# THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE IN ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS

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Abstract:

My aim is to show how Aristotle's theory of friendship supports his thesis that happiness requires virtuous activity. Ethical behavior is valuable, according to the Nicomachean Ethics, not solely because it uses reason (the immoral can use reason too), but also because it is the expression of a loving attitude towards other persons. By emphasizing this aspect of virtuous activity, I defend Aristotle against the charge that his high estimation for pure intellectual activity commits him to an unethical doctrine. I also argue that his theory of love helps explain why he considers the political life second only to the philosophical life.

# The Importance of Love in Aristotle's Ethics[1]

## I

One of Aristotle's major claims in the Nicomachean Ethics is that the virtues contribute significantly to happiness. I want to show that he has a better defense of this thesis than is generally thought. His argument may seem weak because only part of it is considered: the discussion of happiness in Books I and X. My view is that to give him full credit we must take into account his treatment of love in VIII and IX. "These books," according to W. D. Ross, "stand in no vital relation to the rest of the work."[2] I will argue that this seriously underestimates the importance of love in Aristotle's ethics.

The question I am concerned with is why Aristotle thinks the virtues as he conceives them contribute to happiness. For example, he thinks that courage sometimes requires risking one's life for others, that a just person takes no more than his fair share, and that generosity involves giving to others. It is not apparent why acting from such dispositions makes one's life better, and this is the thesis we want to see Aristotle defend. It may be, as he says in Book I, that since a happy life is a life well lived (1095a18-20), we need those qualities which enable us to live well, and these qualities should therefore be considered virtues (1098a7-18, 1106a15-24). There is a conceptual connection, in other words, between faring well and having virtues. But this does not take us very far, because it does not answer the more specific question of whether (for example) justice and generosity as Aristotle conceives them are among the qualities that enable a person to live well.

[1]I thank William Fortenbaugh, Richard Sorabji, and Gregory Vlastos for their comments on an earlier draft. I am especially grateful to Myles Burnyeat for his advice and encouragement.

[2]See his introduction to The World's Classics edition of the Nicomachean Ethics (London, 1954), p. xx. He goes on: "...One is left with the suspicion that (Books VIII and IX) may have been originally a separate treatise, which faulty editing has included in the Ethics." (pp. xx - xxi)

Another point Book I makes is that to live well we must make a good use of capacities which the lower animals lack, and reason is such a faculty (1097b22-1098a4). Bad men can use reason -- Aristotle says they can therefore do much more harm than an animal (1150a4-8) -- but they use it poorly.[3] He defends this point by criticizing the conception of happiness that the evil have. They think a good life is a matter of having as much physical pleasure, honor, or wealth as one can get for oneself, yet none of these can be the most important goal in life. For physical pleasure can be experienced by an animal (1095b19-22), being honored is a passive state we are put in by others (1095b22-1096a4), and wealth is not desirable for its own sake (1096a5-7). To use reason simply to achieve one or more of these goals is therefore to deprive oneself of happiness. But even if these points are valid, they only count against various conceptions of the good, and do not give positive support to Aristotle's own view that we must exercise the various virtues to be happy.

Perhaps he believes that the virtues promote one's happiness because they prepare one for an intellectual life. This is the interpretation proposed by W.D. Ross.[4] He takes Aristotle to be saying that the virtues contribute to happiness because they enable one to engage in the activity which Book X argues is the best available to human beings: contemplation, the intellectual appreciation of certain necessary truths. But it is hard to believe that Aristotle adopted a view with such obvious weaknesses. For some vices better enable us to contemplate than the corresponding virtues. A courageous person, for example, risks death in battle, while a lifetime of pure intellectual activity may be available to the coward. And if, as Ross says, the moral virtues prepare us to contemplate by quieting the passions, then why does Aristotle consider insensitivity to physical pleasure (1119a5-11) and an incapacity for anger (1126a3-8) vices?

[3]See too 1144a23-27, where Aristotle points out that the evil can be clever. When he says that the virtuous live according to reason, whereas others follow passion (1095a1-11, 1169a3-6, 1179b13-16), his point is that rational arguments about how to improve one's life will only affect the virtuous. He does not mean that good individuals are the only ones who use reason.

[4]Ethics, pp. xxii - xxiii. He says that "the moral life ...brings the contemplative life into being...by keeping the passions in subjection."

In fact, there is good evidence that Aristotle does not adopt such an implausible view. First, he points out that intellectual wisdom can be acquired by those who lack practical wisdom (1141b3-8) and who therefore are not virtuous (1144b14-30). Contemplation, in other words, is not reserved for the good. Second, Aristotle even suggests that great virtue may interfere with intellectual activity: to perform highly noble deeds one needs great wealth or great power, and these goods can be impediments to contemplation (1178a23-1178b5). And third, Aristotle never says that only those who have the intellectual virtues and contemplate are happy. The moral virtues contribute to happiness however much or little they prepare one for the contemplative life.[5]

I conclude that Books I and X do not by themselves give us a satisfactory defense of the claim that the virtues contribute to happiness. But this should be no surprise. Aristotle warns us that these books do not contain everything the Nicomachean Ethics has to say on this topic. He calls his remarks in Book I an opening sketch of the good life (1098a20-23), not the whole story, and he begins his discussion of virtue in Book I, Section 13 with the hope that it will increase our understanding of happiness (1102a5-7). As we read his detailed description of the various virtues in Books II-V, we do learn more about how they promote one's welfare. Courage, for example, enables one to protect oneself against attack, and temperance may be needed to maintain one's health. Now, my thesis is that in Books VIII and IX we learn still more about how the virtues contribute to a good life. For in these books Aristotle

[5]Of course, Aristotle says that perfect happiness is contemplation (1177a12-18, 1177b24-25, 1178a7-8, 1178b8-9, 1179a31-32) and that there is as much happiness as there is contemplation (1178b28-32). By this he clearly means that the best life is a contemplative life, and there is as much of the best activity as there is contemplation. Even while he is praising the intellectual life, he insists that those who are not philosophers are happy too (1178a9-1178b7). One should not be misled by Aristotle's saying about the good man, "His mind has plenty of things to contemplate" (theorematon, 1166a26-27). What he contemplates are the virtuous actions of his friends (1169b33-35); Aristotle is not assuming here that the virtuous are necessarily philosophers. Nor need he be assuming this when he says that practical wisdom sees to it that intellectual wisdom comes into being (1145a9-10). He may simply mean that politics must find a place for philosophy in the state, or that those who can contemplate are practically wise to do so.

proposes the view that to be happy we must enter into loving relationships with other people, and he asserts that a virtuous person is more willing and able to love others than anyone else. So, the difference between a good and a bad man lies not in the degree to which they can use their reason, but in their attitude towards other human beings. An evil person takes the good life to consist in the accumulation of things, while a virtuous individual finds it in exercising his virtues to help other people, especially his friends. It is not contemplation that provides the missing link between virtue and happiness, as Ross thought, but love.

II

Those who love have an intense desire to benefit someone for his own sake.[6] If one wants to help another solely as a way of benefiting or pleasing oneself, then one "loves" that individual only by an extension of the term (1156a14-19, 1157a30-32). Commercial partnerships (1158a21) and purely sexual relationships (1156b1-3) typify such "incidental" forms of love; one person aids or pleases the other only to increase his own wealth or to enhance his own physical pleasure. When love is real, on the other hand, the advantages and pleasures one might receive will be valued, but one does not help the person one loves merely as a means to such goods.

Aristotle recognizes two very different types of genuine love. In one case, we respond to an individual's character and love him for the kind of person he is. This love begins with good will, a mild well-wishing caused by the recogni-

[6]See 1155b31, 1156b9-10 (loving requires wishing someone well for his sake); and 1166b30-34 (the desire must be intense). The wish normally gives rise to action (1166a2-4, 1169b10-12, 1171b21), and tends to diminish if it is not acted upon (1157b5-13), though Aristotle recognizes exceptions: some women give away their children to be brought up, and continue to love them (1159a28-33). Furthermore, Aristotle says that love is not simply an emotion or desire; he distinguishes the affect, philēsis, from the disposition or character trait, philia (1157b28-32). Loving someone, in other words, is not a matter of being struck by an urge, but is rather a fixed attitude that reflects one's values. That love also involves experiencing an emotion if not denied (1126b11-23).

tion of some apparent virtue in a person (IX, 5).[7] As one discovers through greater acquaintance that the object of one's good will really is virtuous and therefore worthy of one's love (1156b25-32), and as one continues to act on one's desire to benefit him for his own sake, this desire, at first weak, strengthens until it becomes love.[8] One comes to love the object of one's benevolence just as a craftsman loves the artifact he has created (1167b31-1168a9). Both have gone to considerable lengths and have exercised their skills, and they see their efforts embodied in the person benefited or product created.

There is a second form of love, however, which has very different features. This is the love of one's child, which is natural to all parents (1155a16-18) and arises immediately at birth (1161b24-25). Rather than developing gradually with increased acquaintance, it arises suddenly with full intensity, and it is not caused by the perception of some good quality in the person loved. We love our children for their own sake (ekeinōn heneka), but not for themselves (di'hautous, kath'hautous); that is, not for their char-

[7]At 1158a7-8, Aristotle says that good will involves a willingness to help someone in need, yet at 1167a8-10, he says it involves "only wanting good things," but not "taking trouble" for others. Perhaps these statements concern different forms of good will, or different stages in its growth. His remark at 1155b33-1156a5 that mutual and recognized good will is friendship is modified at 1167a3-4 to mean that it is the beginning of friendship.

[8]If one is looking for a virtuous person to spend one's days with, then good will does not blossom into love unless one also finds the other person sufficiently pleasant (1157a13-24, 1158a1-10). Though all good people provide some pleasure (1156b14-17), the pleasure of appreciating their virtuous behavior (1169b30-1170a4), this evidently does not of itself make them pleasant enough to spend one's days with.

acter.[9]

Aristotle's theory concerns not only what it is to love someone, but also what kind of association among individuals best deserves to be called a love relationship, or friendship. To begin with, even if A philei (loves) B and B philei (loves) A, they are still not philoi (friends, lovers), unless they are aware of each other's love (1156a2-4). Furthermore, they must spend their days together (1157b19, 1158a8-10), choose and enjoy the same things (1157b22-23, 1166a7), and rejoice and grieve with each other (1166a7-8, 1171a6-7). Aristotle calls this intimate association companionship or comradeship (hetairikē, 1157b23). It exists only among the equally virtuous (1161a25-26), and is the ideal relationship (1156b7-35).

We can now state Aristotle's position more precisely. A non-virtuous person can "love" others for the sake of his own advantage or pleasure, and he can love his children for their sake. But he does not love others for their character, and in this he differs from the virtuous individual (1157a16-19). I will examine Aristotle's reasons for believing this by separately discussing three groups: the evil, the virtuous, and those who fall between these extremes.

Generally, Aristotle portrays the bad person as one who harms others because of an excessive desire for wealth,

[9]I take these expressions to be roughly equivalent: loving others for themselves (kath'hautous; 1156a11; di'hautous: 1156b10, 1157a18, 1157b3), loving others for the sort they are (poious tinas: 1156a13), loving others for their character (dia to ethos: 1165b5-6). None of these, however, are equivalent to: loving others for their own sake (ekeinon heneka: 1155b31, 1156b10, 1166a4). Loving someone for his character (i.e. loving him because he has virtues) is a special case of loving someone for his own sake (i.e. not merely as a means to one's own advantage or pleasure). Unfortunately, Ross' translation obscures this. Twice he translates di'hautous as "for their own sake" (1157a18, 1157b3), and he thus creates the false impression that according to Aristotle only a good person loves others for their own sake. What Aristotle really says at 1157a16-19 is that only a good person loves others for themselves.

physical pleasure, honor or power.[10] In his relations with all but his own children, he does not aim at virtuous behavior, since he considers the virtues of little importance for happiness. Rather, he aims at the accumulation of one or more of these goods, and he acts in an unjust, ungenerous, cowardly, intemperate way to get them. When he does help those who are not his offspring, it is only as a means to his own or his children's welfare. It is therefore understandable why Aristotle believes that such a person, who sees his neighbors only as potential sources of some external or physical good, loves no one but his children. As the Eudemian Ethics puts it, "The evil prefer what is good by nature to a friend, and since none of them love mankind more than things, they are not friends" (1237b30-32).[11]

Aristotle does not deny that the evil can seek and enjoy the pleasure of being with other people, and he even admits that they "delight in each other's wickedness" (1159b10). By this he means that they admire and honor each other's character (cf. 1124a21-24). But such admiration is not love, since it does not dispose the immoral person to benevolent behavior. The bad individual may think that others have the sort of character one should strive for, but he has no strong desire to benefit such individuals.[12]

There are two objections to this portrait of an evil per-

[10]For this description of the evil person's motives, see 1167b9-13, 1168a29-31, 1168b12-18; and in the Politics, 1267a12-14, 1323a36-40. Having a vice may not indicate that one is a bad person, since to be bad one must harm others, and not all vices harm others (1121a25-27, 1123a31-33, 1125a16-19). Notice that for Aristotle one who lies merely because he delights in a lie for its own sake is not a bad person (kakos). The worst liar is one who deceives for financial reasons (1127b9-13).

[11]By "what is good by nature" he means such external or bodily goods as honor, wealth, physical excellence, good fortune and powers (Eudemian Ethics, 1248b27-30).

[12]I therefore disagree with Frederick Siegler's suggestion that, contrary to Aristotle, an evil man "might participate in the highest form of friendship." See his "Reason, Happiness, and Goodness" in H. Walsh and H. Shapiro (eds.), Aristotle's Ethics (Belmont, Cal., 1967), p. 45. Siegler correctly points out that the evil can admire each other, but he fails to realize that mutual admiration is not "the highest form of friendship."

son, which I will briefly mention now and respond to later. First, one need not be predominantly selfish to be evil. A person may dedicate himself to the happiness of others, yet be so mistaken about how to achieve it that he does tremendous damage. Perhaps there is some justification for not taking such a person as the paradigm of evil, since, unlike Aristotle's standard case of a bad man, the misguided altruist is aiming at the same target that the virtuous hit. At any rate, we still want to know whether such people love others for their character and whether Aristotle can show that they are less happy than the virtuous.

The second objection is that a person may be predominantly selfish, yet not quite so extreme as Aristotle's paradigm of the evil man. Someone might willingly harm many others in his pursuit of external goods, yet make an exception for a few individuals he loves because of their character. After all, if Aristotle allows an evil person to have genuine love for his children, why can't this attitude be extended to several others as well? Of course, the more individuals a person loves, the more he treats virtuously, and the less he remains a clear case of a bad person. Still, we want to know what consequences it has for Aristotle's theory if he admits that one can love some for their character, and willingly harm others for the sake of external goods.

If we leave aside these two complications for the moment and concentrate on the paradigm of evil that Aristotle describes, we can agree with him that such a person is indeed evil, and that since he is willing to harm all but his own children, he loves no one for his character.

I turn now to the opposite extreme: the person who fully has all the virtues. Throughout Books VIII and IX, Aristotle assumes without argument that such an individual loves others of good character, and it is worth asking what leads him to make this assumption. Part of the answer is obvious, if we look at his description of the virtuous person in Books II through VI. A good man must have a strong desire to perform virtuous acts, and many such acts benefit others and keep them from harm. For example, courage (III, 6-9), generosity (IV, 1), magnificence (IV, 2), and pride (IV, 3) all require more than simply refraining from behavior that causes unjustified harm. They involve preventing harm and doing positive good. So, a virtuous person must have a strong desire to perform acts that benefit others. Yet he will not aid others indiscriminately, but only when his assistance is merited. The generous give only to those who deserve financial help, and the magnificent and proud benefit others only when it is fitting. It is natural,

therefore, for Aristotle to assume that the virtuous will develop strong desires to perform acts which benefit those whose character they admire. But notice that one can have such desires and still not love. One can intensely want to do something that happens to benefit someone without wanting to do it for his sake. So, to explain why Aristotle believes the virtuous love others, we must attribute to him a further assumption, having to do with the motives of the virtuous person: when he is performing acts that benefit those whose character he admires, he does so for their sake. The good man does not look upon his virtuous acts as behavior that just happens to help others. Rather, when those aided by such acts are people he considers virtuous, his purpose in acting is to benefit them. Aristotle does not spell this out when he describes the good man in Books II through VI, but he must be assuming it, for otherwise he would not look upon the virtuous person as one who loves others for their character.[13] The chapters on friendship thus lead us to a better understanding of what Aristotle's virtuous person is like.

III

We have seen why Aristotle claims that the virtuous love others for their character while the paradigms of evil do not. Now we can ask why he thinks that this difference affects their relative happiness.

To begin with, certain external goods that contribute to happiness are more accessible to those who love. One of these goods is the love one gets from others. The evil man might be loved by his parents (unless he is exceedingly wicked: 1163b22-25), and he might be loved for his character if he tricks people into considering him good. But such deception cannot be easy, since we love others only after having studied their character over a period of time. The good person, on the other hand, receives not only the love of his parents, but more easily wins the love of others. This is a significant difference between the virtuous and

[13]Of course, Aristotle says something in Books II through VI about the motives of the virtuous: they choose virtuous acts "for themselves" (1105a31-32) and "for the sake of the noble" (1120a23-24). I take this to mean that good people lack certain ulterior purposes; they do not behave virtuously as a means to receiving wealth, pleasure, honor, etc. Acting for the sake of the noble and acting to help a friend are therefore not competing motives. Aristotle says at 1168a33-34 that a good person acts both "because of the noble" and "for the sake of a friend."

the evil, since Aristotle thinks that being loved is a more important part of happiness than being honored (1159a25-27). The latter is wanted primarily as a means to other goods or as a confirmation of one's opinion of oneself, whereas being loved is something everyone wants for its own sake (1159a16-25). I take this to mean that we want others to have a certain attitude towards us, even apart from their acting on this attitude. We value the strong desires our friends have for our welfare, and not just the assistance they actually give us. In fact, Aristotle considers this the greatest external good (1169b8-10).[14]

There is something else all human beings want from others besides their love: we want the pleasure of being with other people. "No one would choose to have all the good things if he had to be alone, for man is polis-oriented (politikon) and by nature lives with others" (1169b17-19). Living in a polis, however, does not fully satisfy our desire to associate with others. To varying degrees (1158a1-3), people want the pleasure of spending their days with one or possibly more intimate comrades whose tastes they share and whose company they enjoy. The evil too have this desire (1166b13-14), and Aristotle never denies that they can satisfy it. But he does believe that their personal relationships are unsatisfying unless they deceive others into thinking them virtuous. Those who are better than an evil man will not choose him as an intimate companion, if they recognize his vices, and so he will have to seek the company of those he knows are evil. The relationships he forms are unstable (1156a19-24), filled with quarrels (1162b5-21), and lacking in trust (1157a20-25), for he realizes that the others have no great interest in helping him, and they know the same about him. Relationships among the good, by contrast, have the opposite qualities: they are enduring (1156b11-12), amicable (1162b6-13), and trustful (1157a20-

[14]Aristotle seems to contradict himself when he says in his treatment of pride that honor is the greatest external good (1123b17-21). I think, however, that he is merely being sloppy, and the contradiction is only apparent. He wants to know, in his discussion of pride, what is the best thing a perfectly good person deserves from those he benefits. To answer, "love," would be correct but uninformative, for it would only tell us that others should want to do something good for the proud man. The important question is, "What good?" and Aristotle's answer is, "honor." In other words, in the friendship between the proud man and his beneficiaries it is only just that he get something in return, and the best they can offer him is honor (1124a4-9, 1163b1-14).

25). Surely this difference between the good and the bad is relevant in determining whose life is better.

Being loved and having satisfying personal relationships are goods that can be achieved by someone who merely appears to be virtuous, and in this sense they are external goods. But loving others is not an external good, and Aristotle claims that it is in itself a necessary part of a good life, aside from the goods we are likely to get in return for our benevolence. "Of what use is prosperity," he asks at the outset of Book VIII, "to someone who is prevented from accomplishing good?" (1155a7-8). The same point is made near the end of Book IX, when he asks whether a happy man needs friends. He does need them, Aristotle says, since he needs people to treat well, and it is preferable to benefit a friend than a stranger (1169b10-13). In another passage, Aristotle claims that as good as it is to receive aid from friends, it is more desirable still to give them aid. For benefitting friends is an activity and an accomplishment that requires work and deserves praise, while being helped is simply a passive state (1167b28-1168a27).

If we now return to our original question, "Why do virtuous acts contribute to the agent's happiness?" we can see a large part of Aristotle's answer. If you benefit someone you love for his sake, that by itself contributes to your own well-being. Since a great many acts performed by a good person benefit his friends, and he performs them for their sake, he makes himself happy by helping those he loves. An evil man, on the other hand, loves others to a smaller extent. He benefits his children for their sake, but in all his other dealings with people, he is selfish and sees others as means to the accumulation of various goods. To this contrast, we may add another: the good person is more likely than the evil man to receive love from others, and his personal relationships are more likely to be satisfying.

One point that emerges from this deserves special emphasis. Aristotle cannot be interpreted as an egoist, in spite of his placing the question, "How shall a person be happy?"

at the center of practical reasoning.[15] When he poses this question, he is asking what major goals of a person's life should be, and, as we see now, he responds that one of them must be helping friends for their sake. An egoist advances the welfare of others only as a means to his own happiness; their well-being is not part of his happiness, as it is for Aristotle's virtuous person. An egoist, if he were interested in love at all, would be interested in being loved, for this might be one of the goods he seeks for himself. For Aristotle, on the other hand, being loved is secondary to loving.

IV

Not all virtuous acts, however, are acts of love. Aristotle thinks that much virtuous behavior benefits those who are not friends. For example, when we assist someone, we may approve of his character and think him worthy of help without loving him (1157b17-19, 1158a7-8). Even when we do not admire someone's character, virtue requires us to be just (Book V) and even pleasant (IV, 6) to him. Certain virtuous actions benefit the entire public, though Aristotle thinks that the public cannot be loved, since we can have this feeling for only a few individuals (IX, 10). The magnificent man, for example, donates money for public buildings and religious ceremonies (IV, 2), and the courageous man defends the state by fighting on the battlefield (III, 6-9). In all of these cases of beneficent behavior unmotivated by love, our question still remains unanswered: how do these virtuous acts contribute to one's happiness?

An extension of the theory I have attributed to Aristotle suggests itself. Just as a virtuous person has a strong desire to benefit his friends for their sake, so he also has a weaker desire to benefit those he does not love for their sake, and he must want to refrain from unjustifiably harming

[15] I do not pretend to have settled here the question of whether Aristotle is an egoist. He makes a number of statements which have an egoistic ring, and a full consideration of this issue would have to examine these passages one by one. I do not believe that any of them, properly understood, commit Aristotle to ethical or psychological egoism as these doctrines are generally defined. He is considered an egoist, however, by W.D. Ross, Aristotle, 5th edn. (London, 1949), p. 230; D.J. Allan, The Philosophy of Aristotle, 2nd edn. (London, 1970), p. 138; and G.C. Field (London, 1921), pp. 108-110. See too W.F.R. Hardie, Aristotle's Ethical Theory (Oxford, 1968), pp. 214-216, 326-331 for a discussion of this question.

them. Since acting out of love greatly contributes to one's happiness, so acting out of a similar but weaker desire also contributes to a good life, though to a smaller degree. It would be one's own misfortune to take no interest in benefiting anyone but one's intimate companions and thus to cut oneself off from the wider world. The fully virtuous man avoids this by helping even those he does not love.

Is there any basis for extending Aristotle's theory in this way? Some evidence is provided by his discussion of a certain nameless virtue which he says resembles love (IV, 6). Those who have this characteristic know when and how to please all those they associate with, not just their friends. They aim at giving pleasure and not causing pain, when these goals do not conflict with doing what is beneficial or noble. They may, for example, cause others pain if this is to their long-term advantage, and they will refuse to acquiesce pleasantly in another's disgraceful conduct. But when no harm is done, they aim at pleasing others.

What is the motive of those who display such behavior? We can infer that it is to please others for their own sake. For Aristotle says that this nameless disposition resembles love, and if passion were added to it, it would be love (1126b20-25). Since the motive of those who love is to benefit others for their sake, it follows that those who are pleasant even to strangers wish to please them for their sake.[16]

Consider now a much more significant way in which some virtuous people do good for those they do not love. Any good state, whether it be a kingship, an aristocracy or a polity, must be ruled by good men, and the aim of those who rule such states is to benefit the citizens for their sake (1160a31-1160b22). This is just the respect in which good governments differ from corrupt ones, for in bad states the rulers aim at their own advantage and not the welfare of others. Now, good rulers inevitably help those they do not love, since they benefit many but can love only a few. It follows that when a good ruler exercises his virtue by benefiting those he does not love, he does so for their sake. And just as a good person will be pleasant even to those who are not virtuous, so a ruler may not think that the citizenry he is benefiting is especially good. He may have to make

[16]Aristotle explicitly describes the motive of those who have this virtue as the desire "to give pleasure for itself" (1127a1-2). I take this to mean that they have no ulterior reason for being pleasant; they are not doing so in order to increase their influence, or wealth, etc.

the best of a less than ideal situation and establish policies suited to those whose moral training has been mediocre (Politics 1295a25-39). Even in this situation, the ruler's aim is to benefit the citizens for their sake.

There are other ways in which a good person benefits those he does not love. He may display magnificence, if he has great wealth, by using it for the public good, and regardless of his wealth he may be called upon to defend his country on the battlefield. He must be just to all other human beings, good and bad alike, and in taking only his fair share and fulfilling his contracts he helps others. All of these benefits are smaller than those provided by a good ruler, but greater than those provided by being pleasant to all. Surely, if the good man's motive in the greatest and smallest matters is to benefit others for their own sake, he will have the same purpose when his beneficence lies between these extremes.

If we now ask why such virtuous treatment of those we do not love contributes to our happiness, it is open to us, as I suggested before, simply to extend Aristotle's theory of love. That theory asserts that to be happy we must have and satisfy strong desires to benefit others for their sake. A good person will direct such intense desires only towards his children and those he is sure are virtuous. Yet Aristotle also attributes to him a desire to benefit those who are neither friends nor virtuous, and he helps them for their sake. How does this make him happy? The simplest answer we can provide Aristotle is: it is better for us to have some interest in benefiting even those we do not love than to ignore them.

Aristotle thinks that every human being has some good in him (Eudemian Ethics, 1238b12-14). Everyone, even the bad man, loves his children, and so no one is entirely selfish.[17] It is therefore natural for Aristotle to believe that we should be pleasant and just to all people, not merely to those of excellent character. In doing this, the virtuous person does not abandon the principle that, one's children excepted, all benefits must be deserved. No one is

[17]See the claim in the Politics 1323a24-34 that no one, good or bad, would destroy a friend merely for a trivial sum of money. No one, in other words, is governed entirely by self-interest. Aristotle also says that one has the virtues to a small extent simply by promoting one's own advantage, for example, by courageously saving one's life, or temperately refraining from unhealthy pleasures. For this idea, see 1129b33-1130a8 and Politics 1323a24-34.

so devoid of virtue that he does not merit just treatment, though, of course, a thoroughly bad person does not deserve more than this. "We praise lovers of mankind (philanthropous)", Aristotle says. "One can see in one's travels that all men are akin (oikeion) and dear (philon) to one another" (1155a21-22). Here, of course, the word for "love" is being used loosely, since one can have this strong feeling only for a few. But there is something comparable to love which Aristotle is genuinely praising here: receptiveness to whatever good there is in everyone, and a willingness to help anyone in accordance with his deserts. Needless to say, Aristotle does not condemn harming people when this is justified. To defend with courage those who deserve protection, for example, requires a willingness to hurt others. And to safeguard people against attack we must be willing to punish injustice. Aristotle believes that given the way the world is, benevolence sometimes requires doing harm. But he considers it a vice to wish evil to any person if that evil is undeserved, and so he condemns envy, which is pain at the sight of any good fortune, and spite, which is pleasure caused by any bad fortune (1108b4-6). We can see now why such malevolent attitudes are vices: in wishing unwarranted evil upon others, one harbors too much hostility towards the world, and so one deprives oneself of happiness.

V

I turn now to intermediate cases. We must determine whether those who are not so bad as the paradigms of evil might be as happy as the paragons of virtue. In particular, the two complications we mentioned in Section II must now be discussed.

I pointed out that there is a kind of person who is not selfish but who nevertheless causes much harm in trying to do good. He wants to act virtuously, yet is ignorant of what the various virtues require of him in many particular situations, and so he acts unjustly, ungenerously, etc., in spite of his good intentions. Doesn't such a person nonetheless love others and isn't he therefore as happy as the completely virtuous individual?

Aristotle's reply is that love is not simply a matter of having good intentions or experiencing certain emotions. Rather, it is a disposition or characteristic (hexis) which gives rise to the right choices (1157b28-32). A person may wish to do what is just and generous, but actually choose actions that are harmful to others, because of his lack of practical wisdom. In that case, he does not really have the disposition, love, just as he is not really just or generous (1144b1-17). Aristotle therefore says that "it is

characteristic of a friend to do good" (1171b21), not merely to wish for it.[18]

This view may strike us as odd, for it does not accord with the way we use the word, "love". We believe that if a person is mistaken about what will help his friends, he may love them nonetheless. But even if we think Aristotle is wrong about this, his error does him little harm. What he would insist upon is that the person who succeeds in helping others has a better life than one who tries and, perhaps without realizing it, fails. Surely Aristotle is correct that any rational person who is given a choice between these two lives would prefer the former. Once we grant this, it is unimportant whether we agree with him that the misguided altruist does not love those he harms.

The second complication we postponed concerned an evil person who is not quite so selfish as Aristotle's paradigm. Besides loving his children, he loves a few other individuals because of their character, and he treats them with justice, courage, and so on. But he has no interest in benefiting anyone else for his own sake. All others he regards as means to various external goods, and so he harms them when it pays to do so. Now, it may be that such an individual loves as many people as the good man does, since anyone's circle of friends is necessarily small (IX, 10). The difference between the two is in their attitude towards those who are not friends: one is pleasant, helpful and just, while the other is antagonistic. Aristotle overlooks this when he says that only the good love others for their character (1157a16-19). But again no damage is done to his more important claim that the virtuous are happier than all others. For he believes that it is better to respond to the good in those we do not love than to treat them as means to the accumulation of external goods. If this is correct, then the completely virtuous person has a better life than the moderately evil man who loves his friends and exploits everyone else.

There is, however, a serious weakness in Aristotle's theory which is best mentioned here. What if a person finds

[18]Other passages in which Aristotle says that a friend does good to others: 1157a2-3, 1157b7-8, 1157b33-34, 1169b10-12, 1171b21. At 1166a2-4, he hedges. He says, "A friend is considered someone who wishes for and does things that are or seem good for another's sake." Why "seem" (phainomena)? Perhaps because a friend, though he chooses what is good, can involuntarily do what is bad, through no fault of his own. See Book III, 1-2.

that to help a friend he must be unjust, or steal, or murder? Perhaps medicine is needed but there is no ethical way of obtaining it. And so he decides to aid his friend by acting immorally and hurting someone he does not love. He is not indifferent to the person he harms, but his devotion to his friend is greater. Can Aristotle give any reason for believing that on balance this unethical action will not contribute to the agent's happiness? I believe not. Sometimes we can foresee that what is most likely to contribute to our happiness is one of those actions Aristotle says are never to be done (1107a8-27). A happiness-oriented ethical theory does not always support the strict prohibitions that Aristotle himself accepts.

At any rate, we can conclude that although Aristotle oversimplifies when he says that only the good love others for their character (1157a16-19), this error does him little damage. A misguided altruist and a moderately selfish person can love others for themselves, but Aristotle's central claim, that they are less happy than the virtuous, remains intact.[19] If there is a serious weakness in his theory, it lies in the possibility that loving some might require unjustifiably hurting others.

## VI

This completes my explanation of how Aristotle's theory of love supports his thesis that the virtues contribute to happiness. I have not claimed that all virtuous actions

[19]Two other intermediate cases, of minor importance, should be mentioned. First, there are those who behave properly only out of fear of punishment or reproach, or who are only trying to shine in the eyes of others (1116a15-1116b3). Aristotle is right in thinking that such an individual does not love others for their character, since he benefits them not for their sake but only to avoid pain and criticism, or to receive honor. Second, the strong-willed (who have to overpower their appetites) and the weak-willed (who act contrary to rational choice) are neither good nor evil. Here too we have counterexamples to Aristotle's thesis that only the good love others for their character. I see no reason why a strong- or weak-willed person cannot love others for themselves. But again, Aristotle's oversight does him no real harm, since every strong- and weak-willed person would gladly change places with the virtuous, whose appetites "harmonize" with their rational choice (1102b26-28).

benefit others,[20] or that they are needed only because benevolence is essential to a good life. Many virtuous acts benefit the agent and no one else. In general, the virtues promote a person's happiness because they either foster his own welfare, or the welfare of others, or both. I have emphasized the altruistic component of virtue and happiness because this is the part of Aristotle's theory that is overlooked.

I will now briefly round out my interpretation by showing how it clarifies what Aristotle says about the aim of ethical theory, and about the morality of an intellectual life.

Aristotle insists that the purpose of studying ethics is not to acquire knowledge for its own sake, but to act in the light of that knowledge (1095a5-6, 1179a33-1179b2). He promises his students that his lectures will greatly benefit them (1095a10-11), for they will be more able to hit their target once they know what they are aiming at (1094a22-24). Yet it is not clear why he thinks his audience will profit so much from studying ethical theory. Aristotle's lectures do not try to persuade his listeners to abandon their evil ways, since he assumes that they already are virtuous (1095b4-6). Nor does his theory help its audience make difficult decisions about what to do in particular situations, as Aristotle himself points out (1138b26-32). In what way, then, is he trying to benefit his listeners?

The answer is contained in Aristotle's doctrine that one's happiness is increased as one becomes more able to aid other people. For the Nicomachean Ethics is designed as an introductory course in the art of politics, and the proper aim of politics is to benefit the citizens. The treatise opens and closes with declarations of its political nature, and the topics it treats are those which Aristotle

[20]Aristotle may or may not believe that some virtuous actions benefit no one -- neither the agent nor others. He says that a lie is in itself bad and blameworthy (1127a28-29), and that one should tell the truth even when "it makes no difference" (1127b1-3). But notice that he seems to praise truthfulness when nothing is at stake because a truthful person is therefore even more likely to tell the truth when it does make a difference (1127b3-6). Another virtue that might require performing acts which benefit no one is rectificatory justice (V, 2-7). But perhaps Aristotle believes that unjust acts should be punished even when this benefits no one, because it is in the community's long-term interest to have judges who consider cases simply on their merits.

believes a good ruler must study. If, for example, someone wants to produce virtue and therefore happiness in the citizens, then he must know in some detail what virtue is and how it develops. If one wants to make laws and uphold them, then one should study justice and the conditions under which a person is responsible for his actions. There is, of course, nothing new about the observation that Aristotle's ethics is designed for students interested in a political career. My point is that in the light of Aristotle's theory of friendship we can see why he thinks his course will improve the lives of his listeners: their own happiness is increased as they acquire the ability to benefit others on a large scale.[21]

We saw earlier that Aristotle thinks one can love only a small number of people, and therefore a ruler cannot strictly speaking love the entire citizenry.[22] It is important, however, not to be misled into believing that according to Aristotle a good person will find greater happiness in aiding his few friends than in benefiting a whole state. From the fact that of a thousand people there are five I have an especially strong desire to help, it does not follow that my interest in them outweighs my concern for all the rest. Aristotle, at any rate, rejects this inference, for he believes that it is better for someone to rule an entire state well than to remain a private citizen. One should be content, he says, to bring happiness to just one person, but it is finer and more godlike to bring it to a people and a polis (1094b7-10). And therefore, when Aristotle discusses the question of what kind of life to lead, he narrows down the serious possibilities to two: the political life and the contemplative life (I, 5; X, 7-8). He assumes without

[21]I believe that Aristotle thought his students would benefit from studying ethics in another way: they come to an explicit realization of the many reasons for being virtuous and so their practical wisdom grows. (See 1140a25-28 for the claim that practical wisdom tells us what contributes to the good life.) Aristotle may have this advantage of ethical theory in mind when he says that one studies ethics to become good (1103b27-29, 1179b2-4): one becomes good by increasing one's practical wisdom. Nonetheless, Aristotle must have believed that studying ethics is benefitial primarily because it prepares one for a political life.

[22]He does talk of the love of the rulers for the governed (VIII, 11), but here I think he is only extending the term beyond its strict use, just as he extends it when he talks of those who love mankind (1155a20-22).

question that if one is not suited to the intellectual life, then the next best alternative is the godlike task of making people happy. His theory of love explains why he makes this assumption: if benefiting others makes one happy, then the more one can help the happier one will be.

Aristotle's reverence for contemplation, his belief that it is the best single human activity, is thought by some to commit him to an immoral, selfish position. And he would indeed be in trouble if he thought that virtuous behavior is worthwhile only because it exercises one's reason. Since contemplation is an even better use of reason, presumably Aristotle would be committed to saying that we should above all maximize our opportunities to lead an intellectual life.[23] Rather than risk one's life for friends and country, we should run away and think. Of course, Aristotle wants to reject this policy. He says in a well-known passage that a virtuous person dies for his friends and country, if necessary (1169a18-20). "He would prefer a short period of intense pleasure to a long one of mild enjoyment, a twelvemonth of noble life to many years of humdrum existence, and one great and noble action to many trivial ones" (1169a22-25, Ross). But, some believe that Aristotle cannot really justify his admiration for the noble sacrifice, since acts of cowardice can bring a lifetime of contemplation.

I believe this criticism is unfair. It is true that Aristotle values ethical behavior because it involves the use of reason, but as we have seen, this is not the only merit he sees in it. In exercising the virtues, we are satisfying a need that contemplation cannot fulfill, the need to benefit others for their sake, and those who lack this desire or who cannot satisfy it are unhappy. Aristotle never says that one cannot have a good life unless one engages in theoretical activity. That would commit him to the view that the "godlike" political life is an unhappy one. Virtue is what we need to be happy, though contemplation is better. It should be clear, then, why Aristotle says that a good man risks his life, if necessary. Even though he may die and (if he is a philosopher) lose years of contemplation, he is otherwise sure to lose something essential to his happiness. Were he to act in a cowardly way to secure a lifetime of contemplation, he would know something about

[23]See A.W.H. Adkins, From the Many to the One (London, 1970), p. 204: and W.F.R. Hardie, Aristotle's Ethical Theory (Oxford, 1968), pp. 328-331. Hardie says, "Aristotle tends to speak as if all that was needed was to set up a paramount end and then work out plans for attaining it" (p. 23). The paramount end, of course, is contemplation.

himself that would affect the quality of his remaining life. He would know that he is willing to go only so far in the aid of a friend or his country, however worthy they are, and his benevolent acts would then be tinged with considerations of self. He would be helping others because what is asked of him is not so very much. His concern for them would henceforth be guarded and limited rather than earnest and open. Once Aristotle's ethics is read in the light of his theory of love, we can see why he believes that although there is something better than virtuous activity, nothing can take its place.

Not all the virtues are needed for a good life. For example, though generosity is needed, magnificence is not, since it is a quality available only to the wealthy, and happiness does not require riches (1179a1-17). Pride too is not essential, since it belongs only to the extraordinarily virtuous, and for happiness simple virtue suffices. We need only the ordinary virtues to have a good life, and once we have them, we can best increase our happiness by leading an intellectual life. But if we find contemplation too difficult or unsuitable, then Aristotle recommends politics.

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