

otherwise innovative and bold study a bit one-sided. Also, some of his important assertions seem sketchy in regard to alternative theories (based on a selective focus on a few prominent instances) and due to the lack of details about his own positive theses. Nonetheless, his book is an important contribution to the pressing project of construing a realistic normative theory for an equitable global governance.

DEEN K. CHATTERJEE
University of Utah

Lear, Gabriel Richardson. *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics."* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. vii+238. \$37.95 (cloth).

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) is, and has been considered, for, say, the past few decades, to be one of, if not the most, influential of ethical treatises from the past for current research in moral philosophy. Yet it is one of the most disputed works in the whole history of ethics. And the controversy is not on details but on key issues such as *akrasia*, the role and status of *phronêsis*, the role of emotions, and so on. And, as if that weren't paradoxical enough, perhaps the most vividly disputed question is on the very central and leading theme of this whole eudaemonistic enterprise: what is eudaemonia?

As is well known, the interpretative terrain is quite clearly divided into two camps. The first kind of interpretation, labeled 'inclusive', sees happiness as a whole whose parts, which are the intellectual as well as the ethical "virtues" or "excellences," are constituents; a person lacking, say, courage, wouldn't be considered to be living a happy life. The second kind of interpretation, labeled 'dominant' or 'monistic' (or 'exclusive', but that term is probably too strong), considers happiness as mainly, or "dominantly," a life of "contemplation" (*theôria*), the other virtues or excellences, including *phronêsis*, which is practical wisdom, being either tools for contemplation or, in one way or another, dependent on contemplation. That is the interpretative camp Gabriel Richardson Lear aims to defend.

Let's say it from the beginning: together with Richard Kraut's important book (*Aristotle on the Human Good* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989]), this book is the most extensive and powerful defense of a "dominant" reading; Lear's fresh and new ways of reading well-known, and puzzling, passages from *NE* offer no less than a new way of understanding *NE* as a whole, and she manages to provide very consistent answers to most of the difficulties and puzzles interpreters have been trying to solve during the past four decades of a very crowded literature (since Hardie's article, where the labels 'inclusive' and 'dominant' appeared). Yet, putting my cards on the table, since I think (like many others and, perhaps, the majority of Aristotelians, and more generally, scholars of ancient philosophy) that an "inclusive" reading is after all the better camp, I suggest providing a very rough summary of her main arguments, before trying to reply to some of them.

The point of departure of Lear's book is taking seriously the hierarchy of means and ends which is the departure point of Aristotle's own research: happiness is a supreme good which is the end of human existence to which all intermediary ends are subordinated (what Lear calls 'middle-level ends'). As Aristotle says quite insistently, the two criteria of this good are to be an ultimate end and to be self-sufficient. Following Aristotle, but much more firmly than most interpreters so far, Lear interprets the idea of end in correlation with that of choice-worthiness: only the ultimate end is chosen for itself; all the other ends are in the final analysis only chosen with a view to that end, which makes that end the reason for the ultimate value of all choices. The interpretation Lear proposes of the second criterion, self-sufficiency, proceeds from her insistence on this question of choice: hence, to say that the good or the ultimate end should be self-sufficient does not signify that that good, or happiness, should contain all the goods, as the "inclusivist" interpreters claim, each in his own way, but that, being the cause or "organizing principle" (52) of all the middle-level ends, the choice of that supreme end renders a life organized by it happy, lacking nothing for its desirability. Since pleasure, honor, and moneymaking were all dismissed in chapter 5 as candidates for such a good, *theôria* remains the only possible candidate, which Aristotle makes explicit in the last book.

Now how exactly are we to understand that that highest good is the supreme value all other goods depend on? Here is Lear's central thesis: virtues in the ethical sphere are approximations of the activity of contemplation and are valuable insofar as they are approximations. The thesis is in itself not altogether new (see in particular David Charles), but the way that Lear presents and defends it is absolutely original. For she interprets the sense of finality, and hence the question of the source of value, from the background of some other texts from Aristotle's natural philosophy, above all a passage from *De anima* (415a25–b7) and a passage from *De generatione and corruptione* (337a1–7), which present finality in terms of imitation or approximation: thus, according to *De anima*, which is consonant with Plato's *Symposium*, "the immortality of the particular creature is its telos. But since that end cannot be achieved literally, mortal creatures act for its sake by means of approximation" (81–82). Lear sees that central thesis implicitly at work in the description of *phronêsis*, whose proper value, which is essentially presenting a practical truth, depends on it, because it is an approximation of truth as such, which is the goal of *theôria*. On the level of the "ethical" virtues, Lear shows that one can easily reconstruct what Aristotle, here too, only says implicitly: courage is per se a valuable thing to the extent that the conception of life, meaning a free life, not enslaved, that is defended on the battlefield, is a good. But in turn, the reason why this type of life is a good, and worth risking life itself over, is that it permits contemplation. Contemplation is thus the final reason, meaning the ultimate value, whence the value of courage derives.

This notion of approximation clarifies the sense of the hierarchization Aristotle proposes in book 10: the politician's happy life is only second best since his good, ethical and political praxis, is only an "approximation" of contemplation, whereas the life of the philosopher is the happiest not only because he is able to contemplate but also because he alone understands why morally good actions and virtues are worthy. Finally, that reading enables Lear to answer the vexing question of why a philosopher, immersed in his contemplation, should

also emerge and perform ethical acts without minimizing his happiness. It is because ethical acts are just such approximations, and therefore worthwhile, that the philosopher tends to maximize his happiness, indirectly let's say, by performing them.

I have no doubt that Lear's new arguments and readings will fuel the fires of combatants of the "monistic" or "dominant" camp. But I wonder whether contenders of the "inclusive" camp will consider themselves definitively defeated. For, as every historian of philosophy should ask, does Aristotle's text itself provide us enough evidence for her thesis? Here is a sample of some queries one might advance.

The first and basic argument in her reading of *NE*, book 1, is that Aristotle conceives of eudaemonia as a monistic good which must be one of the goods he enumerates in chapter 5: since to be *teleios* is to be choice-worthy per se and never for the sake of something else, and if *theôria* is such a good, *theôria* must be eudaemonia in the sense of the highest good constituting a "happy life." But in fact, Aristotle only says that explicitly in book 10 (1177b1–4), where he compares the values of *praxis* and *theôria*. And if we rely exclusively on our reading of the first book (and imagine for a moment that we don't have that last book), it would, I think, be very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain such a position. On the contrary, evidence from the first part of chapter 7 of this very text shows that none of the goods taken into review in chapter 5 can be that highest good: "We do in fact always choose happiness because of itself and never because of something else, while as for honour, and pleasure, and intelligence [*noûs*], and every excellence, we do in fact choose them because of themselves . . . , but we also choose them for the sake of happiness" (1097b1–4), where *noûs* can only be understood as the faculty corresponding to the activity of *theôria*. Of course, Lear knows that phrase, which she quotes, or refers to, five or six times, using it in favor of her thesis, but either without our striking word '*noûs*', or without explaining its unexpected (for her thesis) presence! Additionally, it is noteworthy that, in chapter 5 (1096a4–5), Aristotle explicitly postpones his discussion of *theôria*, as if he precisely wanted to dissociate his discussion of happiness as such from the discussion of the relative value of each good he provides in the last book: here too, if we didn't have book 10, we would be hard put to infer from book 1 that the highest good Aristotle is looking for is *theôria*.

As I have said, according to Lear, Aristotle's core, although implicit, concept in *NE* is "approximation." But at least two claims which are central to her interpretation are much more controversial than she seems ready to admit. Her first claim is that we can, and should, understand the conception of finality we find in those two passages of *De anima* and *De generatione and corruptione* in conjunction with *NE*. But the problem is that that conception doesn't seem to be of any real importance in those passages themselves, where it plays no central role, nor do we find any discussion of such a conception in the important discussion of finality in the *Physics* or in the biological treatises. One might then at least wonder why Aristotle hasn't explained it more explicitly in *NE*, where it is supposed to play so central a role. Her second claim is this (cf. 91–92, reassessed 194–96). There is only one passage in *NE* where she claims that Aristotle comes out and says that *praxis* is an approximation of *theôria*, when he says that "eudaimonia is a certain kind of theôria" (*theôria tis* [1178b32]), taking

eudaimonia there to be referring to praxis. But in fact, such an interpretation of the text (which we also find in other interpreters, particularly in Kraut) is very unnatural for the context: the expression ‘*theōria tis*’ is simply a repetition of the same expression found a few lines below where Aristotle says that “perfect happiness” is “a kind of contemplative activity” (*theōrētikē tis energeia* [1178b7–8]), whose “kind” is then explained: the perfectly happy life for human beings can only be an “approximation” (*homoïōma*) of the perfectly happy life (*bios makarios* [1178b26–27]) of the gods, since we human beings cannot contemplate continuously. In other words, the mere “approximation” Aristotle recognizes explicitly is that of our imperfect contemplative life in comparison to the gods’.

A third kind of query may be about the audience of Aristotle’s treatise. In reading Lear’s book, we get the increasing impression that philosophers, and philosophers alone, form his audience: they alone can understand why and how praxis is worthy whereas courageous soldiers or generous public donors remain unaware of these reasons. That statement (which is repeatedly assessed by Lear) is essential to her demonstration since she thinks that one, and only one, good makes life valuable, and she accepts the traditional reading according to which Aristotle presents the two possible happy lives as competitors for the title of “happy life,” and not as “aspects” of a single (inclusive) happy life, and thus that a soldier, or a politician, is not a philosopher. Yet at the beginning, in a footnote (8, n. 2), Lear honestly recognizes, agreeing in part with Richard Bodéüs’s thesis, that future statesmen also share in it, since Aristotle emphasizes the political dimension of his treatise, which is explicitly called a “political science,” or “enquiry.” How then are we to reconcile these with the idea that the aim of Aristotle’s treatise is to discover what is exactly our ultimate end which should make us able to take it as our target, as archers do (cf. the famous statement at 1194a22–24), if “we” are those future politicians? One would have a very strange political leader, who is now “philosophically” educated, who understands why his actions are worthy, but who also sees why his life is only a second-best choice: if he is not foolish, wouldn’t he then choose to do philosophy rather than pursue a political career? But in that case wouldn’t we be obliged to suppose that Aristotle’s very final aim was a kind of “*Aufhebung*” of “political science,” that is, his own treatise?

These few questions and criticisms were only aimed at opening the debate that such an original and provocative book deserves. It is a very important study, fresh and creative, and clearly argued, which all Aristotelian scholars, as well as scholars interested in the history of ethics, should read and meditate on.

PIERRE DESTRIÉE

Catholic University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve)

Lockhart, Ted. *Moral Uncertainty and Its Consequences*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. 232. \$55.00 (cloth).

I am often uncertain about what I morally ought to do. Sometimes, this is simply because I don’t know all of the nonmoral facts that could be relevant to my

Copyright of Ethics is the property of University of Chicago Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.