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To understand Aristotle's conception of how to live *the good life*, first we must first understand Aristotle's conception *the good*. Aristotle proposes two primary criteria that he argues must define *the good*: completeness and self-sufficiency.

To explain his criteria of completeness, Aristotle first posits that every action and choice aims at some kind of end. In medicine, the end being aimed at is health; in carpentry, it may be a finished chair or table; in war, it is victory, etc. Each of these ends Aristotle considers to be a kind of good. However, these goods are not what Aristotle would consider the chief or universal good that we are seeking to define. We would not say that making an excellent chair is the universal good, for instance. Yet, recognizing that there are multitudes of goods, we can understand that most goods must be aimed at for the sake of another good. Consider that a carpenter might want to make an excellent chair so that he can sell it, and he might want to sell it so that he can afford a home, and he might want to be able to afford a home to be able to make his family safe and comfortable, and so on. Because each of these goods are aimed at some greater good, Aristotle considers them *incomplete*.

If there is a chief or ultimate good, Aristotle argues it must be *complete*. Aristotle segments completeness into four tiers. The lowest tier, or the least complete, are goods that are desirable for the sake of something else, like the making of the excellent chair, which is desirable for the sake of money, a home, a good family life, etc. A tier above the least complete goods are goods worthy of pursuit in and of themselves (but might also be desirable for the sake of something else, too). For instance, the pleasure from sex might be aimed at in and of itself, but that pleasure perhaps also aims at putting the person experiencing that pleasure in a better mood than the mood they were in before having sex. A tier above this are goods that are never aimed at for anything besides themselves. Lastly, the highest tier of completeness consists in goods that are never aimed at for anything besides themselves and that are *always* desirable or aimed at.

So, we can synthesize Aristotle's criteria for the highest form of completeness into three primary requirements: the good must be desirable for itself, it must not be desirable for the sake of another good, and it must always be desirable. If there is an ultimate good, it must be the good that most meets these criteria. Aristotle contends that there is only one good that could possibly meet these criteria of absolute completeness: happiness (note: In Aristotle's terms, happiness is not a subjective mental state, but rather a life of flourishing and success). While wealth, honor, pleasure, etc. might all be aimed at for themselves, they also must invariably aim at living well, or else why would they be aimed at? Thus, while they are partly complete, they still aim at another good, so they are not wholly complete. Happiness, on the other hand, is what all other ends implicitly aim at always (everything is done ultimately for the end of living well), therefore happiness, and only happiness (because all other ends are incomplete given that they aim at happiness), meets Aristotle's criteria for absolute completeness.

Aristotle does not find this argument alone satisfactory to deem happiness the ultimate good, for he contests that a complete good must necessarily be entirely self-sufficient as well. By self-sufficiency, Aristotle does not mean solitary or lacking the need for other people. Instead, the self-sufficient life is the life which, if isolated with all that it constitutes, would be lacking in nothing. In other words, if nothing could be added to a life, the self-sufficient life would not be negatively altered or deficient because, by definition, it lacks nothing, so there would be nothing valuable that could be added. The good life, then, must entail self-sufficiency because if it were truly the most desirable life, then it should not be able to be made better by anything additional beyond what it contains. Therefore, it is evident that whatever is the most complete good would also be self-sufficient, because the most complete good aims at nothing besides itself, is always desired, and all other ends aim at it. Nothing can be added to a life with the complete good because any good added would aim at the complete good, which the life with the complete good already contains. Happiness, thus, satisfies both criteria of the ultimate good, because it is the most complete good, and by subsequent, entirely self-sufficient.

But, to say that happiness is what constitutes the good life is not very helpful. The question of "well, what does a life of happiness consist of?" lingers. To address this question, Aristotle offers what is known as his function argument.

The argument begins with the premise that for all things that have a function, the good or 'well' reside in the function, specifically in doing the function well. For instance, a carpenter is a good carpenter because he builds well, building being his function. So, from this Aristotle concludes that if man has a function, the universal good for man must lie in doing his function well. To demonstrate what man's function is, Aristotle seeks what is peculiar to man. The implicit assumption here is that whatever is peculiar to man must be his function. Well, the life of nutrition and growth are common to all living things, even plants, so nutrition and growth cannot be man's function. Perception is common to all animals, so perception too cannot be man's function. Next in Aristotle's hierarchy of function is rational principle, which no other being is known to possess aside from humans. So, rational principle is man's function, given Aristotle's implicit premise that what is peculiar to man must be his function. Also, given Aristotle's premise that the good lies in executing one's function well, exercising reason well , therefore, must be the universal human good. Therefore, the good life, for Aristotle, consists in excellent use of reason.

Aristotle believes that, in the course of a good life in which one uses excellent reasoning, there will be three primary aspects, or constituents, that mark the good life. The first is the *use* of virtue or excellence. Aristotle believes there is no good in simply possessing excellence. If we simply possess the capacity for excellent reason, our life could still be equated with the life of an individual who is perpetually asleep. We would not say that the sleeping person lives well, just as the person who merely possesses virtue or excellence but does not exercise it does not live well. The second is the presence of pleasure. When we engage in activities that we love, Aristotle contests, we derive pleasure. The person living the good life would necessarily love the use of reason (for this is what he is always choosing to do), and because he constantly engages in an action he loves, he will derive deep pleasure from his life of using excellent reasoning. Lastly, Aristotle believes the good life has sufficient external goods. External

goods are essentially the fundamental needs required for a person to have the potential to live the good life. For instance, food, shelter, being born into a supportive family (or if not this, some form of childhood support), etc. are prerequisite to being able to survive and be healthy while living a life consisting in using excellent reasoning. Thus, the good life must include sufficient external goods.

Aristotle's contention that the good life consists in excellent use of reason is still vague. To clarify, Aristotle contends that reason is segmented into two kinds: practical/moral reason and theoretical/contemplative reason. Practical reasoning refers to thinking about what to do, taking into account moral implications. Thus, Aristotle uses the politician as a paramount example of an individual dedicated to practical reasoning, provided that the politician's objective is to create the best society. Theoretical reason, on the other hand, refers to thinking about what to believe or what to even think about in the first place. It is a purely intellectual endeavor and is frequently equated by Aristotle to philosophy and wisdom-seeking.

The distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning is critical for Aristotle, because he ultimately concludes that life devoted to purely theoretical reason is the most complete good life, whereas life devoted to practical reason, although the next best alternative, is inferior. The argument for this conclusion is dubious, as I will now explain.

Aristotle uses two approaches to support his conclusion that theoretical reason is superior to practical reason: an argument about self-sufficiency, and an argument about divinity. The former of these, I believe, is valid but not sound because one of its premises I take to be false. The latter, I believe, is simply invalid as it involves circular reasoning.

Aristotle contests that self-sufficiency only truly belongs to contemplative activity. Practical reasoning, Aristotle argues, aims at an end that is different from the activity of reasoning itself. The politician exercises practical reasoning to form the best society. The just man exercises practical reasoning to do just acts. Furthermore, practical reasoning is dependent on there being a circumstance to apply it to. The just man cannon be just in a vacuum, and the politician cannot be successful if there are no people to govern. Contemplation, on the other hand, aims only at itself. We contemplate beauty and

truth for the sake of experiencing our own contemplation. Furthermore, a wise man can contemplate truth even if he is entirely alone. There are no circumstances necessary to allow or validate his contemplation (aside from basic external goods). Thus, because contemplation is the only truly self-sufficient act, exercising it is the highest and most universal good.

The premise that contemplation aims only at itself, however, seems directly false. For, it seems obvious that contemplation must aim at truth. Consider that Aristotle correlates contemplation with wisdom and philosophy. We know that wisdom implies an understanding of something (or else, it would not be wisdom, it would be foolishness), and an understanding of something implies a correlation with truth. Thus, to contemplate, which Aristotle equates to philosophy and wisdom-seeking, is inherently bound up in a relationship to truth. If it is not, then philosophy and wisdom would be nothing more than arbitrary musings devoid of any significance or meaning. Furthermore, if we disregard what I have just said, and take contemplation to have absolutely no relationship to truth, then Aristotle's position about the supreme goodness of contemplation is entirely at odds with the rest of his ethics. Recall that Aristotle designates *excellence* in a *function* as the embodiment of goodness. Yet, if contemplation has no correlation to truth, it seems that the sleeping man who subconsciously is attentive to his own dreams, or the deluded man who closely considers his distorted reality, are capable of excellent contemplation. But, surely Aristotle would not call these men excellent, for their actions are based in delusion and subjectivity, not reality. In other words, if contemplation is not in some way wedded to truth, there is no metric for excellence in contemplation. Contemplation, philosophy, and wisdom become arbitrary, entirely subjective, and meaningless under this view. Surely, Aristotle does not adopt this position, which implies he must admit that contemplation is bound up with truth. Thus, Aristotle would have to concede that contemplation cannot aim only at itself, but rather also at truth. Therefore, contemplation cannot be said to be more self-sufficient than practical reasoning.

Aristotle also argues that contemplation is the activity of the g-ds, thus humans must strive for excellence in contemplation because it is the most divine aspect of ourselves and fostering the divine within us equates to the good life. To make the claim that contemplation is the activity of the g-ds,

Aristotle first explains that we assume that the g-ds are ultimately blessed and happy. Then Aristotle designates the task of identifying which activities we will then assign to the g-ds, given the assumption that they are ultimately blessed and happy. Aristotle claims that we could run through an infinite list of actions, including all practical reasoning, but all would be unworthy to the g-ds besides contemplation because all other actions would prove trivial given that they would be incomplete and aim at happiness (and thus, contemplation). Therefore, because the g-ds are ultimately blessed and happy, they must contemplate. And because the g-ds contemplate, for humans to attain the happy/good life, they must seek excellence in contemplation because it is the divine aspect of themselves. And humans should foster the divine aspect in themselves because the g-ds are ultimately blessed and happy.

This argument engages in circular reasoning and is thus deeply problematic. Aristotle uses the premise that happiness consists in excellent contemplation in order to explain the activity of the g-ds. But, this is ultimately in service of supporting his conclusion that happiness consists in excellent contemplation. Evidently, Aristotle is using his conclusion as part of his premises, which is a fundamental logical flaw. His entire divinity argument, therefore, does not add anything new to bolster his thesis that contemplation is the ultimate good, because the divinity argument depends on this thesis being true.

So, Aristotle is not able to support his claim that contemplation is the ultimate good with either of his two primary arguments in support of his claim. He falls short both in his self-sufficiency argument and his divinity argument. Therefore, he has offered us no legitimate reason to suppose that the life devoted to contemplation is superior to the life devoted to the exercise of practical virtue.