Being Well Together

Aristotle on Joint Activity, Plural Self-Awareness, and Common Sense

Hans Bernhard Schmid, University of Vienna (hans.bernhard.schmid@univie.ac.at)

Forthcoming in: Proceedings of the 37th International Wittgenstein Symposium. Berlin, De Gruyter

Abstract: According to Aristotle, our ultimate purpose in life is to be well, and well-being is in virtuous action over a lifetime. While the concepts of well-being and virtue are subject to heated controversies in the received literature, most interpretations tacitly assume a *distributive* reading of Aristotle's basic claim. In this reading, well-being is what *each of us* wants in *his or her own life,* and it is in *the agent's own* virtuous action over *his or her own* lifetime. A distributive reading can easily accommodate other-regarding and impartial attitudes, as well as the view that no agent can be truly well without the well-being of those with whom he or she lives together. However, no distributive reading can accommodate the view that agents who live closely together in egalitarian relations *participate* in each other's well-being in such a way that one agent's well-being *is*, in parts, also another's. In his analysis of virtuous friendship, however, Aristotle points towards such a participatory view. It has been claimed repeatedly in the received literature that any such view has unacceptable consequences, as it extends the subject of well-being in a way that ignores the basic separateness of persons. Taking another person's well-being to be one's own seems to disrespect the other person's own agency. The core claim of this paper is that these passages should be reconstructed as suggesting a *collective reading* of Aristotle's basic view that complements rather than replaces the distributive view. In this collective reading, what *we jointly* want to do in our *shared life* is to be *well together,* and that being well together is in virtuous *joint activity* over the time of living together. It is argued that Aristotle's participatory conception of well-being does not undermine the participants' own agency as it is in their *common sense* of action that they are unified to a plural subject of well-being. Common sense of joint action is the participants' plural pre-reflective self-awareness of their action *as theirs, collectively.* The extension of the subject of well-being to we-groups broadens our view on how well-being is subjective or first-personal and opens up a plural perspective on the good.

Keywords: Well-being, Aristotle, Common sense, Joint action, Collective intentionality

On the Aristotelian account, being well is something that we *do* rather than something that happens to us. It relates to agency in at least two ways. First, well-being (εὐδαιμονία) is our ultimate goal – it is what we pursue, in our activity, for its own sake, rather than with some further purpose in mind; well-being is good in itself (EN 1094a). Second, well-being relates to action in that it consists in a *form of action.* Well-being is not some product (κτῆμά τι), but rather some activity (ἐνέργειά τις; EN 1169b 30f.). Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is an examination of the particular form of activity that constitutes well-being.

Aristotle does not ignore that well-being requires external goods (ἐκτὸς ἀγαθά; 1099a 31) such as some wealth, health, status, and friends. But these goods are goods only in relation to the intrinsic good they make possible which, Aristotle claims, is virtuous living (cf. Cooper 1985). Formally speaking, virtuous living is the exercise of the rational faculties of our soul over a lifetime (1098a 16f.), and Aristotle's ethical writings contain a catalogue of the single virtues and their mutual relation which the exercise of the rational faculties of our soul entails.

A consequence of the two ways in which well-being is related to agency is that well-being is *subjective.* The subjectivity in question is of the ontological rather than the epistemic kind. Well-being is not whatever you happen to consider as such. At the beginning of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle refutes some widely held views of well-being, and thus advocates an epistemically objective view; people may *think* that their well-being is in acquiring riches or experiencing lust, but, according to Aristotle, they are wrong. The subjectivity in question is of the ontological rather than the epistemological kind. Well-being is a form of activity, and activity has an agent whose activity the activity in question is. As the form of activity that is well-being is the ultimate goal of the reasonable agent whose activity it is, it follows that the ultimate goal of any reasonable agent is his or her *own* well-being. A modern way to express the ontological subjectivity of well-being is to say that it is *first personal.* This is to say that well-being is what it is *for an agent,* and the relevant agent is he or she whose activity, if it is well-guided, constitutes his or her own well-being.

If it is true that what we ultimately want in our lives is to be well, it thus appears that this can only mean that what each of us ultimately wants in his or her life is *his or her own* well-being. This seems to be a conceptual consequence of the first-personal nature of well-being – but it sounds problematic. There is something wrong about saying that each of us always strives for his or her own happiness. After all, our lives are interconnected. We are not indifferent concerning other people's well-being, and there are limits to account for this in the usual understanding of the Aristotelian claim. While subjective well-being may easily be extended to an inclusive form in such a way that it matters to me how you are, it remains committed to the view that your well-being is yours, and mine is mine. Yet it seems that our well-being is shared in a way that seems to be misunderstood even in an extended distributive view. There is a strong intuition that we *participate* in the well-being of those with whom we share our lives and this intuition seems to be at odds with the way in which well-being is conceived in the Aristotelian view.

Our lives are *shared* lives and Aristotle himself acknowledges this: συζῆν, living together, is what we do, and there seems to be something about living together that is not exhausted by each one living his or her own life. If this is the case, it seems that true well-being cannot be first-personal in the way we have encountered. Insofar as we live together, not all of our well-being is not mine and yours, severally or distributively. It is, in parts at least, mine and yours *together,* as a whole in which we take parts. This is not to deny that your well-being and my well-being are distinct. We certainly do not share our *entire* lives – your hobbies may not be mine and our shared life may not extend over our entire lives. But our human way of living together is sharing important parts of our lives. Insofar our life is shared and in the domain of the activities in which we engage together, jointly, as a team, a couple, a family, or a group, it simply seems wrong to say that all there is to us is that we are several individuals, each one strivings for his or her own happiness. True, we *are* several individuals each one striving for his or her own well-being. But we are not *just* that. There is a sense in which important parts of the striving in question, and the well-being it might constitute, is *ours,* together.

Aristotle himself seems to consider an expansion of the subject of well-being in his analysis of virtuous friendship, especially in chapter 9 of book 9 of the Nicomachean Ethics, where he seems to suggest that one's own agency may somehow extend into that of one's friends in such a way that the form of one's friend's activity is indeed part and parcel of one's own well-being. This line has been harshly criticized in the recent literature. Perhaps most prominently, Roger Crisp writes in the introduction of his *Stanford Encyclopedia* Entry on well-being: "On Aristotle's view, if you are my friend, then my well-being is closely bound up with yours. It might be tempting, then, to say that 'your' well-being is 'part' of mine, in which case the distinction between what is good for me and what is good for others has broken down. But this temptation should be resisted. Your well-being concerns how well your life goes for you,

and we can allow that my well-being depends on yours without introducing the confusing notion that my well-being is constituted by yours." (Crisp 2013)

In this view, an extension of the subject of well-being is simply a "collapse of the very notion of well-being" (ibid.). Other interpreters argue that any such extension of one's own agency into another person's is a "delusion" (Smith-Pangle 2003, 152) and that what Aristotle, in his right mind, can only mean is that the "notational egoism" or "formally egocentric doctrine" implied in the ontological subjectivity of well-being does not include, but indeed implies "practical altruism" (Price 1985, 125ff.).

The following argues for a different view of Aristotle's thoughts on an expansion of the subject of well-being – it is neither a "collapse of the very notion of well-being", nor an illusion of extending one's own agency into another person's, nor a conception that remains "formally egocentric". The key to an adequate understanding of how we participate in the well-being of those with whom we live together is to see that the first-personal nature of well-being does not come in the singular only. The first person has a plural, too, and it is in this plural way that well-being is first-personal for agents who live and act together. The expansion of the subject of well-being that is implied in the participatory view of well-being does not sever the links between well-being and agency insofar as joint action implies a plural subject. In a brief survey of the current literature on joint action, I will argue that a version of the plural subject view is plausible.

I shall proceed as follows:. In the first section, the Aristotelian thoughts on a potential expansion of the subject of well-being in his discussion of virtuous friendship will be introduced and some of the critical views to be found in the recent literature will be addressed (1.). The second offers the negative argument that no "formally egocentric" conception of well-being, however altruistic and universal it may be, captures the sense in which we participate in each other's well-being within a shared life (2.). The third section offers a positive account of the first-personal nature of well-being that extends to the plural, and addresses some issues concerning the relation between singular and plural well-being within a life that is neither ever completely shared nor lived in isolation (3.).

1.

In his *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry on well-being, Roger Crisp calls it "tempting" to read Aristotle's views on virtuous friendship in such a way that as my friend, your well-being is "part" of mine (Crisp 2013). As a temptation, this reading should, of course, be resisted in Crisp's view and he makes clear that he thinks so with a view on the fact that any well-being is always a person's. It is not quite clear, however, whether or not he thinks that Aristotle did in fact endorse an expansion of the subject of well-being – as he has published his own translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, one would expect him to have a view on this question. Reading the relevant passages in book 9, however, Crisp's somewhat ambiguous assessment appears to be fair. Aristotle here seems to present a view that points towards a straightforward participatory reading of the sharing of well-being among virtuous friends without really going all the way. Of special importance in this regard is the argument in chapter 9. Aristotle here argues for the view that even a person who is virtuous and blessed in such a way that she seems to be rather self-sufficient in her well-being still needs friends. Aristotle approaches this issue from a series of perspectives. One particular line of argument, presented in 1169b, goes through a series of steps which lead up to the core straightforward paradox of virtuous friendship that has bothered most interpreters. The first step is that while virtuous action is good in itself, there is further well-being to be gained from *contemplating* good action. It is a source of the kind of pleasure that contributes to well-being to observe good actions if it is accompanied with an understanding of why they are good. Perhaps it is not too far a shot to capture this thought in the above terminology in the following way: While well-being is

ontologically subjective, there is an epistemically objective element to it as well. The epistemic subjectivity in question is not the kind that well-being is whatever is *believed* to be well-being, but rather that the *knowledge* of well-being is part of our well-being. Well-being is not just in acting virtuously, but also in judging that an activity is virtuous. In Aristotle's term, *to see and recognize* (θεωρεῖν) virtuous action is pleasurable (ἡδεῖον), too – and a person that is fully happy cannot miss that pleasure. In the next step, this epistemic recognition is qualified in two ways, leading to the two horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, Aristotle argues that while knowledge of *any* virtuous action is pleasurable, it is most pleasurable for an agent to recognize virtuous action that *belongs to him- or herself* (Aristotle uses the term οἰκεῖον here, not αὐτον – "domestic" rather than "one's own"). On the other hand, Aristotle argues that our capacity to see and recognize (θεωρεῖν) our own actions is limited. We cannot, Aristotle seems to argue, look at ourselves disaffectedly, and "objectify" our own actions sufficiently to take that pleasure-yielding cognitive stance towards them (Aquinas, in his comment to the Nicomachean Ethics [1896], argues that some *privatum affectum* – an emotional bias for ourselves – plays the role of the culprit here). The epistemic stance in question requires some distance and it can be taken in a better way towards one's neighbors than towards oneself, so that their way of acting can be better observed and recognized in that theoretical way than one's own (θεωρεῖν δὲ μᾶλλον τοὺς πέλας δυνάμεθα ἢ ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τὰς ἐκείνων πράξεις ἢ τὰς οἰκείας). From a better position to observe and recognize, Aristotle seems to imply, comes greater pleasure.

Thus it seems that we are caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, the epistemic pleasure is greater in observing one's own virtuous way of acting rather than other people's, because the target of observation is more pleasurable. On the other hand, the epistemic pleasure is greater in observing other people's virtuous way of acting rather than one's own, because the observation is better. It seems that we cannot have it both ways. Whether we are contemplating our own virtuous way of acting or other people's, our pleasure is somewhat impaired. It may thus seem that we cannot reap full pleasure from contemplating virtuous activity because for that, we would need to contemplate an agent that is *us,* and another agent at the same time.

In the final step of the argument, however, Aristotle simply forces the two horns of the dilemma together in what may seem to be an act of conceptual violence. He argues that this paradoxical creature who is both another and oneself is exactly what a virtuous friend *is:* he is, at the same time, ἕτερος, another agent, and αὐτὸς that is, oneself (1169b 7; cf. 1166a 32). The view is not that the other is "another self" *from his or her own perspective;* rather, the other is oneself in that his or her activity is one's own. The paradoxical characterization of the virtuous friend as *alter ego* concludes this line of argument why even a person who is fully virtuous and endowed with all other external goods still needs virtuous friends.

Given the paradoxical nature of the conception, it is perhaps not surprising that Aristotle's view of the virtuous friend as an *alter ego* has met with rather sharp criticism in the received literature. Taking one's friend to be oneself amounts to disrespecting his or her own agency and displacing it with one's own. Many interpreters have observed that Aristotle has developed accounts of an extension of one's own agency into that of another person in the context of his views on the nature of slavery, and of the relation between parent and child (cf., e.g., Price 1985, 103ff.). Not only is it hard to imagine how these paradigms could serve to capture the nature of participation in egalitarian relations: these conceptions seem to be inconsistent in themselves.

Aristotle's view of the nature of power and domination is extreme in that it entails a straightforward sense in which the slave is not an agent of his or her own, but rather an extension of his or her master's agency (cf. 1140a). In his or her role, the slave does not perform any action of his or her own and therefore does not seem to have any well-being of

his or her own in Aristotle's account. This is of course not to say that they "participate" in their master's well-being, because any participation requires that the participants have their own part in what they share in common, which is not the case here, as the only well-being there can possibly be in a master-slave-relationship, if any at all, can only be the masters', and it is the slaves themselves that become "parts" of their masters (cf. Politics 1255b 11). The passages on the extension of the masters' agency into that of their slave oscillate between sociological realism and action-theoretic nonsense. On the one hand, it is perhaps a frighteningly realistic account of the harsh facts of the institution of slavery in which power relations are not agency-regarding (for the concept of agency-regarding relations, cf. Rovane 1998, 74ff.). On the other hand, it is an action-theoretic view that is deluded in ignoring the slaves' own agential viewpoint even within a slaveholder society. Even within extremely oppressive institutions, any individual's activity, if it instantiates action, instantiates the individual's *own* action, however coerced it may be. This is what Aristotle's view of the slave as a "tool for action" ignores.

A similar delusion seems to be at work in Aristotle's account of virtuous friendship. "Aristotle shows how the friend who is loved as another self is, in some important way, cherished as an extension of oneself, an extension that can tempt one into the delusion that this other really is oneself, and as such is able to help overcome one's limitedness and mortality" (Smith-Pangle 2003, 152). Smith-Pangle, as well as many other interpreters, points out that the idea of the "alter ego" makes its first appearance in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the context of an analysis of the relation of parents and children (1161b). Along these and similar lines, the whole idea of some participation in well-being is a mere delusion, and it is not a particularly nice one because the motive seems to be self-aggrandizement, that is, the extension of one's first-personal perspective over the lives and agencies of others. If this is indeed the motive behind Aristotle's argument that friends are needed, it should certainly not be part of a normative conception of well-being. A plausible conception of shared well-being should not be predicated on such self-aggrandizing delusions.

Thus there is much to say in favor of a non-extensional view of well-being, a conception in which each person pursues his or her own happiness, minding the virtues of her own actions along the distributive reading of Aristotle's basic view. Crisp (2013) argues for this view, claiming that well-being is always "a person's", and that any attempt to argue that "your well-being is 'part' of mine" results in a "collapse of the very notion of well-being". A broadly Aristotelian way of arguing for this view is the following. Aristotle's conception of well-being, as introduced in the first book of the NE, is that an agent's well-being is the ultimate goal that reasonable agents aim at. Furthermore, Aristotle argues that the ultimate goal that reasonable agents aim at is not a product of action, but a form of activity. This tight link to agency leads to the view that happiness is not only ontologically subjective, but indeed *first-personal*. If happiness is the form of activity that is the agent's ultimate goal, it seems to be conceptually true that the only happiness towards which an agent can strive is the agent's own, because it is only his or her own action that an agent can want to bring about in such a way that the action is not a product of what he or she does, but in the doing itself. This is what Price (1985) refers to as the "formal egocentricity" or the "notational egoism" of Aristotle's account.

Imagine what it may mean to aim at another person's happiness from this perspective. *Ex hypothesi*, another person's well-being is a sustained form of his or her activity. Now it is certainly possible to influence people in such a way that the form of their activity changes, and in ordinary language, we would probably say that in this case, you're making another person happier. But again, it should be remembered that in the Aristotelian view, well-being is an activity (ἐνέργειά τις) rather than some property (κτῆμά τι; 1169b 30f.). The good that is well-being is a form of the activity itself rather than its product. Thus "making somebody happy" can only mean providing the "external goods" that enable the other to be active in the

way that constitutes his or her own well-being. As the well-being you're helping to bring about is in the form of the other person's activity, it is something that *the other person does*, rather than a form of your own activity. Thus in assisting other people in such a way as to make them act in a better way, your acting is of the kind that *contributes* to other people's well-being and, maybe to some degree "makes the other person act", but insofar as this assisting activity is a part of anyone's well-being, the only possible candidate well-being is your own.

It is thus a conceptual truth, in this conception, that well-being is always each agent's own, simply because it is his or her own agency only that each agent exerts. Even a person who has great powers of command over others, and is thus in some control of what they do, does only the *commanding* rather than the *doings* of his or her subordinates. Each agent does his own doing, even where agents are under other agents' power. One might call this minimal agential autonomy: Wherever an agent acts, the action in question is his or her own. In a conception of well-being according to which well-being is a form rather than a product of action, this minimal conception of agential autonomy seems to force a distributive reading: As each does his or her own doing, each one's well-being is his or her own.

II.

Whether or not it is something like this first-personal nature of well-being Crisp has in mind when he says that the "temptation" to say that we can literally participate in each other's well-being should be resisted, he goes on emphasizing that any such view should not be taken in the sense of atomistic independence or narrow egoism. This is certainly right and even though it does not take us as far as Crisp hopes, the ways in which the distributive reading of well-being can accommodate mutual interdependence, altruism, and non-particularism deserve to be mentioned.

"Your well-being concerns how well your life goes for you, and we can allow that my well-being depends on yours without introducing the confusing notion that my well-being is constituted by yours. There are signs in Aristotelian thought of an expansion of the subject or owner of well-being. A friend is 'another self', so that what benefits my friend benefits me. But this should be taken either as a metaphorical expression of the dependence claim, or as an identity claim which does not threaten the notion of well-being: if you really are the same person as I am, then of course what is good for you will be what is good for me, since there is no longer any metaphysically significant distinction between you and me." (Crisp 2013)

The non-threatening version of the identity claim is the one in which "you are the same person as I am" simply means "you are the same *kind of* person". It is qualitative or type identity that Crisp advocates here, not numerical or token identity. It may not initially seem convincing, however, that my being of the same *type* of person as you solves the problem of the first-personal nature of well-being. Just the fact that I like to do the same type of activities that you like does not *per se* bring us together in any friendly way – in a world where resources are scarce, conflict easily results from people having preferences of the same kind. The type identity claim clearly needs to be specified in order to capture something of the spirit of "being well together".

There are several steps to take. First and perhaps most basically, the "dependence claim" Crisp mentions has to be taken into account. Ways in which "my well-being is closely bound up with yours" can obviously be accounted for without any expansion of the subject of well-being, and without blurring the neat distributive distinction between how well your life goes for you and how well my life goes for me. Aristotle recognizes that happiness requires suitable conditions. Here, the issue of "external goods" is important. Aristotle lists having nice children, some wealth, and being reasonably good-looking as paradigmatic examples in this category, but it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to claim that in order for a person to

be truly happy, it is necessary that his or her loved ones be reasonably happy, too. After all, it is difficult to imagine that a virtuous person be completely happy if everybody around her is just plain miserable, and given the nature of Aristotle's inquiry, one likes to think that he must have said so somewhere. There is *some* sense in which well-being obviously involves sharing here. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle emphasizes the *sympathetic* nature of close friendship, arguing that we want to share even our friends' pains, and if it is not possible to share the *same* token experience of thirst or hunger, then we want to experience at least "what is closest to it" (EE 1240a 39). It seems plausible that this extends beyond single episodes and stretches to our friends' whole well- or unwell-being. This kind of sharing – sympathy – does not challenge the first personal conception of well-being in any way. Even if it is true that well-being involves so much sympathy that I can be truly well only if you are, too, or if it is true that I can be truly well only if everybody else is, it remains a fact that in spite of this dependence, my well-being is not yours and yours is not mine. A condition of my and your well-being may be that we are equally well and it may be exactly the same kind of activity that makes each of us happy. But even if we're both equally well and if it is the same sort of activities that constitute our well-being, your happiness is yours and my happiness is mine.

The next step is that in addition to dependence and qualitative identity, it has to be recognized that Aristotle's first-personal account of well-being, even in its most straightforwardly "egocentrical" reading, certainly does not entail crude egoism. The first-personal way in which Aristotle spells out the ontological subjectivity of well-being has to be distinguished clearly from the view that agents are self-centered. It is true that Aristotle does seem to ascribe a great deal of egoism to agents (cf. Kahn 1981): "Each one seems to love his own good", Aristotle says (1155b 23), and again: "everyone wants good things most of all for himself" (1159a 11-12). But the qualification in the first quote already makes clear that egoism is not a conceptual truth about agency, and it seems that Aristotle is talking about the average unhappy individual here rather than the virtuous person who is truly well. Aristotle's analysis makes it quite plain that a lot of my close ones, and indeed society at large, will profit a great deal from my true well-being, and that they will do so not only as an unintended side-effect of my conducting my life well, but as part of what it is for me to lead a good life. This is obvious from the fact that generosity is a paragon feature of the good life, as Aristotle argues at length in the catalogue of virtues, and fairness plays a key role, too. Aristotle's conception of happiness, as well as any plausible conception, states that a good life involves finding a balance between the pursuit of one's own interest and an engagement for the interests of others. On this line, Aristotle says of the "virtuous man" that his "conduct is often guided by the interests of his friends and of his country" and that "he will if necessary lay down his life on their behalf, thus ". This, however, is not against the reasonable self-interest of people, as they thereby "chose great nobility for themselves" (1169a). Thus the claim that well-being is first-personal does not entail that well-being should be pursued in a self-centered frame of mind or that the only interests a reasonable agent takes into account are his or her own. Subject and beneficiary of well-being are two separate issues. The subject is the first person, but the circle of beneficiaries is much wider; the question of whose well-being is at stake does not answer the question of who profits from one's well-being.

This leads us to the last (and perhaps most important) step. In Aristotle's view, well-being is about proper guidance by reason, entailing values such as justice. And such values are universal rather than particular in nature. This is not to deny that we do tend to endorse self-serving conceptions of justice; but to the degree to which we do, we're not truly just. Justice is what it is not just *for me,* but *for anyone.* Insofar as well-being is in a life that is guided by reason, it is, in a way, a *universal* life; it is guided by the parts of our souls in which there is, indeed, "no metaphysically significant distinction between you and me", as Crisp puts it. The first-personal character of well-being does thus not entail particularism, but rather entails a great deal of universalism. This is the point at which, in spite of all the differences, some

interpreters have found a connection between Aristotle's conception of virtue and Kantian thoughts on duty (e.g., Sherman 1997). The virtuous life is universal in its being guided by reason and universal values.

It is time to take stock and see how far these steps have taken us. Has our problem with the first-personal distributive reading been solved? Crisp suggests that if the mutual interdependence between our well-being, the difference between the ontological subject and the beneficiary of well-being, as well as the universalism of Aristotelian well-being is properly understood, nothing remains unaccounted for in the view that well-being is about each of us pursuing his or her own well-being. But this is not so. Even if it is true that my well-being presupposes yours, and that it involves so much sympathy that I can be truly happy only if you are, if it is true that I can be truly well only if everybody else is, and that it is in the same kind of activity that each of us finds his or her happiness, the plain fact remains that my happiness cannot be part of yours and your happiness cannot be part of mine. And this seems to be a serious limitation. In close friendship, that is, in an intimately shared life among equals, the well-being is shared in a different and more straightforward sense than the "non-threatening" sense advocated by Crisp. It is not just that friends tend to be equally well or unwell and that their well-being is mutually interdependent and in the same kind of activities. Rather, they participate in each other's well-being. If we live closely together, it is certainly the case that each of us pursues his or her own well-being and that our individual well-beings are closely interrelated. But this is not all there is to a shared life. In intimate relations, the striving for well-being is not something each member pursues by him- or herself, in a more or less generous, sympathetic and universal fashion. Rather, it is something we *do together* and whatever well-being is in activity that is not *mine and yours, severally*, but *ours, together,* it seems clear that the well-being in question is ours in such a way that we literally participate in each other's well-being. This is the sense excluded by Crisp's version of the identity claim, but it is a sense that seems plausible and indeed constitutive of the kind of well-being we may enjoy in a life that is truly shared with others. Are there ways to account for this without thereby causing a "collapse of the very notion of well-being"?

III.

That *joint activity* is a key to understanding the participatory nature of well-being that Aristotle seems to advocate in his conception of virtuous friendship has not gone unnoticed in the received literature (cf., e.g., Cooper 1977; Price 1989, 103-130; Sherman 1997, chap. 5; Kosman 2004). To focus on just some of these examples, Anthony W. Price's chapter on "perfect friendship" (1989, 103-130) is guided by the intuition that the kind of participation in each other's well-being that seems to be implied in Aristotle's account cannot be captured adequately in any other way as in an analysis of what it means to cooperate or act jointly, together, and he undertakes a thorough examination of the conceptual tools Aristotle offers to understand the kind of interrelation between cooperating agents and their participation in joint activity. A second example out of many is Nancy Sherman's *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (1997), especially the chapter entitled "the shared voyage". "Doing things together" and "friendship and shared activity" are the key topics here and Sherman again focuses on the passages that support the reading of living together in terms of joint activity.

Aristotle characterizes living together (συζῆν) as a "sharing of words and deeds" (λόγων καὶ πραγμάτων κοινωνεῖν; NE 1126b 11). It is true, though, that Aristotle does not mention joint action in other places at which the issue of συζῆν comes up. In 1270b, "κοινωνεῖν λόγων καὶ διανοίας", "the sharing of words and thoughts (or considerations)" is the expression Aristotle uses, and in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he characterizes the living together again cognitively rather than practically, this time as joint perception and common knowledge (or common

acquaintance, or common understanding; συναισθάνεσθαι καὶ συγγνωρίζειν, cf. EE 1244b 26f.). The fact that Aristotle's focus is on the sharing of perception, knowledge, logos, and thinking, however, does not mean that it is only here and not in actual action that the sharing (or "communing"; κοινωνεῖν) takes place in living together. Rather, he focuses on the rational infrastructure of the kind of activity that is "with account" or according to (the right) reason [κατὰ (τὸν ορθόν) λόγον] for the following two reasons: It is only this particular kind of action that comes into question of a shared life that is a good life, as the good life is a reasonable life, and the sharing of activity that is integrated at the level of the reasoning is shared in a different sense than spontaneous joint activity, or shared activity that is based on individual reasons and in which each participant ultimately pursues an individual agenda. The idea is that for our shared life to be a good life, our shared activities must issue from a joint rational perspective and it is in virtue of this perspective that the activity in question is unified.

Given this widely shared interpretation in the received literature, the task ahead is to show that the interpretation of virtuous friendship as joint virtuous activity can accommodate a straightforward participatory reading of well-being that is free of the paradox and the inacceptable consequences encountered above, especially that it is non-delusional and does not undermine basic agency-regard and that involves an expansion of the subject of well-being that does not end up in a paradox and a "collapse of the very notion of well-being", as Crisp assumes.

Before coming to these issues, let us first retrace our steps to see how the apparent paradox of the participatory reading of well-being emerged. In the Aristotelian view, well-being is tied to action in that it is our ultimate aim, and it is a particular form of activity rather than a product of action. The only activity which we can "do" in a way that is not a product of our activity is *our own* (the *own agency*-condition), this leads to a first-personal account of well-being, according to which the kind of well-being at which each agent aims is his or her own (sect. 1 above). This does not rule out altruistic conceptions of one's own well-being or a universalist orientation, but it does seem to rule out a participatory conception of well-being in which well-being is shared in a straightforward sense, as we cannot seem to conceive of another person's action as our own without undermining the other's own agency (sect. 2 above). The *own agency*-condition and the agency-regard it implies seem to be incompatible with the view that the other's action is somehow one's own. If this is true, it follows that you pursue your happiness and I pursue mine and that all there is about sharing well-being is mutual dependence, altruism, and a non-particularist conception of well-being, without any straightforward sharing of well-being between us.

Thinking about virtuous friendship in terms of *joint activity*, however, suggests that the way in which we participate in each other's well-being may not be a matter of me doing your individual actions, which violates the *own agency*-condition, but rather a matter of *us* acting *together* in the sense that there is *one* activity to which each of us contributes. If we act together, there is one token action that we perform together, but this is not to say that your agency is somehow subsumed under mine, as you contribute your parts while I contribute mine. This suggests a conception of well-being that is both first-personal and agency-regarding, and participatory in a straightforward sense. Joint agency respects the *own agency*-condition because it does not suggest that I do your contributions to the joint activity or that you do mine. As far as joint agency is virtuous however, it constitutes a well-being that is not yours and mine, severally or distributively, but *ours,* collectively.

Thinking further along these lines, the next issue to take up would be an analysis of what exactly virtuous joint action is, and how it relates to individual virtuous action. Are there virtues that are *specific* for joint activity? A first candidate to consider may perhaps be cooperative-mindedness, that is, the habitualized disposition to engage in the kind of joint

activity that is directed towards the common good. To be cooperative-minded is to see and relate to one's partners as competent participants in reasoning and action. It would be interesting to see how exactly the kind of trust and mutual reliance involved in cooperation relates to the kind of self-confidence and self-reliance – trust in *one's own* abilities and judgment – advocated in Aristotle's accounts of the virtues of magnanimity (or "big-souledness", μεγαλοψυχία).

This would be the topic for another paper. The current aim is a more modest one: It is to point out the flaw in the line of argument that lead to the view that the first-personal nature of well-being cannot be reconciled with the intuition that well-being can be shared in a straightforward sense. This flaw is in the tacit assumption that the first-personal nature of well-being is limited to the *singular.* This is a mistake because there is the first person *plural,* too. The way in which being well together is first personal is in the plural. Participatory well-being is tied to joint action in the same way individual well-being is tied to individual action. Being well together is what we, together, ultimately want and it is in the virtuous form of our joint activity. Such well-being does not imply the delusion that my agency somehow extends into yours and thereby displaces your agency, but it is based on the insight that agency can be joint in such a way that both of us participate in a common endeavor. If this endeavor is virtuous, it constitutes well-being that is not mine or thine, but *ours.*

Thus the "extension in the subject of well-being" at stake here is not the displacement of the second person by the first person, but the move from the first person singular to the first person plural.

It may not initially seem convincing, however, that the mere fact that individuals act jointly somehow involves the "extension of the subject of well-being". If the subject of well-being is "us, together" in a way that implies a whole that contains us as parts, it seems that the subject of the virtuous joint activity must be plural. Looking at the recent literature on joint action, such a claim seems to receive only weak support. Most authors agree that joint actions are collectively intentional, but only few authors claim that collective intentionality has a plural subject in the sense of there being a group who "has" the intention in question (cf. Schweikard/Schmid 2013). Most authors answer the question of what's collective about collective intentionality by pointing towards the *content* (e.g., Michael E. Bratman [2014]) or the *mode* (e.g., John R. Searle [2010] and Raimo Tuomela [2013]) of the intentionality in question. For a long time, Margaret Gilbert (1989) has been unique in pushing a plural subject account of collective intentionality, and her account has been met with serious objections. Instead of entering this extended debate – out of which, in my view, a revised version of the plural subject account emerges victorious –, let us again look at Aristotle and see how a plural subject account of joint activity (and thereby of participatory well-being) could be construed with the action-theoretic tools he provides. There may be a bit of a lacuna to be filled here. As seen above, the existing literature on Aristotle's virtuous friendship as an account of joint action has largely focused on the claim that what is joint about joint action comes from the *joint reasoning* from which the action issues. Yet this only pushes the question further back. After all, reasoning is just another activity. What is the feature in virtue of which *this* activity is joint, that is, a unified activity of reasoning, rather than a case of two or more individual reasonings that are interlinked in such a way that each comes to the same conclusion? What is the feature in virtue of which the conclusion is *one* that is reached *together* rather than an interlinked aggregate of individual conclusions?

It is certainly true that not only activities that issue from deliberation can be joint activities. Just as there are spontaneous individual actions that do not issue from a prior intention (cf. Bratman 1987, 126f.; Velleman 2007), there are cases of spontaneous joint action such as an improvised Jazz jam session (cf., e.g., Tuomela 2007, 274). It may not even seem altogether convincing that such spontaneous activities should be somehow less important to our well-

being – individually or collective – than fully reasoned choices, as Aristotle clearly claims. More importantly, however, even if one assumes that only reasoned activities can be joint in a way that is relevant for being well together, the question of what exactly is joint in joint activity, is not to be answered simply by pointing out that kind of activity. So the crucial question remains open: what is the feature in virtue of which some activities are joint activities? What would an Aristotelian account of collective intentionality look like?

Looking at the decisive chapter 9 of book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* more closely, a feature hits the eye which has not been taken sufficiently into account in the received literature (an exception is Hitz 2011). Aristotle devotes large parts of this chapter to a discussion of a theme which is recurrent in his work: the idea that – liberally translated – human activity is typically *conscious* activity; there is a sort of awareness – the term Aristotle uses is αἴσθησις here – of our activities. "one who sees is conscious that he sees, one who hears that he hears, one who walks that he walks, and similarly for all the other human activities there is a faculty that is conscious of their exercise" (1169b). It is, Aristotle then continues to argue, essentially in virtue of the *self-awareness* that virtuous action constitutes well-being, suggesting that it is self-awareness of virtuous activity that makes existence desirable. The next step in the argument makes the crucial move. Earlier in book 9, Aristotle has pointed out several ways in which an agent's relation to his or her friend parallels, or is identical with, the relation of an agent to himself, culminating in the parallel between individual self-love and love of friends in virtuous friendship. In chapter 9, Aristotle seems to spell this out in terms of self-knowledge or self-awareness.

To my knowledge, Zena Hitz' interpretation of Aristotle's conception of friendship is unique in that she focuses on the relation between friendship and self-knowledge. In her thorough and careful examination, Hitz points out that it is in the role of self-knowledge of one's friends' action that a solution to the problems that have been diagnosed in previous interpretations can be found. The way in which one's friends' actions are "somehow one's own" is not in some delusional extension of one's own agency, but in a sort of knowledge of the activities in question. But of course, the paradox reappears immediately: how can an agent be self-aware of another agent? It is important to take a closer look at the decisive passage here. The way Aristotle puts his point across is not by claiming that an agent has *the same* αἴσθησις of his or her friend's action or existence as of her own. Rather, Aristotle says that an agent ought to have αἴσθησις of his or her friend's virtuous action *together* with the friend (1170b). The word Aristotle uses here is συναισθάνεσθαι, "being aware together", meaning that the αἴσθησις in question is a συναίσθησις – in this latter, nominal form, the term only seems to occur once in the *corpus Aristotelicum.* In EE 1245b, Aristotle emphasizes that while it be desirable to extend the sharing of αἴσθησις to many, it can be actualized only with the few with whom one actually lives together; the sharing of one's life determine the limits of that "community of consciousness". Yet it is clear that in spite of these tight social limitations placed on the actual sharing of self-knowledge, Aristotle's remarks on the role of συναισθάνεσθαι and συναίσθησις prepare the concept of the "shared perception" the "shared sense" (κοινὴ αἴσθησις) placed at the heart of human sociality in book 1 of the *Politics* (P 1253a).

Aquinas translated Aristotle's κοινὴ αἴσθησις with „sensus communis" and, over the course of a long and often reconstructed history, this has turned into the „common sense" many social and political philosophers have assigned a core place in their thought, usually giving it the meaning of the basic mental capacities, dispositions, and attitudes people can usually be expected to have and that therefore provides a non-idiosyncratic and impartial standard of judgment. If the interpretation given above is correct, however, Aristotle's conception of the common sense provides a deeper reason why any such common sense should be distributively

general. Each of us has common sense because we have common sense *together,* collectively, in that common sense is awareness of the way in which we live and act together.

The later history of common sense has covered up the collective root of common sense. But the difference between a merely distributive understanding of common sense and an understanding of common sense as collective does matter. In the exclusively distributive reading, the sense in question just happens to be common in something like the way in which each human usually happens to have one nose and two ears. It is only in the reading that extends to the collective dimension that common sense is transparent as the basic feature of the kind of activity that is our shared life. Each of us has common sense for him- or herself *because* we have common sense *together*. Seeing common sense as something in which each of us participates rather than just as something each of us instantiates for him- or herself opens up a perspective on how common sense is *contingent* rather than something like an unchangeable "given" of our social life, as it seems to be seen in conservative views. If common sense is seen as our awareness of the way in which we live together, it is obvious that our common sense is a feature of what we do, jointly, as societies. And this is up to *us, together.*

This brings us to a final point, which concerns the relation between the συναισθάνεσθαι in virtue of which our activity in our shared lives is a joint activity and the θεωρεῖν of virtuous action that according to NE IX 9 adds to our well-being (cf. above sect. 1). Aristotle claims of that in θεωρεῖν, in seeing and recognizing virtuous action we experience a pleasure that is essential for a life that is fully happy. This θεωρεῖν is obviously not the αἴσθησις we have encountered in this section and that is part and parcel of any conscious activity (in the way that any hearing involves the awareness of hearing) – even though both attitudes are self-referential and have the same target, that is, the activity. It is tempting and perhaps not too much of a stretch to reconstruct the difference between these two self-referential attitudes as the difference between pre-reflective, non-thematic, non-objectifying self-awareness on the one hand, and reflective self-knowledge on the other. If this is the case, the kind of θεωρεῖν that makes us fully happy that Aristotle is looking for in NE IX, 9, would be reflective self-knowledge of shared activity: making explicit and thematic the pre-reflective συναίσθησις that marks our shared activity.

Here, I claim, is the key to an understanding of how well-being can be participatory without displacing the other as an agent. The way in which agents can be well together in a participatory sense is by having self-knowledge of what they are jointly self-aware of, that is, their shared activity. The θεωρεῖν in question is the knowing that whatever each of us is doing in living together (συζῆν) is unified by a strong common sense. Living well together is conscious activity, and it is not that I am conscious of what I do and have observational or inferential knowledge of what you are doing, knowing that *mutatis mutandis,* the same is true for you and that there is some structure of common knowledge between us. Rather, the consciousness in virtue of which our shared life is *ours, collectively,* rather than yours and mine, distributively, is *plural* consciousness, or συναΐσθησις, that is, αἴσθησις that is *ours* rather than yours and mine. The consciousness in question is plural pre-reflective self-awareness (Schmid 2013), and in the right way of seeing and recognizing that activity (θεωρεῖν), our activity is not only to be seen as a distribution of individual activities, but it should be grasped from its collective ground. Being well together is acting virtuously together and knowing it.

This step from the singular to the plural is how Aristotle's account of participatory well-being involves an "extension of the subject of well-being". It is not delusional, it does not imply a self-aggrandizing view of the extension of one's power into the domain of what is up to others, and it is certainly not "a collapse of the very notion of well-being", as Crisp claims.

Rather, it adequately describes how agency is marked by a sense of self, and how that sense of self is plural where agents live closely together and engage in joint activities. You do not thereby become "I" and "I" am not you. Yet you and I are *us,* and as such, we can be well together in such a way as to participate in a well-being that is not just an aggregate or distribution of individual well-beings, but a collective well-being. It is in this sense that it is not only true that what each of us wants in his or her own life is to be well, but that what *we jointly* want to do in our *shared life* is to be *well together,* too. And it is in this sense that your well-being is not only a prerequisite or a product of my virtuous activity, but something in which we participate insofar as we are living together rather than leading mutually interdependent, but separate lives.

References

Bratman, Michael E. (1987): *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reasons.* Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press.

Cooper, John M. (1977): "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle." *Philosophical Review* 86, 290-315.

Cooper, John M. (1985): "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune." *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 2, pp. 173-196.

Crisp, Roger (2013): "Well-Being." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/well-being/).

Hitz, Zena (2011): "Aristotle on Self-Knowledge and Friendship." *Philosopher's Imprint* 11, 1-28.

Kahn, Charles K. (1981): "Aristotle and Altruism." *Mind* 90/375, 20-40.

Kosman, Aryeh (2004): "Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends." *Ancient Philosophy* 24, 135-154.

Price, Anthony W. (1989): *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle.* Oxford, OUP.

Rovane, Carol (1998): *The Bounds of Agency. An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics.* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Schmid, Hans Bernhard (2013): "Plural Self-Awareness." …

Schweikard, David P./Schmid Hans Bernhard (2013): "Collective Intentionality." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collective-intentionality/).

Sherman, Nancy (1997): *Making a Necessity of Virtue. Aristotle and Kant on Virtue.* Cambridge, CUP.

Smith-Pangle, L. (2003): *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship.* Cambridge, CUP.

Tuomela, Raimo (2007): *The Philosophy of Sociality. The Shared Point of View.* Oxford, OUP.

Velleman, David J. (2007): "What Good is a Will?" in A. Leist (ed.), *Action in Context.* Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 193-215.