

Eudaimonia and Self-sufficiency in the Nicomachean Ethics

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There is a well known difficulty in understanding Aristotle's answer to the central question of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:¹ what is eudaimonia? Some, leaning on Bk. X, chapters 6-8, maintain that Aristotle's answer is contemplation to the exclusion of anything else. Others, leaning on Bk. I, hold that eudaimonia includes other goods besides contemplation, especially (what I will call) moral action, the exercise of the moral virtues. Still others hold that Bk. X contains an exclusive view of eudaimonia as consisting in nothing but contemplation, and is not in the end reconcilable with Bk. I's inclusive account.

At present, a consensus seems to be growing that at least we can be sure that Bk. I propounds an inclusive account of eudaimonia.² Hence, if Bks. I and X fit together into a coherent account, Bk. X must be brought into line with such a position. I'll call this "the comprehensive view" of eudaimonia.

The comprehensive interpretation relies on a number of arguments to support its view of NE I, above all the criterion of self-sufficiency laid down at 1097b14-21. In the present paper I will argue that the appeal to self-sufficiency as well as other arguments fail to prove the comprehensive

¹ Hereafter NE. All references are to this work unless otherwise indicated.

² J. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 99; D. Keyt, "Intellectualism in Aristotle", *Paideia*, Special Aristotle Issue, 1978, pp. 138-57; J. Whiting, "Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 68 (1986), pp. 70-95; J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*", in A. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 15-33; T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1985); and "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon", in J. Annas (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy III* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 89-124; and "Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness", in M. Schofield and G. Striker (eds.) *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 205-44; A.W. Price, "Aristotle's Ethical Holism", *Mind* 89 (1980), p. 341; M. Nussbaum, "Aristotle", in T. James Luce (ed.) *Ancient Writers*, vol. I (New York, 1982), p. 403; D. Devereux, "Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness", in D.J. O'Meara (ed.) *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, 1981), p. 249f.