

## Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν

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All the virtues, Aristotle says, are undertaken for the sake of the *καλόν* (τοῦ καλοῦ ἕνεκα, *EN* 1122b6-7).<sup>1</sup> Curiously, however, Aristotle offers no direct account of this concept, despite its role as the end (τέλος) of virtue. He may have felt confident that his audience would regard the meaning of the *καλόν* as sufficiently obvious, but it is left to scholars to reconstruct this understanding.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, two constellations of usage in Aristotle's ethical discourse offer a means to clarification. These patterns also offer a means of addressing the question whether Aristotle's ethics is altruistic, as Terence Irwin and others have recently contended.

### I

'Beautiful' was the primary literal meaning of τὸ καλόν in Aristotle's day, as it had been since Homer's, when the word was employed to describe everything from ornamented robes (*Od.* iii 467) to princes (*Il.* iii 44). The term also seems to have denoted what we might call 'functional excellence'. For example, Xenophon's Socrates describes a shield as καλόν 'for it covers the vulnerable parts without hindering the use of the hands' (*Mem.* iii 10.9-10). Aristotle's ethical construal of τὸ καλόν incorporates both aesthetic and functional aspects, but rests on a deeper idea.

Aristotle often indicates that what renders an entity καλόν has much to do with order (τάξις) and related properties, including symmetry (συμμετρία), definiteness (ὠρισμένον), and absence of the haphazard (μὴ τυχόντως). He remarks that goods such as health and temperance are καλόν for their order (τάξις) and equilibrium (ἡρεμία), and that the immovables are even κάλλιον since they possess these properties to a greater degree (*EE* 1218a21-24; cf. *PA* 645a23-25, *Meta.* 1078a36-b1, *Pol.* 1326a29-35, *Poet.* 1450b34-37). Virtue itself manifests such order and equilibrium, for Aristotle, in two ways.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1115b12-13, 1120a24. τὸ καλόν may be translated as the noble, fine, fair, beautiful, or admirable, depending on context. Owens' suggested translation is 'right', but for reasons that should become clear, this is too narrow (1981, 265-269). I will be employing 'the noble' since it captures the grandeur of the concept, as well as connotes respectability, which, as we shall see, is essential to Aristotle's conception.

<sup>2</sup> Relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the καλόν, but see Allan 1971, Owens 1981, Irwin 1986, and for less systematic comments, Lucas 1968, Woods 1982, Engberg-Pedersen 1983, and Madigan 1985.

First, virtue is orderly because it is rational. Aristotle endorses the Platonic doctrine that an agent's actions manifest order to the extent that the elements of his soul are hierarchically arranged with reason in control (*EN* 1098a4-17; see *Rep.* 430e, 443d). Virtue's nobility, then, has something to do with the harmony of soul that underlies it.<sup>3</sup>

Second, virtue displays equilibrium by its association with the mean. The mean, quite straightforwardly, is a condition of equilibrium (1106a29-32), in which one's feelings and actions are in every respect *fitting* or *appropriate*, i.e., occurring 'at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way' (b21-22).<sup>4</sup> The overall fittingness of virtuous action is also, therefore, relevant to its being *καλόν*.

Aristotle's frequent association of both virtue and *τὸ καλόν* with the fitting (*τὸ πρέπον*), suggests that fittingness is not only relevant to the nobility of virtue, but, indeed, essential. In the *Topics*, Aristotle says that the *πρέπον* is *definitory* (*ὀρίκόν*) of *καλόν* (102a5-6), and also that *πρέπον* cannot be a property of *καλόν* since, in fact, the two are the same (*ταὐτὸν γάρ ἐστι τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ πρέπον*, 135a13-14).<sup>5</sup> There is clearly a difference between making definitional remarks about the *term καλόν* and giving an account of what makes human action *καλόν*, but it is evident that Aristotle's statements in the *Topics* are of more than terminological significance. Throughout his ethical works, Aristotle associates what is *καλόν* with what it is *πρέπον* and generally fitting (*προσῆκον*, *ἐμμελής*, *ἄξιος*) to do. Thus, Aristotle describes the magnificent individual as one concerned to spread his wealth in the 'the noblest (*κάλλιστον*) and most fitting way (*πρεπωδέστατον*)', and derives the name of this virtue, *μεγαλοπρέπεια*, which consists in 'expenditure that is fitting in its large scale', from its constituent terms, *μέγεθος* and *πρέπουσα* (1122a22-26). Aristotle goes so far as to describe the magnificent person as being like a scientific expert (*ἐπιστήμων*) in his grasp of the *πρέπον* (1122a34-35). Aristotle also states at *EE* 1248b26-1249a17 that natural goods are only *καλόν* to people for whom they are *πρέπον*, and at 1249a9 that the *πρέπον* is *καλόν*. In addition, he often relates choice of the *καλόν* to acting in accordance with worth (*κατ' ἀξίαν*, *EN* 1115b19-20; cf. 1119a16-20, *EE* 1249a8), and acting in accordance with worth, to *τὸ πρέπον*: *τὸ γὰρ πρέπον κατ' ἀξίαν ἐστίν· οὐθὲν γὰρ πρέπει τῶν παρὰ τὴν ἀξίαν* (*EE* 1233b7-8). Similarly, 'two principles have to be kept in view, what is possible (*δυνατόν*) and what is fitting (*πρέπον*): at these every man ought to aim' (*Pol.* 1342b17-35). Finally, Aristotle considers the virtuous individual most stable because he bears what befalls him 'most nobly (*κάλλιστα*), and altogether appropriately' (*ἐμμελῶς*, *EN*

<sup>3</sup> Allan, who touches upon this point, suggests that virtuous action may be *καλόν* 'in so far as it exhibits the beauty of order' (1971, 65-66).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Statesman* 284e.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Hippias Major*, Plato denies that *τὸ καλόν* may be defined as *τὸ πρέπον* since what is appropriate varies with context, whereas what is truly *καλόν* is consistently so (293d-294e); Aristotle evidently failed to address, or else rejected this point.

1100b19-22).<sup>6</sup>

These statements suggest that what renders virtue *καλόν* is its complete *appropriateness*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, to describe a virtuous act as *καλόν* is, at the literal level, to say that it is fully medial and appropriate, occurring at the right time, about the right thing, towards the right people, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> It may not be amiss to say that τὸ *καλόν* in this sense functions as the formal cause of virtue, for Aristotle links it with the mean in which virtue formally consists.<sup>9</sup>

It is through its inherent order and propriety, that Aristotle conceives of virtue as *καλόν* in both of the traditional senses of the term, ‘beautiful’ and ‘functionally excellent’. Following Plato, who describes virtue as the beauty (*κάλλος*) of the soul (*Rep.* 444e), and compares it to the harmony of a musical scale (443d), Aristotle recognizes a certain aesthetic quality to virtue, conceiving of the good man’s enjoyment of *καλά* as akin to the musician’s pleasure at hearing beautiful (*καλοῖς*) melodies (*EN* 1170a9-10), that are themselves based on mathematical proportion (cf. *Pol.* viii 5-7). Virtue’s connection with the *πρέπον* only undergirds this aesthetic context, since *πρέπον* means ‘seemly’ no less than ‘fitting’.

The *καλόν* also emerges in Aristotle as an epithet of functional excellence. The virtue of anything, he argues, be it an eye or a human being, depends directly upon the correct performance of its respective *ἔργον* (1097b25-28). Whether or

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1120b23-24, 1122b23-26. Aristotle says that the *μεγαλόψυχος* refrains from vice because it does not fit (*ἀρμόζοι*) him (1123b31-32).

<sup>7</sup> On the orderly and appropriate, cf. Cicero, *De Officiis* i 93-99, 110-114, 142-149. See also Cicero’s account of *honestum* at *De Finibus* ii 45-50, where praiseworthiness is stressed.

<sup>8</sup> It must asked, though, to what extent Aristotle’s conception of *καλά* also derives from Greek cultural norms. Certainly many of his examples reflect common Greek values, particularly those pertaining to war. Moreover, Aristotle’s failure to furnish an analysis of the *καλόν* suggests that he felt comfortable that his audience would grasp the term’s meaning as he used it. Yet it is not uniformly the case that Aristotle’s remarks about the *καλόν* reflect general attitudes, as when he states in *EE* that whichever choice conduces most to the speculation of god, is noblest (*κάλλιστος*, 1249b16-19). Also, Aristotle says enough about the *καλόν* to suggest some conscious refinement of the concept on his part. This issue forms part of the larger one regarding Aristotle’s ethical conservatism and use of dialectic, that I cannot adequately discuss here; see Irwin 1988, esp. ch.1-3, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Does Aristotle regard the mean or the *καλόν* as the more primitive notion? This is extremely hard to tell. At times, Aristotle suggests that we arrive at the mean by ‘referring’ (*ἀναφέρων*) to the *καλόν* (as well as to the beneficial, I should note, but this creates no conflict since the only individual who truly pursues the *καλόν* is the *καλὸς κἀγαθός*, and in his case, the *συμφέρον* and the *καλόν* coincide, *EN* 1126b28-29; *EE* 1249a10-11). Aristotle also remarks that we fail to reach the mean whenever we act in a way that deviates from (*παρά*) the *καλόν* (1119a18). Moreover, Aristotle states that in order to be susceptible of moral education, people must already possess a character that is ‘fond’ of (*στέργων*) the *καλόν* (1179b29-31), which perhaps suggests the latter’s primacy. Finally, the *καλόν*, through its connection with the beautiful, seems to possess a perceptual immediacy absent in the mean, which is something we come to understand primarily upon reflection. Irwin defends the *καλόν*’s primacy, stating that ‘the mean is determined by reference to the fine’ (1986, 135). Yet insofar as Aristotle conceives of the *καλόν* in terms of appropriateness, and appropriate action in terms of hitting the mean, it would seem that he views the mean as the more primitive notion. Perhaps the solution is that neither concept is ultimately prior, although I lack space to pursue this suggestion here.

not an entity achieves functional excellence is a question of whether its parts possess the proper order, thus, those persons who exhibit a disorderly soul cannot perform their function or, therefore, achieve the *καλόν* (cf. *Gorgias* 503e-504a). The exemplars of virtue in Aristotle's scheme are those whose lives exhibit the correct order (*τάξιυν ὀρθήν*, 1180a14-18), and it is precisely such people who perform their function most fully (1106a16-24) and so act nobly (*καλῶς*, 1179a29).

Aristotle does not treat the aesthetic and functional dimensions of τὸ καλόν as metaphysically separable, and whenever he employs the *καλόν* in its aesthetic sense, some point about well-functioning is implied or stated explicitly, and vice versa. For instance, Aristotle argues in *Poetics* 1450b34-37 that for a story or plot (or any whole with parts, including an animal) to be *καλόν*, its parts must comprise a certain order, and though Aristotle does not say it, I take the point of this remark to be that without such order, the story or plot or animal or whatever else, could not accomplish its particular ἔργον. Thus Aristotle later remarks that the most beautiful (*καλλίστης*) form of tragedy will arouse pity and fear, since this is the particular purpose of the tragic type of imitation (1452b30-33). On the other hand, beauty is so bound up with functionality that Aristotle thinks that entities that appear ugly on the surface, can come to be seen as beautiful once their inner structure and purpose is discerned (*PA* 645a4-25; cf. Lucas 1968, 113).

There is thus a considerable thrust to the idea that virtue is *καλόν* for its underlying order and propriety, which qualities are at once the source of beauty and well-functioning. Aristotle's *πρέπον* construal of τὸ καλόν, however, does not exhaust his views on the subject. In addition, he frequently treats the *καλόν* as simply 'the praiseworthy'. Our next task must be to consider this aspect of Aristotle's conception of τὸ καλόν, and how the two come together.

## II

As with the *πρέπον*-based *καλόν*, the idea of the *καλόν* as the praiseworthy stems from traditional usage, in which the epithet *καλόν* was attached to all sorts of commendable qualities and practices, from loyalty (Tyrtæus, frag. 10) to remaining stouthearted in battle (Euripides, *Iphigenia Taurica* 1064), and, for ladies, not passing amid throngs (Euripides, *Orestes* 108) or asking too many questions (Sophocles, *Ajax* 586). Aristotle goes beyond merely offering examples of the praiseworthy, though, and explores the further question *why* we praise.

It is hard work to be good (*σπουδαίον*), since in each case it is hard to hit the intermediate (τὸ μέσον); for instance, not everyone can find the middle of a circle, but only one who knows. Thus also anyone can get angry, for this is easy; and similarly anyone can give and receive money. But to do these things to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is not easy, nor can everyone do it. That is why goodness (τὸ εὖ) is rare, praiseworthy, and *καλόν* (1109a24-30; cf. 1105a10-11, 1108a14, 1125b11-21,

1126a33-b10).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, e.g., it is not merely ‘standing firm’, but ‘standing firm against what is painful’, which makes us justly praise people for their bravery, ‘since it is harder to stand firm against something painful than to refrain from something pleasant’ (1117a32-35; cf. 1115a29-32, 1130a5-8). Now, we do not commend a person simply for his actions, if he is not acting from the correct state of character (1103a9-10; *EE* 1228a1-19). Assuming that an agent’s choices do stem from virtue, however, it is the rarity and difficulty of his undertaking that foremost move us to praise him.

One might, upon further consideration, find it difficult to see why Aristotle should emphasize praise at all. For praise is a form of bestowing honor, yet Aristotle argues against valuing honor too highly since it is largely dependent upon factors we cannot control (1095b22-26). Further, Aristotle states that the *μεγαλόψυχος*, the moral exemplar, ‘counts honor for little’ (1124a19) and ‘is not concerned to have himself praised’ (1125a6-7). To grasp why the virtuous agent might be concerned with his own praiseworthiness, even to the point of death (1169a25-32), we must keep in mind that praiseworthiness as such does not imply a particular point of view: if the good man is praiseworthy, he is so not merely to others, but also *to himself*.<sup>11</sup> An agent’s pursuit of the *καλόν* is integrally connected, therefore, with his sense of self-worth and his ability to experience self-respect.

*Καλά* create self-respect in two ways, according to Aristotle. First, in pursuing *τὸ καλόν*, the agent is aware of himself as a superior type of man who repudiates the many’s slavish attachment to advantage. This is brought out by Aristotle’s distinction between noble goods (*καλά*) and goods that are merely ‘useful or necessary’ (1116b2-3; cf. 1116b2-3, 1120b1, 1155a28-29, 1165a4, 1171a24-26). Whereas the virtuous agent willingly abandons ordinary ‘contested’ goods in order to acquire the *καλόν* (1169a18-31), the many choose the *καλόν* ‘only when they have plenty of everything else’ (*EE* 1243a38). In valuing useful and necessary goods above virtue, the many render themselves slavish (*EN* 1095b19-20) and dependent: their continued material success is at the mercy of fortune (1100b22), and the spiritual good they value most, honor, can be acquired only through other people (1095b23-26). The agent of virtue is akin to ordinary people in that he finds value in useful and necessary goods, as indeed one must, if one is to live; unlike the slavish, however, the virtuous man is concerned not merely to live, but to ‘live well’ (e.g., 1098a12-17). This requires that he transcend the merely useful and necessary, and voluntarily pursue something more difficult and dignified, namely, the *καλόν* (e.g., 1117b9-15). As a consequence of his rejection of the merely expedient, the virtuous man, in contrast to the greedy and

<sup>10</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>11</sup> Madigan overlooks this point, instead claiming that seeing oneself as praiseworthy requires a viewpoint ‘distinct from that of the agent’ (1985, 19). This leads to problems reconciling noble action with flourishing (e.g., 8).

vicious who spend their time in self-loathing and regret over their past deeds and, indeed, ‘shun life and destroy themselves’ (1166b11-28), takes pride in his achievements and in himself, almost never regretting what he has done (1166a12-29).

*Kalá* affirm self-respect in a second way: the praise lavished upon the good man by persons of equal merit strengthens his sense of his own goodness. In Aristotle’s view, self-knowledge can be difficult to attain (1169b33-35). When one is honored by ‘decent people and people with knowledge’, however, their judgment that one is good makes one confident in one’s own goodness (1159a22-24; cf. *Rhet.* 1371a7-8).

Why is self-respect so important in Aristotle’s view? For one thing, the greater one’s self-respect, the more self-sufficient one is. Base men, who conceive their own well-being in terms of pleasure-gratification, and who willingly do wrong if that will enhance their pleasure, tend to crumble in the face of misfortune. The good man, by contrast, though shaken and distressed, remains secure: his most stable and valuable possession, his nobility or dignity, is not something fortune can take away (1100b30-33). Even if his material fortunes are drastically reduced, then, his commitment to his own goodness will prevent him from doing ‘hateful and base actions’; instead, ‘given his circumstances at any time he will do the noblest actions’ (1100b34-1101a3). Since ‘activities control life’ (1100b33), the good man, who respects himself too much to stoop to the level of vice, will always retain essential control over his own destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Second, a person needs a sense of self-respect in order to feel worthy to undertake virtuous actions at all.

Each type of person pursues the things that accord with his worth, and these people [sc. the pusillanimous] refrain even from noble actions and practices (*καλῶν*), and no less from external goods, because they consider themselves unworthy of them (*EN* 1125a25-27).

The virtuous person, by contrast, is properly proud (e.g., 1125b19-21), and his realistic sense of his own worth enables him to pursue the appropriate measure of success in both goods and activities. The good man is evidently not averse to all praise, then, but especially to that offered by sycophants, whose commendations are prompted not by an objective assessment of the good man’s worth, but by their own ulterior motives.

### III

Having seen that Aristotle associates τὸ καλόν with two distinct ideas, the *πρέπον* on the one hand, praiseworthiness on the other, it is a matter of some concern how, if at all, the two come together. There is one rather obvious sense in which they do. As we saw, Aristotle thinks that we praise action for its rarity and

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle does think it possible for misfortune to be so extreme that even the virtuous are ‘shaken’ from their happiness, as in the case of Priam; this is evidently a rare occurrence, however, and Aristotle thinks that, over time, recovery is possible (*EN* 1101a9-13).

demandingness. But he also points out that achieving the *πρέπον* in virtue, viz., having the right feelings and pursuing the right actions at the right times, about the right things, and so on, is exceptionally ‘hard’ (*χαλεπόν*). For ‘there are many ways to be in error, since the base belongs to what is unlimited, ...but there is only one way to be correct. Thus the one is easy and the other hard, since to miss the target is easy, and to hit it hard’ (1106b28-33). As the ancient saying went, *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* (cited at *Rep.* 435c). At the very least, praise and the *πρέπον* are connected by the relation of each to a third term, viz., difficulty.

To bring the connection into sharper focus, I suggest, following Allan 1971, 70-71, that we raise the issue from the standpoint of Socrates’ problem in the *Euthyphro*: Is an *x* praised because it is *καλόν*, or *καλόν* because it is praised? I think that Aristotle would answer *both*. Ultimately, he does seem to acknowledge an objective foundation for praise, the criteria for which are, generally, difficulty and overall fittingness of action. Neither of these elements is sufficient of itself to elicit praise: a difficult act not grounded in the mean is not virtuous, and we do not normally praise action that is medial but not particularly demanding, for instance, drinking moderately; perhaps this explains why Aristotle associates praiseworthiness in addition with the idea of rarity (*EN* 1109a29-30). In any case, Aristotle’s account of nobility and praiseworthiness in the *Ethics* may plausibly be viewed as supporting the first horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma.

But Aristotle does not confine his discussion of nobility and praise to the *Ethics*. There is also a full chapter on the subject in the *Rhetoric*, and there Aristotle seems to alter his conception markedly. In what follows, I discuss the *Rhetoric*’s treatment of the *καλόν*, and suggest that it answers to the *Euthyphro* dilemma’s second horn.

In *Rhetoric* i 9, Aristotle proposes to examine virtue and the *καλόν* insofar as they concern epideictic oratory (1366a24-25). Rather than associating praise with difficulty of action, however, as he had done in the *Ethics*, Aristotle seems to conceive of praise in the *Rhetoric* as a response to altruistic self-sacrifice. His illustrations of *καλὰ* include

whatever someone has done for his country, overlooking the good of himself (*παριδὼν τὸ αὐτοῦ*), and the things that are good by nature and that are not goods for him (*ἀ μὴ αὐτῷ ἀγαθὰ*), for the latter are for his sake (*αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα*). And those things which more properly belong to a person when dead than alive, for what belongs to a person when he is alive is more likely to be for his own sake. And whatever deeds are undertaken for the sake of others, for these are less directed to one’s own benefit. And successes which benefit others and not oneself... And acts of kindness, for these are not directed to oneself (1366b37-1367a6).

Now one might argue that this account of praise is compatible with that in the *Ethics*, by pointing out that sacrificing one’s own good for others can be particularly demanding (cf. 1120a17). Perhaps Aristotle’s ultimate view, then, is that we

praise those personally costly and demanding actions which benefit others. This would seem not an uncommon view for a Greek to hold, considering the ancient tradition of supplying lavish commendation upon war heroes and other social benefactors. Moreover, Aristotle himself says in the *Ethics* that *καλά* benefit the community, in addition to just the agent himself (1169a8-11). Perhaps the conceptions of the praiseworthy held by the philosopher on the one hand, and the many on the other, are not as disparate as it at first seemed.

Before we attempt to understand or revise the *Ethics*' account of praise in light of the *Rhetoric*, we must consider the more basic issue of whether the *Rhetoric*, a manual for speakers, is a reliable source for Aristotle's ethical views. Aristotle does after all state that a speaker should employ 'notions possessed by everybody' (*κοινῶν*, 1355a26-29) on the assumption that his audience consists of 'persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning' (1357a1-4). To say that the conceptions of virtue and *καλόν* articulated in the *Rhetoric* are meant to have popular appeal, however, is not to say that they express Aristotle's own views. Conversely, just because the ideas are popular that does not mean that Aristotle rejects them. The key question is whether Aristotle himself endorses the *Rhetoric*'s portrait of virtue and praise.

There is perhaps one thing to suggest it does. Prior to offering the list of altruistic illustrations cited above, Aristotle had claimed that virtue is *καλόν* for being *ἐπαινετόν*, and this term is normative, meaning not simply 'praised', but 'praiseworthy' (1366a33-36). This has led Irwin to suggest that the *Rhetoric*'s illustrations, which, he claims, show that 'the feature of virtue that is properly praised is its tendency to benefit others', does in fact represent Aristotle's own views (1986, 127n8). But there are four reasons to doubt that this is so.

(1) According to Aristotle, average people, that is, members of a popular audience, have no understanding of the *καλόν*. As I mentioned earlier, in the *Ethics* Aristotle denies that the multitude possess any 'notion of what is noble (*καλοῦ*) and thus truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it' (1179b15-16). Yet he emphasizes in *Rhet.* i 9 that in making a speech of praise, 'everything that is esteemed (*τίμιον*) we are to represent as *καλόν*' (1367b11). It is clearly the audience's conception of the *καλόν* illustrated here; why assume it is shared by Aristotle when he does not impute to the many a grasp of what is truly *καλόν*?

(2) Even if we were to suppose Aristotle agrees with the ethical claims of *Rhet.* i 9, the 'altruism' interpretation of the *καλόν*, as we might call it, leaves portions of the text unexplained. For Aristotle thinks there are other qualities which the public praises and that therefore a speaker should regard as *καλόν*, and these have nothing to do with the good of others. For example, Aristotle states that *καλά* include the distinctive characteristics of particular peoples and whatever symbols a culture admires, such as long hair, that the Spartans praise as a mark of freedom (1367a28-31); it is also contributes to one's praiseworthiness to have been the only or the first one to have done something significant (1368a10-11).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> An anonymous referee protests that even the Spartan's long hair and freedom connect to the

To understand the *Rhetoric*'s conception of praise in terms of altruism, offers no way of explaining why things such as these should be regarded as praiseworthy and καλόν.

(3) *Rhetoric* i 9 proceeds by 'illustration only' (ὅσον παραδείγματος χάριν, 1366a32), and Aristotle can agree that a set of illustrations exemplify virtue without agreeing with the many as to why they do. Both consider, e.g., dying in battle for one's country a καλόν and praiseworthy deed (1366b36-38; cf. *EN* 1115b29-35). The many consider such an action virtuous because it seems to them like self-sacrifice for the sake of others, and this is what they think virtue involves (1168b25-28); they praise this deed since it is the kind of thing they would benefit by, and as a general rule, all are persuaded to praise and blame by considerations of their interests (συμφέροντι, *Rhet.* 1365b22-26), that the many conceive in terms of appetite-gratification (*EN* 1168b19-21), acquiring natural goods at all costs (*EE* 1248b27-34) and receiving benefits (*EN* 1167b27-28).<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, however, offers different reasons for thinking courage virtuous and praiseworthy. He defines courage in the *Ethics* in terms not of the effect it has upon others but of standing firm in the face of fears and displaying confidence (1115b10-20); and Aristotle finds courage praiseworthy primarily for the pain and hardship it demands (1117a32-35). Furthermore, as we saw earlier, Aristotle maintains in the *Ethics* that praise is properly a response not to a person's actions, but to his *state* (ἔξις, 1103a9-10). *Rhet.* i 9 merely enumerates a set of actions, however. These actions may well share the property of being beneficial to others; but that said, it must remain an open question for Aristotle whether the actions are also praiseworthy. In short, the fact that a number of *Rhetoric* i 9's illustrations of virtuous action are compatible with Aristotle's considered moral views need not signal a convergence between his views and the altruistic assumptions underlying *Rhet.* i 9, for two conflicting theories can incorporate the same facts and examples in different ways. Aristotle can grant, therefore, that virtue is beneficial to others and even that it is praiseworthy on this count, without thinking that what it is to be virtuous, praiseworthy, and καλόν is to possess a tendency to benefit others.

(4) In stating that virtue is praiseworthy (ἐπαινετόν) for being good (*Rhet.* 1366a36), Aristotle is not indicating his agreement with the list of illustrations following this remark, but, rather, setting out the parameters of praise: if a

good of others: is the free man not in a better position than a slave to benefit those around him? Surely this is stretching things. Technically, it just seems false: slaves clearly spend a greater portion of their time in the service of others than do free men. It could be replied that free men accomplish *greater* things for others, though perhaps fewer. To settle this matter, it will help to consider the reverse point, namely, why marks of slavishness are blamed. Aristotle offers two basic reasons: the slavish are deficient in reason and they lack self-sufficiency (cf. above). It is more in keeping with these basic views, I would say, to maintain that Aristotle regards freemen as praiseworthy for their possession of the opposite of these traits, viz., rationality and self-reliance, than for the contribution they may as a result make to others' good.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aristotle's remark that a speaker can get the audience to favor a person (himself or another) by demonstrating that person's goodwill toward them (*Rhet.* 1378a6-19).

speaker wishes to persuade an audience that some person is virtuous and *καλόν*, he must do so by reference to some notion of the good. This is a general principle regarding praise, also put forward in the *Ethics* (1101b17-18), of which any effective speaker (as well as anyone who wishes to understand what it is to be praiseworthy) requires knowledge. But *Rhet.* i 9 is not interested merely in praise or in praising virtue, but in *persuading* an audience that a particular person should be praised for his virtue. This goal requires a grasp of the popular mind, and it is this mindset which Aristotle's series of illustrations is meant to reflect. The mere fact that a set of seemingly altruistic illustrations follows upon a general remark about the commendableness of virtue does not entail that they or the assumptions underlying them represent Aristotle's own considered judgment about the matter.

Although *Rhetoric* i 9 may not of itself be a reliable source for Aristotle's ethical views, there are a handful of passages in the *Ethics* that also seem to conceive of the *καλόν* in altruistic terms, thereby backing up the *Rhetoric*'s account. The *Ethics* passages are unique in that they connect *καλά* not with self-sacrifice, but, rather, the common good of which the agent's own good forms part (e.g., 1169a8-11); since the *Ethics* continues to associate the *καλόν* with benefit to others, however, Irwin has argued that the altruistic insights of the *Rhetoric* are preserved (1986, 132). In order to assess the merits of this claim, as well as offer a final judgment as to the significance of *Rhetoric* i 9 and its bearing upon the *Euthyphro* problem, it will be necessary to analyze the relevant *Ethics* passages, of which there are three representative types.

The first sort describe the *outcome* of *καλά* as the common good. For instance:

If everyone were to strive for the *καλόν* and strain to do the noblest actions (*τὰ κάλλιστα*), then all would be as it should for the common good, and each individual would receive the greatest goods, since that is the character of virtue (*EN* 1169a8-11).

To appeal to this type of remark for information about the nature of the *καλόν*, however, as Irwin does (1986, 132), is to confuse the consequences of *καλόν* action with both its prerequisites and object.<sup>15</sup> The fact that *καλά* benefit others,

<sup>15</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 1983, 40 interprets 1169a8-11 as offering Aristotle's 'criterion' for acting nobly, viz., acting so as to benefit the community and oneself. Inexplicably, Engberg-Pedersen then goes on repeatedly to employ the phrase 'acting nobly, so as to benefit others' as though self-good had suddenly dropped out of the equation, and he had thereby shown the *καλόν* to be an altruistic notion (1983, e.g. 47, 48, 49). He does attempt to reconcile this altruistic reading of the noble with the happiness of the agent, but his argument rests upon the anachronistic idea that the 'basic problem' in Aristotle's ethics 'is that of how natural goods should be shared'—is this really the 'problem' of cowardice and intemperance, for instance?—as well as his construal of Aristotelian reason as a completely 'universal and impersonal' faculty, that leads the agent to 'view...himself as one among others' without placing 'any special value on the natural good which is his life due to the mere fact that it is his own life' (1983, 44, 48-49). Though, as I discuss below, an Aristotelian does not make exceptions for himself when it comes to upholding ethical principles, there seems no basis for attributing to him this virtual self-indifference.

as Aristotle explicitly thinks they do, is a question of their outcome. To say that an action has consequence  $x$ , however, is neither to give an account of the action (i.e., it is not to say that what makes the action *καλόν* is its promotion of the common good) nor is to say that  $x$  is the action's *object* (i.e., that in choosing to perform it, the agent is concerned with the common good).

Even if the passage did not deal strictly with results, though, it would still fail as evidence for the altruism interpretation because it relates the *καλόν* *equally* to the common and personal good: Aristotle does not say the *καλόν* promotes an individual's good by promoting the common good, but that it leads to both the common good and that of each individual. Since, however, no priority or hierarchy is established among these goods, the passage no more shows that the *καλόν* is bound up with the community's than with one's personal good.

The second type of passage to consider seems to identify virtue and the *καλόν* with beneficent giving.

It is more appropriate to the generous person to give to the right people than to take from the right sources and not to take from the wrong. For it is more appropriate to virtue to do good than to receive it, and to undertake noble actions (*τὰ καλὰ*) than to be the beneficiary of them, or to refrain from base actions (1120a9-13).

Though, undeniably, this passage mentions the *καλόν* and benefit to others in, as it were, the same breath, it does not connect them in the manner the altruism interpretation requires.<sup>16</sup> First, it does not say that giving is appropriate to generosity and virtue, and taking inappropriate, but that giving is *more* appropriate than taking. Since both are appropriate, however (cf. 1120b27-1121a1), the passage of itself offers no more reason for associating the *καλόν* with one than the other, or for saying that generosity and virtue are only *καλόν* in so far as they involve giving, but not in so far as they involve taking.

Now Aristotle does remark at 1120a34-b2 that the generous person regards his own taking not as *καλόν* but, rather, as 'necessary' in order that he may have something to give. Yet consider the remarks preceding this statement:

- (a) 'Each thing is best used by the person possessing the virtue concerning it' (1120a5-6).
- (b) [By (a)] 'the best user of riches will be the person who has the virtue concerning riches', i.e., generosity (a6-8).
- (c) Giving is 'using wealth', whereas taking merely involves its 'possession' (a8-9).

<sup>16</sup> On Irwin's interpretation: 'This passage connects three important concepts used in the account of the virtues: what is right and ought to be done (*dein*), what is fine, and what is beneficial to others. Aristotle assumes (as "for it is proper..." shows) that by doing what he ought to the virtuous person does fine actions and actions that benefit others.' 'These connexions', he continues, 'allow us to ascribe to Aristotle a fairly recognizable concept of moral obligation. What I ought to do, as he explains it, is conditional not on my good but on the good of others; and it is true that I ought to do it irrespective of my own interest' (1986, 130).

(d) ‘Hence, [by (b) and (c),] it is more appropriate to the generous person to give to the right people than to take from the right sources...’ and so forth (a9-17).

Since generosity is a mean, it will require that the virtuous person strike a balance between correct giving and receiving; nevertheless, insofar as receiving involves the passive non-use of wealth, ‘the right sort of taking’ does not involve a *καλόν* action, but merely the avoidance of a shameful one. Giving, by contrast, requires the active use of money, and since virtue is activity, the virtuous person will consider his own giving *καλόν*. In claiming it better to benefit than to be benefitted, Aristotle is arguing not for an identification of the *καλόν* with altruism, but more simply with activity.

Aristotle’s remarks at *EN* 1168a9-12, also cited by Irwin, are subject to the same ‘activity’ interpretation, as is clear from the surrounding discussion, in which Aristotle compares beneficence to production (1167b17-1168a9). The passage states that ‘to a benefactor that is *καλόν* which depends on his action, so that he finds enjoyment in the person whom he acts on; but the person acted on finds nothing *καλόν* in his benefactor, but at most something advantageous, which is less pleasant and lovable’. Consider what led up to this remark. Aristotle had been puzzling over why benefactors love their beneficiaries more than the other way around. It is not because benefactors are hoping for a return, he explains, but because ‘the cause (*αἴτιον*) would seem more appropriate to nature’ (1167b29) and we are in some sense causes of our beneficiaries, not unlike a craftsman is the cause of his handiwork (1167b33-1168a5). Why do we love what we produce? Because we love our own being, we *are* in so far as we are *actualized*, and creating a product actualizes us: ‘thus the producer loves his product, because he loves his own being. And this is natural, since what he is potentially his product manifests in actualization’ (1168a7-9). What is *καλόν* for the benefactor, Aristotle is saying, is what accords with his action, and he has just explained that *this* is the fact that the action realizes the benefactor’s inherent potentials. The benefactor takes pleasure in this (*τοῦτο*), viz., his actualization, in the person of the beneficiary (*ἐν ᾧ*) since the beneficiary is the concrete realization of the benefactor’s actuality. Thus Aristotle remarks a few lines later: ‘what is most pleasant is that through which we are actualized’ (1168a14-15). At 1168a9-12, Aristotle is not saying that what makes beneficence *καλόν* and therefore pleasant for one is that one aims at another’s good, but that in providing good for another, one is being active and thereby actualizing oneself.<sup>17</sup>

The third sort of passage we must examine appears to establish ‘number of persons benefitted’ as the criterion of nobility.

While one must be content to attain the good for an individual, it is *κάλλιον* and more divine to do so for a people and for cities (1094b9-10; cf. 1121a27-30).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *EE* 1241a33-40: benefactors are more fond of their beneficiaries than vice versa partly because ‘activity is more choiceworthy (*αἰρετώτερον*)’.

At first glance, this would seem to back up the altruism view: if an act is *κάλλιον* for benefitting the community, is nobility not then a function of benefitting the community? In fact, no: to say that benefitting many is more virtuous or *καλόν* than benefitting one, is not to say that what is virtuous about benefitting many is the fact that one is benefitting many. Analogously, it is more courageous to stand firm in battle than to flee, but standing firm in battle is not what it *is* to be courageous, but instead a manifestation of courage, which consists, rather, in the proper moderation of one's fears and confidences.<sup>18</sup> The mere fact that Aristotle considers it *κάλλιον* to achieve the well-being of many people rather than few, in no way signifies that he is compromising or altering his basic account of the *καλόν* as order and fittingness.<sup>19</sup>

It may be objected that we should simply construe the *πρέπον* as that which benefits others. There are two problems with this suggestion, however. First,

<sup>18</sup> In interpreting 1094b9-10, it is useful to keep in mind that *καλὸν καὶ μέγαλον* was a common Greek epithet, in use as early as Homer (e.g., *Od.* i 301, iii 199, ix 513). Aristotle himself remarks on at least three occasions that the *καλόν* is realized in or requires a certain magnitude. In the *Poetics*, he attributes this to the fact that if a thing is too small (or too large, for that matter), we will not be able to comprehend it as a whole, which is essentially a condition of perceiving it to be *καλόν* (1450b34-37; cf. *EN* 1123b7-9, *Pol.* 1326a29-35).

<sup>19</sup> There are three other relevant passages invoked by Irwin that I shall discuss briefly for completeness. First: 'It is *κάλλιον* [to have friends] in good fortune...., and we must eagerly call our friends to share in our good fortune, since it is *καλόν* to do good (*εὐεργετικόν*)' (1171a25-26, b16). The main problem here is that the passage deals with benefaction to friends, and so further argument would be needed to use it as evidence for an interpretation of Aristotelian virtue in general, which is concerned with how we should behave toward everyone (including ourselves), not just our friends. This is especially so in light of the friend's unique status as 'another self' (1170b6-7) and the role of friendship in self-actualization. We may consider Aristotle's remark that 'it is fine to do good' to be more general, but for reasons already discussed, Irwin cannot derive what he needs from a statement of this form.

The other two passages appear in Aristotle's account of magnificence; each describes the *μεγαλοπρέπης* as one who spends money on the common good (1122b19-23, 1122b35-1123a5). Whereas Aristotle clearly regards the magnificent person a great social benefactor, though, large-scale spending for the common good is unique to the virtue of magnificence. Even if Irwin can show, then, that what is *καλόν* about *magnificence* is the way it serves the common good—though Aristotle nowhere suggests this, arguing instead that the virtue lies in the appropriateness of the expenditure (1122a22-b10)—there are no grounds for extrapolating from this particular virtue to a characterization of virtue and the *καλόν* in general.

Aristotle does remark at 1123a4-5 that the magnificent person spends money on the community and 'not on himself', which Irwin takes to support his altruism thesis (1986, 132-133). But Aristotle modifies this claim in the very next line, arguing that the magnificent person should, in addition to spending on the public, build himself a great home 'befitting his wealth' (a6-7). The erection of a grand home in the city may somehow contribute to the common good, but it seems to be stretching things to classify this as an act of altruism. More importantly, prior to his remark about the common good, Aristotle had already established that the principle of magnificence is appropriate expenditure (1122a22-26, a34-b6). When he goes on to say that magnificence requires spending upon the common good, therefore, this should be taken to mean not that he has suddenly and without explanation switched his view of the standard of magnificence from the noble and appropriate to the altruistic, but that, in his view, the standard of nobility and appropriateness dictates that the wealthy should spend money upon the community.

Aristotle himself nowhere says that this is what is meant by τὸ πρέπον, nor does he refer to others' good in fleshing out the πρέπον in connection with the individual virtues.<sup>20</sup> Second, an altruistic construal of the πρέπον, as well as the καλόν generally, overlooks the extent to which καλόν action may be purely self-regarding. Yet any satisfactory account of these concepts must be broad enough to subsume those examples of καλὰ which have no apparent connection to other people or their welfare. For instance: enduring personal misfortune (*EN* 1100b30-33), facing death in dangerous circumstances (1115a29-34), contemplating god (*EE* 1249b16-19), and not selling or purchasing an inheritance (*Pol.* 1270a19-21). Clearly, whatever it is that makes something πρέπον and so καλόν for Aristotle cannot be so narrow as the fact that it aims at or involves benefit to others.<sup>21</sup>

Irwin, for one, seems to grasp this, for he concedes that Aristotelian virtue is often purely self-regarding. Yet he chooses not to expand his conception accordingly, but rather to redefine self-regarding actions so that they will not, he thinks, undermine his altruistic view of the καλόν. Thus, even self-regarding actions 'will be for the sake of the fine in so far as they are regulated by a conception of the common good' (1986, 136). But how do we know that they are so regulated? Irwin argues:

Not every action will be related to the fine, and hence to the common good, in exactly the same way. Many self-regarding actions will be self-regarding, not aiming explicitly at the common good. None the less they will be for the sake of the fine in so far as they are regulated by a conception of the common good. The temperate person will sometimes pursue some pleasure for the sake of his health (1119a16-18), not directly for the sake of the fine. But he will have formed this tendency because he has reached the mean, and he will have reached that by reflexion on the fine; he is therefore acting for the sake of the fine when he acts temperately. If we are allowed to understand action for the sake of the fine in this way, we can accept Aristotle's claim that this motive is a common feature of the

<sup>20</sup> Examples of the sorts of things to which Aristotle does refer: (1) in generosity: an agent's wealth (*EN* 1120b7, 1119b34-1120a4), (2) in courage: the normal objects of human fear (1115b7-9), and (3) in friendship: the friends' characters, as well as the closeness of their relation (1165a30-33).

<sup>21</sup> It remains, of course, to fill out Aristotle's conception of fittingness. I lack space for a full discussion here, but would like to offer some suggestions for the future study of this generally neglected topic. Among the things that will have to be considered are (1) whether Aristotle introduces general criteria of fittingness, or whether he thinks that the πρέπον is something that cannot be precisely formulated, but, perhaps, discerned by φρόνησις in each particular circumstance, and (2) how the πρέπον functions in Aristotle's wider ethical theory and relates to other central ethical concepts, especially εὐδαιμονία. It might also be useful to examine the wider Greek ideal of fitting and harmonious activity, and the criteria it involves, as well as the use of the πρέπον and related terms in Plato and various pre-Socratic thinkers, such as Democritus and the Pythagoreans. I am currently examining these and related topics in a separate paper.

virtues, without supposing that every virtuous action is directly other-regarding. (137)

As Irwin's caveat (viz., 'if we are allowed to understand action for the sake of the fine in this way') shows, he is assuming for the purpose of this argument that the *καλόν* is connected to the common good, a point he takes himself to have shown on independent grounds; the passage then argues that, since self-regarding virtue is *καλόν*, it must, for that reason, be regulated by the common good. We have rejected Irwin's prior association of the *καλόν* and the common good, however, so his defense here collapses into circularity, amounting to the claim that the *καλόν* cannot be self-confined because it is altruistic—the very point at issue.

Granted, Aristotle does sometimes associate self-regarding virtue with beneficial *results* to others. For instance, as we have seen, he says that when each individual strains to do what is *καλόν*, the community will greatly profit (*EN* 1169a8-11). But Irwin cannot claim that temperance or any such self-regarding virtue is *καλόν* on the grounds that it involves one in deeds beneficial to others, because he himself says that 'choosing an action because it is fine is choosing it because it is the kind of voluntary action it is, one that aims at the common good, *not because it is or promotes success in achieving some result*' (1986, 136 emphasis mine; cf. 131). Nor, indeed, does Aristotle anywhere invoke 'beneficial result to others' as a reason for the nobility of temperance.

To sum up, the basic problem with the altruism interpretation of the *καλόν* in the *Ethics* is twofold. On the one hand, it does not follow from the passages its defenders cite; on the other, it is too narrow to handle all of the passages they do not. Since the *Ethics* does not back up the altruistic conception of the *καλόν* sketched in *Rhetoric* i 9, and since we have four independent reasons for denying that the *Rhetoric*'s account of the praiseworthy represents Aristotle's own considered view, we may conclude the following. First, Aristotle does not praise actions for being *καλόν* on the grounds of their being altruistic. He does praise some socially beneficial activity, but that is not the same thing.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, in the *Ethics* Aristotle introduces difficulty and fittingness as the general grounds of praise, apparently aligning his own view with the first horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma, according to which actions are praised because they are *καλόν*. Second, the public regards as *καλόν* that which they praise, in accordance with the second horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma. This is suggested by the fact that (1) Aristotle offers two separate accounts of praiseworthiness, one in his ethical writings, the other in the *Rhetoric*, only one of which he endorses, and (2) he explicitly remarks that the many do not grasp the *καλόν*, and that a speaker should treat as *καλόν*, for the purpose of oratory, whatever the audience happens to praise. To repeat, this is not to say that a philosopher and the many will not praise a number of the same things, only that they will invoke different standards for doing so.

<sup>22</sup> Thus Aristotle refuses to praise a soldier led by foolishness and reckless daring to run head-long into battle for the sake of the common defense (*EN* 1117b17-20; cf. 1124b6-9).

### Conclusion

A central motive in developing the altruism interpretation of the *καλόν* has been to prove that Aristotle's ethics enjoins an 'intrinsic' form of other-regard that does not depend solely upon the agent's self-interest (Irwin 1986, 118-122). Had the argument gone through, it would have been far more significant than recent attempts to discover altruism in Aristotle's theory of friendship (*φιλία*), for it would have demonstrated that altruism does not simply exist in parts of Aristotle's ethics, but that it actually underlies Aristotle's conception of virtue as such. Though the argument is unsuccessful, I would like to conclude by pointing to a feature of my own interpretation of the *καλόν* by which we can support, if not altruism, certainly the conviction that the Aristotelian moral agent can be relied upon consistently to respect and uphold the good of others.

This feature is the *καλόν*'s connection to praise and self-respect. Insofar as pursuit of the *καλόν* is a precondition of holding oneself in the proper regard, the *καλόν* constitutes a profound psychological need that provides the moral agent with an *internal* sanction for virtue. To see this, contrast the lives of the many. Since the masses 'live by their feelings' and possess no 'notion of what is fine (*καλοῦ*)', according to Aristotle, they obey only 'fear, not shame (*αἰδοῦ*)' (1179b11-15). For this reason, they 'yield to necessity more than to argument, and to punishments more than to what is noble (*καλῶ*)' (1180a4-5). The virtuous man, in contrast, understands his own need for self-respect, as well as the *καλόν*'s critical role in fulfilling that need. For this reason, as well as his simple distaste for *αἰσχροῦ*, it is unnecessary to force him by external means to be *καλόν*; rather, he is a 'law unto himself' (*νόμος ὧν ἑαυτῷ*, 1138a21-22).<sup>23</sup>

Without grounding virtue in altruistic concern for others, what is there to guarantee that the Aristotelian moral agent will persist in his choice of the *καλόν* when it is *their* interests that are at stake, rather than his own? Aristotle would dispute the terms of this question. Unlike many moral theorists, he does not treat one's dealings with others as a separate type of ethical situation, requiring either unique principles, or some special rationale for applying principles one already has. *Καλόν* behavior toward others is no different from *καλόν* behavior *tout court*: it involves, principally, doing what is *πρέπον*. Thus:

<sup>23</sup> Owens 1981, 274 also speaks of the *καλόν* as having an 'intrinsic obligatory character', but he identifies the *καλόν*'s force with the 'awe' experienced by the agent 'at being the originator of a course of activity absolutely new in the universe'. This creates a sense of responsibility in the agent 'aligned with the begetting of [his] own children': he wishes to act in a way that fully manifests his rational agency, viewing his action as though it were his child. I agree that the virtuous agent's choice of the *καλόν* is a choice to realize the best within himself, but in explaining the *καλόν*'s internal force, I think the thing to emphasize is, rather, the point about self-respect: one is not so much 'awed' at one's own agency as such, as respectful of one's own worth, viz., what one has *achieved* through one's agency.

I think Alexander Grant summed up Aristotle's attitude quite well with the remark that 'the great-souled man does not avoid vice because it is "wrong" (in the modern sense), but simply because it is unworthy of him' (1885, ii 72).

We do just and courageous actions, as well as the others that express virtue, in relation to other people (*πρὸς ἀλλήλους*), by according to each what is *πρέπον* in contracts, services, and all types of actions, as well as in feelings (*EN* 1178a10-13).

The Aristotelian moral agent's stable character (1100b12-13) ensures that he will not suddenly and, indeed, schizophrenically, abandon his standards just because the interests of others have come into play. Through his doctrine of the *καλόν*, Aristotle expresses what is at once among his most profound and least comprehended insights, namely, that altruism is unnecessary for virtue.<sup>24</sup>

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