ARISTOTLE AND HAPPINESS AFTER DEATH:
NICOMACHEAN ETHICS 1. 10–11

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IN *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 10–11 Aristotle discusses the meaning of Solon's advice that one look to the end before judging a person happy. The consideration of this issue leads him to discuss at some length the popular opinion that the dead are affected by the changing fortunes of living descendants and friends. Aristotle himself mentions how incongruous such an opinion is with his own account, which equates happiness with a certain activity (1100a13–14). Several times in the ensuing discussion he uses the common Greek word for the dead, οἱ κεκμηκότες (literally, "the ones who have completed their labor"), as if to accentuate this incongruity (1101a35, b6). Nevertheless, chapter 11 ends with the assurance that the good or bad fortune of friends does have some effect on (but cannot reverse) the happiness or unhappiness of the dead (1101b5–9).

Faced with this apparent inconsistency, interpreters of the *Ethics* have responded in a remarkably uniform way. Common to all accounts with which I am familiar is the view that Aristotle himself does not seriously entertain the possibility that the dead are happy or unhappy, despite the literal preoccupation with the topic in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 10–11. To some, Aristotle is actually in some disingenuous way reconciling the received opinions about the departed with his account of happiness. J. A. Stewart, for instance, says that Aristotle merely "minimizes" popular opinions because a forthright account of his own views would wound "the tenderest feelings of mankind."[1] According to R.-A. Gauthier, Aristotle is content to reveal inconsistencies in the received opinions on the dead and thus, with a "condescending smile," to discredit them as a challenge to his analysis.[2] To others, like J. Burnet and H. Rackham, the passage's actual concern is the question of our estimate of a dead person's life, although they find the text inconsistently attributing awareness to the dead at several places.[3] Another response to the apparent inconsistency between happiness as virtuous activity of soul and the existence of the

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1. *Notes on the "Nicomachean Ethics" of Aristotle,* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892), 1:149.

2. "Le sens commun proclame que le mort est hors de l'atteinte des maux . . . et en même temps il semble admettre . . . que les morts éprouvent le contrecoup du sort de leurs descendants: Aristote se complaît à souligner cette contradiction des croyances populaires." "Il n'est pas dupe et laisse entrevoir sur ses lèvres le sourire condescendant qui accompagne sa réponse [to popular beliefs]." R.-A. Gauthier and J.-Y. Jolif, *"L'Ethique à Nicomaque,"* 2 vols. (Louvain and Paris, 1970), 2:78–79 and 2:86 respectively.

3. J. Burnet (ed.), *The "Ethics" of Aristotle* (London, 1900), p. 50; H. Rackham (trans.), *The "Nicomachean Ethics"* (London, 1962), p. 48. Cf. E. Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics,* trans. B. F. C. Costelloe and J. H. Muirhead, 2 vols. (London, 1897), 2:133, n. 2.

happy dead is somehow to construct Aristotelian εὐδαιμονία as surviving
the demise of its possessor. It is hard to know what kind of status such
εὐδαιμονία would have. Aristotelian εὐδαιμονία cannot, of course, be
equated with such things as wealth and friends which indeed do survive
their deceased possessors, since friends and possessions are merely nec-
essary conditions for happiness. Nevertheless, much might be made of
the fact that for Aristotle happiness is not discussed as a feeling which
one has, and so the person's subjective state may be irrelevant to what
εὐδαιμονία is all about. Thus it might be meaningful to talk of a person's
happiness and to gauge its fate at the hands of uncertain fortune even
when the person himself is no more.[4] The overall consensus is that Ar-
istotle does not deem worthy of serious consideration, much less accept,
the received opinion that the lot of the dead themselves is affected by the
fortunes of the living and its underlying premise that the dead partake
in some form of conscious life.[5]

This common view presents Aristotle discussing at some length popular
opinions which he takes to be false, though he never states his own
position.[6] It is barely plausible, however, that a regard for popular sen-
timent is restraining him in a work not intended, so far as we know, for
popular consumption. Equally doubtful is the view that he is mocking
inconsistencies in received opinions, inasmuch as all sorts of apparently
conflicting opinions are regularly aired at the start of a dialectical argu-
ment. The interpreters invariably look at 1100a18–21, where Aristotle
cites the opinion that good and evil exist for the dead as for the living
who are not aware of them, and decide that this view denies consciousness
to the dead. They then find the opinion expressed in this passage at odds
with that expressed in the closely following lines which asserts that the
fortunes of descendants do affect the happiness that dead ancestors enjoy
(1100a29–30). The problem, of course, is compounded by the way chapter
11 ends, with its bald assertion that the dead are happy and unhappy.
No inconsistency arises, however, if Aristotle's comparison between the
dead and the ignorant living at 1100a18–21 does not deny a conscious
afterlife to the dead. It is commonly assumed that this ascription of goods
and evils to both living and dead turns on a lack of consciousness common
to both. It is argued below, however, that this is not the case and that
the critical feature of the comparison is the independence of the goods
and evils mentioned from the control of their living and dead possessors.

4. Such an approach has been mentioned to me enough times in conversation to warrant its inclusion
here, although I am unable to clarify it much further. R. Solomon ("Is There Happiness after Death?,"
Philosophy 51 [1976]: 189–93) to my knowledge comes closest in print to exemplifying this approach to
the problem.

5. H. H. Joachim (*The "Nicomachean Ethics,"* ed. D. A. Rees [Oxford, 1951], p. 60) does not take
quite so strong a stand, but simply affirms "that Aristotle is unwilling to state dogmatically that the
dead cannot feel at all."

6. Stewart, *Notes,* p. 138, writes in an introductory note to chapter 10: "His discussion of this question
(resumed in ch. 11) is remarkable as leading to no definite statement of his own view." Gauthier, *"L'Ethique
à Nicomaque,"* vol. 2, p. 78, writes: "Il n'en reste pas moins remarquable qu' Aristote, précisément, se
contente de se référer à ces vues populaires, comme si, en dehors d'elles, il n'y avait rien. . . ."

What is genuinely odd is that Aristotle would not seriously entertain popular views, given his conviction that received opinions of the many and the wise are important touchstones for the truth of a theoretical account. And yet this is a consequence of the common view of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 10–11 just outlined. The discussion which follows takes issue with this common view and argues that Aristotle, faithful to his methodological convictions, does treat the received opinions on the dead in a serious fashion. Those received opinions on the dead are important and must be reconciled with his account of happiness, not only because they are widely held, but because they are tied to the notion of friendship lying at the heart of Greek social organization.

At the outset it is important to be clear about the status of generally held opinions in an Aristotelian investigation. G. E. L. Owen has discussed the ambiguity in Aristotle's use of the word φαινόμενα and has shown that Aristotle uses the word to denote either empirical observations or things people are inclined or accustomed to say.[7] All φαινόμενα, however, whether they happen to be empirical observations or common opinions, play the same confirmatory role in an Aristotelian inquiry, and this must be one reason why Aristotle can use the one word. A true account of something stands in agreement with the φαινόμενα relevant to it. In *De caelo* 1. 3 (270b4–9), for example, Aristotle writes that the account in question confirms the φαινόμενα and the φαινόμενα confirm the account. The φαινόμενα here turn out to be commonly held opinions about the gods. In general, received opinions and a true account should be mutually confirming.[8]

In the *Ethics* this conception of the role of φαινόμενα is readily apparent. The discussions of Solon's dictum and of the happiness of the dead are part of a larger effort to confirm in the court of received opinions the account just developed of happiness as activity in accordance with virtue. At the beginning of this program Aristotle writes (1098b9–12):

> Accordingly we must examine our first principle not only as a logical conclusion deduced from certain premises but also in light of the current opinions (τῶν λεγομένων) on the subject. For if a proposition be true, all the facts (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα) harmonize with it, but if it is false, it is soon found to be discordant with them.[9]

As this passage shows, Aristotle readily includes current opinions among the "facts" with which his account of happiness must square. A correct account should be compatible with these φαινόμενα, which are genuine, though perhaps inarticulate, expressions of truth. Most interpreters quite

7. "ΤΙΘΕΝΑΙ ΤΑ ΦΑΙΝΟΜΕΝΑ," in *Aristotle,* ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), pp. 167–190, especially pp. 168–172; the article was published originally in *Aristote et les problèmes de la méthode* (Louvain and Paris, 1961), pp. 83–103.

8. A full study of Aristotle's use of opinions of the many and the wise is far beyond the scope of this essay. The first part of Owen's paper (see n. 7) is a good source on this subject, as is W. J. Verdenius, "Traditional and Personal Elements in Aristotle's Religion," *Phronesis* 5 (1960): 56–70. I am not suggesting that Aristotle invariably holds to received opinions or that he never twists their meaning to fit his account. Aristotle does maintain, however, that a true account should harmonize with the relevant received opinions, and this is what I want to stress.

9. Rackham's translation from the Loeb edition is used throughout.

rightly emphasize the location of chapters 10 and 11 within this dialectical project; in this case, however, they do not seem to pay sufficient heed to the technical role which dialectic and received opinions are supposed to play in Aristotelian method. The suggestion seems to be that this is *just* a dialectical discussion, and that the opinions on the dead expressed in these chapters are particularly naive and pre-scientific.[10] It will be argued, however, that Aristotle's treatment of the opinions concerning the dead should be read as a serious, methodical discussion of data with which his account of happiness must harmonize.

The discussions in chapters 10 and 11 of Solon's dictum and the happiness of the dead arise within the context of the relation of fortune to happiness. It is a common belief, and one incorporated by Aristotle from the first in his account of happiness (1098a18–20), that happiness requires a complete lifetime. The life of Priam affords a troubling example of the need for this maxim, since his long, prosperous life ended in total misery. Fortune can deal in the same way with anyone else.

Chapter 10 begins with Aristotle seeking to determine the general significance of Priam's example (1100a10–11): "Are we then to count no other human being happy either, as long as he is alive? Must we obey Solon's warning, and 'look to the end'?" This question, which follows quite easily from what has preceded, is the first of the several interrelated questions which together provide the issues for this and the subsequent chapter. In this introductory passage Aristotle presents the first obstacles to be encountered since the examination of received opinions began in chapter 8, and two chapters are devoted to overcoming them.[11]

The need to interpret Solon's advice, τέλος ὁρᾶν, determines the structure of this introductory passage. Aristotle advances an interpretation of it and an objection to that interpretation (1100a11–13, a13–14). He then sets forth a second interpretation and a corresponding objection (a14–17, a17–21). This last objection leads to a digression on how the fortunes of the living affect the dead's happiness (a21–30). The discussion then returns to the main problem, the exegesis of Solon's warning (a31–32).

Full measure must be taken of the import of the use of Solon's dictum. The saying "look to the end," which derives from a meeting of Solon with King Croesus, was exceedingly popular in antiquity and a common theme in tragic literature.[12] To the Greek mind such a saying is an expression of wisdom whose significance must be unearthed. Aristotle's first attempt at exegesis reads the saying in a literal fashion (1100a11–14): "And if we are indeed to lay down this rule, can a man really be happy after he is dead? Surely that is an extremely strange notion, especially for us who

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10. See, e.g., Stewart, *Notes*, p. 149; Gauthier, *"L'Ethique à Nicomaque,"* p. 78, pp. 85–86; Burnet, *"Ethics,"* p. 49.

11. Stewart, *Notes*, pp. 138–39, notes the disproportionate length of chapters 10 and 11 and suggests that material from an early, less dogmatic, Aristotelian dialogue may be present. Whether this is true or not, the transition to this discussion is not contextually abrupt, and the length of the discussion may be due to the serious challenge which these opinions pose to Aristotle's account.

12. The story is preserved in Hdt. 1. 30–33 and Plut. *Sol. 27.* Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 928–29; Soph. *OT* 1530, *Trach.* 1; Eur. *Andr.* 100–101.

define happiness as a form of activity!" This literal interpretation must obviously be at odds with an account of happiness based on virtuous activity, as Aristotle forcefully points out. Aristotle's account of happiness as virtuous activity of soul even refuses to grant happiness to a child, except in anticipation of future noble actions (1100a1–3).

Aristotle then presents a more sophisticated exegesis of Solon's dictum, which gives to τέλος ὁρᾶν the sense that "only when a man is dead can one safely call him blessed as being now beyond the reach of evil and misfortune" (1100a16–17). This new exegesis expresses what many interpreters take to be the main issue in the entire discussion, namely, the estimate which the living make of the completed lives of the dead. The ensuing objection to this new exegesis is also usually understood to apply to our estimate of the dead person's life and, perhaps, to a "happiness" which, like good repute, wealth, family, friends, and so on, survives the demise of its possessor; it is not usually interpreted as affirming existence among the dead. The text reads (1100a18–21):

> This also admits of some dispute; for it is believed that some evil and also some good can befall the dead, just as much as they can happen to the living without their being aware of it—for instance honours, and disgraces, and the prosperity and misfortunes of their children and their descendants in general.

It is generally held that this comparison between the living and the dead, by speaking of goods and evils of which the living are not aware, means to deny awareness to the dead. The comparison has point, it is supposed, precisely because good or bad fortune can befall a living person without that person's awareness of it, and so in some sense good or evil fortune can befall the dead, who are not and never become aware of it or anything else. Stewart compares the dead person to someone on a voyage, who has no knowledge of disaster at home.[13] Gauthier cites the example of Oedipus, who unwittingly brings doom on his head.[14] Solomon attempts to show how the unconscious dead can meaningfully be called happy by providing a logic of the notions of desire, satisfaction, and happiness. A person is happy if his or her desires are satisfied; whether the person comes to know that a particular desire has been satisfied is irrelevant to the issue of happiness.[15]

But does the popular belief cited at 1100a18–21 in objection to the "estimate" interpretation of Solon's warning really carry such esoteric implications? Stewart's traveler will eventually learn of the misery. The story of Oedipus, as Sophocles gives it in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, tells not so much of ignorance of the terrible deed, but of a slowly growing consciousness of it and the resulting misery which that brings.[16] Solomon's

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13. *Notes*, p. 142.
14. *"L'Ethique à Nicomaque,"* p. 78.
15. "Happiness," p. 190.
16. The last lines of *Oedipus Tyrannus* have the chorus presenting the fallen Oedipus and echoing Solon's advice: "Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, / this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, / and was a man most mighty; on whose fortunes / what citizen did not gaze with envy? / Behold into

logic, however insightful, does not deal at all closely with Aristotle's text.
An attempt to construe 1100a18–21 as an allusion to an Aristotelian
εὐδαιμονία which in some sense survives the complete demise of its pos-
sessor and thus can be affected but not overturned by the fortunes of the
living is itself decidedly un-Aristotelian in temper. Aristotelian εὐδαιμονία
is virtuous activity, and virtuous activity is impossible for the dead. But
a challenge to this Aristotelian account is enshrined in popular opinion.
It is better to see Aristotle, in accord with his methodological principles,
seriously grappling with this challenge in this passage than to develop as
Aristotelian a rather esoteric doctrine of a person's happiness which does
not require the existence of the person whose happiness it is.

The idea that the dead are happy or unhappy rests on the idea that
the dead have a share in at least some goods and evils. The goods and
evils granted to the dead at 1100a19 are the same goods and evils which
"can happen to the living without their being aware of it" (1100a19 τῷ
ζῶντι μὴ αἰσθανομένῳ). From the perspective of common opinion and
common sense reported by Aristotle in this dialectical passage, some goods
and evils which occur without the immediate awareness of a person can
and do exercise an effect on that person's happiness. The rather odd idea
that a person's happiness can be affected by something of which he or
she is never aware need not be read into the passage. The nature of the
examples Aristotle uses to illustrate goods and evils shared by the living
and the dead makes this clear, although their significance in this regard
has not been acknowledged. Examples of the good and evil ascribed to
both living and dead are honors (τιμαί) and disgraces (ἀτιμίαι) and the
prosperity and misfortunes of descendants.[17] Two interconnected points
need to be made about these examples. First, they are all things which
affect the happiness of the individual but which are beyond the individ-
ual's direct control. As such, they may be and often are beyond the
immediate knowledge of the individual, as in the case of Stewart's voy-
ager. Second, these are not discrete examples. A direct tie exists between
a person's honors and disgraces and the prosperity and misfortunes of
relatives and friends.

Τιμή, or honor in the Greek sense, includes all the things which con-
stitute one's stature in the social order, including good birth, a large family,
material possessions, and so on. It is a precarious commodity, and its
maintenance depends more on the actions of others than on one's own
efforts. At *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 5 (1095b22–26) Aristotle rejects τιμή
as the basis of happiness precisely because it depends on others. At that
early point in the text, however, he can only "divine" (μαντευόμεθα) that

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what a stormy sea of dread trouble / he hath come! / Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the / destined
final day, we must call no one happy / who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed / life's border, free
from pain." The translation is by R. Jebb, *The "Oedipus Tyrannus"* (Cambridge, 1893), p. 199.

17. The following discussion of τιμή and φίλος owes much to the excellent studies of A. W. H. Adkins
in *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960), p. 63, and *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient
Greece* (New York, 1972), pp. 14–18.

happiness is proper to its possessor and not easily destroyed by others. To acquire and maintain τιμή and to avoid ἀτιμίαι are important aims for the Greek, and of necessity one must rely on one's family and friends to do so. This fact illustrates the connection between the individual's honor or disgrace and the fortunes of his or her descendants. To the Greek, a φίλος, or friend, is any person with whom one is allied or associated for mutual support and service. The good and bad fortunes of such associates, be they relatives or not, affect one's τιμή and condition one's happiness. The individual who is thus affected, however, may not be actively involved in the activities of his friends, activities which are nevertheless significant for his own well-being; he may not even have any immediate knowledge of the good and bad fortunes of his friends, although these fortunes touch on his happiness.

The text asserts that both the dead and the living share in goods and evils which they "do not sense." The examples given show what this means: the happiness of the individual is affected by factors outside his control and oftentimes beyond his immediate awareness. To acknowledge honor, dishonor, and the fortunes of friends as goods and evils, that is, as factors determining the happiness of the individual, and then to insist that they apply to the dead and living alike, is directly to challenge Aristotle's account of happiness, which is based on the individual's own activity.

This ascription of good and evil to the unknowing living, dependent as it is on the link between one's honor and the fortunes of one's associates, fits perfectly with the common Greek conception of the dead as inactive but conscious, and conscious especially of the fortunes of their descendants. For a dead person in such a condition, the factors affecting happiness which are not within the individual's control may well play their part, just as they do for the living. Pindar's *Olympian* 14 presents what I take to be the kind of conception of the dead and their ties to the living that Aristotle has in mind. The last lines of the ode, which celebrates Asopichos' victory in a footrace, read:

> Go now, Echo, to the black walls
> Of Persephona's house
> And bring the fine news to his father;
> See Kleodamos and tell him
> How his son
> In the famous valleys of Pytho
> Has crowned his young hair
> With the wings of a glorious triumph.[18]

This traditional conception of the dead sees them as intensely interested in the fortunes of their descendants and, though inactive, able to be happy or unhappy as honor is bestowed on or taken from them through the

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18. *The "Odes" of Pindar,* trans. C. M. Bowra (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 33. Cf. *Pyth.* 5. 95–100; Hom. *Od.* 11. 490ff. I am grateful to Professor L. E. Woodbury of the University of Toronto for pointing out the Pindar passages to me.

changes of their friends' fortunes. I am not insisting that Aristotle endorses this conception of the afterlife. At 1101a34–1101b1 he expresses a scepticism concerning it which is frequently voiced in Greek literature.[19] This note of doubt and the early objection that the notion of the happy dead seems highly inconsistent with an account of happiness based on activity (1100a13–14) are the only places in chapters 10 and 11 where Aristotle's own views on the issue of the afterlife surface. On the basis of his other writings it is hard to see how Aristotle could allow a personal afterlife for a dead man or woman, but here his scepticism never becomes denial, and he never explicitly rejects the popular conception of the state of the dead.[20] Instead Aristotle treats it as setting up a parallel case to that of living persons with regard to the problem of the turning wheel of fortune.

Thus at 1100a21–29 Aristotle raises a problem with this conception of the dead: if the dead are happy and unhappy, then their condition is subject to continual change according to the changing fortunes of living friends. Similarly at 1100b4–7 the living person's happiness is subject to continual change according to the turns of the wheel of fortune. Aristotle's eventual solution to this problem for the living, which is based on the stability of virtuous activity and provides the true meaning of Solon's dictum, is simply applied a fortiori to the dead. This strategy is indicated at 1100a31–32, where Aristotle says that an understanding of the relation of fortune to the happiness of the living may help to answer the questions raised concerning the happiness of the dead. With respect to the living, Aristotle decides that virtuous activity of soul is decisive (1100b9–11, b33–34 κύριαι) for establishing the happiness of the individual. Although not decisive, good and bad fortune do play a role in a person's happiness. Good fortune enhances the happiness achieved by virtuous activity (1100b25–28), and bad fortune tests the mettle of the virtuous individual (1100b28–33), but neither can reverse the condition made stable by virtue. The dead, no longer capable of activity according to the common opinions on the subject, may nevertheless be happy or unhappy in the land of

19. Cf. Isoc. *Ev.* 2, *Plat.* 61; Dem. *Lept.* 87; Soph. *El.* 352.

20. Aristotle never explicitly discusses the issue of an afterlife, although he does remark on ἀθανασία in several places. Humans can wish for immortality, but not choose it, since the impossible can be an object of wish but not of choice (*EN* 1111b20–23). Despite the inevitability of death, humans strive to be immortal through reproduction (*De an.* 415b3–6) and a life of contemplation (*EN* 1177b31–34). Death, according to Aristotle, is due to the destruction of the connate heat in an organism (*Juv.* 469b19–20; *Resp.* 478b22–32), and an organism remains alive as long as the connate heat, whereby the organism's soul is "so to speak fired" (*Juv.* 469b16 τῆς ψυχῆς ὥσπερ ἐμπεπυρευμένης), is preserved. Upon the disintegration of the living composite at death, the soul is incapable of undergoing affections which could be ascribed to the individual or be called personal. The active intellect, which alone is ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀΐδιον, does not have an activity, it seems, which could constitute the personal consciousness of an individual human being (*De an.* 408b18–19, 24–25; 403a5–10; 430a23). Thus Aristotle is committed to views, particularly in the *De anima*, which seem to preclude a personal afterlife for the deceased. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1115a26–27, where death is called the most fearful thing because it is the πέρας beyond which no good or evil seems (δοκεῖ) to befall a person; cf. *Int.* 21a23. On the other hand, the *Eudemus* fragments show Aristotle endorsing a personal immortality for the soul (1480a11; 1480b2). With regard to the present passage, Aristotle's actual beliefs on the afterlife at the time of composition cannot be reliably inferred; as the paper tries to show, Aristotle does not dismiss the popular traditional beliefs about the afterlife out of hand, but shows their compatibility with his innovative doctrine of happiness.

shadows because of τιμή, friends, and so on. Since such factors do not reverse the condition of the living, a fortiori they do not reverse the condition of the dead, who are removed from the land of the living wherein the drama of shifting τιμή and changing fortunes occurs. To illustrate the reduced influence of the good and bad fortune of friends on the happiness of the dead, in contrast to its influence on the living, Aristotle mentions the difference of effect on the spectator at a tragedy when he learns of a terrible deed which has already happened (a situation comparable to that of Kleodamos, who hears of his son's success in *Olympian* 14), as opposed to when he sees the deed done before his eyes (1101a32–34; note that in neither case does the spectator *do* anything).

· This dual application of the solution to the problem of fortune for both the living and the dead is possible because the living and the dead are in a similar situation. Events and actions outside their control affect the happiness of the living and the dead.[21] The effect of the actions of the living on the dead must be weaker, however, than those of the living on the living, since the dead have passed from this world (1101a31–34).

Rather than deny that the dead can or cannot be happy, Aristotle allows to stand the opinion that it would be strange if ancestors were not affected (συνικνεῖσθαι) by the fortunes of descendants (1100a29–31). The verb συνικνέομαι, used here to refer to the effect of the actions of the living on the dead, also appears in the discussion at 1101a25, where it denotes quite generally the effect that events have upon living beings. A similar influence of events upon the dead is being asserted here and with it the view that the dead are happy and unhappy.[22]

Aristotle, according to plan (1100a31–32), revives the question of the happiness of the dead at the beginning of chapter 11, after solving the problem of the meaning of Solon's dictum. He now argues against denying an influence of the living on the dead for two reasons. Such a denial would be (a) "too unfriendly" (λίαν ἄφιλον) and (b) contrary to accepted beliefs (1101a22–24). The importance of the second reason has already been discussed. The first reason, that it would be "too unfriendly" to make such a denial, requires some attention.

Many interpreters conflate this reason with the other and contend that it would be "too unfriendly" to contradict the masses on such a touchy issue as the afterlife. I believe it is distinct and should be taken literally as pertaining to the important role which the conception of "friendship" plays in the Greek understanding of the social order. Indeed, Aristotle introduces the two-pronged objection to the denial of an influence of the living on the dead by mentioning descendants and friends in general (1101a22), and the notion of friendship has played a role throughout the preceding discussion in chapter 10, where the relation of fortune to happiness for both living and dead is at issue. Elsewhere in Aristotle the

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21. Cf. 1100b7–1101a13 and 1101a28–1101b9.

22. Commentators generally agree that this reading of 1100a29–31 is correct, and can only join in noting the inconsistency with the preceding passages as they have interpreted them. Cf. Burnet, *"Ethics,"* p. 50, and Rackham, *"Ethics,"* p. 48.

word ἄφιλος always refers to the condition of being friendless, and Aristotle always uses ἀφιλία, whose cause is τύχη (*Rh.* 1386a9), in a literal fashion as well.[23] In this passage, too, a literal rendering seems required, for the context of λίαν ἄφιλον is dominated by the intimately linked themes of fortune and friendship. It would be literally "too unfriendly" to deny that the happiness of the dead is influenced by the fortunes of their descendants and friends in general; that is, it would be contrary to the system of friendship at the heart of Greek social organization to believe that the bonds of support and interdependence between friends are completely severed by the grave. For the Greek, the world is divided into friends and enemies.[24] The bonds between friends, whether they be related by blood or not, are the very means for a decent human existence. Aristotle's lengthy treatment of friendship in Books 8 and 9 of the *Ethics* testifies to the importance of the friend to the good life. In the popular mind these bonds of friendship, especially between family members, withstand even death. And so goods and evils exist for the dead in the form of the honors and disgraces of descendants and other friends, and consequently the dead can be happy or unhappy. Aristotle's overriding concern with regard to this complex of popular beliefs is to argue that such goods and evils are not the decisive factors in the happiness of an individual, living or dead.

Thus when chapter 11 ends and Aristotle writes that the dead seem to be influenced by the fortunes of their friends, he sets forth a conclusion which stems from an acknowledgment on his part of a complex system of beliefs not only about the afterlife but about the structure of the social order and the nature of interpersonal relations. These views on the dead, combined and intertwined as they are with the Greek notion of a φίλος and the dependence of the individual's well-being on others, present a genuine challenge to an account of happiness founded on the individual's activity. On the one hand, Aristotle wants to found the individual's happiness on activity of soul. On the other, he is opposed to the Platonic position which makes friends and fortune in the end irrelevant to the happiness of the individual. His strategy is to say that activities in accord with virtue are decisive (1100b9–11, b33–34 κύριαι) with regard to the individual's happiness but that other things, such as good birth, fine children and friends, physical beauty, and wealth, are needed in addition and are indispensable conditions for happiness (1099a31–b8, b27–28; 1100b8–9; 1153b17–19). Aristotle's determination to confirm popular sentiment and allow to factors outside the control of the individual a meaningful role, albeit not the decisive role, in the individual's happiness includes a genuine respect for the conception of friendship which he finds about him. He thus refuses to admit a conclusion which is ἄφιλον. This conception of friendship, moreover, is of a piece with traditional views

23. *EN* 1170b22, 1115a11; *Rh.* 1373a5, 1386a9; *EE* 1234b33; see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* 128b6–7, 10–11.
24. See, e.g., Pl. *Resp.* 332A–B and *Meno* 71E.

on the afterlife. In tandem they challenge (or at least require Aristotle to clarify) an account of happiness primarily based on activity of soul but open to the influence of external factors. What Aristotle does, then, in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 10–11 is to show that the popular conception of friendship, insofar as it relates to and supports views on the afterlife, can stand side by side with his own account of happiness. While Aristotle indicates clearly enough his doubts about the possibility of a conscious afterlife for the departed, there is no indication that he does not treat these views in a serious fashion or that he mocks or "minimizes" them. What he does do, as he must, given the demands of his own method, is to show that the popular views on the dead harmonize with his own account of happiness. He accomplishes this within the context of the relation of fortune and external factors to the happiness of the individual, a problem so critical to his position on happiness.[25]

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