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Egoism and *Eudaimonia*-Maximization in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

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1. Introduction

Is Aristotle an egoist? One of the most extended and insightful discussions of this admittedly vague question occurs in the second chapter of Richard Kraut's important book *Aristotle on the Human Good*.¹ Kraut argues that Aristotle is not an egoist. I will argue that Aristotle holds the following principle:

(AE) An ethically virtuous person always chooses a course of action that he believes promotes his own *eudaimonia* at least as much as any other course of action he could have chosen.

The claim that Aristotle holds such a principle conflicts with Kraut's interpretation of Aristotle's view. I am inclined to count (AE) as a brand of egoism, primarily on the grounds that it implies that sacrificing one's own *eudaimonia* for the sake of the *eudaimonia* of others is incompatible with complete ethical virtue. On such a view, a person who knowingly enhances the quality of the lives of others at the expense of the quality of his own life thereby reveals an *ethical defect* in his character. Nevertheless, (AE) is significantly different from the kind of egoism that is typically attributed to Aristotle. I am not particularly concerned with the issue of whether it is appropriate to apply the term 'egoistic' to Aristotle's ethical view. My main concern here is to make the case that Aristotle holds (AE) and that Kraut's non-egoistic interpretation of Aristotle is incorrect.

Before turning to that project, some remarks about (AE) are in order. First, the principle applies only to ethically virtuous persons. It is consistent with (AE) that non-virtuous persons sometimes perform actions that they know are not in their own best interest. Furthermore, (AE) is not a claim about what makes right or virtuous actions right or virtuous; instead, it is a claim about the sorts of choices a virtuous person makes. Notice also that (AE) does not imply that an ethically virtuous person is motivated exclusively by concern for her own *eudaimonia*. It is perfectly consistent with this principle, for instance, that a virtuous person is motivated by concern for the *eudaimonia* of others as well. Indeed, (AE) is not a claim about motivation at all. It claims only that a virtuous person always chooses certain actions that she believes have a certain feature, but it does not say that she chooses those actions *because* they have that feature. Still, the principle does imply that, when faced with a choice between doing what is best for herself and doing what is best for someone else, a virtuous person always chooses what is best for herself.

I will not be concerned here with the question of whether Aristotle's commitment to such a principle renders his ethical theory unacceptable.² It should be obvious, however, that a correct interpretation of Aristotle's views on issues related to egoism is essential for an adequate understanding and proper evaluation of his ethical system as a whole.

The strongest evidence that Aristotle holds (AE) is found in NE 9.8. In what follows I offer an interpretation of that chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and explain how Aristotle's remarks there shows that he holds (AE). I then turn to Kraut's arguments for the view that Aristotle is not an egoist and illustrate where they go wrong.

2. NE 9.8

This crucial section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is devoted to the question of "whether one should love oneself most of all, or someone else" (NE 1168a29).³ Aristotle presents arguments on both sides of the issue, beginning with the case for the view that we ought to love others most of all:

[P]eople criticize those who love themselves above all, and they label them 'self-lovers', as a reproach. And a bad person, it seems, does everything for his own

sake, and the more wicked he is the more he is like that...whereas a good person acts on account of what is noble, and, the better he is, the more he acts on account of what is noble and for the sake of a friend, and thus he disregards his own interests. (NE 1168a30-35)

The two main claims of the passage are these:

- (A) A person who loves himself the most is wicked.
- (B) A good person acts on account of what is noble and acts for the sake of his friends.

On the assumption that we ought to be as good as we can be, the two principles seem to support the view that we ought to love our friends more than we love ourselves. The passage is immediately followed by an argument for the opposite view. The argument is based on the principle that “one ought to love most of all the person who is most of all one’s friend” (NE 1168b2). Since each of us is his own friend more than is any other person, it follows that each of us should love himself the most.

Having presented opposing arguments, Aristotle suggests that the way to proceed is to “make a distinction and determine to what extent and in what respect each set of arguments is true” (NE 1168b10-15). He distinguishes between two kinds of self-lovers, whom I shall refer to respectively as a *base self-lover* and a *true self-lover*. In its ordinary sense, ‘self-lover’ refers to a base self-lover, and when used in this sense it is a “term of reproach” (NE 1168b15). But in fact the other type of self-lover is actually “more of a self-lover” (NE 1168b30). To see why, we need to understand how Aristotle conceives of the two types of self-lovers.

Base self-lovers are “those who allot to themselves the greater share when it comes to money and honours and bodily pleasures” (NE 1168b15). The true self-lover, by contrast, is “always acquiring what is noble for himself” (NE 1168b25) and “assigns to himself the noblest things and the best goods” (NE 1168b30). One important difference, then, between the two kinds is that a base self-lover values material goods, honors, and bodily pleasures most of all whereas a pure self-lover values ethically virtuous activity most of all. Aristotle thinks that ethically virtuous activity is more valuable than wealth, honor, and bodily pleasure. As the conclusion of the *ergon* argument in NE 1.7 indicates, *eudaimonia* is “activity of soul in accordance with excellence” (NE 1098a15).⁴ Ethically virtuous activity is a type of *eudaimonia*: wealth, honor, and bodily pleasure are, at best, contributors to *eudaimonia* and not *eudaimonia* itself.⁵ This means that what the true self-lover is most concerned to secure for himself is better than what the base self-lover is most concerned to secure for himself. For this reason, the way in which a true self-lover loves himself is more appropriately characterized as self-love than is the way in which a base self-lover loves himself.⁶

A second difference between the two has to do with which part of themselves each loves the most. The base self-lover loves the non-rational part of his soul the most (NE 1168b20), whereas the true egoist loves his *nous* the most.⁷ Since “each person is this [*nous*], or is this most of all” (NE 1169a) it follows that the part of his soul that the true self-lover loves the most is him (or at least is him in the truest sense), whereas the part of his soul that the base self-lover loves the most is not him (or at least is not him in the truest sense). Again, the point is that true self-love is primary whereas base self-love is derivative.

Aristotle further suggests that a true self-lover is ethically superior to a base self-lover. Because the former is concerned most of all with engaging in ethically virtuous activity, no one will find fault with him (NE 1168b30). He resembles an ethically virtuous person in that (i) he values ethically virtuous activity most of all and (ii) he loves his *nous* most of all (NE 1169a). Aristotle eventually concludes that “he [the ethically virtuous person] would be most of all a self-lover” (NE 1169a, [...] my addition). True self-love is a facet of complete ethical virtue.

We are now ready for the answer to the central question of the chapter. It turns out that what one ought to do – where one’s obligations lie – depends on the sort of person one is:

[H]e [the ethically virtuous person] differs from the other sort of self-lover as much as living by reason differs from living by emotion, and desiring what is noble differs from desiring what is reputed to be advantageous. So then, everyone approves of and praises those who distinguish themselves in their eagerness for noble actions. And if everyone were to vie for what is noble and strive to do the noblest things, then everything in public life would be as it should, and each person would individually obtain the greatest goods – if indeed virtue is that sort of thing. It follows that a good person should be a self-lover, since by doing noble deeds, he will make himself better off and benefit others; but a bad person should not, since he will harm both himself and those around him by following his bad inclinations. (NE 1169a3-15, [...] my addition)

Aristotle's answer to the question of whether a person should love himself or someone else most of all is as follows. If you are a virtuous person, you ought to love yourself the most, thereby exhibiting true self-love. A virtuous person who loves himself the most will seek to maximize his own level of ethically virtuous activity. This will benefit him, since it brings him *eudaimonia*, and it will benefit others as well. On the other hand, if you are a vicious person, you should love others the most. A vicious person's self-love is base self-love, and hence a wicked person who loves himself the most will seek to maximize his own material wealth, honor, and bodily pleasure. This will harm both the wicked man and his neighbors. Virtuous persons who love themselves the most tend to produce good consequences for all involved, whereas vicious persons who love themselves the most tend to produce bad consequences for all involved. Therefore, the virtuous ought to love themselves the most and the vicious ought to love others the most.

Immediately after the passage cited above, Aristotle notes that not only ought an ethically virtuous person love himself more than others, he will in fact do so. Then, in a very important remark, we are given this explanation of *why* this is so: "Every mind [*nous*] chooses what is best for itself, and a good person submits to his mind" (NE 1169a15).

Aristotle does not say merely that *nous* always chooses what is *good* for itself; he says that *nous* always chooses what is *best* for itself. Since he has earlier claimed that a person is (or is most of all) his *nous*, it would seem to follow that he holds that an ethically virtuous person always chooses not just what is *good* for himself but what is *best* for himself. Of course the "most of all" qualification makes this conclusion somewhat tentative but, as we shall see, it is supported by what is said later in NE 9.8.

The question posed at the beginning of the chapter has now been answered. Surprisingly, perhaps, the chapter continues. To see why, recall the two principles Aristotle presented in favor of the view that we ought to love others the most:

- (A) A person who loves himself the most is wicked.
- (B) A good person acts on account of what is noble and acts for the sake of his friends.

(A) has been dealt with; it is true in one sense and false in another. If (A) is a claim about base self-love then it is true; if it is a claim about true self-love then it is false. We should strive to love ourselves as the true self-lover loves himself, obeying our *nous* in all matters and pursuing virtuous activity above all else. But (B) has not yet explicitly been dealt with. For this reason, the chapter must go on.⁸ What is Aristotle's attitude toward (B)? He says:

It is true of a good person...that he does many things for the sake of his friends and his fatherland, even, if necessary, dying for them, since he will give up money and honours and, in a word, the 'fought-over' goods, in acquiring what is noble for himself. (NE 1169a15-25)

Aristotle does not merely affirm (B); he argues for its truth. He argues for (B) by providing an explanation of *why* an ethically virtuous person will act on behalf of his friends and fatherland.

To understand the remainder of NE 9.8, it is crucial to see that Aristotle is not just describing *how* an ethically virtuous person acts; he is also explaining *why* an ethically virtuous person acts as he does.⁹

In the passage quoted above it is noted that a virtuous person will give up money and honor in exchange for "what is noble." The point is expanded upon later:

He [a virtuous person] gives up money on condition that his friends receive more, since the friend gets money, but he gets what is noble; thus he assigns the greater good to himself. It works the same way with honours and positions of authority: he will give up all of these things for his friend, since that is noble and praiseworthy for himself. It is quite understandable, then, that he is thought to be good, since he chooses what is noble in exchange for anything else. (NE 1169a25-30, [...] my addition).¹⁰

An ethically virtuous person rightly values ethically virtuous activity more than he values money, honors, and public office. For this reason, he is always willing to give away the latter in exchange for the former. The passage shows that Aristotle holds:

- (P1) Whenever faced with a choice between securing virtuous activity for himself and securing some other type of good for himself, a virtuous person will choose the virtuous activity.

The passage cited above says nothing about cases in which a virtuous person must choose between greater and lesser amounts of ethically virtuous activity. The passage that immediately follows, however, does:

It is possible to give up actions too for a friend, and it is possible that it be nobler to become the cause of a friend's acting than to act oneself. . . Hence, when it comes to any praiseworthy thing, a good person evidently allots more of what is noble to himself. (NE 1169a30-35, my emphasis)

Here we find the suggestion that an ethically virtuous person will do more than give wealth, honor, and public office to his friend. He will also, when faced with a choice between performing an ethically virtuous action himself and enabling his friend to perform that very action, allow his friend to perform the action rather than perform it himself. Why will he do this? For a given virtuous action V, enabling one's friend to perform V is more ethically virtuous than performing V oneself. So, in enabling his friend to perform the virtuous action, an ethically virtuous person actually acts more virtuously than his friend does. In this way, he assigns the larger share of virtuous activity to himself and, once again, gets the better end of the bargain. The passage illustrates Aristotle's commitment to this principle:

- (P2) Whenever faced with a choice between securing a lesser and a greater amount of ethically virtuous activity for himself, an ethically virtuous person will always choose the greater amount of ethically virtuous activity.

The view that has emerged, then, is as follows. An ethically virtuous person seeks to maximize the overall virtuousness of her own life.¹¹ Since one's own *eudaimonia* is in direct proportion with the overall virtuousness of one's life, and an ethically virtuous person knows this, she always performs actions that she believes maximize her own *eudaimonia*. An ethically virtuous person does not just perform noble actions; she performs the *noblest* actions that she can. She does not merely perform actions that are good for her; she performs actions that are *best* for her. We can conclude, therefore, that in NE 9.8 Aristotle is committed to the principle I introduced at the outset:

(AE) An ethically virtuous person always chooses a course of action that he believes promotes his own *eudaimonia* at least as much as any other course of action he could have chosen.

(P1) and (P2) do not strictly entail (AE), but I think that when placed in the context of the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's commitment to the first two principles shows that he is committed to (AE). To support this position, we may consider a way of interpreting Aristotle according to which he holds (P1) and (P2) but not (AE). This interpretation agrees with mine that on Aristotle's view, a virtuous person always performs the noblest or most virtuous action that he can. But on the alternative account, a virtuous person does not realize that doing so most promotes his own *eudaimonia*. As long as the person can identify the most virtuous option in a given situation and always chooses that option because it is the most virtuous, he is a virtuous person. He need not have any view at all on the nature of *eudaimonia*.

The rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* reveals that this interpretation fails. For instance, a person is ethically virtuous only if he has the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (NE 1144b30-35). *Phronesis* is characterized as the capacity to deliberate well about "what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general" (NE 1140a25-30). *Phronesis* is the ability to figure out how best to secure *eudaimonia* for oneself. And surely one cannot have this ability unless one has an accurate conception of the nature of *eudaimonia*. Hence, Aristotle holds that a virtuous person does have a view about the nature of *eudaimonia*. Without such a view he would not have *phronesis* and hence would not be ethically virtuous. The following passage confirms this interpretation:

[E]ach disposition has its own corresponding range of fine things and pleasant things, and presumably what most distinguishes the good person is his ability to see what is true in every set of circumstances, being like a carpenter's rule or measure for them. (NE 1113a30-35)

Different types of people have different views on *eudaimonia*. One thing that is distinctive of an ethically virtuous person is that his view about *eudaimonia* is correct. This idea is also evident in the following remark about a virtuous person's attitude toward his own death:

[T]he greater the extent to which he possesses excellence in its entirety, and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the prospect of death; for to such a person, most of all, is living worth while, and this person will *knowingly* be depriving himself of goods of the greatest kind, which is something to be pained at. (NE 1117b10-15, my emphasis)

Because a virtuous person's life is filled with virtuous activity, he has the most to lose in death. We are explicitly told that a virtuous person *knows* this. Surely the idea is that he knows this precisely because he knows that ethically virtuous activity is a kind of *eudaimonia* and his death would mean the end of his virtuous activity. It seems clear, therefore, that Aristotle holds (AE).

We might wonder if he also holds a stronger principle:

(AE') An ethically virtuous person always chooses a course of action that he believes promotes his own *eudaimonia* at least as much as any other course of action he could have chosen, and he chooses such a course of action precisely *because* it has this feature.

The properties of *being such as to maximize the overall virtuousness of one's life* and *being such as to maximize one's own eudaimonia*, even if necessarily co-extensive, are conceptually distinct. Therefore, it may be consistent with the passages we have considered thus far that a virtuous person chooses the actions he does because they have the former property but not because they have the latter. Although he will *know* that the actions he chooses have the latter property, he will not choose them *because* they have this property. In general, a person can choose to perform a given action, A, and know that A has feature F, and yet not perform A

because it has F. For instance, I have known for many years that every action I perform has this property: being such as to disturb some oxygen molecules. Yet I have never performed an action *because* it has that property. So, while I think there is sufficient evidence to attribute (AE) to Aristotle, and that NE 9.8 is consistent with and, I would say, at least hints at (AE'), I am not sure that we can confidently attribute the stronger principle to him.

3. Kraut on Aristotle's Egoism

Richard Kraut maintains that Aristotle is not an egoist. Specifically, Kraut identifies three types of egoism – pure egoism, combative egoism, and benign egoism – and argues that Aristotle does not hold any of these three forms of egoism. Kraut's favored interpretation is inconsistent with (AE). He writes:

I should emphasize that egoism, as I construe it, is a doctrine that enjoins us to give priority to our own well-being by choosing the act that *maximizes* our good...It is therefore possible to deny that Aristotle is an egoist, but at the same time to take him to be saying that one should always promote one's good *to some extent*. For he might believe that every act undertaken by an ideal agent – someone who fully understands what happiness is and how it is achieved – will be in that agent's interest, though not necessarily in his maximal interest. And in fact I think that this is Aristotle's view. (*Human Good*, 84-85)

On Kraut's view Aristotle holds that a fully virtuous person may sometimes "rightly give priority to the well-being of others, and accept less happiness for [himself] than [he] might have had" (*Human Good*, 86). Kraut (rightly, I think) attributes to Aristotle the views that (i) how good a person's life is for that person is entirely a function of the amount of *eudaimonia* in that person's life and (ii) *eudaimonia* comes in two varieties, theoretical contemplation and ethically virtuous activity, the former being superior to the latter (*Human Good*, 47, 64).¹² So, if Kraut is right that on Aristotle's view an ethically virtuous person is sometimes willing to accept a lesser amount of *eudaimonia* so that someone else might have a greater amount of *eudaimonia*, then Aristotle holds that an ethically virtuous person sometimes chooses a course of action that benefits him less than some other course of action he could have chosen. And this conflicts with (AE).

In the next section I examine the textual evidence from Aristotle that Kraut offers in support of his position and show that the passages Kraut discusses are consistent with my proposed interpretation of NE 9.8.

4. Politics and Friendship

One piece of evidence Kraut appeals to is Aristotle's view on ostracism as put forth in *Politics* 3.13. Ostracism is "the device by means of which the citizens of certain Greek cities could vote to expel one of their members for a fixed period of time (often ten years), even though that citizen had violated no law" (*Human Good*, 92). As Kraut reads him, Aristotle holds that ostracism is acceptable and just when "the citizen who is being expelled does not excel all others in virtue, though he nonetheless has far more power than they, because of some superiority in external goods" (*Human Good*, 92). Kraut further notes that Aristotle supports the claim that ostracism is just in such cases on the grounds that it is better for the community as a whole: "[I]f some one citizen's presence would detract from the well-being of the rest of the community, then he can justly be excluded" (*Human Good*, 93).

How, exactly, might Aristotle's views on ostracism conflict with (AE)? Kraut's idea is that ostracism makes the one who is ostracized worse off than he would be otherwise. So, if one is justly ostracized, willingly accepts that ostracism, and leaves the city for the required amount of time, one willingly sacrifices one's own *eudaimonia* for the sake of the *eudaimonia* of others. As Kraut puts it, "[t]he victim of ostracism cannot lead a political life for a long period of time, and Aristotle would have to be remarkably stupid not to realize that this might not be in that person's best interests" (*Human Good*, 95). An ethically virtuous person might willingly accept

ostracism, thereby choosing a course of action that benefits him less than some other course of action he could have chosen.

To see where this line of reasoning goes wrong, we must distinguish two claims that Kraut appears to conflate. The first is the claim that (i) a person who is justly ostracized is better off than he would have been if he had not been justly ostracized. The other is the claim that (ii) given that one has been justly ostracized, of the available alternatives, the one that is best for the victim is willing acceptance of the ostracism. Kraut thinks that Aristotle would reject (i). But such a rejection makes no trouble for Aristotle's commitment to (AE). It is rather Aristotle's stance with respect to (ii) that is relevant here. If he can endorse (ii), then, regardless of his position on (i), he can consistently maintain both (AE) and the view that an ethically virtuous person will freely accept a just ostracism. The question before us, then, is this: Can Aristotle endorse (ii)?

To answer this question, we can note that there seem to be two alternatives available to someone who has been justly ostracized: accept the ostracism or not. Since the ostracism is just, one acts justly by accepting it. By not accepting it, one presumably acts unjustly. On Aristotle's view, ethically virtuous activity is one kind of *eudaimonia*. Engaging in ethically virtuous activity makes one's life good. Another part of Aristotle's view that is less emphasized both by Aristotle himself and by his commentators is that engaging in ethically vicious activity makes one's life bad. Vicious activity is a kind of anti-*eudaimonia*. This idea is evident in a remark found in NE 1.11: "If one's activities are what determines the quality of one's life, as we have said, no one who is blessed will become miserable; for he will never do what is hateful and vile" (NE 1100b35). By accepting the ostracism, then, the victim engages in virtuous activity, whereas by unjustly clinging to his power, he engages in vicious activity. This suggests that accepting the ostracism may be the best alternative available to him.¹³

This response, however, may be too fast, for, as Kraut notes, by accepting the ostracism, the victim deprives himself of the opportunity for political activity (ethically virtuous activity on a grand scale) for a long period of time. Perhaps, then, it would be better for the victim to cling unjustly to power. In this way, he gains some unhappiness by acting unjustly, but this is outweighed by the political activity he gains by staying in power. To counter this line of reasoning we must consider another passage from NE 9.8:

[H]e [an ethically virtuous person] would choose to . . . live nobly for a year, rather than as chance may have it for many years; and to do one noble and great action rather than many insignificant ones. This is presumably what happens with those who die for others: they choose, then, some especially noble thing for themselves. (NE 1169a20-25, [...] my addition).

If Aristotle would have to be stupid not to realize that ostracism would deprive its victim of political activity for a long period of time, he would have to be a complete fool not to realize that death would deprive its victim of such activity forever. Yet in this passage he suggests that despite this, one may achieve a high level of virtuous activity by sacrificing one's life. The more general point here is that by performing a single great action one can achieve a higher level of *eudaimonia* than one would by performing a bunch of less significant ones.¹⁴ We must, then, consider this question: How great an action would the willing acceptance of just ostracism be?

By accepting a just ostracism, one not only acts justly but also enables one's fellow citizens to engage in a greater amount of political activity than they could otherwise. This is a case, then, of stepping aside and enabling others to engage in virtuous activity – the very sort of thing Aristotle says an ethically virtuous person will do because "it be nobler to become the cause of a friend's acting than to act oneself" (NE 1169a30-35). It is therefore open to Aristotle to maintain that by stepping aside, the ostracized citizen "allots more of what is noble to himself" (NE 1169a35).¹⁵ Moreover, to secure the good for "one person on his own is satisfactory enough, [but] to do it for a nation or for cities is finer and more godlike" (NE 1094b8-10, [...]) my addition). And, in light of what is said in NE 9.8, it seems that standing aside and allowing one's fellow citizens to secure the good for an entire nation is nobler still! For these reasons, the

willing acceptance of a just ostracism would be, in Aristotle's eyes, an "especially noble thing" (NE 1169a25).

Just as sacrificing one's life may be a great action and the alternative that most benefits its agent, so may the willing acceptance of just ostracism, which can be understood as a kind of temporary political suicide. Kraut himself elsewhere acknowledges Aristotle's commitment to the view that enabling others to engage in virtuous activity is more virtuous than engaging in that activity yourself (*Human Good*, 124). But this principle would allow Aristotle to say that accepting his fate is the best alternative available to someone who has been justly ostracized. He can indeed accept (ii).¹⁶

As Kraut points out, Aristotle seeks to make the case that ostracism is sometimes just by showing that it sometimes benefits the community as a whole. He does not seek to show that ostracism is sometimes just by arguing that it is sometimes best for the person who is ostracized. Kraut thinks that this fact is telling:

[S]urely his claim that in all the crafts we look not to each individual component, but to the well-functioning of the whole, suggests that he saw the obvious: a defense of ostracism cannot rest on the claim that this will be best for the person expelled. (*Human Good*, 95)

Again, it is important not to conflate (i) a person who is justly ostracized is better off than he would have been if he had not been justly ostracized with (ii) given that one has been justly ostracized, of the available alternatives, the one that is best for the victim is willing acceptance of the ostracism. Even if Aristotle rejects (i) he may hold (ii) – and if he does, then his views on ostracism are consistent with (AE). Still, perhaps Kraut's point may be put this way: If Aristotle does hold (ii), why does he not appeal to it in arguing for the justness of ostracism in certain cases? Does not the lack of such an appeal suggest that Aristotle does not in fact hold (ii)?

The answer is no. The argument that willing acceptance is sometimes the best alternative for one who has been ostracized *relies* on the premise that ostracism is sometimes just. For this reason, Aristotle could not use (ii) as a premise in an argument for the justness of ostracism – such reasoning would be viciously circular. But once the justness of ostracism has been established on independent grounds, the way is open for the argument outlined above. And, when we look to NE 9.8, the crucial section that Kraut acknowledges is the only section of the corpus in which Aristotle directly raises "the question of how strong one's love for oneself should be, in comparison with one's love of others" (*Human Good*, 115), we find passages that suggest the sort of argument sketched above. I conclude that Aristotle's views on ostracism are perfectly consistent with his commitment to (AE). Kraut's argument from ostracism fails.

Another of Kraut's arguments is based on Aristotle's commitment to the principle that "when the citizens are equal in virtue, then it is just for all to take equal turns in sharing office" (*Human Good*, 98). Kraut would have it that "[b]y endorsing the idea that political power and office should be shared equally among equals, Aristotle commits himself to the rejection of all forms of egoism" (*Human Good*, 98). Kraut holds that when the political principle is combined with other parts of Aristotle's view it commits him to the rejection of (AE):

Good citizenship in a community of equals requires a rotating division of labor between rules and ruled, but for anyone who equates happiness with the exercise of practical virtue, it is better to occupy the former position than the latter...among those who lead a political life, those who occupy high office more frequently are better off than those who do so less frequently. (*Human Good*, 99-100)

The idea is that when one's term is up and when stands aside, one is thereby accepting a lower level of *eudaimonia* for oneself than one could have had otherwise. But this view can be dealt with in much the same way that Aristotle's views on ostracism were dealt with. In standing aside, one acts justly. Moreover, one enables others to engage in virtuous activity and so it is

open to Aristotle to suggest that in so doing a citizen "allots more of what is noble to himself" (NE 1169a35).¹⁷ The choice between standing aside when one's term is up and refusing is, like the choice between accepting a just ostracism and clinging to power, a choice between performing a just action that enables others to engage in virtuous activity on the one hand and engaging in vicious activity on the other. The claim that the former sort of action is better for its agent than is the latter is perfectly in line with NE 9.8.

The question of which political arrangements are just is distinct from the question of how an ethically virtuous person acts. Aristotle's commitment to the idea that justice sometimes requires those with political power to stand aside so that others can act politically in no way conflicts with the claim that an ethically virtuous person always chooses what is best for himself. The two ideas are reconciled in part by the principle Aristotle proposes at the end of NE 9.8: Standing aside and enabling others to perform a given virtuous action is more virtuous than performing that action oneself. Sometimes the way to maximize one's own *eudaimonia* is to stand aside. The virtuous citizen realizes this, and for this reason will gladly stand aside when justice requires him to do so. Aristotle's political views do not conflict with (AE).¹⁸

Kraut's case does not rest entirely on Aristotle's political views. Kraut also argues that certain parts of Aristotle's views on friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* show that Aristotle is not an egoist. For example, he draws attention to various remarks Aristotle makes about how we should treat other people. We should not give the same amount of honor to our mother and our father, but rather should give each the appropriate amount (*Human Good*, 111). We should exhibit a certain amount of loyalty to our friends even if their ethical character deteriorates. (*Human Good*, 113). We should be reluctant to share our sorrows with our friends since this will cause them to suffer as well (*Human Good*, 113-114).

Kraut thinks that Aristotle's commitment to these principles shows that he is not an egoist. For instance, Kraut says that, from an egoist perspective, "[l]oyalty would not be a consideration: why should one spend time on a person who is becoming worse, when one can achieve greater gains with someone who is one's equal?" (*Human Good*, 113) And Kraut argues that if Aristotle were an egoist, "then we would expect him to think about [sharing pain with one's friends] in the following way: Each time I suffer a misfortune, I should share it with my friend. That will lessen my pain" (*Human Good*, 114).

But the Aristotelian remarks Kraut points to do not conflict with (AE). So, for example, Aristotle claims that it is virtuous to remain faithful to an ethically deteriorating friend and vicious to abandon him. If this is right, then an ethically virtuous person will of course remain faithful to his friend. In so doing he acts virtuously and avoids acting viciously, and hence performs the action that most promotes his own *eudaimonia*. Kraut is mistaken when he writes that "the egoistic project of maximizing one's own good is one that looks exclusively to the present and future, and disregards the past" (*Human Good*, 112). Since what is virtuous in the present may depend in part on the past, an ethically virtuous egoist – a true egoist – will often look to the past.¹⁹ A person who ignores the past and looks only to the future is likely to break some of his obligations grounded in the past, thereby doing what is hateful and vile and hence becoming miserable. (AE) is not only consistent with the notion that an ethically virtuous person will be concerned with the past; it offers an *explanation* for that sort of concern.

Similarly, if it is virtuous to keep one's sorrows to oneself and vicious to trouble one's friends with them, an ethically virtuous person will keep his sorrows to himself. (AE) does not imply that an ethically virtuous person would share his sorrows, knowing it is vicious to do so, in order to decrease his own amount of pain. To think that it does is to treat Aristotle as conceiving of an ethically virtuous person as a hedonist – as one who tries to maximize his own pleasure and who would choose pleasure over virtuous action. But of course to reason this way is to miss one of the central points of NE 9.8. An ethically virtuous person is not someone who seeks to maximize his own pleasure. Rather, he is a "lover of excellence" (NE 1099a10) who always "chooses what is noble in exchange for anything else" (NE 1169a30-35). Kraut's argument proves at most that an ethically virtuous person is not a hedonistic egoist. But this is a point that Aristotle himself takes great pains to make, and it in no way conflicts with (AE).

An ethically virtuous person will honor his parents as he should, he will remain faithful to his friends even if their character deteriorates, and he will keep his sorrows to himself. He will do each of these things because it is virtuous to act in these ways and vicious to act otherwise, and he knows that *eudaimonia* lies in virtuous activity and misery lies in vicious activity. Like his political views, Aristotle's views on friendship are consistent with (AE).

5. Conclusion

I have argued that there is strong textual evidence for the view that Aristotle holds (AE). Kraut's arguments that certain of Aristotle's political views and views on friendship show that Aristotle is not an egoist are unsuccessful. None of the Aristotelian views that Kraut discusses conflicts with (AE). I conclude, then, that Aristotle holds (AE). I leave the discussion of the implications of this for the plausibility of his ethical view for another time.

NOTES

1. R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good [Human Good]* (Princeton, 1989), 78-154.
2. For relevant discussions, see J. Annas, "Self-Love in Aristotle," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXVII, suppl. (1998), 1-18, R. Kraut, "Comments on Julia Annas's 'Self-Love in Aristotle'," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXVII, suppl. (1998), 19-23, and P. Gottlieb, "Aristotle's Ethical Egoism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 77 (1996), 1-18.
3. The English translations of passages from Book IX of *Nicomachean Ethics* are from M. Pakaluk, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX [Books VIII and IX]* (Oxford, 1998).
4. English translations of passages outside of book IX are from S. Broadie and C. Rowe, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2002).
5. Such a view is not universally accepted. But it is accepted by Kraut; see, for example, *Human Good*, 47, 64. The claim here is that *bodily* pleasure is not a component of *eudaimonia*; other types of pleasure may be.
6. Both types are concerned to secure for themselves what they *take* to be the greatest good – presumably this is what gives each some right to the title of 'self-lover'.
7. What '*nous*' refers to in this section is a matter of debate. Kraut maintains that it refers to practical reason (p. 128). J. Cooper, on the other hand, maintains that it refers to the entire rational part of the soul. See his *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (Hackett, 1986), 170. C. Kahn seems to take a similar view in "Aristotle and Altruism," *Mind* 90 (1981), 20-40. Both possibilities are consistent with my position so we need not resolve this issue here.
8. In addition to addressing (B), the remainder of NE 9.8 also provides support for Aristotle's earlier claim that "if everyone were to vie for what is noble and strive to do the noblest things, then everything in public life would be as it should" (NE 1169a5-10). In this way, the remainder of NE 9.8 provides further support for the consequentialist argument Aristotle makes earlier.
9. Pakaluk appears to construe Aristotle's goal in the remainder of NE 9.8 to be to show that "typically and in general, a good person loves himself more than others, and that this is a good condition to be in and worth pursuing" (*Books VIII and IX*, 196). While a full discussion of Pakaluk's interpretation is beyond the scope of this paper, I should note that it appears that Pakaluk would reject the claim that Aristotle's remarks in NE 9.8 commit him to (AE); see, in particular, page 199.
10. These remarks correspond with Aristotle's comments on generosity and munificence in NE 4.1-2. He characterizes a generous person as someone who "does not value money for itself, but for the purpose of giving" (NE 1120b15-20). He notes that a munificent person "will incur. . . expenditure for the sake of the fine, since this is a shared feature of the excellences" (NE 1122b5). The implication is clear in both cases: the virtuous person prefers virtuous action to wealth.
11. I take that *being virtuous* is a property that (i) actions and activities can have and (ii) comes in varying degrees. One action may be more virtuous than another, although both are virtuous. If we think of a life as an activity consisting of various activities and actions, then we can say that lives, too, have varying degrees of virtuousness. It is the overall virtuousness of her own life that an ethically virtuous person seeks to maximize. It should also be pointed out that on Aristotle's view, the overall virtuousness of a life is not merely a sum of the virtuousness of the various actions that make up that life. His axiology is holistic; see NE 1169a20-25 and section 4

below. Matters are further complicated by the infamous NE 10.6-8; I will not seek to resolve these complications here. In NE 9.8, Aristotle appears to ignore the later complications. In interpreting NE 9.8, therefore, I will do likewise.

12. The literature on Aristotle's views on the nature of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is extensive. The implications of Aristotle's commitment to (AE) to the view that the highest form of *eudaimonia* is theoretical contemplation, while important, are beyond the scope of the present paper.

13. R. McKerlie seems to attribute this sort of view to Aristotle in "Aristotle and Egoism" ["Egoism"], *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXXVI (1998), 554, note 19. McKerlie thinks the view is inadequate. I agree, but I also think a better view is available to Aristotle. I describe this view below.

14. This is the holistic feature of Aristotle's view alluded to in note 11 above. McKerlie seems to overlook this aspect of Aristotle's view: "Despite its value as a noble deed the act of heroic bravery may make my life as a whole worse in terms of *eudaimonia* if it prematurely ends a life that would otherwise have been spent in philosophical contemplation or political leadership" ("Egoism," 544). A shorter life that ends in a heroic sacrifice may be better than a longer life of virtuous activity. And, the more one gives up, the greater and more virtuous is the sacrifice.

15. In an important footnote on page 95 (note 22), Kraut acknowledges that by willingly leaving the *polis*, the victim acts justly. But he doesn't seem to notice the connection between the willing acceptance of ostracism and Aristotle's suggestion that standing aside and enabling others to engage in a given virtuous action is more virtuous than performing that action oneself.

16. I remind the reader that the issue here is only what Aristotle's views are, not whether those views are correct. I make no claims about the plausibility of (ii); I claim only that it is reasonable to attribute it to Aristotle.

17. As before, Kraut notes that one acts justly by standing aside when one's term is up (*Human Good*, 102, note 33). This time he even notes the connection between Aristotle's political views and the idea that enabling others to act virtuously is the more virtuous action (*Human Good*, 125, note 49). But he doesn't seem to notice how damaging this connection is to his position.

18. Kraut also appeals to certain remarks Aristotle makes about slaves, women, and children to support his position (*Human Good*, 104-113). Kraut suggests that Aristotle holds that each of these types of persons will sometimes choose a course of action that is less beneficial for themselves than another course of action they could have taken. Even if this is correct, it is perfectly consistent with (AE), since, on Aristotle's view, slaves, women, and children cannot attain genuine ethical virtue.

19. McKerlie makes this point ("Egoism", 551, note 7).

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