

PART II

Happiness

PROOF

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CHAPTER 2

Living for the sake of an ultimate end

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It is for the sake of happiness that we all do everything else we do.¹
(*E.N.* 1.12, 1102a2–3)

Aristotle claims that we do everything for the sake of happiness (*eudaimonia*). It is now well recognized that he does not mean by this that our actions are aimed at making us feel happy, satisfied, or otherwise pleased. “Happiness” (*eudaimonia*), for Aristotle, is a placeholder for “the ultimate end in life” – that which we desire for its own sake and for whose sake we pursue all our other objectives (*E.N.* 1.2, 1094a18–19; cf. 1.7, 1097a30–b6). The normative question of importance to Aristotle, as well as for the rest of Greek ethics, is not *whether* we should pursue happiness,² but rather *what* happiness consists in. Is it for the sake of pleasure, honor, virtue, contemplation, or something else that we should direct all our actions in life?

The answer to this normative question was disputed among the major philosophical schools in antiquity, and the precise nature of Aristotle’s own answer has been a matter of considerable controversy among his modern interpreters. Could he really be affirming, as he patently appears to in *E.N.* x.7–8, that the ultimate goal of life is to engage in theoretical contemplation (*theoria*)? Would not this “intellectualist” conception of the ultimate good imply that ethical activity (the exercise of the virtues of character) is for the sake of contemplation? And how could this be so? Aristotle’s extensive discussion of ethical activity shows no evidence that he takes it to be productive of contemplation, nor does it seem credible that he thinks our commitment to it should be contingent on its ability to yield this result.

¹ Translations here and elsewhere in this chapter are by Rowe in Aristotle (2002), occasionally slightly altered for consistency with my own terminology.

² The ancient Cyrenaics were an exception: see Annas (1993) p. 38n.41.

Such objections rest on a cluster of assumptions about what is involved in pursuing something as an ultimate end that have become the focus of scholarly debate in recent decades. Chief among them is the assumption that any action performed for the sake of an end must be a means to that end. J. L. Ackrill famously argued that this need not be the case, thereby inspiring a whole generation of interpretations (generally classified as “inclusivist”) according to which intrinsically desirable things are also “for the sake of happiness” – in the sense that they are constituents of happiness rather than means to it. Ethical activity and *theoria* are both constituents of happiness, he argued, without the former being pursued for the sake of the latter.³ The most sustained and influential rejoinder to Ackrill was from Richard Kraut, who insisted that for one thing to be “for the sake of” another, it must causally promote it. Ethical activity, on Kraut’s reading of Aristotle, is indeed for the sake of contemplation. (He avoids the unpalatable conclusion that we are enjoined to act unethically when this would improve our prospects for *theoria* by arguing that Aristotle does not think we are licensed to maximize our happiness.)⁴ In the most recent sustained defense of the intellectualist interpretation, Gabriel Richardson Lear has joined Kraut in criticizing Ackrill, but argues that the “for-the-sake-of” relation is wider than Kraut allows. Ethical activity, she proposes, is “for the sake” of *theoria* not in the sense that it causally promotes it, but rather in the sense that it is an approximation of it.⁵ My project here is to defend what I take to be Ackrill’s core insight about the “for-the-sake-of” relation against the objections articulated by Kraut and Richardson Lear, but I do so in the service of the intellectualist interpretation of Aristotle that he rejects. Ackrill’s core insight about the “for-the-sake-of” relation, I shall argue, comes apart from his inclusivism.⁶

I THE “FOR-THE-SAKE-OF” RELATION IN *E.N.* I

Aristotle’s interest in goal-directed behavior is evident from the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In its famous opening sentence, he claims that “every sort of expert knowledge, and every inquiry, and similarly every action and undertaking seems to seek some good” (*E.N.* I.1, 1094a1–2).

³ Ackrill (1980). ⁴ Kraut (1989). ⁵ Richardson Lear (2004).

⁶ The outline of the view for which I will here be arguing is presented without sustained defense in Meyer (2008), pp. 56–62. For helpful discussion of drafts of the present essay I am grateful to the Greater Philadelphia Ancient Philosophy Colloquium, to audiences at Kutztown University and the University of Richmond, and especially to Anna Cremaldi, Miriam McCormick, Jon Miller, Nancy Schaubert, Krisanna Scheiter, and John Simmons.

Moreover, he continues, individual instances of goal-directedness themselves tend to exist in nested hierarchies. The bridle maker produces bridles for the use of the cavalry and the blacksmith shoes for their horses; thus bridle making and horseshoe making are “for the sake of” (*charin*) fighting on horseback. The cavalry, in its turn, like the other branches of the military, is deployed by the general; hence its activity is for the sake of the general’s goal, victory in war (*E.N.* 1.1, 1094a9–16). Thus the various ends of the disciplines practiced by the bridle maker, the blacksmith, the cavalry rider, the hoplite, and the infantryman are all unified under the single goal of the general. The general’s goal is in turn subordinate to that of the statesman, who determines when and whether the city will pursue its objectives by military means. It is for the good of the citizens that the statesman directs the general’s craft, along with all the other disciplines practiced in the city. This latter goal, the human good, is the ultimate aim of all the activities in the well-regulated city (*E.N.* 1.2, 1094a27–b7). Thus the statesman’s regulation of the subordinate practices in a well-ordered city replicates, on the political scale, the unifying focus that the pursuit of happiness provides in the life of an individual person. We would therefore do well to keep the political paradigm in mind when endeavoring to understand what is involved in doing everything for the sake of an ultimate goal.

One important point that becomes clear from this perspective is that a pursuit’s being for the sake of an end is not simply a matter of its practitioner’s desiring that goal. If this were so, then bridle making would be for the sake of cavalry riding, and ultimately for the sake of winning wars, just in case individual bridle makers chose to undertake their craft out of a desire to support the cavalry and contribute to the war effort. But surely bridle making is for the sake of cavalry riding, in the way to which **here** **Aristotelian** draws our attention, even if bridle makers choose their occupation without regard to the interests of the cavalry, the generals, or the city at large. Just as the soldiering can be “for the sake of” military strategy even if the army is populated by unenthusiastic conscripts (even pacifists), bridle making is no less for the sake of the cavalry when the trade is plied by slave labor secretly rooting for the cavalry’s defeat. The soldier and the bridle maker may perform their functions better and be more likely to advance the cause of the general if they are motivated by a desire for that goal, but such a motivation cannot be what makes it the case that bridle making is for cavalry riding and soldiering for winning battles.⁷

⁷ Richardson Lear (2004) has also pointed this out (pp. 13–14, 32–37).

What is it then about the relation between bridle making and cavalry riding that makes it the case that the former is for the sake of the latter, even if the practitioner of the former does not desire the latter? One might note, to begin with, that the product of the bridle maker is used by the cavalry rider, and thus causally contributes to the latter's activity. But causal contribution of this sort is clearly not enough,⁸ for making bridles also contributes to the death of hide animals, but it is not for the sake of killing animals any more than the blacksmith's fire is for the sake of the unhealthy air that it inevitably produces. Such antecedent or "efficient" causality is insufficient to ground a "for-the-sake-of" relation because the latter is an instance of teleological or "final" causality – in which a goal exerts causal influence on the processes directed toward it. When A is for the sake of B, A is in some sense *because of* B. So it must be in virtue of an *effect* that cavalry riding has on bridle making, or that horseshoe making has on the blacksmith's fire, that the latter are for the sake of the former. Here we might note that the blacksmith's fire is hot enough to soften iron *because* horseshoe making involves beating molten iron (whereas it does *not* produce soot *because* this makes the air unhealthy).

The sort of influence that the higher pursuit has on the lower pursuit that is practiced for its sake comes in two varieties.⁹ In the first, which I shall call normative governance, the higher practice supplies the norms that are internal to the lower one – as when the craft that uses a product supplies the norms that govern its production. For example, the nature of horseback riding determines the norms that govern bridle making, since a bridle is a device used by a rider to control a horse. Indeed, depending on the sort of riding, the norms for the bridle will be different – the show jumper and the cavalry rider will need different types of bridle. The nature of cavalry riding (which distinguishes it from show jumping, dressage, or herding) is itself informed by the use to which it is put by the general. So just as the bridle maker's goal is determined by the nature of the riding performed by the cavalry, the nature of that riding is determined by the military use to which it will be put. In a famous set of examples from Plato's *Statesman*, weaving (the enterprise of intertwining warp and woof) governs the subordinate practices of woof- and warp-spinning. It determines that the latter will produce strong threads suitable for providing strength and structure along the length of the fabric, while the

⁸ And I shall argue below that it may not even be necessary.

⁹ A point well developed by Richardson Lear (2004), pp. 17–19. Kraut, as far as I can tell, does not distinguish these two types of normative control.

former will produce softer threads suitable for intertwining with the latter to yield a supple fabric (*Stsm.* 282d–283b).

The second way in which a higher pursuit may govern a practice that is for its sake is to regulate when, whether, and to what extent the lower practice will be engaged in. For example the general decides when and where the cavalry will ride in battle. This kind of influence, which I shall call “regulation,” may be exercised regardless of whether the lower craft’s goal is a product (bridles) or an activity (fighting on horseback). It is displayed in tactical decisions (e.g., when and where to send in the cavalry) as well as strategic ones (how large a cavalry is to be trained, how many bridles to order, how much of a state’s resources to commit to a standing military) and in questions of policy (what are the moral limits on the conduct of warfare?). In contrast with the case of normative governance, the norms that regulate the subordinate practice are external to that practice. While it is not obvious that every superordinate craft in the political paradigm supplies the norms internal to the enterprises it controls (a point to which I will return), external regulation of the lower enterprise by the higher does seem to be essential to the subordinating relationship. Indeed, at least in some cases, the exercise of such regulation pretty much amounts to the exercise of the higher order craft: it is the general’s function *par excellence* to decide when to send in the cavalry, and the statesman’s whether to go to war.

Examining the relation between such regulatory activity and the activities of the regulated enterprises in certain paradigm cases will help to illuminate an important insight of Ackrill’s. This is that one activity may be for the sake of another activity of which it forms a part. Consider, for example, the relation between the battle directed by the general and the activities of the cavalry and infantry on the battlefield. The battle is not just the cavalry, the infantry, and the other participants each performing their respective functions – even though in a sense their activities exhaust the actions constituting the battle. We can see that this is so by considering why the battle is won or lost. It is not just because the cavalry fight on horseback and the infantry fight on the ground, but because the cavalry of a particular size and formation attacks when it does and where it does (all variables within the scope of the general’s not the cavalryman’s expertise), and similarly for the infantry. Thus the activity of the general is displayed in precisely these features of the cavalry’s and infantry’s activities. In this sense, the activities that constitute the battle (those of the cavalry and infantry) are *part of* the general’s activity. At the same time, they are for the sake of it, for Aristotle explicitly tells us that the goal of

the subordinate activity is “for the sake of” the superordinate activity’s goal (*E.N.* 1.1, 1094a14–16). Thus we have here an example of a set of activities (the cavalry’s and the infantry’s) that are for the sake of another activity (the general’s) of which they are a constituent part.

Ackrill is therefore right to insist, on Aristotle’s behalf, that an activity may be composed of other activities that are performed for its sake. We can (and should) endorse this insight, even if we reserve judgment on the “inclusivist” interpretation that Ackrill sought to erect upon it. In a nutshell, that inclusivism consists of Ackrill’s further claim that Aristotle conceives of the ultimate goal in life as a composite end of which *theoria* and ethical actions are its constituents – neither pursued for the sake of the other and both pursued for the sake of happiness. Interpreters inspired by Ackrill expanded the list of the ultimate good’s constituents to include all things (not just activities)¹⁰ desirable for their own sakes – hence the label “inclusivism.” The common motivation for this class of interpretations was to avoid attributing to Aristotle a “monolithic” conception of our ultimate end: specifically, that everything we do in life is (or should be) for the sake of contemplation.

Partisans of the monolithic (or “intellectualist”) interpretation of Aristotle have rightly objected that an aggregate or compound of ends does not thereby constitute a further end for whose sake the original ends are pursued; a mere aggregate of ends does not have the focus and unity to be “endlike” in its own right, to exercise the normative or regulative control characteristic of genuine and paradigmatic examples of ends.¹¹ If two of my ends in life are growing a garden and raising a family, it does not follow that it is for the compound end of growing-a-garden-and-raising-a-family that I engage in the former two pursuits (even if it is true that the compound of the two ends is better than either individually).¹² A genuine end, we have seen, must structure or regulate the pursuit of subordinate goals.

¹⁰ Kraut rightly objects, against this version of inclusivism, that in the function argument Aristotle unambiguously and exclusively identifies the human good with excellent activity (no other “goods” are included in it; see Kraut [1989], p. 199). Ackrill, however, is not vulnerable to this objection, since the only constituents of the final good that he identifies are activities: *theoria* and ethical action. It is perhaps Ackrill’s examples (e.g., tomatoes and bacon being constituents of the best breakfast) that have led some to include other goods (e.g., health and honor) on the list of happiness’s constituents.

¹¹ Kraut (1989), pp. 8–9, 212; cf. Richardson Lear (2004), p. 42.

¹² As Ackrill (1980) points out of his version of the example: a breakfast of bacon and tomatoes is better than one of either separately (p. 21). Here we may see that Aristotle’s claim that the higher end is more choiceworthy than the subordinate ends (1094a14–15) is not true in the contrapositive.

This point must be conceded. Ackrill in fact acknowledges it as a legitimate constraint on any theory that ethical activity and *theoria* constitute the compound ultimate end of life; in his view Aristotle regrettably but understandably fails to identify the requisite principles structuring the pursuit of the compound end of ethical-activity-and-*theoria*.¹³ It is important to note, however, that Ackrill's central insight, articulated above, is not vulnerable to this objection. There are indeed (and Aristotle recognizes that there are) cases where the activities that constitute an end are regulated by its pursuit. The activity of the cavalry and of the infantry, which comprise the battle (or one side of it), are structured and regulated by the general's plan, which is realized in the battle itself. So too are the activities in Ackrill's own examples, golfing and having a good vacation. Whether, when, and how often to golf on one's vacation are, in the practice of the competent vacationer, regulated by her standards for vacationing well. The golfing vacationer, in making such decisions, is golfing as part of vacationing *and* in order to vacation well.¹⁴

Thus we may retain Ackrill's original insight about the "for-the-sake-of" relation. My aim in the rest of this essay is to show how that insight illuminates the kind of unity involved in a life structured around an ultimate goal while still allowing that *theoria* may be the ultimate goal of the best human life. I shall proceed in two stages. First I will consider the life structured by the demands of the ethical virtues – the life that Aristotle labels second best in *E.N.* x.8 (1178a9). Here Ackrill's insight has its primary application (and grounds what is most plausible in the inclusivist position). I shall then consider the relation between ethical activity and *theoria* in the life that Aristotle identifies as best. On the basis of lessons learned from reflecting on the ways in which one pursuit may be for the sake of another in the second-best life, I will explain how we can make sense of the proposal that, in the best life, ethical activity is itself "for the sake of" contemplation without thereby being committed to the implausible thesis that ethical activity is either a constituent of or a means to contemplation. The structure of a life organized around the pursuit of *theoria* is consistent with the pursuit of a wide range of activities valued for their own sakes, including an uncompromising commitment to ethical activity.

¹³ Ackrill (1980), pp. 31–33.

¹⁴ It is odd that Ackrill fails to use the examples that Aristotle himself provided in *E.N.* 1.1 – the very text on which he bases his interpretation.

II LIVING *TOU KALOU HENKA*

The virtues of character, as Aristotle conceives them, regulate feelings and actions across the whole of a person's private, social, and political life. For example, temperance concerns our pursuit of bodily pleasures and health, and courage our concern for personal safety and our willingness to risk it in defense of our fellow citizens. Liberality and magnificence concern the pursuit, expenditure, and display of wealth in service of family, friends, and the common good. Magnanimity concerns the pursuit of honor, justice our financial transactions with others, and a whole host of interpersonal virtues concern the various ways we cooperate with, support, amuse, or are amused by others in social situations. Each virtue concerns the pursuit of an objective valued for its own sake (pleasure, life, wealth, or honor, for example), and regulates that pursuit in the light of a higher norm. For example, not all opportunities for gain are to be taken, nor is every opportunity for pleasure and honor. In the words of the doctrine of the mean, one must pursue these objectives neither too much nor too little, at the right time, to the right degree, in the right circumstances, and so on (*E.N.* II.6, 1106b18–23).

While Aristotle notoriously declines to specify criteria by which to determine when it is appropriate to pursue these objectives and when it is not, he does explicitly identify the norm in the light of which the virtuous person makes these discriminations. This is “the admirable” or “the fine” (*kalon*), whose opposite is the “shameful” or “ugly” (*aischron*) (*E.N.* III.7, 1115b13). Aristotle offers us no further analysis of this pair of notions, but it is clear that the basic competence of the ethically virtuous person is to opt for options that are *kalon* and eschew those that are *aischron* (*E.N.* IV.2, 1122b6–7). For example, the courageous person withstands life-threatening dangers only when it is *kalon* to do so or *aischron* not to (*E.N.* III.7, 1115a12–31, b23–24, 1116a10–15). The temperate person differs from the intemperate in that he declines to pursue opportunities for shameful bodily gratification (*E.N.* III.11, 1119a18). The “liberal” person will not seek or accept income from sources that are shameful (*E.N.* IV.1, 1121b1–2). The friendly person shares the pleasures of others as long as they are fine (*E.N.* IV.6, 1126b32). The appropriately witty person, unlike someone who will stop at nothing to get a laugh, has a standard of decency and avoids shameful jokes (or jokes that would be shameful to tell in the circumstances, 1128a4–7, 33–b1). The *kalon* thus functions as the goal (*telos*) of the virtuous person, whose characteristic motivation is to act “for the sake of the admirable” (*tou kalou heneka* – *E.N.* III.7, 1115b12–13; *E.E.* III.12, 1230a28–29).

We may note that in the life of ethical virtue, the relation between the virtuous person's pursuit of the *kalon* and his pursuit of such subordinate objectives as pleasure, honor, and wealth replicates the way in which the general's conduct of the battle structures the activities of the cavalry and the infantry while at the same time being constituted by them. The ethical life, as Aristotle conceives of it, involves the pursuit of a wide range of objectives – from the large and important (bodily pleasure, life and health, family security, personal honor, being agreeable to others) to the relatively less significant (making people laugh or entertaining them richly). In also pursuing them “for the sake of the *kalon*,” the ethical person is regulating his pursuit of them in the light of his unwavering commitment to doing what is *kalon* and avoiding what is *aischron*. His pursuit of the *kalon* as an end therefore structures and regulates his pursuit of these subordinate objectives, while at the same time being constituted by those pursuits. That is, the ethical life (one version of the happy life as Aristotle conceives it), consists of a wide range of different pursuits that are regulated by the requirements of ethical virtue. Thus Ackrill is right (about this version of the happy life at least) that activities for the sake of happiness may constitute the happy life.

This picture is what I take Irwin to have in mind when he responds to Kraut that happiness consists not of a mere aggregate of goods, but of a variety of goods structured by the requirement of virtue, and likewise Broadie, when she characterizes Aristotelian happiness as putting constraints on the pursuit of lower-order goods.¹⁵ Richardson Lear criticizes such conceptions of the goal of life on the ground that they fall short of satisfying Aristotle's conception of an ultimate end (that for the sake of which). Against Broadie's proposal that an ultimate goal may constrain but not determine the nature of subordinate pursuits, Richardson Lear charges that a constraint on the pursuit of an activity does not count as that activity's goal (2004, p. 38). However, we have just seen a clear counterexample to this principle in our discussion of the ethical person: Aristotle's own account of the ethical person's motivation makes it explicit that the *kalon* is both a constraint on her pursuits and her goal in performing them. Consider the activity Richardson Lear invokes as an example: giving a dinner party. How lavishly and how often one entertains, as well as how many guests one hosts, are all within the scope of the Aristotelian virtue of magnificence (*megaloprepeia* – *E.N.* IV.2). The virtuous host avoids vulgar displays of wealth and the opposing extreme of

¹⁵ Irwin (1991), p. 389; Broadie (1991), pp. 31–32; both cited by Richardson Lear (2004), pp. 38, 42.

shabbiness (*mikroprepeia*). In so regulating the entertainments he offers, he is acting *tou kalou heneka* (1122b6–7). Thus the *kalon*, the norm that regulates his dinner party giving, is also his goal in giving any particular dinner party.

While it might seem odd to say in English that the party-giving of the appropriately restrained host is “for the sake of” the *kalon*, it may simply be that “for the sake of” does not perfectly precisely translate the expressions Aristotle uses to express this teleological relation: “*heneka* + genitive” or “*charin* + genitive.” It is a perfectly natural and well-attested use of these expressions in Classical Greek to indicate a constraining limit. In Plato’s *Republic*, the restrictions on physical intimacy allowed to lovers are delimited using *charin* + genitive. The lover may be with, kiss, and touch his beloved “for the sake of what is fine” (*tôn kalôn charin* – *Rep.* III, 403b6); that is, he will not engage in any intimacies that are shameful. Similarly, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates uses the expression “the pleasant is to be done for the sake of the good” (*heneka tou agathou*) to urge that our pursuit of pleasure must be constrained by our commitment to the good (*Gorg.* 506c9). Aristotle also uses “*charin* + genitive” in this limiting way in *E.N.* 1.13, when he explains that the statesman must study the human soul, but only as far as (*toutôn charin* – 1102a24) his goal of cultivating excellence in the citizens requires – that is, not in the depth that Aristotle himself pursues the inquiry in his work *De Anima*.¹⁶

The *kalon*, for Aristotle’s virtuous person, is a genuine goal of the activities whose pursuit it regulates. It is not merely a good that he prefers to, or ranks more highly than, his other objectives – such that he will always choose the *kalon* in circumstances in which it conflicts with any of the latter. Rather, it is a condition of his finding those alternatives desirable *tout court*. Faced with a conflict, in particular circumstances, between the pursuit of pleasure and adherence to the standards of the *kalon*, the virtuous person does not simply *prefer* the admirable option to the shameful one (in the sense that he desires the former more highly than he values the latter); he does not desire the disgraceful pleasure at all.¹⁷ This distinguishes the truly virtuous from the merely continent person; thus the former is pleased at his action and the latter is pained (*E.N.* 11.3, 1104b3–8).

¹⁶ I suspect that the puzzling occurrence of “*heneka tinos*” in the catalogue of particular ignorance at *E.N.* III.1, 1111a5 is another instance of this use: while fully cognizant that one should not hit one’s sparring partner hard enough to cause injury, one may be ignorant of how hard (*tinis heneka*) one is in fact hitting him.

¹⁷ A point stressed by John McDowell in (1980), §13 and (1978), pp. 13–29.

Richardson Lear is right to point out that, for Aristotle, a genuine *end* must be a source of value to subordinate ends pursued for its sake (2004, p. 39). But she is wrong to claim that a constraint cannot perform this function. For Plato's Socrates in the *Republic*, wealth, reputation, and the like are not worth having unless they are acquired and used justly. Similarly, Aristotle claims that it is only for the good person that the objectives usually pursued as good are in fact good (*E.N.* III.4, 1113a25–b2). The virtuous person, as Aristotle conceives him, adopts just such a perspective: in a life without the prospect of living up to the standards of the *kalon*, none of his other objects of pursuit would be attractive to him. As Broadie characterizes such a motivation: the agent “may recognize some [other things] as good because of what they themselves are, and not because of something else [sc. the central good] which they make possible. But [he] may also recognise that without the central one he would not *want* any of the others ... In that sense the central good gives the others their point.”¹⁸

The fundamental error that Richardson Lear finds in Broadie's and Irwin's proposals is that the final good, as they conceive it, fails to determine the norms internal to the subordinate pursuits. It merely limits their pursuit, but does not determine *that they should be pursued* in the first place (38–39, 42–43). Similarly, on the version of these proposals that I am advocating, our commitment to the *kalon* determines that we should limit our pursuit of pleasure (or honor, or dinner parties) in the light of the *kalon*, but it does not tell us that we should pursue these objectives in the first place. Of the two ways in which one practice may regulate another – normative governance and external regulation – Richardson Lear insists that both are necessary for a genuine for-the-sake-of relation. But is this a legitimate requirement?

One might be persuaded that it is by focusing on the relation between the bridle maker, the cavalry rider, and the general. In each of these cases the higher pursuit, in addition to using the product or regulating the activity of the lower pursuits, also supplies the norms to those pursuits. But is this also true of the statesman's relation to all the pursuits he regulates in the city? Presumably it is true of some of them; for example, the statesman determines that the state must have a military capacity, not just when and whether it is to be exercised. But is this so of every pursuit that he will allow in the city? Are the citizens to be permitted to engage only in those activities that the statesman has determined are necessary for

¹⁸ Broadie (1991), p. 27, is not here specifically referring to the role the *kalon* plays in the virtuous person's life, but her discussion perfectly captures the structure of the virtuous person's motivation, as Aristotle describes it.

the project of living virtuous lives? To be sure, any activities that militate against the success of this project are to be disallowed. But are there not many others that are neutral with respect to that goal (provided that their practice is subject to the doctrine of the mean)? Think for example of all the leisure activities that might be pursued.¹⁹ (Even as staunch an advocate of state central planning as Plato does not suppose that the statesman or legislators will write the scripts for the songs and plays and games that are to be performed in the city!)

A full investigation of Aristotle's position on this specific question would require a study of the *Politics* and is thus beyond the scope of this paper. But we already have at hand, in Aristotle's detailed account of the ethical life, a compelling counterexample to Richardson Lear's assumption that a goal must not merely regulate, but also dictate, the activities performed for its sake. It is clear, upon reflection, that the ethical person's commitment to adhere to the standards of the *kalon* is not sufficient to determine or explain all of his actions, or even all of his subordinate goals. To be sure, there are some situations in which his commitment to the *kalon* makes it clear what he must do (or not do). This is the case, for example, when standing his ground in battle and risking his life is called for and fleeing his post would be shameful; or when being agreeable to a tyrant, laughing at a particular joke, or failing to take offence would be shameful. However, many more situations, perhaps even most of the situations in which an ethical person acts, are ones in which nothing admirable or shameful is at stake. Which socks shall I wear this morning? Shall I go to the movies tonight or stay home and read a book? Shall I become a doctor or a dentist? Should I marry George? Shall I have tea or coffee with my breakfast? Should I accept the job in Toronto or in New York?

While it is easy to dream up circumstances in which something ethically significant would be at stake in these choices, this is not invariably the case in these as well as myriad other choices that we make in the course of our lives. What an ethical person chooses in such situations, even though it is regulated by the norms of the *kalon*, is not required by them; nor is it even a means to that ultimate end. The pursuit of the *kalon* as an ultimate goal leaves open a very wide range of options in life, large-scale and small, which are indifferent with respect to their bearing on the *kalon*. We may call this the "space of permissions" left open by that ultimate commitment. A life devoted to the pursuit of the *kalon* may

¹⁹ Suppose, to borrow Ackrill's example, that golfing is to be allowed to the citizens. Does this mean that the rules of golf should issue from the statesman's political expertise in the way that the specifications for bridles issue from the equestrian craft?

therefore involve the pursuit of a wide variety of other goals that are valued and pursued for their own sakes, as long as a person's pursuit of them is regulated or limited by her commitment to the *kalon*. (Indeed, it must contain other such goals, or else she will be unable to make most of the choices she faces in life.)

This "space of permissions" opens up precisely because, in the ethical life, commitment to the *kalon* as an ultimate goal supplies a norm that is *external* to the pursuits it regulates, without also determining the norms internal to the regulated pursuits. Thus, the one life whose teleological structure Aristotle outlines in considerable detail in the *E.N.* – the life of ethical virtue – shows that our ultimate goal in life need not govern our subordinate pursuits in life as tightly as the general's goal regulate the activities of the cavalry. External regulation may ground a for-the-sake-of relation even in the absence of internal normative governance. This observation will be important for understanding how *theoria* can function as an ultimate end.

III CONTEMPLATION AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF LIFE

Of course Aristotle's view of the goal of life is more complicated than we have been considering so far. While he devotes a major part of the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* to a detailed articulation of the ethical virtues, he makes it clear in *E.N.* x.7–8 that it is not the practical activity of these virtues but theoretical activity (*theoria*) of the intellectual virtues that best satisfies the criteria for happiness. The activity of the ethical excellences is a kind of happiness, but it is second best to *theoria* (1178a9). Granted, Aristotle does not explicitly claim in these chapters that it is for the sake of *theoria* that one should do everything in life;²⁰ indeed, the conception of happiness as such a comprehensive *telos* is not mentioned in these chapters.²¹ Nonetheless, unless we are to assume that Aristotle has in Book x abandoned the conception of happiness clearly and forcefully articulated in Book I, it seems clear that these chapters in *E.N.* x are proposing *theoria* as the best answer to the question articulated in Book I, of what is the ultimate goal for whose sake we should do everything in life.

What would be involved in having one's life organized around this goal? *E.N.* x.7–8 makes it clear, for example, that *theoria* could not

²⁰ As Natali points out **in his** (2001), pp. 174–75.

²¹ Only the constraint that happiness not be desired for the sake of anything else is invoked in this chapter, as one consideration among many (x.7, 1177b1–4, 13–15; cf. 1.7, 1097a25–34).

function as our goal in life in the same way it does for the gods. They, as pure intellects, engage in *theoria* uninterruptedly and in perpetuity while we – being human, with bodily and social needs – and can engage in *theoria* at best episodically (*E.N.* x.7, 1177b26–31). The best human life will therefore consist of both theoretical and practical activity. But if *theoria* is to be the ultimate goal of such a life, then the practical activities within it (including the activities of the ethical virtues) must all be “for the sake of” *theoria*. How are we to understand this? This is a legitimate question to raise of Aristotle’s theory, even if it is not one that he himself addresses explicitly.

We might note for a start that, as in the case of the political paradigm presented at the opening of the *E.N.*, we are considering a case in which one set of pursuits (practical activities) is governed by a higher endeavor (the pursuit of *theoria*). As when the cavalry’s activity is governed by that of the general, or the general’s by that of the statesman in the well-ordered *polis*, the pursuit of practical activity in the properly directed life is to be governed by (“for the sake of”) the pursuit of *theoria*. Our analysis of the political model identified two ways in which one pursuit might be “for the sake of” another. In the first (normative governance), the controlling practice supplies the norms internal to the subordinate practice – as when cavalry riding determines the specifications for bridles or military strategy the standards for cavalry riding. In the second (external regulation), the controlling practice regulates when and whether the subordinate practice will be engaged in (as when the general determines when to send in the cavalry or how many bridles to order from the bridle maker, or the statesman determines what leisure activities and occupations will be allowed in the city). In which of these two ways might the ethical actions be subordinated to the pursuit of *theoria*?

One might reasonably doubt that Aristotle thinks the pursuit of *theoria* determines our practical activities in the first sense – that is, by providing the standards by which practical activities are to be judged excellent. There is certainly no evidence that Aristotle endorses anything even remotely like the thesis that actions are *kalon* to the extent that they promote or maximize one’s opportunities to engage in *theoria* – a highly revisionist criterion of conduct considerably at odds with the conservative bent of Aristotle’s discussions of the individual virtues of character. A very different and more promising proposal about how an ultimate commitment to *theoria* might supply the standards for practical reasoning has been articulated by Richardson Lear, who has argued that the standard of rationality exemplified by *theoria* is approximated in the

practical rationality constitutive of ethical excellence.²² Thus, a person's ultimate aim is to engage in *theoria*, but when enmeshed in the practical life and unable to theorize, one can approximate that kind of rational activity by using practical reasoning excellently. I think there is something deeply right about this proposal – although it is not my project here to defend it.

What I do want to insist on is that Aristotle clearly takes our commitment to the ultimate value of *theoria* to regulate our pursuit of practical activity *in the second sense*. Even though, being human, we are incapable of engaging in *theoria* uninterruptedly throughout our lives, he enjoins us to engage in this activity insofar as we are able (*E.N.* x.7, 1177b31–34). This is to say that our ultimate commitment to *theoria* should determine when and whether we will engage in practical activity. It is a common worry that this would mean that we are licensed to engage in *unethical* activity (disregard the standards of the *kalon*) when we have an opportunity to engage in *theoria*. For example, if I can finance an extended period of uninterrupted *theoria* by embezzling some money, am I not mandated to do it? Yes, it would be shameful and unjust, but if it goes undetected, is it not an excellent means to my highest and most important goal of engaging in reflection? The worry in its general form is that the goal of the ethical life, abiding by the *kalon*, if it is supposed to be regulated by our higher commitment to the pursuit of *theoria*, may be impeded or compromised by that higher pursuit.

Reflecting on the political paradigm allows us to defuse this familiar worry by distinguishing two very different questions that face the regulator of a practice. The first is whether to engage in the regulated pursuit at all. Thus the statesman deliberates about when and whether to go to war, and the general deliberates about when and whether to employ the cavalry. The second question is whether to interfere with the regulated pursuit once it is embarked upon. Regulation of the second sort involves the real danger of impediment and compromise to the regulated pursuit. Such would be the case if the generals, in addition to telling the bridle makers what kind of bridles to make and how many, overrode the bridle makers' expert judgment about what kind of leather to use and how to cut it, or if the statesman, in addition to determining the ethical limits on the use of force and deciding when and whether to declare war, meddled in the general's deployment of troops on the battlefield.

²² Richardson Lear (2004), pp. 3–4, 85–92, 196–207.

Regulation that concerns the first question, however, does not impede the regulated pursuit. Given Aristotle's emphasis on the ethical person's uncompromising commitment to the standards of virtuous choice – a point reiterated in *E.N.* x.8 (1178b5–6) – we must also suppose that this is how the ethical person's higher commitment to reflection will regulate his pursuit of the practical life. His higher commitment to reflection determines when and whether he will engage in practical activity as opposed to *theoria*, but it does not compromise his commitment, when engaged in the practical life, to abide by the standards of the *kalon*.²³ One is engaged in the practical life whenever one is exercising choice (*prohairesis*) – an activity of deliberative reasoning about contingent matters (*E.N.* III.3, 1113a9–12). While Aristotle categorically distinguishes such deliberative reasoning from the theoretical reasoning displayed in *theoria* (*E.N.* VI.2, 1139a6–14) he also recognizes that *theoria* is the subject of choice for human beings, for the decision to engage in *theoria* is itself an exercise of practical reason (*E.N.* VI.13, 1145a8–9). While engaging in *theoria* involves disengaging, for a time, from practical reasoning, the decision to disengage is itself within the scope of practical reasoning and thus subject to the norms of the virtues of character. The person who seizes an opportunity to *theorize* at the price of committing an injustice is like the statesman who interferes with the general's exercise of tactical judgment on the battlefield, or the general who meddles in the bridle maker's shop. In the well-regulated psyche envisaged by Aristotle, by contrast, practical reason is unimpeded and uncompromised as long as it is active, while at the same time it is limited by and subordinated to the commitment to *theoria* – in just the way the general's activities in the well-ordered city are regulated by the statesman.

One might object, at this point, that there is an important disanalogy with the political paradigm, in that the activity of the general *promotes* or *is a means* to the goal pursued by the statesman.²⁴ For example, in beating back the invading army, the general brings about the peace and security that the statesman seeks for the city. By contrast, the activities of practical

²³ That the primacy of *theoria* has practical implication for the choice between practical and theoretical activity rather than between ethical and unethical activity is nicely reflected in Cooper (1975), pp. 163–65, who stops short of saying that the imperative to engage in *theoria* will conflict with the demands of ethical action.

²⁴ Kraut insists that such "causal contribution" is necessary for a for-the-sake-of relation (Kraut [1989], pp. 200–02, 213, 215).

reason in the ethical life do not generally serve to promote the activity of contemplation; indeed Aristotle implies that, at least in the short term, the former impede and preclude the latter (*E.N.* x.8, 1178b4). So, if ethical actions are neither productive of nor a means to *theoria*, how could they be genuinely “for its sake”? This objection, however, presupposes something that was shown to be false in the case of the ethical life. There we saw that not every subordinate pursuit in a life organized around an ultimate goal is required by the pursuit of that goal. Abiding by the *kalon* as an ultimate objective, we saw, requires us to perform certain actions and refrain from others, but it also leaves open a “space of permissions” whose limits are determined by that ultimate goal, but where choice must be determined by invoking other norms. In such cases, the regulated activity is not productive of, or a means to, the governing pursuit. For example, an ethical person’s choices of a day’s apparel, a life mate, or an evening’s entertainments take place within a “space of permissions” left open by his ultimate commitment to the *kalon*, without “promoting” the *kalon* or being a means to it. So too we may understand our engagement in practical activity quite generally to take place in the space of permissions left open by our ultimate commitment to *theoria*, without promoting or being a means to *theoria*.

But isn’t it more correct, on the interpretation I am defending, to say that *theoria* takes place within the space of permissions in the ethical life, rather than the other way around? To the extent that one’s commitment to the norms of ethical excellence is uncompromising (so that one will not theorize at the expense of justice), the imperative to *theorize* at *E.N.* x.7, 1177b33–34 is constrained by and subordinated to the pursuit of ethical excellence. Doesn’t *theoria* turn out to be just one among a number of valuable ends whose pursuit is regulated by one’s allegiance to the standards of right action? (Note how close we are here to the inclusivist interpretation, on its most defensible articulation.)

In response it must be conceded that *theoria*, for Aristotle, does fall within the scope of practical wisdom. He explicitly recognizes it as such when he raises the puzzle at the end of *E.N.* vi about how to reconcile the superiority of intellectual to practical excellence with the equally evident fact that cultivating and exercising theoretical excellence is within the scope of practical reason (*E.N.* vi.12, 1143b33–35). His solution to that puzzle, however, makes it clear that intellectual excellence (and presumably also its activity, *theoria*) still functions as the goal of excellent practical reasoning. It is within the scope of practical reasoning, without

being subordinated to it, in just the same way that health is within the scope of the medical craft (which brings it about) but at the same time serves as that craft's end:

Neither is practical wisdom [*phronesis*] sovereign over intellectual wisdom [*sophia*] or over the better of the two rational parts, any more than medical expertise is sovereign over health; for it does not employ it, but rather sees to it that it comes into existence, so that it prescribes on its behalf, not to it. It is as if one said that political expertise rules over the gods, because it issues prescriptions about everything in the city. (*E.N.* VI.13, 1145a6–11)

Even though practical reason controls whether and when we will engage in *theoria*, practical reason is not thereby “using” or directing *theoria* as a subordinate practice (in the way, for example, the statesman employs the general). Rather than legislating *to theoria*, practical wisdom legislates *on its behalf*—in the same way that the statesman looks to the gods for guidance when making laws about religious observance. This is, as Aristotle remarks, not to rule the gods, but to be ruled by them.

Aristotle clearly recognizes that *theoria* is both within the scope of practical reason (as an activity one can choose to engage in) and also above it (as a higher goal whose pursuit limits the pursuit of practical reasoning). This twofold status of *theoria* is a function of the human condition, as Aristotle conceives it. As human beings we exercise choice; thus *theoria*, as an activity we choose to engage in, is subject to the norms that govern choice. But, as beings capable of engaging in *theoria*, we share in the divine nature (*E.N.* x.7, 1177a15–16) and are bound by the imperative to exercise it (1177b31–34). *Theoria* is thus our best and ultimate good, not simply one among the many goods we pursue in life.

One might wonder at this point how far we are from Ackrill's own view. While dissenting from Ackrill's denial, on Aristotle's behalf, that *theoria* is our single ultimate goal in life, I am in agreement with his claim that, for Aristotle, both *theoria* and ethical activity (“right actions” in Ackrill's terminology) are the constituents of the happy life. In Ackrill's view, Aristotle failed to specify principles about how to combine these two activities in the best human life, and Ackrill himself expressed pessimism about whether any such principles could honor both the evident priority that Aristotle assigns to *theoria*, and his uncompromising attitude toward the demands of ethical excellence.²⁵ One of the things I hope to have shown in this essay is that Aristotle has in fact indicated (even if not explicitly specified) these principles. Very roughly: in all your

²⁵ See Ackrill (1980), pp. 31–33.

choices, abide by the *kalon* – but when blessed with the opportunity to desist from choice and exercise *theoria*, embrace it. If my argument is successful, it has also shown, by drawing on Ackrill’s own insights into the “for-the-sake-of” relation, how these principles also express the way in which *theoria* may function as the ultimate goal of an uncompromisingly ethical life.

PROOF