives from a smaller pool of wealth” (IV.1120b9-11). On this principle, the generosity of a gift cannot be judged in absolute terms, but only in relation to the wealth of the one making the gift. For example, if a poor man gives a small gift that is significant to him, it might be more generous than a much larger gift made by a wealthy man that costs him little. One could well generalize this principle further, to make the worth of all actions purely relational to both the external and internal resources that the agent possesses—emotional, psychological, material. Virtuous activity would then turn out to be something more like doing the best possible thing under the circumstances, given one’s limited resources, whatever those might be. This, however, is decidedly not the direction that Aristotle ultimately chooses to go, at least in his account of excellent practical activity—since he both makes magnificence and magnanimity excellences, and makes the virtues be mutually entailing. If one looks to NE X, where Aristotle respecifies eudaimonia as excellent contemplative activity, however, things are different—contemplation depends upon external goods as the conditions for its exercise (1178b33-35), but it does not have the same intimate relationship with such goods that is characteristic of practical activity. That is, contemplation has a value that is more separable and independent from that of the external goods.
Excellent practical activity for Aristotle thus fails to be equally accessible to all humans both because of its restriction in its fullest form to those with fully rational souls (free adult men), and also because of the circumstantial conditions required for its exercise (wealth, etc.). But Aristotle seems concerned only by the latter—that is, one gets the sense that Aristotle would at least prefer for all men capable of rational judgment to have the opportunity to exercise virtue. Nevertheless, he is the one who defines virtues in socially specific ways that make them dependent not only upon a full capacity for reasoning, but also upon external resources. And not only that, but in the *Politics* he is not especially preoccupied by trying to form a society in which the opportunity for virtue is allotted to all those who have the requisite rational capacity. Thus he does not deny that vulgar craftsmen are capable of reason, but he does regard their activities as interfering with the development of this capacity, and thus makes the best city-state exclude them from citizenship (III.1278a8-13). Thus there is a large but very imperfect overlap for Aristotle between those who qualify as having fully rational souls (non-slave adult men), and those who have the correct circumstances to exercise complete virtue—which does not overly concern Aristotle, at least when a person is born into such adverse circumstances for the cultivation and exercise of virtue. Thus Aristotle’s paradigm case of misfortune that takes away *eudaimonia*—Priam—is not a rational man born to barbarous parents or to poverty, but rather a man who was born into ideal circumstances for such exercise, and who probably retained considerable external goods and other advantages until Troy actually fell—despite his personal and political tragedy.

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210 See, for example, *Politics* III.1278a20-21 & VII.1328b39-41.
Seeing women or slaves as subject to the strokes of moral luck for Aristotle is thus mistaken, since Aristotle does not think of virtuous action in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as equally accessible to all, and it is not at all clear that he would regard it as a loss of any kind for large swathes of humankind to be unable to exercise such activity.\(^{211}\) As I have pointed out, for Nagel and Williams moral luck arises from the *failed pretension* of morality to be equally within the grasp of all as human agents. But when a category of value lacks this pretension—as excellent practical activity in the full sense does for Aristotle—it cannot be regarded as having failed to realize this pretension in this way, and thus cannot properly be regarded as moral luck. It is true that there is a difficulty in Aristotle’s position—that he both seems to attribute a rational nature to man, and to deny the full form of such reason to certain members of the species.\(^{212}\) Nevertheless, this is his position. The function argument notwithstanding, he does not begin with the thought that there is a supreme good equally within the reach of all humans.

*Previous Attempts to Assess Aristotle’s Position on Moral Luck in the NE*

Before turning to my own analysis of Aristotle’s categories of value in order to isolate his position on the possibility of moral luck, I would like to show why previous attempts to identify his position have been inadequate. In fact, each such attempt has been marred by a failure to examine Aristotle’s own categories of value on their own terms. Thus

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\(^{211}\) Accordingly, the claim of Ponesse (2007) 33-35, that being born as a natural-slave or a woman counts as a form of moral luck for Aristotle, seems wrong-headed.

\(^{212}\) As pointed out, for example, by Lear (1998) 64-65.
Anthony Kenny’s 1993 paper, “Aristotle On Moral Luck,” takes the NE discussion of the dependence of eudaimonia upon luck as the main treatment of moral luck within the Nicomachean Ethics—without trying to distinguish eudaimonia from other kinds of value that Aristotle relies upon throughout this discussion or elsewhere in the NE. Yet it is not at all clear that eudaimonia is a strictly moral good for Aristotle. For one thing, as I have already remarked, Aristotle does not see it as a good equally accessible to all. Furthermore, eudaimonia is defined in at least formally egoistic terms, in a way that the moral is not. And it is possible to possess at least one kind of ethical good (character virtue) without possessing eudaimonia at all. Kenny’s approach would have been more reasonable for the Stoics, Plato, Epicurus, or the Cynics, since all more closely identify an agent’s own well-being with his achievement of ethical worth. Even in these cases, however, one would still need to begin by examining exactly how eudaimonia and such ethical value are related—accidentally or essentially.

Most famously, Martha Nussbaum devotes the final and third part of The Fragility of Goodness to Aristotle’s view on the susceptibility of “goodness” to loss through misfortune, both in the Poetics and the NE. The very title of her work seems to suggest an interest in moral luck, and she refers to Bernard Williams from time to time, yet she rejects the moral/non-moral distinction upon which his and Nagel’s work rests. She

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214 But see Irwin (1980b) for some remarks on different senses of “egoistic” and their aptness for Aristotle’s understanding of eudaimonia.
215 NE I.1098b31-1099a7.
justifies this rejection by claiming, “The Greek texts make no such distinction,” and describes herself as using “more concrete and informal distinctions” in place of the moral/non-moral distinction. Yet, while it is true that Aristotle does not rely upon the moral/non-moral distinction as such, he does develop his own categories of value, to which Nussbaum is for the most part inattentive. Thus, Nussbaum often refers simply to goodness, without clarifying whether she means character virtue, eudaimonia, both, or some other notion of her own construction that has a more complex relation to Aristotle’s categories. And she also sometimes refers to “ethical assessments,” where this neither tracks, nor seems intended to track, Aristotle’s own notion of praiseworthiness. This issue is crucial, since Aristotle himself often directly distinguishes between the degree of control that an agent exercises over different kinds of goods—as, for example, when he remarks that action and character are both voluntary, but in different ways (NE III.1114b30-1115a3). Thus, to use the term moral loosely, he distinguishes different kinds of moral luck that correspond to different categories of value.

In a paper published in 1992 that deals primarily with Aristotle’s Poetics, Cynthia Freeland at one point turns to the topic of moral luck in the NE, drawing on Nussbaum’s work. Implicitly contrasting her own position with that of Nussbaum, she remarks: “Though I believe there is some room in the [Nicomachean] Ethics for moral luck, I

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220 As her reviewers have noted. See: Long (1988) 365 & Barnes (1987) 175.
221 See Nussbaum (2001) 324, where Nussbaum’s own language of “ethical assessments” corresponds to nothing in the passage she is considering. That passage, NE I.1098b31-1099a7, makes no reference to praise or blame, but rather to “crowning”—that is, honoring. Thus Nussbaum is either misinterpreting this passage, or else developing her own independent notion of ethical praiseworthiness, which she neither clearly explains, nor seems to track anything found in Aristotle.
doubt that it extends very far.” 222 While Freeland draws directly on Nagel and Williams’ analysis, however, she too fails to explain how she thinks the moral piece of moral luck maps on to Aristotle’s scheme of value in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. 223 Thus at one point, she seems to analyze a purely passively suffered loss as a kind of moral luck, without showing how such a loss would impinge upon the moral status of the agent. 224 Thus Freeland’s analysis suffers from the same basic problem as those of Nussbaum and Kenny—a failure to examine Aristotle’s own scheme of value critically as a prerequisite to any analysis of his position on moral luck.

Another analysis of Aristotelian moral luck by Judith Andre focuses not on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, but simply on Aristotle’s more general interest in character virtue. 225 The author, however, acknowledges that she is not actually using the term “Aristotelian” to refer to Aristotle’s exact views, but to pick out a strand in “our present ways of thinking.” 226 Accordingly, her analysis is simply of the kind of moral luck that would result from taking “moral” to refer primarily to virtue of character, rather than primarily to action or will. 227 Thus none of these studies offers an analysis of Aristotle’s view on moral luck that is grounded in his own scheme of value.

Drawing on my work in the previous three chapters, then, I shall outline some of the interpretive problems for isolating Aristotle’s position on moral luck in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

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222 Freeland (1992) 117.
223 For her summary of Williams and Nagel’s analysis of moral luck, see Freeland (1992) 117.
224 Freeland (1992) 118.
227 See Andre (1993) 127, where she claims in what she sees as an Aristotelian spirit, “In its central sense, I contend, morality refers to excellence of character.”
Unlike previous studies, I shall take Aristotle’s own scheme of value as my starting point. First, I shall give an overview of the different kinds of value that Aristotle identifies in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the degree to which each can be considered moral in nature. As I do so, I shall also sketch what kind of susceptibility to external factors Aristotle supposes each kind of value to have. In some cases, this will raise interpretive questions that lie beyond the scope of this chapter, so that I will have to indicate how the problem applies to the question of what Aristotle’s position on moral luck is, rather than actually providing a definitive solution. In the final part of this chapter, I shall examine two particular discussions that bear on Aristotle’s position on moral luck—the NE III analysis of involuntary action, and Aristotle’s remarks on the way that misfortune influences both the happiness of a moral agent, as well as his ability to realize “the fine” (τὸ καλὸν). Basically, my concern here will be to assess how exactly Aristotle reckons with the possibility that a good man might involuntarily do something that would ordinarily be regarded as wicked—except that in this case it has been done involuntarily rather than intentionally.

**Kinds of Value and Kinds of Moral Luck in Aristotle’s NE**

As I have already remarked, because Aristotle does not himself know the modern category of the moral, assessing his position on moral luck amounts to asking a broad question about the degree to which he regards each of his own categories of value as depending upon factors outside of a person’s control. Thus one can speak of Aristotle’s
position of moral luck in a loose sense, with reference to the degree of contingency of each of the various categories of value that he distinguishes. Here, I shall outline the problems posed by each category of value that Aristotle distinguishes, before turning to a more pointed examination of two specific parts of the NE that help to assess his position on moral luck.

First, there is eudaimonia itself. To retrace some ground for the earlier part of this chapter, while Aristotle does reckon eudaimonia to be the supreme good, and in this respect it resembles the Kantian notion of moral worth, Aristotle does not reckon it to be equally accessible to all. This, by itself, creates a wide gap between eudaimonia and moral worth—either as it is defined by Kant himself, or as moral philosophers such as Williams and Nagel think of it. A second difficulty is that Aristotle seems to conceive of eudaimonia as at least formally self-regarding,\textsuperscript{228} while Kant, at least, tries to draw a fairly hard line between happiness and moral worth. Few would dispute this characterization of Aristotle, but one complication here for trying to characterize Aristotle’s conception of eudaimonia as formally egoistic is the self-sufficiency requirement, which Aristotle wants somehow to apply to a group rather than a single person alone (1.1097b8-13). Yet this would seem to make eudaimonia an irreducibly social rather than a good that an individual (in some formal sense, at least) pursues for his own sake. While I do not want to dismiss this qualification to self-sufficiency, it is hard to know just how to interpret it—whether Aristotle has in mind some natural social need, or merely the need for others in order to engage in the full range of excellences. Aristotle’s ability to maintain eudaimonia as a formally self-regarding good, while

\textsuperscript{228} For the characterization of Aristotle and Plato’s ethical systems as “formally egoistic” but not substantively so, see Williams (1985) 32.
including social ends within it, is well demonstrated by his own analysis of true self love (IX.1168a28-1169b2). For Aristotle the true lover-of-self is particularly apt to perform noble acts that would normally be thought of as self-sacrificing, but in fact such a person gains nobility (τὸ καλὸν) and thus distributes “the greater good” to himself (1169a27-29). Thus, one might say, the man of practical excellence is formally egoistic, but not substantively so.\footnote{A wrinkle here is that in fact the true lover-of-self has in fact given himself the greater good (nobility) on his own lights. Thus one might wonder if in some sense it would be more noble to teach one’s friends nobility, rather than (as Aristotle seems to suggest here) making their lives more comfortable or safer.}

Another difficulty, which results from Aristotle’s formally self-regarding conception of eudaimonia, is that he does not necessarily define it as concerned with one’s conduct or one’s relations to others. That is, Aristotle claims that almost all regard eudaimonia as the highest achievable good (ἀκρότατον τῶν πρακτῶν ἀγαθῶν) (I.1095a14-18), and this formal definition is perhaps in some sense more basic than his later specifications of it—as a kind of excellent rational activity, and then variously as practical activity or contemplative activity. Thus Aristotle’s method can be seen as proceeding to a more and more specified conception of eudaimonia, and it is only once he reaches the fully specified form that it is perhaps identified with excellent practical activity (but perhaps with contemplative activity). Thus there are a few ways in which eudaimonia differs from moral worth—in that it is at least formally self-regarding, in that it does not necessarily concern one’s conduct, and in that, while supreme, Aristotle does not reckon it equally accessible to all.

Aristotle also refers to praise and blame throughout the NE, and one may abstract a notion of praiseworthiness as a particular kind of value or worth from these remarks. In
NE III, Aristotle introduces his discussion of the voluntary, explaining that only what is voluntary is subject to praise and blame, while what is involuntary is subject to forgiveness and “sometimes” pity (1109b30-35). This distinguishes a clear notion of assessment of the individual, which is meant to correspond to things that are under his own control in the specific sense that they are voluntary. Thus Aristotle’s requirement that what is praised or blamed be voluntary approximates Nagel’s requirement that what is subject to moral assessment be under the control of the agent. Nevertheless, Nagel in the end is far more skeptical than Aristotle about what may be assigned to an agent’s control—supposing that even actions that an agent brings about through negligence (such as running someone down while driving one’s car recklessly) depend upon factors outside of an agent’s control (the presence of a pedestrian near a red light).\(^\text{230}\) Nagel’s skepticism about whether actions that Aristotle would regard as voluntary fall under the control principle is driven by a desire to uncover a category of value that is truly equally accessible to all—a desire Aristotle does not quite share. If luck is a factor in the worth of some act, then (for Nagel) it violates the principle of control. Thus voluntary and praiseworthy acts (for Aristotle) would hardly satisfy Nagel as being equally within the grasp of all agents. Indeed, Aristotle’s notion of responsible control is very different from Nagel’s—for Aristotle, whatever an agent knowingly causes counts as voluntary (III.1111a22-24).

Yet despite the fact that the praiseworthy seems more nearly equally accessible to all than excellent practical activity, there is no reason to suppose that Aristotle regards the praiseworthy as a supreme good—indeed, Aristotle reserves that distinction for

\(^{230}\) For this example, see Nagel (1979) 25.
**eudaimonia**, which he regards as beyond praise (1101b10-27). And, at the same time, in the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE* II.1220a4-6), Aristotle remarks that the intellectual virtues may be praised, suggesting that praiseworthiness has a broader scope than moral worth does, and extends beyond the domain of conduct. Thus the praiseworthy cannot at all be assimilated to the moral.

Character virtue also seems to represent a distinct class of value. As I remarked earlier, constitutive moral luck consists in the factors outside of an agent’s control that nevertheless influence the development of his character, will, or preferences in some way that determines the extent to which he is capable of acting morally.\(^{231}\) Thus if Aristotelian moral character were to depend upon factors outside of an agent’s control, then this would be a kind of constitutive moral luck in Nagel and Williams’ terms (with the qualification that character virtue is neither a supreme good, nor is supposed to be equally accessible to all for Aristotle, and thus only approximates the moral).

Aristotle makes conflicting remarks about whether he regards the character excellences as subject to forces beyond an agent’s control, however. On the one hand, Aristotle makes a number of remarks that suggest that the moral agent is at the mercy of his rearing for the development of his character excellences—especially in *NE* I and II.\(^ {232}\) And he furthermore admits of the possibility of natural character virtue—though he supposes that it always requires the development of practical wisdom in order to be brought to perfection (*NE* VI.1144b34). Such natural virtue, insofar as it would seem to make it easier either to approximate virtuous acts, or else to close the gap to achieve full virtue, is a kind of constitutive moral luck. Thus Aristotle seems to admit two kinds of

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\(^{232}\) See *NE* I.1095b4-6; II.1103b22-25; II.1104b1.
constitution moral luck—through rearing and through natural virtue. Yet in *NE III.5*, Aristotle argues that states of character are up to the agent, apparently relying upon the consideration that those actions which eventually result in a state of character are up to the agent.\(^{233}\) Not only does this position contradict his remarks elsewhere about the importance of rearing, but the argument itself presents some difficulties. An attempt at resolving Aristotle’s position on this question would require extensive investigation, and thus lies well beyond the scope of this chapter.

Excellent practical activity itself seems to have another distinct kind of worth. Such activity depends upon various things outside the control of the agent—in particular, it cannot be predicted in advance whether a particular action will turn out to be performed knowingly—as Aristotle requires of virtuous action (*NE II.1105a31-33*). For another thing, excellent practical activity in the strict sense depends upon the possession of an underlying state of character, so that if character excellence depends upon forces outside the agent, then so does virtuous activity. Virtuous action also depends upon certain opportunities for action (though Aristotle says little about this directly), and the possession of certain external goods. Finally, as I have argued somewhat controversially in my third chapter, such action depends upon the achievement of aimed at results. A further question concerns whether or not Aristotle truly regards all the particular character excellences as mutually entailing, as he sometimes says (*NE VI.1144b32-34*). If so, this would be a particularly demanding kind of moral luck, since in order to possess

\(^{233}\) See Ackrill (1978) for a critique of the first part of this argument, given by Aristotle at *NE III.1113b3-14*. 
any of the other virtues, one would need to possess the wealth needed for magnificent action, for example.\(^{234}\)

Another kind of value that Aristotle distinguishes is “the fine” (τὸ καλὸν). Aristotle never directly defines the fine in the *NE*, but he refers to it often, and these references give a reasonably clear sense of what he has in mind. Again, it approximates but is not identical to the moral. The fine is not a supreme good, since it is not identical to *eudaimonia*, which is regarded as the supreme good. This is shown clearly by Aristotle’s admission of the possibility that someone could continue to realize the fine, but at the same time fail to be *eudaimōn* (on which see the final section of this chapter). Furthermore, the fine seems to rest in part on the external, visible aspects of an action,\(^ {235}\) whereas the moral tends to depend more strictly upon the will.

Thus, to draw some general conclusions, Aristotle has no category of value that closely approximates the moral—as a supreme good equally accessible to all, and as arising through correct conduct. *Eudaimonia* is the supreme good, but it is not equally within the reach of all, since it consists in activities that Aristotle regards as accessible only to non-slave men who have the supply of the external goods needed to support excellent practical activity. Praiseworthiness seems to come closer to being equally accessible to all, but it does not have supreme worth, nor is it restricted to the domain of conduct. Character excellence is not equally accessible to all either—certainly not to slaves, women, or children, and perhaps not to everyone else either, since Aristotle

\(^{234}\) See Gardiner (2001) for an argument that the so-called “non-basic virtues” of magnificence and magnanimity are not required in order to possess the other virtues. See Irwin (1988b) and the reply by Kraut (1988) for a discussion of the problem posed by magnificence and magnanimity to the unity of the virtues. Irwin and Kraut, however, both avoid drawing definite conclusions about Aristotle’s position.

\(^{235}\) As Richardson Lear (2004) 130 argues.
sometimes makes remarks that seem to acknowledge that nature and nurture both stack the deck for some over others. The fine (τὸ καλὸν) seems restricted to matters involving conduct, in the *NE* at least, and in a passage that I shall discuss later Aristotle does seem to regard it as equally within the reach of all. Nevertheless, it arises from excellent activities, and Aristotle describes results as fine, even though such results clearly are outside of the full control of the agent. Thus, since none of Aristotle’s categories of value maps very closely on to the moral, one must be content with speaking of Aristotle’s view on moral luck in a loose sense, and distinguishing between the different kinds of control that an agent exerts over Aristotle’s various categories of value.

**NE III on Moral Luck?**

Now that I have surveyed some of the main kinds of value that Aristotle distinguishes within the *NE*, and sketched out the evidence for how each depends upon what is outside of the agent’s control, I shall consider some specific sources of moral luck. One obvious place to begin looking is *NE* III. Here, Aristotle analyzes involuntary acts due to force or ignorance, as well as “mixed” action that is partly voluntary, partly involuntary. I shall focus here on Aristotle’s analysis of a particular kind of involuntary action—action rendered involuntary by ignorance of a relevant particular—since it forms a particularly

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236 Sorabji (1980) 260-261 denies that such actions are mixed in the sense that they are “both voluntary and involuntary.” Nevertheless they are both voluntary and involuntary, as even Sorabji admits, at least in the sense that they are *in one respect* voluntary (in respect to the particular circumstances), and *in another respect* involuntary (without this qualification, ἐπιλογία). A complete account of the action evidently involves saying both things about it, and Aristotle never describes them as voluntary without adding some qualification to that assertion.
unambiguous challenge to an agent’s control over virtuous activity. Since Aristotle restricts praise and blame to what is voluntary, such an involuntary act of ignorance ought not then be subject to praise or blame. Likewise, since Aristotle requires that virtuous action be done knowingly, it cannot count as virtuous action either (NE II.1105a31-33).

Indeed, involuntary action of this general kind is taken as a paradigmatic form of moral luck for Williams in his original paper. While obviously he is developing his own view, rather than interpreting Aristotle, some classicists have been stimulated by his discussion. Thus Nussbaum, in the *Fragility of Goodness*, refers to “the situation of Oedipus”—using Oedipus as the paradigm case of the more general kind of bad moral luck that he exemplifies—that is, of action performed in ignorance of a salient particular. Furthermore, Nussbaum claims that Aristotle regards this general category of action as blameworthy—remarking somewhat obliquely that Oedipus’ action is “a hideous rather than a blameless one.” While it may well be hideous on Aristotle’s lights as well as ours, this remark implies that the act, though involuntary and subject to circumstances outside of his control, is nevertheless still blameworthy. Despite this claim, Aristotle quite clearly regards such action as blameless, insofar as actions performed in ignorance of a relevant particular are involuntary, and thus excluded from the class of

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238 For Nussbaum’s use of the phrase, “the situation of Oedipus,” to refer to the general category of action performed in particular ignorance, see Nussbaum (2001) 334.
239 Nussbaum (2001) 380. This remark occurs in her discussion of the Poetics, but it seems intended to characterize Aristotle’s allegedly shared view about such action in both the Poetics and the NE. Elsewhere, however, Nussbaum (2001) 383 seems to take a different position—describing Oedipus’ ignorance as “innocent,” seemingly implying that the act too is blameless.
240 Assuming, of course, that the agent has taken reasonable measures to know the particulars relevant to the action in question.
voluntary things that are subject to praise or blame.\textsuperscript{241} And Oedipus’ homicide in particular seems to have been the sort of act that would have been acceptable except for what he did not know.\textsuperscript{242} Thus even though Aristotle does not explicitly remark on Oedipus’ ignorant patricide or ignorant mother-marriage in \textit{NE} III, nevertheless what he does say would clearly render acts of this kind as involuntary and thus not subject to praise or blame at all.

Determining exactly what Aristotle thinks is bad about an involuntary act performed in ignorance of a relevant particular, and what kind of value is affected is difficult, however. Somewhat curiously, Aristotle even fails to remark on how performing such an act affects the \textit{eudaimonia} of the agent who does it.\textsuperscript{243} This silence is surprising, given that actions of this kind would seem to bear directly on the \textit{NE} I discussion of the dependence of \textit{eudaimonia} upon luck and the external goods.

One possible explanation for Aristotle’s silence on the influence of such acts upon \textit{eudaimonia}, is that Aristotle regards them as fairly unusual, and not having any decisive significance for the entire life of a normal person. In support of this interpretation, Aristotle’s examples of ignorant acts all seem to be one-off events that take place in the course of a few moments—such as thinking a stone is pumice when it is not, and (presumably, though Aristotle does not say) using it to strike someone (1111a13). Of course, an event of short duration may still sometimes have wide-reaching effects. Accordingly, scholars discussing Aristotle’s analysis often mention Oedipus as the

\textsuperscript{241} As Botros (1987) 117 observes.
\textsuperscript{242} For an Athenian law that apparently made an allowance for homicide that occurs “on a road” (\textit{ἐν ὁδῷ}), perhaps because of the difficulty of maintaining order in the territory separating city-states, see Demosthenes, \textit{Against Aristokrates} 23.53.
\textsuperscript{243} As Botros (1987) 119 notes.
example *par excellence* of ignorant involuntary action.²⁴⁴ Aristotle himself never mentions Oedipus in *NE* III, however. And, interestingly, the tragic example that Aristotle does give here, of Merope falsely believing her son to be her enemy, is an act intended but never carried out, since Merope apparently had a recognition before she could perform the involuntary act of harming her son.²⁴⁵ Aristotle’s use of this example, especially, seems to suggest a certain hesitation to admit that there can be truly life changing acts of ignorance.

One might also try to determine how the fineness or baseness of such an act might be judged. If fineness partly rests in the full realization of virtue in action, depending both on the success of results, and the visibility and magnitude of those results, then the evaluation of the fineness of an act would seem to be diminished by a failed or unintended and undesirable result. At any rate, such an act might fail to count as fine, insofar as it would fail to bring virtue to completion, and thus not be visibly fine. Yet it is not clear that it would be base either, since the base, like the fine, seems to depend upon a certain kind of character and intention.²⁴⁶ Thus involuntary actions and their results may fail to be fine, but they do not seem actually to count as base.

Another possibility is that such an act or its result could be evaluated as a kind of external evil, an extension of Aristotle’s explicitly developed notion of the external goods. Yet, as I have argued in chapter 2, Aristotle tends to think of the external goods as in-general goods that have not been specified as good by a virtuous agent—so that the

²⁴⁴ See, for example, Nussbaum (2001) 334.

²⁴⁵ See Hyginus, *Fabulae* 137, for a summary of the plot of the play to which Aristotle is apparently referring here.

²⁴⁶ As indicated, for example, by Aristotle’s use of the fine and the base at III.1117b7-9 to refer to voluntarily enduring or avoiding wounds, where doing so is demanded by bravery.
aim of an action, or its result is good in a different and stronger way than the external goods. At the same time, Aristotle requires that an involuntary action be regretted by the agent after he discovers what he has done (III.1110b18-25). This seems to require that something in the action is actually contrary to the wish or desire of the agent, and in this respect such involuntary acts approximate vicious acts. In this way, then, describing an involuntary act of particular ignorance as an external evil seems inadequate. It is bad, not because it is bad in general, but rather because it runs contrary to correct choice.

It is thus difficult to establish a clear Aristotelian position on the evaluative status of an action performed in ignorance of the relevant particulars, which brings about an undesirable result of some kind. Evidently such an action fails to be praiseworthy or blameworthy, to be fine or base, to be virtuous or vicious, or to partially instantiate eudaimonia. And while it might amount to an external evil, this does not seem to fully explain what is bad about it. Thus this only tells us what such an action is not, not what it is. Aristotle does say that such an action is regretted, but does not say what exactly is regretted or why. This evaluative silence is not so surprising as it might seem at first, as I shall now try to show.

**Does Aristotle Claim that Good Men Always Do Good Deeds in *Nicomachean Ethics* I?**

In *NE* I, Aristotle makes several remarks in succession that individually and jointly imply that the good man can always realize the fine (τὸ καλόν), even if the degree of fineness
possible under given circumstances varies. If this interpretation is correct, then while such a man depends on things outside of his control in order to achieve acts of a certain degree of fineness, he does not depend on things outside of his control in order to realize the fine as such. Since each remark is somewhat different, I shall consider each in turn.

After Aristotle describes how great misfortunes can affect *eudaimonia*, in the latter part of *NE* I, he writes: “But nevertheless, even in these situations, nobility shines through (διαλάμπει τὸ καλόν), whenever someone bears many great misfortunes well, not because of insensitivity, but because he is well-born and great-souled” (*NE* I.1100b30-33). Aristotle’s use of “shine through” (διαλάμπει) seems to be a metaphorical way of referring to the fact that virtue makes itself perceptible *despite* conditions of misfortune—that is, virtue shines through misfortune, making itself manifest in the noble. And since virtue must be activated or realized in some way in order to be perceptible to others at all, Aristotle must mean that some pattern of action will render a person’s character virtue actual and perceptible, even in conditions of misfortune. For Aristotle, however, even responses that might at first appear passive can count as actions—such as enduring wounds because doing so is fine (*NE* III.1117b7-9). And in some misfortunes, presumably this more passive activation of virtue is all that would be possible. The next line makes this implied focus on the activation of virtue explicit, beginning: “And if the activities are in control of life…” (1100b33-34).

What is unclear is whether Aristotle supposes that the fine can shine through even in cases of typically tragic action—such as action performed in ignorance of some relevant particular—for example, that of Oedipus or Deianeira. Oedipus kills his father and commits incest with his mother, and Deianeira involuntarily poisons her husband
Heracles, ignorant that the Centaur’s potion is poison. Actions of this kind do not
themselves seem to express nobility in any form. On the other hand, the aftermath of such
action clearly poses special challenges for the activation of a person’s virtue, and thus for
“nobility to shine through.” Perhaps with this latter thought in mind, this remark that
“nobility shines through” has been read as “extremely pertinent to tragedy.” And it is
hard to deny this, but one should ask the reverse too—whether tragedy is extremely
pertinent to understanding the meaning of the remark in the NE in its own context.

In fact, what Aristotle goes on to say seems to exclude certain kinds of typically
tragic action from consideration. He writes next that if the activities are in control of life,
no one blessed will become wretched (ἀθλιος), “since he will never do anything hateful
and wicked” (οὐδέποτε γὰρ πράξει τὰ μισητὰ καὶ τὰ φαῦλα) (I.1100b33-35).
Aristotle’s argument is that a blessed man will never become wretched, because he will
never do anything terrible—where he is evidently supposing that wretchedness only
arises from doing, never from merely passively suffering. Thus wretchedness is implicitly
defined as the opposite of eudaimonia. Whereas eudaimonia arises from excellent
actions, wretchedness arises from bad ones. These parallel definitions are also in keeping
with another remark that Aristotle had made a little earlier: “the actions that accord with
virtue are in control of eudaimonia, and their opposites, of the opposite” (NE I.1100b9-
11).

One problem, however, is whether the definitions of eudaimonia and wretchedness
are perfectly or only approximately parallel. If eudaimonia consists in voluntary virtuous

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247 Nussbaum (1992) 130. Although she avoids saying directly that Aristotle has in mind typically
tragic actions when he makes this remark in the NE, she implies as much, for example, at: pg. 130
n. 43.
actions chosen for their own sake, then wretchedness ought to consist in vicious actions chosen at least voluntarily, if not actually for the sake of viciousness. If this strictly parallel definition of *eudaimonia* and wretchedness were what Aristotle had in mind, then he would simply be denying that good men ever do terrible things voluntarily, and are thus rendered wretched. This interpretation makes good sense of the passage, except that Aristotle does not qualify the remark by saying that good men never perform hateful and wicked actions *voluntarily.* Thus he does not take an explicit position on how involuntary acts of particular ignorance influence *eudaimonia* here, just as he avoids doing in *NE III.*

Aristotle’s language for those acts that render a man wretched, and which the good man is immune from doing, is τὰ μισητὰ καὶ τὰ φαῦλα (“hateful and wretched acts”). While Aristotle normally uses φαῦλος to refer to intentional wickedness, the term “hateful” suggests a much broader meaning. Indeed, given the requirement in *NE III* that acts of particular ignorance be regretted, “hateful” seems an apt enough description of such an act, at least if the unintended result that ensues from the action is of a serious enough kind. Yet it makes no sense for Aristotle to claim that the good man is immune from performing even involuntary hateful acts. The most reasonable interpretation, then, seems to be that Aristotle is simply ignoring cases of involuntary action, perhaps because he regards them as rare, and thus making the (inaccurate) claim that good men do

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248 He does make a qualified version of this remark at *NE IV.1128b28-29,* however, saying that the good man (ἐπιεικῆς) never performs wicked acts (φαῦλα) voluntarily.

249 Thus, for example, Aristotle contrasts φαῦλος with σπουδαῖος at *NE 1151a28,* and with ἐπιεικῆς at 1113b14.

250 Indeed, the whole reason that acts rendered involuntary because of particular ignorance do count as involuntary, must be that in such cases one could not have been expected to know that of which he was ignorant. If one failed to do whatever was reasonable to acquire the relevant knowledge before acting, then the act would presumably not count as involuntary.
not do anything terrible. I think the positive implication is most important to the passage as a whole, however—that good men will always perform fine acts.

What Aristotle goes on to say gives further support to this positive implication. He writes, “we suppose the truly good and sensible man to bear his fortunes well and always to do the finest actions available (ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἄει τὰ κάλλιστα πράττειν), just as a good general makes the most warlike (πολεμικῶτατα) use of his army, and the cobbler makes the finest sandal (κάλλιστον ὑπόδημα) from the leather that he is given” (1100b35-a5). Strictly, Aristotle is not denying that under some circumstances, it would be impossible to perform a fine action at all. That is, in principle, given certain circumstances, the finest act possible for a man might be a terrible deed performed in ignorance. Nevertheless the implication of saying that he will “always do the finest available things” is that he will always do something that is at least somewhat fine. Thus, Aristotle implies that fine action is always possible, and that it is merely the degree of the fineness of the action available to an agent that will vary with the attendant circumstances. If this interpretation is correct, then the good man always acts finely, and it is only the degree of fineness that varies. This is a kind of moral luck, to be sure, but it is a restricted kind.

The immunity from doing anything terrible that Aristotle evidently ascribes to the virtuous throughout this *NE* I discussion is a denial of a particular kind of moral luck. In this respect, Aristotle seems to be taking on a modified form of a Socratic position. For

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251 Nussbaum (1992) 130 n. 43—in reference to a similar remark made by Aristotle a little earlier, at 1100b19-22—relies on this possibility in order to claim that Aristotle is admitting the possibility that “one might not always succeed in fully doing the things according to excellence.” But this ignores repeated statements by Aristotle that ignore this possibility and imply the reverse.
Socrates, the virtuous man never does harm, and furthermore his virtue is necessary and sufficient for *eudaimonia*, though perhaps not identical to it. These two claims are in a sense combined in his well-known remark, “I would like neither, but if it were necessary to do injustice or to suffer injustice, I would choose rather to suffer injustice than to do it” (Pl. *Gorg.* 469b12-c2). That is, Socrates evidently regards doing injustice as worse *for himself*, but he nevertheless says that he would prefer to avoid suffering injustice. Thus Socrates supposes that only by doing injustice he would lose his *eudaimonia*, but he still ascribes some significance to suffering injustice at the hands of another. Aristotle likewise supposes that suffering passively or having the scale of one’s virtuous acts reduced can remove a man’s *eudaimonia*, but only *doing* ill can reduce a man to wretchedness. Thus, for Aristotle, too, one is always better off avoiding doing ill. But for Aristotle, virtue is sufficient for realizing the fine and for avoiding wretchedness, whereas for Socrates it is sufficient for *eudaimonia*. Here, Aristotle specifically supposes the avoidance of “hateful and wicked” deeds to render a man immune from wretchedness, and that the good man can always manage this. Aristotle’s position thus rests at a kind of midpoint point between that of Socrates and the commonsense view that *eudaimonia* is entirely a matter of fortune. Furthermore, Aristotle’s willingness to admit that virtue is sufficient for τὸ καλὸν but not for *eudaimonia* seems to amount to an admission that the realization of excellence does not always bring about *eudaimonia*, and thus that

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252 See Vlastos (1991) ch. 7 for a discussion of Socrates’ rejection of retaliation.

253 See Vlastos (1991) 224-231 for a defense of the interpretation that Socrates claims that virtue is sufficient for *eudaimonia*, rather than identical to it.

254 It is difficult to find any direct statement of the latter view, but Herodotus has Solon remark at one point that “man is entirely a matter of fortune” (οὗτω δὲν, ὡς Κροίσε, πάν ἕστι ἄθροιστος συμφορή) (I.32.4). A closer examination of Solon’s analysis of Tellus, Kleobis and Biton as exemplars of *eudaimonia* shows some implicit regard for excellent activity within an account that emphasizes the part of fortune.
eudaimonia depends on something other than such excellent activity. This opens up a clear space for goods that have eudaimonic value that does not arise from making activity more excellent.

Aristotle’s choice of Priam as a paradigm of the virtuous man who suffers a massive reversal of fortune also bears directly on the question of whether he has in mind obstructed or involuntary, as opposed to merely diminished, action.255 Scholars sometimes characterize Aristotle’s reference to Priam’s loss of eudaimonia here as tragic.256 And Priam’s reversal is clearly tragic in the sense that he suffers a reversal of fortune—to follow Aristotle’s account of the simple tragic plot in the Poetics (X.1452a14-16). But does his reversal involve some kind of constrained or failed action—either an act performed in ignorance of the relevant particulars, or a choice between two imperfect courses of action?257 Indeed, Priam might reasonably be blamed for failing to turn over Helen to the Greeks, or represented as facing a difficult choice between loyalty to his son Paris’ interests, and those of the Trojans as a whole. Nevertheless, the literary tradition most often presents Priam as facing a basically passive misfortune, in the sense that his misfortune is something that he suffers rather than something that he does or that he brings upon himself.258 Indeed, in the Iliad it is Paris who is blamed by Hector for the siege, with no mention of their father’s part in failing to

255 Aristotle twice uses Priam as a paradigm case of the virtuous and happy man who suffers a change in fortune in the NE I discussion of the effect of misfortune and the loss of externals upon eudaimonia, at 1100a5-9 and 1101a6-8.
257 As far as I know, Freeland (1996) 344 is the only one to have posed this specific question about Aristotle’s use of Priam as an example in the NE.
258 As White (1992) 89 n. 2 likewise argues in reference to Aristotle’s use of Priam as a paradigm case of misfortune.
end it (VI.326-331). Likewise Herodotus does not blame Priam, instead considering it absurd that the Trojans would wage a highly destructive war with the Greeks, which could easily have been averted by handing over Helen (Hdt. II.120). Yet he regards this absurdity as evidence that Helen was not at Troy but in Egypt, rather than as an indication that Priam exhibited some kind of tragically self-destructive loyalty to his son Paris, or some other failing. Indeed, Herodotus regards it as absurd that someone would fail to hand over Helen at such great cost, even if she were his own wife.

There are some exceptions to this way of treating Priam, however. In particular, there is a tradition that Paris was prophesied to bring ruin upon Troy, and therefore exposed as a child, but that he survived being exposed and was raised by a herdsman. Later, his identity was revealed and he resumed his place as the son of Priam.259 This version of the Paris myth does not necessarily place blame on Priam for Paris’ survival, but at any rate it supplied grounds for raising the question of who was to blame for Paris’ survival both when he was exposed as a baby and also later when his survival and identity became known. Accordingly, in the Trojan Women Euripides has Helen blame Priam for not killing Paris as a baby (918-922). And the fragments of Euripides’ Alexandros show that the play dealt with the failed exposure of Paris, and surely also the question of whether he should have been killed both at birth and also later when his identity was discovered.260 But, as I have argued, NE I shows no interest at all in actions in which a basically decent man fails to act properly under the pressure of circumstances—indeed, it implies that such cases do not occur. Thus there is no reason to think that Aristotle has Priam’s failure to kill Paris in mind when he uses Priam as a paradigm of the happy man whose fortunes

260 See the discussion of the fragments in Collard et al. (2004) 35 ff.
are reversed. Instead, the concerns of NE I are much more closely aligned with the tradition found in the *Iliad*, which treats Priam not as bringing about his own misfortune, but as managing it effectively.

The crucial point, then, is that a misfortune that someone endures and manages, rather than causes, poses much less of a threat to *eudaimonia* for Aristotle, since it is what a person *does* that primarily determines his *eudaimonia*. Thus by relying on an example of this kind of misfortune, Aristotle also avoids evaluating how the good man’s *eudaimonia* is affected by constrained or involuntary acts—perhaps because he considers these cases sufficiently rare as to be unimportant. The scale and range of Priam’s virtuous action might be reduced, but its essence would be more or less retained. Indeed, Priam would have retained kingly resources for managing the crises facing Troy even as he was unable to prevent his city from being taken. His journey to the Achaean camp to reclaim the body of Hector from Achilles also serves as a perfect case of excellence in the midst of loss—in Aristotle’s own terms, an example of doing the finest possible thing under the circumstances.\(^{261}\)

\(^{261}\) *Iliad* 24.159-706.
Conclusion

At NE I.1099a31, Aristotle remarks that *eudaimonia* “evidently has a further need of the external goods.” For convenience, I have called this claim “the external goods requirement.” The basic question that I ask in the second chapter is—on what authority does Aristotle make this claim? Why does Aristotle regard this claim as true? Is there an argument that Aristotle thinks proves this? And if so, does this argument presuppose his formal definition of *eudaimonia*, or not? Or perhaps Aristotle supposes that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods because many people believe this to be true, and he regards that as sufficient reason to accept it?

Although I focus on this question in the second chapter, this is the basic question from which all of the other questions of the dissertation radiate. Thus even the preceding first chapter develops an account of Aristotle’s method in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that serves the chapter 2 analysis of Aristotle’s argument for the claim that *eudaimonia* needs the external goods. The third chapter, meanwhile, extends the work of chapter 2 by examining not the specific argument that Aristotle actually offers for the external goods requirement (as in chapter 2), but rather the kinds of arguments for the value of the external goods that are available to him in terms of his own account of action. Examining Aristotle’s account of action in this way, in order to determine what role the external goods might have in contributing value to action, is particularly important, since on some readings of Aristotle’s theory, the only value that the external goods can possibly have for Aristotle is in what they do to promote excellent activity. Finally, in the fourth chapter I draw on my findings in chapter 2 and 3 to try to assess Aristotle’s position on moral
luck—asking how the various things outside of an agent’s control influence his ability to realize not only eudaimonia, but the various categories of value that Aristotle develops in the Nicomachean Ethics.

Chapter 3 and 4 extend the scope of the thesis somewhat by considering not only the external goods—which are defined as those things physically outside of the soul or the body of the agent—but also those things outside the control of the agent. Although there is a distinction between the external goods and this broader class of “external things,” there is some textual warrant for considering them here. Thus even Aristotle’s formal argument for why eudaimonia needs the external goods at 1099a31-b8 ends with a reference to good season rather than the external goods, suggesting that he views the external goods as an aspect of a larger problem. Scholarship on the external goods has in any case tended to view the external goods simply as identical to good luck and the external results of actions. And even though this conflation is mistaken, these three things are related—inasmuch as all of them are to some extent outside the agent’s control. Thus for the sake of clarifying Aristotle’s position, it is useful to distinguish a separate category of things that Aristotle himself does not have a term for—the whole class of those things that lie outside of an agent’s control. Accordingly, I look at the external goods within the context of this larger category of goods in both the third and fourth chapters. In this respect, my work advances on previous scholarship.

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262 Aristotle alternates between using the external goods in these two senses, as pointed out by Cooper (1985) 177.

263 For what is in my view a conflation between the external goods, good luck, and the external results of actions, see especially Cooper (1985) and Brown (2006).

264 I do not mean to imply that the external goods are always or necessarily outside of the control of the agent, as is sometimes implied. Indeed, under certain conditions, gaining, losing, and keeping the some particular external good will be very much within the control of an agent.
But to turn back to the narrower question of the second chapter—I ask why Aristotle supposes that people need the external goods in order to sustain a worthwhile and satisfying life. In particular, I ask whether Aristotle justifies his claim on the basis of an endoxic or commonsense view—as at least one prominent Aristotelian has supposed— or whether, instead, Aristotle simply regards himself as proving the claim that he advances with an argument made in the terms of his own theory—as the articles by John Cooper and Eric Brown argue. I find that, although the context would suggest that the external goods requirement is indeed an endoxon, the language used to express the claim—that it is “evident”—is stronger than what Aristotle typically uses for endoxa. Furthermore, although Aristotle initially argues for the claim within the terms of his own theory, he soon gives up on proving or explaining it strictly in terms of that theory. This makes it hard to offer a clear answer for why Aristotle believes the claim in the first place—at least, within the terms of Aristotle’s method, as I interpret it in the first chapter of the dissertation.

The upshot of this analysis, from the perspective of Aristotle’s definition of eudaimonia, is that Aristotle apparently recognizes that the external goods have some value that cannot be explained in terms of the improvement of excellent activity—or, at least, not by an improvement of the kind that Aristotle’s theory seems to demand. Thus Aristotle apparently recognizes a limitation of his own theory, and rather than modifying it, or rejecting the offending explanandum, he shrugs his shoulders—so to speak. As I go on to argue in chapter 3, it is trivially true that a person’s access to anything of value is mediated in some way by some kind of activity, but that is not enough for Aristotle’s

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theory, since it is supposed to be the activity itself that is the bearer of value, not the
valuable things with which it comes into contact and through which it might be thought
to receive value more passively.

One objection to the style of interpretation that I defend here, is that it takes the
theory less seriously on its own terms. But I think this objection gets things exactly
wrong—the way to take a theory seriously is not to finesse it into internal consistency or
explanatory success at any cost to the text itself, through ingenious interpretive moves—
but to look at what the text actually says, how its different parts actually fit together, or
fail to, how successfully it explains the various relevant *explananda*, and so on. In the
case in question, because Aristotle has implicitly defined the external goods in a way that
is not virtue-relative, it makes it impossible for his definition of *eudaimonia* as excellent
activity to offer a full explanation of their value. Yet those committed in advance to
uncovering a consistent and successful theory may ignore this inconvenient strain on
Aristotle’s theory. To some extent the theory-generator’s attitude toward his theory is
irrelevant to the success or consistency of the theory that he advances—that is, whether
he regards it as consistent, or successful, or whatever. It is just that it seems particularly
perverse to ascribe more consistency or greater explanatory power to a theory than the
theorist himself does—when the theory itself does not justify such a judgment.

In the third chapter, I turn from Aristotle’s own explicit argument for the value of the
external goods, and instead examine the kind of explanation for their value that is
available to Aristotle within his account of action. That is, I ask just how far Aristotle’s
account of action can go in explaining the value of the external goods, by looking at what
role such goods may play within action. Thus here I set aside the question of Aristotle’s
attitude to his own theory, and just see what comes out of taking the theory on its own terms. I consider not only the external goods as Aristotle defines them, but also the broader category of those things that are outside of an agent’s control.

One crucial point here, is that by requiring virtuous action to be performed *knowingly*, Aristotle makes such action dependent upon external circumstances that are not always within the control of the agent. In this sense, at least, virtuous action *cannot* be said to be purely a matter of what takes place within the soul of the agent. It is, instead, defined in relation to something outside of the agent—both physically outside of him, and outside of his full control. While Aristotle’s analysis of involuntary action has a classic status, its implications for his account of action, and especially for action’s relation to external things in the broadest sense, has not been appreciated. My argument offers a strong reason to be skeptical of the so-called “internal use” explanation of the value of the external goods, according to which they derive their value purely from the activity of the soul that they make possible.\(^{267}\) Minimally, Aristotle requires that such activity of the soul be situated in relation to external particulars that it knows about accurately—which seems to exclude the possibility that Aristotle really views excellent practical activity as a pure good of the soul (despite his classification of actions among the goods of the soul at *NE* 1098b12-16).

Initially, I focus on the requirement that virtuous actions be performed knowingly, because it offers such a clear cut case in which excellent practical activity depends upon what is not always within the control of the agent. In this sense, at least, excellent

\(^{267}\) For the phrase “internal-use view” to describe an interpretation of Aristotle’s *NE* according to which other goods to have value only for their role in promoting the excellent practical activity within the soul, see Annas (1993) 380.
practical activity is not a purely internal matter. I go on to argue further that this knowledge requirement would be mysterious unless Aristotle regarded action as something that happens in the world, rather than something that happens just within the soul of the virtuous man. Aristotle’s repeated insistence that the virtuous man acts correctly in relation to particulars supports this view. That is, for Aristotle a virtuous man acts in the right way, at the right time, in relation to the right person, and so on. In enumerating the particular virtues, Aristotle does not say that the virtuous man intends to act in the right way at the right time, but that he actually does so. Practical wisdom together with the knowledge requirement seems to come close to guaranteeing that this requirement is satisfied—since an agent who has the right kind of general understanding of how to act (practical wisdom) as well as the right kind of knowledge of the relevant particulars, will almost always get things right.268

More specifically, I argue that the best explanation for Aristotle’s requirement that virtuous action be performed knowingly, is that Aristotle regards the result of an action as a partial determinant of its worth. This is supported especially by Aristotle’s requirement that involuntary ignorant acts be painful and regretted (NE III.1110b18-30). This regret seems pretty mysterious unless the virtuous man attaches some significance to the results of his actions. And furthermore, Aristotle seems to regard nobility (τὸ καλόν) as a particular kind of worth that is spread evenly (so to speak) over the process of

268 I set aside the thorny question of whether there are some situations in which (1) practical wisdom, and (2) knowledge of the relevant particulars, together fail to guarantee that the virtuous man does the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, etc. But presumably in some cases the virtuous man will knowingly and correctly undertake a risky action. In this kind of situation, it seems, practical wisdom and particular knowledge are not sufficient to guarantee an act that actually fully realizes virtue. But admittedly, Aristotle does not seem to be particularly explicit on this point.
deliberation and choice, the bare process of aiming at some end, and the external result at which that act aims.

In fact, my arguments here go further than anything else in the secondary literature to point out the full range of evidence that supports the inclusion of results as partial determinants of the worth of actions. I point to a number of distinct reasons for thinking that Aristotle regards results as significant determinants of the worth of action. In particular:

(1) Aristotle’s distinction between action and production does not necessarily exclude results from being partial determinants of the worth of actions.

(2) Aristotle’s requirement that virtuous action be chosen “for its own sake” does not necessarily exclude results from being the object of choice.

(3) Aristotle often ascribes aims to particular kinds of virtuous action—for example, justice aims at the advantage of others, and friendliness aims at the pleasure of others.

(4) The result at which a successful virtuous action aims and which it achieves has a more intimate relation to practical reason than the external goods—since such a result is specified by practical reason rather than merely being taken or rejected in whole or in part. As such, there is good reason to think that they might have a different kind of value than the external goods.
(5) Aristotle requires that virtuous actions be performed knowingly, and in particular with knowledge of “that for the sake of which” an action is done. He also requires that an act rendered involuntary because of ignorance be regretted. But it is hard to see why such knowledge would matter if Aristotle judges results irrelevant to virtuous action.

(6) In at least two instances, Aristotle describes results as being “noble” (καλός) (NE III.1115a29-35; IV.1123a7-9)—which suggests that he regards them as possessing the same kind of value as the features of action that occur under the direct control of the agent within his soul.

(7) Aristotle often refers to conventional action types, which are defined in terms of their results, as actions (e.g., murder, theft).

The first three points are made by Jennifer Whiting—and (less recently) by Alexander of Aphrodisias in his commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics. Furthermore, both use these considerations in order to argue that Aristotle reckons results as parts of those actions from which they issue. But—as far as I have been able to determine—no one else has gathered anything like the full range of considerations that I offer here for supposing that Aristotle might well regard results as partial determinants of virtuous action.

It is also worth emphasizing the importance of this—as a ground-level question about any ethical theory. To put it bluntly, if the value that an ethical theory attaches to results is obscure, the whole theory is obscure. It is impossible to explain how an ethical theory would evaluate some particular action without knowing what value that theory attaches to

269 See Chapter 3 for a discussion.
results. In the specific context of philosophical ethics, it is also particularly important to be able to say what Aristotle thinks about results in order to distinguish his ethical theory from Utilitarians, and from Kant—both of whom take explicit positions on this question.

In the latter part of this chapter I then consider different specific roles that the external goods might play within action, and what kind of value they might contribute to excellent activity in these various different roles. My conclusion is that the value of the external goods as Aristotle understands them cannot be explained fully in terms of a contribution to action. This conclusion thus offers a possible explanation for why Aristotle fails to offer a successful explanation of their value within the terms of his own theory, and accordingly corroborates the findings of chapter 2.

Finally, in the fourth and last chapter of the dissertation, I examine Aristotle’s position on moral luck. This is a notion originally developed by Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel, but which has since taken on a life of its own. Moral luck picks out an area of moral worth that is subject to luck in the particular sense that it is not within the control of the agent in question. Yet strictly, since Aristotle has no notion of the moral, he can have no notion of moral luck either. Thus, to point out just one obvious problem with ascribing some notion of morality to Aristotle, Aristotle identifies no category of value that is at once supreme and at the same time equally accessible to all. *Eudaimonia* is of supreme worth, but it arises through the exercise of reason, and Aristotle regards this reason as being apportioned very differently to different kinds of people—so that not everyone can be expected to realize it. And virtuous action cannot be taken to approximate the moral either, since in its perfected form, at least, it too is accessible only to the fully rational agent. Thus—again—it is not something that Aristotle regards as
equally accessible to all. Because of this, one can only examine Aristotle’s position on
moral luck in a looser sense—by looking at his own categories of value, and by asking
how exactly each depends upon forces outside of an agent’s control.

This chapter makes a particularly clear contribution to the secondary literature.
Previous studies of moral luck in Aristotle fail to apply the concept of moral luck in a
way that is sensitive to Aristotle’s own categories of value. Thus Anthony Kenny’s paper
treats eudaimonia as corresponding roughly to moral worth—without offering a
justification for why this should be. Likewise, in her well-known study, The Fragility
of Goodness, Martha Nussbaum draws her inspiration from the idea of moral luck, but
self-consciously avoids references to the moral, while failing to track Aristotle’s own
categories of value.

In the latter part of this chapter, I also make a specific positive contribution, arguing
that Aristotle regards virtue as sufficient for avoiding wretchedness, and for realizing “the
noble” (τὸ καλὸν), even if it is not sufficient for eudaimonia itself. Thus Aristotle
supposes “the noble” as well as the avoidance of wretchedness to be within the control of
the agent, but regards eudaimonia as falling outside of his full control. But if Aristotle
regards the noble (τὸ καλὸν) and avoidance of wretchedness as within the control of the
agent, then this is a kind of denial of moral luck (in the loose sense of “moral luck”).
Furthermore—and this is crucial—Aristotle’s willingness to split “the noble” from
eudaimonia further supports the conclusions of chapter 2—that Aristotle does not, in the
end, regard excellent activity alone as sufficient for eudaimonia, but instead admits the

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271 See chapter 4 for a discussion of the flaws in Nussbaum’s interpretation of Aristotle’s position on the so-called fragility of goodness.
external goods as independent goods that contribute to *eudaimonia* directly, apart from their role in promoting excellent activity.
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