

The Two Categorizations of Goods in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Bradford Jean-Hyuk Kim

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Abstract: This paper resolves some difficulties with Aristotle's discussion of the choiceworthy (*hairetos*). *Nicomachean Ethics* I posits goods that are choiceworthy for themselves and for something else, but *Nicomachean Ethics* X appears to present being choiceworthy for itself as mutually exclusive with being choiceworthy for something else; moreover, *Nicomachean Ethics* X seems to claim that action is choiceworthy for itself and therefore not choiceworthy for something else but also seems to claim that action is choiceworthy for something else and therefore not choiceworthy for itself. As for the latter problem internal to *Nicomachean Ethics* X, I argue that Aristotle is ultimately committed to the idea that action is choiceworthy for something else. As for the problem between *Nicomachean Ethics* I and X, I argue that *Nicomachean Ethics* X only claims something admitted by *Nicomachean Ethics* I: being choiceworthy for something else is mutually exclusive with being choiceworthy *only* for itself.

In the first and last books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) of Aristotle, there are parallel discussions of the choiceworthy (*hairetos*).¹ This paper assesses major yet insufficiently addressed issues with this axiological framework, one Aristotle uses to construct central concepts like happiness (*eudaimonia*), contemplation (*theōria*), and moral-action (*praxis*).² *EN* I presents a trichotomy of goods choiceworthy *only* for something else, goods choiceworthy *only* for *themselves*, and goods choiceworthy for *both* themselves *and* something else. *EN* X's parallel passage poses a problem; it seems to deny *EN* I's idea that something can be choiceworthy both

for itself and something else. For it describes various activities interchangeably as “choiceworthy for themselves” and “choiceworthy for *nothing* else.” *EN X* also poses an internal problem, in suggesting both that moral-action is “choiceworthy for itself”/“choiceworthy for nothing else” and that moral-action is “choiceworthy for *something* else”/“*not* choiceworthy for itself.”

After detailing these problems (§ 1), I offer solutions that preserve the coherence of *EN* as it is traditionally composed. As for the problem internal to *EN X* and that is often overlooked (§ 2.2), Aristotle endorses only one description of moral-action: moral-action *is* choiceworthy for something else. As for the problem between *EN I* and *X* (§ 2.1), I follow Aquinas; *EN X*’s “choiceworthy for itself” should be understood as “choiceworthy *only* for itself,” and being choiceworthy only for itself is mutually exclusive with being choiceworthy for something else in *EN I* no less than in *EN X*. Yet I diverge from Aquinas’s assumption that *EN X* simply re-words *EN I* here; the extension of “something else” in “choiceworthy for something else” differs between these contexts.

1. Problem Texts

Consider *EN I*’s trichotomy of goods:

(A) We call that which is pursuit-worthy on account of itself more complete than [that which is pursuit-worthy] because of another thing, (B) and that which is never choiceworthy because of another thing [more complete] than those things which are choiceworthy on account of themselves and because of it, (C) and [we call] complete without qualification indeed that which is choiceworthy always on account of itself and never because of another thing. (D) And happiness most of all seems to be such a thing; (E) for we choose that always because of itself and never because of another thing, (F)

but honor and pleasure and understanding and every virtue we choose both because of themselves, on the one hand (G) (for we would choose each of these without anything resulting [from them]), (H) and we choose [them] also for the sake of happiness, on the other hand (I) (supposing that we will become happy through these). (J) But for the sake of these no one chooses happiness, nor because of anything else at all. (I.7.1097a30-b6)

(A)-(C) categorize things into what I will call “transitional goods,” things choiceworthy (*hairetos*) or pursuit-worthy (*diōktos*) *only* for the sake of or because of *something else*, “terminal goods,” things choiceworthy *only* for the sake of *themselves*, and “hybrid goods,” things choiceworthy for the sake of *both* themselves *and* something else.³ One might question the italicized “only.” For example, (A) mentions things that are pursuit-worthy “because of another thing,” not “*only* because of another thing.” However, (A) presents choiceworthiness-for-something-else as excluding choiceworthiness-for-itself while (B) makes clear that choiceworthiness-for-something else does *not* exclude choiceworthiness-for-itself; to avoid contradiction, we must understand (A)’s choiceworthiness-for-something else more restrictively, as choiceworthiness-*only*-for-something else. “Only” is implied not just in the passage’s characterization of transitional goods but also in its characterization of terminal goods; that such a good is *never* choiceworthy for *another* (B, C) clearly implies that it is *only* choiceworthy for *itself*.

Now, the terminal sort of good, what is “complete without qualification (*haplōs*)” (C), has just been called “the best good... [which seems] complete” (I.7.1097a28), specifically *most* complete (I.7.1097a30). Aristotle takes happiness to be such a terminal good (D) since humans choose it always for itself and never for something else (E). This contrasts with virtue (*aretē*), which is chosen for itself (F) and also for happiness (H). Aristotle adds an intensional layer to

(H) by saying that *we suppose (hupolambanontes)* that through virtue we will become happy (I), before reiterating that the converse does not apply; we do not choose happiness for virtue (J). Before proceeding, I will note that despite mentioning “terminal goods” in the plural, this paper does not take any conclusive stance on this category’s singularity or plurality, or on happiness’s content.

Compared to transitional goods and terminal goods, hybrid goods like virtue are not immediately explicable. (F) and (H) say that we choose virtue for *both* itself *and* happiness (*kai... kai*); are we to understand (G), flanked by (F) and (H), as including happiness in “anything” when it says we would choose virtue apart from anything else obtaining? Despite (I)’s insistence that we choose virtue supposing that through it we will become happy, the answer is “yes”; however, this axiological independence is qualified, for *total* axiological independence is what distinguishes happiness, a terminal good, from hybrid goods like virtue.

To better understand hybrid goods, consider VI.12.1144a1-6 (cf. X.3.1174a4-8):

(K) First then let us say that [theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom] are necessarily choiceworthy on account of themselves (since they are virtues, each one [being a virtue] of each part [of the soul]), even if they do not produce anything besides themselves. (L)

Next, [let us say that] they *do* produce [something besides themselves], not as the medical craft produces health, but as health [produces health]⁴ thus also theoretical wisdom [produces] happiness; (M) for since being a part of the whole of virtue, theoretical wisdom produces happiness in its being possessed and in its being exercised.

(K) suggests that virtue is choiceworthy for itself in that we would choose it regardless of whether it produces anything. And (L) is most plausibly read as including happiness in this set, since it gives happiness as an example of something *produced*. Yet (M) suggests that we cannot

understand virtue's value independently of happiness; it is precisely because it is a virtue, one virtue that makes up virtue understood in the collective sense, that theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) produces happiness. Some terminological remarks are helpful here. VIII.5.1157b5-6 says that virtue can be spoken of as state (*hexis*) or activity (*energeia*). In (M), state is referred to by the idea that virtue is "possessed," whereas activity is referred to by the idea that virtue is "exercised." Now, Aristotle hesitates over the value of the *state* of virtue in isolation. Happiness requires this state that is an actualization of rationality, which *EN* I.7's famous "Function Argument" establishes as humanity's function (*ergon*). But virtue as a state is insufficient for happiness and is compatible with undesirable conditions, like extreme and sustained pain, and eternal unconsciousness (I.5.1095b30-1096a1). Happiness requires something beyond virtue that is incompatible with such pain (I.10.1100b28-1101a8, VII.13.1153b1-25, X.4.1174b14-33, X.5.1175b13-24) and with unconsciousness: the actualization of this state, virtuous activity (i.e., *expression* of virtue) (I.5.1095b30-1096a2, I.7.1097b31-I.8.1099a7, I.13.1102b1-8). This subordination of state to activity, that virtue is of questionable value *sans* activity and is indeed for the sake of activity, goes beyond axiology; *De Anima* II.4 *definitionally* subordinates states such as virtue to their corresponding activities.⁵

If virtue is valuable independently of what it produces, how can we understand Aristotle as questioning its value apart from its consummation in the virtuous activity of happiness? The point of VI.12 is not that we would choose virtue regardless of happiness, but as follows. The default is that we choose virtue for happiness *itself*. However, if happiness fails to be produced (because of bad external conditions; I.10.1100b18-34), we would still prefer virtue for happiness *that might be produced*.⁶ Or if happiness is unlikely to be produced, we would not regret having pursued virtue (Kraut, "Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself," 230) and would continue to

pursue it to avoid *the opposite of* happiness, the misery that comes only with vice (I.10.1100b34-35, IX.4.1166b6-29) and that risks permanence.⁷ In each case, we prefer having virtue over not having it; thus such goods are choiceworthy for themselves.⁸ But equally in each case, we pursue virtue in reference to happiness (happiness itself, prospective happiness, avoiding happiness' opposite); such goods are thus choiceworthy for happiness, where it is this feature of being choiceworthy for something else that distinguishes hybrid goods from terminal goods. Only the latter are *totally* independently valuable.

EN X seems to deny the possibility of hybrid goods. Just as *EN I.7* categorizes goods, as those that are their own ends and those that are not, in order to identify *the good* (Endnote 3), *EN X.6* categorizes *activities*, as those that are their own ends and those that are not, in order to identify the good (1176b2-3). *EN X.6* then says:

(N) Choiceworthy on account of themselves are the activities apart from which nothing is sought beyond the activity (*aph' hōn mēden epizēteitai para tēn energeian*). (O) Such seem to be the actions according to virtue; for doing fine and excellent things is one of the things that are choiceworthy on account of themselves. (P) And so also the pleasant activities of amusements; for people do not choose these because of other things; (Q) for they are more harmed than helped by these, since they disregard their bodies and possessions. (1176b6-11)

(N) recalls *EN I's* (G) and *VI's* (K); these discuss choosing something for what is apart from it.⁹ After (O) designates moral-actions as choiceworthy for *nothing* apart from the activity itself, (P) considers amusements; these are also chosen for themselves and not something else, since the results apart from amusement are deleterious.

I highlight two points. First, the claim is not that the activities in question are *sometimes* choiceworthy for something else. While “choiceworthy” by itself is ambiguous on this score, (N) clarifies the modal situation by saying the relevant activities are sought for *nothing* apart from the activity. This starkly worded characterization would be misleading if the claim is really that the relevant activities are *sometimes* sought for *something* apart from the activity. Whether Aristotle endorses (N)-(Q) on moral-action is a question for § 2.2, but we must understand their content in the aforementioned way to avoid their presentation as courting misunderstanding.

Second, being choiceworthy for itself (O) is glossed as being *not* choiceworthy for something else (P); conversely, being choiceworthy for *nothing* else (N) is glossed as being choiceworthy for itself (N, O). Therefore, “being choiceworthy for itself” is interchangeable with “being not choiceworthy for something else.” Does this contradict *EN I*, which suggests that some goods, hybrid goods, are choiceworthy for both themselves *and* something else? Given the first point above, one cannot reply that what is choiceworthy for itself/not choiceworthy for something else is *sometimes* choiceworthy for something else.

Let us consider some more evidence from *EN X*:

(R) And contemplation alone would seem to be cherished because of itself; for nothing from it arises besides contemplating, (S) but from practical things we acquire more or less something apart from the action. (T) And it seems that happiness occurs in leisure; for we busy ourselves in order that we may have leisure, and we wage war in order that we may be at peace. The activity of the practical virtues occurs in politics or in war, and the actions corresponding to these affairs seem to be unleisurely, and the activities of war seem to be so completely, for no one chooses to wage war for the sake of waging war or prepares for war [for the sake of waging war]; for someone would seem to be completely

murderous, if he would make his friends enemies, in order that battles and slaughters may occur. (U) And the activity of politicians is also unpleasurably, and, apart from political activity itself, it gathers powers and honors or happiness for oneself and for citizens, which is different from political activity, and which we clearly seek as being something different [from political activity]. (V) If then of the actions according to the virtues the political and warlike actions stand out in respect to the fine and magnitude, and they are unpleasurably and aim at some end and are not choiceworthy because of themselves, (W) but the activity of the understanding¹⁰ seems to excel in seriousness since being theoretical, and to aim at no other end apart from itself... (X) this [latter] then will be the complete happiness of man. (X.7.1177b1-20, 24-5; cf. *Politics* VII.15.1334a11-34)

I begin with the scope. While (T) seems to imply that moral-action is exhausted by the contexts of war and politics (“the activity of politicians,” U), (V) makes clear with a partitive genitive that only a subset of moral-actions occurs in these contexts: *of* moral-actions, political and warlike ones *stand out*. Yet it would be mistaken to take Aristotle as comparing contemplation to moral-actions only of the political or warlike sort. First, the main distinction between contemplation and “practical things” is that the latter aim at results beyond the activity itself (S) and it is hard to see how this excludes private moral-action (§ 2.2)—even if what is achieved apart from private moral-action falls closer to “less” in “more or less something apart from the action” (I.2.1094b7-10, V.1.1129b30-1130a8). Second, while (V) does set apart political and warlike moral-actions, it hardly does this in a way that cordons off the remaining moral-actions and distinguishes their significance. Rather, (V) suggests that political and warlike moral-actions serve as paradigms for the whole class. For they stand out in respect to the fine (*to kalon*), and it is seeking the fine that specifically characterizes *the person concerned with moral-action*, namely, the virtuous agent

(*passim* EN III-IV). Especially since EN IX.8 characterizes such people as seeking the fine *as much as possible*, it is likely that Aristotle focuses on moral-actions that *stand out* in respect to the fine precisely because these political and warlike moral-actions are paradigms for the entire class. Another way to put the point is that given that (maximally) seeking the fine characterizes the person concerned with moral-action, it would be *odd* for our EN X.7 passage to use as its examples of moral-action those that do *not* stand out in respect to the fine but border on triviality. Similar points apply to what is mentioned in (V) along with exceptional fineness: magnitude (IV.3.1124b6-9, 24-6, IX.8.1169a22-6).

The passage first distinguishes contemplation as choiceworthy for itself (R, W), where this is elaborated upon in terms of lacking results apart from the activity (W). Moral-action is designated as *not* choiceworthy for itself, because it is chosen for results that go beyond the activity (S, U, V; cf. III.3.1112b32-3). These results include what is explicitly distinguished from moral-action, happiness (U). Now, Aristotle invokes the feminine singular “happiness (*eudaimonian*)” when he says “happiness for oneself and for citizens,” so it is this result in particular which is labeled “different (*heteran*)” and “which (*hēn*) we clearly seek as being different (*heteran*)” from political activity. For while Aristotle would have no problem applying these labels to the whole set of results (powers, honors, happiness), the (feminine) singular rather than (perhaps neuter) plural for “different” and “which” indicates (U)’s preoccupation with distinguishing political activity from one result in particular, happiness (whether “happiness” in T and U refers to X’s *complete* happiness is not explicit). The “or (*ē*)” that succeeds “powers and (*kai*) honors” and precedes “happiness” reinforces the fact that the “different” that follows modifies just “happiness.” Now, none of this renders impossible that happiness *includes* political activity as a *distinct* component. Yet it excludes happiness being *coextensive* with political

activity; when Aristotle indicates coextensiveness *sans* co-intensiveness, he says that x and y are “the same but not in being” (V.1.1130a12-13, VI.7.1141b23-4) but here suggests that happiness and political activity are not only not the same (they are “different”) but *also* that they are not the same in being. This latter denial of co-intensiveness, which is perhaps more important than the denial of coextensiveness as far as ends are concerned, is indicated by the fact that (U) says that we seek (*zētoumen*) happiness “*as being different (hōs heteran ousan)*” from political activity. Now, whatever moral-action’s extensional and intensional relationship with happiness *simpliciter*, it is clear that moral-action is not coextensive or co-intensive with *complete (teleia)* happiness, which is rather explicitly identified with contemplation (W-X).

The two points about the previous passage apply here. Being choiceworthy for itself is glossed as being choiceworthy for nothing else (R); conversely, being not choiceworthy for itself is glossed as being choiceworthy for something else (T-V). As for the modality of this mutual exclusivity between being choiceworthy for something else and being choiceworthy for itself, it would be misleading for the claim to be that contemplation is *sometimes* choiceworthy for something else. For (R) says that *nothing arises* from contemplation besides itself and (W) says that contemplation *aims at no other end* besides itself. And it would be misleading for the claim to be that moral-action is *sometimes* like contemplation, choiceworthy for itself in that it aims at no other ends besides itself. For (V) straightforwardly says that moral-action is *not* choiceworthy for itself and *does* aim at ends beyond itself, namely the things that *do* arise from the activity besides itself (U).

Since they maintain the framework of mutual exclusion, *EN X*’s (R)-(X) would seem unhelpful in resolving the tension between the claim in *EN I*, that something can be choiceworthy for both itself and something else, and the apparent claim in *EN X*’s (N)-(Q), that

choiceworthiness-for-itself and choiceworthiness-for-something-else are mutually exclusive.

Further, (R)-(X) seem to contradict (N)-(Q). (N)-(Q) claim that moral-action is choiceworthy for itself in that it is choiceworthy for *nothing* apart from the activity (N, O) that is being presented as a candidate for happiness. But (R)-(X) claim that moral-action is not choiceworthy for itself in that it is choiceworthy for *something* else, understood precisely in terms of the results apart from that activity (S, U, V); and far from being presented (at least straightforwardly) as a candidate for happiness, moral-action is emphatically distinguished from happiness (U).

2. Solution

I will now solve both apparent contradictions, that between *EN I* and X (§ 2.1) and then that within *EN X* (§ 2.2).

2.1. Extensional Shifting

Elaborating on Aquinas' commentary on *EN* (Marietti text paragraph 2097), some solve the contradiction between *EN I* and X by suggesting that what *EN I* speaks of in terms of a trichotomy, *EN X* simply speaks of in terms of a dichotomy.¹¹ *EN X* contrasts things which are *not* choiceworthy for something else (equivalent to being choiceworthy *only* for themselves) and those that *are* choiceworthy for something else. And the latter category is simply what was depicted in *EN I* as two categories: goods choiceworthy for *only* something else and goods choiceworthy for both something else *and* themselves.

I agree to this extent; *EN X*'s language of "choiceworthy for itself" implicitly refers to what is choiceworthy *only* for itself, just as some instances of "choiceworthy for something else" and "choiceworthy for itself" in *EN I*'s passage implicitly refer to what is choiceworthy *only* for

something else and what is choiceworthy *only* for itself, respectively. So there is no contradiction. For *EN X*'s contrast between what is choiceworthy *only* for itself and what is choiceworthy for something else is perfectly compatible with *EN I*'s positing of goods that are choiceworthy for both themselves and something else.

This solution works as far as the language. However, we cannot accept the explanation that Aquinas and his followers provide for this solution: that *EN X*'s dichotomy ultimately just is *EN I*'s trichotomy. In *EN I*'s trichotomy, "something else" in "choiceworthy for something else" refers exclusively to a more complete category of good; with transitional goods, "something else" refers to a hybrid good or terminal good, and with hybrid goods, "something else" refers to a terminal good. This is consonant with how *EN I* begins, with chapter 1 largely comprised of examples of final causal chains, with one thing being for another's sake. Some of these subordinations apparently occur *within* the categories to be introduced in *EN I.7*, in contrast to *EN I.7*'s subordinations *between* these categories; nevertheless, as Reeve, Action, Contemplation, and Happiness, 229, argues, the axiological subordination is upwards. *EN X* drops this strictly hierarchical orientation; "something else" has a wider reference. (U) says that moral-action is choiceworthy for happiness; whatever our reaction to moral-action's subordination, the claim that *x* is choiceworthy for *y* where *y* is a terminal good is hardly surprising in light of *EN I*'s trichotomy. However, (U) also claims that moral-action is choiceworthy for honor (*timē*) and power (*dunasteia*). This *is* surprising in light of *EN I*'s trichotomy, because "choiceworthy for something else" refers to something more complete in that framework, but *EN I* has earlier led us to believe that honor is in fact *less* complete than moral-action (I.5.1095b22-1096a2); moreover, Aristotle goes on to hint that power is less complete than even honor (IV.3.1124a12-20). What this indicates is that choiceworthiness-for-something-else is not understood in *EN X* in terms of

what is more complete; rather, it is understood in terms of what is separate, whether more complete or less. That this is a non-trivial difference is something we will be in a position to appreciate only at § 2.2's end.

Is this exceptionally misleading equivocation? *EN X.6* opens by saying that it will re-iterate some points about happiness (1176a30-33) and putatively does this by reviewing *EN I.7*'s categories of goods; immediately succeeding are *EN X*'s (N)-(Q), so it would seem misleading for *EN X*, referring back to *EN I*'s terminology, to suddenly change that terminology. However, we need not assume that *EN X* is changing the *meaning* of "choiceworthy" or "for" in "choiceworthy for something else." We need only concede that Aristotle is not being as explicit as he could be about the *extension* of "something else." However, I believe context sufficiently illuminates the extension; as I have presented it, "something else" clearly refers in *EN I.7* up the hierarchy of completeness but in *EN X* to external results, whether up or down the hierarchy.

2.2. Considered Versus Descriptive Views

So *EN I* and *X* only appear to conflict. Choiceworthiness-for-something-else excludes choiceworthiness-*only*-for-itself in *EN I* no less than in *X*. Let us now turn to the contradiction within *EN X*. (N)-(Q) suggest that moral-action is choiceworthy for (only) itself, for nothing apart from the activity, but (R)-(X) suggest that moral-action is choiceworthy for not (only) itself but something apart from the activity.

Broadie replies there is no contradiction "because even if the best reason for engaging in politics is that the activity in itself is worth while, once you do engage, you are committed to pursuing particular political goals... where a successful result depends on factors besides your own activity" (Nicomachean Ethics, 443; cf. Ethics with Aristotle, 421-7). Broadie does not

adequately deal with the starkness of Aristotle's language. (N)-(O) suggest that moral-action is sought for *nothing* apart from the activity, rather than that it is sought *primarily* for the activity, that the activity is simply "the best reason." And we would still lack an adequate explanation for why (S)-(V) seem to straightforwardly deny (N)-(O).

Our *EN X* texts form an argument concluding that contemplative happiness is supreme; (N)-(Q) are located at the beginning of this argument and represent only provisional claims. (O) states that moral-action "seems (*dokousin*)" choiceworthy (only) for itself, understood in terms of (N), being chosen for nothing apart from the activity. And (P) reports *peoples'* choosing amusement (only) for itself (cf. Plato's *Republic* II.357b4-8). That Aristotle is distancing himself from these people is apparent from the fact that he depicts them as foolish; before arguing against their mode of operation for the rest of *EN X.6* (see also *Politics* VIII.5.1339a14-21, b10-17, 31-42), Aristotle suggests in (Q) that the relevant parties ruin themselves because of their pursuit of amusement. Anyone can designate anything, including vicious excess (VII.7.1150a19-21), as choiceworthy only for itself, but Aristotle clearly repudiates some designations.¹² This distinction between what people as a matter of fact find choiceworthy and what Aristotle considers truly choiceworthy mirrors *EN III.4*'s discussion of wish; what is good can be understood as what appears good to someone or what actually is good for someone, where these can overlap or come apart.¹³

So the contradictory claims in *EN X* should be resolved as follows. (N)-(Q) present claims that are *not* Aristotle's considered views but rather merely descriptive views, including the view that moral-action is choiceworthy for nothing apart from the activity. And (R)-(X) present a claim that *is* Aristotle's considered view, that moral-action unlike contemplation is choiceworthy for *something* apart from the activity.¹⁴

The immediate objection is that Aristotle's considered view is that moral-action is *not* choiceworthy for something apart from the activity and that this is precisely what distinguishes it from production (*poiēsis*) like building. Let us assess this distinction. *EN* VI.4 states that production and moral-action are mutually exclusive (1140a2-6, 16-17). *Why* they are mutually exclusive is discussed before *EN* VI.4 by VI.2, as echoed after VI.4 by VI.5 (1140b3-7).

Consider VI.2.1139b2-4:

What is produced is not an end without qualification (*telos haplōs*) (but rather [an end] relative to something and for something) (*alla pros ti kai tinos*), but what is enacted [*is* an end without qualification] (for acting well is an end, and desire is for this [i.e., acting well] [*hē gar eupraxia telos, hē d' orexis toutou*]).

Note the implicit “only.” The fact that production is not an end, is not choiceworthy for itself, is immediately elaborated upon in terms of being choiceworthy for something else.¹⁵ The putatively contrasting fact that action *is* an end, *is* choiceworthy for itself, should then be understood as being elaborated upon in terms of being *not* choiceworthy for something else. In other words, the passage is saying that action is choiceworthy *only* for itself and that production is *not* choiceworthy *only* for itself. This contrast does not deny that moral-action necessarily has any ends external to the activity.¹⁶ What makes moral-action different from production is rather that it is not *as such, qua itself*, choiceworthy for something beyond the activity.¹⁷ In *EN* VI.2's terms, the end separate from the activity is not the end “without qualification” and the activity itself *is* the end “without qualification.” With production it is the reverse; the end separate from the activity *is* the end without qualification and the activity itself is *not* the end without qualification.¹⁸ Now, contemplation is both absent from our VI.2 passage but like moral-action in that the activity is the end without qualification. The explanation for both is the same; because

contemplation *differs* from moral-action as not necessarily involving an external end, there are no competing ends in contemplation's case that would generate VI.2's controversy about what the end without qualification is.

EN X is not contradicting this moral-action-production distinction whereby moral-action is unlike production in being *as such* choiceworthy for nothing else. Rather, *EN X* is claiming something that *EN VI*'s moral-action-production distinction does not deny: *contra* the common opinion of (N)-(Q), moral-action is no different from production in being necessarily choiceworthy, in some way (but not as such), for something else. As X.7's (U) distinguishes moral-action from contemplation (§ 1), we seek results which are "different from political activity, and which we clearly seek as being something different [from political activity]."¹⁹ This also seems to be the point of X.8's thought experiment; after going through various sorts of moral-actions (1178b7-16), Aristotle concludes that they all appear to be "small and unworthy of the gods" (1178b17-18). This conclusion, in turn, is meant to show at least that contemplative happiness is supreme (if not that contemplation is the only thing that counts as "happiness" in the full sense); the supreme entities, gods, must be happy, which involves activity, but happiness hypothesized in terms of moral-action is irrelevant in godlike conditions (1178b18-23).²⁰ Aristotle is hinting at the idea that it is not possible for moral-action to be choiceworthy, in all ways of being choiceworthy, only for itself. In the language of X.7's (T), to choose brave action irrespective of dangerous conditions is to be like a "murderous" person, who creates the conditions for brave acts by making friends enemies. Similar reasoning applies to less extreme examples, whereby it would be odd to choose conditions of entropy or the existence of mundane trivialities for the relevant moral-actions; I have in mind temperance, the domain of which (food, drink, sex) presupposes the existence of a sort of pleasure which in turn presupposes the

existence of pain (X.3.1173b13-16; see Reeve, Practices of Reason, 162-3). Moral-action, in short, is necessarily choiceworthy for something beyond the activity itself, for ends which are necessarily responses to the non-ideal human condition. To be sure, contemplative humans need the necessities of human life no less than practical humans (X.7.1177a28-9). But the *activity* of contemplation does not in and of itself presuppose for its choice the human condition (X.8.1178a9-22; see Reeve, Practices of Reason, 163-4, Action, Contemplation, and Happiness, 120-21)—that is, the hunger, fear, etc. of which we would not and should not choose over a godlike existence (X.7.1177b26-1178a2).²¹

What this discussion indicates is that Aristotle can maintain the moral-action-production distinction while *denying* the common opinion in (N)-(Q) that moral-action is choiceworthy for nothing else; moral-action is like production in being necessarily choiceworthy for external ends but is unlike production in *not* being *as such* choiceworthy for these external ends.²² In fact, Aristotle *needs* these two different specifications of being valuable (as distinct from two different *values*) for his two different contrasts of moral-action. Moral-action's being necessarily choiceworthy in some way for something else fails to distinguish moral-action from production, but succeeds in distinguishing it from contemplation. And moral-action's being not *as such* choiceworthy for something else fails to distinguish moral-action from contemplation but succeeds in distinguishing it from production (which is, recalling Endnote 16, at least as an expression of the virtue of craft, necessarily choiceworthy for itself and thus cannot be distinguished from moral-action in this regard).

Notably, this reply to the objection about the moral-action-production distinction would seem to resolve a contradiction widely discussed yet inadequately resolved since Ackrill's influential 1978 paper: *EN VI.2* (as quoted here in § 2.2) depicts moral-action as choiceworthy

(only) for itself in contrast to production but *EN X* (R-W, § 1) depicts moral-action as *not* choiceworthy (only) for itself in contrast to contemplation. Responses to Ackrill have assumed the way that he sets up the problem, without distinguishing between *p*'s being valuable in some way and *p*'s being valuable *qua p* (e.g., Charles's classic response to Ackrill, "Aristotle: Ontology and Moral Reasoning," and Heinaman's criticism of Charles, "Activity and *Praxis* in Aristotle," 103-11). However, it seems that the problem largely dissolves once one has recognized these distinctions. Production is *as such* valuable for something else while moral-action is *not*; this is how moral-action is choiceworthy (only) for itself. Yet moral-action necessarily aims at external results, is necessarily choiceworthy in some way for the results, while contemplation does *not* necessarily aim at external results, is *not* necessarily choiceworthy in some way for the results. This is how moral-action is choiceworthy for something else while contemplation is choiceworthy (only) for itself.

Let us attend to § 2.1's significant point that I indicated we would only now be in a position to appreciate. § 2.1's conclusion was that "something else" in "choiceworthy for something else" refers axiologically upwards in *EN I* but in *EN X* refers to something external and not necessarily axiologically upwards. *EN I*'s hierarchical orientation is reasonable in context; chapter 1 considers choosing things for the sake of other things before chapter 2 immediately suggests that desire will be futile unless there is something at the top of the final causal hierarchy, something to stop the "for the sake of" chain. Yet this focus of "choiceworthy for something else" strictly on what is axiologically higher misses an important point that *EN X* fills out. It misses the point that while a virtue like courage is choiceworthy for something else that is more complete (happiness) and is choiceworthy for itself (in that we would prefer having it over not having it, independently of what it produces), courage is also choiceworthy for

something else that is *not* more complete: a result external to courage's actualization in the agent's soul, like honor or power for one's city. Such external results, *EN X's non-hierarchical* framework highlights, are what moral-action is necessarily choiceworthy for even if, as *EN VI* highlights, they are *not* what moral-action is *as such* choiceworthy for.

3. Conclusion

I have resolved problems with two parallel categorizations of goods in *EN* (§ 1). *EN I* gives us three categories of goods, those choiceworthy only for themselves, those choiceworthy only for something else, and those choiceworthy for both themselves and something else. *EN X* seems to reject the possibility of the last category; it seems to suggest that being choiceworthy for itself is mutually incompatible with being choiceworthy for something else. Following Aquinas, I have argued that *EN X* is only suggesting that being choiceworthy *only* for itself is mutually incompatible with being choiceworthy for something else, something that *EN I* itself implies (§ 2.1). However, I have rejected Aquinas's idea that *EN X's* schema just is *EN I's* threefold schema in twofold form. *EN I's* threefold schema represents a hierarchy of goods; when Aristotle here says that some goods are choiceworthy for something else, "something else" refers to a more complete category of good. Abandoning this strictly hierarchical picture, *EN X* uses "choiceworthy for something else" to refer rather to external results independently of relative completeness. Another problem I have addressed is that *EN X* appears to contradict itself by claiming that moral-action is *not* choiceworthy for something else and that it *is* choiceworthy for something else. On the basis of context, I have argued that only the latter is Aristotle's considered view (§ 2.2). It may seem strange for moral-action to be described as choiceworthy for something else, given that Aristotle contrasts moral-action with production as *not* being

choiceworthy for something else. I have argued that while moral-action is unlike contemplation in being necessarily choiceworthy in some way for something else, it is unlike *production* in *not* being *qua itself* choiceworthy for something else.²³

Polonsky Academy, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

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Notes

¹ I use the Oxford Classical Texts and my own translations; unmarked citations are of *EN*. I stick to *EN*’s axiological terminology and will not attempt, as Tuozzo 1995 does (for *EN* and other Aristotelian texts), to map it onto contemporary and fluid notions of final, etc. value.

² Precision is a reason for preferring “moral-action” over the typical “action” to translate *praxis*. Aristotle sometimes uses “action” loosely, to refer to activity including contemplation (Endnote 18). “Moral-action” also helpfully connotes an exclusion of what is *immoral*. Using Aristotle’s “actions according to the virtues” solves only the latter ambiguity; “virtue” in “action according to virtue” refers at least primarily to virtue of character (e.g., courage), yet in other contexts, “virtue” refers to virtue of thought, which includes virtues relevant to contemplation (*EN* VI.3, 6-7).

³ The assessed passages use *dia* (“because of”), *kata* (“on account of”), *heneka* (“for the sake of”), and *charin* (“for the sake of”); no one doubts that in these contexts these prepositions all refer (at least) to Aristotle’s final cause, the *hou heneka* (“that for the sake of which”). Clearly, 1097a30-b6 is then discussing ends (*telē*), but one might wonder why I speak of “goods” when the text lacks “good (*agathon*).” One might then think that I should speak of categories of *ends*; however, Aristotle is probably not giving categories of ends *per se*, for one category is of *non-ends* (transitional goods). So it seems better to suggest that Aristotle *is* speaking of goods, categorizing them in terms of ends and non-ends. Indeed, the very purpose of the passage and its trichotomy is to identify the *good*, mentioned both immediately before the passage as “the good” or “the best good” (I.7.1097a21-8) and after the passage as “the complete good” (I.7.1097b7-8). In any case, all the ends of interest here are goods; consider the language of pursuit/choice and the exemplified objects of pursuit/choice. Further, the categories are presented in terms of degrees of being *teleion*. *Teleion* is often translated “complete” but is cognate with *telos* (“end”) and would literally translate as “end-like” (for discussion, see Reeve 2012, 245-9). There would be a tautologous ring if Aristotle were categorizing *ends* in terms of end-likeness.

⁴ My conjecture of the direct object “health” follows modern translations (e.g., Broadie 2002, Irwin 2019), which apparently follow arguments in Gauthier and Jolif 1970, 544-5. Note also that (L)’s plural “they do produce (*poiouσι*)” apparently assumes the same two grammatical subjects of the verbs in the preceding (K), practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. This perhaps indicates that practical wisdom also plays, at least in some way, the role that (L) and (M) go on to explicitly ascribe only to theoretical wisdom: producing happiness.

⁵ There is another, related sense of *energeia*, as contrasted with *kinēsis* (process); activity in this sense is complete at any time of its instantiation and process is complete only after it has reached

a certain point (*EN* X.4, *Metaphysics* IX.6; for discussion, see Reeve 2012, 140-42). I will bypass this distinction's controversies (e.g., Ackrill 1965). What is clear is that certain cases of moral-action are activities in the sense of being actualizations of the state of virtue.

⁶ If happiness just *is* virtuous activity, it may seem odd to characterize pursuit of virtue as sometimes falling short of happiness (as opposed to falling short of making a *happy person*, *eudaimona*, as the Oxford Classical Text lists as an alternative for "happiness" in M). Yet it is unclear that pursuing virtue automatically involves an exercise of virtue that is fully distinguished from mere possession of virtue; Aristotle's point about pain impeding activity (I.10.1100b28-1101a8, VII.13.1153b1-25, X.4.1174b14-33, X.5.1175b13-24) and the pleasure that supervenes on activity (X.5.1175b16-36) seems to imply a pursuit of virtue precisely in terms of a failed attempt at exercise. For an Aristotelian argument employing the possibility of such failure, see Kim 2021b's analysis of IX.9.1170a5-6 (502-5).

⁷ *Politics* VII.3.1325a34-b7 considers the plan of viciously seizing power to maximize one's opportunities for moral-actions. Aristotle denies this will work; once one has viciously seized power, one cannot recover her ability to act finely. *EN*'s discussion of vice's permanence is murkier; vice seems permanently incurable in VII.8, curable in IX.3.1165b13-22. Minimally, permanence is a risk.

⁸ In contrast, we are indifferent to transitional goods *sans* what they are choiceworthy for (Reeve 1992, 116).

⁹ To express this idea, (G) uses the preposition *apo* ("apart from") prefixed to a verb, (K) uses the genitive of separation, and (N) along with (R)-(W) below use a combination of the prepositions *apo* and *para* ("beyond"). Reeve 1992, 101-6, 2012, 145, emphasizes the distinction between choosing *x* for something different (*allo*) from and something beyond (*para*) *x*, but these

passages seem to treat the expressions synonymously. For example, 1176b6-11 here talks of lacking an end *beyond* moral-action (N) and of lacking an end *different* from amusement (P), but these differently worded descriptions clearly do the same work. Reeve would argue that without this distinction between *allo* and *para* ends, I cannot adequately deal with the distinction between moral-action and production (1992, 74-5, 105-6); I agree that this latter distinction poses a problem, but I use a distinction different from the former distinction to solve it (§ 2.2).

¹⁰ To avoid contradicting IX.8, we must take the faculty of the understanding (*nous*) here in X.7 to be the understanding *qua* theoretical, as distinguished from the understanding *qua* practical (and further distinguished from VI.6's *virtue* of understanding). For IX.8 describes political and warlike moral-actions as the activity of the understanding as well (1168b35, 1169a17-18; see also *Metaphysics* II.2.994b9-16). Notably, *EN* says that each human is most of all her *nous*, where this claim appears in both the contexts of moral-action (IX.4.1166a15-22, IX.8.1168b35-1169a3) and of contemplation (X.7.1178a2-8).

¹¹ Kraut (1976, 232-3; 1989, 164-7, 191-2, 216) and Lear (2004, 182-3).

¹² Richardson (1992, 337-8, 344, 347-8) risks conflating descriptive views with Aristotle's considered views by repeatedly appealing to the case of those who boast for the sake of nothing (IV.7.1127b9-14) to develop Aristotle's considered axiology.

¹³ Kim 2021a, 226-9. Kim 2021a discusses Aristotle's notion of the lovable (*philēton*), which in its similarities and dissimilarities with the choiceworthy illuminates the later.

¹⁴ Reeve 1992, 153, 2012, 236, 270, seems to recognize that (R)-(X) present Aristotle's considered view of moral-action. However, it is less clear that Reeve recognizes (R)-(X) as overturning the merely descriptive (N)-(Q) on moral-action; even though Reeve presents

Aristotle as somehow advancing past (N)-(Q) on *amusement* (1992, 152, 2012, 270), he nevertheless presents these lines as Aristotle's considered views at 1992, 29, 120-21.

¹⁵ I do not contradict Gauthier and Jolif 1970, 445, who deny that "what is produced" can be identified with "the process of production." Rather, I highlight the explanatory relations between these two, relations that Aristotle apparently uses to contrast what is produced and what is enacted. Namely, Aristotle makes a point about the value of what is enacted by appeal to (as indicated by "for," *gar*) the value of *acting*; I assume, then, what distinguishes the value of what is enacted from the value of what is produced has to do with the value of *producing*.

¹⁶ Nor does the passage's saying that production is not choiceworthy *only* for itself exclude, in all aspects of choiceworthiness, production's being necessarily choiceworthy for itself. Indeed, (K) in *EN* VI.12 (§ 1) says that being a virtue makes something necessarily choiceworthy for itself, and the virtue expressed in at least some production, craft (*technē*), is no less a virtue of thought than practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom (VI.2.1139b12-VI.3.1139b17). Nevertheless, that passage does ascribe to theoretical wisdom and perhaps practical wisdom a role in producing happiness (Endnote 4), and craft might differ in this regard (Endnote 20).

¹⁷ The idea of *p*'s value *qua p* seems to also appear in I.6.1096b23-5's claim that with "honor and practical wisdom and pleasure, the accounts are different and differ in the manner in which [they] are goods (*heteroi kai diapherontes hoi logoi tautēi hēi agatha*)." The idea is also repeated outside *EN*. *Politics* I.9.1257a6-13 and *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.1.1246a26-35 say that each thing has a use on account of itself as well as accidental uses (e.g., using an eye to see and using it for food, respectively). And *Eudemian Ethics* I.5.1216b10-16 claims that while there is nothing to theoretical sciences beyond themselves, "nothing prevents them from being accidentally useful" for practical affairs.

¹⁸ Some actions are unlike moral-actions in being *as such* choiceworthy for something else and therefore closer to productions; these would seem to include actions that *Politics* VII.14.1333a30-36 labels necessary (*anangkaia*) and useful (*chrēsima*), as opposed to fine (*kala*) (see also *Politics* VIII.2.1337a39-b15). Note that Aristotle sometimes uses “action” loosely so as to include production and contemplation (*Politics* VII.3.1325b14-23).

¹⁹ Commentators have inquired about II.4.1105a26-33’s idea that with virtuous agents, moral-actions are decided on for themselves (*prohairesthai*, from the same root as *haireton*, “choiceworthy,” *di’ hauta*). The question here is whether the virtuous agent decides on moral-action because of something internal to it, like actualization of the agent’s own rationality, per Kraut (1976, 238-9), or external to it, like welfare-promoting results of the moral-action, per Müller (2018, *passim*) and Whiting (2002, *passim*). That “choiceworthy for something else” refers to the results of political activity and “choiceworthy for itself” refers to the activity itself would at least hint at the former interpretation.

²⁰ These lines also indicate that if practical activity is eliminated from consideration, productive activity is eliminated “even more (*eti de māllon*)” (1178b20-21). Aristotle is possibly referring to the fact that production is not only like moral-action in being necessarily choiceworthy in some way for something external to it but also, *unlike* action, *as such* choiceworthy for something external to it and not itself. This last difference between moral-action and production perhaps explains why moral-action at least receives a “secondary” designation as happiness (X.8.1178a9) while production does not receive a tertiary designation. It might already strain an activity’s candidacy for happiness for it to be choiceworthy *in some way* for something else like honor or contemplation, but surely a candidate for happiness cannot be *as such* choiceworthy for something else.

²¹ See also *Politics* VII.13.1332a7-27, which posits a contrast similar to the contrast between gods and humans here but restricted to the human condition. There are moral-actions that are fine without qualification (*haplōs*) and those that are fine by hypothesis (*ex hupotheseōs*); the latter moral-actions include just punishments which depend on the undesirable context of vice, and the former include moral-actions that are not so dependent.

²² That the actualization internal to the agent and not the external result is what makes moral-action as such valuable seems to be the point behind I.10.1100b28-31's claim that the fine (*to kalon*), a key value of Aristotle's (*EN* III-IV, IX.8), "shines through" even if one fails to bring about the external ends of the moral-action (see Kim 2020, 681-2). With production, there is no hint of such axiological success *sans* the successful execution of the external end, the product (Reeve 2012, 188-9). We can put this contrast another way. With moral-action as such, value is determined by the actualization internal to the agent; indeed, a vicious person can do the same, externally executed moral-action as the virtuous person, like doing a just action without being just (VI.12.1144a13-20). With production as such, value is determined by the product external to the production (II.4.1105a26-33).

²³ I thank the Polonsky Academy Philosophy Work-in-Progress Group and the anonymous referees of *HPQ* for helpful discussion.