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The ergon argument in Aristotle's ethics

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Abbreviations

Aristotle

<i>An. post.</i>	<i>Analytica posteriora</i>
<i>An. pr.</i>	<i>Analytica priora</i>
<i>Cael.</i>	<i>De caelo</i>
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Categoriae</i>
<i>De an.</i>	<i>De anima</i>
<i>Eth. Eud.</i>	<i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>Eth. Nic.</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Gen. an.</i>	<i>De generatione animalium</i>
<i>Gen. corr.</i>	<i>De generatione et corruptione</i>
<i>Hist. an.</i>	<i>Historia animalium</i>
<i>Mag. mor.</i>	<i>(Magna moralia)</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Mete.</i>	<i>Meteorologica</i>
<i>Part. an.</i>	<i>De partibus animalium</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Physica</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica</i>

Plato

<i>Alc.</i>	<i>Alcibiades</i>
<i>Cri.</i>	<i>Crito</i>
<i>Euthyd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>Hp. mai.</i>	<i>Hippias maior</i>
<i>Lach.</i>	<i>Laches</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Leges</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phlb.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Respublica</i>
<i>Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

Iamblichus

<i>DCMS</i>	<i>De Communi Mathematica Scientia</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>

Unless otherwise noted the texts used and cited in this book are all from the Thesaurus Linguae Graeca (TLG).

Introduction

The following book is a study in the groundwork of Aristotle's ethics. It examines the so-called *ergon* argument, which first appears in Plato's dialogues, more precisely at the end of the first book of the *Republic*. Aristotle presents this argument in three treatises concerned with ethics: *Protrepticus*, *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹ Despite Aristotle's sweeping criticism of Plato's ethics,² it seems Aristotle inherited this argument from his teacher and, as I will argue, even accepted its role in ethical exposition.

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that everyone agrees that the highest good, which is attainable through our actions, i.e. not as a divine gift or a result of luck, is called happiness (εὐδαιμονία, *Eth. Nic.* 1.4, 1095a17-20).³ Yet, there is disagreement both among the lay and expert public as to what *eudaimonia* entails. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle agrees that *eudaimonia* is the highest good and is what we ultimately strive for. What is *eudaimonia* then? First, he clearly sets forth that *eudaimonia* is an activity (ἐνέργεια).⁴ Generally speaking, it is a certain activity performed by the soul (its part or parts) in accordance with virtue (*Eth. Nic.* 1099b26, 1102a5; *Eth. Eud.* 1219a38-39). Any further specification, I will argue, depends on which of Aristotle's texts one reads. The

¹ Throughout this book, I use Grube's translation revised by Reeve of Plato's *Republic*, translation of the *Protrepticus* by Hutchinson and Johnson, Kenny's translation of the *Eudemian Ethics* and Ross' translation revised by Lesley Brown for the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I explicitly point out whenever I dare to vary from these translations.

² Cf. most notably in Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6.

³ The most usual English translation of εὐδαιμονία is happiness, other possibilities are flourishing or prosperity. I will keep the term εὐδαιμονία merely transliterated wherever the context allows; I will deal with the term ἔργον in the same manner, cf. footnote 6 below.

⁴ E.g. *Eth. Nic.* 1098a16-18, 1099a29-30, 1102a5, 1153b10-11, 1177a16-18; *Eth. Eud.* 1219a38-9; or *Pol.* 1328a37-9, 1332a7-9; cf. Heinaman (2007).

Protrepticus does not provide a clear definition, as it argues that whether *eudaimonia* is wisdom, virtue or pleasure, it is always confined to the realm of theoretical philosophy.⁵ According to the *Eudemian Ethics*, it is the complex activity of living, given that the relevant virtue in question is a complete virtue comprising all other virtues as its parts, namely καλοκάγαθία (*Eth. Eud.* 8.3, 1248b8-11). On the other hand, I maintain that according to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *eudaimonia* is the activity of reason, θεωρία (*Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177a18, 1177a24, 1177b19-1177b25; 1178b28-32).

Regardless of these different outcomes and strategies, what always lies at the heart of the ethical theories developed in these writings is the *ergon* argument. How can we define it? Let's begin with the question: what is *ergon* (ἔργον)? The most common English translation is 'function' and therefore the argument itself has garnered recognition under the name 'function argument'.⁶ Yet, this translation might be misleading, since *ergon* can be, for example, a thing or product (a shoe in the case of shoemaking) as well as the activity itself (seeing in the case of sight). Perhaps the closest approximation is that of 'function,' as defined in the second entry in *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'an activity or mode of operation that is proper or natural to a person or thing; the purpose or intended role of a thing.'⁷

⁵ Iambl., *Protr.*, 7, 41.7-24 and 12, 59.24-60.10; throughout this book I use Pistelli's edition from 1888, reprinted at 1996.

⁶ A list of the different possible translations of ἔργον in Aristotle's ethics can be found in Baker (2015, 229–30); LSJ offers possible meanings such as work, deed, occupation, matter (i.e. an issue or difficulty as in 'what's the matter?') and function. It will be clear from my interpretation that 'function' can be a misleading understanding of the term. Clark (1975, 15) nicely illustrates how Hardie (1968, 23) mistakenly argues that since *ergon* is to be understood as function, a human being does not have *ergon* unless we understand human beings as instruments designed for a particular use. Similarly, Shields (2007, 316) opens his discussion of the *ergon* argument as if 'function' were the exact translation and meaning of the term. Adkins (1984) provides a good survey of the general meaning of the term 'ergon' in Aristotle as well as other authors.

⁷ Checked in 'function, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/75476. Accessed 31 January 2020.

However, not even this definition spans the same semantic range as *ergon*, as it clearly leaves out e.g. products and artefacts.

It is always an *ergon* of something and it tells us something important about the entity whose *ergon* it is.⁸ Furthermore, we will see that Aristotle believes that the good of a given entity is to be found in its *ergon*.⁹ How can this claim be understood? When one wants to know if a certain flute player is good, let him play. One can tell a good flute player by how well he plays, which is his *ergon*. Similarly, if one wants to know whether a certain house is good, one should consider if it ‘functions’ or ‘works’ properly as a house. If so, it is a good house. This is similarly applicable in the case of a horse or dog. If it does what it is supposed to do as a horse or dog well, then it is a good horse or a good dog. The same reasoning applies across the domains of crafts or occupations, artefacts, as well as living entities.

How does Aristotle use the *ergon* argument?¹⁰ It is important to note that the *ergon* argument does not argue that a human being has *ergon*. The claim that a human being has *ergon* is an assumption usually supported in the text of the *ergon* argument, though it is not at the core of the *ergon* argument.¹¹ In my interpretation, I will show that the *ergon* argument plays a dual role both for Plato and Aristotle. First, the *ergon* argument serves as a formal explanation of the relations between a given entity, its virtue and its *ergon*. It

⁸ Arist., *Mete.* 4.12, 390a10-12: ‘What anything is is defined by its *ergon*: a thing really is what it is when it can perform its *ergon*, for example an eye when it can see. When something cannot perform its *ergon*, it is that thing in name only, like a dead eye or one made of stone.’ Cf. *Part. an.* 640b33-641a6, 648a15-16; *Gen. an.* 731a25-6; *Metaph.* 1045b32-4; *Eth. Nic.* 1176a3-9; and *Pol.* 1253a23-25. An extensive list of passages showing how Aristotle understands the term *ergon* can be found in Reeve (2014, 217).

⁹ *Protr.* 7, 42.5-9; *Eth. Nic.* 1.7, 1097b26-27.

¹⁰ See Korsgaard (1986), Lawrence (2001) and recently Scaltsas (2019) for a discussion about the role of the argument.

¹¹ Shields (2007, 318) elaborates on this claim; in Aristotle’s case, the concept of *ergon* must be understood together with its appearances in the *Physics*, *Metaphysics* and his biological texts. Contra Karbowski (2019, 221); cf. Adkins (1984, 34–5).

explains what is a virtue and how it relates to the entity of which it is a virtue. Typically, the *ergon* argument posits that a given entity does a certain activity (or produces a given product) well due to the corresponding virtue.¹² The virtue is a quality which ensures that a given activity or product is produced well. For example, if the *ergon* of a knife is to cut, the corresponding virtue might be sharpness, meaning that the knife cuts well when it is sharp, i.e., it cuts well because of the sharpness. The first role is the explanation of the relations between the entity, *ergon* and virtue.¹³ The term ἀρετή (virtue or sometimes translated as excellence) is used in ethics in the same way as it is used in other domains. What makes it unique in the domain of moral philosophy is the fact that it is the ἀρετή of us, human beings, and as such is used to explain *human* good. Simply put, the importance of this concept stems from the fact that we are human and it is thus the good of mankind that is in question. Otherwise, the concept is the same when talking about the virtue of a knife or shoemaking: virtue is the quality which makes a given activity or product a good one.

Furthermore, Aristotle (following Plato) uses the *ergon* argument as the first step in transitioning from the formal characteristics of *eudaimonia*, or the good, towards a substantive account of human good and therefore into an exposition of what *eudaimonia* actually entails. I will demonstrate that in Plato's *Republic*, the *ergon* argument serves as the first positive argument against Thrasymachus, which reveals not only the failures and inconsistencies of Thrasymachus' position, as the preceding arguments did, but reveals something about Socrates' own conception of human good. Both in the *Eudemian* and

¹² Nicely described by Clark (1975, 16): 'we are here concerned with what an entity does, not what is done to it.'

¹³ For example J. Cooper (1975, 146) complains that the *ergon* argument is too formal to be informative; however, I believe that he neglects the other, substantial aspect of it. A much more nuanced interpretation can be found in Lawrence (2001, 453): 'the function argument, on the formal reading, may be disappointingly abstract about human excellence, but surely it is materially informative about human function: "the practical life of the part which has reason" (1098a3-5). And this is hardly purely formal'.

Nicomachean Ethics, the *ergon* argument appears exactly as a transition from the formal characteristics of *eudaimonia* to a substantive account of what it consists of.¹⁴

These two roles are, of course, interconnected, as the formal aspect of the *ergon* argument lends itself easily to argumentation concerning its content. However, this then opens up the discussion regarding the substantive components behind the formal scheme, which - in the case of ethics - concerns the human being, the soul and its various activities and parts. In this respect, the *ergon* argument constitutes part of the biological-metaphysical foundation of Aristotle's ethics.¹⁵ To a certain degree, this also includes Aristotle's science of living things, such as his conception of the soul (*ψυχή*) and living (*ζωή*). It will be further demonstrated that natural teleology is also intrinsic to Aristotle's ethics and that the interpretation of the *ergon* argument must work in conjunction with metaphysical notions such as 'goal' (*τέλος*)¹⁶ and 'activity' (*ἐνεργεία*).

Furthermore, the *ergon* argument reveals the human situation within the Aristotelian cosmos. Aristotle is explicit in that human beings are not the best in the world (*Eth. Nic.* 6.7,

¹⁴ Since the *Protrepticus* is not a general treatise on ethics and seems to have a dialectical task, namely the defence of a theoretical philosophy, its position is slightly different or rather inverse: it explains the fundamental relationship between engaging with theoretical philosophy and our human nature; cf. Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) and Hutchinson and Johnson (2018) for the status of Aristotle's lost text which will be discussed later.

¹⁵ Philipp Brüllmann understands the argument as a transition from an account about what humans want to an essential discussion about *eudaimonia*; see Brüllmann (2010, 119): 'Das Ergon-Argument markiert den Wechsel von einer Betrachtung dessen, was Menschen kontingenterweise erstreben, zu einer Betrachtung dessen, was die *eudaimonia* tatsächlich ist.'

¹⁶ See *Cael.* 286a8-9 where Aristotle considers *ergon* as a goal: 'everything that has *ergon* is for the sake of its *ergon*' (cf. *Part. an.* 4.12, 694b13-15) and in the *Eudemian Ethics* he explicitly states that 'each thing's function is its goal' (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a8). See other passages where 'goal' and 'good' come together in an explication of final causality such as *Ph.* 2.3, 195a23-26; *Metaph.* 5.2, 1013b25-28; some additional points are made at *Metaph.* 1.3, 983a31; 2.2, 996a23-26; 11.1, 1059a35-38.

1141a20-23; cf. *Eth. Eud.* 1.7, 1217a22),¹⁷ though compared to other mortal living beings, they have one crucial capacity, namely reason, which elevates man closer to the divine.¹⁸ We are living beings and have something in common with plants and animals; yet we are capable of thinking, exercising our intellect, and we can contemplate (θεωρεῖν). This makes us similar to—what Aristotle considers to be— god.¹⁹ Another thing which further differentiates us from the animals is *eudaimonia*. Other animals can live well, but only human beings can experience *eudaimonia*.²⁰ The *ergon* argument focuses on the specific characteristics possessed by human beings and thus serves as the ultimate explanation for Aristotle’s conclusions that ‘it would be strange (ἄτοπον) if someone chose for himself not his own life, but that of someone else,’²¹ and ‘no-one chooses to have everything at the price of becoming what he is not.’²² The *ergon* argument explains Aristotle’s insistence as to why ethics are to be grounded in human nature and moreover why he maintains that living in accordance with this nature (which may include the important aspect of the divine, as we will see) is good.

This biological- metaphysical groundwork of Aristotelian ethics is unanimously rejected by the Aristotelizing revival of virtue ethics which appeared around the middle of the 20th century. A paradigmatic example is MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, where MacIntyre introduces

¹⁷ This position does not necessarily have to be in conflict with anthropocentrism; the fact that the composition of the universe benefits human beings is not inconsistent with the fact that there is ultimately a different aim or object of aspiration for the entire universe, namely god, cf. Sedley (1991); for a critical discussion of Sedley’s interpretation see Johnson (2005, 226–7, 231–7).

¹⁸ Cf. Roche (1988, 183) and Johnson (2018).

¹⁹ See Walker (2018) and particularly Sedley (1997) on the platonic heritage of Aristotle’s conception of the assimilation to the divine in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.

²⁰ See for example *De an.* 3.12, 434b22-25; *Part. an.* 2.10, 656a3-8; *Eth. Eud.* 1.7, 1217a29; *Eth. Nic.* 1.9, 1099b32-33; 10.8 1178b24-28.

²¹ *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1178a2-3.

²² *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a19.

his own modern and non-metaphysical concept of virtue: ‘any adequate teleological account must provide us with some clear and defensible account of the telos; and any adequate generally Aristotelian account must supply a teleological account which can replace Aristotle’s metaphysical biology.’²³ Yet, the importance of the *ergon* argument as partially forming the groundwork of ethics, which is apparent in the *Protrepticus* as well as in the two *Ethics* by Aristotle, suggests that modern ethical theories can be *eudaimonistic*, naturalistic and built around the concept of virtue, though without the *ergon* argument they can hardly be Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian.²⁴

The current state of the art and the aim of this book

There is a paucity of literature on the *ergon* argument as it appears in the *Republic*, since it is generally considered to be too simplistic and its use is thought to be limited to the problematic refutation of Thrasymachus.²⁵ Gerasimos Santas successfully challenges these assumptions and argues that the functional theory of the good works in conjunction with

²³ MacIntyre (2007, 163); cf. similarly Annas (1993, 15, 139). See the discussion of Aristotelianism in contemporary ethics in Rapp (2010).

²⁴ I did not find any usage of the *ergon* argument apart from Platonic-Aristotelian tradition; the closest parallel could be the stoic *telos* argument presented in Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* 9, though it works differently. Hildebrandt (unpublished) summarizes the argument as follows: 1. Human beings have a goal (cf. 49.1-15 and 49.26-51.6 Pistelli). 2. The goal is always better than the means to the goal (cf. 49.15-25). 3. Criterion: We determine the goal of natural beings (such as human beings) by looking at what comes last in the process of their development (cf. 51.16-20). 4. Last in the process of the development of human beings is (the exercise of) wisdom (cf. 51.20-52.2). 5. Thus, the goal of human beings is (the exercise of) wisdom (from 1, 3 and 4; cf. 52.2-11). 6. Thus, (the exercise of) wisdom is the highest good of human beings (from 2 and 5; cf. 52.11-16). It is clear that the criterion differs from any version of the *ergon* argument available and it does not explain why the ‘goal’ (τέλος) of a human being must be viewed as that which is latest (ὑστατον), when Aristotle himself says that in the case of human beings, τέλος is not to be understood in temporal terms since the true τέλος of a human life is the best (τὸ βέλτιστον, *Ph.* 2.2, 194a31-33).

²⁵ Blössner (1991) offers a detailed critical study, which will be discussed in Chapter One.

the metaphysical account presented in the later books of the *Republic*.²⁶ My interpretation supports Santas' general thesis and offers a more complex account on the usage of the *ergon* argument in the *Republic* as well as in other dialogues.

The *ergon* argument in Aristotle's ethics deserves a lot more attention in contemporary scholarship. I will discuss specific interpretations in my subsequent exposition. Here, I will instead call attention to previous interpretations which most informed my own understanding of the *ergon* argument. I will then introduce texts focusing on the aspects of the *ergon* argument that will not be included in my account. Finally, I will present a brief overview of the aim of this book.

Stephen Clark, for example, focuses on the political and social aspects of the *ergon* argument much more than I do. Given the importance of these aspects in Plato's *Republic*, I believe that it is still a topic worthy of discussion for scholars of Aristotle's practical philosophy.²⁷ Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the vigorous defense of the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian* as well as *Nicomachean Ethics* conducted by D. S. Hutchinson. Hutchinson presents a detailed structure of the argumentation employed in both versions of the argument and defends its validity and importance.²⁸ The subsequent interpretation will shed light on where my interpretation diverges from Hutchinson's. Moreover, I will elaborate on his account by taking into consideration the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus*.

Richard Kraut unlocked many topics in the modern debate on the *ergon* argument by inquiring about (a) the relation between the *ergon* argument and the thesis that *eudaimonia*

²⁶ Santas (1985); Santas (2006) for a critical response see Singpurwalla (2006).

²⁷ Clark (1972), cf. Clark (1975, 14–27), where the social aspect gives way to rather biological considerations.

²⁸ Hutchinson (1986, 39–72); another strong defences of the argument's validity are Achtenberg (1989) and Lawrence (2011). For argumentation against the validity of the *ergon* argument see Glassen (1957), Suits (1974) or J. Cooper (1975, 145–8).

is contemplation and (b) a detailed discussion regarding the steps of the argument, particularly concerning the condition that *ergon* is something peculiar or distinctive (ἴδιον) to us.²⁹ Kraut convincingly shows that the *ergon* argument is not ‘a complete but defective argument on behalf of the ethical virtues’ but rather ‘the foundation for a defence (sc. of virtues) that Aristotle continues to develop throughout the rest of his work’.³⁰

Timothy Roche argues that the *ergon* argument supports Ackrill’s inclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* and further strengthens the claim that the *ergon* argument might have a direct bearing upon the discussion of *eudaimonia* in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³¹

Jennifer Whiting interprets the *ergon* argument as working over the domain of natural kinds and demonstrates how Aristotle’s deliberations on the functions of living organisms always exhibit normative aspects.³²

David Reeve sees the major contribution of the *ergon* argument in that it establishes a close connection between Aristotle’s metaphysics and ethics.³³ Contrary to Roche, he argues that *ergon* actually gives evidence against inclusivism.³⁴ If Reeve’s interpretation shows how closely the *ergon* argument relates to metaphysics, Philipp Brüllmann positions the *ergon* argument within the context of Aristotle’s natural philosophy. Brüllmann focuses on the psychological and biological aspects of the argument, revealing that they can already be found in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³⁵

²⁹ Essentially found in Kraut (1979), though his interpretation is later developed in Kraut (1989, 312–27).

³⁰ Kraut (1989, 323).

³¹ Roche (1988). Müller (2003) argues that a joint interpretation of the *ergon* arguments in the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* supports an inclusive reading.

³² Whiting (1988); cf. Thompson (2008, 63–82) as an example of contemporary philosophical ethics developed in a similar direction.

³³ Reeve (1992, 99–138).

³⁴ Reeve (1992, 129).

³⁵ Brüllmann (2010, 107–48) and Brüllmann (2012).

Gavin Lawrence has devoted several articles to the *ergon* argument.³⁶ Lawrence demonstrates how informative the *ergon* argument is and argues that Aristotle's aim was to lay down 'a focal account' of human good.³⁷ Essentially what he does is elucidate what the focus should be when discussing human good and *eudaimonia* in tandem.

The most recent comprehensive study on the matter is Samuel Barker's complex study 'The concept of *ergon*'.³⁸ Baker offers a thorough interpretation of the *ergon* argument, which is—to my knowledge—the first treatment in which most of the relevant texts from the *Protrepticus*, the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* are examined in conjunction. However, it is surprising that Baker does not seem to consider the association between these texts. So, for example, the claim that '*ergon* of an X is an activity in some cases but product in others' is not a conclusion furnished by Baker, it is simply Aristotle's statement. Aristotle makes this distinction explicitly in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1. Furthermore, treating *ergon* as a *telos* is yet again explicitly stated in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1, and I will argue that it is a reaction to a specific problem with the *Protrepticus* version of the argument.³⁹ Finally, it is unclear what change Baker's 'alternative concept of an *ergon*' as 'the best achievement' actually brings forth in our understanding of Aristotle's ethics.

In this book, I would like to present a detailed interpretation of four different versions of the *ergon* argument. This endeavour makes use of the recent reconstruction, ordering and authentication of sizeable fragments of Aristotle's lost *Protrepticus* carried out by Doug

³⁶ See esp. Lawrence (2001), Lawrence (2006) and Lawrence (2011).

³⁷ Similarly Kraut (1989, 326): '... function argument is doing a good deal of work for Aristotle. It does not leave the door open to many different types of life, but narrows down our options to those devoted to thinking and mastery of thought over all other elements of human life.'

³⁸ Baker (2015).

³⁹ Cf. footnote 15 and Brüllmann (2012, 5–9).

Hutchinson and Monte Johnson.⁴⁰ Adding this new comparandum to the interpretation allows me, first, to examine the possible differences between the *ergon* arguments and their respective outcomes in the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* with regard to the *Protrepticus* version. Second, it allows for a better understanding of the relation between the *ergon* argument, as it is presented at the end of Book 1 of the *Republic*, and Aristotle's later usage of *ergon* in his own writings.

As I have mentioned above, I would like to demonstrate that Aristotle—and to a certain degree Plato in the *Republic*—uses the *ergon* argument as a stepping stone away from the discussion about the formal characteristics of *eudaimonia* towards a substantive discussion about its content. This will moreover show that the relevance of the *ergon* argument is not limited to discussions on the so-called moral or practical virtues. As shall be demonstrated, the *ergon* argument ties into the final books of the *Eudemian* as well as the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴¹

I will argue that the different versions of the *ergon* argument discussed in this book can be read as a succession, with each of the versions relating to one another, and in some particular cases, even tying directly into the previous one. Aristotle's usage of the *ergon* argument is undoubtedly inspired by Plato's *Republic*. In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle, the master of divisions and classifications, develops a complicated argumentative structure, which is as impressive as it is problematic. I believe Aristotle was motivated by the possible problems posed by the simplistic argument at the end of the *Republic* 1. However, his own argumentation in the *Protrepticus* is too complicated and exhibits several unnecessary steps

⁴⁰ See esp. Hutchinson and Johnson (2005).

⁴¹ Against e.g. Joachim (1955, 50), who argues that the *ergon* argument is merely for human good, i.e. moral virtues, whereas *θεωρία* is the work of the divine in us and therefore is not a part of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

and problems (for example, the text introduces two different *erga* and distinguishes between *ergon* on the one hand and ‘goal’, *τέλος*, on the other). I will argue that these problems are later revised in the *Eudemian Ethics* which—compared to the *Protrepticus*—presents a simplified version of the argument. Compared to the account in the *Republic*, the *Eudemian* version makes several important distinctions, such as between *ergon* as an external product and *ergon* as an activity, which are tacitly assumed but not outwardly stated in the argumentation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Finally, as I have mentioned earlier, I will argue that the *ergon* arguments are relevant not only for some of Aristotle’s ethics but that they rather serve as the groundwork for his entire ethical theory. For example, in the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *ergon* argument not only paves the way for a discussion of moral virtues, but also relates to the concluding debate on *eudaimonia* as contemplation in Book 10. The *ergon* argument itself forces the reader to consider the relation between wisdom (*σοφία*) and practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*), which is invoked in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7 when Aristotle concludes that ‘it would be strange if a man were to choose not the life of himself but that of something else.’ Therefore, a comparative interpretation of the *ergon* arguments in three different ethical writings will also shed some light on the possible doctrinal differences between the ethical theories presented in these writings.

The structure of the book

The structure of the following book is quite simple and straightforward. I will start by examining Plato’s usage of the *ergon* argument at the end of Book 1 of the *Republic* (Chapter 1). I will expand this interpretation in order to elucidate, first, that the argument is not limited to the discussion with Thrasymachus, but actually provides an interpretative basis for several important claims about justice made in the central books of the *Republic*. Second,

I will discuss some passages from the *Crito*, *Alcibiades major* and other dialogues, and I will posit that the *ergon* argument is at play in these texts as well, though it is not explicitly developed in these dialogues.

The rest of the book will concern different versions of Aristotle's *ergon* argument. First, I will focus on the lost *Protrepticus* (Chapter 2). As it is not within my power to attest to the authenticity of the available fragments I will rely on the recent findings of Doug Hutchinson and Monte Johnson.⁴² My interpretation will focus on the role of the *ergon* argument in the general argumentation of the *Protrepticus*. According to this line of argumentation, regardless of whether *eudaimonia* is understood to be some form of wisdom, virtue or enjoyment, living happily is either exclusively or in large part limited to the philosophers.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument. First, I will examine how it can be seen as a reaction to the *Protrepticus*. I will go on to reveal the direct link between the opening chapter of Book 2 of the *Eudemian Ethics* and its conclusion in Chapter 3, Book 8. I will then elaborate why the *ergon* argument is good grounds for this close relation between the beginning and end of Aristotle's own substantive account of *eudaimonia*. Based on this interpretation, a general observation will be made concerning the usage of the term ὄρος in the *Eudemian Ethics*, given the absence of this term in the arguments of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Chapter 4 is an interpretation of the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As this version of the argument is the most studied, I will also respond to the most common objections to the argument.

⁴² See esp. Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) and their website <http://protrepticus.info/> for updated information about the *Protrepticus*.

The fifth and final, 'The *ergon* argument and *eudaimonia*', will reveal the relevance of the *ergon* argument for the discussion of *eudaimonia* in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will posit that Aristotle differentiates between the concept of *eudaimonia* on the one hand and the notion of a happy life (βίος) on the other. I will then argue that throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers *eudaimonia* to be the activity (ἐνέργεια) of contemplation (θεωρία).

Synopsis of the argument of the book:

- (1) Plato's *Republic* is the first text where we find a full exposition of the *ergon* argument. Its role is (a) to elucidate the concept of virtue and (b) provide the groundwork for the subsequent argumentation that a just life is in all relevant respects better than an unjust life. *Ergon* is specified as that which a given entity does alone or does best.
- (2) Aristotle uses the *ergon* argument in his *Protrepticus*, which is his defence of a theoretical philosophy. The perfected *ergon* is said to be the good of a given entity. Aristotle thus argues that this perfected *ergon* is 'being true' (ἀλήθεια), which is the practical wisdom (φρόνησις) perfected by the virtue of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). This scheme is too complicated and lends itself to multiple lines of criticism.
- (3) This complicated structure of the *ergon* argument is identified in the version that appears in the *Eudemian Ethics*. This version suggests equating the *ergon* of a given entity with the *ergon* of the corresponding virtue. Second, it claims that the *ergon* and 'goal' of a given entity are the same. As such, it simplifies the structure of the *ergon* argument.
- (4) The *Nicomachean Ethics* clearly puts forth that *ergon* functions as a transition from formal accounts on good and happiness towards a substantive exposition of human

good. The text suggests that the *ergon* argument utilizes concepts from Aristotle's metaphysics as well as the science of living things.

- (5) The *ergon* argument alone is not enough to resolve the ongoing debate between the so-called exclusive and inclusive accounts of *eudaimonia*. Nevertheless, it can offer a new interpretation which circumvents many of the problems raised in the contemporary debate. Using the *ergon* argument, I will assert that Aristotle distinguishes between *eudaimonia* as contemplation ($\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$) on the one hand, and a happy life on the other. *Eudaimonia* as the activity of $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is an exclusive concept. A happy life also includes the so-called practical virtues and the corresponding activities.

The *ergon* argument in the *Republic* and Plato's other dialogues

When conducting a thorough interpretation of the *ergon* argument in Aristotle's ethical works, one cannot but compare it to the usage of the *ergon* argument in Plato's dialogues. My main focus will be on the argument presented at the end of the *Republic* 1. I will offer a reconstruction of the argument which will show its strengths and weaknesses in replying to Thrasymachus' infamous position. Furthermore, I will show the important role it plays in the rest of the *Republic*, which presents the ideal city as a complex structure where everyone serves a function for which he is naturally suited.⁴³ I believe that the *Republic* offers the best account of the *ergon* argument in Plato's dialogues and is also the best example of the argument's use in Plato's moral and political philosophy. However, the argument also appears in several other dialogues and I will thus briefly discuss these instances in the concluding section of this chapter.

My interpretation will extend to the *Alcibiades* I., *Crito* and *Meno*.⁴⁴ The *ergon* argument can be understood as a part of a tradition which lays down the groundwork of ethics by examining human nature and its particulars when pitted against other forms of life. In this context, Martha Nussbaum discusses Socrates' argument against the radical hedonistic life in *Philebus* 21c-22c.⁴⁵ She is right in that this argument, which I will revisit later, is based on the normative force imposed on human life specifically. In this respect, it bears resemblance

⁴³ Santas (2006) offers a comprehensive overview on the use of the term *ergon* later in the *Republic*; cf. Barney (2006, 55–6) for a brief assessment of Plato's use of this argument.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Alc.*I 126b; *Cri.* 44d, 49c; *Meno* 71e-72a; on the passages in the *Crito* cf. Barker (1977, 25–26) and on the *Meno* cf. Lawrence (2001, fn. 10).

⁴⁵ Nussbaum (1995, 98–102).

to several passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,⁴⁶ though it is not directly linked to the *ergon* argument. I will posit that in order to see the *ergon* argument at use outside of the *Republic*, it is more promising to look at the *Alcibiades I.* and the *Crito*, as these two dialogues utilize the *ergon* argument in their treatment of virtue and basic moral principles. It is possible that Plato thus puts the basic scheme of the *ergon* argument to work in more dialogues than it has been acknowledged thus far.

Plato's version of the *ergon* argument and how it relates to Aristotle's ethics is not discussed in detail by too many authors.⁴⁷ Those who consider the *ergon* argument at the end of the first book of the *Republic* to be a precursor to Aristotle's argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*⁴⁸ disagree on how much the latter account owes to the former. Some scholars assume that these two arguments are virtually the same.⁴⁹ Nearly all commentators see Aristotle as an improvement upon Plato's tenuous argument⁵⁰. Others claim that Plato's account was unfit for Aristotle, who could not utilize it in his own treatment and was thus forced to make substantial changes to the argument itself.⁵¹

Rachel Barney acknowledges the importance of Plato's account for Aristotle, yet thinks that Aristotle diverges from Plato in two important ways. First, Aristotle 'avoids the Platonic conception of function as instrumentality' and second, Aristotle rejects Plato's

⁴⁶ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.8, 1099a31-b7 or 1.10, 1100b8-22 and, of course, the *ergon* argument in 1.7.

⁴⁷ Some notable exceptions are Lawrence (2001, 449–50), Barney (2008), Gottlieb (2009, 68ff.) and Baker (2015). I am generally in agreement with Baker (2015, 231–236), in that Plato's account is a forerunner of Aristotle's *ergon* argument and that the concept of *ergon* subsumes both products and activities.

⁴⁸ Only Baker (2015, 238, 243) briefly links the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus* and the *Eudemean Ethics* to Plato's *Republic* 1.

⁴⁹ Grant (1885, 1, 449); Burnet (1904, 34); Dirlmeier (1999, 277–78); J. Cooper (1975, 145). Tuozzo (1996, 146, 148) says that the arguments are similar in structure and possibly in outcome as well, yet Plato's argument does not aid in establishing that there is a specific human *ergon*.

⁵⁰ E.g. Barney (2008, 300–1) or Gottlieb (2009, 69).

⁵¹ Kraut (1979, 468–469, 478).

understanding of what qualifies as the function of a given entity.⁵² This departure stems from Aristotle's different understanding of the condition that such a function is 'own' (ἴδιον) to the given entity. For Plato, it is 'that which one can do only with it or best with it' (352e2-3). Aristotle, on the other hand, considers the function to be ἴδιον, in the sense of being proper to us, namely realizing what is our own. I believe that both of these conclusions must be qualified and that the arguments for both must thus be rejected.⁵³ Concerning Barney's understanding of *ergon* in the *Republic* 1, I hope to show that Plato's account does not treat *ergon* as mere instrumentality. It is not the case that sight is instrumental to the eye, as it is rather us, human beings, who have eyes for seeing. Yet, sight is a virtue of the eye, and is what makes the eye a good eye, not *for* us, but in that it is a good eye in general. Similarly with the horse: being swift is a virtue of the horse, though it is never said that it is so because of some instrumental value that the horse or its swiftness has for humans. Indeed, swiftness generally improves a horse's living, regardless of whether it lives in captivity or in nature. Nevertheless, Barney's interpretation does have some merit, as Plato uses the example of a knife, a man-made instrument for pruning grapevines, to illustrate what *ergon* is. Instruments or artefacts in general are not presented as examples in Aristotle's account in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵⁴ Given that this is not the case in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1219a4), one is justified in pondering this omission.

⁵² Barney (2008, 300–1).

⁵³ I will discuss these claims in detail later at 204–208.

⁵⁴ Of course, this distinction points to a profound difference between the two conceptions of teleology, one which sees the end state as a result of intentional activity, and the other which does not posit any intentionality in order to explain the end state. Plato is usually considered a proponent of the former, while Aristotle's natural teleology champions the latter. For a discussion on these distinctions see Charles (1991) and Johansen (2004, chap. 4). Cf. Johnson (2005, 118–127) who explains why Aristotle is justified in his claim that Plato's explanation actually never uses the cause for the sake of which.

Paula Gottlieb points out several aspects in which Plato's argument falters compared to Aristotle's. First, Aristotle introduces the complexity of the human soul, which is absent from Plato's account in the *Republic* 1. Second, the argument in the *Republic* 1. makes no distinction between functioning and functioning well. According to Gottlieb, 'lacking a function is a vice, having the function is a virtue,' i.e. if sight is the virtue of the eye, as Thrasymachus claims, then blindness as a vice means that the eye does not see and thus does not perform its function.⁵⁵ Gottlieb's account cannot be correct, since if Plato conflated the notion of function or proper activity with the notion of virtue, the *ergon* argument would never serve its intended function. Even bad or unjust people live and it is their souls that are responsible for their bad living.⁵⁶ Yet, we need the notion of virtue to account for good living and the text in the *Republic* clearly indicates that Plato operates with this distinction (353c, e). Moreover, it is not clear whether Plato considers sight to be a virtue. This conjecture is made by Thrasymachus but is not affirmed by Socrates, who explicitly states that he does not wish to discuss any particular virtues during that point in their conversation.⁵⁷

Richard Kraut claims that Aristotle's reliance on Plato's argument is actually a mistake, one which creates unnecessary problems for Aristotle's own argumentation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵⁸ According to Kraut, the problem lies in the very definition of *ergon* in the *Republic*. Plato says that the *ergon* of an entity is what it alone can do, or what it can do better than anything else. Kraut considers this to problematize Aristotle's position, where human *ergon*

⁵⁵ Gottlieb (2009, 69–70).

⁵⁶ In 353c5-7, Plato uses the dative in order to express that 'anything that has a function performs it well by means of its own peculiar virtue (τῇ οἰκείᾳ μὲν ἀρετῇ).' Interestingly in Book 10, 609a9-b2, Plato writes that each thing can be destroyed only by its own badness (τὸ σύμφυτον κακὸν ἐκάστου) and its own wretchedness (ἡ πονηρία ἑκάστου).

⁵⁷ I will come back to this claim in pp. 46-47.

⁵⁸ Kraut (1979, 472–474); cf. Kraut (1989, 312–317).

is defined as the individual's excellent use of reason.⁵⁹ Since god can contemplate better than a human being, Plato's conception of *ergon* would not work for Aristotle. I maintain that Aristotle provides a good solution to this problem and although he modifies the meaning of *ergon* in certain aspects, he builds on Plato's argument.⁶⁰

In the subsequent analyses, I will try to elucidate the role the *ergon* argument plays in the *Republic* 1. I will offer an interpretation and suggest how it relates to the political philosophy of the subsequent books of the *Republic*.

The response to Thrasymachus

The *ergon* argument at the end of the first book of Plato's *Republic* is one of Socrates' attempts at rebutting Thrasymachus' position on justice and injustice. In order to understand the *ergon* argument, it is important to map out its context. The discussion with Thrasymachus deserved ample attention and I will thus only focus on the points which are pertinent to my interpretation of the *ergon* argument.⁶¹

The reasoning regarding justice in the *Republic* 1 is framed by an inquiry into the relevant constraints on our actions. This topic is prefaced in the very first dialogue of the book. The opening of the *Republic* catches Socrates and Glaucon returning from the Piraeus when they are stopped by Polemarchus who tries to change their route and plans:

⁵⁹ Kraut (1979, 467).

⁶⁰ See 'The second reply'. Richard Kraut actually changes his mind and in Kraut (1989, 319, fn. 12) he explains why Aristotle relies on Plato's account. According to Kraut, Aristotle uses Plato's specification of *ergon* in order to lend greater specificity to human *eudaimonia*. Kraut avoids the problem posed by gods being better contemplators than human beings by interpreting the *idion* condition as relating specifically to the mention of plants and animals in the text of the argument.

⁶¹ A good bibliography was compiled by Barney (2017).

'Polemarchus said: It looks to me, Socrates, as if you two are starting off for Athens. - It looks the way it is, then, I said. - Do you see how many we are? he said. - I do. - Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here. - Isn't there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go? - But could you persuade us, if we won't listen? - Certainly not, Glaucon said.' (327c4-13)

Polemarchus bases his demand that Socrates follow him on the size of his entourage and power. Socrates, on the other hand, seems to rely on his power of persuasion. Persuasion can take many forms, but Polemarchus' response makes it clear that, according to him, persuasion takes the form of verbal argumentation. Number and strength are quite straightforward means of making someone change his course of action. One changes his intended actions in order to avoid trouble or to avoid being worse off. Persuading someone does not mean threatening or hectoring him.⁶² Persuasion can change not only one's course of action, but also one's mind. In the act of persuasion, one must be *reasoned* into something. Therefore, I understand the situation as offering two ways of altering someone's course of action: number and strength on the one hand and reasoning on the other. The above passage immediately points out a problem with reasoning: what if one does not listen? What if one is deaf to reason just as prisoners in the cave are resistant to the attempts of the one who returned to the cave from the sunny world above?⁶³ The function of the *ergon* argument which crowns Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus is to offer reasons as to why justice is in our best interest and why we should thus be persuaded to follow its demands.

⁶² Of course, one could be persuaded by number and strength, but in this context, number and strength are pitted against persuasion.

⁶³ *Resp.* 7, 517d4-e2.

Thrasymachus on justice and injustice

Book 1 of the *Republic* explicitly states its primary thesis twice in the text:

‘... which whole way of life would make living most worthwhile for each of us?’ (344e1-3)

‘... the argument concerns no ordinary topic but the way we ought to live.’ (352d5-6)

Both sentences appear in important areas within the argumentation of Book 1. The question concerning the way of life directly follows Thrasymachus’ long speech in which he presents his final arguments for injustice being more advantageous than justice (343b-344c). The second description regarding the theme of the discussion and its importance directly precedes the *ergon* argument itself. In both cases, it is the gravity of the topic at hand that compels one of the protagonists to stay in the discussion. In 344e, Thrasymachus wants to leave, but Socrates protests that such a serious topic cannot be abandoned so easily. In 352d, Socrates says that he considered his part of the speech to be finished, but that the seriousness of the question prompted him to continue with further argumentation.

The question concerns a ‘whole way of life’ (ὅλου βίου διαγωγὴν) and not only old age, as was the case in his discussion with the ageing Cephalus. It inquires into the kind of life we should live. The term βίος in the first quotation means ‘way of life,’ which bears the same meaning as ‘way to live’ (τρόπος of living) in the second sentence. We will not discuss specific actions or instances in a person’s life, but will focus rather on the manner of life as a whole.⁶⁴ Furthermore, there is specific mention of profitability or beneficialness. We are asked which way of life, i.e. life structured around justice or injustice, would make living

⁶⁴ Cf. Williams (2006, 4–6) and Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1.5 on different ways of life. Plato brings back a similar reflection on the topic when discussing the tyrannical character in Book 9: ‘for the investigation concerns the most important thing, namely, the good life and the bad one’ (578c6-7; cf. 608b as well).

our lives most profitable or beneficial (λυσίτελής).⁶⁵ Therefore, Plato is interested in exploring what qualifies as a good life. He asks which life is good for us in the sense of such a life being worth living. We will see that the *ergon* argument will be the first proactive step towards his answer.

Before we engage with the *ergon* argument, let us briefly characterize Thrasymachus' position. Thrasymachus comes crashing into the discussion like a 'wild beast' and after being promised to be paid for his answer about justice, he states that 'justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger' (338c1-2). According to him, the ruling element, or simply the ruler of the city, always shapes the laws to his own advantage and declares that it is just for his subjects. Thrasymachus thus claims that it is just to obey the ruler and that justice is the advantage of the stronger, i.e. the advantage of the ruling element (338e-339b).⁶⁶

Socrates tries to refute him by suggesting the possibility that a ruler might issue a law against his own advantage. It would then be both just to follow this law, since it is just to obey the rulers, and unjust to follow it, since it would be against the interest of the stronger (339d1-3). However, Thrasymachus offers a good response, elevating his account from that of mere empirical observation: ruler *qua* ruler never errs (340d-341a);⁶⁷ in other words, a

⁶⁵ Tucker (1900, 149) thinks that the lines 344e1-3 operate with the distinct meaning of βίος and ζωή. ζωή, according to him, differs from βίος 'as the physical existence differs from the course of life.' His understanding is that the "rational way of leading a life" (βίου διαγωγήν) is answered by "getting the most profit out of existence" (λυσίτελεστάτην ζώην ζῶη). Cf. Jirsa (2017, 225–233) and 'Life and living' below on this difference and its importance in Aristotle's ethics.

⁶⁶ For a detailed summary of the question of whether or not this qualifies as a definition, cf. Anderson (2016). Some authors think that Thrasymachus is merely debunking justice by showing its effects as they are usually understood, e.g. Barney (2006, 45). The status of Thrasymachus' account is not important for my later interpretation of the *ergon* argument and I will thus speak only about Thrasymachus' conception of justice.

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive interpretation of this argumentation see Annas (1981, 40ff.).

craftsman is not called a craftsman because of a potential error he might make. This is an important step in the discussion. For the first time in the *Republic*, the ruler is presented as a craftsman and ruling as a craft, positing knowledge as an essential component of ruling. Just as a doctor knows how to cure a patient and is called a doctor due to this knowledge and not because of an error which would demonstrate a failure in his knowledge and skill, the ruler is not called a ruler because of his mistakes, but because of his ruling. In order for this analogy to hold, ruling must be understood as a type of knowledge, like accounting or grammar.

Socrates again tries to refute this argument by pointing out that medicine or shepherding does not seek advantage to itself but always an advantage to its subject. Therefore, he generalizes, ‘no kind of knowledge seeks or orders what is advantageous to itself, then, but what is advantageous to the weaker, which is subject to it’ (342c11-d1). Medicine seeks good of the body, shepherds the good of their sheep and similarly a ruler *qua* ruler seeks the advantage of his subjects.

In his response, Thrasymachus claims that ‘justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves’ (343c3-5). His argument about the ruler *qua* ruler demands a certain level of abstraction and reasoning. In support of this claim, Thrasymachus uses realpolitik arguments: the unjust man is better off in contracts with another person as well as in dealings with the city (343d). Finally, ‘a person of great power outdoes everyone else’ (344a1), which is best demonstrated using tyranny: a petit criminal with his petit injustice is usually caught and punished, yet the tyrant—the most unjust person of all, as he steals not only their property but the citizens themselves—is called happy and blessed (εὐδαίμονες καὶ μακάριοι, 344b7). Injustice, Thrasymachus concludes, ‘is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. And, as I said from the first, justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one’s own

profit and advantage' (344c5-8).⁶⁸ Thrasymachus thus bolsters his theoretical argument using observations from realpolitik. This is interesting from a methodological standpoint, as Socrates is then forced to react both to the theoretical argument and to Thrasymachus' rather empirical claims about justice and injustice in the world around us.

Is this position *prima facie* coherent? Thrasymachus made several claims about justice and injustice, though whether they all hold up is open to debate. The problem here lies in explaining the relation between Thrasymachus' claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c2), while the stronger is understood as the ruler (338d7-339a9), with justice as obedience to the law (339b7-9) and the good of another (343c3). Are rulers bound by their obedience to the law? When rulers act justly, do they act for their own advantage according to the claim in 338d7-339a9 or is this justice for the good of another as well? It certainly seems that rulers can never act justly according to all aspects of Thrasymachus' conception of justice, rendering his account inconsistent.⁶⁹

In my understanding, Thrasymachus pits the ruler or rulers (what I referred to as the ruling element in society) against the ruled subjects. His conception of justice always assumes this antagonism and unbridgeable chasm in society. The ruler does not have any rulers (anyone

⁶⁸ Annas (1981, 45) sees this long speech as the main contribution of Thrasymachus; she is right about its importance, though I think it cannot be separated from his earlier claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger, namely the ruling element in the *polis*. Thrasymachus' long speech in 343b-344c is actually the story of an unjust single man and his success. Yet, Socrates' response, both in Book 1 as well as in the rest of the *Republic*, will target both the individual and the political accounts.

⁶⁹ Nettleship (1901, 47) claims that Thrasymachus' doctrine is untenable, since it does not allow to build a life around it all. Annas (1981, 45-6) believes that his conceptions are incoherent, but since they share a common idea (acting justly is not in the agent's interest), Thrasymachus' position is not entirely undermined *per se*. Among the authors that claim Thrasymachus' position is inconsistent are e.g. Hourani (1962, 110); Cross and Woosley (1980, 41); this seems to be implied in Welton (2006, 315) as well. On the other hand, several authors take Thrasymachus' conception as a coherent opposition to Socrates' account, cf. Nicholson (1974); Boter (1986); Lycos (1987, 52); Reeve (1988, 9-19); Bloom (1991, 332-337); Irwin (1995, 261-281); Barney (2006, 45-7).

stronger) above him. The ruler is unjust and thus acts for his own profit and advantage (344c8). Justice is for the weak, for the subjects who obey the law and thus act for the advantage of another, for the stronger and the ruler (343c3-5; cf. 338d-339a). Do rulers obey the law? Given that laws are made to their own advantage (338e1-2), they very well could. However, in this case, that would make them both just and unjust. However, nothing in the text suggests that Thrasymachus considers the ruler to be bound by the laws he issues. When Thrasymachus first develops his idea that justice is the advantage of the stronger, he says that the ruling element in the *polis* makes the laws and declares them ‘just *for* the subjects’ (τοῖς ἀρχομένοις, 338e3-4). On the other hand, an unjust person acts on the basis of strength and power, often illegally, i.e. against the law both in private and public matters (343d). Therefore, I maintain that the conception of justice as obedience to the law does not extend to the rulers.⁷⁰

The basic objection against exempting rulers from justice in the above mentioned sense is that of democracy.⁷¹ Thrasymachus mentions democracy explicitly in 338e2, and so it is clear that his account is also applicable to democracy. However, in a democracy, there are too many people participating in the legislative process and in the act of ruling. Therefore, it is not within reason to say that the citizens who make the laws do not have to obey them. I believe there to be a good way out of this problem. The point here is that within a democracy, it is not many or most of the citizens who are involved in ruling; instead, all the citizens participate in ruling, assuming that Thrasymachus or Socrates do not include—at

⁷⁰ Nicholson (1974, 223–224) and Reeve (1985, 258) also argue that rulers are exempt from the conception of justice as the good of another and advantage of the stronger, as they apply only to the subjects and not to the ruling element. Thrasymachus builds his conception of justice on the divide between the rulers and the ruled, choosing then not to bring the two closer together but to position them even further apart. This is made clear in Socrates’ counter-argument regarding power, cf. pp. 39-41.

⁷¹ Anderson (2016, 3–4, fn. 7).

this stage of the discussion in the *Republic*—women, children or slaves, and that their discussion is strictly about the citizens in question. I suggest that in the case of democracy, we should understand the majority (in each decision) to be the ruler and the minority to be the ruled part of society. Based on this understanding, the situation could be understood as a tyranny of the majority, especially in societies where the majority is sufficiently large and long-lasting across different votes.⁷²

Another way to grasp Thrasymachus' conception of justice is to see how it is understood by other participants in the dialogue. Later in Book 2, when Glaucon 'revives' Thrasymachus' argument, he summarizes it in three points: according to Glaucon, Thrasymachus explained the people's understanding of the origin and nature of justice; second, justice is practiced reluctantly as something that is necessary but not good and, finally, that an unjust life is far better than a just life.⁷³ In conclusion, Thrasymachus maintains that injustice should lead our way of life and that a properly unjust life would be the most beneficial for us (*Resp.* 2, 358c1-6). This is his answer to the crucial questions posed by Book 1.

Socrates' arguments against Thrasymachus

Interpreters vary in the number of arguments identified in Socrates' refutation of Thrasymachus and how successful they are.⁷⁴ I will focus on the final three arguments which, for the sake of clarity, I will call the knowledge argument (348e5-350d3), the power

⁷² Cf. an excellent treatment of this problem in Shapiro (2003, 213–219).

⁷³ Boter (1986, 267–268) claims that this recapitulation suggests that Thrasymachus' views are widely accepted among the public, since Glaucon talks about them as public opinion.

⁷⁴ For example, Annas (1981, 55) believes that 'none of Socrates' arguments carry any conviction,' Barney (2006) presents a powerful defense of Socrates' arguments as both philosophically sound and satisfactory. In opposition to Annas, I will present my interpretation of the argument in order to elucidate that each version carries some weight.

argument (350d4-352d2) and the *ergon* argument (352d8-354a9). The first two arguments will be discussed in order to understand the position and purpose of the *ergon* argument itself. The first two arguments serve as a rebuttal of Thrasymachus' position, tackling the internal inconsistencies of his argument. I will present the *ergon* argument as the first productive step in Socrates' argumentation. I believe that this argument paves the way for his response, which shows that a just life is better than an unjust life. In order to explain the position of the *ergon* argument, I have to clarify the scope of the first two counterarguments. The first two arguments will be discussed for the remainder of this section and the *ergon* argument will be analyzed in detail in the subsequent section.

Socrates begins his first counterargument by ensuring that he understands Thrasymachus' position and persuades him to agree with several propositions (labelled T1-T8).

Thrasymachus believes that:

(T1) A just person (ὁ δίκαιος) does not want to outdo (πλέον ἔχειν) another just person (349b1-7).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ What does Thrasymachus mean by πλέον ἔχειν, to 'outdo' or literally 'have more' or 'have a larger share'? For the meaning of the corresponding noun πλεονεξία cf. Balot (2001, 3–5). The collocation πλέον ἔχειν together with the verb πλεονεκτεῖν introduces the notion of greed, gain and advantage at the expense of others. Ryan Balot, in his study on greed, insists that the noun πλεονεξία points to an understanding of citizenship as a form of sharing within a community (μετέχειν τῆς πολιτείας), Balot (2001, 5–6); cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1268a24, 1268a27–28, 1302b26–27, 1306b10–11. Someone who πλεονεκτεῖν wants to take for himself more than his share of power, honour or money. The important point here is that the general meaning of πλέον ἔχειν is to either have more or strive to have more. Thrasymachus maintains that a just person does not want to have more than another just person. According to this perspective, the members of a just community, made up of just members, all have their proper share. This can mean that everyone has an equal share or that the shares are proportionate to the standards of the community, i.e. when someone has more than another person, the former is entitled and justified to have more and the latter has no relevant basis to complain against the former.

(T2) A just person wants to outdo the unjust (349b11-c3).⁷⁶

(T3) An unjust person (ὁ ἄδικος) wants to outdo anyone (both just and unjust) (349c4-10).

(T4) An unjust person is clever and good (φρόνιμος τε καὶ ἀγαθός) (349d3-4).⁷⁷

(T5) A just person is not clever and good (349d4-5).

(T6) An unjust person is like a clever and good person (349d6-7).⁷⁸

(T7) A just person is not like a clever and good person. (349d7).

(T8) Each person has the qualities of the people he is like (349d10-11).⁷⁹

At this point, Socrates starts his own counterargument. According to Socrates:

(S1) There is a difference between a musical (μουσικόν) and unmusical person (ἄμουσον) (349d13-e2).⁸⁰

(S2) A musical person is clever (φρόνιμον) (349e4).

⁷⁶ Socrates asks whether a just person wants to outdo an unjust one ‘thinking that this is what he deserves (ἀξιοί)?’ (349b11-c2) Thrasymachus assumes that the just individual is unsatisfied with the miserable situation in relation to the unjust individual and wants to rectify it by outdoing the unjust one. However, since the unjust individual possesses strength, the just one will never succeed.

⁷⁷ This was agreed on in 348d3-4, where Thrasymachus says that injustice is ‘good judgement’ (εὐβουλία) and thus something which entails goodness as well as certain cognitive skills and capacities.

⁷⁸ T6 assumes that justice and injustice are related to knowledge or expertise. Indeed, this is Thrasymachus’ position in 340e4-6: ‘No craftsman, expert or ruler makes an error at the moment when he is ruling ...’ Ruling is then continuously treated by both Socrates as well as Thrasymachus as a kind of expertise or knowledge (e.g. 341d7-8, 342a1ff., 342c11-d1). Socrates’ argument then views acting justly or unjustly as an example of this expertise. Therefore, Annas (1981, 51) is not entirely justified in criticizing the argument for treating justice and injustice as expertise; this is not something introduced by Socrates during the argument, as it is primarily an assumption held by Thrasymachus.

⁷⁹ This is a general principle which is illustrated in T6 and T7; it is not a generalization from T6 and T7.

⁸⁰ The term μουσικός bears the general meaning of ‘man of letters’ or ‘scholar.’ In any case, it points towards a certain knowledge or skill, suggesting that the difference between a musical and an unmusical person lies in their knowledge or lack thereof.

(S3) An unmusical person is stupid (ἄφρονα) (349e4-5).

(S4) A musical person is good (ἀγαθόν) at what he is clever in and bad (κακόν) at what he is stupid in (349a6).

(S5) The same is true about a doctor (349e8).⁸¹

(S6) A musical person does not want to outdo another musical person in musical matters (i.e. in what he is clever in) (349e10-13).⁸²

⁸¹ Both doctors and musicians work with proper proportions, accuracy and right measure. Health is associated with proportions and even harmony both in Plato (e.g. *Phlb.* 31c-d, *Ti.* 47c-e, 87c-d) and the Hippocratic treatises. Chapter 12, *On Ancient Medicine*, deals with accuracy in medicine: the doctor must strive for extreme accuracy or at least to ‘get close to the greatest accuracy’ by means of reasoning; cf. Hippoc. *Acut.* 1.2 on the importance of right proportions. Hutchinson (1988, 22) surmises that: ‘Medical skill aims at the appropriate and avoids what is insufficient or excessive in therapy.’ On the right measure in Hippocratic medicine cf. Boudon-Millot (2005, 92–93). On music and harmony see *Ti.* 35b-36b, *Resp.* 401d-e, *Leg.* 657b; a comprehensive account on harmony and music in Plato is in Barker (2007, chap. 12).

⁸² Some interpreters claim that this assumption is false since a musician wants to outdo his rival musician and wants to be more successful than him or to earn more than him, e.g. Barney (2006, 53) or Annas (1981, 51). However, this concern is misplaced. First, if a musical person wants to outdo another musical person in the above-mentioned case, he does it not *qua* being musical but *qua* a different wage-earning craft (cf. 346c-d). However, this is not to be understood in the sense of ‘outdoing’ and ‘having more.’ Socrates wants to say that since music (as well as medicine) aims at accuracy and right proportions (cf. footnote 81), one cannot ‘outdo’ another by taking forcing or attaining more than the right proportion. This is why he stresses that his focus is on matters that a musical person (or doctor) is knowledgeable about. The examples he provides are tuning the lyre and prescribing food and drink, which clearly refer to a professional knowledge of music and medicine. The standard according to which the musician *qua* musician measures success is accuracy, not having or doing more than anyone else. If a musician is supposed to play a C, he will not do better by playing a C-sharp. If a doctor is supposed to attain the right proportion of hot and dry, having or doing more is yet again not better, as he is meant to attain the exact proportion given. The general idea behind this conclusion is that knowledge is universal and monistic in the sense that if one knows the solution (how to play a given melody, how to cure a given disease, how to calculate a given equation), anyone else who wants to be right must do the same and arrive at the same solution as the one who knows. This epistemic monism is nicely described in Berlin (2002, 191–195).

(S7) He wants to outdo the unmusical person (349e15-16).⁸³

(S8) A doctor does not want to outdo another doctor in the practice of doctoring (350a1-2).

(S9) A doctor wants to outdo a non-doctor in the practice of doctoring (350a4).

Therefore, Socrates generalizes:

(S10) A knowledgeable person (ἐπιστήμων) does not want to outdo another knowledgeable person (350a6-9).

(S11) An ignorant (ὁ ἀνεπιστήμων) person wants to outdo both knowledgeable and ignorant people (350a11-b1).

(S12) Knowledgeable is wise (σοφός) and wise is good (ἀγαθός)(350b3-6).⁸⁴

Socrates now makes a series of conclusions:

(C1) A good and wise person does not want to outdo those like himself but those who are unlike him and his opposite (350b7-8), from S10 and S12.

(C2) A bad and ignorant person (κακός τε καὶ ἀμαθής) wants to outdo both those who are like him and his opposite (350b10-11).

Therefore, we can further conclude:

(C3) A just person is like a wise and good person (350c4-5), from T1, T2 and C1.

(C4) An unjust person is like an ignorant and bad person (350c5), from T3 and C2.

Which leads Socrates to his final conclusion that:

⁸³ The musical person outdoes the unmusical person by attaining the right proportion, the right melody, as accurately as possible. The doctor outdoes the layman by prescribing exactly the right amount or proportion of medicine.

⁸⁴ On the basis of transitivity, Socrates is justified to believe that the knowledgeable are both wise and good.

(C5) An just person is good and wise, whereas an unjust person is ignorant and bad (352c10-11), from T8 plus C3 and C4, respectively.

As in other cases of *elenchus*, Socrates uses premises furnished by Thrasymachus himself (namely T1-T3) in order to show that Thrasymachus is wrong in believing T4-T7, namely that he is wrong in his substantial claims that an unjust person is clever and good and a just person is stupid and base.

After the argument, Socrates postulates that they ‘agreed that justice is virtue and wisdom’ (350d4-5). Is he justified in this claim?⁸⁵ The knowledge argument is preceded by a short exchange between Thrasymachus and Socrates concerning justice and virtue.

Thrasymachus agrees that justice and injustice are a pair of vice and virtue, yet he disagrees with Socrates in calling justice a virtue and injustice a vice (348c2-8). In the subsequent exchange, Thrasymachus falters somewhat as he is unwilling to outwardly call justice a vice, but is comfortable ‘placing’ (τίθημι) injustice together with virtue and wisdom and justice with their opposites (348e1-3). Socrates then compels him to agree that injustice belongs to virtue and wisdom, or that it can be categorized under virtue and wisdom (349a1-2). Thrasymachus never explicitly says that justice is a vice, though he does agree that justice and injustice are a pair of vice and virtue at the beginning of the argument. If Thrasymachus classifies injustice together with virtue and Socrates refutes his position, demonstrating that justice actually holds the position Thrasymachus reserved for injustice, I believe it is justified to call justice a virtue (350d4-5).

⁸⁵ Irwin (1995, 191–195) argues that the knowledge argument merely reveals that justice is more similar to virtue than injustice. Irwin maintains that Socrates actually never establishes that justice is a virtue and thus his arguments fall flat.

This first argument is rather abstract as it targets Thrasymachus' most theoretical assumption that injustice should be associated with good judgement and cleverness (348d1-6). We have seen that Thrasymachus combines theoretical as well as empirical (or quasi-empirical) approaches in his exposition: first, he introduces injustice as a sort of cleverness; second, he shows why people are always better off being unjust rather than just. The power argument that Socrates makes next corresponds exactly to the latter, empirical part of Thrasymachus' account. This account culminates in the claim that injustice is stronger and more masterly (ἰσχυρότερον, δεσποτικώτερον) than justice and is thus also profitable (344c4-8). In this account, Thrasymachus essentially tells a story about justice and injustice. Similarly, Socrates' counterargument is presented as a narrative with empirically based observations and assumptions.

The question is whether injustice is as powerful (ἰσχυρόν) as Thrasymachus claims (350d7). Socrates clearly distinguishes this line of argumentation from his previous argument rooted in the general relation between injustice and knowledge. He posits that since justice was established to be knowledge and virtue, whereas injustice is ignorance, it could be generally or absolutely (ἀπλῶς) surmised that justice is stronger (351a3-6). However, Socrates opts for a different approach instead.⁸⁶ He does not start with an abstract argument by identifying justice as knowledge and virtue. One possible explanation is that no clear definition of knowledge and virtue has been laid out at this point in the text. The notion of virtue will be explained in the *ergon* argument, though an explication of knowledge is not made until the middle books of the *Republic*. Socrates instead proceeds with his narrative about injustice and its outcomes in real life.

⁸⁶ Annas (1981, 53) thinks Socrates presents merely an example of unconvincing rhetoric; I prefer to see his account as a narrative about justice and injustice that takes on Thrasymachus' long speech in 343b-344c.

Socrates claims that any social unit, be it a city, army or even a criminal gang, must be bound by justice in order to be able to succeed in achieving a common goal (351c6-10). Socrates stresses that he means a common purpose for the entire group, not individual projects or their sum. The group performs better in achieving this common goal as a unit rather than a dysfunctional multitude divided by inner strife. This principle will be familiar to anyone who has seen a crime or mafia film: one of the best ways to disrupt a criminal organization is to implant a conflict by suggesting that some of the group's members are behaving unjustly towards others and to the common goal, i.e. they are stealing or collaborating with the enemy.

Injustice, according to Socrates, brings 'civil war, hatred and fighting' into any unit and renders it incapable of achieving any common purpose (351d8-e1). In this line of argumentation, Socrates reveals an important aspect of Thrasymachus' understanding of justice. The conception of justice as the good of another or the advantage of the stronger always implies an antagonism between (at least) two groups in a given city or community: the stronger and the weaker, the rulers and the ruled. Thrasymachus' conception of justice is built on this antagonism, seemingly regarding all social relations as some form of exploitation. Socrates thus uses justice—here as well as later in the *Republic*—to establish unity within a multitude while Thrasymachus, on the other hand, posits justice as intensifying the inner social strife upon which it is built.

The counterargument could end here, as it has been established that injustice makes a given group, community or state incapable of achieving its task. A just community is more capable in this respect and as such is stronger than an unjust community, which is weaker because of injustice. However, Socrates takes his argumentation one step further. This step involves a clarifying part while also introducing a new point in the conclusion. Injustice

causes men to hate (μισεῖν) each other. Hatred is the principle of breaking up relations within the unit (351d4, 10).

Injustice incites hatred not only among the men unjust to each other, but also creates enemies out of just men, and since gods are just as well, the unjust will also be enemies of the gods (352a5-b2). This will make it even more difficult for the unjust to accomplish anything, as their enemies will not only be those who are similarly unjust but will also extend to the just and to the gods. This hostility only increases their inability to act and thus diminishes their strength.⁸⁷ In conclusion, injustice prevents communities from achieving their goals and as such it cannot be called ‘stronger’ or ‘more masterly’ than justice. Moreover, the unjust will be hated by the gods and the just, i.e. their situation will be much worse compared to the just who are capable of cooperation and do not suffer the hatred of the gods.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Since this argumentation utilizes empirical observation, one could ask how it is possible that there are any unjust groups at all. Socrates answers that (a) such groups are not completely unjust, (b) their members refrain from inflicting injustice upon each other, even though as a group they inflict injustice upon others and c) when the group started doing unjust things, its members were only partially corrupted (352b-c). This passage offers Socrates’ general account of injustice on a broader scale and shows that Reeve (1985, 261) and Irwin (1995, 182–3) are wrong in their understanding of the entire argument. Reeve summarizes their objection: ‘it isn’t clear that a polis can’t treat its members justly, producing the desired coherence, while treating non-members unjustly.’ Their criticism just proves Socrates’ point that any group needs the principles of justice to be able to achieve the common goal.

⁸⁸ This argument could be compared with the *theophilestatos* argument in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8 1179a22-32; Here, Aristotle argues that gods will favor those who are most like them, i.e. those who exercise their reason in a contemplative activity. However, it is clear that Aristotle does not allow for gods to bestow any gifts upon humans, since they do not conduct any action. For a detailed interpretation of this argument see Segev (2017, 87–9).

The ergon argument in the Republic 1

The two attempts at refuting Thrasymachus' position described above focused on the internal inconsistencies of his position. First, Socrates showed that Thrasymachus cannot maintain that the unjust person is both clever, i.e. knowledgeable, and that he outdoes everyone. Second, he argued that injustice is not stronger than justice, as it destroys any unity and community and thus renders the unjust entirely incapable of action. If an entity is incapable of acting, it cannot be called strong.

As of yet, Socrates has not argued that justice is better than injustice or that the just live better than the unjust. In this sense, he still owes an answer to the crucial question of Book 1: how should one live or which way of life is the most profitable for us?⁸⁹

Socrates himself thinks that the question has already been resolved (352d5), since he has demonstrated that Thrasymachus' position does not hold. Nevertheless, he continues in his investigation, as the two do not engage in an entirely random discussion (οὐ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ ἐπιτυχόντος ὁ λόγος, 352d6-7), but rather address the very issue of how one should live. It is the importance of the topic that drives Socrates. Moreover, we still lack a positive argument in support of his position in order to explain why he believes that justice is more profitable than injustice.

Socrates starts his investigation in 352d9-e1: 'Tell me, do you think there is such a thing as the *ergon* of a horse?'⁹⁰ Thrasymachus agrees, though he is incapable of following his line of argumentation once Socrates specifies what he means by *ergon*: 'that which one can do only with it or best with it' (ὁ ἂν ἢ μόνῳ ἐκείνῳ ποιῆ τις ἢ ἄριστα) in 352e4. As Thrasymachus

⁸⁹ *Resp.* 1, 344e1-3; 352d5-6.

⁹⁰ For the contrast between *logos* and *ergon* cf. Antiphon, *On the murder of Herodes*, 84.11 and *On the Choreutes* 47 or Philolaus B11, l. 19.

does not understand this concept, Socrates offers several examples: we cannot see with anything but our eyes and we cannot hear with anything except our ears. Therefore, seeing is the *ergon* of the eyes and hearing is the *ergon* of the ears, according to the first part of his definition of *ergon*, namely the *x* which one can do only (μόνῳ) with it (352e10). Socrates then illustrates the second part of the definition, the *x* which one can do best (ἄριστα) with it: one can use several instruments for pruning a vine, but the pruning knife is the best for it and therefore pruning is the *ergon* of this sort of knife (353a7). Socrates reiterates his understanding of *ergon* as ‘what it alone can accomplish or what it accomplishes better than anything else’ (ὃ ἂν ἢ μόνον τι ἢ κάλλιστα τῶν ἄλλων ἀπεργάζεταιται, 353a10-11).⁹¹

However, several things remain unclear after this explication. *Ergon* itself is a value-neutral notion. *Ergon* can be done or achieved well or badly, it allows for a normative scale, and it seems that the very concept of *ergon* implies a standard which is to be met or exceeded if a given *ergon* is done well. As will be illustrated in the case of the soul, if living is the *ergon* of the soul then living well and living badly are two modi of this *ergon*.⁹² Furthermore, *ergon* is defined without any mention of intention, purpose or desire. Even in the case of the pruning knife, which is said to be made for pruning (353a4-5), the very definition of *ergon* is based on what it does, and not that it was designed for a particular purpose.⁹³

So far, Socrates has listed three types of entities (cf. πράγματος at 353b1) as having *ergon*: animals, bodily organs and artefacts. Socrates presents a universal definition of *ergon* which he sees as fitting for all of the above examples. At the level of specific *erga*, we are told that

⁹¹ Grube’s translation modified based on Baker (2015, 235).

⁹² Cross and Woosley (1980, 58) are wrong to criticize the argument based on the hypothetical example that *ergon* could be doing something badly. *Ergon* is simply doing something; *how* the *ergon* is performed is a different matter altogether. Lycos (1987, 148) rightly says that *ergon* ‘indicates an area of activity where things can be done better or worse.’

⁹³ Cf. Santas (1985, 229) supports this interpretation as well.

the *ergon* of the eyes, ears and knife is a certain activity. Can we assume that Plato considers *ergon* to always be an activity? No other type of *ergon* is mentioned within the *ergon* argument itself.⁹⁴ Yet, Samuel Baker rightly points out that throughout the *Republic*, Plato equates the *ergon* of crafts with their products. Moreover, in many instances, Plato uses the verb ἐργάζομαι, which appears in Socrates' recapitulation of his definition of *ergon* (353a10-11).⁹⁵ Baker concludes that Plato operates with a single definition of *ergon* which subsumes both activities and products.⁹⁶ Yet, unlike Aristotle, Plato does not use crafts as an example in his *ergon* argument, and when Thrasymachus says he understands the concept of *ergon*, he calls it 'ergon of each *pragma*' (353b1). Thrasymachus understands that Socrates is talking about *erga* of *pragmata*, i.e. things in a general way. This summary comes after Socrates' reiteration of what *ergon* is. At the very least, this suggests that Thrasymachus does not consider the *ergon* specified here to include crafts, since they can hardly be classed as *pragmata*.⁹⁷

One could question whether the term πρᾶγμα is used by Thrasymachus, but Socrates reacts affirmatively without objection or correction (εἰέν, 353b2). Later, when Socrates wants to express his reservations concerning Thrasymachus' reply, he does so without any hesitation (e.g. 353c5, which I will discuss later). Therefore, it seems that crafts and thus products are not included in the *ergon* argument here. The reason for this is that Plato wants to show

⁹⁴ Most interpreters understand *ergon* as a function, i.e. activity; cf. summary in Baker (2015, 233, fn. 18).

⁹⁵ Baker (2015, 233–235); e.g. *Resp.* 1, 346d1-6; 4, 421d9-e5 etc.

⁹⁶ Baker (2015, 236).

⁹⁷ By the end of the entire *Republic* in 10. 601d4-6, Socrates says: 'aren't the virtue or excellence (ἀρετή), the beauty and correctness of each manufactured item, living creature, and action related (πρὸς) to nothing but the use (τὴν χρείαν) for which each is made or naturally adapted (πεφυκός)?' This confirms that Plato sees the *ergon* of artefacts, living beings and actions in use, in a certain activity; second, the possible *ergon* of crafts is omitted again, despite the fact that the passage appears within the discussion of crafts and imitation.

that the *ergon* of the soul is living, an activity, rather than a product, such as wealth or honour. On the other hand, the omission of crafts from the *ergon* argument does not mean that Plato does not believe that a product can be an *ergon*.⁹⁸

Plato's definition of *ergon* allows for an unproblematic understanding of *ergon* as a product. However, it seems that in Plato's account, no thing (*pragma*) can have another *pragma* as its *ergon*. The *ergon* argument at the end of Book 1 of the *Republic* focuses on entities such as animals, organs, artefacts and the soul, where the *ergon* for each is an activity.⁹⁹

After elucidating the notion of *ergon*, Socrates turns to the notion of virtue, which is discussed in 353b2-d2. For each entity which has an *ergon* there is also a corresponding virtue: there is the virtue of the eye or ear and the given entity performs or achieves its *ergon* well (καλῶς) while in possession of this virtue, i.e. while being virtuous (353b14). The *ergon* of each thing is said to be achieved *by* its particular virtue (τῇ οἰκείᾳ μὲν ἀρετῇ τὸ αὐτῶν ἔργον εὖ ἐργάζεται τὰ ἐργαζόμενα, 353c6-7).¹⁰⁰ In the absence of such virtue, the *ergon* is done badly (κακῶς), as the virtue is replaced by badness (κακία, 353c6-7). The

⁹⁸ Lycos (1987, 147) suggests that Plato understands *ergon* as an activity. Based on Socrates' statement about *technai* that 'each does its *ergon* and benefits the thing it is set over' (αἱ ἄλλαι πᾶσαι οὕτως τὸ αὐτῆς ἐκάστη ἔργον ἐργάζεται καὶ ὠφελεῖ ἐκεῖνο ἐφ' ᾧ τέτακται, 346d5-6), Lycos claims that the *ergon* of each craft is to benefit its object. It is clear that Lycos understands καὶ as being explicative, i.e. an expertise 'does its *ergon*, namely benefiting ...' and Baker (2015, 233-4) sees it as an additional function, i.e. expertise 'does its *ergon* and (besides that) it benefits.'

⁹⁹ I believe the idea that a thing produces another thing would be inconceivable for Plato; while it is true that an animal 'produces' another animal, its offspring, it does not seem to be what Plato means here, despite the fact that he does not outwardly define the *ergon* of a horse (moreover, the role of virtue is not applicable here, since virtuous fathers do not necessarily have virtuous sons). An entity producing another entity is, I believe, the concept of robotization, which is a concept alien to ancient thought; and although ancient traditions have produced several examples of artificially created living beings, there is no preserved story about an artificial entity producing another entity as its *ergon*, cf. discussion in Mayor (2018).

¹⁰⁰ For the use of the dative in this sentence see ftn. 56. The *ergon* is done well *by* or *due* to the virtue in question, the virtue is responsible for the *ergon* being good.

argument does not posit any middle ground between the virtue and badness; the *ergon* is either done well or badly.

So far, this account is purely structural or schematic; it is not a substantive argument about particular virtues. The argument posits that there is a given entity that has its own particular *ergon* and that its virtue is the quality or feature of that entity which is responsible for the *ergon* being performed well. When Thrasymachus attempts to provide names of the virtues and supplements his laconic reply by calling the virtue of the eye ‘sight’ and its badness ‘blindness,’ Socrates is quick to admonish him: ‘whatever their virtue is, for I am not now asking about that’ (353c5).¹⁰¹ We do not know the *ergon* of a horse and we are never told what Socrates thinks is the virtue of a knife, eye or ear. So far, we only know what virtue means: that by which a given entity does its *ergon* well.

Furthermore, it is now obvious that the term ‘virtue’ is a rather inadequate iteration of ἀρετή. The *ergon* argument makes it clear that virtue applies to artifacts, animals, bodily organs and perhaps many other types of entities. Human moral virtues¹⁰² are a specific subset of virtue as it is defined in the *ergon* argument. Of course, the *ergon* argument in the *Republic* as well as in Aristotle’s writings is presented in order to reveal something important about human beings and human moral virtues, though its scope is actually much broader. The *ergon* argument does not single out human beings from other entities in the world; quite the contrary, it operates with the human being and soul as it does with any other entity which has *ergon*. While ‘excellence’ might correspond more closely to the intended meaning of ἀρετή, I will keep using the term ‘virtue.’ First, most of my

¹⁰¹ Cf. Lawrence (2001, 450) according to whom the argument is a purely formal one.

¹⁰² The phrase ‘human moral virtues’ is a rather clumsy translation of ἀρεταί, indicating a certain moral value about human beings; at this moment, the phrase includes both noetic and ethical virtues, as distinguished by Aristotle.

investigation actually centres around human *ergon* and thus around human moral virtue.

Second, I will exercise discretion when referring to this specific and most important genus of its kind will try to avoid any misinterpretations related to this shift in naming.

Socrates has now clearly elucidated his conception of *ergon* and virtue. In the subsequent step of his argumentation, he applies the formal scheme to the human soul (353d3-354a9). Among the several *erga* of the soul there is living (τὸ ζῆν, 353d9). Thus, if the human soul has an *ergon*, it must have a virtue as well (353d11; based on 353b2-13). Having a peculiar virtue, i.e. being virtuous, means that the soul does its *ergon* well, i.e. it lives well (353e1-5). In a somewhat controversial turn, Socrates claims that they have agreed (συνεχωρήσαμεν) that the soul's virtue is justice (δικαιοσύνη) and badness is injustice (353e7-8). Therefore, it follows that a just soul and just man live well, whereas a bad man lives badly (353e10-11). One who lives well (εὖ ζῶν) is, according to Socrates, blessed and happy (μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων, 354a1-2). The just person is thus happy and the unjust is the opposite, that is, wretched (ἄθλιος, 354a4). As being wretched is not profitable (λυσitteλει) and being happy is good or profitable for that person, Socrates concludes the entire argument by postulating that justice is more profitable than injustice (354a8-9).¹⁰³

There are several important points in this line of argumentation that require closer inspection. The task of the argument was to show that the just live better (ἄμεινον ζῶσιν) and that they are happier than the unjust (352d1-3), in response to a question inquiring as to how one should live (352d7). In this context, one can explain why Socrates singles out living as the soul's *ergon* as his point of interest (353d9). The text makes clear that the soul has multiple *erga*, such as caring, ruling or deliberating (353d4-5). However, given that the aim

¹⁰³ For a detailed, formal reconstruction of the argument cf. Blössner (1991, 63-4).

of the argument is to show the nature of how just and unjust people live, Socrates focuses on living.¹⁰⁴

Julia Annas thinks that there is a gap in the argument given that the entity that is considered to live well is a just man, despite the fact that the argument is about the soul. She insists that Socrates never conjectures that man is his soul, which Annas believes is imperative if the argument is to work.¹⁰⁵ Annas is right in pointing out that this premise is missing,¹⁰⁶ though I do not believe that it is necessary here. The argument is based on a much weaker premise which is suppressed, though I believe that it is generally shared by the participants of the discussion as well as contemporary readers or listeners of the dialogue.¹⁰⁷ It is my understanding, in line with other dialogues as well as the general Greek mindset at the time, that the soul is what differentiates living from non-living entities. It is because the soul is understood to be the bearer of life (*Phaedo* 105c8-5) that it is responsible for the living in us, or put differently, it is what lives in us (*Phaedrus*, 245c-d, *Laws* 895c11–12). Therefore, if one wants to argue about *living* well, one is justified in moving from a man to his soul in the same manner as one moves from a man to his eye when examining the act of seeing, as we do not see with anything other than our eyes.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Blössner (1991, 65) is right that ‘living’ is not the all-encompassing *ergon* of all of the other activities listed in 353d. However, all of the activities listed in 353d presuppose the entity in question to be alive. Moreover, unlike the activities listed in 353d, living is a normatively neutral term. On the other hand, being uncaring, a lack of rule or not deliberating have negative connotations. Furthermore, some later passages such as *Resp.* 9 579b-e suggest that a bad soul, i.e. a badly living soul, does not rule over anyone but seems to be entirely slavish.

¹⁰⁵ Annas (1981, 54).

¹⁰⁶ For the argument that man is his soul see *Alcibiades I.* 129b-130c.

¹⁰⁷ The connection between life or living and the soul can be assumed to be understood by the discussants as well as the readers of the dialogue; cf. Jaeger (1944, 40ff.), Lloyd (1966, 254–255); Adkins (1970, 62, 217), King (2006, 12–6).

¹⁰⁸ Blössner (1991, 65) offers a more sophisticated version of this objection. While it has been agreed that justice is a virtue (349b-350d), it has not been agreed that it is a virtue of the soul. The answer to this

Another issue worthy of attention is the cascade of conclusions in 353e10-354a9. Socrates concludes that a just soul and a just man live well (εὖ βιώσεται) and that an unjust man lives badly (353e10-11). The one who lives well, Socrates continues, is ‘blessed and happy’ (μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων, 354a1). Therefore, the just person is happy. These conclusions are a response to the initial question of whether just people live better and happier than the unjust. However, Socrates continues by adding that ‘injustice is never more profitable than justice’ (οὐδέποτε ἄρα λυσιτελέστερον ἀδικία δικαιοσύνης, 354a8-9).

There are two reasons as to why the claim about the profitability of justice is to be understood as the final conclusion of the *ergon* argument in favour of any of the previous conclusions. First, one of the principle topics which informs Thrasymachus’ understanding of justice from the very outset is that of profit. At the end of his long speech about the fate of just and unjust people in our world, Thrasymachus concludes that ‘injustice is to one’s own profit and advantage’ (344c8). Both Socrates and Glaucon understand profit to be essential to his account (cf. 347e7 and 348b10) when reacting to and summarizing his position. When Thrasymachus posits that injustice yields profit (λυσιτελέω at 348c7-8), he means that the unjust person *has more* than the just one (cf. 343d5-6, 343d8, 344a1). Thrasymachus’ ideal model for profit is that of a tyrant (344a6, cf. esp. 348d5-6), though his conception of profit also extends to thievery, which he deems profitable as long as it is not exposed (348d7-8). The last conclusion of the *ergon* argument is directly aimed at this essential component of Thrasymachus’ conception of injustice.

objection is technically the same as to Annas’s critique above. Justice is the virtue we associate with living and acting. The discussion with Thrasymachus is about living justly or a just way of life. Were the discussion about clear sight, one would be justified to say that clarity is the virtue of the eye. Analogously, Plato is justified in moving from just living to saying that justice is the virtue of the soul, since the soul ‘does the living’ in the same way as the eye ‘does the seeing.’

Second, I believe that demonstrating the profitability of justice might help in dispelling the objection that Plato may be guilty of mistaking the good *of* man with good *for* man. In actuality, Socrates' task has, since the very beginning, been to show that the good of man *is* good for man. Justice is the good of man (350c10-11) and it has been argued that it is also good for man (354a8-9). The just person lives and does better in terms of profit. Such a life is not only a morally better life; it is a better life *simpliciter*. Notice that Thrasymachus is rather dissatisfied with the conclusion, though he never implies that Socrates skews the meaning of the term 'profitable.' However, Glaucon believes that this conclusion in particular requires further investigation (357b1-2). The *ergon* argument thus does not confuse the good *of* man with good *for* man, though it should be further developed in order to clarify its meaning.¹⁰⁹

This argument can be further problematized in that it might be said to entail the fallacy of equivocation concerning the notion of good. According to Norbert Blössner, Plato uses the term 'good' in two different ways. A good knife is good because it meets or exceeds certain standards for cutting. In contrast, 'living well,' according to Blössner, does not mean that living meets certain standards. 'Living well' is a statement about the being of the one who lives.¹¹⁰ What is Blössner actually calling into question here? First, it might appear that he does not agree with calling living an *ergon*. Living, according to this objection, is not what

¹⁰⁹ A similar point is made by Santas (1985, 229–230): 'I don't think that Plato or Aristotle confuse the concepts of a good man and the good of a man, or more generally the concepts of a good F and the good of an F. They take it for granted that the human virtues make a man a good man, and they then argue that the virtues are good for a man. The notion of function, thought of as the exercise of characteristic capacities, is used to bridge the two concepts. There need not be any confusion so long as we notice what is being defined and what argued for.'

¹¹⁰ Blössner (1991, 66): "gut leben" wird nicht verwendet in Aussagen darüber, dass eine Funktion die 'leben' heisst, effektiv und auf einem hohen Standard verrichtet wird, sondern in Aussagen über die Befindlichkeit dessen, der lebt.'

we do in the same way as a knife cuts or an eye sees and thus cannot be treated in the same way. However, this does not seem to be the trajectory of Blössner's critique. He thinks that the problem of equivocation is picked up by Glaucon at the beginning of Book 2, where Glaucon suggests dividing the different goods into the goods we want (i) for their own sake and not because of their effects, (ii) for their own sake as well as because of their effects and (iii) those we want because of their effects and not for their own sake (357b4-d2). Blössner claims that ἀρετή is understood within the *ergon* argument as a good of category (ii) or (iii), i.e. as an instrumental good for the sake of the proper conduct of the *ergon*. On the other hand, he understands the conclusion of the argument as using 'living well' and 'good life' in the sense of a purely final good (i).¹¹¹

Socrates himself categorizes justice among the goods (ii) which we want for their own sake as well as for their effects. I also stand in favour of this claim, since, as Glaucon demands, Socrates must define the role of justice in the soul of an individual (358b). However, I do not believe that Socrates is guilty of a fallacy. Blössner locates this 'fallacy' between the premises concerning the relation of virtue and *ergon* in 353b2-353d2 and their application to the soul in 353d11-e6 and the conclusions of the argument in 353e10-11 and 354a1-2. The notions that he takes issue with must be εὖ βιώσεται at 353e10 and εὖ ζῶν at 354a1, since there are no other instances of the term 'good' in the concluding passages of the argument he references. Let us now examine the premises in which Blössner identifies another meaning of 'good', namely, an instrumental one. The argument in 353b2-13 does not make use of the term 'good,' it merely claims that whatever has an *ergon* has virtue as well. The lines 353b14-353d2 argue that 'anything that has an *ergon* performs it well (εὖ ἐργάσεται) by

¹¹¹ Blössner (1991, 71). I take it that Blössner's point is not the same as the above discussed confusion between 'good of' and 'good for.' Blössner claims that the Socrates' premises use the term 'good' in a different meaning than the one employed in the conclusion of the argument.

means of its own peculiar virtue (τῆ οἰκείᾳ ἀρετῆ).’ This must be the passage which Blössner considers to be in conflict with the conclusions quoted above.¹¹²

I thus cannot see any fallacy at work here. It is clear that Socrates (as well as Blössner) considers justice to be the good we want both for its own sake and for its effects, as Socrates explicitly says so (358a1-2). We do not know anything about the status of ‘good living’ in 353e10 and 354a1 nor about that of happiness in the subsequent lines—happiness is mentioned here as a response to Thrasymachus’ claim that tyrants are called happy (344b-c).¹¹³ Nevertheless, even if we agree that good living and happiness are final goods which we want for their own sake and not for their effects, Blössner’s critique does not hold. The *ergon* argument merely claims that doing an *ergon* well is the result of a specific virtue. The *ergon* argument does not derive the goodness of a given activity (‘well-functioning’ if one were to translate *ergon* as ‘function’) from the fact that virtue is good for the sake of doing this action well, i.e. from the goodness of the virtue.¹¹⁴ The connection established here lies in that virtue is good for doing the *ergon* well. It is not the case that the *ergon* done with virtue is good because of the virtue’s good. The *ergon* is done well because of the virtue, not because of the virtue’s goodness. The virtue is good for achieving the *ergon* by definition: this is what virtue is and does. The instrumental goodness of the virtue is different from the

¹¹² Blössner further mentions the lines 353d11-12 and 353e1-6, which are an application of the general premises established earlier regarding the soul and do not bring anything new concerning the concept of virtue or goodness.

¹¹³ Blössner (1991, 66) cites Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1.4, 1095a17-20 to support his claim that living well (εὖ ζῆν) was generally considered the same as being happy (εὐδαιμονεῖν).

¹¹⁴ This allows the virtue, in this case justice, to be a good we want for its own sake as well as for its effects, as Socrates says in 358a1-2.

goodness of the *ergon*. However, this difference does not indicate a fallacy in the argument, since these two ‘goodnesses’ are not conditioned upon one another within the argument.¹¹⁵

Allow me now to present some general comments regarding the *ergon* argument in the *Republic*. The *ergon* argument posits that justice is based on the *nature* of things. It is not a social or psychological construct. In this respect, it clearly reveals which side of the Euthyphro dilemma Socrates stands: justice is not something we invent or impose upon us or others, it is rooted in the nature of things themselves.

Next, it is important for the rest of the *Republic* and for Plato’s understanding of justice in general, that the *ergon* argument makes the shift from justice as an *interpersonal* or *relational* virtue to the virtue of the soul. All previous accounts of justice given by Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus involved two parties and justice was used to characterize the relationship between them. Cephalus’ understanding of justice as truth telling and paying debts presupposes the existence of someone to converse with or someone to pay back (331a-c). Polemarchus talks about giving to each what he is owed (331e) and about benefiting friends and harming enemies (332d). We saw that Thrasymachus’ position references internal strife among the strong and the weak, the rulers and the ruled. On the other hand, the *ergon* argument presents justice as the virtue of a single entity, i.e. of the soul or, as it will be stated later in the *Republic*, of a city.

Should we then be satisfied with the arguments made against Thrasymachus? As there are nine more books of the *Republic* and they are generally regarded as a type of response to Thrasymachus, there is a clear need for further explanation.¹¹⁶ Why does such a need arise?

¹¹⁵ To put it differently, the *ergon* argument does not argue that happiness or doing well is our final good. That seems to be the general assumption about *eudaimonia*. Cf. Hutchinson (1986, 48).

¹¹⁶ E.g. Algra (1996, 47): ‘Socrates’s claim (352d-354a) that justice is a virtue of the soul in the sense that it constitutes its health and its proper functioning, is not justified in the context of *Rep.* 1 and indeed only

Glaucon is quite succinct at the beginning of Book 2: it is not always and entirely better to be just rather than unjust (357b1-2). Furthermore, he wants to know what justice and injustice *is* in the soul of an individual, not about its effects (358b4-6). Finally, he wants Socrates to refute or debunk the contractarian justice argument (359b4-5), which could lend credence to the idea that justice is exacted out of necessity and not for the sake of a good life (this was Glaucon's second point in summarizing Thrasymachus' position in 358c4-6). Glaucon's second demand aligns with Socrates' complaint regarding his own contributions by the end of Book 1.

Socrates complains that instead of inquiring about what justice *is*, he ventured into different arguments about its categorization and characteristics (354a13-c3).¹¹⁷ On the other hand, not much later in Book 2, Socrates claims to be satisfied with his arguments against Thrasymachus, to the effect that justice is better than injustice (368b5-7).¹¹⁸ It seems that Socrates considers his arguments against Thrasymachus to be sufficient, though he needs to elaborate them in order to convince Glaucon. What is more, Socrates fails to provide a definition of justice. In summary, Socrates needs to explain what justice is, and he needs to give a detailed account of what justice does. In the following section, I will suggest how the

becomes intelligible against the background of the moral psychology worked out in book 4, in particular 444a-e.'

¹¹⁷ This complaint mirrors Socrates' complaints against his discussion partners in other dialogues, that instead of receiving an answer which would identify the entity in question, he instead hears about its characteristics or is given particular examples of it (e.g. *Meno* 72a; *Hp. mai.* 287d-e). Barney (2006, 44) takes this as a sign that no one is satisfied with the arguments in Book 1.

¹¹⁸ Rowe (2007, 186, 197) takes Socrates seriously and considers his arguments against Thrasymachus to be sufficient.

ergon argument aids in our understanding of Socrates' arguments in the remainder of the *Republic*.¹¹⁹

Usage of the ergon argument later in the Republic

The *ergon* argument is not abandoned at the end of the first book of the *Republic*.¹²⁰

Gerasimos Santas believes there to be ample textual evidence that the *ergon* argument is also used in the subsequent books of the *Republic*.¹²¹ Santas notes that Plato talks about the division of labour in terms of individual *ergon* (τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔργον, 369e2). Furthermore, citizens are said to be naturally fitted for their respective *erga* (370b1-2). The different classes of citizens in the *polis* are differentiated according to their particular *erga* (421c, 423d and 374e). The concept of *ergon* is also employed at the beginning of the argument that 'doing one's own' is justice (434a-c).¹²²

It is not enough to list specific instances of the term in the nine books of the *Republic*. The term *ergon* is a common word which can appear in non-technical, everyday usage. In order to demonstrate the importance of the *ergon* argument for the entire *Republic*, I will map out an interpretation of justice as it appears in the central books of the *Republic*, thereby highlighting the role of *ergon*. This explication will make it sufficiently clear that Plato does

¹¹⁹ Santas (2006) calls this the 'functional method.' My interpretation below was inspired by Santas' functional approach to the *Republic*. For another interpretation of the usage of *ergon* in the later books, see Zingano (unpublished).

¹²⁰ Much of the subsequent section is inspired by Gerasimos Santas' reading of the *Republic* as entertaining the *ergon* argument throughout the entire book; cf. Santas (1985); Santas (2006).

¹²¹ Santas (2006, 137ff.).

¹²² Santas (2006, 140) points out the importance of *ergon* in the tenth book of the *Republic* (e.g. 601d, 602d-603b) as well.

not abandon the *ergon* argument after Book 1 but that he puts it to work in his final account of justice as well.¹²³

Justice in the city is defined in Book 4 of the *Republic* as follows:

‘For the money-making, auxiliary, and guardian classes each to do its own work (οἰκαιοπραγία) in the city, is the opposite (sc. to injustice). That’s justice, isn’t it, and makes the city just?’ (434c7-10)

Plato is primarily concerned with membership in one of the three classes of society, although he does talk about the particular *erga* of occupations within these classes as well (443c5-7). Membership in these classes is rooted in nature (423d2-6, 434b1) and must not be disturbed via violent vertical social mobility on the basis of wealth (oligarchy), number (democracy) or strength (tyranny). Justice means having and doing ‘one’s own’ (433e12-434a1). What is one’s ‘own’ extends to each of the classes listed above as well as to individuals and their lives.¹²⁴ The same principle applies in the case of an individual. The principle of doing one’s own is slightly adapted to a psychological account of justice:

‘... we must also remember that each one of us in whom each part is doing its own work will himself be just and do his own.’ (441d12-e2)

The parts of the soul are in harmony when each one does its own. Plato understands this psychic justice as underlying the social justice of the city. He clearly maintains that a just person will act justly in his social activities and relations. Just actions contribute to the justice exercised in the city, i.e. just actions contribute to the state of a city in which each class does its own. Unjust actions contribute to injustice and disturb the state in which each

¹²³ The following interpretation is based on Jirsa (2013).

¹²⁴ Vlastos (1991, 668).

class does its own (443e2-444a2). Doing one's own in the case of his or her social class means doing the *ergon* of that given class (e.g. 374d8).

When Plato writes that the *ergon* of an individual is given by his or her nature (370a7-b2, 453b10-c2; cf. 452e-453a), he skilfully combines several possible meanings of this term: the first is social or familial descent, which relates an individual's nature to the nature of his biological parents (cf. 414dff., esp. 415c).¹²⁵ The second meaning is 'natural talent,' which is reminiscent of *ergon*. Plato uses the term φύσις to talk about the forms that justice or beauty take, describing them as 'natural justice and beauty' (τὸ φύσει δίκαιον καὶ καλόν, 501b2). Similarly, in the passage about artefacts and forms, he refers to the form of the bed as a 'bed in nature' (ἡ ἐν τῇ φύσει οὐσσα, 597b5-6). Therefore, if one's *ergon* is given by his φύσις, it is not accidental, but rather an expression of who a given person really is.¹²⁶

How do these notions of nature and *ergon* relate to justice as 'doing one's own'? At the beginning of Book 4, Socrates defends his claim that the entire *polis* should be happy and that no particular class or group should be made happy at the expense of others.

Throughout this exposition, he employs the simile of a painter decorating a statue (420c4-e1). Even the artisan paints the most beautiful part—the eyes—using the colour that is most fitting and not necessarily the most magnificent. The task of the painter is not to paint the most magnificent or beautiful eyes but to make the whole statue beautiful by bestowing each part with what is most appropriate (τὰ προσήκοντα). The emphasis here is on bestowing what is appropriate to everyone. In the case of a *polis*, this does not mean the proper distribution of rewards and punishments, but primarily the appropriate distribution

¹²⁵ All meanings are based on the entry in LSJ.

¹²⁶ This does not require the existence of a form of man nor a form of an individual; it is essentially the distinction between the nature of a given person on the one hand, and the accidental features or interests of a given individual on the other. Cf. Adkins (1970, 158).

of roles and functions to the individuals of a *polis* based on his or her nature. This reveals that in Plato's *polis*, places are specifically structured in that they are occupied by individuals whose nature is the most appropriate for a given place.¹²⁷ The places should be properly allocated as a result of education which is under the control of the rulers:

'This was meant to make clear that each of the other citizens is to be directed to what he is naturally suited for (πρὸς ὃ τις πέφυκεν), so that, doing the one work that is his own (ἐν ἑκάστων ἔργον), he will become not many but one, and the whole city will itself be naturally one not many.' (423d2-6)

Each citizen is naturally suited for his own *ergon* which he should perform in the *polis*.¹²⁸ This means that whoever is a guardian by nature will profit the city most as a guardian and, moreover, he will live more happily than in any other occupation. A natural guardian might die of boredom as a shopkeeper and a natural shopkeeper would not do well as a guardian. Therefore, Plato illustrates an image of justice (εἰδωλὸν τι τῆς δικαιοσύνης, 443c4-5) as a profitable situation in which 'it is right for someone who is by nature a cobbler to practice cobblery and nothing else, for the carpenter to practice carpentry, and the same for the others' (443c5-7). This image shows that an individual's *ergon* is based on the *physis* of that individual in respect to his or her particular education as well as his or her membership in one of the three classes.

Injustice and the decline of the *polis* are described as a kind of sickness caused by the violent usurpation of inappropriate places by the lower classes or as the result of a similarly violent usurpation of property in the case of a ruler vying to become a tyrant (434a9-b7, 466b-c). At

¹²⁷ Cf. Santas (1985, 232): '... the formula "doing one's own work" is essentially a functional interpretation.'

¹²⁸ Pradeau (2002, 63) writes 'In the most excellent city, as thus defined, a citizen clearly relates to his city through his function. This is the role (to exercise the function that is his), his contribution to all that is needed by the entity formed by all the citizens.'

any rate, injustice means obtaining that which is unbefitting and improper to have: lower classes ought not to rule and rulers ought not to have property. Having something inappropriate parallels the phrase *πλέον ἔχειν*, having more, from the argument in Book 1. ‘Having more’ means having or striving for more than is due, for more than one’s share, i.e. for something improper. Here, obtaining that which is inappropriate forms the core of injustice in the community. If the structure of natural places breaks up and ‘a farmer wouldn’t be a farmer, nor a potter a potter,’ then the city would soon be in ruins, as it was established based on the tenet of everyone doing one’s own work.

There is a similar structure of natural places and functions in the tripartite soul of an individual and we can thus assume that justice in the soul will be described in an analogous manner (435b4-c2).¹²⁹ The psychological definition of justice, quoted above, states that one is just if each part of his soul does its own (441d12-e2), which, according to Plato, is the very crux of justice:

‘And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn’t concerned with someone’s doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.’ (443c9-e2)

Plato considers psychological justice to be the primary conception of justice, thereby establishing a foundation for political and social justice (cf. 443e2-444a2 discussed above).

¹²⁹ For a discussion on the tripartition of the soul see e.g. Burnyeat (2006).

This ‘inner’ justice consists of each part of our soul doing what it is naturally suited for. There is no space within the scope of this book for a detailed discussion on the arguments of the natural functions of the soul-parts. To be brief, it is appropriate for the rational part of the soul to rule, since reason is wise and it is the only part that takes into consideration the whole of the soul while doing its work (441e4-7). Moreover, the rational part is the only part which possesses the knowledge about what is profitable for each of the parts and for the whole soul (442c5-8).¹³⁰ The spirited part of the soul should help the rational part and should also control the appetitive part, which is naturally the most voracious one (441e-442b). Plato mentions the nature of these different soul parts in relation to the natural hierarchical structure of the soul: reason’s natural role is leading and ruling for the above mentioned reasons and the other soul-parts should follow (444a-c). Any diversion or change in this natural order is considered to be a case of injustice or some other psychic ill (444b1-8, cf. φύσει at 444b4).

Plato’s focus on the natural tasks or functions of the soul-parts is evident when he tries to elucidate his conception of justice using the analogy of health in the body:

‘To produce health is to establish the components of the body in a natural relation (κατὰ φύσιν) of control and being controlled, one by another, while to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν). - That’s right. - Then, isn’t to produce justice to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation (κατὰ φύσιν) of control, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν)? - Precisely.’ (444d3-12)

¹³⁰ Reason persuades the other soul parts to agree with its rule (442c11-d1), whereas the lower soul parts ‘enslave’ the other parts while ruling them (442b1, 553d2, 554a7, 569c3-4, 575a1-2).

When each part of the soul does its own (τὰ οἰκεῖα) and does not purloin the work of other parts (μὴ τὰλλότρια πράττειν), it is called justice (cf. 443c9-e2). What is ‘own’ to each part of the soul is natural to it. Therefore, virtue, or a good state of the soul (εὐεξία ψυχῆς), requires each part of the soul to do what is natural to it (444e1).¹³¹ One crucial conclusion furnished by Plato’s moral or political psychology in the *Republic* and which originates from the *ergon* argument is that ‘what is best for each thing is most its own’ (586e2). Doing one’s own *ergon* well thus leads to the good life of the individual as well as the well-being of the *polis*.¹³² Since doing our *ergon* is what is own to us, it is also the best (way of living) for us.

***Ergon* argument in other dialogues**

The *Republic* is surely the most important dialogue for understanding Plato’s version of the *ergon* argument, though it is not the only one. Surprisingly little has been written about the presence of *ergon* argumentation in other dialogues. The dialogues other than the *Republic* mentioned in the secondary literature are *Philebus*, *Crito* and *Meno*.¹³³ I will briefly discuss

¹³¹ Mansion (1960, 70–1); Düring (1961, 234–35) misread this argument, claiming that justice is the virtue of the rational part of the soul and it is what drives the other parts of the soul to do their own. First, justice is not the virtue of the rational part of the soul; it is clearly stated in the *ergon* argument that it is the virtue of the entire soul. The virtue of reason is wisdom. Moreover, the relation between οἰκειοπραγία, doing one’s own, and justice, is in direct opposition to what Mansion believes and Düring essentially mirrors her reasoning. Justice does not cause οἰκειοπραγία, as made clear in the interpretation above, justice *is* οἰκειοπραγία.

¹³² Clark (1972, 276) makes an important observation regarding the *ergon* of a citizen in *Resp.* 407a1; the main difference between Plato and Aristotle is that for Aristotle, ‘one’s identity is something created in one’s choices rather than an immediately given fact,’ whereas for Plato, *ergon* is given by the individual’s nature, which can develop in the process of a proper education but cannot be changed.

¹³³ Nussbaum (1995, 110) mentions the similarity of the *ergon* argument in Aristotle’s *Eth. Nic.* 1.7 to the *Phlb.* 21c-d; Lawrence (2001, 449) points to the *Meno* 71e-72a; Barker (1977, 25) uses the *ergon* argument in the *Republic* in order to interpret the claim found in the *Cri.* 48b11-d5 which posits that the only harm relevant to *us* is moral harm.

the relevant passages from these two texts and will also provide an interpretation of a passage in the *Alcibiades I.* which employs the *ergon* argument.¹³⁴

The *Meno* passage is Meno's first attempt at explaining what virtue is (71e1-72a5). Meno lists the virtues of men, women and children, and at the end of his account he generalizes that: 'for each of us, you see, and for each pursuit (*ergon*), there is the relevant virtue to match each activity and age' (72a2-5; transl. Long). Gavin Lawrence believes that Plato prompts Meno to make the connection between virtue and *ergon* himself, as it was a common concept at the time.¹³⁵ Yet, unlike the *Crito* and *Alcibiades I.*, the *ergon* argument does not figure in the later discussion after Socrates revisits the question about virtue (79c and following). Moreover, Meno is generally misguided in trying to capture the essence of virtue by listing the different types and instances of virtue instead of providing the single account or definition Socrates asks for. Masking a correct approach with an erroneous answer without ever revisiting it seems to be a strange stylistic move. Long's translation of the texts actually highlights the relativism that appears in the text: there is a different virtue for each *ergon* of each individual based on activity and age. The *ergon* is simply whatever we do in a given activity and its virtue is, moreover, relative to our age. Therefore, Meno concludes, it is impossible to provide a simple account of virtue.

The relevant passage in the *Philebus* appears at the beginning of the dialogue, when Socrates discusses a radical hedonistic way of life. For the sake of discussion, Socrates and Protarchus strip the hedonistic life of all higher cognitive capacities such as practical

¹³⁴ Concerning the authenticity of the *Alcibiades I.* Cf. Smith (2004) and Jirsa (2009); there is no need to establish the authorship of the dialogue for the purposes of this chapter. Even if the *Alcibiades I.* was written by someone else, including the use of the *ergon* argument in the text, it merely shows that it was perceived as truly platonic argumentation (even authors who deny Plato's authorship of the *Alcibiades I.* agree that the text is platonic, perhaps even too platonic).

¹³⁵ Lawrence (2001, 449).

wisdom (20e4), knowing, intelligence, calculation (21a14), reason, memory, knowledge and true opinion (21b6). The resulting conclusion is then that in choosing a life of pleasure that is devoid of reason, one ‘would not live a human life (οὐκ ἀνθρώπου βίον) but the life of a mollusk or of one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea’ (21c6-8; transl. D. Frede).¹³⁶

Socrates’ argument assumes that there is such a thing as a life which is a person’s own or that is natural to human beings, maintaining that no other way of life is more suitable for humans. In accordance with the above interpretation of the *Republic*, we can assume that a life suitable or own to human beings is also the best life for human beings. Any other life is worse for human beings and is thus not a worthy choice,

The *ergon* argument does not appear to be alluded to in the *Meno* passage discussed above; the *Philebus* passage, on the other hand, is more promising in this manner, and it is especially important when reading the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7. The passage discusses the appropriateness of a certain way of life, which is an important issue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and one could look for analogous passages concerning different *ergon* in the *Republic*.¹³⁷ However, I will argue that the *Crito* and *Alcibiades I.* use the *ergon* argument to explicate the notion of virtue, which provides a much stronger parallel to its use in the *Republic*. If my hypothesis is correct, it means that Plato does not limit his usage of the *ergon* argument to the first book of the *Republic*, but uses it to explain what virtue is in other dialogues as well.

¹³⁶ Hackforth (1945, 449) rightly calls our attention to parallels between the characterization of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s *Eth. Nic.* 1.7, 1097a25-b11 and in the immediately preceding passage in *Philebus* 20d. He does not mention any relation concerning the *ergon* argument, but if Nussbaum is correct, it is clear that Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1.7 responds to these passages from the *Philebus*.

¹³⁷ Cf. section ‘Usage of the *ergon* argument later in the *Republic*’ above.

For example, in the first half of the *Crito*, before the entrance of the personified laws, Socrates responds to Crito's offer to aid in his escape from prison by explaining his basic moral principles (46b-50a). He claims to listen to nothing but to the best available *logos* (46b) and one of these *logoi* seems to be the thesis that it is not worthy to live with a ruined soul: 'And is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits? Or do we think that part of us, whatever it is, that is concerned with justice and injustice, is inferior to the body? - Not at all.' (47e7-48a2; transl. Grube)

A little later in the text it becomes clear that the only harm that is of any significance is moral harm classed as injustice: to harm someone is unjust (49c7-8). Andrew Barker links this passage to the *ergon* argument in the *Republic* and claims that man is harmed only by harming himself in what a man does *qua* man, i.e. harming himself in his *ergon*.¹³⁸ Unjust actions harm our soul and just actions benefit our soul. This is made clear from the *ergon* argument and it also operates as an explicit premise in the *Crito*. Just actions are beneficial since justice is the virtue of the soul, which is responsible for doing the soul's *ergon*, i.e. living, well. Therefore, the idea behind Socrates' claim in the *Crito*, that justice is beneficial and that the type of harm most relevant to us is moral harm, rests upon the conclusions of the *ergon* argument.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Barker (1977, 25–6). Barker tries to illustrate his interpretation using a knife as an example: 'To damage a knife, *qua* knife, must be to blunt or chip its blade, or otherwise impair its capacity for cutting: to paint its handle a hideous colour will not damage it as a knife, though it may impair it as a work of art or a financial asset.'

¹³⁹ The chronology of Plato's writings is not important for these interpretations of the *Philebus*, *Meno*, *Alcibiades I.* or *Crito*. My argument is not that these texts are contingent upon or rely on the text of the *Republic* 1. The passages in the *Alcibiades I.* and *Crito* share some similarities with the text that houses the *ergon* argument in the *Republic* (examples in the case of the *Alcibiades*, the discussion of the profitability of justice in the case of the *Crito*). However, there is nothing to suggest a dependence or a direct reference to the text of the *ergon* argument in the *Republic*. The discussed passages from the *Alcibiades I.* and the *Crito*

The dialogue *Alcibiades I.* concludes that individuals as well as cities need not only external goods and tools in order to be happy and prosperous but are rather primarily in need of virtue, which ensures that they will do well and will not make mistakes (133d-134c; esp. 134b7-9). The final passage of this dialogue echoes the previous examination of a city's management. In 126a5-6 Socrates asks: 'But what is present or absent (παραγιγνομένου ἢ ἀπογιγνομένου) when the city is safe and better managed?' (transl. Hutchinson). He then goes on to list a few examples to explain what he means: if someone were to ask what needs to be present so that the eyes are good, the answer would be 'sight,' meaning that blindness would have to be absent from the eyes. Similarly, in the case of the ears, deafness must be absent and hearing must be present in order for them to be well and well cared for.

Both examples of the eyes and ears are present in the *ergon* argument in the first book of the *Republic*. Similarly as it is described there, virtue is thought to be present in an entity to indicate that the entity is doing well. In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates explains the role of virtue in the same way as the *ergon* argument does: if a virtue is present in a given entity, then the entity does its activities well (134c1-2). Despite the fact that the term *ergon* does not appear here, the scheme and argumentation is the same as that employed at the end of Book 1 of the *Republic*: virtue is what secures that a given entity does what it is supposed to do well.

Based on these examples, I believe that the *ergon* argument is not only made in the *Republic*, nor is it limited to the first book of the *Republic*. I have demonstrated that an important part of Plato's argumentation about justice that appears in the rest of the *Republic* is rooted in the *ergon* argument. Moreover, the thought pattern or scheme of the *ergon* argument is also

presuppose only the general scheme of the *ergon* argument and its conclusions and there is no need to conjecture as to when this argument was written down in detail.

apparent in several other dialogues. It is further used to elucidate the notion of virtue and to explain Plato's conviction that what is one's own is one's best.

The philosopher's life according to the *Protrepticus* and the *ergon* argument¹⁴⁰

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Plato uses the *ergon* argument at the end of the first book of the *Republic* as the first positive response to Thrasymachus' position. Plato wants to show that a just person is blessed, happy (μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων, *Resp.* 354a1) and lives well. The argument concludes that injustice is never more profitable than justice: in this sense of the term, justice is worthwhile (*Resp.* 354a8-9).

Another text which features the *ergon* argument in a crucial role and which I want to examine is Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.¹⁴¹ The text of Aristotle's lost work has been reconstructed to an astonishing extent since the rediscovery of its fragments in the nineteenth century. I will briefly outline the history of the reconstruction in the subsequent section. The *Protrepticus* is currently gaining more attraction in literature on Aristotle's ethics, psychology¹⁴² and in works on ancient protreptic literature.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ I am thankful to D. S. Hutchinson, Monte Ransome Johnson, Hynek Bartoš and the participants of the workshop on protreptic strategies in Aristotle that took place in Athens for all of their comments on the previous drafts of this chapter. Their feedback has been an invaluable asset and I take full authorship of the remaining flaws in my work.

¹⁴¹ I have profited greatly from the work done by D. S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson which has been made generously accessible at www.protrepticus.info. Throughout the text, I will use their translation and edition of the *Protrepticus* available on the mentioned website (differences from their translation will be indicated). I will refer to the text from Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* according to Pistelli's edition from 1888, reprinted by Teubner in 1996; and Iamblichus' *De Communi Mathematica Scientia* according to Festa's edition (1891) revised by Klein in 1975.

¹⁴² See for example Gerson (2005, 60–70); Bobonich (2007); Walker (2010); Geis (2013); Baker (2015, 236–238); Hutchinson and Johnson (2014a); Johnson (2018); an older exception is, of course, Monan (1968).

¹⁴³ Collins (2015, 243–264).

The protreptic form aims to convince the audience (readers or listeners) to turn towards a certain goal or good, which is usually specified as virtue or philosophy.¹⁴⁴ Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, most probably written in the late 350s, is a protreptic towards the *right kind* of philosophy. Hutchinson and Johnson convincingly claim that it is a polemic response to Isocrates's *Antidosis*, positing that Aristotle wants to defend the value of theoretical philosophy over its rather utilitarian understanding as an instrument of prosperity in the social and political life of the *polis*.¹⁴⁵ It seems that Aristotle has several of Plato's dialogues in his arsenal when responding to the attack made by the rival intellectual school. The obvious point of reference here is Plato's *Republic* 1. However, in the following interpretation, I will refer to the *Euthydemus*, *Alcibiades I.* and *Philebus* for parallel arguments that also might have inspired Aristotle.

The *Protrepticus* shares the general view that happiness (εὐδαιμονία) is our supreme goal or the highest good in our life.¹⁴⁶ Aristotle's conclusion in the *Protrepticus* is that regardless of whether *eudaimonia* is understood as a type of wisdom, virtue or enjoyment, living happily is ascribed either exclusively or primarily to the philosophers. Therefore, 'everyone capable of it should do philosophy' (*Protr.* 12, 59.24-60.10). One leg of this argument might be a logical one.¹⁴⁷ Ancient authors saw the main thrust of the argument in that once someone makes a statement about the desirability or undesirability of philosophy, that person is

¹⁴⁴ For an introduction to the protreptic genre see Collins (2015) and Jordan (1986); on Plato's protreptics in particular, see the still relevant Gaiser (1959), and more recently Gallagher (2004). When discussing the *Protrepticus*, it is important to examine its possible relation to Plato's *Euthydemus*. On the protreptics in this dialogue see Chance (1992) and Michelini (2000).

¹⁴⁵ Hutchinson and Johnson (unpublished); compare Collins (2015, 255ff.). Düring (1955, 85) believes that the *Antidosis* is criticism directed against Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.4 1095a17-20.

¹⁴⁷ The logic of the argument is interpreted in detail by Castagnoli (2010, 11) and Hutchinson and Johnson (2018).

already doing philosophy since, according to Hortensius in Cicero's lost eponymous dialogue: 'it is a philosopher's business to debate what should and should not be done in life.'¹⁴⁸

However, Alexander of Aphrodisias adds an important observation: Aristotle's argument that one should pursue philosophical study or contemplation (θεωρία) posits that doing so is 'appropriate for a human being' (οἰκεῖον τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ).¹⁴⁹ This 'appropriateness' is pivotal in my subsequent interpretation. I believe that in order to explain the value and central role of theoretical philosophy in the *Protrepticus*¹⁵⁰, one must examine the appropriateness of philosophy as the supreme activity of human beings. According to my interpretation, the *ergon* argument is at the crux of this argumentation. I will thus demonstrate that the *ergon* argument is needed in order to show that doing philosophy is something that is our 'own' or appropriate to us.¹⁵¹

The main portion of my interpretation will focus on the text preserved in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* 7, 41.22-43.25, which is included in all modern editions of the work. The *communis opinio* thus seems to be that if any of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* has been preserved these passages belong to it.¹⁵² Therefore, we can proceed by working with the assumption that we read Aristotle's text written towards the end of his studies at the Academy.

¹⁴⁸ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 3.9 (396b, ed. Brandt, transl. Bowen - Garnsey); similar references have been compiled in Johnson and Hutchinson (2017, 4).

¹⁴⁹ Alexander of Aphrodisias, in *Aristotelis Topicorum libros octo commentaria*, 149.14, ed. Wallies.

¹⁵⁰ Hutchinson and Johnson (unpublished) conclude that philosophy is 'an intrinsically valuable activity, and perhaps the only activity in which humans engage in their unique and final function.'

¹⁵¹ Only a few interpreters make use of the *ergon* argument, as it appears in the *Protrepticus*, in their work on Aristotle's ethics, cf. Reeve (1992, 136); Tuozzo (1996, 148); Brüllmann (2012, 6-7); Hutchinson and Johnson (2014b, 391-2) and Baker (2015, 236-8).

¹⁵² Iambl., *Protr.* 7, 41.22-43.25 (Pistelli) = Fr. 6 Walzer and Fr. 6 Ross; Düring B61-70. Most translations are based either on Walzer/Ross or Düring and thus cite these passages as Aristotle's. Following Walzer and

The fragmentary character of the *Protrepticus*, however, might problematize this endeavour. Nevertheless, I maintain that the role of the *ergon* argument can still be elucidated within the complex argumentation of the *Protrepticus*, i.e. that we can form a general understanding of the broader argumentative context despite not having access to the original, meaning that we cannot know for certain how much of the original text is actually missing.

First, I rely on the findings furnished by Hutchinson and Johnson, which postulate that Iamblichus remained faithful to his sources and did not rearrange their line of thought.¹⁵³ Even if this were not the case, my interpretation would not be jeopardized, as it takes the form of a systematic argument which is not directly dependent on the order of the fragments. Moreover, if the original text was a dialogue (to be discussed further in the subsequent section), it might have been necessary to reconstruct the argument based on the different utterances made by one or more speakers in this work. Iamblichus' faithfulness and method of working with the material helps in reading the preserved text, though it does not play a substantial role in my argumentation. As we will see, the text that houses the *ergon* argument appears to be a technical piece of argumentation which does not bear any signs of a dialogical exchange. It rather gives the impression of a dense line of argumentation presented in one piece. Second, Konrad Gaiser notes that the *Eudemian Ethics* makes two references to the 'written *logos*' (1.8, 1218a36, 7.12, 1244b30), potentially alluding to the lost *Protrepticus*. If this is true—and Gaiser's findings have not been disputed thus far—then Aristotle uses the *Protrepticus* both at the beginning and in the concluding

Ross are Chroust (1964), Casaglia (2001) and Zanatta (2008). Following Düring are Berti (2000), Mincă and Partenie (2005), Megino Rodríguez (2006) and his own German translation, Düring (1969). The idiosyncratic versions of the text by Schneeweiss and Flashar include the text as well, see Schneeweiss (1966, 206–7, 211–3), Schneeweiss (2005, fr. 59, 66); Flashar (2006, 60–2).

¹⁵³ Hutchinson and Johnson (2005, 285–290).

section of the *Eudemian Ethics*. This might lend a dose of optimism to the claim that *Protrepticus* used to be a complex treatise with long ethical argument, rendering it justifiable to interpret the *ergon* argument within the broader context of the work.¹⁵⁴

Recovering and reading the *Protrepticus*

The history of how the lost text of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* was recovered has been described by several authors and I will limit my commentary to the points which are relevant for the subsequent interpretation.¹⁵⁵ The genealogy of the current state of the art concerning evidence of Aristotle's original text can be—for the sake of clarity—summarized in three stages.

The first stage started with the discovery of the first fragments in the nineteenth century and lasted until Ross' translation and edition.¹⁵⁶ The most substantial work carried out on the *Protrepticus* during this first stage was the expansion of the number and length of the fragments as well as attempts to contextualize the *Protrepticus* into one of the interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy. The discovery started with the innovative work of J. Bernays and V. Rose.¹⁵⁷ According to their findings, the *Protrepticus* seemed to be a polemical text in defense of theoretical philosophy. Their work was supported by Ingram Bywater, who revealed Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* to be a potential source of quotations from

¹⁵⁴ I am thus in disagreement with the otherwise highly valuable interpretation of James Collins, who characterizes passages of the *Protrepticus* as a 'hodge-podge of popular sentiments' with 'a dash of esoteric learning', cf. Collins (2015, 260).

¹⁵⁵ The history of the older debates is nicely summarized in Chroust (1973, 86–104); up-to-date overview can be found in Hutchinson and Johnson (2005, 196–203) and Collins (2015, 247–50). See Meeren (2011, 2–7, 72–6) for a different perspective on the textual reconstruction.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ross (1952) for the translation and Ross (1955) for the edition of fragments.

¹⁵⁷ Bernays (1863) and Rose (1863); Rose (1870); Rose (1870).

Aristotle's lost work.¹⁵⁸ According to Bywater, the text is purely Aristotelian in nature and exhibits a doctrinal parallel to Aristotle's preserved writings. The thesis concerning the Aristotelian nature of the text was vehemently challenged by Werner Jaeger¹⁵⁹, according to whom the young Aristotle was a devote Platonist who later became antagonistic to the teachings of his former master. R. Walzer published his edition of the fragments under the influence of Jaeger's work, though he did not hesitate to highlight many convincing parallels to Aristotle's preserved works.¹⁶⁰ Walzer's edition later served as the foundation for Ross' translation and edition mentioned above.

The main scholarly debates concerning the *Protrepticus*—apart from its reconstruction—circled around the doctrinal nature of the work and its literary form. Plato and Aristotle were viewed as two opposing poles in the philosophy of the Classical period and interpreters thus tried to identify which of these poles the *Protrepticus* belonged to.¹⁶¹ The next question concerned the original stylistic form of the text: is it a dialogue written in the style of Plato or a treatise that is more in line with Aristotle's preserved works?¹⁶² The polemic nature of the work was made clear from the first attempts at selecting the relevant fragments. However, a dialogue presupposes a more diverse dialectical discussion, meaning

¹⁵⁸ Bywater (1869).

¹⁵⁹ Jaeger (1923), English translation.

¹⁶⁰ Walzer (1934), his edition is still used today.

¹⁶¹ Zeller (1879); Bignone (1936); Jaeger (1948); de Strycker (1960, 80) argue for the Platonic nature of the text. On the other hand, Gadamer (1928), Bywater (1869), Diels (1888); Düring (1961, 17–8); Schneeweiss (1966, 273) attest to the Aristotelian nature of the *Protrepticus*. Düring (1960, 36) presents a more nuanced view of Aristotle as being a rather peculiar Platonist.

¹⁶² Rose (1863); Rose (1870), Bywater (1869), Usener (1873), Diels (1888), Hartlich (1889) consider the text to be a dialogue. Hirtzel (1876); Jaeger (1948, 55–6) and Düring (1960, 55) think it was rather a letter or a treatise. Hutchinson and Johnson (2018) present a convincing argument that the *Protrepticus* was a dialogue.

that not all of the perspectives presented in the dialogue can easily be ascribed to the author of the text.

This development was abruptly interrupted by W. G. Rabinowitz and his publication *Aristotle's Protrepticus and the Sources of its Reconstruction* (1957). In his short book, which was planned to be the first part of larger study which was never published, Rabinowitz essentially claims that we do not yet have a sound method for identifying the fragments of Aristotle's text with any precision.¹⁶³ Rabinowitz only examines Chapter 6 from Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* and asserts that several of Aristotle's works could be at play here, not only the *Protrepticus*. If one were to identify any actual fragments, they would be too short to serve as adequate *comparandum*. Moreover, Rabinowitz claims that we cannot exclude the presence of non-Aristotelian sources from Iamblichus' text, surmising that this text cannot serve as the basis for a reconstruction of Aristotle's own text.

Rabinowitz' criticism was met with severe resistance and counterarguments. According to all ancient lists of his works, Aristotle wrote one single protreptic treatise and it is thus safe to assume that Iamblichus draws on this text. Second, Rabinowitz' classification of several fragments as Platonic, Speusippian or Academic, was revealed to be premature and inconclusive.¹⁶⁴ Rabinowitz' critique, however, have a problematic impact on scholarship. In order to stave off any potential criticism similar to that of Rabinowitz', later editors of the *Protrepticus* would present the text in an extremely fragmentary form.

¹⁶³ Cf. Chroust (1973, 98–9) who summarizes the criticism and responses to it; similarly Hutchinson and Johnson (2005, 200–1).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. critical reviews listed by Hutchinson and Johnson (2005, 200, fn. 19), and a summary of the reasons listed by Chroust (1973, 99); on the other hand, Rabinowitz' criticism is accepted by C. J. Rowe (1971, 76–7) as well as by Kenny (2016, 3), who defend him for expelling the *Protrepticus* from the discussion on the chronology of the two *Ethics*.

This is the case with Düring's response to Rabinowitz, namely *Aristotle's Protrepticus: An Attempt at Reconstruction* (1961), as well as two attempts by Gerhard Schneeweiss.¹⁶⁵ All of these editions present Aristotle's text fragmented into more than a hundred pieces without providing a sound methodology on how the fragments were selected from the preserved texts. These editions further include lines and quotations from Aristotle's other writings and, finally, the guiding principles used to order the fragments remain unclear. Düring's edition of the text and his commentary are valuable contributions to the debate, though it is extremely problematic to use these materials as a basis for philosophical interpretation.

The current stage of the discussion enormously benefits from the work on the reconstruction of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* carried out by D. S. Hutchinson and Monte Johnson.¹⁶⁶ According to Hutchinson and Johnson, we can reconstruct quite large portions of the original dialogue in their original order. From that we can surmise from this dialogue with two other figures (Isocrates himself and Heraclides, the Pythagorean), Aristotle defends theoretical philosophy against Isocrates' opinion that only practical knowledge or philosophy in political and social use can be beneficial.¹⁶⁷ How did they arrive at this conclusion? Their assumption is that Iamblichus' treatment of the Aristotelian source is similar to his approach to Plato's dialogues in the first half of his own *Protrepticus*: he evidently quotes relatively long passages from good manuscripts, as the quotations correspond to the preserved text of the dialogues; furthermore, Iamblichus provides only brief commentary, leaving most of the original text intact. Finally, Iamblichus preserves the order of the text as it appears in the original work, i.e. Aristotle does move back and forth in

¹⁶⁵ Schneeweiss (1966); Schneeweiss (2005).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. especially Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) and the editorial material documented at www.protrepticus.info.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Hutchinson and Johnson (2018) for their argumentation concerning the dialogue form and the participants of the dialogue.

the original. This allows Hutchinson and Johnson to reconstruct quite large fragments of the original text in a series which corresponds to the order of the original.¹⁶⁸

Most modern authors refrain from evaluating the style of the text, though the case for the dialogical form was bolstered by the work of Hutchinson and Johnson as well as the contribution made by James Collins.¹⁶⁹ Hutchinson and Johnson convincingly show how Iamblichus tries (often unsuccessfully) to suppress the dialogical features, while James Collins calls attention to the aggressiveness and *ad hominem* attacks in the text, which are more characteristic of a dialogue rather than a polemical treatise.

Where does my interpretation lie in light of the different interpretations mapped out above? In my explication, I will assume that the *Protrepticus* is a defence of Plato's Academy written by Aristotle in response to Isocrates' attacks in the *Antidosis*.¹⁷⁰ I will show that there are several possible references to Plato's dialogues which Aristotle was familiar with and may have even had 'on his table' when writing the *Protrepticus* (e.g. the *Euthydemus*, *Alcibiades I* and the *Republic*, which possibly inspired him concerning the *ergon* argument). On the other hand, Aristotle is not simply replicating Plato's ideas here; he develops his own arguments with many similarities and even proto-versions of the arguments and claims which appear in the (supposedly) later works in their extant form.¹⁷¹ As to the style of the work, I am

¹⁶⁸ Vendruscolo (1989, 297) furnishes similar conclusions even without the evidence found in Hutchinson and Johnson (2005).

¹⁶⁹ Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) and Collins (2015, 261).

¹⁷⁰ See Hutchinson and Johnson (unpublished); the idea that *Protrepticus* is a response to the *Antidosis* was mentioned already by Jaeger (1923), Bignone (1936) and Einarson (1936).

¹⁷¹ Gerson (2004, 221) presents a great analogy in order to illustrate the relation of Aristotle's critique to the criticized Platonism: 'one might compare in this regard the example of a Protestant theologian's criticism of Catholic theology. It hardly needs stating that such criticism is typically made on the basis of shared Christian principles. Those who dismiss out of hand the idea that Aristotle was a Platonist suppose, I guess, that Platonism is to be considered more like Catholicism than like Christianity. That might indeed turn out to be the case. But the fact that the plainly recognizable Platonic elements in the Aristotelian corpus are,

tempted to believe Hutchinson, Johnson and Collins, in that the original text was a dialogue. However, my interpretation does not make use of the dialogical form in any respect; Hutchinson and Johnson ascribe all of the passages I will interpret to the character ‘Aristotle’¹⁷² and they are long enough to form a more or less coherent argument.

The role of the *ergon* in the argument of the *Protrepticus*

One of the few points which have persevered from antiquity until today is the general conclusion of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*: one ought to do philosophy.¹⁷³ Moreover, current scholarship agrees that this philosophy is further narrowed down to a theoretical kind of philosophy and that the argument is a response to accusations that theoretical philosophy is useless unless it is put to work in political or social practice.¹⁷⁴ I believe that the *ergon* argument preserved in Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* 7, 41.22-43.25 (Pistelli = Fr. 6 Ross, Düring B61-B70) plays an important role in the argument, as it establishes a solid connection between doing theoretical philosophy and human nature.¹⁷⁵ In order to see how this argument works, I will start with the assumed conclusion of the treatise and explain the premises and sub-arguments upon which it rests. We will see that the *ergon* argument lays down the groundwork for the argumentation since—similarly as in the *Eudemian Ethics* and

typically, eliminated by rather brazen *ad hoc* applications of ingenuity might give us reason to think otherwise.’

¹⁷² Cf. their provisional edition of the text at www.protrepticus.info; I refer to their 2017 and 2018 versions.

¹⁷³ Cf. references in footnote 148 above.

¹⁷⁴ E.g. Jaeger (1948, 57); Bignone (1936); Einarson (1936); Mansion (1960, 68); Hutchinson and Johnson (unpublished); Walker (2010).

¹⁷⁵ Monan (1968, 30–4) presents an interpretation of this passage; yet Monan leaves out the discussion of *ergon* entirely. Moreover, I believe that his brief interpretation is erroneous since, according to him, knowing is the best form of human activity *because* all men love thinking and knowing most of all. However, as my interpretation will clearly demonstrate, the line of thought is inverse here: all men love thinking because it is their best activity.

the *Nicomachean Ethics*-it serves as the impetus for Aristotle's substantial ethical work, i.e. it catalyzes his argument that it is because we are human beings, which is an indisputable fact, that philosophy is the source of *eudaimonia*.

In the section which Hutchinson and Johnson consider to be the last fragment of Aristotle's text, it states that: 'thus we take the position that *eudaimonia* is either practical wisdom and a certain wisdom, or virtue, or enjoying oneself most of all, or all the above' (59.26-60.1).¹⁷⁶ This is either Iamblichus summarizing Aristotle's earlier statement or Aristotle rephrasing his own thesis stated right before the *ergon* argument:

'Moreover, whether living happily¹⁷⁷ consists in enjoyment, or in having virtue, or in practical wisdom, in accordance with all these we should do philosophy, for these things happen to us most of all, and in a pure way, through doing philosophy.'

καὶ μὴν εἴτε τὸ ζῆν εὐδαιμόνως ἐν τῷ χαίρειν ἐστὶν εἴτε ἐν τῷ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔχειν εἴτε ἐν τῇ φρονήσει, κατὰ ταῦτα πάντα φιλοσοφητέον· ταῦτα γὰρ μάλιστα καὶ εἰλικρινῶς διὰ τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ἡμῖν παραγίνεται. (7, 41.11-15)

¹⁷⁶ See Vendruscolo (1989, 319–20) on the textual problems in this passage. Any possible reading leaves intact the four candidates for εὐδαιμονία: practical wisdom and certain wisdom, virtue, enjoyment or all of these combined. For an ideological debate over the Platonic or Aristotelian meaning of the phrase 'practical wisdom and certain wisdom' (φρόνησιν καὶ τινα σοφίαν) see Jaeger (1923, 82), Gadamer (1928), Monan (1968, 5) and Düring (1961, 191).

¹⁷⁷ Hutchinson and Johnson translate εὐδαιμονία as 'success'; throughout my text, I opt for the traditional translation of 'happiness' (and leave the Greek term transliterated wherever possible), though there are several other attractive options, such as 'flourishing.' These terms are possible translations, each possessing their own strengths and weaknesses; the new translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Adam Beresford makes a strong case for the novel translation of εὐδαιμονία as 'prosperity', cf. Beresford (2020).

Aristotle's text does not provide an explicit definition of what *eudaimonia* actually is.¹⁷⁸ The closest thing we get to a definition of *eudaimonia* are the lines 7, 43.13-14, where the question of whether *eudaimonia* is φρόνησις or comes from φρόνησις is left open.¹⁷⁹ The three potential candidates for *eudaimonia* correspond to the three major goods which are usually ascribed to *eudaimonia* as listed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5: pleasure, virtue and θεωρία.¹⁸⁰ The fourth possible candidate for happiness, namely wealth or greatness of possessions, is rejected at the very beginning of the text in the papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy 666 = Ross Fr. 3, Düring B2-5).¹⁸¹ External goods are like adornments and no one would say that a body is doing perfectly fine when it is sick but adorned with splendid clothing. Similarly, a horse is good not because of its expensive bridle but because of its own state. Moreover, *eudaimonia* is never something base or disgraceful. When unworthy people thus come across great wealth, it is disgraceful to see a constellation in which one's wealth is worth more than the man himself.

¹⁷⁸ If Hutchinson and Johnson are correct in their inclusion of *DCMS* 22-27 in the text of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, then the character of Isocrates in *DCMS* 26, 79.18-24 explains his concept of *eudaimonia* as 'acting well' (πράττειν εὖ) and thus, according to him, it is fitting for philosophy 'to be either a practice of good things or else useful for those sorts of practices.' Isocrates' position here is that every type of knowledge must be put in use if it is to be beneficial. The benefit lies in the results achieved by putting knowledge to practice, i.e. in its utility.

¹⁷⁹ Vendruscolo (1989, 312) suggests that the original text did not refer to φρόνησις but to ἀρετή and that Aristotle must be claiming that εὐδαιμονία is ἀρετή or comes from ἀρετή. Both possibilities work within my interpretation and making a choice between φρόνησις and ἀρετή is not necessary at this moment.

¹⁸⁰ For possible connotations to the soul-division in the *Republic* and references to ancient authors, Gauthier and Jolif (1970a, 29–30). Further see the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 1218b34-35 which refers to the public writings concerning the fact that practical wisdom (φρόνησις), virtue and pleasure are (a) found in the soul and (b) they are the goals of our actions; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.8, 1098b23-26.

¹⁸¹ Bernays (1863) already mentioned that this papyrus might belong to Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. Hutchinson and Johnson suggest that the speaker is Isocrates, yet there is no strong evidence in support of their claim. Even if it is Isocrates, Aristotle seems to accept his point concerning external possessions and he does not revisit the external goods as possible candidates for εὐδαιμονία.

Therefore, pleasure, virtue and practical wisdom seem to be the only remaining serious candidates for *eudaimonia*.¹⁸² The lack of a definition of *eudaimonia* might be frustrating to the reader but it does not jeopardize the argument, since Aristotle shows that regardless of the definition we choose, we ought to do philosophy if we want to achieve our goal. If *eudaimonia* is practical wisdom, it is clear that it belongs to philosophers (12, 60.1-2). This could be taken as a self-evident claim if philosophy were to mean any intellectual endeavour in general. However, we will see that Aristotle is referring to a specific kind of philosophy here. Second, if *eudaimonia* is virtue, it will belong to the philosophers, ‘for virtue is the most authoritative thing in us’ (ἀρετὴ γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ κυριώτατον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, 12, 60.4-5). In order to understand the explanation here, we will have to inspect Aristotle’s argument on how doing philosophy relates to ‘the most authoritative’ thing or part of ourselves. Lastly, if *eudaimonia* entails enjoyment, it will belong to philosophers as well, since φρόνησις is the most pleasant of all things (12, 60.5-6). Aristotle must thus explain how practical wisdom and thinking bring about this supreme pleasure. In any case, Aristotle concludes that one ought to do philosophy, since this—doing philosophy—is the perfect living (τὸ τελέως εὖ ζῆν) or most perfect living in comparison (12, 60.8-10).

The pleasure of philosophy

Let us start unfurling Aristotle’s argument as to why doing philosophy is the most pleasant activity. Aristotle leads with the distinction between feeling pleasure while doing an activity and pleasure *coming* from or being caused by a given activity (11, 58.17-27). Someone can drink and feel pleasure at the same time, yet this does not make drinking a pleasant activity.

¹⁸² The *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.4-5 suggests that it is exactly these four candidates (wealth, pleasure, virtue and intellectual activity) along with the Platonic ‘good in itself’ which are to be regarded as a veritable specification of εὐδαιμονία.

The presence of pleasure during a given activity is not enough to call this activity pleasant. The pleasure has to be caused by the activity itself so that we can rightly call it a pleasant activity.¹⁸³ Our feeling of pleasure must be the direct outcome of a given activity. Therefore, the text suggests a causal relation between an activity and the corresponding pleasure. The *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4-5 does not introduce this causal language and it calls pleasure the ‘completion’ of a given activity (*Eth. Nic.* 10.4, 1174b31-33 and 10.5 1175a30-31).¹⁸⁴ The account in the *Protrepticus* is much simpler in this regard, as Aristotle merely strives to distinguish co-presence from causal relation.

Aristotle applies this distinction to the activity of living (ζωή): living is pleasant when one enjoys pleasure that is derived from living (χαίρουσι τὴν ἀπὸ ζωῆς ἡδονήν, 11, 59.2-3). Therefore, living is not pleasant simply because we feel pleasure while living, this pleasure must be brought about by living itself.¹⁸⁵ In the next step of his argumentation, Aristotle claims that the pleasures of life are said to be derived from the uses of the soul (ἀπὸ τῆς χρήσεως τῆς ψυχῆς, 11, 59.6), as the soul is that what ‘does’ the living.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, living can be measured in terms of degrees, i.e. more or less (cf. μάλλον at 11, 59.4). So, for example, a man awake is more alive than a man asleep and an intelligent one is more alive than a stupid one. Just as the soul is more ‘in use’ when one is awake, so in being intelligent, in thinking, it is more in use than in being stupid.

¹⁸³ *Protr.* 11, 58.21-23 (Pistelli): οὐκοῦν τοῦτον ἡδεσθαι μὲν καὶ ἡδόμενον πίνειν φήσομεν, ἀλλ’ οὐ τῷ πίνειν οὐδὲ ἡδέως πίνειν.

¹⁸⁴ A good summary of the interpretations and problems with this conception can be found in Van Riel (1999); for an attempt at discussing the concept of pleasure in the *Protrepticus* cf. Dumoulin (1981, 127–8).

¹⁸⁵ According to the *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9 1170a25–26, living is naturally good and pleasant for us. However, if one lives a blessed life, he even enjoys living more (1170a27). On the other hand, the state of extreme badness endangers one’s existence and thus makes even the activities of living unbearable and unpleasant (1170a23). For a discussion of this passage see Jirsa (2017, 227–8), later in this book pp. 267-268.

¹⁸⁶ See Düring’s comment in Düring (1961, 247–8).

What then are the uses of the soul? Is there someone or something that uses the soul?¹⁸⁷

This would be well in line with the common usage of the terms *χρησθαι* and *χρήσις*. Here it seems that Aristotle uses them in a proto-technical way in order to differentiate activity on the one hand from potentiality on the other.¹⁸⁸ For example, when Aristotle makes the distinction between the capacity to see and the act of seeing, he says that actual seeing is ‘using the capacity’ (*χρώμενα τῇ δυνάμει*, 11, 56.18-19) and later generalizes: ‘sensing means two things – strictly as using the senses, but otherwise as being capable of using them.’¹⁸⁹ These two examples typify the distinction between *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια*. In some passages of the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle uses *ἐνέργεια* instead of *χρήσις* (e.g. 11, 56.15-16). Therefore, when Aristotle talks about *χρησθαι* and *χρήσις* of the soul, he clearly means *activity* of the soul itself, and not that the soul is being used by something or that some of its capacities are being used passively.¹⁹⁰

Among the uses or activities of the soul, ‘the most authoritative (*κυριωτάτη*) one of all, certainly, is to make use of being intelligent as much as possible.’¹⁹¹ Aristotle further writes that pleasures arising from ‘being intelligent and contemplating’ must be the pleasures that are derived from living (*ἀπὸ τοῦ ζῆν*, 11, 59.10-11) and that these pleasures are not merely

¹⁸⁷ Cf. the argumentation about a certain kind of personal identity in Plato’s *Alcibiades I*. 129b-130c where *χρήσις* and *χρησθαι* always assume a user and something being used.

¹⁸⁸ Menn (1994, 79) provides a convincing analysis of this passage and shows that: ‘Aristotle uses the words *χρήσις* and *ἐνέργεια*, *χρησθαι* and *ἐνεργεῖν*, interchangeably and all-but-synonymously; furthermore, it is *χρήσις* that is the original technical term for activity, *ἐνέργεια* having begun as an explanatory synonym or alternate for *χρήσις* before coming to displace it.’ Cf. evidence collected in Menn (1994, 79–80, fn. 11). Further compare Beere (2009, 164–166).

¹⁸⁹ *Protr.* 11, 56.23-25: τὸ δ’ αἰσθάνεσθαι διττόν, κυρίως μὲν τὸ χρησθαι ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἄλλως δὲ τὸ δύνασθαι.

¹⁹⁰ We will see that this usage of *χρησθαι* and *χρήσις* is found in the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 as well; cf. Menn (1994, 80).

¹⁹¹ *Protr.* 11, 59.7-9: εἰ τοίνυν καὶ πολλὰ ψυχῆς εἰσι χρήσεις, ἀλλὰ κυριωτάτη γε πασῶν ἢ τοῦ φρονεῖν ὅ τι μάλιστα.

present while we are living. This suggests that our living (ζωή) consists of these activities. When Aristotle characterizes or defines living in *De anima*, he does so with help of several natural capacities which are actualized in living:

‘But living is spoken of in several ways. And should even one of these belong to something, we say that it is alive: reason, perception, motion and rest with respect to place, and further the motion in relation to nourishment, decay, and growth.’ (De an., 2.2 413a22–25, transl. Shields)¹⁹²

Aristotle employs the same explanation for human living in the *Eudemian Ethics* 7.12:

‘The matter will become clear if we ascertain what living is (τὸ ζῆν), as activity and as goal. It is evident that it is perception and knowledge ... For every individual self-perception and self-knowledge is the most desirable of all things, and that is why an appetite for living is inborn in each of us, for living must be regarded as a kind of knowing.’ (Eth. Eud., 7.12, 1244b23–29; transl. Kenny)¹⁹³

The latter quote is from an ethical treatise which concerns human affairs. Therefore, when Aristotle says that living is a kind of knowing, he means that living is a kind of knowing *for human beings*, his subject of interest.¹⁹⁴ For us, humans, living primarily means knowing, ‘being intelligent and contemplating,’ as it is posited in the *Protrepticus*. Therefore, Aristotle is justified to assume that pleasure stemming from thinking and contemplating is actually the pleasure of living, since human living comprises activities of practical wisdom and

¹⁹² Cf. *De an.*, 2.1, 412a14–15.

¹⁹³ Kenny translates ζωή as life, though I would like to reserve this term for βίος. Therefore, for the sake of consistency, I have modified his translation from ‘life’ to ‘living.’

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Johnson (2018, 61).

contemplation. Of course, a human being could somehow live without practical wisdom and observation, though that would not be the life of a human being. Aristotle makes this thought experiment explicit earlier in the *Protrepticus*:

'... when sensation and intellect are taken away, a human becomes roughly the same as a plant; when intellect alone is taken away, he turns into a beast; when irrationality is taken away but he remains in his intellect, a human becomes like a god.' (5, 35.14-18)

A human being is thus primarily understood to be living when he is intelligent and contemplative, since these are the most authoritative natural activities human beings are capable of.

Therefore, when Aristotle talks about living 'more or less' (11, 59.9), he does so in accordance to the degrees with which these natural activities of the soul can be exercised. For example, in the *Topics* 8.1 he says:

'inasmuch as a higher degree of perception is a property of a higher degree of life, a lower degree of perception will be a property of lower degree of life, and the highest of the highest and the lowest of the lowest degree, and perception without qualification of life without qualification' (*Top.*, 5.8, 137b23-27; transl. Pickard).¹⁹⁵

In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle expresses the same line of thought: someone who is awake and whose soul is active is more alive than someone who is asleep, since the former is said to be alive based on the active phase of his living (11, 57.19-23). As Aristotle makes clear, whoever

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Johnson (2018, 60) on the philosophical context of this passage.

thinks more correctly lives more (ζῆν μᾶλλον ὁ διανοούμενος ὀρθῶς, 11, 58.6), in which case, living would bring about more pleasure.

Aristotle assumes that better activities produce more pleasure, or, as he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the perfect activity results in perfect pleasure (*Eth. Nic.*, 10.4 1174b14-20). The argument about the pleasure of philosophy assumes that being intelligent and contemplative are the most authoritative activities of human beings. In fact, it assumes that these activities are somehow our ‘own,’ which is why exercising them yields pleasure. This, I believe, needs to be explained further, and can be done so with reference to the *ergon* argument.¹⁹⁶

Philosophy and nature

In the next step, I will continue analysing Aristotle’s claim that an intelligent human being lives more fully than an ignorant one. Aristotle believes that using something correctly (ὀρθῶς) is actually using it *more* (μᾶλλον), since using a given entity correctly is to use it in a natural way (11, 58.1-2). I maintain that ‘use’ (χρησις) stands for activity, meaning that anything that is active in a correct manner, i.e. in a way that is natural for it, is active more than if it were active against its nature. Thinking and reasoning (τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι) are the *ergon* of the soul and therefore whoever thinks more correctly lives more (11, 58.3-10). Living *perfectly* (τελέως ζῆν)¹⁹⁷ is then attributed to those who use their practical wisdom the most, i.e. to the intelligent ones (τοῖς φρονουῦσι καὶ τοῖς φρονίμοις, 11, 58.10). This is not because they are merely capable of using their practical wisdom, but

¹⁹⁶ Compare with the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.5, 1176a3-5, where Aristotle claims that each living being has its proper pleasure—similarly as it has its proper *ergon*—and that this proper pleasure corresponds to the activity of this *ergon*.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Top.*, 5.8, 137b23-27 quoted a few lines above.

rather on the basis of actual usage, i.e. exercising the activity of knowing. Philosophy is the discipline and practice of (theoretical) wisdom and practical wisdom (6, 37.11-22; 6, 39.25-40.4) and therefore Aristotle can claim that philosophers exercise perfect living.

How should one understand this claim which resembles a recruitment brochure for a liberal arts college? I believe that there are two distinct ways in which practicing (theoretical) wisdom and practical wisdom perfects our living. First, philosophy allows us to succeed in life as it furnishes us with the knowledge of proper ὅροι, standards or measures, which guide us through life. This first understanding is a practical and perhaps even utilitarian one, since living with knowledge is more beneficial than living in ignorance because of its profitable outcomes. Ignorance causes mistakes and failures in our undertakings which leads to frustration and thus worsens our lives.¹⁹⁸ Second, and perhaps more importantly, the practice of wisdom and practical wisdom is akin to the perfection of ourselves *per se*. In thinking and reasoning, we exercise what we truly are. To perfect these activities is thus to perfect ourselves.¹⁹⁹

I will first discuss the practical understanding of the perfection of a philosopher's living.

The second interpretation will be discussed in the subsequent section on the *ergon* argument, since the *ergon* argument is at the core of the argument on human perfection.

Aristotle lists several professions which acknowledge the importance of the natural ὅροι which guide their practice. Doctors and trainers of athletes agree that they must be knowledgeable about nature (φύσις) for the success of their practice (10, 54.12-16). Aristotle surprisingly adds that the legislator must also be experienced about nature. While the

¹⁹⁸ Cf. parallel protreptic passage in Plato's *Euthydemus* 281b-d: most goods are not goods to those who are ignorant and have a spoiled soul.

¹⁹⁹ Monan (1968, 17) was right when he saw the relation between the ideal of thought and ideal of conduct as one of the main problems discussed in the *Protrepticus*.

former professions are concerned with virtues of the body, he is concerned with virtues of the soul. However, both the body and soul belong to the sphere of nature. Moreover, the virtues of the soul are much more important for the success of the polis than the virtues of the body and therefore even a legislator must study nature (10, 54.16-22). Aristotle's conviction that nature provides the correct standards lies in that 'everything that comes to be (or has come to be) in accordance with nature at any rate comes to be (or has come to be) well, since what is unnatural is inferior.'²⁰⁰

A similar call to study the soul, i.e. to engage with the psychology of the science of living things, is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well: since the virtue in question is human virtue and, more specifically, the virtue of the soul, we ought to study the soul to the extent necessary for ethics.²⁰¹ The science of living things belongs to the study of nature and therefore even the ὄροι of ethics and politics stem from this domain. One must look for proper, natural ὄροι, as it is not enough to proceed by copying others:²⁰²

'For just as in the other craftsmanlike skills the best of their tools were discovered on the basis of nature, in carpentry, for example, the carpenter's line, the standard ruler, the string compass, <... missing line of the text ...> for some are acquired with water, or with light and beams of sunshine, and it is by reference to these that we put to the test

²⁰⁰ *Protr.*, 9, 50.16-19: καὶ τὸ μὲν γινόμενον γίγνεται, γέγονε δὲ τὸ γεγονὸς τό γε μὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἅπαν καλῶς, εἴπερ τὸ παρὰ φύσιν φαῦλον καὶ τῷ κατὰ φύσιν. Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 2.10, 1227a18-23 and *Eth. Nic.* 1.9, 1099b20-23 for the same claim that nature naturally end in good; Geis (2013, 297–8) provides a short interpretation of these passages. Moreover, in *Eth. Eud.* 7.6, 1240b20-21, Aristotle claims that man is naturally good and being wicked is against his nature.

²⁰¹ *Eth. Nic.* 1.13, 1102a7-24; cf. Geis (2013, 303–4).

²⁰² 'The craft imitates nature' is the famous Aristotelian dictum (*Ph.* 2.2, 194a13ff., 2.8, 199a8ff.). In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle speculates that the craft cannot properly proceed by copying another craft, as it actually *needs* to be guided by nature in order to succeed. Cf. interpretation in Monan (1968, 20–1).

what is to our senses adequately straight and smooth - similarly the statesman must have certain guidelines taken from the nature itself, i.e. from the truth, by reference to which he judges what is just, what is good, and what is advantageous.'

καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις τέχναις ταῖς δημιουργικαῖς ἀπὸ τῆς φύσεως εὕρηται τὰ βέλτιστα τῶν ὀργάνων, οἷον ἐν τεκτονικῇ στάθμῃ καὶ κανῶν καὶ τόρνος † τὰ μὲν ὕδατι καὶ φωτὶ καὶ ταῖς ἀύγαῖς τῶν ἀκτίνων ληφθέντων, πρὸς ἃ κρίνοντες τὸ κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἰκανῶς εὐθὺ καὶ λεῖον βασανίζομεν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὸν πολιτικὸν ἔχειν τινὰς ὅρους δεῖ ἀπὸ τῆς φύσεως αὐτῆς καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, πρὸς οὓς κρινεῖ τί δίκαιον καὶ τί καλόν καὶ τί συμφέρον. (*Protr.* 10, 54.22-55.3)

The good house builder uses such ὅροι as well, namely rulers and such, and does not build merely by comparison with already made houses (10, 55.14-17). Similarly, a good lawgiver or politician does not merely imitate institutions and constitutions of other states such as Sparta or Crete (10, 55.17-21),²⁰³ but must have certain ὅροι taken from nature itself. Nature here is called 'truth,' and the politician judges according to these natural ὅροι what is 'just, what is good, and what is advantageous.'²⁰⁴ Therefore, all the craftsmen value their tools

²⁰³ If the *Protrepticus* was written around the same time as Plato composed his *Laws* (suggested by by Hutchinson and Johnson (2014b, 385)), it could signal a connection to the opening sequence of the *Laws*, where the Visitor enquires about the origins of the laws in Sparta and Crete. This connection could work both ways: either the young Aristotle teases his teacher or Plato shows that Aristotle might be too hasty in turning down possible inspiration from these two city-states.

²⁰⁴ *Protr.* 10, 55.1-3. Notice the three values of political life mentioned by Aristotle: a politician judges what is just, noble and beneficial. Aristotle does not discuss whether all three are always present at the same time, though all three are judged based on the guidelines or standards taken from nature itself.

discovered on the basis of nature (ἀπὸ τῆς φύσεως, 10, 54.22-24) and the standard for practical matters is taken from nature and truth itself (10, 55.2).

Aristotle writes that in skills other than philosophy, the tools and the most precise thoughts are not acquired ‘from the primary things themselves’ but rather rely on experience (οὐκ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν πρώτων ... ἐξ ἐμπειρίας, 10, 55.9-12).²⁰⁵ The philosopher, on the other hand, is ‘a spectator of these very things, not of imitations’ (10, 59.13-14). Aristotle employs Platonic language which is scarcely found anywhere else in his writings:²⁰⁶ all others—except the philosophers—have to imitate—presumably in their crafts and lives—imperfect imitations. These imitations are neither beautiful nor divine nor stable. Therefore, their imitations (the products and actions of non-philosophers) cannot be beautiful, stable and divine either. On the other hand:

²⁰⁵ Most (1992, 202) adds that poets could be another example of craftsman oriented towards transcendent truth. See Meeren (2011, 124–126, 135–139) on the platonic heritage of this passage.

²⁰⁶ Jaeger (1923, 91, fn. 3) sees this as proof of Aristotle’s Platonism; Düring answers him in length in Düring (1960, 44–9). The Platonic context must be clear to anyone reading this passage. The two main reasons for believing that Aristotle echoes Plato here are the clause ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν πρώτων together with the language of *mimesis*. These two aspects are reminiscent of the theory of Forms and the claim that the standards derive from looking into nature and the divine (θεῖον), cf. footnote 207, which could be another example of Platonic heritage. It is clear that Aristotle must have been conscious of the terminology he employed. Moreover, the *Philebus* 55d-57a presents a similar line of thought: in this text, the most accurate knowledge belongs to philosophical arithmetic (57a) and ‘more accurate’ in this passage stands for ‘more prior’ (56c). Cf. Düring (1960, 46) for a detailed analysis and comparison. However, I agree with Düring that this does not seem to be evidence enough that Aristotle is championing the theory of Forms at this point in the text. First, the clause *auta ta Xs* stands apart from the technical language of Form and the *Protrepticus* is not a lecture which utilizes strictly technical vocabulary. Second, the same thought and even language is found in the *Metaph.* 2.2 and *An. post.* 1.2, where the ‘primary’ stands for the ‘primary principles’ (ἀρχαί) of Aristotelian provenience without any reference to the separated Forms. Finally, recognizing and studying the divine element in the cosmos does not make one a Platonist, cf. the interpretation of το θεῖον in the text above. There is no talk of separation (χωρισμός) among the first entities of principles and the reality around us. On the other hand, the text stresses the natural (φύσει) aspect of these standards.

‘... the philosopher is the only craftsman to have both laws that are stable and actions that are correct and beautiful. For he is the only one who lives looking toward nature and toward the divine and, just as if he were some good navigator who hitches the first principles of his way of life onto things that are eternal and steadfast, he moors his ship and lives life on his own terms.’

ἀλλὰ μόνον ὅτι μόνου τῶν δημιουργῶν τοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ νόμοι βέβαιοι καὶ πράξεις εἰσὶν ὀρθαὶ καὶ καλαί. μόνος γὰρ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν βλέπων ζῆ καὶ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, καὶ καθάπερ ἂν εἰ κυβερνήτης τις ἀγαθὸς ἐξ αἰδίων καὶ μονίμων ἀναψάμενος τοῦ βίου τὰς ἀρχὰς ὀρμεῖ καὶ ζῆ καθ’ ἑαυτόν.

(10, 55.24-56.2)

The poetic language yields an important conclusion: the philosopher is the only one whose actions are correct and beautiful. As Aristotle writes later in the *Protrepticus*, his living is perfect. The reason for this is that he obtains his standards from looking directly into nature and the divine.²⁰⁷ The philosopher is likened to a ship-captain who finds a safe haven where he can moor his ship and live on his own terms (ζῆ καθ’ ἑαυτόν). This ‘living on his own

²⁰⁷ In terms of looking into the divine, the two obvious parallels with Plato’s dialogues are the *Phaedrus* and *Alcibiades I*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes how the followers of Zeus look into each other’s souls in order to ascertain whether their loved one has an aptitude for philosophy and leadership (*Phdr.* 253e2). If they are successful in their search, they stay with that person and devote time to learning so that they can find the nature of god in themselves. This is performed under the strong desire to look towards god (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλέπειν, *Phdr.* 253a2). In the *Alcibiades I*, self-knowledge as a prerequisite for a good and successful private and political life is achieved by looking into the region of the soul that resembles the divine and thus ‘someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine — god and understanding — would have the best grasp of himself as well’ (τῷ θεῷ ἄρα τοῦτ’ ἔοικεν αὐτῆς, καὶ τις εἰς τοῦτο βλέπων καὶ πᾶν τὸ θεῖον γνοῦς, θεὸν τε καὶ φρόνησιν, οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίη μάλιστα., *Alc. I.*, 133c4-6). Nevertheless, I am convinced that even here, the divine can be explained not only in reference to Plato, but within a more Aristotelian context as well.

terms' means that the captain lives in accordance with his nature and therefore he lives more and lives better than anyone not living on his own terms.

The philosopher is said to live looking πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ... καὶ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον. Here, nature and the divine stand as two distinct objects of the philosopher's interest.²⁰⁸ As we have seen, nature plays an important role in the argument since it is the source of the right ὅροι necessary for the success of builders, doctors, trainers, legislators as well as philosophers. Whatever is done in accordance with nature is better than what is done in an unnatural way (9, 50.16-19). However, the mention of the divine appears to be absent in his later argumentation. Is this a mere stylistic issue or does it allude to the author's Platonic background? The divine is mentioned earlier in the text when Aristotle makes Heraclides say that 'nothing divine or blessed (θεῖον ἢ μακάριον) belongs to humans apart from just that one thing worth taking seriously ... insight and practical wisdom (νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως)'.²⁰⁹ Even if the speaker is Heraclides,²¹⁰ the idea is congruent with Aristotle's argument. In his treatises, Aristotle tends to separate intellect (νοῦς) from the realm of nature (φύσις).²¹¹ Therefore, if the term τὸ θεῖον refers to νοῦς and φρόνησις in our humane context, Aristotle might maintain that these are somehow separate from nature, though the philosopher should study both aspects of reality. The philosopher should then investigate, looking into nature as well as the divine, namely νοῦς and φρόνησις in the case of human

²⁰⁸ Düring (1961, 222) claims that the first καὶ is expegetic; this claim is contradicted in Walker (2010, 149).

²⁰⁹ *Protrept.* 8, 48.9-11: οὐδὲν οὖν θεῖον ἢ μακάριον ὑπάρχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, πλὴν ἐκεῖνό γε μόνον ἄξιον σπουδῆς, ὅσον ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως.

²¹⁰ The identification of the speaker is adopted from the edition by Hutchinson and Johnson; it is further supported by Hutchinson and Johnson (2018).

²¹¹ E.g. *Part. an.* 1.1, 641a32-b10 and *Gen. an.* 2.3, 736b5-7; this difference is suggested as well at *De an.* 2.1, 413a3-7; 3.5, 430a17-18; 430a23, cf. *Metaph.* 12.3, 1070a24-6.

beings.²¹² Being intelligent and learning is said to be ‘the for the sake of which’ of our living (9, 52.5), and is to be understood as the goal of our lives.²¹³ This claim could be compared to the passage from *De anima* 2.4, where Aristotle argues that procreation is a natural way for living beings to partake in the everlasting and divine to the greatest extent that is available to them. This is said to be ‘the for the sake of that everything does whatever it does in accordance with nature’ (*De an.* 2.4, 415a23-b7). Therefore, even if Aristotle suggests a separation between nature and the divine in the *Protrepticus*, the philosopher should study both and perhaps should come to see the complex relation between the two.²¹⁴

The philosopher who studies both nature and the divine is likened to a ship-captain finding a safe haven for his ship. The image of the ship-captain is a part of the famous simile of the ship of the state.²¹⁵ In the *Republic*, Plato uses it to highlight stratification within the state and to support the role of knowledge in guiding the *polis*.²¹⁶ The good, knowledgeable captain in the *Republic* is attacked for being a ‘star-gazer’ and good for nothing, as he would spend time studying the heaven and stars. Yet, it is precisely this knowledge of nature which is necessary for a safe voyage at sea. The ship of the state simile is usually employed

²¹² See Walker (2010, 149–50) for an excellent analysis of this passage; Walker assumes that the references are to the divine νοῦς ordering the universe; I am not certain that this cosmic reading is necessary, though it is not untenable.

²¹³ The concept of τέλος will be discussed in more detail in the next section on the *ergon* argument.

²¹⁴ Cf. Walker (2010, 150) on the utility of such studies. Monan (1968, 17) nicely writes about moral conduct as ‘the natural result of beatifying contemplation’; the emphasis is his and he clearly sees the close relation between the natural and the divine.

²¹⁵ The image of ‘the ship of state’ is attested to in Alcaios, Theognis, Aeschylus and Sophocles, cf. references in Nussbaum (1986, 438–9, fn. 25). Nussbaum (1986, 55) argues that the ship is only a means for different ends of its different sailors or passengers. First, I am not sure there are any passengers in this image (i.e. people not involved in political life, I understand the image as presenting all citizens as sailors). Second, Nussbaum overlooks the realities of ancient sea voyages where the only goal of all of the people (once out at sea) was to reach the destination safely and therefore they were unconditionally subordinated to the captain of the ship for the duration of their journey.

²¹⁶ Plato, *Resp.* 6, 487e-489e.

to demonstrate the hardship of political leadership which demands skills, expertise and knowledge. The sea voyages were risky and dangerous for ancient Greeks and this danger which must be overcome by art or expertise is reflected in the simile. Now, Aristotle's philosopher-captain in the *Protrepticus* is the one who finds safe home for the ship and himself without further risks and dangers.

But how could we talk about a craftsman and a craft when the knowledge in question should be strictly theoretical?²¹⁷ Aristotle is clear in that although we are talking about theoretical knowledge, 'we nevertheless do countless things in accordance with it, acquire some things and avoid others' (10, 56.9-12).²¹⁸ This knowledge thus serves as a source of ὄροι which allow our living to be guided successfully without mistakes and missteps.

The structure of the *ergon* argument

The argument presented thus far assumes three points which need to be explained. First, as I have said, the argument about the pleasure of philosophy considers practical wisdom and contemplation to be the highest possible activities of human beings. One could ask why that is and how Aristotle arrives at this conclusion. Second, Aristotle considers (theoretical) wisdom and practical wisdom to be a perfection of ourselves since, third, 'we exist for the sake of being intelligent and learning something' (δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἐσμὲν ἕνεκα τοῦ φρονῆσαι τι καὶ μαθεῖν, *Protr.* 9, 52.5). We have to examine why practical wisdom (φρόνησις) is the

²¹⁷ For an excellent account on the utility of contemplation in the *Protrepticus* see Walker (2010); Walker argues that the *Protrepticus* presents contemplation both as (a) the highest good and (b) supporting the lower goals as well.

²¹⁸ *Protr.*, 10, 56.9-12: οὕτω δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης θεωρητικῆς οὐσης μυρία πράττομεν κατ' αὐτήν ὁμῶς ἡμεῖς, καὶ τὰ μὲν λαμβάνομεν τὰ δὲ φεύγομεν τῶν πραγμάτων. The language of acquiring (presumably) good things and avoiding bad things is reminiscent of Plato's *Meno* 87d-88d.

goal in accordance with nature (κατὰ φύσιν τέλος). If this is the case, then ‘being intelligent would be the best of all’ (ἄριστον ἂν εἴη πάντων τὸ φρονεῖν).²¹⁹ This explanation, I believe, is furnished by Aristotle with the help of the *ergon* argument.

In this section, I will provide a close reading of this argument as it is preserved in Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* 7, 41.22-43.25 (=Fr. 6 Ross, Düring B61-70).²²⁰ I will begin by presenting the text of the entire passage divided into several argumentative steps which will be interpreted later. The Greek text has been adopted from Pistelli’s edition of Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* and the English translation is in large part comprised of Hutchinson-Johnson’s translation with a couple of changes indicated in the footnotes.

(1) 41.22-42.4

<p>And everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue, for to have obtained this is good. Moreover, it’s when a thing’s most authoritative and most estimable parts have their virtue that it is mostly well disposed, for the natural virtue of that which is better is naturally better.²²¹ And that which is by nature more</p>	<p>πάν δὲ εὖ διάκειται κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν· τὸ γὰρ τετυχηκέναι ταύτης ἀγαθόν ἐστι. καὶ μὴν ὅταν γε ἔχη τὰ μάλιστα καὶ κυριώτατα (41.25) καὶ τιμιώτατα τὴν ἀρετὴν, τότε εὖ διάκειται τοῦ βελτίονος ἄρα φύσει βελτίων ἐστὶν ἢ κατὰ φύσιν ἀρετῆ. βέλτιον δὲ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἀρχικώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον</p>
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²¹⁹ *Protr.* 9, 52.11-12, it is unclear whether it is Aristotle or Iamblichus’ summary, cf. the draft edition of Hutchinson and Johnson; Düring includes the lines in his fragment B20.

²²⁰ For an early outline of the main points of the argument cf. Hartlich (1889); Hartlich’s dissertation is summarized in Rabinowitz (1957, 11–2). Mansion (1960) deals with substantial parts of the argument, though she merely paraphrases selected fragments; for the conclusion of the argument cf. Geis (2013, 298–9).

²²¹ Hutchinson and Johnson connect the sentences using ‘therefore’. However, my understanding of the particle ἄρα is that it presents the reason for and not the consequence of the former sentence. Furthermore,

of a ruler and more commanding is better, as a human is than the other animals; thus, soul is better than body (for it is more of a ruler), as is the part of the soul which has reason and thought, for this kind of thing is what prescribes and proscribes and says how we ought or ought not to act.

Whatever, then, is the virtue of this part is necessarily the virtue most valuable of all as such, both for everything in general and for us; in fact, I think one might actually set it down that we are this portion, either alone or especially.

(2) 42.4-9

Furthermore, when the natural *ergon* of each thing is brought to perfection and is said to be most beautiful not by coincidence but in itself, that is when one should say that it (sc. the *ergon*) is good, and the most authoritative virtue should be reckoned the one by which each thing naturally fashions this.

(3) 42.9-22

ἡγεμονικόν, ὡς ἄνθρωπος πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα ζῷα· οὐκοῦν ψυχὴ μὲν σώματος βέλτιον (ἀρχικώτερον γάρ), (41.30) ψυχῆς δὲ τὸ λόγον ἔχον καὶ διάνοιαν· ἔστι γὰρ τοιοῦτον ὃ κελεύει καὶ κωλύει, καὶ δεῖν ἢ μὴ δεῖν φησι (42.1) πράττειν. ἦτις ποτὲ οὐδ' ἔστιν ἀρετὴ τούτου τοῦ μέρους, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πάντων αἰρετωτάτην ἀπλῶς τε πᾶσι καὶ ἡμῖν· καὶ γὰρ ἂν τοῦτο, οἶμαι, θεΐη τις, ὡς ἦτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν τὸ μόνον τοῦτο.

ἔτι τοίνυν ὅταν ὁ πέφυκεν ἔργον ἐκάστου μὴ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἀλλὰ καθ' αὐτὸ λεγόμενον κάλλιστα ἀποτελεῖ, τότε καὶ τοῦτο ἀγαθὸν εἶναι λεκτέον, ταύτην τε ἀρετὴν θετέον κυριωτάτην, καθ' ἣν ἕκαστον αὐτὸ τοῦτο πέφυκεν ἀπεργάζεσθαι.

in agreement with Vendruscolo, I understand the sentence in that τὰ μάλιστα precedes εὖ διάκειται, on textual problems in 41.25-27 cf. Vendruscolo (1989, 304).

So something that is composite and partitioned has many other activities, but something that is by nature simple and whose substance is not relative to anything else necessarily has a single virtue in itself in the strict sense.²²² So if a human is a simple animal whose substance is ordered according to reason and intellect, there is no other *ergon* for him than only the most precise truth, i.e. to be true about existing things,²²³ but if several capacities are ingrown in him, it is clear that, of the several things he can naturally bring to perfection, the best of them is always *ergon*, e.g. of a doctor health, and of the navigator safety. And we can name no *ergon* of thought or of the contemplating part of our soul that is better than truth.

(4) 42.23-43.5

τοῦ μὲν οὖν συνθέτου (42.10) καὶ μεριστοῦ πλείους καὶ διάφοροί εἰσιν ἐνέργειαι, τοῦ δὲ τὴν φύσιν ἀπλοῦ καὶ μὴ πρὸς τι τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχοντος μίαν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τὴν καθ' αὐτὸ κυρίως ἀρετὴν. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀπλοῦν τι ζῶόν ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ κατὰ λόγον καὶ νοῦν τέτακται αὐτοῦ ἡ οὐσία, οὐκ (42.15) ἄλλο ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἔργον ἢ μόνη ἡ ἀκριβεστάτη ἀλήθεια καὶ τὸ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀληθεύειν· εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἐκ πλειόνων δυνάμεων συμπεφυκός, δῆλόν ἐστιν ὡς ἀφ' οὗ πλείω πέφυκεν ἀποτελεῖσθαι, ἀεὶ τούτων τὸ βέλτιστον ἔργον ἐστίν, οἷον ἰατρικοῦ ὑγεία καὶ κυβερνήτου (42.20) σωτηρία. βέλτιον δὲ οὐδὲν ἔχομεν λέγειν ἔργον τῆς διανοίας ἢ τοῦ διανοουμένου τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν ἀληθείας.

²²² I believe that the phrase τὴν καθ' αὐτὸ κυρίως ἀρετὴν is not only about 'the strict sense' or 'in the full sense of the word' as translated by Düring. I think that the term κυρίως harkens back to κυριωτάτην earlier in 7, 42.8 as well. A single entity then has a single most important virtue which is related to its single *ergon*.

²²³ The phrase 'to be true' better corresponds to ἀληθεύειν as a verb meaning an activity and not a state or a product, compared to 'tell the truth' in Hutchinson and Johnson's translation.

Truth therefore is the most authoritative *ergon* of this portion of soul. And it performs this (sc. *ergon*) with knowledge as such, and it performs this more with more knowledge; and the most authoritative goal for this is observation. For when of two things one is valuable because of the other, the one on account of which the other is valuable is better and more valuable; for example, pleasure is better than pleasant things, and health than things conducive to health, for the latter are said to be able to produce the former. Thus nothing is more valuable than practical wisdom, which we say is a capacity of the most authoritative thing in us, to judge one condition in comparison with another, for the cognitive part, both separately and in combination, is better than all the rest of the soul, and knowledge is its virtue.

(5) 43.5-18

Therefore, its *ergon* is none of those (sc. *erga*) of particular virtues, for it is better than all of them and the final creation is always superior to the knowledge that

ἀλήθεια ἄρα τὸ κυριώτατον ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ μορίου τούτου τῆς ψυχῆς. τοῦτο δὲ δρᾷ κατ' ἐπιστήμην ἀπλῶς, μᾶλλον δὲ κατὰ τὴν μᾶλλον ἐπιστήμην, (42.25) ταύτη δ' ἐστὶ θεωρία τὸ κυριώτατον τέλος. ὅταν γὰρ δυοῖν ὄντων θάτερον διὰ θάτερον αἰρετὸν ἢ, βέλτιόν ἐστὶ τοῦτο καὶ μᾶλλον αἰρετὸν δι' ὅπερ αἰρετὸν ἐστὶ καὶ θάτερον, οἷον ἡδονὴ μὲν τῶν ἡδέων, υἰγεία δὲ τῶν υἰγεινῶν· ταῦτα γὰρ ποιητικὰ λέγεται τούτων. (43.1) οὐκοῦν τῆς φρονήσεως, ἣν φαμεν δύναμιν εἶναι τοῦ κυριωτάτου τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, οὐκ ἔστιν αἰρετώτερον οὐδέν, ὡς ἕξις πρὸς ἕξιν κρίνεσθαι· τὸ γὰρ γνωστικὸν μέρος καὶ χωρὶς καὶ συγκεῖμενον βέλτιόν ἐστὶ πάσης τῆς (43.5) ψυχῆς, τούτου δὲ ἐπιστήμη ἀρετή.

οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶν ἔργον αὐτῆς οὐδεμία τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν· πασῶν γὰρ ἐστὶ βελτίων, τὸ δὲ ποιούμενον τέλος αἰεὶ κρεῖττόν ἐστὶ τῆς ποιούσης ἐπιστήμης·

produces it. Nor is every virtue of the soul a *ergon* in that way, nor is it *eudaimonia*; for if it is to be a skill that can produce, other ones will produce other things, as the building skill (which is not a portion of any building) produces buildings; however, practical wisdom is a part of virtue and of *eudaimonia*, for we say that *eudaimonia* either comes from it or is it. Thus according to this argument too, it is impossible for this to be a knowledge that can produce, for the goal must be better than its coming to be. And nothing is better than practical wisdom, unless it is one of the things that have been mentioned; and none of those is a *ergon* other than it.

(6) 43.18-25

Therefore, one should say that this kind of knowledge is a theoretical one, since it is surely impossible for a creation to be its goal. Hence being intelligent and theorizing is an *ergon* of the virtue, and this of all things is the most valuable for humans, comparable, I think, to seeing for the eyes, which one would choose to have even if

οὐδὲ μὴν ἅπασα τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετὴ οὕτως ἔργον οὐδ' ἢ εὐδαιμονία. (43.10) εἰ γὰρ ἔσται ποιητικὴ, ἕτερα ἑτέρων ἔσται, ὥσπερ οἰκοδομικὴ οἰκίας, ἣτις οὐκ ἔστι μέρος τῆς οἰκίας, ἢ μέντοι φρόνησις μῦρον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔστι καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας· ἢ γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἢ ταύτην φαμὲν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν. οὐκοῦν καὶ κατὰ τὸν λόγον (43.15) τοῦτον ἀδύνατον εἶναι τὴν ἐπιστήμην ποιητικὴν· βέλτιον γὰρ δεῖ τὸ τέλος εἶναι τοῦ γιγνομένου, οὐδὲν δὲ βέλτιον εἶναι φρονήσεως, πλὴν εἴ τι τῶν εἰρημένων, τούτων δὲ οὐδὲν ἕτερον αὐτῆς ἔστιν ἔργον.

θεωρητικὴν τινὰ ἄρα φατέον εἶναι ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστήμην, (43.20) ἐπεὶ ἀδύνατον ποίησιν εἶναι τὸ τέλος. τὸ φρονεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν ἔργον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔστι καὶ τοῦτο πάντων ἔστιν αἰρετώτατον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ὥσπερ οἶμαι καὶ τὸ τοῖς ὄμμασιν ὄραν, ὃ καὶ ἔλοιτό τις ἂν ἔχειν, εἰ

there wasn't any other thing that was going καὶ μή τι μέλλοι γίγνεσθαι δι' αὐτὸ παρ'
to come into being through it beyond the (43.25) αὐτὴν τὴν ὄψιν ἕτερον.
sight itself.

The language of the entire passage seems to be rather technical and the style is quite dry and more scientific compared to the other fragments. The text is almost entirely devoid of examples or similes and the three examples presented in the argument are only mentioned in two or three words (cf. humans and other animals at 41.28 and doctor or navigator at 42.19-21). Aristotle simply lays down one claim after another, building up the entire argumentative structure. If any passage from the *Protrepticus* seems to be from a treatise rather than a dramatic dialogue, it is the *ergon* argument.²²⁴

In order to understand the role of the argument, Iamblichus, or Aristotle himself, introduces it as an explanation as to why practical wisdom and understanding are not only useful but intrinsically valuable for humans (47.7-9). Second, the text immediately preceding the *ergon* argument serves as a reminder regarding the general aim of the treatise: whether living happily is defined as pleasure, virtue or practical wisdom, one must do philosophy (47.11-15). Both of these reminders confirm that the concept of *ergon* does in fact play a crucial role within the *Protrepticus*.

Precursors to the ergon argument

Hutchinson and Johnson suggest that Aristotle's own argument starts with the claim that 'everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue (κατὰ τὴν

²²⁴ Düring (1961, 236) suggests that the phrase ἀλλὰ καθ' αὐτὸ λεγόμενον in 42.6 might be Aristotle's apology for using technical jargon.

οικείαν ἀρετήν).’ The claim that it is good for an entity to be ordered ‘in accordance with its own proper virtue’ is repeated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, 1098a15 in the context of the *ergon* argument elaborated therein.²²⁵ Here, it stands as an assumption which will be explained using the *ergon* argument in order to elucidate the concept of οἰκεῖος.

In the preceding chapter, however, we saw Plato use this expression in his version of the *ergon* argument at the end of the first book of the *Republic*. Socrates asks Thrasymachus ‘whether anything that has *ergon* performs it well by means of its own peculiar virtue’ (εἰ τῇ οἰκείᾳ μὲν ἀρετῇ τὸ αὐτῶν ἔργον εὖ ἐργάσεται τὰ ἐργαζόμενα, Plato, *Resp.* 1, 353c6-7; cf. 353e2). The *Republic* suggests that virtue is the cause of good *ergon* and further that each particular *ergon* has a ‘peculiar’ virtue—using Grube’s translation of οἰκεῖος—assigned to it (cf. Plato, *Resp.* 353c1). I will argue that the lines 42.9-13 (section (3) quoted above), which will be discussed later, suggest that Aristotle uses the same concept of οἰκεῖος when talking about the relation between virtue and *ergon*.

Aristotle argues that the virtue of a better entity is better than the virtue of a presumably lesser entity. As noted by Düring in his commentary, this principle is applied across Aristotle’s corpus and is most clearly elucidated in the *Politics* 7.1, 1323b13-21: ‘no proof is required to show that the best state of one thing in relation to another corresponds in degree of excellence to the interval between the natures of which we say that these very states are states’ (transl. Jowett). Based on which criteria does Aristotle judge what is better? It is clear from the text that the relevant aspect here is whether the given entity is naturally in control or ruling (ἀρχικός, ἡγεμονικός, 41.27-28). What is naturally ruling and commanding is better (βελτίων) than what is ruled and commanded, i.e. the virtue of the

²²⁵ See Meeren (2011, 170–171, fn. 11) on the conception of proper virtue in relation to the *ergon* argument.

ruling part is always better than virtues of the ruled part (cf. the same reasoning earlier at 6, 38.14-15).

Aristotle goes on to say that for human beings, it is naturally reason and thought (λόγος and διάνοια) which tell us how we ought or ought not to act. This is then the best part of the soul and therefore the soul is better than the body, since it is more naturally a ruler over the body.²²⁶ The virtue of the most valuable part in us is thus the most valuable virtue as well.²²⁷ Aristotle adds: ‘I think one might actually set it down that we are this portion, either alone or especially’ (καὶ γὰρ ἂν τοῦτο, οἶμαι, θείη τις, ὡς ἦτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν τὸ μόνιον τοῦτο, 42.3-4).²²⁸ Furthermore, in the introductory passage, Aristotle presents his general rule that the order of the inferior parts in a complex whole is always organized with reference to or in favour of the ruling elements (41.18-20). It can already be deduced that intellect and thought somehow function as a goal or a reference point around which all parts of a human being are organized.

²²⁶ Aristotle does not use such strongly political terminology when he talks about the relation of the soul parts or the soul and the body in other treatises (Ross rightly translates κρατεῖν in *Eth. Nic.* 1168b34-1169a3 as ‘to be in control’ rather than ‘to rule’); yet one could compare it to *Eth. Eud.* 8.1 1246b11-12, where the virtue of the ruling element (in the soul, presumably) uses the virtue of the ruled elements (ἡ γὰρ τοῦ ἄρχοντος ἀρετὴ τῇ τοῦ ἀρχομένου χρῆται). The language is, of course, reminiscent of Plato’s political vocabulary used to describe relations between the soul and body or between the parts of the soul in several dialogues (e.g. *Phd.* 79b-80a, 94b, *Resp.* 353d, *Ti.* 45b, or *Leg.* 689b); for the idea that the soul is a natural ruler over the body, see also *Ti.* 34c; *Alcib. I.* 130b or *Leg.* 726a.

²²⁷ This does not mean that our best virtue is *per se* the best virtue in general, since ‘man is not the best thing in the world’ (*Eth. Nic.* 6.7, 1141a21-22).

²²⁸ Using the phrase τὸ μόνιον τοῦτο does not signal a reference to Plato’s conception of parts of the soul as Düring (1961, 236) claims, nor is it convincing that οἶμαι is a reference to Plato. Cf. Dirlmeier (1999, 551-3) for a discussion of this passage which tries to position it in an entirely Platonic context. According to D. S. Hutchinson, in private communication, the most probable explanation of the first person verb οἶμαι is that it is a part of the dialogue that Iamblichus did not remove.

This line of thought is put to use in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well. Aristotle says that we should do everything we can in order to live in accordance with what is the most powerful among the things that are in us (κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ, 1177b33–34). Each man is even said to be this ‘best in us,’ since each man is the authoritative and better part of himself (1178a2–3). Here Aristotle expresses the general thesis of his top-down philosophical framework: a complex entity is defined in accordance with its best part: ‘just as a city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is a man’ (*Eth. Nic.* 9.8 1168b31–32, transl. Ross-Brown).²²⁹

The ergon of a human being according to the Protrepticus

After establishing that the part of the soul which has reason and thought is the most valuable part of us—indeed we can be said to *be* this part—and thus its virtue is the best and highest virtue for us, Aristotle puts the concept of *ergon* to work (section (2) in the text above). The most authoritative virtue is said to achieve the natural *ergon* (ὁ πέφυκεν ἔργον) in the most perfect manner possible for the *ergon* in question. As a result, the *ergon* is done well—it is good (τοῦτο ἀγαθὸν εἶναι). Furthermore, this means that the given entity can be considered to be ‘well disposed’ (εὖ διάκειται), as alluded to in the opening lines of the argument quoted above: ‘everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue, for to have obtained this is good (τὸ γὰρ τετυχηκέναι ταύτης ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ)’ (41.22–24). ταύτης refers to the proper virtue and it is now clear that acquiring this proper or own virtue is good for the given entity.

²²⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 9.8, 1169a2. For a discussion of these passages see Dominic Scott (1999, 232, fn. 22) and Jirsa (2017, 231). Gerson (2004, 63–4) discusses this passage together with the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, 1177b30–1178a8, which I will explore in the subsequent chapters.

I consider this to be Aristotle's first exposition of the core of the *ergon* argument which he subsequently applies to human beings. Given that whatever is done in accordance with nature is better than that which is done unnaturally, Aristotle talks about natural *ergon*. This *ergon* is perfected in the most beautiful way (κάλλιστα ἀποτελεῖ) by 'the most authoritative virtue' (ταύτην τε ἀρετὴν κυριωτάτην). It is my understanding that this phrase refers to the concept of the best virtue discussed in the preceding lines. We do not know what *ergon* is, as the term is not defined in the *Protrepticus*. What we can infer from the text is that it is clearly something a given entity does, it is always an *ergon* of an entity capable of doing or acting. Aristotle speaks about the *ergon* of a capacity as well (6, 39.24). Should an entity have several *erga*, Aristotle is interested in the best or most authoritative one (42.20-25, sections (3) and (4)).

The next step in his argument involves making a distinction between composite and simple natures in respect to their *ergon* and virtue (section (3)). This distinction, together with the previously explained concept of *ergon*, is then applied to human beings.

A complex entity has several activities (ἐνέργεια),²³⁰ whereas an entity of a simple nature (τὴν φύσιν ἀπλοῦ) has only one proper virtue. The simple entity is a self-standing entity which is not dependent on anything else, i.e. it is not to be understood as a part of a larger whole.²³¹ We are not told that a simple entity has a single activity or virtue. The text says

²³⁰ Cf. on ἐνέργεια see a detailed analysis in Menn (1994).

²³¹ Düring (1961, 237) glosses the phrase μὴ πρὸς τι τὴν οὐσίαν as 'common in logical and ontological classification,' characterizing the dependence of a given entity. The πρὸς τι is a label for one of the categories which classifies things being related to something else (cf. Arist., *Cat.* 6a36). Here it is specified that the substance (οὐσία) of a given thing is not related to anything else, i.e. the given entity is largely independent. In the *Categories*, Aristotle explicitly asks whether any substance οὐσία can be πρὸς τι, relative (8a13-28). It cannot be the case with primary substances nor with most secondary substances. Yet, Aristotle leaves the question open in cases like a head or hand, i.e. explicitly in the case of bodily organs which are bodily organs given their presence and function within a complex organism, i.e. always in

that it has a single virtue (καθ' αὐτὸ κυρίως). Yet, in the following lines, Aristotle deduces that if a human being is a simple entity it must have one single *ergon*. I thus understand this to be a preliminary suggestion that a simple entity has one *ergon* and one virtue specific to it. The number of virtues is dependent on the number of activities of the given entity since virtue is understood as that which elevates the given activity to perfection.²³²

Aristotle then applies this distinction to a human being as a living entity. A human being can be viewed either as a simple animal (ἀπλοῦν τι ζῶον) or as a complex of several capacities (ἐκ πλειόνων δυνάμεων συμπεφυκός). The distinction is exhaustive in that a human being must be one or the other. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the distinction might obstruct one important detail. The simple animal is said to have its substance ordered according to reason and intellect (κατὰ λόγον καὶ νοῦν τέτακται αὐτοῦ ἡ οὐσία). The idea of being 'ordered' or 'put into order' suggests ordering a multitude. It seems that the simple animal is simple because it is ordered by reason and intellect.²³³ Düring and the other interpreters seem to have missed an obvious reference here: the mythography passage from the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates explains his lack of a certain kind of self-knowledge:

relation to something (cf. the famous dictum that a marble or wooden hand—or a hand of a corpse—is a hand only by name, e.g. Aristotle, *Part. an.* 1.1, 640b30-641a16, *De an.* 2.1, 412b10-412b24, *Gen. an.* 1.19, 726b20-23). On the other hand, *Metaph.* 12.4, 1070b1-9 seems to make an exclusive pairing out of the categories of substance and πρὸς τι: one entity can only be one or the other, never both. Yet, the usage of this 'common in logical and ontological classification' (according to Düring) raises a question concerning the protreptic function of the text. The distinction between οὐσία and πρὸς τι is hardly 'common' outside of the Academy or Peripatos. Therefore, if Aristotle expects his readers or listeners to be aware of this distinction and therefore does not feel any need to explain it, then he seems to be presupposing that the audience of the text is already somehow versed in Academic philosophy. I am thankful to Hynek Bartoš for raising this question.

²³² This principle seems to be confirmed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2, 1139a15-17: ἡ δ'ἀρετὴ πρὸς τὸ ἔργον τὸ οἰκεῖον. Transl. Ross-Brown: 'The virtue of a thing is relative to its proper work.'

²³³ This unity by means of ordering a plurality is missed by Vendruscolo (1989, 307–308) who therefore sees unnecessary problems in this passage.

‘Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?’

εἴτε τι θηρίον ὄν τυγχάνω Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον, εἴτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον (Plato, *Phaedrus* 230a3-6, transl. Nehamas - Woodruff)²³⁴

Socrates maps out two radical options: the monstrous Typhon on the one hand and a simpler animal with a share in the divine on the other. Similarly, as in the *Protrepticus*, the simpler animal cannot be entirely simple since it has a share in divine and gentle nature. Later in the dialogue, Plato shows that a human soul can take both of the suggested forms. It is irreducibly complex, composed of parts with a heterogeneous nature (*Phdr.* 246b) and is also eternally moving (*Phdr.* 245c). At the same time, it can gain a share in the divine by nurturing its mind with practical wisdom and pure knowledge (νόῳ τε καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ) together with the gods (*Phdr.* 247d, 248a-b).

For the argument being made in the *Protrepticus*, it does not matter whether a human being is simple or complex in the above-mentioned sense. If it is simple, Aristotle continues, he has no other *ergon* than truth or the activity of ‘telling truth’ or ‘being true’ about existing things (τὸ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀληθεύειν, 42.16). The sentence suggests that Aristotle does not understand ἀλήθεια here to be a product but rather an activity expressed by ‘being true’ (ἀληθεύειν).²³⁵

²³⁴ Cf. comments on this passage in Yunis (2011, 94); Griswold (1986, 40).

²³⁵ Crivelli (2004, 45) claims that Aristotle uses the term ‘truth’ here for the act of believing. According to Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.4, 1221b29-30 as well as the *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.2, the truth is the *ergon* of both the theoretical as well as the practical part of νοητικόν (1139b12-13); in fact, this entire passage nicely illustrates the usage of the argument in the *Protrepticus*: ‘The work of both the intellectual parts,

If, on the other hand, a human being is composed of several capacities, the best thing which he can bring to perfection will be his *ergon*. The examples given of these best things are health for a doctor and safety for a navigator.²³⁶ According to this interpretation, a human being is capable of several activities and, as we have seen, these activities can be ordered based on their value. The two principles of ordering that we have discussed thus far are: what is in accordance with nature is better than what is against nature (9, 50.16-19) and, furthermore, ruling is better than being ruled, i.e. a ruling nature is better (6, 38.14-15; 7, 41.27-28). At the beginning of the argument, Aristotle claims that the part of a complex human being's soul which has reason and thought is the ruling element. Therefore, Aristotle considers the activity of this part of the soul to be the *ergon* he seeks. He maintains that there is no better *ergon* of this part of the soul than ἀλήθεια.²³⁷

Ingemar Düring, following Suzanne Mansion, stresses the difference between the outcomes of the *ergon* argument here in the *Protrepticus* and in Plato's *Republic*.²³⁸ However, their

then, is truth. Therefore, the states that are most strictly those in respect of which each of these parts will reach truth are the virtues of the two parts.' (transl. Ross - Brown) Truth is the *ergon* of both parts of νοητικόν and every part has a virtue that is responsible for reaching the truth. For further commentary on truth as *ergon* cf. Meeren (2011, 175, fn. 32-33).

²³⁶ The *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 1219a15 says that health is the *ergon* of the doctoring art rather than of the doctor; however, this should not be read as signalling a substantial difference in the conceptions of art, knowledge or *ergon*. Health is the *ergon* of a doctor qua being a doctor, i.e. due to the doctoring art, cf. *Ph.* 2.3, 195b21-24.

²³⁷ Cf. list of passages suggesting Aristotle's conviction that truth is linked to goodness and falsehood to badness in Crivelli (2004, 63, fn. 62).

²³⁸ Mansion (1960, 70); Düring (1961, 234-5). Mansion's original interpretation which crossed over to Düring's commentary is highly problematic. In addition to the points mentioned above in the text, she assumes that Plato's position is essentially Socratic intellectualism without taking into account the more complex psychology of the *Republic*; second, it is hard to evaluate her claims such as 'Clearly Aristotle is right, contrary to his master, when he says that the proper work of the highest part of the soul (reason) is to know the truth.' Does this mean that Mansion shares Aristotle's position? How else could she conclude this without investigating the different assumptions behind the *ergon* argument in both treatises (which

comparison is misguided. They claim that, according to Plato, the *ergon* of the rational part of the soul is to rule and that the corresponding virtue is justice. Aristotle, on the other hand, claims that the *ergon* is to know the truth and that the virtue is knowledge. First, Plato does not use the *ergon* argument in order to establish that the rational part of the soul should rule. The passage in the *Republic* 4, 441e—referred to by Mansion—says that it belongs (προσῆκω) to reason to rule, ‘since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul.’ This is a different method of argumentation from the one we find at the end of the Book 1 concerning the soul and justice. It could be that ruling is the *ergon* of reason for Plato, though that is not what Mansion and Düring argue. Instead, it is suggested that its *ergon* is some intellectual capacity, which is *why* it should rule. Second, justice is not the virtue of the rational part of the soul according to Plato.²³⁹ The *ergon* argument discussed in the previous chapter concerned the entire soul and its *ergon* was living (not ruling). Even later in the *Republic*, it is clear that justice is the virtue of the entire soul and not of one specific part of the soul (cf. 443c9-e2).

Aristotle diverges from Plato since he explicitly bases his argumentation on one part of the soul, the rational part (41.27-42.4, section (1)). This shift in meaning becomes apparent again when he discusses the two possibilities concerning human beings: either we are simple entities ordered by reason and practical wisdom or we are complex entities. In both cases, however, the rational part and its *ergon* is the most authoritative and relevant activity. Plato’s *ergon* argument at the end of Book 1 of the *Republic* is about the entire soul. Nevertheless, Plato’s account is promising precisely because of his insistence that the *ergon* of the soul is living—after all, the soul is what distinguishes the animate from the inanimate.

she does not do)? She does not see a major difference between the context and aim of the *ergon* argument in both treatises, nor is she interested in the possibly different premises of both versions of the argument.
²³⁹ Cf. footnote 206 in the preceding chapter; the virtue of intellect is wisdom (σοφία).

Aristotle's simplification is thus not a step back: as we have seen earlier, knowing is a kind of living for human beings (cf. *Protr.* 11, 59.7-9).

Alétheia and phronésis: the double ergon scheme

The claim that ἀλήθεια is the *ergon* of the relevant part of the soul is the peak of the argument (42.20-22). What is more, Aristotle continues specifying the virtue related to this activity, namely ἐπιστήμη (section 4 in the text above). Before introducing the formal scheme of the *ergon* argument presented in this passage, I want to address two points. Aristotle illustrates his teleology of value here. The entity which leads us to call another entity valuable is better and more valuable, since the latter entity derives its value from the value of the former. The value of pleasant things is dependent upon the pleasure they produce and the value of medical procedures is dependent on the health they produce. According to Aristotle's work in the *Protrepticus*, an goal (τέλος) is always better since everything that comes to be always comes to be for the sake of some goal.²⁴⁰ Therefore, pleasure is better than pleasant things and health is better than things which produce health.

Second, when Aristotle talks about the cognitive part of our soul (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος), he adds 'both separately and in combination.' I believe that this addition is made in reference to the two possibilities concerning human beings in 42.13-20. The claim regarding the cognitive part of our soul is valid—as we have seen—when it is considered separately or in combination with other parts and capacities of the soul.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Protr.* 9, 51.16-18: εἰ τοίνυν παντὸς ἀεὶ τὸ τέλος ἐστὶ βέλτιον ἔνεκα γὰρ τοῦ τέλους πάντα γίγνεται τὰ γιγνόμενα, τὸ δ' οὐ ἔνεκα βέλτιον καὶ βέλτιστον πάντων.

The passage (4), namely the passage 42.23-43.5 quoted above, introduces parts of the mosaic which allow me to draft a formal scheme of the *ergon* argument as presented by Aristotle thus far. The entity whose *ergon* is discussed is that of a human being (ἄνθρωπος), yet Aristotle methodologically reduces the entity in question to the best or most important part of us with which we can be identified (42.4-5). This part is called ‘the cognitive part’ (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος, 43.3) or διάνοια, more precisely ‘the contemplating part of the soul’ (τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς, 42.21). The corresponding capacity of this part of the soul is practical wisdom (φρόνησις, 43.1) and the virtue of this capacity through which the *ergon* is obtained is called knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 43.5, cf. 42.23-24). Furthermore, the goal (τέλος) and ultimate aim of this virtue is contemplation (θεωρία, 42.25).²⁴¹ Finally, the *ergon* of this part of the soul is ἀλήθεια, being true (ἀληθεύειν, 42.16).

The account seems perhaps too convoluted or rather unpolished, as it introduces several features which are *prima facie* redundant and make the argument unnecessarily complicated. I will start with a simplification which lends itself most readily. I think it is not necessary to look for the difference between τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος and τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς, as these two names clearly refer to the same part or portion of soul. I find no need to accuse Aristotle of inconsistency as he does not have a clear vocabulary for parts of the soul in the *Protrepticus*. The vocabulary of the soul parts is quite complex and complicated.

Aristotle’s consistency even in the *De anima* itself remains an open-ended issue.²⁴²

Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Protrepticus* does not exhibit established psychological

²⁴¹ Θεωρία appears as the goal (τέλος) of theoretical knowledge in Iamblichus, *DCMS* 23, 72.4-6, which Hutchinson and Johnson attribute to Aristotle as well.

²⁴² See Corcilius and Gregoric (2010) on the complications and problems posed by this terminology.

terminology. Moreover, I have not found anything in the text that would suggest any difference between τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος and τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς.²⁴³

However, there are more questions to be answered. What is the relation between contemplation (θεωρία) as the goal of the virtue in question (ἐπιστήμη) and the truth as *ergon* which is secured by this virtue?²⁴⁴ Aristotle presents *ergon* as ‘the best’ that a given entity can do (42.20-22, section (3)), and virtue as the quality which ensures that the relevant activity is carried out perfectly so that the *ergon* can be attained. The puzzling issue here is that apart from the *ergon*, Aristotle introduces another capacity of the entity, namely φρόνησις, which—when active—does the judging on behalf of the cognitive part of the soul (43.1-3, section (4)).²⁴⁵ Since the *ergon* also appears to be an activity (namely ἀληθεύειν), we are thus presented with two activities and their relation remains unclear. Yet, this passage clearly treats practical wisdom (φρόνησις) as a capacity. Vendruscolo suggests that we should understand the passage as saying that practical wisdom relates to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in the same way as capacity relates to *virtue*.²⁴⁶ Moreover, the second possible duplication is that the ἐπιστήμη perfects the *ergon* in question, though its goal seems to differ from the *ergon*, since θεωρία is the τέλος and ἀληθεύειν is the *ergon*. Is this not an unnecessary complication of the argument?

In the *Republic*, the final picture is much simpler: a given entity has its *ergon* (activity or perhaps a product) which is perfected by the corresponding virtue. The *ergon* of a soul is living and justice ensures that the living is done well.

²⁴³ Similarly Düring (1961, 239–40) who equates τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος with νοῦς.

²⁴⁴ For identifying ἐπιστήμη as virtue cf. Vendruscolo (1989, 309) as well.

²⁴⁵ On the method of judging see Düring (1961, 239–40).

²⁴⁶ Vendruscolo (1989, 310).

I will show that in the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle seems to understand *ergon* as something which has to be achieved as a perfected state or condition of the activity in question. However, if *ergon* already has this normative meaning (it is something to be achieved rather than something that the entity does which a virtue makes it ‘do well’), it complicates the argument by adding another layer to it. It is no easy feat creating a semblance of order in the cognitive terminology used by Aristotle in the *Protrepticus*. Nevertheless, after interpreting the remaining lines of the argument, I will try to propose a coherent structure of the argument. I will now proceed with lines from Iamblichus’ *Protrepticus* 43.5-25 (sections (5) and (6)) which, in my understanding, close the *ergon* argument. I will then suggest two possible ways of dealing with the complexity and terminological muddle of the text.

The previous passage (4) concluded in 43.1-5 that nothing is more valuable than practical wisdom, which is said to be the capacity of the most authoritative part of us, and that knowledge is the virtue of this part of our soul. The text continues that ‘its *ergon* is none of those *erga* of particular virtues (οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶν ἔργον αὐτῆς οὐδεμία τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν), for it is better for all of them.’ This sentence already poses a problem which can hardly be resolved with any certainty. What does the feminine αὐτῆς refer to here? Namely, which *ergon* are we talking about now? If any of the preceding lines were missing, it would be impossible to determine the referent. Previous drafts of the reconstruction by Hutchinson and Johnson separated the text at 43.5 into two fragments and the lines 43.5-8 were marked as Iamblichus’ summary and not as a direct quote from Aristotle’s text. This could suggest that Iamblichus skipped a part of the original text, meaning that the referent of αὐτῆς cannot be determined. On the other hand, Iamblichus probably would have noticed and would have substituted the pronoun with the appropriate term. The 2018 edition by Hutchinson and Johnson presents the *ergon* argument in one

block from 41.6 to 43.25 and the lines 43.5-8 are marked as Aristotle's. Therefore, I will suppose that the preceding sentence is 'thus nothing is more valuable than practical wisdom, which we say is a capacity of the most authoritative thing in us ... for the cognitive part ... is better than all the rest of the soul, and knowledge is its virtue' (43.1-5, end of section (4)).

Therefore, the possible references of the feminine ἀὐτῆς are practical wisdom (φρόνησις), soul (ψυχή) or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) as its virtue (ἀρετή).²⁴⁷ It is said that the *ergon* in question is not one of the particular virtues, 'for it is better than all of them.' The argument rests on the premise that the given *ergon* is *better* than the *erga* of all particular virtues and I believe that this statement may even echo the evaluation made in the previous passage. However, the previous passage claimed that nothing is more valuable than practical wisdom and that the cognitive part of the soul is better than the entire rest of the soul. Finally, if a virtue perfects or strengthens a given activity (cf. 42.23-25, opening of section (4)), its *ergon* would be better than what is being perfected or strengthened.

It seems *prima facie* more natural to assume that Aristotle has the previous understanding of practical wisdom in mind here. If that is the case, the *ergon* in question is the *ergon* of practical wisdom. Now, this would be problematic, since Aristotle is now talking about the *ergon* of an activity of a given entity which is at the same time the *ergon* of a given entity. He would have to explain how these two *erga* belong together and the concept of an *ergon* of an *ergon* does not look very promising. Aristotle understands seeing as the *ergon* of the eyes (as in 43.22-25) and it would be strange if he were to start talking about the *ergon* of

²⁴⁷ If knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is virtue (ἀρετή), deciphering which is the grammatical referent does not impact the argument. Moreover, I believe it would be impossible to tell.

seeing over and above seeing itself. Yet, this would be the case if αὐτῆς were referring to φρόνησις.²⁴⁸

We saw that the second evaluation conducted in the previous passage was an evaluation of the cognitive part of the soul.²⁴⁹ The cognitive part of the soul (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος) is, of course, grammatically neuter, but one could argue that the referent is ψυχή, mentioned in 43.5, taking into consideration Aristotle's claim that the best part can stand for the complex entity. The cognitive part of the soul is the best part of the soul and therefore its *ergon* is the proper *ergon* of the entire soul. The *ergon* of the soul cannot be of one of the parts of the virtue, since it is the *ergon* of the entire soul, namely the *ergon* of its best part. The reference of the feminine αὐτῆς would be the soul *via* its highest part and thus the *ergon* in question would be the *ergon* of the soul. First, I see no reason as to why Aristotle would not refer directly to the part of the soul with the neuter pronoun. Second, several lines earlier, Aristotle firmly establishes that there is no better *ergon* of the highest part of our soul than ἀλήθεια (42.1-22, esp. section (3) above) and there is no mention of ἀλήθεια in the present context.

The third possibility is that αὐτῆς refers to the virtue in question, i.e. to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).²⁵⁰ This reading could actually explain the occurrence of ἔργον τῆς ἀρετῆς, i.e. the *ergon* of a virtue, in 43.21, which most editors following Düring amend to ψυχῆς, despite the manuscript reading.²⁵¹ On the other hand, this reading would create a doubled scheme

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Protr.* 6, 39.25 where Aristotle talks explicitly about the *ergon* of φρόνησις; however, this passage says that the *ergon* of φρόνησις as a capacity is φρονεῖν.

²⁴⁹ Ross (1952, 35) seems to translate the αὐτῆς as a reference to the part of the soul; this reference is made explicit in Chroust (1964, 28).

²⁵⁰ This possibility is found in the French translation by des Places (1989, 73) as well as in Follon (2006, 26); similarly in Schneeweiss (2005, 127).

²⁵¹ Düring (1961, 76) suggests an emendation of ἀρετῆς to ψυχῆς on doctrinal grounds (he refers to the *ergon* of the soul in his B85, i.e. Pistelli 9, 58.3-4) as he glosses over the fact that αὐτῆς in his B68 (= 43.6 Pistelli)

where we would have (i) the *ergon* of the entity (human being or soul) coupled with(ii) an *ergon* of the virtue which would secure the first *ergon*. The situation could be exemplified thusly: ‘the function of sharpness is to perfect the function of eyes, namely the sight’ where we have a separate *ergon* of the virtue, namely perfection itself, over and above the *ergon* of a given entity. Yet, the example with seeing introduced later in the text (43.23-25, end of section (6)) is a simple one, which makes no mention of the possibility of a double *ergon* and hardly supports such a reading.

None of the readings suggested above are entirely unproblematic and a conclusion can scarcely be formed solely on the basis of the text here.²⁵² In the subsequent interpretation of the *ergon* argument, I will refer to the lines 58.3-10 where the *ergon* argument reappears. I believe that these lines support the third reading, namely that αὐτῆς in 43.6 refers to the virtue and that Aristotle thus presents us with a scheme of two *erga*: the *ergon* of a given entity and the *ergon* of a virtue.²⁵³

One point which is made clear here is that Aristotle is not discussing particular virtues. He is concerned with the highest virtue, i.e. the virtue of a human being. This virtue is the virtue of the highest or best part of us.²⁵⁴ Aristotle proceeds to identify and more closely

might refer to the virtue; neither Ross nor Walzer see any need for such a change. The emendation ψυχῆς is adopted by Chroust and Schneeweiss. Hutchinson and Johnson retain ἀρετῆς, which is read by Flashar (2006, 61) and by Bobonich (2007, 166) as well. For a different argument in support of reading ἀρετῆς in 43.21 see Vendruscolo (1989, 313–314).

²⁵² Both the English translation by Hutchinson and Johnson as well as Düring (1961, 77) are unhelpful, since they use the English ‘its’ which can refer to any preceding noun regardless of its grammatical gender. Moreover, Düring divides Iamblichus’ text into two fragments exactly at 43.5, which makes it almost impossible to determine the reference of αὐτῆς in the opening line of the new fragment.

²⁵³ This, I believe, solves the apparent inconsistency mentioned by Vendruscolo (1989, 306).

²⁵⁴ Düring (1961, 77) understands τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν as referring to ‘moral virtues’; yet the phrase κατὰ μέρος related to virtue suggests rather a distinction between particular virtues and a general, perfect or complete virtue, cf. esp. *Eth. Eud.*, 8.3 1248b8-12, the same in *Mag. Mor.* 2.9; further cf. *Eth. Nic.*

specify this virtue. Quite surprisingly, he says that ‘not every virtue of the soul is an *ergon* in that way, nor is it success’ (43.8-10). Once again, he closely links *ergon* and virtue as if some virtues could be or at least could have their own *erga*. Let me add this observation to the ever-growing heap of yet unresolved problems.

We know that the *ergon* in question (regardless of whether it is an *ergon* of the cognitive part of the soul or an *ergon* of its virtue) must be a cognitive capacity and Aristotle is now vying to specify what kind of cognitive capacity it is: First, it does not create anything. It is not ποιητική, as if it were to produce something other than itself, it would not be a part of what was produced, given that the skill of building is not a part of the house *stricto sensu*. Yet, Aristotle maintains that practical virtue should be a part of both virtue and *eudaimonia*.²⁵⁵ Therefore, it cannot be knowledge that creates something (ἐπιστήμη ποιητική), since the goal (τέλος) is always better than the entity or process which belongs to the goal (cf. 9, 51.16-23 interpreted above) and nothing is better than practical wisdom. The practical wisdom, Aristotle concludes, is the *ergon* (οὐδὲν ἕτερον αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἔργον 43.18).²⁵⁶ However, an important clause is added here: nothing is better than practical wisdom, ‘unless it is one of the things mentioned’ (πλὴν εἴ τι τῶν εἰρημένων). What are these things mentioned and how could something be better than the *ergon*? Moreover, an obvious (and related) question arises: did Aristotle or Iamblichus, if he is responsible for the muddiness of the text, just forget that the *ergon* was ἀληθεύειν just a couple of lines earlier?

1129b25-9, 1130a30-b2, 1141a9-22 as well; for an interpretation of the clause κατὰ μέρος in agreement with mine see Tessitore (1996, 47); Lear (2004, 109); Natali (2010, 91); Curzer (2012, 276).

²⁵⁵ Here, Aristotle refers back to 7.41.7-11; moreover, φρόνησις is listed as one of the candidates for *eudaimonia*.

²⁵⁶ It is already clear that Dumoulin’s classification of cognitive capacities in the *Protrepticus* is misleading; Dumoulin essentially lists instances of a given capacity in the text without proper context and suggests no relations between the capacities, despite the fact that these relations are suggested in the text; cf. Dumoulin (1981, 119–20).

I do not believe this to be a case of confused terms. It seems that the argument of the *Protrepticus* operates with two *erga*, namely the truth and the practical wisdom. Before suggesting a coherent interpretation, I will discuss the remaining lines of the *ergon* argument in order to paint a full picture.

Given that the knowledge in question cannot be productive, i.e. such knowledge does not have an outcome different from itself, it must be theoretical or—as Hutchinson and Johnson translate—observational knowledge. The activity of φρόνησις and θεωρία is said to be the *ergon* of the given virtue, i.e. of knowledge. Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) was the only virtue mentioned thus far and no other virtue is introduced in the text. Düring and others consider the term ἀρετῆς to be an obvious mistake in the text and change it to ψυχῆς.²⁵⁷ I will show that such emendation is not necessary, as Aristotle’s complex argument presupposes two *erga*, one of the soul and one of the virtue. Here, Aristotle concludes that this, namely the activity of φρόνησις and θεωρία, is the most valuable for humans. It is something so natural to us—as is sight for the eyes—that we should choose it for its own sake and not for any possible effects.

Tying up the loose ends

Let me now summarize all of the loose ends and problems which I have reserved for the concluding section of the interpretation. First, contemplation (θεωρία) is said to be the goal of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), which is at the same time the virtue which secures the *ergon*, namely ἀληθεύειν. What then is the relation between contemplation and truth? Second, what is the link between the two *erga* introduced in the text: ἀληθεύειν on the one hand and φρόνησις on the other? What is the relation between these two capacities? Third, what are

²⁵⁷ Cf. footnote 251, Düring’s main argument rests on the clause ψυχῆς ἔργον at 58.3-5.

we to make of Aristotle's claim that virtue has an *ergon* of its own (43.8-10, section (5))? And finally, what precisely are these things which are better than practical wisdom (43.10)?

An easy way out would be to say that it is too much to expect an elaborate account of the *ergon* argument from the text. The dialogue calls for rhetorical exercise and allows for some terminological liberties.²⁵⁸ Therefore, Aristotle is just in using a bit of flowery language for the cognitive capacity in question, while keeping the scheme of the *ergon* argument as simple as the *Republic* most likely taught him. First, we are reduced to the cognitive part of the soul. This reduction is based on several methodological assumptions introduced above. The main or proper capacity of this part of the soul is thought—and it is immaterial as to whether Aristotle calls it φρόνησις, θεωρία, ἀλήθεια or uses the corresponding verbs. The virtue of this part of the soul is ἐπιστήμη and it perfects the cognitive capacity so that it does this job well.

The obvious disadvantage of this simplistic interpretation is the complexity of the text. Why would Aristotle present a scheme as simple as the one described in such a complicated and muddled way? Furthermore, if it were merely a simplistic scheme, Aristotle (or perhaps Iamblichus) would be guilty of mistakenly writing ἀρετῆς instead of ψυχῆς in 43.21.

The other alternative, which I will try to develop, is to take the text seriously. As I have said, the text seems quite technical compared to other fragments of the *Protrepticus*. What is more, some later fragments of the text seem to operate with two levels of cognitive capacities which correspond to the two *erga* introduced here. Finally, as I have mentioned above, ἀλήθεια or ἀληθεύειν was treated not as an *ergon* in the sense of what a given entity

²⁵⁸ Support for this view can be found in Gadamer's analysis of the terminology used in the *Protrepticus*, cf. Gadamer (1928, 148): 'im *Protreptikos* verfolgt Aristoteles nicht die Absicht, ethische Begriffe in ihrer spezifisch ethischen Valenz zu bestimmen. Hier hält er sich an ... das möglichst allgemeinen philosophischen Sprachgebrauchs.'

naturally does, but as something a given entity *ought* to do. This opens some room for a distinction to be made between an *ergon* we do on the one hand and a perfected *ergon* which we ought to do on the other hand.

The concept of *ergon* reappears later in the *Protrepticus* when Aristotle concludes why perfect living (τελέως ζῆν) belongs to those who are practically wise and observing or contemplating (φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν) in accordance with the most precise knowledge:

‘Now of a soul, too, thinking as well as reasoning is the only ergon of the soul, or is most of all its function. Therefore it is now simple and easy for anyone to reach the conclusion that he who thinks correctly is more alive, and he who most tells the truth lives most, and this is the one who is practically wise and observing according to the most precise knowledge;²⁵⁹ and it is then and to those that living perfectly, surely, should be attributed, to those who are using their practical wisdom, i.e. to the intelligent.’

ἔστι δὴ καὶ ψυχῆς ἥτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα πάντων ἔργον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι. ἀπλοῦν ἄρα ἤδη τοῦτο καὶ παντὶ συλλογίζεσθαι ῥάδιον ὅτι ζῆ μᾶλλον ὁ διανοούμενος ὀρθῶς καὶ μάλιστα πάντων ὁ μάλιστα ἀληθεύων, οὗτος δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην· καὶ τό γε τελέως ζῆν τότε καὶ τούτοις ἀποδοτέον, τοῖς φρονοῦσι καὶ τοῖς φρονίμοις. (58.3-10)

²⁵⁹ Precision is one of the features according to which Aristotle judges the value of ἐπιστήμη, the other being the worth of its objects, cf. Iamblichus, *DCMS* 23, 71.26-73.5 which Hutchinson and Johnson attribute to Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* as well.

First, Aristotle is clearly referring to the *ergon* of the soul here; indeed, this is the passage which convinced Düring that the expression ‘an *ergon* of virtue’ must be a mistake. The *ergon* of the soul is introduced here in the general sense as thinking and reasoning (τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι). Both stand for the activity of the cognitive part of the soul called διάνοια or τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς (42.21, end of section (3)), which is why Aristotle uses τὸ διανοεῖσθαι here. Already in 41.10-11, i.e. before the *ergon* argument itself, Aristotle associates practical wisdom with λογίζεσθαι. Therefore, it is my understanding that when Aristotle talks about the *ergon* of the soul in terms of thinking and reasoning, he unfurls what he means by the term φρόνησις, which was introduced as *ergon* in 43.18.²⁶⁰ Throughout the relevant fragments of the *Protrepticus*, φρόνησις stands for the capacity of the highest or most authoritative part of the soul (cf. 6, 39.25-40.4, 7, 43.1-5; cf. 5, 36.9-11 on φρόνησις of animals).

A potential problem for my understanding of practical wisdom as capacity and not as virtue are the lines 43.12-13 (section (5) in the text above), where Aristotle says that practical wisdom is a part of virtue and *eudaimonia*. Practical wisdom as a part of *eudaimonia* is not a problem, provided that practical wisdom is our *ergon*, as in this case, exercising it would undoubtedly be part of our *eudaimonia*. However, if practical wisdom is a part of virtue, does it not mean that it cannot be the capacity which is improved or done well because of a virtue?

²⁶⁰ There is an unsettled dispute concerning the objects of φρόνησις. Jaeger (1948, 83) claims that the objects are the Forms, or as he puts it: ‘the pure Norms by reference to which man should order his life.’ On the other hand, Düring claims that φρόνησις is practical wisdom (as opposed to theoretical knowledge) in essentially the same sense as it appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, cf. Düring (1955, 95–6). Monan (1968, 20) rightly points out that the object of the philosopher’s contemplation is nature or at least a natural object, which is why Aristotle (unsuccessfully according to Monan) tries to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge. My argumentation in this chapter is not contingent upon the outcome of this dispute.

I admit that the reference to the part of a virtue is puzzling and problematic. One of the reasons behind such obfuscation is that nothing else in the *Protrepticus* suggests that Aristotle uses the concept of a complex virtue composed of several parts which would themselves be virtues, akin to perfect virtue (καλοκάγαθία) from the *Eudemian Ethics*.²⁶¹ Merely a few lines earlier in 43.6-7, we read the phrase ‘its *ergon* is none of those (sc. *erga*) of particular virtues’ (οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶν ἔργον αὐτῆς οὐδεμία τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν). However, this phrase is not enough to justify any conclusion positing that there is a complex or complete virtue which is made up of particular virtues. The above-quoted sentence is the result of the previous argument that the *ergon* of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is higher and above the *ergon* of any particular virtues, since knowledge is the virtue of the best part of the soul, namely the cognitive part. Therefore, the contrast here is not between a complete virtue and particular virtues as its components, but between the best virtue as the virtue of the best part of ourselves and the particular, lower virtues.

Furthermore, when Aristotle lists suitable candidates for *eudaimonia* both in 41.11-15 and 59.26-60.1, the virtue is a separate candidate from practical wisdom and it is only the puzzling passage in 43.12-13 that suggests that these two candidates for *eudaimonia* could actually be consolidated into one. Nowhere in the *Protrepticus* is practical wisdom explicitly labelled as a virtue, as it is instead emphatically stressed to be a capacity.²⁶²

The one who thinks correctly (ὁ διανοούμενος ὀρθῶς) is said to live more (ζῆ μᾶλλον) compared to someone ignorant. Yet, the one who ἀληθεύειν, who is being true, lives the

²⁶¹ Cf. section ‘Postscript: *horos* or *stochos*? A note on the relation between the two *Ethics*’ in the next chapter in pp. 162-185.

²⁶² Vendruscolo (1989, 312) suggests that when Aristotle writes in the immediately following lines 43.13-14 ἢ γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἢ ταύτην φαμὲν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν (‘for we say that success either comes from it or is it’), the referent of ταύτης and ταύτην, i.e. ‘it’ in English, is not φρόνησις but ἀρετή. My interpretation makes clear that I do not see a reason for this reading.

most of all (μάλιστα πάντων) and is someone who ‘is intelligent and observing according to the most precise knowledge’ (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην).²⁶³ This suggests a hierarchy between those living more than someone else and those living most of all (including the ones living more). Those living more are the ones who think correctly, who exercise their διάνοια. Yet, those living most of all are the ones being true. Exercising one’s διάνοια, i.e. generally speaking φρονεῖν (if I am correct in that τὸ διανοεῖσθαί τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι stands for φρόνησις), does not seem to be sufficient grounds for being true. For being true one has to φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν in accordance with the most precise knowledge, i.e. with the virtue.²⁶⁴

The one who most tells the truth (ὁ μάλιστα ἀληθεύων) is said to be the one who is intelligent and observing according to the most precise knowledge (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην, 58.7-9). I have claimed that being true is the *ergon* of human beings (42.9-22, section (3)), not in the sense of the *ergon* we do, but in the sense of the *ergon* we ought to do, namely our own natural activity perfected by the given virtue which is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). It is then only fitting that Aristotle describes the *ergon* of our virtue as τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν (43.20-21). My claim that truth is our *ergon* in the sense of a normative *ergon* of the corresponding virtue is corroborated by Aristotle, who describes both being true as well as the *ergon* of virtue as τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν.²⁶⁵

Another potential issue for my interpretation are the lines 44.24-26. Pistelli’s text is ταύτης δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν αἰρετωτέρα καὶ τοῦ ζῆν ἔστιν ἡ φρόνησις κυριωτέρα τῆς ἀληθείας. One way of understanding the sentence would be: ‘and practical wisdom is more

²⁶³ Mansion (1960, 68) writes that ‘the activity of knowing truth is nothing else than life itself at the maximum of its perfection.’

²⁶⁴ Here Einarson (1936, 265) seems to be right in that the ‘practical wisdom’ of the *Protrepticus*, i.e. φρόνησις, is not the Socratic virtue but rather a theoretical science or knowledge.

²⁶⁵ Similarly in Meeren (2011, 179)

valuable than it (sc. sight) and all the other²⁶⁶, including living, and it is more authoritative than truth.’ It is puzzling to read that ‘practical wisdom is more authoritative than truth.’ First, there is a doctrinal problem with defining practical wisdom as capacity, as even if it somehow were a part of a virtue, it could hardly be more authoritative than truth, which is our normative *ergon*. The second problem is grammatical: what is to be made of τοῦ ζῆν and how is the syntax of this sentence to be understood?

Ross accepts a conjecture proposed by Jaeger: κυριωτερα <ουσα>, and his translation is ‘but practical wisdom is preferable to it (vision) and to all the other senses, and to life itself, since it has a stronger grasp of truth’.²⁶⁷ This is a fair attempt, as Aristotle previously claimed that living was valuable because of sensation and cognition is a form of sensation (44.17ff.). Since practical wisdom provides more truth than sensation, it is more valuable and thus more preferable to vision and all other senses.

However, as noted by Doug Hutchinson,²⁶⁸ the term κύριος cannot mean ‘stronger grasp’ and the phrase ‘life itself’ is an overtranslation as there is no ‘itself’ in Greek.²⁶⁹

Furthermore, it is prudent to say that practical wisdom is preferable to other forms of cognition, but what does it mean to say that practical wisdom is more valuable than living (ζωή)?²⁷⁰ If we read ζωή as its colloquial meaning of ‘living,’ it is possible to understand the claim as the result of the previous argument that living is valuable because of cognition to the effect that living without cognition would not be worthy living at all. Therefore, if one

²⁶⁶ The phrase τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν could be either ‘all the other senses’ or even more generally ‘all the other activities’ mentioned earlier in the argumentation.

²⁶⁷ Ross (1952, 37).

²⁶⁸ In private communication, cf. notes to this passage at www.protrepticus.info.

²⁶⁹ Ross reads another conjecture here which he fails to mention, namely Düring’s suggestion to read <αὐτοῦ> τοῦ ζῆν in his fragment B77, cf. Düring (1961, 78).

²⁷⁰ We have seen above that ζωή is actually broken down to particular activities of living and in the case of human beings, φρονεῖν seems to be one of them.

were to choose between living without cognition and not living at all, one ought to choose not living at all. As affirmed later in the text: ‘nobody would choose to live having the most private property and power over people if, however, they ceased to be intelligent or were insane.’²⁷¹

In the latest working draft of their translation, Hutchinson and Johnson suggest to construe the text as saying: ‘practical wisdom is preferable to it (sc. vision) and to all the other senses, and it has more authority over living than truth does.’²⁷² Their understanding of the passage does not lend itself to a reading of practical wisdom as having authority over truth *tout court*, as this claim would be incompatible with the argumentation thus far. Such an interpretation means that truth alone is not a motivational factor; it needs to be accessed, so to say, by some cognitive capacity. According to this understanding, one is motivated by knowledge, which is the internal authority, and not simply by something being true.

Therefore, to conclude, the lines 44.24-26 do not pose a problem for my reconstruction of the *ergon* in the *Protrepticus*. In both proposed readings of the passage, i.e. based on Jaeger’s emendation of the text as well as the reading proposed by Hutchinson and Johnson, practical wisdom (φρόνησις) stills holds as the capacity of the soul and being true or truth (ἀλήθεια) is its perfected *ergon*.

Aristotle introduces practical wisdom as the capacity of the most authoritative thing in us, i.e. the capacity of the highest part of our soul (43.1-5; cf. 43.16-18). At the same time, truth is the most authoritative *ergon* of this part of the soul (42.22) and contemplation (θεωρία) is the goal of its activity (42.25). I believe that combining practical wisdom and contemplation

²⁷¹ *Protr.* 8, 45.6-9: οὐδείς ἂν ἔλοιτο ζῆν ἔχων τὴν μεγίστην ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐσίαν καὶ δύναμιν, ἐξεστηκῶς μὲντοι τοῦ φρονεῖν καὶ μαινόμενος. According to Hutchinson and Johnson, the speaker here might be Heraclidus, though I believe that he is summarizing the preceding argument made by Aristotle.

²⁷² Cf. www.protrepticus.info .

in the definition of truth (i.e. the *ergon* of the virtue ἐπιστήμη) is well justified. The contemplation elevates the practical wisdom²⁷³ and by instilling it with the proper, natural standards (ὅροι), it makes it true.²⁷⁴

This seems to confirm the complex interpretation of the *ergon* argument. The entity in question is that of a human being; Aristotle proceeds with justifying his reduction of the human to the soul and further to the cognitive part of the soul. When he talks about the *ergon* of this part of the soul, he talks simply about the soul as illustrated in 58.3-4.

However, this is problematized when Aristotle introduces truth or being true (ἀλήθεια or ἀληθεύειν) as the *ergon* of this soul part (42.9-22, section (3)), though later it appears that practical wisdom is the *ergon* as well (43.16-18, the end of section (5)). Moreover, Chapter 9 of the *Protrepticus* introduces thinking and reasoning (τὸ διανοεῖσθαί τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι) as the *ergon* of the soul (58.3-5).

My solution is to understand practical wisdom (φρόνησις) as the capacity of the highest part of the soul (43.1-5, the end of section (4)), which is our own, and which animals have only ‘glimmers’ of (36.9-11). Aristotle explains the term φρόνησις in terms of thinking and reasoning (τὸ διανοεῖσθαί τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι). In this sense, practical wisdom is our *ergon*, it is an activity of the most authoritative part of us. Furthermore, this activity can be perfected by a virtue, namely knowledge, and its result is truth or being true (cf. 42.23-24, the opening of section (4) above). In this sense, truth is our *ergon* as well, it is the perfected *ergon* of our

²⁷³ Cf. *Protr.* 5, 35.5-9: ‘Hence those thought processes which are valuable merely on account of the observing itself (δι’ αὐτὸ τὸ θεωρεῖν) are more honorable and superior to those that are useful for other things (τῶν πρὸς ἄλλα χρησίμων); and it is on account of themselves that the observations (θεωρία) are honorable; and the wisdom in these observations of the intellect is a virtue, but the ones in accordance with practical wisdom are honorable on account of the actions (διὰ δὲ πράξεις αἱ κατὰ φρόνησιν).’

²⁷⁴ Cf. Düring (1955, 82): ‘contemplation of the universe ... is the highest form of φρόνησις.’

soul.²⁷⁵ However, Aristotle seems to be aware that these two *erga* cannot be entirely separate.²⁷⁶ Therefore, he explicates both ‘being true’ as well as ‘the *ergon* of a virtue’ in terms of φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν. Truth is φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν in accordance with the most precise knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). The virtue strives to reach a perfected state of the cognitive capacity, it strives for the truth. In this sense, the truth is the highest *ergon* of a human being.

It is now apparent that Aristotle argues for practical wisdom and contemplation to be the highest activities of human beings.²⁷⁷ These activities can be perfected by the virtue called ἐπιστήμη so that we are not only thinking but are ἀληθεύειν, we have truth, or in other words are perhaps ‘thinking in a true way.’ This is human perfection, which is good for its own sake but also for its effects.²⁷⁸ As the practical wisdom is our natural *ergon*, it has become evident that it is also our natural goal and therefore ‘being intelligent would be the best of all’ (ἄριστον ἂν εἴη πάντων τὸ φρονεῖν, 52.11-12).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle maintains that the *ergon* of an entity is also the τέλος of a given entity (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a8); further cf. *Metaphysics* 9.8, 1050a21 for the same account.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1219a18-20; here, Aristotle explicitly claims that the *ergon* of an entity is the same as the *ergon* of its virtue. In the subsequent chapter on the *Eudemian Ethics*, I interpret this claim as an amendment of the complicated scheme within the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus*.

²⁷⁷ Moreover, according to *DCMS* 23.71.26-73.5, the philosopher engages with the most honourable and divine objects of knowledge, namely the heavenly bodies, as well as with the most general features of nature. This echoes the *Timaeus*, where the entire composition of the human body is intended for the observation of the movements of heavenly bodies. Cf. Betegh (2003) and Gregorić (2005). Second, a similar thought is repeated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, 1177a19-21, where the θεωρία is said to be the best activity of human beings ‘since not only is intellect the best thing in us, but the objects of intellect are the best of knowable objects’ (transl. Ross and Brown, rev. Jirsa).

²⁷⁸ Cf. the argument on the double value of contemplation in Walker (2010); for more on θεωρία in the *Protrepticus* see Hutchinson and Johnson (2014b, 389–90).

²⁷⁹ Here, Aristotle generalizes his conclusion, as according to the reconstruction of the *ergon* argument, it would be more precise to add that being intelligent *in accordance with the most precise knowledge* would be the best of all.

Philosophy is said to be a possession as well as a use, an activity of wisdom (40.2-3). It has also been demonstrated that philosophy is the only science which generates correct judgements, as it observes what is primary and recognizes the correct ὄροι (cf. 55.24-56.2). Therefore, it is through philosophy that one exercises his own, proper activities at the highest level. It then follows that philosophy is not only the path to the most pleasant living, but is also what leads us towards virtue and our own perfection.

Concluding remarks on the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus*

In response to the critiques of theoretical philosophy, Aristotle argues that regardless of whether *eudaimonia* is defined as some sort of wisdom, virtue or enjoyment, living happily belongs either exclusively or predominantly to the philosophers. Therefore, ‘everyone capable of it should do philosophy’ of the theoretical kind, as championed in the *Protrepticus* (59.24-60.10). The *ergon* argument provides grounds for Aristotle to posit that practical wisdom and being true (φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια) are our highest capacities. They are also our most ‘own’ or proper capacities, since they are the *erga* of the part of the soul that Aristotle identifies with human beings throughout the course of the argument.

Compared to the argument in Plato’s *Republic*, the version found in the *Protrepticus* is more technical and undoubtedly more intellectual. I consider the technical nature of this version to be symptomatic of Aristotle’s own philosophical style and nature. His argument in the *Protrepticus* exhibits many concepts which appear in his preserved philosophical writings, such as the *dynamis–energeia* distinction, the conceptualization of living in terms of activities proper for each kind of living being, and traces of his teleological reasoning.²⁸⁰ The intellectual outcome of the argument can be attributed to the dialectical goal of the

²⁸⁰ See Johnson (2005, 152–4).

Protrepticus. Unlike the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Protrepticus* is not a general treatise on moral philosophy. The aim of the text is rather to convert readers by prompting them to embrace serious knowledge and theoretical philosophy.

For this reason, it would be problematic to simply assume that as both *Ethics* provide a more general and complex view of human *ergon*, that Aristotle is correcting his opinion from the *Protrepticus*. In the subsequent chapters, I will engage with the *ergon* argument in Aristotle's preserved ethical treatises. I will try to demonstrate how exactly he deviates from the version in the *Protrepticus* and which components of the arguments he preserves.

The *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*

The following chapter will discuss the *ergon* argument and its role in the *Eudemian Ethics*. First, I will discuss some methodological questions and briefly introduce the current state of the art concerning the relation between the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Protrepticus*. Second, I will provide a detailed interpretation of the *ergon* argument as it appears in the first chapter of the second book of the *Eudemian Ethics*. I will argue that some of the peculiarities found in this version of the argument are symptomatic of its relation to the *Protrepticus* version. Finally, in the postscript to this chapter, I will revisit the general problem of the relation between Aristotle's two *Ethics*.

I agree with Anthony Kenny in that there is no reason to treat the *Eudemian Ethics* as inferior to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁸¹ The two treatises simply differ in several points, though I will show that there are some similarities which Kenny overlooks. If both treatises are Aristotle's works,²⁸² one has to identify where they diverge in their treatment of particular topics as well as in their general outcome. The subsequent two chapters will focus exclusively on the differences within the *ergon* argument, though a postscript will be added on the general outcomes of both treatises. It will then be argued that apart from the final claims concerning human happiness, there are significant traces of similarity to be found between the two works. I believe these traces to be signs of Aristotle's ongoing philosophical endeavour to conceptualize the relation between the theoretical and practical

²⁸¹ Kenny (2016, 241).

²⁸² The discussion of authenticity lies beyond the scope of this chapter; the authorship of both treatises has been questioned in recent scholarship: Pakaluk (1998) argues that the *Eudemian Ethics* could not have been written by Aristotle because it presents egalitarian ideas too foreign to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. If I understand Kenny's suggestion at the end of *The Aristotelian Ethics*, he believes the *Nicomachean Ethics* to have been compiled after Aristotle's death, cf. Kenny (2016, 239).

domain. This crucial problem takes many forms: the relation between the ‘intellectual’ and ‘practical’ virtues, the relation between the two best lives and, ultimately, the relation between theoretical and practical knowledge.

This relation between the practical and the theoretical is at the core of the discussion both in the climax of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 10.6-8, as well as in the final chapter of the *Eudemian Ethics*. The problem that both texts encounter is the same: the activity of νοῦς is the most important and distinctive activity for a human being, yet we live embodied, social lives in which we employ other skills and capacities than reason. The question that arises then is what place does this activity hold in human action and in our lives in general? I will show that despite the differences between the two ethics, they exhibit significant similarities which should not be overlooked. A detailed analysis of the *ergon* argument will furnish me with solid grounds for making tentative conclusions about the outcomes of both *Ethics* in the postscript to this chapter.

The introductory section of this chapter will present only a brief summary of current approaches to the *Eudemian Ethics* and several points relevant to the subsequent interpretation of the *ergon* argument. I will make two interrelated claims in the postscript concerning the relation of the two *Ethics*: the *communis opinio doctorum* seems to be that the tone and conclusion of the *Eudemian Ethics* is less intellectualistic than that of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Eudemian Ethics* presents καλοκάγαθία as a complete virtue embracing both so-called ‘practical’ as well as intellectual virtues, whereas the *Nicomachean Ethics* argues for *eudaimonia* as being the activity of θεωρία, rendering its relation to the practical virtues a long-standing and open-ended problem. I will argue that the *Eudemian Ethics* should be read in a more intellectualistic manner (which is actually supported by the *ergon* argument in *Eth. Eud.* 2.1), since the contemplation of god plays a crucial role here (cf. *Eth. Eud.* 8.3). On the other hand, it must be understood that the claim that *eudaimonia* is

θεωρία found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is framed by practical and political considerations.²⁸³

My subsequent argument will concern the concept of ὅρος introduced in the *Eudemian Ethics* 5.1 and especially 8.3. It has been elucidated that ὅρος plays a crucial role in the argumentation employed in the *Protrepticus*. The *Eudemian Ethics* seems to preserve this role and thus also the conviction that one can attain truth and agreement in ethical matters. On the other hand, the concept of ὅρος is virtually absent from the *Nicomachean Ethics*—it appears only in 6.1, i.e. in one of the common books shared with the *Eudemian Ethics*. Several authors have noticed and interpreted the methodological differences between the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁸⁴ I believe that focusing on the role of ὅρος within the *Eudemian Ethics* and its absence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* can aid these methodological interpretations by shedding light on the substantive difference between the two *Ethics*. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, moral philosophy does not look for a single ὅρος which would prompt us to make the right decisions and therefore act well; moral philosophy shows how we *aim* to find a good solution in particular situations.

However, before these general conclusions are made, I will first have to present an interpretation of the *ergon* argument, since I will posit that this argument is Aristotle's first step towards a substantive account of human good in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

²⁸³ The *Eudemian Ethics* suggests that the good belongs to the science of politics as well (*Eth. Eud.* 1.8, 1218b13-16), though this idea is undeveloped compared to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is essentially enveloped by considerations about politics.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Allan (1980), Barnes (1980), Irwin (1981), Jost (1991), Zingano (2007), Karbowski (2015), Karbowski (2019).

Introduction: Aristotle's two *Ethics* and modern scholarship

There are many detailed and well-informed introductory studies on the reception of the *Eudemian Ethics* and its changing status and importance.²⁸⁵ I will thus limit myself to a brief introduction in order to better facilitate my interpretation of the *ergon* argument in the subsequent section.

It is well known that the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* share the so-called 'common books.' Further, there are separate books, i.e. *Eudemian Ethics* 1-3 and 7-8 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1-4 and 8-10; the middle books are common to both treatises, as they have been presented to us over the centuries (*Eudemian Ethics* 4-6 = *Nicomachean Ethics* 5-7).²⁸⁶ It is an open question as to where, i.e. in which of the *Ethics*, the common books originated. The debate thus far has sought the origin and the intended home of these books either in the *Eudemian Ethics* or *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁸⁷ However, it is important to note that these are not the only two options. Adam Beresford suggests an alternative approach to

²⁸⁵ See Christopher J. Rowe (1971); Kenny (2016, 1–49), first published in 1978; Inwood and Woolf (2013, viii–xiii); Jost (2014) and Rowe (2015) for a survey of contemporary scholarship.

²⁸⁶ A useful comparison of the texts of the common books (*Eth. Nic.* of Susemihl (1912) and the *Eth. Eud.* of mss. Laur.81.15) is provided by Peter Simpson, available at https://www.academia.edu/26718413/Aristotles_Eudemian_Ethics_parallel_Greek_text_of_the_Common_Books_in_EN_and_EE_mss.

²⁸⁷ For the distinction between the question concerning the origin of the common books and their intended home cf. Nielsen (2018, 599). Most authors believe that the common books have their origin in the *Eudemian Ethics* and have been adapted (with minor edits) in the *Nicomachean* version where they found their intended home, see for example Jaeger (1948), Christopher J. Rowe (1971), or Charles (2012). On the other hand Kenny (2016) and Jost (2001), for example, make the opposite argument in that the *Eudemian Ethics* are considered to be both the original context of the common books as well their intended home. Pakaluk (1998) must suppose that the origin of the common books and their intended home is in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as he argues that the *Eudemian Ethics* is not Aristotle's work; to my knowledge, the only author to recently have claimed that the common books do not belong to the *Eudemian Ethics* and locates them exclusively in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is Zanatta (2012), discussed in Rowe (2015, 225).

this issue.²⁸⁸ As Kenny notes, the common books are replete with repetitions—long repetitions of almost identical sentences and topics.²⁸⁹ Kenny is right in that the incidence of these repetitions does not lend much credence to the idea that the books were carefully rewritten by Aristotle in his later treatise. However, even if the common books were not rewritten, Kenny does not provide an explanation for the repetitions. If the repetitions were in fact part of the original text, it would be hard to explain why Aristotle repeats himself so much, for example, within the scope of a single book on justice. This repetitive style does not appear anywhere else in the remaining books of the *Eudemian Ethics* or *Nicomachean Ethics* and is only characteristic of the common books. Therefore, as Beresford quite plausibly suggests, the repetitions are the result of a later collation of two separate texts on the same issues. At some point, an editor tried to collate the two texts on ethics into one single treatment. This effort was successful in passages where the content was rather similar. Conversely, the work was left unfinished in sections where the differences were too great for the text to be consolidated. The so-called ‘common books’ which we now possess are the product of this editorial endeavour. It would thus be misguided to ask which of the *Ethics* they originally belonged to, as the entire hypothesis presupposes two complete treatises on ethics (perhaps lecture notes) from two different periods of Aristotle’s career.²⁹⁰

The *Eudemian Ethics* was the preferred text by most ancient authors. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is not even included in the list of Aristotle’s works compiled by Andronicus, unlike the *Eudemian Ethics*, which is said to have eight books, i.e. Andronicus attributes the

²⁸⁸ Beresford, Talk on the Editing of Book 5 of the *NE*, 14.10.2017, Washington CUA.

²⁸⁹ Kenny (2016, 242). Kenny does not list any examples, but cf. 1130a16-24 with 1130a28-1130b1 on particular *adikia* with several repetitions in these short parts of the text or the two examples of the shoemaker and the builder on the one hand and the shoemaker and the farmer on the other, both illustrating the same problem: the proportional equalisation of their goods and the invention of currency.

²⁹⁰ Verdenius (1971) shows that the common books were transposed to several manuscripts of the *Eudemian Ethics* as well.

common books to the *Eudemian Ethics*.²⁹¹ Both treatises were recognized during antiquity, and until Aspasius' commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics* from the second century A.D., the *Eudemian Ethics* were given clear preference. However, from the Byzantine period onwards, we are left with a handful of manuscripts of the *Eudemian Ethics* on the one hand and twenty manuscripts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the other.²⁹² The *Nicomachean Ethics* was considered more important—and received much more commentary—in the Middle Ages compared to the *Eudemian Ethics*. Furthermore, scholarship in the nineteenth century considered the *Eudemian Ethics* to be spurious material.²⁹³ There was a paradigmatic shift in scholarly opinion at the beginning of the twentieth century and the *Eudemian Ethics* started to gain recognition as Aristotle's authentic work.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion remained that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was the 'definite statement of Aristotle's ethical system.'²⁹⁵ This is why all translations of the *Eudemian Ethics* into any language up until 2011 did not include the common books.²⁹⁶

The situation has recently changed and the *Eudemian Ethics* no longer seems to be the 'Cinderella' of Aristotelian ethics, having instead become regarded as a standard text subject to scholarly analysis.²⁹⁷ The general consensus seems to be that the *Eudemian Ethics* was written earlier than the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is Aristotle's final text on ethics.

²⁹¹ Kenny (2016, 18).

²⁹² Verdenius (1971, 27); cf. Kenny (2016, 1).

²⁹³ For example, Burnet (1904, xiv) regards it as a work of Eudemus and treats it as an illuminating commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Kenny (2016, 1–2); Jost (2014, 410–2).

²⁹⁵ Kenny (2016, 1); cf. Christopher J. Rowe (1971) for a full elaboration of this claim.

²⁹⁶ The first full modern translation of the entire *Eudemian Ethics* is Kenny (2011).

²⁹⁷ Cf. Rowe (2015, 213–4).

However, Anthony Kenny's work in particular continues to problematize this seeming consensus on the basis of stylometric as well as substantial philosophical grounds.²⁹⁸

The *Protrepticus* discussed in the previous chapter might aid our understanding of some of the steps in the *ergon* argument from the *Eudemian Ethics*.²⁹⁹ However, it is important to remember that the *Protrepticus*—as far as we know—was not a general treatise in moral philosophy comparable to the two *Ethics*. The *Protrepticus* serves the dialectical purpose of defending the value of theoretical philosophy. The nature of the different texts thus poses at least two consequences: different conclusions of similar arguments might not signal a change in the author's mind but rather that the texts may not necessarily strive for the same purpose; second, the absence of certain ethical questions or topics from the *Protrepticus* does not mean that Aristotle does not recognize their importance for ethics in general, but merely that they are unnecessary for the argument posed by the treatise.

I will briefly discuss the most significant applications of the *Protrepticus* in discussions on the *Eudemian Ethics* thus far.³⁰⁰ Werner Jaeger, in order to bolster his interpretation of Aristotle's philosophical development from Plato's student at the Academy to a mature thinker in opposition to his teacher, argues that the first book of the *Eudemian Ethics* in particular is 'determined by a striking extent by the *Protrepticus*.'³⁰¹ According to Jaeger, both works were influenced by Plato's later philosophy and theology. Jaeger goes on to identify several parallels between the two texts, including the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 1218b37-

²⁹⁸ Cf. Kenny (2016) and especially the two Appendices in the latest edition of his 1978 book. For a discussion on Kenny's argument, see Jost (2014, 415–7).

²⁹⁹ Kenny (2016, 3) actually rejects the relevance of the *Protrepticus* based on the critique of Rabinowitz (1957); for a discussion of Rabinowitz cf. 73-74 above.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Verdenius (1971, 289) for a discussion on the possible similarities concerning φρόνησις in the *Protrepticus* and the *Eudemian Ethics*.

³⁰¹ Jaeger (1948, 234).

1219a13 from the passage containing the *ergon* argument, which he believes echoes *Protrepticus* 7, 41.22-42.9. I will discuss this particular parallel in the subsequent interpretation of the *ergon* argument. I will only add two comments at this point: First, Jaeger is too willing to see the text of the *Protrepticus* as a model for the *Eudemian Ethics*, even claiming that some passages were simply transposed from the earlier *Protrepticus* to the text of the *Eudemian Ethics*.³⁰² However, the parallels are never exactly identical and are often not textually similar enough to corroborate Jaeger's conclusion.³⁰³

Second, Franz Dirlmeier criticizes Jaeger's attempt to compare the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1, 1218b37-1219a13 with *Protrepticus* 7, 41.22-42.9.³⁰⁴ Dirlmeier is partially right in that the *Protrepticus* passage, as we have seen, is *prima facie* more intellectualistic and theoretical compared to the conclusion of the *ergon* argument as it appears in the *Eudemian Ethics*. However, Dirlmeier's critique seems to gloss over two points: First, the *Protrepticus* undertakes the specific task of defending the value of theoretical philosophy, thereby accounting for the different outcomes between the two texts. On the other hand, there are several parallels that appear in specific stages of the argument. I will show that the *Eudemian* version even corrects and reacts to the idea that there are two separate *erga*, namely that of the entity itself and another *ergon* of its virtue. Second, thinking and reasoning is a kind of living for Aristotle, which is stated both in the *Protrepticus* as well as

³⁰² Jaeger (1948, 249).

³⁰³ From the list he suggests, I would draw attention to the parallels in *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1218b34-36 = *Protr.* 59.26; *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219b28-31 = *Protr.* 7, 41.20-22; already mentioned *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1218b37-1219a13 = *Protr.* 7, 41.22-42.9 (I will show that only some parts of this text can be considered exact parallels) and perhaps the example of Anaxagoras in *Eth. Eud.* 1.5, 1216a11-14 = *Protr.* 9, 51.11-15. The other parallel passages suggested by Jaeger merely prove that the *Eudemian Ethics* addresses the same questions and topics as the *Protrepticus*, though they do not establish any evidence of the *Eudemian Ethics*' dependence on the *Protrepticus*.

³⁰⁴ Dirlmeier (1984, 222).

the *Eudemian Ethics*.³⁰⁵ The intellectualistic conclusion of the *Protrepticus* is then not necessarily incompatible with the outcome of the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Therefore, even if the general tone of the *Eudemian Ethics* is more practical compared to the *Protrepticus*, the parallels should not be dismissed so hastily.³⁰⁶ To conclude, I believe that the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* must be interpreted in relation to the *Protrepticus*, though one should be careful when making general comparison of both texts due to the different scope and aim of both works.

If we assume that we are working with two complex treatises on ethics written by one author who treats various topics in these treatises differently in certain aspects, the obvious question is how are these differences between the *Eudemian* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be understood? The purpose of this question is merely to introduce my subsequent interpretation of the *ergon* argument and its relevance for the outcome of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Inwood and Woolf list the following differences:

1. The role of political science in relation to ethics.
2. The contributions of theoretical and practical reason to the happy life.
3. The nature of pleasure and its relationship to the goal of life (the telos).

³⁰⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Eud.* 7.12, 1244b23-29; *De an.* 2.2, 413a22-25 and *Protr.* 11, 59.7-9. Verdenius (1971, 295) claims that: “The question, “What is life in its full realization and as an end?” is answered by the words “perception and knowledge,” “for living should be regarded as a kind of knowing,” and “one wishes to live because one wishes to know” (*Eth. Eud.* 7.12, 1244b23-1245a10; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1170a18).’

³⁰⁶ Dirlmeier (1984, 222) understands the possible references and parallels with the *Protrepticus* as signs of a dependence upon the Platonic heritage; yet, I hope to have demonstrated that the *Protrepticus* is not merely an Academic text written in the Platonic tradition, but that it is also a testament to Aristotle’s own philosophical craft. Therefore, if the *Eudemian Ethics* exhibits some parallels with the *Protrepticus*, it is not yet wise to assume that it is more Platonic than the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

4. The nature of friendship.
5. The nature of voluntary action.
6. The philosophical method.³⁰⁷

According to Inwood and Woolf, the *Nicomachean Ethics* has a surprisingly solid political framework compared to the *Eudemian Ethics*.³⁰⁸ Concerning the second point, they highlight the difference between the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, where contemplation (θεωρία) is said to be *eudaimonia* and the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3, where the contemplation of god functions as a standard (ἄρος) for the correct formation of καλοκάγαθία, the complete virtue. I will discuss the first two points from their list in more detail in the postscript to this chapter.

Points 3-5 on the list are explained in detail by Inwood and Woolf and there are already several studies which engage with these issues and which cannot be elaborated on or even summarized here.³⁰⁹ However, the last point concerning the methodology of ethics plays a vital role in my interpretation.

³⁰⁷ Inwood and Woolf (2013, xviii).

³⁰⁸ Inwood and Woolf (2013, xviii). However, Inwood and Woolf are perhaps too hasty here; in *Eth. Eud.* 1.8, 1218b13-16, Aristotle states that the good itself is the object of a supreme science which is political and the science of economics and practical wisdom (πολιτική καὶ οἰκονομική καὶ φρόνησις). Inwood and Woolf are correct in that this sentiment remains undeveloped and that the *Nicomachean Ethics* presents hierarchy of sciences, where πολιτική is at the top, in greater detail and in a much more prominent position in the treatise.

³⁰⁹ Inwood and Woolf (2013, xx-xxii). From recent accounts on these topics see, for example: Müller (2015); Leigh (2012); and the treatment of Aristotle's differences regarding his theory of action in Charles (1984).

The two most common explanations for the differences between the two *Ethics* are: that they each address a different audience³¹⁰ and Aristotle's change of mind.³¹¹ For example, Kenny entertains the thought that:

*'the NE is more fluent, less austere philosophical, less telegraphic in its arguments than the EE; it may be designed for a less professional audience than the EE, just as, throughout history, it has appealed to a wide readership, whereas the EE has never appealed to more than a handful of Aristotelian fanatics.'*³¹²

Peter Simpson claims that:

*'there are no differences between EE and NE that cannot be as well, or better, explained by the hypothesis of difference in audience than by difference in time of writing. ... EE and NE differ, as is evident especially, but not only, from their beginnings and endings (and as is argued in more detail in the commentary), because EE is directed primarily to philosophers and NE (which continues immediately into the Politics) primarily to legislators (which will include especially advisers to kings). EE will thus constitute a sort of apologia pro vita sua for Aristotle and his closest friends in philosophy, while NE will be a sort of extended vademecum for legislators.'*³¹³

³¹⁰ Cf. Miller (2003) and most vehemently Simpson (2013, xii–xiii); Kenny (2016, 270).

³¹¹ I am leaving aside Allan's somewhat critical remark that the difference might be—as far as I understand him—a difference in methodology, as in the case of Descartes' *Meditations* and *Principles of Philosophy*, Allan (1980, 318).

³¹² Kenny (2016, 270).

³¹³ Simpson (2013, xii). For a critical response to Simpson cf. Rowe (2015, 224).

This, according to Simpson, then explains the difference in methodology for both ethical treatises. If it were only for the methodological difference, i.e. presenting the same or similar subject matter in different ways or using different types of argumentation, Simpson might be right. However, I will argue that the difference in methodology is closely related to a shift in Aristotle's substantive view of ethical matters which cannot simply be accounted for by a different intended audience. Moreover, as Christopher Rowe notes in his discussion of Simpson's translation of the *Eudemian Ethics*, it would be a strange defence for philosophers if philosophy, intellectual virtues and contemplation were less dominant than the intellectualistic outcome of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13 and 10.6-8.

What then is this methodological difference exactly? D. J. Allan, in his discussion of the *Eudemian Ethics*, introduces the notion of a 'quasi-mathematical' method. This method consists of introducing some true but vague propositions which are to be refined and clarified by the philosopher, allowing for an exchange that ultimately reveals the relevant causes ('the why'). The exact result is then to be confirmed by experience, i.e. from prevailing opinions. The entire scheme is, according to Adam, based on the mathematical pattern of deduction.³¹⁴

Despite the fact that Allan's account has been rightfully criticized,³¹⁵ its importance lies in highlighting that the *Eudemian Ethics* presupposes much higher level of exactness and precision in ethics than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Even if Allan is wrong concerning Aristotle's assumed inspiration by methods in geometry, it is still the case that the *Nicomachean Ethics* opposes any kind of mathematical method and exactness in ethics

³¹⁴ Allan (1980, 307).

³¹⁵ E.g. Jost (1991), and recently Karbowski (2015).

whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* does not exhibit any such hostility and its arguments are similar to mathematical proofs.³¹⁶

Marco Zingano tries to explain the ‘quasi-’ part of the term coined by Allan by insisting on the fact that ethics cannot function without the reputable opinions of others, whereas mathematics has no such limitations.³¹⁷ Joseph Karbowski goes on to demonstrate how the scientific method proposed in *Posterior Analytics* II is applied in the *Eudemian Ethics*.³¹⁸ According to Karbowski, the methodology of the *Eudemian Ethics* can be summarized as follows: ‘seek causal definitions of ethical kinds by appeal to arguments appropriate to the subject matter, which use the phenomena as witnesses and examples.’³¹⁹ This, I believe, supplements both Allan as well as Zingano: the *Eudemian Ethics* is in large part epistemically stricter than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It generally operates with the possibility of a higher level of cognitive certainty in ethical matters than the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³²⁰

The difference can be clearly elucidated using quotations from methodological passages of both *Ethics*.³²¹ In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle states:

³¹⁶ Cf. Karbowski (2015, 112): ‘it is not my intention to wholeheartedly deny that there may be ways in which the *EE*’s arguments are similar to mathematical proofs, or more similar to them than those of the *NE*’ and similarly Karbowski (2019, 131–2): ‘Aristotle has scientific aspirations in the *Eudemian Ethics*. He is seeking the first principles of a demonstrative ethical science, which yields *epistémé* of human value. ... the passages that give rise to these worries (sc. concerning scientific treatment of ethics) are confined to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. None of the cautionary remarks about ethical precision that make scholars suspicious of a scientific reading of Aristotle’s ethical project have counterparts in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Not once does Aristotle comment upon the fluctuation of ethical phenomena or, more generally, indicate that ethics is less precise than any other discipline in that treatise.’

³¹⁷ Zingano (2007, 300).

³¹⁸ Karbowski (2019, 109).

³¹⁹ Karbowski (2019, 119).

³²⁰ Cf. Karbowski (2019, 131).

³²¹ For a detailed discussion see Zingano (2007); Inwood and Woolf (2013, xxii–xxiii) and especially Karbowski (2019).

‘About all these matters we must seek conviction through argument (πειρατέον δὲ περὶ πάντων τούτων ζητεῖν τὴν πίστιν διὰ τῶν λόγων), using people’s perceptions as evidence and example. The best thing would be if everyone turned out to be in agreement with what we are going to say (συνομολογοῦντας τοῖς ῥηθησομένοις); if not so, that all should, on reflection, reach at least partial agreement. After all, everyone has something of their own to contribute to the truth, and we must start our proof from such points. If we begin with things that are said in a manner that is true but unenlightening, we shall make progress towards enlightenment, constantly substituting more perspicuous expressions for ones that are more familiar but confused. In every discipline there is a difference between philosophical and unphilosophical manners of expression. Even in political thinking it is misguided to treat as irrelevant an inquiry into not only what is the case, but why it is the case (δι’ ἧς οὐ μόνον τὸ τί φανερόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ διὰ τί). In every discipline that is the way a philosopher proceeds: but great caution is needed here.’ (Eth. Eud. 1.6, 1216b26-40; transl. Kenny)

Nothing similar is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; there Aristotle insists that we should not demand the same degree of precision from all fields of study and that ethics or politics cannot be regarded as ‘exact’ sciences:

‘Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now noble and just actions, which political science investigates, exhibit much variety and fluctuation, so that they may be thought to exist only by

convention, and not by nature. But goods exhibit a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true, and with premises of the same kind, to reach conclusions that are no better.’ (Eth. Nic. 1.3, 1094b11-23; transl. Ross and Brown)

The difference in how ethical matters are approached here is quite obvious: whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* treats ethics like the other sciences, the *Nicomachean Ethics* differentiates between them. The *Eudemian Ethics* maps out how precise statements can be made, ideally resulting in a general consensus, while the *Nicomachean Ethics* stresses that precision varies across the sciences, positing that ethics cannot produce anything but rather rough and statements which are not always precise. In the postscript, I will show that this methodological difference is symptomatic of Aristotle’s change of opinion on a substantial ethical issue and cannot be simply ascribed to the different intended audiences of the two *Ethics*.

The first book of the *Eudemian Ethics* is faithful to the method stated above and proceeds with a series of distinctions that clarify the object and methodology of Aristotle’s investigation.³²² First, Aristotle makes clear that his investigation of a good life belongs to the practical and not theoretical disciplines (1214a10-13). He then asks whether happiness is the product of nature, learning, training, some divine power or luck (1214a14-25).³²³ The

³²² Already Monan (1968, 119) characterizes Book 1 as a reflective clarification.

³²³ Plato’s *Meno* opens with this question as well (70a); Meno asks whether virtue can be taught, if it is the result of practice, or if it is possessed by nature or some other means.

third distinction within the first chapter of the first book concerns three of the most suitable objects, popular candidates for *eudaimonia*: wisdom, virtue and pleasure (1214a30-34). The second chapter clarifies one problem of the ongoing debate: some people mistake parts of *eudaimonia* and its necessary conditions (1214b24-27). Upon making these clarifications, Aristotle briefly touches upon the endoxic method: his investigation will not consider all possible opinions but only the opinions of the wise (1215a3-4).³²⁴ What does *eudaimonia* consist of? Does it pertain to the quality of one's soul or must this quality be demonstrated in action (1215a22-25)? Once again, Aristotle does not answer and proceeds by making a distinction between different kinds of life (βίος). The life of commerce and business is treated similarly as in the *Nicomachean Ethics* here: it is not pursued for its own sake, as it is always instrumental to satisfy some other need. The remaining three lives are the political life centred on virtue, the philosophical life centred on wisdom and the hedonistic life centred on pleasure.³²⁵ The following chapter introduces Aristotle's method (cf. *Eth. Eud.* 1.6, 1216b26-40 quoted above). Since some good things are attainable for humans while others are beyond our grasp, the seventh chapter clarifies that happiness is the prime good of those which are attainable for humans.³²⁶ After rejecting Plato's theory of good in chapter eight, Aristotle circles back to his previous account of happiness as the best thing to be achieved by humans, forming the object of his subsequent enquiry.³²⁷

³²⁴ The Greek text is unclear; however, this understanding of the passage based on a note to one of the MSS can be found in Rackham (1992) originally published in 1935, Dirlmeier (1984), Woods (2005), Kenny (2011), Inwood and Woolf (2013). See the textual problems discussed in Dirlmeier (1984, 160). See Décarie (1997, 53) and Dalimier (1995) for a different reading of the text.

³²⁵ The categorization of lives is introduced in chapter four; chapter five discusses the corresponding goods: pleasure, virtue and wisdom.

³²⁶ *Eth. Eud.* 1.7, 1217a39-40: δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρακτῶν ἄριστον θετέον.

³²⁷ The closing sentences of Book 1 are corrupted; see apparatus in OCT. The final lines 1218b24-27 seem to mirror the opening line of the same chapter (1217b1: σκεπτόν τοίνυν τί τὸ ἄριστον, καὶ λέγεται ποσαχῶς).

It is true that Aristotle has not yet defined happiness. He does not provide a substantive account until the following book, which opens with the *ergon* argument. Therefore, I understand the *ergon* argument at the beginning of the second book as the first step towards substantive ethical enquiry concerning the *eudaimonia* of human beings.³²⁸

The *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1: an interpretation

Given the problematic reception of the *Eudemian Ethics* in modern times, it is unsurprising that the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument has gained less traction than its *Nicomachean* counterpart.³²⁹ D. S. Hutchinson rehabilitates the argument and defends its validity by offering a reconstruction that tries to answer some objections raised in Wood's commentary, which will be discussed in the following interpretation as well.³³⁰ Jörn Müller, in a detailed comparison of the arguments in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, puts forth that the arguments are mostly the same. The outcome of the *Eudemian Ethics* thus problematizes any exclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³³¹ Samuel Baker discusses the *ergon* argument made in the *Eudemian*

³²⁸ Similarly Müller (2003, 515–6) who correctly notes that the position and role of the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* is the same as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: it has a central position in Aristotle's transition from the formal account of the concept of 'eudaimonia' to a substantive enquiry about its content.

³²⁹ The most detailed comparative studies are Hutchinson (1986, 39–72) and Müller (2003); an extensive footnote in J. Cooper (1975, 145–6) briefly compares the arguments.

³³⁰ Hutchinson (1986, 39–46); cf. Woods (2005, 87).

³³¹ Müller (2003, 535). I do agree with Müller's detailed comparison of the *ergon* arguments in so far as he claims that the superficial differences between the structure and concepts used in the arguments are not substantial. I disagree with his conclusion that the arguments lead to the same conclusion. As I will show in the postscript to this chapter, the outcomes of the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* are not as different as many commentators claim. However, in the subsequent interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I will show that there are differences which cannot be neglected. How then do I avoid the trap of incorporating the same arguments found in critical sections of both *Ethics* which—according to my own reading—differ in their outcomes? First, I will argue that the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* most probably

Ethics in tandem with Plato's *Republic*, the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as the *Protrepticus*.³³²

However, I believe that his initial problems stem from reading the *Nicomachean* version of the *ergon* argument in isolation. Despite the fact that Baker discusses all versions of the *ergon* argument, it remains unclear as to what he considers to be the relation between the three arguments presented in Aristotle's writings.

On the other hand, the few authors engaging with the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument appreciate its precise and explicit character compared to the *Nicomachean* version, which is considered 'shorter and sketchier, more preemptive.'³³³ This seems to be the implication of the quasi-mathematical methods adopted in the *Eudemian Ethics*.³³⁴

assumes an exclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* (it certainly does not rule it out), though the argument of *eudaimonia* as *θεωρία* is not concluded until Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Moreover, cf. support for the exclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia* in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Heinaman (2007). Second, I believe that despite the fact that the conclusion of the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* could be used to bolster the premise that *eudaimonia* is *θεωρία*, as established in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle himself opts for a different approach and instead employs another account of *eudaimonia* as an activity of perfect living in accordance with a perfect virtue, namely *καλοκἀγαθία* (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a38-39 and 8.3, 1249a16). On the other hand, the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not use the concept of *καλοκἀγαθία* and the term 'perfect' or 'the most perfect' virtue refers to *σοφία* (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 6.13, 1144a3-9 and my interpretation in the subsequent chapter).

³³² Baker (2015).

³³³ Jost (2014, 418); even Woods (2005, 85) who is critical regarding several aspects of the argument, writes that the 'structure of the argument is fairly clear,' which cannot be said about many of Aristotle's arguments of such length and complexity. Hutchinson (1986, 39) writes: 'Aristotle's argument is sound and our surprise ought to give way to admiration.' On the other hand, cf. critique in J. Cooper (1975, 145-6), this critique is answered in Hutchinson (1986, 46-50).

³³⁴ See above pp. 138-139. Hutchinson (1986, 40) calls the *Nicomachean* version 'a cryptic and compressed version of a more elaborate and persuasive argument in the *EE*.' Cf. extensive formal reconstructions of the argument in Woods (2005, 85-7) and Hutchinson (1986, 40-3). Both of these reconstructions show that the *Eudemian ergon* argument clearly exhibits a very complex structure. However, this is not ample reason to believe that the shorter *Nicomachean* version builds on the preceding *Eudemian* version, as the inverse could be explained as Aristotle's attempt to subsequently clarify and unpack the argument originally presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Book 2 begins with the announcement of a fresh start into the inquiry of *eudaimonia*.

Aristotle at first continues with the divisions: the goods are either ‘external’ or ‘in the soul’, with goods of the soul being the most preferable (1218b31-32). According to Aristotle, this distinction has already been made in the ‘exoteric works’ or as Kenny translates, ‘popular writings’ (1218b34).³³⁵ The text talks about works or writings in plural, meaning that this distinction may have appeared in more than one treatise. Perhaps the most promising reference is *Protrepticus* 52.12-16, which postulates that if thinking (φρονεῖν) is the best of all activities, then it follows that one must do other things for the sake of thinking: ‘one must have the goods in the body for the sake of those in the soul, i.e. virtue for the sake of φρόνησις.’³³⁶

Aristotle previously claimed there to be three candidates for the highest good: pleasure, virtue and wisdom (φρόνησις, ἀρετή, ἡδονή). All of them are to be found in the soul, not outside of it. The soul is the most proper subject for feeling pleasure and for being virtuous and wise; even if—for example—certain pleasures pass through the body, it is the soul which *feels*. However, it is not yet outwardly stated as to *what* pleasure, virtue or wisdom are. All of these three goods are located in the soul and Aristotle goes on to say that ‘states and capacities’ (ἔξεις ἢ δυνάμεις) or ‘activities and processes’ (ἐνέργειαι καὶ κινήσεις; 1218b36-37) are to be found in the soul.³³⁷ We now have to determine where these goods belong.

³³⁵ Cf. Dirlmeier (1984, 220–1).

³³⁶ It is not clear whether this passage is a quotation from Aristotle or Iamblichus’ summary of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*. These lines are not marked as authentic in the Hutchinson-Johnson edition; on the other hand, the lines appear in Ross’ fr. 11 and Düring’s fr. 21 of the *Protrepticus* and Walzer’s fr. 11. Walzer (1934): 50 points to the reference in the *Eth. Eud.* 2.1 as referring to this particular part of Iamblichus’ text.

³³⁷ This division is quite crude; the parallel passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.5 1105b19-21 offers three possibilities: ‘since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds — passions, capacities, states of character (πάθη δυνάμεις ἔξεις) — virtue must be one of these’ (transl. Ross and Brown).

Aristotle's argumentation starts by explaining the concept of virtue. The *ergon* argument is then employed to support Aristotle's assumption that 'virtue is the best condition or state or power of whatever has a use or *ergon*.'³³⁸ Therefore, virtue generally belongs to the category of 'states and capacities.' Second, it is described as the best of these states, and third, it is the best state of whatever has some activity (*χρησις*) and *ergon*. In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle uses the term *χρησις* in order to talk about 'activity.' Similarly, the term *χρησις* is used for 'activity' in the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* (esp. 1219a14 and 1219a18). On the other hand, the *Eudemian Ethics* uses the term *ἐνέργεια* to denote 'activity' as well, and the term *χρησις* at times seems to refer to the 'use' of something rather than 'activity' in general.³³⁹ However, the subsequent interpretation will reveal that the term *χρησις* stands for 'activity' in general in the *ergon* argument.

How then are we supposed to understand the phrase 'activity or *ergon*'? 'Activity' cannot mean the same as '*ergon*,' as later in the argument, Aristotle says that *in some cases* the *χρησις*, i.e. the activity itself, is the *ergon*, such as seeing in the case of the eyes; however, sometimes the activity and *ergon* differ, as in the case of medicine, where health is its *ergon*

³³⁸ *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1218b38-1219a1: ταῦτα δὴ οὕτως ὑποκείσθω καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ βελτίστη διάθεσις ἢ ἔξις ἢ δύναμις ἐκάστων, ὅσων ἐστὶ τις χρῆσις ἢ ἔργον. Cf. Zingano (2007, 321) on the meaning of ὑποκείσθω.

³³⁹ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 7.7, 1237a40-1238b1 where the activity of friendship is glossed as 'using' or 'treating' the other as a friend. However, the two terms are still used hand in hand; although I am not entirely convinced by Menn (1994, 80, 87) that these two terms 'alternate almost indifferently' throughout the *Eudemian Ethics*. The passage which Menn considers to suggest that *χρησις* is essentially a synonym for *ἐνέργεια* is *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219b1-2: 'doing well and living well are the same as being happy; each of these, both life and action, is a use and an activity' (τό τε γὰρ εὔ πράττειν καὶ τὸ εὔ ζῆν τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ εὐδαιμονεῖν, ὧν ἕκαστον χρῆσις ἐστὶ καὶ ἐνέργεια; transl. Inwood and Woolf). However, even here Aristotle needs to explain the use of *χρησις*: 'since a life of activity involves use of things – the smith makes a bridle, the rider uses it' (1219b2-4). It is clear here that *χρησις* is treated slightly differently from *ἐνέργεια* and the pairing of the two must be explained. I agree with Menn that Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* treats *χρησις* similarly to *ἐνέργεια*, though it is not the case that *χρησις* is used entirely interchangeably or as a substitute for *ἐνέργεια* everywhere in the *Protrepticus*.

and not healing (1219a13-17). At the same time, it would be too hasty to suppose that the expression ‘activity or *ergon*’ denotes two separate things. In accordance with the methodology introduced in Book 1, I understand the claim to be a general thesis which is then qualified and explained later in the argument.

According to Aristotle, the meaning of virtue as the best condition or state of whatever has activity or *ergon*, is clear from induction (1219a2).³⁴⁰ Induction is a cognitive process which allows for general conclusions to be gleaned from specific cases. It can begin either with specific perceptions (*An. Post.* 2.19, 100b3-5, cf. *An. Post.* 1.18) or *endoxa*, i.e. opinions, as one of the methods essential for dialectics (*Top.* 1.12, 105a10-19). Here Aristotle presents three examples where the virtue can be inferred based on the entity’s *ergon* or use. A cloak, house or a boat are used for something, they ‘do’ something. These entities can fulfil their *ergon* (the English translation of ‘function’ is suitable here) in a better or worse manner. When their *ergon* is done well, it marks the presence of the corresponding ἀρετή (here one can see why some authors prefer to translate ἀρετή as excellence and not virtue).³⁴¹ A good cloak is a cloak which does its *ergon* well, presumably in that it protects and covers us well.

This is similarly the case with the soul, since it has an *ergon* as well (1219a5). Is Aristotle justified to claim that the soul has an *ergon*?³⁴² I find no such supportive argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Perhaps Aristotle believes that since the soul has a certain activity (cf. *Protr.* 11, 59.3-7), it must have an *ergon* as well since—as it is explained later in the argument—its *ergon* is its activity and not an external product. It is indisputable that the soul

³⁴⁰ On ἐπαγωγή cf. Dirlmeier (1984, 222); Owen (1961, 86–7).

³⁴¹ Cf. discussion of the translation of ἀρετή in the chapter on Plato’s *Republic*, p. 146.

³⁴² Woods (2005, 89) thinks there is no such argument; similarly Zingano (2007, 323).

has some activity, which may explain why Aristotle felt no need to present an explicit argument for it.

Analogous to the claim in the *Protrepticus* that ‘the natural virtue of that which is better is naturally better’ than other virtues, Aristotle adds that a better state (ἔξις) has a better *ergon*.³⁴³ In both treatises, Aristotle seems to presuppose a transitivity of value: a better entity has a better virtue and a better state has a better *ergon*.³⁴⁴ Further, the *ergon* of each thing is said to be its ‘goal’ (τέλος, 1219a8). What is the purpose of such identification? The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not entail this premise.³⁴⁵ According to Woods and Hutchinson, this premise combined with the claim that the goal of each thing is the best for that thing (1219a10-11) yields the conclusion that the *ergon* is better than the corresponding state or capacity (1219a11-13). Yet, in the case of *erga* which are activities, this premise is immaterial, since Aristotle believes and later claims that activities are better than their corresponding states or capacities (1219a31); therefore, this identification might play some role in the case of *erga* as external products.

However, there is another possible reason for identifying *ergon* with a goal: it simplifies the conundrum encountered in the *Protrepticus*, where Aristotle claimed that the *ergon* of the virtues ‘being true’ but its goal is contemplation.³⁴⁶ In the *Protrepticus* version, one has to

³⁴³ *Protr.* 7, 41.25-27.

³⁴⁴ This claim might actually suggest that the *ergon* of a virtue (a good ἔξις) differs from the *ergon* of the entity which possesses the virtue; I have indicated this scheme in the *Protrepticus* version of the *ergon* argument; cf. the discussion of a double *ergon* in ‘Alétheia and phronésis: the double *ergon* scheme’. However, in *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 1219a11-13, Aristotle explicitly rules out this option.

³⁴⁵ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find the claim that ‘virtue both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the *ergon* of that thing be done well’ (ῥητέον οὖν ὅτι πᾶσα ἀρετή, οὗ ἂν ἦ ἀρετή, αὐτό τε εὖ ἔχον ἀποτελεῖ καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ εὖ ἀποδίδωσιν, *Eth. Nic.* 2.6, 1106a15-17, transl. Ross and Brown), though this is as close as Aristotle comes to describing the relation of the *ergon* to its completion or perfection, which could be related to the goal of a given entity.

³⁴⁶ *Protr.* 7, 42.13-25.

assume that contemplation and ‘being true’ are closely connected or are somehow one and the same, otherwise the logic of the argument is jeopardised. When Aristotle explicitly identifies *ergon* with the goal, no such speculation is needed. Therefore, I not only understand the identification of *ergon* with the goal to be an explanation of what Aristotle means by *ergon*, but I see it as Aristotle’s concerted effort to simplify the structure of the *ergon* argument in order to avoid the complications posed by the *Protrepticus* version.

Let us return to the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*. After concluding that *ergon* is better than the corresponding state or capacity (1219a11-13), Aristotle says that the *ergon* can be expressed in two ways (διχῶς): in some cases, the *ergon* differs from the given activity as its product, in other cases, the *ergon* and the activity are one (1219a11-17). The first possibility is illustrated using the examples of the craft of building and medicine; their *erga* are not the process of building or healing but their outcomes—a building and health. The second possibility is illustrated using the examples of sight and mathematics, where their *erga* are seeing and contemplation.³⁴⁷

This distinction is not an *ad hoc* one. It seems to be a part of Aristotle’s broader metaphysical perspective. Without trying to speculate as to the exact chronological relation of both texts, I will refer to his *Metaphysics* 9.8, 1050a21-28 which is in several aspects analogous to the interpreted passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*:

*‘For the ergon is the end, and the activity is the ergon (τὸ γὰρ ἔργον
τέλος, ἡ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον), and this is why the name “activity”*

³⁴⁷ The examples of house building and seeing are mentioned in the parallel passage from the *Protrepticus*, which argues for the same distinction among *erga* as outcomes in some cases and activities in others (*Protr.* 7, 43.8-26); the example of health is mentioned just before when Aristotle says that health itself is more valuable than things conducive to health (*Protr.* 7, 42.25-29), which suggests that health and not the process of healing is the *ergon* of medicine, as is explicitly stated in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

(ἐνέργεια) is said of things with reference to the ergon, and extends to actuality (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν). And, whereas in some cases it is the use that is the ultimate thing (ἡ χρῆσις), for example, seeing in the case of sight, and nothing beyond this comes to be from the sight, from other things something else does come to be, for example, from the craft of building a house comes to be that is beyond the activity of building, yet the use is in the former case no less the end, and in the latter case more the end, than the capacity is. (transl. C. D. C. Reeve)

Similarly as in the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Metaphysics* (a) treats *ergon* as *telos* and further etymologically derives the term ἐνέργεια from *ergon*. Moreover, (b) Aristotle distinguishes between two types of *erga*, using the same examples as in the *Eudemian Ethics*, namely *ergon* as an activity in the case of sight and house in the case of the craft of building.

After distinguishing two possible types of *ergon*, Aristotle continues:

‘Having made these distinctions, let us say that the ergon of a thing is the same as the work of its virtue, but not in the same way.’

τούτων δὲ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον διωρισμένων, λέγομεν ὅτι <ταῦτό> τὸ ἔργον τοῦ πράγματος καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡσαύτως. (1219a18-20)

The illustrative example is quite simple: the *ergon* of a shoemaker is a shoe. When the shoemaker has the relevant ἀρετή, i.e. is in his best disposition as a shoemaker, what is the *ergon* of this ἀρετή, what is its result? What change does the virtue bring about into the

picture of the shoemaker and the shoe as the outcome of his shoemaking activity? The answer is that the *ergon* of the ἀρετή is a good shoe (1219a20-23).³⁴⁸

Woods does not understand the clarification that the *ergon* of a given thing is the same as the *ergon* of thing's virtue 'but not in the same way' (ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡσαύτως; 1219a20).³⁴⁹ I believe that this clarification quite clearly concerns the quality or value of the *ergon*. A shoemaker makes a shoe. A good, virtuous shoemaker makes a *good* shoe. The *Protrepticus* introduced two distinct *erga* in this regard: the *ergon* of the entity and a different *ergon* of its virtue. The *ergon* of the rational part of the soul was defined as practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and the *ergon* of its virtue was 'truth' (ἀλήθεια) or the activity of 'being true' (ἀληθεύειν).³⁵⁰ This further problematized the conclusion of Aristotle's argument, as he had to reconcile how 'being true' relates back to the original entity, namely our soul or its highest part. Second, the introduction of a double *ergon* obscured the fact that practical wisdom and 'truth' must be the same activity of the corresponding soul part and that 'being true' must be the good or virtuous activity of practical wisdom (φρονεῖν). If there were a different activity of the virtue itself apart from the activity of a given entity, the virtue would not be a virtue *of* that original entity and would not be the betterment of its activity. Designating the *ergon* of the entity and the *ergon* of the virtue as two different activities would separate the entity and the virtue, thereby obscuring the relation between the two. Therefore, I understand the claim that the *ergon* of a given entity is the same—but not in the same way—as the *ergon* of its virtue to be a reaction to the problem which arose from the concept of a

³⁴⁸ The adjective used in the phrase 'good shoemaker' and 'good shoe' is σπουδαῖος; this usage suggests that the term σπουδαῖος – at least within the *Eudemian Ethics* - is not reserved for moral goodness.

³⁴⁹ Woods (2005, 89).

³⁵⁰ Cf. previous chapter, pp. 122-124.

double *ergon* in the *Protrepticus*. Within the context of the *Protrepticus*, it is much easier to understand why Aristotle explicitly introduces this claim and why he adds the qualification. The next step is to define the *ergon* of the soul:

*Let us postulate that the ergon of the soul is living – or to exercise living while awake, since in sleep the soul is idling and at rest.*³⁵¹

‘Living’ (τὸ ζῆν) was already discussed in the previous chapter on the *Protrepticus*,³⁵² so I will only allude to it briefly in order to facilitate the subsequent interpretation. First, ‘living’ is described in several ways relative to different kinds of living entities:

*But the term living (ζωή) seems to be said not in accordance with a single form, rather one exists for the animals and another for the plants. At the same time, it is possible also to deliberately frame the definition in this way and to speak in accordance with a single form of every living thing (ζωῆς)’ (Top. 6.10, 148a29-33)*³⁵³

Multiplicity is similarly to be found in the *De anima* as well. Aristotle is convinced that (a) one can give a general account of living, but (b) living and activities of living can be described differently for different species or kinds of living things:

³⁵¹ *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a23-25: ἔτι ἔστω ψυχῆς ἔργον τὸ ζῆν ποιεῖν, τοῦ δὲ χρῆσις καὶ ἐγρήγορσις· ὁ γὰρ ὕπνος ἀργία τις καὶ ἡσυχία. I changed Kenny’s translation by presenting ‘living’ as the activities of ζωή. I prefer Kenny’s reading which differs from others since he (a) takes ποιεῖν to mean ‘postulate’ and (b) reads τούτου instead of OCT’s τοῦ (similarly to Solomon or Rackham in their translation). For example, Inwood and Woolf translate ‘Moreover, let the *ergon* of the soul be to make a thing be alive, and let the *ergon* of being alive be a using and a being awake – sleep is a kind of idleness and rest.’

³⁵² Cf. previous chapter, pp. 119-122; for the relation between the metaphysical vocabulary of the passages cf. Beere (2009, 164–166).

³⁵³ Translation adopted from Johnson (2018, 57); in some points, the following interpretation relies on Johnson’s summary.

'We say, then, taking up the beginning of the inquiry, that what is ensouled is distinguished from what is not ensouled by living (τῷ ζῆν). But living is spoken of in several ways. And should even one of these belong to something, we say that it is alive: reason, perception, motion and rest with respect to place, and further the motion in relation to nourishment, decay, and growth.' (*De an.* 2.2, 413a20-25; transl. Shields)

We can deem any entity to be 'alive' or 'living' as long as it exhibits at least one of the activities listed. This, however, is complicated by the divine living being, whose living entails activities of reason. However, setting this aside for the moment, Aristotle's most general notion of living refers to activities of nourishment, decay and growth.³⁵⁴ Other, higher activities are then specific to certain types of living things. In the case of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle is explicit about the meaning of 'living' for us, human beings:

'The matter will become clear if we ascertain what living is (τὸ ζῆν), as activity and as end. It is evident that it is perception and knowledge ... For every individual self-perception and self-knowledge is the most desirable of all things, and that is why an appetite for living is inborn in each of us, for living must be regarded as a kind of knowing (τὸ γὰρ ζῆν δεῖ τιθέσθαι γινῶσιν τινά).'' (*Eth. Eud.* 7.12, 1244b23-29; transl. Kenny)

It means that for us, human beings, being alive is a kind of knowing. This opens the argumentation up to a radically intellectualistic conclusion. Since the *ergon* of the soul is living, and in the case of human beings living means some kind of knowing, our *ergon* is

³⁵⁴ Cf. Johnson (2018, 59).

some kind of knowing. Aristotle himself does not draw this intellectualistic conclusion that knowing is our *ergon*—as he does for example in the *Protrepticus*—but it is important to note that even the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument is open to such intellectualistic interpretation. Therefore, such an interpretation remains plausible thus far. However, I will argue that it is the conception of καλοκάγαθία as the governing virtue which effectively closes the possibility of a strictly intellectualistic interpretation of human *ergon*. It is important to add here that the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not operate with the concept of καλοκάγαθία in the same way as the *Eudemian Ethics* does.³⁵⁵

By employing the definition of *ergon*, Aristotle paved the way for a first draft of the definition of *eudaimonia*. If the *ergon* of a given entity is the same as the *ergon* of its virtue, but in the specific way interpreted above, then it follows that the *ergon* of the virtue of the soul is good living (ζωὴ σπουδαία, 1219a27). Good living is the perfect or final good (τὸ τέλειον ἀγαθόν, 1219a27-28). It has been established that Aristotle perceives activity to be better than the corresponding state or disposition (1219a17-18, 1219a31) and that the best activity is the activity of the best state or disposition (1219a6, 1219a32). The best thing for us humans is thus the activity of the soul's virtue (1219a33-34). Earlier in Book I, Aristotle already agreed with the general and formal understanding of *eudaimonia* as the greatest and best of human goods (1.7 1217a21-22). Within the *ergon* argument, he repeats that *eudaimonia* is the best thing (1219a29 and a34) and therefore can arrive at his first conclusion:

³⁵⁵ The term καλοκάγαθία appears in *Eth. Nic.* 10.9, 1179b10 in a discussion of the implications of Aristotle's ethical theory for politics and social life. Nothing suggests that the term plays as important a role as it does in the *Eudemian Ethics*. The term is not mentioned in the fragments of the *Protrepticus* either; in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* we find it only once in a Platonic passage based on the *Gorgias* and *Menexenus* (19, 91.11), which is irrelevant for our purposes.

'The eudaimonia is activity of a good soul.'

ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐνέργεια (1219a34-35)

Since *eudaimonia* is the perfect or final good, it is itself perfect or final (1219a36). On the other hand, both living and virtue can be either perfect or imperfect (τελέα καὶ ἀτελής, 1219a36). In the case of ἀρετή, Aristotle specifies that the notion of perfection is understood in terms of mereological completeness, in that a virtue can be perfect, i.e. whole, or partial (ἢ μὲν γὰρ ὅλη, ἢ δὲ μόνιον, 1219a37). Consequently, the activity of what is imperfect is itself imperfect, though that cannot be the case with *eudaimonia*, which is something perfect or final.³⁵⁶ Therefore, Aristotle further specifies what *eudaimonia* is:

'Eudaimonia is the activity of a perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue.'

εἴη ἂν ἡ εὐδαιμονία ζωῆς τελείας ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετὴν τελείαν.
(1219a38-39)

Here, the *ergon* argument is concluded with a definition of *eudaimonia*, or rather with a substantive specification of what our, human *eudaimonia* consists of.

Michael Woods presents three steps of the argument which he deems highly problematic in that they undermine the validity of the argument. It is (a) the claim that an activity is better than the corresponding state or disposition (ἔξις) (1219a31),³⁵⁷ (b) that the best thing is the

³⁵⁶ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 10.4, 1174b14–20 for the notion of τελεία ἐνέργεια, this passage will be discussed later, pp. 255-258.

³⁵⁷ I believe that Woods (2005, 87) is right in that Aristotle neglects δυνάμεις and κινήσεις in his argument, yet Woods himself suggests that ἔξις and ἐνέργεια are used here in a broad sense; moreover, even the expression τῶν δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ τὰ μὲν ἔξεις ἢ δυνάμεις εἰσί, τὰ δ' ἐνέργεια καὶ κινήσεις at 1218b36-37 suggests a division into two general groups (*ta men ... ta de ...*) and not into four specific aspects in the soul.

activity of the soul's virtue (1219a33-34) and (c) that *eudaimonia* is the activity of a good soul (1219a34-35).

However, claim (b) is contingent upon the validity of (a). If an activity is better than the corresponding state and the virtue is the best disposition of the soul (1219a5), then it follows that the activity of the virtue is the best activity of the soul. Furthermore, since the goods of the soul are better than the external goods, Aristotle can conclude that the activity of the soul's virtue is the best thing for humans (this qualification is perhaps unnecessary, though it is important to point out that the entire argument concerns 'human' good).

I believe that claim (c) is based on the formal account of *eudaimonia* presented in Book 1 of the *Eudemian Ethics*. Aristotle stated at the very outset that *eudaimonia* is the best thing (1214a7-8) and concluded this formal account by positing that it is the prime good of all the goods attainable by humans (1217a39-40). Therefore, if we agree that the best thing for humans is the activity of the soul's virtue, we can identify this activity as the content of *eudaimonia*, which was formally mapped out in the first book and later applied in the *ergon* argument.

What about claim (a) concerning the priority of activity (ἐνέργεια) over state (ἔξις)? Wood is correct in saying that the *Eudemian Ethics* does not provide any argumentation which could be used to support this premise. However, in relation to Aristotle's above claim in which he posits that in the soul we find states and capacities on the one hand and activities and processes on the other (τῶν δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ τὰ μὲν ἔξεις ἢ δυνάμεις εἰσὶ, τὰ δ' ἐνέργειαί καὶ κινήσεις, 1218b36-37), he does introduce a general division of the soul's 'content' into two categories. The division is not an exhaustive inventory of four different things or aspects found in the soul.³⁵⁸ This interpretation can be supported by pointing out Aristotle's use of

³⁵⁸ Cf. footnote 355 above.

the *men ... de ...* clause along with his varied usage of different connectives within the two categories (ἢ in the first case, καὶ in the other). This indicates that Aristotle is not presenting a careful enumeration of four different things but a division into two general groups. The priority of activity over state is thus merely a variation of the priority of activity over potentiality (δύναμις), which is discussed at length in *Metaphysics* 9.8-9.³⁵⁹ The interpretation of these chapters from *Metaphysics* exceeds the scope of this chapter and I will thus only map out one possible way of responding to Wood's concern.

First, I believe the most relevant passage from the *Metaphysics* 9.8 to be lines 1050a10-14, where Aristotle discusses the teleological priority of exercising a given capacity over possessing a given capacity. Aristotle uses two examples; someone having the knowledge of a builder contrasted with someone actually building, and animals having sight contrasted with animals actually seeing. He argues that the builder has the knowledge of building *in order to* build and that animals possess sight *in order to* see. If there is such a teleological relation and, as Aristotle asserts, the goal (τέλος) of each thing is the best for it (1219a10-11), then it follows that the activities are better than the capacities in the sense required by the argument.

Second, a more practical argument for the priority of activities over states is presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

'To virtue belongs virtuous activity. But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state or in activity (ἐν ἔξει ἢ ἐνεργείᾳ). For the state may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity

³⁵⁹ Cf. extensive commentary on this chapter with further references in Makin (2006, 181-220).

will of necessity be acting, and acting well.' (*Eth. Nic.* 1.8, 1098b31-1099a3)

Therefore, activity is prior to states in an ethically relevant way, as it is the activity and not the state which brings about acting well and therefore only activity can lead to the attainment of human good.³⁶⁰

Furthermore, Woods worries about the cogency of the argumentation in lines 1219a18-28:

'Having made these distinctions, let us say that the ergon of a thing is the same as the ergon of its goodness or virtue, but not in the same fashion. ... Let us postulate that the ergon of the soul is living—or to live while awake, since in sleep the soul is idling and at rest. So, since the ergon of the soul and of its virtue must be one and the same, the ergon of its virtue will be a virtuous living. This, then, is the complete good, which, as we saw, is eudaimonia.' (transl. Kenny)

Woods considers this passage to be superfluous in the argumentation. This misunderstanding stems from his preoccupation with the conclusion that *eudaimonia* is the activity of a good soul (1219a34-35). However, this is not the final conclusion of the argument and Aristotle goes on to conclude that *eudaimonia* is an activity of perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue (1219a38-39). Therefore, the above-mentioned argument is not superfluous but necessary for legitimizing the notion of 'living' being introduced in the final definition.³⁶¹ Since the *ergon* of the soul is living, then *eudaimonia* is not constituted by any activity of a good soul, but by living (ζωή) specifically.

The chapter later delves into the division of the soul and the corresponding types of virtue. However, this is precluded by Aristotle's effort to show how three of the major claims

³⁶⁰ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219b1-3: 'Doing well and living well are regarded as the same thing as being happy, and each of these, both living and doing, is an employment and an activity' (transl. Kenny).

³⁶¹ Cf. similarly Hutchinson (1986, 45).

posited by the *ergon* argument correspond to generally shared beliefs. It is not the case that he directly confronts the conclusion with shared beliefs, as the conclusion of the *ergon* argument is Aristotle's own philosophical outcome. I think Aristotle believes that the testimony of generally shared opinions further bolsters his conclusion.

First, Aristotle shows that the wise must share his claim that *eudaimonia* is activity. As doing well and living well are considered the same as being happy (εὖ πράττειν καὶ τὸ εὖ ζῆν τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ εὐδαιμονεῖν), and doing and living are both activities (χρησὶς καὶ ἐνέργεια), then it follows that *eudaimonia* is also an activity (1219b1-4). Second, Aristotle seeks support for his claim that happiness is something perfect (τέλειον) in the sense of being complete (1219a35-36). Once again, this corresponds to the shared opinion that one cannot rightly be called happy for one day or when still a child, or because of any single part of his life for that matter, but only once his living has reached perfection, as posited by Solon (ἀλλ' ὅταν λάβῃ τέλος, 1219b3-8).

Finally, the third claim for which Aristotle seeks confirmation in general opinions is the relation between the *eudaimonia* and *ergon* of a relevant virtue. This, I believe, is the intention of the following lines:

‘Further, if virtue is praised, it is because of the erga that express it; the erga themselves are matter for congratulation. It is those who actually win who receive the crown, not those who have the ability to win but do not do so. Again, it is from their erga that one judges what sort of a person someone is. Furthermore, why is eudaimonia itself not an object of praise? Because it is the reason why other things are praised, either for leading up to it, or by being parts of it. So felicitation and praise and congratulation are all different from each other. Congratulation is

bestowed on an individual action, praise is for being a certain kind of person, and felicitation pertains to the end.' (1219b8-16, transl. Kenny)

Virtue, its *ergon* and *eudaimonia* are different albeit interconnected, as can be observed with the three types of speech.³⁶² We congratulate someone for doing something good or virtuous. We praise someone whose character is virtuous—and we can praise him even if he happens to be sleeping, though it would be absurd to congratulate him for sleeping. Now we neither congratulate nor praise anyone because he is *eudaimon*, happy or prosperous.

Eudaimonia is neither a particular action nor a state of one's soul. It is the *telos* of our action and the appropriate form of speech to celebrate the *telos* would be felicitation.

Looking back at the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument, where does it stand? Marco Zingano claims that in the *Eudemian Ethics*, all ethical matters are expressed in terms of opinion.³⁶³ I agree with Zingano that Aristotle's method in the *Eudemian Ethics* exhibits a dialectical approach to common beliefs and opinions, as evidenced throughout Book 1.³⁶⁴ However, at the beginning of the *ergon* argument, Aristotle tries to break with the dialectical approach and presents the argument as the outcome of his philosophical deliberations, not as a dialectical endeavour.

First, the concept of virtue is grounded in *ἐπαγωγή*, an inductive method which might be a part of a dialectical process, though in this case it does not operate with opinions but observable facts. The references to the sources of the argument which are not found in the *Eudemian Ethics* are the public writings by Aristotle himself and specific facts in *ἐπαγωγή*. I have not found a single reference to common opinions in the argument until the final

³⁶² Cf. *Rh.* 1.9, 1367b26-33; cf. further references in Dirlmeier (1984, 228–9).

³⁶³ Zingano (2007, 313).

³⁶⁴ On the methodology cf. above pp. 136-141.

definition of *eudaimonia* in 1219a38-39. Second, even the terminology employed throughout the argument suggests that Aristotle considers it to be proof of his conception of human *eudaimonia*.³⁶⁵ Finally, if there are any opinions used in the argument, they are Aristotle's own philosophical theses: the division of the goods refers back to his own writings, the concept of virtue is supplied by ἐπαγωγή, the priority of activities over states and capacities is yet again not a common notion but a part of Aristotle's metaphysics, and the distinction of two different types of *erga* (the activity itself and the product) is developed by Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* (43.5-25).

Joseph Karbowski presents a nuanced conclusion concerning the status of the *ergon* argument which is worth quoting at length: 'The central argument (λόγος) of *EE* 1.7–2.1 can be summarized as a deductive argument, but, importantly, it is not a demonstration (ἀπόδειξις). It does not explain a per se accident of happiness by appeal to an immediate account of its causal essence. Instead, it proceeds in the reverse order, deriving the fundamental causal definition of happiness ('happiness is the activity of the virtuous soul') from an initial 'unclear [by nature]' account of it ('happiness is the best human good and an end achievable in action') through a series of steps. This is just what we should expect, given Aristotle's earlier remarks about the direction of his inquiries (*EE* 1.6, 1216b32-35). However, as I have pointed out above, his final definition can, in principle, serve as a premise in a genuine demonstration that explains per se accidents of happiness.'

What I would add to Karbowski's assessment is that the *ergon* argument not only derives the definition of *eudaimonia* from an initial account of happiness, it elevates this strictly formal definition of *eudaimonia* (*eudaimonia* is the best human good achievable in action),

³⁶⁵ The following expressions and phrases indicate that Aristotle considers the argument to validate his definition: δῆλον δ' ἐκ τῆς ἐπαγωγῆς (1219a1), φανερόν τοίνυν ἐκ τούτων (1219a9), ὥστ' ἀνάγκη (1219a17), δῆλον δὲ ἐκ τῶν ὑποκειμένων (1219a28-29).

which says nothing of its content, towards a substantive account of what *eudaimonia* actually is in the case of human beings. The claim that ‘*eudaimonia* is the best human good achievable in action’ does not aid in our understanding of what it actually is and, moreover, it does not help in the practical sense either. What kind of life should one live? What is the highest good around which one’s life should be structured? These questions can only be answered using argumentation which takes humans into consideration. The *ergon* argument which introduces the notion of the soul and living into the overall argumentative structure plays exactly this role of providing substantial material for the definition of human *eudaimonia*.

Postscript: *horos* or *stochos*? A note on the relation between the two *Ethics*

One of the usual ways how to phrase the possible difference between the *Eudemian Ethics* on the one hand and the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the other is in the terms of intellectualism.³⁶⁶ Within the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 Aristotle defines happiness as ‘the activity of perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue’ (1219a38-39). The final passages of the *Eudemian Ethics* provide us with a clear definition and structure of the perfect virtue. The perfect virtue is *καλοκάγαθία* (1249a16), a virtue comprising all of the particular virtues discussed thus far (1248b8-10).³⁶⁷ The *καλοκάγαθία* is perfect in the

³⁶⁶ For a valuable account on this term see Keyt (1978); for summary of different approaches to the relation between the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, cf. Jost (2014). The difference between the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* phrased in intellectualistic terms is to be found in e.g. Monan (1968), Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 35), J. Cooper (1975, 90–1, 118–9); Kraut (1989, 251); Broadie (1991, 374–5, 389); Kenny (1992, 5–6); Reeve (1992, 129); Lear (2004, 5, 27); Kenny (2016, 242–3).

³⁶⁷ The text allows a reading that *καλοκάγαθία* as comprising virtues which were discussed or at least mentioned in the *Eudemian Ethics*; though this depends on the strength we give to the claim ‘we have

sense of being complete and not lacking any part; furthermore, it is perfect, because, as will be demonstrated, it even adds something valuable to the natural goods, such as health, wealth and honour.

The identification of the perfect virtue as *καλοκάγαθία*, which includes the so-called practical virtues, led to the general consensus that the *Eudemian Ethics* advocates a more inclusive and more complex notion of happiness than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The lack of an analogous definition of the perfect virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives rise to conflicting interpretations of happiness. On the one hand, it can be read as an inclusive concept including practical virtues and other goods, quite similar to the account in the *Eudemian Ethics*. On the other hand, one could argue that happiness is the activity of *θεωρία* and other possible goods are excluded from its definition. The identification of the perfect virtue as *καλοκάγαθία* does not seem to allow this discussion concerning the outcome of the *Eudemian Ethics* and so it creates one of the major differences from the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³⁶⁸

I will argue that despite the fact that the *Eudemian Ethics* does not identify happiness with contemplation, the contemplation of god nevertheless plays a very important role as the *ἄριστος* (standard) of our actions. While examining this concept in the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3 I will show similarities with the usage of *ἄριστος* in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. On the other hand, I

already spoken about each particular virtue' (κατὰ μέρος μὲν οὖν περὶ ἐκάστης ἀρετῆς εἴρηται πρότερον) and the following expression that *καλοκάγαθία* is composed of these (διαρθρωτέον τῆς ἐκ τούτων), namely the virtues we have already spoken about (1248b8-10). One could argue that *καλοκάγαθία* is a closed concept, a complete virtue comprising precisely the parts that were mentioned in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Another alternative would be to opt for a looser understanding, namely that *καλοκάγαθία* is composed of all particular virtues, regardless of whether they were mentioned or not.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Bobonich (2006, 24–5); similarly in Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 33–6), yet Rowe leaves *καλοκάγαθία* out of his interpretation.

will argue that the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not entail this concept of ὄρος and in this respect it seems more particularistic than the *Protrepticus* or the *Eudemian Ethics*.³⁶⁹

I believe that this substantial difference is reflected in the methodological approaches in the two *Ethics* as well.³⁷⁰ The *Eudemian Ethics* presents ethical inquiry in a rather scientific or even mathematical way compared to the *Nicomachean Ethics* which repeatedly questions exactness and scientific character of ethics. In my interpretation I will start with these methodological differences and show how they relate to the substantial ethical discussion of ὄρος or its absence.

Marco Zingano in his contribution to the debate on Aristotle methodology states these complex differences in a clear way:

‘In NE deliberation becomes the faculty that elevates the prudent man to the realm of the truth. He is no longer in the world of opinion; he is now a resident of the world of truth. In a passage of NE, which has no parallel in EE, Aristotle writes that the virtuous man is the one who “judges correctly each action, and in each, the truth appears to him” (3.4, 1113a29–30). The virtuous man, once capable only of providing good opinions, now sees truth in each action. As soon as Aristotle makes such a change, he has to abandon the dialectical syllogismas the type of proof for ethics, for ethics is now in a place which opinion cannot systematically reach: the world of (practical) truth. ... The Nicomachean virtuous man lives in the realm of truth, but this place is not quite so comfortable. He can be there only by diminishing his

³⁶⁹ On particularism see Engberg-Pedersen (1983) or Loudon (1986).

³⁷⁰ Cf. Bobonich (2006, 25–7) and Inwood and Woolf (2013, xviii) for useful summary of these differences.

*claims to accuracy in practical matters. This is why the central problem of method in NE is related to what kind of precision the moral discipline may claim.*³⁷¹

Practical truth does not belong to the domain of general principles or standards and is thus a part of the domain of perception. Furthermore, Aristotle does not present induction as a tool for ascertaining a general standard in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is rather the state of our character which is responsible for how we judge practical matters:

‘The good man (ὁ σπουδαῖος) judges each class of things rightly, and in each the truth appears to him; for each state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and measure of them (ὡςπερ κανὼν καὶ μέτρον αὐτῶν ὄν).’ (1113a29–33; transl. Ross and Brown)

Similar claims are made in several instances in the special books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but nothing of the sort is to be found in the special books of the *Eudemian Ethics*, where ethical truth is modelled analogously to the truth of other sciences.³⁷² Similarly, as I will show later in the text, the *Protrepticus* groups ethical knowledge and philosophical expertise with all other knowledge and expertise which search for the proper natural ὄρος. Nothing like this is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the norm and measure is the practically wise man (φρόνιμος) or the excellent man (σπουδαῖος).³⁷³

³⁷¹ Zingano (2007, 314).

³⁷² Bobonich (2006, 26–7), Devereux (2015, 146), Karbowski (2019, 132), see e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a12–13; 10.5, 1176a15–19; 10.6, 1176b24–27.

³⁷³ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 3.4, 1113a29–33.

I will argue that the methodological differences have a counterpart in Aristotle's conception of the nature of moral affairs. This difference can be explicated on the example of the concept of ὅρος and its different usage in Aristotle's ethical works. The *Eudemian Ethics* discusses ὅρος at the very climax of the book, namely in the third chapter of Book 8.

This chapter starts by revisiting past claims: Aristotle already spoke about particular virtues (κατὰ μέρος ἀρετῆς) and their capacities. Now he will address the virtue that arises when they are combined: καλοκάγαθία (1248b7-11). Καλοκάγαθία is a perfect virtue in the sense of completeness;³⁷⁴ someone who is καλός κάγαθός must have all particular virtues similarly as all body parts must be healthy for someone to be healthy. The specific task or work of καλοκάγαθία is to ensure that a person will use all of the natural goods in a noble way (1249a5-7). What does Aristotle mean by the term natural good? A natural good is for example health, strength, honour, good fortune and power. All of these things are naturally good but can be harmful to those with bad character (ἔξις, 1248b30). On the other hand, for a good person (ἀγαθός) – a person with good character – these natural goods will be good (1248b26-27). Natural goods, however, are not noble in themselves because, Aristotle claims, they are not laudable or praiseworthy (ἐπαινετὰ, 1248b25). Natural goods are not praiseworthy precisely because they can be abused and are bad if the character of the person who possesses them is not good.

A noble person (καλός κάγαθός) is someone who possesses noble goods and does noble deeds for their own sake (1248b34-36). Noble goods are the virtues and their respective *erga*. Since a noble person has noble motives and acts in a noble way, the natural goods are not

³⁷⁴ For a similar understanding of perfection as completeness cf. for example Broadie (2010, 4).

only good for him (as in the case of a good person) but noble as well, since: ‘things become noble when people’s motives in doing and choosing them are noble’ (1249a5-7).³⁷⁵

Καλοκάγαθία therefore ensures our correct treatment of the natural goods so that they are not only good for us but noble as well. But there seems to be an additional role of καλοκάγαθία in relation to particular virtues. By the end of the discussion of natural goods and nobility, Aristotle adds that a person ‘who thinks that one should possess the virtues for the sake of external goods will do noble things only coincidentally’ (1249a14-16). It is the Spartan character described a few of lines earlier (1248b37-1249a6): someone who acknowledges the role of the virtues but considers them to be instrumentally good for the sake of the natural goods.³⁷⁶ This means, for example, that he acknowledges the role of courage, justice and moderation but only as far as they contribute to e.g. honour, power and health. The virtues and their acts are not considered to be good in their own right; they are always good *for* something else, for an external good.³⁷⁷ Such a person is a good person since the natural goods are good for him, but he is not καλός κάγαθός, since his deeds and motives are not noble. It seems that καλοκάγαθία thus positions the virtues the right place

³⁷⁵ This is echoed in the *Pol.* 7.13, 1332a7-18 (transl. Reeve): ‘We say, and we have given this definition in our ethical works (ἐν τοῖς ἠθικοῖς), if anything in those discussions is of service, that happiness is a complete activation or use of virtue (ἐνέργειαν εἶναι καὶ χρῆσιν ἀρετῆς τελείαν), and not a qualified use but an unqualified one. By “qualified uses” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) I mean those that are necessary; by “unqualified” (ἀπλῶς) I mean those that are noble (τὸ καλῶς). For example, in the case of just actions, just retributions and punishments spring from virtue, but are necessary uses of it, and are noble only in a necessary way, since it would be more choice worthy if no individual or city-state needed such things. On the other hand, just actions that aim at honours and prosperity are unqualifiedly noblest.’

³⁷⁶ Cf. Simpson (2013, 671–2).

³⁷⁷ I believe that within this argument the ‘natural goods’ and ‘external goods’ are one and the same category. Cf. the general division of the goods at *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1218b31-32: one kind is in the soul (e.g. virtues), the other kind is external.

as well. To be καλός κάγαθός means having virtues and doing virtuous things for their own sake, because they are virtuous.

How does a good person find the right path toward the natural goods so that they are not harmful for him?³⁷⁸ Aristotle answers using the analogy of medicine: a doctor has a standard (ὄρος) by which he distinguishes health body from a sick one. And at the same time, there is a standard for the degree to which something can be healthy and beyond which it can be harmful to one's health (1249a21-24).

'Similarly, in regard to actions and choices of things that by nature are good but not praiseworthy, the spoudaios should have a standard (δεῖ τινα εἶναι ὄρον) of possession, choice, and avoidance concerning abundance and scarcity of wealth and other gifts of fortune.' (1249a24-1249b3; transl. Kenny)

Aristotle insists that the σπουδαῖος³⁷⁹ must have a ὄρος according to which he judges the right amount of possession, in accordance with which he chooses and acts regarding the natural goods.³⁸⁰ The doctor analogy says that the doctor judges by reference to the ὄρος

³⁷⁸ Since the noble man, καλός κάγαθός, is a good man – the natural goods are good for him and moreover they are noble because of καλοκάγαθία – therefore, the following passage treating a good man's treatment of natural goods applies to the noble man as well.

³⁷⁹ Kenny translates σπουδαῖος as 'a good man' and presumably does not see a substantial difference between σπουδαῖος and ἀγαθός. Inwood and Woolf have 'an excellent man'. The usage of σπουδαῖος here is not evidence that Aristotle refers to the noble man (καλός κάγαθός) here as well, but it does make such an understanding possible.

³⁸⁰ In opposition to Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 110) Kenny (2016, 183) argues that the scope of this ὄρος is not limited to the natural goods; he shows that it does entail those virtues which deal with natural goods and generally the virtues of the lower part of the soul. Broadie (2010, 5) interprets καλοκάγαθία as 'a general attitude to virtue as such' since according to her one can have all the virtue and not be καλός κάγαθός. I will come back to the scope of καλοκάγαθία later in the text.

which is quite general since it covers ‘each thing’ and specific at the same time since it is the standard of more or less (ἔλαττον ἢ πλεόν, 1249a23) in these matters.³⁸¹

The term ὄρος is used surprisingly little in the medical literature, yet it is clear that a physician needs a standard for his actions. What can the medical analogy tell us? First, ὄρος is a distinguishing mark for the possibility of science. In *De arte* 5.22 we read ‘where the correct and incorrect have a proper ὄρος, surely there must be τέχνη’, i.e. wherever there is ὄρος for telling correct from incorrect we can establish an expertise and we do not have to be dependent on luck. Second, the ὄρος discussed in medical writings is a general standard which is looked for in particular cases so that the doctor knows how to proceed with diagnosis and treatment.³⁸²

What could be this ὄρος in the case of σπουδαῖος?³⁸³ Aristotle’s first answer is that ‘one should conduct one’s living with reference to one’s superior (πρὸς τὸ ἄρχον ζῆν) and more specifically to the quality of one’s superior activity (πρὸς τὴν ἕξιν κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὴν τοῦ ἄρχοντος)’ (1249b6-8). What does he mean? I believe it refers back to the previous chapter, *Eudemian Ethics* 8.2, where the discussion of the origin (ἀρχή) of our thinking prompts Aristotle to write:

‘As in the universe, so here, god moves everything. For in a manner the divine element in us moves everything. Reason is not the originator of

³⁸¹ The sentence is ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ τις ὄρος καὶ τῶν ἰατρῶν, πρὸς ὃν ἀναφέρων κρίνει τὸ ὑγιεινὸν σῶματι καὶ μὴ, καὶ πρὸς ὃν μέχρι ποσοῦ ποιητέον ἕκαστον καὶ εὖ ὑγιαίνειν, εἰ δὲ ἔλαττον ἢ πλεόν, οὐκέτι (1249a21-24). The reference of ἕκαστον is not clear, yet the exact meaning is not crucial for my argument; for example, Rackham and Woods translate ‘each thing’, Kenny ‘each activity’.

³⁸² *De septimestri partu* 9.26 talks about physicians using patients’ state on particular days (e.g. odd days or specific even days) as ὄρος for telling the crisis in the disease. *Epidemics* 6.2.20-21 asks whether an appearance of a particularly sparse blood is not ὄρος for indicating empyema. Cf. brief discussion in Angier (2010, 9–10).

³⁸³ Cf. discussion in Kenny (2016, 182–3) and Broadie (2010).

reasoning, but something superior. But what can be superior to knowledge and to intelligence, except god? For virtue is an instrument of intelligence.’ (1248a25-29; transl. Kenny)

God is the most superior element of all and the passage outlines a hierarchy of value: virtue is an instrument for reason or intelligence (νοῦς) and νοῦς with λόγος are inferior to god. The hierarchy between reason and god is laid out in terms of superiority. This is picked up by Aristotle’s insistence that one’s living should be organized and led in accordance with one’s superior (ἄρχων) and the quality of his activity.³⁸⁴

Indeed, a few lines later Aristotle says that the superior is god (1249b14) and thus concludes that:

‘whatever choice or possession of natural goods—bodily goods, wealth, friends, and the like—will most conduce to the contemplation of God is the best; this is the finest criterion (ὁ ὄρος κάλλιστος).’ (1249b16-19; transl. Kenny)

The ὄρος, the standard for natural goods is the contemplation of god (τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρία).³⁸⁵ Whatever the amount of natural goods or whichever goods we choose serves the contemplation of god this amount or choice is thus good; on the other hand, when a given amount (either too much or too little) of the natural goods or our choice hinders or impedes

³⁸⁴ The terminology indicates a possible relation between the god as the ἀρχή of thinking and at the same time the ἄρχων of our living; for the textual possibilities supporting this interpretation see Dirlmeier (1984, 499–500); I differ from Dirlmeier, since I accept that the ὁ θεός at 1249b14 refers to the god of the universe introduced at *Eth. Eud.* 8.2, 1248a22-29. See Eijk (1989, 30–1) for a brief discussion of the relation to the *Metaphysics* 12 and Eijk (1989, 33–8) for a detailed commentary on this passage.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 109–10).

with the contemplation of god, the amount or choice is actually bad. In all practical matters regarding wealth, honour or health, the contemplation of god is the criterion which

This conception of the contemplation of god as a ὄρος for our practical actions invites comparison with the concept of ὄρος in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.³⁸⁶ There Aristotle insisted that all expertise (τέχναι) including the lawgiver and philosopher must have standards (ὄροι) acquired from nature (55.1-2). Unlike the other τέχναι, the philosopher takes his standards from the primary things themselves (ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῶν πρώτων, 55.9) since he is a spectator (θεατής) of these precise things and not of their imitations. Philosopher's actions are then correct and noble (ὀρθαὶ καὶ καλά) since 'he is the only one who lives looking toward nature and toward the divine'.³⁸⁷

The *Eudemian Ethics* as well as the *Protrepticus* use the concept of ὄρος as a principle, standard or a guideline for our action. According to the *Protrepticus* philosopher acts correctly and nobly, since he looks towards nature and the divine. According to the *Eudemian Ethics*, a good person as well as a noble person have a standard for their practical actions concerning the natural goods: the contemplation of god. The natural or external components of καλοκάγαθία are good in so far as they promote the contemplation of god and they should be considered bad when they endanger or hinder this contemplation. Therefore, the goodness of the natural components of the complex concept of καλοκάγαθία

³⁸⁶ Cf. section 'Philosophy and nature' at 83-91 above. Verdenius (1971, 289) discusses other possibly parallels between the *Protrepticus* and *Eth. Eud.* 8.3. All references to the *Protrepticus* are to the Pistelli's edition, 1996 reprint. For current discussion of the *Protrepticus* and its status within Aristotle's corpus see Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) and Hutchinson and Johnson (2018). Gauthier and Jolif (1970b, 437-8) try to separate the concept of ὄρος in the *Protrepticus* from its usage in the *Eudemian Ethics*; however, their argumentation is based solely on the assumption that the *Protrepticus* belongs to the Platonic tradition, whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* is a peripatetic work, i.e. that these two works do not share the same philosophical framework.

³⁸⁷ *Protr.* 55.26-27.

is dependent upon an intellectualistic principle. For both, good and noble people the contemplation of divine is the criterion of correct choice and action.

The concept of ὄρος in the *Eudemian Ethics* does not only appear in the closing chapter.³⁸⁸ It also appears the beginning of the Book 5, i.e. one of the common books shared with the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is a methodological passage where Aristotle invites us to recall that we were told to choose the mean as determined by reason.³⁸⁹ This serves as the topic of his discussion:

‘In all the states of character we have mentioned, as in all other matters, there is a mark (σκοπός) to which the man who has reason looks, and heightens or relaxes his activity accordingly, and there is a standard (ὄρος) which determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being in accordance with correct reason (κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον).’ (1138b21-25; transl. Ross and Brown)

The mark (σκοπός) which we should look at is what we aim in virtuous action.³⁹⁰ The standard (ὄρος) determines or settles where the mean is.³⁹¹ It is clear that this ὄρος is not

³⁸⁸ Bonasio (2019, 17) argues that the ὄρος passage in *Eth. Eud.* 5.1 should be read in tandem with *Eth. Eud.* 8.3.

³⁸⁹ Cf. cross-references in Ross and Broadie’s translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³⁹⁰ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.2, 1094a23-24 ‘Shall we not, like archers who have a mark (στόχος) to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?’ transl. Ross and Brown. Cf. further 2.6, 1106b32; 3.12, 1119b16; 6.13, 1144a26 for the idea of ‘hitting’ or ‘aiming’ at something as a goal or a target; the σκοπός is set right by a virtue (6.13 1144a8).

³⁹¹ See Bonasio (2019, 26) for interpreting this passage together with *Eth. Eud.* 8.3. The appearance of ὄρος in the *Nicomachean Ethics* was already confusing for Ramsauer (1879, 371); Burnet (1904, 250–1) considers the term ὄρος to be a sign of an ‘Eudemian touch’. Similarly, Stewart (1892a, 3–4) interprets this passage as pointing to the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3. On the other hand, Kraut (1989, 327–38) interprets the passage without any reference to the *Eudemian Ethics*.

limited to the action and choices regarding the natural goods, but rather encompasses all states of character and all matters (καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων). Aristotle further adds that this concerns ‘all other pursuits which are objects of knowledge’ (1138b26-27).³⁹² Moreover, it is clear that Aristotle assumes that σκοπός and ὄρος are two different concepts with different functions.³⁹³ Aristotle concludes that:

‘it is necessary with regard to the states of the soul also, not only that this true statement should be made, but also that it should be determined what correct reason (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος) is and what is the standard (ὄρος) that fixes it.’ (1138b32-35; transl. Ross and Brown)

The correct reason recognizes the ὄρος and it is because of this recognition that it is called correct. The reason is right if it recognizes the ὄρος, the standard of a mean between excess and deficiency. According to the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3 this ὄρος is the contemplation of god;³⁹⁴ it has been elucidated that too much or too little of the natural goods can hinder the contemplation of god and that whatever hinders the contemplation of god is not correct and is thus bad. The correct reason recognizes this and commands that our action and choices maximise our contemplation of god.

This, of course, is the *Eudemian* version of the story; nothing of the sort is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Not only does Aristotle not define the perfect virtue, he does not

³⁹² Cf. *Protr.* 9, 54.22-23: καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις τέχναις.

³⁹³ I believe Tuozzo (1995, 138) is wrong in equating σκοπός and ὄρος; the identification goes against the text of opening of the *Eth. Nic.* 6.1; Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 111) argues against identifying σκοπός with ὄρος.

³⁹⁴ Broadie (2010, 24) argues that this ὄρος is not limited to the natural goods, but extends to the goodness of the soul in general, cf. *Eth. Eud.* 8.3, 1249b21-23.

discuss ὄρος anywhere else than in these opening lines of the book on the intellectual virtues, i.e. the Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (= Book 5 of the *Eudemian Ethics*).

Despite the fact that the passages 1138b21-25 and 1138b32-35 quoted above look like a promise of a further investigation, the *Nicomachean Ethics* never discusses the concept of ὄρος.³⁹⁵ The meaning of ὄρος is thus left open in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and its role in the argumentation is unclear.³⁹⁶ Ackrill suggests that ‘promoting εὐδαιμονία’ could be such a ὄρος.³⁹⁷ This suggestion is plausible when informed by the meaning of ὄρος in the *Eudemian Ethics* presupposing that the *Nicomachean Ethics* considers εὐδαιμονία to be a kind of θεωρία (*Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178b33, cf. 10.7, 1177b19). Since θεωρία is the prime activity (ἐνέργεια) of god (*Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178b21-22) and the *Eudemian Ethics* claims that ‘one should conduct one’s living with reference to one’s superior, and more specifically to the state of one’s superior activity (ἐνέργεια)’ (*Eth. Eud.* 8.3, 1249b7-8), this comprehensive interpretation makes sense.³⁹⁸ However, it mixes accounts from two different treatises and

³⁹⁵ Cf. Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 112) or Kraut (1989, 330) complaining that ‘unfortunately, Aristotle does not spell out any answer to these questions’. See further references to frustrations of modern interpreters in Peterson (1988, 234–6). Much of my following interpretation is inspired by Peterson’s analyses of ὄρος (and its absence) within the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³⁹⁶ The only other occurrence of the term ὄρος in the books specific to the *Nicomachean Ethics* is in 1.7, 1097b13 in the discussion of self-sufficiency where it means ‘limit’ or ‘boundary’: we are naturally social living beings, our conception of a happy life includes family, friends and social relations. Yet, there has to be a certain *limit* for how many can be included. The other occurrence of ὄρος in the common books is in *Eth. Nic.* 7.13, 1153b25; however, even there is no account of what ὄρος is or how it works. In the context of the discussion of ‘good luck’ (εὐτυχία), it is said that the ὄρος of good luck is fixed by reference to εὐδαιμονία. ‘Good luck’ is examined in greater detail in a prominent location in the *Eudemian Ethics* directly preceding the discussion of ὄρος (i.e. *Eth. Eud.*, 8.2)

³⁹⁷ Ackrill (1980, 138).

³⁹⁸ This is the strategy of C. D. C. Reeve who tries to reconcile both *Ethics* and argues that the ὄρος has the same meaning in both treatises, namely it is the contemplation of god, cf. Reeve (2012, 134–40). His account is important since it brings together the two *Ethics* as well as the *Protrepticus*. However, Reeve derives his account of ὄρος from passages found in the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Protrepticus* and then assumes it to play the same role in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (based on its occurrence in the common books), even though the

Ackrill is right to acknowledge that nothing in this vein is suggested anywhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself.³⁹⁹ Christopher Rowe thinks that the ὅρος concerns ‘particular cases’⁴⁰⁰ but immediately suggests that there is ‘no detailed criterion possible’ within Aristotle’s ethical system and that ‘there is no reason why Aristotle should not answer the question by saying, in effect, that no such (sc. ὅρος) exists’.⁴⁰¹

treatise does not even come close to specifying what ὅρος is. Even Reeve eventually acknowledges that compared to the *Eudemian Ethics* the *Nicomachean Ethics* is much less concrete concerning the presupposed concept of ὅρος. Reeve (2012, 139): ‘In the *Eudemian Ethics*, the defining-mark for these prescriptions is the “choice and possession of natural goods—either goods of the body or money or of friends or the other goods—[that] will most of all produce the contemplation of the divine constituent.” The *Nicomachean Ethics* settles for saying that we should ‘do everything’ to live in accord with our understanding (10.7, 1177b33).’ The ‘understanding’ in question is φρονεῖν and I will argue, that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it would be extremely hard or even impossible to supply any specific ὅρος of φρονεῖν in ethical matters. Moreover, even if – according to Reeve – there were a definition of ὅρος, ‘we are not any closer to being able to use it to guide our actions in particular circumstances’ (Reeve (2012, 139)). This conclusion is well plausible in the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, though it is untenable in the context of the *Eudemian Ethics*. In the *Eth. Eud.*, the ὅρος applies to any choice or acquisition of natural goods and, as has been elucidated, to any choice at all (*Eth. Eud.* 8.3, 1249b16-21). Reeve’s attempt to identify the same ὅρος in both *Ethics* encounters two problems: the meaning of ὅρος allegedly employed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is said to be derived from the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Protrepticus*, despite their possible incongruences with the *Nicomachean Ethics*; second, the conclusion of his synthesizing analysis, which conversely draws on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, contradicts the conclusion concerning ὅρος explicitly posed in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

³⁹⁹Ackrill (1980, 138). Cf. similarly J. Cooper (1975, 101–3); as Peterson remarks Cooper differs from Ackrill in taking the ὅρος to determine the mean state, whereas Ackrill takes it as a general criterion or standard of what has to be done; cf. Peterson (1988, 235).

⁴⁰⁰ Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 111).

⁴⁰¹ Christopher J. Rowe (1971, 112); cf. Broadie and Rowe (2002, 358–60), in this commentary Rowe says that ‘there is little or no evidence in Book 6 for the view that what distinguishes Aristotle’s wise individual is adherence to a rule commanding promotion of some single goal.’ His interpretation is directed against Ackrill’s understanding of ὅρος. Rowe concludes that the wise person’s decisions are good answers to the practical, ethical question ‘What should I do?’ He takes the opening of 6.1 to be a general introduction to the problem of ὁρθὸς λόγος without a specific promise concerning the ὅρος. However, this leaves aside the question of ὅρος and its function.

Sandra Peterson in her study of ὄρος and its relation to the ‘right’ or ‘correct’ reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος) offers four possible answers to Aristotle’s question which she rephrases as follows: ‘what is the line or border between too much and the intermediate and between too little and the intermediate that the right reason of the person of practical wisdom marks off?’⁴⁰² The terms ‘line’ and ‘border’ imply a certain level of exactitude. Yet, none of the four answers proposed by Peterson – which I believe are all correct – operate with any level of exactness which could correspond (a) to the methodological remarks made in the *Eudemian Ethics* which call for proper explanation of the causes and possible congruence of different opinions using rational argumentation or (b) Aristotle’s concept of ὄρος in the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3 interpreted above. I will follow Peterson’s suggested answers to a certain extent, though I will argue that do not qualify as possible candidates for ὄρος. They do, however, shed light on the difference between the conceptualization of the ethics in the *Eudemian Ethics* on the one hand and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the other.

First, Aristotle cannot actually define ὄρος because the nature of practical matters – as understood in the *Nicomachean Ethics* – does not allow it. Finding the mean is not easy and is not a matter of reasoning since:

‘it is not easy to determine both how and with whom and on what provocation and how long one should be angry ... up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning (οὐ ῥάδιον τῷ λόγῳ ἀφορίσαι), any

⁴⁰² Peterson (1988, 242); cf. Kraut (1989, 327–34).

more than anything else that is perceived by the senses.' (1109b14-22;
transl. Ross and Brown)⁴⁰³

Our practical decisions (at least in the moral domain) are based on our trained moral sensibility and not on any general principle or standard.⁴⁰⁴ When Aristotle pairs decision-making with perception (1109b23), he makes clear that virtues allow us to *see* what is good and what is not.⁴⁰⁵ The proper objects of perception are particulars, not abstract entities or principles.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, Aristotle argues that ὄρος is to be associated with intellect and not with practical wisdom (1142a25-27).⁴⁰⁷ Aristotle is therefore incapable of defining or even articulating any ὄρος, he can merely introduce particular examples, similarly as if one were to explain what a red is. This seems to be Rowe's solution to the problem: there is no general and abstract answer to the question 'What should I do?' or 'What is good to do?'⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰³ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 4.4, 1126b1-4: 'How far, therefore, and how a man must stray before he becomes blameworthy, it is not easy to state in words; for the decision depends on the particular facts and on perception.' And again in *Eth. Nic.* 2.3, 1104a8-10: 'the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion'.

⁴⁰⁴ On the difficulty to find the mean cf. Kraut (1989, 328) and even more explicit statement in London (2001, 582) 'Aristotle says that with respect to a given action or emotion as such, there is no single fixed point that is always right (*Eth. Nic.* 2.6, 1106a29-32).'

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Engberg-Pedersen (1983, 202) on φρόνησις as a form of perception.

⁴⁰⁶ Carlo Natali accepts that 'the judgement of particular situations is left by him to moral perception, *aisthēsis*, both in intellectual and in moral knowledge,' though he is right to warn against scepticism concerning the general ideas presented in Aristotle's ethics: 'the very possibility of knowing the particular depends on the possession of the universal, as he says both in the *Analytics* and in the *Metaphysics*, because, as we saw at the beginning, the particular always falls under an universal that explains it (981a22).' However, this importance of universals still does not establish the necessity or even possibility of a general standard in ethical judgements. See Natali (2010, 94-5).

⁴⁰⁷ Engberg-Pedersen (1983, 204) offers interpretation of this passage.

⁴⁰⁸ Broadie and Rowe (2002, 359). Cf. Grant (1885, 514) commenting on this passage: 'Aristotle meant that general rules are often inapplicable to particular cases, which must then be decided by a kind of "intuition" or "tact", not derived from philosophy, but natural.'

Second, Aristotle suggests that even if there were some general truths, one could not know them in advance. We do not deliberate and make choices concerning necessary things, nor about the things outside of our power.

‘Deliberation is concerned with things that happen in a certain way for the most part, but in which the outcome is obscure (ἀδήλοις), and with things in which it is indeterminate (ἀδιόριστον).’ (Eth. Nic. 3.3, 1112b8-9; transl. Ross and Brown)

As Peterson puts it, ‘often what is true to say will be clear at the moment of action’.⁴⁰⁹

Human deliberation is problematic and difficult, as the outcome is uncertain and indeterminate—if this were not the case, we would have no reason to deliberate.

Third, even if there were some general principles and standards, recording them in an ethical treatise would be practically useless as they would lack an appropriate audience. Experienced people with good character do not need these standards as it is their good character that leads them to act well. Conversely, those who are not experienced cannot make proper use of such standards due to their lack of experience:

‘Even medical men do not seem to be made by a study of textbooks. Yet people try, at any rate, to state not only the treatments, but also how particular classes of people can be cured and should be treated — distinguishing the various habits of body; but while this seems useful to experienced people, to the inexperienced it is valueless.’ (1181b2-6; transl. Ross and Brown)

⁴⁰⁹ Peterson (1988, 245); she is referring to Aristotle’s claim that ‘the decision rests with perception’ (1109b23).

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines the goal of ethical studies to be ‘action’ instead of ‘knowledge.’ Therefore, the inexperienced and young are not suited to study the science of politics, since it is derived from action and is about action. In order to understand ethics properly and effectively, Aristotle claims that one needs to experience the actions that it entails (1.3, 1095a2-6) not a theoretical knowledge of rules and standards.

Fourth, ὄρος might be a superfluous concept, as it has been established that the most important of all is the character of a good man coupled with practical wisdom, which allows for the correct choice to be made in a particular situation.⁴¹⁰ Aristotle's definition of a moral virtue says that it is ‘a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it’ (1106b36-1107a2; transl. Ross and Brown).⁴¹¹ The mean here is determined by λόγος, which is not an eternal standard but the reason of a practically wise man.⁴¹² The concept of moral virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not entail anything that resembles the ὄρος found in the *Protrepticus* and *Eudemian Ethics*. The concept of ὄρος is simply obsolete in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Protrepticus* look for the right ὄρος in the practical matters (according to the narrow interpretation of καλοκάγαθία the matters concerning natural goods) and they settle this ὄρος with reference to the nature or to the divine, the most standard like looking standard which the *Nicomachean Ethics* could offer is the

⁴¹⁰ Peterson (1988, 246–7).

⁴¹¹ Cf. London (2001, 571): ‘When he first introduces the doctrine of the mean in the *NE*, Aristotle remarks that if it is true that virtue, like nature, is better and more precise than any of the arts, then it follows that virtue has the quality of being able to aim at and hit the mean (*NE* 2.6, 1106b14-16 and 1106b27-28).’

⁴¹² Recently there has been a line of interpretations which understands λόγος in the definition of virtue as a principle or rule, cf. Tuozzo (1995) and Curzer (2016); even this understanding of λόγος is not threatening my interpretation of ὄρος and its role in the Aristotle’s two *Ethics*. The interpretation of λόγος does not have to effect understanding or the role of ὄρος.

σπουδαῖος, the outstanding person which is said to be the ‘norm and measure’ (κανὼν καὶ μέτρον, 1113a29-33):

‘The man who is without qualification good at deliberating is the man who is capable of aiming in accordance with calculation (στοχαστικὸς κατὰ τὸν λογισμόν) at the best for man of things attainable by action.’
(1141b12-15; transl. Ross and Brown)

Such a man must be a virtuous man, since virtue aims at the mean (στοχαστική τοῦ μέσου). However, even here there is not a single mention of ὄρος that would be anyhow inform process of finding and choosing the mean in emotions and actions (*Eth. Nic.* 2.9., 1109a20-25 and cf. *Eth. Nic.* 2.6, 1107a2-6).⁴¹³ Now it seems that the concept of aiming or hitting (στοχάζομαι),⁴¹⁴ and the capacity of a virtue to ‘hit’ upon a mean, is used instead of finding a ὄρος that would settle the question of right action and choice. I believe this change to be one of the main differences between the two *Ethics*. Instead of looking for a general ὄρος which one is supposed to find in each and every relevant situation, the idea seems to be that virtue is the character state which enables us to ‘hit’ the mean, the right spot, the right course of action. As Aristotle says: ‘The man who is without qualification good at deliberating is the man who is capable of aiming (στοχαστικὸς) in accordance with calculation at the best for man of things attainable by action’ (1141b12-14; transl. Ross, re5. Brown). The verb ‘to hit’ (στοχάζεσθαι) is used both in general explanations of how virtues work (e.g. at 1106b16, 1106b28, 1109a22) as well as in descriptions of how individual virtues

⁴¹³ Cf. London (2001, 572–4) on this passage.

⁴¹⁴ On these concepts cf. Engberg-Pedersen (1983, 189–90) and Boudon-Millot (2005, 96–9).

or vices work (cf. 1126b29, 1128a6).⁴¹⁵ Aristotle says that virtue ‘hits’ the mean.⁴¹⁶ The verb is not used within the *Eudemian Ethics* and it does not understand the virtue as a character state which aims or hits on something.

As I have said several times already, most authors articulate the main difference between the two *Ethics* in terms of intellectualism: the outcome of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is much more intellectualistic compared to the *Eudemian* version. The *Eudemian Ethics* defines *eudaimonia* with the reference to the complex *καλοκάγαθία*, which also subsumes the practical virtues. This seemingly well founded general view was recently called into question by Sarah Broadie.⁴¹⁷ Broadie rehabilitates theoretical reason and its activity (*θεωρία*) in the *Eudemian Ethics*. According to her, Aristotle claims that theoretical reason is ruled by god just as ‘health’ rules the medical art: it does not rule by prescriptions but as a goal to be reached (1249a13). Aristotle states that analogously to orders being issued for the sake of health in the medical art, ‘the practical wisdom issues orders for the sake of god’ (ὄϋνεκα ἡ φρόνησις ἐπιτάττει, 1249b14-15). The god described here is clearly the cosmic god, the origin of all motion and reasoning (1248a25-29).

Broadie concludes: ‘God is the object studied in theoretical activity, and practical wisdom (in the *kalosk’agathos* who is involved with theoretical activity) acts so as to maintain whatever disposition or dispositions underlie *theoria*. Practical wisdom is concerned with any such disposition as basis for theoretical activity.’⁴¹⁸ Practical wisdom is presented here as inferior both to god and to the *θεωρία* for the sake of which it gives commands.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Kraut (1989, 329) who is lead from analysing the sentences about hitting the mean at 2.6, 1106b28 to considering the concept of ὄρος at 6.1 and finally complains that Aristotle does not give answer to the question of ὄρος in ethics.

⁴¹⁶ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 2.9, 1109a22: μεσότης τις ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετή, στοχαστική γε οὔσα τοῦ μέσου.

⁴¹⁷ Broadie (2010, 22–4). Similarly, Dirlmeier (1984, 498) stresses the priority of το θεωρητικόν in this passage.

⁴¹⁸ Broadie (2010, 23).

This conclusion resembles the result of the comparison between practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and theoretical wisdom (σοφία) in the final lines of Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle says that practical wisdom ‘is not supreme over philosophic wisdom, i.e. over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being; it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it’ (*Eth. Nic.* 6.13, 1145a6-10, transl. Ross and Brown). In both treatises, φρόνησις provides for σοφία and its activity; the comparison is in both cases illuminated by the example of medicine and health and in both cases the relation is expressed as ‘giving orders’ (ἐπιτάσσω).⁴¹⁹ These passages clearly exhibit similar features and, moreover, if Broadie’s interpretation is correct, even the *Eudemian Ethics* suggests that practical wisdom is subservient to theoretical activity.

The last point of Broadie’s interpretation examines the final lines of the argument concerning ὄρος as the θεωρία of god:

‘And this applies to the soul, and it is the best ὄρος for the soul when one is least aware of the irrational part of the soul as such.’

ἔχει δὲ τοῦτο τῇ ψυχῇ, καὶ οὗτος τῆς ψυχῆς ὄρος ἄριστος τὸ ἥκιστα αἰσθάνεσθαι τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς, ἢ τοιοῦτον. (1249b21-23; transl. Inwood and Woolf)⁴²⁰

The best ὄρος for the amount and usage of natural goods is said to be the ὄρος of the soul as well. The entire soul is in good shape when it supports the contemplation of god and is in

⁴¹⁹ On these passages cf. section ‘Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronésis*’ at pp. 244-249 below as well.

⁴²⁰ Here I use the translation of Inwood and Woolf, since it is closer to Broadie’s understanding of the text. The Greek here is unclear and any interpretation borders on speculation, cf. Dirlmeier (1984, 504): ‘Das ist nicht Griechisch’ and similarly Broadie (2010, 24): ‘The first clause as printed in OCT is barely possible Greek.’ For the discussion of the textual issues cf. Tuozzo (1995, 142).

bad shape when it hinders and obstructs the contemplation of god.⁴²¹ This means that the virtuous soul – i.e. a soul that is in good shape – supports activity of contemplation. This could explain the earlier claim that virtue is an instrument or tool of intellect (νοῦς) and that god is superior (κρείττων) to knowledge and intellect (1248a25-29 quoted above). The virtues are ‘instruments’ in the sense that they provide for the contemplative activity which must be originated by god as an external ἀρχή. This is the same god, which is the object of the contemplation in question.

One could compare the passage from *Eth. Nic.* 10.6 on leisure (σχολή), where the practical virtues have a similar position: ‘*And happiness is thought to depend on leisure (σχολή); for we are busy that we may have leisure, and make war that we may live in peace. Now the activity of the practical virtues is exhibited in political or military affairs, but the actions concerned with these seem to be unleisurely*’ (1177b4-8; transl. Ross and Brown). Similarly, as in the *Eudemian Ethics*, the practical virtues exhibited in political and military affairs acts so as to maintain or achieve σχολή which in turn is necessary for θεωρία. Therefore, the idea that the practical virtues – which might be good in themselves as well – are also subservient to some higher goal, namely intellectual or theoretical activity, is to be found in both *Ethics*.⁴²²

To conclude, I consider the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be rather complex and not as unequivocally intellectualistic as, for example, Monan and many others do. On the other hand, I understand the climax of the *Eudemian Ethics* to be more intellectualistic and contemplative. I have argued that the intellectualism or the primacy of θεωρία is present in both writings in a structurally similar fashion. However, Monan is right in noticing that this

⁴²¹ Broadie (2010, 24).

⁴²² Stewart (1892a, 9) even claims that there is ‘no difference’ between *Eth. Nic.* 10.6-7 and *Eth. Eud.* 8.3 with regard to the ultimate standard.

intellectualistic aspect is far more developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* compared to the discussion in the closing lines of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

One of the major differences between the two texts lies in how the goodness of our actions is measured. Whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* (together with the *Protrepticus*) works with the concept of ὄρος, which is the standard of goodness of our actions and choices, the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not deem practical matters capable of such precision nor does it recognize a general standard of good acting and choosing. Why is the concept of ὄρος missing from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (apart from the one occurrence in the common books)? I have argued that the concept of ὄρος is rendered obsolete if not impossible in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I have presented four reasons, based on Sandra Peterson's study, which suggest that Aristotle actually abandoned the notion of a general ὄρος for ethical matters for ethical matters in favour of the concept of aiming at or hitting the right mean by way of our virtuous character.

The remaining loose end which should be explained is why Aristotle introduces the concept of ὄρος in the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.1 at all? I would like to suggest a tentative answer based on the status of the so-called common books. It might be the case that the passage about ὄρος actually does not belong to the *Nicomachean Ethics* where it merely rises unfulfilled promises, but it is from the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Adam Beresford's recent suggestion that the common books are a result of later collation of two separate texts – if developed and supported by further research – might help to solve the problem with the reason why the current text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* mentions ὄρος and rises hopes that it will explain it.⁴²³ If his hypothesis is correct, then the double

⁴²³ Beresford, Adam, Talk on the Editing of Book 5 of the *NE*, 14.10.2017, Washington CUA; this hypothesis was discussed above at 128-130.

appearance of ὄρος at the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.1 is not a carelessness on Aristotle's side. Indeed, it seems that Aristotle is promising to provide an account of ὄρος which he never does within the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But it is only because the promise might be originally taken from the *Eudemian Ethics* where it is fulfilled in the Book 8 chapter 3. The editor collating the two *Ethics* into one (and thus creating the common books) took this passage from the *Eudemian* original but did not collate the later books because of their divergence. Therefore, we find the account of ὄρος only in the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3 and not in the *Nicomachean Ethics* where it originally does not belong.⁴²⁴

Moreover, one could argue – based on Beresford's hypothesis and the interpretation of the differences between the moral theory developed above – that the concept of ὄρος used in the *Protrepticus* and *Eudemian Ethics* is foreign to the *Nicomachean Ethics* as such.

Concluding remarks

The *Eudemian Ethics* introduces the *ergon* argument as essential to the 'fresh start' announced at the beginning of Book 2. The *ergon* argument furnishes Aristotle with a basis for transitioning from the discussion of formal aspects of *eudaimonia* in Book 1 toward a substantive account of human good. The *ergon* argument grounds Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* in the concept of human nature. It is introduced as an argument backed by a comparison with several *endoxa* of wise people, though it does not originate from them; it is derived from the claims made in the exoteric writings, via induction from particular cases, and from several principles developed in his other writings.

I have argued that the *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument reacts to at least two problems in the *Protrepticus* version. It simplifies the structure of the argument by equating

⁴²⁴ Cf. Stewart (1892a, 1) who notes that the Book 6 starts as if with two introductions.

the *ergon* of each thing to its goal (1219a8) and further, it explicitly argues that ‘the *ergon* of a thing is the same as the work of its virtue’ (1219a18-20). The second claim in particular is understandable when read as a reaction to the complicated structure of the double *ergon* introduced in the fragments of the *Protrepticus*.

Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as ‘the activity of a perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue’ (1219a38-39). This definition clearly elucidates that Aristotle bases his account of *eudaimonia* on the living activities (ζωή) of a human being. While the *Protrepticus* inquires into ‘living happily’ (7, 41.11-15) and the surviving fragments do not provide a definition of *eudaimonia*, the *Eudemian Ethics* clearly identifies *eudaimonia* with certain activities of living. I believe that this aspect is elaborated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and I will thus explore it further in the subsequent chapter.⁴²⁵ What is more, contrary to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly identifies the perfect virtue using the definition of *eudaimonia*. The perfect virtue is *καλοκάγαθία* (1249a16), and it is perfect in the sense of being composed of all of the partial virtues discussed thus far (1248b8-10). Moreover, it was made clear that *καλοκάγαθία* is perfect in that it bestows nobility to the natural goods and our actions in terms of our selection of the natural goods. Furthermore, *καλοκάγαθία* informs a certain approach to other virtues: the good and noble man possess virtues for their own sake and does virtuous actions for their own sake.

The definition of *eudaimonia* which arose out of the *ergon* argument prompted me to compare two different approaches towards ethical matters as presented in the two ethical treatises, the *Eudemian* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I have argued that the outcome of the *Eudemian Ethics* is more intellectualistic than is commonly believed. This can be attested to by the usage of the concept of ὅρος, the standard of telling apart the good from bad in the

⁴²⁵ See pp. 265-269.

case of the natural goods, such as health, honour and wealth. At the same time, the concluding lines of the *Eudemian Ethics* (though the text here has been revealed to be corrupted and extremely problematic) suggest that such a ὅρος is actually used for the goodness of the entire soul. This ὅρος must be discovered and applied in our action and choice. On the other hand, the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to abandon the idea that there can be such a general standard for ethical matters.

In the subsequent chapter, I will interpret the *ergon* argument as it appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while also enlisting the findings produced by my interpretation of the *Eudemian Ethics*. In the concluding section of the next chapter I will provide further support for my understanding of the general relation between the two *Ethics*.

The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

The *Nicomachean* version of the *ergon* argument is perhaps one of the most studied topics of Aristotle's ethics.⁴²⁶ Many scholars dislike this *ergon* argument and consider it to be either fallacious or useless.⁴²⁷ I will argue that the argument is not fallacious and that it should in fact be regarded as the basis of Aristotle's ethical theory as it is developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the following chapter I will defend my earlier claim that the *ergon* argument bridges the gap between the formal account of ethical notions such as virtue or *eudaimonia* and the substantive account of what these notions actually entail. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 is highly relevant for ordering the intellectual virtues in Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as for the discussion of *eudaimonia* and a happy life in Book 10. The relevance of the *ergon* argument for Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* as θεωρία will be made clear in the next chapter, though I will already allude to the fact that the *ergon* argument points in this direction.

Right before the *ergon* argument itself, Aristotle resumes the discussion concerning the good he seeks (1097a15). Aside from the methodological remarks from the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3-4 and several *endoxa* about the good, which Aristotle discusses in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5-6, it is clear that the good in question is the best one (τὸ ἄριστον, 1094a23), it is the goal which encompasses or surpasses all other goals (τὸ τέλος περιέχει ἅν τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, 1094b6) and finally, it is the highest of the practical goods or goods achievable by human action (τὸ πάντων ἀκρότατον τῶν πρακτῶν ἀγαθῶν, 1095a16-17).

⁴²⁶ From the copious literature on this argument, I found the following texts especially useful: Clark (1972), Korsgaard (1986), Hutchinson (1986), Whiting (1988), Kraut (1989) Chap. 3, Broadie (1991) Chap. 1; Reeve (1992) Chap. 1, Lawrence (2001); Lawrence (2006); Lawrence (2011), Müller (2003), Brüllmann (2010) Ch. 3, Brüllmann (2012) and recently Scaltsas (2019).

⁴²⁷ For the list of complaints see Achtenberg (1989, 37).

Aristotle repeats that the good is a goal (τέλος, 1097a23), thus rendering the good a practical good, something achievable through action. If there are more such goals, these will then be the goods (1097a23-24). This does not seem to add anything radically new to what is stated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1-2, though Aristotle does continue in his attempt to pinpoint what exactly this good actually is.

First, not all goals are final, but the best (τὸ ἄριστον) goal is a final one (τέλειόν τι, 1097a27). If there is one final goal, it is the good Aristotle seeks; if there are more final goals, than it is the most final one (τὸ τελειότατον τούτων, 1097a30). What is the meaning of 'τέλειος' here? It clearly designates a position at the top of a hierarchy or hierarchies of goals. This is clear from the argument at the beginning of the second chapter of Book 1:

'If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good (τὸ ἄριστον).'⁴²⁸

The chief good is final in the sense that there is no further end or goal beyond it. It remains unclear what the relation this chief good and ultimate goal have to other goals lower on the hierarchy. Is the chief good final because it includes the lower goods and goals, i.e. it is final

⁴²⁸ *Eth. Nic.* 1.2, 1094a18-22: Εἰ δὴ τι τέλος ἐστὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ὃ δι' αὐτὸ βουλόμεθα, τᾶλλα δὲ διὰ τοῦτο, καὶ μὴ πάντα δι' ἕτερον αἰρούμεθα (πρόεισι γὰρ οὕτω γ' εἰς ἄπειρον, ὥστ' εἶναι κενὴν καὶ ματαίαν τὴν ὄρεξιν), δῆλον ὡς τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον.

because it is complete? Or is the chief good final because it is the best good, the perfect good which exceeds all other goods?⁴²⁹

The term τέλειος itself cannot settle the dispute. In the philosophical dictionary from the *Metaphysics* 5.16, Aristotle says that the term τέλειος can mean:

- 1) 'that outside which it is not possible to find even one of the parts proper to it';
- 2) 'that which in respect of excellence and goodness cannot be excelled in its kind';
and it can apply to
- 3) 'the things which have attained a good goal.'⁴³⁰

The third option seems to be secondary or derivative compared to the first two.⁴³¹

Moreover, it cannot apply here, as we are inquiring into what an ultimate goal is, the answer to which cannot possibly be that it is a goal which has attained a good goal.

The last chapter revealed that καλοκάγαθία in the *Eudemian Ethics* is τέλειόν in the first meaning listed above. Aristotle deemed it the complete virtue due to being composed of the other virtues and further suggested a complex relation within the parts of καλοκάγαθία, namely between what is good and what is noble. Moreover, he provided an analysis of ὄρος, whereby the proper amount of natural goods could be ascertained. I suppose that if the good we were looking for was 'final' in the sense of completeness, then we would find a similar account of a complex entity or activity to serve as Aristotle's candidate for the good.

Aristotle would simply provide a similar account of the complete virtue as he does in the *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3.

⁴²⁹ This is, of course, the core of the ongoing debate between so-called 'inclusivist' and 'exclusivist' interpretation. I will come back to this discussion in the next chapter, see pp. 244-249.

⁴³⁰ *Metaph.* 5.16, 1021b12-1022a3; transl. W. D. Ross.

⁴³¹ Cf. Ross (1924, 332).

On the other hand, if the good we were looking for was final in the sense of perfection, i.e. it cannot be excelled with respect to excellence and goodness, we would be justified in expecting an account of a single entity or activity. This account would explain why this entity or activity is the best goal and why nothing can exceed it in excellence or goodness.

I believe that the good we are looking for is final in the second mentioned sense. The chief good is final because it is perfect, not because it is complete in that it encompasses all the relevant goods.⁴³² However, it is important to realize that even if the final good does not entail the lower goods as its parts, the hierarchical argument from 1.2 quoted above suggests an important teleological relation between them. The fact that the lower goods exist for the sake of the chief good (though they might be valuable in themselves as well)⁴³³ does not render them a part of the chief good. Yet, this does not separate the chief good from the lower goods either.

I will illustrate this point using the example of health. In *Physics* 7.3, Aristotle introduces the following definition of health: ‘bodily excellences such as health and fitness we ascribe to the mixture and due proportion of the warm and cold things, in relation either to each other or to what surrounds them.’⁴³⁴ Health is a good and it is the goal of many things we do. For

⁴³² I will argue for this conclusion while interpreting the relevant passages of the *ergon* argument (i.e. 1098a16-18) and for my discussion of how the *ergon* argument relates to the account of *eudaimonia* in Book 10 in the next chapter. As will be demonstrated, this chief good is *eudaimonia* understood as activity (ἐνέργεια). Activity is always ‘complete’ compared, for example, to κίνησις (cf. Burnyeat (2008) and my interpretation in the next chapter), though Aristotle considers it to be τέλειος because it is perfect and not because it is somehow mereologically complete; cf. a different approach in Müller (2003, 534) who nevertheless sees τέλειος to have different meanings in the two *Ethics* as well.

⁴³³ Aristotle clearly recognizes goods which are good both for something and good in themselves, cf. 1.7, 1097b2-5 discussed below; cf. Walker (2018, 15–6) for support for this interpretation of teleological ordering throughout Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁴³⁴ Arist., *Ph.* 7.3, 246b3-6, tr. Wicksteed and Cornford, modified by Hynek Bartoš to whom I am grateful for these references. For further attempts at defining health see *Ph.* 210a20-21 and 210b25-27, *Cat.* 8b37-9a1, *Gen. Corr.* 1.7, 324a15-19 and 324b1-3, *Top.* 139b21 and 145b8.

example, we brush our teeth so that they are clean for the sake of health, we exercise so that we are fit for the sake of health, we eat appropriately so that we have the right nutrition for the sake of health. Clean teeth, our fitness and right nutrition are goals of our actions through which we achieve health. However, this does not make them *parts* of health in the sense that they would be included in the answer to the question ‘What is health?’ Health is defined in terms of combinations and the due proportion of warm and cold things; it is not the sum of activities and entities conducive to health. On the other hand, water is H₂O, it is composed of hydrogen and oxygen, which have a particular kind of bond between them. Hydrogen and oxygen are constitutive parts of water. The lower goals and goods are not constitutive parts of happiness.

Compare the relation Aristotle suggests between *eudaimonia* and several other goods and goals:

‘honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy.’

τιμὴν δὲ καὶ ἡδονὴν καὶ νοῦν καὶ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν αἰρούμεθα μὲν καὶ δι’ αὐτά (μηθενὸς γὰρ ἀποβαίνοντος ἐλοίμεθ’ ἂν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν), αἰρούμεθα δὲ καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας χάριν, διὰ τούτων ὑπολαμβάνοντες εὐδαιμονήσειν. (1097b2-5)

Honour, pleasure, reason and virtues are lower goals compared to *eudaimonia*. We believe that we are happy *through them*, yet they do not figure in Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* and there are not treated as constitutive parts of it.⁴³⁵

Let us return to the formal characteristics of the good Aristotle seeks.⁴³⁶ After asserting that the chief good is τέλειος, he adds that τέλειος can be defined as that 'which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else' (τὸ καθ' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν ἀεὶ καὶ μηδέποτε δι' ἄλλο, 1096a33-34). This is—in accordance with the general opinions discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.4—*eudaimonia*, as it is unanimously treated as the final goal and thus does not prompt the question of why or to what end one seeks it.

Furthermore, the final good is 'self-sufficient' (αὐτάρκης, 1097b6-8);⁴³⁷ self-sufficient here does not mean individualistic or even egoistic. The human being is naturally social and solitary life does not suit him.⁴³⁸ In a solitary life, one misses out on the goods of the *polis*, family and friendship.⁴³⁹ Self-sufficiency is then carefully defined with respect to the way of life (βίος): 'the self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes life

⁴³⁵ Cf. similarly in Broadie and Rowe (2002, 14–5, 247–75).

⁴³⁶ See Curzer (1990) on the criteria for happiness.

⁴³⁷ I agree with Lear (2004, 48) that the condition of self-sufficiency does not threaten the monistic or exclusivist interpretation of *eudaimonia*, I quote from Lear: 'happiness is sufficient by itself to make a life worth choosing insofar as it is an ultimate *telos* or goal of all the actions, projects and decisions that together constitute the happy person's life.' Moreover, from my argumentation in the subsequent chapter, 'The *ergon* argument and *eudaimonia*,' it will be made clear that I fully endorse her tacit assumption that there is a difference between happiness as a goal and a person's happy life.

⁴³⁸ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1169b18-19 and the famous lines *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a2-3 for the claim that a human being is naturally a social animal.

⁴³⁹ Family, friends and social living are among the external goods which must be provided if *eudaimonia* is to be achieved (*Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1169b10).

desirable and lacking in nothing' (1097b14-15).⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, Aristotle sums up three main formal characteristics of *eudaimonia*, 'happiness is something final, self-sufficient and it is the end of action' (1097b20-21). The term 'final' should be read here as 'desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else,' since it is the only explication of 'τέλειόν' thus far.

According to Aristotle, this is a plain truth and he wants to provide a clearer or more distinct (ἐναργέστερον) account of *eudaimonia*. What is ἐναργέστερον is better known and somewhat more easily recognizable for us than its counterpart (cf. *An. Pr.* 68b36; *Mag. Mor.* 1187a30). Therefore, the following account should further elucidate what *eudaimonia* is and what it entails. The best way to clarify the concept of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle maintains, is by considering the *ergon* of human being (1098a24-25).

The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7

The status of the passage

What is Aristotle doing when he presents a clearer account of *eudaimonia*? The text in 1097b24-1098a20 is written as a closed argument with the conclusion that 'the human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting virtue' (1098a16-17). In the first half of 1.7, Aristotle introduces formal criteria for happiness. So far, the text has not stated what happiness consists of, though we have been informed of its distinctive features, i.e. what criteria must be fulfilled by any credible candidate of *eudaimonia*. In the chapters following the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, Aristotle claims that the common reputable opinions actually

⁴⁴⁰ Aristotle understands *eudaimonia* to be self-sufficient because an additional good can never perfect or enhance *eudaimonia* itself. Here I accept Wedin's interpretation of the lines 1097b14-18, cf. Wedin (1981, 257-260).

confirm the conclusion of the *ergon* argument. Furthermore, he discusses the process of acquiring happiness (i.e. the *Meno*'s question discussed in *Eth. Eud.* 1.1, 1214a14-25 as well), and the problem of the temporality of happiness. By the end of Book 1, he begins with a discussion of virtue which continues to span several books. The structure of Book 1 makes clear that the *ergon* argument opens up a more substantial ethical discussion. Without the *ergon* argument, Aristotle could hardly move from the formal aspects of happiness to the discussion in chapters 1.8-13, which already assumes the substantive conclusions made by the *ergon* argument. In the following interpretation, I will present the *ergon* argument as a bridge from the formal criteria of happiness to the beginning of a substantive account of what happiness entails.⁴⁴¹ Since the argument concludes that the chief human good is 'activity of soul exhibiting virtue,' the remaining task of practical philosophy is to explicate this virtuous action of the soul and the virtue as such.⁴⁴²

The argument starts with the concept of *ergon*, which is not explicitly introduced or defined in the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, I will argue that (a) the text presents all of the essential information needed for the argumentation and (b) it builds on the versions of the *ergon* argument found in the *Eudemian Ethics* as well as the *Protrepticus*. Nevertheless, certain qualifications must be highlighted. The text is more concise and less formally structured than the argument in both the *Protrepticus* and *Eudemian Ethics*. Therefore, the premises and particular steps of the argument require more thorough elucidation here. Moreover, compared to the other two versions, it seems to assume certain facts from Aristotle's biology and metaphysics which were less explicit in the arguments in the

⁴⁴¹ Similarly Pakaluk (2005, 74) and Müller (2003, 515–516); cf. Lawrence (2001, 453) for the same conclusion that the *ergon* argument introduces more than a formal discussion of human good.

⁴⁴² Korsgaard (1986, 260) similarly regards the *ergon* argument to be 'the basis of Aristotle's theory of virtues.'

Protrepticus and the *Eudemian Ethics*.⁴⁴³ Therefore, even if the arguments are interpreted primarily as self-standing pieces of argumentation, some excursions to other areas of Aristotle's philosophy will be needed more than with the previously discussed versions of the *ergon* argument. Aristotle himself concludes that the *ergon* passage was rather a roughly sketched outline (1098a20-22), which requires a more detailed analysis. Despite its argumentative structure, the passage is treated as a preliminary account or—as I have phrased it—as a bridge from a formal towards a substantive account of human good.⁴⁴⁴

Human ergon in the Nicomachean Ethics

After introducing the formal characteristics of happiness and explaining his intentions for the *ergon* argument (namely a clearer account of human good), Aristotle opens his argumentation claiming that:

'all things that have an ergon or activity, the good and 'well' is thought to reside in the ergon, so would it seem to be for a man, if he has a function.'

⁴⁴³ A good introduction to these biological and metaphysical aspects can be found in Scott (2018, 117–118, 153–154); cf. Lennox (1999) for an explanation of the biological aspects of human virtue. Karbowski (2019, 221–225) argues that Aristotle's *ergon* argument does not draw upon 'antecedently established psychological or biological principles' (p. 222). This claim is problematic for several reasons: (a) I argue that it is plausible to suppose that the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* draws on the versions in the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Protrepticus*; Karbowski does not mention these versions in his interpretation; (b) the claim that *ergon* is *telos* (and the related teleology) is not defended or developed in the *Ethics*, it is taken from other treatises; (c) the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* presupposes psychology developed in the *De anima* (which Karbowski (2019, 224) admits) including the notion of ζωή as activities of living. It seems that according to Karbowski, if Aristotle does not make an explicit reference to other writings, these writings are not 'drawn upon' by Aristotle, which seems to be a rather strict condition of limited interpretative use.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Zingano (2007, 323); or Hutchinson (1986) Ch. 3.2.

ὅλως ὧν ἔστιν ἔργον τι καὶ πράξις, ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ δοκεῖ τἀγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ
τὸ εὔ, οὔτω δόξειεν ἂν καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, εἴπερ ἔστι τι ἔργον αὐτοῦ.

(1097b26-28)

What might be the impetus behind the thesis that the good of all entities which do something can be found in their *ergon*?⁴⁴⁵ First, I believe this claim echoes the very opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle opens the treatise claiming that every art, inquiry, action and choice aims at some good (1094a1-2). There can be two types of goals: activity (ἐνέργεια) and product (ἔργον, 1094a3-4). The term ἔργον is used here in the more restricted sense of an external product. The notion of *ergon* developed in the *Eudemian Ethics* explicitly subsumed both activities and products (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a13-17). The *Nicomachean* version does not mention these two possibilities since—as will be made clear—the argumentation does not require such a distinction to be made, though it is well plausible that the concept of *ergon* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* can apply to activities as well as products. It is important to note that from the very outset of the treatise, Aristotle argues that we aim at some good and that this good is therefore the goal (τέλος) of our action. These goals can either be activities or products. If the concept of *ergon* used later actually extends to both activities and products, then Aristotle is justified in his claim that the good resides in the *ergon*.

Furthermore, Aristotle's opening claim in the *Nicomachean* version of the *ergon* argument is supported by its *Eudemian* counterpart, where Aristotle explicitly states that the *ergon* of each entity is its goal (1219a8). This claim also appears in the *Metaphysics* 9.8: 'For the *ergon* is the goal, and the activity the *ergon*; and that is why the name 'activity' (ἐνέργεια) is

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Barney (2008, 311–313) on this passage as well.

employed with respect to the *ergon* and points towards the fulfilment (ἐντελέχεια).⁴⁴⁶

Therefore, the claim that *ergon* is ‘goal’ is not limited to the *Eudemian Ethics*, as it seems to be a general notion of Aristotle’s metaphysics. If the *ergon* is a thing’s goal and the goal is what we aim at and we always aim at some good, then it follows that the thing’s good resides in its *ergon*.⁴⁴⁷

Aristotle has not yet established that a human being has an *ergon*. The conditional conclusion was that *if* a human being has an *ergon*, the good of the human being will reside in this *ergon*. Aristotle continues:

‘Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain erga or activities, and has man none? Is he born without an ergon?’⁴⁴⁸ Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has an ergon, may one lay it down that man similarly has an ergon apart from all these? What then can this be?’

*πότερον οὐν τέκτονος μὲν καὶ σκυτέως ἔστιν ἔργα τινὰ καὶ πράξεις,
ἀνθρώπου δ' οὐδέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἀργὸν πέφυκεν; ἢ καθάπερ ὀφθαλμοῦ*

⁴⁴⁶ *Metaph.* 9.8, 1050a21-23: τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τέλος, ἢ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον καὶ συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν. This passage has already been quoted above, pp. 148-149. Cf. *Cael.* 286a8-9: ‘everything that has a function is for the sake of its function’ (ἕκαστόν ἐστιν, ὧν ἐστιν ἔργον, ἔνεκα τοῦ ἔργου, transl. Reeve in Reeve (1992, 123)).

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. Whiting (1988, 39): ‘The fact that formal and final causes coincide in this way is important. For Aristotle generally associates the final cause with the good of the organism (*Metaph.* 983a30-b1, 1013b25-27) or with what is better for the organism (*Ph.* 198b4-9), and hence with something explicitly normative.’

⁴⁴⁸ Since the term ἀργός can mean ‘lazy’ or ‘idle’ as well, the suggestion that a human being is so naturally born might also have a comic force: one cannot accept that humans are naturally without anything to do when we see the work of carpenters and tanners, i.e. hard working people. I am thankful to Pierre Destree for this suggestion. However, this rhetorical or comic aspect is not the entire meaning of this passage; I believe Aristotle makes a serious implication that human beings have *ergon*, though he does not provide a complete argument here, cf. Karbowski (2019, 222–223) for an opposing interpretation.

καὶ χειρὸς καὶ ποδὸς καὶ ὅλως ἐκάστου τῶν μορίων φαίνεται τι ἔργον,
οὕτω καὶ ἀνθρώπου παρὰ πάντα ταῦτα θεῖη τις ἂν ἔργον τι; τί οὖν δὴ
τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη ποτέ; (1097b28-33)

Several authors maintain that Aristotle does not furnish his claim that a human being has an *ergon* with a valid argument in a proper logical form.⁴⁴⁹ According to them, the above-quoted passage is not a valid case of induction nor it is an argument by analogy. Too few examples are presented in order for well-founded induction to be made and they are expediently selected from only two categories (expertise or occupations and bodily parts). Moreover, there is no clear analogy between the particular examples and human beings.⁴⁵⁰

However, the crux of Aristotle's argumentation lies exactly in the nature of the two categories of examples listed: entities which have corresponding products. There are two uncontroversial truths in the text: different occupations have their own *erga* and body parts have their own *erga* as well. Therefore, a human being is composed of parts and each part has its own *ergon* in relation to the complex whole, i.e. to a human being.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, any occupation or social and family status that one holds has its *ergon* as well. I am composed of functional elements and since I am—for example—a son, a father and a lecturer, I always partake in the family and social positions which have their own *erga* as well (cf. 1097b11).

⁴⁴⁹ E.g. Suits (1974); Hardie (1968, 23–4); Gomez-Lobo (1989), Bostock (2000, 225) or recently Karbowski (2019, 222–223); a good summary of older objections is in Achtenberg (1989, 37–8).

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. criticism in Broadie (1991, 34). It is important that both expertise and arts as well as bodily parts have their *erga* in relation to a broader, complex entity: *polis* and a living body. The same seems to hold in the case of human beings as well, namely that the *ergon* of man makes sense in relation to a broader complex entity of the *polis*, cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a33-35.

⁴⁵¹ Clark (1972, 272) points out that according to Aristotle, the organs have functions (*erga*) only in relation to a given whole or parts of this whole, cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 7.10, 1035b23.

Aristotle thus suggests that it would be extremely unlikely for a being that is virtually surrounded by *erga*, i.e. products, to not have a product on its own.

First, consider the bodily parts of a human being.⁴⁵² The bodily parts and their activities are always considered in relation to the whole, i.e. to a living body:⁴⁵³ *‘and the finger is defined by means of the whole body; for a finger is a particular part of a man. ... A finger cannot in every state be a part of a living animal; for the dead finger has only the name in common with the living one’* (transl. Tredennick).⁴⁵⁴ The internal organs are not a cluster of entities wherein the *ergon* of each is independent of the whole. If we group several entities together—let me use artefacts for the sake of illustration—with independent functions, e.g. vacuum cleaner, CD player and mincer, we have a ‘whole’ in that each part has a function, but the whole has none. Yet, this is not the case of the body and its parts, for the bodily parts are defined as such with reference to the body. The bodily parts only make sense as bodily parts with reference to the whole. One could hardly ascertain what a finger is doing, what it is naturally for, unless it is considered as a part of a living organism.⁴⁵⁵

In the *Parts of animals* Aristotle claims that:

‘As every instrument and every bodily member is for the sake of something, viz. some action, so the whole body must evidently be for the sake of some complex action. Thus the saw is made for sawing, for

⁴⁵² Cf. Lloyd (1968); Lloyd claims that ‘the idea that there is an *ergon anthropou* is not an assumption that Aristotle simply takes for granted without discussion. It is, rather, a thesis which he seeks to establish by argument, that is by appealing to the two types of analogies at 1097b28ff.’

⁴⁵³ Clark (1972, 272).

⁴⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 7.10, 1035b10-11, 1035b24-25: ὀρίζεται καὶ ὁ δάκτυλος τῷ ὅλῳ· τὸ γὰρ τοιόνδε μέρος ἀνθρώπου δάκτυλος. ... οὐ γὰρ ὁ πάντως ἔχων δάκτυλος ζῶου, ἀλλ’ ὁμόνυμος ὁ τεθνεώς.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Barney (2008, 297). Moreover, as Clark (1975, 28) notices only man ‘has his parts in natural place (*Part. an.* 2.10, 656a7).’

sawing is a function, and not sawing for the saw. Similarly, the body too must somehow or other be made for the soul, and each part of it for some subordinate function, to which it is adapted.'

Ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ μὲν ὄργανον πᾶν ἔνεκά του, τῶν δὲ τοῦ σώματος μορίων ἕκαστον ἔνεκά του, τὸ δ' οὐ ἔνεκα πράξις τις, φανερόν ὅτι καὶ τὸ σύνολον σῶμα συνέστηκε πράξεώς τινος ἔνεκα πολυμεροῦς. Οὐ γὰρ ἡ πρίσις τοῦ πρίονος χάριν γέγονεν, ἀλλ' ὁ πρίων τῆς πρίσεως· χρήσις γὰρ τις ἡ πρίσις ἐστίν. Ὡστε καὶ τὸ σῶμά πως τῆς ψυχῆς ἔνεκεν, καὶ τὰ μόρια τῶν ἔργων πρὸς ἃ πέφυκεν ἕκαστον. (*Part. an.* 1.5, 645b15-645b20, transl. W. Ogle)

In both passages, Aristotle assumes that if a whole is composed of parts which have a function and which are for the sake of something, the corresponding whole is naturally for the sake of something and has a function as well. As I have said, it is imperative that the parts in question, namely the bodily parts, are always defined in relation to the whole.

Aristotle then assumes that if the proper meaning⁴⁵⁶ of a given part is defined as the part of a whole, then this whole must be a meaningful whole. It must be a whole which does something, which is for the sake of something, and thus unequivocally has an *ergon*.⁴⁵⁷

Second, what is the purpose of the reference to the *ergon* of a flute-player, sculptor, carpenter, tanner or any artist? The usage of expertise (τέχνη) always implies a normative aspect. In other words, one can work well or badly; one can be a good carpenter or a bad

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. ὁμώνυμος in *Metaph.* 7.10 1035b24-25 quoted above.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Tuozzo (1996, 148). Nussbaum (1995) argues that it is wrong to assume that since bodily parts have *ergon*, the whole should have *ergon* as well, since she maintains that Aristotle never ascribes *ergon* to creatures as wholes; Johnson (2005, 219) shows that her claim is wrong by quoting and interpreting e.g. *Gen. An.* 1.4, 717a21-22 and *Part. An.* 2.2, 648a15-16.

carpenter and interestingly enough, one can be such a bad carpenter as to not be a carpenter at all. Furthermore, similarly as in the case of bodily parts, the *erga* of different crafts are to be understood in the context of a larger whole (*Politics* 3.4, 1276b20-29).

It is clear that a man has an *ergon* as a carpenter or a flute-player. However, does he have an *ergon* as a man? Once again, being a carpenter or a flute-player suggests that the entity which accepts these roles or occupations *does* something, it presupposes a certain activity and action. Moreover, it does more than presuppose the activities of woodworking or flute playing, since picking up these roles, deciding to be a carpenter or a flute player, is an activity and choice which is not the activity of a given τέχνη. In order to be a craftsman with a clear *ergon*, one must be a human being, which is not a social role or craft.⁴⁵⁸ The *ergon* of a human being has not yet been made clear and Aristotle continues in his search to find a suitable candidate for it.

What could it be? Aristotle asks, and continues:

‘Living seems to belong even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the living of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a living of perception, but it also seems to be shared even by the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active living of the element that has reason; of this, one part has it in the sense of being obedient to reason, the other in the sense of possessing reason and exercising thought. And, as ‘life of the rational element’ also has two meanings, we must state that living in the sense

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Barney (2008, 297): ‘the carpenter and shoemaker are here said to have *praxeis*, actions, as well as *erga*, and *praxeis*, since they require *prohairesis*, deliberative choice, are a distinctively human form of behaviour (*Eth. Nic.* 6.2, 1139a31-b5).’

of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term.'

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ζῆν κοινὸν εἶναι φαίνεται καὶ τοῖς φυτοῖς, ζητεῖται δὲ τὸ ἴδιον. ἀφοριστέον ἄρα τὴν τε θρεπτικὴν καὶ τὴν αὐξητικὴν ζωήν. ἐπομένη δὲ αἰσθητικὴ τις ἂν εἴη, φαίνεται δὲ καὶ αὕτη κοινὴ καὶ ἵππῳ καὶ βοῖ καὶ παντὶ ζώῳ. λείπεται δὲ πρακτικὴ τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος· τούτου δὲ τὸ μὲν ὡς ἐπιπειθὲς λόγῳ, τὸ δ' ὡς ἔχον καὶ διανοούμενον. διττῶς δὲ καὶ ταύτης λεγομένης τὴν κατ' ἐνέργειαν θετέον· κυριώτερον γὰρ αὕτη δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι. (1097b33-1098a7; transl. Ross and Brown, adapted)

Aristotle starts with the most general activity at hand: living (ζωή). It is an undeniable fact that human beings live. What can be said about this living? In the chapter on the *Protrepticus*, I pointed out that ζωή generally stands for the activities of living.⁴⁵⁹ This is stated in the *De anima* 2.2⁴⁶⁰ as well as in the *Eudemian Ethics* 7.12,⁴⁶¹ where Aristotle claims that, in the case of human beings, this living must be regarded as a kind of knowing. Similarly, according to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, human 'living' properly understood is then the activity of perceiving and thinking.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. above p. 151.

⁴⁶⁰ *De an.*, 2.2 413a22–25: 'But living is spoken of in several ways. And should even one of these belong to something, we say that it is alive: reason, perception, motion and rest with respect to place, and further the motion in relation to nourishment, decay, and growth.' (transl. Shields)

⁴⁶¹ *Eth. Eud.*, 7.12, 1244b23–29: 'The matter will become clear if we ascertain what living is (τὸ ζῆν), as activity and as end. It is evident that it is perception and knowledge ... For every individual self-perception and self-knowledge is the most desirable of all things, and that is why an appetite for living is inborn in each of us, for living must be regarded as a kind of knowing.' (transl. Kenny)

⁴⁶² *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1170a19: τὸ ζῆν εἶναι κυρίως τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἢ νοεῖν.

Here Aristotle excludes plain living understood in the terms of nourishment, growth and decay (these activities represent the most general meaning of living for all mortal living beings; cf. *De an.* 2.1, 412a14-15), which is also intrinsic to plants and the living of perception, which we share with all animals. Both of these points are made to elucidate that these two kinds of living are not *proper* or *peculiar* (ἴδιον) to human beings.⁴⁶³

The *Eudemian* version of the *ergon* argument did not make the stipulation that the *ergon* in question should be peculiar or proper to the given entity. No such claim is made in the *Protrepticus* either, though the text does present the concept of a proper way of life (Iamblichus, *DCMS* 23, 70.16-21) and more importantly the notion of a proper virtue (οἰκείαν ἀρετήν, *Protr.* 7, 41.23). Aristotle claims that everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its *own proper* virtue—and to achieve this is called its ‘good’ (ἀγαθόν). This does not amount to the claim that a given *ergon* should be something *proper* or *peculiar* to a given entity, though the term οἰκείος already suggests something own or proper for a given entity. Plato, in Book 1 of the *Republic* at 352e4, defines *ergon* as: ‘that which one can do only with it or best with it’ (ὁ ἂν ἢ μόνῳ ἐκείνῳ ποιῆ τις ἢ ἄριστα). A little later at 353b14-353d2, he claims that ‘anything that has an *ergon* performs it well (εὖ ἐργάζεται) by means of its proper virtue (τῇ οἰκείᾳ ἀρετῇ).’

What is the meaning of the ἴδιον condition here and does it relate to the concept of a proper virtue introduced in the *Protrepticus* and Plato’s *Republic*?⁴⁶⁴ The meaning of ἴδιον here can be either ‘peculiar,’ which points in the direction of Plato’s concept of *ergon*, or ‘proper’ in

⁴⁶³ Whiting (1988, 36) offers an interpretation according to which Aristotle believes that ‘that for each species there is an ultimate end such that realizing that end (which Aristotle identifies with living a certain sort of life) is categorically or unconditionally good for any normal member of that species.’

⁴⁶⁴ Particularly useful accounts of this problem are Kraut (1979) which is later corrected in Kraut (1989, 312–9); Whiting (1988, 198), Müller (2003) and Barney (2008).

the general sense, which might allude to the essence of a given entity.⁴⁶⁵ There are at least two problems posed by reading the term to mean ‘peculiar’ in the strict Aristotelian sense developed in the *Topics* 1.5, 102a18-30. First, according to the *Topics*, the term does not allude to the essence of a given entity (ἴδιον δ' ἐστὶν ὃ μὴ δηλοῖ μὲν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, 102a18). However, it has been established that the *ergon* of a human being is its *telos* and as such it relates to our essence. Moreover, Aristotle at one point in the *Meteorology* closely links *ergon* together with the substance of a given entity:

What a thing is is always determined by its function: a thing really is itself when it can perform its function; an eye, for instance, when it can see. When a thing cannot do so it is that thing only in name, like a dead eye or one made of stone.

ἅπαντα δ' ἐστὶν ὠρισμένα τῷ ἔργῳ· τὰ μὲν γὰρ δυνάμενα ποιεῖν τὸ αὐτῶν ἔργον ἀληθῶς ἐστὶν ἕκαστον, οἷον ὀφθαλμὸς εἰ ὀρᾷ, τὸ δὲ μὴ δυνάμενον ὁμωνύμως, οἷον ὁ τεθνεὼς ἢ ὁ λίθινος.

(*Mete.* 4.12, 390a10-12; transl. Webster)

It is unclear as to what exactly Aristotle means by ‘showing the essence’ as articulated in the *Topics*. However, given the close relation between *ergon* and the substance of a given thing as proposed in the *Meteorologica*, it is rather persuasive that the meaning of ἴδιον used in the *ergon* argument cannot be the one developed in the *Topics*.

⁴⁶⁵ Kraut (1979) suggests that the peculiarity is relative to the immediate context; on the other hand, Whiting (1988) and Barney (2008) argue that the meaning must be ‘proper’ not ‘peculiar.’ Reeve (1992, 126) argues for the meaning of peculiar, yet he agrees with Whiting that it must point towards the essence of a given entity.

Second, the *Topics* describe ἴδιον as something that ‘belongs to a given entity alone’ (102a18-19). Yet, as will be revealed, the *ergon* of a human being will be problematized in this respect, for the relevant activity—the activity of reason—seems to be shared with other entities, namely the gods, which possess it to an even greater extent than humans (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1178b21-23; 1178b25-28).⁴⁶⁶ In order to avoid this complication, Richard Kraut points out the distinction between absolute and relative peculiarity that is also developed in the *Topics* (1.5, 102a18-28). If we understand ἴδιον in relative terms, i.e. only in relation to the immediate context it appears in, then our search will be one for something ‘that sets us apart from plants and animals – rather than something that sets us apart from *all* living things whatsoever, including the gods.’⁴⁶⁷

For the reasons stated above, many authors opt for understanding ἴδιον to mean ‘proper,’ i.e. *ergon* would be something proper to us and would refer to the essence of human being⁴⁶⁸, or it would allude to the best realization of our nature.⁴⁶⁹ I am strongly sympathetic to this interpretation of the ἴδιον so that the *ergon* is related to or reveals something important about what we, humans, are. Moreover, I will later argue that even the possible problem of sharing in contemplation with the gods does not threaten the peculiarity of our *ergon* as many interpreters believe to be the case.⁴⁷⁰

This means that Aristotle seeks something that is *proper* to us, human beings, and what distinguishes us from other living things, especially the so-called ‘lower life forms’ of plants

⁴⁶⁶ For an articulation of this concern and for a different treatment of the ἴδιον condition, see e.g. Roche (1988, 183).

⁴⁶⁷ Kraut (1989, 316).

⁴⁶⁸ Whiting (1988, 37); Reeve (1992, 126, fn. 35).

⁴⁶⁹ Barney (2008, 301).

⁴⁷⁰ I will revisit this problem later in section ‘The second reply’, pp. 231-234.

and animals. Moreover, as D. S. Hutchinson illustrates, Aristotle believes that there is a certain hierarchy of value between the activities characteristic of each life form:⁴⁷¹

‘For to the essence of plants (τῆς τῶν φυτῶν οὐσίας) belongs no other function or business (ἄλλο ἔργον οὐδὲ πράξις) than the production of seed. ... But the ergon of the animal is not only to generate, which is common to all living things, but they all of them participate also in a kind of knowledge, some more and some less, and some very little indeed. For they have sense-perception, and this is a kind of knowledge (ἡ δ’ αἰσθησις γνῶσις τις). If we consider the value (τὸ τίμιον) of this we find that it is of great importance compared with the class of lifeless objects, but of little compared with the use of the intellect. For against the latter the mere participation in touch and taste seems to be practically nothing, but beside plants and stones it seems most excellent; for it would seem a treasure to gain even this kind of knowledge rather than to lie in a state of death and non-existence.’
(*Gen. An.* 1.23, 731a25-b4; transl. Platt)

The ἴδιον condition and comparison with other life forms introduces a hierarchy of living activities; we must distinguish human beings from lower life forms, i.e. we should not live like plants—merely nourishing and reproducing ourselves—nor like animals and beasts.⁴⁷² If there is something proper to us, human beings, then fully realizing this means realizing what we are, what is natural and proper for us. Failing to achieve this means failing to

⁴⁷¹ Hutchinson (1986, 60).

⁴⁷² Cf. *Protrepticus* 5, 35.14-18: ‘when sensation and intellect are taken away, a human becomes roughly the same as a plant; when intellect alone is taken away, he turns into a beast; when irrationality is taken away but he remains in his intellect, a human becomes like a god’; and the interpretation in Johnson (2018, 60–1) and a similar conclusion based on the *Nicomachean Ethics* alone in Whiting (1988, 42).

realize what we are; moreover, destroying the capacity which manifests itself in the activity of our *ergon* would be a destruction of what we are.⁴⁷³

Finally, Aristotle claims that ‘an active living of the element that has reason’ (πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος, 1098a3-4) is what remains after rejecting the living shared with lower life forms.⁴⁷⁴ The living that Aristotle identifies as the *ergon* of human being has two characteristics: it is a ‘kind of active living,’ or in Michael Pakaluk’s words, a ‘kind of living displayed in action’⁴⁷⁵ (πρακτική τις) and it is the living of that which has reason (τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος). Aristotle further focuses on the latter, though the ‘practical’ aspect should not be neglected either. What is πρακτικός pertains to action and therefore deliberation and choice. The term πρακτικός can be used in opposition to θεωρητικός (cf. *Eth. Nic.*, 6.2, 1139a26-29 and 10.7, 1177b6), though this distinction has not yet been established.⁴⁷⁶

However, Aristotle might assume a twofold role of πρακτικός here. First, as will be made clear, action (πρᾶξις) is one of the differences between our way of life and that of the gods (1178b17-18), i.e. calling our living πρακτικός might be an additional reason as to why this *ergon* is peculiar to us despite the fact that we share θεωρία with the gods. Second, in order to achieve *eudaimonia* we need action (cf. 1100a2). Aristotle himself even talks about human θεωρία in terms of action (*Pol.* 7.3, 1325b14-22). Therefore, it seems that the phrase πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος does not directly exclude θεωρία or the theoretical way of

⁴⁷³ Whiting (1988, 42); cf. similarly Achtenberg (1989, 43).

⁴⁷⁴ In the *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a8-18 Aristotle lists additional characteristics which are ‘peculiar’ or ‘proper’ to man: articulated speech and a sense of good and bad which allows him to live in societies or communities. These characteristics do not threaten the coherence of the *ergon* argument in *Eth. Nic.* 1.7 since they are both derived from the fact that man is endowed with reason.

⁴⁷⁵ Pakaluk (2005, 78).

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. a detailed interpretation of these lines in Lawrence (2001, 458–459) who similarly argues (a) for a loaded notion of πρακτική but (b) against its direct contrast with contemplation.

life described in *Eth. Nic.* 1.5. In this sense, θεωρία might be one of the activities of living.⁴⁷⁷

This must be considered when interpreting Aristotle's further reasoning.

Next, Aristotle distinguishes two parts of that which has reason in us: one has reason in the sense of being obedient to it, the other part truly has reason and thinks. This division anticipates the division of the rational part of the soul in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13, 1103a2-3: 'that which has *logos* will be twofold, one having it in the strict sense and in itself, and the other having a tendency to obey as one does one's father.' Accordingly, living is said to be twofold, and Aristotle employs this distinction to make clear that he means living in the modus of ἐνέργεια, i.e. actively using reason, not merely following it. Now it is evident that the *ergon* argument poses a similar problem for interpretation as the entire text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. On the one hand, *ergon* is said to be πρακτικός living; on the other hand, Aristotle is concerned with the activity of the part of the soul which has reason in the strict sense and in itself. The virtues of this soul part, such as wisdom (σοφία) or practical wisdom (φρόνησις), are called intellectual virtues in contrast to the moral or practical virtues, such as liberality or temperance (1103a3-7). Yet again, Aristotle presents the problem of attributing the activity of reason to practical living.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Burnet (1904, 35) understands the passage to talk about the active living of the rational part where πράξις covers θεωρία as well; similarly, Gauthier and Jolif (1970b, 56) write that 'la vie active inclut aussi bien la contemplation que l'action.' Stewart (1892a, 99) refers to the passage in *Politics* 7.3, 1325b16-30 where Aristotle defends θεωρία from the critique that it is 'doing nothing' and claims that even θεωρία is rightly called a sort of πράξις. Stewart then understands the phrase to mean 'a life consisting in the action of the rational part,' which I believe to be correct. Irwin (1999, 184) considers that the phrase πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος might have the meaning of 'a life of goal-directed activity that is its own end, in a broad sense of "activity" that may include study (JJ: i.e. θεωρία)' and finds support for this alternative in the passage from *Politics* 7.3 introduced earlier by Stewart. Broadie and Rowe (2002, 276) utilize the same passage to reinforce a similar conclusion, stating that πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος does not exclude θεωρία.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. section 'Postscript: *horos* or *stochos*? A note on the relation between the two *Ethics*' in the chapter on the *Eudemian Ethics* above, p. 128-141.

Aristotle continues rewording and specifying the *ergon* of human being, introducing the role of the virtues and linking the argumentation back to the notion of human good. I will quote the entire passage and interpret it with respect to its division as suggested in the text:

(A) Now if the ergon of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies reason, and (B) if we say 'a so-and-so' and 'a good so-and-so' have an ergon which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of virtue being added to the name of the ergon, for the ergon of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well: if this is the case [and (C) we state the ergon of man to be a certain kind of living, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the ergon of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the proper virtue: if this is the case], (D) human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most perfect. (E) But we must add "in a perfect life". For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.'

(A) εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἔργον ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατὰ λόγον ἢ μὴ ἄνευ λόγου, (B) τὸ δ' αὐτὸ φάμεν ἔργον εἶναι τῷ γένει τοῦδε καὶ τοῦδε σπουδαίου, ὥσπερ κιθαριστοῦ καὶ σπουδαίου κιθαριστοῦ, καὶ ἀπλῶς δὴ τοῦτ' ἐπὶ πάντων, προστιθεμένης τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν ὑπεροχῆς πρὸς τὸ ἔργον· κιθαριστοῦ μὲν γὰρ κιθαρίζειν, σπουδαίου δὲ τὸ εὖ· εἰ δ'

οὕτως, (C) [ἀνθρώπου δὲ τίθεμεν ἔργον ζωὴν τινα, ταύτην δὲ ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν καὶ πράξεις μετὰ λόγου, σπουδαίου δ' ἀνδρὸς⁴⁷⁹ εὖ ταῦτα καὶ καλῶς, ἕκαστον δ' εὖ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν ἀποτελεῖται· εἰ δ' οὕτω,] (D) τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ' ἀρετὴν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην. (E) ἔτι δ' ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ. μία γὰρ χελιδὼν ἔαρ οὐ ποιεῖ, οὐδὲ μία ἡμέρα· οὕτω δὲ οὐδὲ μακάριον καὶ εὐδαίμονα μία ἡμέρα οὐδ' ὀλίγος χρόνος. (1098a7-20; transl. Ross and Brown; adapted)

Parts (A), (B) and (C) are conditions or premises for the conclusion reached in (D); (A) seems to be based on the previous text and this consequence requires further explication; (B) introduces the role of virtue which is parallel to its role in the previously discussed versions of the *ergon* argument and I believe that it tacitly assumes some conclusions furnished by the *Eudemian* version of the argument. Part (C) is a repetition or brief summary before the presentation of conclusion (D). Bywater suggests excluding (C), as he does not see the purpose of such repetition. However, repetition is not grounds for exclusion. Hutchinson is right in that the passage introduces the important notion of 'proper virtue,' which is why I believe that it belongs to the text. Passage (E) is an important qualification of the conclusion.

The *ergon* of human being is said to be the activity of the soul with reason or not without reason. Is it justified to change the subject from the human being to the soul? The soul is the subject since it is what makes one alive (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a23-25; cf. *De an.* 2.1, 412a27-29) and it is the *eidos* of a living being (*De an.* 2.1, 412b10 ff.). Therefore, it can be said that

⁴⁷⁹ Together with Ross or Irwin I take it that the genitive ἀνδρὸς depends on the suppressed term *ergon* so that it produces the meaning of '... the *ergon* of a good man ...'. Another possible translation, e.g. in Reeve (2014), would be that 'it is characteristic of an excellent man too.'

human *ergon* is an activity of one's soul, since the soul is the *eidos* of man; moreover, if the *ergon* in question is a kind of living, the soul is the subject which 'does' the living.

Passage (B) in lines 1098a8-12 introduces two important points: First, Aristotle says that the *ergon* of a given entity and that of the same but *good* entity is the same in kind (τῷ γένει). In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the *ergon* of a thing is the same as the *ergon* of the relevant virtue (*Eth. Eud.*, 2.1, 1219a19-20). I have interpreted this as a rectification of the problems arising from the concept of a double *ergon* posed by the *Protrepticus*. Since the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* started with an explication of the notion of virtue (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1218b38-1219a5), Aristotle elaborated on the *ergon* of a thing and the *ergon* of the relevant virtue. The *Nicomachean Ethics* however, has not yet provided an account of what virtue is or what it does. Therefore, Aristotle does not make as clear of a distinction here: 'we say "a so-and-so" and "a good so-and-so" (τοῦδε καὶ τοῦδε σπουδαίου) have an *ergon* which is the same in kind.' He means, for example, a lyre-player and a good lyre-player. Both the *Eudemian* as well as the *Nicomachean* version use σπουδαῖος to describe a good entity; we saw that the *Eudemian* version even employs the term σπουδαῖος together with a product, e.g. a good shoe is a σπουδαῖος shoe. Aristotle means that if the *ergon* of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, the *ergon* of a good lyre-player will be to play the lyre well.

In order to clarify his reasoning, Aristotle introduces the second important point from the passage (B): the role of virtue. What is the difference between the *ergon* of a given entity and the same, good entity if the *ergon* is said to be the same in kind? Aristotle responds by alluding to the addition of 'eminence in respect of virtue' (τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν ὑπεροχῆς). Aristotle is more informative here than in the *Eudemian Ethics* by specifying that there is a certain eminence or superiority bestowed to the *ergon* in question. This eminence is κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν. This is the first occurrence of this phrase in the *Nicomachean* version of the *ergon* argument; the second is in the repetitive lines (C), and the third is in the conclusion of

the *ergon* argument at 1098a16-17.⁴⁸⁰ The first two occurrences receive much less attention than the one presented in the conclusion. The meaning of the first two occurrences must be the same, since passage (C) ties into and reformulates passage (B) and preserves the same meaning of the phrase. Nothing suggests that Aristotle alters the meaning of the phrase for the conclusion of the *ergon* argument. Richard Kraut suggests that when something is or is done ‘κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν,’ it makes use of or actualizes this virtue.⁴⁸¹ The superiority would then lie in exercising, actualizing this virtue. The good lyre-player would play well since he actualizes the ἀρετή of lyre-playing. Virtue is thus the distinguishing mark between the mere act of doing and doing something well.⁴⁸²

Passage (C), 1098a12-16 is excluded by Bywater in his edition of the text, yet it remains in all translations at my disposal.⁴⁸³ The passage is repetitive, but it does bring to light at least one new point. Aristotle repeats that the *ergon* of man is a certain kind of living, namely the activity and action of the soul that has reason, which a good man will do well, since ‘any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the proper virtue (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν)’ (1098a15). The concept of a proper or own virtue is absent from the *Eudemian Ethics*; on the other hand, the *Protrepticus* version of the *ergon* argument opens with: ‘everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν), for to have obtained this is good’ (*Protr.* 7, 41.22-23).⁴⁸⁴ Later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that ‘the virtue of a thing is relative to its proper

⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, cf. κατ' ἐνέργειαν at 1098a6.

⁴⁸¹ Kraut (1989, 238); his argumentation is supported by passages 1099a11, 1100b12-17 and 1177a9-18. See Walker (2018, 19–20) for a broader understanding of κατὰ.

⁴⁸² It seems that Aristotle accepts Plato's formal concept of ἀρετή from the *Republic* 1: ἀρετή is that through which or by which we do a certain activity well. See the dative ἀρετῆ in Plato, *Resp.* 1, 353c6 which suggests that our accomplishments are the product of virtue.

⁴⁸³ Cf. Hutchinson (1986, 19–20) for an argument against this exclusion.

⁴⁸⁴ The same phrase is used by Plato in the *ergon* argument in *Resp.* 1, 353c6-7; cf. 353e2.

ergon.⁴⁸⁵ This suggests an additional parallel between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Protrepticus*, since the *Protrepticus* puts forth that each *ergon* has its own peculiar virtue, which is the only relevant virtue for the given *ergon*.

This is, of course, a different line of thought from the one in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where the relevant virtue was καλοκάγαθία, the complete or perfect virtue, which subsumes both practical and intellectual virtues. The final definition of *eudaimonia* in the *Eudemian Ethics* is that it is ‘the activity of a perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue’ (1219a38-39). The perfect virtue, καλοκάγαθία, is then composed of all the partial virtues discussed thus far in the treatise (1248b8-10). Introducing the notion of a ‘proper virtue’ suggests that Aristotle might have a single virtue and a single *ergon* in mind. In fact, Aristotle introduces the notion of a ‘proper virtue’ in the *Protrepticus* right before his deliberation on whether human beings are simple living beings or composed of several capacities:

So if a human is a simple animal whose substance is ordered according to reason and intellect, there is no other function for him than only the most precise truth, i.e. to tell the truth about existing things; but if several capacities are ingrown in him, it is clear that, of the several things he can naturally bring to perfection, the best of them is always a function.

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀπλοῦν τι ζῶον ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ κατὰ λόγον καὶ νοῦν τέτακται αὐτοῦ ἢ οὐσία, οὐκ ἄλλο ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἔργον ἢ μόνη ἢ ἀκριβεστάτη ἀλήθεια καὶ τὸ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀληθεύειν· εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἐκ πλειόνων δυνάμεων συμπεφυκός, δῆλόν ἐστιν ὡς ἀφ' οὗ πλείω πέφυκεν

⁴⁸⁵ *Eth. Nic.* 6.2, 1139a15-17: ἡ δ' ἀρετὴ πρὸς τὸ ἔργον τὸ οἰκεῖον.

ἀποτελεῖσθαι, ἀεὶ τούτων τὸ βέλτιστον ἔργον ἐστίν. (*Protr.* 7, 42.13-19;

transl. Hutchinson and Johnson)

Such a thought could not hold in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where *eudaimonia* is ‘the activity of a perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue’ (1219a38-39) and the virtue is perfect (τελεία) because of (a) its completeness and (b) because it adds something valuable to the natural goods. The notion of completeness invalidates the consideration about simplicity on the one hand and a plurality of capacities, *erga* and virtues on the other. My reason for dwelling on this difference so much is that immediately in the following passage (the conclusion labelled (D) in the text above), we find a deliberation that is structurally the same as the two alternatives regarding human nature from the *Protrepticus* quoted above.

Aristotle concludes the *ergon* argument by saying that ‘human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most perfect’.⁴⁸⁶ Here, Aristotle explicitly reflects on the possible plurality of the relevant virtues and suggests that this plurality be reduced to the best and most perfect one. This step in the argument suggests that, akin to the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle seeks a single virtue which is relevant to the given part of the soul.⁴⁸⁷ It is telling that such a reflection is yet again absent from the *Eudemian Ethics*, where Aristotle considers the complete virtue to be composed of particular virtues.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ *Eth. Nic.* 1.7, 1098a16-18: τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ’ ἀρετὴν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην.

⁴⁸⁷ Moreover, later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posits that, in a way, the human being is this soul part: *Eth. Nic.* 9.8, 1168b34-1169a3 describes this part as τὸ κυριώτατον of human being; Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a19-29 as well.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. a completely different consideration which is absent from the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (on *Eth. Nic.* 6.12, 1144a5 cf. footnote 503), at *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1220a2-4: ‘And just as physical well-being is constituted by the virtues of several parts, so is the virtue of the soul when it is complete’ (transl. Kenny). I understand the conjecture that reduces the possible plurality of virtues to the best one in lines 1098a16-18 to support

Is Aristotle justified in making the conclusion of the *ergon* argument in terms of human good?⁴⁸⁹ According to D. S. Hutchinson and others, an explicit premise connecting human good and human *ergon* appears to be lacking here.⁴⁹⁰ However, the premise is in fact present, right at the beginning of the argument: ‘all thing that have an *ergon* or activity, the good and the well is thought to reside in the *ergon*’ (1097b26-27). I have argued that this claim is based (i) on the opening passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and (ii) on the identification of *ergon* as a goal. Furthermore, I believe this claim can be substantiated by the formal role of virtue which is introduced both as a result of induction in the *Eudemian Ethics* and stated as ‘the eminence in respect of virtue’ (τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν ὑπεροχῆς) in the *Nicomachean* version. A virtue is that which makes a given *ergon* a good one. If the *ergon* of man is activity and action of the soul which has reason (1098a13-14) and it is κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν, i.e. it is ‘perfected’ by virtue or exhibits the activity of virtue, it is the well performed *ergon* or goal of man which is the good of man. Therefore, Aristotle is justified in concluding the *ergon* argument in terms of human good.

When Aristotle writes that human good is the activity of the soul ‘exhibiting virtue’ (κατὰ ἀρετὴν) it means that this activity is done well because virtue is what ‘perfects’ or ‘elevates’ a given activity or entity. At the same time, the virtue in question is active, it is actualized virtue in activity, not a potential state.⁴⁹¹ The account of human good is no longer purely formal. In addition to the formal characteristics of *eudaimonia* developed in the first half of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, human good is presented as the activity of the soul, namely the

the exclusivist (or dominant end) interpretation; even J. Cooper (1975, 99) agrees that this passage favours an exclusivist, intellectualistic interpretation, a similar conclusion is e.g. in Kenny (1992, 86–87).

⁴⁸⁹ This is seen as a mistake by Glassen (1957); discussed in Hutchinson Hutchinson (1986, 56).

⁴⁹⁰ Hutchinson (1986, 56).

⁴⁹¹ Cf. a concise and clear formal explanation given by Lawrence (2001, 449): ‘F’ing well is F’ing in accord with excellence(s) proper (*oikeia*) to F’ing.’

part or portion of it that involves reason in a particular manner. None of these are formal or conceptual points; Aristotle later cites this as the reason as to why a student of politics must study the human soul to the extent needed in order to understand human good (1102a12-26). Gawin Lawrence argues that the concept of ἀρετή remains formal (i.e. without substantive content) throughout the *ergon* argument.⁴⁹² We do not yet know what virtue is, apart from the formal account which can be deduced from the text: it is what makes a given activity or entity a good one. We do not know, so to say, anything ‘material’ or ‘substantial’ about it, Aristotle does not say what it is until the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, Aristotle makes clear that it is the virtue of the rational part of the soul which does not merely obey reason, but which actively ‘uses’ reason. Moreover, it must be the virtue ‘own’ or ‘proper’ to it. These two points already offer up some substantial information concerning the virtue (or virtues) in question.

Aristotle continues that human good is an activity of the soul exhibiting virtue and ‘if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with best and most perfect’ (κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην, 1098a17-18). This phrase belongs among the most crucial passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as interpreting it correctly determines which of the two general approaches should be employed when interpreting *eudaimonia* in the treatise. How then should the superlative ‘τελειοτάτην’ be understood? Does Aristotle suggest a perfect virtue in the sense of completeness (such as καλοκόγαθία in the *Eudemian Ethics*)⁴⁹³ or does he

⁴⁹² Lawrence (2001, 448–9).

⁴⁹³ For this understanding in relation to the *ergon* argument, see esp. Ackrill (1980); Roche (1988); Roche (2014) and Gomez-Lobo (1989); see a rather comprehensive list of inclusivist interpretations in Heinaman (2007, 223, fn. 4).

suggest a perfect virtue in the sense of excellence, i.e. the best of the virtues?⁴⁹⁴ This is, of course, at the core of the long-standing inclusivist-exclusivist debate.⁴⁹⁵

The interpretation of the phrase ‘the most perfect virtue’ in the sense of completeness finds the strongest support in the immediately following lines where Aristotle talks about the perfect or complete life (1098a18), which clearly refers to the duration of life, i.e. a complete life of a certain duration. However, I will later demonstrate that this cannot mean duration exclusively.⁴⁹⁶ I shall now turn to the earliest comprehensive interpretation which gives credence to an understanding of *τελειότητα* as ‘the most complete.’ In his pioneering article that laid down the foundations for an inclusivist interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Ackrill quotes two passages which allegedly attest to the claim that the virtue in question is the most complete (1100a1-5 and 1102a5-7).⁴⁹⁷ However, in 1100a1-5, Aristotle does not discuss virtue but life span (*βίος*) and ‘*τελεία ἀρετή*’ is only mentioned to clarify that this perfect or complete virtue still requires a complete life as well. Similarly, the lines 1102a5-7 do not support Ackrill’s conclusion, since Aristotle merely states that ‘since *eudaimonia* is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue (*κατ’ἀρετὴν τελείαν*), we must consider what virtue is, since we might thus see better what *eudaimonia* is.’ Furthermore, Timothy Roche cites *Rhetoric* 1.9 1366b1-3 as just grounds for understanding ‘*τελειότητα*’ as ‘most complete,’ and Aristotle indeed posits that ‘parts of virtue are justice, courage, temperance ... practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom.’ However, Aristotle is not referring to a complete or perfect virtue here, but rather to a distinction between *ἀρετή* as

⁴⁹⁴ For this understanding, see J. Cooper (1975); Heinaman (1988); Kenny (1992, 16–9); Lear (2004, 44–5); with certain conditions Broadie (1991, 39) and Lawrence (2001) as well.

⁴⁹⁵ I will revisit this debate at the beginning of the next chapter ‘The *ergon* argument and *eudaimonia*,’ pp. 244–249.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. important but generally neglected passage in *Ph.* 2.2 194a31–33.

⁴⁹⁷ Ackrill (1980, 28–9).

such (καθόλου) and parts of it (περὶ τῶν μορίων, *Rhet.* 1.9, 1366b23-25). This is not merely a terminological dispute, as it implies a more general problem. The *Rhetoric* is supposed to discuss the art of rhetoric and its success. The status of the account about *eudaimonia* is thus problematic; Aristotle seems to operate with general opinions rather than his own philosophical concepts.⁴⁹⁸

The exclusivist interpretation, on the other hand, understands the phrase ‘κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην’ to indicate one single virtue, which might be identified later in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as wisdom (σοφία). According to this interpretation, the meaning of τέλειος in 1098a17-18 must be the same as in the passages immediately preceding the *ergon* argument, where it means ‘final’ or ‘perfect.’⁴⁹⁹ Robert Heineman argues:

‘But in fact, if we assume that ‘teleion’ means the same at 1097a30 and 1098a18, then it can be proved that ‘the most teleion’ virtue at 1098a18 cannot mean ‘the most comprehensive virtue’. For Aristotle explains what he means by ‘more teleion’ (teleiotes) 1097a30-b6, and that explanation is incompatible with an interpretation of ‘teleion’ as meaning ‘complete’. I take 1097a30-b6 to be saying: x is more teleion than y if: (i) x is chosen for its own sake and y is always chosen for the sake of something else, or (ii) x is chosen for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else, and y is chosen for its own sake and for the sake of something else. Aristotle gives wealth as an example of an end which is chosen for the sake of something else (1097a27), and honor as

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Lawrence (1997, 50) and especially Hutchinson and Johnson (2018, 122). Compared to the ethical treatises, the *Rhetoric* employs different conceptions of happiness as well as virtue; cf. Irwin (1996) and Woerner (1992) for these differences; J. Cooper (1975, 122–123) treats—mistakenly in my opinion—the passage from the *Rhetoric* as relevant for understating the conception of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s ethics.

⁴⁹⁹ E.g. J. Cooper (1975, 99–100); Kenny (1992, 16–7).

*an example of something chosen for its own sake (1097b24). So honor is more teleion than wealth on Aristotle's criterion. But of course honor is not a more complete or comprehensive end than wealth.*⁵⁰⁰

Therefore, if Aristotle uses the term τέλειος in the same manner as he does directly preceding the *ergon* argument, he does not mean 'most complete virtue' but 'most final' or 'most perfect virtue.'

Moreover, the virtue in question is a virtue of the activity of the soul (1098a16); this activity is singular throughout the *ergon* argument. It is one single activity of the human soul.

However, as David Reeve argues, there cannot be a complete activity related to a complete virtue (i.e. complete, including theoretical as well as practical virtues), since the activity of wisdom is leisured and the activity of φρόνησις, for example, is unleisured and a single activity cannot be both leisured and unleisured.⁵⁰¹

Moreover, as argued above, the term 'proper virtue' or 'own virtue' (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν) presented in 1098a15 together with the explicit consideration of two options concerning the relevant virtue ('and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete') constitute a different form of argumentation than the one found in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where the final virtue is the complete virtue of καλοκάγαθία. I believe that the pattern of thought mirrors the *Protrepticus*, according to which there is a single relevant virtue, namely ἐπιστήμη.⁵⁰² Moreover, the *Eudemian Ethics* proves that when Aristotle introduces the concept of a complete, complex virtue, such as καλοκάγαθία, he

⁵⁰⁰ Heinaman (1988, 38). Reeve (1992, 130–1) independently reaches the same conclusion that the meaning of τέλειος must be supplied from the previous text; cf. Lawrence (2005, 59) as well.

⁵⁰¹ Reeve (1992, 129).

⁵⁰² Cf. 'The *ergon* of a human being according to the *Protrepticus*' above, pp. 100-105.

does so explicitly and discusses its structure and inner-workings.⁵⁰³ Therefore, the line of thought exhibited in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that the meaning of τέλειος is ‘final’ in the sense of perfection, not completeness.⁵⁰⁴

For all of the above reasons, I am more inclined to claim that the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* actually supports the exclusivist reading, which maintains that Aristotle does not introduce the concept of a complete virtue at this point in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵⁰⁵ Instead, he alludes to the most perfect virtue, which is not yet specified. At this point, it is evident that the virtue in question will be the virtue related to the activity of the rational soul part, namely the part where reason is active and not to the part which merely obeys reason, i.e. to the most perfect of intellectual virtues.⁵⁰⁶

Even if one assumes, as I do, that Aristotle is referring to the best virtue and not complete virtue,⁵⁰⁷ it is still open for debate as to which virtue is meant here as the ‘best and most

⁵⁰³ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 8.2-3. However, cf. *Eth. Nic.* 6.12, 1144a5: ‘so does philosophic wisdom produce *eudaimonia* ... being a part of virtue entire’ (ἡ σοφία ... μέρος γὰρ οὐσα τῆς ὅλης ἀρετῆς). This is the only occurrence of the concept of a complex whole virtue and a particular virtue as its part in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Grant (1866, 183) notices that this concept is foreign to the *Nicomachean Ethics* but is developed in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Gauthier and Jolif (1970b, 543–5) list further parallels and similarities of the passage *Eth. Nic.* 6.12 1144a3-9 (which I will discuss later in section ‘Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronésis*’, pp. 247-249) to the *Eudemian Ethics*.

⁵⁰⁴ A similar conclusion based on different argumentation can be found in Müller (2003, 534) as well; according to Müller the meaning of τέλειος in the *Eudemian Ethics* means complete, whereas in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it means final in the sense of perfection, i.e. that which cannot be exceeded in goodness.

⁵⁰⁵ One further argument which validates the reading of τέλειος as perfect instead of complete might be the opening of *Eth. Nic.* 10.7 which refers back to the *ergon* argument: ‘If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us.’ (Εἰ δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὐλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην· αὕτη δ’ ἄν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. 1177a12-13). It is clear here that Aristotle cannot mean a complete, complex virtue; rather he implies a single virtue of the best part of human being.

⁵⁰⁶ I will resume this interpretation later in the section ‘Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronésis*’, pp. 244-249.

⁵⁰⁷ For example Irwin (1999, 185) leaves the possibility of a complete virtue open.

perfect' (1098a17-18). Are there any suggestions in the text of the *ergon* argument which would indicate which virtue Aristotle has in mind? I believe that some implications are made, however, they are not enough to provide a clear answer. Nevertheless, I do not believe this to be a failure of the *ergon* argument, as it is not intended to provide a unanimous definition of *eudaimonia*. The *ergon* argument should help to elucidate the content of *eudaimonia*, and is thus the first but by no means last step in a long answer.

When Aristotle seeks to find what is ἴδιον, own or peculiar to us, he comes up with 'active living of what has reason' (1098a3-4). As the meaning of this can be twofold, namely 'obeying reason' on the one hand and 'having reason and thinking' on the other, Aristotle makes clear that he is referring to thinking as an activity (κατ' ἐνέργειαν, 1098a6). This would suggest that Aristotle considers wisdom (σοφία) to be the virtue of the part of the soul which has reason and thinks.⁵⁰⁸

However, the immediately following clause problematizes this very conclusion. Aristotle continues using the conditional 'if the *ergon* of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies reason ...' (ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατὰ λόγον ἢ μὴ ἄνευ λόγου, 1098a7-8). The phrase 'ἢ μὴ ἄνευ λόγου' in particular, which could be translated as 'not without reason,' relativizes the earlier conviction that Aristotle is referring to the highest virtue of the soul part which actively thinks. This broader concept brings φρόνησις back into play since it is the primary virtue of a different, but still rational, part of the soul.⁵⁰⁹

As will be elucidated in the next chapter,⁵¹⁰ the sixth book might shed some light on this passage. I will only make some preliminary observations at this point in my interpretation.

⁵⁰⁸ Kenny (1992, 86) argues that σοφία is the most perfect virtue as well.

⁵⁰⁹ See Lear (2004, 5) on this problem; even the detailed interpretation by Lear does not provide a clear-cut answer.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. 'Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronésis*,' pp. 244-249.

First, the ultimate conclusion of Book 6 is that φρόνησις is not superior to σοφία, but rather that it provides for it (1145a6-9). Second, when Aristotle describes the inner-workings of these two virtues, he claims that σοφία is the formal cause of *eudaimonia*,⁵¹¹ whereas the human *ergon* is performed in accordance with φρόνησις and moral virtue (1144a3-9).

The following points attest to σοφία as the virtue in question: (i) it should be the virtue of the part of the soul that actively thinks (1098a6), (ii) σοφία is higher or superior to φρόνησις (1145a6-9) and (iii) the *ergon* argument should elucidate the concept of *eudaimonia* and that σοφία produces *eudaimonia* (1144a3-4). Practical wisdom, on the other hand, seems to be a candidate for the ‘best and most perfect’ virtue mentioned in 1098a17-18, since (i) the *ergon* argument says that the *ergon* of man might be an activity of the soul ‘which follows or implies reason,’ thereby implying a weaker or broader notion of reason than the one associated with σοφία; (ii) in 1144a3-9, Aristotle claims that human *ergon* is attained by φρόνησις and moral virtue.

In the subsequent chapter, I will argue that the virtue in question is σοφία. This cannot be demonstrated solely on the basis of the text of the *ergon* argument and the answer requires a more comprehensive interpretation of *eudaimonia*. I believe that this will also facilitate an explanation as to why one unequivocally needs φρόνησις and moral virtue in order to reach our human *ergon*.⁵¹²

Finally, as an important coda to the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes: ‘But we must add “in a perfect life” (ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ). For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed

⁵¹¹ Cf. Lear (2004, 116).

⁵¹² The unresolved opposition between σοφία and φρόνησις within the *ergon* argument is another illustration of the crucial problem that occupies Aristotle: what is the relation between the practical and the theoretical in our lives?

and happy' (1098a18-20). Most interpreters agree that the phrase 'in a perfect life' refers to the entire duration of one's life which is necessary in order for one to become virtuous and practice the relevant virtues.⁵¹³ This passage has been glossed with a parallel passage in the *Eudemian Ethics*: 'one cannot be happy just for one day, or while a child, or only for the prime of one's life' (Kenny's translation; 1219b5). The following passage on the need of a sufficiently long life at 1100a1-9 supports this chronological reading:

'For this reason also a boy is not happy; for he is not yet capable of such acts, owing to his age; and boys who are called happy are being congratulated by reason of the hopes we have for them. For there is required, as we said, not only complete virtue but also a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan Cycle; and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy.'

Yet, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle disagrees with Solon that one has to be happy without interruption until one's befitting death (1101a6-13).⁵¹⁴ Therefore, the meaning of 'ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ' does not seem to be a chronological one in the sense 'from the beginning till the end.' Moreover, in *Physics* 2.2, Aristotle says that it is baseless to talk about the *telos* of a human being in temporal terms (i. e. as an end of one's life, τὸ ἔσχατον), since the true *telos* of a human life is the best one (τὸ βέλτιστον, *Phys.* 2.2 194a31-33). Therefore, the meaning of 'ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ' seems to be chronological, as one needs to live a sufficiently long life in order to become virtuous and exercise the relevant virtues or virtue. However, this does not

⁵¹³ Cf. Pakaluk (2005, 83) and Kraut (1989) for the most comprehensive interpretations.

⁵¹⁴ See Rassow (1874, 116-9) who already raised this issue.

seem to be the only condition. It is not merely the length of one's life which renders it τέλειος.⁵¹⁵ I will argue that the best life is not only sufficiently long so as to enable one to become mature and virtuous, but it must be structured around and for the sake of the relevant goal as well (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.5).⁵¹⁶

Aristotle concludes the *ergon* argument by saying that human good was defined, though it was only mapped out in order to better approximate what he means before he proceeds to describe it in more detail (1098a20-22).⁵¹⁷ This description then fills the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and reaches its peak in Book 10, where Aristotle once again mentions that the human good, *eudaimonia*, is 'an activity in accordance with virtue' (κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, 1177a12). The best activity we are capable of is contemplation (θεωρία, 1177a18). Aristotle thus comes back to the activity of reason, mentioned in the first book during the *ergon* argument (1098a4-5 compare with 1177a13-17), and declares that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία (1178b32). However, I will reserve these considerations for the subsequent chapter.

⁵¹⁵ The following argumentation from Paul Farwall is indicative of the interpretations which maintain that *eudaimonia* itself requires a complete lifetime: 'At *Metaphysics* 1048b18-35 Aristotle lists being happy alongside more standard examples of activities such as seeing, thinking and understanding. If being happy is indeed an *energeia* it is a very odd one. Unlike seeing, thinking and understanding, being happy requires a considerable period of time - in fact, the bulk of a life.' Farwall is hesitant to accept Aristotle's explicit claim and his assumption that *eudaimonia* requires 'a bulk of time' is based on the questionable lines 1098a18-20. Cf. Farwell (1995, 259). I will take an opposing stance in my interpretation and will simply try to make sense of what Aristotle says about *eudaimonia* as ἐνέργεια, cf. section 'Theoria as eudaimonia' at 249-260.

⁵¹⁶ I will come back to this issue later in the discussion on *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177b25 on p. 250. Cf. Grant (1885, 451) suggesting that the τέλειος does not only have a chronological meaning but indicates other factors that make it worthy of choice.

⁵¹⁷ Dirlmeier (1999, 280-1) presents a comprehensive interpretation of these lines.

Objections and replies

I tried to present Aristotle's conception of the *ergon* of human being as convincingly as possible. I will now turn to three objections in the opposite direction in order to pave the way for a substantial discussion about human *eudaimonia* based on human *ergon*. According to the first objection, the *ergon* argument is fruitless within the overall argumentative structure of the *Eth. Nic.*, as Aristotle actually presents not one but two morally satisfying lives: the life of moral virtue described in the central books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the contemplative life mapped out in Book 10. Given that Aristotle clearly argues for the superiority of the contemplative life in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, the *ergon* argument plays only a minor role in introducing the moral virtues and is cast aside in the crucial and concluding Book 10.⁵¹⁸

The second objection is as follows: even if one admits that the *ergon* argument is consistent with conclusions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, the *ergon* that Aristotle deems fitting for man does not meet his own criteria for *ergon* since (a) it is not unique (*ἴδιον*), as it is not only men but also (and foremost) the gods who contemplate and enjoy the activity of reason.⁵¹⁹ Moreover (b) there are many other activities or doings peculiar to human beings which Aristotle does not suggest and does not discuss.⁵²⁰

Finally, the third objection claims that the good of a human being does not have to be good *for* a human being.⁵²¹ Specifically, if justice is an excellence or virtue of human character, it characterizes the good life of a human being. However, a just man might suffer because of

⁵¹⁸ Roche (1988, 183). This objection is entertained in Korsgaard (1986, 260) as well.

⁵¹⁹ Kraut (1979).

⁵²⁰ Whiting (1988, 36–8); Broadie (1991, 36); Williams (2008, 59).

⁵²¹ Wilkes (1978).

his own justice. In the same way as sharpness is a good or virtue of a knife, it is hard to see how it is good *for* a knife.

The first reply

Is it indeed the case that Aristotle uses the *ergon* argument solely in order to arrive at the description of a moral life based on the so-called moral virtues⁵²² only to abandon it in Book 10? Or in other words, is Aristotle guilty of introducing θεωρία as *eudaimonia* in Book 10 despite and against the methodology and argument in the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics*? The possible answer is twofold. First, I will show that Aristotle does not abandon the *ergon* argument and that the conclusion in Book 10 corresponds to the principles furnished by the *ergon* argument in Book 1. Second, it is demonstrable that Aristotle reflects on the relation between a contemplative and practical life in the middle books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a manner that facilitates our understanding of the relation between moral virtues and contemplative virtues. I will make my case solely using textual evidence, with minimal or even no interpretation. A proper and detailed interpretation of these passages is to be found in the subsequent chapter ‘Divine Activity and Human Life.’

Indeed, it is the case that the term *ergon* is missing from crucial chapters on the contemplative life (i.e. *Eth. Nic.* 10.7-8), though it does play an important role in Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure in Chapter 5 of Book 10. Aristotle uses the example of different *erga* in order to support his thesis that ‘activity’s own pleasure contributes to increasing the activity’ (1175a30-31). Each man takes pleasure doing his own *ergon* rather than the *ergon* of anyone else; every entity gets better at his own activity due to the pleasure he derives from it and this pleasure is said to ‘increase’ this activity as something which is ‘own’ to it

⁵²² On so-called moral virtue cf. *EN* 2.1, 1103a13; 2.9, 1109a20; 6.2, 1139a22; 6.12, 1144a7.

(1175a31-b1). This argument then leads Aristotle to the general conclusion that: ‘each kind of creature seems to have its own kind of pleasure, just as it has its own *ergon*, for the pleasure corresponding to its activity will be its own’ (δοκεῖ δ’ εἶναι ἐκάστῳ ζῴῳ καὶ ἡδονὴ οἰκεία, ὥσπερ καὶ ἔργον· ἢ γὰρ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, 1176a3-5).

Moreover, Aristotle refers to the thesis that everyone derives the most pleasure from doing what is his or her own in the conclusion concerning the contemplative life as the happiest life. Once again, I will quote directly:

‘Again, what was said before will fit with the present case too: what belongs to each kind of creature is best and most pleasant for each; for man, then, the life in accordance with intelligence is so too, given that man is this most of all. This life, then, will be happiest.’ (1178a4-8)

This refers back to Chapter 5 mentioned above. The quoted passage suggests that the contemplative life is closely tied to the *ergon* of human being.⁵²³ This is the answer to the question of what sort of life is lived by someone who sees human good in ‘an activity of soul in accordance with virtue and if there are more virtue than one, in accordance with the best and the most complete’ (1098a16-18).

The entire argument of these lines confirms that the *ergon* argument is not forgotten in Book 10. Aristotle claims that the activity of reason (νοῦς) is the perfect *eudaimonia* of man,⁵²⁴ though he immediately problematizes it in that: such a life exceeds what is human (1177b26-27). There are two possible ways of addressing this concern. First, the more careful approach would be to suggest that the *perfect eudaimonia* (ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία) is reserved

⁵²³ Of course much depends on the understanding of life (βίος), see Keyt (1989) for one possible interpretation. Cf. section ‘Bios as a way of life’ on pp. 269-275.

⁵²⁴ Arist., *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177b16-26; the phrase ‘perfect *eudaimonia* of man’ (ἡ τελεία δὴ εὐδαιμονία αὐτῆ ἄν εἴη ἀνθρώπου) explicitly says that the *eudaimonia* in question is human not divine.

for divine beings, whereas we, mere humans, should only aspire for a glimmer of it and live a human life. Another alternative would be to show that human *eudaimonia* as ἐνέργεια does not differ from the *eudaimonia* of the gods, though we do not share the same kind of life (βίος). I believe the latter interpretation best approximates what Aristotle is referring to in the following lines.⁵²⁵

Aristotle counters the saying that mortals should think mortal thoughts⁵²⁶ by claiming that one must act immortal or become immortal as much as possible (ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν, 1177b33).⁵²⁷ This passage has been interpreted as a sequence to the ending of Plato's *Timaeus* and therefore within the tradition of the 'becoming like god' doctrine.⁵²⁸ Regardless of the differences within this interpretation,⁵²⁹ placing this passage within this tradition poses several important implications. As has already been noted, the duration of life itself is not directly in question.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, Aristotle seems to exhort towards imitating an important feature of divinity, namely the activity of reason. Lastly, the

⁵²⁵ See the section 'The second reply' below. Lear (2004, 195) offers an argument according to which moral action is itself godlike; Segev (2017, 107) shows her argument to be controversial. Moreover, for my interpretation it is sufficient to claim that we share θεωρία with the gods but differ in our respective ways of life (if it can be said that the gods or god has βίος at all).

⁵²⁶ See Pindar *Isthm.* 5.16, Sophocles *Tereus* fr.290; see Long (2019, 63–9) for a recent interpretation of these lines.

⁵²⁷ Different translations are listed in Long (2019, 64); there is no parallel passage in Aristotle which could aid in establishing the correct meaning and translation. In the *Protrepticus* 8, 48.12 Aristotle writes that νοῦς and φρόνησις are the only immortal and divine things in us; though the passage might be attributed to the Pythagorean character, cf. Hutchinson and Johnson (2018) and the edition Hutchinson and Johnson (2017) ad loc.

⁵²⁸ Sedley (1997).

⁵²⁹ Long (2019, 66) distinguishes between the doctrinal and local explanation, i.e. he asks whether the text explicates Aristotle's opinion that intellect is immortal (cf. *De an.* 3.5, 430a23) or merely responds to the popular axiom 'mortals think mortal thoughts.'

⁵³⁰ Long (2019, 64): 'the length of a life makes no contribution, in itself, to 'immortalization': someone who never engages in intellectual contemplation but has an abnormally long life, prolonged (let us imagine) over several centuries, has not come any closer towards what Aristotle is recommending.'

assimilation to god is presented here in an ethical treatise as an ethical goal, akin to Plato's *Theatetus* 176b-c.⁵³¹

Aristotle admits that living a theoretical life, i.e. a life centred around θεωρία as its goal, would be our living insofar as there is something divine in us. He then makes two argumentative steps which echo passages from the *ergon* argument both in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as the *Protrepticus*. Human nature is undoubtedly composite, as we are beings of reason but also flesh and bone. Yet, one part of us, namely reason, is something divine according to Aristotle. This part is superior to any other part and to our composite nature as such (1177b28-29).⁵³² This is a similar consideration as the one concerning the simplicity or complexity of human nature in the *Protrepticus* 7, 42.13-20: even if human nature is composite, the *ergon* will be the activity of the best capacity in him. Analogous to the *ergon* argument in Book 1, Aristotle says that human good is 'an activity of soul exhibiting virtue and if there are more than one virtue in accordance with the best and most perfect one' (1098a17-18).

Indeed, Book 10 immediately picks up this line of thought, positing that the activity of this part is superior to any activity in accordance with other virtues (1177b29). This is a complicated claim and I believe it to be a condensed articulation based on Aristotle's views on the transitivity of value. The different parts of a complex whole are hierarchically ordered and reason is the most superior one. The argument presupposes that each of these parts can do something, they have a certain capacity and corresponding activity when active. Each activity has a corresponding virtue which makes a given activity a good one (as the virtue of flute-playing is responsible for playing well). Therefore, Aristotle claims here

⁵³¹ Cf. Sedley (1997, 328).

⁵³² On the possible references to the composite element cf. Reeve (2014, 346).

that the activity of νοῦς is better than any other activity of a human being and thus its virtue is superior to other virtues as well.⁵³³ Moreover, we are this reason, since it is the ‘authoritative and better part’ of us (1178a2-3).⁵³⁴ Therefore, Aristotle continues, it would be strange if a man were to choose a way of life different from his own based on what a human being is.⁵³⁵ Moreover, as quoted above, one’s own way of life is the best and most pleasant that one can live.⁵³⁶

Second, this interpretation is supported by Aristotle’s own reflection on the relation between the contemplative life on the one hand and the life of moral virtues on the other. Within the discussion of the intellectual virtues in Book 6, Aristotle compares φρόνησις and σοφία on two occasions (1141a18-22, 1143b33-35). These comparisons yield the same results: σοφία is above φρόνησις since its objects belong to the greatest and most valuable ones within the cosmos (1141a19-20) and wise people (σοφοί) have the knowledge of first principles (1141a18). Moreover, σοφία is said to rule and command over φρόνησις since it either creates φρόνησις itself or supplies it with material to work with.⁵³⁷

⁵³³ This might also lend support to the claim that the best and most perfect virtue mentioned in the *ergon* argument (1098a17-18) is actually wisdom (σοφία).

⁵³⁴ The same conclusion has already been suggested in *Eth. Nic.* 9.8, 1168b34-1169a3; cf. section ‘Theória as eudaimonia’ in the next chapter. For references to Aristotle’s related texts cf. Dirlmeier (1999, 593); my interpretation is similar to Lear (2004, 188–193). Monan (1968, 129) rightly notes that man is said to be reason ‘more than anything else’ in the *Protrepticus* 7, 42.4 ; for the relation to Plato’s *Republic* see J. Cooper (1975, 168–9).

⁵³⁵ Plato argues similarly in the *Philebus* 21c-22c against the hedonistic way of life; cf. Nussbaum (1995) and my reaction to her interpretation in the section ‘*Ergon* argument in other dialogues’ pp. 61-62 above.

⁵³⁶ For more on this see Walker (2018, 169–170)

⁵³⁷ The sentence goes as follows: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄτοπον ἂν εἶναι δόξειεν, εἰ χείρων τῆς σοφίας οὐσα κυριώτερα αὐτῆς ἔσται· ἢ γὰρ ποιούσα ἄρχει καὶ ἐπιτάττει περὶ ἕκαστον (1143b33-35). The explicative *gar* clause is puzzling and translators do not agree on its meaning. Stewart (1892b, 97) reads the clause so that σοφία supplies material for φρόνησις. Most translations understand the phrase to mean that σοφία brings about or produces φρόνησις.

Aristotle further claims that despite this comparison, both virtues of φρόνησις and σοφία are independently desirable since they each belong to a different part of the soul (1144a1-3). This means that both virtues satisfy an important condition of *eudaimonia* (cf.1097a32-34) and cannot be substituted. Aristotle then proceeds to describe what these virtues do. Aristotle explicitly states that wisdom produces *eudaimonia* in the soul (1144a4-5).⁵³⁸ φρόνησις and the moral virtues contribute to fulfilling the *ergon* of man, virtue is responsible for possessing the right ‘mark’ to aim at in action (σκοπός) and the rationality for the right means leading to it (1144a7-9). Therefore, the contemplative life seems unquestionably higher than the life of moral virtue. Nevertheless, virtue and rationality are necessary, albeit not sufficient, components of *eudaimonia*, as without them one could not fulfil one's own *ergon*.⁵³⁹

The second reply

The second objection is comprised of two parts. According to the latter, Aristotle neglects the various specific doings of man. This can be answered with the help of his explicitly stated methodology.⁵⁴⁰ When Williams criticizes Aristotle's interpretation for arbitrarily choosing one peculiar doing of man without discussing other options, he writes: ‘If one approached without preconceptions the question of finding characteristics which differentiate men from other animals, one could as well, on these principles, end up with a morality which exhorted men to spend as much time as possible in making fire; or developing peculiarly human physical characteristics; or having sexual intercourse without

⁵³⁸ It is said that σοφία produces *eudaimonia* not as a physician produces health but as health produces a good state in the body; Stewart (1892b, 98) comments extensively on the analogy with health and its implications.

⁵³⁹ Compare *Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177a27ff. on self-sufficiency in relation to intellectual and moral virtues.

⁵⁴⁰ An extremely useful article is Barnes (1980).

regard to season; or despoiling the environment and upsetting the balance of nature; or killing things for fun.’⁵⁴¹ Let us accept that these characteristics are peculiar to man and are not contingent upon our rationality. Nonetheless, Aristotle presents a fairly reasonable reply: first, all of these suggestions are absurd and unconvincing as an ethical ideal; second, human *ergon*, as has been established, has a strong relation to our essence, which these additional peculiar activities lack. This is enough to disqualify them from a serious inquiry. When Aristotle reflects upon his methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he makes clear that he is not obliged to go through all logically possible options. Firstly, the study of ethics does not allow for the same degree of precision as, for example, mathematics or metaphysics (1094b19-27). Secondly, and more importantly, it takes into consideration only the most credible opinions and the most important (1145b2-7). Therefore, Aristotle is not obliged to examine all peculiarities of a human being. Anyone who suggests, for example, that making fire is a human *ergon* serving as the basis for human *eudaimonia* should first genuinely experience a life based on such an *ergon* before making this claim.⁵⁴²

The variety of peculiarities found in human beings does not threaten Aristotle’s argument. However, how can we reconcile the fact that on the one hand he claims that *ergon* must be something ἴδιον (1097b34) and then identifies *eudaimonia* with θεωρία (1178b32), which is rather a life of gods than humans (1178b25 ff.)?⁵⁴³ Aristotle uses the term ἴδιον in order to

⁵⁴¹ Williams (2008, 59). Broadie (1991, 36) lists different characteristics but her argument is the same.

⁵⁴² Shields (2007, 319) convincingly argues against this objection in the case of ‘functions’ or activities that are done by *some* members of a given species (and no other species) such as ‘driving in Cadillac.’ However, the objection above enumerates general activities which could easily be shared across the entire species (such as making fire or having sex regardless of the season).

⁵⁴³ See Kraut (1979) and Kraut (1989) Ch. 6.1; for a detailed interpretation of what living like a god could mean, see Broadie (1991, 408–412). My account will be much simpler (and I believe more accurate), as Broadie’s interpretation does not seem to take into consideration the distinction between θεωρία as ἐνέργεια and hence ultimately *eudaimonia* and βίος θεωρητικός as a particular way of life open to humans, cf. the subsequent chapter ‘The *ergon* argument and *eudaimonia*.’

reject the plain fact of living (ζωή) as human *ergon* since it is common to every living thing, including plants. He further excludes the form of life based on sensation, as it is common to all animals (1097b33-1098a3). Therefore, when looking for a human *ergon* that is ἴδιον, Aristotle lands at a complex form of ‘practical living of an entity that possesses reason’ (1098a3-4). This living is indeed ἴδιον for human beings as gods relate to θεωρία in a different way and their form of life cannot be called practical because it is not based on doing (πρᾶξις). Aristotle considers contemplation as one possible kind of human doing⁵⁴⁴ and nothing human can last in its activity without interruption (1175a4-5). On the other hand, gods do not do anything since no doing (πρᾶξις) can be worthy of them (1178b17-18). The gods are active in the sense of ἐνέργεια not πρᾶξις, and their activity is contemplation.⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, god is this ἐνέργεια and is thus constantly happy.⁵⁴⁶ The living of the gods is blessed in its entirety, while our lives are only blessed in so far as they bear some semblance to the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the gods. Simply put, while contemplation is something that humans do (on occasion), it is the very essence of what god actually is.⁵⁴⁷ Human beings can only be similar to god, as it is in the moments of θεωρία that they share

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Arist., *Pol.* 7.3, 1325b16-21: ‘Yet it is not necessary, as some suppose, for a life of action to involve relations with other people, nor are those thoughts alone active which we engage in for the sake of action’s consequences; the study and thought that are their own ends and are engaged in for their own sake are much more so. For to do or act well is the end, so that action of a sort is the end too.’ (transl. Reeve)

⁵⁴⁵ *Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178b21-22: ὥστε ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνέργεια, μακαριότητα διαφέρουσα, θεωρητικὴ ἂν εἴη. Aristotle never mentions πρᾶξις in relation to god or the gods; he consistently uses ἐνέργεια. Cf. Grant (1885, 236).

⁵⁴⁶ On god as ἐνέργεια see *Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b26-28: καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει· ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια· ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδῖος. A couple of lines earlier it says that god’s ἐνέργεια is also his pleasure (ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου, *Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b16) and in *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a21-23 Aristotle says that god possesses the good solely by virtue of what god is (ἔχει γὰρ καὶ νῦν ὁ θεὸς τὰγαθὸν ἀλλ’ ὧν ὅ τι ποτ’ ἐστίν).

⁵⁴⁷ Wilkes (1980): 345 writes that ‘the gods do nothing else.’ This is incorrect, as the gods do not do anything, they *are* the ἐνέργεια of contemplation. Cf. the subsequent chapter ‘Divine Activity and Human Life’ for a further elaboration on this topic; a detailed interpretation of this question and possible answers can be found in Lawrence (2011, 345–55).

in the same ἐνέργεια that constitutes the essence of god. Within these (perhaps rare) moments we, humans, are god-like but our lives differ substantially from god's mode of existence

The third reply

I have suggested possible answers to two objections. According to the third, the good of a human being that is determined by the *ergon* argument does not have to be good *for* a human being.⁵⁴⁸ Glassen, in his classic article, complains that: 'From the statement that the function of a good lyre-player is to play the lyre well, or in accordance with excellence, what follows is, not that the good of a lyre-player is playing the lyre in accordance with excellence, but rather that the goodness of a lyre-player consists in playing the lyre in accordance with excellence.'⁵⁴⁹ Glassen suggests that even if the lyre-player plays well, there is no indication as to whether or not this is in any way good for the lyre-player. He might perform his *ergon* well, though this only speaks to the good of the *ergon* and thus the goodness of the lyre-player, though it does not attest to what is good for the lyre-player.

Before I address the possible responses to this objection, I would like to explore the notion 'good for' used by Glassen and other critics following his lead. First, when Aristotle talks about a good lyre-player, he means a lyre-player *qua* lyre-player and not a lyre player as a human being. It is self-evident that the *ergon* of the lyre-player is to play. Playing the lyre is the *ergon* of a lyre-player *qua* lyre-player and not of a lyre-player as a human being in this role or occupation. Is there any plausible understanding in which playing well is not only a testament to the goodness of the lyre-player (in Glassen's terms) but is good for the lyre-

⁵⁴⁸ This challenge actually mirrors Glaucon's problem with justice in the second book of Plato's *Republic*, 360d-361d.

⁵⁴⁹ Glassen (1957, 320); for a possible reply see e.g. Lawrence (2011).

player *qua* lyre-player as well? One could mention several things which are derived from the lyre-player's goodness that benefit the person: profit, reputation, and perhaps even a higher level of satisfaction from how well and easily one mastered the art in question. Concerning the lyre-player *qua* lyre-player, one could say that it makes him a good lyre player. What about the example of a knife or horse mentioned in Plato's *Republic*? The sharp and well-shaped knife which does its *ergon* well is a good knife. Moreover, when someone says 'it is a good knife,' this assertion is warranted not in sentiment ('it is a good knife, I've had it for years'), but in the very reality of that knife and its properties. Similarly, a horse that performs its *ergon* well is a good horse and the 'good' is not something its owner says out of love for this particular animal, but rather because of what the given horse is and what it does. However, this cannot be applied to human beings so easily, as we tend to distinguish between 'good' in the sense of morally good and 'good' in the sense of well-off or doing good. As Bernard Williams phrases it, the ancient philosopher 'believed and most of us still hope that a good life is also the life of a good person.'⁵⁵⁰ After the trial of Socrates and after Plato wrote his *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, Aristotle could not have been entirely unaware of this problem—even if he might have believed there to be no distinction between the good *of* and the good *for*. Yet, I believe that the *Nicomachean Ethics*—not necessarily the *ergon* argument itself—offers some recourse for responding to this objection. The *ergon* argument has established that 'human good is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue' (1098a16-17). Now we ask whether these virtues are good *for* this human being. The question is not limited to ascertaining whether a corrupt society can threaten the *eudaimonia* of a just and moral person, since it is unclear whether one can gain any moral virtues while living in a corrupt society in the first place (1179b31 ff.). This critique aims at

⁵⁵⁰ Williams (2006, 5).

justification of Aristotle's morality to someone who does not accept its basic premises.

When talking about the human good (*Eth. Nic.* 1094b7, 1098a7, 1102a14, 1140b5 atd.), Aristotle presupposes that the good of man is at the same time good for man, since nothing that is not his own can be good for him. Yet, how can Aristotle respond if this very assumption is being questioned?

I believe that Aristotle has three types of recourse at his disposal here. First, the human *ergon* and the good Aristotle seeks could be explained as being enjoyable, in that it is actually living well and fine to the highest possible degree. Second, doing the human *ergon* well could actually mean living well in the sense of avoiding ills, mistakes and failures. Finally, doing human *ergon* well could be regarded as the natural perfection of a human being in the sense that doing anything else and living differently would be less perfect, less good.

The first attempt might be to appeal to a naturally hedonistic point of view, since no one would contest that pleasure derived from one's own doing is good for the human being (not the highest good, of course, but a simple good because we enjoy it).⁵⁵¹ Aristotle's basic tenet that what is one's own is enjoyable in itself (1169b33) can be employed here. What is more, pleasure is essentially connected with the activity it makes complete:

'This may be seen, too, from the fact that each of the pleasures is bound up with the activity it completes. For an activity is intensified by its proper pleasure, since each class of things is better judged of and brought to precision by those who engage in the activity with pleasure; e.g. it is those who enjoy geometrical thinking that become geometers and grasp the various propositions better, and, similarly, those who are

⁵⁵¹ Cf. Scaltsas (2019, 52).

fond of music or of building, and so on, make progress in their proper function by enjoying it; so the pleasures intensify the activities, and what intensifies a thing is proper to it.' (1175a29-36; transl. Ross and Brown)

When we apply this principle to a human being that is foremost *nous*, reason (1169a2-3, 1178a2, 1178a7), the result is that a human being not only achieves *eudaimonia* through contemplation, but that it brings human beings the highest pleasure as well.

What is to become of this answer if the critic either rejects the relation between pleasure and activity or disapproves of Aristotle's fundamental association between what is one's own and pleasure and *eudaimonia*? Aristotle considers both the relation between pleasure and activity on the one hand and the principle that what is one's own is highly pleasurable on the other hand to be basic principles derived from experience (cf. his argumentation at 1104b3ff., 1169b30ff., and 10.4-5 from which I quoted above). The only possible answer to someone who denies such basic principles seems to be: go and try. That is why the *Nicomachean Ethics* posit that sufficient experience in the doings of life is a necessary prerequisite for a reasonable discourse on moral philosophy (1095a1-13).

Theodore Scaltsas, in a recent article, focuses on the notion of rationality implied by the *ergon* argument.⁵⁵² Throughout our lives, we are confronted with many decisions and we must thus decide which goals or goods are to be the aim of our actions. Scaltsas argues that:

'the introduction of reason into the activities of the soul secures the internal cohesion in the activities and pursuits of the human soul. ... for Aristotle the coherence between pleasures, or by extension, between the

⁵⁵² Scaltsas (2019).

*goods pursued by the soul, is what secures that the phenomenal pleasures or the phenomenal goods have been excised and the remaining ones are the real pleasures and the real goods. The good performance of the human function, namely the conformity of the activity of the soul to reason, will secure that only real goods are pursued by the soul in its choices of human actions and objects of pursuit.*⁵⁵³

If a human being pursues only real goods and the soul's activities are supervised—so to say—by reason, then this human being (i) avoids mistakes and failures and (ii) chooses what is really good. Therefore, doing human *ergon* well means attaining what is really good for a human being, since the reason in accordance with which the soul performs its activities is a guarantee of living well.

Jennifer Whiting suggests another possible response which focuses on the normative aspects of *telos*.⁵⁵⁴ According to Whiting, Aristotle must show that belonging *essentially* among human beings indicates something beneficial as opposed to merely accidentally belonging to the class of lyre-players. According to her, Aristotle believes that 'for each species there is an ultimate end such that realizing that end (which Aristotle identifies with living a certain sort of life) is categorically or unconditionally good for any normal member of that species—that is, good for it whatever its actual interests and desires.'⁵⁵⁵ As I tried to demonstrate above, the concept of *ergon* is tied to the concept of *telos* throughout Aristotle's writings. Whiting further shows that the final cause is generally associated with the good of the organism (*Metaph.* 983a30-b1) or with what is better for the organism (*Ph.* 198b4-9). If

⁵⁵³ Scaltsas (2019, 55).

⁵⁵⁴ Whiting (1988, 36); cf. a critical exposition of her interpretation in Lawrence (2011, 348–9).

⁵⁵⁵ Whiting (1988, 36).

that is the case, Aristotle might argue that the good residing in the *ergon* of a given entity is not only the good *of* that entity but—in the case of living beings—the good *for* that entity as well.

In this sense, the good realization of one's *ergon* is in a sense a form of perfection. In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle considers wisdom and intelligence to be a perfection of ourselves since, 'we exist for the sake of being intelligent and learning something' (δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἐσμὲν ἕνεκα τοῦ φρονῆσαι τι καὶ μαθεῖν, *Protr.* 9, 52.5).⁵⁵⁶ The *ergon* argument thus shows how we differ from the lower life forms and how we are similar to the divine.⁵⁵⁷ It suggests what kind of activity human beings should engage in so that they do their *ergon* well, namely so that they perfect the essence of their being.

Conclusion: the relevance of the *ergon* argument

The interpretation above presented the *ergon* argument as Aristotle's first step towards presenting a substantive account of human good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It serves as a bridge between the formal characteristics of *eudaimonia* in the first half of 1.7 and the discussion of virtue in general as well as the particular virtues in the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (cf. beginning of 1.13: 'since happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue (JJ: which is a reference to the conclusion of the *ergon* argument earlier in the book), we must consider what virtue is ...').

What remains unresolved is the relation between the *ergon* argument and Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle seems to suggest that the prime activity of the soul is θεωρία and indeed that *eudaimonia* is this θεωρία. D. S. Hutchinson, whose interpretation of

⁵⁵⁶ See above, pp. 89-91.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Clark (1972, 282) and Kraut (1979, 478).

the *ergon* argument in both of Aristotle's *Ethics* is perhaps the most vigorous defences of these arguments, claims that they are basically 'prolegomena to the study of ethical virtue' and thus 'the arguments for intellectualism are not applications of the *ergon* argument.'⁵⁵⁸

However, in the *Protrepticus*, the *ergon* argument serves as the crux of Aristotle's defence of theoretical philosophy. It remains unclear as to why the *ergon* argument cannot be used to reach intellectualistic conclusions. Richard Kraut, on the other hand, claims that '1.7 and 10.7 must be read together if we are to understand Aristotle's case for philosophy.'⁵⁵⁹

In light of recent interpretations of the *ergon* argument, I have already hinted towards the direction envisaged by Kraut. The *ergon* argument is not conclusive on its own concerning the nature of *eudaimonia*. As I have said above, the *ergon* argument claims that the *ergon* of a human being is *πρακτικὸς* living; on the other hand, Aristotle is clearly interested in the activity of the part of the soul which has reason in the strict sense and in itself. However, nothing in the *ergon* argument seems to definitely exclude the possibility of an intellectualistic interpretation. I have even suggested that the usage of the phrase 'κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια' together with an emphasis on the best and most perfect virtue might give credence to the intellectualistic conclusion postulated in Book 10. The following chapter will focus on the relevance of the *ergon* argument for the general conclusion of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Book 10, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁵⁸ Hutchinson (1986, 61).

⁵⁵⁹ Kraut (1989, 347–8).

The *ergon* argument and *eudaimonia*⁵⁶⁰

Based on the interpretation of the *ergon* argument above, I will argue that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία in accordance with Aristotle's repeated assertion in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. On the other hand, a happy life is a complex way of life which includes not only theoretical activity but also demands that other virtues be exercised, including the so-called moral and social virtues. To put my claim in the language traditionally used in the discussion of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle, my account of *eudaimonia* will be a strictly exclusivist one: θεωρία and only θεωρία qualifies as *eudaimonia*.⁵⁶¹ However, in my account the happy human life includes practical virtues and other facets of our social life. It is clear by now that I do not believe Aristotle equates happiness with a happy life.⁵⁶² Though this definition might amuse Socrates,⁵⁶³ it lacks textual support and unnecessarily problematizes Aristotle's moral philosophy.

⁵⁶⁰ I am thankful to Anthony Price for his comments on this chapter.

⁵⁶¹ For the usage of the terms 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' interpretation see Keyt (1983, 365–6). The current discussion uses the analogous labels 'inclusive end' and 'dominant end,' see e.g. Dahl (2011, 68). The interpretation labelled as 'exclusive' considers *eudaimonia* to be θεωρία and accordingly claims that the happy life is a βίος θεωρητικός. In that sense, θεωρία should be the 'dominant end' of our life. All other goods are excluded from Aristotle's final account of *eudaimonia* and a happy life. Cf. J. Cooper (1975, 91–115, 149–54) for a clear exposition of this view. On the other hand, the 'inclusive' interpretation claims that *eudaimonia* and correspondingly the happy life combine both theoretical and practical aspects. The best human life would be a combination of a theoretical and political life.

⁵⁶² The widespread but mistaken claim that happiness is a certain kind of life is to be found for example in Ackrill (1980, 18–9); Heinaman (1988, 32); Lawrence (1993, 18); Farwell (1995, 259); Sherman (2002, 467–8); Dahl (2011). On the other hand, see Kraut (1989, 297): 'we must not run together (a) the question of what a happy life or person must have and (b) the question of what the happiness is.' Huby (1983) provides a useful overview of the peripatetic definitions of happiness; while happiness is consistently described as an activity (ἐνέργεια) or use (χρησις), only one definition in Arius Didymus suggests that happiness is a noble and complete life (βίος).

⁵⁶³ Cf. Plato, *Hp. mai.*, 287e where Hippias answers the question 'What is the fine?' with 'A fine girl is a fine thing.' A similar point is made by Crisp (1994), p. 114.

Aristotle – though having plenty of space and opportunities in his ethical treatises—never says that *eudaimonia* is life (βίος) or some kind of life (βίος τις). He refers to *eudaimonia* as a kind of living (ζωή, *Metaph.* 9.8, 1050a34-b2) and suggests something similar in the *Eudemian Ethics* as well (2.1, 1219a35-39). The terms βίος and ζωή come semantically close, though I will demonstrate that these terms operate with different meanings in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (cf. section Life and living). I will argue that in addition to the common meaning of ‘lifespan,’ the term βίος refers specifically to the way we live our lives. Throughout this chapter, I will use the translations ‘living’ for ζωή and ‘life’ or ‘way of life’ for βίος. The terms *eudaimonia* and βίος often appear in tandem,⁵⁶⁴ though the text never states that a happy life equals happiness.⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, I will rather focus on what Aristotle repeatedly makes explicit, namely that *eudaimonia* is ἐνέργεια.⁵⁶⁶

My second assumption is that Aristotle must be taken at face value when he says that *eudaimonia* is a kind of θεωρία (1178b32; cf. 1178b21-25, 1178b28-32) and further that the perfect *eudaimonia* is θεωρία (1177a17-18, 1177b16-26, 1178b7-8). I will argue that such a conclusion is an organic one, as Aristotle paves the way for it from the first through the middle books, culminating with the explicit version in the last book of the treatise.

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle postulates:

⁵⁶⁴ See esp. Arist, *Eth. Nic.* 1.5, further e.g. 1097b14-16, 1100b8-10, 1153b14-15, 1176b27-30, 1177b24-25 and 1177a9-10 discussed later.

⁵⁶⁵ The passage which comes closest to equating happiness with a kind of life is 1.4, 1095a18-20; however, this presents the opinions of ordinary people and elites on what it means to be happy. Their answers are not phrased in terms of βίος but as εὖ ζῆν καὶ τὸ εὖ πράττειν. Moreover, it is explicitly said that they do not have a good answer to the crucial question: ‘What is happiness?’

⁵⁶⁶ Aristotle claims that *eudaimonia* is activity (ἐνέργεια) at: 1100a14, 1100b10, 1102a5, 1102a17, 1144a6, 1153b11, 1169b29, 1169b31, 1177a12, 1177a17, 1178b7. Furthermore, one could say that being happy then lies in living and being active (ἐν τῷ ζῆν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν, 1169b31).

... in all the other cases where there is no other product in addition to the actuality (ἐνέργεια), the actuality is in them, for example, seeing in the one seeing and contemplation in the one contemplating and living in the soul, which is why eudaimonia is also; for it is a kind of living (ζωή γὰρ ποιά τις ἐστίν). (*Metaph.* 9.8, 1050a34-b2; transl. S. Makin)

This passage identifies *eudaimonia* as a kind of ζωή and my interpretation will try to provide some insight as to why Aristotle might have made this suggestion. I will argue that *eudaimonia* is a certain activity (ἐνέργεια) and that this activity is θεωρία, which, in this respect, is one of the activities of living (ζωή). This activity is virtually the same for the gods as it is for humans. The difference between them lies in their way of life (βίος). Generally speaking, while *eudaimonia* is the same for the gods and humans, a good human life is own to and typical for human beings and for no one or nothing else.⁵⁶⁷

Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronésis*

The core of the exclusivist vs. inclusivist debate is the relation between θεωρία and the moral or social virtues discussed in the middle books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This problem can be traced back to the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.⁵⁶⁸ As was demonstrated in the last chapter, at 1098a7-8 Aristotle says that human *ergon* is the activity of the soul in accordance with reason or following reason (not without reason). After showing how this *ergon* can be done well so that the one who does his *ergon* well will be good in this respect (as a good lyre-player is one who plays well), Aristotle concludes that the human *ergon* is a

⁵⁶⁷ See Curzer (1991, 51) for a similar point which, however, is developed in a different direction than my following interpretation.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. my interpretation in the chapter 'The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.'

certain living (ζωή), namely the activities and actions of the soul informed by reason (1098a13-14). The structure of the sentence suggests that the activities and actions of the soul *are* the living which constitutes human *ergon*.⁵⁶⁹ Doing this *ergon* well thus sufficiently constitutes the good of human being (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθόν, 1098a16), which is the subject of Aristotle's study in question (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.13, 1102a13-15).

One of the problems is the relation of the *ergon* argument to the ethical intellectualism in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, namely to the thesis that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία (1178b32). First, when articulating the *ergon* argument itself, Aristotle uses a condition according to which the *ergon* in question must *properly belong* to the subject whose *ergon* is discussed (1097b34). Therefore, human *ergon* cannot be plain living, since the activity of living is shared with all living beings; even living based on perception is shared with all other animals.⁵⁷⁰ Θεωρία does not seem to satisfy this condition either: it belongs in the first place to the gods and humans only somehow derivatively share in it (1178b21-22, 25-27).⁵⁷¹ Second, the *ergon* argument combined with the intellectualism in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10 leads to the highly implausible thesis of 'strict intellectualism,' which permits immoral acts for the sake of θεωρία.⁵⁷² At the same time, the *ergon* argument seems to open up the discussion of practical

⁵⁶⁹ In all of these cases, 'living' refers to activities in our lives. The same characterization of ζωή as activities of living appears at two places in *De anima* 2.1-2 (412a14-15, 413a22-25).

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. section 'The second reply' at pp. 231-234 above.

⁵⁷¹ One possible way out would be to follow Richard Kraut in his narrow and contextually limited understanding of ἴδιον as differentiating humans from lower life forms rather than the divinities, which are not mentioned in the text. However, this interpretation proved problematic given the entire text of the *Topics* 1.5, 102a18-28 upon which it rests, cf. Reeve (1992, 126, fn. 35); Barney (2008, 301-2).

⁵⁷² For the concept of 'strict intellectualism' see Keyt (1983, 368). For concerns over unethical deeds performed for the sake of θεωρία see e.g. Meyer (2011, 61). Let us imagine that the only relevant virtues were intellectual virtues and that θεωρία was all that mattered. Acting so as to maximize one's opportunities for θεωρία would not qualify as acting virtuously, though it would most likely be permitted or even recommended. I will demonstrate why this does not problematize the phrase ἡ τελέεια εὐδαιμονία from 1177b24-25, since Aristotle claims that one naturally maximizes opportunities for θεωρία by performing virtuous actions; cf. section

virtues in the central books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to strict intellectualism, the activities in accordance with the practical or political virtues are not constitutive parts of *eudaimonia*, they are only means to θεωρία.⁵⁷³

The first step towards remedying some of the issues mentioned above can already be found in Book 6, where Aristotle discusses the relation between the theoretical and practical virtues.⁵⁷⁴ In order to elucidate the theoretical or intellectual virtues, Aristotle returns to the bipartite division of the rational part of the soul (1139a3-17). The rational part of soul is divided into two parts according to their respective objects. The one concerned with objects that have the unchanging ἀρχαί is ἐπιστημονικόν, the other, the objects of which have variable ἀρχαί, is labelled λογιστικόν (1139a12). Aristotle then proceeds as follows:

We must, then, learn what is the best state of each of these two parts; for this is the virtue of each. The virtue of a thing is relative to its proper work (ἔργον). (1139a15-17, transl. Ross & Brown)

When formulating the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, Aristotle already mentions that each *ergon* is accomplished well when ‘it is done in accordance with its own virtue’ (1098a15).⁵⁷⁵ The virtue makes a given entity good or even the best at its *ergon*. Moreover, in terms of *erga* which do not differ from the activity itself, one could say that the virtue of the given entity manifests itself at work within this activity.⁵⁷⁶

Another passage which echoes the *ergon* argument comes later in Book 6, where Aristotle

‘Theória as *eudaimonia*’.

⁵⁷³ For this interpretation see Grant (1885); J. Cooper (1975); Kenny (2016).

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. Walker (2018, 24–7).

⁵⁷⁵ Both passages entail the same point made about *ergon* and virtue in Plato's *Republic* 1, 353b-c.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a13-17 interpreted above in the section ‘The *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1: an interpretation’ at 145-146.

discusses the relation between practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and theoretical wisdom (σοφία). He asserts that practical wisdom is inferior to theoretical wisdom (1143b34), though the reasoning behind this remains unclear⁵⁷⁷ until the end of Book 6. Practical wisdom is not predominant ‘over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being; it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it’ (1145a6-9). This explanation of the priority of theoretical knowledge over practical wisdom helps to understand the complex relation between *ergon*, virtue and *eudaimonia*.

One could say that both practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom as virtues of two rational parts of the soul are choice-worthy in and of themselves and as such do not produce anything else. However, according to Aristotle that would be erroneous:

...they do produce something, not as the art of medicine produces health, however, but as health produces health; so does philosophic wisdom produce eudaimonia; for, being a part of virtue entire,⁵⁷⁸ by being possessed and by actualizing itself it makes a man happy. Again, the work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with practical virtue; for virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom makes what leads to it correct. (1144a3-9)

⁵⁷⁷ The entire sentence is quite complicated, *Eth. Nic.* 6.12, 1143b33-35: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄτοπον ἂν εἶναι δόξειεν, εἰ χειρῶν τῆς σοφίας οὐσα κυριώτερα αὐτῆς ἔσται· ἢ γὰρ ποιούσα ἄρχει καὶ ἐπιτάττει περὶ ἕκαστον. I believe the translation by David Ross and Lesley Brown is the closest approximation to the meaning of the sentence: ‘Besides this, it would be thought strange if practical wisdom, being inferior to philosophic wisdom, is to be put in authority over it, as seems to be implied by the fact that the art which produces anything rules and issues commands about that thing.’ This understanding corresponds to the lines 1145a6-9 which I discuss later in this chapter.

⁵⁷⁸ On the claim that σοφία is a part of the virtue entire cf. footnote 503 in the previous chapter and Grant (1885, 2, 183).

The two virtues are thus productive in a certain sense of the word.⁵⁷⁹ They are not efficient causes as medicine is for health, since health or being healthy produces health as its formal cause. Theoretical knowledge brings about *eudaimonia* and practical wisdom in the same way that it secures the achievement (ἀποτελεῖται) of the *ergon* of man. Theoretical wisdom is a formal cause of *eudaimonia* which is achieved through the actualization (ἐνέργεια) of this wisdom. The formal cause of human *ergon* has two components: practical wisdom and practical virtues. Human *ergon* then consists of their actualization as living in accordance with the virtues. As observed in the previous chapter, performing the *ergon* and performing it well because of the virtue is the same in genus and differs in ‘the eminence in respect of virtue’ (1098a8-12).

The two analogies involving medicine and health must not be confused as they illustrate two different points. First, the example at 1144a3-9 served to illuminate the relation between theoretical wisdom and *eudaimonia*. Second, the example at 1145a6-9 uses the same analogy in order to illustrate the relation of practical and theoretical wisdom. The art of medicine is an efficient cause of health since it works towards health. Medical prescriptions are made for the sake of health but do not govern health itself. In the same way, practical wisdom—amongst other things—works towards theoretical wisdom and it prescribes for the sake of theoretical wisdom, though it does not prescribe to it.

However, it now seems that *eudaimonia* cannot be so easily elucidated using the *ergon* argument, as *eudaimonia* and human *ergon* have two different formal causes (theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom) which stand in hierarchical relation to one another. In the last chapter I argued that doing the human *ergon* well amounts to human good, since the good of

⁵⁷⁹ In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle offers us a classification of three types of production: ‘Things are productive of other things in three senses: first as being healthy produces health; secondly, as food produces health; and thirdly, as exercise does—i.e. it does so usually’ (*Rh.* 1.6, 1362a31-34, transl. Rhys Roberts).

an entity exhibiting *ergon* lies in this *ergon* and presumably in doing this *ergon* well (1097b26-27). It is now clear that doing this *ergon* leads to *eudaimonia* which is ‘produced’ or ‘secured’ through theoretical wisdom in the sense discussed above.⁵⁸⁰ I will explain the nature of this relation by interpreting the relevant chapters of Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the subsequent sections.

Theória

Theória as eudaimonia

The text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8 leaves no room for doubt regarding the concept of *eudaimonia* in these chapters. It is activity (ἐνέργεια) and specifically it is θεωρία. This conclusion is clearly stated three times in the text and thus scarcely enables alternative readings.

If eudaimonia is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. ... the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect eudaimonia. That this activity is contemplative we have already said. (1177a12-18, translation amended by JJ)⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸⁰ See Lear (2004, 115–22) for further support of this conclusion. My line of argumentation suggests that Aristotle anticipates the conclusion from *Eth. Nic.* 10.7-8 in 6.12-13 as well as 9.8 (cf. 1168b34-1169a3). For an opposing view cf. Cooper (1987, 189–90, 200).

⁵⁸¹ I have modified the translation so that τέλειος is translated as ‘perfect’ in all instances, though it is of course a combination of final, perfect and complete. I will revisit this later in this chapter. A relevant analysis of the term τέλειος is in White (1990, 106–15).

... but the activity of reason, which is contemplative ... it follows that this will be the perfect *eudaimonia* of man. (1177b19-1177b25, translation amended by JJ)

Eudaimonia extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of *θεωρία*; for this is in itself precious.

Eudaimonia, therefore, must be some form of *θεωρία*. (1178b28-32)⁵⁸²

I will now discuss three ways in which Aristotle argues that the perfect *eudaimonia* is *θεωρία* and will also shed light on the relevance of the *ergon* argument for his argumentation in Book 10.⁵⁸³ First, Aristotle entertains the idea that *eudaimonia* is an activity in accordance with virtue (1177a13; cf. 1098a16-18). It could be deduced, with the help of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13, 1144a3-9 (quoted above), that the virtue of the activity in question is theoretical wisdom (*σοφία*).⁵⁸⁴ Moreover, this activity is identified as the most pleasant of all virtuous activities (1177a24) when Aristotle shows that his concept of *eudaimonia* also entails pleasure. However, Aristotle uses a different line of argumentation.

⁵⁸² J. Cooper (1975, 89) understands this passage as saying that creatures incapable of *θεωρία*—such as animals and children—are not capable of *eudaimonia*, though his narrow interpretation seems to neglect Aristotle's criterion regarding the extent of *eudaimonia* and *θεωρία*: *eudaimonia* must be some kind of *θεωρία* (ὥστ' εἴη ἂν ἡ εὐδαιμονία θεωρία τις, 1178b32). This conclusion reveals that Aristotle derives a certain identity between *eudaimonia* and *θεωρία* on the basis of their co-extension. While co-extension on its own is not sufficient grounds for an identity thesis to be formulated, Aristotle does provide separate, independent arguments that *eudaimonia* is *θεωρία*, which I discuss in the following parts of this chapter.

⁵⁸³ Here I argue against Kraut (1989, 45ff.), who claims that *eudaimonia* can be identified with two distinct activities. By the same token, I disagree with Cooper (1987, 202) in that *eudaimonia* involves 'all of a human being's natural works being done in accordance with the virtue or all the virtues appropriate to each.' However, see my following sections for an interpretation which, despite the singular concept of *eudaimonia*, allows for a complex best life.

⁵⁸⁴ Suggested already by Burnet (1904, 461).

As readers of the *Nicomachean Ethics* saw there to be many virtues, the virtue in question must be the highest one and thus the virtue of the best part of ourselves (1177a13-14; cf. 1098a15 and 1098a17-18 discussed in the last chapter).⁵⁸⁵ Furthermore, Aristotle deliberates as to whether this part of ourselves is reason (νοῦς) or something which exhibits the characteristics of reason and whether this part is divine in itself or only the most divine part of ourselves. Despite this uncertainty, which foreshadows the later tension between the divine and humane, the discussion on self-love already postulated that we are our reason (1168b34-1169a3).⁵⁸⁶ Therefore, the activity constituting *eudaimonia* will be the activity of reason, which is θεωρία.

The second argument relies on the agreement between the criteria of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 and the characteristics of θεωρία presented in 9.7.⁵⁸⁷ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 Aristotle characterizes *eudaimonia* as a (i) final goal, (ii) which is always desired in itself and never for anything else, and finally (iii) as something which is self-sufficient. A longer passage that describes θεωρία (1177a18-1177b26) not only reveals that the wise person is the most self-sufficient (1177b1) but also that ‘the already mentioned self-sufficiency’ belongs to θεωρία (1177a27-28).⁵⁸⁸ Moreover, θεωρία is the only activity ‘loved

⁵⁸⁵ See esp. *Eth. Nic.* 1.7, 1098a16-18: ‘Human good turns out to be activity of the soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most perfect one.’

⁵⁸⁶ The term νοῦς employed at 1168b35 could refer to the practical νοῦς, however the part with which we are identified is described as τὸ κυριώτατον, which means the most authoritative or supreme part; in accordance with my interpretation of the relation between φρόνησις and σοφία above, I believe that this is the part of us which has σοφία as its virtue. Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 9.4, 1166a19-29 as well.

⁵⁸⁷ Curzer (1990) argues that the criteria of happiness in *Eth. Nic.* 1.7 differ from *Eth. Nic.* 10.7-8. I hope to demonstrate that he overestimates these differences. On the other hand, concerning the relation between Book 1 and 10, I am in agreement for example with Kenny (1992, 87–9); Kraut (1989, 17, 239–40); Pakaluk (2002); Pakaluk (2011).

⁵⁸⁸ Kenny (1992, 23, 36) distinguishes between two meanings of ‘self-sufficiency’; in Book 1 self-sufficiency relates to the final good in the sense of ‘that which on its own makes a man happy,’ whereas in Book 10 it

for its own sake alone' (δόξαι τ' ἄν αὐτῇ μόνῃ δι' αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶσθαι, 1177b1-2).⁵⁸⁹ In addition to these characteristics which correspond to the criteria of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, Book 10 adds that θεωρία is the best, most continuous, and most pleasant of virtuous activities and that as such it is also a leisurely activity.

The third argument at 1178b7-23 starts with the *eudaimonia* of the gods, which are considered to be supremely blessed and happy. Since *eudaimonia* is an activity (ἐνέργεια), what kind of activities or actions can be ascribed to the gods? According to Aristotle, the gods do not perform any action (πράξις) and therefore do not possess any action-related virtue (i.e. practical virtue):

If we were to run through them all, the circumstances of action (περὶ τὰς πράξεις) would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, everyone supposes that they live (ζῆν) and therefore that they are active (ἐνεργεῖν).
(1178b17-19)

If the gods are without any action, what kind of activity is left? According to Aristotle, it can

relates to a person in the sense of 'that which makes a man happy on his own.' Even if Kenny is right, Aristotle opens the passage on self-sufficiency in Book 10 with 'ἢ τε λεγομένη αὐτάρκεια,' the previously discussed iteration of self-sufficiency. This might refer to the mention of 'self-sufficiency' at *Eth. Nic.* 10.6, 1176b5 or directly to Book 1. However, even if it refers to the beginning of *Eth. Nic.* 10.6, the passage refers to a previous discussion, presumably in Book 1, cf. references in Stewart (1892a, 2, 437), Gauthier and Jolif (1970b, 867), Dirlmeier (1999, 588), Broadie and Rowe (2002, 440), Brown and Ross (2009, 192), Reeve (2014, 344). Moreover, even in Book 1, Aristotle claims that the self-sufficiency of the final good makes one's life (βίος) 'desirable and lacking in nothing,' which also extends to the person living said life. Therefore, Kenny's observation does not threaten the relation between Book 10 and Book 1. For recent discussions on self-sufficiency which corroborate my interpretation see Heinaman (1988) and Lear (2004, 59–63).

⁵⁸⁹ The term ἀγαπάω functions similarly to αἰρέω (resp. αἰρετός) cf. 1096a9 and 1096b11. Even if the sentence is read to mean that θεωρία 'is loved only for itself' whereas virtuous actions have external goals, it does not problematize my interpretation. Θεωρία is still the best candidate for *eudaimonia* since it is always chosen for itself and never for the sake of something else (cf. 1097b1) and thus it is still the final good (1097a30-34).

only be the highest theoretical activity: θεωρία.⁵⁹⁰ Therefore, if the gods are happy and *eudaimonia* is an activity and θεωρία is the only possible activity of gods, it follows that *eudaimonia* must be θεωρία.⁵⁹¹

One possible objection might be that θεωρία is one of many activities and desirable things, whereas *eudaimonia* was said to be ‘not counted as one good thing among others’ (1097b16-17).⁵⁹² Yet again, I turn to the difference between defining what *eudaimonia* is and what constitutes the best life. I argue that θεωρία is the most important and essential component of the best life in the sense that it shapes and forms this life (cf. later sections ‘*Bios* as a way of life’ and ‘Conclusion: *happiness* and *happy life*’). However, the answer to the first question is that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία, to which nothing else must or can be added. *Eudaimonia* is not

⁵⁹⁰ All other cognitive capacities involve a bodily element and change which seems to be a disqualifying condition here, cf. *De an.* 3.5, 430a17-18 and *Ph.* 7.3, 247b1-6.

⁵⁹¹ This passage actually explains a puzzling statement made earlier in the seventh book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: ‘This is why god always enjoys single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found more in rest than in movement.’ (*Eth. Nic.* 7.14, 1154b26-28) This statement seems to *prima facie* contradict that *eudaimonia* is an activity (ἐνέργεια). However, Aristotle does not deny that a supremely happy god is active, he merely denies that the god is in motion (κίνησις). Burnyeat (2008) argues that the distinction between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις known thus far from the *Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b18-35 actually originates from one of the ethical treatises; cf. Skemp (1979, 240).

⁵⁹² Cf. excellent treatments of this passage in Heineman (1988), Kenny (1992): Ch. 3 and more recently Lear (2004, 63–9). Kenny (1992): 24-26 sheds light on the ambiguity of the passage; it can mean that (1) ‘happiness is that activity, or good, which if considered in itself and not conjoined with any other activity or good, is the most choice-worthy of all’; or (2) in an explanatory mode: ‘it is not, of course, the kind of thing that can be counted as one thing among others.’ Apart from the syntax, which according to Kenny favours reading (1), there are two reasons why *eudaimonia* is not composed of other goods: Aristotle discusses here *endoxa* in terms of *eudaimonia* and none of the *endoxa* listed presents *eudaimonia* as a complex notion; second, if *eudaimonia* cannot be considered alongside other goods because it already subsumes them, it means that it includes all of them, including for example fine hair—which is absurd. So even if *eudaimonia* is the best among the goods, adding more goods to one's life might add more good, but not more *eudaimonia*.

complex, nor is it one good thing among many, it is the best one.⁵⁹³

The second objection to my interpretation might be that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, Aristotle talks about perfect happiness (τελεία εὐδαιμονία), which must be distinguished from the *eudaimonia* generally discussed in Book 1⁵⁹⁴ and further that this perfect *eudaimonia* demands a certain lifespan. Here is the most problematic passage:

‘the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the perfect happiness of man, if it be allowed a perfect term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is imperfect).’ (Eth. Nic. 10.7, 1177b19-26 translation amended by JJ)

There are two related problems here: what does the phrase ‘perfect happiness’ (τελεία εὐδαιμονία) mean and is there any difference to *eudaimonia* without qualification? Second, doesn’t the prerequisite that the perfect *eudaimonia* have the perfect lifespan problematize my distinction between *eudaimonia* as ἐνέργεια on the one hand and εὐδαίμων βίος on the other?

⁵⁹³ Here I disagree with Ackrill (1980, 21), in how he reads the lines 1097b16-17 and their context. Ackrill concludes that ‘*eudaimonia*, being absolutely final and genuinely self-sufficient, is more desirable than anything else, in that it *includes* everything desirable in itself.’ However, *eudaimonia* being ἐνέργεια can hardly ‘include everything desirable.’ Second, the fact that the best life entails many good components does not mean that *eudaimonia* includes many good things. Herein lies the weakness resulting from Ackrill’s assumption that *eudaimonia* is a kind of life.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. for example Cooper (1987, 206).

Given that *eudaimonia* is ἐνέργεια, I believe it is fitting to examine in which respect ἐνέργεια can be final or ultimate in order to ascertain what ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία means in 1177b24.⁵⁹⁵ The phrase τελεία ἐνέργεια occurs twice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and does not seem to appear in Aristotle's other works.⁵⁹⁶ At 1153b16, Aristotle says that no activity is perfect when it is impeded. However, further in 10.4—i.e. the chapter which re-examines the account of pleasure, directly preceding the chapters on *eudaimonia* as θεωρία, we find Aristotle's own account of what qualifies as τελεία ἐνέργεια:

Since every sense is active in relation to its object, and a sense which is in good condition acts perfectly in relation to the most beautiful of its objects, for perfect activity seems to be ideally of this nature (τοιούτων γὰρ μάλιστα εἶναι δοκεῖ ἡ τελεία ἐνέργεια); whether we say that it is active, or the organ in which it resides, may be assumed to be irrelevant, it follows that in the case of each sense the best activity is that of the best-conditioned organ in relation to the finest of its objects. And this activity will be the most perfect and pleasant. (1174b14-20)

This seems to be the general account of τελεία ἐνέργεια, since after elucidating the nature of a perfect activity, Aristotle goes on to say that pleasure does not perfect the activity in the above-mentioned sense (1174b24 ff.). Therefore, these two aspects of a perfect activity, namely the good condition of the subject and the finest objects of the activity, seem to encapsulate Aristotle's opinion on what qualifies as τελεία ἐνέργεια.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Ancient commentators used the phrase τελεία ἐνέργεια in contrast to ἀτελής ἐνέργεια, which stands for κίνησις; cf. Burnyeat (2008, 237, fn. 45).

⁵⁹⁶ Another possible occurrence might be the *Protrepticus* 9, 58.15, which yet again shares the ethical context.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Segev (2017, 122).

If that is the case, what is the meaning of perfect happiness (τελεία εὐδαιμονία)? First, the subject of the activity must be in good condition or well arranged (εὖ διακειμένης according to the text above). What or who is the subject of *eudaimonia*? According to the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is the soul, since *eudaimonia* is called ‘activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue’ (1102a5-6).⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, the soul must be in good condition.⁵⁹⁹ I believe that the good condition of the soul means that it is virtuous (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1.7; 1.13, 1102a13-18, 1103a3-7.). The good, virtuous soul will be virtuous in all of its parts as described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13,⁶⁰⁰ including reason as its highest part. Therefore, it is my understanding that for perfect happiness, the soul must be in good condition in order to allow for the best possible activity, i.e. θεωρία. The perfect *eudaimonia* is θεωρία, as purported at 1177b24, though I believe that this presupposes or assumes some kind of perfection of the entire soul.

Second, the perfect *eudaimonia* must be directed towards the best possible objects, therefore the objects of θεωρία must be the most noble and the best possible objects for it. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, 1177a19–21, the objects of reason are the best possible objects of any cognition and I believe that the objects of reason here refer to the best objects of θεωρία. Nevertheless, as the following section will elucidate, Aristotle does not limit θεωρία to unchanging, eternal objects, principles or abstractions, but rather ascribes it to a much broader domain (cf. ‘Humane theoria in the *Nicomachean Ethics*’). However, the perfect

⁵⁹⁸ Notice that the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1, 1219a35-39 provides the same account, except that it uses ζωή instead of ψυχή: *eudaimonia* is the activity of perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue (ἡ εὐδαιμονία ζωῆς τελείας ἐνέργεια κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν).

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Aristotle’s claim in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1, 1219a35 that happiness is the activity of a good soul (ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐνέργεια).

⁶⁰⁰ The lowest part of the soul presents the problem of how it can be described as being in a good or bad state, but I believe one option would be to consider its health or strengths.

θεωρία will grasp or deal with the objects which are most suitable and in this sense perfect for it.⁶⁰¹

I will now address the second issue posed by the above-quoted passage, 1177b19-26. Aristotle says that the perfect *eudaimonia* is θεωρία predicated upon a perfect or complete lifespan (μῆκος βίου τέλειον). The condition concerning the lifespan stems from the *ergon* argument discussed above.⁶⁰² Furthermore, it is important to contextualize this claim, especially the following explanatory clause: nothing attributed to happiness is imperfect or incomplete. The passage lists certain attributes or qualities of perfect happiness, including the prerequisite of a certain lifespan. Firstly, this refers to a certain duration of time, as perfect happiness can only be achieved in adulthood. Furthermore, we need time for learning and other activities, including time for acquiring moral virtues and the related social activities, as it has been established that perfect happiness presupposes a virtuous soul. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, we need time to practice θεωρία and we need ample time since—as articulated by Aristotle at the end of the *ergon* argument— ‘one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day’ (1098a18-20).

However, the duration of life is not everything. The temporal aspect is not the most important, as will be elucidated when examining the objection pertaining to the second happy life. In the temporal sense, all lives are complete in their death. This cannot be what Aristotle has in mind and thus τέλειος cannot mean ‘complete’ or ‘final’ in a strictly temporal sense. In *Physics* 2.2, Aristotle briefly notes that it is nonsensical to talk about the *telos* of a human being in temporal terms (i.e. as the end of one’s life, τὸ ἔσχατον), since the true *telos* of human life is

⁶⁰¹ Here I am in agreement with Walker (2018, 30) who reaches a similar conclusion based on *Metaph.* 6.1, 1026a17-22.

⁶⁰² Cf. ‘Human *ergon* in the Nicomachean Ethics’ pp. 243-244. Similarly, Reeve (2014, 346, note 842) or already Stewart (1892a, 448).

the best (τὸ βέλτιστον, *Phys.* 2.2, 194a31-33).⁶⁰³ Even the famous saying that ‘one swallow does not make a summer’ quoted above corresponds with a ‘perfect life’ as well as ‘(temporally) complete life,’ for nothing excludes the possibility of a long, complete life with one or two ‘swallows’ in it, i.e. with rare and isolated occurrences of θεωρία. However, the perfect life suggests the predominant and leading role of *eudaimonia*—i.e. not only a life of many swallows, but as will be made clear in my interpretation of βίος θεωρητικός, a life organized for the sake of swallows. The term τέλειος here does not have an exclusively temporal meaning, but also extends to the quality or form of life.⁶⁰⁴

Finally, there might be a third possible objection to the thesis that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία, which, when examined, will clarify my previous claim. This objection concerns Aristotle’s description of the second best life introduced at 1178a9-22. I will discuss the passage in detail later (section ‘Bios as a way of life’). I would now like to focus on the crucial lines 1178a19-22:

Being connected with the passions also, the moral virtues must belong to our composite nature; and the virtues of our composite nature are human; so, therefore, are the life and the happiness which correspond to these
(καὶ ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία).

⁶⁰³ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a10-11: τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὗ ἕνεκα τὰλλα πάντα. Thus according to the *Eudemian Ethics*, the τέλος is the best in the sense of being the final goal for which everything else is done.

⁶⁰⁴ Even if the reference of the phrase ‘μήκος βίου τέλειον’ (1177b25) is temporal, its meaning is far from clear. Θεωρία is not a process (κίνησις) that requires a certain length of time. Following the tense test from the *Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b18-35, which is interpreted in Burnyeat (2008), θεωρεῖν has to mean that one is at once contemplating and has contemplated, is happy and has been happy. As I have argued, within our practical life, we need a certain duration of time for our plans and projects, i.e. becoming virtuous. This does not seem to apply to the very activity of θεωρία, although we need time in our lives in order to θεωρεῖν. Nevertheless, this temporal aspect cannot concern θεωρία itself.

What *eudaimonia* could be related to the virtues of our composite nature if *eudaimonia* is θεωρία? And if this is the only humane *eudaimonia* in the sense of the happiness of human beings (cf. ἀνθρωπικός at lines 1178a10, 1178a14 and 1178a21), the perfect happiness interpreted above would be a divine (perhaps unachievable) goal and true human good would lie in the activity of moral virtues and thus within political life.

First, nothing in the text suggests that we should abandon the perfect *eudaimonia* mentioned earlier. Aristotle explicitly urges against such a ‘merely human’ perspective (1177b31ff.). Second, what can be said about *eudaimonia* in the second best life, i.e. *eudaimonia* related to the social and political activities?⁶⁰⁵ It is clear that it is not *teleia eudaimonia*, it is not perfect *eudaimonia*. The difference is analogous to the one Myles Burnyeat identifies between ἡ ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια and ἐνέργεια ἀτελής: not the difference between two different kinds, but the difference between X ‘in the full sense of the term and one from which you cannot expect everything you would normally expect’ and X.⁶⁰⁶ The first and most obvious limitation of political or practical affairs is, of course, that exercising such activities is practical and not theoretical (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 6.13, 10.7). However, the limitation here specifically pertains to the *eudaimonia* which Aristotle ascribes to the second best life. What is missing from the

⁶⁰⁵ For example, J. M. Cooper (1975, 167) reads the second life in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be the mixed life described as an ideal in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

⁶⁰⁶ Burnyeat (2008, 264). Here I compare τελεία εὐδαιμονία to εὐδαιμονία (possibly labelled εὐδαιμονία ἀνθρωπικά, human happiness) analogously to ἡ ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια and ἀτελής ἐνέργεια in Burnyeat’s article; with respect to the terminological difference, one could object that human happiness seems to be the standard state and the perfect happiness is some superb or above-standard state. Yet again, Aristotle’s insistence that perfect happiness extends to human beings (1177b31ff.) goes against this understanding. Moreover, it would create a strange pattern within Aristotle’s metaphysics, since it would postulate a third level of ἐνέργεια (there would be ἀτελής ἐνέργεια, i.e. κίνησις, then ἐνέργεια as such, and above it a mysterious τελεία ἐνέργεια), which is not attested in Aristotle and ancient commentators use τελεία ἐνέργεια to simply describe ἐνέργεια proper in contrast to ἀτελής ἐνέργεια; cf. fn. 595 above.

eudaimonia of a political life? I believe it lacks a formative function, as the life of the politician does not have θεωρία as its goal, which would give it a form.⁶⁰⁷

Even the politician, the one who lives the second best life, can contemplate (θεωρεῖν) at some points in his life. This θεωρία is *eudaimonia*, though it does not mean that this politician could rightly be called happy or happy in the proper, highest sense of the word. While he may experience happiness in his life, his life can be happy only to the second possible degree, as it is not governed by θεωρία as its goal. Therefore, neither the phrase *teleia eudaimonia* nor Aristotle's attribution of some type of *eudaimonia* to the second best life problematizes my interpretation which postulates that *eudaimonia* as θεωρία is not tantamount to a happy life.

Humane theória in the Nicomachean Ethics

One possible question might be what Aristotle means by θεωρία in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Is it an activity strictly limited to the unchanging, most valuable objects or structures of the Aristotelian universe? If so, how could it function within the second, political kind of life? In this section I thus examine the meaning of θεωρεῖν and θεωρία in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶⁰⁸ The traditional view is that θεωρία concerns only the highest and most noble eternal objects of thought.⁶⁰⁹ This view is supported by the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, 1177a19–21, which not

⁶⁰⁷ The goal structures life as its final cause; life is lived for the sake of pleasure, honour (and practical virtues) or θεωρία; at the same time, it has a practical counterpart, cf. Meyer (2011, 52): 'A genuine end ... must structure or regulate the pursuit of subordinate goals.'

⁶⁰⁸ Here I am indebted to Roochnik (2009), with whom I mostly agree. In the following I hope to supplement Roochnik's analysis with several new points. My interpretation opposes Kraut (1989, 15–6), where he claims that Aristotle uses θεωρία in two different senses. I will argue that θεωρία covers a wide range of objects (although some might be more proper for it than others). Furthermore, the fact that Aristotle does not consider theoretical wisdom (σοφία) to θεωρεῖν what makes human beings happy (1143b18–20) does not contradict the claim that θεωρία is *eudaimonia*. A similar but brief account is presented in Dudley (1982, 408).

⁶⁰⁹ Examples of this view can be found in Nussbaum (1986, 375); Kraut (1989, 16, 73); Nightingale (2004, 238);

only posits that reason is the best in us, but also that the objects of reason are the best possible objects of any cognition. Aristotle unsurprisingly correlates the characteristics of the object of cognition with the characteristics of the proper cognitive activity (cf. 1141b1-3). However, I maintain that this is not the entire concept of θεωρία. It is my understanding—and likely Aristotle's as well—that θεωρία is not exclusively a cognitive activity related only to eternal, unchanging and the highest possible objects. It is undoubtedly the *proper* cognitive capacity of these objects, i.e. it is the best (and perhaps the only) activity that can engage with these objects. On the other hand, it is not restricted to these objects.⁶¹⁰

Firstly, the *Nicomachean Ethics* shares the general meaning of θεωρία with *De anima* 2.1, which differentiates between possessing knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and exercising knowledge (θεωρία). At the *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, 1146b31-35 (probably at 1175a1 as well) Aristotle distinguishes between two senses of knowing: (a) someone is a knower because he has knowledge though he does not use it or (b) he is a knower because he uses knowledge. The second, active exercise of knowledge is θεωρεῖν.

The verb θεωρεῖν is used throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* simply as 'exercising one's rational capacity' over something, thus we can θεωρεῖν the nature of a virtue (1106a25), reasonableness (1140a24-25), incontinence (1149a25), pleasure and pain (1152b1), laws, constitutions and generally political matters (1181b8, 1181b20). The magnificent man is said to θεωρεῖν what is fitting and spends large sums accordingly (1122a34-35). This understanding seems to disrupt the traditional view of θεωρία. At least two passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* state that θεωρία is possible not only for the noble and eternal but also for changing and perishable entities:

Rorty (1980); Charles (1999, 216–7).

⁶¹⁰ This position is defended in Whiting (1986, 83) as well.

And let it be assumed that there are two parts which grasp a rational principle — one by which we contemplate (θεωρεῖν) the kind of things whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things. (1139a6-8)

We all suppose that what we know is not even capable of being otherwise; of things capable of being otherwise we do not know, when they have passed outside our θεωρία, whether they exist or not. (1139b19-22, translation amended by JJ)

The activity of θεωρία is said to be characteristic of the practically wise person (1141a25-26, cf. 1140a24-25).⁶¹¹ Aristotle uses Pericles as an example of someone who is practically wise. This is because Pericles was capable of θεωρεῖν what was good both for him and for other people (1140b7-11). The θεωρία of these goods is what enabled people to become good in managing the household as well as the state.⁶¹² This explains the presence of a θεωρία and thus *eudaimonia* in the second best life as well (cf. interpretation of 1178a19-22 above).

Similarly, the noun θεωρία does not seem to be reserved for the investigation of the highest and most noble objects. In one of its few occurrences outside of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, it is used to investigate incontinence (1146b14) and concerns ethical matters (1103b26), even though it is not the goal of an ethical study (we should aim at doing good not merely knowing good).⁶¹³ Θεωρία is presented as the counterpart of action (πρᾶξις) when Aristotle tries to articulate the complexity of a happy person's life: 'he will do and θεωρεῖν what is virtuous'

⁶¹¹ This point was made already by Monan (1968, 74).

⁶¹² Heinaman (1988, 35), argues that Aristotle considers Pericles happy but never says that he exercises theoretical wisdom. However, Heinaman overlooks that according to Aristotle, Pericles θεωρεῖν what is good and that θεωρία is the activity of the highest soul part. It is possible that Pericles was generally considered to be φρόνιμος and the example is merely a reflection of common opinion, though there is no textual source for this characterization preceding or contemporary to Aristotle.

⁶¹³ In the *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8, 1217b36 θεωρία is a learned examining in any possible field of knowledge (similarly *Eth. Eud.* 2.3, 1220b37 and 1.5, 1216a38).

(1100b18-22).⁶¹⁴

Finally, θεωρία is the key concept used in Aristotle's argument concerning a happy man's need for friends (*Eth. Nic.* 9.9, cf. interpreted below at 4.1). As Aristotle explains, a happy man needs friends, 'since his purpose is to θεωρεῖν worthy actions and actions that are his own, and the actions of a good man who is his friend have both these qualities' (1170a2-4). The activity of θεωρία relates here to actions and not to any unchanging eternal objects.⁶¹⁵

However, if I am right in that Aristotle's understanding of θεωρία is the same in Book 6 as it is in Book 10,⁶¹⁶ then this might be said to obscure the difference between the first, best life and the second best life of social and moral virtues.

The end of the previous section (3.1) elucidated the differences between *eudaimonia* as θεωρία in the best life and in the second best life: in the second best life, it is not a perfect happiness and moreover it does not serve as the goal which shapes one's life. It is important to note that the second best life is a social or political life governed by virtue and the related honour as its goal. This second best life is not 'organized' for the sake of θεωρία. Θεωρία merely occurs throughout the course of this life which is practical in its essence. It must also be mentioned that the best life, including θεωρία in this life, is said be self-sufficient (1177a27-28). The second best life is not self-sufficient and since θεωρία is not the goal in this second best life,

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Gauthier and Jolif (1970b, 81) on understanding this sentence.

⁶¹⁵ Cf. *Metaph.* 6.1, 1025b25-28 according to which theoretical knowledge can be about what can change and alter. Cf. Walker (2018, 30).

⁶¹⁶ Nothing in the text seems to suggest such a change; moreover, at 10.7, 1177a19–21 Aristotle talks about the best, most fitting objects for θεωρία and the context suggests that there are other less perfect objects of this activity as well. Furthermore, at 10.8 1178a19-22 Aristotle talks about *eudaimonia* in relation to moral virtues and social life; since according to Book 10, *eudaimonia* is θεωρία, there is some θεωρία concerned with changing and perishable entities in Book 10 as well.

it is not self-sufficient in this sense of the word either.⁶¹⁷ Practical action, and the θεωρία related to practical matters, is not self-sufficient since it depends on external goods (cf. 1099a29-1099b8). Therefore, despite the continuity between the meaning of θεωρία in Book 6 and Book 10, there is a justified difference between the two lives.

Ultimately, there seems to be ample opportunity for θεωρία to be exercised within the second best, i.e. political, way of life. At the same time, it seems that particular occurrences of θεωρία do not suffice to constitute the best life. As I will argue in the next section, one's life has to be shaped or formed by θεωρία as the highest goal in order to be considered happy. However, this does not jeopardize Aristotle's claim that θεωρία is happiness. There is simply a difference between happiness as ἐνέργεια on the one hand and the way of life (βίος) on the other.

Life and living

My interpretation allows us to accept Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* as a theoretical activity. At the same time, I want to avoid the pitfalls of strict intellectualism and do not deem Aristotle to be inconsistent regarding the unique status of human *ergon* between the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 and 10.7-8. In order to bolster this interpretation, I will illuminate the distinction between Aristotle's usage of ζῶν (living) and βίος (lifespan or way of life), allowing for a coherent interpretation of *eudaimonia* and a happy life.⁶¹⁸ The verb ζῶν (to live) naturally

⁶¹⁷ The dependency of the second best life is nicely illustrated in the description in *Eth. Nic.* 10.8 1178a9-22: all of its aspects are connected with the body and other changeable and perishable aspects of human nature; life and *eudaimonia* in the second best life are dependent on our composite nature, the *eudaimonia* of the best life—on the other hand—is separate, i.e. it is self-standing and self-sufficient (cf. 1178a21-22: καὶ ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία. ἢ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ κεχωρισμένη).

⁶¹⁸ A still-valuable account is Keyt (1989). Cf. Curzer (1991, 51), distinguishing between βίος and *eudaimonia*; Dudley (1982, 402), differentiating between θεωρία and βίος θεωρητικός and finally Lawrence (1993, 14, 18)

goes together with life (βίος) in that one lives a certain life (e.g. 1097b9). Aristotle also says that ‘no one would choose living with the intellect of a child throughout his life (βίος)’ (1174a1-2) and a person who would be asleep for his entire life would ‘lead a life of a plant’ (φυτῶν ζῶντι βίον, 1176a33-35).⁶¹⁹

In the *ergon* argument interpreted in the previous chapter, Aristotle distinguishes human living from the lower life forms in terms of ζωή (1097b33, 1098a1). The main difference lies in the activities of living: nutrition, growth and perception, which we share with other mortal living beings, and the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the soul which follows or implies reason, which seems particular to humans. Indeed, our ζωή is specified as the activity and action of the soul (1098a13-14). On the other hand, when Aristotle qualifies human good at the end of the *ergon* argument, he says that this activity of the soul must be situated within a ‘perfect life’ (ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ, 1098a18). Here, the meaning of βίος must differ from ζωή. If the expression ‘perfect life’ had a temporal meaning (which I have argued is not its only meaning), then it would not hold in the case of activity or activities.⁶²⁰ Second, if ζωή stood for the activities of living and its meaning were the same as βίος, Aristotle would claim that the activity of the soul must be situated within perfect activities of living, which is implausible. In this section, I will argue for a distinction between the meaning of ζωή and βίος. This will facilitate an understanding of how these terms operate in the *ergon* argument and will also clarify the difference between

mentioning but not developing the distinction between *eudaimonia* as θεωρία and a happy life (βίος); Reeve (2012, 239) comes close to my interpretation when understanding ζωή as biological life processes and βίος as ‘a sort of life ... a biographer might investigate’ (suggested already in Reeve (1992, 149–50)); Lockwood (2014, 352) writes that the relationship between *energeia* and βίος is ‘the central philosophical problem looming behind Aristotle’s treatment of the contest of lives.’

⁶¹⁹ Notice here that the term βίος is not limited to human beings; even plants and animals have their own lives (1141a26-28). However, Aristotle never says that god leads a life (βίος), despite the fact that god is alive, in *Metaph.* 12.7 he chooses διαγωγή to denote god’s life.

⁶²⁰ Cf. Burnyeat (2008) discussed above in the section ‘*Theória* as *eudaimonia*,’ pages 254-257.

Aristotle's notions of *eudaimonia* and a happy life.

Activity of living in the Nicomachean Ethics

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9 Aristotle argues that even a happy person needs friends. He starts by presenting several general reasons for his position: friends are thought to be the greatest of the external goods (1169b9-10), a happy person will need people to bestow his goodness onto (1169b12-13), man is naturally political and social (1169a18-19)⁶²¹ and it is evidently better to live among friends than strangers (1169b20-21). However, the opponent who claims that a happy person does not need friends presents a serious counterargument (1169b22-28): it follows from what was said that a friend is something useful. Now, a happy person already has the goods one needs for being happy. Why would a happy person need a friend? Such an opponent sees that a happy person does not need friends for their usefulness and assumes that a happy person does not need friends at all.

According to Aristotle, a happy person needs friends and they are naturally desirable for him. Aristotle presents several arguments to bolster his claim. I will focus on the argumentation which can facilitate our understanding of Aristotle's concept of ζωή (*Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1170a25-1170b8).

Before commencing his argument, Aristotle says that from a φυσικώτερον perspective, a virtuous friend is naturally (φύσει) desirable for a virtuous person (1170a13-14). The emphasis on nature (φύσις) suggests that the argument will consider the natural characteristics of human beings in their relation to the ethical framework. It is important for my argument that the key general term which Aristotle uses for the natural activities throughout his argument

⁶²¹ Aristotle uses the term συζῆν (1169b18-19) in order to describe the social component of human nature.

is living (ζωή; cf. *De an.* 2.1, 412a14-15 and 2.2, 413a22-25).

According to Aristotle, human ‘living’ properly understood is the activity of perceiving and thinking.⁶²² Therefore, when Aristotle further says that living is naturally good and pleasant he means that the activities in question are naturally good and pleasant for us. Being alive is thus naturally perceived as good and pleasant (1170a25-26). We enjoy our activities of living, such as perceiving, hearing, walking or thinking *per se*. However, Aristotle calls attention to those who are good and blessed (ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ μακαρίους, 1170a27). Their life or way of life (βίος) is the most desirable. Therefore, people naturally do not seem to differ in how they experience and assess their living, which is by nature good (1170b1-2, cf. 1170a22), but differ according to their way of life (βίος). One could object to my interpretation by citing the very same passage in which Aristotle also calls ‘living’ (ζωή) supremely blessed (μακαριωτάτη ζωή, 1170a28-29). If that is the case, the experience of the plain activities of living would differ as well. However, while I am in agreement, I do not consider this to jeopardize my interpretation. Living is said to be good by nature or naturally (1170b1-2), which allows for exceptions. According to the text, such exceptions arise in extreme cases of moral goodness and wickedness.

Human living specified here in terms of different activities is naturally good and pleasant for us. This is a natural or perhaps even biological fact which is the same for all men regardless of their moral status. Living seems pleasant to all ‘unless their living is wretched, wicked or they live in pain’ (μοχθηρὰν ζωὴν καὶ διεφθαρμένην ... ἐν λύπαις, 1170a23). The term μοχθηρός is quite common in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and it refers to serious moral wickedness. On the other hand, being wretched or destroyed (διαφθείρω) is depicted quite rarely and refers to a very extreme case of human badness which is not only morally wrong

⁶²² *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1170a19: τὸ ζῆν εἶναι κυρίως τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἢ νοεῖν.

but which endangers and possibly destroys one's entire existence (1138a13, 1140b13, 1140b17, 1150a2, 1170a23, 1176a24). In this case, διαφθείρω strengthens μοχθηρός and the badness in question is such that it makes unpleasant the very living in question. In conclusion, living is naturally good and pleasant for us. However, if one lives a blessed life, he enjoys such living even more. On the other hand, a state of extreme badness endangers one's existence and thus makes the activities of living unbearable and unpleasant.⁶²³

Finally, let us return to the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8 and verify whether the text corroborates my interpretation of ζωή from 9.9. Aristotle uses the verb 'to live' three times within the discussion of *eudaimonia* at the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8. The first occurrence is within the polemic passage concerning what is fitting for human beings. Some say that humans should think human thoughts (1177b32). Aristotle disagrees and claims that 'we must, as far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us (τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ)' (1077b33-34). The advice is essentially to θεωρεῖν, in that we must live in accordance with reason and exercise σοφία. Our activities should be guided by reason. The two other occurrences are in the passage discussing the gods and the nature of their constitutive activity (1178b17-21). Aristotle claims that any action is unworthy of the gods. However, he adds that 'everyone supposes that they live and are active.' Now, if one were to remove doing (πράττειν) and producing (ποιεῖν) from the concept of living, the only ἐνέργεια that would remain would be θεωρία. The living of the gods thus lies in the single activity of θεωρία.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ Another passage which combines the terms ζωή and βίος is 1100b22-28, discussing the role of chance. According to my understanding of the difference between ζωή and βίος, Aristotle claims that chance does not affect the balance of living activities but that a multitude of great things which arrive by chance might have an effect on the blessedness of one's way of life (βίος).

⁶²⁴ At *De an.* 2.2, 413a22-25 Aristotle says that the presence of only one of the activities of living is enough to call a given activity alive; i.e. god can be considered alive while being only a single activity. This conclusion

Based on the evidence gathered thus far, I conclude (i) that the term ζωή refers to ‘activities of living’ and that Aristotle differentiates this meaning from βίος. Furthermore, (ii) ζωή is an activity (ἐνέργεια) and as such (iii) it provides the basic and fundamental link between the gods and human beings. The essential activity of the gods is θεωρία (*Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178a17-21 and *Met.* 12.7, 1072b22-30). Now, if *eudaimonia* is θεωρία, it follows not only that the gods are supremely happy but also that our *eudaimonia* is this divine activity and as such it does not differ from the essential activity of the gods. The θεωρία in the case of the gods is continuous and eternal—indeed god *is* this activity—it is the living or so to say the being of the gods. On the other hand, human beings θεωρεῖν only temporarily, since whatever they do cannot be eternally continuous and is always limited (*Eth. Nic.* 10.4, 1175a4-5; cf. *Met.* 12.7, 1072b24-26, 1072b28-30). This temporal limitation is the only difference mentioned thus far. In order to explain the specific nature of a happy human life and its relation to divine being I will turn to βίος and examine its usage within the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Bios as a way of life

I will discuss two passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* which will help elucidate the meaning of βίος. The first passage is chapter 1.5, where Aristotle discusses three different ways of life. The second is, yet again, the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8, since the crucial difference between the gods and humans is articulated in terms of ways of life. Before I turn to these key passages, I will try to clarify my understanding of the concept of βίος using Aristotle’s deliberations about βίος throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will show how the concept of βίος differs

is in agreement with Aristotle’s description of the unmoved mover in the *Metaphysics* 12.7. Aristotle claims that god is living (ζωή), since the actuality of thought is living (ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωή) and god is that best and eternal actuality (*Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b26-28). This conception fully corresponds to the living of the gods described in *Eth. Nic.* 10.7-8.

from ζωή, which was characterized in the preceding sub-chapter.

Matters related to βίος are said to be the purpose of political community (1160a11, 1160a23).⁶²⁵

This is a distinctive feature of mankind, as all the other animals unite solely for the sake of reproduction. Matters related to βίος are an additional purpose of human togetherness (1162a22). The term βίος here clearly refers to a specifically human way of life involving—among others—society with friendship and politics.

By the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.6, Aristotle argues that the activity of the better part of us (or of the whole of human being) is superior to the activity of the lower parts in that it is more constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Bodily pleasure, for example, is not *eudaimonia* since a slave enjoys bodily pleasures no less than the best person, ‘but no one assigns to a slave a share in *eudaimonia* — unless he assigns to him also a share in life (βίος)’ (1177a8-9; translation amended by JJ). Now βίος seems to be the framework or prerequisite within which *eudaimonia* occurs. The condition that a slave might have a share in βίος is purely rhetorical. Aristotle argues that it would be completely absurd to assume that a slave may share in *eudaimonia* while still enjoying the bodily pleasures no less than the best person, meaning that bodily pleasure is not *eudaimonia*. Therefore, slaves, according to Aristotle, do not have βίος. Since no one would dispute that slaves are alive,⁶²⁶ the term βίος must have a special meaning which applies only to free citizens.

A βίος is a matter of choice (1178a4) and we have the possibility to choose our way of life. In order to be able to choose, there has to be something to choose from. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5 Aristotle introduces three general ways of life. Most men, including the most vulgar, think that the good and *eudaimonia* consist of pleasure, which could be ascertained from the

⁶²⁵ The meaning is clear despite the lacuna in the text at line 1160a23 after the phrase ἀλλ' εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν βίον.

⁶²⁶ E.g. *Pol.* 1.4, 1253b32 where the slave is characterized as ‘ensouled possession’.

way they live (ἐκ τῶν βίων). They live a life of pleasure and consumption (ἀπολαυστικός βίος, 1095b14-16).⁶²⁷ Most men are slavish and choose a way of life that is more suitable to cattle than humans (1095a19-20).

The energetic men of taste consider honour to be both the good and *eudaimonia* since that is the goal (τέλος) of the political way of life (πολιτικός βίος) which they live (1095b22-23). However, this cannot be the good that Aristotle seeks. Honour depends on the person bestowing the honour rather than the one who is being honoured, whereas the good in question belongs to the good person in question. Moreover, political men do not want honours from just anyone and for nothing. They genuinely want to be honoured by the practically wise men (ὑπὸ τῶν φρονίμων) and on the basis of their virtue (1095b26-29). Therefore, virtue seems to be more important in this respect. One could even say that virtue is the proper goal (τέλος) of the political life (1095a30-31).

Concerning the third, theoretical life (βίος θεωρητικός), Aristotle only says that it will be considered later (1096a4-5).

The above-mentioned ways of life primarily differ in their goals. The three general ways of life are not characterized by any specific actions or aspects. Aristotle distinguishes the three ways of life according to their respective conceptions of the good which figures as the life goal for those who live in such a way. Most people consider pleasure to be the chief good and therefore act so as to maximize the pleasure in their lives. Nothing is said about the particular actions or types of actions chosen to reach this goal. On the one hand, Aristotle is clearly dismissive about this way of life, on the other, he says that defining the good as pleasure is

⁶²⁷ Aristotle further adds that this consideration is not unreasonable (1095b15). This is a reference either to the authorities living a hedonistic life that are mentioned a few lines later (1095b21-22), or to the doctrine of pleasure in *Eth. Nic.* 10.1-5, according to which pleasure in a certain way belongs to *eudaimonia*.

not without reason (1095b15). Similarly with the political way of life, the political man sees honour or virtue as the goal of his life and whatever he does in accordance with the life he lives fits into the hierarchy of ends, with honour or virtue at the very top.⁶²⁸

I maintain that the term βίος plays an important role in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8 as well, since the two crucial discussions concerning the implications of *eudaimonia* as θεωρία pertain to different ways of life. First, Aristotle compares the divine with the humane way of life (1177b26-1178a8) and then describes the relation between βίος in accordance with νοῦς and the second best humane life, namely βίος πολιτικός (1178a9-1178b7).

Aristotle claims that the activity of νοῦς, θεωρία, is the perfect *eudaimonia* of man (1177b24-25) and that a happy person must live in accordance with it. However, such a life would surpass the human way of life, since:

it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him. ... If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life (βίος) according to it is divine in comparison with human life (βίος). (1177b26-28, 1177b30-31)

The difference between the divine and humane is described as the difference between two ways of life.⁶²⁹ It is not a difference in the activity constituting *eudaimonia*, which human beings exhibit a capacity for, as made clear in several places in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (6.8, 1142a23-30 or 6.11, 1143a35-1143b5). Θεωρία is *eudaimonia*, though we saw that a person is happy if he lives a βίος within which θεωρία has its proper place. Aristotle does not preoccupy

⁶²⁸ In this respect, each man can live only one βίος at a time, according to which highest goal he prescribes to. However, I believe that one could change his ways of life and that one does not necessarily live one single βίος throughout his entire adulthood. Therefore, I agree with Keyt (1983, 373–4) that a certain βίος can be lived only for one phase of life, though my interpretation of how different ways of life relate to each other diverges here.

⁶²⁹ Cf. Long (2011) on the humane and divine in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

himself with whether a human being can θεωρεῖν. Our θεωρία might be limited compared to the gods (cf. 1178b23, 1178b27), but it is essentially the same ἐνέργεια.⁶³⁰ The question is whether we can live a life which seems to be more divine than humane. After expressing some scepticism, Aristotle answers with a counterargument that should settle it (1178a2-8). Life (βίος) in accordance with reason is the humane life since man is reason (νοῦς).⁶³¹ This life is said to be most pleasant one since it is proper to us and, finally, it will be the *eudaimonestatos*, the happiest or most fulfilling life (1178a5-8).

If man is reason, we should live life in accordance with reason, since it is the βίος which is proper to us.⁶³² Does it mean then that it is the life of the gods? I do not believe that to be the case. We are beings that are different from gods. In a way, we are much more complex than gods and our best life will thus be a far more complex one. The living of the gods is simply one single activity, θεωρία (cf. 1178b7-32).⁶³³ Our living (ζωή) necessarily consists of different

⁶³⁰ Here I disagree with the thesis posited by Burger (1990) and Lawrence (1993, 20). I believe that the confusing conclusion that Aristotle defines human *eudaimonia* as something that is not achievable by humans stems from the failure to distinguish between happiness and happy life. The fact that humans share the same activity with the gods does not mean they have to share the same life. Moreover, as I have shown, there is plenty of evidence within the *Nicomachean Ethics* that human beings θεωρεῖν. This is never disputed by Aristotle, though he is rightly unwilling to equate the life of men with the divine διαγωγῆ. Broadie (1999, 234), makes a similar point against the impossibility of human happiness, cf. Broadie (1991, 406-7) as well.

⁶³¹ Aristotle says that we should do everything in order to be living (ζῆν) in accordance with the best which is in us (κατὰ τὸ κρᾶτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ, 1177b33-34). Each man then is this ‘best in us,’ since each man is the authoritative and better part of him (δόξει δ’ ἄν καὶ εἶναι ἕκαστος τοῦτο, εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον, 1178a2-3). Here Aristotle articulates the general thesis of his top-down philosophical framework: a complex entity is defined in accordance with its best part, see *Eth. Nic.* 9.8, 1168b31-32: ‘just as a city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is a man.’ Cf. Dominic Scott (1999, 232, fn. 22).

⁶³² Segev (2017, 110) points out that at some places (*Mag. Mor.* 2.15, 1213a14-15, *Eth. Eud.* 7.12, 1244b26-27) Aristotle claims that to imitate the activity of the gods means engaging in self-reflective thought. If the self is νοῦς then it is understandable since the activity of god as νοῦς is contemplation of the self as well (*Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b20-27; cf. Segev (2017, 118) as well).

⁶³³ Cf. *Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b7-8, 1072b23-25.

activities, since our nature is complex compared to the simplicity of the divine.⁶³⁴ Our happy life is analogously complex, which—of course—does not mean that it is any better than the course of life (διαγωγή) of the divine:⁶³⁵

For while the whole life of the gods is blessed, and that of men too in so far as some likeness of such activity belongs to them. (1178b25-27)

It has been established that the gods do not do anything other than θεωρεῖν, which is their essential activity and is also the essence of what they are. Our life can be called blessed or happy only in so far as it shares in the same activity. Yet, this *eudaimon* life will be more complex since our nature is not does not allow for constant θεωρία due to our bodily needs (1178b33-35).⁶³⁶ On the other hand, this complexity does not mean that we should not strive to live in accordance with νοῦς and its virtue.

The way of life which reflects human complexity and does not revolve around the fact that νοῦς is our proper self is called ‘second’ or ‘secondary’ (1178a9). The comparison is explicitly between two kinds of life (cf. 1178a9 and 1178a21). Aristotle says that the secondary life is lived in accordance with ‘the other virtues and the activities based on these are human’

⁶³⁴ This complexity and relations of the humane are highlighted in the text itself: not only are the actions which exemplify moral virtues performed ‘in relation to each other’ and is our nature defined as composite (σύνθετον used twice at 1178a20), but the passage describing this composite human nature exhibits four verbs starting with the prefix *syn*—suggesting a complexity of relations (1178a14-19). On the other hand, there is reason, which is said to be separate (ἡ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ κεχωρισμένη, 1178a22).

⁶³⁵ Since, strictly speaking, the gods do not have βίος, I use the term as Aristotle in *Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b14. διαγωγή here means ‘a course of life’ analogously to βίος in the case of human beings. Cf. Elders (1972), p. 181, referring to Aristotle, *Pol.* 1334a16, 1338a10, 1339b17-19; and *Metaph.* 981b18, 982b23 for the context of διαγωγή.

⁶³⁶ Compare Aristotle’s discussion of the body and external goods in relation to *eudaimonia* at 1178a9-23 and 1178a23-1178b7.

(1178a9-10).⁶³⁷ These virtues naturally belong to us and in this sense they are not ‘merely human’ but are human virtues. At the same time, nothing suggests that Aristotle abandons the notion that we should aspire to live a divine way of life in accordance with νοῦς, which is the best part in us. However, in order to live this *eudaimonestatos* life, we have to fulfil the goals of this secondary life as well. We are not gods and as Aristotle says, we are far from being the most perfect entities in the world (1141a34-b2). Moreover, unlike the gods, our nature is not self-sufficient enough for θεωρία.⁶³⁸ Therefore, I believe the secondary life to be necessary (in addition to its own value) in order to make the realization of βίος θεωρητικός possible for humans.⁶³⁹

Practical wisdom, φρόνησις, is the prominent virtue within the secondary life. According to Aristotle, φρόνησις and the practical virtues realize human *ergon*, whereas σοφία, the virtue of νοῦς, whose activity is θεωρία, leads to *eudaimonia* (1144a3-9; cf. esp. ποιούσι ... οὕτως ἡ σοφία εὐδαιμονίαν). The secondary life is a good life but it is not the best life available to human beings.

Conclusion: happiness and happy life

Human beings differ from the gods due to their composite nature (1177b29, 1178a20). If the

⁶³⁷ On this passage see Reece (2020); my interpretation is in agreement with his suggestion to read the lines 1178a9-10 as saying ‘life in accordance with the other kind of virtue is proper to a human being in a secondary way, for activities in accordance with this kind of virtue are properly human’.

⁶³⁸ Cf. similarly Reeve (2014b), pp. 215-216, note 63.

⁶³⁹ Aristotle indisputably acknowledges that some things can be valuable both in themselves and as a means for something else (1096b14-19, 1097b2-5). The first passage lists reasoning, seeing, some pleasures and honours; the latter entails honours, pleasure, reason and all of the virtues. Therefore, I do not take issue with the practical virtues and the entire secondary βίος to be valued both as a means for something else and in themselves. The activity of these virtues and the practical life are *per se* valuable for us. At the same time, they are valuable in that they allow for βίος θεωρητικός.

ergon argument served to clarify the difference between human beings and lower life forms, then Book 10 addressed the corresponding difference between humans and gods. As composite beings, we cannot permanently θεωρεῖν as the gods or god can. Even the best way of life must include care for the body, which invokes the need for the activities of the practical virtues as well as some external goods.⁶⁴⁰ However, it must be clear by now that this does not jeopardize the thesis that *eudaimonia* is θεωρία. What remains to be explained is the complexity of the best human life which at once reflects the composite human nature and observes νοῦς as the most important and leading part of us. In the previous chapter, I called attention to the fact that this dichotomy is already present in the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.⁶⁴¹

I have already posited that there is a twofold relation between the best life and the secondary life. First, in addition to its own value, the secondary life is necessary for creating a conducive environment for the best life (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 6.12-13 and 10.6-8). Second, I believe that the secondary life is necessary for a good human life as well. Therefore, the secondary life is both valuable in itself as well as for the βίος θεωρητικός. This can also be phrased as follows: the best *life* has its own goal (θεωρία) and, moreover, it includes the goals of the secondary life as well, but the secondary life does not constitute the best life on its own and does not recognize θεωρία as its goal.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴⁰ Aristotle summarizes this thesis at 1178b33-1179a9, cf. 1178a9-23 for the practical virtues naturally related to the body and 1178a23-1178b7 on the external goods.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. pp. 217-223 above.

⁶⁴² Perhaps an analogy with the relation between the three soul-kinds described in *De anima* 2.2-3 might help to understand the relation of the three kinds of life. According to Aristotle, the different soul-kinds are organized one after another in a certain order (*De an.* 2.3, 414b29). The so-called lower or more rudimentary kinds of the soul are presupposed by the higher parts of the soul, which cannot exist without them. The only exception is active intellect, which is said to be 'separated' (e.g. 413b26-27, 430a17-18, cf. *Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 1178a22). Therefore, all animals must have the nutritive part of the soul in order to have the perceptive part

Aristotle insists that a man living βίος θεωρητικός is a human being as well (1178b5, 1178b33) and as such he needs the external goods to support his human living (ἀνθρωπεύομαι at 1178b7). It is stated that the practical, political life is for the sake of σχολή, which might entail *eudaimonia* (1177b4-6). This suggests that one cannot properly live the best life without the appropriate political and social environment and that this cannot be achieved without the proper (virtuous) political and social action.⁶⁴³ Furthermore, it is my understanding that this cannot be achieved without satisfying our bodily needs. Extreme poverty, hunger or frailty preclude a happy life since they already preclude the appropriate social and political life.

The three main ways of life are distinguished according to their respective goals.⁶⁴⁴ The three goals are pleasure, honour and (practical) virtue, and finally θεωρία. From the interpretation above, it follows that the best life necessarily entails practical virtues, but they are no longer the final goal of one's life. This is not to say that they are not valuable in themselves as well. Pleasure is something which is valuable both as a means for something else and in itself (1096b16-19, 1097b2-5). However, the way of life which posits pleasure as its final goal is a life of cattle not one proper for men.⁶⁴⁵ At the same time, the best life is said to be naturally

and humans must have these two in order to possess reason. On the other hand, the lower soul parts can exist without the higher soul parts (e.g. plants have only the nutritive part of the soul). There seems to be an analogous relation among the goals of the three general ways of life discussed at *Eth. Nic.* 1.5. For another treatment of this issue cf. Lockwood (2014).

⁶⁴³As Broadie (1991, 392) phrases it: 'human θεωρία is utterly dependent on practical wisdom for securing it regular conditions'; cf. Whiting (1986, 91-2). I believe Adkins (1978, 300) exaggerates the potential inconsistencies between a theoretical way of life and practical affairs. I think Aristotle clearly offers a reason why someone living a theoretical way of life must engage in practical activities: they are a necessary means (some of them worthy in themselves as well) for establishing a suitable environment—both social and bodily—within which θεωρία can find its proper place.

⁶⁴⁴This understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5 is supported, *inter alia*, in Lear (2004, 23-5) and Walker (2018, 23-5).

⁶⁴⁵In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5, Aristotle considers the popular ways of life. It would be wrong to dismiss pleasure as such, especially after he elaborated his own conception in Book 10 (cf. 1175a18-21). Even at 1.5,

the most pleasant (1178a6). Moreover, the practical virtues are dispositions which prompt us to act in the best way in relation to pleasures and pains (1104b27-28). Pleasure and pain are the primary instruments of the early habituation of the virtues. In this sense, pleasure is present in the best life as well—not only is it the most pleasant life, but in order to achieve it, one needs to pursue pleasure properly. While pleasure is not the final goal of the βίος θεωρητικός, it is nevertheless valuable on its own and when it is properly used it is a valuable tool in our moral development (1179b31 ff.). In this way, the best life at once includes the goals of the two lower kinds of life while exhibiting its own separate goal.

I have argued that if we are to understand Aristotle's position correctly, we should differentiate between *eudaimonia* as such, i.e. *eudaimonia* as ἐνέργεια on the one hand, and a happy or fulfilled life (βίος) on the other. I hope to have convincingly argued that *eudaimonia* is indeed a single ἐνέργεια, namely θεωρία, while the βίος of a happy man is a complex way of life, in which θεωρία is its goal, though it entails many other activities and actions, including the practical virtues.

It is my understanding that doing the human *ergon* well makes it possible for *eudaimonia* to be attained. *Eudaimonia* itself is an activity of σοφία, the virtue of the highest soul part naturally possessed by humans. This activity is θεωρία. The best life (βίος) of a human being has θεωρία as its goal and it is shaped in accordance with this goal. This ἐνέργεια is the same as the one Aristotle ascribes to god. The θεωρία of god constitutes its entire living (ζωή), while the θεωρία of human beings has its proper place within a more complex life which differs from the purely divine way of life. This interpretation means that Aristotle can be taken at face value when he repeatedly defines *eudaimonia* as θεωρία. At the same time, it allows for

1095b15, Aristotle says that considering pleasure to be *eudaimonia* is not entirely baseless and that the activity of σοφία is said to be the most pleasurable activity after all (1177a23-24). However, pleasure is always an insufficient goal (τέλος) of human life.

a credible picture of the best life to be presented as a complex way of life within a community, with friends, and as one filled with various social and political activities.

Conclusion

The *ergon* argument is an important part of the groundwork of Plato's and Aristotle's ethics. As argued in the interpretation above, it serves as a transition from a formal account of the characteristics of *eudaimonia* towards a substantive exposition of what it actually entails and what kind of a life is formed around it. The particular structure and conclusions of Plato's and Aristotle's arguments were discussed above and I would like to conclude by making a few observations and summarizing the main points.

The *ergon* argument reveals how values are at the root of our essence and the structure our lives. In the *Republic*, the opening question inquires as to how one should live: '*... the argument concerns no ordinary topic but the way we ought to live*' (352d5-6).⁶⁴⁶ Thrasymachus defends a life of power and exploitation. His conception of 'justice' always presupposes a divided society where the predominant social relation is exploitation: the powerful abuse the weak and the many prey on the few. Socrates conversely argues that any social group or community must be bound by justice to ensure that it coheres as a unit, capable achieving its end—justice is a precondition for the action of a complex whole (351c6-10).⁶⁴⁷

Plato's *ergon* argument, in its simplicity, shows that 'injustice is never more profitable than justice' (354a8-9). The *ergon* argument makes the transition from justice as an interpersonal relation based on giving and receiving to justice as a virtue of the soul. In accordance with the *ergon* argument, Plato further frames the just city as a complex social structure within which the places and positions are occupied by people naturally suited for these places, i.e. everyone does his or her own *ergon* (370b1-2, 434c7-10). Moreover, the inner, psychological

⁶⁴⁶ See Williams (2006, 4–6) who analyses this question.

⁶⁴⁷ Moreover, Plato argues that the just person will be a friend of the gods (*Resp.* 1, 352b).

justice which underlies social justice is yet again characterized as an order of one's soul in which all parts are doing their *erga* (441d12-e2).

Despite the differences between their respective ethical theories, the *ergon* argument introduced in Plato's *Republic* 1 is fully utilized and inherited by Aristotle. The *ergon* argument illuminates how Aristotle's ethics relates to his science of nature and metaphysics. First, it utilizes much of Aristotle's psychology developed in the *De anima* as well as his biological notion of ζωή, the activities of living.⁶⁴⁸ Furthermore, the *ergon* argument was shown to have close ties to the discussion of natural teleology and living organisms in *De partibus animalium*.⁶⁴⁹ It was demonstrated that the *Protrepticus* uses the term χρῆσις for 'activity,' whereas the *Eudemian Ethics* operates with a newly established term, ἐνέργεια, and explains its relation to χρῆσις. The *Nicomachean* version of the *ergon* argument, on the other hand, abandons χρῆσις and consistently uses ἐνέργεια. Second, this relation to the science of nature and metaphysics also has a broader meaning. The *ergon* argument describes the position of the humane in Aristotle's universe. First, as humans, we are living beings, animals and social animals.⁶⁵⁰ In many respects, we behave and—so to say—'work' as other animals do. At the same time, we are endowed with reason, which makes us somewhat similar or at least connected to the divine. The reflection on our relation to the gods reveals our limits and dependency; on the other hand, the reflection on our relation to

⁶⁴⁸ *De an.*, 2.2, 413a22–25, cf. *Eth. Eud.*, 7.12, 1244b23–29 as well.

⁶⁴⁹ *Part. an.* 1.5, 645b14ff.; further see *Gen. an.* 5.1, 778a33.

⁶⁵⁰ Barney (2008, 320) nicely characterizes the *ergon* approach in ethics so that 'our ethical lives (are) structured around activities which at once express our natures, realize our good and contribute to our communities.'

other mortal animals reveals the source of human dignity, namely reason, which makes us similar to the divine.⁶⁵¹

There are two aspects which differentiate human beings from the rest of the natural world. Firstly, it is the complexity of our natural social living,⁶⁵² which due to our share in λόγος entails the discussion of the good and bad, the just and unjust.⁶⁵³ Moreover, being human is the only type of mortal living which is characterized by intellect.⁶⁵⁴ At the same time, we are the only species of mortal living beings which can be happy or which can have *eudaimonia*.⁶⁵⁵ Both of these aspects yield normative considerations; I have argued that the relation between these two aspects, between the practical or social on the one hand and the theoretical on the other, is the core problem of Aristotle's ethics, though he does not offer up one all-encompassing solution. As argued above, he provides several answers, which I believe to be answers to the same problem: how to reconcile these different aspects of human nature into a single normative ethics.

This general scheme is also developed in the *Protrepticus*, where Aristotle defends the value of theoretical philosophy. A man is defined by his intellect in relation to beasts and gods: 'when sensation and intellect are taken away, a human becomes roughly the same as a plant; when intellect alone is taken away, he turns into a beast; when irrationality is taken away but he remains in his intellect, a human becomes like a god.'⁶⁵⁶ However, a human being is not a god and must secure his own *eudaimonia*, his well-being and happiness. In the

⁶⁵¹ See Nussbaum (1995, 96–8) as a fine treatment of human nature spanning beasts on the one hand and gods on the other.

⁶⁵² Another specific aspect of human nature might be that a man is both gregarious and solitary (*Hist. an.* 1.1, 488a7).

⁶⁵³ *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a15ff.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. *Eth. Eud.* 7.12, 1244b23–29 or *Protr.* 5, 35.14–18 and 11, 58.10.

⁶⁵⁵ *Eth. Nic.* 1.9, 1099b31ff.; *Ph.* 2.6 197b4ff.

⁶⁵⁶ *Protr.* 5, 35.14–18.

Protrepticus, Aristotle does not define *eudaimonia*. His argument is structured so that ‘*eudaimonia* is either intelligence and a certain wisdom, or virtue, or enjoying oneself most of all, or all the above,’⁶⁵⁷ and in each and every case it belongs most to those who practice theoretical philosophy.

What are the pleasures of human living? In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle argues that they are the pleasures of thinking and contemplating, since human living actually consists of the activities of intelligence and contemplation.⁶⁵⁸ Moreover, those who exercise their intelligence the most are said to live perfectly (*Protr.* 11, 58.10). Why? Because intelligent living is more profitable than living with ignorance, which gives rise to mistakes, troubles and frustration. Second, because the virtuous practice of wisdom and intelligence is a perfection of ourselves. The *ergon* argument serves as the crux of the argumentation for this second explanation as to why intelligent people live perfectly and why their life is better compared to the lives of others.⁶⁵⁹

I have argued that Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* presents *ergon* in a twofold manner; first, it is something that a rational being essentially does, it is the activity of practical wisdom (φρόνησις). Second, it is something we ought to achieve, that we should do: it is being true (ἀληθεύειν), which we do when we think correctly. Practical wisdom is the *ergon* of the cognitive part of us and ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια) is the *ergon* of the virtue of this part, namely the *ergon* of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). This double *ergon* scheme is also manifested in Aristotle’s

⁶⁵⁷ *Protr.* 12, 59.26-60.1.

⁶⁵⁸ Johnson (2018, 61).

⁶⁵⁹ See Clark (1972, 283) who claims that according to Aristotle, ‘though all men are human, some are actually more – more actually human than others. It is in these men that we see most clearly what gives sense to human structure and society.’ I believe that he is right and that this anti-egalitarian or anti-populistic sentiment is present in Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* and also in some form in his later writings as well; cf. Pakaluk (1998) who argues that the *Eudemian Ethics* cannot be Aristotle’s work due to its egalitarian tendencies.

conclusion about perfect living: those who exercise their thinking live more than those who do not. Furthermore, those who are true (ἀληθεύειν) live perfectly, and live most of all. This hierarchy is comprised of three levels: those merely living, i.e. not exercising their thought, those who think and thus live more, and those who live the most since they think truly. This renders the *ergon* argument the primary defense of theoretical philosophy in the *Protrepticus*.

This perspective underwent a slight shift when I moved from the *Protrepticus* to Aristotle's two complex treatises on ethics. As mentioned above, the relation between the practical and the theoretical is the crucial problem discussed in both *Ethics*. We are not only social or political animals; we are rational animals as well. These two aspects of our nature not only go hand in hand (cf. *Politics* 1.2), but inquiring as to the ultimate end of all our actions requires a hierarchy to be established between these two aspects (and as has been elucidated, Aristotle always assumes hierarchical relations within complex wholes). Are we rational in order to be social or are we social and political in order to exercise our rationality in a proper way?

Both *Ethics* culminate with a discussion of this problem and each offers a partially different solution. In the chapters centered on the *ergon* argument in these treatises, I argued that the *ergon* argument plays an important role for the conclusion of each treatise.⁶⁶⁰ In both cases, the *ergon* argument functions as a transition from a formal account detailing the characteristics of *eudaimonia* to a substantive account of what it entails. As such, the *ergon* argument plays a pivotal role in the conclusion of both treatises, namely in the closing

⁶⁶⁰ In this respect, cf. Pakaluk (2011) and Lockwood (2014) on the unity and complexity of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

discussion of *eudaimonia* in Book 8 of the *Eudemian Ethics* and in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

I maintain that according to the *Eudemian Ethics*, *eudaimonia* is inclusive, since ‘happiness is the activity of a good soul ... in accordance with complete virtue’ (*Eth. Eud.* 2.1, 1219a34-39). This complete virtue is *καλοκάγαθία*, which is defined as a virtue encompassing all of the other virtues (*Eth. Eud.* 8.3 1248b8-11). The *Nicomachean Ethics*, on the other hand, develops an exclusivist conception of *eudaimonia* as the activity of *θεωρία* (*Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177a16-18, 1177b19; 10.8, 1178b7-8, 1178b32).

The *Protrepticus* serves as a very useful reference point, allowing for the differences between both *Ethics* to be more readily explained. I take it that both the *Eudemian* version and the *Protrepticus* share the concept of ethical knowledge modelled accordingly with other areas of knowledge. Both texts assume that there are natural standards (*ὄροι*) which should be applied in our decision making.⁶⁶¹ This conviction seems to be missing entirely from the special books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which instead accept the intellectualistic modus of the *Protrepticus* and give preference to the theoretical over the practical virtues. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, similarly to the *Protrepticus*, methodologically reduces the human being to his reason and the rational part of the soul, something which once again is not present in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

I presented the *ergon* argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2.1 to be a refinement of the earlier version in the *Protrepticus*; it is not merely a simplified version which avoids some of the issues of the *Protrepticus*, it is more explicit and concise than the *Protrepticus* version. I made clear that the argument should be read in conjunction with the closing chapter of Book 8, as only then does it furnish us with a full account of Aristotle’s position in the *Eudemian*

⁶⁶¹ Cf. especially Peterson (1988), Broadie (2010) and Kraut (1989, 327–34), cited above on this issue.

Ethics.⁶⁶² Despite the fact that *eudaimonia* is an inclusive concept which encompasses the moral virtues, the pinnacle of the *Eudemian Ethics* is more intellectualistic than is commonly believed. The θεωρία of god plays a central role, yet Aristotle never calls it *eudaimonia*. The θεωρία is the ὄρος which designates the proper amount of natural goods and possibly serves as the ὄρος for all activities of the soul.

The *Nicomachean* version of the argument is perhaps the most polished, though it is not as clear and transparent as its *Eudemian* counterpart. The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not conclusive concerning the inclusive or exclusive (dominant) character of *eudaimonia* in this treatise. However, I believe that when read in the context of the previous discussion of τέλος and τέλειος, it supports an exclusivist reading.

Several authors have claimed that Aristotle's ethics suffers from a major flaw as it discusses the good of man but not the good *for* man, i.e. that he did not demonstrate how the good in question is also good for us.⁶⁶³ The *ergon* argument is not the source of this problem, but rather the solution. The good of a given entity lies in its *ergon*, yet doing one's *ergon* well is always the best a given entity can do. Doing the best also means doing what is best for us. As I have argued, Aristotle offers at least two ways to explain this position. First, being rational and exercising our wisdom means living in accordance with knowledge as opposed to living in ignorance. Ignorance breeds mistakes, failures and frustration. Second, being rational signals a perfection of ourselves. One who is perfect or—according to the *Protrepticus*—lives perfectly, lives well and fares well. A good person is good and does well, which is the conclusion of ethics based on the *ergon* argument.⁶⁶⁴ Moreover, the works of

⁶⁶² Similarly Broadie (2010).

⁶⁶³ E.g. Glassen (1957); Wilkes (1978).

⁶⁶⁴ This seems to be the argumentation employed by Hutchinson (1986, 62–72), Lawrence (2011) and Brüllmann (2010, 134ff.) as well. Cf. Lawrence's conclusion: 'there is no room at this level for an opposition between, say, prudence and morality, where the one (whichever) is viewed as our proper functioning and

both Plato and Aristotle exhibit a theological coda to the entire argumentation: a good person is a friend of god and favored by the gods. Therefore, such a person can be considered happy even according to traditional morality.⁶⁶⁵

The final part of my book offers a new way out from the inclusivist-exclusivist debate on the nature of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I propose to distinguish between happiness on the one hand and a happy life (βίος) on the other. To phrase it simply, happiness is something different from a happy life. I believe this is made clear when the *ergon* argument from Book 1 is read in tandem with the passages ranking the intellectual virtues in Book 6 and the closing chapters of Book 10. My understanding of *eudaimonia* is an exclusivist or dominant one: *eudaimonia* is contemplation (θεωρία). Yet, I have avoided the unwanted and objectionable implications of such a reading by distinguishing *eudaimonia* from a happy βίος, a happy way of life.⁶⁶⁶ The happy human life naturally includes friends, family, community, social life and the related practical virtues (i.e. activities governed by practical virtues). However, that does not mean that happiness itself entails all or any of these. As I have phrased it: the question ‘What is happiness?’ is a different one from ‘What is a happy life?’ or ‘What does a happy life consist of?’ This sheds light on how Aristotle can reconcile the fact that we share *eudaimonia* with the gods, though we differ in our respective ways of life entirely.

the other, by contrast, as our real interest or greatest good. ... In short, contrary to Wilkes’ remark that: “it is far from clear ... how ... the superb functioning of any ergon-bearing creature is relevant to what that creature’s greatest good is,” I take it that it is precisely Aristotle’s position that with any ergon-bearing thing their greatest good couldn’t be anything but their excellent functioning’ in Lawrence (2011, 358).

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. Adkins (1960, 138–48) or Dover (1994, 259–60).

⁶⁶⁶ Such as the fanaticism mentioned by Clark (1975, 159) or possible immoral activity for the sake of θεωρία, cf. Meyer (2011, 61).

Similarly, as the higher parts of the soul presuppose the lower parts (but not vice versa) so that a rational animal necessarily has the two other parts of the soul as well (cf. *De an.* 2.3, 414b33-415a10), the happy life also subsumes the ends of the other two paradigmatic lives discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5. However, in this case, virtue and pleasure are not the final ends. The happy life is structured around θεωρία as its end, though this does not exclude the involvement of pleasure or social activities and the related virtues.

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