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*Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates on the Nicomachean Ethics.*

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Burger's book is a remarkable dialectical journey through the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), placing us on the inside track of thinking through the mind of Aristotle. She poses, juggles and suggests resolutions to the oppositions that clutter *NE*, which she claims is to be read as a dialogue between Socrates and Aristotle eventually leading to the reconciliation of the main opposition between intellectual and ethical virtues.

Chapter 1 poses the question, 'Is the good or happiness Socratic *theoria* or Aristotelian *praxis*?' Aristotle identifies happiness serially with virtue, theoretical life, money, pleasure; but none singly nor jointly are sufficient and 'happiness' is defined through *ergon* (human function) as 'action in accordance with perfect virtue'. *Theoria*, as a human function, is sustained alongside *praxis* in the pursuit of happiness.

In Chapter 2 *phronēsis* as practical reasoning reconciles the oppositions of i) virtue as a natural Socratic function versus the Aristotelian mean, and ii) the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge versus the Aristotelian identification of it with habituation. *Phronēsis* is hence a necessary condition for genuine virtue.

Chapter 3 poses the opposition of the Socratic thesis that no one knowingly and willingly does evil and the Aristotelian conception that good and evil are done out of choice. If naturalism prevails we perform evil deeds unwittingly and unwillingly; however, if *phronēsis* prevails, then through deliberation we choose not to perform evil even if we are ignorant, because we consider the practical consequences of actions. The Socratic position that all virtues merge into one singularity is opposed to Aristotle's view that there is a plurality of virtues. (Here 'one singularity' is preferable to 'a single virtue', as for Burger it may not be a single virtue that is at issue at all in this merging.) For Aristotle each virtue is a distinct mean sharing the common aim of beauty until beauty disappears, and justice in the state is the supreme virtue that submerges beauty and the individual. Nonetheless the virtues are guided by the singular virtue of *phronēsis* that absorbs all the other virtues but allows each virtue to flourish autonomously. Hence, plurality is sustained.

In Chapter 4 Burger demonstrates that desire pursues beauty as the ultimate and most desirable ethical virtue, but when beauty disappears desire has nothing left to desire except truth, which is best grasped by *sophia* (contemplation). Desire and deliberation become partners in the pursuit of happiness, which is now *sophia*, that which is pursued not for the sake of anything else but for its own sake; and *phronēsis*, which now serves *sophia*, is the instrument for deliberation.

The opposition in Chapter 5 is between *phronēsis* as the ability to practically do the morally right action and *akrasia* as the inability to perform the virtuous act while having the same knowledge that is required for *phronēsis* to function. *Akrasia* is overcome by recognizing what is good for oneself. This is the work of *phronēsis*, not *epistēmē*, because *akrasia* is not ignorance of the good but of what is good for oneself. Hence, *phronēsis* itself reconciles the conflict between the opposites of *phronēsis* and *akrasia*. The good is re-identified with pleasure, but Aristotle moves away from plurality to unity found in the divine pleasure of *sophia*, which re-emerges as supreme. Hence *phronēsis* must be sustained as the only chariot in which *sophia* travels.

In Chapter 6 two more tensions emerge, one between the political and the rational and the other between being immersed in action and standing apart in contemplation. Both ends of both oppositions are required for happiness but can only be achieved through friendship. The primacy of the social over the individual is maintained as friends are found in a social setting, but then Aristotle claims that one's best friend is oneself. Through contemplation one comes to love one's own mind and this allows one to love the minds of others, one's family and close associates, thereby establishing a social setting of friends living together. Friendship, which is practical, lays the path for happiness to be identified with *sophia*. Even though happiness involves friends contemplating together, it is for the sake of exercising prudence that one seeks such happiness. Obviously, this is a non-standard interpretation, inasmuch as it requires us to consider happiness as something other than an end which is not for the sake of any other end.

In Chapter 7 the main opposition is reduced to that between thinking and doing. This is reconciled only by contemplation as the doing of ethics is the same as the thinking of it (214). What we have been doing is thinking, not in a theoretical sense divorced from life, but in a practical sense married to life. Happiness, what we have been seeking, is this contemplative act of seeking itself. The seeking was done for the sake of happiness which is not sought for anything else but for its own sake; but now we realize that the seeking itself is the sought. When happiness is identified with contemplative seeking, which is for the sake of the sought, then the sought is the seeking for its own sake. Happiness then is the activity of the contemplative seeking of happiness. The ordinary person does not know this and thinks that happiness is a goal just out of reach, whereas the philosopher knows that happiness is this activity itself and thus her happiness is more complete as 'happiness' is a comparative.

Though *phronēsis* can serve as a reconciler, connecting *theōria* to *praxis*, it cannot be *eudaimonia*, as it is not for its own sake but only functional, its function being to make this very connection. Contemplation as a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness must be inclusive of *phronēsis*. Furthermore, in the comparatively lower happiness of the common person, *phronēsis* adds the sufficiency condition to the definition of 'happiness' in terms of pleasures or beauty or justice.

The end sought and the doing are contemplation, but most of what has been doing the doing throughout *NE* is *phronēsis* not *sophia*, so isn't it *phronēsis*, after all, that is

happiness? It can easily be argued that *sophia* performs its role for the sake of happiness, which is the activity of pursuing happiness, and that this activity is *phronēsis*. Thus I conclude with the following suggestion for Burger's account of Aristotle: if Aristotle wants happiness to be both an activity (doing) and an object, then *phronēsis* is as good or better a candidate than *sophia*.

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