

OXFORD

# The Highest Good in Aristotle & Kant

*edited by*

JOACHIM AUFDERHEIDE  
& RALF M. BADER



## The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant

## MIND ASSOCIATION OCCASIONAL SERIES

This series consists of carefully selected volumes of significant original papers on predefined themes, normally growing out of a conference supported by a Mind Association Major Conference Grant. The Association nominates an editor or editors for each collection, and may cooperate with other bodies in promoting conferences or other scholarly activities in connection with the preparation of particular volumes.

*Director, Mind Association:* M. Fricker

*Publications Officer:* Julian Dodd

Recently Published in the Series:

How We Fight

*Ethics in War*

Edited by Helen Frowe and Gerald Lang

The Morality of Defensive War

Edited by Cécile Fabre and Seth Lazar

Metaphysics and Science

Edited by Stephen Mumford and Matthew Tugby

Thick Concepts

Edited by Simon Kirchin

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

*History and Interpretation*

Edited by Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter

Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction

Edited by Catharine Abell and Katerina Bantinaki

Emergence in Mind

Edited by Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald

Empiricism, Perceptual Knowledge, Normativity, and Realism

*Essays on Wilfrid Sellars*

Edited by Willem A. deVries

Spheres of Reason

*New Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity*

Edited by Simon Robertson

Dispositions and Causes

Edited by Toby Handfield

# The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant

EDITED BY

Joachim Aufderheide  
and Ralf M. Bader

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,  
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of  
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© the several contributors 2015

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted

First Edition published in 2015

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in  
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted  
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics  
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the  
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the  
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form  
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014948345

ISBN 978-0-19-871401-9

Printed and bound by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and  
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials  
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

# Contents

<i>Note on Citations</i>	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1. Determining the Good in Action: Wish, Deliberation, and Choice <i>Dorothea Frede</i>	15
2. The Content of Happiness: A New Case for <i>Theôria</i> <i>Joachim Aufderheide</i>	36
3. Aristotle on the Highest Good: A New Approach <i>David Charles</i>	60
4. The <i>Summum Bonum</i> in Aristotle's Ethics: Fractured Goodness <i>Christopher Shields</i>	83
5. 'The end of all human action'/'The final object of all my conduct': Aristotle and Kant on the Highest Good <i>Robert B. Louden</i>	112
6. The Complete Object of Practical Knowledge <i>Stephen Engstrom</i>	129
7. The Inner Voice: Kant on Conditionality and God as Cause <i>Rachel Barney</i>	158
8. Kant's Theory of the Highest Good <i>Ralf M. Bader</i>	183
9. The Highest Good: Who Needs It? <i>David Sussman</i>	214
10. Why Some Things Must Remain Unknown: Kant on Faith, Moral Motivation, and the Highest Good <i>Jens Timmermann</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	243



# Note on Citations

References to Aristotle's works are to the editions of the Oxford Classical Texts series unless stated otherwise.

The works cited are abbreviated as follows:

- *Categories* (Cat.)
- *De Anima* (DA)
- *Eudemian Ethics* (EE)
- *Generation and Corruption* (Gen. et Corr.)
- *Magna Moralia* (MM)
- *Metaphysics* (Met.)
- *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN)
- *Physics* (Phys.)
- *Posterior Analytics* (APo)
- *Poetics* (Poet.)
- *Politics* (Pol.)
- *Rhetoric* (Rhet.)
- *Topics* (Top.)

References to Kant's works are to the Akademie-Ausgabe of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (1900 Reimer/de Gruyter), citing volume and page numbers, with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason* which is cited in terms of the A/B page numbers. Reflexionen are cited by means of the R-numbers in the Akademie-Ausgabe. Translations (where used) are listed in the respective bibliography.



# List of Contributors

JOACHIM AUFDERHEIDE is a Lecturer in Philosophy at King's College London.

RALF M. BADER is a Fellow of Merton College, University of Oxford.

RACHEL BARNEY is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto.

DAVID CHARLES is a Professor of Philosophy at Yale University.

STEPHEN ENGSTROM is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh.

DOROTHEA FREDE is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hamburg.

ROBERT B. LOUDEN is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern Maine.

CHRISTOPHER SHIELDS is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.

DAVID SUSSMAN is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

JENS TIMMERMANN is a Reader in Moral Philosophy at the University of St Andrews.



# Introduction

Though the notion of the highest good used to play a central role in ethical theorizing in the past, in particular in Antiquity and in Christian and medieval ethics, it has largely disappeared from the contemporary philosophical landscape. It is at best mentioned, but is not an object of investigation and does not play an important role in contemporary moral philosophy. To the extent to which this notion still persists, it does so only in the form of the structureless version to be found in consequentialist theories, which treat the highest good as that good which it is best to maximize, rather than in the form of the Aristotelian or Kantian version.

While consequentialists simply order different goods by generating a betterness ordering and identify that good (or those goods) that are at the top of the ordering as the one(s) that it would be best to bring about,<sup>1</sup> the Aristotelian or Kantian recognizes more complicated types of value interaction. In particular, they allow for the highest good to play a much more nuanced role in that it can function as the source or condition of the goodness of other goods. As such, it classifies as the highest good not only in the sense that it is better than the other goods, but in the sense that the others would be lacking goodness were it not for the highest good. In this way, the resulting value theory will have much more structure and the highest good can accordingly be considered to be higher than other goods not only qua being better but also qua being prior in the order of dependence.

Since the notion of the highest good used to play a central role in ethical theorizing in the past, in particular in the moral theories put forward by Aristotle and Kant, it is surprising that this notion is no longer of significance. Whilst consequentialists at most recognize a watered-down version of the highest good, in a similar way this notion rarely plays any substantive role in contemporary non-consequentialist thinking. Especially surprising is the fact that the highest good has to a noticeable extent dropped out of recent Aristotelian accounts, which have tended to focus on virtue, agency, and character rather than on value-based considerations.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is almost completely absent from contemporary Kantian moral theories, which have

<sup>1</sup> The *locus classicus* is the opening paragraph of Mill's *Utilitarianism*, where he equates the *summum bonum* with the criterion of right and wrong.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Anscombe 1958, Hursthouse 1999, and Foot 2001. An up-to-date overview is found in Hursthouse 2012.

primarily focused on issues concerning universalizability, autonomy, and dignity. In addition, the highest good is frequently downplayed even in Kant scholarship.

One important reason for this trend is that the rejection of consequentialism often leads to ignoring or rejecting axiological considerations altogether. Rather than focusing on value-theoretic questions, the key issues of concern centre around deontic notions. In addition, the rejection or neglect of these understandings of the highest good is probably largely due to the teleological and theological presuppositions and implications that they involve and that fit uneasily into naturalized and secularized conceptions of morality.

For instance, on Kant's account the highest good is closely connected to immortality and the existence of God. The rejection of these theological implications is likely to lead either to a rejection of the highest good altogether or, alternatively, to attempts at working out secularized conceptions that consider this notion to be of less significance and try to downplay its importance.

Similarly, the teleological background of Aristotle's account is seen to involve an implausible natural philosophy as well as an implausible conception of what a human being is.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary ethicists working in the spirit of Aristotle's *Ethics* are prone to introducing a more secularized naturalism that dispenses with Aristotle's god as a central notion in both natural and ethical philosophy.<sup>4</sup> This has led neo-Aristotelian approaches to also play down the value-theoretical role of the highest good, as Aristotle characterizes this role importantly as something divine. Instead, they focus on a comprehensive notion of happiness understood as 'flourishing' or well-being as a substitute for Aristotle's highest good.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the highest good plays a particularly important role in both Aristotle's and Kant's ethical theories is at least *prima facie* surprising, given that their approaches to ethics are commonly conceived as being diametrically opposed. The vast differences that separate Aristotelian and Kantian theories make it somewhat unexpected that both of these philosophers should agree in assigning a significant role to the highest good.

While these theories are usually compared by focusing on their respective emphases on character and duty, recent comparisons of Aristotle and Kant have exposed some of the deficiencies of this traditional approach and have helped to pave the way towards a reconciliation of these two theories (cf. in particular the essays in Engstrom and Whiting 1996). In line with this, several essays in this collection compare Aristotle and Kant by focusing on their respective value theories, in particular on the notion of the highest good. Even though there are important differences with respect to content, this kind of comparison brings to light important similarities in terms of the structural features of Aristotle's and Kant's value theories.

<sup>3</sup> Williams 1985, 43–53.

<sup>4</sup> See again Hursthouse 1999 and Foot 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The point generally emphasized is that ethical virtue is necessary for happiness in that the former is partly constitutive of the latter, thus making virtue into the primary notion for the theory of value (cf. Hursthouse 2012).

For instance, Aristotle's conception of the highest good as 'the principle and cause of goods' (*EN* 1.12; also cf. *EE* 1.8) resembles Kant's idea that the highest good, in the sense of the supreme good, is the condition of all other goods. Moreover, interesting parallels can be identified when comparing Aristotle's twofold characterization of the highest good as (i) the principle and cause of the good and as (ii) what is most complete and desirable (*EN* 1.7) with Kant's distinction between the supreme good (*supremum bonum*) and the complete good (*consummatum bonum*), cf. 5:110.

By shedding light on their respective theories, the essays in this collection contribute to improving our understanding of both Aristotle and Kant. In particular, studies of Aristotle's notion of the highest good have almost exclusively focused on the question whether the good comprises several goods (inclusivism) or whether it is simple (dominant end view).<sup>6</sup> Only recently have scholars turned back to studying the theoretical role of the highest good more closely.<sup>7</sup> The comparison with Kant's distinction between the supreme and complete good will help clarify the different ways in which goods can interact and contribute to a better understanding of how one good can be higher by being the condition of the goodness of other goods. As a result, the scholarly attention will hopefully shift from the question of inclusivism to the question of how the highest good can be the source and cause of all other goods, and maybe even suggest alternative models for construing the relationship between the highest good and various other goods. Similarly, a more explicit focus on value-theoretic considerations can help us attain a better understanding of Kant's ethics that remedies the relative neglect of value-theoretic concerns, thereby providing a more balanced picture of Kant's ethics that not only deals with considerations pertaining to duty and autonomy, but also gives a prominent place to happiness.

Additionally, by providing a comprehensive treatment of the notion of the highest good in Aristotle and Kant, the chapters in this collection allow us to gain a better understanding of how their theories relate to each other. In particular, they lead to a rapprochement of these theories by comparing them in terms of their accounts of the good, rather than taking the traditional route of contrasting their emphases on character and duty. Moreover, they show how fruitful and important the notion of the highest good is, thereby encouraging a return to a more traditional approach that is focused on this notion.

## Summaries

Dorothea Frede's chapter ('Determining the Good in Action: Wish, Deliberation, and Choice') deals with the highest good in connection with Aristotle's philosophy of action. Action is the result of deliberation, choice (*proairesis*), and wish for the end. Frede traces the process leading to action back from choice and deliberation to wish,

<sup>6</sup> This debate takes its beginnings in the classic papers of Ackrill 1974 and Hardie 1965.

<sup>7</sup> See Korsgaard 1986, Kraut 1989, and especially Broadie 2007a, 2007b, 2007c.

focusing in particular on the difficult question how ends are determined. Rather than being the result of deliberation or choice, both of which are confined to finding and choosing the best means to attain a given goal, the setting of ends is a matter of wish. It is the desire for the end that precedes the process of deliberation, making the deliberative desire that constitutes choice derivative of the desire for the end.

In particular, wish involves a judgement of what is good in a particular situation and it is such a judgement that sets off the process of deliberation to determine the means and constituents required for the realization of the end, resulting in choice of actions. The key question then is how the good is determined. Frede here argues that selecting good ends is inseparable from having appropriate affections since the latter are required for motivation, i.e. making it the case that the agent has a desire for the end that has been selected. In this way, what an agent wishes expresses that agent's character, whereby wishes in particular situations presuppose and must fit into an overall view of the good. It is such a comprehensive conception that allows for reconciling and adjudicating between conflicting ends. This comprehensive conception, however, need not be understood as involving a life plan that the agent is to follow. Instead, the content of the overall good is supplied by moral training, which can only successfully take place within a well-arranged society, one in which laws are set up so as to enable individuals to flourish. In such a society, an agent can have a comprehensive view of the conception of happiness by reference to which the laws are set up and can act accordingly. While the agent does not need to follow a life plan on the basis of this conception of happiness, her judgements in particular situations are nevertheless informed by this conception, given that the moral education she received is one that is provided by this society.

Frede's answer to the question as to how the good is determined is thus that it is virtue that supplies the right ends. This is a powerful hypothesis which can unify Aristotle's remarks on action. First, it renders true the claim that one does not deliberate about ends. Ends are the objects of wish and thus depend on what appears good to the agent which is not open to deliberation and choice. It can also accommodate the further claim that some sort of judgement is part of getting the object of wish right (*krinei*, 1113a30), and that the good person has the correct view of what is good in particular situations (a30–1). Second, insofar as virtue is responsible for responding correctly to a given situation (II.3.1104b18–35), the agent discerns what needs to be done in particular contexts, making it the case that the object of wish is specified according to the normative parameters as to when, about what, and in relation to whom something is to be done (II.6.1106b21–3), rather than its being the case that the object of wish is something as general as 'acting justly'. Third, emphasis on virtue and the idea that wish is an expression of character also highlights that the object of wish is desired: virtue is not merely about right action, but also about right affection, desire being one of the affections (II.5.1105b21–3). So, the good person is not only able to discern what is to be done in a particular situation, she also desires appropriately to bring about this end.

In his chapter ‘The Content of Happiness: A New Case for *Theôria*’, Joachim Aufderheide provides a new argument for the thesis that happiness, for human beings as well as for gods, consists only in the activity of theoretical reflection (*theôria*). He begins by distinguishing between two different uses of the word ‘happiness’ (*eudaimonia*) in the *EN* in order to pin down Aristotle’s meaning in the definition of happiness as ‘the activity of the rational soul in accordance with excellence . . . in a complete life’ (I.7.1098a16–18). Focusing on Aristotle’s dialectical engagement with both common and philosophical views of happiness, one can separate two uses of happiness: ‘happiness’ can be understood either as the condition of being happy, or as that through the successful pursuit of which one becomes happy. Aufderheide argues that Aristotle is mostly concerned with happiness in the latter sense not only because Aristotle follows Plato in this use, but also because of the dialectic in I.4–5, and because of the role he assigns to happiness: it is the presence of happiness in one’s life that makes a person and a life happy, given that happiness is the ‘principle and cause of goods’ (I.12.1102a2–4).

The remainder of the chapter is concerned with determining the content of happiness. The argument focuses especially on *EN* I.12, a chapter standing at the end of the *endoxic* confirmation of Aristotle’s definition of happiness. Aristotle argues that it is a mark of happiness to belong to the best and honourable things, but not to things praiseworthy, as the latter are praised on account of something else. Aufderheide argues that the activity stemming from practical virtue cannot count as the activity of happiness, as they fall short of the characteristics of happiness identified in I.12. In that chapter Aristotle says that virtue and the good man are only praiseworthy, thus contrasting them with things honourable (1101b14–16; 31–2), whereas only the most godlike person is called ‘happy’ and ‘blessed’ (1101b23–7). Virtue and virtuous action thus fall short of happiness, as practical virtue is specifically human, whereas happiness is said to be divine (1102a4). Aufderheide supports this result by highlighting that Aristotle in fact tends to think of virtuous actions as having good results apart from their performance—which makes virtuous actions objects of praise and prevents them from being honourable.

The positive part of the chapter argues that the criteria for happiness introduced in I.12—being something honourable, complete, and divine—will be satisfied by the activity of reflection as discussed in X.7–8. While many interpreters believe that Aristotle’s discussion of happiness in Book I leaves open the content of happiness, Aufderheide argues that even in Book I, chapters 9, 10, and 12, Aristotle sets up the abstract conception of happiness in a way that makes reflection the only possible determinate realization of it. The description of the most godlike man in these chapters resounds with that of the philosopher in *EN* X.7–8, showing that reflection has all the required characteristics of happiness. Thus, given Aristotle’s role of happiness, the philosopher’s life is happy in virtue of the presence of reflection in it. If reflection is what makes a life happy, then what are we to make of lives that lack reflection? In particular, what about the life of the virtuous but non-philosophical

politician? Aufderheide argues that Aristotle is committed to denying that these lives are happy. In particular, Aristotle does not distinguish between human happiness and divine happiness such that the latter, but not the former, requires reflection. In fact, there is no good at all in a life that is not suitably related to reflection, given the role of happiness as specified in I.12: happiness is the principle and cause of goods.

In his chapter ‘Aristotle on the Highest Good: A New Approach’, David Charles argues that the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is best understood as an enquiry into the human good following the three-stage approach identified in the *Posterior Analytics* II.2–10: first, we need ‘to give an account of what the name or name-like expression signifies’, then we need ‘to establish that the object or kind in question exists’, and finally, we can ‘discover the essence of the kind, the answer to the definitional “What is it?” question’. Charles begins by characterizing inclusivist and dominant end interpretations of the human good as applying both to the level of meaning and to the level of reference. He provides an alternative account that is neutral at the level of meaning, insofar as he takes Aristotle to be neither committed to assuming that it means ‘one non-composite most valuable human good’, nor that it means ‘one human good, made up of several independently valuable goods’. Instead, the term ‘highest good’ simply signifies ‘the best human good whatever that may be’, thereby remaining uncommitted as to whether this is a unique good or a composite of different goods (and indeed neutral about whether there exists a highest good in reality). The characterizations that Aristotle provides from I.1 through to I.7 which are usually taken to support either a dominant end or an inclusivist interpretation (in particular being ‘what everything seeks’, that ‘which we choose for itself and the other things for the sake of this’, as well as being ‘the object of political science’) are shown to leave all these questions open and are rather part of a preliminary investigation into what ‘highest good’ signifies.

Beginning at 1097b22, Aristotle moves onto the third stage, attempting to discover the essence of happiness and in this way settle the question of reference (as well as thereby also establishing that happiness exists). Here Charles argues that both inclusivist and dominant end interpretations are mistaken because they both fall short of explaining a characteristically human good: the human good consists neither of only one good, nor of a multiplicity of unrelated goods. Charles highlights that we need an account that unifies the things that are good for human beings without conflating their definitions. Such a unifying account explains what makes certain activities instances of the human good in terms of focal and analogical connections to intellectual contemplation, thereby characterizing the basic nature of the highest good. He argues that Aristotle gives this account in the function argument: the best human activity is best in virtue of being excellent rational activity (of some kind). Extending Aristotle’s remark that there might be several kinds of excellent activity, even if only one is the best, Charles suggests that the other excellent activities are good in virtue of standing in a relation of analogy or focality to the central case. In this way, one neither ends up with a unique thing that is taken to be good, nor with a

list of independently specified goods. Instead, there is a core case of the human good consisting in intellectual contemplation and a number of peripheral cases that are connected focally or analogically to the core.

This enables Aristotle to show that each of the agreed-on goods is, in fact, in a way an instance of excellent rational activity which in turn shows that it is good for human beings to have this good, as the assumption underlying the function argument is that fulfilling one's function (excellent rational activity) and what is good for human beings coincide. On Charles's interpretation, Aristotle can recognize that the human good is not one single good, without simply assuming that there is a list of unconnected goods which simply happen to be good for human beings. Rather, there are genuinely several goods that form the human good, but they are unified through human function, i.e. excellent rational activity. At the level of reference, the highest good is thus identified with excellent activity that has one central instance, namely contemplation, and different non-central instances that are sufficiently similar to the central case.

Christopher Shields's chapter 'The *Summum Bonum* in Aristotle's Ethics: Fractured Goodness' focuses on the fractured nature and non-univocity of 'good' that follows from rejecting the Platonic conception of the good and on how it can be reconciled with a commitment to a highest good. In particular, the question is what conception of goodness remains for Aristotle if his criticisms of Plato's form of the good were successful and to what extent Aristotle could make sense of there being a highest good. Given that Aristotle rejects the idea that the good is 'something common, universal, and one' and 'good' is instead held to be non-univocal and 'meant in many ways', a puzzling situation arises: if the highest good is the cause and source of all other goods, then is there not something that is shared by all goods and that is common to them? This situation is particularly puzzling given Aristotle's endorsement of a causal synonymy thesis as well as a commensurability thesis (that  $x$  and  $y$  are commensurable with respect to  $F$  only if they are  $F$  univocally, a principle which Shields takes from the *Topics*). If the goods are to be caused by the highest good and are to be commensurable such as to allow a ranking of them that puts the highest good at its top, then they need to be univocally good.

A possible response to this problem holds that 'good' becomes sortal-dependent and that the rejection of the Platonic conception simply amounts to the rejection of good *simpliciter*. Yet, Shields points out that the idea that goodness needs to be relativized to kinds is problematic due to Aristotle's comparability commitments. In particular, the claim that life with a rational soul is superior over life with a merely perceptual soul requires comparability yet involves different kinds. Moreover, such an interpretation would make the criticisms of Plato less substantive.

Shields then turns to assessing Aristotle's criticisms of Plato to determine what conception of goodness remains, focusing on four arguments in *EN* I.6, such as the claim that 'good' cannot be univocal given that it is predicated in more than one category. If these arguments were successful, they would ensure that goodness was

radically fractured and would thereby threaten commensurability. Though one could achieve limited commensurability by appealing to the notion of functional goodness, this would be sortal-dependent and would not allow for the full range of comparisons and orderings to which Aristotle appeals. Another alternative would be to recover commensurability by means of analogical comparisons. Yet, this risks introducing higher-order synonymy insofar as there would be a univocal standard of goodness with respect to which goods would be comparable. Moreover, this approach is restricted to a teleological framework insofar as it relies on the idea of functional goodness, making this framework insufficient for accounting for all kinds of goodness in that it would not be applicable to intrinsic goods that are not functional kinds. Aristotle is thus left with an unstable position insofar as the presuppositions regarding comparability that are required for making sense of his conception of the *summum bonum* seem to be in conflict with his anti-Platonism.

In his contribution “‘The end of all human action’/‘The final object of all my conduct’: Aristotle and Kant on the Highest Good”, Robert Louden discusses two aspects of the highest good in Aristotle and Kant: (i) the practical role of the highest good in action, and (ii) the metaphysical conditions under which the highest good is possible. Louden finds two fundamental similarities in the practical role of the highest good: one positive and one negative. First, concentrating on what role the highest good plays, he argues that Kant and Aristotle agree insofar as they consider the highest good to be the end of all of our practical endeavours and thus consider it to enable the practical agent to live a rational life. In this way, the highest good structures individual choices, preferences, and attitudes and makes it possible for the agent to distinguish what is good and beneficial from what merely seems good at the moment (under the guise of the pleasant). Second, he argues that Kant and Aristotle agree in that they deny that the highest good plays any role in determining what is morally right (this is a role which Cicero and Mill assign to the good). This is familiar territory for Kantians: a system that were to define what is right by reference to what is conducive to happiness would be heteronomous. But, unbeknownst to Kant, Aristotle is not guilty of this mistake: the virtues are not determined by happiness, nor is what counts as the right thing to do in a given situation.

Though Kant and Aristotle agree in thinking that (a) the highest good requires a union of happiness and virtue, and that (b) god, or the divine, is necessary for the attainment of the highest good, Louden identifies a number of differences between their respective accounts of the highest good. First, although a happy life for Kant as well as for Aristotle must be a life of virtue if the highest good is to be realized, what such a life consists in for each of them tends to be quite different: (i) While Aristotle ranks the virtues and their activities, maintaining that the happiest life can be had only by putting special emphasis on the activity of contemplation, no such primacy of doing philosophy is found in Kant since there is strictly speaking only one virtue, and that is doing one’s duty. (ii) An Aristotelian politician is concerned only with providing the conditions for the happiness of citizens in ‘his’ polis, whereas for

Kant, on Loudon's interpretation, we all have the duty to promote the highest good (i.e. everyone's getting what they deserve). Loudon, reflecting on this last difference, suggests that it is to be explained by the advent of Christianity, and in particular Kant's Pietist outlook. Second, the role assigned to God in Aristotle's and Kant's conceptions of the highest good differs in important respects. Though they share the assumption that the best possible life depends on the existence of God (for Kant) or the existence of something divine (for Aristotle intelligence is divine), Loudon argues that for Aristotle human beings can achieve the highest good by themselves, whereas for Kant divine intervention is required since only God can see to it that everyone attains happiness to the extent of their moral worth. Loudon closes by arguing against secular conceptions of Kantian happiness, as well as by raising difficulties for the more transcendent conceptions of Kantian happiness.

The project of Stephen Engstrom's chapter ('The Complete Object of Practical Knowledge') is to establish that Aristotle and Kant belong to a common tradition of ethical thought, being neither rationalist nor empiricist about the object of practical knowledge but instead belonging to the practical-cognitivist tradition. He argues that similarities amongst their views are not accidental but the result of three important structural features that they share: (i) Aristotle and Kant agree about the end of practical agency insofar as they identify the complete good as consisting of happiness and virtue. (ii) They agree that an agent can achieve the complete good only if she has a certain kind of practical knowledge, since the proper use of the goods comprised in the complete good depends on this knowledge. (iii) They agree on the way in which the complete good is determined—in line with Kant's paradox of method (i.e. we start with the faculty determining the goods, rather than vice versa).

Focusing on the highest good on a personal rather than on a political or cosmic level, Engstrom begins by outlining broad agreement between Aristotle and Kant as regards the object of practical knowledge. He shows that Aristotle's system is not subject to the charge of heteronomy because for Aristotle, as for Kant, the object of practical agency is not determined by something external to the faculty responsible for action, namely practical reason. They agree, moreover, that the object of practical knowledge is a good comprising several goods, differing in kind and role, which raises the question as to how the different goods are related.

By using Socrates' arguments in the *Meno* as a foil, Engstrom shows that Aristotle and Kant agree that there is a supreme good which functions as the principle of practical agency: without this principle neither goods of the soul nor external goods are guaranteed to be good. Thus, the goodness of these other goods is conditional upon the supreme good. Engstrom brings out that Kant's supreme good, the good will, is closer to Plato's and Aristotle's candidate, some kind of knowledge, than it might seem. For Kant's good will plays a role in practical agency similar to Aristotle's wish and decision: the will not only represents the object but is also efficacious in bringing about the end. Just as for Aristotle an agent's virtue (together with practical wisdom) ensures that goods are used properly with respect to the human good, for

Kant an agent's good will ensures that nothing is willed that is bad. Thus, for both philosophers it is a kind of practical knowledge upon which the other goods depend for their goodness.

Engstrom closes by considering whether Aristotle's and Kant's theories converge structurally, or only on the surface level. This might at first seem odd, since a structural similarity would require that Aristotle, like Kant, starts with an enquiry into the practical principle before determining the good in accordance with this principle. But Engstrom argues that this precisely is the case: (a) the supreme good, practical wisdom, is established *a priori*, as there is no possible further discovery of any good that could take its place, and (b) practical knowledge is supreme among the goods because it cognizes and causes the other goods. Thus the complete good, the good represented by practical knowledge, comprises both practical knowledge together with other goods of the soul as well as external goods, whereby the goodness of the latter is conditional on the presence of the former.

In her chapter 'The Inner Voice: Kant on Conditionality and God as Cause', Rachel Barney focuses on Kant's claim that the value of happiness is conditional on moral virtue. She begins by elucidating Kant's conception of happiness, charting the disagreement between his and the ancient's conceptions. Rather than happiness being constituted by virtuous activity, it is a subjective phenomenon that is non-moral in nature, depending only on the satisfaction of inclinations. Though practical reason plays a role in systematizing desires that do not conflict but can be realized together, conditionality is not internal to the conception of happiness. Instead, it is the result of claims of self-love being subordinated to morality and it is in this way that happiness ends up as a conditional component of the highest good. The distinctively Kantian claim that happiness is good only in proportion to virtue can be derived, according to Barney, from the moral law and our natural end through universalization of our maxim of self-love which stems from self-interest. By making self-love into a law, we can see that one can have happiness only if one assumes the standpoint of virtue and that this precludes the villain from rationally willing his happiness. This does not preclude the villain from pursuing his happiness, even successfully. Instead, it only means that he does not get anything good. This shows Kant's deep commitment to desert and justice.

Barney then considers why it must be possible for the highest good to be realized and argues that the possibility of its realization is a condition on our intending to pursue it. For the highest good to be the object of my willing, its realization must be possible which requires the existence (rather than the possibility) of God to bring about the proportionality between happiness and virtue. This approach needs to deal with the problem that the conditions for an agent to intend to promote the highest good seem to come apart from the conditions for the highest good to be completely realized. Barney addresses this objection by noting that my successfully promoting the highest good has to be part of a global system in which the goodness of happiness is proportional to the virtue and that this can only be possible through God's

collaboration. So, our own actions aimed at the highest good must be viewed as part of a greater system which ensures the proportionality of happiness and virtue in the highest good. As we cannot know that an adequate cause exists (the empirical world might suggest the contrary), all we have is hope that our inner voice which cries out for justice and fairness is right. That is, our local pursuit of the highest good requires hope that our actions contribute to a rational system that is realized through divine assistance. Barney argues that hope is to be understood as a practical stance that amounts to seeing one's actions as parts of a collaborative project of realizing the highest good rather than as a kind of belief or some other cognitive attitude. In this way, no additional actions are required by the highest good but only that the agent adopt a particular kind of practical stance insofar as the agent performs actions under a certain description, namely as contributions to a rational system of justice, which seems to lead to the difficulty that the postulation of God appears to have an epistemic character that exceeds what is warranted by this kind of non-doxastic practical stance. Barney concludes with the interesting observation that, in rejecting Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of the highest good that treat the necessitation relation between happiness and virtue as being internal to the agent, Kant reverts back to a much older school of thought, namely that of Hesiod, who also thought that we must assume that our good actions are rewarded by a God whose existence (and goodness) needs to be postulated.

In his chapter 'Kant's Theory of the Highest Good', Ralf M. Bader provides an interpretation of the account of the highest good that Kant put forward in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The chapter addresses in particular the questions (i) why happiness is included in the highest good, (ii) in what way we are meant to bring our dispositions into complete conformity with the moral law, (iii) why happiness should be distributed in proportion to virtue, (iv) in what sense the highest good is something that we are meant to bring about, and (v) why the validity or bindingness of the moral law presupposes the possibility of the highest good.

Bader argues that the highest good is to be considered as resulting from the combination of the object of empirical practical reason, namely happiness which is a conditional pathological good, and the object of pure practical reason, namely virtue which is an unconditional moral good. Happiness is thus included in the highest good on the basis that it is good when deserved, rather than being included on the basis of the duty of beneficence. In order to make sense of the immortality postulate, Bader claims that, in the context of the highest good, virtue is to be understood as an extensive magnitude that concerns the proportion of actions that issue from a good will, rather than in terms of the notion of virtue that Kant develops in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, according to which it is an intensive magnitude corresponding to the agent's strength of will. This allows us to see the requirement to bring our dispositions into complete conformity with the moral law as following from applying the requirement to act on the categorical imperative to the totality of our actions. Such a complete conformity of dispositions amounts to the extensional

equivalent of holiness, and it can only be approximated in an infinite series that is such that the proportion of bad actions becomes diminishingly small. The proportionality between happiness and virtue, in turn, is explained in terms of the conditionality of the goodness of happiness together with the necessary connection that must obtain between happiness and virtue in the highest good, given that this connection is cognized a priori. By appealing to the distinction between the highest good in a person and the highest good of a world, Bader argues that everyone is commanded by the categorical imperative to bring about the supreme good in one's own person, namely to become virtuous, and that everyone is commanded by the pragmatic imperative to bring about the conditioned good in one's own person, namely to take the means that are required for becoming happy to the extent to which one is worthy of happiness. In this way, the reasons to bring about the highest good in the person are reducible to the reasons for bringing about the components thereof. The complete good of the world, on the contrary, is not the object of the will of any finite creature but only an object of the will of God. Finally, by considering the highest good as a necessary system of ends, he argues that practical reason has to presuppose the possibility of such a systematic unity of ends if it is not to be in conflict with itself, something that would undermine the very source of morality. In this way, one can make sense of the idea that the possibility of the highest good has to be presupposed if morality is to be binding, without compromising the unconditional and categorical nature of morality.

David Sussman's chapter ("The Highest Good: Who Needs It?") provides an interpretation of Kant's claim in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* that the highest good offers us 'something to love' in morality and thereby fulfils an important need analogous to that of finding beauty in the natural world. While Kant was steadfast in his commitment to the idea that the highest good is needed and that this brings with it a requirement to accept practical postulates regarding the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, there are important shifts as to how exactly he understood the way in which the highest good is needed. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant assigned a motivational role to the highest good but this approach was dropped once Kant had developed his conception of autonomy. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* an *absurdum practicum* argument is provided, which holds that a rejection of the possibility of the highest good would lead to a practical absurdity. Sussman criticizes these approaches as well as the way in which the highest good features in the antinomy of practical reason and then turns to the idea developed in Kant's later works that we need an object of love towards which we can direct our moral efforts and that this role is filled by the highest good. In this way the commitment to the highest good can be seen to derive from the psychological effects that this commitment can have on moral agents. In particular, the highest good is understood as allowing us to move away from an Ethical State of Nature (where everyone cares about their own virtue only) towards an Ethical Commonwealth that is governed by common laws (where we see our actions as part of a collaborative

effort). It thereby allows us to conceive of ourselves as striving for a common purpose that can be seen as the expression of a general will and thus functions as a practical analogue of the *sensus communis*. All of this becomes possible because the highest good makes room for an expanded conception of our agency as having a common goal and helps us to avoid self-conceit, in particular the form of self-conceit associated with moral envy as well as with moral pride that can result from viewing one's moral striving as a personal project and as such can be overcome by integrating one's moral endeavours into a shared project. It thereby reconciles the individual's perspective with the perspective of the ethical community to which he belongs.

Jens Timmermann's contribution 'Why Some Things Must Remain Unknown: Kant on Faith, Moral Motivation, and the Highest Good' examines Kant's intriguing suggestion at the end of the *Dialectic of Practical Reason* that virtue would not be possible if we knew that God existed and that the possibility of realizing the highest good consequently depends upon the postulates of pure practical reason being mere practical postulates rather than theoretical cognitions. This suggestion seems to imply that 'theoretical certainty of the *possibility* of promoting the highest good would have been just as fatal for morality as conclusive theoretical proof of its *impossibility*'. Timmermann explains this claim on the basis that theoretical certainty of divine rewards and punishments ensures that there will never be a case in which morality and self-interest can genuinely conflict. Knowing that one's actions will be judged by God will ensure that the commands of prudence will not run counter to those of morality and that one will consequently always act out of self-love in accordance with what morality requires, rather than out of respect for the moral law. The punishment that would with certainty result from an impermissible action would outweigh any incentive for performing such an action in the first place. The commands of self-interest will in this way always coincide with those of morality. This, in turn, leads to a situation in which prudence and morality do not conflict, which undermines the possibility for morality to strike down self-conceit and thereby undermines the possibility for the feeling of respect to arise. Since respect is the incentive of morality, such agents can never act out of respect for the moral law and can hence not be virtuous.

Timmermann concludes his discussion by raising a number of concerns regarding Kant's argument, pointing out that the actions of those who know that God exists appear to be self-defeating since God would only reward genuine moral behaviour and not the kind of prudentially motivated actions that, though exhibiting legality, lack morality. Additionally, it is unclear how imperfect positive duties fit into the picture, in particular whether a rigorist construal of beneficence will follow insofar as imperfect duties are only meritorious with respect to human beings but not with respect to God. Furthermore, the question arises whether there is anything that ensures that moral faith, i.e. belief in the existence of God based on practical considerations, can never have the same deleterious results as theoretical cognition of God's existence.

## References

- Ackrill, J. L. 1974. 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia'. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 60: pp. 339–59.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. 1958. 'Modern Moral Philosophy'. *Philosophy* 33(124): pp. 1–19.
- Broadie, S. 2007a. 'The Good of Practical Beings: Aristotelian Perspectives'. In *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Broadie, S. 2007b. 'On the Idea of the Summum Bonum'. In *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Broadie, S. 2007c. 'What Should We Mean by "the Highest Good"?' In *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engstrom, S., and Whiting, J. (eds.) 1996. *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foot, P. 2001. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hardie, W. F. R. 1965. 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics'. *Philosophy* 40(154): pp. 277–95.
- Hursthouse, R. 2012. 'Virtue ethics'. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <<http://stanford.library.usyd.edu.au/entries/ethics-virtue/>>.
- Hursthouse, R. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, C. 1986. 'Aristotle and Kant on the Source of Value'. *Ethics* 96(3): pp. 486–505.
- Kraut, R. 1989. *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Williams, B. 1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana and Collins.

# 1

## Determining the Good in Action

### Wish, Deliberation, and Choice

*Dorothea Frede*

#### The Background

To those not intimately familiar with the scholarly discussion of Aristotle's ethics it might seem strange that his conception of the good attainable in action, so central to his moral philosophy, should still be in need of further elucidation. But as every expert knows, the sketchy state of Aristotle's texts often leaves room for differing interpretations, not only of marginal but even of central points. One of those points concerns the question of how, precisely, human agents come to determine the end or aim of their actions, and how those ends in turn determine their deliberations and decisions. To this question Aristotle devotes several chapters in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. They provide an analysis of all the concepts that are important factors in moral agency, one by one: the voluntary and involuntary (ch. 1), choice and deliberation (chs. 2 and 3), wish (ch. 4), and the extent to which actions are in the control of the agent (ch. 5).

But though this discussion is quite extensive, at least by Aristotle's standards, the text leaves many questions open, not only concerning the factors that determine human decisions and actions, but most of all concerning the main question, how in each case the good intended by action is fixed. One of the reasons for this uncertainty is that 'wish' (*boulêsis*)—the desire for the good—seems to be treated by Aristotle in a quite cavalier fashion.<sup>1</sup> It is introduced, very briefly, only after the much more detailed discussion of deliberation and choice.

Now it may be objected that deliberation (*bouleusis*) and choice (*proairesis*) receive special attention because Aristotle is concerned to specify the exact conditions under which human actions are determined. He therefore starts out with a distinction

<sup>1</sup> It is by now common knowledge that in classical Greek there is no conception of 'will' as a separate psychic force causing action. How wish, deliberation, and choice jointly fulfil the function that has later been attributed to the will should become clear in what follows.