I. Introduction

In Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*), Aristotle seeks to identify the human good, which he also calls *eudaimonia* or happiness (I 4, 1095a14-20) and which he explains as that for the sake of which one should do everything one does (I 7, 1097a22-24 and 1097a25-b21). After introducing the idea (in chapters one through three) and surveying some received accounts of it (in chapters four through six), he seems to give his definition in the seventh chapter, where he appeals to the human function and concludes that “the human good is activity of the [rational] soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are multiple virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue” (I 7, 1098a16-18). This account is sketchy, as Aristotle admits (I 7, 1098a20-22): he needs to say what virtuous activity is, how many virtues there are, and whether some one virtue is best and most complete. But the account has enough content to suit Aristotle’s initial purposes (I 7, 1098a22-b8) and to court interpretive controversy.

Perhaps the most obvious controversy is this: Does Aristotle really mean that the human good is just virtuous rational activity? Are health and wealth, not to mention friends and lovers, *not* part of the goal for the sake of which one should do everything one does? Many readers think that Aristotle does not intend such a narrow account. Some point to what he says about happiness before he comes to the human function argument, or to what he says about the good human life outside of Book One in, say, his discussion of friendship. But others point to what he says about happiness in Book One *after* he produces his apparently narrow definition. In *EN* I 8-12, Aristotle tests his account against what is commonly said about happiness, and he affirms that goods external to the soul—"external goods"—are necessary for happiness. Some readers insist that in these chapters he also expands his definition of happiness to include the external goods.

In this essay, I tackle just this last part of the question: my exegetical thesis is that Aristotle sticks by his narrow account of happiness from its
introduction in *EN I 7* through the rest of Book One. What I propose to show is restricted: I leave aside concerns from Book One that precede the function argument and those from outside Book One. Moreover, what I propose to show is unoriginal: the debate over Aristotle’s definition of the human good is well established, and others have supported the claim that he sticks to a narrow definition of happiness as virtuous rational activity.

But I do have three exotic fish to fry. First, I support my exegetical thesis by providing a map of *EN I 8-12* as a whole. The thorny and much-discussed passages that directly pertain to the relation between external goods and Aristotle’s account of happiness are contestable, but I argue that the transitions throughout *EN I 8-12* make Aristotle’s intentions plain. Second, to uphold my exegetical thesis, I maintain that in *EN I 8-12* Aristotle claims that external goods are necessary for happiness only because they are necessary for virtuous rational activity, and to defend this, in turn, I offer a new account of why he thinks that external goods are necessary for virtuous rational activity. My account innovates by attributing to Aristotle the view (roughly) that virtuous people have a psychological need for certain external goods. Third, I develop my account in terms of Aristotle’s distinction between wish and choice. On my view, he wants us to choose activity while we merely wish for good fortune and the external goods that good fortune brings. But as I shall argue, Aristotle also believes, first, that choosing virtuously requires wishing for external goods that cannot be chosen, because virtue is partly constituted by the correct appreciation of value, and second, that our capacity to choose virtuously is diminished when we do not get what we wish for. These previously unacknowledged claims about the relation between wish and choice help to explain why Aristotle believes that external goods are necessary for virtuous activity and thereby happiness. They also seem to me both striking and quite possibly true. My primary purpose here is to bring them to light.

II. “In a complete life” (*EN I 7, 1098a18-20*)

I start with my exegetical thesis. I maintain that Aristotle sticks by his narrow definition of happiness as virtuous activity after he introduces it in *EN I 7*. There is a challenge to this thesis even before *EN I 8-12*. Upon completing his function argument and concluding that happiness is virtuous activity, Aristotle immediately adds, “And in a complete life” (*EN I 7, 1098a18-20*). It is possible to hear in these words a reference to the need for external goods in addition to virtuous activity, and thus to hear in them