

## I. Postscript

### (1)

When I first thought of writing this book, I conceived it as little more than a re-writing of the *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, expounding the moral insights I had learned over many years of reading and teaching it. The contribution I hoped to make I thought of mainly as a communication of its fundamental insights in language, imagery, and examples that have currency today, thus making them more accessible to the contemporary reader than they are in the pages of Aristotle. In addition, I planned to convey only those portions of Aristotle's doctrine which have a universality that transcends time and place, and so have relevance for men living in any historic society and culture. I had one other criterion of selection. I would report only those Aristotelian formulations which seemed to me to be true and coherent. After many readings of the *Ethics*, much remained that I could not assimilate to my purpose, because it was inconsistent with what I regarded as the controlling principles of Aristotle's doctrine, and much remained dark or obscure. Therefore, I would select only those points that I could expound clearly, defend as true, and put together into a consistent and coherent moral philosophy.

As this project developed in my mind and as the preparatory work for writing this book took the form of notes for lectures, I decided to keep my original intention a secret from the reader, mentioning it in a Postscript rather than in a Preface. I realized, of course, that for those readers who have studied Aristotle's *Ethics* and who have found it, as I have, a philosophical refinement of common-sense wisdom, it would be a poorly kept secret. But I also felt relatively sure that it would not be discovered by casual readers of the *Ethics*, or even by many contemporary philosophers whose interpretation and evaluation of that book differ remarkably from my own. To preserve the secret, as much as it could be preserved, I refrained from making references to Aristotle's moral philosophy in the body of the book or in the notes to its chapters. The attentive reader will have observed, with some puzzlement perhaps, that—with one exception—all the citations of, or quotations from, Aristotle are on logical or meta-ethical points, not on matters germane to the substance of moral philosophy.

Now that the book is written, my original plan for the Postscript is somewhat altered. I still think that the *Nichomachean Ethics* is a unique book in the Western tradition of moral philosophy. As Aris-

tole is uniquely the philosopher of common sense, so his moral philosophy is uniquely the ethics of common sense. It is the only ethics that is both teleological and deontological, the only ethics that is sound, practical, and undogmatic, offering what little normative wisdom there is for all men to be guided by, but refraining from laying down rules of conduct to cover the multifarious and contingent circumstances of human action. In the history of Western moral thought, it is the only book centrally concerned and concerned throughout with the goodness of a whole human life, with the parts of this whole, and with putting the parts together in the right order and proportion. As far as I know, its only parallel is to be found outside of Western culture in the moral teachings of Confucius, which address themselves to the same problem and which offer a solution to it that also refines the wisdom of common sense—by means of aphorisms rather than, as in Aristotle’s case, by means of analysis and argument.<sup>1</sup> But while I still hold this high regard for the *Nichomachean Ethics*, I now realize that it would be misleading for me to claim that my book is nothing but Aristotle in modern dress.

For one thing, I now realize that this book of mine contains formulations, analytical distinctions, arguments, and elaborations that cannot be found in the *Ethics*; in addition, the conceptions and insights taken from Aristotle are not simply adopted without modification, but adapted to fit together into a theoretical framework that is somewhat different from Aristotle’s. If it appears immodest for me to claim some originality for what is set forth in these pages, it would be dishonest for me to pretend that I am merely translating into twentieth-century idiom the wisdom I have found in a book written almost 2,500 years ago. The most accurate description of what I have done, it seems to me, would be to say that certain things to be found in Aristotle’s *Ethics* constitute my point of departure and control the general direction of my thought, but that I have gone further along the line of thinking about moral problems laid down by Aristotle—adding innovations to his theory, as well as extending and modifying it. Much of what is new or altered in my formulation of the ethics of common sense results from my effort to defend its wisdom against philosophical objections that were unknown to Aristotle, or to correct the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and ignorances that have dominated the scene in the last few hundred years.

However, even in dealing with the multifarious errors in modern and contemporary moral philosophy, I have been able to employ critical tools I have found in Aristotle. As an indirect confirmation of this, let me call attention to the fact that in criticizing such lead-

ing modern and contemporary moral philosophers as Kant, J. S. Mill, G. E. Moore, H. A. Pritchard, A. J. Ayer, and John Dewey, I have, usually without mentioning Aristotle's name or citing his work, pointed out misunderstandings of conceptions fundamental to Aristotelian doctrine or ignorance of distinctions and neglect of insights that, had they been learned from Aristotle, would have prevented these modern authors from making the mistakes they have made. They all certainly read the *Nichomachean Ethics* as students and most of them reconsidered it in the years of their own mature development; but the evidence is plain that for one reason or another, they read it very poorly, or perhaps I should say that their reading of Aristotle and their interpretation of his thought are as different from mine as if they and I were reading utterly different books.<sup>ii</sup>

I know of few books that have been as variously interpreted as the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Many of the interpretations—in fact, most of them—make it out to be worth studying as a monument in the history of thought, or worth criticizing in order to point out errors we should avoid, but hardly a book that contains the one right approach to moral problems and more wisdom and truth in the solution of them than any book written since the fourth century B. C.<sup>iii</sup> Among contemporary commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, even the few interpretations that commend his approach or praise certain of his insights do not go all out in defense of his doctrine.<sup>iv</sup> I know of only one book—Henry Vatch's *Rational Man*—that not only adopts Aristotle's approach without reservation, but also expounds and defends the wisdom and truth to be found in his doctrine, while at the same time acknowledging that Aristotle, like every other great philosopher, made mistakes that should not be perpetuated out of reverence for his authority.<sup>v</sup>

Scholars often argue for the correctness of their interpretation of a text; scholarly literature is full of controversy over the correct reading of this set of passages or that. Adjudicating such arguments or taking part in such controversies is not the business of a philosopher. Faced with the many divergent interpretations of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, I have no right or wish to claim that my reading of it has so perfectly grasped the meaning of every passage in that complicated text that I know with assurance precisely what Aristotle thought. For all I know, the meaning I attach to the words on this page or that may diverge from or even distort what Aristotle had in mind. I have already confessed that there is much in the book that remains dark or obscure to me, and that I have found many passages the apparent meaning of which I cannot easily rec-

oncile with my interpretation of other passages that I have construed as expressing the controlling insights of the book.

What, then, can I claim for my reading of Aristotle's *Ethics*? Only this: (1) that it is an interpretation which sets forth a moral philosophy that is sound, practical, and undogmatic; (2) that it is an interpretation which, applying philosophical, not scholarly, criteria for judging what is morally true and wise, separates the wheat from the chaff and rejects what cannot be assimilated to a coherent ethical theory that is both teleological and deontological and that is based on the specific nature of man; and (3) that the ethical doctrine which emerges from this interpretation deserves to be called Aristotelian even if it does not represent the doctrine of Aristotle's *Ethics* in its entirety; or, in other words, that the moral wisdom and truths I have expounded as the ethics of common sense can be attributed to Aristotle more than to any other philosopher.<sup>vi</sup>

Such support as can be given for the first two points in this three-fold claim have already been given in the body of this book and in the notes appended to its chapters, especially the chapters of Parts Two and Three. It is the task of this Postscript to provide support for the third point. But how can that be done within the compass of a few pages, in view of the diverse interpretations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in view of the apparently conflicting passages in the book itself? It is a long and complicated book to deal with as a whole; furthermore, it presents more than the usual difficulties of rendering Greek into English; and, in addition, the close relation between Aristotle's *Ethics* and his *Politics* requires an examination of passages in the latter book that have a critical bearing on the interpretation of the former.

Some readers of these works, especially Aristotle's medieval commentators and their modern counterparts, have found the whole a seamless fabric of clear and coherent doctrine. I am unpersuaded by their efforts to make it appear so. Some readers, in modern times and especially in our own day, have gone to the opposite extreme—finding nothing but unresolvable difficulties or perplexities, irreconcilable strains of thought and inadequately expounded views. I cannot accept the picture they present, nor the estimate it implies. I myself have, from time to time, adopted a third alternative, which is probably as untenable. It is the old myth, for which there is certainly no clear or sufficient evidence, that these works originated in lectures that Aristotle gave to his students; that in the course of these lectures Aristotle was engaged in a systematic effort to explore for the first time the ethical and political dimensions of moral philosophy; that in the process of doing so, his own

thought gradually developed and changed, with important insights and discoveries occurring at a later stage in the process, discoveries which called for the modification or even rejection of tentative formulations expressed at an earlier stage; that when he had finished giving his lectures, he had not yet reached the point where he was in possession of a clear-cut and coherent doctrine that he could expound systematically; that his lectures were either handed down to his students in manuscript, or taken down in extensive notes by them, compiled as treatises, and edited, but *not by Aristotle himself*, and that if Aristotle had re-read these compilations and then himself had written the books based on his lectures about ethics and politics, he would have produced two books in moral philosophy quite different from the ones we now have.

The difficulty with this myth, quite apart from any question about its factual authenticity, is that it might lead the person who adopted it to claim that he knew how Aristotle would have written the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, if he had carefully studied the notes based on his lectures and revised what he found there in order to present a clear and coherent doctrine, set forth demonstratively rather than dialectically and in the logical order of exposition rather than in the order of discovery. This would be tantamount to claiming that one had the inside track to all of Aristotle's thought, which is as impossible to support as the claim that one has the only correct interpretation of his works. What claim, then, can I make for the passages from the *Ethics* and *Politics* that I am going to quote in support of the proposition that the ethics of common sense expounded in this book is Aristotelian in tenor, even if it does not represent the whole of Aristotle's thought and may even run counter to certain aspects of it?

A letter William James wrote in 1900 to a graduate student at Harvard who had written a doctoral dissertation on his philosophy will help me to explain what I propose to do. "As a Ph.D. thesis," James told Miss S., "your essay is supreme, but why don't you go farther? You take utterances of mine written at different dates, for different audiences belonging to different universes of discourse, and string them together as the abstract elements of a total philosophy which you then show to be inwardly incoherent. This is splendid philology ... [but] your use of the method only strengthens the impression I have got from reading criticisms of my 'pragmatic' account of 'truth,' that the whole Ph.D. industry of building an author's meaning out of separate texts leads nowhere, *unless you have first grasped his center of vision, by an act of imagination*. ... Not by proving their inward incoherence does one refute philosophies—every human being is incoherent—but only by superseding

them by other philosophies more satisfactory. Your wonderful technical skill ought to serve you in good stead if you would exchange the philological kind of criticism for constructive work. I fear however that you won't—the iron may have bitten too deeply into your soul!!” The letter is signed: “Yours with mingled admiration and abhorrence, Wm. James.”<sup>vii</sup>

If Aristotle were alive today to read the commentaries that have been written about his philosophy, I could imagine him feeling about most of them what James felt about the efforts of Miss S. Therefore, I am going to try in this Postscript to follow James's excellent advice—by selecting those passages in Aristotle's *Ethics and Politics* that I regard as controlling any effort to get at the center of his vision. If, in the view of others, this is too much to claim, I am prepared to fall back on more modest claims and ones I think can be defended: first, that the passages I am going to cite must be given a controlling position in any interpretation of Aristotle's thought; and, second, that the insights expressed in these passages do in fact control the development of the moral philosophy I have expounded in this book, and justify my calling the ethics of common sense Aristotelian, even if it is not identical in content with Aristotle's *Ethics*.

I will proceed in the next five sections of this Postscript to quote and interpret what I have called the “controlling passages,” and to indicate how other, apparently conflicting passages can, by interpretation, be reconciled with them. Then, in a final section, I will conclude with a few brief observations concerning the fate of Aristotle's *Ethics* in the history of moral philosophy in the West.

## (2)

I have said that Aristotle's *Ethics* is both teleological and deontological. An ethical theory is teleological if it posits a single ultimate end as its first principle, and it is deontological if it makes the good which is this ultimate end the primary object of a categorical moral obligation that is universally binding on all men in the same way. For Aristotle, the single ultimate end is happiness conceived as the goodness of a human life as a whole. So conceived, happiness is the *totum bonum* (the whole of goods), not the *summum bonum* (the highest among the various partial goods that are components of happiness or parts of the whole). As the *totum bonum*, happiness or a whole good life is a normative, not a terminal, end—an end that takes a complete life to achieve, and therefore an end that is not achieved at any moment in the time of our lives. Therefore, happiness is neither experienceable nor enjoyable, for

the satisfactions of desire that we experience and enjoy occur in passing moments of time. In contrast to happiness, all other goods—all of them less than the whole good and all of them parts of happiness—can be possessed and enjoyed during the course of our lives.

The passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) that I am now about to cite reveal what, in my judgment, is the most distinctive feature of that book and what makes it unique among treatises in moral philosophy. It is the only ethical theory in which a good life as a temporal whole is the controlling or normative end of all action, and in which the goodness of particular types of activity or the goodness of the results they achieve is measured by their contribution to making a whole life good, each of these partial goods being a means to that end and all of them together being that end in the process of becoming. I will postpone until Section 3 the citation of the texts that give us Aristotle's enumeration of the partial goods or means to happiness and that indicate which among them is the highest good, and then, in Section 4, I will cite textual evidence to show that, in Aristotle's view, we are under a categorical moral obligation to make a really good life by choosing rightly—or virtuously—the activities or the results of action by which we can make our lives good as a whole.

“If we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity and our desires would be empty and vain), then there is some end of the things we do which we desire for its own sake—everything else being desired for the sake of this. Clearly, this must be the good and the chief good” (*NE*, I, 2, 1094<sup>a</sup>18–22). Some goods may be merely means, some goods may be ends as well as means, but of the goods that are ends, only one is an end that is never a means, and it is, therefore, the ultimate or final end. “We call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more final than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else; and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else is more final than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of something else. Therefore, we call final without qualification [*i.e.*, the ultimate end, absolutely speaking] that which is desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else” (*NE*, I, 7, 1097<sup>a</sup>30–35).

This, Aristotle declares, is happiness—the good “we always seek for its own sake and never for the sake of something else,” whereas every other good, even those we desire for their own sakes, “we seek also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall become happy” (*ibid.*, 1097<sup>a</sup>37–1097<sup>b</sup>6). Aristotle then

points out that when we speak of happiness as the ultimate end, we must be careful not to speak of it as a good, but rather as *the* good. Although he himself has called it “the chief good,” he makes clear that it is not to be thought of as the highest good, but as the whole of goods. Happiness is the chief good only in the sense that “it is the most desirable of all things without being counted as one good among others.” His argument to support this point is unanswerable. If happiness were counted as one good among others, even though it were the highest or best of all such goods, “it would become more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods,” in which case happiness by itself would not be the most desirable good, for the combination of happiness (as just one good) with any other additional good would be more desirable than happiness by itself, since “among goods the greater is always more desirable.” Therefore, happiness as the ultimate end is not *a* good, but *the* good—that whole of goods to which nothing can be added and from which “nothing is lacking” (*ibid.*, 1097<sup>b</sup>15–22).

The foregoing argument is repeated in Book X, where Aristotle says that “it is by an argument of this kind that Plato proves the good *not* to be pleasure; he argues that the life of pleasure is more desirable with wisdom than without it, and that if the combination of the two is better, then pleasure is not *the* good, for *the* good cannot become more desirable by the addition of anything to it” (*NE*, X, 2, 1172<sup>a</sup>28–32). Aristotle then adds that no other partial good, any more than pleasure, can be *the* good if it is just one good among others, to which other goods can be added. Thus, as we shall see presently, the intellectual activity which, in Book X, Aristotle regards as the highest good (the *summum bonum*) does not constitute happiness (the *totum bonum*), for it, like pleasure, is only one good among others, and can be made more desirable by the addition of such other goods as wealth, health, and pleasure.

Happiness, Aristotle says again and again, is a good life as a whole; it consists in living well by choosing rightly among the various activities that can occupy our time and that can achieve certain results, each of which is only one good among others. However one describes the constituents of happiness, Aristotle insists that to any enumeration of its component parts, we must always add ‘in a complete life’; for one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so one day, or a short time, does not make a man happy” (*NE*, I, 7, 1098<sup>a</sup>17–18; cf. X, 7, 1177<sup>b</sup>23–24). That is why children and youths cannot be called happy. If we ever attribute happiness to them in view of their promise or the good fortune that smiles on the beginning of their lives, it is “by reason of the hopes we have for them” not because they have



achieved happiness, for that “requires a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age” (*NE*, I, 9, 1100<sup>a</sup>1–7). Aristotle confirms this in his discussion of Solon’s observation that one can accurately judge the goodness of a human life only when it has been completed, but not while it is still in process (see *NE*, I, 10, 1100<sup>a</sup>10–1100<sup>b</sup>10). Of a living man, we can never say *without qualification* that he is happy; only when a man’s life is over can we say that it was a happy or a good life. While the individual is still engaged in trying to make a good life for himself, we can say only that the signs suggest that he is succeeding, that he is becoming happy, or that his life is becoming a good one. Happiness consists in living and acting well, under fortunate circumstances, “not for some chance period but throughout a complete life.” At any moment in our lives, “the future remains obscure to us”; one’s fortunes and one’s character may change for better or for worse. As we shall see, good fortune and good character are essential conditions of happiness. So when we call a living man happy, our doing so is not only descriptive of his past but also predictive of his future: we are saying that he is one “in whom these conditions are *and are to be fulfilled*” (*NE*, I, 10, 1101<sup>a</sup>15–21; italics added).

## (3)

Aristotle names a relatively small number of goods, each of which is a component of happiness—an element in the *totum bonum* that is a good life as a whole. A good life, he says, is impossible without a decent minimum of external goods, which include not only the means of subsistence but other forms of prosperity, some of which are conferred by good fortune (see *NE*, I, 8, 1099<sup>a</sup>31–1099<sup>b</sup>8; I, 10, 1101<sup>a</sup>16; VII, 13, 1153<sup>b</sup>18–24; X, 8, 1179<sup>a</sup>2–12). It is impossible without the goods of the body—health and vigor (see *NE*, VII, 13, 1153<sup>b</sup>17; X, 8, 1178<sup>b</sup>34–35). It is impossible without pleasure, not only the pleasures of sense but the pleasures inherent in certain types of activity (see *NE*, VII, 13, 1153<sup>b</sup>13–15; VII, 14, 1154<sup>a</sup>1–22). It is impossible without friends or loved ones (see *NE*, IX, 8, 1169<sup>b</sup>3–22; IX, 11, 1171<sup>a</sup>34–1171<sup>b</sup>27). It is impossible without what Aristotle calls “the goods of soul”—the goods I have called the goods of self-improvement. These, as a class, stand highest among the partial goods that constitute the *totum bonum* (see *NE*, I, 8, 1098<sup>b</sup>14–16).

All the mistakes men make about happiness or the good life consist either in identifying it with one or another of the partial goods or in not correctly ordering these partial goods in relation to one another

(see *NE*, I, 4; I, 5; I, 8; VII, 13, 1153<sup>b</sup>20–24; VII, 14, 1154<sup>a</sup>8–21; X, 3, 1174<sup>a</sup>1–14; X, 6, 1176<sup>b</sup>8–1177<sup>a</sup>12). The fact that each of these partial goods is something happiness depends on may explain but does not lessen the mistake of regarding any of them as the one thing in which happiness consists. The fact that each of these goods corresponds to a natural human need does not make them all coordinate or of equal value, for some of them, as Aristotle points out, serve as means to other ends as well as being means to happiness itself, and some, such as the goods of self-perfection, are not only means to happiness but good in themselves, as ends to be sought for their own sake.

In addition to naming the goods that are indispensable to happiness or a good life, Aristotle also names, with one exception, the basic types of activity by which these goods are obtained: wealth, by work; pleasure, by *play* or amusement; friendships and the goods of self-improvement, by *leisure*. The one exception is Aristotle's failure to name the various activities by which the bodily goods of health and vigor are obtained, for which I have employed the omnibus term *sleep*. Some of these activities, including the therapeutic form of play which Aristotle calls "relaxation," are mentioned in Book X of the *Ethics* (see Ch. 6 and 7) and are discussed again in the *Politics* (see Bk. VII, Ch. 14–15; Bk. VIII, Ch. 3, 5). Aristotle's ordering of these activities confirms his ordering of the goods with which they are associated. What he says about therapeutic play applies to all the activities I have grouped together under sleep; giving us health and bodily vigor, they are for the sake of work—either subsistence-work or leisure-work. Subsistence-work, in turn, is for the sake of leisure-work, and while a certain amount of play simply for the pleasure inherent in it is a necessary element in a good life, it should be engaged in with moderation in order to allow as much free time as possible for the self-cultivating pursuits of leisure.

Under the guidance of the controlling insight that happiness is the good (*totum bonum*), not the *highest* good (*summum bonum*), in which case it would be only one good among others, we can see that happiness does not consist in self-perfection, or the goods of self-improvement, even though these constitute the highest among partial goods. The same insight applies to leisure among the activities that occupy our time, and to that special form of leisure—speculative activity, contemplation, or thinking and knowing for the sake of thinking and knowing—which Aristotle prizes for its contribution to happiness.

Aristotle's views concerning the principal forms of leisure were somewhat conditioned and colored by the cultural circumstances of an aristocratic, agrarian, slave-holding society, but that need not prevent us from divesting his conception of the good life of its local trappings and universalizing its terms so that they apply not just to an elite living under certain historic conditions but to all men everywhere at all times. He says, for example, that men who have sufficient property and slaves to attend to chores, so that they do not have to work for a living or operate their estates, should "occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics" (*Politics*, I, 8, 1255<sup>b</sup>37–38). This need not be read narrowly to signify the activity of the philosopher or the activity of the statesmen as Aristotle thought of these pursuits—activities which, in other places, he contrasts as the speculative or contemplative life, on the one hand, and as the political or active life, on the other (see *NE*, I, 5, 1095<sup>b</sup>18; X, 7, 1177<sup>b</sup>15–1178<sup>a</sup>2; X, 8, 1178<sup>a</sup>8–13; and cf. *Politics*, VII, 2, 1324<sup>a</sup>27–32; VII, 3, 1325<sup>b</sup>15–23). The word "philosophy" can be broadly interpreted to stand for all the arts and sciences—for the whole range of creative intellectual work by which the individual himself learns and also, perhaps, makes some contribution to culture as a result of his learning. The word "politics" can be similarly extended to cover all the institutions of society and all public or quasi-public affairs, including those of business and other corporate enterprises, involving the individual in action as well as in thought, yet constituting genuine leisure for the individual only to the extent that his intellectual involvement results in learning or some other aspect of personal growth. Thus, broadly interpreted, philosophy and politics would appear to be the two principal forms of leisure, even though they may not exhaust every variety of leisure pursuit, among which must be included the activities concerned with love and friendship.

The man who is neither a philosopher nor a statesman in Aristotle's sense of these terms is not precluded from engagement in the pursuits of leisure. Considering the diversity of human aptitudes or talents and the wide range of individual abilities, it still remains the case that, for every man, leisure, in one form or another, is supreme among human activities, and the resulting goods of self-improvement constitute the most important ingredient in a good life. Aristotle's handling of the question whether speculative or political activity makes the greater contribution to happiness leaves the matter unresolved; there are passages, among those cited above, in which he favors the one, and passages in which he favors the other. However, a resolution is obtainable by altering the question somewhat. Considering an individual's talents and temperament, as well as the external circumstances of his life, what form

of leisure-work will contribute most to his learning—to the growth of his mind and to the development of his personality? That, *for him*, is the highest form of leisure; *for someone else*, it may be something else; *for each man*, happiness is to be achieved to the highest possible degree by the fullest engagement in what is for him the highest form of leisure-work.

## (4)

It is in one way easy to understand why modern philosophers, beginning with Kant, have regarded Aristotle's eudaimonistic ethics or ethics of happiness as the very opposite of a deontological ethics, or an ethics of categorical obligation. There can be no question that it gives primacy to the good rather than to the right. It proceeds mainly in terms of the desirable rather than in terms of the dutiful. It appears to lay down no moral laws: the pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are almost totally devoid of explicitly formulated rules of conduct, and of criteria for judging whether a particular action is right or wrong. Nevertheless, as I will now try to show, to dismiss Aristotle's doctrine, as Kant and others following him have done, as purely pragmatic or utilitarian, in the sense that it appeals only to what men do in fact consciously desire without considering what they ought to desire, represents a profound misreading of the book.

This misreading is remarkable because it fails to observe points that furnish the reader with controlling insights for interpreting the book as a whole. First of all, there is the fact so pervasive that it is very difficult to miss, namely, that Aristotle, in dealing with the diverse opinions men hold concerning happiness, directs his efforts toward discovering and formulating the one right conception of happiness. He is clearly denying that any version of the good life is as sound as any other, and just as clearly affirming that happiness, rightly conceived, is the same for all men precisely because, regardless of their individual differences, they are all human beings, the same in their specific nature. He rejects the opinion that happiness consists solely in a life of pleasure, a life of money-making, a life filled with external goods, a life devoted to the attainment of public honor or prestige or power over other men, and even a life that consists exclusively in being virtuous or in the pursuits of leisure (see *NE*, I, 4, 1095<sup>a</sup>15–27; I, 5; I, 8, 1098<sup>b</sup>20–29, 1099<sup>a</sup>32–1099<sup>b</sup>8; VII, 13, 1153<sup>b</sup>13–24; X, 3, 1174<sup>a</sup>1–12; X, 6, 1176<sup>b</sup>27–1177<sup>a</sup>11; X, 8, 1178<sup>b</sup>32–1179<sup>a</sup>12; and cf. *Politics*, I, 9, 1257<sup>b</sup>35–1258<sup>a</sup>7; VII, 1, 1324<sup>a</sup>1–2; VII, 3, 1325<sup>a</sup>20–33; VII, 13, 1332<sup>a</sup>17–27). The reason in each case is the same. With the exception of arbitrary power over other men, each of the things mentioned is a

good or is associated with the attainment of a good, but it is not *the* good, and therefore it is only a part of happiness, not the whole of it. Correctly conceived as the *totum bonum*, happiness consists in all the things that are really good for a man; none, not even the least of these, can be omitted if the individual is to achieve a good life, but they are not all of equal value, and so he must seek to relate and mix the ingredients of happiness in the right order and proportion. An ethics of happiness which insists upon seeking the one right end (happiness correctly conceived as the *totum bonum*) and seeking it in the right way (by correctly relating and proportioning the partial goods that enter into it) is clearly a moral philosophy that declares what a man *ought* to seek and how he *ought* to seek it.

This controlling insight is confirmed in a number of ways. It is confirmed by a statement in the *Politics*, in which Aristotle says that the successful pursuit of happiness depends upon two things: “one of them is the choice of the right end and aim of action, and the other the discovery of the actions which are means to it; for the means and the end may agree or disagree” (VII, 13, 1331<sup>b</sup>27–31). It is also confirmed by all the passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle, considering the role of pleasure in the good life, distinguishes between good and bad pleasures, and between a right and wrong pursuit of them (see, for example, II, 3, 1104<sup>b</sup>8–12, 30–35; X, 5, 1175<sup>b</sup>22–35, 1176<sup>a</sup>15–29). Commenting on the pleasures of sense, he points out that one can have too much of these goods. “The bad man is bad by reason of pursuing the excess, not by reason of pursuing the needed pleasures (for *all* men enjoy in some way or other both dainty foods and wines and sexual intercourse), *but not all men do so as they ought*” (*NE*, 1154<sup>a</sup>16–18; italics added). Most of all, it is confirmed by Aristotle’s use of the distinction between the real and the apparent good.

With regard to the desire for the good, Aristotle points out that “some think that it is for the real good; others, for the apparent good. Now those who say that the real good is the object of desire must admit in consequence that that which the man who does not choose aright seeks is not an object of desire while those who say that the apparent good is the object of desire must claim that there is nothing which is naturally an object of desire, but only that which appears good to each man—and different things appear good to different individuals” (*NE*, III, 4, 1113<sup>a</sup>15–23). Aristotle then goes on to suggest that the apparent good is that which men in fact consciously desire, whether they ought to or not, and the real good is that which they in fact naturally desire and ought consciously to desire. Hence the difficulty is resolved; both the real

and the apparent good are objects of desire, but whereas the former is both the object of natural desire and that which men ought consciously to desire, the latter is only the object of conscious desire. “That which is really good is an object of desire for the good man [that is, the man who desires as he ought to desire], while any chance thing may be an object of desire [an apparent good] for the bad man” (*NE*, III, 4, 1113<sup>a</sup>25–27). If real goods—the objects of natural desire—ought to be desired, and nothing but real goods ought to be desired, then the right conception of happiness—the good life that all men ought to seek and that is the same for all men because they are men—must be a conception of it as constituted by the sum of real goods. Aristotle’s remark that “the end appears to each man in a form corresponding to his moral character” (*NE*, III, 5, 1114<sup>a</sup>32–1114<sup>b</sup>1) clearly means that only the morally virtuous man—the man of right desire, the man who chooses aright—will be motivated by the right conception of happiness as the end to be pursued. The morally virtuous man is one whose will is aimed at the end that every man ought to seek, and whose actions in pursuit of that end are chosen as they ought to be chosen in relation and proportion to one another.

If any further confirmation were required to show that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is at once deontological and teleological—that it prescribes categorical oughts with respect to the ultimate end and the necessary means thereto—the *prima facie* evidence for it lies in the indispensability of virtue to happiness, the good life, or living well. It is so clear in Aristotle’s mind that happiness can be rightly conceived and rightly pursued only by a person who has the habit of desiring and choosing aright (such good disposition of will, or habit of right desire and choice, being moral virtue), that he allows an elliptical definition of happiness, as “activity in accordance with virtue” or as “virtuous activity” (*NE*, I, 7, 1098<sup>a</sup>27; I, 9, 1099<sup>b</sup>26) to serve in place of the more exact and complete statement that happiness or the good life consists in possessing all the real goods that are the objects the morally virtuous man desires, as he ought, in the right order and proportion; for the morally virtuous man is one who aims at the end that he ought to seek and chooses the means to it in the way they ought to be chosen (see esp. *NE*, I, 10; I, 13, 1102<sup>a</sup>5–6; X, 6, 1176<sup>b</sup>37; and cf. *Politics*, VII, 2, 1324<sup>a</sup>1–2; VII, 13, 1332<sup>a</sup>8–25). Still another way of expanding the elliptical statement that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue or is virtuous activity is to say that the activities of a good life all aim at real goods, or at apparent goods only when they are innocuous, and these activities contribute to making a whole life really good because they and the goods they aim at have been sought and chosen virtuously, that is, in the right order and proportion.

Moral virtue is not itself a component part of happiness, except insofar as it is one aspect of self-perfection or self-improvement; its special relation to happiness consists in its being not the highest good, but rather the chief instrumental or operative means to achieving a good life. All the goods that are needed for a good life are either the goods of chance or the goods of choice. For some of the constituent elements of happiness, we depend wholly on the chance favors of fortune, including the good fortune of living in a just and benevolent society, but for those elements essential to a good life that depend wholly or even partly on our own free choices, moral virtue is the decisive factor (see *Politics*, VII, 2, 1323<sup>b</sup>25–29; and cf. *NE*, I, 10, 1100<sup>b</sup>23–32).

## (5)

Since moral virtue plays so critical a role in Aristotle's theory of the good life, as the *sine qua non* of a man's effective pursuit of happiness, it is necessary to clarify two points that can be and usually are overlooked in the reading of the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

The first concerns Aristotle's use of the phrase "virtuous activity." It might be thought that virtuous activity is a special type of activity, as work, play, and leisure are distinct types of activity. But that is not the case. At the end of Book I, Aristotle, projecting an extended discussion of virtue that will occupy Books II–VI, points out that "some of the virtues are intellectual and others moral" (*NE*, I, 13, 1103<sup>a</sup>5). Although the intellectual virtues can be inculcated by teaching as moral virtue cannot be, both consist in habits—in stable dispositions of mind or character (see *NE*, II, 1, 1103<sup>a</sup>15–25). In the case of the intellectual virtues—take, for example, science or art—the virtue is a habit or disposition of the mind to act in a certain way. The scientist or the artist is a man whose mind can perform well certain operations that the man who is not a scientist or an artist either cannot perform at all or certainly cannot perform well. Excellence in a certain type of intellectual activity will be found in those men who possess the appropriate intellectual virtues—the good habits or dispositions of mind that give rise to such activities.

Moral virtue, in contrast, is a habit of willing and choosing, not a habit of acting in a certain specific way. It is, Aristotle writes, "a state of character concerned with choice" (*NE*, II, 6, 1106<sup>b</sup>37). Specific activities of all sorts, intellectual and otherwise, are the things men choose to engage in or avoid in order to achieve the end that they seek. The habit of seeking a certain end and the habit

of choosing and ordering activities in a certain way to gain that end is the habit of willing and choosing which is moral virtue. In one sense, of course, willing and choosing are actions, but they are not activities in the same sense in which working, playing, and leisuring are activities, nor in the sense in which scientific or artistic operations are specific forms of leisure activity. Thus, when the reference is to moral, not intellectual, virtue, the phrase “virtuous activity” must be treated as an elliptical expression that is short for “virtuously chosen activities,” and this, like the phrase “activity in accordance with virtue,” needs further expansion as follows: “activities directed to the right end and chosen in the right order and proportion.”

The morally virtuous man is one who has a good character. This consists in a habit or disposition with respect to the end that he seeks and the means that he chooses; and the *goodness* of this habit of willing and choosing, which makes it a *virtue* rather than a vice, consists in its being a disposition to will the right end or the end that he ought to seek and to choose the means in the right way or in the way that he ought to choose them in order to achieve the end. Living as he ought by habit, the man of good character has no need of rules of conduct; moral virtue as good habit dispenses with rules.

This brings us to the second and more important point that requires clarification. Since an intellectual virtue is the habit of a certain specific type of intellectual activity, there can be a number of distinct intellectual virtues. But since moral virtue is a disposition to will the right end and to choose the means for achieving it in the right way, there cannot be a number of existentially distinct moral virtues, but only a plurality of analytically distinct aspects of one and the same existential state of good moral character.

The controlling text on this point is to be found in the last chapter of Book VI, though even there Aristotle himself uses the word “virtue” in the plural rather than the singular, and the passage is further complicated by an ambiguity in Aristotle’s use of *phronesis* for two quite distinct qualities of mind: (a) moral wisdom, which consists in a correct understanding of the *ultimate end* to be sought and of the *means in general* for achieving it; and (b) prudence, which consists in the habit of reaching a sound judgment in *this particular case* about which is the better or best of alternative means for achieving the end. English translators usually render *phronesis* by “practical wisdom”; but wisdom (*sophia*)—whether speculative or practical—in Aristotle’s understanding of it is always restricted to universal principles. In the practical or moral



order, the principles with which wisdom is concerned are constituted by the *ultimate end* and the *means in general* (the means to happiness universally conceived). Deliberation about which is the better or the best of available means *in a particular case* does not come within the scope of moral or practical wisdom. It belongs to another habit of mind—the habit of prudence, which is a habit of proceeding in the right way to reach a decision about the means in a particular case, that is, by taking counsel, by weighing the alternatives, by deliberating carefully, and so on (see *NE*, VI, 7, 1141<sup>b</sup>8–23; VI, 8, 1142<sup>a</sup>20–31; VI, 9, 1142<sup>b</sup>3–35). The only justification for calling prudence “practical wisdom” lies in the word “practical,” not in the word “wisdom,” for the word “practical” does refer to action; action always takes place in particular cases; and it is the particular case with which prudence is always concerned, as wisdom never is.

With these clarifications in analysis and vocabulary, let me now render the passage I regard as giving us the controlling insight for understanding Aristotle’s theory of moral virtue, in itself, as a single habit of will and choice, and in its relation to moral wisdom, on the one hand, and to prudence on the other. Book VI ends with the statement: “It is clear, then, from what has been said that it is not possible to be good [morally virtuous] in the strict sense without being morally wise, nor prudent without being good [having moral virtue]. In this way we may refute the dialectical argument whereby it might be contended that the virtues [moral virtues] exist in separation from each other. ... This is possible in the case of certain temperamental qualities [such as fearlessness, on the one hand, and mildness on the other], but not in the case of that attribute with respect to which a man is called without qualification morally good” (*NE* VI, 13, 1144<sup>b</sup>30–1145<sup>a</sup>2)

Aristotle’s rejection of the view that the moral virtues can exist in separation from each other makes it impossible to hold that there can be two existentially separate moral virtues, such as fortitude or courage, on the one hand, and temperance on the other, as there can be two existentially separate temperamental qualities, such as fearlessness and mildness. The plurality of names used in the case of moral virtue (and there is a large number of them in Books III and IV, of which fortitude and temperance are the principal ones) must, therefore, be interpreted to signify a plurality of analytically distinct aspects of one and the same good habit or state of good moral character, not a plurality of existentially distinct moral habits, any one of which can be possessed in the absence of others.

The reason for the existential unity of moral virtue should be clear from what has been said earlier about a good moral character. It consists, as we have seen, in a habit of right desire, which is to say a habit of desiring as one ought, a disposition to will the right end and to choose the right means in the right order and proportion. Since there is only one right end to be sought and only one right order and proportion of the means for achieving the end, there is only one habit of right desire and that one habit is moral virtue, complete and entire. We can read this insight back into the passage in Book I, where Aristotle, having said that the good life consists of activity in accordance with virtue, then adds: “and *if* there is more than one virtue, then in accordance with *complete* virtue” (*NE*, I, 7, 1098<sup>a</sup>28; cf. I, 10, 1101<sup>a</sup>15; italics added).

From what has been said, it should also be clear why it is impossible for a man to be morally good without being morally wise, since one could not have the habit of right desire without having an understanding of the right end to be sought and knowledge of the means in general for achieving it, together with an understanding of how those means should be ordered and proportioned. Such knowledge and understanding of the end and the means constitute moral wisdom. But moral wisdom can be possessed in two ways—*explicitly*, in the propositional form typical of intellectual cognition, or *implicitly*, without propositional or argumentative expression. The man of moral virtue or good moral character must certainly possess moral wisdom implicitly, but whether he must also possess it explicitly, in the propositional and argumentative form appropriate to intellectual cognition, is doubtful. This is not to deny that he would be better off if he did.

The reverse point that Aristotle makes at the end of Book VI is on one interpretation true and on another interpretation false. In the passage already cited, the usual translation has it that it is impossible to be “practically wise without moral virtue,” as well as “morally good without practical wisdom.” We have just seen that it is impossible to be morally good (have the habit of right desire) without having moral wisdom implicitly, though it remains questionable whether one must also have it explicitly. But the reverse relationship between moral virtue and “practical wisdom” holds only when “practical wisdom” is understood as referring to *prudence*, not when it is understood as referring to *moral wisdom*.

It is impossible to be prudent without being morally good; prudence as distinguished from mere cleverness or shrewdness consists in the habit of proceeding in the right way to reach a decision about the means in a particular case *only* if the choice is among

means all directed to the right end. A thief or a murderer may exhibit that counterfeit of prudence which Aristotle calls cleverness or shrewdness, but it is not true prudence because the means with which it is concerned in the particular case are not means to the right end (see *NE*, VI, 12, 1144<sup>a</sup>25–29; VI, 13, 1144<sup>b</sup>1–16, 1145<sup>a</sup>5–7). But while it is impossible to be prudent without being morally good, it is certainly possible to be morally wise—in a purely intellectual way—without being a man of good moral character or of moral virtue. Being able to recite the truths of moral philosophy or even being intellectually convinced of them does not necessarily carry with it that stable disposition of the will—that habit of right desire—which constitutes moral virtue or a man’s good moral character. If only that were the case, then imparting moral wisdom to the young by the teaching of a sound moral philosophy would produce morally virtuous men, but we know moral virtue is not acquired in this way. Rather it is by discipline and training, by practice and habituation, that morally virtuous individuals are formed (see *NE*, X, 9, 1179<sup>b</sup>19–1180<sup>a</sup>4). Aristotle is careful not to give specific rules for the cultivation of moral virtue, just as he is careful not to rely on teaching moral philosophy to the young (see *NE*, I, 3, 1095<sup>a</sup>2–11).

Among the many aspects of moral virtue discussed in Books II–IV, fortitude and temperance are the principal ones. Virtue, Aristotle says, is “concerned with pleasures and pains,” for “it is on account of pleasures that we do the wrong things, and on account of pains that we abstain from doing the right ones” (*NE*, II, 3, 1104<sup>b</sup>10–11, 15; cf. IV, I, 1121<sup>a</sup>4–5). It is in these terms that he differentiates between temperance and fortitude as distinct aspects of moral virtue. Temperance consists in a disposition to give up immediate pleasures that are only apparent goods in order to achieve real goods that are often remote; fortitude consists in a disposition to suffer the pains or withstand the difficulties that are often attendant upon doing the things one ought to do for the sake of making one’s whole life really good. Both are aspects of one and the same basic habit of choice—the disposition to prefer a good life in the long run (however hard it may be to work for that end) to a good and an easy time here and now (however pleasant that may be from moment to moment).

There is only one other principal aspect of moral virtue, and that is justice, which is treated in Book V. Here Aristotle distinguishes between justice in general, which is nothing but moral virtue as directed toward the good of other men, and the special forms of justice that are the qualities of human transactions, such as exchanges and distributions, or human laws and other acts of gov-

ernment. The latter, which in one place he refers to as a “part of virtue” (see Ch. 2) occupies his attention in the rest of Book V, but it need not concern us here for it is not an aspect of moral virtue except insofar as it is involved in a man’s being generally just. “Justice in this sense is not a part of virtue, but virtue entire,” yet it is complete virtue “not absolutely, but only in relation to our neighbor” (*NE*, V, 1, 1129<sup>b</sup>24–25, 1130<sup>a</sup>10).

If, because they are merely distinct aspects of one and the same habit of right desire, a man cannot be temperate without having fortitude, or cannot be courageous without having temperance, then it is also true, for exactly the same reason, that a man cannot be generally just unless he is also temperate and courageous, and he cannot have temperance and fortitude without also being generally just in his dealings with his fellow-men and in relation to organized society as a whole. So the man who has a good moral character will not only be habitually disposed, in his making of choices, to act as he ought in the pursuit of his own happiness; he will also be habitually disposed to act as he ought in relation to the rights of other men and in relation to the good of the community as a whole—in Aristotle’s language, both fairly in his transactions with other men, and lawfully in relation to the good of the community (see *NE*, V, 2, 1130<sup>b</sup>7–1131<sup>a</sup>9).

However, that aspect of moral virtue which is justice does not habitually incline a man to act in every way for the good of his fellow-men, but only to act in such a way as not to injure them by unfair treatment or the violation of their rights. Only the benevolence of love or perfect friendship impels a man to act positively for the happiness of another, as he would act for his own ultimate good. That is why “when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well” (*NE*, VIII, 1, 1155<sup>a</sup>25–27).

(6)

One further point deserves brief comment, and that is the relation of the two branches of moral philosophy we have come to call ethics and politics. Aristotle himself used the term “politics” or “political science” for the branch of learning that is concerned with the ultimate human good, and because it is concerned with the ultimate end, he speaks of it as the “master discipline” or “architectonic science” (see *NE*, I, 2). Nevertheless, the book in which man’s ultimate end and the means to it are given the most extended and detailed treatment is titled *Ethics*, whereas the book in which human happiness is treated only as a measure of the goodness of the state

and its constitution is titled *Politics*. The purely verbal difficulty is resolved if we use the phrase “moral philosophy” to name the one architectonic discipline in the practical order or order of human action, and use “ethics” and “politics” to name related aspects of this one discipline, each of which has a certain primacy, but not in the same respect.

When Aristotle says that “the end is the same for the single man and for the state,” he adds that “the end of the state ... is something greater or more complete, whether to attain or to preserve” (*NE*, I, 2, 1094<sup>b</sup>8–9; cf. *Politics*, VII, 2, 1324<sup>a</sup>5–7). Now, if the end is the same for both, and that end is human happiness or the good life, then the only sense in which the end of the state is greater or more complete must reside in the fact that the state aims at the happiness of all its citizens, whereas the single individual aims only at his own or, at most, his own together with the happiness of his immediate friends whose lives are united with his own.

On the other hand, it is not merely for the sake of life, but for the sake of the good life, that the state comes into existence and continues in existence (see *Politics*, I, 2, 1252<sup>b</sup>29–30; cf. III, 9, 1280<sup>a</sup>21–32; III, 10, 1280<sup>b</sup> 39–40). And it is the good life for individual men (the *totum bonum hominis*), not the good of the community as such (the *bonum communitatis*), which is the ultimate end to be aimed at by all political arrangements. That is why Aristotle criticizes Plato for maintaining, in the *Republic*, that the ideal state is not concerned with the happiness of its guardian class or any other of its component groups. There is no meaning to the happiness of a society as a whole except in terms of the happiness of all, or most, or some of its human members (see *Politics*, II, 6, 1264<sup>b</sup>16–24). Since, then, the ultimate end of the state is the happiness of its individual members, that aspect of moral philosophy (ethics) which deals with the pursuit of happiness *as such* has an obvious primacy, whereas that aspect of moral philosophy (politics) which deals with the external conditions that affect the pursuit of happiness has primacy only in relation to the problem of doing what can be done to make it possible for all men to engage in the pursuit of happiness.

Anyone who is concerned with thinking about the “best form of state,” or the ideal conditions men should aim at in their social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements, must first determine “which is the most eligible life,” that is, which is the best life for man (*Politics*, VII, 1, 1232<sup>a</sup>14–22). When that is determined, as Aristotle has determined it in the *Ethics* (the conclusions of which he summarizes in the *Politics*), the ideal can be

simply stated: “That form of government is best in which every man, whoever he is, can act best and live happily” (*Politics*, VII, 2, 1324<sup>a</sup>24–25).

There is a sense in which the goals of the single individual and of the organized community are not the same. The individual aims at his own happiness and, beyond that, only at the happiness of his friends or loved ones. He does not aim at what Mill called “the general happiness”; that is the objective of the state or organized society, not the individual man. But since moral virtue is the principal operative means in the individual’s making a good life for himself, the pursuit of his own happiness and that of his friends involves him also in acting justly toward other members of the community and for the good of the community as a whole. Thus, it is only in the books concerned with justice and with friendship (V and VIII–IX) that the *Nicomachean Ethics* deals with the relation of the individual to other men and to the community, but even when it does so, the focus of attention always centers on the moral virtue or good character of the individual as the factor indispensable to his making a good life for himself.

However, there is another factor indispensable to the individual’s making a good life for himself, and that consists of all the things that he needs but does not have the power to obtain wholly for himself, no matter how virtuous he is. These goods, which can all be lumped together as wholly or partly goods of fortune (goods of chance rather than of choice), include such things as freedom from coercion and duress, political liberty, a dignified and basically equal status in the community, equality of educational opportunity, a healthful environment and medical care, a decent share of the available economic goods, as much free time as possible, recreational opportunities, and, last but not least, a state of external and of civil peace. To provide the conditions under which *all*—all, *not* some—of its human members can succeed in making good lives for themselves, if they also have the moral virtue and moral wisdom requisite for success in that effort, the state, or organized community as a whole, faces a complicated set of practical problems that are quite different from those of the individual man, though both aim at the same ultimate end.

Aristotle’s *Politics* not only fails to provide us with satisfactory solutions to most of these social, economic, and political problems; it also advocates views that, if adopted, would prevent their being solved in a manner that would produce the good society—a society in which all men would have an equal opportunity, as far as external conditions were concerned, to engage effectively in the pursuit

of happiness. Its chief contribution lies in its one controlling insight that the standard by which a society, in all its aspects, is to be judged as good or bad, better or worse, is the good life for the individual man. I do not mean to say that the *Politics* does not make a number of important contributions to the theory of the state and of government (such as its account of the origin and nature of the state, and its conceptions of constitutional government, of citizenship, and of political liberty), but it suffers much more from the limitations of the historic circumstances under which it was written than does the *Nichomachean Ethics*. It is relatively easy to universalize the truths to be found in the *Ethics* concerning the good life for man. I would like to think that this book of mine has done that with some measure of success. But to state the truths about the good society in an equally universal manner, one would have to repudiate much that is said in the *Politics*, transform in radical ways the sound conceptions it offers, and deal with many subjects it does not treat at all.

## (7)

In the history of moral philosophy in the West, the *Nichomachean Ethics* has had a checkered career. The soundness of its approach to moral problems and the moral wisdom it offers for their solution were almost totally ignored by the leading schools of thought in the Hellenistic period. The Roman Stoics and Epicureans developed doctrines the flimsiness and fallacies of which would have been apparent to anyone who had read Aristotle's *Ethics* and had discovered its central and controlling insights. Cicero, who took pride in his effort to translate Greek thought into the Latin language, wrote two moral treatises—*De Officiis* and *De Finibus*—which show little or no evidence of his acquaintance with or understanding of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. In the later Middle Ages, when the works of Aristotle had been recovered and reintroduced into Western thought, Arabic, Jewish, and Christian commentators explicated the text passage by passage, usually erring in the direction of treating it with the same reverence for every sentence that governed their interpretation of Holy Writ. Nevertheless, in spite of this undue effort to make the text read as if it were a seamless whole from beginning to end, there existed for a brief period a better understanding of the book's pivotal conceptions and guiding principles than can be found in earlier centuries. Yet even this better understanding involved serious changes in emphasis that resulted from subordinating moral philosophy to moral theology in the writings of such devoted followers of Aristotle as Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. I will return to this point presently.

From the seventeenth century on, the turn is for the worse again, with the *Nichomachean Ethics* either unread or misread by the leading moral philosophers of modern times—by Spinoza in the seventeenth century; by Hume and Kant, in the eighteenth century; by J. S. Mill and Henry Sidgwick, in the nineteenth century; and, in our own century, by John Dewey, G. E. Moore, H. A. Pritchard, and others among contemporary writers on ethics or meta-ethics.<sup>viii</sup> Failure to refer to Aristotle's *Ethics* where it is plainly relevant to the problems with which these authors are concerned constitutes evidence either of their ignorance of the book or of their lack of sufficient understanding of it to perceive its relevance. Reference to it, accompanied by its dismissal as making little or no contribution to the solution of the problems with which they are concerned shows little or no understanding of its doctrine on their part. Explicit rejection of it as an erroneous or inadequate approach to moral philosophy, as in the case of Immanuel Kant or John Dewey, is based on their fundamental misapprehensions of Aristotle's theory, which I have taken pains to point out in the chapters of this book.<sup>ix</sup> These misapprehensions not only convert their rejection of Aristotle's *Ethics* into an act of knocking down a straw man, but, in addition, they reappear as fundamental mistakes in their own doctrines—mistakes so crucial that they invalidate those doctrines at their core. I know of only one contemporary work in which the rejection of Aristotle's approach to moral problems is based on a criticism of it that shows an understanding rather than a misunderstanding of his theory, and that is Professor von Wright's *The Varieties of Goodness*.<sup>x</sup>

I am not saying that Aristotle's *Ethics* is above criticism, that its doctrine as expounded here is without errors or faults, or that it solves all moral problems perfectly. My only claim is that it is sounder in its approach to moral problems, advances more truth in their solution, and does so in a manner that is more practical and less dogmatic than any other ethical treatise in the tradition of Western thought. It is, in short, so substantial a contribution to man's thinking about good and evil, and right and wrong, in the conduct of human life that its shortcomings or faults deserve much better criticism than they have so far received. To be better, the criticism, of course, would have to be based on a better understanding of the *Nichomachean Ethics* than has been manifested in modern times and in contemporary discussion.

I mentioned earlier the changes in emphasis that resulted in the Middle Ages from subordinating moral philosophy to moral theology. Aquinas, for example, heavily stressed what Aristotle had to



say about contemplation in Book X of the *Ethics* and, in addition, attached to contemplation a religious significance it could not have had for Aristotle; furthermore, in view of the Christian dogmas concerning the immortality of the soul and Divine rewards and punishments, Aquinas viewed man's terrestrial and temporal happiness, centering either exclusively or primarily in the activity of contemplating God, as nothing but an imperfect and unsatisfactory anticipation of the eternal happiness of heavenly rest in the beatific vision enjoyed by the souls of the blessed in the presence of God.<sup>xi</sup> Looked at one way, this represents a transformation of Aristotle's doctrine, assimilating what truth there is in it to the dogmas of Christian moral theology; but looked at another way, it represents a rejection of Aristotle's position as false in its own terms, since for him the ultimate end—the *totum bonum*—is the temporal whole of a good life on earth, and since, as I have also shown, contemplation for Aristotle is not the contemplation of God but merely knowing for the sake of knowing, which may be the highest form of leisure activity in Aristotle's estimation but which, even so, is only one good among others, each of which is a part of happiness, and all of which contribute to the good life as a whole.

The rejection of the *Nichomachean Ethics* as false in its own terms, because it runs counter to the fundamental dogmas of orthodox, traditional Christianity, can also be based, as it has been by Jacques Maritain in our day, on the grounds that Aristotle proceeds on a hypothesis about human nature that is contrary to fact—the fact in this case being the revealed truth about man. The dogma of original sin and its consequences, which render man dependent on Divine grace for even the least measure of success in acting or living well, makes a sound and adequate moral philosophy inherently impossible.<sup>xii</sup>

This criticism applies not only to Aristotle's *Ethics*, but to every other attempt on the part of philosophers to deal with the problems of human conduct, good and evil, right and wrong, on the purely secular and natural plane. Whether it is correct or not is hardly an arguable issue, for one side appeals to articles of faith the truth of which the other side does not acknowledge. Nevertheless, I would offer one reason for seriously questioning the view that a sound and adequate moral philosophy is impossible *as such* (that is, without the transformations and qualifications that a dogmatic moral theology would insist upon). My reason is couched in Aristotelian terms, and it is as follows.

The only standard we have for judging all of our social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements as just or unjust, as

good or bad, as better or worse, derives from our conception of the good life for man on earth, and from our conviction that, given certain external conditions, it is possible for men to make good lives for themselves by their own efforts. It follows that those who take Maritain's view must also maintain that men of diverse religious faiths and men totally devoid of religious faith cannot find a common ground and make common cause against the social, economic, and political injustices that exist all over the world. If they take the opposite view, as Maritain himself does,<sup>xiii</sup> then there must be sufficient truth in moral philosophy to provide a rational basis for the efforts at social reform and improvement in which all men, regardless of their religious beliefs or disbeliefs, can join. Such common action for a better society presupposes that the measure of a good society consists in the degree to which it promotes the general welfare and serves the happiness of its people—this happiness being their earthly and temporal happiness, for there is no other ultimate end that the secular state can serve.

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<sup>i</sup> At the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies in the summer of 1967, the eminent Confucian scholar Dr. Wing-sit Chan and I conducted a joint seminar devoted to a comparison of the Confucian and Aristotelian conceptions and of Aristotle were respectively summarized by Dr. Chan and by me, and the members of the seminar were asked to discuss the similarities and differences they noted. It was generally agreed that the outstanding difference between the two philosophers was in their intellectual style and method; on the side of substance, it seemed equally clear to all present that the fundamental notions and insights were either the same or closely parallel.

<sup>ii</sup> In the chapters of this book, and especially in the notes, I have indicated the basic differences between my own views and those of Kant J. S. Mill and John Dewey Since my views, expounded as the ethics of common sense, also represent my understanding of the pivotal and controlling insights in the *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, it seems to me a reasonable inference that Kant, Mill, and Dewey settled for an understanding of that book quite different from my own. With regard to Kant, see Chapter Note 10; Chapter 12, Note 7; Chapter 14, Notes 2, 3, and 8; Chapter 15, Note 1; and Chapter 18, Notes 2 and With regard to J. S. Mill, see Chapter 12, Note 8; Chapter 13, Note 5; Chapter 14, Notes 3, 8, and 12; Chapter 18, Notes 1 and 11. With regard to Dewey, see Chapter 9, Note 6. An examination of these critical comments on Kant, Mill, and Dewey will, I think, reveal what I mean by the chasm between their reading of Aristotle's *Ethics* and mine.

Kant Mill and Dewey did not write what professed to be commentaries or interpretations of the *Nichomachean Ethics*; their attack on it was oblique. That, however, is not the case with H. A. Pritchard and G. E. Moore. We have essays from them about it which, in my judgment, are egregious misreadings—almost non-readings of the book. See “The Nature of Moral Philosophy,” in Moore's *Philosophical Studies*, pp. 310–339; and “The Meaning of ‘ΑΓΑΘΟΝ in the *Ethics* of Aristotle,” in Pritchard's *Moral Obligation*, pp. 40–53. The latter was subjected to a penetrating critical dissection by J. L. Austin in a posthumously published essay: ‘ΑΓΑΘΟΝ and ΕΥΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑ in the *Ethics* of Aristotle” (in *Aristotle, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by J. M. E. Moravcsik, pp. 261–296).

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Whitney J. Oates, *Aristotle and the Problem of Value*, esp. Ch. VII; R.A. Gauthier, *La morale d'Aristote*; H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle, The Nichomachean Ethics, A Commentary*, ed. by D. A. Rees; Frederick Siegler, “Reason, Happiness, and Goodness,” in *Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. by J. J. Walsh and H. L. Shapiro, pp. 30–46; G. E. M. Anscombe, “Thought and Action in Aristotle,” in *ibid.*, pp. 56–69. J. Donald Monan, *Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle*; W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*.

<sup>iv</sup> See, for example, Stuart Hampshire, “Fallacies in Moral Philosophy,” in *Contemporary Ethical Theory*, ed. by J. Margolis, pp. 158–159; W. F. R. Hardie, “The Final Good in Aristotle's *Ethics*,” in *Aristotle, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by J. M. E. Moravcsik, pp. 297–322; and Georg Henrik von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness*.

<sup>v</sup> See, for example, Veatch's rejection of Aristotle's overemphasis on contemplation or knowing for the sake of knowing: *op. cit.*, pp. 58–69. My one serious criticism of Veatch's interpretation of Aristotle is his identification of human

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happiness with human perfection—the perfection of the individual man as a man—rather than with the goodness of his life as a whole. See *ibid.*, pp. 69–71.

Even though they are not exclusively concerned with Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, two other books should be cited here as exceptions to the contemporary misinterpretation of its doctrine. One is by F.J.E. Woodbridge: *Aristotle’s Vision of Nature* (see Lecture IV); the other is by J.H. Randall, *Aristotle* (see Ch. 12).

<sup>vi</sup> In view of all the conflicting interpretations to which the book has been subject, I certainly cannot claim that mine is the right interpretation of its message. However, I think I can defend the statement that mine is an interpretation that produces a sound and practical moral philosophy, and one that has a great deal of wisdom.

<sup>vii</sup> *The Letters of William James*, ed. by his son Henry James, in two volumes: Vol. II, pp. 352–356.

<sup>viii</sup> See Note 2, *supra*.

<sup>ix</sup> See Note 2, *supra*.

<sup>x</sup> Professor von Wright tells us his reason for turning away from Aristotle’s teleological ethics in the direction of Mill’s utilitarianism. Having adopted a *teleological* position, he then distinguishes “between two main variants of this position in ethics. The one makes the notion of the good relative to the *nature* of man. The other makes it relative to the needs and wants of individual men. We could call the two variants the ‘objectivist’ and the ‘subjectivist’ variant respectively. I think it is right to say that Aristotle favored the first. Here my position differs from his and is, I think, more akin to that of some writers of the utilitarian tradition” (*op. cit.*, p. vi).

<sup>xi</sup> See *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I–II, QQ. 1–5.

<sup>xii</sup> See Jacques Maritain “Reflections on Moral Philosophy,” in *Science and Humanism*, pp. 137–220; and *Moral Philosophy*, Ch. 3, 5.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, pp. 194–248; *Ransoming the Time*, pp. 126–140; *The Range of Reason*, pp. 172–184.