

Reading the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an Investigation

(Pre-Print Draft)

Abstract

Aristotle tells us that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an “inquiry” and an “investigation” (μέθοδος and a ζήτησις). This paper focuses on an under-appreciated way that the work is investigative: its employment of an exploratory investigative strategy—that is, its frequent positing of, and later revision or even rejection of, merely preliminary positions. Though this may seem like a small point, this aspect of the work’s methodology has important consequences for how we should read it—specifically, we should be open to the possibility that some contradictions in the text are the result of his employment of this investigative strategy. In the paper, I describe this investigative strategy, discuss what motivates Aristotle to employ it in the work, and go through four contradictions that are plausibly identified as examples of its use—specifically, his claims that courageous people do and do not fear death, that virtuous actions are and are not intrinsically pleasant, that friendship is and is not mutually recognized goodwill, and that virtuous people do and do not choose noble actions for their own sake.

1. Introduction

Aristotle tells us that the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter “NE”) is an “inquiry” and an “investigation” (μέθοδος and a ζήτησις, see NE 1094b10-11 with 1102a12-15). One important way that the work comprises an investigation is that it is a prolonged search for the definition of happiness. He (i) lays down criteria for the identification of happiness (εὐδαιμονία); (ii) considers various candidates; and then (iii) makes his final pronouncement at the conclusion of

the work. This investigative feature of the work is well-known.¹ However, there is another important way in which the work is investigative. I mean, specifically, its frequent positing of—and later revision or rejection of—merely preliminary positions; that is, Aristotle does not always offer his considered views *up front*. He sometimes deliberately posits an initially attractive but ultimately inadequate view and then revises or rejects it later on when its problematic consequences have come to light. I will hereafter refer to this investigative feature as an exploratory investigative strategy.

That Aristotle sometimes employs something like an exploratory investigative strategy in the NE is not completely unknown. Particular instances of this investigative strategy have been observed in passing by various scholars,² but it has yet to receive a thematic treatment.³ Such a

¹ See, for example, Vermigli 2006, 81, first two paragraphs; Pakaluk 2005, 1-2; *ibid.* 2011, 26, top paragraph; Natali, 2007, 377, top paragraph; Curzer 2012, 388; Karbowski 2019, 17-18.

² Some examples: David Ross observes that Aristotle's discussion of courage corrects the "too readily assumed" harmony between pleasure and virtue in the first book of the NE (1949, 205, second paragraph; compare Aquinas *Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraph 592); C. D. C. Reeve notes that Aristotle later modifies his famous definition of happiness from NE 1.7 (2014, xlvi-xlix); John Cooper observes that in the *Eudemian Ethics* (hereafter "EE") Aristotle contradicts his own division of useful friendships into "character" and "legal" types. He then concludes that this division was merely "preliminary" (1980, 337, n. 16); A. W. Price, in turn, criticizes Cooper for overlooking the similarly preliminary character of Aristotle's initial definition of friendship in the NE (1989, 138-9, 150, 161); Sarah Broadie (2002, 408) and Lorraine Pangle (2003, 54, bottom paragraph) also observe the preliminary character of this definition.

³ Perhaps an exception should be made for Ronna Burger's *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* (2008). She in fact offers an esoteric reading of the NE; that is, she claims that Aristotle attempts to conceal certain tensions or difficulties about commonsense morality from the majority of his audience while simultaneously revealing them to a select few (see 3, bottom paragraph). Nevertheless, she also claims that, in the process, he adopts preliminary positions that reflect commonsense morality and then revises or rejects them when the difficulties that they lead to have become clear (to at least a special subset of his audience; see 4-7).

My account can be distinguished from Burger's by not approaching Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy on the basis of esotericism; that is, I wish to explore what *non-esoteric* account can be given for this investigative feature of the NE. This is desirable for two reasons. First, esoteric accounts are extremely controversial and divisive; and second, the motivation that Burger offers for adopting an esoteric reading isn't sufficient. She argues that Aristotle's claims about his audience—specifically, that it must already possess correct moral views and that if it already does so, there will be no need to explain why these views are true (NE 1095b3-8)—imply the paradoxical conclusion that there is no real audience for the work. To then avoid this absurd conclusion, she suggests attributing an esoteric intention to Aristotle (3, bottom paragraph). But it's not true that the work has absolutely nothing to offer its stated audience. Even if I already accept that certain things are noble, for example, it may be useful to grasp other things more clearly; for example, how can I best promote virtue in others (NE 2.1-4, 10.9); and given that I am aiming to promote virtue in others (NE 1102a7-10), how can I sufficiently identify it (consider NE 3.8); what should I do when certain obligations seem to conflict (NE 9.2); how should I treat my former friends (NE 9.3); how should I measure my repayments to my friends (NE 8.13); how should I resolve

treatment is desirable for at least two reasons. First, the fact that Aristotle employs this investigative strategy has important implications for how the work should be read. If we are not sufficiently conscious of the fact that he proceeds in this exploratory fashion, then we run the risk of mistaking his merely preliminary positions for his considered views. We also run the risk of misinterpreting certain contradictions in the text. What some may argue is the result of the interpolation of two different texts or others may argue is a merely apparent contradiction that must be rendered consistent by an acceptable interpretation, may simply be an example of Aristotle deliberately revising or rejecting what he had earlier set down as a merely preliminary view. The second reason that a general treatment of Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy in the NE is desirable is that his use of this investigative strategy sheds some light on his pedagogical and methodological commitments. It is the result of a deliberate choice on his part, and this choice is plausibly explained by his pedagogical and methodological commitments. Thus, by reflecting on what parts of those commitments plausibly explain this choice, we can shed some light on their character.

Before I proceed, it will be useful to distinguish the exploratory investigative strategy that I have discussed from other claims about the methodology of the NE. To be clear, I don't think that the investigative feature that I am attributing to the work compromises its governing methodology; that is, I don't see it as a third competitor to scientific and dialectical accounts of the work's over-all methodology.⁴ First of all, I am not claiming that Aristotle employs this

disputes between friends (NE 8.13-9.1); and, of even more central importance to the work, if I accept that "it is more noble and god-like to provide and preserve happiness for a nation and a city" (NE 1094b10), how can I get a clear enough grasp of happiness in order to achieve this (NE 1.2, 1.4, 1.7, 1.13, 10.7-9)? Unfortunately, she neither addresses these possibilities nor shows why they fail to explain why Aristotle undertook the project of the NE.

⁴ A scientific methodology follows the outline of inquiry laid out in the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*; namely, it proceeds from the established facts in a domain toward their explanations, and it privileges appealing to the essences of various objects in a domain in order to explain other non-incident facts about them (*Post. Ana.* 2.1-2). Proponents of his Aristotle's use of a scientific methodology in the work include Carlo Natali (2007); Gregory Salmieri (2009), and Joseph Karbowski (2019). Definitions of a "dialectical" methodology are contentious;

investigative strategy at all or even most times in the work. I am making the weaker claim that he employs it often enough for it to be considered a regular member of his argumentative repertoire.⁵ And second, this investigative strategy is a general pattern of argumentation that is formally compatible with either a scientific or dialectical governing methodology; that is, he could always offer preliminary endorsements of views only to revise or reject them when, to use Burnet's particular analysis of Aristotle's dialectical methodology as an example, it comes to light that they don't adequately resolve the various conflicts between the *endoxa*. Or, for that matter, he could not. He could simply announce his considered views up front and then justify them in terms of their power to resolve the conflicts between the *endoxa*. And similarly, the exploratory investigative strategy that I have outlined could also be exemplified within a scientific methodology; to foreshadow an example that I will later discuss, Aristotle may offer a preliminary definition only to later reject it, not when it fails to adequately resolve the contradictions between the *endoxa*, but when it fails to adequately explain all of the relevant facts.

2. Why an exploratory investigative strategy?

Given that Aristotle does in fact employ the exploratory investigative strategy that I have outlined, why does he do so? One plausible way of explaining his adoption of this strategy is to

some take the argumentative practice of dialectic in Aristotle to be defined by a reliance on *endoxa*; others, by a reliance on what is believed by an argumentative partner or opponent (see, for example, Smith 1993, 339-343; Karbowski 2019, 28-30), but those who think that the NE follows a dialectical methodology tend to understand dialectic in terms of reliance on *endoxa* (see, for example, Burnet 1900, xxxix-xl; Irwin 1988, 37-9, 358). My case in this paper won't depend on the correctness of either view, but, for the record, I find the above scientific accounts of Aristotle's methodology to be persuasive and illuminating.

⁵ Karbowski's distinction between "argumentative strategies" adopted by Aristotle to address particular topics and "general" norms of inquiry that govern all philosophical inquiries or "local" norms that govern a particular domain of inquiry, such as "ethics," is helpful here (see 2019, 9-10, 105). For this reason, I won't address many of Aristotle's better-known methodological statements since they strike me as either (a) addressing the over-all methodology of the work (for example, Aristotle's comments about the degree of precision to be expected in ethical arguments, NE 1094b11-27) or (b) addressing particular argumentative strategies that he is adopting at particular places in the work (for example, his attempt to reconcile conflicting views about "selfishness" (φιλαυτία) in NE 9.8 by appealing to what each party means by "selfish," see NE 1168b12-15).

appeal to its pedagogical function. I noted earlier that scholars have observed that the NE is structured as an investigation. Instead of laying out his considered views at the beginning and then offering justification for them—for example, that happiness is theoretical contemplation—he gradually walks his reader or audience through the process of searching for the truth. It’s plausible that he structured the work in this way because, besides communicating his view and their justification to his audience, he wished to provide them with a kind of training in carrying out a philosophical investigation.⁶ To this end, he walks his audience through the processes of conducting a philosophical investigation—sometimes explicitly addressing the investigative strategies he is adopting at the moment;⁷ other times modeling them for his audience without explicit comment.⁸ This same pedagogical goal can explain his use of an exploratory investigative strategy in the work. When we undertake an actual philosophical investigation, it’s likely that we will arrive at points where we find certain answers attractive but, at the same time, are not wholly confident that they are correct. One way to proceed in these circumstances is to employ the exploratory investigative strategy that I have discussed—to tentatively adopt an initially attractive position for the sake of exploring its consequences and then later on making a holistic judgement about whether the view we adopted in a tentative and investigative spirit was the correct one. Thus, as part of the general act of modeling an investigation for the edification of his audience, Aristotle chooses to model specific investigative strategies that he believes are useful in conducting philosophical investigations. In terms of the exploratory investigative

⁶ Compare Karbowski 2019, 17-18.

⁷ For example, NE 1098b9-12.

⁸ On the general point that Aristotle sometimes addresses the investigative strategies he is modelling for his audience and other times does not, see Karbowski 2019, 104. For an example of him failing to comment on his investigative strategy, see NE 1109b30-1110a1, 1111a22-4 (contrast this with 1129a17-31). I take this example from Karbowski (see *ibid.*). I consider Aristotle’s employment of his exploratory investigative strategy to be generally unremarked upon unless NE 1098b11-12 is an explicit reference to it. I agree with Karbowski (2019, 17) and an anonymous referee that Aristotle is presumably presenting a “simulated” inquiry rather than the record of an actual investigation that he undertook, though nothing precludes that he worked in aspects of his actual investigations.

strategy that I wish to discuss, he sometime purposefully adopts views that he believes are mistaken and then corrects them when their defects come to light later on down the road—all for the sake of demonstrating to his audience the investigative strategy of asserting initially attractive (but uncertain) views in order to judge them in light of their consequences.⁹

Beyond its general usefulness in philosophical investigations, there is reason to think that the exploratory investigative strategy I have discussed is especially useful within the investigative framework of the NE. It's a distinguishing character of the work that it explicitly relies on proper ethical habituation as a starting point in its inquiry; that is, in the work, Aristotle elevates proper habituation to a reliable truth-generating process akin to perception.¹⁰ However, this reliance on proper ethical habituation introduces a difficulty. Of all of the views that virtuous people have a tendency to accept, we need to separate out those views that are genuinely grounded in proper habituation and experience from those that are mistakenly inferred from such

⁹ For a Platonic analogue to this investigative strategy, see *Phaedo* 100a3-7, 101d3-5. On the other hand, there is a weaker possible interpretation of what I've labeled Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy. One could argue that it doesn't so much amount to a deliberate investigative strategy of the sort described in the *Phaedo* as it does to a willingness to revise or reject our initial views in light of what comes to light later on in our investigation. Aristotle then chooses to model this willingness for his audience, not so much to pass on a deliberate investigative strategy that they can employ, but to pass on a spirit of epistemic humility and the willingness to go back and revise our initial assumptions in the light of what our investigation later turns up (compare NE 1179a16-22). This strikes me as a reasonable alternative, but I prefer the stronger interpretation I've offered here because I think it provides a better explanation for why Aristotle would go to the trouble of modeling for his audience the process of asserting flawed views and then later on revising or rejecting them.

An anonymous referee also suggests the following alternative: what I've identified as an exploratory investigative strategy is really an effect of Aristotle's use of "outline" (περιγραφή, τύπος) accounts in the NE. Burnet, for example, suggests that "outline" is a reference to the practice of outlining a painting before filling it in (see Burnet 1900, 38, n. 17) which would presumably include erasing or modifying one's outline during the actual process of painting. Similarly, Aristotle revising or changing his accounts as he goes along is part of the process of filling in his outlines. This is an interesting suggestion. It does seem plausible that outline accounts allow for *some* degree of revision as we proceed to fill them in. But, at the same time, there's presumably also a point where we've revised our account too much for it to count as filling in our previous outline. Moreover, the hallmark of an outline account is that it's *prima facie* incomplete. Aristotle's outline definition of happiness as an activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue is an excellent example. Since there are multiple kinds of activities that belong to the rational part of the soul (with different corresponding virtues), *which* activity in accord with virtue happiness is identical to remains to be specified. But there's a kind of revision of an earlier position that doesn't belong to the process of filling in an earlier *prima facie* incomplete account, and, in my view, some of the revisions or rejections of earlier positions that I discuss fit this description (specifically, examples one, three, and four). For this reason, I don't here reduce Aristotle's use of an exploratory investigative strategy to his use of outline accounts, but I do think that the issues deserves more investigation.

¹⁰ See NE 1098b3-4; Karbowski 2015, 125-6.

views or are otherwise mistaken. Though we may be certain in some cases that we have identified those views that are genuinely based in proper habituation and experience, there's also room for uncertain cases. We may find ourselves unsure whether a view that virtuous people have a tendency to accept reaches all the way down to the bedrock of proper habituation and experience. The exploratory investigative strategy that I have discussed is one way of approaching this difficulty,¹¹ and this may have contributed to Aristotle's decision to model its use in the NE.¹²

3. Transition to examples

My discussion up to this point has been merely hypothetical. I have supposed that Aristotle employs the exploratory investigative strategy that I have described, and I have offered an explanation for why he does so. I will now turn to the task of offering evidence that he actually employs this investigative strategy in the NE. This evidence will consist of four examples of its use. I do not take these examples to exhaust Aristotle's employment of this investigative strategy in the work. Rather, as I mentioned above, I take them to be sufficient evidence that an exploratory investigative strategy is a regular member of his argumentative repertoire.

Before I proceed to these examples, it will be useful to lay out some guidelines for the plausible identification of an example of an exploratory investigative strategy. This investigative strategy is most apparent when Aristotle is later revising or rejecting a view that he earlier

¹¹ The first, second, and fourth examples that I discuss below strike me as plausible examples of this process. Compare Samieri's observation that "Aristotle often works back from the sometimes confused beliefs of his audience to what is truly 'first for us.'" (2009, 335). However, I differ from him in saying that, in certain cases at least, Aristotle attempts to work back from the confused views of virtuous people to what is truly based in proper habituation or experience by initially positing, and then examining the consequences of, those views. The third example, by contrast, relies more on *endoxa* and less on the habitual views of virtuous people. Compare Salmieri's observation that books 8-9 of the NE are more aporetic than earlier parts of the work and contain greater reference to *endoxa* (2009, 317).

¹² This is not to deny that this investigative strategy is still useful (or present) elsewhere. Rather, if Aristotle in fact employs this strategy more often in the NE than in other places, this would provide a reason why. I will leave the question of to what extent he employs this exploratory investigative strategy in other works for another occasion.

asserted. I will therefore limit myself to examples of him *contradicting* a view he earlier asserts. However, not all contradictions of earlier claims are plausible examples of an exploratory investigative strategy. Therefore, from among the apparent contradictions in the text, I will select those where (i) the view that is initially asserted is initially attractive¹³ and (ii) a good reason for rejecting this initially attractive view later comes to light in the course of the investigation. I take a contradiction that satisfies these conditions to be a plausible example of the exploratory investigative strategy that I have described.¹⁴

4. First example: courageous people do and do not fear death

My first example of Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy occurs in his discussion of courage. In his summary outline of the character virtues in NE 2.7, he labels courage as a mean condition concerning fear and confidence (NE 1107a33-1107b1). Then, in NE 3.6-9, he gives a more detailed exposition of the virtue. His stated objective in addressing all of the character virtues is to say "what they are" (τίνας εἰσὶ), "what sorts of things they are concerned with" (περὶ ποῖα), and "how" (πῶς, NE 1115a4-5). I take the latter two requirements to amount to clarifying

¹³ I take "initially attractive" to be a broader category than *endoxa*. A view may be initially attractive because it is an *endoxon*. It may also be so because it is an ethical view that virtuous people have a tendency to endorse; that is, since Aristotle views proper habituation and (ethical) experience as reliable truth-generating processes, the endorsement of a view by virtuous people presents the possibility of it being supported by such a processes. Nevertheless, the view is still uncertain because it could also be the result of a tendency for virtuous people to make certain mistaken inferences from what they genuinely grasp through habituation or experience. Compare Salmieri's observation that "The experienced and decent people who are the proper students of ethics will have already traveled part of the distance from the starting-points towards definitions, though often in a confused manner." (2009, 334-5).

¹⁴ An anonymous referee wonders whether the *mode* of a position's adoption is evidence for Aristotle's employment of an exploratory investigative strategy; for example, does an explicitly qualified or tentative adoption of a proposition count in favor of his employment of this investigative strategy? Not necessarily. All examples of this investigative strategy do involve the assertion of tentative positions, though they may not always be linguistically flagged as such, but not all assertions of tentative positions count as examples of this investigative strategy. One can tentatively assert a position in order to indicate the possibility that it may later need to be revised if one comes across new evidence without intentionally undertaking a search for this evidence, and I take Aristotle's investigative strategy to constitute such a search. On the other hand, in conjunction with the other requirements I mentioned—to wit, that Aristotle's initial position is initially attractive and that a good reason for rejecting the initial position comes to light in his subsequent investigation—the explicitly tentative assertion of a position can count as (additional) evidence for Aristotle's employment of an exploratory investigative strategy. Note, also, that I don't take the explicit linguistic flagging of a position as tentative to be necessary either for his employment of this investigative strategy or for the plausible identification of an example of such. For a case in which explicit linguistic flagging does occur, see the first example below and n. 17.

the sphere or spheres of emotion and action that the particular virtues are directed towards and *how exactly* a person with a given virtue is emotionally and practically disposed within that or those spheres. I also take these tasks to contribute to the general goal of saying more clearly what each of the virtues is since each virtue is essentially related to its sphere or spheres of emotion and action and essentially exemplifies the mean *within that or those spheres*. My particular concern in this section will be with how Aristotle says the courageous person is disposed toward their proper sphere of fear or fearful things. I'll leave aside for the sake of this discussion what he says about the courageous person's relationship toward the sphere of confidence or confidence-inspiring things.¹⁵

In accordance with his stated goals, Aristotle proceeds in NE 3.6 to clarify the sphere of fear or fearful things that the courageous person is concerned with. She is not concerned with all fears or fearful things; disgrace, poverty, being without friends or family (*ἀφιλία*), and sickness, for example, aren't fearful things that fall within the sphere of courage. Though a courageous person may be afraid or unafraid of these things, being such isn't an essential part of courage.¹⁶ The special fearful thing that courage is directed toward is "the greatest" and this is death (NE 1115a25-6). Moreover, it is directed toward death "in the most noble (or "most glorious," *τοῖς καλλίστοις*) circumstances" (NE 1115a29-30), and this, Aristotle concludes, is death in battle (*ibid.*, i.e., when one is fighting for one's country). So much for the sphere (*περὶ ποῖα*) of courage. How (*πῶς*) is the courageous person emotionally disposed toward noble death in battle? In a

¹⁵ Aristotle understands courage as involving two means—fear and confidence—and thus two emotional spheres (see NE 1107a33-1107b4), though he claims that fear is the more important emotional sphere (see NE 1117a29-30).

¹⁶ Note that this could be true even if it's a non-incidental fact that courageous people fear (or don't fear) certain things. Aristotle claims, for example, that fearing (moral?) disgrace isn't incompatible with courage since it's noble to fear it and shameful not to (NE 1115a12-13). Perhaps, then, all courageous people fear disgrace (he is more concerned to point out that fear of disgrace is compatible with courage than to make it clear whether it's a non-incidental fact that courageous people actually fear it); they still wouldn't fear it qua courageous person but presumably qua virtuous person (note Aristotle's comment at NE 1115a13-14 that fear of disgrace is a mark of decency).

word, fearlessly. Aristotle both states early on in the process of clarifying the scope of courage that the courageous person is a “certain fearless person” (ἄφοβος...τις; NE 1115a16; compare 1115a18-19) and also repeats in his concluding statement about the scope of courage that the person who is courageous in the authoritative sense (κυρίως) “would then be said to be (δὴ λέγεται ἄν) ¹⁷ someone who is unafraid (ἄδεής) concerning a noble death and as many things as, being close at hand, inflict death (θάνατον ἐπιφέρει ὑπόγνια ὄντα ¹⁸.” (NE 1115a33-4). Now, it’s unclear whether the second phrase (“as many things as...”) means that it’s an essential part of courage to be generally unafraid of present life-threatening dangers or whether it only means that it’s an essential part of courage to be unafraid of present life-threatening dangers *in the noblest circumstances*. What is clear is that Aristotle takes it to be a non-incidentally fact that courageous people are generally unafraid of death. We can see this in his subsequent comparison of courageous people and experienced sailors amid the life-threatening dangers of the sea. He prefaces this comparison by claiming that “the courageous person is *fearless* (ἄδεής) among diseases and in the sea.” (NE 1115a35-1115b1, my emphasis); that is, when the courageous person comes face to face with death in non-noble circumstances—the sea, diseases—she is also unafraid. In sum, it’s an essential part of courage to be unafraid of a noble death in battle, and it’s non-incidentally (and perhaps also essentially) true of courageous people that they are unafraid of death generally speaking.¹⁹

¹⁷ Note the explicitly tentative character of the conclusion about courage here (compare Roochnik 2015, 217, bottom paragraph). As I remarked earlier (see n. 14), an explicitly tentative assertion isn’t, on its own, evidence of Aristotle’s employment of an exploratory investigative procedure, though, in conjunction with the presence of the other requirements I listed, it can function as evidence.

¹⁸ I follow Burnet’s reading of this phrase (1900, 142, n. to paragraph 10). I take the point to be that courageous people do not fear present, life-threatening dangers, not that they do not fear life-threatening dangers that appear suddenly. For the latter reading, see J. A. Stewart’s comment on 1115a34.

¹⁹ Whether being unafraid of death is a merely non-incidentally truth about courageous people or rather an essential one depends on the nature of the emotional disposition that is an essential part of courage; to wit, is the emotional disposition that is an essential part of courage a disposition to be unafraid of death (generally speaking) that courage as a whole calls upon *in the special circumstances of noble death in battle* or rather is the emotional disposition that

However, Aristotle soon contradicts this account of courage. After elaborating in NE 3.7 a distinction between fearful things that are “above a human being” (ὕπερ ἄνθρωπον) and those that are “in line with a human being” (κατ’ ἄνθρωπον),²⁰ he states that the courageous person will *also* (καί) fear the fearful things that are “in line with” a human being but will “endure” (ὕπομενεῖ) their fear (see NE 1115b10-12; compare 1115b17-19).²¹ Moreover, the context of Aristotle’s claim makes it clear that the courageous person will do this qua courageous since he states that she will fear the fearful things according to a human being but “endure” her fear “as she should, and as reason commands and for the sake of the noble”—that is, in the ways that essentially characterize the mean condition of virtue. Do the fears that courageous people endure include the fear of death? Presumably they do. As we saw before, death is a fearful thing, even the most fearful thing (NE 1115a26), and noble death in battle is the proper sphere of courage (NE 1115a24-31).²² This, then, is the contradiction. The courageous person both is and is not afraid of death.²³

is an essential part of courage not a disposition to be unafraid of death (generally speaking) but a disposition to be unafraid of death *in the special circumstances of noble death in battle*. One consideration in favor of the first option is that it would explain why Aristotle goes on to assign a general fearlessness of death to courageous people.

²⁰ The exact meaning of this contrast is unclear. It’s either (a) a contrast between fearful things that human beings cannot defend themselves against and those that they can (see, for example, Anonymous Paraphrast, *In Eth. Nic.*, 54, lines 24-26; Aquinas, *Com. Nic. Eth.*, 544); (b) a contrast between things that (sane) human beings cannot help but fear and those they are capable of not fearing; or (c) a contrast between fearful things that cast all (sane) human beings into panicked, terror-stricken states à la things that “over-strain human nature” (NE 1110a24-6) and fearful things that human beings are capable of facing without losing their heads (see Taylor 2006, comment on 1115b7-9).

²¹ From this point on, the endurance of fear—as well as the psychological pain that this endurance involves—become important themes in Aristotle’s discussion of courage. See NE 3.9 and my discussion of this theme in the next example; note, also, the backwards pointing claim at NE 1117a32-4 that “as has been said” people are called courageous by virtue of enduring painful things. For an early allusion to the connection between endurance and courage, see NE 1115a25-6. Note, however, that this connection is not fleshed out until after Aristotle has already laid on the table (at NE 1115a23-4) a view of courage as essentially involving fearlessness in the face of death (or perhaps just noble death).

²² That courageous people fear death is also the view of Aspasius (*In Eth. Nic.*, 82, lines 15-17), Ross (1949, 204, bottom paragraph, 205, second paragraph), Harry Jaffa (1952, 85-7 with 100 and 102), Terence Irwin (1999, 212, n. on paragraph §2), Pakaluk (2005, 160, bottom paragraph), Burger (2008, 75, bottom paragraph), and Curzer (2012, 56, bottom paragraph).

²³ Compare Curzer’s observation that Aristotle “alternates between saying that courageous people feel fear and saying that they are fearless” (2012, 57). An anonymous referee wonders whether Aristotle’s outline definition of courage as a mean between cowardice and an unnamed deficiency in fearfulness (see NE 1107b1-4) already implies

As I mentioned above, for an exploratory investigative strategy to be a plausible explanation for this contradiction two things must be clear: (i) the position that's later rejected must be an initially attractive one and (ii) something must become clear over the course of the investigation that recommends the rejection of this position. I think it's clear that saying that courage people are fearless in the face of death is an initially attractive position. We can see this attraction at work in the fact that Aristotle himself endorses this definition of courage in the *Topics* (125b20-7).²⁴ We can also see it at work in the fact that, in his Eudemian discussion of courage, he follows his intermediary conclusion that "the courageous person feels many great fears" (EE 1228b14-15) with the objection, "but it seemed to the contrary that courage makes one fearless, and this is by virtue of fearing little or nothing" (EE 1228b15-17). I will suppose, also, that these things mark out the view as an *endoxon*.²⁵

that courageous people will feel fear within the proper sphere of courage (whatever it is). I think this is correct, but, as we have seen, Aristotle still chooses to present courage as a sort of fearlessness in the face of (noble) death in NE 3.6. I think he does so because, as I argue below, this genuinely was an attractive position, so he thinks it's important to investigate it. In other words, it wouldn't have been satisfactory to just reject this view of courage on the basis of his admittedly provisional outline in book 2. Compare how, in the EE, he also wrestles with the issue of whether or not courage makes one fearless within its proper sphere (see EE 1228b4-17) *even though* he has already given his provisional outline of courage as a mean between recklessness (there depicted as excessive *fearlessness*) and cowardice (see EE 1221a18-19).

²⁴ I take this reference from René Gauthier and Jean Jolif (comment on 1115b12-13).

²⁵ It's difficult to say whether the view is being asserted because it's an *endoxon* or because it's a view that virtuous people have a tendency to accept. Unlike the next example I will discuss, Aristotle doesn't explicitly appeal to the judgement of the virtuous person for support. And given what he will go on to say, people who have experience in acting courageously should know better than anyone else that this view is false. On the other hand, he doesn't explicitly highlight the view as an *endoxon* either, and it's possible that decent or virtuous people who either lacked experience in acting courageously or who were not attending to their experience had a tendency to endorse this view. My view here can be contrasted with Salmieri (2009, 319, 324-5), who denies that Aristotle uses either *endoxa* or views that virtuous people have a tendency to accept as starting points of inquiry in his discussion of courage (or the moral virtues more generally). Salmieri does grant that Aristotle sometimes begins an inquiry by making reference to either *endoxa* or the views of virtuous people, but he claims that it is only as a heuristic indicator of places to focus his own attention (323-4, 325, bottom paragraph); that is, he denies that Aristotle *posits* or *accepts* views at the beginning of an inquiry either *because* they are *endoxa* or *because* they are views that virtuous people have a tendency to accept. I, however, think that we can find some plausible examples of this very thing. Note that Salmieri himself approaches this view. He observes that Aristotle begins his investigation of courage by "*Assuming* that bravery is a virtue and that it consists in a certain sort of imperviousness to fear" (324, my emphasis), which views seem to be a part of what Salmieri calls the "body of received opinion" about courage (see 323, bottom paragraph).

There is also something that satisfies the second requirement I mentioned—namely, that something comes to light in the process of Aristotle’s investigation that recommends the rejection of his initial view about courage. It can be found in the comparison between courageous people and sailors at the end of NE 3.6 that I mentioned above, which, interestingly, occurs right before his claim in NE 3.7 that courageous people fear fearful things within the scope of courage but endure their fear. Though he claims in the comparison that courageous people, like experienced sailors, will be fearless in the face of death at sea (NE 1115a35-b2), he notes that, unlike experienced sailors who are confident of their survival on account of said experience, courageous people “despair of being saved and are displeased (δυσχεραίνουσιν) with this sort of death.” (NE 1115b2-3). But if, as he plausibly claims, courageous people are displeased to die “this sort of death,” which I take to be a non-noble death, then they must consider dying this sort of death to be something bad. As the Anonymous Commentator puts it:

For as he [the courageous person] is deprived of many and great goods, and also deprives his family and fatherland of this sort of splendor, it is reasonable that he will be pained at the prospect of death. On account of which, he would also be on guard against his dying for the sake of nothing noble, for example, *dying at sea* or in a flood or in an earthquake or in any other situation like this. (*In Eth. Nic.*, 168, lines 23-7, my emphasis).²⁶

It thus becomes clear from Aristotle’s consideration of courageous people amid the dangers of the sea that they take dying a non-noble death to be something bad. However, he had earlier laid it down that “put simply (ἀπλῶς)²⁷ bad things are what is fearful (NE 1115a8-9), and he had

²⁶ Compare Burnet’s comment: “there is surely a touch of humour in this contrast between the cheerful sailors and the brave Hellene who has given up all hope, and *laments* that drowning is a *nasty death*, not fit for a gentleman and soldier” (1900, 142, n. to paragraph 11, my emphasis).

²⁷ The meaning of the ἀπλῶς here is unclear, so I’ve given it an open-ended translation. It either means “to put the matter in a simplified fashion” (i.e., “roughly”) or it means “without qualification” in the sense that “without qualification” bad things are fearful but what’s fearful *to each person* is what is bad *for them*. If Aristotle means the

pointed out that, “as a consequence,” fear “is defined” (by Aristotle?) as the expectation of something bad (NE 1115a9). If bad things—or those bad things that are destructive of our life or body and/or are very painful—are what is fearful, then, whether or not fear just is the expectation of personal harm—or of a harm that is destructive of our life or body and/or very painful—it should at least accompany that expectation. Therefore, if courageous people take dying a non-noble death to be a bad thing that is destructive of their life and body and/or painful (which seems undeniable), they will fear it, especially when this sort of death is a present risk for them. As the Paraphrast observes, “Death in the grips of a disease or at sea will be frightening to the courageous person, to the extent that it does not come according to something honorable (σεμνόν).” (*In Eth. Nic.*, 54, lines 3-4).²⁸

I have argued that it follows from Aristotle’s consideration of courageous people amid the dangers of the sea that they fear a non-noble death. This conflicts with Aristotle’s initial view that courageous people are generally unafraid of death. However, it was unclear whether he intended a general fearless of death to essentially characterize courageous people or to constitute a merely non-incidental truth about them. By contrast, it was clear that courage is essentially directed toward noble death in battle (NE 1115a29-33). Is there a reason to think that courageous people fear even this sort of death? There is. The very features that make death at sea something bad belong equally to a noble death in battle. Death at sea is bad because it is painful and because it deprives us of the opportunity to act virtuously in the future. But, as Aristotle himself points out later in NE 3.9, a noble death in battle is both painful (on account of the destruction of

former, then he is presumably alluding to the specification he makes in other works that fearful things are those bad things that are either destructive of our body or life and/or very painful (*Ars Rhe.* 1382a21-4; EE 1229a33-35).

²⁸ This point is also observed by the Anonymous Commentator. He states that courageous people who face death at sea “do not give themselves up to their fear about themselves.” (*In Eth. Nic.*, 162, lines 24-5). That is, the courageous feel, but are not overcome by, their fear of their own death. Aspasius (*In Eth. Nic.*, 81, lines 18-21 with 29-35) approaches this conclusion, but fails to draw it. He remains in the awkward position of claiming that the courageous really are fearless in the face of death at sea, even though they are displeased at dying such a “vain death” (μάτην ἀποθνήσκειν). Compare C. C. W. Taylor’s comment on 1115a35-b3.

our body, NE 1117b4-8, and our knowingly being deprived of a good life, NE 1117b9-13) and deprives us of a future of virtuous activity (ibid.; Aquinas *Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraphs 588-9). Indeed, all death deprives us of the enjoyment of future goods, including life itself (NE 1115a26-7 with 1170a19-22; Aquinas *Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraph 536). Therefore, assuming that courageous people are not ignorant of these features of a noble death in battle, they will take it to be something bad. This is no doubt why he says in NE 3.9 that courageous people suffer death, even noble death in battle, “unwillingly” (ἄκων, NE 1117b7-8); that is, they attempt to act nobly in battle while struggling, if possible, to avoid having to die. But if courageous people view even a noble death in battle as something bad (and, obviously, destructive of our life or body and/or very painful), then they will fear it, especially when it is staring them in the face. Aristotle thus faces a choice. Either maintain his initial view that courageous people are fearless in the face of death, including noble death in battle, by denying that they think that death is something bad or reject that view by conceding that courageous people are afraid of death, including noble death in battle, but persist despite their fear. He chooses, sensibly, to reject his initial view.

Let us sum up this example. Aristotle begins his discussion of courage by positing an initially attractive view: courageous is characterized by fearlessness in the face of (noble) death. A point then comes to light that conflicts with this view—namely, that courageous people consider death, even noble death, to be harmful and, therefore, fearful. And finally, he resolves this conflict by rejecting his initial view. Courageous people are afraid of death, including noble death, but they endure their fear.

5. Second example: virtuous actions are and are not intrinsically pleasant

My second example concerns the pleasure of virtuous action. After setting down his famous outline definition of happiness as activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with

virtue in NE 1.7, Aristotle endeavors (starting in NE 1.8) to show that his definition is consistent with the things that “are (truly) said” (τὰ λεγόμενα) about it (NE 1098b9-11),²⁹ which includes the claim that happiness involves pleasure (NE 1098b25; compare 1152b6-8, 1177a22-23). To then show that this claim about happiness is consistent with his outline definition, he argues that virtuous actions are “pleasant by nature” (φύσει ἡδέα, NE 1099a13) and “pleasant according to themselves” (ἡδεῖται καὶ καθ’ αὐτάς, NE 1099a14-15).³⁰ I will summarize these claims as the position that “virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant,” and I take this position to require at least two things: (i) a virtuous person does virtuous actions with pleasure and (ii) the pleasure they experience while doing virtuous actions is caused by the virtuous actions themselves (as opposed to, say, the expectation of a reward). I also take it that he is making this claim about virtuous actions insofar as they are (or qua) virtuous actions; that is, I take it that he is claiming that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant because they instantiate certain universal features of virtuous action and not for some other reason.

However, in the final chapter of his discussion of courage (NE 3.9), Aristotle contradicts his earlier claim that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions. Thinking of courage in particular, he states, “To be active with pleasure (τὸ ἡδέως ἐνεργεῖν) does not belong to all the virtues, except to the degree that one grasps the end (τοῦ τέλους ἐφάπτεται).” (NE 1117b15-16). By “grasping the end,” I take Aristotle to mean “accomplishes the end they are

²⁹ That Aristotle takes *ta legomena* he mentions to express facts about happiness (and therefore fit to serve as a test-stone for his definition) is helpfully pointed out by Salmieri (see 2009, 331) and Karbowski (see 2015, 122-3).

³⁰ He offers several arguments for these claims: an induction to the principle that “a lover of something” feels pleasure when they obtain what they love combined with the implicit premise that virtuous people are lovers of virtuous actions (see NE 1099a8-11); an induction to the claim that someone isn’t virtuous unless they take pleasure in virtuous actions (see NE 1099a17-21); and, most importantly for my purposes, the well-known doctrine that the judgement of the virtuous person is an authoritative measure of the truth along with the claim that they, as a matter of fact, do judge virtuous actions to be pleasant by nature and pleasant according to themselves (see NE 1099a21-4).

aiming at.” And since noble action is the end of virtue,³¹ that end is presumably a noble action.³² In other words, since the virtuous person aims at noble action, she will feel pleasure when she accomplishes this goal. His position therefore amounts to the following. The virtuous person takes pleasure in the accomplishment of a virtuous action, but the process of accomplishing the virtuous action is not always pleasant—or at any rate, not always pleasant because one is exercising virtue. As H. H. Joachim puts it, “good action is pleasant only so far as the agent attains his end: the *actual activity* will involve at least effort and often pain.” (1970, 121, my emphasis).³³ It follows that either not all virtuous actions are done with pleasure, or, if they are, it is not because they instantiate universal features of virtuous action. And either way, virtuous actions will not be intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions.

Concerning the first requirement for the plausible identification of an example of an exploratory investigative strategy—that the view that’s initially asserted is initially attractive—as we saw (see n. 30), Aristotle explicitly supports the view that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant by appeal to the judgement of the virtuous person. As I mentioned earlier (see n. 13), this suffices to make a view initially attractive. Moreover, given the explicitness of this appeal, it’s plausible that he posits this view at least in part *because* virtuous people have a tendency to

³¹ See NE 1115b12-13, 1116a11-12, 1117a16-17, b9; compare Alexander of Aphrodisias *De Ani. Lib.*, 154, lines 30-2; Ross 1949, 204, bottom paragraph.

³² This is also the reading of Grant (1973, vol. 1, 226) and Gauthier and Jolif (comment on 1117b16).

³³ Compare the example of running a marathon. The accomplishment of the goal of running a marathon is no doubt pleasant, but the process of accomplishing the goal is difficult, painful, and toilsome. For similar readings, see Korsgaard 1996, 222, bottom paragraph; Curzer 2012, 35-8. Perhaps someone will object that insofar as (a) the end of virtue (and the virtuous person) is noble action and (b) when they are acting the virtuous person is doing a noble action, the very process of doing a virtuous action is pleasant. However, “being a noble action” is presumably exemplified by the whole virtuous action and not its nascent parts. If I am going to the bank to get money in order to give it away generously, I am in the process of doing something noble, but have not, as of yet, done anything noble. If so, then we will not necessarily feel pleasure when we are in the process of doing a virtuous action. Only when we have actually brought into being or “accomplished” a virtuous (noble) action, will we necessarily feel pleasure.

endorse it.³⁴ What about the second requirement? Is there something that comes to light over the course of Aristotle’s investigation that recommends the rejection of the view that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions? There is indeed. As we saw in the last section, courage, a particular virtue, comes to light as essentially involving the endurance of fear (NE 1115b7-13). But fear, especially fear in the face of imminent bodily harm or death, is painful.³⁵ Courage therefore comes to light as essentially involving the endurance of something that is painful; as Aristotle puts it in NE 3.9, “people are [correctly] called courageous by virtue of enduring painful things” (NE 1117a32-3). Moreover, if we accept the *Rhetoric*’s definition of fear as a certain “pain or disturbance” (λύπη ἢ παραγή, 1382a21-2), courage may even essentially involve the endurance of a certain pain.³⁶ Given all of this, Aristotle concludes in the same chapter that “courage is indeed painful” (NE 1117a33-4; compare 1117b7-13)—that is, the exercise of courage, one of the virtues, is painful. As I have discussed, this conclusion conflicts with his initial claim that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions. He therefore faces a choice. Either reject the conclusion that the exercise of courage is painful or

³⁴ The likely explanation for this is that virtuous people’s experience teaches them that acting virtuously *involves* pleasure—specifically, when they accomplish their goal of acting nobly. However, they also have a tendency to mistakenly conclude from this that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions. Note that this tendency would be greater for decent or virtuous people who lack experience in acting courageously—or who have this experience but aren’t actively reflecting on it. This is a good example of Salmieri’s earlier-mentioned observation (see n. 11). Note, also, that Aristotle’s two inductive arguments mentioned in n. 30 only establish that weaker conclusion just mentioned that, for virtuous people, acting virtuously will in some way involve pleasure. The argument from the judgement of the virtuous person, on the other hand, does get him the conclusion that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant.

³⁵ On this point, compare Curzer 2012, 38, bottom paragraph. He labels the “painful ‘thought of death’” that Aristotle attributes to the virtuous person at NE 1117b9-11 as “fear.”

³⁶ That courage essentially involves the endurance of pain is the view of the Anonymous Paraphrast (*In Eth. Nic.*, 58, line 40-59, line 1). However, it is unclear whether he identifies fear as a certain pain or whether he thinks that courage essentially involves enduring the pain that accompanies the fear of death. Similarly, Burnet (1900, 152, n. 2) claims that courage “implies” the presence of pain, while Joachim considers courage to be shown in “the endurance of danger and pain” (1970, 121), but, like the Paraphrast, it’s unclear whether they identify fear as a certain pain or whether they think courage essentially involves enduring the pain that accompanies fear. Aquinas, on the other hand, does not claim that courage essentially involves the endurance of pain. Rather, he claims that it essentially involves holding firm in the face of imminent harm, which is “afflicting,” “distressing,” and painful (*Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraphs 584-6). Courage thus involves pain, but is not essentially the endurance of pain (paragraphs 588-9).

reject his initial view that virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant qua virtuous actions. He chooses, reasonably, to reject his initial view.³⁷

Let us sum up this example. Aristotle initially posits an initially attractive view—virtuous actions are intrinsically pleasant insofar as they are virtuous actions. However, after a careful study of courage, a particular virtue, he observes something that conflicts with this view—namely, that the exercise of courage is painful. He then resolves this conflict by rejecting his initial view. As he says elsewhere, “accounts about the universal are more common (or “more empty,” κενώτεροι if the reading of Γ is correct), but those about the particulars capture more truth.” (NE 1107a30-1). Of course, he could have corrected his claim about the intrinsic pleasure of virtuous actions right after he made it, but he chose not to. He chose to let it stand until, two books later, the facts that force the correction come to light in connection with their natural subject matter (courage). This is a good indication of his commitment to modeling an exploratory investigative strategy.

6. Third example: friendship is and is not mutually recognized goodwill

My third example of Aristotle’s exploratory investigative strategy occurs in his two-book discussion of friendship (φιλία). After justifying, in NE 8.1, his discussion of the topic in connection with the project of the NE and raising several puzzles about the subject, he settles on a definition in NE 8.2. He observes that “[people say that] friendship is mutually reciprocated goodwill” (NE 1155b33-4), where “goodwill” (εὐνοία) is wishing good things for another person “for that person’s own sake” (ἐκείνου ἕνεκα, NE 1155b31-2). He then himself adds to

³⁷ This rejection has important implications for the proposition that happiness is the activity of moral virtue. Since, as we have seen, happiness has pleasure woven into it, any activity that’s identical to happiness must be intrinsically pleasant. But, given what comes to light in Aristotle’s investigation of courage, not only does the activity of moral virtue fail to be intrinsically pleasant qua activity of moral virtue, it’s sometimes even intrinsically painful. In light of this, it’s not at all surprising that he will go on to argue that the activity of theoretical virtue is a better candidate for the identity of happiness because it’s more intrinsically pleasant (NE 1177a22-27, b19-24).

this popular definition that the two people must also mutually recognize the goodwill that they bear toward each other (see NE 1155b34-1156a5). Mutually recognized goodwill is thus the definition of friendship.

In the next two chapters (NE 8.3-4), Aristotle elaborates upon the above account. He argues that only virtuous people who bear goodwill toward each other on account of each other's virtue fully live up to his definition of friendship (see NE 1156b7-10); he identifies several relationships commonly called "friendships" (see NE 1156a6-14), but which fail to fully live up to his definition (either because they don't involve goodwill at all³⁸ or because the goodwill they involve is constrained and limited³⁹); and he develops a classification of friendship in which one kind of friendship, the one he defined in NE 8.2, is friendship in the strict and authoritative sense, while the other relationships commonly called "friendships" are counted as such insofar as they more or less closely resemble friendship in this authoritative sense (see NE 1157a25-32).

However, Aristotle soon contradicts this account. In NE 8.5, after distinguishing "friendship" (φιλία) in the sense of a "disposition" (ἔξις, NE 1157b5-7)—the way that friends are disposed toward one another *as friends*—identifying its two characteristic activities—sharing life together with one's friend (συζῆν) and benefiting one's friend (NE 1157b7-10)—and observing that this disposition is dissolved by prolonged distance (see NE 1157b10-13), he observes that old and sour people aren't disposed toward forming friendships (οὐ...φιλικοί) *since* they aren't pleasant to be around and it isn't possible to share one's life with someone who isn't pleasant to be around (NE 1157b13-17; compare the similar point at EE 1237b6-7).⁴⁰ To then explain the importance of sharing life together to friendship, he remarks, "those who approve of (ἀποδεχόμενοι) each other, but do not share life together, are more like those who

³⁸ This is the traditional reading; see, for example, see Pakaluk 1999, 61-2.

³⁹ This is the influential reading of Cooper (1980, 313).

⁴⁰ Aristotle has a notoriously unflattering view of the old (see *Ars Rhe.* 2.13).

have goodwill (εὐνοί) than they are like friends, for *nothing* (οὐδὲν) belongs to friends the way that sharing life together does.” (NE 1157b17-19, my emphasis). Sharing life together is now the most central characteristic of friendship and not goodwill, even “mutually recognized”—friendship’s putative definition.

Aristotle also repeats his claim that sharing life together (and not mutually recognized goodwill) is the central characteristic of friendship at the start of the next chapter (NE 8.6). After repeating his observation that old and sour people (unlike the young) are not disposed to form friendships since they aren’t pleasant to be around (NE 1158a1-7), he allows that such people often “have goodwill towards each other...*but they are not quite friends* (or, “are not at all friends,” οὐ πάνυ, NE 1158a7-9, my emphasis). The reason why is that they don’t share life together and enjoy each other’s company (NE 1158a9), and these things—not mutually recognized goodwill—“are held to be most characteristic of friendship” (μάλιστα εἶναι δοκεῖ φιλικά, 1158a9-10).⁴¹ As Michael Pakaluk observes,

Aristotle now argues that ‘living life together’ (*suzēn*) is the more characteristic of friends.

This is surprising, since it was the wishing and providing of goods that had figured in the apparent definition of friendship in VIII.2 and in his delineation of the three forms in VIII.3.” (1999, 84, my emphasis).⁴²

The contradiction, then, is the following. Mutually recognized goodwill both is and is not the definition of friendship.

⁴¹ See, also, his later restatements of the centrality of sharing life together to friendship at NE 1170b33-1171a4, 1171b35-1172a8; compare his definition of friendship in terms of sharing life together at *Pol.* 1280b38-9.

⁴² That Aristotle here rejects his initial definition of friendship is also observed by Broadie (comment on VIII 2, 1155b17-1156a5) and Pangle (2003, 54, bottom paragraph). That, according to Aristotle, living life together is more essential to friendship than mutually recognized goodwill is observed by Aquinas (*Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraph 1598-1600) and Gauthier and Jolif (comment on 1155b27-1156a3).

It is easy enough to show that Aristotle's initial definition of friendship in terms of mutually recognized goodwill is an initially attractive view. As I remarked above, he tells us that the definition reflects what "people say" (note φάσι and λέγουσιν, "people say," in NE 1155b31-4; compare *Mag. Mor.* 2.12.6-7). It is also very similar to his definition of friendship in the *Rhetoric* (1380b36-1381a2, the difference being that "not for the sake of oneself," ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτοῦ, is missing from the Nicomachean definition), which offers premises and definitions for use in popular oratory (1355a24-29, 1358a36-b8; compare *Grg.* 458e5-459a3). All of this is very good evidence that the initial definition of friendship in the NE is a popular view.⁴³ It is therefore an *endoxon*. Moreover, given Aristotle's explicit reference to what "people say," it is plausible that he posits this definition *because* it is an *endoxon*.

There is also something that comes to light in Aristotle's investigation that recommends the rejection of his initial definition of friendship. As I mentioned above, right before he first states his second account of friendship (at NE 1157b19; I say "account," not "definition," because the claim that "x is most essential to y" leaves open the possibility that there are other things that are also essential to it), he observes that prolonged distance, which in the Ancient world implied the prolonged absence of mutual interaction and contact, dissolves friendship in the sense of the disposition that friendship involves. This observation supports the rejection of his initial definition of friendship. However, in order to understand why, we must discuss another feature of Aristotle's understanding of friendship.

Friendship for Aristotle is teleological or end-directed. Friendships are differentiated based on the ends that the friendship exists in relation to. In the case of "pleasure friendships," one of the non-authoritative forms of friendship that doesn't fully live up to his initial definition

⁴³ The popular character of the first definition is also observed by Joachim (comment on 1155b17), Pakaluk (comment on 1155b29-31, note "Aristotle's evident reliance on *endoxa*"), and Burger (2008, 163, bottom paragraph).

of friendship in terms of mutually recognized goodwill, the end is pleasure (NE 1156a10-14); in the case of “utility friendships,” another non-authoritative form of friendship, the end is some benefit that the friend will in some way provide (ibid., NE 1157a14-16); in the case of “perfect” or “authoritative” friendship, the sort of friendship that fully lives up to his initial definition, the end that the friendship is directed toward is simply the other friend herself, or rather, her happiness (NE 1156b7-10, 1157a29-32). This teleological understanding of friendship gives rise to the following principle of friendship dissolution. Since a friendship exists in relation to a certain end, when the friends no longer line up with this end, the friendship will dissolve. As he puts it, “that on account of which people were friends being destroyed, the friendship is also dissolved, since the friendship exists in relation to these things.” (NE 1156a22-4; see, also 1164a8-10, 1165a36-b4).

Let us now return to Aristotle’s observation. Prolonged distance, which includes the prolonged absence of mutual interaction or contact, dissolves the disposition that friendship involves. His initial definition of friendship is ill-suited to explain this observation. Given that (a) the end that belongs to authoritative friendship just is the other friend herself, or her happiness, and (b) those who are friends in the authoritative sense hold each other as ends because of each other’s virtue, prolonged distance should not dissolve the friends’ disposition towards one another. As Aristotle himself says after introducing his initial definition, “the friendship of these [virtuous] people lasts as long as they are virtuous” (NE 1156b11-12), and distance does not dissolve virtue. This is presumably why Aspasius goes so far as to claim that Aristotle’s observation about prolonged distance does not actually apply to virtuous friends (see *In Eth. Nic.*, 171, lines 1-8). But Aspasius is wrong. Aristotle introduces no exception to his observation that

prolonged distance dissolves friendship (compare his similar observation at EE 1245a22-4 that distance is a burden to friendships).

Aristotle thus faces a choice. Maintain his initial definition of friendship, but be unable to adequately explain his observation that prolonged distance dissolves friendship, or reject it in favor of an account that provides a more adequate explanation. He chooses the latter. In contrast to his first definition of friendship, his second account has no difficulty explaining his observation.⁴⁴ On this account, authoritative friendship exists primarily for the end of sharing life together, which requires mutual interaction and contact. As I mentioned above, prolonged distance makes it difficult to do this to a sufficient degree, especially in the Ancient world. Absent friends therefore fail to line up with the primary end of their friendship—sharing life together—and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Given his principle of friendship dissolution, the friendship should eventually dissolve, which is what he claims we observe.

Let us sum up this example. Aristotle begins his discussion of friendship by positing an initially attractive definition. He then observes something that raises difficulties for this definition—namely, that prolonged distance dissolves friendship. The difficulty is that, according to his first definition, the end of friendship just is the other friend themselves, or their happiness. But, if so, then this end is not thwarted by prolonged distance. This is especially true if friends treat each other as ends because of each other's virtue. Distance, after all, does not dissolve virtue. He then resolves this difficulty, not by repudiating his observation that distance dissolves friendship, but by adopting a new account of friendship—namely, that the primary goal of friendship is not the happiness of the other friend, but sharing life together.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ His second account also allows for a better explanation of his related observation that enjoying spending time together is what makes people become friends in the first place (see NE 1158a1-6; Anonymous Paraphrast *In Eth. Nic.*, 170, lines 28-9; Aquinas *Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraphs 1598, 1607-8).

⁴⁵ For a fuller discussion of Aristotle's revision of his initial definition of friendship, see Schuh forthcoming.

7. Fourth example: virtuous people do and do not choose noble actions for their own sake

My final example of Aristotle’s exploratory investigative strategy concerns one of his well-known requirements for acting virtuously. After setting out his theory of moral development in terms of habituation at the beginning of book 2 of the NE, he raises (in NE 2.4) the puzzle that if someone is habituated into moral virtue by repeatedly performing virtuous actions, then, they would already be virtuous at the time they are undergoing the process of habituation (NE 1105a17-21). His proposed solution is to distinguish between the actions that the virtuous person performs and *the way* that she performs them (see NE 1105a26-30). He then lays out several criteria for the latter, one of which is “choosing the [virtuous] actions because of themselves” (προαιρούμενος δι’ αὐτά, NE 1105a32).⁴⁶ He then further elaborates on this requirement in his discussion of courage. He there defines the essential aim of virtue as what is noble (NE 1115b12-

⁴⁶ There’s some disagreement about the meaning of this phrase. One reading is that it’s equivalent to choosing virtuous actions “for the sake of themselves” (ἔνεκα αὐτῶν) where “for the sake of” (ἔνεκα) designates an end or goal in relation to which something is chosen or done (see, for example, Burnet 1900, 87, n. 3 with 144, n. 6; Taylor 2006, 86-7); thus, on the this reading, Aristotle is saying that it’s a requirement of acting virtuously that one takes the performance of a virtuous (or noble or generous, courageous etc...) action as one of one’s goals in acting. Another reading sees the phrase as non-equivalent to choosing virtuous actions “for their own sake,” but, in the case of Jennifer Whiting, equivalent to choosing a (virtuous) action for the sake of an end that it essentially aims at or realizes (in this case, the particular sort of benefit that the particular sort of virtuous action essentially aims at or realizes, see Whiting 2002, 274-6, 280) or, in the case of Jozef Müller, equivalent to choosing a (virtuous) action for the sake of an end that it is publically recognized and sanctioned to serve (in this case, the various benefits that a community cultivates virtue in order to secure for itself, see Müller 2018, 171-4).

However, there is strong textual support for the first reading, which I will here adopt. Consider the following examples: (1) in NE 1.7, Aristotle supports the claim that we choose honor, pleasure, intellectual awareness (νοῦς), and virtue *because of themselves* (δι’ αὐτά, NE 1097b2-3) by pointing out that we would still choose them *even if nothing further came out of them* (μηθενὸς...ἀποβαίνοντος, NE 1097b23-4); (2) in the same section, he either supports or elaborates his claim that happiness is chosen “always *because of itself* (δι’ αὐτήν) and never *because of anything else* (δι’ ἄλλο)” (NE 1097b1) by pointing out that “nobody chooses happiness *for the sake of those [above-mentioned] things* (τούτων χάριν) nor generally *because of anything else* (δι’ ἄλλο, NE 1097b5-6);” (3) in NE 6.12, Aristotle again contrasts doing virtuous actions in a non-virtuous way—“unwillingly, through ignorance, or *because of something else and not because of themselves* (δι’ ἕτερόν τι καὶ μὴ δι’ αὐτά, NE 1144a15-16)—with doing them in a virtuous way—“acting because of one’s choice and *for the sake of the [virtuous] actions themselves* (αὐτῶν ἔνεκα τῶν πραττομένων, NE 1144a19-20);” (4) in NE 10.6, he reminds us that happiness is one of the activities that are chosen “according to themselves (καθ’ αὐτάς, NE 1176b4),” where activities chosen according to themselves are “those from which nothing else is sought in addition to the activities themselves” (NE 1176b6-7); he then points out that virtuous actions seem to fit this criteria because “they are among the things chosen *because of themselves* (δι’ αὐτά, NE 1176b8-9).”

Finally, note that the contradiction I will discuss doesn’t depend on any given reading of the phrase προαιρούμενος δι’ αὐτά / αἰρετὰ δι’ αὐτά. Formally speaking, Aristotle says “x” and “not x.” What’s at issue is the meaning of the contradiction and what explains its occurrence in the text.

13)—that is, the noble actions themselves that the virtuous person performs.⁴⁷ Thus, virtuous people choose virtuous actions for their own sake insofar that they aim at and perform noble actions for their own sake.⁴⁸

However, in NE 10.7, at the conclusion of the work, he contradicts his claim that virtuous people choose noble actions for their own sake. As part of his argument that virtuous actions, unlike contemplation, don't satisfy the requirement of happiness that it exists "in leisure" (ἐν τῇ σχολῇ, see NE 1177b4), he claims that the noble actions in politics and war—that is, the preeminent actions of moral virtue (compare NE 1094b7-10)—are not chosen for their own sake:

If, among the actions according to virtue, those in politics and war are preeminent in nobility and greatness, they are without leisure and aim at some end and *are not chosen because of themselves* (οὐ δι' αὐτὰς αἰρεταί εἰσιν). (NE 1177b16-18, my emphasis).

It's important to observe that Aristotle isn't simply claiming here that the preeminently noble actions have *some* goal beyond themselves—for example, that they are chosen both for their own sake and for the sake of the benefits that they bring one's community; rather, he is denying that the preeminently noble actions are chosen for their own sake at all. Moreover, if, as Aristotle here claims, the preeminently noble actions are not chosen for their own sake, then virtuous people cannot choose noble actions for their own sake generally speaking. Since if they did, they would also choose the preeminently noble actions for their own sake, and, given the virtuous person's status as an authoritative measure,⁴⁹ the preeminently noble actions in politics and war

⁴⁷ See my discussion of this point in the second example.

⁴⁸ Because virtue aims at and gives rise to noble actions, I will use the expressions "noble actions" and "virtuous actions" interchangeably.

⁴⁹ In other words, the measure doctrine prevents one from avoiding the contradiction by taking the position that virtuous people are foolish or mistaken in choosing noble actions for their own sake so that, even if *those foolish virtuous people* choose noble actions for their own sake, it's not correct to conclude that they are chosen for their own sake "without qualification" (ἀπλῶς).

would then be chosen for their own sake.⁵⁰ This, then, is the contradiction. Virtuous people both do and do not choose noble actions for their own sake.

This contradiction touches on an issue at the heart of Aristotle's account of moral virtue. It is not surprising, then, that there have been various attempts to either mitigate or explain it. Some take him to be confused.⁵¹ Others either deny that he means what he says⁵² or attempt to give a meaning to the phrase αἰρετὸν δι' αὐτόν that differs from the one it appears to bear in other parts of the text.⁵³ Still others take his surprising declaration as the (presumably esoteric) expression of his true view.⁵⁴ I will discuss the explanation for this contradiction that we can provide by appealing to Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy.

It is clear enough that the view that virtuous people choose virtuous actions for their own sake is initially attractive. The thought, longstanding in the history of philosophy, is that virtue is motivationally distinguished from vice; that is, being a virtuous person—and acting virtuously—requires that one act with a special motivation (see NE 1144a13-19, 1168a30-5). If someone consistently does the sort of actions that a virtuous person does because they fear punishment, for example, this does not make her virtuous. What Aristotle does is identify this special motivation with the actions themselves. The virtuous person does noble actions for their own sake. And, according to what he tells us in the work, this was a popular view of virtuous motivation (see NE 1168a30-35, esp. 33-4). It therefore counts as an *endoxon*. But it presumably *also* counts as a view that virtuous people have a tendency to accept; that is, it presumably also counts as a view

⁵⁰ Along these lines, note that Aristotle himself classifies virtuous actions as things chosen “because of themselves” (δι' αὐτά) just a chapter earlier (see NE 1176b6-9).

⁵¹ This is the view of Henry Sidgwick (1967, 68) and Ross (1949, 233-4).

⁵² This is the reading of David Bostock (2000, 239).

⁵³ This is the strategy of Irwin (1999, 309, n. to paragraph §7) and Price (2011, 75-6). Contrast their readings with the uses of αἰρετὸν δι' αὐτόν at NE 1097a30-b5, 1105a31-2, 1176b7-10.

⁵⁴ See Burger 2008, 202, first paragraph; Bruell 2013, 21-2.

that appears to be, or at least presents the possibility of being, grounded in the reliable truth-producing processes of proper habituation and experience.⁵⁵

Someone might suggest that a good reason for abandoning the position that noble actions are chosen for their own sake appears in the considerations in NE 10.7 that directly precede Aristotle's surprising conclusion about noble actions. These considerations are directed toward showing that the preeminently noble actions (those in politics and war) are unleasured activities. They are (a) we make war for the sake of peace (NE 1177b5-6); (b) nobody chooses to be at war for the sake of being at war since (γάρ) one would be "completely bloodthirsty" (παντελῶς μαιφόνος) if she deliberately provoked war so that she would have the opportunity for performing noble actions (NE 1177b9-12); (c) in politics, we aim at other benefits besides our actions, including the happiness of our community, which we understand to be different than just providing citizens the opportunity to engage in more political action (NE 1177b12-15). While these considerations support the conclusion that the preeminently noble actions aim at goals other than themselves, they don't support the more extreme conclusion that Aristotle also draws—that noble actions altogether fail to be chosen for their own sake. I take this to be obvious for (a) and (c) above. For (b), consider that deliberately provoking war for the sake of giving oneself a chance to act nobly would be classified as a *vicious* (hence "totally bloodthirsty") action; it's therefore not a means we should take to provide ourselves with an opportunity for exercising virtue. Likewise, we shouldn't reduce others to destitution so that we can generously provide them with the money they need to survive. But this doesn't preclude noble actions in war from being chosen for their own sake. It just means that we're constrained in what we can

⁵⁵ In this case, the virtuous person's experience presumably tells them that they aim at doing noble actions (compare NE 1179b7-10, 29-32), but they have a tendency to add, beyond what their experience strictly teaches them, that they aim at noble actions *as an end*. I will here put aside the question of whether Aristotle posits this view of virtuous motivation because it is an *endoxon* or because virtuous people have a tendency to accept it.

(virtuously) do to bring about the conditions that will allow us to perform these actions. Nevertheless, if we happen to find ourselves in the right circumstances for performing these preeminently noble actions, nothing Aristotle says above precludes that we choose them for their own sake (if also for the sake of other goals).

Let me therefore suggest a different reason for rejecting the view that virtuous people choose noble actions for their own sake. It becomes gradually clear over the course of the NE that virtuous actions are—and are also understood by virtuous people to be—deserving of rewards.⁵⁶ In other words, Aristotle agrees with Kant that “From the very same grounds on which he [the upright man] believes in virtue, he also believes in reward” (LE, 78). But, according to Aristotle’s analysis, an action, such as a virtuous benefaction, deserves a return from another, such as a reward, only if the actor gets less out of it than the recipient. This is clear from what he says about the relationship between (virtuous) benefactors and their communities when discussing the quarrels about fair exchange (ισότης, τὸ ἴσον) that crop up in unequal friendships (NE 8.14). He says there that honor, the “reward of virtue” (γέρας τῆς ἀρετῆς), must be given to (virtuous) benefactors by their communities because “nobody endures having less in everything” (ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τὸ ἔλαττον οὐδεὶς ὑπομένει, NE 1163b9). In other words, the reward of honor is given to (virtuous) benefactors in order to prevent them from “getting less” out of their (virtuous) benefactions than their beneficiaries.⁵⁷

There are two ideas here that it will be useful to distinguish. The first is the idea of “owing” or “debt.” If a voluntary interaction provides something more choiceworthy to one of

⁵⁶ See NE 1099b16-18, 1113b22-6, 1115a28-32, 1123b15-1124a1, 1124b9-12 and note προσοφλήσει, “owe in addition,” 1134b1-8, 1163a26-1163b11; consider, also, the discussion of νέμισις or “righteous anger” at 1108a35-b4. That virtue is owed a return is observed by Aquinas (*Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraphs 539, 742, 745, 1010-11, 1748-51, note *praemium* [“reward”] in 539 and 742, *merces* [“payment”] in 1011, 1748-51, and *restitutio* [“repayment”] in 1749 and 1751), Susan Collins (1999, 141, second paragraph) and Pangle (2003, 6, second paragraph, and what follows, 60, first paragraph, 128, second paragraph, 129-30, 220, n. 25).

⁵⁷ This point is well observed by Aquinas (*Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraphs 1749-51), Irwin (1999, 288, n.’s on chapter 14, paragraphs §2 and §3), and Pangle (2003, 129-30).

the parties, then there is an inequality and a sensible “debt” from the one who got more towards the one who got less (compare Kant LE, 197, second paragraph). This is a fairly intuitive idea, and it provides the background for Aristotle’s analysis of rewards. The second idea is that the rewards that (virtuous) benefactors are agreed to deserve can be analyzed in terms of this sort of inequality and debt. Rewards are given to virtuous benefactors for the purpose of restoring equality between them and their beneficiaries. They eliminate the debt felt by the beneficiaries (compare Kant LE, 78). Therefore, for a virtuous benefactor to deserve a reward for her (virtuous) benefaction, there must be an inequality or debt that the reward will remove. This analysis, intuitive as it may be, has severe consequences.

These consequences are the following. If virtuous benefactors are deserving of rewards, then their beneficiaries must be indebted to them. But if their beneficiaries are indebted to them, then virtuous benefactors must get less out of their virtuous benefactions than their beneficiaries. If virtuous benefactors did not get less out of their virtuous benefactions than their beneficiaries—for example, if they actually got more out of their actions than their beneficiaries did—then their beneficiaries would not be in their debt.⁵⁸ And if beneficiaries are not indebted to their virtuous benefactors (because their virtuous benefactors get as much or more out of their virtuous benefactions), then their virtuous benefactors would not be deserving of any rewards. A reward, after all, is given to remove the debt owed to the virtuous benefactor and restore equality. It is a corrective of inequality. Thus, if no debt is owed, no reward is deserved.

Therefore, according to Aristotle, virtuous people face the following dilemma. Either accept (a) virtuous people are owed nothing by their beneficiaries and (b) they are not deserving of any rewards or accept (c) virtuous people get less out of their virtuous actions than their beneficiaries. Now, Aristotle agrees with Kant that virtuous people reject both (a) and (b). He

⁵⁸ This consequence is well observed by Pangle (2003, 236, n. 13).

therefore has reason to conclude that they do or would accept (c)—that virtuous actions are less choiceworthy, in themselves, than the benefits they provide to others;⁵⁹ that is, insofar as virtuous people believe both that virtuous actions make one deserving of rewards and that beneficiaries are indebted to their virtuous benefactors, they take virtuous actions to be less choiceworthy, in themselves, than the benefits they provide to others. And even if virtuous people are inconsistent about this point, Aristotle has reason to believe that this is the view they are more committed to.

Now, this conclusion does not necessarily conflict with the claim that virtuous people choose virtuous actions for their own sake. But it plausibly does. I noted above that Aristotle thinks it is a fundamental commitment of virtuous people that virtuous actions are deserving of rewards. But this can be put more precisely. Virtuous actions are seen to make one unqualifiedly deserving of rewards (see NE 1123b15-1124a1). I mean by this that unless some additional (sufficiently) choiceworthy thing accrues to a virtuous person as a consequence of her virtuous action, she will be seen as deserving of a reward. As I discussed, this requires, on Aristotle's analysis of rewards, that virtuous actions be unqualifiedly less choiceworthy than the benefits they provide to others. There are two possible explanations for why virtuous actions would be this way.

The first explanation is that virtuous actions are not choiceworthy for their own sake. They therefore unqualifiedly place the beneficiary in the debt of her virtuous benefactor (since her virtuous benefactor doesn't get anything out of the actions themselves). And since a reward is a corrective of inequality, virtuous actions unqualifiedly make the virtuous benefactor deserving of a reward. The second explanation is that virtuous actions are choiceworthy for their

⁵⁹ This is also Pangle's interpretation (2003, 60, first paragraph, 77, bottom paragraph, 120-2, 126-30, 139, first paragraph, 165, bottom paragraph, and what follows). She is challenged by Gabriel Richardson Lear (2003), but Lear appears to have missed parts of Pangle's argument. The difficulty is not, as Lear represents it, that virtuous people strive for honor (paragraphs 9, 12, 15), but that they perceive honor, or some other external benefit, as their justly owed reward, as she herself acknowledges (paragraphs 12, 14, 20).

own sake, but of such infinitesimal value that, whatever benefits they provide to others, they unqualifiedly put the virtuous actor at a disadvantage. But if virtuous actions unqualifiedly put the virtuous actor at a disadvantage, then, since a reward is a corrective of being at a disadvantage, virtuous actions will make the virtuous actor unqualifiedly deserving of a reward.

The first explanation is the more plausible one both as an explanation for why virtuous actions would be unqualifiedly less choiceworthy than the benefits they provide to others and also as an explanation for why they would be seen by virtuous people to be; that is, insofar as virtuous people see virtuous actions as unqualifiedly deserving of rewards, they see them as unqualifiedly less choiceworthy than the benefits they provide to others. And the better explanation for why virtuous people see virtuous actions this way is that they see them as not being choiceworthy for their own sake. However, this explanation conflicts with Aristotle's claim that virtuous people choose virtuous actions for their own sake. He thus faces a choice. Either deny that virtuous people see virtuous actions as unqualifiedly deserving of rewards or deny that they chose virtuous actions for their own sake. He chooses the second option. He denies, in the last analysis, that virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake. This point can also help explain two other puzzling things that happen in book 10 of the NE.

The first puzzling thing is Aristotle's relegation in NE 10.7-8 of the life of moral virtue to a mere secondary status when it comes to happiness (see NE 1178a6-10, 20-2, 1178b25-32). To some commentators, this has been difficult to square with his earlier association of the activity of moral virtue with happiness.⁶⁰ But if he denies, in the last analysis, that virtuous actions are

⁶⁰ See, for example, Nussbaum 1986, 375-6. Note that Aristotle's initial association of happiness with the activity of moral virtue (see, for example, NE 1099a24-33, 1099b28-1100a1, 1100b33-1101a13, 1117b7-13) may actually be another example of his exploratory investigative strategy; that is, after concluding in the function argument that happiness is a rational activity in accord with virtue, he initially posits that this virtue is *moral virtue*. However, after proceeding onward in his investigation of virtue, he finds reason to revise or reject his initial position. It then comes down to the question of whether his initial association of happiness with the activity of moral virtue represents an initially attractive view.

chosen for their own sake, then he has good reason to conclude that the activity of moral virtue is not identical to happiness. If virtuous actions are not chosen for their own sake, then they fail to meet a requirement of happiness (see NE 1176a35-1176b5).⁶¹ In Aristotle's eyes, the fact that virtuous people see virtuous actions as (unqualifiedly) deserving of rewards ultimately undermines their claim to happiness. Thus, if we set him down as denying that virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake, we can go some of the way to explaining why, at the conclusion of his investigation, he denies that happiness proper is the activity of moral virtue.

This second puzzling thing is a statement Aristotle makes in NE 10.8. In comparing the happiness of contemplation with the happiness of moral virtue (or "the virtue of the intellect with moral virtue," the implied subjects at NE 1178a22 and 1178a25 are unclear) with a view to their reliance on external goods (NE 1178a25-8), he says that virtuous people need other people not only because they need others toward whom they will exercise their virtue, but also because they need others to *witness* their virtue (see NE 1178a28-34; Aquinas, *Com. Nic. Eth.*, paragraph 2118). We can now explain this point. Virtuous people need others to witness their virtue because they need their virtue to be rewarded. As Michael of Ephesus puts it in commenting on Aristotle's claim in NE 9.8 that virtuous people are "selfish" (φιλαυτοι) in the sense that they deliberately secure for themselves what is noble, "That is, [they secure for themselves] honor from virtuous people and reward from God, our creator." (*In Eth. Nic.*, 506, lines 31-2; see, also, 507, lines 7-10, 21-4).⁶²

⁶¹ More accurately, the activity of moral virtue would fail to meet two requirements of happiness: (i) being chosen for its own sake and (ii) being intrinsically pleasant (see n. 37).

⁶² It might be objected that Michael misreads καλόν here. He takes it to mean "what makes one highly thought of" (i.e., being honored by virtuous people and rewarded by God) instead of "what makes one *worthy* of being highly thought of" (compare Cicero *De Fin.*, 2.48-9 and note that *honestum* is the Latin stand-in for [Epicurus'] καλόν). But this does not matter. The point is that Michael is willing to attribute to Aristotle the view that virtuous people are motivated by external rewards.

Let us sum up this example. Aristotle initially posits an initially attractive view about virtuous motivation—the virtuous person chooses virtuous actions for their own sake. However, after observing that virtuous actions are, and are also held by virtuous people to be, unconditionally deserving of rewards and also after laying out the conditions for deserving a reward, he sees that virtuous people encounter a dilemma. They must either deny that virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake or deny that they are unconditionally deserving of rewards. Aristotle believes that virtuous people either do or would choose the first option. He therefore denies, at the conclusion of the work, that virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake. Such, at any rate, is the explanation for this contradiction that we can provide by appealing to Aristotle's exploratory investigative strategy.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that Aristotle employs an exploratory investigative strategy in the NE; that is, he posits initial attractive views with an eye to exploring their consequences. And when he discovers that an initially attractive view has problematic consequences, he revises or rejects it. This may seem like a small point, but it has important implications. First of all, it has implications for how we should read the work. If we accept that he employs an exploratory investigative strategy, then we should be open to this investigative strategy as a possible explanation for various contradictions in the text. I have provided four such examples but there are presumably others as well. Second, Aristotle's employment of an exploratory investigative strategy has implications for his pedagogical and methodological commitments; specifically, he comes to light as just as concerned with modeling how to undertake a philosophical investigation—including the employment of what he judges are useful investigative strategies, such as the exploratory investigative strategy I have described in this paper—as he is in

communicating the results of his own philosophical investigations. Furthermore, I pointed to a reason to think that the employment of this investigative strategy may be especially useful within the investigative framework of the NE. It's one of the hallmarks of the work that Aristotle elevates (proper) habituation to a reliable truth-producing process akin to perception. However, this gives rise to the problem of "false positives." Just because virtuous people tend to accept a given view does not necessarily mean that it's grounded in their habituation or experience. An exploratory investigative procedure is thus one possible response to this problem; that is, in cases of uncertainty, it proves a way to test and explore a given view that virtuous people tend to accept. If in fact Aristotle employs this strategy more often in the NE than in other places, this would then provide a reason why he does so. However, the question of to what extent he employs this investigative strategy elsewhere will have to wait for another occasion.⁶³

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