In Book I of his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle reasons that everything in life has an endpoint, a “good” towards which all knowledge and every choice is directed. This good, Aristotle believes, is happiness. Establishing happiness as the ultimate good serves as the beginning of a discussion on the central components of living life well, a discourse that examines the function of the soul and its respective parts, defines virtues as means between extremes, and classifies the different types of choice. At the center of many of these issues is the role of intelligent and moral virtue and whether they are divisive or complimentary in influencing human activity. In Book X, Aristotle repeals aspects of his earlier arguments by stating that intelligent virtue is the “highest possession we have in us,” rather than moral virtue (Aristotle 289). Aristotle’s conclusion in *Nicomachean Ethics* is not consistent with the entirety of his discussion on happiness and ignores the interdependent function of intellectual and moral virtues within the rational half of the soul, thereby calling for a life beyond the capacities of human nature.

Book X’s conclusion on the topic of happiness breaks with arguments made in earlier books and elevates the concept of supreme happiness to a point unattainable for human beings. Aristotle discusses friendship extensively across several books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in his reasoning makes it appear that friendship is necessary for happiness. In Book IX he considers it “strange that we should assign all good things to a happy man without attributing friends to him” (263). Furthermore, a man of high moral characteristics needs people with whom he can do good as it is “nobler to do good to a friend than a stranger” (263). In this way, to be supremely happy, one must have friends with whom to give and receive “good,” for that maximizes the happiness produced by friendship. That is why Aristotle’s assertion in Book X that “a life based on the activity of our reason constitutes complete happiness,” raises many ques-

---

tions. This sort of contemplative happiness is not complete, as activity based solely on reason excludes the happiness gained from friendship. Since man is “inherently a social and political being whose natural condition is to live with others,” this contemplative happiness appears not only to contradict earlier arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics* but calls for a life that is superhuman (264). If complete happiness is an endpoint, a thing towards which all things strive, as stated in Book I, Aristotle's idea of contemplative happiness insinuates that society is the reverse of the true good, that isolation among human beings is complete happiness and therefore the greatest good. Book X is not exclusively inconsistent but suggests an ultimate existence against the very nature of man.

Aristotle’s construction of the soul creates a dependent relationship between intellectual and moral virtue, which makes the elevation of one virtue above the other a trite and contrary resolution to an otherwise detailed discussion. In Book I, Aristotle divides the soul into the rational and the irrational. The rational element of the soul encourages a person to follow the “right” path. By following this path, the person is considered “morally strong.” Aristotle then further divides the rational element of the soul into intellectual virtue and moral virtue, which rule different functions of a person. Intellectual virtue is the basis of theoretical wisdom, understanding, practical wisdom, and is formed by teaching. Moral virtue controls generosity and self control, and is conditioned by habit (32). Aristotle says that in the pursuit of moral virtue, one must exercise choice. According to this understanding of the soul, the culmination of teaching and habit is the essence of a person. By dividing the rational element of the soul in half, Aristotle indicates that a person is not complete without both intelligent and moral virtue. Thus, it seems impossible that one virtue could be considered greater than the other. It analogous to considering whether the brain is better than the heart; yes, it provides us with thought and intelligence, but it cannot function without the heart, nor could the heart function without the brain. One cannot be more important than the other because without the other there is nothing. Indeed, the placing of intellectual virtue over moral virtue in Book X is simply absurd when considering Aristotle’s construction of the soul in Book I.

The disparity between Book X and the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is due
to the perception of intellectual virtue as superior to moral virtue. A contemplative happiness based solely on reason and isolation contradicts Aristotle’s earlier arguments for friendship based on moral virtue and promotes a path of life contrary to human nature. Also, the apparent interdependence of intellectual virtue and moral virtue based on the discussion of their functions in earlier books collides with their hierarchical placement in Book I, alienating the last book from the rest of the work. It is certainly curious why Aristotle feels a need to distinguish one virtue as superior to the other after discussing their respective merits. His love of intellectual virtue may be much like Plato’s love for philosophers; perhaps he thinks what he loves most is the best. As great of an irony as that would be, Aristotle’s arguments for rationality should not go unnoticed for the slight tangent in Book X does not totally corrupt the value of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a guide to living life conscientiously.