

13. I do not wish to imply, however, that Epicurus advocated the kind of maximizing strategy favored by Jeremy Bentham and the utilitarians. Although some theorists have argued for such an interpretation of Epicurus, I agree with Julia Annas that this is a mistake. As Annas explains, "The pleasure which we seek is not a simple feeling, as Bentham assumed. Pleasure is our final end, and as such . . . it must be something capable of organizing and focusing all the concerns and aims of my life as a whole; it must encompass everything worthwhile in my life. . . . Once pleasure is understood as it has to be in an ancient theory where it forms the agent's final end, we see that it is not the kind of thing that the agent can coherently try to maximize." Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 85–86.

14. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 36; Raymond Belliotti, *Happiness Is Overrated* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 23.

15. See Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 113–120. Taylor explains that for the Epicurean, "pleasure is the only ultimate good, and pain the only ultimate evil. Other things are good and bad only in relation to these. . . . Divest justice and the other commonly accepted virtues of their pleasurable fruits, and they retain nothing whatever of their goodness" (106–107).

16. *Ibid.*, 120. See also Belliotti, who objects to Epicureanism, because "even friendship is reduced to instrumental value as its Epicurean justification is benefit to the self, not the other." Belliotti, *Happiness Is Overrated*, 27.

17. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 274–275.

18. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 239, 240, 341.

19. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," 35.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 346; and Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 269.

22. A related problem is adaptation or what psychologists refer to as being on a "hedonic treadmill," which occurs when we inevitably get used to whatever pleasures we experience, leaving us craving even more. See Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 48–49.

23. Tim O'Keefe, "Epicurus," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

24. Epicurus, "Leading Doctrines," 36.

25. Layard, *Happiness*, 29; Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox* (New York: Random House, 2003), xvi.

26. Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox*, 164.

27. Epicurus, "Leading Doctrines," 39.

28. Layard, *Happiness*, 50–51.

29. Jeremy Bentham, "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 99.

30. John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 122.

31. *Ibid.*, 123.

32. *Ibid.*, 123–124.

33. *Ibid.*, 127.

34. Wayne Davis, "Pleasure and Happiness," *Philosophical Studies* 39 (1981): 305–317.

35. Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56.

36. Fred Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 110, 137.

37. Carson, "Happiness and the Good Life," 78.

38. Daniel Haybron, "Why Hedonism Is False," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 174.

39. L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 102.

40. Haybron, "Why Hedonism Is False," 175.

41. *Ibid.*, 176.

42. Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, 109; Feldman, *Pleasures and the Good Life*, 56.

43. Richard Taylor, *Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 109.

CHAPTER TWO

Happiness as Virtue: Plato and the Stoics

The view that happiness can be attained through a life of virtue (or moral excellence) originates with the ancient Greek and Roman ethicists, but this idea has also had a very strong influence on the way many contemporary philosophers think about happiness. Before we consider the theories themselves, we must first discuss the concept of virtue, for understanding virtue is essential for being able to critically evaluate this view of happiness. One doesn't encounter *virtue* much in everyday conversation, and I suspect the word is rarely used at all outside of philosophy classrooms. Julia Annas calls our everyday conception of virtue "unorganized" and "something of a mess," and she says our intuitions about it are "both vague and conflicting." Bernard Williams notes, "The word 'virtue' has for the most part acquired comic or otherwise undesirable associations, and few now use it except philosophers."¹

I will confess that prior to studying philosophy, I had only the vaguest impression of what this word meant. I can recall sitting in an undergraduate ethics class where the professor asked us the simple question "What is virtue?" As my mind went completely blank, the only thought I could conjure up was that patience is a virtue, though I had no idea what that actually implied about virtue. Now, when I teach my ethics classes, I always ask my students the same question, just to see how they will respond. Usually, my question is met with several blank stares (the rest look away), and sometimes one brave soul ventures

a guess that it has something to do with patience, which I suppose is something at least. But when pressed further, even the brave soul usually gives up, unable to come up with any further associations.

What I find more surprising is that vice, virtue's opposite, seems to fare no better. For instance, I often read a weekly column in the business section of the *New York Times* that features an interview with a frequent traveler. The final question they always ask the interviewee is "What is your secret airport vice?" Quite often, the replies involve things one would expect, such as eating a lot of junk food, reading tabloids, and spending too much money at airport gift shops. But there are also answers that are downright surprising, such as "I use earplugs," "I take medication to help me rest," or "I befriend the flight attendants," answers that suggest perhaps the interviewee did not quite understand the question. I have also tried asking my students about vice, thinking perhaps it was a more familiar concept that I could use to introduce virtue. But the few vague references I've gotten usually involve the seven deadly sins (of which sloth seems to be the only one anyone can remember), and I suspect the Brad Pitt movie *Seven* is the source of this weak association.

So, returning to our question, what is virtue? And why is it so vitally important to the ancient ethicists? For now, I shall provide only a sketch of virtue in broad terms, leaving the majority of the detail to be filled in by the three classic accounts we shall consider in this chapter and the next, which come from Plato, the Stoics, and Aristotle. Put simply, virtues are good character traits that people have, such as honesty, generosity, temperance, courage, and, of course, patience, which cause them to act in ways that we find admirable or praiseworthy. Annas describes virtue as "something which goes deep in the person, and is a matter of their character." Virtues involve two things that "develop together and are intertwined in practice. One is the ability to reason reflectively in the morally right way . . . The other thing involved in virtue is a developed habit of feeling and reacting in the right way, that is, the way that accords with the correct reasoning."²

To fully appreciate why virtue is so important to the ancient ethicists, we must first look at what they were trying to do, for their approach to ethics is quite different from the way we conceive of morality today. What is our present conception of ethics or morality? I'm not sure that most ordinary people have a very well-developed concept of morality, especially if they have never studied

philosophy in a formal setting. But I can offer some evidence based on discussions with my students. I start the first day of all ethics classes with a free association: I put up the words *ethics* and *morality* on the board, and after explaining that the two terms are generally taken to be synonymous, I ask my students what comes to mind when they see either of these terms. Usually, the first response involves some mention of "right and wrong," and that is followed up with punitive concepts such as justice, laws, rules, and punishment. Someone usually mentions religion, and sometimes there is also a reference to one's conscience and emotions such as guilt. But I almost never get any reference to the kinds of things that concerned the ancient ethicists, such as a person's character or her values; nor is there any mention of the good life, happiness, or virtue. Yet the word *ethics* actually comes from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning "character" or "custom," and the principal task of any ancient ethicist is to think about how one should live one's life, including which values and principles one should adopt. The ancient ethicists are not interested in presenting formal theories that tell us which acts are morally right or wrong; rather, they focus on questions regarding how one achieves happiness and lives a good life.

Happiness figures centrally in many ancient ethical theories, which view happiness as the final end or purpose of all human action (which they call our "telos"). Annas provides a useful description of our final end (or telos): "When we stand back a bit from our ongoing projects and ask why we are doing what we are doing, we do not find a satisfactory halt until we get to the final end which makes sense of our life as a whole."³ For the ancient philosophers, this natural stopping point is happiness, because happiness is something that we all want, and they believe it is the pursuit of happiness that drives all of our choices. However, most people are completely ignorant about what actually causes happiness, and they spend their lives pursuing the wrong things, mistakenly believing these things will produce happiness. The ancient texts can be seen as guides or manuals offering advice on how to avoid these mistakes and live a happy life.

Although the ancient ethicists differ on the precise connection between virtue and happiness, they agree that being virtuous is a necessary component of a happy life. The importance of virtue becomes more apparent when we reflect on Aristotle's description of the virtuous person as someone who will do the right thing "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards

the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way.¹⁴ As this quote suggests, the basic idea is that the virtuous person is getting things right; her priorities are in good order, she makes good judgments, and she is living well overall. If we think about our lives and all of the choices we face each day, deciding what to do can be a daunting task. The virtuous person, because she has these good, stable character traits, will be able to accurately assess each situation and recognize the best way to act every time. Virtuous people also aren't prone to the rash or impulsive actions that people often regret, nor do they act out of anger or for any other shortsighted reason. The virtuous person knows what is important in her life, and she isn't swayed by short-term pleasures or temptations, because she is fully in control of her emotions. So being virtuous is not only intrinsically good (good in itself), but it is also good for you, because it promotes your well-being.

In the following sections, we shall consider two historical perspectives on how one can achieve happiness through a life of moral virtue, which come from Plato and the Stoics. We shall consider Aristotle's view of happiness in the following chapter.

Platonic Happiness

Plato (428–347 BC) is the best-known and most influential ancient Greek philosopher. Plato wrote in dialogue form, and most of his dialogues feature his teacher Socrates as the main interlocutor. In what is probably his greatest work, the *Republic*, Plato tackles the question of whether it is always better to be a just (virtuous) person rather than an unjust one.

Before we turn to Plato's actual arguments, let's first discuss what he means by justice. I've found his use of this term sometimes confuses people, for they associate justice with simply abiding by the laws or following the rules of one's society. Plato uses the term *justice* much more broadly, so that it encompasses everything we would associate with being a moral or righteous person, including all the good character traits we call virtues. So when Plato considers the question of whether justice is necessary for happiness, what he is really asking about is the connection between morality and happiness: can one be happy with a life of immorality, or is being a morally good person a necessary condition for living a happy life?

In this dialogue, Plato offers several arguments to defend the claim that being a just (morally good, virtuous) person is necessary for happiness, and his view implies the unjust (immoral, vicious) person will never be happy despite any outward appearances to the contrary. One might initially be skeptical about the connection Plato posits between virtue and happiness, because real life seems to provide so many examples of immoral people who appear to enjoy happy lives. This was my initial reaction to Plato's claim, but it is important to reserve judgment until after we have reviewed Plato's account of justice, for he does address this objection explicitly.

The *Republic* begins with Socrates posing the question "What is justice?" After several simple definitions are rejected, Socrates considers the view presented by Thrasymachus, who identifies justice as the interest of the stronger. Thrasymachus argues that the rulers of a city enact the laws that determine what is just, so we can expect these laws to promote what is in their own best interest. By following the laws of justice, we are only furthering the self-interest or happiness of the ruling class (the interest of the stronger), and this is often to our own disadvantage. Therefore, if we want to promote our own happiness, we are better off committing acts of injustice, for these will be much more profitable, assuming that we don't get caught. As Thrasymachus explains, "When a man not only seizes the property of his fellow-citizens but captures and enslaves their persons also, instead of those dishonorable titles he is called happy and highly favored, not only by the men of his own city, but also by all others who hear of the comprehensive injustice which he has wrought."¹⁵

Although his example may seem a bit arcane, Thrasymachus's point about the benefits of injustice should resonate, especially considering how common immorality is within our own society. Politics and business are two obvious areas in which people are frequently willing to suspend the ordinary standards of morality in order to promote their own (or their company's) interests. But even ordinary people frequently commit acts of injustice, such as driving above the speed limit, illegally downloading music from the Internet, skipping jury duty, or cheating on their taxes. Thrasymachus is arguing that we commit these acts of injustice because they make us happier than behaving justly. This is precisely the view of justice Plato wishes to refute, for he believes it is always better to be just. The challenge for Plato is to convince Thrasymachus (and us) that he is right.

In book 2 of the *Republic*, Glaucon picks up Thrasymachus's argument, challenging Socrates to convince us that "on every account it is better to be just than to be unjust."⁶ Glaucon begins by distinguishing three ways in which things are good or valuable. First, we say that something has intrinsic value when we desire it solely for itself, such as feelings of enjoyment, happiness, or harmless pleasures. Second, we say that something has instrumental value when we desire that thing for its good consequences, despite the fact that it may be irksome, painful, or unpleasant. Glaucon offers exercise, undergoing medical treatments for an illness, and working to make money as examples of things with instrumental value. The final category consists of things that have both intrinsic and instrumental value, and this includes intelligence, sight, and health, because they are valued both for their own sake and for their good consequences.

Glaucon asks Socrates in which category he places justice, and Socrates replies that justice belongs in the highest category, with things valued both for their own sake and for their consequences. Glaucon replies that most people would disagree, for they view justice as belonging to the second category, with things that are "disagreeable and repulsive" in themselves but valued because of the advantages they bring.⁷

To illustrate, Glaucon relays the Myth of Gyges Ring, which is the story of a shepherd who finds a gold ring that makes its wearer invisible. Upon discovering the power of the ring, the shepherd uses it to seduce the queen, kill the king, and take possession of the throne. Glaucon has us imagine there are two rings in existence, one given to the just man and one to the unjust man, and he asks whether we expect these two men to behave any differently. Glaucon's reply is that "no one would be so steered against temptation as to abide in the practice of justice, and resolutely to abstain from touching the property of his neighbors, when he had it in his power to help himself without fear to anything he pleased in the market, or to go into private houses and have intercourse with whom he would, or to kill and release from prison according to his own pleasure, and in everything else to act among men with the power of a god."⁸

Glaucon is arguing that the just man would behave no differently from the unjust man, for both would be tempted to satisfy their own desires. Furthermore, we recognize committing injustice as a rational choice, especially if it is unlikely one will be caught. Glaucon even argues, "If anyone having this license

[possession of the ring] within his grasp were to refuse to do any injustice, or to touch the property of others, all who were aware of it would think him a most pitiful and irrational creature."⁹ He concludes that justice is only instrumentally valuable; we behave justly because we lack the power to commit acts of injustice with impunity, and we are afraid of the consequences. But justice (in itself) has no special value, for when the fear of punishment is removed, no sane person would continue to behave justly.

As a final illustration of his argument, Glaucon asks us to compare the lives of two people, one who is perfectly just and the other perfectly unjust, to see who is actually better off. The perfectly unjust man, we are told, is morally depraved and vicious, but he maintains the appearance of justice. Because he is perfectly unjust, he has everyone fooled into thinking he is the most honorable and respected member of society. He is loved by all, and he enjoys a life blessed with money and privilege, powerful friends, a wonderful wife, and successful children. In contrast, the perfectly just man is stripped of everything but his justice. Although he is truly noble and good, he enjoys none of the benefits of justice, because his society thinks he is a scoundrel. Given his terrible reputation, Glaucon tells us, the perfectly just man will be "scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified."¹⁰ The simple question is: which man is better off? This example is especially challenging for Plato, because his view of justice implies the perfectly just man must be happier than the perfectly unjust man, when just the opposite seems to be true.

To answer this challenge, Plato appeals to the effect of justice (or morally good behavior) on the state of a person's soul. Plato begins with a description of the soul as consisting of three distinct parts, which one can think of as three distinct and competing motivations. Although the terminology Plato uses to describe our psychology may sound a bit archaic (today, we are probably more likely to refer to a person's "mind" or "consciousness" rather than her "soul"), his description of how our motivations can compete against each other for primacy actually makes a lot of intuitive sense. Consider an example. You are stuck in traffic, and there appears to be a bad accident up ahead with several dead bodies strewn among the wreckage. As you approach the accident, part of you wants to slow down and look. But at the same time, part of you does not want to witness the gruesome scene, which you will probably find disturbing.

You may struggle with yourself, turning your head away as you get close, but the urge to look just as you are in front of the accident may overwhelm you. Plato describes the competing pull of these two opposing motivations as taking place between two different parts of your soul.

According to Plato, altogether, there are three distinct parts of the soul, which he refers to as reason, spirit, and appetite. Reason is the rational part whose job it is to exercise forethought on behalf of the whole person and to make wise decisions. Reason can be compared to the little angel sitting on our shoulder urging us to get to work on time, quit smoking, and eat more vegetables. Spirit is the emotional part, which is naturally allied with reason, and spirit helps us to act on reason's commands. Appetite is the irrational part, which impels us to indulge in pleasures. Appetite is like the little devil sitting on the other shoulder, the one who tempts us to eat another piece of chocolate cake or to go out drinking even though we know we have to get up early the next morning. Plato warns that appetite must be controlled by reason and spirit, because it is the largest part of the soul, and it will get out of hand if it is overindulged.

According to Plato, a person has a just soul when all three parts are working in unison to promote the well-being or good of the person, with each part doing its own proper work. Reason issues commands about what is in the individual's best interest, and spirit is working together with reason to tame the appetite. Because her soul is in balance, the just person will experience a kind of psychic harmony and inner peace. Put simply, she will be happy.

Plato describes the person whose soul is in balance as entirely virtuous, for she will embody each of the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance (or moderation), and justice. She will be wise, because reason is providing guidance about what is best for her. She will be courageous, because her spirited part is listening to reason about which situations she should fear, and she won't be swayed by the momentary pains or pleasures that cause people to act in cowardly or rash ways. She will be temperate (or moderate), because her appetite is controlled by spirit and reason, and all three parts are in agreement. Finally, she will be just, because justice is defined as having an ordered soul with all three parts functioning well together. Within the just person, every part does its proper job, and none exerts more authority than it should. Plato describes the just person as having achieved self-mastery; she does not experience any

of the inner turmoil that leads to unhappiness. Therefore, on Plato's view, the just person is happy, because she has a healthy, well-balanced soul.

Alternatively, acts of injustice cause strife among the parts of the soul. Because the unjust person's soul is out of balance, the three parts will meddle and interfere with each other, not listening to reason. The unjust person may become self-indulgent, and she will be tempted to pursue harmful pleasures. Once the soul is imbalanced, there will be confusion among the parts of the soul, and this person will suffer from tremendous inner turmoil. The unjust person will experience intense urges for the wrong things, feeling constantly outmatched and overwhelmed by her desires. Even if she is able to fulfill some of her desires, she will never feel satisfied or content, because her appetite will always be raging.

Plato believed that every just (or morally good) act serves to reinforce the inner harmony within our souls, and he describes the just soul as healthy, beautiful, and in accord with nature. Alternatively, acts of injustice lead to disorder among the parts, and Plato describes the unjust person as having a disease that violates our true nature. Therefore, Plato's reply to Glaucon's challenge is quite clear: acts of justice will always make us happier than acts of injustice, because only justice will preserve the harmony within our souls. One should never be tempted to commit unjust or immoral acts, because they will make the soul sick by encouraging discord among the parts. Whatever reward one hopes to reap from such unjust behavior, such as money or power, it will be useless if one's soul is corrupted and ruined. Therefore, Plato believes that justice is necessary for living a happy life, because it promotes order within the soul.

Jeffrie Murphy is a contemporary philosopher who agrees with Plato about the necessary connection between happiness and moral behavior. Murphy argues that the whole point of philosophizing about happiness is to supply this notion with content. Although the uneducated masses might consider someone like the perfectly unjust man to be happy, because they associate happiness with earthly possessions and power, the philosopher can provide a more enlightened understanding of happiness that shows why he is not really happy. Murphy argues that Plato is trying to advance our philosophical understanding of happiness by suggesting that "full human happiness is to be understood as the satisfaction one takes in having a personality wherein all the elements required for a fully realized human life are harmoniously integrated."¹¹

Philippa Foot advocates a similar view of happiness, for she argues that “great happiness, unlike euphoria or even great pleasure, must come from something related to what is deep in human nature, and fundamental in human life, such as affection for children and friends, the desire to work, and love of freedom and truth.” Since the unjust person lacks many of these attributes, including integrity, moral emotions, and the capacity for true friendships, it follows that she cannot really be happy in the full sense used by philosophers. Murphy believes the unjust person is probably afraid of having her true nature revealed, and that fear is also incompatible with genuine happiness. Murphy concludes that when he thinks of someone like the perfectly unjust man, he pities this person, because “he is punished simply by being the kind of person he is. But why would I pity him if I thought he was truly happy?”¹²

Plato’s view of happiness, which is endorsed by Murphy and Foot, implies the immoralist, or the person who knowingly commits acts of injustice, can never be happy, because her soul is sick. When we think about some of the reasons people give to explain their bad behavior, Plato’s description of the disordered soul is especially accurate. For example, crimes of passion, cases of rage, and brawls in bars often involve people getting carried away by their irrational side, following their raging appetites instead of listening to reason. In other cases, highly intelligent and accomplished people get overwhelmed by a traumatic life event, which causes them to act in highly irrational and often immoral ways. For example, Lisa Nowak was a married mother of three children and a NASA astronaut when a breakup with her lover caused her to drive nine hundred miles (wearing a diaper, so she would not have to stop) in order to confront her romantic rival. She has since been arrested and charged with attempted murder and kidnapping. More recently, Amy Bishop, a University of Alabama biology professor, shot six faculty members at a department meeting shortly after being denied tenure.

Plato’s picture of the disordered soul provides a good explanation of the psychology of people who act in rash, impulsive, and obviously regrettable ways, people whose behavior is not just immoral but also irrational. One wants to ask the people in these examples, what on earth were you thinking? What could you possibly have hoped to gain by acting in this way? On Plato’s view, the answer is simple: they were not thinking clearly, because reason was not in control of the nonrational parts of their soul, appetite, and spirit. These

cases demonstrate how committing acts of injustice can lead to unhappiness, and they suggest that if you are interested in promoting your own happiness, you have a serious reason to refrain from immoral behavior, which might disturb the balance within your soul.

But now we must ask how well Plato’s analysis describes the case of the perfectly unjust man described by Glaucon. Plato must say the perfectly unjust man’s happiness is merely an illusion, because his acts of injustice imply that he has a disordered soul. Although this analysis may sound comforting, for no one wants to see the “bad guy” flourish, one might not find it entirely convincing. Consider all of the cases within business and politics where people commit white-collar crimes. These immoral and blatantly unjust acts often lack the impulsive, emotional, irrational characteristics that one would expect from a person who is dominated by one of the nonrational parts of the soul. Rather, these cunning immoralists appear to be in complete control of their emotions, and their immoral behavior often results in their getting exactly what they want. Plato’s model seems to assimilate all wrongdoing to the work of a raging appetite and spirit that dominate or overpower reason. One might wonder whether Plato’s model actually captures the thriving immoralist Glaucon portrays, the person who is such a good actor that he has everyone fooled. The perfectly unjust man does not appear to be controlled by a raging appetite, and his ability to keep his immorality concealed suggests reason is more in control than Plato would like to admit. It is comforting to think that, eventually, even the perfectly unjust man will get caught (like Bernie Madoff). But until that day comes, one might wonder how Plato can deny the perfectly unjust man’s happiness. The problem is that certain criminals seem to exhibit excellent self-control and very good instrumental reasoning, and their immoral behavior does not seem “crazy” or blatantly self-destructive. On the contrary, they often appear to enjoy the kind of psychic harmony Plato associates with having a just soul (at least until they get caught).

David Sachs raises a related concern about Plato’s conception of justice. Sachs argues that “Plato thought that men who were just according to his conception of justice would pass the tests of ordinary morality. But although Plato more than once has Socrates say things to this effect, he nowhere tries to prove it. Attempts to show that Platonic justice entails ordinary morality are strikingly missing from the *Republic*; Plato merely assumes that having the one involves having the other.”¹³

The problem, according to Sachs, is that the virtues exhibited by a just soul, such as wisdom, courage, and temperance, are entirely compatible with "a variety of vulgar injustices and evil-doing. Neither as usually understood nor as Plato characterizes them are those virtues inconsistent with performing any of the acts Thrasymachus and Glaucon mention as examples of injustice. In this regard, it is tempting to assert that the most that can be said on behalf of Plato's argument is that crimes and evils could not be done by a Platonically just man in a foolish, unintelligent, cowardly or uncontrolled way." Sachs concludes that "neither separately nor conjointly do the theses of Books VIII and IX [Plato's *Republic*] . . . exclude the possibility of men whose souls are Platonically just committing what would ordinarily be judged immoral acts."¹⁴

Sachs's argument calls into question Plato's analysis of the perfectly unjust man, for it implies that having a just soul is no guarantee that one will behave morally. The perfectly unjust man described by Glaucon is someone who reasons well about how to satisfy his desires and fools everyone about the deviant nature of his character. Sachs's argument suggests it is possible the perfectly unjust man has a just soul (with reason dominating the two nonrational parts), and this would explain how he is such a successful immoralist. But if the perfectly unjust man has a just soul, then according to Plato's own reasoning, he is also happy.

Raymond Belliotti also questions whether Plato proves the unjust person is always doomed to unhappiness. Belliotti explains that according to Plato, "The unjust soul is unhealthy due to internal disharmony. Unjust people are not happy regardless of external appearances that suggest otherwise. In the same way that physically unhealthy people may seem healthy to their acquaintances, unhealthy souls cannot always be detected by the naked eye. Injustice, nevertheless, manifests an illness that is never in the interests of the perpetrator." Belliotti agrees with Plato when we are assessing "a thoroughly and morally depraved, intellectually bankrupt tyrant. Most such people are unlikely to be happy. Their excesses are themselves often attributable to their unhappiness and inability to adapt to their social environments. Even their episodic satisfactions evaporate quickly." However, Belliotti finds Plato's argument much less convincing "if we are assessing the vast majority of human beings who are neither moral paragons nor unrepentant tyrants. That people can be reasonably happy while falling far short of being moral and intellectual paragons remains plausible. Consult your own lives and those of your peers."¹⁵

Before we reject Plato's analysis of the perfectly unjust man, however, we must consider what Plato (and his defenders) might say in response to these objections. First, it should be emphasized that Plato does address the cunning criminal who carefully plans his acts of immorality and avoids detection. Plato offers several specific examples of deviant people (which he refers to as timocratic, oligarchic, and democratic) who "have rational plans for their lives and execute them steadily, without especially frequent lapses into incontinence," or a lack of self-control. As Terence Irwin explains:

The timocratic person need not be specially prone to imprudent bursts of anger; indeed, his plans encourage him to control his appetites and emotions in order to pursue his long-term aim of honour and reputation more efficiently. The single-minded and systematic planning of the oligarchic person is strongly emphasized. . . . The democratic person acts on a variety of desires with no clear hierarchical structure, but this is not because he cannot control his desires. On the contrary, his rational plan is precisely to leave his different desires a certain agree of freedom, and in acting on them he does just what he rationally plans to do.¹⁶

Therefore, Plato was clearly aware of the existence of the cunning criminal, whose acts of immorality are not rash, irrational, or blatantly self-destructive.

Plato would certainly object to calling the cunning criminal just, even though she exhibits good instrumental reasoning about how to satisfy her desires, for Plato would also take into account the nature of a person's desires. Irwin suggests that a soul dominated by reason has "formed desires resting on wise deliberation about what is good for the whole soul and it uses these desires to guide the whole soul."¹⁷ Plato would argue that the immoralist's desires are defective, because they do not reflect what is good for her as a person. Immoral desires originate not from reason, but from one of the two nonrational parts of the soul, whose view of what is good is naturally limited.

As Irwin explains, the rational part "incorporates, but also modifies, the outlooks of the two non-rational parts. If we can see all four sides of a building, we can understand the points of view of four observers each of whom can observe only one side; each point of view is misleading by itself, and even the sum of their four points of view is misleading, but we can see how far they are accurate if we understand the whole building of which they observe different

parts. The rational part takes this wider point of view on the desires and interests of the non-rational parts, so that it can satisfy their interests better than it would if it simply chose to be guided by their desires."¹⁸

Acting on desires that reflect a person's entire good is important, because whenever we act on our desires, we have certain expectations about the satisfaction we will experience. Under the best circumstances, our expectations will accurately represent how we will feel after we get what we want. Suppose I have always wanted to be a famous actress, because I love being the center of attention. If my expectations about what being famous is like are accurate, I stand a good chance of being happy once I achieve my goal. But if my expectations are wildly mistaken, I may get exactly what I want, yet be miserable. When we are dominated by the nonrational parts of our souls, we are being led by our desires for various things, but the nonrational parts lack the perspective to accurately gauge whether these desires will actually make us happy. Satisfying desires formed by the nonrational parts could be deeply disappointing, unsatisfying, or harmful, because these desires may not reflect what is good for the person as a whole. As Irwin explains:

Since the non-rational parts are moved by present inclination when they form their aims, they are easily misled by misleading features of the background that forms their present inclination. The rational part, by contrast, is concerned to find what is really better and worse on the whole. This concern with truth leads it to pursue the true good of the whole soul. If it takes this point of view, it does not form its aims simply on the basis of the strength of its inclinations, and so it will not make its choices in the distorting conditions that influence the non-rational parts.¹⁹

I leave it to the reader to decide who makes the better case—Plato or Glaucon—regarding the perfectly unjust man's happiness. Whereas some theorists have found Plato's analysis less than convincing, perhaps most notably Aristotle, as we shall see in the next chapter, Plato has certainly anticipated these kinds of objections and does offer a reply to them. We shall return to the question of whether virtue is actually necessary for happiness in the final section of the next chapter, where I shall critically evaluate this view. First, we must consider another historical perspective on the connection between virtue and happiness.

Stoic Happiness

Stoicism was founded by Zeno (344–262 BC) during the Hellenistic period, though only fragments of his work or those of his immediate predecessors survive. The complete works we do have by Stoic philosophers come from Seneca (4 BC–AD 65), Epictetus (AD 55–135), and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180). Stoicism was initially popular within ancient Greece, but it spread to the Roman Empire, where it appealed to the Roman character as “a code which was manly, rational and temperate, a code which insisted on just and virtuous dealing, self-discipline, unflinching fortitude, and complete freedom from the storms of passion.”²⁰

Like Plato and many other ancient moralists, the Stoics begin from a reflection on the agent's final good (or *telos*), which they equate with happiness. Seneca explains, “To live happily . . . is the desire of all men, but their minds are blinded to a clear vision of just what it is that makes life happy; and so far from its being easy to attain the happy life, the more eagerly a man strives to reach it, the farther he recedes from it if he has made the mistake in the road; for when it leads in the opposite direction, his very speed will increase the distance that separates him.” The Stoics agree with Plato that virtue is a necessary component of the happy life, but they believe happiness is attained by “living in accord with nature,” and they associate virtue with using reason to control your will. The early Stoic Arius Didymus explains, “One's aim, they say, is being happy, for the sake of which everything is done, while it is not done for the sake of anything further; and this consists in living according to virtue, in living in agreement and further (it is the same thing) in living according to nature.”²¹

Before we go further, we should get clear on what the Stoics mean by nature, for they aren't suggesting that we take up organic farming or join a hippie commune. Rather, they are referring to the nature of the universe, or “cosmic nature,” which they believe exhibits rational planning and order. The Stoics are causal determinists, meaning they believe every event that occurs in the present was caused by some prior event in the past, and this chain of events goes all the way back to the beginning of time. Put simply, the determinist would say that whatever is happening right now is inevitable or predetermined given what has happened before it. Since every event within the universe contributes

to its ultimate perfection, everything that happens in nature is for the best, even if we, as human beings, cannot appreciate that from our limited perspective.

In a humorous example that illustrates how the Stoics view every natural occurrence as having an important purpose, Annas cites Plutarch as saying that mice encourage us to be careful not to leave things lying around, while bedbugs help us to get up in the morning and be productive. To use another example, human beings often attach emotional significance to natural events, such as hurricanes, floods, and fires, viewing them as awful or devastating, because they cause damage to our property and homes. But the Stoics would argue that these natural occurrences should not provoke an emotional reaction at all, because they are simply a necessary part of the natural world. Although we might be tempted to make negative judgments concerning them, the Stoic would advise us to view everything that is beyond our control with complete emotional detachment or indifference. As Marcus Aurelius succinctly explains, "Put from you the belief that 'I have been wronged,' and with it will go the feeling. Reject your sense of injury, and the injury itself disappears."²²

The Stoics believe the entire natural world is pursuing its final purpose and that human beings are just one small part of that world. Marcus Aurelius explains, "Universal Nature's impulse was to create an orderly world. It follows, then, that everything now happening must follow a logical sequence. . . . Remembrance of this will help you face many things more calmly." As human beings, we can achieve virtue by using reason to understand nature. Essential to this understanding is grasping the distinction between what we can control and what we cannot and concerning ourselves only with what is within our control. All natural occurrences are inevitable or predetermined, so they are beyond our control; our judgments or reactions to those occurrences, however, are within our control. When natural events occur, the Stoic maintains the proper attitude of "apathy" or emotional indifference to them. Marcus Aurelius explains how one achieves this apathetic attitude: "Think of the totality of all Being, and what a mite of it is yours; think of all Time, and the brief fleeting instant of it that is allotted to yourself; think of Destiny, and how puny a part of it you are."²³

Annas explains that the Stoics who are virtuous will exhibit a complete lack of feeling or emotion, because "they stress the importance of the cognitive side of virtue, regarding it in very intellectual ways, and say roundly that there is

no degree of feeling that it is appropriate for the virtuous person to have." The Stoic philosopher Arius further explains their view of the emotions: "A feeling . . . is an impulse which is excessive and disobedient to reason . . . or, an <irrational> movement in the soul contrary to nature. . . . And 'contrary to nature' is understood in the sketch of feeling as something happening contrary to the reason which is correct and according to nature."²⁴

Therefore, the Stoics associate virtue with eliminating all emotion, because they view the emotions as contrary to reason, and, therefore, contrary to nature.²⁵ The Stoics believe the virtuous person will choose to do the right thing, simply because she recognizes (through the use of reason) that it is the right thing to do, and not because she feels an emotional impulse, which is unreliable. By severing the connection between morality and emotion, the Stoics make it possible for anyone to develop a virtuous character, because virtue depends solely on reason and the power of your own will. It is essential to the Stoic conception of virtue that you remain unemotional or indifferent to whatever happens by chance, not allowing any external events to disturb you. Consider the following passage from Marcus Aurelius, who encourages us to focus on the things we can control, such as the development of our characters:

You will never be remarkable for quick-wittedness. Be it so, then; yet there are still a host of other qualities whereof you cannot say, "I have no bent for them." Cultivate these, then, for they are wholly within your power: sincerity, for example, and dignity; industriousness, and sobriety. Avoid grumblings, be frugal, considerate, and frank; be temperate in manner and in speech; carry yourself with authority. See how many qualities there are which could be yours at this moment. You can allege no naïve incapacity or inaptitude for them; and yet you choose to linger still on a less lofty plane. Furthermore, is it any lack of natural endowments that necessitate those fits of querulousness and parsimony and fulsome flattery, of railing at your ill-health, of cringing and bragging and continually veering from one mood to another? Most assuredly not; you could have rid yourself of all these long ago, and remained chargeable with nothing worse than a certain slowness and dullness of comprehension—and even this you can correct with practice, so long as you do not make light of it or take pleasure in your own obtuseness.²⁶

The Stoics believe there is no good or evil in the world, for all good and evil consists in our own minds and judgments. Since we have control over our own minds, it follows that nothing that happens in the world can affect us unless we allow it to. According to the Stoics, all of the unhappiness we experience is caused by our judgment that certain events are bad or harmful. But these events are external to us, and since they are beyond our control, we should not let them affect our happiness.

There is some truth to what the Stoics say about happiness, because people often become unhappy when they start making demands on the universe and the universe fails to deliver. The Stoics would say the problem is not with the universe or the natural order of things; the problem is with us, or rather with our judgments. As Epictetus explains:

What disturbs men's mind is not events but judgments on events. For instance, death is nothing dreadful, or else Socrates would have thought so. No, the only dreadful thing about it is men's judgment that it is dreadful. And so when we are hindered, or disturbed, or distressed, let us never lay the blame on others, but on ourselves, that is, on our own judgments. To accuse others for one's own misfortunes is a sign of want of education; to accuse oneself shows that one's education has begun; to accuse neither oneself nor others shows that one's education is complete.²⁷

*The fault
lies not in the
stars
but in the
man*

Consider an example. You are waiting for the bus on a cold, windy day, and it has just started to rain. You are becoming increasingly uncomfortable as the wind blows the rain underneath your flimsy umbrella, and you can feel the water starting to soak through your clothes and shoes. As you realize the bus is delayed, your anger and unhappiness intensify, so that now, in addition to being cold and wet, you are also quite miserable. However, the bus delay and dreadful weather conditions are completely beyond your control. By letting these external events negatively affect your mood, the Stoics would argue, you are ultimately responsible for your own unhappiness. The ideal Stoic sage will acknowledge that she is cold and wet, but she will refuse to let these sensations bother her. Instead, she will view the weather and the delay with apathy or indifference, thereby maintaining her happiness. As Epictetus explains, "Make it your study then to confront every harsh impression with the words, 'You are but an impression and not at all what you seem to be.' Then test it by those rules that

you possess; and first by this—chief test of all—'Is it concerned with what is in our power or with what is not in our power?' And if it is concerned with what is not in our power, be ready with the answer that it is nothing to you."²⁸

Therefore, the Stoic experiences all of the same sensations, pleasures, and pains as everyone else; the difference lies in her reaction to them. For she experiences them as things that do not matter. Epictetus explains:

It is silly to want your children and your wife and your friends to live forever, for that means that you want what is not in your control to be in your control, and what is not your own to be yours. . . . Exercise yourself then in what lies in your power. Each man's master is the man who has authority over what he wishes or does not wish, to secure the one or to take away the other. Let him then who wishes to be free not wish for anything or avoid anything that depends on others; or else he is bound to be a slave.²⁹

There are several similarities between the Stoics and Plato, for both believe that virtue is necessary for achieving happiness, and both identify the virtuous person as having reason firmly in control of her emotions and appetite (or the will). Both views imply that what matters for happiness is not what happens in the external world, but what happens within your own mind or soul, and both associate the happy life with maintaining inner harmony or tranquility. The Stoics would have no problem accepting the happiness of Plato's just man on the rack, for they would not view his external suffering as an adversity that should diminish his happiness. As Epictetus explains, "Sickness is a hindrance to the body, but not to the will, unless the will consent. Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not to the will. Say this to yourself at each event that happens, for you shall find that though it hinders something else it will not hinder you."³⁰

Another similarity between Plato and the Stoics is the role reason plays in their ethical systems. For Plato, reason acts as a commander who uses spirit to control the appetite. As long as reason dominates the soul, Plato believes, we have what is necessary for achieving happiness. The Stoics offer a similar picture, for although they do not emphasize controlling our desires, they focus on achieving a state of detachment, such that we remain perfectly content regardless of what happens in the external world. Both strategies seek to protect us from the kinds of dissatisfaction that often lead to unhappiness.

Although the Stoic strategy of remaining indifferent to devastating adversities is admirable, I wonder whether exerting such fierce control over our emotions does not also inhibit or limit the experience of happiness. Some theorists, most notably Aristotle, deem the emotions an essential part of living a happy life. Trying to eliminate the emotions you *feel* may help to blunt the traumas you experience in life, but it is doubtful whether these strategies will do much to promote your happiness, especially when you consider how much a person's happiness is connected with loving others and being attached to people. If you are a good Stoic, you will not let yourself be consumed by any emotions, but that strategy may also preclude being deeply involved with other people.

Raymond Belliorti raises a related concern about the implications of Stoicism: "Grieving, sorrow, and suffering are not inherently evil. Human beings are by nature valuing creatures. We cannot be stonily indifferent and retain our humanity. To value something is to make it an object of concern. . . . If we remain indifferent to the loss of what we value we call into question the intensity of our commitment. . . . Because our evaluations, convictions, and actions define our lives, we cannot be indifferent to our defeats, disappointments, and losses. . . . We should not cry over spilled milk. We should cry over spilled blood."³¹

Richard Taylor offers the following description of a good Stoic, which further emphasizes this objection: "You act as you would act if you loved, but you resolutely suppress any inclination to love, for that is a mere feeling and hence irrational. The compelling force for the Stoic in such a situation is not one's obligations to others, much less any love for them, but rather, one's obligation to oneself. That obligation is, as always, to tend and reinforce one's own excellence as a person. . . . You help the suffering, not for their sake, but because to do otherwise would be to compromise the sense of obligation that is essential to a truly noble life."³²

Consider the following passages from Epictetus: "Remember always to say to yourself, 'What is its nature?' If you are fond of a jug, say you are fond of a jug; then you will not be disturbed if it be broken. If you kiss your child or your wife, say to yourself that you are kissing a human being, for then if death strikes it you will not be disturbed." Epictetus also advises, "Never say of anything, 'I lost it', but say, 'I gave it back.' Has your child died? It was given back. Has your wife died? She was given back. Has your estate been taken from you? Was not this also given back? But you say, 'He who took it from

me is wicked.' What does it matter to you through whom the Giver asked it back? As long as He gives it to you, take care of it, but not as your own; treat it as passers-by treat an inn."³³

The problem with Stoicism is that it encourages emotional detachment, but one might worry that this also includes distancing oneself from other people.³⁴ By keeping ourselves apathetic or indifferent to what happens to other people, as Epictetus advises, it seems we are missing out on one of the greatest sources of joy available to human beings. Being apathetic will certainly protect us from experiencing pain, but it may also prohibit us from experiencing the full range of human happiness. Therefore, maintaining an attitude of Stoic indifference does not appear to be a realistic way of achieving happiness for most ordinary people, for there is an important difference between a life that contains no emotional pain or suffering and one that is genuinely happy. Although I believe we can all benefit from adopting the Stoic's attitude of indifference when we find ourselves facing adversities, I am not convinced it is the best strategy for living a happy life. Achieving happiness seems to require more than simply avoiding unhappiness.

In response, the defender of Stoicism could argue that we have misunderstood Epictetus, who did not advocate adopting a careless attitude toward our loved ones. As Irwin explains:

[Epictetus] does not imply that the death of a child or friend really matters no more than the breaking of a pot. He advises us to use this thought to dislodge us from our previous attachment to external goods. He assumes that we need to counter a tendency in our appearances to go too far, and that we can do this by taking account of features of the situation that a particular appearance tends to neglect. The appearances that underlie passions tend to draw our attention to only one of the practically relevant aspects of a situation. Sometimes they draw our attention to the most relevant feature, but sometimes they mislead us by diverting attention from equally relevant or more relevant features. Epictetus wants us to recall features that we tend to overlook because of the appearance that underlies the passion. The comparison between the loss of a child and the loss of a cup reminds us of our conviction that good and ill fortune are no part of happiness, since they are no part of virtue. If we keep this in mind, we will not confuse cases in which we lose a preferred indifferent [someone we care about] with cases in which life is not worth living because we are really deprived of happiness.³⁵

William Irvine argues that the Stoic technique of "negative visualization" (which involves our contemplation of the bad things that can happen to us) may cause us to value those things more. For example, by contemplating the death of our relatives and friends, "we will be less likely to take our friends for granted, and as a result, we will probably derive far more pleasure from friendships than we otherwise would."³⁶

The Stoic's view of emotions is also a source of debate among scholars. For instance, Michael Frede argues that the Stoics do not advocate eliminating all emotions, but only those that are irrational. "The rational emotions are those of a perfectly rational reason whose sentiments are not coloured and intensified or weakened by any false assumptions, assumptions, e.g. concerning the value of the things we are attracted or repelled by." Therefore, it is a mistake to assume the Stoic sage does not experience any feelings or have any human concerns. Rather, "things do move him, but not in such a way as to disturb his balanced judgment and make him attribute an importance to them which they do not have." Terence Irwin agrees with this interpretation, for he says that the Stoic has "good affections" that "allow him joy, caution, and wish. . . . The good affective states are reasonable reactions to situations that provoke passions in other people."³⁷

Given the disagreements among scholars over how to interpret the Stoics, it is difficult to issue a judgment regarding the success of their strategies for achieving happiness. Thankfully, we need not settle this debate in order to evaluate the question of whether virtue is necessary for happiness. However, before turning to that question, we must first consider one more classic view, a view that has probably exerted the most influence in shaping the way contemporary theorists view happiness. We shall begin the next chapter by discussing Aristotle's view of happiness, and then we can critically evaluate the claim that virtue is necessary for achieving happiness.

Notes

1. Julia Annas, "Virtue and Eudaimonism," in *Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, edited by Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.
2. Annas, "Virtue and Eudaimonism," 247–248.
3. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 43.
4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 26.
5. Plato, *Republic*, in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, edited by Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57.

6. *Ibid.*, 65.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 67.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 68.
11. Jeffrey Murphy, "Happiness and Immorality," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 263.
12. Philippa Foot, *Moral Dilemmas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 35; Murphy, "Happiness and Immorality," 264.
13. David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 48.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Raymond Belliotti, *Happiness Is Overrated* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 9–10.
16. Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 284.
17. Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1:103.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 293–294.
20. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, translated by Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 10.
21. Seneca, "On the Happy Life," in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitrano, 41; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 163.
22. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 161; Aurelius, *Meditations*, 65.
23. *Ibid.*, 19, 86.
24. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 61, 62.
25. However, some commentators believe the Stoics did not advocate the elimination of *all* emotions, but only the negative ones. For instance, in *A Guide to the Good Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), William Irvine argues that contrary to popular assumption, the Stoics valued joy and "the phrase 'joyful Stoic' is not an oxymoron" (48). "Rather than being passive individuals who were grimly resigned to being on the receiving end of the world's abuse and injustice, the Stoics were fully engaged in life and worked hard to make the world a better place" (8).
26. Aurelius, *Meditations*, 78–79.
27. Epicurus, "Enchiridion," in *Ethics*, edited by Cahn and Markie, 184–185.
28. *Ibid.*, 184.
29. *Ibid.*, 186.
30. *Ibid.*, 185.
31. Belliotti, *Happiness Is Overrated*, 31.
32. Richard Taylor, *Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 50.
33. Epicurus, "Enchiridion," 184, 185.
34. The Stoics did believe in the process of social *oikeiosis* (familiarity), which Annas describes as resulting in an extension of "our other-concern in a steadily more rational way until we come to have the same degree of rational other-concern for all other rational beings" (*The Morality of Happiness*, 302). But the goal of this process is increasing impartiality; we extend our moral concern for others outward to include not just our immediate friends and family but more distant relatives and eventually strangers. Although this process of *oikeiosis* implies that we have connections with other people, its emphasis on impartiality invites additional objections. As Annas notes, "Impartiality has seemed to many to be too high a demand for a reasonable morality to make, too much of an alienation from our natural attachments to be a requirement that moral agents can reasonably be expected to respect" (267).
35. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 345.
36. Irvine, *Guide to the Good Life*, 70.
37. Michael Frede, "The Stoic Doctrine of the Affections of the Soul," in *The Norms of Nature*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 94, 110; Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 343.

CHAPTER THREE

Happiness as Virtue: Aristotle

Aristotle begins *Nicomachean Ethics* with this statement: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good."¹ Aristotle's statement is a simple truism: whenever anyone acts, we assume she is motivated by something she sees as good. Some goods, Aristotle tells us, are subordinate to others. For instance, exercise is a subordinate good, because we exercise in order to achieve physical fitness and health. But the highest good (our "telos") is not subordinate to anything, for it is something we desire intrinsically or solely for its own sake. Following Plato and the Stoics, whose views we considered in the previous chapter, Aristotle identifies the highest good with happiness.² He explains, "Verbally, there is very general agreement [as to the highest of all goods achievable by action] for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and many do not give the same account as the wise."³

Aristotle offers an argument to support his identification of happiness with the highest good. He tells us the highest human good must meet the following two criteria: it is complete, meaning it is desirable solely for its own sake, and it is self-sufficient, meaning it lacks nothing. Among the suggestions he considers for what might be the highest good, including wealth, honor, and pleasure, only happiness meets both of these criteria. Therefore, happiness must be the highest good.

Aristotle's conclusion that happiness meets both criteria is supported by reflecting on our ordinary attitudes about happiness. Regarding the first criterion, it does seem wrong to say that someone could be seeking happiness instrumentally; it is difficult to understand how someone could want happiness for any reason other than its own intrinsic properties. Furthermore, happiness, when offered as an explanation for action, puts an end to all chains of reasoning: if someone explains why she is doing something by saying, "Because it will make me happy," no further reasons are necessary. Happiness is self-sufficient, because it encompasses all the other goals a person might have. For instance, you work in order to make money, which in turn makes you feel secure and gives you a sense of pride and accomplishment. But all of these goals are part of the highest good, which is happiness.

Aristotle's argument only establishes that happiness is the highest or chief good; it does not provide much content to the notion of happiness. Aristotle acknowledges this and explains, "Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man . . . for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function."⁴

Aristotle is suggesting "the good" of anything that has a function is going to be directly related to that function. For example, we say a water bottle is good when it performs the function of water bottles well. Applying this reasoning to human beings, who also have a distinct function, we could say that someone is living a good life (achieving happiness) when she is performing the function of human beings well. To determine our function, Aristotle looks at what is special or unique about human beings, which is our rationality. Unlike other animals who can act only on instinct, we have reason, which enables us to reflect on our motivations and freely choose what to do. Aristotle defines our function as "an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle." The good person will perform this function well, and this implies she does it with virtue (or excellence). So Aristotle concludes that "happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue."⁵

Therefore, if we wish to understand the nature of happiness, we need to learn about virtue, which involves the state of a person's soul. Aristotle begins

with the idea that "one element in the soul is irrational," and the other "has a rational principle," by which he means reason. Aristotle describes one part of the irrational element as vegetative in nature, meaning it governs our basic biological functioning that includes nutrition and growth. Since nonhuman animals also have this part of the soul, "it has by its nature no share in human excellence." However, he explains, "there seems to be another irrational element in the soul—one which in a sense, however, shares in a rational principle," and this part is unique to human beings. Aristotle describes this part as involving appetite and desire, and its job is to listen to the dictates of reason, which is trying to promote what is best for the person. In some people, this irrational part "fights against and resists this [rational] principle," but in the virtuous person, it listens to reason and "speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as the rational principle."⁶

Since there are two elements within the soul (the rational and irrational), there are two corresponding kinds of virtue, one relating to the intellect (intellectual virtue) and the other to one's character (moral virtue). Although Aristotle gives separate accounts of how to achieve each kind of virtue (intellectual and moral), Sarah Broadie argues that it is a mistake to think these two kinds of virtue can occur apart, for "excellences of character are impossible without the intellectual excellence which he calls 'phronesis,' often translated as 'practical wisdom.'"⁷ Being virtuous implies that one is living well, but living well requires having both a good character and wisdom, for the "listening" part must follow the dictates of reason, but reason must also provide good commands. Therefore, happiness requires one to possess moral and intellectual virtue, both of which mutually reinforce each other.

However, Aristotle denies that having a virtuous soul is sufficient for happiness, because "it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment." The virtuous person must also be "sufficiently equipped with external goods," such as money, health, an attractive physique, good friends and family, and a certain amount of good fortune. Aristotle explains, "The man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition."⁸

Although Aristotle believes that virtue is necessary for happiness, his recognition of the importance of external factors (including luck) in achieving happiness marks a departure from the theorists we considered in the previous chapter, namely, Plato and the Stoics.⁹ Reflection on our commonsense intuitions about happiness suggests Aristotle's view is more plausible. For instance, the virtuous person is supposed to exhibit good character traits, such as kindness, patience, and generosity. But how can one exhibit these traits if she is shunned by her society (as in Plato's example of the perfectly just man) or if she is destitute? I can be called a generous person only if I have demonstrated generosity, but this entails that I have enough to give and that I have someone to give it to. Although your poverty and lack of family may not be your fault or lie within your control, the absence of these goods will most certainly adversely affect your happiness.

Plato and the Stoics want happiness to be completely self-sufficient, meaning it is something that anyone can attain by virtue of her own merits. But as I suggested earlier, it is doubtful how many human beings could actually be happy without at least some measure of external goods. Even Aristotle reacts with what Annas calls "outraged common sense" when he considers Plato's example of the perfectly just man, for Aristotle charges, "Those who say that the victim on the rack or the man who falls into great misfortunes is happy if he is good are, whether they mean to or not, talking nonsense."¹⁰ Aristotle's view of happiness provides a more accurate picture of human nature, and I suspect that is part of the reason Aristotle's view has had such a profound influence on contemporary philosophers' views of happiness.

Returning to the question of how we become virtuous, Aristotle tells us that intellectual virtue "owes its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit." In his work the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle spends considerably more time discussing moral virtue, which he argues does not arise in us naturally. We can always change our characters (and become more honest or generous), but we cannot change what arises in us by nature. According to Aristotle, we become morally good or bad people based on the habits we choose to cultivate, and he warns, "It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference."¹¹

Aristotle believes virtues are like other skills that we learn first by doing them. For instance, we become dancers by dancing, pianists by playing the piano, and chefs by cooking. Similarly, Aristotle says, "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."¹² However, what one must do in order to become virtuous cannot be prescribed exactly, for it will vary depending on the situation. One could draw a comparison with health: all healthy people are in the same physical state, but how much food and exercise they need to maintain their health will depend on the individual. Similarly, all virtuous people are in the same state, but what they must do to be brave or honest, for example, will vary.

All virtuous people do share something important: they avoid both excess and defect, and they strive for moderation in their feelings and actions. Once again, we can draw a comparison with health: if you eat or exercise too much (excess) or too little (defect), you will cease to be healthy, whereas the healthy person will get just the right (moderate) amount of food and exercise. Similarly, the person who feels too much fear will be cowardly, while the person who feels too little fear (or has too much confidence) will be rash. Being courageous implies that one experiences a moderate amount of fear or confidence, and Aristotle argues that all virtues involve moderation.

Therefore, your state of character determines how you experience your emotions and whether you feel them too strongly, too weakly, or just the right amount. Virtues are states of your character, which imply that you stand well with respect to your emotions, because you feel them moderately. Aristotle believes all emotions, which include fear, confidence, anger, appetite, pity, pleasure, and pain, could be felt too intensely or too weakly. The virtuous person will be disposed to feeling them "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way."¹³

Aristotle's view implies that feeling our emotions moderately is essential for achieving virtue and living well, once again putting him at odds with the Stoics, who sought to minimize the influence of the emotions. The Stoics believe reason should control or eliminate one's emotions, and they equate virtuous behavior with acting solely on the dictates of reason. In contrast, Aristotle views the emotions as an essential part of reacting in the right way to a situation, and I believe Aristotle's view better reflects our commonsense intuitions.

Consider all the situations in which demonstrating an emotional response is not only expected, but required. One should grieve over the death of a spouse or child, for that is a healthy way of coping with the loss of someone who is cared about. The person who remains completely unaffected emotionally, who demonstrates no sadness or grief, might be deemed callous or suspected of not really loving or caring for the person who has died.¹⁴

Furthermore, psychologists have found that our "gut reactions" (which rely on our emotions without thinking) can be more accurate than our deeply analyzed responses, and this research challenges Plato's contention that reason is our best guide to living well. In one study, a group of people were asked to think about their current romantic relationships and provide a list of reasons to support their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.¹⁵ People in another group were simply told to give their "gut reactions" to the relationships without doing any analysis. One would think the group who took the time to analyze their relationships would give more accurate answers about how they felt, but just the opposite was true. The satisfaction ratings of the group who gave their "gut reactions" predicted whether they were still dating their partners several months later, whereas the ratings of the analyzing group did not predict the outcome of their relationships at all. This study suggests too much analysis might confuse people about how they really feel. For instance, ignoring one's feelings and listening only to reason might cause one to stray in a relationship in which one is not happy, simply because (according to reason) things appear to be just fine. Aristotle's view recognizes the importance of our emotions in living well, a point that is not emphasized enough by either Plato or the Stoics.

Empirical research on happiness lends further support for Aristotle's contention that we develop a virtuous nature first by acting, for psychologists have found that asking study participants to go out and do something nice for someone caused the participants to view themselves as more kind and considerate people. As psychologist Timothy D. Wilson explains, "Numerous social psychological studies have confirmed Aristotle's observation that 'We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage.' If we are dissatisfied with some aspect of our lives, one of the best approaches is to act more like the person we want to be, rather than sitting around analyzing ourselves."¹⁶

Richard Taylor is a contemporary philosopher who presents a view of happiness similar to Aristotle's, and he argues that many people spend their lives pursuing the wrong ideals, missing out on happiness altogether. According to Taylor, we can test whether someone is happy by asking ourselves whether we would wish to be that other person; if we would not, then it must be because she is not really happy. Taylor suggests, "If someone seems to himself or herself to be happy, perhaps he or she really is happy after all. But one can see how shallow this is by asking whether one would really wish to be that other person. It is hard to see why not, if that other person is believed to be truly happy. But we know, in fact, that such persons are not; they only seem so to themselves, largely because they are unwilling to admit their own folly."¹⁷

Taylor defines happiness as the proper functioning of the person as a whole, and following Aristotle and the other ancient ethicists, he sees happiness as intimately connected with using reason or our natural intelligence. But Taylor advocates a broader conception of reason that includes "not merely the activity of reasoning (as exhibited for example in philosophy) but also observation and reflection and, above all, creative activity."¹⁸ Therefore, on Taylor's view, happiness involves fulfilling ourselves as human beings by using our creative powers, which encompass the arts and any sort of activity that is guided by intelligence, such as dance, athletics, gardening, playing chess, rearing a family, or exercising skill at a profession or in business.

Now that we have considered all three historical sources as well as several contemporary philosophers who view virtue (which includes both our moral and our intellectual development) as a necessary condition for achieving happiness, we are ready to subject this view to critical analysis to see whether it is viable as a theory of happiness.

Is Virtue Necessary for Happiness?

The first problem that arises when we consider the identification of happiness with virtue is with the standard that must be met in order to deem someone happy. The objection is that by requiring one to fully develop her intellect and character before she can be said to be happy, this view sets the standard for achieving happiness too high. If we actually adopted this standard in our ordinary attributions of happiness, it seems very few people would qualify as

happy. And given the difficulty in gauging the exact state of development of someone's intellect or character, we would have no practical way of applying this notion, and we could never confidently call anyone happy. I question the value of having such a word in our language.

Ordinarily, we do not need to examine the development of a person's intellect or character in order to know whether she is happy or unhappy, and we frequently make happiness attributions independent of the formal criteria advocated by these theorists.¹⁹ Their view fails to represent the concept of happiness, and they seem to have taken a word from the ordinary person's lexicon and provided it with a philosophical definition that has lost its connection with the ordinary notion. We need an argument for why we should adopt the more stringent view of happiness found in philosophy, for without an argument demonstrating the superiority of the philosophical concept, we have no reason to accept the idea that virtue is necessary for achieving happiness.

Our ordinary use of *happiness* also permits us to talk about the happy baby or child, yet this would be impossible if we identify happiness with virtue, for babies and even children do not yet have the mental capacities necessary for achieving moral or intellectual virtue.²⁰ Aristotle and the ancient ethicists accept this implication, which is also acknowledged by Taylor, who argues that "children, idiots, barbarians, and even animals are perfectly capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, but none of these can become happy," because none can achieve happiness "in the sense that is important to philosophy, that is, in the sense of having achieved fulfillment or having been blessed with the highest personal good." Foot is also sympathetic to this implication, for she connects happiness with "what is deep in human nature."²¹ Yet the restricted usage advocated by philosophers clearly deviates from the way ordinary people use the word *happiness*. Although a child may not be capable of achieving moral or intellectual virtue, or of connecting with what is deep in human nature, we often refer to children as experiencing happiness and unhappiness.

Furthermore, identifying happiness with virtue appears to misrepresent ordinary people's motivations and behavior. Modern society is replete with examples of happy immoralists, people who knowingly break the moral law and are unaffected by it.²² As Bernard Williams notes, "There is also the figure, rarer perhaps than Calicles supposed, but real, who is horrible enough and not miserable at all but, by any ethical standard of the bright eye and the

gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing."²³ We frequently make sense of people's behavior by referring to their belief that such behavior will increase their happiness, even when that behavior is immoral or self-destructive. If we cannot explain their motivation in terms of happiness, how can we make sense of why they act immorally?

Additional problems emerge when we take a closer look at Taylor's suggestion for evaluating the happiness of others. According to Taylor, my wanting (or not wanting) to be another person will determine whether that person is truly happy, but this view of happiness is completely mistaken. Consider an example. If I do not share your penchant for chocolate ice cream, I might not long to be you (while you are eating chocolate ice cream). However, my not wanting to be you says nothing about the quality of your experience or your mental state; it certainly has no bearing on the question of whether you are happy while eating your chocolate ice cream. My wanting or not wanting to be someone else is clearly a reflection of my values and preferences, but it says very little about the other person.

Furthermore, I might not want to be you because I have a moral objection to the source of your happiness. Perhaps you get pleasure from eating a juicy steak. I might not want to be you because I am a vegetarian who does not believe it is morally right to eat meat. The fact that I object to the source of your satisfaction should not detract from any happiness you might experience while eating your steak. Could I deny a person's experience of fear on the grounds that I do not find her particular situation scary? Could I deny someone else's hunger because I believe she has eaten enough? Obviously, what I feel (or what I suppose I would feel if I were in your shoes) has no bearing on your state of mind. The same reasoning applies to happiness. I cannot deny another person's satisfaction, because I would not be satisfied were I to be her.

Foot's remarks about happiness also raise objections, for she attempts to list the acceptable means for achieving happiness, which include "affection for children and friends, the desire to work, and love of freedom and truth."²⁴ But what about the person who is made miserable by her work, children, friends, or family? How can her happiness be tied to such things? Clearly, for some people happiness does come from Foot's sources, but for others, happiness may be linked to something else. Why should we limit the concept of happiness to only those sources Foot deems appropriate, when we are

given no justification for her list over any other? Foot appears to be confusing some typical causes of happiness with the nature of happiness. For many people, satisfaction may arise from Foot's causes, but what typically causes happiness in some (or even most people) is conceptually distinct from the nature of happiness. Our collective experience suggests that when someone is in a state of satisfaction, she is happy, regardless of what caused her to be in that state.

The ancient ethicists have a history of conflating happiness with a person's well-being and her moral character, but this conflation changes the meaning of the word *happiness* and causes their theories to deviate from our ordinary understanding of this concept. I believe we are better served by recognizing the independence of a person's happiness, well-being, and moral character, for this arms us with much greater explanatory power, thus enabling us to discuss a wider range of actual cases. For instance, a person might take great satisfaction in the suffering of others, such that their suffering makes her happy. Recognizing this person's happiness does not preclude us from defending the moral judgment that she is a despicable person. In this case, it is the source of her happiness (that she gets satisfaction from the suffering of others) that actually supports our moral judgment.

One reason the ancient ethicists deem virtue a necessary condition for happiness is because they identify happiness with the greatest good. On their view, being happy implies that one is living "the good life," which requires one to develop the best characteristics of human beings, namely, moral and intellectual excellence. But we have no reason to accept their first step, which is to conflate happiness with the good life. If we separate the realm of happiness from the realm of morality, we can accept the immoralist's happiness without thereby committing ourselves to any particular view of the goodness of her life. That is, we can accept the immoralist's satisfaction while admonishing her for it.

Severing the connection between happiness and virtue better represents the way *happiness* functions in our language today, for being happy generally implies nothing about the moral worth of a person's life or her activities, and we often assess a person's happiness without knowing anything about her moral character. Yet recognizing the independence of happiness does not preclude us from issuing evaluative judgments, for we can still make judgments that appeal to other dimensions of people's lives, such as their moral character,

well-being, fulfillment, religious devotion, or aesthetic sensibility. Put simply, we can recognize happiness as simply one good among many others.²⁵

Perhaps someone who is sympathetic to the identification of happiness with virtue could offer a reply to my objections, for this person might insist that the whole point of identifying happiness with virtue is to revise our current concept of happiness, not to capture it. We know the masses think happiness comes from conventional goods like health and wealth, but it is the philosopher's job to tell us what happiness really is. Therefore, we cannot (and should not) look to common usage for help with understanding the nature of happiness.

Annas makes a similar argument about virtue, for she says our ordinary concept of virtue is rather weak and confused and that our understanding can be greatly improved by looking to the ancient philosophers. She also applies this reasoning to happiness, suggesting, "If we accept that our conception of happiness contains several different and incompatible elements, we may regard it as we do our conception of virtue and try to understand the ancient ideas as more coherent and stronger versions of the conception which we recognize as important but have lost consistent interpretation of."²⁶

I believe Annas's mistake is assimilating happiness and virtue. I am willing to agree with Annas about virtue, for most people do not appear to have even the slightest idea what the term connotes—other than its connection with patience, perhaps—and we can learn a lot from the ancients about the nature of virtue and why it is good for us. As Annas suggests, thinking about virtue can encourage us to see life differently, for it can help to reorient our priorities and how we choose to live. But you cannot make the same argument with respect to happiness, because our ideas about happiness are neither vague nor ill-defined. Ask students their opinions about happiness, and a flurry of hands will shoot up. Mention happiness casually at a social gathering, and you will see how much people have to say on the matter. Of course, people's opinions will vary, but what you don't get is a blank stare.

Ordinary people with little or no philosophical training have plenty of robust intuitions about happiness, which is why one cannot just state (as Plato does) that the perfectly just man on the rack is happy, for our collective experience suggests otherwise. Virtue and even well-being are different, for they play no central role in the ordinary person's lexicon, and are, therefore, more amenable to being supplied with a technical or philosophical definition. Happiness is as

important to the man on the street as it is to the philosopher, so the philosopher cannot simply redefine the term. Our shared understanding of happiness must constrain our philosophizing; otherwise, the philosophers will be vulnerable to the charge that they have changed the subject matter, and their theories will not be taken seriously.

In this chapter and the previous one, we considered the view that virtue is necessary for happiness, and we have found it objectionable. Although some people may achieve happiness through a life of virtue, there is nothing in the nature of happiness to suggest that it is necessary. We shall consider an altogether different approach to happiness in the next chapter, a view that is more reminiscent of hedonism, for it equates being happy with getting what you want or having your desires satisfied.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1045a1–2.
2. Aristotle actually uses two different Greek words to refer to the condition of living and doing well—*eudaimonia* and *makarion*. However, following Annas, I shall treat both as referring to the same end state, which is happiness. As Annas explains, “Blessed” (*makarion*) is a loftier and more pretentious word than “happy” (*eudaimon*), but they are interchangeable (other than stylistically). Arius [the Stoic philosopher] says firmly that it makes no difference which word you use.” Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 44.
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a17–22.
4. *Ibid.*, 1097b22–28.
5. *Ibid.*, 1095a8, 1102a5.
6. *Ibid.*, 1102a28, 1102b12, 1102b12–15, 1102b17.
7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17.
8. *Ibid.*, translated by Ross, 1099a30, 1101a15, 1099b3–7.
9. However, some commentators argue that Plato actually agrees with Aristotle that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for happiness and that it was Socrates (and the Stoics) who thought it was also sufficient. According to Gregory Vlastos, Plato views virtue as the main component of happiness, but he recognizes that there are other constituents as well. See Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 8, esp. 204–205. Terence Irwin also supports this interpretation: “When Plato argues that the just person is in all circumstances happier than the unjust person, he does not imply that the just person is happy in all circumstances. He leaves open the possibility that happiness has components that are not infallibly secured by justice. . . . Plato gives no reason to deny that the external goods lost by the just person [in Glaucon’s example] are genuine goods. . . . [H]e implicitly acknowledges that the just person suffers a significant loss in being deprived of external goods.” Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 192.
10. Julia Annas, “Should Virtue Make You Happy?”, *Aspinon* 35 (2003): 11–12; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Ross, 1153b16–22.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Ross, 1103a15–20, 1103b25.
12. *Ibid.*, 1103b1.

13. *Ibid.*, 1106b20.
14. However, William Irvine argues that it is a mistake to assume a good Stoic never grieves, for the Stoics understood that certain emotions are reflexive. Irvine explains, “Suppose, in particular, that a Stoic finds himself grieving over the loss of a loved one. This Stoic . . . will not react by trying to stifle the grief within him. . . . After this bout of reflexive grief, though, a Stoic will try to dispel whatever grief remains in him by trying to reason it out of existence.” Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 216.
15. Timothy D. Wilson, “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2005.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Richard Taylor, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, edited by Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitano (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 224.
18. *Ibid.*, 231.
19. My objection here challenges the necessity of achieving moral and intellectual virtue in happiness attributions. Raymond Belliotti also questions whether achieving moral and intellectual virtue is sufficient “Imagine showing someone that they embodied the prescribed intellectual and moral virtues, and the conditions for faring well. Suppose the person agreed but still insisted, ‘But I am not happy.’ If we respond ‘Oh, you are happy, you just don’t know it,’ our words are odd. If I don’t know that I am happy, how can I be happy? . . . Without the appropriate state of mind, experience, or feelings, however, achieving Aristotle’s condition of the self fails to capture the internal response necessary for happiness.” Belliotti, *Happiness Is Overrated* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 17. But see Richard Kraut, “Two Conceptions of Happiness,” *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 167–197, who argues that anyone who meets Aristotle’s standards for happiness would also be happy on our standard, because this person would automatically have the necessary positive attitude toward her life that we associate with happiness.
20. Actually, as Belliotti notes, Aristotle’s view is even more restrictive, because “women, slaves, and most males could not be happy because they lacked, by virtue of their social positions or natures, the necessary intellectual ability or the conditions for faring well” (*ibid.*, 13). However, Belliotti argues that Aristotle’s convictions about the intellectual inferiority of women, slaves, and manual laborers could be dismissed while still appreciating his key insights about happiness (15).
21. Taylor, “Virtue Ethics,” 11; Philippa Foot, *Moral Dilemmas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 35.
22. Of course, many ancient moralists would reject this description of the “happy immoralist” as a contradiction in terms, for they viewed acts of immorality as destructive of happiness. In *Good and Evil* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), Richard Taylor aptly describes the ancients’ view of the negative effects of injustice on a person: “Committing acts of injustice does corrupt . . . or make you morally worse; indeed, it is the very expression of such inner corruption. And because such corruption is . . . the corruption or ruin of your very soul—indeed, of your inner being—then it is the ruination of that which is to everyone the most precious of possessions. It is the dissolution of your very person” (85).
23. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 46.
24. Foot, *Moral Dilemmas*, 35.
25. Thomas Hurka reaches a similar conclusion in his recent book *The Best Things in Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), where he argues, “Contrary to Epicurus, Socrates, and many others, there isn’t just one ultimate good—there are many. Pleasure isn’t the only good thing in life, nor is philosophical understanding: each is just one item on a longer list of goods, so an ideal life can contain different good things” (6). See also Mike W. Martin’s recent book *Happiness and the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), where he suggests that “we are happy insofar as we love our lives, valuing them in ways manifested by ample enjoyments and a robust sense of meaning” and that we should view happiness as “one dimension of good lives interacting with other dimensions, in particular with authenticity, health, self-fulfillment, moral decency and goodness, and meaningfulness in terms of justified values” (3).
26. Julia Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonism,” in *Happiness*, edited by Cahn and Vitano, 258.

Letter to Menoeceus

by

Epicurus

I. INTRODUCTION

Epicurus to Menoeceus, greeting.

Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no old man become weary of it; for it is never too early nor too late to care for the well-being of the soul. The man who says that the season for this study has not yet come or is already past is like the man who says it is too early or too late for happiness. Therefore, both the young and the old should study philosophy, the former so that as he grows old he may still retain the happiness of youth in his pleasant memories of the past, the latter so that although he is old he may at the same time be young by virtue of his fearlessness of the future. We must therefore study the means of securing happiness, since if we have it we have everything, but if we
10 lack it we do everything in order to gain it.

II. BASIC TEACHINGS

A. The Gods

The gods exist; but it is impious to accept the common beliefs about them. They have no concern with men.

Practice and study without ceasing that which I was always teaching you, being assured that these are the first principles of the good life. After accepting god as the
20 immortal and blessed being depicted by popular opinion, do not ascribe to him anything in addition that is alien to immortality or foreign to blessedness, but rather believe about him whatever can uphold his blessed immortality. The gods do indeed exist, for our perception of them is clear; but they are not such as the crowd imagines them to be, for most men do not retain the picture of the gods that they first receive. It is not the man who destroys the gods of popular belief who is impious, but he who describes the gods in the terms accepted by the many. For the opinions of the many about the gods are not
30 perceptions but false suppositions. According to these popular suppositions, the gods send great evils to the wicked, great blessings (to the righteous), for they, being always well disposed to their own virtues, approve those who are like themselves, regarding as foreign all that is different.

B. Death

Philosophy, showing that death is the end of all consciousness, relieves us of all fear of death. A life that is happy is better than one that is merely long.

Accustom yourself to the belief that death is of no concern to us, since all good and evil lie in sensation and sensation ends with death. Therefore the true belief that death is nothing to us makes a mortal life happy, not by adding to it an infinite time, but by taking away the desire for immortality.

40 For there is no reason why the man who is thoroughly assured that there is nothing to fear in death should find anything to fear in life. So, too, he is foolish who says that he fears death, not because it will be painful when it comes, but because the anticipation of it is painful; for that which is no burden when it is present gives pain to no purpose when it is anticipated. Death, the most dreaded of evils, is therefore of no concern to us; for while we exist death is not present, and when death is present we no longer exist. It is therefore nothing either to the living or to the dead since it is not present to the living, and the dead no longer are.

But men in general sometimes flee death as the greatest of evils, sometimes (long for it) as a relief from (the evils) of life. (The wise man neither renounces life) nor fears its end; for living does not offend him, nor does he suppose that not to live is in any way an evil. As he does not choose the food that is most in quantity but that which is most
50 pleasant, so he does not seek the enjoyment of the longest life but of the happiest.

He who advises the young man to live well, the old man to die well, is foolish, not only because life is desirable, but also because the art of living well and the art of dying well are one. Yet much worse is he who says that it is well not to have been born, but once born, be swift to pass through Hades' gates.

If a man says this and really believes it, why does he not depart from life? Certainly the means are at hand for doing so if this really be his firm conviction. If he says it in mockery, he is regarded as a fool among those who do not accept his teaching.

Remember that the future is neither ours nor wholly not ours, so that we may neither
60 count on it as sure to come nor abandon hope of it as certain not to be.

III. THE MORAL THEORY

A. Pleasure as the Motive

The necessary desires are for health of body and peace of mind; if these are satisfied, that is enough for the happy life.

70 You must consider that of the desires some are natural, some are vain, and of those that are natural, some are necessary, others only natural. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for the ease of the body, some for life itself. The man who has a perfect knowledge of this will know how to make his every choice or rejection tend toward gaining health of body and peace (of mind), since this is the final end of the blessed life. For to gain this end, namely freedom from pain and fear, we do everything. When once this condition is reached, all the storm of the soul is stilled, since the creature need make no more in search of anything that is lacking, nor seek after anything else to make complete the welfare of the soul and the body. For we only feel the

lack of pleasure when from its absence we suffer pain; (but when we do not suffer pain,) we no longer are in need of pleasure. For this reason we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life. We recognize pleasure as the first and natural
80 good; starting from pleasure we accept or reject; and we return to this as we judge every good thing, trusting this feeling of pleasure as our guide.

B. Pleasures and Pains

Pleasure is the greatest good; but some pleasures bring pain, and in choosing, we must consider this.

For the very reason that pleasure is the chief and the natural good, we do not choose every pleasure, but there are times when we pass by pleasures if they are outweighed by the hardships that follow; and many pains we think better than pleasures when a greater pleasure will come to us once we have undergone the long-continued pains. Every
90 pleasure is a good since it has a nature akin to ours; nevertheless, not every pleasure is to be chosen, just so, every pain is an evil, yet not every pain is of a nature to be avoided on all occasions. By measuring and by looking at advantages and disadvantages, it is proper to decide all these things; for under certain circumstances we treat the good as evil, and again, the evil as good.

C. Self-Sufficiency

The truly wise man is the one who can be happy with a little.

We regard self-sufficiency as a great good, not so that we may enjoy only a few things, but so that, if we do not have many, we may be satisfied with the few, being
100 firmly persuaded that they take the greatest pleasure in luxury who regard it as least needed, and that everything that is natural is easily provided, while vain pleasures are hard to obtain. Indeed, simple sauces bring a pleasure equal to that of lavish banquets if once the pain due to need is removed; and bread and water give the greatest pleasure when one who is in need consumes them. To be accustomed to simple and plain living is conducive to health and makes a man ready for the necessary tasks of life. It also makes us more ready for the enjoyment of luxury if at intervals we chance to meet with it, and it renders us fearless against fortune.

D. True Pleasure

110 *The truest happiness does not come from enjoyment of physical pleasures but from a simple life, free from anxiety, with the normal physical needs satisfied.*

When we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of the profligate or that which depends on physical enjoyment-as some think who do not understand our teachings, disagree with them, or give them an evil interpretation-but by pleasure we mean the state wherein the body is free from pain and the mind from anxiety. Neither continual drinking and dancing, nor sexual love, nor the enjoyment of fish and whatever

else the luxurious table offers brings about the pleasant life; rather, it is produced by the reason which is sober, which examines the motive for every choice and rejection, and which drives away all those opinions through which the greatest tumult lays hold of the mind.

E. Prudence

Prudence or practical wisdom should be our guide.

Of all this the beginning and the chief good is prudence. For this reason prudence is more precious than philosophy itself. All the other virtues spring from it. It teaches that it is not possible to live pleasantly without at the same time living prudently, nobly, and justly, (nor to live prudently, nobly, and justly) without living pleasantly; for the virtues have grown up in close union with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life cannot be separated from the virtues.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Panegyric on the Prudent Man

Whom then do you believe to be superior to the prudent man: he who has reverent opinions about the gods, who is wholly without fear of death, who has discovered what is the highest good in life and understands that the highest point in what is good is easy to reach and hold and that the extreme of evil is limited either in time or in suffering, and who laughs at that which some have set up as the ruler of all things, Necessity? He thinks that the chief power of decision lies within us, although some things come about by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own wills; for he sees that necessity is irresponsible and chance uncertain, but that our actions are subject to no power. It is for this reason that our actions merit praise or blame. It would be better to accept the myth about the gods than to be a slave to the determinism of the physicists; for the myth hints at a hope for grace through honors paid to the gods, but the necessity of determinism is inescapable. Since the prudent man does not, as do many, regard chance as a god (for the gods do nothing in disorderly fashion) or as an unstable cause (of all things), he believes that chance does (not) give man good and evil to make his life happy or miserable, but that it does provide opportunities for great good or evil. Finally, he thinks it better to meet misfortune while acting with reason than to happen upon good fortune while acting senselessly; for it is better that what has been well-planned in our actions (should fail than that what has been ill-planned) should gain success by chance.

B. Final Words to Menoeceus

Meditate on these and like precepts, by day and by night, alone or with a like-minded friend. Then never, either awake or asleep, will you be dismayed; but you will live like a