I. Introduction

All people wish to do well. Nobody disagrees about whether or not one wishes to do well. It is even stupid or ridiculous to raise such a question; as a matter of fact, there seems to be a formal agreement with regard to that. Now, since we wish to do well, the question should be how we are to do so. This is the puzzling aspect of the issue, on which almost everyone disagrees. Apparently, the most natural answer is “through having goods” or rather “many goods.” But at this point one has to face an extremely difficult problem: what is the good or what is a true (or “real”) good? Can something be a good because of the fact that it looks pleasant and beneficial just in the short term, or in order for something to be really good should it be pleasant and beneficial in the middle and in the long term as well? Is there any reason to think that if one does not have his or her cognitive abilities trained enough he or she is deceived by what is always most pleasant (in the short term), so that it seems to be of highest worth?

As is obvious for any reader familiar with some of Plato’s early dialogues, this is just a paraphrase of some well known remarks contained in texts, such as Protagoras, (Prot. 354a-d; 356b5-8; 357d1), Euthydemus (Eu. 278e3-280b6), and Gorgias (Gor. 464d1-465a2), where the distinction between the apparent and real good is suggested. The difficulty put forward by Socrates (Plato) in these passages was earnestly considered by all the philosophers who were worried about the subject. In fact, the discussion of whether just people (or, in general, virtuous people) live better and are happier than unjust people is not a haphazard topic, but one that should be seriously taken: how we ought to live, the most serious issue

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1 For their questions, advice, and critical remarks I am grateful to John Cleary, Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer, Gary Gurtler, Marina McCoy, Michael Pakaluk, David Roochnik, and especially Iakovos Vasiliou, my commentator in the BACAP session. I am also indebted to the anonymous referees for their criticisms. This piece was written with the financial support of Universidad de los Andes (Chile, project FIL-002-03).
that everyone should take into account \((\text{Gor.} \ 500c1-4; \ \text{Republic} [\text{Rep.}] \ 352d2-6)\). Everyone remembers the opening pages of Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} (\textit{EN}), where he lays down that all people (both the many and the refined) are in agreement on the fact that the highest good—among the goods that are achievable for human beings—is happiness, and they suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy. There is a sharp controversy, however, regarding what happiness is, and the many and the wise do not account for it similarly \((\text{EN}, 1095a16-22)\). Even the Stoics, who establish a semantic equivalence between such expressions as “living according to nature,” “living honorably,” “living well,” “to be happy,” and “to live according to virtue,” are willing to accept the Socratic-Platonic view. Accordingly, the Stoics distinguish the mere “living” from “living well” \((\text{a point on which there is general agreement})\), and are in line with the Socratic-Platonic tradition maintaining that living well means living in accordance with virtue, which is what happiness consists in.\(^2\)

I am perfectly aware that the subject I intend to deal with is too large to be examined in detail within the limits of a single paper. The aim of this essay is to sketch an account of how the distinction “apparent-real good” is meant to be understood in a line of thought that begins with Socrates, is critically developed by Aristotle—in his criticism of the Socratic account of human motivation—and is resumed by the older Stoics. My most general claim is that, in spite of the fact that the Socratic insight into the way human action should be grasped is always puzzling in its details, and that Aristotle (and probably the mature Plato) disagreed with it at some important points, none of them was able to get rid of some Socratic features in accounting for the complex mechanism that takes place between desire and cognition when what is intended is to explain human action. I will begin by describing some well known Socratic theses, placing emphasis on some issues I consider that were particularly relevant both for Aristotle and the Stoics. With regard to Aristotle I will explore the way in which he appears to have incorporated some Socratic topics into his own moral discussion and how he refined them within his account of action. Finally,\

\(^2\) See Stobaeus, \textit{Eclogae}, (\textit{Ecl.}) 2.77, 16-78, 6, ed. Wachsmuth (cf. \textit{SVF} 3.16 and LS 63A; compare this Stobaeus’ passage with Plato, \textit{Crito}, 48b5-d3: it is not living that matters but living well, this meaning “living according to virtue”). See also Clement, \textit{Stromateis}, 7.10, 5.5 1-3, ed. Stählin-Früchtel-Treu (\textit{SVF} 3.511), who, in a presumably Stoic manner, says that all action done by the one having knowledge \((\text{epistemon})\) is doing well \((\text{eupragia})\). When possible, in the quotation of the Stoic passages I shall indicate the section and number text of the cited passage in Anthony A. Long & David N. Sedley, 1987, 2 volumes; abbreviated LS (followed by the section and text number), and in Herman von Arnim, 1903-1905, 3 volumes (abbreviated \textit{SVF}).