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Eudaimonism and the Demands of Justice
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In the last fifteen years, it has become common to read that ancient philosophers were, as a rule, eudaimonists. Scholars such as Terence Irwin, Julia Annas, and Nicholas White have described eudaimonism as a distinctive approach to ethical theory present in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Eudaimonism asserts that happiness is the ultimate end of all actions within a unified and rational human life. A standing problem for eudaimonist theories is the place of justice within the ethical life. Justice is typically understood as the virtue which promotes the good of others and at times requires the agent to subordinate his own well-being to the common good. The just person recognizes that his membership in society places ethical demands on him: that he uphold the rights and interests of others, even when doing so requires the agent to focus on the good of others and not on his own well-being. If a eudaimonist places the happiness or well-being of the agent at the center of ethical theory, how can these demands of justice be recognized within a eudaimonist framework? The most prominent objection to eudaimonism alleges that eudaimonism is simply another form of egoism and that the demands of justice cannot be integrated within eudaimonist ethical theory in a coherent fashion. In this essay I will try to provide a satisfactory response to this objection. This response draws upon one of the basic concepts of ancient eudaimonism, the concept of the human function. This concept allows us to hold together two intuitions which are often held to conflict: that the demands of justice have a categorical claim on our practical deliberation, and that all actions in a human life are performed for the sake of happiness.

First it is necessary to clarify what is meant by eudaimonism. All eudaimonist theories assert that a good human life is a happy one and that happiness is the ultimate end of all the actions of a human life. Thus a good human life has a certain shape and structure, as all its actions have value by contributing in various ways to the overall end of happiness. An ethical theory is meant to shed light on and help us to achieve a good human life. It does this typically by giving insight into the ways in which actions can contribute to that happiness. Julia Annas observes, “Ancient ethics takes its start from what is taken to be the fact that people have, implicitly, a notion of a final end, an overall goal which enables them to unify and clarify their immediate goals. Ethical theory is designed to enable us to reflect on this implicit overall goal and to make it determinate.”¹ So let eudaimonism be considered as the ethical theory which asserts that happiness is the ultimate end of all human action, and which looks to happiness to serve as the fundamental principle for moral evaluation of those actions.²

One distinction within eudaimonist theories concerns the sort of practical deliberation involved in pursuing goods within a life whose overarching end is happiness. If all practical deliberation aims at a

² Other uses of the term ‘eudaimonism’ to refer to the broad set of ethical principles shared by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their successors in the ancient world reveal a similar understanding of what it is to be a eudaimonist: “Eudaimonism is the view that the fundamental intrinsic value in ethics is the human good. In particular, eudaimonism is the view taken in some attempts to justify ethical conduct in terms of its contribution to an agent’s own good”; William J. Prior, “Eudaimonism and Virtue,” Journal of Value Inquiry 35: 2001, 35; “Eudaimonism is the theory that the central task of ethics is not to say which acts are right but rather to say which ways of life are good. It is a theory about the nature of the good life for human beings”; David Schmidtz, “Self-Interest: What’s In It For Me?” in Self-Interest, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred Miller, and Jeffrey Paul (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109; “All the major systems of moral philosophy in antiquity … are eudaimonist in their structure. In giving their accounts of the right way to lead a human life in general and of the reasons that there are for wanting, feeling, and doing anything in particular, they all refer ultimately to the individual agent’s eudaimonia (happiness)”; John Cooper, “Eudaimonia, the Appeal to Nature, and ‘Moral Duty’ in Stoicism” in Reason and Emotion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 427.
single end or takes as its starting point the need to promote a single end, then we can speak of monistic practical deliberation; the end to be promoted in every piece of practical deliberation is one and the same. A eudaimonist theory which holds that happiness is the only thing good in itself will naturally involve monistic practical deliberation. According to Terence Irwin, Socrates in the earlier Platonic dialogues is this sort of eudaimonist.\(^3\) On the other hand, eudaimonist theories which allow for several goods to count as ends in themselves will countenance practical deliberation which aims at more than one end; this sort of eudaimonist theory involves pluralistic practical deliberation. In the case of pluralistic practical deliberation, concerns and aims other than the agent’s happiness can be pursued as ends in themselves and can provide a source of motivation for action independent of the agent’s happiness. In particular, meeting the demands of justice can be seen as an end in itself and one that is distinct from and potentially in conflict with an agent’s happiness.\(^4\) A eudaimonist who accepts a plurality of ends in themselves will typically argue that no real conflict of ends results from this plurality, since all ends are unified in the pursuit of the single ultimate end, happiness; but the plurality of ends makes such an argument necessary by raising the possibility of conflict of ends.

A standard criticism of eudaimonism is that it amounts only to a more cultivated form of egoism. This criticism emerges from H. A. Prichard’s article, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” In this article Prichard isolates and criticizes a school of ethical thought which we can recognize as eudaimonist. He sees the history of moral philosophy as a series of attempts to justify and support the range of moral obligations which we acknowledge. One way of providing this justification and support can be seen in those philosophers (Plato, Butler, and Mill, among others) who make moral action part of or a means to happiness. Prichard then argues that eudaimonism will not provide the right sort of support for our ordinary convictions about what we ought to do:

Suppose, when wondering whether we really ought to act in the ways usually called moral, we are told as a means of resolving our doubt that those acts are right which produce happiness. We at once ask: ‘Whose happiness?’ If we are told ‘Our own happiness’, then, though we shall lose our hesitation to act in these ways, we shall not recover our sense that we ought to do so.\(^5\) Even if our respect for the interests of others and for the demands of justice tends to bring about our own happiness, Prichard believes that this fact alone does not provide sufficient basis for the claim that we ought to respect the interests of others and act justly. As an intuitionist, he believes that no deeper facts or truths serve as the independent basis from which we can derive such claims about what we ought to do; we must simply acknowledge the brute fact that we ought so to act. The demands of morality in general and of justice in particular are categorical, in the sense that they apply to us regardless of whether they coincide with our interest and our happiness. The demands of justice in this respect are similar to the categorical imperative as Kant describes it: “The categorical imperative would be one which represented an action as objectively necessary in itself, without reference to another end.”\(^6\) Failure to recognize the categorical nature of our moral obligations leaves us with an objectionable form of egoism.


\(^4\) This distinction between monistic and pluralistic practical deliberation draws upon a similar presentation of types of eudaimonist theories in Nicholas White’s *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5-7. I have altered White’s terminology slightly; where he speaks of dualistic practical deliberation, I speak of pluralistic practical deliberation. The leading theme of White’s book is that Greek ethics, though eudaimonist throughout, shares important similarities with modern moral philosophy by recognizing dual sources of motivation: the desire for happiness and the concern to uphold ethical norms, where the latter may well conflict with the former. This is the sort of conflict which can arise within pluralistic practical deliberation.


Prichard’s critique of eudaimonism can be improved by pruning away some of the eccentric aspects of his position. We not need affirm his intuitionism, the notion that correct procedure in ethics is simply to examine the facts of a given situation and perceive the obligations that are incumbent upon us, where these obligations have no basis in any deeper reality. We can dispense with his view that the whole of morality is simply the set of obligations recognized by ‘ought’-statements. Even if the process of discerning truth in ethics is much more complicated than Prichard supposed, even if the moral life includes a great deal more than acting in accordance with obligations, still the core of Prichard’s objection to eudaimonism remains. The moral life includes being subject to the demands of justice. These demands are categorical, having force independently of their relation to the end of happiness. If eudaimonism cannot affirm these basic truths, then it stands convicted of being simply another form of egoism.

If this is the standard objection to eudaimonism, then there is also a standard reply. Eudaimonism cannot fairly be construed as a version of egoism, according to White, because it makes room for and indeed requires as elements in a happy life such altruistic or other-regarding traits as friendship and concern for the demands of justice. White presents a pluralistic version of eudaimonism, in that concerns and aims other than the agent’s happiness can be pursued as ends in themselves and can provide a source of motivation independent of the agent’s happiness. The Republic is a central case of such pluralistic eudaimonism. Clearly Plato wishes to show that the fully just man is happier than the fully unjust man, and that our best hopes for happiness lie in assimilating ourselves to the former rather than the latter; this is the eudaimonist component of the dialogue. Alongside this familiar set of arguments, says White, is a non-eudaimonist component, one that presents respect for justice as a distinct source of motivation and deliberative concern, one that does not motivate by appealing to the benefit to the agent of being just. This non-eudaimonist respect for justice is what Thrasymachus ridicules in Book I when he speaks of justice as the good of another person (Rep. 343c) and high-minded simplicity (Rep. 348c), and also is part of what Plato sets out to defend by explaining what justice is and why it is worth seeking for its own sake. The defense of justice leads ultimately to the description of the philosopher-rulers of Book VII. They leave the cave of human society and ascend to the realm of intelligible forms only to return to the cave and the duties of ruling out of concern for what is just. So Prichard is mistaken in his criticism of eudaimonism; a eudaimonist like Plato is able to support the claims of ordinary morality, and especially the claims of justice, and can rely on other-regarding respect for justice as an independently motivating factor.

This standard reply is not satisfactory as a defence of eudaimonism, though, because it fails to unify an agent’s life around the ultimate end of happiness. It may be the case, as eudaimonists frequently assert, that a happy life will include actions done out of concern for others or respect for justice or some other motivation distinct from the desire for happiness. But the eudaimonist must do more than postulate the fact of such actions and such motivation. He also must clarify their relation to the end of happiness. Are other-regarding actions, in particular those which uphold justice, oriented toward the agent’s happiness? If they are, how is this to be explained, given that such actions are motivated independently of their bearing on the agent’s happiness? If they are not oriented toward happiness, how can the eudaimonist recommend them to us as part of the happy life? The eudaimonist originally promised to describe how a good human life is unified around happiness as its ultimate end, but the unity of such a life is threatened by building into it both self-regarding and other-regarding motivations.

This point can be illustrated with reference to White’s description of eudaimonism in the Republic. Although he speaks of a dualist or pluralist eudaimonism, the moral theory he ascribes to Plato is better described as a monistic eudaimonism joined to a distinct non-eudaimonist theory concerned with other-regarding action. In addition to the arguments seeking to establish that justice benefits us far more than we could gain by being unjust, there is a separate component component consisting of the intuitive respect we have for justice and the philosopher-rulers’ willingness to accept a lesser happiness as part of being just. There is no important sense in which this second component is eudaimonist. The concern to uphold norms of justice does not aim at the agent’s happiness, and when this concern conflicts with the desire for happiness, as in the case of the philosopher-rulers, the non-eudaimonist component overrides the eudaimonist.
This yoking of eudaimonist and non-eudaimonist components makes for neither a stable moral theory nor a unified life in practice. White describes Plato’s moral agent as concerned mainly to promote his own happiness, with the exception that considerations of justice operate as ends in themselves, so that the philosopher-rulers may be called on to sacrifice some of their happiness as part of being just. But then the predominant role of happiness in this agent’s practical deliberations depends on the agent enjoying the good fortune of being placed in a social context in which the demands of justice coincide with the normal desire for happiness. This is one of the basic features of Plato’s ideal city, but of course we do not live in the ideal city, and neither did Socrates, Glaucun, and Adeimantus. Since the requirements of justice and the desire for happiness represent distinct deliberative aims, White’s agent must sacrifice happiness in order to be just, in keeping with the example of the philosopher-rulers. This is not a satisfactory form of eudaimonism, because the status of happiness as the ultimate rational end for an agent does not rest on the reality of what happiness is and the internal ordering of a human life towards happiness in whatever social context that life plays itself out. Rather, the status of happiness as the agent’s ultimate rational end depends essentially on contingent facts about the possibility of both acting justly and achieving happiness.

What is needed is a different way of incorporating the concern for justice within a life oriented toward the end of happiness. To find this way, I will draw on an underutilized resource of ancient eudaimonism, namely the concept of the human function. Contemporary presentations often shy away from assigning the human function a significant role in eudaimonism, perhaps because they wish to avoid making excessive commitments to substantive theories of human nature. As we have seen, the result is failure to unify a life that contains distinct sources of motivation around the end of happiness. With the use of the human function, I will argue, the necessary unity can be found.

The requisite concept of the human function (ergon) is introduced by Plato in Book I of the Republic in the course of an argument for the superiority of the life of a just man over that of an unjust. Socrates says that the function of a thing x is that task or activity which only x can do or which x does especially well (Rep. 352e). For instance, the function of the eye in humans is to see, and it is only with the eyes that we can see. To take another example, the function of a pruning-knife is to cut slips from a vine. Of course, one can use a dagger or a scythe to cut slips from a vine, but not as well as with a pruning-knife. And one can use a pruning-knife to cut bread or to open letters, but it will not do as good a job at these tasks.

Socrates goes on to use this notion of a function to argue that a just man will be better off than an unjust. The function of the human soul is living and ruling and deliberating, and the man who possesses a soul with the virtue of justice will perform this function better and live better than a man with an unjust soul (Rep. 353d-354a). Similarly, Aristotle gives the famous function argument in Book I, ch. 7 of the Nicomachean Ethics: the function of a human being is rational activity of the soul, so happiness or living well for a human being will be rational activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. In both cases, we can reconstruct an argument leading from the human function through the virtue of justice to living well, or happiness. The function or characteristic activity of human beings is seen in their tendency to use reason: to set priorities in their lives; to weigh different options for belief and action and then select the best; to lead a life as opposed to merely undergoing experience. This can be done well or badly. One central case of the human function being performed well in the realm of action is the achievement of the virtue of justice. This achievement shows itself in a standing disposition to respect the demands of justice: to choose to preserve equality with others, to act to promote the common good, and to cooperate with others as a reliable partner in the pursuit of the goods of society. Plato and Aristotle agree in asserting that when a person achieves justice in this way, she not only benefits others but also makes a crucial

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7 “The usual situation, Plato indicates, is one in which a person may, rationally and without qualm, aim at his own happiness. This is true not merely of the overwhelming majority of people – for whom the comprehension of the Form of the Good and the non-self-referential notion that it represents are out of reach – but also of philosopher-rulers at most stages of their lives. Only when the crucial question arises whether or not such a person will actually govern the city does the question arise of doing anything else.” White, Individual, 213.
contribution to her own well-being. The person’s being just is a matter of exercising the human function well and thereby counts as a contribution to her own happiness.

It is important to sketch this general pattern of argumentation in order to make three observations about functions and how they operate. For now I wish to leave to one side questions of the cogency of arguments following this general pattern. Scholarly attempts to pin down and evaluate the particular argument deployed in the Republic, for example, constitute a universe unto itself. My concern here is with three little-remarked features of a function, be it the function of a knife or of an eye or the function of a human being. First, a function is defined in part by its carrying out a distinctive activity. Second, this distinctive activity promotes or brings about an effect which is an end relative to the structure and behavior of the entity which possesses that activity; a pruning knife carries out the activity of cutting slips from vines, and it has the blade it has for the sake of cutting slips from a vine. Third, that the results of the activity that defines a function have the status of ends does not depend on the possessor of that function intending to achieve this end or deliberating with this end as a goal or aim. If these observations are well-founded, we will be in position to say that just actions which carry out the human function are performed for the sake of happiness, the distinctive effect and end of the human function. Although they are performed for the sake of happiness, they need not be motivated by deliberations which have the agent’s happiness as a goal; rather, just actions are typically motivated simply by concern to respect the rights of others or to uphold the common good. This amounts to a novel combination of the theses that justice makes categorical demands on us and that all actions are performed for the sake of the agent’s happiness.

The first observation, that there is a conceptual connection between the function of a thing and the distinctive activity associated with that function, amounts to amplifying the basic concept of a function as presented in Book I of the Republic. A pruning-knife can perform a potentially infinite number of activities, from cutting slips from a vine to cutting bread to opening letters. But only one of these activities is the distinctive activity linked to the function of a pruning-knife, namely that activity which the pruning-knife does the best job of. So there is an intimate connection between the function of a thing and the particular activity that thing typically performs. Contemporary discussions of the function of biological traits have made this point from a different angle. The function of the heart in vertebrates is to beat and thereby to circulate blood. The heart performs a large range of activities by virtue of doing what hearts naturally do, such as producing the sounds of a beating heart. But only the activity of beating to circulate blood is central to the heart’s performance of its function. In general, we understand what a function is in part by learning to connect the function with its distinctive activity.

Second, the distinctive activity of a function produces an effect which is an end relative to the behavior and structure of the thing possessing that function. A pruning-knife has a particular shape and its blade has a definite length for a reason; its shape and length are set for the sake of allowing the knife to cut slips from vines. The composition of the eye, with an adjustable lens and translucent eye-jelly inside, and its abilities to perceive color and light and to focus on objects, all are present for the sake of seeing. There is a teleology built into functions and the objects which have functions, such that the structure and behavior of those objects exist for the sake of the distinctive effects produced by the activities connected to those functions.

The third observation attempts to come to grips with the teleology of functions by asserting that this relation of structure or behavior existing for the sake of an end does not depend essentially on the choices or intentions of the entity which performs the function. When we think of an event being for the

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8 Competing theories of function are set out by Larry Wright, “Functions,” Philosophical Review 82, no.2 (1973): 139-68 and Robert Cummins, “Functional Analysis,” Journal of Philosophy 72, no. 20 (1975): 741-65. Despite the differences between Wright’s etiological account of functions, according to which a function is defined partly by the role of its effects in the evolutionary history of a biological trait, and Cummins’ propensity account, according to which a function is defined in terms of its present disposition to contribute to a containing system’s operations, both accounts distinguish between the broad class of the effects of a trait and the narrower class of those effects it has which are central to its function. On this point see Valerie Gray Hardcastle, “On the Normativity of Functions,” in Functions, ed. Ariew, Cummins, and Perlman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144-56.
sake of an end, often it is natural to understand this on the model of an action being chosen by an agent with the intention of promoting that end; so I choose to walk rather than drive to the store with the intention of promoting my health. We may call this pattern of actions being chosen with the aim or goal of promoting an end intentional teleology. Functions do not follow this pattern; that the structure of the eye exists as it does for the sake of seeing does not depend on any choices or intentions had by the eye. Instead, functions are connected to a different kind of teleology, one which consists of subordinate structures or activities being ordered to an end which provides a standard for evaluating those subordinate structures or activities. If the function of a pruning-knife is to cut slips from vines, then we evaluate the structure of the knife as good or bad for a pruning-knife on the basis of whether the shape and composition of the knife allows it to do a good job of cutting slips from a vine. To speak more formally, we can spell out what it is for a structure or activity to be for the sake of an end in terms of three conditions. Given some structure or activity A of an entity with a function F, that structure is for the sake of an end E if and only if

1) A produces E by performing the function F
2) E is of greater value than A
3) A is in its best state only if it produces E.\(^9\)

In this relationship between the structure or activity associated with a function and its end, the end can be an activity such as seeing, in the case of the eye and its structure, or the end can be a separate result, as in the case of the heart and its production of the circulation of the blood by its activity of beating. In all such cases, it is not necessary that the end in question be intended in performing the activity which is for the sake of the end.

These three general observations about functions can be applied to the important special case of the human function. Previously we have seen in the works of Plato and Aristotle that the human function is understood as rational activity of the soul; it consists of those activities of considering how best to believe and act, of weighing judiciously the different options open to us, and guiding our actions in accordance with our perceptions of what is true and right. These are the distinctive activities connected to the human function in the way suggested by the first observation above. With regards to the second observation, that the distinctive activities of a function have an end which they produce, we can draw on the intuition common to Plato and Aristotle that performing the human function promotes living well or happiness for humans. Living well for humans is not achieved by acting on the capacities for sensory pleasure we share with other animals. This is the lesson of Aristotle’s dismissal of the life of gratification in Book I, chapter 5 of the *Ethics*. Regardless of how much pleasure we enjoy, we have not thereby risen above the life of grazing cattle and so have not achieved happiness. Happiness is a distinctive product of the human function, the end for the sake of which the human function is performed.

In keeping with the third observation, the status of happiness as the end of the activities constituting the human function does not depend essentially on our intending to achieve happiness or aiming at happiness as we perform the human function. It may be the case that a person sets priorities in her life and makes choices with the goal in mind of achieving happiness. But it can also happen that a person sets priorities and chooses between concrete options without happiness as a conscious goal or aim. Even in the latter case, though, happiness is one end of these rational activities. That happiness is the end depends on the sort of facts outlined in the third observation above: that these rational activities do in fact promote the happiness of the agent, that this happiness is greater in value than the activities of setting priorities and making choices, and that these activities are performed best only if they promote the agent’s happiness. Happiness provides a standard (not necessarily the only one) for evaluating a person’s priorities, deliberations, and choices; if these choices fail to promote her happiness and instead lead her away from well-being, then those choices could be improved as instances of the human function.

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Having made this detour into the region of functions, it is time to return to the topic of justice and eudaimonism. Earlier I posed a dilemma for the eudaimonist who claims that acknowledging the demands of justice is a necessary part of the happy life. Either just actions have happiness as their end or they do not. If just actions do have happiness as their end, then the eudaimonist must explain how this is so, given that to acknowledge the demands of justice is to be motivated by concern for the interests of others and typically does not involve aiming at one’s own happiness. If just actions do not have happiness as their end, then the eudaimonist has strayed from his basic conviction that a good and rational life is one in which happiness is the ultimate end of all actions. I propose to grasp the first horn of the dilemma. The human function as described above allows us to explain how just actions can be motivated solely by concern for the interests of others and at the same time can have the agent’s happiness as their end. For just actions count as performances of the human function; they are instances of setting priorities, weighing different options for actions, and choosing what seems the best. Such performances of the human function have the agent’s happiness as their end even if the agent does not aim at or intend to promote her happiness through these actions.

Consider an example of this pattern. Suppose that Katherine is a public-spirited citizen who joins her local civic association. This association represents the interests of local citizens in relation to city government and local business interests. It has a fair amount of influence on housing legislation, among other public policy areas. Impressed by Katherine’s dedication to the community, the other members of the association soon choose her to be their president. In this capacity, she attempts to balance the legitimate financial interests of housing developers with the need of local residents for affordable housing. In setting priorities which influence public policy, in weighing different options for action, and in deliberating over which policy proposals to support, Katherine is motivated by respect for the rights and interests of others and the common good. Her actions are not motivated by concern for her own happiness. She chooses to act justly simply because doing so is the right way to act, and she would act justly even if her actions had no bearing on her happiness. To describe Katherine’s attitude in philosophical terms, she acknowledges the categorical demands of justice. Yet in setting priorities, in deliberating rationally, and in making choices in the service of justice, she is also performing the human function. As such, her just actions have her own happiness as an end. Her just actions promote her living well as a human being, her happiness, although her actions are not motivated by this fact. In this case, acknowledging the categorical demands of justice is one way of acting for the sake of happiness.

This presentation of just actions being performed both from altruistic motivation and for the sake of the agent’s happiness finds a parallel in Annas’s description of the Stoic concept of virtue. As a final proof that eudaimonism does not entail egoism, she notes that Stoicism demanded impartiality of the virtuous agent in promoting his own and others’ interests. As Annas is well aware, this last point runs against some of our intuitions. How can a eudaimonist theory posit an agent’s happiness as the final end for that agent and also require that each agent place the same importance on promoting the interests of others as she does on promoting her own interests? The answer to this lies in the Stoic conception of virtue. For the Stoics, virtue is a rational disposition or skill of providing for oneself and others those natural advantages other than virtue that have value: health, strength, pleasure, power, and so on. Seen in this way as a rational disposition or skill, virtue requires that an agent exercise impartiality in promoting her own well-being and that of others. At the same time, seen as a matter of living in accordance with nature, virtue is sufficient for happiness, as Annas notes:

Happiness, then, lies not in aiming at virtue plus external goods, as though they were the same kind of thing, but rather in aiming at external goods in a way which constitutes the exercise of virtue, that is, of a developed rational disposition to select among the indifferents, to give them their proper priorities and relations. For virtue is the skill of rightly selecting among and making use of the other valuable things.

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The Stoic sage shows no partiality to himself as he deals with the natural advantages virtuously, but in doing so he achieves his final end of happiness.

Here we can use the human function to articulate the relation between the virtuous pursuit of the natural advantages on the one hand and happiness on the other. The former, according to the Stoics, involves an impartial concern to deal rationally with such preferred indifferents as health, material security, and position in society. In terms of the virtuous agent’s intentions and goals, these natural advantages are to be managed without special regard for the agent’s own well-being. But acting virtuously in this way means acting for the sake of the agent’s happiness in the manner outlined above, where actions performing the human function are performed for the sake of the end typically produced by those actions. In virtuous action the agent exercises the human function of reason by dealing rationally with the natural advantages. At the same time, the agent produces her own happiness, which is identical with living in accordance with nature and ruling oneself rationally, by virtue of her performance of the human function. Her happiness is a greater good and more valuable than any individual virtuous act. And each virtuous act is performed in the best way only if it contributes to the agent’s happiness, since on the Stoic view happiness is identical with virtue. As a result, the virtuous actions of the Stoic agent are performed for the sake of the agent’s happiness even if they are not performed with the intention of achieving happiness. Even if the Stoic wise man acts impartially, with no concern to promote his own happiness as something separate from the interests of others, still he acts for the sake of his happiness. This shows that the Stoic devotion to virtue, which entails impartial concern for the good of all, can be reconciled with the fundamental eudaimonist claim that all rational actions are performed for the sake of the final end of happiness.

These reflections suggest that the ancient eudaimonists were not misguided when they gave a prominent place to the human function in their ethical theory. Most modern reconstructions of eudaimonism do not employ the human function in this way. Though this gives them the appearance of being more streamlined and plausible, they fail to unify a life which respects the demands of justice. It is evident that in the Republic and other ancient ethical works humans are presented as acting out of concern for the good of others. They show respect for justice and act from altruistic motivation, and this is one source of value for a human life according to eudaimonism. But the question arises of whether this is the only sort of value a human life can have. Surely not; it matters as well whether a human life is flourishing and happy. How do these two aspects or areas of a human life combine? To present actions done from altruistic motivation as existing in splendid isolation from the actions done for the sake of happiness threatens to split a life and to fracture its overall structure. The better way is to propose that all actions, both those motivated by altruistic concerns and those motivated by the desire for happiness, are performed for the sake of happiness, with the caveat that the first set of actions need not be performed with any intention of achieving happiness. This respects the fact of altruistic motivation while integrating that motivation into the fabric of a happy life. But to achieve this unity, we must take seriously the notion of the human function and make room for it within the structure of eudaimonism. Only when we use the human function to develop a version of eudaimonism is it possible to describe the demands of justice as categorical, as making unconditioned demands on our practical rationality, and also to describe actions performed to meet these demands as being oriented to happiness as their end.