Eudaimonia and Self-sufficiency in the Nicomachean Ethics

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There is a well known difficulty in understanding Aristotle's answer to the central question of the Nicomachean Ethics: what is eudaimonia? Some, leaning on Bk. X, chapters 6-8, maintain that Aristotle's answer is contemplation to the exclusion of anything else. Others, leaning on Bk. I, hold that eudaimonia includes other goods besides contemplation, especially (what I will call) moral action, the exercise of the moral virtues. Still others hold that Bk. X contains an exclusive view of eudaimonia as consisting in nothing but contemplation, and is not in the end reconcilable with Bk. I's inclusive account.

At present, a consensus seems to be growing that at least we can be sure that Bk. I propounds an inclusive account of eudaimonia. Hence, if Bks. I and X fit together into a coherent account, Bk. X must be brought into line with such a position. I'll call this "the comprehensive view" of eudaimonia.

The comprehensive interpretation relies on a number of arguments to support its view of NE I, above all the criterion of self-sufficiency laid down at 1097b14-21. In the present paper I will argue that the appeal to self-sufficiency as well as other arguments fail to prove the comprehensive

1 Hereafter NE. All references are to this work unless otherwise indicated.


Phronesis 1988. Vol. XXXIII (Accepted August 1987)