

currently living is, taken as a whole, good.) This last sense of happiness, unlike the previous two already discussed, is the sense of happiness we would most willingly be prepared to describe as having, in some instances, an ethical dimension. We would be prepared to describe this last sense of happiness in this way if, as no doubt is often the case, by 'good' we mean 'morally good'.

It will become clear below that happiness understood in this third sense, particularly if understood as referring to the quality of a life (understood as a whole), cannot be fully characterized in terms of the first two senses of happiness, even though, obviously, a happy life must in general be pleasant and, for a life to be pleasant, the circumstances must generally be good (good circumstances being understood here as circumstances from which a given subject takes pleasure). The fundamental reason why one cannot reduce the third sense of happiness to the first two senses is, as we shall see below, that a life is an extremely complex fabric that involves much more than simply pleasure and the circumstances for pleasure (a complexity that is, I think, commonly acknowledged by most of us). In addition, I shall argue that, to understand a good life in this manner is to understand it as an organized – structured – whole (or unity). Such a unity is constituted by a general sort of organization of circumstances, emotions, thoughts, dispositions, actions and so on.

It is important to note at this point that the three senses of happiness discussed above are considered by Aristotle when analysing the popular Athenian beliefs about *eudaimonia*, and this coincidence just gives more support to the view that *eudaimonia* is appropriately translated as 'happiness'. Aristotle, with regard to '... the highest of all goods achievable by action ...',<sup>9</sup> argues that:

Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people with superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and faring well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, honour; they differ, however, from one another – and often even the same man identifies things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor.<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle argues that, on the one hand, some people identify *eudaimonia* with pleasure, and this identity is analogous with the identity some establish between happiness and pleasure. On the other hand, some people identify *eudaimonia* with wealth and honour, and these are just two types of pleasant circumstance.<sup>11</sup> After this basic analysis of what is normally meant by the term, Aristotle proceeds to analyse *eudaimonia* proper, and his analysis is similar to, though much more sophisticated, than my initial characterization of one of the possible interpretations of the third sense of 'happiness' – the interpretation that involves understanding 'good' in ethical terms.<sup>12</sup>

*Eudaimonia*, we shall see, is most properly understood as a particular interpretation of the third kind of happiness. I shall, from now on, call the third sense of happiness 'well-being', 'flourishing', or simply 'happiness'. 'Happiness' will only be used to express the other two senses of happiness when specified. The choice of expressions is not capricious since 'well-being' and 'flourishing' are also common translations of *eudaimonia*. While both these translations have their strengths and weaknesses, I consider well-being to be an appropriate translation because the notion of well-being, like the notion of a happy life, refers to a certain style of living and so *may* implicate considerations regarding not just a specific segment of a life, but a life in its totality (understood as a complex active unity across time). The sense of happiness that involves considerations regarding a life as a whole is precisely the sense of happiness that Aristotle is most interested in analysing, and it is that which he refers to as *eudaimonia*. But although 'well-being' is a good translation of *eudaimonia*, as most translations of complex terms go, it is not a perfect one. 'Well-being', I think, does not place sufficient emphasis on the fact that, for Aristotle, happiness is a particular type of complex *activity*, indeed, more specifically, he argues that happiness is activity in conformity with virtue.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, 'flourishing' is also a relatively good translation of *eudaimonia* because it emphasizes other central features of this fundamental concept. 'Flourishing' is primarily a botanical concept and it denotes not only activity, but also activity in a particular direction – it denotes development (in the sense, for example, that a seed develops into a healthy mature plant). Moreover, when we say that something flourishes, we do not only mean that it develops in a particular direction. We mean something stronger. We mean that there is a *peak* of development in a particular direction, and this peak is what Aristotle refers to as the *telos* of a developing thing.<sup>14</sup> Plants that flourish, for example, not only grow into mature specimens of their particular species, they are also *paradigmatic exemplars* of their species. Moreover, human flourishing, like the flourishing of a plant, involves the full manifestation and the exercise of the characteristic dispositions that define us as the creatures that we are.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a plant flourishes not when one part of it flourishes to the detriment of other parts (assuming this type of flourishing is available to a plant), but when the plant as a whole flourishes – when the plant as a whole reaches its peak of development, its *telos*. Analogously, the flourishing of a human life understood as a whole involves the flourishing not of one aspect of that life (say, the professional aspect) to the detriment of another or other important aspects of that very life (as so often happens with compulsive professionals who dedicate little or no time to those they claim to love).<sup>16</sup>

Another crucial parallel between the concepts of flourishing and *eudaimonia* is that plants flourish when external conditions are *ideal*.<sup>17</sup> So the notion of flourishing ties in the flourishing of a given plant with the context in which that plant is located. As we shall see in more detail below,

the *eudaimonia* of a given individual likewise cannot be separated from the external conditions within which that individual's life is played out. Indeed, for an individual to achieve *eudaimonia*, the external conditions must also be ideal. To use an example made famous by Aristotle and which I shall discuss in detail below, a person does not merely require friends, without further qualification, in order to achieve *eudaimonia*. Rather, an individual needs the best sorts of friends – friends who exercise their friendship in accordance with the *ideal* of friendship. Moreover, as I shall also discuss in some detail below, the ideal circle of friends which is required for a given individual to flourish depends also on its embeddedness in an ideally constituted community.

However, although the idea of flourishing stresses some aspects of *eudaimonia*, it does not give sufficient emphasis to other central aspects of *eudaimonia*, such as to the role pleasure plays in a *eudaimon* life. Nonetheless, even though 'flourishing' is not a perfectly adequate translation of *eudaimonia*, I still think it is a useful term given that it does bring the developmental and contextual aspects of *eudaimonia* into prominence. The similarities between the ideas of flourishing and *eudaimonia* will become clearer as we shed more light on the meaning of *eudaimonia*.

So, to recapitulate, depending on what aspect of *eudaimonia* one wants to bring into prominence, it can be understood most appropriately as either happiness, well-being or flourishing. It will become even clearer why *eudaimonia* can be understood in these ways as the discussion proceeds.

I have mentioned above that a correct analysis of happiness would show us that the best way of understanding happiness is to understand it as *eudaimonia*. Yet there are reasons for doubting that such an identity can be established. Contrary to Aristotle and, for that matter, contrary to ancient ethics generally, our contemporary intuitions, and many strands of contemporary ethics, seldom relate happiness to ethics and virtue. *Eudaimonia*, on the other hand, is the central concept of Aristotle's *Ethics* (as already stated above). But, I think, a proper clarification of 'happiness' – in the sense of living a happy life – will show us that it is, in fact, fundamentally an ethical concept. The reason why we do not generally understand happiness in the way in which Aristotle understands *eudaimonia*, we have already seen, is at least partly due to the fact that we generally and simplistically, though by no means universally, identify happiness with *feeling* happy. That said, however, pleasure particularly, and the emotions generally, also have a central role to play in Aristotle's *Ethics*. In fact, Aristotle explicitly provides us with reasons to believe that the *eudaimon* life is the *pleasantest* of lives.<sup>18</sup>

It might be worth clarifying that the defence I will be providing for an understanding of happiness understood as *eudaimonia* should in no way be understood as involving a refutation of the other senses. One of the beauties of the concept of *eudaimonia* is that it involves all prevalent understandings of happiness. We shall see in what sense the different senses of happiness

form a system. replicates all prevalent senses of happiness that I will be able to establish the plausibility of the sort of conception of happiness that I am currently defending. It is my hope that, by the end of this inquiry, one will be able to claim something along the lines that what has been argued in this investigation was something known to us all along. And indeed, as already argued above, one of the fundamental requirements of an acceptable theory of happiness is that it accords with basic intuitions, since the sort of analysis in question is an analysis of a concept that in a sense is already at least partially known to us all (or at least to most of us). I might just add parenthetically that the same applies to the concept of ethics. All I do, and all Aristotle does, is clear the way of confusion so that the concepts under analysis shine in all their splendour. Their brilliance is largely established by showing how concepts known to us all to some degree fit together to form a system of mutually constitutive concepts.

### Notes

- 1 One sort of external authority which I have not tackled explicitly is what could be described as intrinsic authority. This is the sort of authority one would be eliciting if one wanted to claim that a given moral principle was self-justifying. I have not explicitly dealt with this sort of self-justifying external authority because I think my comments against external authority generally apply to any sort of appeal to external authorities as grounds for the ethical.
- 2 One should not be tempted to suppose that the present claims are taken as gospel – they are not. The claims will be substantiated in the ensuing discussion.
- 3 Of course, the subject matter under discussion might not be clearly defined. But, if this were the case, then one of the fundamental goals in this type of discussion would be to determine the specific nature of the subject matter under scrutiny. Also, and crucially, even though it is perhaps an obvious point, for a subject matter not to be clearly determined presupposes that it must already be determined to a certain degree. If this were not the case then, again, our (purported) discussions would, literally, be *about* nothing. Finally, what I have said above is only intended to refer to the specific type of conversational situation which has as its goal to increase the shared intellectual understanding of the participants. Clearly not all conversational situations are discussions.
- 4 Indeed, to be a little more precise, a revision *qua* revision cannot be too radical, since the very function of a revision is to alter one's beliefs about a specific subject matter rather than to altogether shift one's attention away from it.
- 5 I will argue that the very possibility of existing as a person depends on being in communication with others. For this reason, I reject ideas such as those espoused by Hobbes and Locke who presuppose the possibility of there being radically autonomous persons. Contractarian theories of justice generally are inconsistent with the communitarian view I defend, since they presuppose the view that persons as such may exist prior to the establishment of social contracts.
- 6 Aristotle does think of personhood as a natural kind, and for reasons that will be given below, I think he is wrong, and wrong for reasons that he himself unwittingly provides.
- 7 There will, of course, be variations with respect to the sort of caring involved depending on the different sorts of relationships one (directly or indirectly) engages in. Obviously,