I. Endoxic Method & Aristotelian Naturalism

The conception of ethical theory that underlies the approaches considered in this work belongs to a Socratic-Aristotelian tradition in moral philosophy. This tradition can be said to consist in a methodological stance—derived from a, possibly non-constructive, methodology classically attributed to Socrates (the method of elenchus) and further developed by Aristotle into the more constructive endoxic method—and a commitment to a form of naturalism (derived primarily from Aristotle that we therefore can label Aristotelian naturalism). The methodological stance and the naturalist commitment constitute perennial themes within western moral philosophy—ranging from ancient ethics to present-day analytic moral philosophy—that helps us to demarcate this tradition, our focal point of inquiry.

While not all eudaimonists—in short those holding a position in substantive ethical theory according to which the telos (final end), or summum bonum (highest good), of human life and conduct is eudaimonia (happiness) and that the achievement of this goal is closely linked to the acquisition and exercise of moral virtue(s)—need accept either the naturalist commitment or the methodological stance the major systems, such as Epicureanism, Stoicism and Aristotelianism, developed in the Hellenistic era do.1

A central element of the methodological stance is traceable to what is commonly referred to as the Socratic elenchus (argument of refutation; cross-examining; to shame; to refute; to prove):2 Socrates’ method of argument in a number of dialogues which, partly for this reason

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1 Plato is traditionally read as rejecting both the naturalist commitment and the methodological stance while retaining the basic tenets of eudaimonism, for instance.
2 Gregory Vlastos (in “The Socratic Elenchus”, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy Vol. 1: 27-58; 71-74, reprinted as “The Socratic Elenchus: method is all” in Vlastos, Gregory, Socratic Studies, Cambridge University Press 1994:1-29m7) cites George Grote (1865) as the first to use the term as a label for Socrates’ method (closely followed by Lewis Campbell in 1867 and Henry Sidgwick in 1872 (in “the Sophists”, Journal of Philology Vol. 4:288-307), however the term was first introduced to a Modern-day English speaking audience in 1941 via the first edition of Richard Robinson’s Plato’s Earlier Dialectic (Cornell University Press, 1941), the second edition of which had a huge influence on the scholarly community upon its release in Britain in 1953. The cementation of the term was made definite by Vlastos’ seminal 1983 paper.
4 The term lacks an established etymology, but Lesher, James, H., “Parmenidean Elenchos”: 19-28 makes a compelling case for a semantic slide from (i) “shame” and “disgrace” commonly associated with failure with regards to military (or semi-military) valour to (ii) the tests by means of which shame is incurred to (iii) a wide range of contests and tests other than (quasi-)military ones’ such as the testing of a poet’s works by public opinion. (iv) By mid 5th century the term (and its cognates) signify a test for a thing’s (true) nature or person’s mettle (v) In, what we would call, a philosophical context after this point the focus is narrowed to (cross-) examination of a person’s words for truth or falsity.
of methodological consistency, are usually grouped together as Plato’s ‘Socratic’, ‘early’, or ‘elenctic’, dialogues (where Plato is taken to recreate the method and doctrines of the historical Socrates).

Even though it is far from clear how we are to properly understand Socratic elenches, Gregory Vlastos’ account of what he calls “standard elenches”, essentially a process wherein an interlocutor is asked to state a thesis (p)—usually a definition of an ethical concept—and Socrates goes on to show how its negation (~p) follows from further propositions (q, r) asserted by Socrates that the interlocutor (and Socrates, for the most part) assents to and that, thus, the conjunction (p & q & r) is false, can serve as a point of departure.

At this point interpretations divide between those who argue that the elenches ends here (all that has been show is that {p & q & r} is inconsistent) and those who argue that the elenches continues and establishes one of the conjuncts (usually, though not always, p) as false due to the fact that the others enjoy some special status (they are prima facie plausible, instances of endoxa, believed by Socrates, etc.).

Plato is, to borrow a terminology from Arius Didymus, at least polyphōnos (of many voices) if not poludoxos (of many opinions or doctrines). Whatever position one is compelled to take with regards to the “Socratic problem”, Plato’s usage of the dialogue form, the ordering of the dialogues, and other issues—all of which makes problematic the attribution of a systematic ethical theory to either Socrates or Plato—it would appear that cross-examinations (elenchus) classically attributed to Socrates questioned common conceptions of the fundamental values of human life and everyday notions such as ‘virtue’ in a way that necessitated a widening of the scope of inquiry. This widening of scope led to the inclusion of not only scrutiny of common opinion and socio-political conditions of morality but also its metaphysical, epistemological and logical grounding leading to the development of explicit systematic ethical theory. This

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5 The Platonic dialogues give varying accounts and presentations of this central element (that is never baptized by either Socrates or Plato) and seem lacking in explicit meta-philosophical discussion. See Vlastos, Gregory, “The Socratic Elenchus”, Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 79 No. 11, 711–714: 712. Even if Vlastos is here perhaps stretching the rational reconstruction somewhat in attributing to the historical Socrates (and Plato) a clear distinction between ethical inquiry, meta-ethics and meta-philosophical theorizing even though passages such as Apology 19b, Sophistical refutations 183b7 and Metaphysics 987b1 hints at something akin to such a distinction.)

6 Vlastos, Gregory, ”The Socratic Elenchus”. See also Frede, Michael, “Plato’s Arguments and the Dialogue Form.” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy. Supplementary volume. Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues where it is argued that Vlastos’ forth step is incompatible with the aporetic nature of the early dialogues.

7 Here the Socratic elenchus differs from its earlier predecessor the Zenonian paradox, in which the refutands are unasserted counterfactuals and instances of reductio ad absurdum. A common element to both methodologies, under the assumption that Zeno targets common beliefs rather than some technical Pythagorean stance (as argued, most influentially, by Tannery, P., ‘Le Concept Scientifique du continu: Zenon d’Elee et Georg Cantor’, Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger, 20(1885): 385, and more recently by Matson, W. I., ‘Zeno Moves!’, in A. Preus (ed.), Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy VI: Before Plato, State University of New York Press, 2001, is a drive towards the re-valuation of commonly voiced opinions.

8 Euthyphro 7a2–4 provides a notable exception.

9 Ex. Charmides 160b2–161a4: p; self-control (sōphrosunē) is a sense of shame (aidōs)(160b2–5); (q) self-control is fine (kalon) and good (160b13); (r) Homer was right to say that a sense of shame is not always a good thing (161a2–4).

10 Main problems for this “non-constructivist” group are (i) to account for passages (such as Gorgias 479e, 505e, 509a, Crise 46b–c, Charmides 166d, 165b) where Socrates apparently takes his elenches to have constructive results. (ii) How is Socrates able to defend positive convictions granted that the elenches constitutes his sole philosophical method? (iii) How is the distinction between eristic (debate seen as a form of pastime without any aim for truth) and elenches to be maintained?

11 The main problem for the constructivist is, of course, to make sense of Socrates’ famous disavowal of knowledge.

12 Arius Didymus Introduction to Ethics (if he is indeed the author), preserved in Strobaeus Eclogae 2.
development, in turn, necessitated the formulation of more constructive dialectical methodological approaches such as Plato’s *Maieutics*. This scrutiny of common opinion carried over to Aristotle’s philosophical method, where an extensive review of pre-existing opinions on a given subject precedes Aristotle’s statement of his own view.

Central to the scholarly discussion concerning Aristotle’s general philosophical method as it applies to moral philosophy is the following oft quoted passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

As in the other cases we must set out the appearances (phainomena), and first of all go through the puzzles (diaprosantas). In this way we must prove the common beliefs (ta endoxa) about these ways of being affected – ideally, all the common beliefs, but if not all, most of them, and the most important (kriterion). For if the objections are solved, and the common beliefs (endoxa) are left, it will be an adequate proof.

Aristotle’s method appeals to *endoxa* (common opinions; the reputable views), and thus assumes that substantial philosophical theorizing can proceed directly from some kind of ‘data’ gathered by our, in principle, and for the most part, dependable, cognitive and perceptual faculties. The degree to which Aristotle sees himself as committed to retaining the *endoxa* and *phainomena* he initially sets out from is a matter of debate but it is clear that a given set of *endoxa* will oftentimes generate inconsistencies (often as a direct consequence of the *phenomena* generating *aporiai*) that warrants re-interpretation, possible (partial) rejection, and systematization in order to generate a revised coherent subset of the most (or most important) of the original *endoxa*.

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13 It is possible to tell a story similar to the Aristotelian one we are currently concerned with about the development of this Platonic-ironic branch of the western philosophical tradition that would presumably trace the roots of the maieutic method to Pythagorean doctrines concerned with cleansing (atharismos) and reminiscence (that develop into Plato’s technical usage of recollection (anamnesis)) and practices, rites and poetry of Ancient Orphism and include thinkers such as Kierkegaard (who, in his master’s thesis *The Concept of Irony*, argues that Socratic midwifery is only possible as an element within, or at least in constant conjunction with Socratic irony), Nietzsche (whose perspectivism and ironic tone can be seen as instruments aimed at forcing the reader into a classical Socratic dialectic), and Levinas. For a partial attempt at something like this see Westfall, Joseph, “*Ironic midwives: Socratic maieutics in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard*”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* Vol. 35 No. 6: 627–648.

14 Note that Irwin, unlike e.g. Ross, here renders *epi tois allois* as “in the other cases” rather than “in all other cases” as the word “all” is not explicit. This particular exegetical problem (which, as Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*: 478n1 argues, might seem settled in favour of the inclusion of “all” due to the remarks in *AP* 4617–22 which makes explicit the crucial role of *phainomena* for any *techne* or *episteme*) need not concern us here since the present project is confined to ethical theory.

15 Just as the translation ‘observed facts’ used in the original Ross text (prior to J. O. Urmson’s revision, which uses ‘phenomena’) carries realist connotations, ‘appearances’ invite to a constructivist or anti-realist reading of Aristotle’s position. In an attempt to remain non-committed I will henceforth use the more neutral, if cumbersome, ‘phenomena’.

16 Aristotle here uses *diaprosantas*, that is, “to raise puzzles” (aporiai) thus providing a link to what he sees as the fundamental drive towards philosophical inquiry. Cf. *Met.* 982b 12.

17 NE1145b1–7.

18 The Proper translation of *ta endoxa* is a matter of dispute: some believe Aristotle to include all manner of pre-existing opinions on a subject while others take him to include only a subset thereof consisting of the most reputable (such as the opinions of other philosopher). Often Aristotle uses *ta endoxa* to refer to these common opinions, opinions that are accepted “by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them” (*Topics* 100b22–23). See also Barnes, Jonathan, “Aristotle and the Methods of Ethics”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 34: 490–511. At any rate *endoxa* are, in contrast to (mere) *doxa* rejected by Plato as indicative of truth, opinions that Aristotle sees as tested in some way (either by prior philosophical and scientific scrutiny or by being dialectically scrutinized in the public sphere).
The endoxic method thus differs sharply from foundationalist approaches, such as the one championed by for instance Descartes, which seeks to provide a firm foundation for philosophy and science by employment of methodological doubt.

The methodological stance and the naturalist commitment are connected; for the phenomena that are taken as the starting point of the inquiry of the methodological stance are taken to be natural phenomena: it makes more sense to adopt a methodology based on common opinion and pre-philosophical intuition if one thinks that the ultimate ground at which ethical inquiry aims is to be found inside the realm of the natural rather than in some metaphysically distinct third realm.

The adherence to the naturalist commitment excludes approaches to ethical theory that takes moral philosophy to be fundamentally autonomous from inquiry into nature and/or attempts to ground ethics in some alternative metaphysical realm distinct from both the mental and the physical, including constructivist approaches that take the basis for this construct to be an idealization ultimately derived from such a realm but allows for more austere constructivist approaches of a kind that abstracts away or brackets some aspects of the natural without appealing to a transcendental realm and/or idealized conceptions of rational agency.\(^\text{19}\)

The methodological stance excludes non-naturalist meta-ethical\(^\text{20}\) approaches since the (moral) language expressing the common opinions and pre-philosophical intuitions that form the starting point of enquiry needs to be (at least minimally) truth-apt and (in some way taken as) referring to the world around us for the endoxic method to get of the ground, but allows for error-theoretic, quasi-realist and functionalist approaches.

The adherence to the naturalist commitment and the methodological stance also has important implications with regards to the kind of ethical theories that tends to ensue as the upshot of analysis within this tradition, particularly with regards to the scope of these theories. While it is not necessarily so that approaches adhering the naturalist commitment and the methodological stance need to be comprehensive, or synoptic\(^\text{21}\) theories, a vast majority of them have been. A Synoptic ethical theory attempts to ground or place morality in an understanding of the cosmos and humanity’s place in it by presenting a unified philosophical system linking ethics with other areas of inquiry in order to present a framework, or world-view, for human fulfilment\(^\text{22}\) (by contrast non-synoptic ethics restricts inquiry to a confined sphere).\(^\text{23}\)


\(^{20}\) The label non-naturalism is plagued by the usual problems (such as determining what instances of similarity are the relevant ones) that accompany approaches trying to understand a genus via a prominent species thereof (in this case G. E. Moore’s position in Principia Ethica, which might have been misread, see Skorupski, John, “Aristotelianism and Modernity: Terence Irwin on the Development of Ethics”, *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 2: 312–337 in which case Moore does not subscribe to (iii) below but rather to some cognitivist antirealism). In view of this ‘meta-ethical non-naturalism’ can mean: (i) the semantic thesis that moral predicates cannot be analysed in non-normative terms; (ii) the epistemological thesis that knowledge of (some sub-set of) moral principles, value-judgments, etc. is in some way self-evident (this thesis often goes by the label ‘intuitionism’); (iii) the metaphysical thesis that moral properties, though existent, are not, are not identical to, or reducible to, natural properties. Note that as stated (ii) is not strictly speaking incompatible with the methodological stance: we could allow for a subset of the domain of moral principles etc. to be self-evident as long as the remaining members of this set are to be reached via endoxic method thus landing us in a combinatory approach.


\(^{22}\) That is, this approach to ethical theory denies what John Rawls has called “the independence of moral theory”, the thesis that “much of moral theory is independent from the other parts of philosophy. The theory of meaning and epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of mind, can often contribute very little. In fact, preoccupation with the problems that define these subjects may get in the way and block the path to advance.”
The distinction between synoptic and non-synoptic theories is neutral with respect to a further distinction between particularist and generalist theories of morality.24 Broadly speaking, a generalist stance to morality holds that ethical reasoning and judgement is at least partly dependent upon appeal to (universal) principles. This thought involves the formal postulate that there are certain ethical principles that hold for all cases, and a claim concerning the universal scope of these principles stating that (at least some of) the universal principles hold for (more or less all) moral agents.25 The most extreme form of generalism is algorithmic theories that assert that morality can be completely codified into a system of rules and/or principles. Classical utilitarianism constitutes the most obvious example of a theory of this kind although Kantianism is sometimes read in a way that makes it come out as algorithmic.26 Even the most algorithmic of theories must allow for a limited role to be played by judgements.27 More moderate generalist approaches, that we can call framework theories, hold that although there are principles applying to moral agents, these principles does not fully codify the moral realm since an agent would still need to exercise judgement in weighting different principles against each other in times of conflict where this process of weighing is not itself regulated by any principle.

Opposed to generalist approaches stands ethical particularism. Ethical particularism is a position in meta-ethics28 that holds that any non-moral feature,29 $F$ (or set of features) that serve

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23 The distinction between synoptic and non-synoptic (ethical) theories can be understood via John Rawls’ notion of reflective equilibrium, essentially his own cashing out of the endoxic method (famously explicated by in his A Theory of Justice, Harvard University Press, 1971 but already hinted at in an earlier paper entitled “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics”, The Philosophical Review Vol. 60, No. 2:XX). Reflective equilibrium is, essentially: a state in which our (i) considered judgements (deep-lying trusted intuitions, cf. Aristotle’s phainomena) and the (ii) principles we have adopted (cf. Aristotle’s endoxa) reach maximum coherence reached by a process of matching in which neither (i) or (ii) are immune to revision. Rawls maintains that “the independence of moral theory” is a consequence of this view. A range of critique that essentially boiled down to the charge that Rawls in fact did make assumptions concerning the metaphysics of the person moved him to restate, or perhaps just explicate, his position into what is now called wide reflective equilibrium, which is reached in a similar fashion as narrow reflective equilibrium with the exception that (i) and (ii) now also has to cohere with a set of (iii) background theories, theories covering such fields as philosophy of mind and the metaphysics of the person. (see Rawls, John, “The Independence of Moral Theory”, in Rawls, John, Collected Papers, Harvard University Press, 1999 and Daniels, Norman, “Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics”, The Journal of Philosophy I 76, 1979). The distinction between synoptic and non-synoptic ethical theories can be said to mirror the distinction between narrow and wide reflective equilibrium in such a way that comprehensive ethical theories strive at wide reflective equilibrium whereas non-comprehensive ethical theories are content with reaching narrow reflective equilibrium.


25 This characterization builds upon O’Neill, Onora, Towards Justice and Virtue 11.

26 Kantian ethics comes out as an algorithmic theory if we understand Kantianism as saying that we ought to test the legitimacy of any given act by simply feeding the relevant action-description (maxim narrowly interpreted) into the Formula of Universal Law and that such a procedure immediately makes it clear whether the act in question is permissible or not.

27 The algorithmic utilitarian will have to concede that agents will have to exercise their judgements when assessing quantities of the good and the algorithmic Kantian will have to admit that judgement needs to be exercised in order to determine which maxim we are considering.

28 Particularism cannot be said to be a paradigmatic meta-ethical theory (such as the ones concerned with the
as right-making, or reason providing, or value-making in one set of circumstances need not have this function in a different set of circumstances. This, the particularist claims, is due to the fact that the moral significance of \( F \) is irreducibly context-dependent. This thesis connects with particularism’s rejection of moral rules or principles: If one thinks that the number of potentially morally relevant features of a situation is in fact infinite there seems to be no room for principles in ethics.\(^{30}\)

It should be noted that while the family of positions here considered under the unifying label of *eudaimonism* are teleological in the sense that they all see the fundamental aim of human conduct as connected to an ultimate end (telos, summum bonum) identified as happiness (*eudaimonia*) and naturalist in the sense that they hold that when we venture into an investigation concerning the nature and attainment of this *summum bonum* we are aided by an investigation into our own human nature and our place in the natural world eudaimonist synoptic approaches are not by necessity committed to any form of teleology in the classical sense of being *pan-axial* and thus at odds with post-Baconian and post-Darwinian cosmology. Grounding human fulfilment in terms of harmonization with an overarching order of cosmic Nature, providence, or final causes are but alternatives here, the systems presented by Epicurus, Descartes, and Spinoza are synoptic in the here required sense while not attempting to locate value within the structure of the universe as a whole.\(^{31}\)

Our interpretations of the key notions of *endoxa* and *phainomenon* have repercussions for how these dialectical starting points delineate philosophical theory within the Socratic-Aristotelian tradition with regards to issues such as realism vs. anti-realism, synoptic vs. non-synoptic theory, and the possibility of ethical particularism.

Martha Nussbaum has argued that we are to understand *phainomenon* in a way that makes Aristotle out to be a kind of Putnamian internal realist—i.e. holding some version of the view that the question “*what objects do the world consist of?* is a question that it only makes sense to ask

\[^{29}\] The term “moral features” is here used in order to leave it open whether these features are concerned with value or with deontic status.

\[^{30}\] The principles rejected by the particularist are those that assume an unforfeitable or indefeasible supervenience function holding between the non-moral and the moral. It is a further question whether the particularist’s rejection of moral principles also needs to hold when concerned with non-ideal practical reasoning in ethics. For more on this see Little, Margaret, “Moral Generalities Revisited”, in *Moral Particularism*, ed. Hooker, Brad and Little, Margaret, Oxford university Press, 2000 and Olson, Jonas and Svensson, Frans “A Particular Consequentialism: Why Moral Particularism and Consequentialism Need Not Conflict”, *Utilitas*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2003.

within a theory of description”, and that “[t]ruth, in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability [...] and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent 'states of affairs'” — in which case it would seem natural to pursue a synoptic approach that is open to the possibility of particularism.

If we instead side with G. E. L. Owen and take Aristotle to use the word ‘phainomena’ equivocally, sometimes denoting empirical observations (in the context of the scientific works) and sometimes the common conceptions (endoxa) on the subject at hand we end up with two distinct methods in Aristotle: one scientific and one dialectical. The postulation of two separate methods grants plausibility to a non-synoptic approach while it remains neutral towards both the realist vs. anti-realist debate and the debate over ethical particularism.

A third option is the interpretation championed by Irwin, which holds that Aristotle’s methodology aims not only at a systematisation of common opinions (pure dialectic in Irwins terminology) but at first principles (archai). This, Irwin maintains, is possible due to the effect that this “strong dialectic” proceeds from an appropriately selected subset of endoxa, which can arrive at knowledge of first principles. Irwin’s interpretation thus seemingly excludes the possibility of particularism (since there are first principles in ethics) and makes ethics out to be “an autonomous discipline, in so far as its basic principles are independent of disputes in natural science and the rest of philosophy.”

It is crucial to note that this is not mere exegetical squabbling since the possibilities of interpreting the endoxic method in different ways (depending on our understanding of phainomena) opens interesting possibilities for philosophical investigations subscribing to the method and have consequences for our understanding of the ensuing naturalism. This gives us a notion of phainomena that is indeed ambiguous between different philosophically interesting readings and thus in need of further specification, but it is neither vacuous nor unimportant.

The brief outline of the Aristotelian method provided above seems to leave it open to charges of seeming tediousness, conservatism, and lack of ambition that comes associated with a methodology primarily concerned with salvaging pre-philosophical intuitions which threaten to invite abrupt philosophical dismissal.

The charge that Aristotle’s concern with endoxa generates a philosophical theory that is by and large a descriptive enterprise actualizes the more general question of whether philosophy as such ought to be descriptive or revisionist. The history of philosophy provides us with prominent voices on both sides of the divide. David Lewis embraces a rather starch descriptive stance:

One comes to philosophy already endowed with a stock of opinions. It is not the business of philosophy either to undermine or to justify these pre-existing opinions, to any great extent, but only to discover ways of expanding them into an orderly system.  

36 This distinction originates with P. F. Strawson’s *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1959.
37 Strawson asserts: “Revisionary metaphysics is at the service of descriptive metaphysics. Perhaps no actual metaphysican ha ever been, both in intention and effect, wholly the one thing or the other. But we can distinguish broadly: Descartes, Leibniz, Berkeley are revisionary; Aristotle and Kant descriptive.” (Strawson, P. F., *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen, 1959: 9).
38 Lewis, David, *Counterfactuals*, Harvard University Press, 1977: 88. This sentiment can be carried even further, to the point where even expansion into an “orderly system” seems unwarranted. Nietzsche writes: One should
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Henry Sidgwick gives voice to the opposite, revisionist, view:

For we conceive it as the aim of a philosopher, as such, to do somewhat more than define and formulate the common moral opinions of mankind. His function is to tell men what they ought to think, rather than what they do think: he is expected to transcend Common Sense in his premises, and is allowed a certain divergence from Common Sense in his conclusions. It is true that the limits of this deviation are firmly, though indefinitely, fixed: the truth of a philosopher’s premises will always be tested by the acceptability of his conclusions […] we should expect that the history of Moral Philosophy […] would be a history of attempts to enunciate, in full breadth and clearness, those primary intuitions of Reason, by the scientific application of which the common moral thought of mankind may be at once systematized and corrected.39

Sidgwick is aware of his debt to Aristotle at this point. After detailing how he, in a step-by-step fashion, came to embrace intuitionism by influences from Mill, Butler, and, Kant he asserts:

In this state of mind I had to read Aristotle again; and a light seemed to dawn upon me as to the meaning and drift of his procedure – especially in Books ii., iii., iv. of the Ethics – (cf. History of Ethics, chap. ii § 9, p. 58, read to end of section).

What he gave us there was the Common Sense Morality of Greece, reduced to consistency by careful comparison: given not as something external to him but as what ‘we’ – he and others – think, ascertained by reflection. And was not this really the Socratic induction, elicited by interrogation?

Might I not imitate this: do the same for our morality here and now, in the same manner of impartial reflection on current opinion?40

Regardless of exegetical issues concerned with Aristotle’s position – which seems to me to lay somewhere in between starch descriptivism and radical revisionism41 – it should be clear from the above that there is nothing in the endoxic methodology as such that settles the question of revisionism vs. descriptivism.42

II. Eudaimonism: An axiomatic characterization

Eudaimonism, as we have said, is a position in substantive ethical theory that holds that the telos (final end), or summum bonum (highest good), of human life and conduct is eudaimonia (happiness)43 and that the achievement of this goal is closely44 linked to the acquisition and own up in all strictness to what is still necessary here for a long time to come, to what alone is justified so far: to collect material, to conceptualize and arrange a vast realm of subtle feelings of value and differences of value which are alive, grow, beget, and perish – and perhaps attempts to present vividly some of the more frequent and recurring forms of such living crystallizations – all to prepare a typology of morals” (BGE §186).

41 I do not wish to argue this point here as nothing in what follows hinges on this purely exegetical point.
42 Neither does the endoxic method imply conservatism in a political sense: One need only consider F. H. Bradley’s careful treatment of “the vulgar notion of responsibility” in his Ethical Studies to see just how revisionist an endoxic stance can get with regards to metaphysics while showing how independent this metaphysical question is from that of political conservatism. The eudaimonist positions here considered occupy a number of positions on this divide also: Aristotle can be charged with political conservatism whereas Stoic and Epicurean stances exemplifies a sort of political liberalism, broadly construed.
43 A note on translation: The classical way of rendering eudaimonia into English is as ‘happiness’. This rendering is favoured by amongst others Gregory Vlastos who argues that, when used quite generally, the best translation is ‘happiness’ since the Greek term eudaimonia includes both the objective features of ‘happiness’ (understood broadly as the attainment of good) and its subjective connotations (a state of mind marked by profound contentment). Vlastos thus conclude that there “is ample reason for sticking to the traditional translation
exercise of moral virtue(s)\textsuperscript{45}. This approach, which constitutes the paradigm\textsuperscript{46} of ethical theory in ancient ethics, rests on a tradition that goes back at least to Socrates via Plato and Aristotle\textsuperscript{47},

provided only we bear in mind that in its pre-theoretical uses \textit{eudaimonia} puts a heavier loading on the objective factor in ‘happiness’ than does the English word.” (Vlastos, Gregory, \textit{Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher}, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991: 203). See also, Long, A. A., “`Stoic eudaimonism’” in Long A. A., \textit{Stoic Studies} Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996: 179–201. Apart from this standard rendering ‘living well’, ‘faring well’ and ‘well-being’ all have their merits depending on context (to a certain degree this is dependent upon variations in the Greek and Latin originals). W. D. Ross at times (e. g. in his \textit{Aristotle: Complete Exposition of His Works and Thought}, Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1959: 186) favours ‘well-being’ though it should be noted that Ross in other places retains the more widely accepted ‘happiness’ (e. g. his translation of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908.) The same is true of Ackrill. (See Ackrill, John, \textit{Aristotle’s Ethics}, London: Duckworth, 1973). See also Sidgwick, Henry, \textit{The Methods of Ethics}, London: Maximilian, 1907: 92 and Ackrill, John, \textit{Aristotle the Philosopher}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980: 14 for an earlier and a later voicing of this opinion). Some modern translators and theoreticians prefer ‘flourishing’, or ‘success’. For interesting further discussions see Hursthouse, Rosalind, \textit{On Virtue Ethics}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999: 9–10, and Kraut, Richard “Two Conceptions of Happiness”, \textit{The Philosophical Review}, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1979: 167–197. I here retain a transcribed rendering of the Greek εὐδαιμονία as ‘\textit{eudaimonia}’ throughout the text (it should be noted that some scholars sometimes renders ‘eudaimonism’ as ‘\textit{eudaimonism}’ (see, for example, Irwin, Terence, “Kant’s Criticism of Eudaemonism” in Engstrom, Stephen, and Whiting, Jennifer, (eds.) \textit{Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 63–101). I have chosen to use ‘\textit{eudaimonia}’ primarily to sidestep intuitions, linguistic or otherwise, that might arise with a rendering into English. I am aware of a major shortcoming here: by using ‘\textit{eudaimonia}’ I very much set the discussion up as a philosophical, as opposed to an everyday, one. The reader is therefore asked to remember that in its original setting the term was not a philosopher’s term of art but rather an everyday word linked to urgent practical questions.

\textsuperscript{44} Usually eudaimonists identify \textit{eudaimonia} with a life of virtuous activity. The most obvious exception is the Epicureans, who hold that \textit{eudaimonia} is constituted by static (katastematic) pleasure, often referred to as \textit{ataraxia}, a state negatively defined as the absence of \textit{tarachai} (troubles) i.e. the pleasure of being in a state without hindrance. (Cf. Epicurus, \textit{Letter to Menoeceus} 127–129, \textit{De Fin.} I. 29; I. 37–39, for example). In addition to this Rosalind Hursthouse holds that even though virtuous activity is strictly speaking neither necessary or sufficient for \textit{eudaimonia} it still constitutes our ”only reliable bet” at achieving our final end – ”even though, it is agreed, I might be unlucky and, precisely because of my virtue, wind up dying early or with my life marred or ruined””. (Hursthouse, Rosalind, \textit{On Virtue Ethics}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999: 172.)

\textsuperscript{45} The rendering of the Greek term \textit{aretē} into English as virtue is relatively unproblematic as uncontroversial examples include piety (\textit{hosiotes}), courage (\textit{andreia}), justice (\textit{dikaiosyne}), temperance (\textit{sophrosyne}) and the like although the reader is advised to note (as is done in Vlastos, Gregory, \textit{Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher}, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991: 200n6) that Socrates’ usage of the word is more narrowly moral than that of Aristotle whom would be closer to popular usage.

\textsuperscript{46} All the major ethical systems of antiquity, with the exception of the Cyrenaics, are eudaimonist. The Cyrenaics argue that our final end is comprised of particular pleasures, not \textit{eudaimonia} (which is only choiceworthy (\textit{kairetē}) because of particular pleasure, Cf. DL II 87–88; Athenaeus, \textit{Deipnosophistae} XII 544a ff. Anniceris and his followers even claimed that there is only a special end for every action – its resulting pleasure, Cf. Clement, \textit{Stromata} II 21, 130.7–8), while accepting a distinctive feeling view of pleasure and a radical empiricist epistemology according to which we can not have knowledge of the nature (\textit{physis}) of things, only of our \textit{pathe} (affections) of physical objects. They also advocate a lack of future-concern (in contrast to Epicurus and the Socrates of the \textit{Protagoras}). Attempts at rational construal’s of this position ranges from arguing that their position is a consequence of them having a “maximising model of rationality” (Annas, Julia, \textit{The Morality of Happiness}: 227–236), or denying personal identity over time in connection with the radical empiricism (Irwin, Terence, “Aristippus against happiness”, \textit{Monist}, Vol. 74, No. 1, 1991: 55–82), to a relativizing of value to present desires reminiscent of Gauthier (O’Keefe, Tim, “The Cyrenaics on Pleasure, Happiness, and Future–Concern”, \textit{Phronesis} Vol. 47 No. 4, 2002.) among others. In light of the exposition of the ancient conception of happiness in the next section I think that the Cyrenaics’ insistence on the value of present experiences is at least in part to be explained by the ancient preoccupation with the potentially disastrous effects of luck (\textit{tuchē}).

\textsuperscript{47} It might be that this tradition reaches even further back as Democritus, for instance, was often seen as an important predecessor of eudaimonistic ethics in the Hellenistic Era, but we are here met with scarcity of
thus assumes as intelligible and important both the question of the nature of the *summum bonum* and agreement on the second-order question of what it is meant to regard *eudaimonia* as the *summum bonum* as well as commitment to two further theses: (i) that human life and conduct is somehow determined by a unified teleological structure, and (ii) that this ultimate good is the agent’s own good.

Eudaimonistic ethical theories are thus to a large extent determined by, on the one hand, their specification of the final end which functions as a central conceptual link between parts of the theory, and on the other a number of shared abstract structural features. This makes it seem like, in Tad Brennan’s words, “all of the Hellenistic ethical theories are variations on a theme, with the element of variation provided by the specification of the end”. In his classic study of the subject Gregory Vlastos formulates what he calls the “Eudaemonist Axiom”:

**EA:**  
[Eudaimonia] is desired by all human beings as the ultimate end (telos) of all their rational acts.

What EA specifies, once the notion of *eudaimonia* is laid out in accordance with the school in question, is a standard of reference for rational behaviour. Additionally all ancient Greek eudaimonists agree on, and offer reasons for believing, two propositions concerned with the substantial nature of *eudaimonia* which provide a way of convergence between a happy life and a life of virtue:

**P1:** [Eudaimonia] is, wholly or partly, a state and activity of the soul.

**P2:** [Eudaimonia] is, wholly or partly, generated by ethical virtue.

verified authentic sources. For more on this see section II: Eudaimonism a brief conceptual history below.

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48 Note, as Julia Annas has reminded us to do, that the concept of *eudaimonia* is central, or primary, rather than basic or foundational. That a notion is primary in this sense means that the theoretical explication start of from primary notions with regards to understanding and determination of the scope of the theory, but is not foundational in the sense that other concepts are derived from them or reduced to them. See Annas, Julia, *Intelligent Virtue*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011: 120, and Ead., *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993: 8-10. See also De Fin. IV. 14; V. 14.


51 As is pointed out by Tad Brennan: ”This requirement does not prevent the agent from acting in whimsical or apparently pointless ways, since it may well contribute to their end to do so, e. g. by offering relaxation and refreshment. There is nothing irrational about relaxation per se, since it is easy to see how a rational agent could explain its role in contributing to their end” (Brennan, Tad, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate*: 118n2). See also NE1176-30f; to which Brennan refers.


53 The English term ‘soul’ here simply transcribes the Greek psyche (all the life-activity, states of awareness etc. of the creature in question) and as such does not carry any particular metaphysical commitments (both Epicureans and Stoics are after all physicalists). It might seem puzzling to the modern reader that something is regarded as both a state and an activity of the soul, but, given the importance the Greeks place on virtue as an active engagement based in dispositions this would not strike the ancient moralist as odd. Aristotle, for example, contrasts between ‘first’ and ‘second’ activity (energeia). A person is in the first activity in relation to his linguistic abilities when she or he is competent in a given language but asleep or thinking of other matters, she or he is in the second activity when actually speaking (cf. NE1146-31). To have a soul is to have a first activity (a state, hexis). When *eudaimonia* is defined as an activity of the soul in accord with virtue (NE1098°15–20) second activities is required, not merely states (NE1095°32, NE1178°18–20).
As Long points out: “Since ethical virtue is standardly regarded as an ‘active state of the soul’, and an active state of the soul deemed necessary to happiness is ethical virtue, [P1 and P2] are mutually inter-entailing”. Up to this point Platonists, Peripatetics, Epicureans and Stoics all agree even on the substantial features of *eudaimonia*. Differences start to appear once we attend to the ‘wholly or partly’ exclusive disjunctions in P1 and P2. We here get a tripartite division between:

(i) those who, like the Stoics, take (the) virtue(s) to be both necessary and sufficient for *eudaimonia*;

(ii) (ii) those who, like Aristotle, take (the) virtue(s) to be necessary but not sufficient for *eudaimonia*, and;

(iii) (iii) those, like Epicurus, that view (the) virtue(s) as instrumentally necessary for *eudaimonia*.

It is at this crucial junction in the search for convergence that a series of different trade-offs are generated ranging from the Epicurean insistence that the end is a certain kind of pleasure, which makes it easy to argue that a life oriented towards this goal will be a happy one but harder to show that this will also be a life of virtue, to the Stoic identification of the end with a life in accordance with virtue, which have a harder time showing that this life will also be a happy one.

There are a range of ways in which one could attack EA, either in solitude or taken as conjoined with P1 and P2, for example: (i) one could dispute its imbedded teleological account of rationality, (ii) one could argue that *eudaimonia*, in any or some substantially specified form or forms, is unfit to fulfil the role it is given in EA, or; (iii) one could dispute the close connection between virtue and *eudaimonia*.

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55 Note that for Epicurus the virtues are what we could call instrumentally necessary, if they fail to deliver the good (pleasure) we should “say goodbye to them” (*Atheneaeus* 546f=LS 21M).
56 See Brennan, Tad, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate*: 117-118. See also *De Fin.* III. 30 for an example of a brief comparative listing of positions.
57 It is this trade-off that is the key to understanding why Epicurus regarded the virtues as merely instrumental goods. Cf. *TD* III. 41-42 (LS 21L), *Atheneaeus* 564F (LS 21M), *De Fin.* II. 69 (LS 21O).
58 For an example of an argument to the effect that only the virtuous life could also be a happy one see *De Fin.* III. 23. At this crucial junction the radical nature of Stoic ethics first emerges: they are alone among the ancient Greek ethicists to claim that happiness wholly consists in virtue understood as an active state of the soul. Plato, at least on some occasions, takes pleasure – alongside virtue – to be a constituent of *eudaimonia*, while Aristotle sees a range of external goods to be necessary for the attainment of *eudaimonia* and Epicurus takes the state of the soul that constitutes *eudaimonia* to be pleasure while virtue is treated as an essential instrument necessary for the attainment of *eudaimonia* but not as part of its content.