Aristotle on Happiness:

The Communal versus the Contemplative Life

By

Therese Tisseverasinghe

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Approved:	Dr. John E.MacKinnon Supervisor
Approved:	Dr. Steven Burns External Examiner
Approved:	Dr. Mark Mercer First Reader
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I dedicate this thesis to
Sara-Kate Huntriss, Sr. Fernande, and Prof. John MacKinnon.

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Abstract

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Abstract: In this thesis, I propose a solution to the apparent incompatibility between Aristotle's account of virtuous friendship and his idea of the contemplative life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the first chapter, I outline the contrast between communal and contemplative life. In the second chapter, I present each of the four attempts Aristotle makes at resolving this issue and show how he fails at each. Finally, in the third chapter, I discuss why both the communal and the contemplative lives are necessary for human happiness and how it is possible to integrate the two. I conclude this paper with a discussion of Buddhist and Christian monastic life as providing a particularly illuminating model for understanding Aristotle's notion of happiness, as they comprise both contemplation and virtuous friendship.

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Introduction

According to Aristotle, happiness is the end at which all our actions are aimed. However, what constitutes happiness is a debated topic. Thus some people equate happiness with material good, while others think it is secured by honour and a good reputation. Aristotle, however, defends an alternative conception of happiness. For Aristotle, we achieve happiness by acting in accordance with our human nature, specifically by acting in accordance with the highest part of ourselves, which is the rational element of our soul. Since contemplation is the activity which is most in accordance with the rational element, he concludes that the contemplative life is the happiest kind of life one can possibly lead.

Prior to his discussion of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle presents a thorough examination of friendship. Aristotle considers friendship an important virtue. Therefore, it is the virtuous man who is most suited for it. However, the contemplative life and virtuous friendship appear to be mutually exclusive forms of life. In a contemplative life, one is expected to lead a solitary, private existence, whereas virtuous friendship entails living with others. It seems that the two are incompatible.

Aristotle presents four solutions to this problem, all of which fail to address the real issue. According to Aristotle, the contemplative life is self-sufficient. However, since the contemplative person can only be self-sufficient to the extent that he is human, Aristotle suggests that his self-sufficiency is inclusive of friendship. This is because human self-sufficiency requires, to some extent, certain external goods. Since Aristotle considers friendship the greatest external good, he categorizes friendship as a component

of the self-sufficient life. However, Aristotle does not provide any explanation as to how the two can be combined; he merely includes friendship in his discussion of self-sufficiency.

Second, Aristotle presents the idea of a friend counting as another self. After demonstrating that there is a similarity between friendship and one's relationship to oneself, he concludes that a friend is another self. By definition, however, "another" and "self" are contradictory ideas. Yet, for Aristotle, this assertion eliminates the issue of the friend being an external factor, because the term "another self" implies that a friend is essentially a part of oneself. And yet, even if a friend is another self, friendship remains an activity that impinges on the contemplative life.

Third, Aristotle proposes that the virtuous friend is an object of contemplation to the virtuous man. That is, the actions of the virtuous friend are "food-for-thought" for the contemplative person. Again, however, this attempt fails. We cannot consider it friendship if one is the observer while the other is the object of thought, for those involved in a friendship must be engaged in the care of and concern for the other.

Finally, in the *Politics*, he proposes a different approach to accommodate the contemplative person within a community. According to Aristotle, the most virtuous man, being the contemplative, should not be considered equal, but rather superior, to the average citizen in a state. His solution, then, is that the noblest man should be the supreme ruler. However, by making the contemplative person a ruler, Aristotle's argument prevents the philosopher from practicing the activity that he cherishes most. As a result, the contemplative cannot be the happiest man, since he must give up his greatest joy.

In my third chapter, after dismissing Aristotle's various attempts, I present a different approach to solving this problem. According to Aristotle, humans are composite creatures, part material and part immaterial, the higher of these being the immaterial soul that has the capacity to act rationally. However, contemplation is an activity and, according to Aristotle, no one can be engaged in an activity continuously. Therefore, we may conclude that no one can contemplate continuously, but only for limited periods of time. From this we may infer that, when not contemplating, the next best thing is to participate in virtuous friendship. Thus, the happiest form of life is one in which the virtuous man contemplates the truth as much as he can and, when not contemplating, engages in virtuous friendships. Finally, I introduce Aristotle's doctrine of the mean to show that happiness requires that one should neither neglect the well-being of his material body nor his immaterial soul. Consequently, the happiest form of life must be one in which both aspects of the person are given the proper attention.

In the final section of the third chapter, I begin my discussion of a way of life that embraces both contemplative and communal lives. This is the monastic life. I explore how the monastic life provides a compelling example of how virtuous friendship can be successfully amalgamated with the contemplative life. The monastic life, as it is generally related to religious life, also seems an ideal example of Aristotle's conception of happiness, since Aristotle himself claims that theology is the highest form of theoretical wisdom. While Aristotle would likely reserve such an existence for men alone, the conception of monastic life that I defend is available to both men and women.

Chapter I: Contradictory Nature of Communal and Contemplative Life

Communal life appears to be incompatible with contemplative life. While communal life essentially depends on one's relationship with others, the contemplative life is independent of it. In this chapter, I will discuss how Aristotle's views on human nature conflict with his position on the nature of the contemplative life.

According to Aristotle, humans are essentially social beings. This is central to his discussion of the state in the *Politics* and of virtuous friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, the argument for the social nature of human beings seems to contradict his assertion that the contemplative life is the noblest form of life to lead. According to Aristotle, the contemplative life is also the happiest life, as it is most in accord with our higher self. And yet, contemplation is an activity that does not seem to accommodate human relationships.

Contradictory Nature of Communal versus Contemplative Life

The communal life and the contemplative life seem mutually exclusive. Contemplation is an activity that must be limited to the individual. This is because, when we are contemplating, we cannot, at the same time, be engaged in any other activity that requires a great amount of our attention. However, to engage actively in a relationship with someone means to focus much of our attention on that person. But then this disrupts us

from attending to our own thoughts. Consequently, our relationship with others distracts us from contemplating the good. Contemplation, then, must be a solitary, asocial experience.

On the other hand, communal life entails many kinds of relationships. There are personal kinds of relationships, such as those we enjoy with family members, relatives, friends, and neighbours, people with whom we have, to varying degrees, an informal, and even intimate, relationship. There are also formal kinds of relationships, such as those we have with our teachers, doctors, and co-workers, people with whom we are in regular contact but with whom we do not associate intimately. Additionally, there is the kind of relationship we have with strangers, such as a shopkeeper, police officer or bus driver, those with whom we come into close contact, but only for a short while. Hence, when part of a community, one must necessarily be involved in different kinds of relationships.

The contradictory nature of the relationship between communal life and contemplative life suggests that one cannot simultaneously be involved in both. That is, one cannot both be present to a friend and contemplate the good at the same time. If one wants to lead a contemplative life, one must be apart from others, since communal life can serve as a source of distraction to the contemplative man. Likewise, contemplative life does not seem to promote the formation of human relationships. If anything, it appears only to prevent one from affiliating with others. Thus, if Aristotle is to be consistent, it appears that he cannot both maintain that humans are essentially social beings and that contemplation is the best activity without proposing how the two might be combined. Therefore, we will investigate how the communal life might be integrated into the contemplative life. Before doing so, we must first take a closer look at

Aristotle's conception of human nature and his argument for the preeminence of the contemplative life.

Aristotle on Human Nature

A vital component of Aristotle's conception of human nature is that we are inherently social beings. As a result, humans naturally seek the company of others. In Book I.2 of the *Politics*, he asserts that "man is by nature a political creature" (*P*1253a2, *P*1278b20). Furthermore, he states, "man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals" (*P*1253a8-9). In fact, Aristotle suggests that a "social instinct is implanted in all men by nature" (*P*1253a 29-30). As such, "men, even when they do not require one another's help, desire to live together" (*P*1278b20-21). Thus, for Aristotle, people are essentially social, not just to satisfy their basic needs, but to express an innate desire to be in the company of other human beings.

According to Suzanne Stern-Gillet, in *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, because Aristotle so strongly emphasizes the social aspect of human nature, human flourishing, for him, "requires the fulfillment of innate social tendencies" (Stern-Gillet, 128). She writes, "since sociality has been defined into human nature, friendly relationships in general are necessary for the actualization of what Aristotle presents as an essential human potentiality" (Stern-Gillet, 130).

In Aristotle's works, the social instinct of human beings plays such a substantial role in human nature that if one lacks this component he is thought to lead an unfulfilled life. In the *Politics*, Aristotle contends that "he who by nature … is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity" (*P*1253a3-4). And again, "he who is unable to live

in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god" (*P*1253a27-29). Stern-Gillet believes that what Aristotle is really implying in these statements is that "a friendless, stateless person should *prima facie* be an object of suspicion." Despite the fact that such an individual "might be wrapped up in contemplation and to that extent be god-like," she asserts that "he is more likely to be a 'beast'" (Stern-Gillet, 130). This is because our social nature is expressed either "through participation in the affairs of the city-state," or "from the formation and cultivation of primary friendships," or "from a combination of both" (Stern-Gillet, 128-9). In fact, Aristotle himself writes that, "man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all" (*P*1253a31-32). We may conclude, then, that, for Aristotle, any person who lives apart from society cannot be considered a good human being, as it is unnatural for any human not to desire the company of others. As it is evident for Aristotle that the social instinct should be preserved in all human beings, no man, not even the most virtuous among us, should live a life outside the state.

Communal Life for Man's Moral Well-being

One obvious reason why we seek communal life is for the sake of our survival. Communal life ensures that we have others to help us find food, build shelters, and shield us from possible dangers. However, Aristotle indicates another important reason why we need to be part of a community. When on our own, we are susceptible to making morally bad decisions. Thus, we need other rational beings to prevent us from moral deterioration.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle insists that the many are better than the few when it comes to our moral preservation. He acknowledges that all people, even the most virtuous human beings, share one moral weakness: our susceptibility to carnal passions and desires. In Book III.14 of the *Politics*, when discussing whether it is better to be ruled by the best man or by the best laws, he recommends that the law is a "better ruler" since it "is free from passion," as opposed to the individual in whom passion "is innate" (*P*1286a17). He continues, "[w]hereas the law is passionless, passion must ever sway the heart of man" (1286a19). Aristotle is concerned that even if a man establishes virtue as his highest priority, he is still at risk of falling prey to his own desires.

In this particular discussion, Aristotle admits that while the law is passionless, it retains one fault, namely, it speaks "only in general terms, and cannot provide for circumstances" (*P*1286a10-11). Consequently, in cases where the law is unable to determine an outcome, Aristotle suggests that multiple individuals, rather than a single person, should render the verdict. He notes, "the many are more incorruptible than the few; they are like the greater quantity of water which is less easily corrupted than a little" (*P*1286a31-34). What is of concern to Aristotle is that "[t]he individual is liable to be overcome by anger or by some other passion, and then his judgment is necessarily perverted" (*P*1286a34-35). Consequently, many judges are better than a few, since "it is hardly to be supposed that a great number of persons would all get into a passion and go wrong at the same moment" (*P*1286a36-38). Hence, the many act as a buffer to the few, so that, even if only one or two may fall prey to these human passions, the rest can prevent them from acting irrationally.

Second, it is morally advantageous to have a large group of people together as it yields a greater variety of virtues. According to Aristotle, provided that "the people are not utterly degraded, although individually they may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge—as a body they are as good or better" (*P*1282a15-18). Consequently, "the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively" (*P*1281a42-b3). Thus, he indicates that when the virtues of individuals are combined, the group as a whole acts as a single entity possessing all the virtues of each individual it comprises. It is "just as a feast to which many contribute" in contrast to a "dinner provided out of a single purse," since "each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner [of] one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition" (*P*1281b3-10). In a sense, the many become a single "super-virtuous" man, comparatively superior to each individual by himself. Therefore, many virtuous men combined can contribute to the single cause better than a single virtuous person.

Aristotle provides yet another reason why the many are better than the few. According to him, having a few virtuous men mixed in with a group of morally weak men is a better alternative than keeping the two groups separate. That is, the righteousness of the few is of greater value when they are integrated with society. This is because, "[w]hen they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and combined with the better class they are useful to the state, but each individual, left to himself, forms an imperfect judgment" (*P*1281b34-38). According to Aristotle, the goodness of the entire state is enhanced, to some extent, by the presence of a few wise

individuals, "just as impure food when mixed with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of the pure would be" (*P*1281b36-37). Therefore, the state benefits most from its virtuous citizens when they are mixed together with the rest of society.

On the other hand, in his discussion of virtuous friendship, Aristotle provides the opposite argument by stating that the virtuous man requires the company of other virtuous people. Although these two arguments seem contradictory, both are made essentially for the same reason. Virtuous men are needed in the state to provide a positive example for the morally weak, yet virtuous men must also keep close to one another in order to sustain their own virtues. Virtuous friends are necessary for our moral well-being, he says, in three important ways, each of which is closely related to the others. First, from virtuous friendship, "[a] certain training in virtue arises ... from the company of the good" (*NE*1170a11-12). Aristotle believes that people take from others "the mould of the characteristics they approve" (*NE*1172a14). Therefore, the virtuous man takes as a model the virtuous behaviour of his noble companions. Second, he asserts that, "it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good" (*NE*1105b10-12). Aristotle firmly believes that the noble man must continually practice his virtues in order to remain virtuous. Since it is easier to practice virtuous acts on good people, he recommends that the wise man be in the company of other noble men. As he puts it, "the friendship of good men is good, being augmented by their companionship; and they are thought to become better too by their activities and by improving each other" (*NE*1172a12-13). Third, virtuous men prevent their friends from

morally failing. According to Dale Jacquette, in "Aristotle on the Value of Friendship as a Motivation for Morality," Aristotle's solution to moral failure is virtuous friendship. Although "[a]nyone can falter in trying to do what is right, through weakness of will occasioned by frustration or fatigue, or conflicting considerations of apparent self-interest," virtuous friends "help each other through [such] periods when weakness of moral will threatens an otherwise good person with the temptation to act immorally" (Jacquette, 383). Therefore, the company of other good men preserves and augments the goodness of the noble man "by providing a good example, by inspiring friends with a sense of shame for wrongdoing, and by living a life of virtue to be admired and imitated" (Jacquette, 384).

In both the *Magna Moralia* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle identifies a different reason why we need the company of others. There, he suggests that it is in our friends that we are able truly to see ourselves. In *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle writes, "we are not able to see what we are from ourselves....As then when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend" (*MM*1213a14-24). According to Stern-Gillet, Aristotle's theory of knowledge "provides a deep and comprehensive account of" what he considers to be "an ineradicable aspect of human nature," which is "that human beings, *qua* such, cannot take the measure of their own being in the absence of things or beings other than and external to themselves" (Stern-Gillet, 129). Our point of reference must always be in relation to things outside ourselves. Similarly, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he states that "[t]o perceive a friend ... is necessarily in a manner to perceive oneself, and to know a friend is in a manner to know

oneself" (*EE*1245a5-9). This is because, "with us welfare involves a something beyond us, but the deity is his own well-being" (*EE*1245b18-19). Stern-Gillet explains that, "[w]hile the divine nature constitutes its own, uniquely suitable, cognitive object, human beings need to apprehend objects external to themselves before they can, derivatively, gain reflexive awareness" (Stern-Gillet, 129). Therefore, in our relationship with others, we come to know ourselves and discover our identity.

For all of the above reasons, Aristotle concludes that the individual is morally improved by living in a community. For him, community life is indispensable to the moral well-being of each individual. It is essential for both the provision of basic necessities and for moral refinement of the individual.

Friendship as a Virtue

In Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle initiates his discussion of friendship, introducing three distinct types. What differentiates each from the others is its particular object of love. Thus, there are friendships based on utility, pleasure, and the good. The first two are similar in that those who are involved in such friendships are in them for the sake of something other than the friend. Only the third type of friendship, that whose object of love is *the* good, is true friendship. Friendships based on utility and pleasure resemble virtuous friendship because they are either pleasant or useful (*NE*1156b14-16). As Aristotle puts it, "[i]t is by their likeness to the friendship of virtue that they seem to be friendships" (*NE*1158b6-7). Virtuous friendship is pleasant because "that which is good without qualification is also without qualification pleasant" (*NE*1156a23). It is also useful, "for those who delight in each other … confer benefits on each other"

(*NE*1157b6-8). Therefore, only the virtuous friendship endures, for it is based on the intrinsic, rather than instrumental, value of the friend.

According to Aristotle, only good men can participate in virtuous friendship. He contends, "[p]erfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves" (*NE*1156b6-8). In fact, Jacquette argues that Aristotle presents the virtuous friendship as a prize for acting morally. He claims that this is Aristotle's response to the challenge posed by Plato in *The Republic*. In the narrative of Gyges' ring, Plato highlights the predicament of trying to act morally when it is easier and more advantageous to simply appear moral (Jacquette, 372-6). According to Jacquette, "since in order to be worthy of morally virtuous friends we must ourselves be morally virtuous, aspiring to the highest form of friendship gives every moral agent a rational motivation for doing what is morally right regardless of the consequences" (Jacquette, 387). Furthermore, since Aristotle indicates that only virtuous men know truly what is good for themselves, the good man, in loving his friend, is naturally seeking what is good for himself as well. According to Aristotle, "in loving a friend, men love what is good for themselves; for the good man in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friends" (*NE*1157b33-35). So it seems that the virtuous man loves his friend as he is attracted to the virtue he identifies in him. Each friend, then, becomes a beacon of virtue for the other and, accordingly, their respective souls benefit.

According to Lorraine Smith Pangle, in "Friendship and Self-Love in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," the paradox found in Aristotle's notion of perfect friendship is that, "in seeking and choosing friends, we seek the good for ourselves, and apparently we

love another only if and only so long as he is good for us, yet we are persuaded that we are not real friends unless we wish one another's good apart from what is good for ourselves" (Pangle, 173). The perfect friendship is different from the useful and pleasant friendship, since in such friendships one is not interested in what is truly good for himself or what is good for his friend, but only what *seems* good and what satisfies one's own physical needs and desires. The perfect friendship, therefore, is necessarily concerned with the goods of the soul, because what is good without qualification should be in accord with the highest part of the human being, namely, the rational element of the soul.

One important feature of virtuous friendship is that it is based on mutual love. Aristotle writes that partners in friendship "must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other" (*NE*1156a3-5). If there is no reciprocal love, then, it is not considered friendship but mere good will (*NE*1155b33-34). Secondly, virtuous friendship must also prevail among people of equal virtue. This is because only then do each of the "friends get the same things from one another and wish the same things for one another" (*NE*1158b1-3). If not, then, there will be a disproportion in their love for each other, with the superior receiving the greater share of love. Aristotle writes, "[i]n all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves" (*NE*1158b24-25). He makes this assertion because "when the love is in proportion to the merit of the parties, then in a sense arises equality" (*NE*1158b27). Thus, the relationship between unequally virtuous individuals would be like that between teacher and student or ruler and subject. Although he admits that "the friendship of such persons will be abiding and excellent" when their love is proportional (*NE*1158b23-24), it is not the same as the perfect friendship between equals

(*NE*1158b11-12). So Aristotle concludes that each friend "both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness; for friendship is said to be equality, and both these are found most in the friendship of the good" (*NE*1157b34-37).

Aristotle asserts that virtuous friendship is perfect "in respect of duration" (*NE*1156b32-33). This is because the source of this friendship is the good, and "goodness is an enduring thing" (*NE*1156b11). The other kinds of friendship are short-lived because usefulness and pleasure are transient goods. Virtuous friendship, on the other hand, lasts as long as those who constitute it remain good (*NE*1156b12).

Aristotle asserts that, in perfect friendship, each friend desires to be with his friend all the days of his life. "For there is nothing so characteristic of friends," he declares, "as living together" (*NE*1157b19-20). In cases where friends live apart, "distance does not break off the friendship absolutely, but only the activity of it" (*NE*1157b10). However, he adds, "if the absence is lasting, it seems actually to make men forget their friendship" (*NE*1157b11-12), in which case the friendship is lost. This is all the more reason why he insists on the necessity of living together, for such an arrangement maintains the vitality of the friendship. However, it is not just that virtuous friends ought, but that they desire, to live together, since "people do not live together if they are not pleasant and do not enjoy the same things, as friends who are companions seem to do" (*NE*1157b22-24).

Ideally, according to Aristotle, true friendship is also free of complaints. He bases this assertion on the fact that "those who are friends on the ground of virtue are anxious to do well by each other (since that is a mark of virtue and of friendship), and between

men who are emulating each other in this there cannot be complaints or quarrels" (*NE*1162b6-9). Furthermore, since the virtuous man is "a person of nice feeling he takes his revenge by doing well by the other" (*NE*1162b9-10). As such, no one can get "offended by a man who loves him and does well by him" (*NE*1162b9-10). Therefore, when virtuous friends live together, each does his best to ensure the well-being of his companions, so that no one is in need, and therefore no quarrels or complaints arise.

I have explored in detail Aristotle's account of virtuous friendship. It is obvious that virtuous friendship, although immensely rewarding, has its share of obligations, since its maintenance requires a considerable investment of one's time and effort.

Aristotle on Happiness

Happiness, or *eudaimonia*, for Aristotle, is the chief good, since it is for the sake of this that we do everything else. He begins the discussion of happiness by stating that everything we do aims at some end. The end or goal is what compels men to "do whatever else they do" (*NE*1097a22-23). This end is more worthy than the means, since it is for the sake of the end that one acts. However, there cannot be an infinite number of ends because this would lead to "empty and vain" desires (*NE*1094a19-21). Hence, Aristotle concludes that there is only one ultimate end to human life, which is happiness (*NE*1097b1). According to Aristotle, although we choose "honour, pleasure, [and] reason" for themselves, we "choose them also for the sake of happiness" (*NE*1097b2-4). By contrast, no one chooses happiness "for the sake of these, nor, in general, for the sake of anything other than itself" (*NE*1097b2-7). He also claims that happiness, being the final good, should be "self-sufficient" (*NE*1097b9), by which he means "that which when

isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing" (*NE*1097b14-16). Therefore, Aristotle defines happiness as "something final and self-sufficient," and, as such, the end of all our actions (*NE*1097b21-22).

Aristotle acknowledges that it is inadequate to simply assert that happiness is the highest good. Therefore, he proceeds to give an account of what produces happiness. In order to determine the activity that leads to happiness, he asserts that we must first determine the function of man. This is because the "good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function" (*NE*1097b27-28). The function of anything is that which sets it apart from all other things. Accordingly, he declares that "the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle" (*NE*1098a7-8), since this is "peculiar to man" (*NE*1097b34). It is this that sets us apart from all other living things. He concludes, then, that "human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there is more than one virtue," it is that which is "in accordance with the best and most complete [in us]" (*NE*1098a16-18). Moreover, one must maintain it "in a complete life" (*NE*1098a19). In other words, happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason, and this activity is contemplation.

The Contemplative Life as the Best Life

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that contemplation is the most excellent virtue in man and, thus, the activity that can produce the greatest happiness. He writes, "[h]appiness extends, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious" (*NE*1178b27-31). Consequently,

contemplation, being the best activity of the soul, is what leads to the highest form of happiness in man.

Aristotle claims that contemplation is the most pleasant of all human activities. He states that "the life according to reason is best and pleasantest," and therefore "also the happiest" life to lead (*NE*1178a7-8). According to Aristotle, contemplation offers "pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness" (*NE*1177a25-28), since "not only is reason the best thing in us, but the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects" (*NE*1177a20-21).

Aristotle asserts that contemplation is also an activity that most truly belongs to the gods. This is because, "if you take away from a living being action, and still more production," the only thing left is "contemplation" (*NE*1178b20-22). Therefore, he concludes, "the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative" (*NE*1178b22-23). Moreover, if contemplation is the activity of the gods, they will hold dear anyone who acts in accordance with this activity. He writes, "[f]or if the gods have any care for human affairs, as they are thought to have, it would be reasonable both that they should delight in that which was best and most akin to them (i.e., reason) and that they should reward those who love and honour this most, as caring for the things that are dear to them and acting both rightly and nobly" (*NE*1179a24-29). Therefore, the contemplative man is believed to be the most blessed among his fellow humans since he is most dear to the gods.

Aristotle also contends that contemplation is an activity that is "loved for its own sake" (*NE*1177b2) since there is nothing practical attached to it. No one contemplates for the sake of anything else. In fact, Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* by arguing

that if "there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), ... clearly this must be the good and the chief good" (*NE*1094a17-23). According to Aristotle, since philosophy is the most unproductive of all arts, for nothing arises from contemplation (*NE*1177b3), and since it "aim[s] at no end beyond itself" (*NE*1177b19), it must be the most worthy of all activities.

He also asserts that contemplation is the most self-sufficient of all activities. While everyone needs the basic provisions of life, it is only "the philosopher, even when by himself, [who] can contemplate truth" (*NE*1177a34-b1). All other activities require people or certain instruments. For instance, the brave man depends on situations that will allow him to act bravely, the compassionate man needs others to practice his virtue, and the generous man requires material goods. However, the philosopher needs nothing more than his mind. Hence, Aristotle concludes that the philosopher "is the most self-sufficient" of all (*NE*1177b2).

Why Not Have Two Ultimate Ends?

Could Aristotle have claimed that humans have two ultimate ends, one being virtuous friendship and the other contemplation? There are several reasons why it is unlikely that he intends this, the most obvious being that contemplative life and communal life seem mutually exclusive. In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Richard Kraut calls attention to this predicament. According to Kraut, Aristotle cannot simultaneously hold "that human beings become happier the more they contemplate" and "that the best life we can lead is one in which we willingly give up time we could spend on theoretical pursuits in order to

engage in political activity" (Kraut, 27). Communal life entails obligations to others. We have already established that those who are in virtuous friendships require great amounts of time and effort to maintain them. When a man has obligations to his friends, even if they are in accordance with his desires, he must necessarily suspend his contemplation in order to attend to them. This is what Aristotle seems to indicate in Book X.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he discusses the superiority of the contemplative life over all else. According to Aristotle, the contemplative man, "with a view to the exercise of his activity," finds everything else to be "hindrances" (*NE*1178b3-7), for these are important to him only in a derivative way.

There is another reason why Aristotle could not endorse two ultimate ends. The evidence for this is found in his work *On the Soul*, where, in Book II.1, he proposes that man comprises both a material body and an immaterial soul. According to Aristotle, the body relates to the soul as the eye does to sight (*OS*412b19). This analogy illustrates how the body and soul are different in kind yet interdependent, for there is no sight without the material eye, while the only function of the eye is sight. He continues, "for sight is the substance or essence of the eye which corresponds to the formula, the eye being merely the matter of seeing; when seeing is removed the eye is no longer an eye except in name" (*OS*412b19-21). He adds, "as the pupil *plus* the power of sight constitutes the eye, so the soul *plus* the body constitutes the animal" (*OS*413a3).

Since "the soul is inseparable from its body," both are necessary for human existence (*OS*413a4). On the question of whether the soul and the body are one, Aristotle responds that "it is as meaningless as to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by

the stamp are one" (*OS*412b6-8). A man is the composite of the two, ceasing to exist if either element is missing. It is only in this composite form that the individual exists.

Returning to the question of why Aristotle is unable to integrate virtuous friendship with the contemplative life, one answer seems to be that, if he were to do so, an inconsistency would arise concerning his assertion about the human soul. He writes, "[s]ome hold that the soul is divisible, and that one part thinks, another desires. If, then, its nature admits of its being divided, what can it be that holds the parts together?" (*OS*411b5-6). Aristotle is worried that if he assigns two ultimate ends to the soul, those of thought and desire, then he would have to admit that the soul is not a unified entity, but rather divisible. This leads to another problem concerning his argument about the nature of the soul. He explains that if "there is something else which makes the soul one, this unifying agency would have the best right to the name soul, and we shall have to repeat for it the question: Is *it* one or multipartite?" On the other hand, if it is divisible into smaller units, then he asks, "[w]hat holds *its* parts together, and so *ad infinitum*?" (*OS*411b9-14). Therefore, if he postulates that the soul has several ultimate ends, then he must grant it the property of divisibility. If he allows this, then he must deal with the problem of infinite regression. Thus, Aristotle maintains that there is only a single ultimate end.

Second, attributing two ultimate ends to human function creates problems in terms of the soul-body relation. He earlier claimed that it is "the soul that holds the body together" (*OS*411b7). However, if the soul itself is held together by something else, then it would be dubious to assume that the soul is responsible for keeping the body intact. In

order to avoid these issues, Aristotle asserts that there is only a single ultimate end for the soul.

There is another implicit reason why he would not recognize two ultimate human goods. If there were two, then he would have to assign two different means to these ends. Thus, proposing two different ends to human happiness would appear to entail two different ethics, each detailing how their respective goal is to be achieved. In turn, each would be competing with one another, and conflicts would arise.

Why Choose Contemplation Over Friendship?

Despite the fact that Aristotle maintains the importance of both reason and desire to human happiness, he values one more than the other. In asserting that contemplation is the best activity, Aristotle is clearly placing reason above desire, thought above love, and the meditative life over one based on relationships. The question is, why does he choose the contemplative life over the communal life as the best means of achieving happiness? The answer to this question lies in the fact that human relationships are, by nature, other-dependant.

All relationships depend on something outside oneself. Thus, to claim that the virtuous friendship is the highest good, would also be to claim that one must depend on another for his happiness. In turn, to place one's happiness, the highest good, in the hands of another, is risky. Martha Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, calls attention to this shortcoming. According to Nussbaum, although Aristotle recognizes the externality of relationships as being "essential to the benefits and value of love," he is aware that it "is also, plainly, a source of great vulnerability" (Nussbaum, 354). In fact,

she contends that "Aristotle devotes more sustained attention" to the discussion of friendship "than to any other of the human excellences," because friendship is "external-dependent," and, as such, a "risky part of human life" (Nussbaum, 354).

In *The Fabric of Character*, Nancy Sherman highlights this weakness as well. According to Sherman, "[t]o form a friendship is in part to expose oneself to this risk," since "[f]riendships, in so far as they depend upon mutual interests and affections, easily dissolve as these interests and affections shift." She claims that Aristotle tried to "counteract this vulnerability by making constancy a condition of the best sort of friendship" and by deriving that constancy, in turn, from the "virtue of those involved." However, Sherman claims that this "constancy can do little to prevent the permanent dissolution of a friendship through death." In fact, she asserts that, "[i]f anything, the stability of "such a friendship leaves us least protected against that contingency." This is because it is in losing a "lifelong friend or loved one that we truly feel we have lost a part of ourselves and a substantial part of our happiness." She thus concludes that friendship "makes us vulnerable" and, despite the fact that Aristotle makes constancy "a feature of that friendship, our self-sufficiency remains at best fragile" (Sherman, 129).

In *Novitas Mundi*, D. G. Leahy also draws attention to this issue. According to Leahy, "Aristotle understands intellectual activity to excel moral activity by reason of its self-sufficiency" (Leahy, 45). This is because "[m]oral virtues (practical wisdom, fortitude, justice and so on) need, as context for their proper exercise, an organized human community." In fact, the "moral virtues need that species-life of the *polis* not only for their *acquisition* but also for their *exercise*." In contrast, the "intellectual life," which is that "by which the individual transcends the limiting conditions of his own

humanity," needs no one "for its exercise" (Leahy, 44). Leahy believes that Aristotle ranks the former as the worthier activity because the contemplative life is its own end, whereas practical-moral activity depends on human community (Leahy, 44). Of course, by arguing that the contemplative person needs no one, Leahy seems to disregard the importance of debates, discussions, and cross-questioning in attaining truth. In fact, Aristotle himself states in Book IX of *Nicomachean Ethics* that the wise man needs "to be conscious of the existence of his friend ... and this will be realized in their living together and sharing in discussion and thought" (*NE* 1170b10-12). Indeed, it is surprising that even Aristotle does not seem to emphasize this point or develop it further, especially since it is an important link between virtuous friendship and the contemplative life.

Conclusion

In this chapter we considered how the contemplative life and the communal life might be regarded as incompatible. A person cannot live both a contemplative life and maintain virtuous friendships at the same time. And yet, if both of these are important, how are we to characterize the happiest life? Is it purely contemplative or does it require virtuous friendship? If the latter, how do we integrate virtuous friendship in the contemplative life? On the one hand, humans are social beings, so human relationships are vital for anyone, especially for the virtuous man. On the other hand, contemplation is thought to be the highest good for man. However, in a contemplative life, there seems to be no room for relationships. In the next chapter we will consider the ways in which Aristotle tries to combine the two virtues.

Chapter II: Four Attempts at Solving this Predicament

There are four different ways in which Aristotle tries to reconcile the contemplative life with the communal life. First, he includes virtuous friendship as a necessary component of the self-sufficient life of the contemplative person. Second, he characterizes a friend as another self, so that, by definition, a friend is a part of oneself. This eliminates the problem of a friend being an external good for the self-sufficient life. Third, he proposes that a virtuous friend serves as the object of thought for the contemplative man. Finally, he argues that although the virtuous man should be part of the state, he is too good to be subject to its laws or to be considered equal to the rest of the citizens. Hence, Aristotle proposes that the most virtuous man should be the ruler of the state. In what follows, I will address all four proposals and demonstrate how each fails.

The Ambiguity of Self- Sufficiency

One way Aristotle attempts to incorporate virtuous friendship into his account of the contemplative life is by means of the notion of "self-sufficiency." On the one hand, he claims that self-sufficiency is inclusive of friendship and other external goods. On the other hand, when he uses this term, he seems to have in mind one's independence from external factors.

Self-sufficiency can mean one of two things. In the first sense, it means that which is worthy in itself, such as the chief good, since nothing more can be added to it to

make it better. As Aristotle describes it, these are things "desirable in themselves," from which "nothing is sought beyond the activity" (*NE*1176b6-7). It is in this sense that Aristotle claims that happiness is self-sufficient, for it is complete in itself. In the second sense, self-sufficiency means that which is independent of all things. For instance, as we discussed earlier, the contemplative person, in so far as he is engaged in this activity, is self-sufficient, since he does not need external goods in order to contemplate. Although these two meanings are related, they are not the same. For instance, happiness needs nothing more to augment its worth, just as the philosopher needs nothing outside himself in order to contemplate. However, while the happy life may depend on external goods, the contemplative life, apart from the requirement for basic provisions, does not.

Aristotle's description of the self-sufficiency of the individual in Book I.7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* includes human relationships. He writes, "by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself," as in the case of "one who lives a solitary life, ... since man is born for citizenship" (*NE*1097b8-12). The self-sufficient man, then, is not someone who is cut off from society. This is in accord with his claim that man is by nature a social animal who, as such, should be involved in community life. In this particular section, "self-sufficiency" means, "that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing" (*NE*1097b14-16).

In the *Politics*, he makes a similar assertion, stating that "the individual, when isolated, is not self sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole" (*P*1253a26). He adds, "the state is by nature prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (*P*1253a19-20). Aristotle introduces an analogy to clarify what he means by this. He writes, "if the whole body be destroyed,

there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that" (*P*1253a19-24). For Aristotle, then, society is essential for each human being. Just as a body part is useless when severed from the body, so too is a man who is detached from society.

However, elsewhere in his work, he emphasizes that the self-sufficiency of the contemplative person is independent of human relationships. In one section of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he states that "while a philosopher, as well as a just man or one possessing any other virtue, needs the necessaries of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly, and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others is in the same cause, but the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do so better if he has fellow-workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient" (*NE*1177a29-b2). Although, here, Aristotle mentions that the philosopher would be better off if he had "fellow workers," this is not equivalent to friendship. The fellow workers in question are useful, but not loved for their own sake. As Leahy comments concerning this passage, the intellectual life "does not need other men for its exercise" except "incidentally, in acquisition of the materials of science." Thus, although "man's *potential* knowledge is increased by the presence of fellow-workers," this cannot be considered communal living since fellow workers are only instrumentally valuable to the intellectual (Leahy, 44).

In another section, Aristotle again seems to indicate that the philosopher only needs basic provisions for the sake of living. He writes, "being a man, one will also need external prosperity; for our nature is not self-sufficient for the purpose of contemplation,

but our body also must be healthy and must have food and other attention" (*NE*1178b33-35). Although he admits that the contemplative person is not self-sufficient in terms of bodily needs, he makes no reference to the need for virtuous friendship, or any other kind of companionship for that matter.

Elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, although he acknowledges that friends are necessary for the virtuous man, the friendship he has in mind is utilitarian. In describing happiness, he writes, the virtuous man "needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments" (*NE*1099a31-b3). His use of the term "friend" in this passage is not equivalent to that which refers to virtuous friendship. As Aristotle himself admits, the friend is only a friend insofar as he is of instrumental value.

In a separate discussion, Aristotle clarifies his claim that the philosopher is most independent of external goods, writing, "[t]he liberal man will need money for the doing of his liberal deeds, and the just man too will need it for the returning of services …; and the brave man will need power if he is to accomplish any of the acts that correspond to his virtue, and the temperate man will need opportunity; … [b]ut the man who is contemplating the truth needs no such thing, at least with a view to the exercise of his activity; indeed they are, one may say, even hindrances, at all events to his contemplation; but in so far as he is a man and lives with a number of people, he chooses to do virtuous acts; he will therefore need such aids to living a human life" (*NE*1178a29-b7). Aristotle makes clear that contemplation is a solitary activity and, as such, cannot accommodate human relationships.

Confusion with the notion of "self-sufficiency" seems to stem from Aristotle's careless use of the term. On the one hand, he argues that happiness is self-sufficient (*NE*1097b21), in the sense that it aims at nothing further, and so is complete in itself. From this, he infers that the happiest man is best suited for perfect friendship, for friendship completes human happiness. On the other hand, when he describes the contemplative person as self-sufficient, he means by this that, when one is contemplating, one needs nothing further. In fact, when contemplating, all other activities hinder the contemplative man. According to Leahy, this inconsistency stems from the divergent nature of human beings. He writes, "Man, *qua* man, is *zoon politikon*, a living political animal" (Leahy, 44). Therefore his self-sufficiency should be inclusive of others. However, "the individual, *qua* individual, is like God. He is especially Godlike ... in contemplation" (Leahy, 45). The relevant question here is, can one continuously contemplate all the days of his life? If yes, then we can equate happiness with contemplation, and, as a result, the virtuous man will not need friends. If not, then the happiest life should not be limited to contemplation and we may conclude that virtuous friendship plays a crucial role in human happiness. I will address this issue further in the third chapter.

Concerning a separate but related topic, John Cooper, in *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, argues that "to be virtuous one must not only do what the virtues require, but also choose these actions for their own sakes and as a fixed and unalterable character." However, the wise man that Aristotle describes performs virtuous actions "insofar as he remains involved with other people" and in order to "conform his conduct to the requirements of the virtues." According to Cooper, however often the

contemplative man performs "the just or the temperate or the liberal deed, anyone who organizes his life from the intellectualist outlook cannot care about such action in the way a truly just or temperate or liberal man does." As a result, Cooper claims that the noble man will lack "the social virtues, or any other virtues, because he will lack the kind of commitment to this kind of activity that is an essential characteristic of the virtuous person" (Cooper, 164). If intellectual pursuits are the only interest for the contemplative man, then all his moral actions will be conducted out of necessity rather than desire.

While contemplation is the primary source of joy for the wise man, it need not be the only source. In fact, one can pursue secondary goals which are sought for their own sake. As Aristotle writes, although we choose happiness "for itself and never for the sake of something else," other virtues, such as honour and pleasure, "we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness" (*NE*1097b1-5). For instance, even if I most enjoy contemplating truth, that does not negate my appreciation of the worth of virtuous friendship. Thus, for Aristotle, even if the moral and social virtues are secondary compared to intellectual virtue, they are also worthy in themselves. In the last chapter I will explain how there is room for secondary goals in a virtuous man's life.

A Second Attempt to Unite the Two: The Friend as Another Self

In another attempt to reconcile virtuous friendship with the contemplative life, Aristotle claims that a friend is "another self" (*NE*1166a31), suggesting that a friend is a part of oneself. However, since the word "another" means "one more," something different from the one already mentioned, whereas "self" refers to a "person's essential being,"

something that distinguishes one from others (*Oxford English Dictionary*), the term "another self" is inherently contradictory. Pangle elaborates this point. According to her, "[t]he juxtaposition of 'other' and 'self' is at the very least paradoxical, since for each of us our own identity and consciousness is utterly unique" (Pangle, 187-8). Elsewhere, she claims that the "paradox of the phrase 'another self' points to the fact that even if a friend were identical, he would never be interchangeable with oneself." Thus, "no degree of similarity can erase the ultimate separateness of two individuals" (Pangle, 188).

However, Pangle presents a different interpretation of why Aristotle would make such a paradoxical statement. According to Pangle, "[i]nner harmony is one of virtue's greatest rewards and inner dissension or self-hatred perhaps the worst consequence of vice and moral weakness" (Pangle, 186). Therefore, "if perfect harmony or unity of choice and purpose is the mark of friendship, friendship will necessarily always be an imperfect approximation of what a good man can realize completely in his own soul, for friends have separate bodies, and, invariably, separate desires" (Pangle, 186). Pangle indicates, therefore, that Aristotle purposely introduces this paradoxical phrase in order to highlight the one feature that human relationships do not share with the contemplative life, that of self-sufficiency. However, although Pangle's point that friendship, by definition, cannot allow for self-sufficiency, is important, her understanding of Aristotle's use of this term does not seem consistent with his work. That is, Aristotle tends to tackle issues in a straightforward manner rather than use paradox to make a point, and even if he purposely resorted to paradox to make such a point, he would have been inclined to provide a thorough discussion of it.

Aristotle introduces the notion of "another self" in Book IX.4 of the *Nicomachean*

Ethics when attempting to define friendship, deriving it from the premise that man is "related to his friend as to himself" (*NE*1166a30). He presents several reasons as to why a man's relation to his friend is like that to himself. First, he defines a friend as "one who wishes and does what is good, or seems so, for the sake of his friend" (*NE*1166a2-3), just as a virtuous man also "wishes for himself what is good and what seems so, and does it …, and does so for his own sake" (*NE*1166a15-17). Second, a friend is "one who wishes his friend to exist and live, for his sake" (*NE*1166a4-5). A virtuous man, too, "wishes himself to live and be preserved" (*NE*1166a18). Third, virtuous friends wish to live together and share the same interests (*NE*1166a6-7). The virtuous man, too, "wishes to live with himself" (*NE*1166a23). Furthermore, his "opinions are harmonious, and he desires the same things with all his soul" (*NE*1166a13-14). Finally, a friend is one "who grieves and rejoices with his friend" (*NE*1166a7), just as the virtuous man "grieves and rejoices, more than any other, with himself" (*NE*1166a26), since "the same thing is always painful, and the same thing always pleasant, and not one thing at one time and another at another" (*NE*1166a26-27). Essentially, then, by stating that the noble man is "related to his friend as to himself," he means that such an individual wishes for his friend the same things he would wish for himself and is able easily to feel empathy for his friends, as he knows them so well. (See reference to Pangle's discussion of the two kinds of self-love below page 58.) For these four reasons, Aristotle concludes that the relation of a man to his friend is like his relation to himself. Thus, a friend is another self.

Let us analyze this further. First, he is stating that A's relationship to B is like A's relationship to itself. But then from this he infers that B must be another A. But the identities of the two are distinct, so B cannot be another A. Aristotle falters because he is

confusing the relationship of the objects with their identity. That is, having compared the two kinds of relationships, he concludes that the objects involved must also be identical. However, this conclusion does not follow from the premise, since two relationships can be similar without the objects involved being the same.

By establishing a friend as another self, Aristotle is able to amalgamate virtuous friendship with the contemplative life. That is, by identifying the friend as another self, the friend is no longer considered an external factor. This recalls the argument for the self-sufficiency of the contemplative man. If a friend is another self, then, even if the self-sufficiency of the virtuous man excludes external goods, the true friend is included in the self-sufficient life. However, as we have seen, no matter how close friends may be, they can never become one. As a result, the friend will always remain an external part of oneself. Thus, one's relationship with another will always impinge on one's contemplative life. Yet, as noted earlier, this need not be a problem, for a virtuous friend can enhance the contemplative life by engaging in discussions, sharing ideas, and providing different perspectives.

A Third Attempt: The Friend as an Object of Contemplation

Aristotle attempts to integrate virtuous friendship within the contemplative life at still another juncture of his argument. According to Aristotle, a friend is an object of contemplation for the noble man. This is based on his assertion that "a good man *qua* good delights in virtuous actions" (*NE*1170a6-8). Hence, the virtuous man delights in the virtuous actions of his friend.

According to Aristotle, "we can contemplate our neighbours better than ourselves

and their actions better than our own" (*NE*1169b34-35). While performing a moral action, we cannot, at the same time, be an observer of our own action since we are preoccupied with the action itself. For instance, we first have to determine the rightness or wrongness of a proposed course of action. We ask ourselves, what should I do in this situation? We deliberate about how to respond, and then act. At each of these stages, our minds are simply too preoccupied with the task that confronts us to actually think about and appreciate it. However, if we are observing someone else acting virtuously, then, not being preoccupied with the situation, we can simply sit back and appreciate it.

Because we can appreciate someone else's action more than our own, Aristotle concludes that the virtuous man requires virtuous friends. Since the virtuous friend is a well-spring of noble deeds, he serves as a source of immense joy to the wise man. Aristotle writes, "if the actions of virtuous men who are their friends are pleasant to good men" (*NE*1169b35-70a1), then "the supremely happy man will need friends of this sort" (*NE*1170a3).

Yet, there is a difference between observing another's virtuous activity and participating in a virtuous friendship. Although we can learn some things about an individual by observing them, it is not the only way. In fact, by itself, it is an insufficient method of getting to know someone. We find out about others through conversing with them, spending time together, and from the testimonials of other people who know them. However, even this is insufficient for a friendship, for there is a difference between getting to know someone and being in a relationship with that person. According to Nussbaum, virtuous friendship cannot "possibly be acquired through a general description, through reading an encomium or a character-portrait, or, indeed, by any

distant and non-engaged relationship." Rather, "[i]t requires the experience of shared activity and the cultivation, over time and through the trust that comes only with time, of an intimate responsiveness to that person in feeling, thought, and action" (Nussbaum, 364-5). She adds, "[t]his responsiveness is not and could not be purely intellectual," since "a solely intellectual knowledge of another ... would not be able to contain everything that is available to the intimacy of *philia*" (Nussbaum, 365). As opposed to intellectual knowledge, Nussbaum contends that "[*p*]*hilia*'s knowledge is guided by the pleasure discovered in that person's company, by the feelings of care and tenderness built up through the association and its shared history" (Nussbaum, 365). Thus, true friendship can only be developed through time spent together and, ultimately, experiencing life together. Furthermore, each party must desire to be in the friendship and know that the other shares the same desire.

We may conclude, then, that it is not through contemplation that one engages in friendship, but through active participation in the relationship. No one makes friends by merely observing their actions, nor do they become friends for the sake of observing another's actions. Thus, the contemplative man, in so far as he is observing his friend's action, is not actively being a friend. So again, friendship, being an activity distinct from contemplation, cannot be incorporated into the contemplative life as Aristotle suggests.

Fourth Attempt: Virtues of a Good Citizen versus Those of a Good Ruler

In the *Politics*, Aristotle proposes a vastly different method of incorporating the contemplative activity into community life. According to Aristotle, the ideal state is one where people live together in perfect harmony. He describes the perfect state as that

which represents "the union of families and villages in perfect and self-sufficing life" (*P*1281a1-2). A community consists of "family connexions, brotherhoods, common sacrifices, [and] amusements which draw men together" (*P*1280b37-38). Therefore, the city is not just an aggregate of individuals, but of families and friends. According to Aristotle, the bond that holds the state together is friendship. This is because all the other relationships "are created by friendship, for the will to live together is friendship" (*P*1280b38-39). Jacquette provides another reason why Aristotle claims that friendship is necessary to the state. He writes, "[w]here friendship prevails there is no need for official justice," since citizens who are friends "do what is right toward each other without the need for judicial intervention" (Jacquette, 379). Thus, the state runs smoothly when all its citizens maintain friendly relations with one another.

The contemplative life, on the other hand, seems to have the opposite effect. A community of contemplatives would be a community of self-sufficient individuals. As we have already discussed, affiliation among contemplatives would be minimal since each individual would lead an independent life focused on his own thoughts. Therefore, since the contemplative life is private to each individual, such individuals would not be beneficial to the state.

From this we may conclude that the virtue of the good citizen in a perfect state is manifested in virtuous friendship. Without friendship, a state would collapse into an aggregate of alienated individuals. As Aristotle states in the *Politics*, "a state is not a mere aggregate of persons, but a union of them sufficing for the purposes of life" (*P*1328b16-17). However, the obvious problem that now confronts us is, what should be done with the contemplative in the perfect state?

The Wise Man is Above Law and Outside the State

It is evident, then, that the contemplative life is not conducive to a well-functioning state. A community of contemplatives cannot be united in friendship. However, we can set aside any anxiety that the welfare of a state is threatened by the proliferation of contemplatives, "for such men are rare" (*NE*1156b24). Still, it is likely that a state will harbour a few virtuous people at any given time. So, the question remains, what should be done with the wise, contemplative man?

Aristotle recognizes that the virtuous man cannot be fully integrated into society. If "there be some one person, or more than one ... whose virtue is so pre-eminent that the virtues or the political capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or theirs," he writes, "he or they can be no longer regarded as part of a state" (*P*1284a3-7). This is consistent with his earlier statements that "he who by nature ... is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity" (*P*1253a3-4) and that "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god" (*P*1253a27-29). We may safely conclude, then, that for Aristotle the most virtuous man is superior to others, since we would not consider him less than human. In fact, Aristotle explicitly states that "[s]uch an one may truly be deemed a God among men" (*P*1284a10-11). Hence, it is wrong to treat anyone who is exceptionally virtuous as merely equal to the average man. As Aristotle puts it, "justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and in political capacity" (*P*1284a3-10).

Aristotle, then, questions what society should do with the supremely virtuous man. He writes, "[m]ankind will not say that such an one is to be expelled and exiled,"

yet such an individual "ought not to be a subject" either, as "that would be as if mankind should claim to rule over Zeus" (*P*1284b29-31). Instead, the "only alternative is that all should joyfully obey such a ruler, according to what seems to be the order of nature, and that men like him should be kings in their state for life" (*P*1284b32-34). Therefore, according to Aristotle, the contemplative man should become the ruler of his own state. In a later section of the *Politics*, he confirms this belief by stating that "when a whole family, or some individual, happens to be so pre-eminent in virtue as to surpass all others, then it is just that they should be the royal family and supreme over all, or that this one citizen should be king of the whole nation" (*P*1288a15-19). In this way, the contemplative is both part of a state and yet not subject to its laws.

According to Aristotle, a noble man should not be at the mercy of human laws. Anyone "would be ridiculous," he says, "who attempted to make laws for them" (*P*1284a14-15). In fact, Aristotle asserts that "there is no law" for a virtuous man, (*P*1284a13) for wise men "are themselves a law" (*P*1284a14). Therefore, the virtuous man is above the state. This is in accordance with what he says in Book I.2 of the *Metaphysics*, where he writes, "the wise man must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey *him*" (*M*982c18-19). It is fitting that Aristotle would make such an assertion, for ultimately, he insists, the purpose of law is to make the individuals within a society virtuous. In the *Politics*, he remarks that "a state exists for a good life, and not for the sake of life only" (*P*1280a31-32). And again, "political society exists for the sake of noble actions" (*P*1281a3). Therefore, the object of a state is to make its citizens virtuous. However, if one is already virtuous, the laws are superfluous. Indeed, since he already possesses all the virtues, he is best fit to rule.

There is a further important reason why Aristotle would insist that the virtuous man should rule, namely, that he would also be the most just. For a ruler, justice is an important quality, since such a man must act impartially towards all. Even more important, such a man is least likely to place his needs above the rest. In Book VIII.10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes, "[f]or a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects" (*NE*1160b2-6). The noblest man, then, being self-sufficient and possessing all the virtues, is the best ruler.

This is one of the reasons Socrates provides in *The Republic* for why the philosopher should rule. Plato writes, "[b]ut the truth is surely this: that city in which those who are going to rule are least eager to rule is necessarily governed in the way that is best and freest from faction, while one that gets the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way" (*The Republic*, VII.520b-d). The reason Plato gives as to why the philosopher is least eager to rule is that, encountering the Good, the philosopher comes to know of "a life better than ruling" (*The Republic*, VII.521a). As a result, the philosopher will not be tempted to secure material goods for himself. For Plato, the philosopher alone is truly rich, "not in gold but in those riches required by the happy man, rich in a good and prudent life" (*The Republic*, VII.521a). Thus, the philosopher, being acquainted with the Forms, especially the Form of the Good, will not be concerned with material goods, and hence, least likely to act out of self-interest.

Aristotle follows Plato and Socrates in insisting that those who are pre-eminent in virtue should rule the state. First, there is the issue of Socrates' fate. While Socrates was

thought to be the wisest man in Athens, he was executed by the state under the pretense that he corrupted the young and acted impiously. In light of this, Aristotle realized that in an imperfect state there is no room for those who are truly virtuous, since such individuals obey no law except the moral law. The greatness of their virtue sets them apart from the rest of society, making them easy targets for attack. This is evident in his *Politics*, where he raises the issue of the virtuous person being ostracized by the state.

In Book III.13 of the *Politics*, Aristotle discusses the ostracizing of those who are supremely good on the grounds that "equality is above all things" (*P*1284a20). In states where equality is the highest aim, Aristotle claims that anyone who "seemed to predominate too much through their wealth, or the number of their friends, or through any other political influence" would be "ostracized and banished from the city" (*P*1284a20-23). Aristotle does not disapprove of ostracism when used in the "right way." For instance, "where there is acknowledged superiority," he says, "the argument in favour of ostracism is based upon a kind of political justice" (*P*1284b16-17). So, ostracism can be a form of justice whereby the state "acts by disabling and banishing the most prominent citizens" (*P*1284a37-38). His concern, however, is about when it is wrongly applied (*P*1284b20-21). Ostracism is a cause for concern, not when it is "applied to [those with] excess strength, wealth, popularity, or the like," but when it is used "against someone who is pre-eminent in virtue" (*P*1284b26-28). Being pre-eminently virtuous, Socrates was viewed as a threat to his state, and so was tried and sentenced to death. For Aristotle, however, it is in precisely such cases that the pre-eminently virtuous man should be elevated to the status of supreme ruler rather than persecuted and banished.

Second, Aristotle's virtuous ruler bears a close resemblance to Plato's philosopher-king. In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato portrays average citizens as prisoners in a dark cave "with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only [what is] in front of them" (*The Republic*, VII.514b). All that the prisoners can see are "shadows cast by the fire," all of which are images of artifacts (*The Republic*, VII.515a). The philosopher, on the other hand, is like one who is released from this bondage, being able to "stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light" (*The Republic*, VII.515c). Being free, the philosopher is able to leave the cave and ultimately behold the sun, which, for Plato, represents the Good. According to Plato, once the philosopher encounters the *idea* of the Good, he will conclude that "this is in fact the cause of all that is right and fair in everything" (*The Republic*, VII.517c). However, Socrates contends that it is intolerable that such a man should rest content with mere contemplation (*The Republic*, VII.519d). Instead, he must return to the cave in order to release the other prisoners. This is the duty of the philosopher-king.

The Philosopher-King Cannot be the Happiest Man

Although Aristotle and Plato advocate similar theories, there is a difference between their views of happiness and the virtuous life. The ultimate aim of Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *The Republic* is to give an account of the good life and what virtuous living consists in. While Aristotle is concerned with happiness in this life, however, Plato is unconcerned with earthly happiness. According to Plato, only at death is the philosopher truly happy, for only then is his soul freed from the bondage of the body (*Phaedo*, 64a-65a).

In making the philosopher into a king, Aristotle is depriving the philosopher of his most cherished activity. Since the philosopher-king is expected to rule, he must relinquish the contemplative life, except to the extent that ruling requires contemplation. According to Plato, philosopher-kings first "go up that ascent; and, when they have gone up and seen sufficiently," they must not "remain there" (*The Republic*, VII.519d). So, despite the fact that the philosopher is disinclined to return to the cave and live "among those prisoners or share their labors and honors," he is compelled to do so (*The Republic*, VII.519d).

When Socrates' companion, Glaucon, protests this assertion, his only response is that "it's not the concern of law that any one class in the city fare exceptionally well, but it contrives to bring this about in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, making them share with one another the benefit that each is able to bring to the commonwealth. And it produces such men in the city not in order to let them turn whichever way each wants, but in order that it may use them in binding the city together" (*The Republic*, VII.519e-520a). It is evident, then, that Plato is unconcerned with the happiness of the individual. His main goal is to improve the entire state. Therefore, he is untroubled by the fact that the philosopher-king is left in an unhappy state, which in any case is transient.

Thus, the philosopher-king, forced to rule, forsakes his greatest happiness. Although this is not a problem for Plato, it is for Aristotle. According to Kraut, in *Aristotle on the Human Good*, ruling is a burden for the philosopher, so the life of the philosopher-king cannot be said to be the happiest form of life. He explains, "philosophers who are not burdened with the responsibilities of Plato's philosopher-king

will have more time for theoretical studies, and, since more contemplation is always better than less, they will have better lives" (Kraut, 27). Therefore, Aristotle cannot assert that the virtuous man is the happiest man if he is forced to be a ruler. It can be either, not both. So, we may conclude that the happiest life for the philosopher is not to be found in ruling.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to demonstrate how Aristotle tried to combine virtuous friendship and the attendant joys of communal life with the contemplative life. In each case, I demonstrated why Aristotle failed. In the first, the use of the term "self-sufficiency" to describe the contemplative life is too vague, at times inclusive of virtuous friendship while at others seeming to exclude it. Indeed, the contemplative life does not seem to accommodate any type of relationship except that in which the individuals involved equally value contemplation and encourage it in each other. Second, while Aristotle's definition of a virtuous friend as another self solves the problem of the friend being an external factor to the self-sufficient life, the statement is meaningless when taken literally. As demonstrated, the notion of another self is paradoxical since, by definition, a "self" cannot be "another." And although Aristotle demonstrates that a man's relationship to his friend is similar to his relationship to himself, this does not entail that a friend is another self. Third, his claim that a virtuous friend is the object of contemplation for the virtuous man fails. If the virtuous man is only an object of contemplation to his friend, this cannot be considered friendship, for friendship entails interaction between those involved. Finally, his attempt to incorporate contemplative

activity into communal life by installing the virtuous man as a ruler fails, since, in assuming such duties, the contemplative person is prevented from practicing the activity that he most desires. We can conclude, therefore, that, despite his best efforts, Aristotle fails to show how the two ideals can be incorporated into a single life.

Chapter III: Integrating the Communal Life into the Contemplative Life

So far, I have only demonstrated that the communal and the contemplative lives are at odds with each other. In this chapter we will take a look at why the two types of life must be reconciled and how we can do so.

Why Must the Two be Reconciled?

The need to reconcile the communal and the contemplative lives stems from the fact that humans are both intellectual and social beings. In *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Cooper presents a "bipartite conception of human flourishing" (Cooper, 144). Cooper claims that since we have "both intellectual and emotional needs," as well as "the possibility of both intellectual and emotional satisfaction, a human being needs both intellectual and moral virtues in order to achieve all the good things attaching to the two parts of his nature" (Cooper, 147). Thus, the happiest life must satisfy both of these dimensions of human nature.

Cooper describes the conception as embracing the "two fundamental ends" of human life, which are "morally excellent action and pure speculative thinking" (Cooper, 147). According to Cooper, "[a] human being necessarily possesses a mind and also desires," and so "is necessarily at once an emotional and an intellectual being." He asserts that, as a result, "the values of social and family life, which are organized by the

moral virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and the rest," should be "given a place alongside the value provided in the development and exercise of the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom." He considers these two as "coordinate parts of the single ultimate end, which is to live a flourishing human life" (Cooper, 144). Therefore, according to Cooper, although human flourishing is a single end, in order to achieve it, one must develop both his intellectual and social natures. Cooper calls this approach the "commonsense" view since it combines the "highest mental functions" with the "remaining human life-powers" and, as a result, "regards a human being as at once and equally an intellectual and a social being" (Cooper, 177-8).

In *The Fabric of Character*, Sherman offers a similar interpretation of Aristotle. According to Sherman, "Aristotle's claim is not that happiness is to be *identified* with the ascetic life." Rather, she believes that "happiness must *include* the leisure for contemplation, and that the good person must find time for its incomparable rewards." She asserts that "[c]ontemplative excellence does not supplant the more worldly virtues nor take precedence. It must be conjoined with them in a life which remains essentially political and communal" (Sherman, 128-9). Thus, according to Sherman, both the social and the intellectual aspects of a human being must be equally cultivated in order for one to achieve his greatest happiness.

Both Stern-Gillet and Nussbaum similarly argue that the contemplative life alone, being solitary, is unsuitable for humans. According to Stern-Gillet, since Aristotle compares the contemplative man to a god and "since God is not in need of friends," people often assume that "the happiest and best human beings, who most resemble the divine, will not need them either" (Stern-Gillet, 129). Whereas "divine *autarky*" or self-

sufficiency "is total," however, she asserts that "ours cannot be other than sporadic and incomplete" (Stern-Gillet, 129). This is because human beings "cannot take the measure of their own being in the absence of things or beings other than and external to themselves" (Stern-Gillet, 129). That is, our external world and our relationships with others play significant roles in how we come to know and evaluate ourselves.

Meanwhile, Nussbaum argues that "the solitary life is insufficient for *eudaimonia*" (Nussbaum, 350). However, her argument for why the solitary life is insufficient is slightly different from that of Stern-Gillet. According to Nussbaum, "[i]f *eudaimonia* is to include every value without which a life would be judged incomplete, it must include the political as an end in its own right" (Nussbaum, 350). That is, if we are to take Aristotle's notion of happiness as being complete, it must include all aspects of human nature. It cannot endorse a life that ignores any part of our nature. She concludes, then, that the "solitary life would not only be less than perfect; it would also be lacking in something so fundamental that we could hardly call it a human life at all" (Nussbaum, 350). Thus, the purely contemplative life is unsuitable for a fully human life. One also needs to develop other aspects of human nature, such as our social tendencies.

In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Kraut suggests a different interpretation of Aristotle's notion of human happiness. According to Kraut, "the best kind of life human beings could want for themselves is one that has the greatest possible amount of philosophical activity." As Aristotle argues, that is, the best human activity is contemplation. So it should be sought before all else. However, "there is a second-best kind of life: one in which one tries to have as much excellent practical activity as possible." That is, when we are unable to pursue the best activity, we must take the

second best. According to Kraut, "Aristotle is claiming that the best target to aim at, when one seeks one's happiness, is not one that is itself a complex mixture of goods. The best any life can achieve is to have as much of one good," and this is contemplation (Kraut, 47).

Kraut's argument is different from the other authors' assertions, for he claims that while they insist that true happiness is a mixture of the two human goods, our social and intellectual natures are not on equal footing for Aristotle. Instead, our intellectual life must take precedence over social life. That is, we must strive above all to cultivate the contemplative life. However, when we are unable to continue with it, we must accept the next best thing. According to Kraut, "Aristotle says several times that *perfect* happiness consists in contemplation, and it is natural to take these statements to entail that if one does not engage in this activity, then one does not have perfect happiness." However, Aristotle admits to "the possibility that one can be happy—though not perfectly happy—even if one does not philosophize." According to Kraut, "it is plausible to assume that, precisely because Aristotle recognizes this possibility, he equates contemplation with *perfect* happiness rather than with happiness *simpliciter*" (Kraut, 49).

My interpretation of Aristotle on the happy life is similar to Kraut's. Aristotle makes it clear that our highest activity is contemplation. Therefore, our greatest happiness relies on practicing this activity. However, at another level, our happiness depends on our social life and the maintenance of our virtuous friendships. So as Kraut insists, although one's *perfect* happiness lies in contemplation, it does not exclude the possibility that one can live a happy life practicing his moral virtues. In order to keep ourselves as happy as possible, therefore, we must order our lives such that

contemplating the truth is the primary goal, and maintaining virtuous friendship the secondary goal.

How Can the Two be Reconciled?

In the previous two chapters, I made it clear that the contemplative and the communal lives cannot be pursued simultaneously by the same person. That is, one cannot concurrently contemplate and actively participate in a relationship. However, if they cannot be practiced at the same time, then the only option left is that one should engage in both when the opportunities present themselves. That is, one should contemplate truth as much as one can, but, when not contemplating, nurture virtuous friendships. One may object to this suggestion, since Aristotle maintains that contemplation is the highest good and that it alone should be pursued by the virtuous man. However, this concern is addressed by Aristotle's own acknowledgement that the purely contemplative life is impossible. That is, one cannot contemplate continuously.

Contemplation, Aristotle maintains, is an activity of the soul. On the one hand, he asserts, "we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can *do* anything" (*NE*1177a23-24). However, he also admits that we are limited in this activity since we are composite beings. According to Aristotle, we are "incapable of continuous activity" (*NE*1175a4-5), and since contemplation is an activity, we can practice it only for short periods of time (*NE*1178a1). Therefore, since no one can live a purely contemplative life, the virtuous man must partake in other activities when not contemplating. As I have already established that the second-best life is communal, we may conclude that one's greatest happiness relies on contemplating the truth and participating in a community.

Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean

Aristotle introduces the doctrine of the mean in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics* as part of his discussion of the moral virtues. Essentially, the doctrine of the mean instructs one "to choose that which is intermediate, not the excess nor the defect" (*NE*1138b16-17). That is, moral virtue is the "mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency." This is because, according to Aristotle, the character of moral virtue "is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions" (*NE*1109a20-24).

Although Aristotle's doctrine of the mean relates specifically to moral virtues, it seems to apply to more general areas of life, as Aristotle himself concedes. He writes, "for not only here but in all other pursuits which are objects of knowledge it is indeed true to say that we must not exert ourselves nor relax our efforts too much nor too little, but to an intermediate extent and as the right rule dictates" (*NE*1138b26-29). The doctrine of the mean, then, could help us determine how much practical and intellectual virtues are necessary for securing our happiness, for too much or too little of either will have detrimental effects on one's happiness. For instance, if one contemplates continuously and neglects other concerns, it will be harmful to his physical well-being. On the other hand, if one neglects the contemplative aspect of life, then his spiritual and intellectual well-being will suffer. Either way, one's happiness is ultimately compromised.

In *Aristotle*, A. E. Taylor explains the importance of a well-balanced life for proper human functioning in Aristotelian ethics. He writes:

> [G]oodness is in the soul what health and fitness are in the body, and ... the preceptor is for the soul what the physician or the trainer is for the body. Now it was well-known medical theory, favoured by both Plato and Aristotle, that health in the body means a condition of balance or equilibration among the elements of

> which it is composed. When the hot and the cold, the moist and the dry in the composition of the human frame exactly balance one another, the body is in perfect health. Hence the object of the regimen of the physician or the trainer is to produce and maintain a proper balance or proportion between the ingredients of the body. Any course which disturbs this balance is injurious to health and strength. You damage your health if you take too much food or exercise, and also if you take too little. The same thing is true of health in the soul. Our soul's health may be injured by allowing too much or too little play to any of our natural impulses or feelings (Taylor, 93-4).

Taylor's metaphor confirms that the optimal condition for happiness requires a balance in both physical and intellectual well-being. In other words, it is not sufficient to balance by alternating our commitments from the spiritual and intellectual to the physical and communal. Rather, we ought to organize our lives in such a way that both the physical and spiritual are in optimal condition, since the neglect of either will have adverse effects on overall happiness.

In his discussion of moral virtues, Aristotle makes it clear that theoretical wisdom takes precedence over practical wisdom (*NE*1141b3-7). For whereas practical wisdom is concerned with what is particular, transient, and human, theoretical wisdom is concerned with what is universal, eternal, and divine. Although Aristotle places theoretical wisdom above practical wisdom, however, the two are vital for human happiness. In "The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," Amelie Rorty explains that, while "practical wisdom cannot ensure *theoria*, it can assure the political conditions that allow contemplators to discover and exercise their potentialities" (Rorty, 377). In other words, although theoretical wisdom is more worthy than practical wisdom, the latter determines the best way to organize our lives around contemplation. Ironically, then, practical wisdom seems to assume a position of pre-eminence over intellectual wisdom.

In *Aristotle*, W. D. Ross makes a similar point, stating that "in the individual life" it is moral action that provides "for the existence of intellectual activity by keeping in subjection the passions," just as the "practical wisdom of the statesman provides by ... legislation for the pursuit of scientific and philosophical studies" (Ross, 233). That is, without moral virtues, we would be subject to our passions and desires, and this in turn would be detrimental to our contemplative lives. So, to a great extent, theoretical wisdom depends on moral wisdom for its proper functioning. On the other hand, Rorty states that the "right rule" which determines the mean can only be attained through contemplation. Indeed, she notes Aristotle's remark (*NE*1140b7-11) that "men like Pericles are thought to possess practical wisdom because they have contemplative understanding of what is good" (Rorty, 377). Essentially, then, the two virtues are necessarily interdependent. It is practical wisdom that determines the best course of action one should take. Yet, it is theoretical wisdom which determines the right rule for that action.

The Suitability of the Contemplative Man for Communal Life

It is a common misconception that, in contrast to communal life, the contemplative life is egoistic and that, as a result, the contemplative man is unsuitable for communal life. However, Aristotle challenges this misconception by elaborating different meanings of the phrase, "lover of self."

In Book IX.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses two kinds of lovers of self. One kind of self-lover he calls "bad men," since they "assign to themselves the greater share of wealth, honours, and bodily pleasures" (*NE*1168b16-17). Such an

individual does "everything for his own sake—and the more so the more wicked he is" (*NE*1168a30-31). The second type of self-lover does everything for "honour's sake, and the more so the better he is" (*NE*1168a33). Such an individual "acts for his friend's sake, and sacrifices his own interest" (*NE*1168a34) since he desires only to gratify "the most authoritative element in himself and in all things obeys this" (*NE*1168b30). According to Aristotle, then, while the good man counts as a lover of self because he lives "according to a rational principle" and desires "what is noble," the wicked man is considered a lover of self because he lives "as passion dictates" and desires "what seems advantageous" to himself (*NE*1169a3-6). Therefore, although the contemplative man is most truly a lover of the self, he is not self-centered. If anything, he is the converse of this, since such an individual obeys only the rational part of himself and does everything for the sake of the good.

According to Ross, "Aristotle's theory here is an attempt to break down the antithesis between egoism and altruism by showing that the egoism of a good man has just the same characteristics as altruism." Ross cites Aristotle's example of altruistic egoism, according to which a mother "feels pain from her child's pain as much as from the hurt of her own body." While Ross allows that such an "altruism may thus be called egoism," he immediately points out that to call the mother an egoist is not to condemn her (Ross, 231). Rather, he asserts that "[t]here is a good self-love as well as a bad," the question being "what sort of a self it is that you love" (Ross, 232). For you may either take "delight in money, honour, and bodily pleasure" or find your "interest in the welfare of friends and fellow-citizens" (Ross, 231).

According to Pangle, Aristotle defines love "by our relations with ourselves." That is, "the standard of love at its best is that one cares for another and his welfare as one cares for oneself" (Pangle, 185). According to Pangle's interpretation, the more we love ourselves and appreciate our own worthiness, the more we are able to appreciate the goodness of others as well. In other words, our love of others is proportional to the love of ourselves. She continues, "[m]en know of no better way to treat another than the way they wish to be treated and seek to treat themselves." As a result, by loving ourselves and treating ourselves well, we also learn to love others and treat them well. According to Pangle, "friendship is derivative from, because it is an extension and reflection of, each man's concern with himself" (Pangle, 187). Furthermore, she claims that the more we love another, the more that person becomes a part of ourselves. She explains, "[t]he more of our thought and energy and trouble we invest in someone, the more that person seems to be an extension of or a realization of our own life, and so, loving our own existence, we find his existence precious to us also." According to Pangle, this is why Aristotle insists that time and familiarity are important in virtuous friendship, for "each person's efforts on the other's behalf increase his affection, and greater affection makes him care more and trouble himself still more for the other" (Pangle, 189).

The contemplative person cannot be said to be occupied with selfish thoughts since he is focused on something greater than himself. While the egoistic man is only interested in satisfying his own needs, the contemplative man sets aside his personal cares for the sake of the good. This is because contemplation is an activity that "aims at no end beyond itself" (*NE*1177b20), while the end of contemplation is to behold the truth. As Aristotle puts it, piety requires "philosophers or lovers of wisdom" to "honour truth

above our friends" and, "for the sake of maintaining the truth," one must be willing "to destroy what touches us closely" (*NE*1096a16). Thus, in contemplating the truth, the noble man is placing something else above himself, and this requires the quality of selflessness. In addition, whereas all the other practical activities secure benefits "more or less apart from the action" (*NE*1177b4), "nothing arises from" contemplating the truth (*NE*1177b3). As a result, the contemplative person is the least egoistic, for even in a virtuous friendship one obtains benefits for himself, such as goods, companionship, entertainment, consolation, and so forth.

Why Should the Contemplative Man Choose to Participate in Communal Life?

Aristotle grants, we know, that one cannot continuously be contemplating. When *not* contemplating, one can either remain in solitude or live amongst others. It is reasonable to assume that the latter is a better choice for three main reasons. First, we are social beings and so have an innate desire to be with others. Second, human company is superior to the company of animals, plants, or inanimate things. As Aristotle indicates, this is because humans are the only composite beings that have the capacity to participate in the activity of contemplation. As he asserts, "none of the other animals is happy, since they in no way share in contemplation" (*NE*1178b26-28). Furthermore, contemplation is "the activity of God" (*NE*1178b22). If so, then we may infer that of all composite beings, humans bear the greatest resemblance to the gods. In other words, humans are closest to the divine, compared to other animals. Finally, and perhaps most important, in the company of other wise people, one can share and develop his thoughts and seek advice. Through cross-examination, discussion, and the exchange of ideas, one can continue his

pursuit of truth even when not contemplating. In fact, having the company of other intellectuals who have the same desires and interests as oneself will only allow one to flourish intellectually. As a result, next to contemplating the truth, the company of humans seems the worthiest choice for the noble man.

In fact, in book VIII.5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes, "people cannot live together if they are not pleasant and do not enjoy the same things, as friends who are companions seem to do" (*NE*1157b23-24). He adds, "it is better to spend [one's] days with friends and good men than with strangers or any chance persons" (*NE*1169b20-21). Elsewhere, he states that "as his own being is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of his friend. ... He needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friend ... and this will be realized in living together and sharing in discussion and thought" (*NE*1170b8-12). Therefore, Aristotle asserts that apart from contemplating the truth, the wise man desires to live with his virtuous friends. This is consistent with his claim that, although the contemplative life offers the greatest happiness, "in a secondary degree the life in accordance with the other kind of virtue is happy; for the activities in accordance with this befit our human estate" (*NE*1178a8-9). Thus, the wise man first chooses the contemplative life, but must also accommodate the communal life. Accordingly, both the contemplative and the communal lives are necessary for achieving human happiness.

So far, I have only demonstrated the necessity of both contemplation and virtuous friendship for the happiness of the noble man. The next issue to deal with is that of how the same person can combine both of these aspects in one life, especially since they are so different from one another. In the following section, I will describe a way of life

practiced by many throughout the centuries that amalgamates the contemplative and the communal lives.

The Monastic Life: An Integration of the Communal and the Contemplative Lives

Although the communal and the contemplative lives seem incompatible with one another, the monastic life demonstrates how we may actually combine the two. Since the monastic life cultivates both the moral and intellectual virtues, and since it is a life that is freely chosen by people for the sake of virtue, it serves as the best example of Aristotle's notion of human happiness.

Like Aristotelian friendship, the monastic life is based on equality and free will. For instance, in his book, *Christian Charity in Action*, Michel Riquet describes Benedictine monasticism as a way of life in which "[f]reely one gives oneself to the monastery." It is also a place where "[t]he monks recognize no differences founded on birth or social rank" and which is "open to every man, provided he has good will." Essentially, it is "a community of men united as brothers, sharing everything in common and providing for all their needs by their own work" (Riquet, 87).

It is a common misconception that monks lead lives so solitary as to amount to efforts at avoiding human association. It is understandable why such a view is so widely held. According to Joseph Elder, "'monasticism' and 'monastery' are derived from the Greek term *monachos*, which literally means 'living alone'" (Elder, 1). Initially, many monastic communities were started by those who renounced the worldly life. For instance, according to Mohan Wijayaratna in *Buddhist Monastic Life*, "Buddhism first arose as a movement of 'renouncers'" (Wijayaratna, 1). Many who initially joined the

Buddhist monastery "had a life of comfort and luxury," but "[t]hey renounced the world to become monks and nuns under the influence of the Buddha's doctrine" (Wijayaratna, 6).

Over time, far from promoting a solitary life, both Buddhist and Christian monasticism began making every effort to prevent the complete isolation of the individual. In Buddhism, monks are expected to live in communion not only with their fellow brothers and sisters, but also with the laity. In fact, Wijayaratna describes Buddhist monks as being "essentially social beings" (Wijayaratna, 117). Wijayaratna confesses that, initially, the Buddha himself practiced complete solitude. After his Enlightenment, however, he came to the realization that complete solitude was excessive, so he abandoned his solitary life in order to organize his community (Wijayaratna, 111). According to Wijayaratna, although the Buddha thought that the solitary life can at times afford a suitable setting for meditative practice, he never actually prescribed perpetual solitude for the monastic life (Wijayaratna, 111). In fact, even those monks who preferred to live in solitude in the wilderness were required to stay in contact both with other members of their community and with lay followers (Wijayaratna, 112).

Christian monks, too, are expected to participate in a communal life. For instance, Augustine's writings on the Christian monastic life in *The Rule* provide a set of instructions for the monastic life. According to George Lawless in *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, "[c]ompassion, mutual consideration, and concern for both common and individual needs are so strongly evidenced in the *Rule* as to strike at the roots of any unwarranted independence, display of power, or egoism, which would be inherently destructive of common life" (Lawless, 16). In fact, Lawless concludes,

"[d]ependence upon one another is regarded as a source of spiritual strength, not a sign of indigence or weakness" (Lawless, 16).

Both Christian and Buddhist monasticism advocate the maintenance of the monastic-lay relationship. According to Augustine, "[m]an, as he appears to man, is a reasonable soul making use of a mortal and earthly body. Hence, whoever loves his neighbour tries to do good both to his body and to his soul. What concerns the good of the body we call medicine: what concerns the good of the soul, education." Therefore, he concludes that "one who loves his neighbour does all he can to make him healthy in body and mind, for the health of the body affects the health of the soul" (Augustine, 92). This is analogous to Aristotle's assertion that man is a composite being. It is in the union of the soul and the body that the individual exists. According to Judith Swanson, in "Aristotle on Nature, Human Nature, and Justice," if Aristotle maintained that "body and soul are one, then the habits of the 'body' must affect, and reflect, the habits of the 'soul,' as the soul to the body. The 'body' cannot be in good condition or healthy unless the 'soul' is too, and vice versa" (Swanson, 227).

Buddhist monks, too, are expected to maintain a strong relationship with lay people. According to Wijayaratna, one of the duties of monks and nuns is to preach to lay people and teach them the Buddhist Doctrine (Wijayaratna, 132). In return, the lay people contribute to the Community by providing them with "clothing, medicine, and food" (Wijayaratna, 117).

In both Buddhism and Christianity, the importance of maintaining unity in the Community is recognized. According to the Buddha, "the unity of the Community is a happiness, and happy is the life of united monks" (Wijayaratna, 122). And again,

"[m]embers of the Community who live united, in friendship and without disputes, are happy" (Wijayaratna, 122-123). There is a comparable emphasis in Christianity. For instance, in the *Rule*, Augustine asserts that the "chief motivation" for the monks is to share their lives in order "to live harmoniously in the house and to have one heart and soul" (Augustine, *Rule* I.2).

Throughout his discussion of friendship, Aristotle maintains that in virtuous friendship there cannot be complaints and quarrels. Of course, it is idealistic of Aristotle to maintain such a notion. However, his main point is that truly virtuous people will be considerate and respectful of others so that there will be minimal occasions for those others to raise complaints. Although the Buddha realized that complaints and quarrels will likely arise when people live together, what concerned him were schisms opening within the group. In Buddhism, therefore, provoking a schism is regarded as such a major offence that it is placed "in the same category as killing one's mother, one's father … or wounding a Buddha" (Wijayaratna, 127). According to Wijayaratna, it is important that monks live "in harmony, like milk and water," and look "upon each other with eyes of affection, with respect and mutual consideration; they [have] different bodies but one mind." Indeed, a "[l]ack of friendly feelings towards fellow monks was thought to be an obstacle on the path of inner progress" (Wijayaratna, 127).

Just as the virtuous man serves as an example to the rest of society for Aristotle, so the monk serves as role models to the lay community for Christian and Buddhist monastic thought. According to Riquet, Christian monks are expected to "set an example of Christian life, fully lived out in a fraternal community" (Riquet, 82). The Benedictine monastery, he adds, plays a social and cultural role for neighbouring populations "[b]y

the example it sets, the teaching it propagates, the services it lavishes" (Riquet, 85). Similarly, according to Wijayaratna, Buddhist monks and nuns were expected to demonstrate the right path through their lives to the lay community (Wijayaratna, 132).

In many ways, the monastic life strongly resembles Aristotle's notion of contemplative life, as it is a life dedicated to the pursuit of truth and goodness. Riquet describes Benedictine monasticism as constituting "a fraternal community of Christians, united in the single purpose of consecrating their lives to the work of God." He describes the Benedictine monastery as comprising "men entirely dedicated, among the uncertainties of life, to the contemplation and praise of God" (Riquet, 84). Similarly, according to Lawless, Augustine gives early attention in *The Rule* "to the prayer-life of the community." He suggests that through "this priority of treatment Augustine intends to say that the prayer-life of the community" determines "the quality of human relations" (Lawless, 23). In Buddhism, too, meditation plays a strong role in monastic life. According to Wijayaratna, for instance, only "[t]hrough the practice of meditation and with great effort" can the noble man "follow the right path and attain the truth" (Wijayaratna, 111). This is especially important since the life of the community rests "on truthfulness and honesty, both toward others and toward oneself" (Wijayaratna, 146).

One may raise the objection that, since Buddhist and Christian monasticism have religious affiliations, they cannot serve as illuminating examples of Aristotle's notion of the virtuous life. However, although Aristotle is known neither to have been a religious man nor to have promoted any specific religious views, he does make it clear that the highest form of contemplation is the thought about God. In Book VI of the *Metaphysics*, he writes:

> [I]f there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable, clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science—not, however, to physics (for physics deals with certain movable things) nor to mathematics, but to a science prior to both. For physics deals with things which exist separately but are not immovable and some parts of mathematics deals with things which are immovable but presumably do not exist separately, but as embodied in matter; while the first science deals with things which both exist separately and are immovable. Now all causes that must be eternal, but especially these; for they are the causes that operate on so much of the divine as appears to us. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology, since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. ... Thus, while the theoretical sciences are more to be desired than the other sciences, this is more to be desired than the other theoretical sciences (*MP*1026a10-23).

Aristotle makes it evident, then, that theology takes precedence over all the other sciences. In his interpretation of this passage, Ross proposes that "since the highest branch of contemplation is called by the name of theology, it is reasonable to suppose that this part of contemplative life would have the character of worship proper to the contemplation of the divine nature" (Ross, 234).

In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle seems to suggest further that the life centered on the meditation about god is the highest good. He writes, "[w]hat choice, then, or possession of the natural goods—whether bodily goods, wealth, friends, or other things—will most produce the contemplation of god, that choice or possession is best; this is the noblest standard, but any that through deficiency or excess hinders one from the contemplation and service of god is bad" (*EE*1249b16-20). In other words, the best life is centered on the contemplation of god.

Despite differences in how various religious communities weigh the importance of intellectual and social virtues, both are, to some extent, incorporated in the monastic life. For example, the Benedictine monastery is a "community entirely ruled by the law of love and charity" (Riquet, 84). However, the lives of Benedictine monks alternate

between "prayer and study, silence and chant, intellectual speculation and manual work, sleep and vigil" (Riquet, 85), since the aim of the Benedictine monastery is "[t]o promote the spiritual and moral well being and progress of mankind" (Riquet, 87).

In his article, "Contemplative Community," David Steindl-Rast explains why both the communal and the contemplative lives are important for monastic living. He writes, "[s]olitude without togetherness deteriorates into loneliness. One needs strong roots in togetherness to be solitary." At the same time, "[t]ogetherness without solitude is not truly togetherness, but rather side-by-sideness. To live merely side by side is alienation. We need time and space to be alone, to find ourselves in solitude, before we can give ourselves to one another in true togetherness" (Steindl-Rast, 293).

In "The Theology of Contemplative Community," Tarcisius Conner describes the interdependence of communal and contemplative values in Christianity. According to Conner, the "true contemplative community ... is to be found in the element of *Koinonia*, which involves a true life of prayer and contact with God as a basis for one's relations with other men." However, he also asserts that "any life of prayer must, by its very nature, tend towards the establishment of community" (Conner, 218). Conner suggests that the contemplative life enhances our relationships with others. In fact, it seems purposeless if not put into practice. Ironically, for Aristotle, it is the very fact that contemplation is so impractical that makes it such a prized activity. However, Aristotle's claim that contemplation is an end in itself does not mean that it is purposeless. In fact, it can serve important purposes in enhancing our daily lives.

Thus, the monastic life embraces both the contemplative and social elements of human beings. The fully human life, the happiest life, is achieved when the communal and contemplative lives are jointly cultivated.

Aristotle and Buddha

It is easy to understand why Christianity is so closely linked to Aristotelian philosophy. After all, it is a religion that flourished in the Western world a few hundred years after Aristotle, and, indeed, many Christian doctrines were directly borrowed from Aristotle's philosophy through the works of philosophers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. However, it is more difficult to understand how Buddhism, a religion and philosophy that began about two centuries prior to Aristotle in a distant part of the world, could be so closely linked with Aristotle's work. However, both Irving Babbitt and Damien Keown separately argue that Aristotle's and Buddha's concerns are strikingly similar.

In *Character and Culture*, Babbitt argues that "Buddha is like Aristotle in his intensely analytical bent." Indeed, just as Buddha is the "greatest of Eastern analysts" Aristotle is the "master analyst of the West" (Babbitt, 153). If, according to Babbitt, the ultimate end of human good is happiness, for Aristotle, "Buddhism is in its essence a psychology of desire in its bearing on happiness and unhappiness." This is because "[a] man's wisdom or his unwisdom is determined by the quality of his desires or, what amounts to the same thing, by his estimate of pleasure and pain" (Babbitt, 155). Meanwhile, both Buddha and Aristotle are concerned with the idea of altruistic self-love. In Buddhism, "[s]ince man must look to himself for salvation" he must "cherish himself" most of all. Similarly, "true self-love" is "the final motive in ethics" for Aristotle

(Babbitt, 158). According to Babbitt, "[w]hat both Buddha and Aristotle understand by self is the permanent self" (Babbitt, 158). Just as it is for Aristotle, writes Babbitt, "[t]o be a lover of one's self in the Buddhist sense is, so far as the ego is concerned, to be selfless" (Babbitt, 158).

Damien Keown, in *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, draws a similar comparison between the two great thinkers and their doctrines. According to Keown, "Aristotle's ethical theory appears to be the closest Western analogue to Buddhist ethics, and is an illuminating guide to an understanding of the Buddhist moral system" (Keown, 21). He explains that "[i]n spite of their different social and cultural contexts there are many formal parallels between the ideal of human perfection conceived by the Buddha and that envisaged by Aristotle" (Keown, 193). This is because both Buddha and Aristotle "regard human nature as a complex of intellectual and emotional factors and consider that the final good for man lies in the full development of his potential in these two dimensions." For both thinkers, furthermore, "this is a gradual, cumulative process," as the "state of perfection," which is "the final goal of human endeavour," is "nirvana for Buddhism and *eudaimonia* for Aristotle." According to Keown, "[t]his state of perfection is the *telos* of human aspiration, and while there are inevitable cultural differences in its characterization in India and Greece there is a broad measure of agreement in respect of its formal content." As he puts it, it essentially "consists in man fulfilling his function through the development of his potentiality in accordance with a specific conception of a goal or end" (Keown, 193).

According to Keown, "*eudaimonia* and nirvana are functionally related in that both constitute that final goal, end and *summum bonum* of human endeavour" (Keown,

195). Despite other functions of nirvana, Keown states that "it is indisputably the *summum bonum* of Buddhism and may be characterized, like *eudaimonia*," in the following terms: "(a) it is desired for its own sake; (b) everything else that is desired is desired for the sake of it; (c) it is never chosen for the sake of anything else" (Keown, 199).

Furthermore, just as "Aristotle adopts a middle position," Keown writes, "so, essentially, does Buddha" (Keown, 226). According to Keown, "[f]or Aristotle, the correct response (the mean) is to be determined by the man of practical wisdom (*phronimos*). For Buddhists the *phronimos* is the Buddha, and it is his choice which determines where virtue lies" (Keown, 226). In other words, the right rule, which is determined by the wise man in Aristotelian ethics, belongs to the Buddha in Buddhist philosophy.

The main difference between the two philosophers, Keown states, is that "[w]hereas Aristotle allows for only one lifetime, in Buddhism this slow maturation takes place over the course of many lives" (Keown, 194). In addition, whereas Buddhism has a spiritual and religious aspect, "[f]or Aristotle the goal of human perfection has no transcendental implications: it is perfection to be manifested in this world alone and specifically in the social context of the *polis*" (Keown, 195). However, although Aristotle does not commit himself to a theology, he does recognize theology as the highest pursuit. And yet, inspite of their differences, it is obvious that Aristotle and Buddha shared a common conception of human nature and human happiness which led each to derive strikingly similar theories of human goodness. It is understandable, then, why Buddhism and Aristotelian ethics are so alike. Indeed, Buddhism affords a further

reason why the monastic life is very much in accord with the Aristotelian conception of human happiness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated that human happiness is dependant on both the contemplative and the communal. Despite Aristotle's assertions that the contemplative life is the noblest life to lead, he also admits that our composite nature limits us in this activity. As a result, the happiest form of life is one in which the noble man practices both contemplative and communal virtues.

I suggested that the monastic life might serve as the paradigm for Aristotle's notion of happiness. In the monastic life, after all, contemplation is highly valued, since it is through contemplation that one beholds the truth. The monastic life also resembles Aristotle's notion of virtuous friendship, since it endorses a way of life in which a number of virtuous people come together in the pursuit of truth. In addition, since Aristotle regards theology as the highest of all theoretic sciences, and since there is a strong resemblance found between Aristotle and Buddha, monastic life seems to be the best representation of the Aristotelian conception of human happiness, as it is so much in accord with his philosophy.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to resolve the issue of how the contemplative life can be incorporated into the communal life. I began with a discussion of how the two ways of living seemed incompatible and proceeded to show that the contemplative life is essentially solitary, while the communal life is active and public. I also demonstrated how Aristotle highly values both kinds of lives. On the one hand, he asserts that the best human activity is contemplation, as it resembles the divine. On the other hand, he asserts that the contemplative person cannot live a solitary life, for humans are essentially social beings. His struggle to unite the two is evident throughout his work.

In the second chapter, I considered Aristotle's four attempts to integrate the contemplative with the communal, demonstrating how, ultimately, each fails. Thus, we need to find a different solution to how the communal life can be integrated with the contemplative life.

Finally, in the third chapter, I demonstrated how virtuous friendship and a life of contemplation can be reconciled. I began with Aristotle's own assertion that humans cannot act continuously. Since contemplation is an activity, it is no exception. Therefore, no one can lead a purely contemplative life. This means that the virtuous man must be engaged in another sort of activity when not contemplating. Since the next best thing to contemplation is participation in community, the noble man can separately practice contemplation and maintain virtuous friendships.

In the final section, I suggest that the monastic life provides an excellent model for understanding Aristotle's notion of the happiest life. As monasticism incorporates both contemplative and communal needs, it confirms both of Aristotle's assertions, that contemplation is the best human activity and that humans are essentially social beings. Since it provides a clear example of how the communal life and the contemplative life can be integrated, we may conclude that it is possible for the virtuous man to lead a contemplative life as well as be part of a community.

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