The Nicomachean Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophy – A Hidden Treasure?

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A Hidden Treasure?

Karen Margrethe Nielsen


Writing the reception history of the Nicomachean Ethics in Hellenistic philosophy is, arguably, an impossible task. The problem is not simply the paucity of evidence. We have no direct citations tying any doctrine discussed by Epicurean, Stoic, or Academic philosophers to views explicitly defended by Aristotle in the N.E., nor any direct evidence for familiarity in the Cyrenaic or Megarian schools. For all the evidence shows, Aristotle’s N.E. was not cited by any philosopher outside the Peripatos in the period from the death of Alexander (323BC) to the year Cicero wrote De Finibus (45BC). That brings us almost all the way up to the year that is conventionally considered the end of the Hellenistic period, 31 B.C. Even in the Lyceum Aristotle’s voice falls strangely silent after the death of his successor Theophrastus of Eresus in c. 287 B.C.

The lack of any direct reference proving that the N.E. was read in the Hellenistic period is perplexing in light of its profound impact on later ethical theory. But it need not trouble us if we can find strong reasons to infer that particular features of Stoic or Epicurean theories are best explained as developments of Aristotle’s ethics. Thus, David Furley has argued that Epicurus’ account of the voluntary attempts to solve problems arising from Aristotle’s discussion of responsibility for character in N.E. III.5 (Furley (1967), pp. 184-209). Similarly, A.A. Long has maintained that the Stoic category of “things in accordance with nature” and the attendant distinction between appropriate acts and successful acts develop essentially Aristotelian insights while equipping nameless Aristotelian categories with convenient labels. According to Long, “The Stoics borrowed many concepts, sometimes altering their language, from the Peripatetics and consciously developed or diverged from others (…) Stoic ethics cannot be completely understood without reference to Aristotle” (Long (1968)). Brad Inwood has reached a similar conclusion regarding Stoic action theory: “The early Stoic theory of human and animal action was influenced by Aristotle as much as was Epicurus”. More recently, Terence Irwin has revived the late Hellenistic view that the disagreements

1 The passage appears in Cicero (2001, II.19), where Cicero states that Aristotle defined the highest good (“ultima bonorum”) as “virtutis usum cum vitae perfectae prosperitate” – which is a grammatically condensed version of the definition Aristotle gives of euaimonia in N.E. I.11, 1101a14-17: happiness is activity in accord with complete virtue, with an adequate supply of external goods in a complete life. The definition has no direct parallel in the Protrepticus, Eudemian Ethics (E.E.) or the Magna Moralia (M.M.). The corresponding passage in the E.E. (II, 1219a25-1219b8) omits reference to external goods, as does the M.M. Insofar as Cicero’s presentation of peripatetic ethics in De Finibus is based at least in part on Theophrastus, we may wonder whether the apparent citation may not have been mediated by Theophrastus, thus standing one removed from the N.E. itself. However, Piso’s reference to a work called the Nicomachean Ethics in V.12 proves that Cicero knew of the N.E. He would therefore not have had to rely on Theophrastus for the definition. In his magisterial study, Moraux (1973) wonders whether Cicero may have relied on summaries in compendia, doxographies, or manuals in his presentation of Peripatetic ethics (pp. 50-51). But even if Cicero did make use of summaries, the direct reference to N.E. makes it unlikely that such summaries were his only source.

2 In his review of Furley, Irwin (1980) observes that N.E. III.5 has no exact parallel in the E.E. (or in the M.M., though the latter work is usually considered spurious). Irwin remarks that “Furley does not argue in detail that Epicurus refers to the EN rather than the EE or the Common Books,” but he nevertheless maintains that there are good reasons to suppose that Epicurus must have been familiar with the specifically N.E. treatment of the voluntary. Kenny (1978) maintains that Epicurus was drawing on E.E. VIII.2. Irwin responds that the arguments presented here are “much less detailed and much less appropriate to Epicurus,” in particular his preoccupation with proving that some of our actions have their origin in us. Irwin (1980), p. 339.

3 Inwood (1985), p. 9. Inwood does not argue in detail for his contention, stating that “I do not want to claim that the
between Stoic and Aristotelian ethics are less profound than critics tend to recognize. Irwin (1990) resists Antiochus’s view that the Stoics are merely recasting Aristotelian points in “violently paradoxical” language, for according to Irwin the Stoics are providing an important service by making clear Aristotle’s true commitments.

In addition to these more recent attempts to explain features of Hellenistic ethics with reference to Aristotle, there is an older tradition going back to von Arnim and Dirlmeyer for thinking that the Stoic theory of oikeiosis develops an observation first made by Theophrastus. Dirlmeyer even claims to find antecedents of the notion in Aristotle’s use of the verb sunoikeioùsthai, which occurs five times in the N.E. (Dirlmeyer (1937), pp. 79-80). Dirlmeyer’s speculative views have been dismissed, but the idea that there are sufficiently important points of contact to allow late Hellenistic authors to expound Aristotle’s theory of self-love and friendship in Stoic terms has found a champion in Annas (1990), who argues – more cautiously – for reading the Stoics’ oikeiosis theory as a philosophical descendant of questions about self-regard and other-regard first raised by Aristotle in his treatment of friendship.

Whatever merits these arguments may have when considered individually, they nevertheless exemplify a type of reasoning that has the potential to fill the gap left by the absence of direct references to the N.E. in the extant Hellenistic sources: inferences to the best explanation. Taking as our explanandum the appearance of a term, phrase, image, or argument in a Hellenistic source, we may infer that the feature in question is best explained on the hypothesis that the author was familiar with the broad outlines of Aristotle’s ethics, or, more specifically, with one or more of the ten books that make up our N.E. or one or more of the eight books that make up our version of E.E.

Direct evidence is not the only kind of evidence there is. In light of the dismal state of the Hellenistic sources we should take particular care not to treat the lack of direct evidence for familiarity with Aristotle’s ethics as evidence of a lack of familiarity. By way of illustration, Diogenes Laertius reports that Chrysippus produced 705 scrolls of papyrus, none of which survive; he credits Epicurus with 300 scrolls and calls him “quite a prolific writer;” we possess three letters, the Kuriai Doxai, and a handful of fragments. Treating the lack of direct evidence as an indication that Aristotle’s ethics was unknown or ignored in the Hellenistic age would be an argument ex silentio in a setting where our sources are mostly silent.

The question is whether individual attempts to trace such influence succeeded, or whether they are just so many blank cheques. Inferences to the best explanation are only as convincing as rival explanations are unconvincing, and many critics, led by the Cambridge scholar F. H. Sandbach, have held that there are general reasons to be skeptical of the type of inference drawn in the work of scholars who assert that Aristotle exerted an influence on the Stoics. Sandbach writes: “Such indications as there are point only rarely to Aristotle as the probable, let alone the certain, origin of Stoic doctrines.” Sandbach reaches this conclusion through a study of earlier efforts to connect aspects of Stoic logic, ethics, and physics to Aristotle’s extant works. Dismissing what he takes to be unsubstantiated claims to the contrary, Sandbach adds:

I hold even more strongly that it is a mistake to proceed on the a priori assumptions that the Stoics must have known the opinions expressed in [Aristotle’s] school-works, must have understood his importance sub specie aeternitatis and must therefore have been influenced by him (Sandbach (1985), pp. 56-57).

In assessing claims about influence, we should be wary of treating the appearance in N.E. of terminology later employed by the Stoics as proof that the Stoics were developing Aristotle’s ideas. As Annas underlines, “verbal parallels prove nothing if the concepts in question are clearly distinct” (1990). Insofar as many of our sources for Hellenistic ethics date to the 1st century BC, when doxographers did not hesitate to employ terminology from one school in expounding the theories of another, we should be particularly reluctant to treat a seemingly “Aristotelian” term in our Stoic source as proof positive that the Stoics inherited the term from him. The overlap may simply reflect the doxographer’s syncretism. But although the appearance of verbs such as “sunoikeioùsthai” or “katorthoun / katorthousthai” in the N.E. does not prove that Aristotle influenced Stoicism, the conceptual role played by such terms is close enough to merit further investigation. While the same terms may hide conceptual differences between two schools, different terms may furthermore hide conceptual agreement. It would therefore equally be a mistake to

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4 For the now mostly discredited attempt to find a basis for the Stoic concept of oikeiosis in Theophrastus, see von Arnim, (1926), pp. 157-61, and Dirlmeyer (1937). These attempts are rejected by Pohlenz (1940), pp. 1-47; Brink (1956); Pembroke (1971) and Moraux (1973). Sandbach (1985) endorses their view, and is followed by Long (1998).

5 Sandbach’s critique is seconded by David Sedley, who remarks that “Aristotle’s own positive teachings appear to have been relatively neglected in the Hellenistic period” (Sedley (1998), p. 353).
proceed on the *a priori* assumption that all apparent points of contact are purely coincidental. In the final part of this paper I will examine Zeno’s description of the happy life and compare his views to those expounded by Aristotle in *N.E.* I. While Zeno promotes his own views as radical departures from tradition, he frequently intervenes in the debate in a way that is best explained on the assumption that he was responding to Aristotle.

This is not to deny that alternative explanations are frequently available. All the Hellenistic schools – with the exception of the Cyrenaics⁶ – share the eudaimonist ethical framework developed by Plato, and their ethics can be summarized as different responses to a handful of fundamental questions: What is the nature of eudaimonia? Is virtue sufficient for happiness? Does happiness require an adequate supply of external goods, and if so, can happiness be augmented by a greater supply of external goods? Insofar as Aristotle’s assumptions can frequently be traced back to Plato, a common ancestry may explain why a Stoic position sometimes looks eerily Aristotelian. Before we infer an Aristotelian influence, we should therefore ensure that considerations favouring an Aristotelian source could not equally well support a common Platonic source.⁷ It would furthermore be a mistake to reduce the question of influence to a question of agreement. That Plato influenced Aristotle can hardly be doubted; but it is equally certain that Aristotle’s development of Plato’s ethics took the form of a critical reappraisal. Aristotle expressly responds to his predecessors, recasting ethics as a dialectical enterprise. The Stoics did not position their views by expressly relating them to views defended by their predecessors. This means that we must identify the positions to which they object by rationally reconstructing the moves in the dialectical exchange in which they took part. If we identify the heart of Zeno’s ethics, points where he presses paradoxical views in defiance of tradition, we can reasonably expect to discern the contours of his targets.

I. ARIUS DIDYMUS & CICERO

The evidentiary situation in the late Hellenistic period (1st century B.C.) is strikingly different from that of the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. Two late Hellenistic authors display detailed knowledge of Aristotle’s ethics.

In Stobaeus’ compendium of ancient philosophical schools, *Eclogae* II, 116-152, we find a summary of “The Ethics of Aristotle and the Other Peripatetics.” This summary has been traced back to a compendium written by the mid-1st century B.C. Stoic Arius Didymus. Arius’s presentation of Peripatetic ethics draws heavily on Stoic terminology. Julia Annas has argued persuasively that this cannot simply be written off as “mindless eclecticism” on Arius’s part. It is not that Arius did not know better, and interspersed Stoic terms in his exposition of Aristotelian ethics in blissful ignorance that the terms are nowhere to be found in Aristotle’s ethics. Nor is Arius trying to prove that Aristotle really agreed with the Stoics on most or all important points. Instead, Arius proceeds on the assumption that using Stoic terms to express Aristotelian thoughts is philosophically unproblematic. The philosophical lexicon has changed – why not use fashionable Stoic terms to illuminate the ideas of a school that is no longer dominant, the Peripatetics? This tendency toward terminological syncretism persists in the work of later commentators, as the surviving account of Aristotle’s ethics in Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *De Fato* (late 2nd century A.D.) attests. Arius’s own sources are uncertain, but the compendium shows that Aristotle’s ethical views were fairly well understood by the middle of the 1st century B.C.

Are there reasons to posit acquaintance with Aristotle’s ethics before the 1st century B.C.? The earliest reference to “The Nicomachean Éthics” by name is contained in a remark in Cicero’s *De Finibus* V.12. In the course of expounding the Peripatetic view of the supreme good, Piso, the spokesperson for the “harmonizing” view of Antiochus of Ascalon, expresses reservations about Theophrastus’ emphasis on the role that good fortune plays in promoting happiness. In his work *On the Happy Life* (now lost), Theophrastus denied that happiness was entirely in the power of the wise person, insisting instead that happiness can be diminished or destroyed by external bad fortune. Piso remarks:

This position, though, seems to me, if I may say so, too soft and delicate to do justice to the power and

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⁷ It is furthermore commonly agreed that the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle’s “popular” exhortation to philosophy, was in circulation from the early Hellenistic period. In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle’s ethical views are still strongly reminiscent of those found in Plato’s *Republic.*
weight of virtue. So I shall confine myself to Aristotle and his son Nicomachus. Now the elaborate treatise on ethics is attributed to his father, but I do not see why the son should not have matched the father. We can still follow Theophrastus on many points, provided that we allow virtue a more robust strength than he did.

As Kenny has observed, the remark presupposes that there were other ethical treatises bearing Aristotle’s name in circulation at the time. Whether this was the Eudemian Ethics or the Magna Moralia or some hybrid treatise is a matter of speculation. The question raised by Piso is whether Aristotle should be considered the author of the Nicomachean treatise, a question he answers in the negative.

The evidence of De Finibus is significant in further respects: Cicero appears to testify to knowledge of Aristotle’s ethics in the early Stoa. In III.10, Cicero submits the Stoics merely “dressed up” Aristotelian ideas in new terminology, and there is agreement between the schools on the point of substance. Their arguments coincide; disputes arise merely over expression. The final book of De Finibus outlines the harmonizing project of Antiochus of Ascalon. Namely an Academic, Antiochus rejected the skeptical turn of Arcesilaus’ New Academy in favor of the dogmatism of the “old” Academy, which he took to include Aristotle as well as the Stoics. On this line of reasoning, Peripatetics and Stoics in fact have no disagreement about the relationship between virtue and happiness. Cicero studied with Antiochus in Athens in 79 B.C., and he treats Antiochus’ “unitarianism” with respect. Particularly significant for our purposes is that Cicero underlines Antiochus’s harmonizing account as anticipated by one of the Stoics’ most acute critics, the Academic skeptic Carneades.

Carneades was the fourth head of the Academy; he died 129 B.C. As Cicero tells it, Carneades “would tirelessly contend that on the whole issue known as ‘the problem of good and evil’ there was no dispute between the Stoics and the Peripatetics other than a verbal one” (III.41). If so, Antiochus was not alone in perceiving deep affinities between Stoic and Aristotelian ethics in late antiquity. The existence of a tradition for treating Stoic and Aristotelian ethics as highly similar suggests that philosophers in the Hellenistic period were familiar with both. This entails that Aristotle’s ethics was known in sufficient detail to warrant confident assertions about convergence – or divergence – on critical points in the century before Arius Didymus and Cicero. It could of course be objected that Carneades may have defended the harmonizing view merely for the sake of argument, only to turn around and show that equally strong reasons count against the thesis. But even if Carneades’ aim was merely polemical, he must have been familiar with both Aristotelian and Stoic ethics to get his polemics off the ground. Carneades would have had no reason to engage in “tireless” polemics unless his main point contradicted a widely shared view – viz. that Aristotle and the Stoics did not in fact agree on the important points in ethics.

Antiochus’ attempt to show that Stoic and Peripatetic ethics converge has received bad press. Few scholars

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8 The dramatic date of De Finibus V is 79 B.C. Cicero and Piso are attending lectures by Antiochus of Ascalon in the revived Academy in Athens, now housed in the Ptolemaeum. After touring Colonus, Sophocles’ village, earlier in the day, Piso experiences the philosophical equivalent of Jerusalem syndrome while touring the grounds of Plato’s Academy in the afternoon: “Those little gardens just nearby not only bring Plato to mind, but actually seem to make the day, Piso experiences the philosophical equivalent of Jerusalem syndrome while touring the grounds of Plato’s Academy in the afternoon: “Those little gardens just nearby not only bring Plato to mind, but actually seem to make Plato appear before my eyes. Here come Speusippus, Xenocrates and his pupil Polemo, who sat on that very seat we can see over there” (Cicero (2001), V.2).

9 The remark also reveals that there was a debate internal to the peripatetic school about the role of fortune in happiness. Cicero acknowledges that the discussions of the supreme good in the peripatetic school sometimes appears inconsistent, but he writes this off as a result of the division between two kinds of books, the popular “exoteric” works and the more specialized treatment in the “note-books” – the school-works that Aristotle calls “esoteric”. To Cicero, Aristotle’s treatment may have seemed to place less emphasis on external goods like health, wealth, friends, beauty, political power, good birth, and good children than Theophrastus” because Cicero read N.E. X as stating that wisdom is sufficient for happiness: “The way of life that [the Peripatetics] most commended was one spent in quiet contemplation and study. This is the most god-like of lives, and so most worthy of the wise person. Some of their most noble and distinguished writing is to be found on this theme” (V.11).

10 As Long (1968) cautions.

11 Sandbach does not mention Carneades in the section devoted to ethics in Sandbach (1985). Incidentally, Carneades, like Socrates, never wrote a word, so we cannot attempt to measure Cicero’s account against surviving fragments of treatises.

12 As Annas (2001) observes in her excellent discussion of Antiochus in the introduction to Cicero’s De Finibus.
II. The Tunnel in Scæpsis

The view that Hellenistic ethics developed independently of its peripatetic forerunner has gained traction not simply due to the lack of direct evidence, but also because of an intriguing story told by Strabo and Plutarch about the fate of Aristotle’s library after the death of Theophrastus.\(^\text{13}\)

If these historians are to be believed, the silence that fell over the Lyceum in the years following Theophrastus’ death was not coincidental, for the Lyceum had effectively been robbed of Aristotle’s school works (the “esoteric” works that make up our corpus Aristotelicum) through a stipulation in Theophrastus’ will.\(^\text{14}\) Later heads of the Lyceum were therefore forced to work from Aristotle’s popular works (“the exoteric works,” now lost), which presented Aristotle’s philosophy in a popularized form. If Strato of Lampsacus (scholarch from 287 – c. 268BC), Lyco of Troas (scholarch c. 268 – 225BC) and Aristo of Ceos (conjectured scholarch 225 – c. 190 BC) were unable to read Aristotle’s esoteric works,\(^\text{15}\) then presumably their peers over in the Stoa Poikilê, a kilometer or so to the west of the Lyceum, or in the Epicurean Garden, a further 1.5 kilometers south of the Stoa, did not have a cache of Aristotelian treatises hidden away for internal consumption.\(^\text{16}\) The lack of any direct evidence of knowledge of N.E. in Hellenistic philosophy is therefore a special case of a general truth: Aristotle’s esoteric works were unavailable until they resurfaced in Athens a little before 86 B.C., when they were carried to Rome by the general Sulla as part of his war booty.\(^\text{17}\) In Rome, Sulla’s librarian Tyrannio, who was a friend of Cicero’s, made the works available to the scholar Andronicus of Rhodes, who then prepared the famous Andronican edition of the corpus Aristotelicum.

Plutarch recounts the fate of Aristotle’s library after the fall of Athens:

Sulla reserved for himself the library of Apellicon of Teos, which included most of the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus. After the library had been taken to Rome the scholar, Tyrannio prepared most of it and Andronicus of Rhodes obtained copies from him, made them public and drew up the catalogues now in circulation. The older Peripatetics were themselves accomplished and scholarly men; but the writings of Aristotle and Theophrastus which they had come across were neither numerous nor accurately written because the estate of Neleus of Scæpsis (to whom Theophrastus had left his books) were passed on to men who were unambitious and not philosophers.

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\(^{13}\) I here draw heavily on the discussion in Barnes (1997), as well as Moraux (1973).

\(^{14}\) The will is preserved by Diogenes Laertius.

\(^{15}\) Cicero observes about Aristotle and Theophrastus that “their successors, though better in my view than the representatives of other philosophical schools, were so inferior to their forebears that you would have thought they had given birth to themselves” (Cicero (2001), V.13).

\(^{16}\) For a helpful map of the Hellenistic schools in Athens, see Long and Sedley (1987), p. 4.

\(^{17}\) Aristotle left Athens after Alexander’s death in 323 B.C., when anti-Macedonian sentiment flared up. He died a year later in Chalcis on the island of Euboea. Theophrastus had followed Aristotle to Chalcis, but returned to Athens the following year. Theophrastus was again forced to leave Athens after his fellow student, the tyrant Demetrius of Phalerum, was removed from power in 307 B.C., and Sophocles of Sunium introduced a law that no philosophers were allowed to lead a school unless approved by the authorities. The law was declared invalid a year later, and Theophrastus returned with other exiled philosophers (Diogenes Laertius, V.38). The legal implications of the incident are discussed by O’Sullivan (2002). It is noteworthy that Epicurus and Zeno founded their schools in the years immediately following the repeal of the law. O’Sullivan remarks that “The vote which secured the abolition of the law avowed the Athenians’ belief in intellectual freedoms, and was the catalyst for the foundation in that city of the last two great philosophical schools: not long after the law’s repeal (in 306), Epicurus returned to his native Athens to establish his famous garden there, and soon after that (c. 300) Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic movement, came to the city and began to teach in the Stoa Poikilê” (p. 252). Sophocles’ law was motivated by anti-Macedonian sentiments, for Demetrius of Phalerum had close connections to Macedonian rulers. Demetrius was responsible for giving Theophrastus dispensation from the law forbidding foreigners from owning land in Athens – as a foreigner, Aristotle did not own the ground or the buildings of the Lyceum. By giving Theophrastus a dispensation, Demetrius enabled the creation of the Lyceum as a formal school.
In other words, after the death of Theophrastus, his associate Neleus of Scepsis—incidentally, the son of Aristotle’s “everyman” Coriscus—inherited all the books in Theophrastus’ possession, thereby cutting later Peripatetics off from Aristotle’s and Theophrastus’ most important work. In addition to Aristotle’s and Theophrastus’ personal collections, the library Neleus inherited contained Aristotle’s works as well as the works of Theophrastus. Plutarch’s sketch is filled in by the richer account in Strabo, most likely Plutarch’s source:

From Scepsis came the Socratics, Erastus and Coriscus, and also Coriscus’ son, Neleus, a man who attended the lectures both of Aristotle and Theophrastus, and who took over Theophrastus’ library, which included Aristotle’s. For Aristotle left his own library to Theophrastus, to whom he also entrusted the school... Theophrastus left it to Neleus, who took it to Scepsis and left it to his successors. They were not philosophers and kept the books locked away and carelessly stored. When they heard that the Attalid kings, by whom their city was ruled, were eagerly searching for books in order to set up the library at Pergamum, they hid them underground in a sort of tunnel, where they were damaged by mildew and worms. Some time later the family sold the books of Aristotle and Theophrastus for a large sum to Apellicon of Teos. Apellicon was a bibliophile rather than a philosopher. That is why he tried to repair the worm-damage by transferring the writings to new manuscripts but did not complete them satisfactorily; and he published the books full of errors.

Thus it was that the older Peripatetics who came after Theophrastus did not possess the books at all—except a few, and in particular the exoteric works—and were not able to do any serious philosophy but merely declaimed generalities. Their successors—once these books became available—were better philosophers and better Aristotelians; yet they were obliged for the most part to speak at haphazard because of the number of mistakes.

Rome too had a considerable hand in this. For immediately after Apellicon’s death Sulla, who had captured Athens, took his library and brought it here, where the scholar Tyrannio, who was an amateur of Aristotle, put his hand to it, having buttered up the librarian. And certain booksellers made use of bad scribes and did not check the copies—something which happens with other books which are copied for sale, both here and in Alexandria. But enough of this...

The account stirs numerous questions. Why would Neleus transfer the library to Scepsis, a Greek settlement in Mysia, Asia Minor? Some conjecture that he was offended after the scholarship went to Strato, and that he removed the library in a pique to undermine the authority of Theophrastus’ successor. Less melodramatically, political unrest may have made removing the books from Athens seem prudent.

In any case, the details of Strabo’s account allow us to reconstruct an approximate chronology for the supposed disappearance and reappearance of Aristotle’s esoteric works. The library in Pergamum was founded by Eumenes II, who reigned from 197-158BC. Apellicon of Teos brought the books to Athens some time before 86BC. That leaves at most 110 years when Aristotle’s esoteric works were hidden in a tunnel in Scepsis. If Barnes is right that Neleus died around 270 B.C., it follows that Aristotle’s successors in the Lyceum were prevented from “doing any serious philosophy” due to the lack of esoteric works for about 180 years. By “serious philosophy,” we should presumably understand “commenting on the school works of the master,” the only serious philosophical project a member of the Lyceum could undertake, if our source is to be believed.18

Strabo’s story presupposes that there was only one copy of Aristotle’s school works available in Athens, namely in the library, and that upon its removal, Peripatetics had nothing but the exoteric works and a handful of esoteric works on which to build until the inferior edition pieced together by Apellicon of Teos resurfaced. There is no need to dwell on the details of the story—Paul Moraux and Jonathan Barnes have done an admirable job trying to uncover its many layers, and anyway, the question is whether the story of the “Tunnel in Scepsis” should really be taken as conclusive evidence that Aristotle’s school works were unavailable to generations of peripatetic philosophers, and by extension, to their Hellenistic contemporaries in Athens.

Even if we accept that Neleus had the only copies of most of Aristotle’s esoteric works in his possession when he left Athens, it would still be the case that Aristotle’s esoteric works were available in Athens for almost the entire period that Epicurus oversaw the Garden (from his return to the city after a brief exile in 306 B.C. until he died in 271 B.C.). The esoteric works would also have been available for the better part of Zeno’s scholarshipship in the Stoa

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18 As Barnes dryly notes, following Moraux.
(Zeno founded the Stoa in c.300 BC; he died around 262 B.C.). We know from the list of Theophrastus’ ethical works preserved by Diogenes that the Lyceum was actively developing Aristotle’s ethical ideas in the decades before Theophrastus’s death. Even if we accept the story of the tunnel as literal truth, then, it would be insufficient to prove that Aristotle’s school works were unknown during the formative years of the Epicurean and Stoic schools. But there are reasons to be skeptical of the story. If Andronicus’ famous edition relied on the copies of Tyrannio, “an amateur of Aristotle,” who was working from manuscripts carelessly restored by Apellicon of Teos, “a bibliophile rather than a philosopher,” after the descendents of Neleus of Skepsis had left them to rot in an underground tunnel, then it seems that we have little reason to place much credence in Andronicus’ edition, or to suppose that it represented a huge improvement over the existing edition – Apellicon’s inept restoration. For if Andronicus did not have access to other manuscripts with which to collate Apellicon’s version, then it seems that any editorial work he performed must have been restricted to conjectures and corrections of obvious scribal mistakes in a single version deriving from scrolls that had been eaten by worms and mildew. Why, then, would Andronicus’ edition be authoritative? A better explanation appears if we reject the assumption that the Peripatetics placed all their eggs in one basket, carried them off to the Troad, and left them to rot in a tunnel in Scepsis. Although the division into “exoteric” and “esoteric” works indicates that the Peripatetics exercised stricter control over access to books than other schools, so that the Physics or the Posterior Analytics couldn’t simply be bought for a Drachma in the market, we have evidence that bootlegging was not unheard of in the ancient world. It isn’t unreasonable to suppose that Aristotle’s works were copied, too – if not by outsiders, then by his students and close associates in the Lyceum. That generations of students had access to only one scroll of each esoteric work seems unlikely, though of course this does not prove that it was not the case.

One response to this line of reasoning would be to deny that Andronicus’ edition actually improved on Apellicon’s. Then, his reputation for essentially creating the corpus Aristotelicum (not Bekker’s 1830’s version, but something similar in content) is entirely overblown. This is Jonathan Barnes’ assessment. To Barnes’ mind, the fact that Cicero shows no awareness of a landmark edition would then not indicate that Andronicus’ edition postdates Cicero (in which case it can hardly have been responsible for reacquainting philosophers with Aristotle’s work as Cicero is already familiar with it), but rather that it at most caused minor ripples in Aristotle scholarship, and not the sea change usually presupposed.

Another response – compatible with the first – is that Plutarch’s account is false – though he and Strabo may accurately trace the trajectory of Aristotle’s own copies of the school works, these copies were by no means the only copies available. More likely there were several copies of each work in circulation after Aristotle’s death (Moraux (1973)). Aristotle’s companion Eudemus of Rhodes is believed to have had several school works in his possession after he left Athens for Rhodes after the death of Aristotle – we know that Eudemus corresponded with Theophrastus about the correct reading of a passage in book V of Aristotle’s Physics and that he had a copy of the Metaphysics in his possession (Moraux (1973)). The E.E. was most likely edited by Eudemus. Given that Eudemus left for Rhodes when the leadership of the Lyceum went to Theophrastus in 322 B.C., the E.E. was probably edited there, so that scrolls containing at least parts of Aristotle’s esoteric ethical works were available to scholars outside Athens in the

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19 In Plato’s Parmenides, Zeno of Sidon defends himself against Socrates’ charge that he vaingloriously published a book that merely restates the arguments of his master (128b) by pointing out that he never intended his youthful work to be published. “Someone made an unauthorized copy, so I didn’t even have a chance to decide for myself whether or not it should see the light” (128e).

20 Barnes remarks: “Then what did Andronicus do? Not much. Perhaps he added bits and pieces here and there – paragraphs, or chapters, or even (in some cases) whole books? Perhaps he added some cross-references and generally tidied up the overall structure of the treatises? Perhaps he was responsible for some titles, and for some of the book editions? Perhaps and perhaps: here there is nothing but guessing. However that may be, Andronicus’ Pinax [catalogue of Aristotle’s works] was surely his chef d’oeuvre: his edition of Aristotle had little value, and his ‘arrangement’ of Aristotle’s works – unlike Porphyry’s arrangement of Plotinus’ works – was at best amateur tinkering rather than genial construction” (Barnes (1997), p. 65). Contrast Long (1985), p. 530.

21 Given how competitive different centers of learning were when it came to acquiring important books, we should not dismiss the possibility that the story played a part in efforts to discredit the accuracy of manuscripts held by competing libraries. The efforts of the Attalid kings in Pergamum have been mentioned; the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt were assembling a vast collection of books in Alexandria; and the high status of book collections is illustrated by Plutarch’s perhaps apocryphal story that the entire collection of the Pergamum library was given by Mark Antony to Cleopatra as a wedding present.
3rd century B.C.

Rhodes was a center of Aristotelian studies in the centuries that followed. The middle period Stoics Panaetius (c. 185-110 B.C.) and Posidonius (c. 135-c. 50 B.C.), who published works attempting to reconcile Stoic and Peripatetic ethics, were, respectively, a native and a resident of Rhodes. Panaetius’ lost treatise On Duties inspired Cicero’s work by the same name and Cicero credits him with detailed knowledge of Aristotle.\(^{22}\)

That it was Andronicus of Rhodes who drew up a detailed catalogue of Aristotle’s works and prepared a landmark edition of the corpus Aristotelicum can therefore be seen as the culmination of a long tradition of Aristotelian scholarship on Rhodes. If Eudemus left a sizeable collection of Aristotle’s works, Andronicus may very well have been able to collate Apellicon’s edition with manuscripts he already possessed, which would explain why his edition was considered superior to that of Apellicon of Teos. It also bears repeating that Strabo’s story does not state that all the esoteric works were lost to the Lyceum, only “most”. We would therefore need separate evidence to show that Aristotle’s esoteric works on ethics were among the works missing from Athens.

I have merely been able to sketch the evidence surrounding the fate of Aristotle’s school works after Theophrastus’ death. Those looking for a detailed assessment should consult Moraux and Barnes. My aim has been to show that Strabo and Plutarch’s story about the unavailability of the school works for almost two centuries is disputable— we should therefore not treat the tunnel in Scepsis as proof that Aristotle’s school works— and by extension the books that compose our N.E. – were unavailable, and unknown until the revival of Aristotelian philosophy in the 1st century B.C.

III. ANTHONY KENNY AND THE ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS

Even if we deny that E.E. went underground in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C., we may still be reluctant to accept that philosophers in Athens had access to anything more than the Protrepticus or other minor exoteric works in the Hellenistic period. In particular, the status of the N.E. seems unclear.

Anthony Kenny ((1978), pp. 32-33) maintains that whatever ethical treatises were attributed to Aristotle in the Hellenistic period, the N.E. was not among them. According to Kenny, the ten-book N.E. that we know was most likely created by the Aristotle commentator Aspasius in the 2nd century AD through an inventive act of cut-and-paste. Kenny conjectures that Aspasius created the N.E. by filling a lacuna in a manuscript containing our N.E. I-IV and VIII-X with Books IV, V and VI from E.E. Exactly why Aspasius should be motivated to perform this act is a question that warrants further exploration. But for now, we should note that if Kenny is right, writing the reception history of the N.E. in Hellenistic philosophy makes about as much sense as writing the reception history of Hume’s Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in the late 1730’s. While material later to be incorporated into the N.E. may have been in circulation before the 2nd century AD, Kenny argues that we have no reason to believe that it was known as a separate treatise, and plenty of reason to suppose that the E.E. was treated as authoritative both by Aristotle’s immediate successors and by writers such as Arios Didymus and Cicero. Kenny recognizes no earlier unequivocal evidence for familiarity with a ten-book N.E. than Aspasius’ mid-second century AD commentary on the treatise (we have his comments on EN I-IV, parts of VII, and VIII), as well as in the surviving works of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who began lecturing in Athens around 198 AD.

Kenny treats as strong support for his thesis the absence of the N.E. from two ancient lists of Aristotle’s works:

(a) The N.E. does not figure in the list of Aristotle’s works in Ptolemy’s Life of Aristotle, preserved in two Medieval Arabic manuscripts (Ibn al-Qifti, 12-13th century and Ibn Abi Usaibia, 13th century). These lists, which both authors attribute to one Ptolemy al-Gharib (“the foreigner” i.e. “unknown,”) are important, because they are believed to derive from Andronicus’ lost catalogue. The list includes two ethical works; item 35, a book named êthikôn megalôn, or major treatise on ethics in two books, and item 36, a minor treatise on ethics called the êthikôn Eudemeiôn in eight books. Here, Paul Moraux has argued that a

\(^{22}\) “As his own writings show, Plato and Aristotle were always on his lips” (Cicero (2001), IV.79). Panaetius traveled widely, including to Rome. He succeeded Antipater of Tarsus as head of the Stoa around 129BC and died in Athens some twenty years later.
reference to a ten-book ethics may have dropped out because it was misunderstood to refer to the sum of 
E.E. (eight books) and M.M. (two books).
(b) N.E. does not figure on the list of Aristotle’s works ascribed to Hermippus (c. 200 B.C.). Hermippus
lists only a five-book ethics. In this case, Düring notes that many other esoteric works on physics and
biology are also missing from Hermippus’s list, works that were known and read in the period. It would
therefore be premature to conclude that N.E. is a later invention. The list may simply be an old inventory
made before the library collection was complete.24

Even if Kenny is right that the exact edition that we possess may have originated in the 2nd century A.D., this does
not prove that parts of the N.E. may not have been known or read prior to this time. If Aspasius compiled the work
by cutting out our “common books” from the E.E. and inserting them into a collection that comprised our N.E. minus
the common books, then there must have been partial versions of the N.E. in circulation already. I don’t have the
space to do justice to Kenny’s intricate argument; suffice it to note that Kenny’s most provocative claims have not
gone unchallenged. It would therefore be rash to treat his conjectures about the origin of N.E. as a fixed point in the
reception history of Aristotle’s ethics.

IV  ZENO AND ARISTOTLE ON THE HAPPY LIFE

In light of skeptical arguments like those presented by Sandbach, Kenny, and their followers, it is tempting to
conclude that all attempts to trace an influence on early Stoic ethics from Aristotle are doomed, and that revisiting
such claims is an exercise in futility. Whatever results we are likely to get will be speculative in the extreme, and
hardly based on a sober assessment of the available evidence. Instead of trying to show that the ethics of the early
Stoa is best explained as critical responses to peripatetic ethics, we should be content to carry out systematic studies
of the philosophical systems of the respective schools, and stay mum on the question of possible avenues of
influence.

I want to steer a middle course between granting the skeptics’ assessment outright and asserting that particular terms
employed by Zeno and his immediate followers are adopted outright from Aristotle’s ethics. If Cicero is right, Zeno
invested a great deal of energy expanding the philosophical lexicon, inventing new terms to match his new ideas
(Cicero (2001), IV.21). Most scholars who have investigated the historic relationship between the ethics of the early
Stoa and the Peripatos have looked for shared terminology first, and agreements in substance second. But this
approach is unsuited to uncover the most common way that one philosophical tradition may influence another: by
presenting a set of unresolved questions. The most promising approach is therefore to look for ways to explain
positions adopted by the early Stoics as dialectical responses to problems arising from ethical theory as they found it
at the end of the 4th century BC. The Stoics may be seen as refining views that were already articulated by their
opponents. As Terence Irwin writes:

Very often philosophers fail to see that two of their doctrines conflict because they do not explore either
of them fully enough to reveal the conflict. If the Stoic formulation of some substantially Aristotelian
doctrines helps to reveal conflicts within Aristotle's own position, then the Stoics have done more than an
important expository service; they have also forced some important choices on our attention. (Irwin
(1990), p. 59)

So, the Stoics can be seen as making principled choices where Aristotle fails to resolve implicit tensions between
endoxa he defends.

In this final part of the paper I will follow Irwin’s lead and examine the relationship between Zeno’s eudaimonism
and the account of happiness defended by Aristotle in N.E. I will furthermore revisit Long’s arguments for supposing
that Aristotle exerted a profound influence on early Stoic ethics. Long (1968) maintains that Zeno’s distinction
between appropriate acts and successful acts mirrors Aristotle’s distinction between acts that are virtuous and acts
that proceed from a virtuous disposition. The distinction, articulated in N.E. II.4, is fundamental for Aristotle’s
account of moral development, which presupposes a divide between acts that lead to virtue and acts that proceed

24 I am indebted to Irwin’s review of Kenny for the preceding points.
from virtue. Long notes that the distinction between *kathêkonta* and *katorthômata* plays a similar role in the Stoic account of moral progress. It seems that Zeno and Aristotle assess the two categories differently, however, and this has prompted Sandbach to object that insofar as the Stoics treat an act as good only if it is performed by a virtuous agent, whereas Aristotle is willing to call things other than virtue and virtuous acts good, the seeming parallels that Long has uncovered are merely apparent. My suggestion is that Zeno moves beyond Aristotle here while preserving the insights of Aristotle’s theory.

*N.E.* II.4 has no exact counterpart in the *E.E.*, nor can it be traced back to any of the surviving fragments of the *Protrepticus*.\(^{25}\) If Zeno’s account is best explained as a critical refinement of Aristotle’s, then we have some reason to believe that the early Stoics were familiar with elements of the *N.E.*

Aristotle describes happiness formally as an end chosen for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else, while everything else that we choose is chosen for the sake of it. This view is shared by the Stoics no less than the Peripatetics.\(^{26}\) Aristotle remarks that happiness is something “complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of things achievable in action” (*N.E.* 1.7, 1097b20-21).\(^{27}\) Happiness is self-sufficient, because it makes life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing all by itself; it is “complete without qualification” because it is an end of everything else we do, and not itself a means to some further end. This makes happiness the most choiceworthy of goods, and not just one good among many:

if it were counted as one good among many, then clearly, we think it would be more choiceworthy (*hairetôteran*) if the smallest of goods were added; for the good that is added becomes an extra quantity of goods, and the larger of two goods is always more choiceworthy (I.7, 1097b20-21).

If a life is happy, it does not become more worthy of choice by having the smallest quantity of goodness added, for by being a happy life, it already contains everything that makes a life choiceworthy.

This claim can be cashed out in one of three directions: (1) as a “maximalist” view that a happy life cannot have any goods added to it, as it already contains everything that is good, including all external goods (such as wealth, friends, and political power), in addition to all goods of the soul (the virtues) and all goods of the body (health, beauty, strength). Aristotle clearly does not adopt the “maximalist” view. It may also be cashed out (2) as a minimalist view that non-moral goods are indifferent as far as happiness is concerned. No amount of non-moral “goods” can increase or decrease happiness, as they make no individual contribution to happiness in virtue of themselves. This is the view that Zeno defended, for he dubbed things like health, wealth, and offspring “preferred indifferents.” Although the virtuous use of such indifferents is the substance of happiness, he denied that they contribute beyond providing the subject matter of virtuous actions. For the virtuous person will select things in accordance with nature appropriately, but his happiness does not consist in obtaining them, but rather in making excellent selections between them. Therefore, the end is not possessing them, but seeking them appropriately. A life that contains things in accordance with nature in addition to the virtues, will be preferable to its opposite, but it is not for that reason *better*, since virtue is the only good. Finally, (3) Aristotle’s remark may be read as stating that once we have a sufficient provision of external and bodily goods, we will be able to live well and be happy, and that any provision beyond this threshold will not make a difference to our well-being: it is already sufficient to lead a happy life. More money or better offspring makes you more “blessed,” but happiness is secured once the threshold is met and you use your non-moral goods as reason dictates. This is the moderate view that Aristotle appears to adopt when he states that “For Aristotle, it seems that things like health, wealth, and excellent children make their own contribution to the happy life, but once your natural needs are met, more of the same won’t improve your lot.

Aristotle distinguishes between two roles that non-moral goods play in the *N.E.*:

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\(^{25}\) Even scholars who consider the *Magna Moralia* authentic will be unable to identify a parallel passage in it.

\(^{26}\) Their convergence on this description allows Cicero to organize his discussion of the schools in *De Finibus* around their differing conceptions of happiness. The Stoics would object to Aristotle’s description of happiness as the highest *good*, however, for the designation “highest” suggests that there is a hierarchy of goods sought either instrumentally, as a means to happiness, or constitutively, as parts of the happy life. And while they are willing to grant that virtuous activity is good and the content of happiness, they deny that anything that contributes to our well-being in any other way is properly deemed “good”.

\(^{27}\) All quotations from the *N.E.* are from (Aristotle (1999)).
(1) They are the instruments of virtuous activity, “for we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources” (I.8, 1099b1-2). For example, without a modest supply of property, we cannot show generosity and without strength, we cannot display courage.

(2) In themselves, external and bodily goods naturally add “adornment” to a life and make it more blessed (I.11, 1100b26), in addition to providing the opportunities for excellent use mentioned under (1). Deprivation of externals like good birth or beauty mars our blessedness. A person who looks repulsive, is ill-born, solitary and childless does not “altogether have the character of happiness” (1099b2-5).

The second claim appears to stand in a tension with Aristotle’s claim that the happy life is most choiceworthy, for if we add better looks or more illustrious ancestors to a life that is already happy, it has received an “adornment” that makes our life more blessed, while if we deny that such advantages makes a difference it is hard to see how they add anything of value at all that makes our lives go better than they would have with dandruff or riffraff for parents. Claim (2) appears to make external goods constituents of the best life, with uncomfortable implications.

Aristotle defines the best life as a life of activity of the soul in accord with complete virtue. He remarks that everyone agrees that “living well and doing well are the same as being happy” (I.4, 1095a20). But a human being only lives well if he exercises the human function well: that is, if he leads a life that displays the properly human virtues. Aristotle’s ethics is therefore naturalist: living well requires living in accordance with perfected human nature. It furthermore treats happiness as a good of the soul, a view that Zeno would second.

The tension appears because Aristotle wants to give two views their due: first, that virtue is the dominant component of happiness; second, that external misfortune may mar a person’s blessedness. The first view is familiar from the Republic, where Socrates meets Glauc’s challenge by attempting to prove that justice, the sum of all virtues, will always make a person happier than injustice, no matter what. While Plato stops short of saying that the just person will be happy and the unjust person unhappy, Aristotle is less squeamish. After discussing the role of non-moral goods in the N.E., he maintains that “virtue controls happiness”: “activities in accord with virtue control happiness, and the contrary activities control its contrary” (I.10, 1100b10-11). Misfortunes may spoil our blessedness if they are of a sufficient magnitude to impede the activities in accord with the virtues. But “it would be seriously inappropriate to entrust what is greatest and finest to fortune” (I.9, 1099b23-24). If we take our cue from a person’s fortune, his happiness will be prone to fluctuate, turning to and fro like his fortune, but a happy person is not a kind of chameleon, insecurely based. Instead, the happy person has the kind of stability that Aristotle has been looking for, and keeps the character he has throughout his life: “for always, or more than anything else, he will do and study the actions in accord with virtue, and will bear fortunes most finely, in every way and in all conditions appropriately, since he is truly ‘good, foursquare, and blameless’” (I.10, 1100b18-23).

Zeno tries to resolve Aristotle’s dilemma by denying that anything except virtue and virtuous action is a part of the happy life. For Zeno, health, wealth, and honor and other things “in accordance with nature” are preferable to their opposites, given our natural impulse to preserve ourselves. They furthermore make up the material of virtuous selection, and the Stoics therefore define the supreme good as “to live applying one’s knowledge of the natural order, selecting what accords with nature, and rejecting what is contrary. This is what it is to live consistently and harmoniously with nature” (Cicero (2001), III. 31). If we treat “things in accordance with nature” or external and bodily goods as different quantities of the same type of value as virtuous activity, we will have to explain why heaping on external goods will not ultimately compensate for a lack of virtuous activity – after all, they may be small units of the good stuff, but they nevertheless add goodness of their own. Why, then, is virtuous activity even necessary for happiness? If you answer that virtuous activity all by itself will always outweigh any quantity of external goods, no matter how great, you will in effect have conceded that the value of virtue is without limit, so that adding one unit of external goods or ten-thousand units will not make an ounce of difference to your happiness. Aristotle’s position seems unstable, then, and it invites the response that Zeno gives: external “goods” aren’t goods at

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28 Moreover, Aristotle adds that it must be a complete life (cf. N.E. I.7, 1098a20-21). Happiness, then, consists in virtuous activity, but in virtuous activity that flows from a virtuous disposition. It is, Aristotle says, the “highest good” available to a human being, and therefore the end that we seek in all activities that reflect our rational nature. This makes happiness a good of the soul, and it further places strain on Aristotle’s seeming admission that non-moral goods can add “adornment” and make our lives go better.
all, but rather things with value (axia) of a different kind, a kind that makes no difference to our happiness. It would, seem then, that the most paradoxical and counterintuitive aspect of Stoic ethics is a principled response to tensions in Aristotle’s account of virtue and happiness.

Zeno defines the end as “living in agreement with nature,” a definition that Diogenes Laertius treats as equivalent to “living in accordance with virtue”: “For nature leads us towards virtue” (VII. 87). All people – indeed, all living things – by nature have an impulse to preserve themselves in their natural constitution. What is valuable is what is either itself in accordance with nature or productive of it. That is why things in accordance with nature are worthy of being selected “because it possesses something of sufficient weight to be valued,” while the opposites of this are disvalued. Those things, therefore, that are in accordance with nature are to be taken, while the opposites are to be rejected, and once this procedure of selection and rejection as been discovered, we are performing appropriate acts, kathêkonta. A kathêkon is an act “in conformity with life” (to akolouthon en têi zôêi, Diogenes Laertius VII.107), an act which, “when it has been performed, can be reasonably defended (ho prachten eulogon ischet apologiston) (cf. Cicero 2001, III.59). Performing appropriate acts is not sufficient for virtue, however, for although all of your acts may have a reasonable defense, you may not yet be able to give a reasonable defense, or to prefer the act because it is reasonable. It is reasonable in general that a human being looks after his health, his children and his parents, and in special circumstances even mutilates himself or disposes of his own property. But an agent who consistently selects appropriate acts is not thereby shown to be virtuous. For in order to perform perfect kathêkonta, you must choose them as instances of virtuous action: for the right reason and from the right disposition. That is why appropriate acts are not by themselves good or bad, but rather intermediate; if returning a deposit is appropriate, and hence neither good nor bad, then returning it duly is right action, and good.

This allows the Stoics to defend a theory of moral development, the stages of which are described by Cicero (2001), III.20:

The initial “appropriate action” (this is what I call the Greek kathêkon) is to preserve oneself in one’s natural constitution. The next is to take what is in accordance with nature and reject the opposite. Once this procedure of selection (and likewise rejection) has been discovered, selection then goes hand in hand with appropriate action. Then such selection becomes continuous, and, finally, stable and in agreement with nature. At this point, that which can truly be said to be good first appears and is recognized for what it is. A human being’s earliest concern is for what is in accordance with nature. But as soon as one has gained some understanding, or rather “conception” (what the Stoics call ennoia), and sees an order, and as it were, concordance in the things which one ought to do, one then values that concordance much more highly than those first objects of affection. Hence, through learning and reason one concludes that this is the place to find the supreme human good, that good which is to be praised and sought on its own account.

Though this homologia or “concordance” is last in the order of discovery, it is nevertheless the only good there is, and the only thing that is worthy of being desired for its own sake. As Cicero puts it, “is in this that that good consists, to which everything is the means.” A person who lives in accordance with nature is therefore happy, since he possesses the only good, that for the sake of which everything is done, but which is not itself done for anything (Stobaeus, II.77).

Once we have progressed to the point where our conduct displays the concordance that characterizes a happy life, we will be performing “perfect kathêkonta” or successful acts. Appropriate acts may therefore be externally indistinguishable from successful acts, for the latter are appropriate acts performed in the way that the virtuous person does them. An appropriate act is perfected by being performed “apo phronêseôs or sapientes”, that is, from

29 Cicero summarizes the Stoic position in a syllogism he treats with characteristic disdain: “Whatever is good is praiseworthy; whatever is praiseworthy is moral, hence whatever is good is moral” (Cicero (2001), III.27). In support of this view, the Stoics submit that a happy life deserves to be taken pride in, and this can only rightly happen with a life that is moral. Aristotle agrees that praise and blame are only appropriate for things that are up to us; e.g., we do not blame people for physical traits they cannot help, such as good eyesight. But if good eyesight is good, then not everything good is praiseworthy, and if they are part of the blessed life, then the blessed life isn’t praiseworthy either – it is rather a result of brute luck. Aristotle is not oblivious to such considerations, however, as his restriction in E.E. VIII of the fine and the praiseworthy to virtue and virtuous activity reveals.
the firm grasp that is peculiar to the person with knowledge. As Long explicates the concept, a *kathorthôma* or perfect act, requires a fixed goal or plan in life, a *skopos*, with a view to which the wise man plans his life. This goal guides his action, and secures that he acts in accordance with a *kathêkou logou*. Writes Long:

The wise man’s actions are good not because they have a certain look about them or because they achieve certain external results (whether they do so is quite contingent), but because they follow from a consistently rational disposition (*apo hexêos kai diatheseôs eulogistou*). They are called *telika agatha* because they are parts of *aretê* and ends in themselves (Long (1978), p. 77).

A successful act, then, is not simply one that has a reasonable justification, but one that is chosen because the agent knows that it is reasonable, and that is chosen for its own sake, and from a consistently rational disposition. Since only the wise man can satisfy these conditions, only a wise man can perform *kathorthôma*, and since these are the perfect actions that make up happiness, only the wise man can be happy. It follows that the task for those progressing towards virtue is to “extrapolate” from the things in accordance with nature which we instinctively pursue as appropriate an order and harmony in practical matters, a conception of the good, “which is the standard and basis of moral action” (Long (1978), p. 77). Once we develop this harmony, our lives will flow smoothly.

Long maintains that Zeno’s distinction between appropriate and successful acts (*kathêkonta* and *kathorthômata*) neatly labels two types of action that Aristotle takes care to distinguish but omits to name: acts in accord with the virtues and acts that flow from the virtues. The distinction lies at the heart of both Stoic and Aristotelian ethics: it explains how a person progressing towards virtue can come to display the firm character that distinguishes the *phronimos* by consistently choosing virtuous acts.

In *N.E.* II.4, Aristotle faces a puzzle regarding his account of the acquisition of virtuous character states. For we may think that if we do grammatical or musical acts, we are thereby shown to be grammarians and musicians, and that if we produce excellent pots or bridles, we are thereby excellent potters and bridle makers. How, then, can Aristotle claim that we become just by doing just acts or temperate by doing temperate acts, if performing the acts themselves is already a sign that we possess the relevant virtues? Aristotle responds that it is possible to construct a grammatical or musical result by coincidence, or under someone else’s instruction. Therefore, we shouldn’t treat the perfection of the product as an indication of the perfection of the producer. To be a grammarian we must both produce a grammatical result and produce it grammatically, that is, in accordance with the grammatical knowledge in us. Aristotle adds to this that while the products of crafts determine by their own qualities whether they have been produced well, the same is not true of actions in accord with the virtues. The standard of excellence for a pot is whether it is sound and stable, beautifully decorated and so forth; the qualities of the producer have no bearing on the excellence of the individual pot. In the case of virtuous acts, the qualities of the agents do make a difference to the quality of act: “for actions in accord with virtues it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent himself must also be in the right state when he does them”:

First, he must do them knowing [that he is doing virtuous actions] (*eidôs*);
Second, he must decide on them and decide on them for themselves (*prohaireoumenos kai prohaireoumenoi di’ auta*); and
Third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state (*bebaiôs kai ametakinêtôs echôn*) (*N.E.* II.4, 1105a31-35).

When Aristotle states that the person must act knowingly, he means that he must possess practical knowledge (*phronesis*) – he must decide on the right actions for the right reasons. This involves choosing them because they have a certain character, namely because they are fine. According to Plutarch, Zeno equated the knowledge (*epistêmê*) of the wise man with *phronesis*. The Stoics likewise argue that the successful acts of the wise man are the content of the happy life, and hence ends that are choiceworthy in their own right, even apart from the external results that they achieve. And they insist that the virtuous person’s *diathesis* (disposition) is *bebaios* (firm) and *ametaptôtos* (inflexible) when they define virtue as *logos homologoumenos kai bebaios kai ametaptôtos* (SVF I.50). These parallels to Long’s mind show that Zeno was responding, albeit critically, to Aristotle.

Sandbach (1985) objects against Long that these parallels are merely apparent, and that they hide substantial disagreement, both in the conception of the virtues and in value theory. The Stoics treat an act as good only if it is performed by a good person – the disposition (*diathesis*) of the agent makes the act good. An act identical save for
the quality of the agent is not a good act. Aristotle, by contrast, is prepared to call all acts in accord with the virtues good regardless of the qualities of the agent, so that an act that a just person would do is just and an act that a temperate person would do is temperate even if it is not done from a just or temperate disposition (hexis). All the same, agents who lack the corresponding dispositions fail to do just acts justly or temperate acts temperately, for they fail to fulfill Aristotle’s three criteria above. Against Sandbach’s objection, we may note that although Aristotle fails to restrict his notion of the “good” to the virtues and the acts and feelings that flow from them, extending the predicate even to things that for the Stoics merely have selective value, such as health, wealth, beauty and honor, Aristotle does restrict his notion of the fine (to kalon) precisely as the Stoics restrict their notion of the good. Fine things, as we learn from a passage in Book VIII of the E.E. (1248b36), are the virtues and acts that flow from virtue (kala d’estin hai te aretai kai ta erga ta apo tês arêtes). While Aristotle, then, is prepared to speak of “ta ekta agatha” (external goods) or “sōmatika agatha” (bodily goods) in addition to ta peri tên psuchên agatha (goods of the soul) he never refers to “goods” of the former types as “fine” in and of themselves. Good things are those that are good for a good man, but fine things are only the acts where he uses these in accord with his virtue.

It would seem, then, that Aristotle, like the Stoics, is prepared to recognize two types of value, the type that is praiseworthy insofar as it is fine, and the type that isn’t praiseworthy but nevertheless good unqualifiedly (though for this or that person, perhaps not good). As Aristotle memorably puts it “Though people pray for [goods of fortune] and pursue them, they are wrong; the right thing is to pray that what is good without qualification will also be good for us, but to choose [only] what is good for us” (N.E. V.1, 1129b 5-7). But he fails to draw a systematic distinction in the N.E, and this paves the way for a Stoic reappraisal. In fact, Aristotle’s considered view on the contribution of external fortune to happiness is hard to pin down. He appears to observe a distinction between blessedness and happiness in N.E. I.9, where he maintains that greater supplies of goods of fortune may increase blessedness and deprivation decrease it, but still holds that virtuous activity controls happiness. That is why he insists that even in cases where people meet misfortunes like the ones that befell Priam, but preserve their virtuous character, “the fine shines through”, and therefore “no blessed person could ever become miserable, since he will never do hateful and base actions”. Instead, he will do the finest actions from his resources at any time, just as a good general will make use of his forces in war and a good shoemaker will make the finest shoe from the hides given to him. If this is Aristotle’s considered view, then happiness is controlled by fine action, for Aristotle no less than the Stoics. But Aristotle’s claim that external goods act as adornment are not easily reconciled with Aristotle’s treatment of Priam. Zeno’s position in value theory resolves certain tensions in Aristotle’s ethics while articulating an insight that Aristotle, appearances to the contrary, might be prepared to accept.

Sandbach treats Long’s “Aristotle’s Legacy to Stoic Ethics” as his test case for assessing Aristotle’s purported influence on Stoic ethics. According to Sandbach, Long’s paper represents the “most important effort” to identify features of Stoic ethics that are most easily explained as the result of knowledge of Aristotle. Although Sandbach acknowledges the parallels that Long identifies, he nevertheless resists Long’s conclusions, for according to Sandbach, it is possible to identify alternative sources of influence in each case so that we need not suppose that the early Stoics knew of or cared about Aristotle’s ethics to explain the origin of their ideas. For instance, he finds the noun “bebaiotês” (firmness) in Plato’s description of the fully virtuous guardian in Republic 503C and 537c, and the word ametapítotos (inflexible) in the Timaeus. And he argues that the Stoics need not have consulted Aristotle for the view that we become just by performing just acts and unjust by performing unjust acts: Plato says as much in Republic 444c. Sandbach’s criticism of Long is severe: he proposes an alternate source for every instance Long cites of Aristotelian influence on Stoic ethics. But despite the rigor with which he examines the textual evidence, Sandbach arguably employs the kind of brisk inference he criticizes in his adversaries in his response to Long. The fact that the Stoics sometimes employ terms that can be found in Plato is insufficient to infer a Platonic source. The mere appearance of the terms in Plato proves little if it cannot also be shown that they stand for the same concepts. It is furthermore significant that the terms fail to appear in tandem in Plato’s description of virtue, for what is striking is that the Stoics, like Aristotle, use the terms together in a definition of virtue. Here, it is worth recalling Annas’ remark that “verbal parallels prove nothing if the concepts in question are clearly distinct.” Sandbach furthermore misses the point of Long’s claim that the Stoics may be reacting to Aristotle by consciously diverging from some of his views. We shouldn’t merely look for points of agreement, for disagreement and protest may be just as indicative of influence as agreement. In short, Sandbach fails to show that the balance of evidence recommends his explanation rather than Long’s.

Sandbach’s study prompted Long to retract some of his claims about Aristotle’s legacy in a later paper, “Theophrastus and the Stoa,” (1998) where Long admits that “In regard to ethics, I concede to Sandbach that the case
for making Aristotle as influential as I once believed him to be is scarcely conclusive. It remains true none the less, that we can learn a great deal about the concepts deployed in Greek ethics by comparing Aristotelian and Stoic doctrines” (pp. 363-364). This is a point Sandbach never disputed – the question is whether Aristotle influenced the Stoics. Despite his concession, Long denies that the Stoics proceeded in total ignorance of Aristotle’s ethical treatises. Where Sandbach consistently treats the availability of alternate explanations as a reason for skepticism about Aristotle’s influence on the early Stoics, Long is prepared to treat explanations that invoke knowledge of Aristotle’s ethics as live options. If I am right, this attitude is warranted even with regard to some of the claims that Long put forth in his original paper, for the early Stoics appear to make principled, if contentious, choices where Aristotle fails to discern the tension between his own views.

Contemporary scholars have tended to treat the Hellenistic period as the dark ages of Aristotle scholarship in general and Aristotelian ethics in particular. This attitude, inspired no doubt by Sandbach’s study and the story of the tunnel in Scepsis, has dissuaded philosophers from exploring possible points of contact and influence from Aristotle to the Stoics. I believe this is an unfortunate state of affairs. Though we should indeed proceed cautiously in this terrain, it would be premature to conclude that Aristotle’s ethics exerted no influence on ethical thought in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC.  

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