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Happiness lies in conquering one's enemies, in driving them in front of oneself, in taking their property, in savoring their despair, in outraging their wives and daughters.

Genghis Khan[1]

1 INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom once held that well-being is an objective affair, something that the masses should not be expected to have a great deal of authority about. Among the more noteworthy ideas in those days was the perfectionist notion that well-being consists, at least partly, in excellence or virtue. The coming of modernity brought a more optimistic view of the individual's authority regarding matters of personal welfare, and the old objectivist orthodoxy yielded to the present age of subjectivism, where common opinion has it that what's good for people is, more or less, whatever they say it is. Crudely, nothing benefits a person, virtue included, unless it somehow answers to her wants or likes. Discontent with subjectivism has been brewing for some years now, driven by a more nuanced understanding of the considerable merits of some objectivist accounts, notably Aristotelian theories, as well as a barrage of criticism aimed at subjectivist views like the desire theory.[2] Indeed, Aristotelian views are now among the chief competitors in discussions of well-being — or, equivalently, welfare or flourishing.[3] This is a welcome development, for such work has greatly enriched contemporary re-

[1] Rodzinski 1979, pp. 164-165, cited in Carson 2000, p. 273. Thanks to Thomas Carson for reminding me of this translation. I am grateful to Carson, as well as Anna Alexandrova, Matthew Cashen, Corinne Gardner, Andrew Pinsent, Adam Shriver, Christine Swanton, the students in my graduate seminar on the psychology of well-being, an anonymous referee for this journal, and an audience at the 2006 Pacific Division meeting of the APA for invaluable feedback on previous drafts of this paper.

[2] For the Aristotelian case, *see*, e.g., Foot 2001, Hurka 1993, Hursthouse 1999, Kraut 2002, 2007, Nussbaum 1988, 1992, 1993, 2000b, 2000a and Toner 2006. The Aristotelian literature has yet to integrate fully with the contemporary literature on well-being, so it is often difficult to tell where an author stands on well-being. (Hurka, e.g., rejects a "well-being" interpretation of his view, yet there is considerable overlap in our concerns.) In fact, one purpose of this paper is to help bring the contemporary and ancient literatures on well-being closer together. For related positions, *see* Annas 1993, 1998, 2003, Darwall 2002, Finnis 1980, LeBar 2004, Murphy 2001 and Sher 1997.

[3] Some would object to using these terms interchangeably, for instance believing "welfare" too closely aligned with Utilitarian doctrines. But theories of "welfare" and "flourishing" seem clearly to concern a common subject matter — what benefits a person, is in her interest, makes her life go better for her. Reserving different terms for different theories just obscures the issues, leaving it unclear how (say) Aristotelian and Utilitarian accounts of value are opposed.

flection on well-being, helping to counter what some of us see as the trivialization of philosophical thought about the good life in the modern era. Whatever the merits of non-subjectivist accounts of well-being, however, it is less clear that the *perfectionism* espoused in much of this literature can be sustained. I will argue that it cannot, using the best-known example of a perfectionist theory, Aristotelianism, to show why. The discussion should concern even those with little interest in perfectionist theories, for a better understanding of the problems confronting Aristotelian perfectionism will illuminate some important points about the nature of well-being and related values.

We can usefully think of Aristotelian theories as centering on three claims. Our inquiry will focus on the first, *welfare perfectionism*, which maintains that well-being consists, non-derivatively, at least partly in perfection: excellence or virtue — or, in the Aristotelian case, excellent or virtuous activity. The perfection in question includes, but certainly is not limited to, moral virtue. Perfection, that is, is a fundamental or ultimate constituent of well-being (non-perfectionists might grant that it can constitute well-being derivatively, say by being desired). Perfection is typically regarded as the perfection of one's nature: being a good specimen of one's kind, for instance, or fulfilling one's capacities well.[4] But I will understand perfectionism broadly enough to include any theory that takes well-being to consist at least partly in excellence or virtue (or the exercise thereof). Some contend that Aristotle counted external goods as an additional part of flourishing, distinct from perfection. I have no wish to debate the fine points of Aristotle exegesis here, as I am less interested in the historical Aristotle than in whether a perfectionist view of well-being can be defended. But it seems to me that his view is most plausibly and charitably read as counting external goods only insofar as they facilitate good functioning, and not as distinct contributors to well-being.[5] Roughly, well-being consists in a life of excellent or virtuous activity, or "well-functioning." But the difference should not seriously affect the arguments to follow, for all Aristotelians take well-being to consist at least primarily in virtuous activity. My arguments should apply as well to weaker forms of perfectionism.

The second claim, *externalism*, is the denial of *internalism* about well-being. A weaker cousin of subjectivism, which grounds well-being in the person's attitudes, internalism roughly maintains that the constituents of an agent's well-being are ultimately determined wholly by the particulars of the individual's makeup *qua* individual (vs. *qua* group or class member). Something's counting as an intrinsic benefit for a person must depend entirely on what that person is like. It is hard to state the view precisely without wading into controversial metaphysical territory, but internalism may be seen as embodying two root ideas. First, what counts toward my well-being must depend on what I am like. My welfare must not be alien to me, a value that floats down

[4] *See*, e.g., Sumner 1992, 1996 and Hooker 1996.
[5] For a good recent discussion, with references, *see* Brown 2005.

from some Platonic realm and, remora-like, affixes itself to me with little regard to the particulars of my constitution.[6] Second, what counts toward my well-being must not depend on what any other individual, or group or class of individuals — actual or hypothetical — is like. It must be possible to specify the ultimate or fundamental conditions for my well-being without making essential reference to other individuals, or to classes or groups of individuals. (The terminology unfortunately suggests that externalists ground well-being in matters that are spatio-temporally external to the individual, which need not be the case. Note that externalists need not require blindness to individual differences, a one-size-fits-all account. Externalism rules out only *complete* deference to the arbitrarily idiosyncratic particulars of the individual's makeup.) It might be objected that some goods depend on what others are like — my benefiting from friendship, say. But the internalist's claim is not that a person's well-being cannot depend in any way on external factors. It is that something's *counting* as an intrinsic benefit must not depend on such factors. And desire theorists, e.g., will say that friendship's status as a good for me depends solely on the fact that I desire it. It forms no part of the ultimate or fundamental conditions for my well-being. A different worry is that it may not be clear how internalism differs from subjectivism. In other work, I have defended a non-subjectivist form of internalism that grounds well-being partly in agents' emotional dispositions (forthcoming-a). Health or physical vitality might also be seen as an objective but internalist good.

Aristotelian theories are externalist in the intended sense: they ground well-being in facts about the species. What benefits a person is what contributes to her functioning in a characteristically — or fully, essentially or distinctively — human way. If I would benefit from friendship, for instance, it is (mainly) because human beings characteristically engage in friendships; doing so would thus make for a more fully human life. Absent further explication, externalism might seem like an unappealing doctrine, but in fact it may be the Aristotelian view's chief selling point: as Nussbaum and others have recently stressed, the failure of a human being to enjoy or even have the capacity for what we think of as the goods of a full human life can seem deeply unfortunate.[7] A handicap like blindness or the absence of sexual functioning seems a great loss, one that impoverishes a life regardless of the individual's goals, likes or desires.

The third claim, *welfare eudaimonism*, maintains that well-being is teleological, consisting in the fulfillment of our natures. More or less ubiquitous among the Hellenistic philosophers, including even Epicurean hedonists, this doctrine has attracted many distinguished adherents since then, including Thomists, Marxists and Hegelians, and perhaps some liberal thinkers such as

[6] Some externalists, Aristotle included, might agree with this, though whether they truly satisfy it is another question.
[7] *See*, e.g., Nussbaum 2000b.

Mill.[8] But in the contemporary literature on well-being, most eudaimonists — I will generally omit the "welfare" qualifier — can be found within the Aristotelian camp.

In this paper I will argue that perfection probably forms no fundamental part of well-being: perfectionism is false. I will not discuss externalism at any length here, though I believe it too is problematical. However, the third Aristotelian claim, eudaimonism, seems to me correct; and one aim of this paper is to help pave the way for a non-Aristotelian[9] form of eudaimonism. The discussion has five parts: first, a pair of examples in which well-being and perfection seem not to connect in the manner required by Aristotelian views. The cases themselves will not be entirely novel to readers familiar with the literature, but I will employ them to make some points that have not been widely appreciated. The second part will discuss a different sort of case indicating that Aristotelians face an unwelcome choice regarding the interpretation of perfection: perfection can be understood in a way that supports the desired connection between welfare and morality, or in a way that yields a potentially attractive account of well-being, but not both. Third, I will examine perfectionist treatments of pleasure and suffering, concluding that no perfectionist view can credibly account for the value of pleasure and suffering. Indeed, so unpromising does the Aristotelian treatment of hedonic goods appear to be that it begs for explanation; to this end, I suggest that Aristotelian views may not even be trying to answer some of the central questions animating modern accounts of well-being. From this point forward, the argument shifts from largely intuitive points to chiefly theoretical considerations. Intuitions about particular cases often differ, so the hope is that intuitions seeming to favor perfectionism will largely dissipate when we reflect on the theoretical points. In the fourth part, I consider the fundamental character of prudential and perfectionist values and why we care about them, concluding that our interests in the two types of value are very different, so that no perfectionist account of prudential value could succeed. Given why we care about well-being, and why we care about perfection, we should not expect well-being to consist, ultimately, in perfection. Finally, I suggest that Aristotelian and related views have seemed so attractive because of an understandable but serious mistake in the way many of their proponents approach the theory of well-being.

A hazard when discussing matters Aristotelian is that even Aristotle scholars differ sharply on many questions of interpretation, so some readers are bound to object, perhaps correctly, that I have gotten Aristotle wrong on one or more points. I cannot emphasize too strongly that what Aristotle himself thought is entirely secondary to our purposes here. The goal is to see

[8] Regarding Mill, see his essay on individuality in *On Liberty*. For reviews, *see* Feinberg 1992, Gewirth 1998.

[9] Yet non-subjectivist. While my arguments will often focus on the sorts of goods that hedonists and desire theorists privilege, I will not assume any such view. I focus on those goods simply because they are relatively uncontroversial.

how far well-being can be cashed out in perfectionist terms and, for this purpose, Aristotle's views are relevant only because some form of Aristotelianism appears to represent the most plausible form of perfectionism. As well, the case against Aristotelian perfectionism should generalize to other forms of perfectionism, such as the Stoic view. My aim is to attack the most credible form of perfectionism. It will not help perfectionism at all to point out that Aristotle actually held some different, but much less plausible, view than the one I discuss. The question is whether a theory of well-being could be both perfectionist and true.

2. Troubles With Perfectionism

2.1 Well-being and perfection: cases of intuitive divergence

The most familiar objection to perfectionism is that many find it obvious that some people are, or can be, downright evil and yet, "by any ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing," as Bernard Williams put it (1985, p. 46). The Aristotelian has a reply to such worries: a selfish or malicious person with no real concern for others also seems, intuitively, to be leading a stunted or impoverished life. A parent whose child turned out this way would likely feel that the child would have been better off leading a fuller life enriched by the usual moral commitments, even if that life is less successful by narrow Calliclean standards.[10] At least, these are intuitions that many people share, and I will not dispute them.[11]

The problem with such replies is that they can only show that well-being requires a substantial degree of moral commitment, in particular, however much is needed for a full and rich life. This leaves room for a considerable amount of immorality: the successful Southern slaveholder who enjoys the approbation of his community and a comfortable existence with a loving family has obvious moral shortcomings, yet it is hard to see in what sense his life must be "impoverished." Why must he be in *any* way worse off than he would be were he more enlightened about human equality? Why must he be worse off than a morally better counterpart who enjoys as much wealth, comfort, success, love and reputation, but without ever wronging anyone? (We can assume that both are well-settled in their moral convictions, equally convinced of their righteousness.[12]) This point arises with greater force in the

[10] Callicles is the immoralist depicted in Plato's *Gorgias*.

[11] Though notice that we might find it intuitive both that a moral monster's life is to some extent impoverished *and* that she nonetheless manages to flourish. Hannibal Lecter might be like that.

[12] It may help as well to apply the sympathy test suggested by Hooker (1996): would sympathy be an appropriate response to the slaveholder, or more so than for his virtuous counterpart? This test is not obviously decisive, particularly in cases of moral turpitude, but (as Hooker notes) sympathy need not be inappropriate even in those cases. Imagine you are an abolitionist relation of the slaveholder, whom you love despite his conduct.

case of a brutal warlord like Genghis Khan, who directed the slaughter of tens of millions. He appears to have done so largely with the blessing of his culture's moral code. It is not hard to imagine that his relatively long life, which appeared to be rather successful on his terms, went very well for him indeed. And while his idea of happiness or well-being is not exactly yours or mine, it is difficult to see the grounds for gainsaying it (as a conception of well-being!).[13] Is humanitarian concern for strangers really necessary for a full or rich, or even a characteristically, human life? History offers little reason for optimism on this count.

Some may find it counterintuitive to say that a Genghis Khan could have led a *happy* life. If we do not find it similarly counterintuitive to say that he might have flourished, been well-off, fared well, etc., we should wonder whether this is a linguistic artifact, or whether different normative concepts are in play. I do not particularly share the intuition in question, but neither does it seem wholly foreign and, at any rate, some people *do* seem to have the intuition. Are they confused? Yes and no. It can seem odd to call such a monstrous life a happy one, but this is probably because we tend to assess lives for happiness as stories or narratives: was the story of Khan's life a happy one? Well, not exactly, since there was after all so much misery in it. The thing is, the misery belonged to *other people*. He, apparently, did just fine; things seem to have gone rather happily *for him*. (Admittedly, he did have a difficult childhood and a propensity for killing anyone whose loyalty he questioned. Nor was he glad that some parts of the world remained unconquered when he died. In any case my interest here is not biographical; should history prove uncongenial to my aims, then we may reflect instead on his lesser known but equally ruthless counterpart, Shmengis Khan, who enjoyed the unwavering support of loving friends and family.) In short, intuitions about whether someone's life was happy may be misleading, since the fates of other actors can affect the story in ways that don't affect the well-being of the central character.

Some may point out that we cannot plausibly say Genghis Khan had a *good* life. True enough, but that's neither here nor there. While we do sometimes use "the good life" to denote well-being, the most natural understanding of the expression concerns a life that is desirable or choiceworthy, not just for the individual's benefit, but, all things considered: *good*. And a life of unchecked savagery is not by anyone's lights — save the savage and those who admire him — a choiceworthy one. Now this could be because, as Aristotelians hold, such a life is not good *for* the agent. But no one not already convinced of welfare perfectionism is likely to say that. Most contemporaries will say, as Kant does, that such a life could at least conceivably serve the

[13] Whereas "happiness" is usually used in contemporary language in a purely psychological sense, which is how I usually employ the term elsewhere, it sometimes functions as a synonym for "well-being." That is how I am using it in this context, and when I write of "leading a happy *life*." "Being happy," by contrast, has a psychological meaning. *See* Haybron 2005, forthcoming-c, forthcoming-b.

agent's interests, but that it is nonetheless an undesirable way to live because it is *wrong*. The good life, on such a view, involves both well-being and, distinctly, virtue. This is not to deny that large strains of commonsense thought see considerable interdependence between welfare and morality ("honesty is the best policy"). But this is a far weaker claim than the Aristotelian makes and, at any rate, is not a matter of universal agreement ("nice guys finish last").

A failure properly to distinguish the notions of well-being and the good life can also explain a further reply that might be made against my arguments, namely that no decent parent would wish a life like Genghis Khan's for his child.[14] This is true, but why should anyone think our concerns for our children are exhausted by their welfare? I want not merely for my children to be well-off or flourish; I want them to be good people and conduct themselves well, *whether or not it benefits them*. In fact this seems more important than their well-being.

There are good reasons, then, to doubt that flourishing requires perfection, and even that vice must in any way reduce an individual's well-being. I now want to consider a different sort of case indicating that a life of greater perfection need not involve greater well-being. Now Aristotelians can happily grant that virtue does not always benefit us, since a virtuous act can impede future virtuous activity, say by crippling or killing the agent. But there are other cases that Aristotelians cannot manage so easily. Sumner has pressed this point with his example of a talented but miserable philosopher who ends up much happier leading a laid-back existence that made far less use of his abilities.[15] Intuitively, the philosopher is much better off quitting the profession; yet his life exhibits far less perfection. We thus seem to have a counterexample to perfectionism. But perfectionists can make two replies to this argument. First, Aristotelians hold that virtue requires taking pleasure in one's activities, so they would deny that the unhappy philosopher truly exhibits perfection. Second, it also seems intuitively plausible that the philosopher has made a *mistake*; he has not acted well in choosing a profession so ill-suited to his nature. Hence it is not even intuitively the case that he exhibits a high level of perfection.

Neither reply cuts much ice: the first because Sumner need not claim that the philosopher is fully virtuous, just *more* virtuous than he would have been otherwise; and Aristotelians can only put so much weight on the importance of pleasure for virtue before their account of virtue begins to look ridiculous. (If I wash a leper out of compassion and duty but take no pleasure in it, is my action *wholly* unvirtuous, no better morally than if I had washed

[14] *See*, e.g., Hursthouse 1999, p. 175, Kraut 1979 and Swanton 2003, p. 86.
[15] Sumner 1992, pp. 4-5, Sumner 1996, p. 24. I have modified the case slightly for convenience.

my hands instead?[16]) If Sumner is right that the philosopher's life *intuitively* involves greater perfection, then Aristotelians deny his claim only by reducing the plausibility of their account of virtue. (And this is not an area where the Aristotelian view is supposed to be counterintuitive; indeed, the role of pleasure in Aristotelian virtue is one of the first things people find *attractive* about the account.) This points to a general difficulty for perfectionist views of well-being: they need to maintain credible theories of *both* well-being and virtue, and moves to preserve their account of one can easily undermine their view of the other. The second reply speaks more directly to Sumner's challenge, but is not clearly correct: even if we grant that the philosopher chose badly in entering his profession, we might still maintain that his subsequent activities exhibited greater perfection than they would have otherwise, and even that his life as a whole involved more perfection. But a different example should bring out the issues more clearly.

Consider then the case of a high-ranking career diplomat for the UK, Angela, who is contemplating an early retirement at the age of 62: having served her country with great distinction for many years, Angela has come into a good deal of money through some canny investments and a bit of luck. She has all but decided to retire with her husband to a villa in Tuscany, and could do so very comfortably on her earnings. (They have a number of good friends in the area and it would bring her much closer to her daughter and grandchildren, who reside in Milan.) She correctly envisages that a life there would be tremendously satisfying, occupied largely with good company and food and drink, walking the countryside and catching up on her reading — in short, kicking back and just enjoying life. It would certainly be a welcome and much-deserved respite from her demanding career in diplomacy: while rewarding in its own way, the schedule is hectic, and by now she has had enough of it. Before she can settle on her plans, however, a political crisis arises overseas and she is asked to take an important post where her considerable wisdom and skills would be of great use. It is hoped that Angela's efforts would help to avert a bloody conflict over the next several years. There are others who could do the job, and her efforts could well fail, but no one could fill the role as well as her. Naturally, the assignment would be taxing and heavy on travel, and frequently would involve dealing with unwholesome individuals about matters of extreme gravity, often calling for a fair measure of anger and indignation on her part.[17] But the experience would not be gru-

[16] Aristotle did not take the ridiculous view of virtue in any event: failure to experience the requisite pleasure would mean you are merely continent, which falls short of virtue but is better than nothing.

[17] As Aristotle observes about courage, virtue isn't always pleasant on the whole. We can imagine cases where this is more pronounced, such as an aid worker in Sudan's Darfur region who works with brutalized rape victims and must continually negotiate with the men responsible for the terror. It could be hard to reconcile virtue with a pleasant existence in such a case, for one thing because levity would normally be less appropriate when dealing with rape than with many other problems. We could easily construct an alternative life for

eling, or even unpleasant on the whole, as she does take pleasure in doing what she does best. Moreover, it would not be *so* taxing that she cannot spend some time with family and friends, and otherwise achieve a modicum of leisure. Yet it would be far less pleasant than the alternative.

From Angela's perspective, the decision is pretty near a coin toss: she could reasonably go either way. Thus she could refuse the position with no regrets: she has already sacrificed much in service to her country, and she has learned that in this line of work one has to be able to carve out some personal space and say no even to important requests, for important requests come along all the time. No one would dream of begrudging her the comfortable life she had begun to set before herself. Yet she accepts the assignment, also without regret: the stakes are high enough that she feels they are probably worth it. She goes on to serve admirably and with a good deal of success in sustaining the peace, but another six years pass before she can take her retirement, which lasts five relatively sedentary but agreeable years before a massive stroke suddenly takes her life. (A time and manner of death that would have been the same had she not taken the job.)

Has Angela acted in her interest? Is she better off having taken the job instead of retiring? This seems deeply implausible: while she arguably fares well in either scenario, she would clearly be better off taking the early retirement. It would be much more pleasant, she would be substantially happier, and she would be pursuing the sorts of activities that most appeal to her and, at least at this stage of her life, bring her the greatest satisfaction. (Things might have been different earlier in her life, when she lived for her work, which then involved greater novelty and conflicted less with her other priorities.) And yet the Aristotelian must presumably say she *is* better off having taken the job. For, by any reasonable measure, the diplomatic assignment involves greater perfection: it is obviously more virtuous, more admirable, and remains so over time — this is not a case of virtuous sacrifice that inhibits future perfection. And the position involves a greater degree of human functioning; she more fully exercises her capacities, functioning more fully *qua* human being than she would as a retiree. While the life of pleasant retirement has its own perfections, there is no credible sense, nonmoral or otherwise, in which Angela, or her activities, would exhibit more excellence on the whole if she retired.[18] While there may perhaps be certain areas of human life — personal relationships, leisure, the pursuit of personal goals — in

such an aid worker, parallel to Angela's, that was far more pleasant and rich in gratifying personal pursuits despite involving less perfection.

[18] Note also that putting so much weight on nonmoral excellence would be hard for conventional Aristotelians to sustain. Compare an immoral "renaissance man," highly talented, cultivated and erudite, with a moral saint whose nonmoral capacities and achievements are modest (though his functioning is not otherwise inhibited by misfortune). Most contemporary Aristotelians would presumably want to recommend the latter life over the former, yet it is not clear they can do so if nonmoral excellences get too much weight relative to the moral.

which the early retirement would involve greater functioning, it cannot reasonably be maintained that her job would leave her impoverished in any of these areas.

It might be argued that Angela herself wouldn't see things this way: from her perspective, her life goes better for her than it would have if she'd taken the retirement. She had, after all, chosen the best course as she saw it, and would presumably deem her life better, more choiceworthy, than the life of retirement. Let's grant, at least for the sake of argument, that she did indeed lead a better life as a result of her choice, and believed this to be the case. As I noted earlier in the case of Genghis Khan, this conclusion would not settle anything regarding her *welfare*. Would she see herself as better *off*, and not just leading a better life? She need not: we can perfectly well imagine that Angela does not see herself as benefited by her choice at all. She may see it as a major — if worthy — sacrifice, and be quick to tell you if you asked. Aristotelians might respond that she would be less than fully virtuous if so, for the truly virtuous see nothing that issues from virtue as a sacrifice.[19] So her claim to be worse off is not to be taken seriously; the claim that counts is the one that accords with virtue: that she is indeed better off. But this position is highly dubious. Indeed, it would count against her virtue were she *not* prepared to recognize the sacrifice that, intuitively, she clearly made. Consider how she might respond if her decision were taken for granted by her superiors and peers, who know full well what she gave up: if, say, they treated her curtly and matter-of-factly, demanding ever more of her with no sign that they even recognized or acknowledged what she had given up to take the job. Such rank ingratitude would be a serious affront, and she would be wholly justified in seeing it that way. Indeed, we should think less of her were she *not* to see this behavior as a slight, for it is a challenge to her self-respect. It is false, then, that virtuous activity will never seem a sacrifice to the virtuous agent. (This example thus undermines the Phillips/McDowell thesis about true virtue never seeming to require a genuine loss for the agent. This claim not only places implausibly strong demands on virtue; it appears to be incompatible with self-respect.)

In taking the job, Angela chose the path of greater excellence and virtue, a life that more fully exercised her capacities as a human being. But she was not securing or promoting her happiness or well-being. She was *sacrificing* it. This is a problem for Aristotelian accounts of well-being, and any other views that see perfection as the sole or primary constituent of human flourishing. While my argument has not addressed the role of external goods in Aristotelian views, it should be apparent that Angela has not been particularly unlucky in her allotment of the goods of fortune; quite the contrary. Aristotelians who wish to secure an intuitively plausible verdict in Angela's case would have to put a lot of weight on external goods — more, it seems, than even the most extravagant interpretation of Aristotle's views could sustain.

[19] *See*, e.g., McDowell 1980 and Phillips 1964.

At least, it is hard to see how one could place that much emphasis on external goods and still maintain the idea that virtue is the primary and controlling factor in well-being.

2.2 What is perfection? An internal problem

I now want to consider a case that raises internal difficulties for the Aristotelian, forcing an unwelcome choice in the interpretation of perfection. Frank learns that the parents of Dennis, a severely autistic child with cerebral palsy, have suddenly died. While he has long been a friend to Dennis's family, their friendship has been only moderately close. The child, with no relations willing or able to care for him, is to be moved to a state facility that will provide tolerable but impersonal institutional care. Frank, a successful artist and happy bachelor, decides to take Dennis in and give him a real home, and assumes the daunting task of caring for him. Though he gets some help from volunteers and hired assistants, his caregiving responsibilities are often grueling and sharply limit his ability to socialize or pursue other activities; he is able to earn a living (doing more commercial art that is less challenging and rewarding) and not much else. But that is what he expected and he tends to Dennis lovingly and without complaint, and takes great satisfaction in the knowledge that he has given him a far warmer and more stable home than he would otherwise have had. Had he not taken custody of Dennis, he would have continued developing his craft according to his passion, leading a highly active social life involving deep friendships, and pursuing his hobbies of sailing, chess and playing bass in a jazz combo. That life, too, would have been very satisfying and much more pleasant (and it too would have involved substantial concern and caring for others, including some philanthropic work, but of a far more pedestrian variety). While he would have felt badly about Dennis's fate, he would hardly have been wracked with guilt at not adopting him.

I take it to be obvious that Frank has acted virtuously, substantially more so than if he had decided not to take in the child. It also seems clear that he would have been a good deal better off not doing so. (Some cases of caregiving, such as caring for a spouse wasting away from Alzheimer's or a badly crippled sibling, may pose sharp difficulties for the Aristotelian, since these can involve *paradigms* of admirable living that are nonetheless profoundly unpleasant and otherwise represent quite major sacrifices — and where, as in Angela's case, we would think more highly of the caregiver if she squarely acknowledged the sacrifice, but made it lovingly and without resentment, than if she cheerfully insisted there was no great loss to her.)

But the more interesting question is what the Aristotelian should say about this case: does Frank's life involve greater perfection? On the one hand, it does involve greater virtue: it is more admirable. On the other hand, it involves a lesser exercise of his human capacities: his functioning is sharply

constrained and inhibited. We could, of course, decide to place such tremendous weight on the range of functionings he does achieve that we conclude that he really is exercising his capacities more fully than he would have otherwise. But this seems strange and unmotivated, yielding a highly moralized and narrow conception of human functioning that denigrates the many other valued functionings Frank achieved in his bachelor life. Intuitively, he functions more fully — more fully in the sense that allows us to think of Aristotelian well-being as *flourishing* — in the life not pursued.

There seems, then, to be a deeply problematical tension within Aristotelian views between two aspects of perfection: *admirability* and *actualization*. When we think of well-being as excellent activity or perfection, do we mean activity that is admirable or virtuous, or activity that actualizes the agent's potential as a human being, that develops and exercises characteristically human capacities? These are different matters, and a plausible account of one may not be a credible account of the other. The problem is that Aristotelians need an interpretation of "perfection" that yields credible views of *both* admirability and actualization. Cases like Frank's suggest that this is not possible: either perfection tracks actualization, which would respect our intuition that Frank would have been better off not taking in the child, or it tracks admirability, which would preserve the traditional association of Aristotelian flourishing with virtue — but at the cost of generating highly dubious verdicts about the well-being of people like Frank.[20] And more worrisome for the Aristotelian, the attractive metaphor of "well-functioning" seems largely to go out the window, so sharply does it discount the exercise of our other capacities.

2.3 Pleasure and suffering

A crucial task for any theory of well-being is to give a credible accounting of the value of pleasant and unpleasant experiences, especially suffering. For nothing else is so plainly central to human welfare, to the extent that many have concluded that nothing else ultimately matters. So strong a claim may well be false, of course, and we may want to qualify pleasure's value in various ways. Thus many of us would not want to lead a life devoid of unpleasant experiences, and sometimes we even value unpleasant experiences. Moreover, certain pleasures are degrading or immoral and may thus be bad, all things considered (which is not necessarily to say they aren't good *for* their bearer — that might be why you find them objectionable). Yet we can pile on all the qualifiers we like and still recognize that pleasure is one of the central goods in life. Suffering, conversely, is one of the central evils. Any theory that can't make sense of such platitudes has a lot of explaining to do.

[20] Cases like Angela's suggest that even the strongest emphasis on actualization cannot yield plausible claims about well-being. But some readers might dispute my handling of her case while granting my description of Frank.

The commonsense view of pleasure is that it is good because, put crudely, it *feels* good. Likewise, suffering is bad because of what it is *like* to suffer.[21] This supposition may well prove false on reflection, but it seems at least an accurate statement of the pretheoretical appearances. The further an account of pleasure strays from it, the less convincing it is likely to be.

What do Aristotelians say about pleasure's value? They certainly do not deny that it *has* value, or rather that the right sorts of pleasure have value. Aristotle even suggests at times that a kind of pleasure is "in some way the best good," though only in a highly qualified sense (*NE*, Bk. VII 13). When it is objected that their account of well-being assigns too little weight to pleasure, Aristotelians frequently observe that their view takes flourishing to be necessarily pleasant, sometimes seeming to think that this settles the matter. It does not: their view needs to value pleasure *for the right reasons*, and to handle non-ideal cases as well. Exactly what Aristotle thinks about the nature and value of pleasure is not an easy question, and I will not try to answer it here. (Again, it doesn't much matter what he thinks: the question is what a perfectionist can plausibly say about pleasure.) But I will assume that pleasure's value derives, on an Aristotelian view, from its connection with virtuous activity.[22] This idea permits at least five interpretations. The first two I will pass by with little discussion: on the one hand, the behavioristic idea that pleasure just is unimpeded (virtuous) activity, as in "his digging was his pleasure"; and on the other, the claim that pleasure's importance consists in its role as an indicator of value.[23] Both notions may be true to some small part of the story, but as complete accounts of pleasure and its value they are, for obvious reasons, wildly implausible.

A third interpretation maintains that pleasure matters because it "completes" an excellent activity (*NE* 1174b24). This too seems hopeless as a full account of pleasure's value. For apparently pleasure is merely a necessary component of virtuous activity, and its value reduces entirely to its role in "completing" such activity. It thus contributes to our lives in much the same way that choosing the fine for its own sake, or doing so from a firm disposition, does: one's activity won't count as virtuous otherwise. And suffering is bad because it renders one's activities incomplete or otherwise defective, undermining their excellence. This is a very strange idea (stranger still if we interpret "perfection" to put the weight on admirability rather than actualiza-

[21] *See*, e.g., Crisp forthcoming.

[22] Likewise for unpleasant experiences. Aristotle does not seem explicitly to connect his discussion of pleasure with unpleasure, but any disvalue the latter has will presumably need somehow to connect, negatively, with virtuous activity. As I note later, the problems may be even more acute here than for pleasure.

[23] Hurka, e.g., suggests that "from a perfectionist standpoint, pleasure and pain can appear to be mere biological signals of good and poor functioning — indicators of what has moral importance, but not significant in themselves" (1993, p. 190). I do not believe this is Hurka's considered view of pleasure's value, and he does not seem explicitly to endorse it in the text; moreover, his more recent work accords pleasure intrinsic value (Hurka 2001).

tion). The notion that pleasure actually matters *simply* as a cog in the machinery of good functioning is so far removed from the appearances that it is hard to know what to make of it. Is the suffering of young leukemia patients bad simply because their functioning is inhibited? One might have thought that an excellent reason to restore functioning to patients is to alleviate their suffering, not the reverse. (Painkillers can also inhibit functioning.[24])

A related interpretation construes pleasure as itself a kind of virtuous mental activity. To have a pleasant experience is (to some extent) to function well psychically; it is a kind of psychic perfection or fullness of being or actuality. And suffering is a kind of psychic ill-functioning or diminution of being.[25] This proposal would allow the Aristotelian to explain how the cheap pleasures of a passive consumer, leading the life of "dumb grazing cattle," nonetheless have *something* going for them. While such a life is markedly inferior to one of rational excellence befitting a human being, it at least permits the fulfillment of our lower, animal natures. But this account still seems unacceptable, partly because it must sharply discount pleasure's value to maintain a credible account of virtue or excellence. The contribution pleasure makes to our lives seems to far outstrip its role in making our lives excellent or perfecting our being. A further worry is that it departs too far from the commonsense view of pleasure's value. It is not plausible to claim that the leukemia patient's suffering is bad simply or even mainly because it constitutes a psychic ill-functioning.[26] What does that have to do with the *experience* of suffering? Zombies can have psychic ill-functionings.

A fifth perfectionist option is to construe pleasure as a bonus that accompanies virtuous activity: it "supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age" (1174b33). Contra the bare "completion" view discussed above, pleasure is the icing on the cake, not a merely necessary ingredient like the yeast. (Conversely, suffering must be the spitting on your grave.) One problem with this proposal is that pleasure does not seem to be merely a nice add-on, the icing on the cake: it is, rather, a large part of the cake. It is substantially what makes life worth living, and a very great part of what I imagine the dying regret leaving behind. And the corresponding view of suffering, as merely a final insult (supervening on *what* injury?) clearly fails to square with the reality. Worse, the "bonus" view of pleasure doesn't explain its value at all; it *presupposes* that pleasure is somehow valuable. Why is it a bonus?

In fairness, perhaps no theory of well-being can readily accommodate pleasure and suffering, save possibly for hedonism; Aristotelian theories are not alone in this regard. But we can expect our theory at least to come *close*, or to hold out the prospect of someday getting it right. Aristotle himself may

[24] *See*, e.g., Annas 1993, p. 380.
[25] As Mark Murphy points out, pain is a difficulty here since it appears to be a "positive reality" rather than a privation (2001, p. 97). Suffering seems analogous on this point.
[26] Presumably we must distinguish this from *mal*functioning, since suffering usually involves no malfunction, and indeed can be crucial to proper functioning.

have been none too happy with this aspect of his theory, given his repeated attempts to come to grips with it. In any case he was not given to saying stupid things, so it is hard to avoid the thought that we have underestimated the resources of his theory on this point.

Or maybe we have misunderstood its aspirations. Perhaps the Aristotelian claim is rather that, while pleasure is only an ancillary part of our goal in leading good lives — not so much what we aim at as something that comes along for the ride — it is nonetheless a large part of what the virtuous agent hopes or *wishes* for.[27] After all, knowing that your goal is virtuous activity only tells you so much: you then need to know what it means to choose and act in accordance with virtue. That, presumably, means seeing various things other than virtuous activity as preferable or desirable. Other things being equal, the virtuous agent sees pleasant experiences as being more desirable than unpleasant ones, and thus prefers them. Indeed, when thinking about all the things it would be nice to have in life, the virtuous agent can give pleasure a very large role. What she cannot do is see pleasure and other objects of choice as even *potentially* competing with virtue; to pursue these things at the expense of acting well is out of the question. What fundamentally matters, then, is virtuous activity, and pleasure is in a sense worthless by comparison, in the very special sense that it is not to be balanced against the demands of virtue. For in a conflict with virtue, pleasure has zero weight.[28] If we construe the Aristotelian view this way then we can see it as having two theories of "value": the main theory, of what should be our goal in life; and a second theory — akin to the Stoic view of indifferents — which concerns the relative weight a virtuous agent will place on the various items that might be chosen or wished for. Such a reading of the Aristotelian project would make it easier to understand not only its popularity but also the success of Stoicism, which can seem downright crazy when viewed through the lens of contemporary debates about well-being.

The problem is that Aristotle never really gives us the second theory; evidently it cannot be specified, but can only be embodied in the practical wisdom of a virtuous agent. (Or, perhaps, derived from an account of human nature.) But if the Aristotelian approach to virtue is to seem at all plausible, we need an account of how the virtuous agent views matters like the leukemia patient's suffering: we need to be told that the *phronimos* sees the suffering as a bad thing, or at least something to be alleviated, *because of how it feels to the child*. Or perhaps for some other reason, such as that the child wants to be rid of it: as long as it turns out that the *phronimos* sees the child's suffering as bad for reasons that are both credible and consistent with a reasonable account of virtue. If the preceding arguments are cogent, the *phronimos* will *not*

[27] I have been influenced here by Eric Brown's reading of Aristotle (Brown 2005).

[28] Some of Aristotle's claims about pleasure may seem to suggest that no such conflict is possible, since pleasures that conflict with virtue wouldn't really be pleasures. This seems to me dubious however one reads him, but in any event I am talking about pleasure as we ordinarily conceive it, not necessarily what Aristotle calls pleasure.

see the child's suffering as undesirable merely for perfectionist reasons. If she considers it bad simply because it indicates illness or poor character, for instance, we will be compelled to reject the account of virtue that proclaims her to be virtuous. Whether this sort of approach can be made to work is a good question, but I will say something more about it later.

2.4 Well-being as a success value

There seem, then, to be no compelling grounds for holding welfare perfectionism: perfection probably forms no fundamental part of well-being. If perfection does seem to be a great benefit for most of us, this is probably due to its relation to other things, like pleasure or the achievement of goals. Or, alternatively, if perfection is fundamental to well-being, then it plays a smaller and different role from that posited by Aristotelian accounts. Perhaps, for instance, well-being consists partly in perfection understood not as admirability but as actualization — the fulfillment of one's capacities, say, where this does not entail moral virtue.[29] This would probably yield an approach to well-being more reminiscent of the self-actualization views of humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers than the familiar Aristotelian corpus, and few Aristotelians would likely be happy with it.

These conclusions have been reached mainly by reflecting on a variety of intuitive points, but now I want to consider a deeper, more fundamental flaw — one that suggests, moreover, that even more modest forms of perfectionism will not work. Sumner charges that perfectionism results basically from a confusion, failing to see the difference between perfectionist and prudential value.[30] In particular, the concept of prudential value is indexical, relativized to the agent, whereas the concept of perfectionist value is not like this. That charge seems too strong: most perfectionists are probably aware that "perfection" and "well-being" express different concepts, with different structures. What they claim, without confusion, is that the two types of value are tightly connected: individuals achieve one type of value *by* achieving the other. Welfare consists in perfection. But while perfectionists seem to be innocent of conflating distinct concepts, I would suggest they have erred about the character of perfectionist value and well-being, respectively. If we properly understand their significance, we will not find it plausible to maintain that one is constituted by the other.[31]

The perfectionist's fundamental mistake lies in not recognizing that well-being is what we might call a *success* value: it concerns the success of an or-

[29] Or perhaps perfection is understood more conventionally, but is not the primary ingredient of well-being, as Aristotelians take it to be. But cases like the immoral slaveholder or Genghis Khan suggest that even this is false.
[30] Sumner 1992, 1996, 1998.
[31] My claim here is neutral between two possibilities: the relevant differences could reside in the concepts themselves, or simply in the roles these concepts play in evaluative thought.

ganism in achieving its goals.[32] This is a very abstract and formal claim, compatible with many if not most accounts of well-being, and that is how it should be. The relevant goals might be understood in the obvious way, in terms of the individual's aims or desires, or more broadly. Thus we might refer to the desires one would have given full information or otherwise ideal conditions. An organism's tendencies for growth and development might also be taken to specify goals (one way in which an objectivist view might fit this schema). Goals can also be found in propensities for positive and negative response: pleasure, pain, happiness, satisfaction, etc. For one way to achieve success, broadly construed, is to attain a state that one welcomes or responds to favorably, even if one had not previously sought it — an *ex post facto* success, so to speak. (If this seems strained, consider how a designer might go about implanting goals in an organism. One option is to build in desires or propensities for functioning in ways that aim at the goals. Another is to build in the right evaluative propensities — tendencies to respond favorably to things that promote the achievement of those goals. This will be especially useful insofar as the designer cannot predict what those things will be in advance, and hence cannot build in tendencies to seek those things directly. By contrast, simply giving the organism the *capacity* to achieve the requisite goals would not be a way of giving it those goals.)

That well-being concerns success can be seen in the fact that actions aimed at improving individuals' welfare are naturally described as "helping," "aiding" or "assisting." We see it also in the ordinary conception of well-being as a matter of an individual's "interests." And it would be hard to understand the appropriateness of sympathetic concern for shortfalls in welfare, much less Darwall's plausible suggestion that welfare is normative for care, if we did not also suppose that well-being somehow concerns the individual's goals.[33] How can we commiserate or sympathize over something that in no way relates to the individual's goals, is not at all rejected or disliked by any part of the individual, and which the individual cannot even be brought to care about? Similarly, the peculiar *in*appropriateness of an emotion like *schadenfreude* seems essentially connected to the broad notion of success. It would make little sense to take malicious delight in someone's vices unless one saw them as somehow frustrating the person's goals.

Perfection, by contrast, bears no necessary connection to anything that can plausibly be viewed as an organism's goals: for one can achieve a perfection, at least to some degree, merely by fulfilling a capacity, even if one hasn't the slightest desire for it, could not be brought to desire it, is in no other way oriented to seek it, and even if one responds with nothing but pain and re-

[32] Simon Keller is developing a view of well-being as success, construed more narrowly than here (Keller 2004).
[33] Darwall 2002.

vulsion toward it.[34] Indeed, one's perfection, as understood by most perfectionist theories, can depend on the fulfillment of capacities one doesn't even *have*, and can't have. It is very hard to see how this sort of perfection could count as succeeding in one's goals, understood as loosely as you like. The problem is that perfection is not a success value but a *performance* value, a type of value that concerns doing things well or being a good example of one's kind. Perfection is normative not for attitudes of caring or sympathetic concern, but for attitudes of *admiration* or deploring, or approval and disapproval.[35] To conceive of well-being or flourishing in terms of perfection, then, is to engage in an inescapably Procrustean enterprise: we will invariably be able to imagine cases in which excellence meets nothing that could be considered among the individual's goals, or where the degree of excellence attained outstrips the degree of goal-attainment.

Our interests in well-being and perfectionist value are fundamentally different: they answer to different concerns. Think about *why* human beings should care about such values, as all healthy persons seem to. What is their role in human life? Prudential value, at least in the case of well-being, apparently relates to the universal problem of deciding how to distribute resources and attention among those we care about, including ourselves. When does a given individual require assistance or special care? Who needs it most (and least)? Who has more than they need? Who has given up the least, or most? Such questions naturally relate to individuals' goals — again, broadly conceived — and what they need to reach them. It would be odd to answer them mainly by reference to individuals' excellences, and I am unaware of any society in which people normally settle such questions that way.[36] This is probably because perfectionist values are not suited to such questions. They concern a different set of problems that face social creatures such as ourselves: the problems of affiliation, including the establishing of relationships and enforcement of norms, that confront groups of individuals trying to live together given disparate abilities and agendas. Who should we trust, befriend or marry? Who should we avoid? Who should we emulate? It should be unsurprising that a value concept oriented to answering these kinds of ques-

[34] While Aristotelians will deny this is complete perfection, I have argued that they cannot withhold the ascription of perfection entirely without retreating to an intolerable conception of perfection.

[35] In describing values as normative for certain attitudes, I am not taking a stand on Darwall's claim that welfare is to be *understood* in terms of care rather than the reverse (Darwall 2002). I am saying only that the correctness or appropriateness of such attitudes depends on the (perceived or actual) presence of the relevant values.

[36] I am not denying that people sometimes use perfectionist criteria to settle distributive questions (e.g., the least skilled child might require greater attention). But even then the grounds for such attention tend not to be perfectionist, relating instead to the child's future success or enjoyment, or are perfectionist for reasons unrelated to the child's welfare, such as that the skills will benefit the group or are simply worthwhile. It is doubtful that sympathetic concern could motivate such attention on purely perfectionist grounds, with no reference to the child's goals.

tions would be ill-suited to addressing the concerns of well-being — helping us decide who needs help and so forth. For these questions bear only tangentially on the individual's goals: for the most part, our interest in these questions has no bearing on the individual's goals, needs or interests. We are more interested in *other* people's needs.

Perhaps the Aristotelian will be unmoved by the preceding account of prudential and perfectionist values. But then we are owed a competing account of well-being's value: if well-being isn't fundamentally a success value, then what sort of value is it, such that a perfectionist account of it would make sense? Some writers, like Hurka, have simply denied that we need a distinct category of prudential value: why not say that perfection is good, period, and be done with it?[37] What's to be gained by distinguishing *good* from *good for*? It is not clear what else one can say.

2.5 Accounts of well-being versus deliberative accounts of the good life

Often with philosophical problems, the hard part is just figuring out what the question is supposed to be. Aristotelians have been asking what is, in some ways, exactly the right question; it just isn't the right question if you're looking for a theory of well-being. Julia Annas writes that "in ancient ethics the fundamental question is, How ought I to live? Or, What should my life be like?" (Annas 1993, p. 27). This eminently reasonable question is arguably approached, at least in Aristotle's writing, by thinking about our ultimate goal in life: each of us seeks to lead a good life; what, then, is the nature of our target, so that we may succeed in hitting it?[38] In short, what is our ultimate goal in life? The question invites us to take up a certain perspective, a first-person perspective from which we think about what our ultimate priorities or goals in life should be; call this the "goal-setting" perspective.[39]

From this standpoint, a perfectionist view like Aristotle's can seem highly appealing: surely we ought, above all, to act well; and perhaps nothing is worth seeking if that means acting badly. Such a view seems all the more plausible when we observe that it need not preclude acting on ordinary reasons of "self-interest," such as that something would be pleasant, healthy, etc., since acting well presumably includes choosing well with respect to such things. As I noted earlier, this view also makes sense of the otherwise curious — to some of us bizarre — idea that pleasure does not really matter all that much in itself, being merely a byproduct that accompanies the achievement

[37] I am grateful to Hurka for pressing me on this point (which is not to say he would endorse my claims here).

[38] My take on Aristotle in this section is reasonable, I think, but not uncontroversial. But my concern is mainly to explain why perfectionist views seem compelling to so many, whatever Aristotle himself believed.

[39] Or perhaps more accurately: we take up a perspective in which we think about how deliberation from the goal-setting perspective should go. I will set aside the qualification for convenience.

of what is truly worthwhile. Even today one often hears such ideas, including from ordinary folk with no commitment to Aristotelian doctrines. And the reason, I am suggesting, is that those who endorse them are focusing on something like the goal-setting perspective: thinking about the role goods like pleasure should take in setting our priorities in life. While pleasure can seem centrally important even from this perspective — it did to the Epicureans — it need not: many decent and intelligent people have thought it inappropriate to make pleasure one's aim in life.

So far so good, then; where's the problem? The problem is that, in approaching the theory of well-being from this perspective, we have effectively changed the subject. To ask how we ought to live, or what our priorities in life should be, is equivalent to asking for an account of the *good life*, in the broad sense mentioned earlier: the sort of life that it is good to lead, not just for one's own sake, but period. Or, more exactly, it is to ask for an account of the good life taken as a goal (we will see the reason for this qualification shortly). As a result, "eudaimonia" seems in Aristotle's writings to fill two roles: on the one hand, it appears to be a rough synonym of "well-being" or "flourishing," a notion that concerns what benefits a person; this is pretty much the conventional understanding of the term. On the other hand, it is claimed to represent whatever it is that would constitute an ideal life, a life that is most choiceworthy, and thus occupies a role akin to the broad understanding of "good life."[40] Thus Annas tells us that "for Aristotle it is trivial that my final end is eudaimonia," for the notion of eudaimonia just is the "notion of living our life as a whole well" (Annas 2006, p. 520-1). And eudaimonia "in ancient theories is given its sense by the role it plays; and the most important role it plays is that of an obvious, but thin, specification of the final good" (Annas 1993, p. 46). But if we begin our inquiries with this understanding of eudaimonia, then we are effectively *stipulating* that eudaimonia is equivalent to the good life. Any account of eudaimonia that cannot credibly explain what it means to live one's "life as a whole well" is simply a non-starter.

Since modern theorists of well-being generally are not even trying to give accounts of what it is to live well, they are just not in the same game as Aristotelians (and other advocates of eudaimonistic ethics). Indeed, probably most of them, like Kant, would expressly deny that well-being is a good measure of a life lived well, since they think it perfectly possible for a bad person, living badly, to flourish. More generally, anyone who believes well-being not to be the measure of a good life, being only a part of it, are not just wrong according to the Aristotelian view — the way, say, Epicureans are thought to be wrong. Rather, they reject a fundamental presupposition of the inquiry, and so aren't invited to the party at all. We should not be surprised,

[40] *See*, e.g., Annas 1993, especially Ch. 1, where she argues that for the ancients the idea that eudaimonia is the ultimate goal that should structure all our activities was considered a virtually empty, platitudinous claim.

then, that Aristotelians and their critics, notably subjectivists about well-being, so often seem to end up talking past each other, and that they frequently regard each others' views with bafflement, if not outright contempt. But this is, to some extent, the wrong comparison: Aristotle and other ancient eudaimonists were fundamentally concerned to recommend a certain way of life. And while — for example — Kant's subjectivist view of well-being differs radically from Aristotle's account of eudaimonia, the two philosophers actually recommend rather similar *ways of life*, in that both accept strong doctrines of the primacy of virtue. Of course, there remain substantial differences, for instance in Kant's advocacy of a far sterner, more moralistic conception of the good life than Aristotle. (A bit ironic, since Aristotelians frequently regard subjectivists as licensing base and ignoble ways of life.) Note that the problem is not the idea that well-being is the ultimate goal that should structure all our deliberations. The trouble, rather, is *stipulating* that well-being is the measure of a good life at the outset and then asking what well-being could be, consistently with that — thus precluding even wondering whether well-being might not be the only thing that matters in a good life. Ask that question, and you're out of the game.

The mistake here — in effect, trying to give a theory of well-being by asking what the good life is like — is quite understandable, and it is not surprising that many discerning observers should have made it. To begin with, the goal-setting perspective obscures the differences between well-being and the good life: when we imagine what true happiness or success would be for ourselves, what we picture tends to be precisely the sort of life we deem to be ideal on the whole. When thinking about our ultimate goals, the good life tends to be indistinguishable from the life of well-being. (It need not be: a rabid Calvinist who thinks original sin has so tainted her that she deserves to suffer might view her happiness in very different terms from the life she ought to pursue. This sort of scenario is not likely to have kept many Hellenes awake at night.) Similarly, we are unlikely to see profit in pursuing a way of life seriously at odds with our considered convictions about the best way to live, period. If you value honesty as a moral virtue, for instance, it would likely be prudent for you to make honesty one of your priorities, simply because people living at odds with their own values tend not, even by their own lights, to flourish.

Where Aristotelians go wrong, in short, is in approaching the theory of well-being via the wrong question: what is my ultimate goal? The natural way to answer such a question is to offer a *first-person comprehensive ideal*. But any theory of well-being that takes such a form is liable to suffer from a host of problems. Insofar as we are asking for a *comprehensive* ideal, which is to say an ideal that encompasses everything desirable in a life, we are really asking for a theory of the good life. And, as I have suggested, Aristotelian theories are fundamentally theories of the good life that have been dragooned into service as accounts of well-being.

The other aspects of the approach are problematical as well. Insofar as a

theory centers on an *ideal*, or target, it risks being unable to handle non-ideal cases well; in general, it is much easier to say what an ideal life is like than to give criteria for assessing ordinary lives which, like Angela and Frank's, fall short. And, as we get away from perfect lives, the various components of an ideal life will often seem intuitively to diverge, as virtue and pleasure (*inter alia*) do in Angela's case. The dual roles of Aristotle's "eudaimonia" likewise come apart, with the "good life" notion tending intuitively to stick closer to virtue and the "well-being" notion tending to track pleasure and other traditional prudential goods. Insofar, finally, as the theory aims to provide a *first-person* ideal, it is liable to neglect aspects of life that are important yet not appropriately aimed at by the individual whose life it is. This could be because they lie beyond the individual's control (e.g., you can ensure you act well, but not that a good outcome follows); because they are most fittingly objects of third-personal concern (e.g., concern for the suffering stoically endured by a loved one); or because the goods in question tend to be the byproducts of other things that are more wisely or appropriately aimed at (e.g., pleasure accompanying worthwhile activity). Such points are largely why the Aristotelian treatment of pleasure gets as much traction as it does. Along with the limitations of ideals, they are also why I have qualified the Aristotelian's fundamental concern as with, not the good life *simpliciter*, but rather the ideal of the good life that should guide our deliberations. There may be things that are desirable to have in one's life, but which are not fittingly incorporated in one's goals. On the other hand, there is a virtue in this: the ancients are often lauded for emphasizing the importance of what we *do*, as opposed to what happens to us. Even if they take this idea too far, there is surely something to it.

As I said at the outset, Aristotelians are in some ways asking exactly the right question. Indeed, contemporary ethics arguably suffers from a handicap of its own in not taking that question more seriously than it does. One might expect that the question of how we ought to live, of what our priorities in life should be, would be central to any serious philosophical ethics. Yet modern ethical theorists tend to address the question piecemeal, looking narrowly at the moral side of the equation, or the prudential side, or at some other aspect of the good life. Or, in the case of the Utilitarians, so inflating the moral side of the equation that it gobbles up everything else, resulting in a theory that is probably impossible to live with. It is a virtue of the ancient tradition that it takes seriously the task of helping people deliberate wisely about their priorities in life, and it is no coincidence that even today many people skip the modern literature and turn to the ancients for philosophical guidance about how to live.

In this paper I have drawn on a distinction between the concepts of well-being and the good life, arguing that a failure to attend to this distinction has contributed to the appeal of Aristotelian views of well-being. Some have objected that this accusation begs the question against Aristotelians, claiming that it is part of such views to deny that any such distinction exists. This

seems to me false: Aristotelians indeed see no *substantive* difference between well-being and the good life, since they take the good life and flourishing to consist in the same thing: roughly, the life of virtuous activity. But this does not amount to saying that no *conceptual* difference exists, as well it should not: the concepts are *obviously* distinct, so it would be bad news for Aristotelians if they had to deny this.

A more profitable reply may be for Aristotelians to grant the points made in this paper and rethink the character of their enterprise. For if we recast Aristotelian theories, not as theories of well-being, but simply as deliberative accounts of the good life — that is, accounts of the ideal of living that ought to guide our deliberations — then they may seem a lot more compelling. Indeed, the broader canvas of ancient eudaimonism may prove more compelling, and less alien, on such a view (revisionary though it is). You could grant everything said in this paper and still accept Aristotle's views about the primacy of virtue, and the importance of activity, in the life well-lived; you just wouldn't think they amounted to a credible theory of *well-being*. Indeed, you might even want to supplement Aristotle's account of the good life — which, as I noted earlier, is notoriously underspecified on many questions, like how we ought to view the suffering of our loved ones — with a subjectivist account of well-being (that is, what we ought to want for people insofar as we care for them). Whereas the Stoic emphasis on the individual's internal state, rather than activity, insulates their view from worries about how we can make *activity* our goal given its dependence on the goods of fortune. And again, we would still need to know about those indifferents: which are preferred, to what extent, and why. A conventional account of well-being — though not so conventional about its value — may be needed here. Even Epicurean hedonism could retain its appeal on this sort of reading: for those who believe we are only capable of seeking pleasure, the Epicureans offer a psychologically realistic yet attractive view of the good life by showing how the pleasant life requires discipline and, more or less, the traditional virtues. I do not know if this sort of rehabilitation of ancient eudaimonism can be made to work, but it seems an avenue worth exploring.

3. Conclusion

The diagnosis offered here is meant to illuminate the mistakes that I suspect have made Aristotelian *perfectionism* seem plausible to many of its supporters — or, at the very least, to articulate the best motivation I can think of for accepting the view. I am not claiming that all Aristotelians have approached the theory in the suggested manner, that Aristotelians to whom my diagnosis applies have regarded their theories only in this manner, or that this is the sole or even best reason for being an Aristotelian about well-being. For example, one attraction of Aristotelian accounts of well-being is a kind of naturalism they seem to embody: starting with a general schema for thinking about the flourishing of any living thing, we develop our account of specifi-

cally human flourishing by looking at our specifically human natures. We thus situate our view of human well-being in a broad theoretical framework that illuminates much else besides. (And for Aristotle, at least, this picture integrates with a still broader comprehensive metaphysics.) So regarded, Aristotle's account of well-being doesn't seem first-personal at all.

All of this, I think, is compatible with the diagnosis proffered above: it is perfectly possible and, I think likely, that Aristotelians, and probably Aristotle himself, have approached the theory of well-being from more than one direction. One possibility is to begin from a third-personal naturalistic perspective that leads to the idea that eudaimonia is our ultimate goal in life, then switching to the first-person "goal-setting" perspective. In any event, I would suggest that the naturalistic perspective, while arguably a source of the Aristotelian view's allures, is not the perspective that gives perfectionism its primary appeal. Aristotle's metaphysics may have helped to motivate his perfectionism, but many contemporary Aristotelians don't buy the metaphysics. Nor is it clear how thinking about human beings as organisms, in the context of plant and animal flourishing generally, compels us to accept perfectionism. There is indeed something appealing about the idea that goodness in a lion consists in perfecting its nature *qua* lion (e.g., Foot 2001). But is it so obvious that lion *well-being* consists in being a good lion, or in the exercise of liony excellence? Perhaps it does, but this idea is not nearly as compelling as another. For what the naturalistic point of view does motivate, I would suggest, is *externalism*: an organism flourishes insofar as it enjoys the goods characteristic of its kind. And many people find it sad or unfortunate when an animal's life is devoid of some major part of a normal or full life for its species — for instance if a lion is never able to hunt. The problem, intuitively, is not lack of perfection — not being a good lion or exercising the virtues proper to lions — but "missing out," failing to enjoy one or more of the elements of a full life for a lion (similarly when a person is born blind, retarded, etc.). Such intuitions have considerable force for many people and, as I noted earlier may constitute the strongest support for Aristotelian accounts of well-being. But this support appears to be for Aristotelian externalism, not perfectionism.

In all this I have not tried to deny the importance of perfection or excellence. Indeed this seems a matter of first importance, more important even than well-being in the achievement of a good life. What I do deny is that *well-being* fundamentally concerns perfection. In fact welfare perfectionism seems in a way to discount the importance of perfection by subsuming it under well-being: perfection matters not *simpliciter*, but because it is at least partly constitutive of flourishing. (And of course it cannot be more important than flourishing.) But it seems more plausible to say that perfection matters, period — whether it benefits us or not.

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