Eudaimonia Reading

Condensed Notes on Aristotle, 1999

Aristotle (1999) Nicomachean Ethics. Translated by T. H. Irwin. Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing

- I.1 Ends and Goods
  - Aristotle here argues that (1) the end of each activity is a good, (2) the ends of some activities are in the activities themselves, (3) some activities are subordinate to others, (4) this is so regardless of whether these activities have intrinsic or external ends, and (5) the ends of ruling activities are higher goods than the ends of subordinate ones.
- I.2 The Highest Good and Political Science
  - Aristotle argues that the highest good is the end sought for its own sake and for whose sake all other ends are sought. This highest good seems to be the end of political science since all other activities appear subordinate (more or less directly) to political science.
- I.3 The Method of Political Science
- I.4 Common Beliefs
  - The term "eudaimonia" is universally used to refer to this highest good. There are many views on what eudaimonia consists in and Aristotle is content to examine only the most popular and/or plausible views. Aristotle makes the further methodological point that only persons brought up in fine habits will follow his argument since it begins from "things familiar to us".
- I.5 The Three Lives
  - Each sort of life embodies some conception of the highest good. There are roughly three most favoured lives: lives of gratification, lives of political activity, and lives of study. The first is a slavish life suitable for grazing animals. The second embodies a conception of the highest good, either as honour or as virtue. The highest good as honour would be objectionably contingent on the attitudes of others. The highest good as virtue is implausible because the best life for humans must be an active one. The highest good as wealth is inconsistent with the highest good's being non-instrumentally good.
- I.6 The Platonic Form of the Good
- I.7 An Account of the Human Good
  - Aristotle briefly argues that if there is an end of all human action this is the good of all human action.
  - Aristotle makes formal claims about eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is complete (i.e. sought only for its own sake), most complete, self-sufficient, and most choiceworthy.
  - Aristotle argues that there is a human function which the good for humans depends on, and this human function is the essentially human function of rationality. An excellent human completes his function excellently, which is to complete that function in accord with the proper virtue. So the human good is activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue, additionally, in a whole life.
- I.8 Defense of the Account of the Good
  - Aristotle sets out common views about eudaimonia and argues that on his account, each view is at least partially correct. Aristotle's account makes sense of the apparent plausibility of these views. (1) Goods of the soul are goods most fully, and such is eudaimonia. (2) The view that eudaimonia consists in virtue is correct in identifying virtue as essential to eudaimonia. (3) The view that eudaimonia consists in pleasure is correct in claiming that the eudaimon life is pleasant. (4) The view that eudaimonia consists in good fortune is correct in claiming that eudaimonia requires some degree of good fortune.
- I.9 How is Happiness Achieved?
  - Aristotle summarily rejects that eudaimonia is simply bestowed by the gods, but maintains that, as the prize of virtue, it is nonetheless divine.
  - Aristotle argues that we achieve eudaimonia (largely) by cultivation rather than fortune, since, plausibly, the highest good is achieved in the best way. Aristotle argues that fortune plays some role since some external goods are necessary or instrumental to the activities in accord with virtue. That we devote such effort to shaping the character of citizens in political activity is evidence of eudaimonia's being largely achieved by cultivation.
  - Since eudaimonia depends on fortune and life includes many reversals of fortunes, we would not count a person who fell into terrible misfortune at an old age as eudaimon.
- I.10 Can We Be Happy During Our Lifetime?
  - Following from I.9, it seems we cannot describe a person as eudaimon in his lifetime, till his fortunes are entirely known. But it is absurd to think a person is eudaimon only when he is dead. So it seems we should think a person was eudaimon while he lived, but only think so when he is dead such that his fortunes are decided. But a person's fortunes are not decided even after his death. Such things as posthumous honours and the well-being of friends and children are matters of fortune that affect a person's living well too.
  - So we should be willing to think a person eudaimon while he lived. We are reluctant to do so because then a person's eudaimonia fluctuates, but we think it secure. It is secure regardless, since it is grounded in that person's being virtuous, which is secure. Activity in accordance with virtue is stable because it is in a sense a virtuous cycle, such activity reinforces the virtue, which such activity flows from. Only a long series of severe misfortune could undermine eudaimonia.
- I.11 How Happiness Can Be Affected After One's Death
  - Intuitively, the fortunes of friends and descendants affect one's living well. But this effect is too small to make a difference to whether a person's life was eudaimon.
- I.12 Praise and Honour
- I.13 Introduction to the Virtues

- X.6 Conditions for Happiness
  - Aristotle here rejects the substantive view that eudaimonia consists in pleasant amusements. This view is attractive because pleasant amusements cause more harm than benefit so appear to be sought for their own sake and because powerful persons enjoy pleasant amusements. But the virtuous person is the standard and pleasant amusements are instrumental to relaxation, which is instrumental to more vigorous pursuit of further goods. It is absurd to think that our suffering and efforts are ultimately aimed at pleasant amusement. We also think a slave could not achieve eudaimonia but could enjoy pleasure.
- X.7 Happiness and Theoretical Study
  - Aristotle argues that teleia eudaimonia is theoria in accord with sophia in a complete life since our understanding is the highest element in us. Aristotle argues that theoria has the marks of eudaimonia. It is most continuous, most pleasant, most self-sufficient, most complete, and most leisurely of the activities proper to virtue. A life of study would be divine since we share in it with the gods, but also most truly human since it is the best element in humans, so we should strive to such a life.
- X.8 Theoretical Study and the Other Virtues
  - The life of activity proper to the other virtues is eudaimonia deuteros because these are human activities (and not divine) and are constrained by human limitations and external circumstances. For example, just action requires other persons as recipients.
  - But because humans are social and political animals, and in fact humans not gods, the person who studies must do the other activities too. So we will require external goods, but only a moderate amount.
  - Eudaimonia tracks study in all beings: gods, humans, and animals.
- X.9
  - Philosophical argument rarely suffices to impart virtue since it struggles to overcome habit.
  - It is by nature, habit, and rational argument that persons come to be virtuous. Only some fortunate few are virtuous by nature. The rest must be habituated and then presented with suitable arguments since only those habituated will be moved by such arguments.
  - Good laws are necessary for such habituation. In cities where laws neglect their role in shaping character, the second best option is for each individual to promote the virtue of his friends and children.

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- I.1 Ends and Goods
  - §1 Each activity pursues some end, and these ends are goods. §2 Some such ends are the activities themselves, other such ends are results distinct from the activities. The latter ends are always better than the activities they result from. §3 There is a plurality of activities and a plurality of ends. §4 Some activities are subordinate to others. For example, bridle making is subordinate to horsemanship, and horsemanship is subordinate to generalship. Suppose some activity is subordinate to some other activity, then the end of the latter is a higher good than the end of the former. §5 This relationship holds even where the ends of the activities are the activities themselves.
- I.2 The Highest Good and Political Science
  - §1 Suppose that (1) there is some end sought for its own sake and for whose sake all other ends are sought, and (2) not all ends are sought for the sake of some further end, then this end is the highest good. §2 Knowledge of the highest good makes us better able to achieve it. §3 So we should strive toward such knowledge. §4-5 The end of political science seems to be the highest good because political science is the highest ruling science. (Presumably, this means that all other activities are subordinate to political science, directly or indirectly. For example, bridle making is subordinate to horsemanship, which is subordinate to generalship, which is subordinate to political science). §6 That the employment of all other capacities is directed by political science suggests that their activities are for the sake of political science, and political science is indeed the highest ruling science. §7 Not only is the end of political science a higher good than the ends of all other activities, the former includes the latter. Because the end of political science is so inclusive, it is the human good. §8 So Aristotle's inquiry is concerned with the basic principles of politics and it is a sort of political science".
    - §7 "introduces the important idea that the highest good is an ordered compound of noninstrumental goods".
- I.3 The Method of Political Science
- I.4 Common Beliefs
  - §1 What is the end of political science, that is the highest good? §2 The term "eudaimonia" refers to the highest good. §3 There is disagreement over what eudaimonia consists in, and a large multitude of opinions. §4 Aristotle is content to examine the the most plausible opinions. §5 An argument can establish principles on the basis of things that are familiar to us, or apply principles to things that are familiar to us. Aristotle's subsequent arguments aim to establish principles on the basis of things that are familiar to us. §6-7 So only a person brought up in fine habits could follow Aristotle's arguments since the things that are familiar to us are familiar only to such persons.
- I.5 The Three Lives
  - §1 Each person's understanding of the highest good is quite reasonably informed by the sort of life this person lives. So each sort of life embodies some conception of the highest good. §2 There are roughly three most favoured lives: lives of gratification, lives of political activity, and lives of study. §3 The life of gratification is is a slavish life, it is a life for grazing animals, so we should reject the conception of the highest good this life embodies. §4 The life of political activity seems to embody a conception of the highest good as honour. But this conception is implausible because a person's highest good is then objectionably contingent on the actions and attitudes of others. §5 This conception is implausible also because persons who seek honour seem to seek honour, in some way, for the sake of virtue. So virtue is a higher good than honour, and honour cannot be the highest good. §6 The conception of the highest good as virtue is also implausible because a virtuous life is made better by being also an active and fortunate one, so virtue is not sufficient for a eudaimon

life. §7 Discussion of the life of study is deferred. §8 The moneymaker's life does not embody a plausible conception of the highest good since money is sought for the sake of further ends.

- I.6 The Platonic Form of the Good
- I.7 An Account of the Human Good
  - §1 The good of an activity is its end since it each activity is for the sake of its end. So if there is a single end of all human action, this is the highest good of all human action. If there are multiple such ends, these are the highest goods of human action. §2 The argument above is a different argument from that at I.2§1, but both reach the same conclusion. The earlier argument relied on the idea of some activities being subordinate to others. This later argument does not rely on that idea.
  - §3 The highest good is complete (teleion) in the sense that it is an end sought for its own sake, and not for the sake of some further end. If only one end is complete, the highest good is this end. If multiple ends are complete, the highest good is the most complete. §4 An end sought for its own sake is more complete than an end sought for the sake of some further end. An end that is sought only for its sake is more complete than another end sought for its sake and for the sake of the former end. Hence an end that is always sought, and sought only for its own sake is unqualifiedly complete. §5 Eudaimonia is always sought, and sought only for its own sake, so it seems unqualifiedly complete. Eudaimonia is more complete than any virtue since each virtue is sought for its own sake and also for the sake of eudaimonia, but eudaimonia is sought only for its own sake.
  - §6 That eudaimonia is complete, it seems, also follows from its being self-sufficient. A good is self-sufficient in this sense iff it is sufficient for a person living in society, not iff it is sufficient for a person living alone, since humans are social and political animals. §7 A good is self-sufficient iff a life with this good alone is choiceworthy and lacking nothing. We think eudaimonia is such a good.
  - §8 It follows from eudaimonia's being self-sufficient that eudaimonia is the most choiceworthy of all goods, in the sense that it is not one good among many. If eudaimonia were one good among many, then the compound good formed by eudaimonia and some other good would be more choiceworthy than eudaimonia alone, then eudaimonia would not be self-sufficient.
  - §9 The formal claims (that situate eudaimonia within a network of normative concepts) made about eudaimonia made above are uncontroversial but also uninformative. Aristotle proceeds to make substantive claims about what eudaimonia consists in.
  - §10 Aristotle begins to give a substantive account of eudaimonia. What is good for something seems to depend on the function of that thing. For example, what is good for a sculptor qua sculptor is his sculpting well. §11 It seems odd to think that such things as carpenters qua carpenters and leather workers qua leather workers have functions but persons qua persons do not. Likewise, it seems odd to think that such things as eyes, hands, feet, and each body part has a function but persons do not. §12 The human function that the human good depends on is the essentially human function. So the human function is not nutrition and growth, which humans share with plants. Nor is it sense perception, which humans share with animals. (Aristotle here relies on his conception of a thing's essence being its soul, and the soul having three parts, a nutritive part, a locomotive part, and a rational part. So the essence of a human is the rational part of the soul and the essentially human function is reason). §13 So the human function is a life of action of the rational part of the soul. The rational part of the soul includes a subpart which is reason-sensitive and another subpart which itself reasons. The human function is a life of activity, it involves more than capacity. §14 So the human function is activity of the rational part of the soul (including both subparts). The function of an excellent harpist is to play the harp excellently. Analogously, the function of an excellent human is excellent activity of the rational part of the soul. §15 Each function is completed excellently by being completed in accord with the virtue proper to that function. So the human good consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with the virtue proper to such activity, or with the highest and most complete such virtue, if there is more than one such virtue. (Aristotle relies on the implicit premise that the good for something consists in its excellently serving its function).
  - §16 The human good consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with the highest and most complete virtue proper to such activity, in a complete life.
  - §17-23 Aristotle discusses methodological considerations.
- I.8 Defense of the Account of the Good
  - §1 Aristotle validates the account of eudaimonia against common views about eudaimonia, including the formal claims set out earlier in I.
  - §2 It is commonly said that goods of the soul (in contrast to goods of the body and external goods) are goods most fully. The above account of eudaimonia concurs. Goods of the soul are goods that depend on the condition of the soul. Goods of the body are analogously defined. External goods are goods that depend on conditions outside the agent. §3 According to the above account, eudaimonia is activity of the soul, this is consistent with its being a good of the soul. §4 The point here is not entirely clear.
  - §5-7 Aristotle sets out some common views about eudaimonia and argues that, on Aristotle's account, each of the common views is partially correct.
  - §8 The view that eudaimonia consists in virtue is correct in identifying that virtue is essential to eudaimonia. §9 This view goes wrong in thinking that eudaimonia consists in a capacity rather than an activity. We think intuitively that this is not so. §10 The view that eudaimonia consists in pleasure is correct in claiming that the eudaimon life is pleasant. On Aristotle's account, being pleased is an activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue. Presumably eudaimonia necessarily involves loving virtue. Then because it also involves activity in accord with virtue, and persons take pleasure in the things they love, eudaimonia necessarily involves pleasure. §11-13 Aristotle offers further considerations for thinking the eudaimon life pleasant. §14 Eudaimonia is most choiceworthy, most fine, and most pleasant.
  - §15-17 Eudaimonia requires some good fortune, so the view that eudaimonia consists in good fortune is partially correct. Eudaimonia requires some good fortune because we cannot do fine actions without external resources such as friends, wealth, and political power. A person deprived of such goods as good birth, good children, and beauty will also not be eudaimon.
- I.9 How is Happiness Achieved?
  - §1 Aristotle introduces the question of whether eudaimonia is acquired by learning, habituation, or fortune. §2-3 Aristotle dismisses the claim that since eudaimonia is the highest good, it is most suitable for the gods to bestow upon humans as a theological claim, beyond the present scope. It is consistent to think that eudaimonia is not so disposed but still in some way divine since eudaimonia, on

Aristotle's account, is the prize of virtue, and we think such a prize is divine and blessed. §4 If eudaimonia is not bestowed by the gods, then it will be widely shared since anyone capable of virtue can achieve eudaimonia through some sort of cultivation. §5 It is better to achieve eudaimonia by cultivation than by fortune, so it is plausible that we achieve eudaimonia by cultivation, since it is plausible that the highest good is achieved in the best way. §6 We think intuitively that our achievement of eudaimonia is to a large extent in our control.

- Aristotle argues in III.5 that being virtuous is up to us, and is not entirely dependent on fortune.

- §7 Some goods are necessary to achieve eudaimonia, other goods are instrumental to it. Such goods are necessary or instrumental to the activities that the eudaimon life consists in. §8 We think that the end of political science is the highest good. Political science is largely devoted to shaping the character of citizens. This suggests that achieving eudaimonia is largely (or at least somewhat) up to us. Why devote such effort if it were not? §9-10 We do not describe animals and children as eudaimon since they are incapable of a life of activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue.
- §11 Eudaimonia is such activity in a complete life because life includes many reversals of fortune and eudaimonia is still somewhat dependent on fortune. We would not describe a person who fell into terrible misfortune at an old age as eudaimon.

- I.10 Can We Be Happy During Our Lifetime?
  - §1 Aristotle introduces the question of whether we could describe a person as eudaimon during his lifetime. §2 It is absurd to think that a person could be eudaimon only after he is dead, especially since eudaimonia is an activity. §3 So it seems we should claim that only when a person is dead can we (completely) safely pronounce that his life was eudaimon while he lived. In other words, since external factors affect how eudaimon one's life is, and only at the end of a life can we be certain of how these factors played out, it is only at the end of a life that we can be certain if it was eudaimon. But this seems questionable because we think how well a person's life goes for him while he lives can be affected by events after his death. For example, if he receives posthumous honours or dishonours, and if his children fare well or fare poorly. §4 But it is absurd that how well a person's life went for him while he lived can fluctuate posthumously.
  - §6-7 It is absurd to refuse to describe a person's life as eudaimon while he lives. §7-8 We are motivated to so refuse because how well a person's life goes for him depends on indeterminate external factors and so is prone to fluctuate, but we think that a life's being eudaimon should be securely based, and should not so fluctuate.
  - §9 A person's achieving eudaimonia admittedly depends on his fortunes, but it is largely determined by his virtue, since eudaimonia consists in activity in accord with virtue. §10 Only a virtuous person can achieve eudaimonia, and a virtuous person can achieve eudaimonia quite (but not entirely) independently of fortune. Activity in accordance with virtue is stable because it is in a sense a virtuous cycle, such activity reinforces the virtue, which such activity flows from. §11 So a life's being eudaimon is securely based. A virtuous person will have a life of activity in accord with virtue quite independently of his fortune.
  - §12 Even major misfortune would not significantly undermine a virtuous person's achievement of eudaimonia since the virtuous person is noble and magnanimous, so will not be crushed by misfortune and will not see reason to give up his virtuous actions. §13 A virtuous person will never do vicious acts and will always do virtuous acts, regardless of his fortunes, although constrained by his resources. Such constraints are not sufficient to undermine eudaimonia. §14 Only a long series of severe misfortune could undermine a virtuous person's eudaimonia. §15-16 Hence a virtuous person can be called eudaimon in his lifetime, even though he is not assured of eudaimonia throughout his life.
- I.11 How Happiness Can Be Affected After One's Death
  - §1 It would be counterintuitive to claim that the fortunes of our descendants and friends (even after our deaths) do not undermine our eudaimonia. §2-4 The magnitude of such effects varies. §5-6 Aristotle suggests that the events that happen after one dies affect how well one's life went while one was alive, but this effect is minimal, and insufficient to render a formerly eudaimon life no longer so or do the reverse.
- I.12 Praise and Honour
- I.13 Introduction to the Virtues
- X.6 Conditions for Happiness
  - §1 Aristotle has concluded his discussion of the virtues, friendship, and pleasure. §2 Aristotle recapitulates that eudaimonia is an activity and not a capacity, and that eudaimonia is sought for its own sake and self-sufficient. §3 Activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue is sought for its own sake, but it seems so are pleasant amusements. Pleasant amusements are not sought for the sake of further ends since they cause more harm than benefit. Further, persons ordinarily considered eudaimon and powerful persons indulge in pleasant amusements. So we might think eudaimonia consists in pleasant amusements. §4-5 That powerful persons seek pleasant amusement is no reason to think eudaimonia consists in pleasant amusement. Powerful persons fail to find virtuous activity choiceworthy because they are not virtuous. The virtuous person is the standard. §6 It would be simply absurd to think that pleasant amusement is the highest good, because the highest good is that for the sake of which we seek all other things, and it is absurd to think our lifelong efforts and sufferings aimed at pleasant amusement. More plausibly, we amuse ourselves to relax, and relax so that we can thereafter more vigorously pursue other activities. So pleasant amusements serve further ends, and cannot be the highest good. §7 We think serious things better than trivial ones. §8 We think a slave's life prevents him from achieving eudaimonia, but a slave could enjoy bodily pleasures or pleasant amusements, so eudaimonia cannot consist in these.
- X.7 Happiness and Theoretical Study
  - §1 Complete (teleia) eudaimonia is the activity of study (theoria) in accord with its proper virtue (sophia) in a complete life. §2 Understanding (nous) is the highest element in us, and the objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge. We are more capable of continuous study than of any other continuous activity. §3 Study is the most pleasant activity. §4 Study is the most self-sufficient activity since it is least dependent on fortunes and external goods, and does not require other persons as partners or recipients. §5 Study, unlike activity proper to the other virtues, is sought for its own sake and never for the sake of some further good. §6 Eudaimonia is found in leisurely activities, in the sense of being activities done for their own sake, not reluctantly for the sake of some further end. Activity in war and political activity are unleisurely in the sense of being disagreeable and instrumental. §7 Activity in war and political activity are sought for the sake of some further end. But study is sought entirely for its own sake and is not

disagreeable as activity in war and political activity are, since the pleasure of study supports study. We think eudaimonia is self-sufficient, leisurely (agreeable and sought for its own sake), and continuous. Study is so too. So complete (teleia) eudaimonia is the activity of study (in accord with the proper virtue of sophia) in a complete life.
    - §8 Such a life of study would be a divine life since study is the activity of the most divine part of the human, the understanding. We should strive toward the divine by living such a life. §9 Such a life of study would be divine but also most truly human, since we should identify the human with the best and ruling element in him. So we should strive toward being most truly human by living such a life. Since such a life is most truly human, it is best and most pleasant for humans.
- X.8 Theoretical Study and the Other Virtues
    - §1-2 The life of activity in accord with the other virtues is eudaimon in a secondary way (deuteros) because these activities are human activities. These activities are constrained by human limitations and external circumstances. §3 Prudence (phronesis, alternatively translated as practical wisdom) is inseparable from virtues of character.
    - §4 The activity of study is less dependent on external goods than the activities proper to the other virtues. The brave person will need strength to do brave activities, and the temperate person can do temperate activities only if he has opportunities to do intemperate activities. §5 One worry is that to be virtuous, plausibly, requires only deciding virtuously and not acting virtuously, and deciding virtuously is not so dependent on external goods. But eudaimonia requires activity, so the relevant comparison is between the dependency of study against the dependency of other activities. §6 The activity of study itself does not require external goods. But because humans are social and political animals, the person who studies must also do the activities proper to the other virtues, and so still requires external goods.
    - §7 That complete (teleia) eudaimonia consists in the activity of study can be established by another argument. We think that the gods are eudaimon, but their only activity is study. It is absurd to think the gods do the activities proper to justice, bravery, generosity, temperance, and the other virtues. The gods do not suffer from the human limitations which make human virtues necessary or praiseworthy. So the human activity most similar to divine activity will, more than any other activity, have the character of eudaimonia (this is not to say that it will be eudaimonia). §8 We do not think animals eudaimon. So eudaimonia tracks the activity of study, not only in humans and gods, but apparently in all beings. §13 The person who does the activities of the understanding in accord with its proper virtue is most godlike, and is then eudaimon in the sense of being loved by the gods and in the sense of living and doing well.
    - §9 Eudaimonia (for humans) requires some degree of external goods since our studying requires that our human needs are met. But the amount of external goods required is not excessive. §10 We can do the actions in accord with virtue even with only moderate resources. This is evident from the observation that ordinary men do such actions, sometimes more than powerful wealthy men. So moderate resources are sufficient for eudaimonia. §11-12 Traditional views of the relation between eudaimonia and external goods concur. But this is not sufficient. A plausible theory of eudaimonia will make sense of how we live.
- X.9 Moral Education
    - §1 Aristotle introduces the question of how we should act given his theory of eudaimonia. §2 We will not be content simply to know virtue. We want to know also how we come to possess virtue and exercise it well. §3 Philosophical argument rarely suffices to impart virtue to a person. §4 The many naturally are moved by rewards, and fear of penalties, not by shame. §5 Philosophical argument struggles to overcome habituation
    - §6 It is by nature, habit, and rational argument that persons come to be virtuous. Only some fortunate few are virtuous by nature. The rest must be habituated and then presented with suitable arguments since only those habituated will be moved by such arguments. §7 A person moved by feeling and not by thought would not be responsive to argument.
    - §8 Such habituation requires the correct laws that prescribe how the many and especially the young should live such that they come to find virtue pleasant by habituation. §9 Even adults require such habituation, hence must be governed by such laws. §10-11 So the politician should present the decent person with arguments (since he will be responsive to them) and punish the base person (such that he will develop the habit of virtue). §12 An individual lacks the power to compel another to act virtuously, but the law has this power. This is because the law is in some way (both practically and theoretically) rational. Further, persons will strongly resist the compulsions of others but less so the compulsions of the law. §13 In most cities, in Aristotle's time, the law has neglected to attend to upbringing and practices. §14 In such cities, the second best option is for each individual to promote the virtue of his children and his friends. §15-17 Education that is adapted to the individual is most effective, but still requires knowledge of virtue generally.
    - §18 When and how should someone acquire legislative science? In general, sciences are imparted by their practitioners. For example, it is doctors who teach medicine. But politicians seem to rely simply on experience rather than careful thought. Politicians do not write or speak on matters of (what is now called) political theory. §19 Though politicians do not have political science, and cannot teach it, their experience is still valuable. §20 The sophists who claim to teach political science are ignorant. §21 Political science rests on experience but involves evaluation and judgement.
    - §22-23 Aristotle's subsequent works compile the political systems of his time and evaluate them.

Ackrill, 1980

Ackrill, J. (1980) "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," in Rorty, A. O. (ed.) Essays on Aristotle's Ethics. London, England: University of California Press, pp. 15-34.

- "In this lecture I should like to [...] contend that in Book 1 (and generally until Book 10) Aristotle is expounding an "inclusive" doctrine of eudaimonia".
- Ackrill distinguishes between two ways of understanding the use of "inclusive" and "dominant" as a contrasting pair. Understood in one sense, an end is "weakly" inclusive iff it is pluralistic and "strongly" dominant iff it is monistic. Understood in another sense, an end is strongly inclusive iff it is pluralistic and its components are of roughly equal, or at least commensurable, value, an end is weakly dominant iff it is an element of a pluralistic end whose value is not roughly equal to, or even commensurable with, the value of the other components of the pluralistic end.

- Aristotle's theory illuminates different aspects of eudaimonia.
  - One aspect of eudaimonia is linguistic. Aristotle's observes that "all agree in using the word eudaimonia to stand for that which is "the highest of all practicable goods," and that all take the expressions "living well" and "doing well" to be equivalent to it."
  - Another aspect of eudaimonia is "formal". For example, Aristotle argues that eudaimonia is "teleion".
  - A third aspect of eudaimonia is "substantive". A substantive theory of eudaimonia makes claims about what eudaimonia consists in. In other words, such a theory makes claims about what sort of life is eudaimon.
  - The formal claim that eudaimonia is inclusive, or that it is dominant, is the claim that eudaimonia's being so follows from an understanding of eudaimonia's relation to adjacent concepts. The substantive claim is the different claim that, although eudaimonia's being so does not necessarily follow from its relation to adjacent concepts, it in fact is so.
- Ackrill argues that Aristotle defends both the formal claim that eudaimonia is weakly inclusive and the substantive claim that it is so.
- Ackrill notes that in I.1, Aristotle discusses the notion of an end and connects it with terms like "good" and "for the sake of". Aristotle's claims here are formal.
  - Aristotle distinguishes between activities which have ends apart from themselves and activities which are their own end. Of the former sorts of activities, Aristotle writes that the ends are "better than" the activities. Aristotle also writes that some activities are subordinate to others, and that this relationship of subordination can hold not only between activities of the former sort. So some activity which is its own end can be subordinate to another which is its own end. The of subordination seems to be, roughly, the relation of "being for the sake of".
  - Then, Aristotle's claim is puzzling. It is not obvious how an activity which has is its own end could be for the sake of some other activity. It seems the former activity is simply for its own sake.
  - Ackrill argues that "what immediately suggests itself instead is a relation like that of part to whole, the relation an activity or end may have to an activity or end that includes or embraces it. [Such as] the relation of putting to playing golf or playing golf to having a good holiday." An activity could be its own end but also be for the sake of some other activity, even if the former is not a preliminary to the latter, if the former is a constituent of the latter.
- This understanding of the relation of subordination between activities is useful to understanding Aristotle's formal claims about eudaimonia.
  - Aristotle writes that eudaimonia is not "the result or outcome of a lifetime's effort; it is not something to look forward to (like a contented retirement), it is a life, enjoyable and worth while all through."
  - On this understanding of the relation of subordination, it is not incompatible to think that eudaimonia is constituted by activities which are their own end.
- In I.7, Aristotle "starts from points about "good" and "end" and "for the sake of" which come from chapter 1 and concludes with the statement that eudaimonia is something final and self-sufficient, and the end of action." This is a formal claim about eudaimonia.
  - The word "final" is a translation of "teleia" which could also be translated as "end-like".
  - Aristotle makes the formal claim that eudaimonia will be the most teleion end.
  - This is puzzling because Aristotle has, up to this point, only used "teleion" to separate ends desired in themselves from ends desired as means to other ends.
  - Aristotle immediately explains that some end is more final than another, even if both ends are sought for their own sakes, if the latter is also sought for the sake of the former. An end is unqualifiedly final if it is always sought for its own sake, and never for the sake of anything else.
  - We think formally that eudaimonia is so unqualifiedly final. For example, we think such things as pleasure are sought for their own sake but also for the sake of eudaimonia, and eudaimonia is always sought for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else.
- Aristotle writes that eudaimonia is "self-sufficient" in the sense that it, taken alone, makes life desirable and lacking in nothing.
- In making such claims about the unqualified finality and self-sufficiency of eudaimonia, Aristotle "is not here running over rival popular views about what is desirable, nor is he yet working out his own account of the best life. He is explaining the logical force of the word eudaimonia and its relation to terms like "end," and "good."
  - Aristotle's two points are that "you cannot say of eudaimonia that you seek it for the sake of anything else, you can say of anything else that you seek it for the sake of eudaimonia" and "you cannot say you would prefer eudaimonia plus something extra to eudaimonia."
- Aristotle seems aware of some distinction between the nature of his formal claims and the nature of his substantive claims, and marks the transition by writing "eudaimonia, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action. However, while the statement that eudaimonia is the chief good probably seems indisputable, what is still wanted is a clearer account of what it is."
- Aristotle concludes from the function argument in I.7 that "eudaimonia, man's highest good, is an active life of "the element that has a rational principle." This would of course cover practical as well as theoretical rational activity."
  - "However, Aristotle's final conclusion adds what is usually taken to be a restriction to theoretical or contemplative thought, theoria, and to express therefore a narrow as opposed to an inclusive view of eudaimonia. For he says: "the good for man turns out to be the activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete"; and it is supposed that this last must refer to sophia, the virtue of theoria.
  - But it is not clear that this restriction is supported by the function argument. "Aristotle has clearly stated that the principle of the ergon argument is that one must ask what powers and activities are peculiar to and distinctive of man. He has answered by referring to man's power of thought".
  - So, thus interpreted, this restriction does not follow from the function argument, and seems also hardly suggested by earlier discussions. It "will be an ill-fitting and at first unintelligible intrusion of a view only to be explained and expounded much later."
  - We could understand "best and most complete virtue" in a way analogous to how we understand "best and most complete activity", as "referring to total virtue". This interpretation "gives a sense to the conclusion of the ergon argument that is exactly what the argument itself requires".

    - "This suggestion is confirmed by two later passages in Book 1, where Aristotle uses the term teleia arete [which can be translated as complete or final virtue] and clearly is not referring to sophia (or any one particular virtue) but rather to comprehensive or complete virtue."
        - Most clearly, at I.13.1, Aristotle writes "since eudaimonia is an activity of soul in accordance with complete virtue, we must investigate virtue." and proceeds in the subsequent books to discuss both the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect.
- Ackrill argues that Aristotle does not satisfactorily answer the question "what is the best life for a man to lead?"
    - "A life of theoria would certainly be the best of all lives [but] man is a sort of compound, an animal who lives and moves in time but has the ability occasionally to engage in an activity that somehow escapes time and touches the eternal. So you do not give a man a complete rule or recipe for life by telling him to engage in theoria. Any human life must include action, and in the best life practical wisdom and moral virtue will therefore be displayed as well as sophia. But then [...] how should they be combined in the best possible human life?"
    - "Aristotle's failure to tackle this question may be due in part to [his] following here a traditional pattern of thought, the "comparison of lives.""
    - Ackrill argues that Aristotle fails to specify how sophia and the other virtues, and theoria and the other activities, are to be combined in the good life because Aristotle's beliefs about the divinity of theoria hence the incommensurably greater value of theoria commit him to the view that we should maximise theoria, or "make ourselves immortal as far as we can". But this is implausible since it implies that a person's life is eudaimon if he does anything however monstrous "if doing it has the slightest tendency to promote theoria".
    - Aristotle "cannot make intelligible in the Ethics the nature of man as a compound of "something divine" and much that is not divine" so "the best life for man must remain incapable of clear specification even in principle".

Lawrence, 1993

Lawrence, G. (1993) "Aristotle and the Ideal Life," The Philosophical Review 102(1), pp. 1-34.

- Aristotle's discussions of eudaimonia appear inconsistent. In NE I, Aristotle claims that eudaimonia consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue over a full life. The rational part of the soul includes the subpart which is reason-sensitive, character, and the subpart which itself reasons, intellect. I.13 and II-VI specify and discuss the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect. At X.6, Aristotle recapitulates that eudaimonia so consists. But at X.7-8, Aristotle seems to offer two further conceptions of eudaimonia, namely teleia eudaimonia and eudaimonia deuteros. The former is apparently a life constituted by study (theoria) in accord with theoretical wisdom (sophia). The latter is apparently a life constituted by the other activities in accord with the other virtues.
- Lawrence identifies three specific difficulties in interpreting Aristotle on eudaimonia.
    - Aristotle then appears to hold two inconsistent views. First, a pluralistic conception of eudaimonia, and second a monistic, intellectualist, conception of eudaimonia. In other words, if "teleia eudaimonia" is eudaimonia in the truest sense, then the discussion of the other virtues in II-VI seems pointless.
    - If "teleia eudaimonia" is eudaimonia in the truest sense, Aristotle is committed to a conception of living and doing well that implausibly excludes ethical action. On this conception, our living and doing well requires our acting however (morally) monstrously to promote theoria.
    - Even if Aristotle's account of eudaimonia is ultimately pluralistic, and does not afford theoria lexical priority over other activities, Aristotle appears unable to explain how the two sorts of activities are to be balanced in a life because he maintains that theoria is divine and other activities merely human.
- Lawrence believes that Aristotle's two discussions of eudaimonia, the first in I and the second in X, should be interpreted as offering two distinct sorts of ideal. The discussion in I is an account of eudaimonia as living and doing well given one's circumstances. In other words, the account in I is an account of what is eudaimonically best given one's circumstances. The discussion in X is an account of what is eudaimonically best, unconstrained by one's circumstances. In other words, it is an account of what is eudaimonically best that describes the eudaimonically best circumstances and the eudaimonically best life within those circumstances. In yet other words, Aristotle in I is concerned with how we eudaimonically ought to live, and in X is concerned with the eudaimonically best life.
    - So Aristotle's view is that, given one's circumstances, the eudaimonically best life consists in activity of the rational part of the soul (both the practical and theoretical subparts) in accord with virtue (both, on the one hand, the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect, and, on the other hand, theoretical wisdom, sophia) in a full life. And the "unconstrained" eudaimonically best life is the life that consists, as much as humanly possible in study in accord with theoretical wisdom in a full life, where what is humanly possible is what is in accord with virtue given the physical, emotional, and social demands of human nature.
- Lawrence argues that this interpretation is consistent with Aristotle's political program and purpose in the Nicomachean Ethics.
    - Aristotle argues in X.9 that politicians as legislators should make laws that habituate persons to acting in accord with virtue such that they may achieve eudaimonia in their lives. Presumably, the politician should also endeavour to bring about circumstances in society such that citizens' lives go eudaimonically best. So knowledge of both constrained (by circumstance) eudaimonia and unconstrained eudaimonia are important to the politician.
- Lawrence argues that this interpretation of Aristotle as offering an account of unconstrained (by circumstance) eudaimonia fits the text of X.6-8.
    - In X.6 Aristotle maintains that eudaimonia consists in a life of activity in accord with virtue and not a life of pleasant amusement. In X.7-8 Aristotle considers the two sorts of virtue, the virtues belonging to the rational subpart of the soul that is reason-sensitive, which are the virtues of character, and the virtue belonging to the rational subpart of the soul that itself reasons, which is theoretical wisdom. So then there are apparently two sorts of eudaimonia, each consisting in activity in accord with one of these sorts of virtue.
    - Aristotle's direct argument in X.7 is that the understanding (nous) is the best part of the soul, so its activity (study, theoria) done in accord with its proper virtue (theoretical wisdom, sophia) is complete eudaimonia.
    - Aristotle's "Six Criteria Argument" follows the direct argument.

    - Aristotle writes "perfect happiness for a human would be simply this best activity done well for a full human lifetime". Lawrence suspects that Aristotle is careful to say "would be" rather than "is". Aristotle seems to mean "perfect happiness would be simply study in accord with theoretical wisdom in a full life if only that were humanly possible". So such a life is superior but unattainable.
    - So Aristotle urges that we should strive for the divine even if being entirely divine is impossible. We should not simply settle for eudaimonia deuteros, a life of activity in accord with virtue but completely empty of study.
    - So when Aristotle writes that we are to immortalise ourselves as much as possible, the possibility at issue is that of ethical or full human possibility. This is not an injunction to maximise study subject only to physical constraints.
    - On this reading, it is evident that Aristotle is concerned with the constitution of eudaimonia, not the activities we should value or be devoted to.
- Lawrence argues that this interpretation quite straightforwardly resolves the problem of inconsistency. Aristotle's discussion in I gives an account of circumstantially-constrained eudaimonia. Aristotle's discussion in X gives an account of circumstantially-unconstrained (but still constrained by human nature) eudaimonia. The two discussions do not offer conflicting accounts of the same concept. The former account is a sort of value pluralism, the latter account is a sort of activity monism.
- This interpretation quite straightforwardly resolves the problem of immorality. Aristotle is not committed to the view that what is eudaimonically best is to act, however (morally) monstrously to maximise study. That is not humanly possible since humans live in society and must be constrained by the other virtues.
- On Lawrence's interpretation, Aristotle's rule for adjudicating between study and the other activities is to immortalise oneself as far as humanly possible. In other words, study as much as possible given one's circumstances while still acting virtuously, since humans are not gods and so cannot escape the demands of the other virtues. The specifics of this are left to practical wisdom.
    - One worry is that practical wisdom will lead one to maximise study at the expense of the other virtues. We worry that this could result because Aristotle's claims about the divinity of study and the merely human-ness of other activity seem to suggest that the former activity is incommensurably more valuable than each of the latter activities.
    - Lawrence argues that on his interpretation practical wisdom will not so determine. Practical wisdom is constrained by human possibility. Because it is humanly not possible to trample over the other virtues, practical wisdom will not determine us to do so.
    - But the problem is apparently deeper, Aristotle's conception of study as a divine activity makes it unclear how we could deliberate (practically reason) at all between study and other activity. We need to know how a divine activity fits into human life and the nature of its value for humans.

Urmson, 1988

Urmson, J. O. (1998) "Eudaemonia," in J. O. Urmson (ed.) Aristotle's Ethics. Oxford, England: Blackwell, pp. 118-127.

- Urmson suggests that we interpret Aristotle's claim in X that "teleia eudaimonia" consists in study as the claim that, while eudaimonia consists in a plurality of activities, study is the dominant activity. Study is so dominant in the sense in which a doctor's practicing medicine is the dominant activity in his life, even though he has not, for example, given up eating and other activities. This is consistent with the sense we have that Aristotle understands eudaimonia to be complex and inclusive, from the discussion in I and more generally in II-VI.
- Urmson argues that there is no profound philosophical reason behind Aristotle's exclusive consideration of the life of philosophy and the life of politics in X.7-8. This is simply a reflection of the prevailing sentiment among the upper classes that Aristotle addressed the Nicomachean Ethics to. Presumably to such persons, only the life of philosophy and the life of politics are serious candidates for the eudaimon life.
- It remains to be explained why Aristotle came down so emphatically in favour of the life of contemplation. Urmson clarifies Aristotle's conception of contemplation and god.
    - Aristotle argues that the life of contemplation is the most god like and god is the most eudaimon, and that we should strive to be godlike.
    - In VI, Aristotle tells us that theoretical wisdom (sophia) is knowledge of things necessary and unchanging. Contemplation is the exercise of theoretical wisdom. It is an activity, not a process, so it is the enjoyment, not the acquisition, of knowledge.
    - According to Urmson, Aristotle thinks that God is "pure intuitive reason".
    - Since man has a capacity for intuitive reason, intuitive reason is in man, and God is pure intuitive reason, so there is a divine element in man.
- One difficulty with Aristotle's account is that it is extreme. Aristotle says that only tiredness and other human weakness should limit one's concentration on contemplation. Urmson "can offer no satisfactory explanation of this".
- But there is very little that man can contemplate. Because of man's cognitive limitations, not many necessary and unchanging truths are intuitively evident to man. So if man were to only contemplate, he would lead an intellectually impoverished life. Urmson again has no solution.
- Further, Aristotle's life does not seem to be one containing much contemplation. Aristotle's works are largely biological and based on observation. The ethical and political works are collections of descriptions of constitutions, and discussions of puzzles and problems, not based on intuitive premises. And the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle has said has a practical rather than theoretical aim. So the life of the philosopher that Aristotle appears to defend is more like the life of a scholar, and it contains little contemplation. So Aristotle's argument from the divinity of contemplation hardly grounds its superiority over the life of politics. Urmson again has no solution.
- The above considerations are difficulties faced by an interpretation under which Aristotle claims that contemplation is the sole constituent of the good life. These problems do not arise for a more moderate interpretation under which Aristotle is claiming that the best career is that of the scholar or philosopher.
- Aristotle concludes that the aim of his theory is practical not theoretical. Its aim is to help legislators frame laws that will better lead and compel men towards a good life.

Nagel, 1972

Nagel, T. (1972) "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," Phronesis 17(3), pp. 252-259.

- Nagel first examines Aristotle's function argument in I.7. Aristotle argues that the good for something is a function of that thing's function.
  - Aristotle argues that the human function is reason. This argument appears to be disjunctive. Aristotle observes that humans do many activities, but some of these are shared with plants and other animals. Aristotle then concludes that the human function cannot be these activities, and so must be the activity of reason, that is not so shared. The operative idea in Aristotle's admittedly brief argument seems to be that the good for something depends on its essential function. Some function of some thing is its essential function if this thing is this thing in virtue of its serving this function. For example, a carpenter is a carpenter in virtue of his practicing carpentry, so practicing carpentry is the essential function of the carpenter, and the good for the carpenter qua carpenter depends on his practicing carpentry. So, Aristotle's disjunctive argument can be more fully spelt out as follows. Humans share the activities of nutrition and growth with plants, so these activities are not the essential function of humans, i.e. we are not humans in virtue of our taking in nutrition and growing. Similarly, humans share the activities of sense perception and locomotion with animals, so these activities are not the essential function of humans. Then, the only remaining activity, reasoning, must be the essential function of humans.
  - But this argument is unsound. Man's reasoning simply is not what makes us human. Suppose that some being, like man, reasons, but does no other activity. This being would not be a human, but some "rarefied individual". Further, man shares the activity of reason with Aristotle's gods, so presumably it is not our reasoning that makes us human.
- Aristotle could resist a broader conception of the human function, as, for example, including healthy bodily functions, on the ground that healthy bodily functions are objectionably sensitive to fortune, so a person's healthy bodily functions are not a matter of his functioning well or poorly, but a matter of his being fortunate or otherwise.
  - "Therefore if I contract cholera, the intrusion of the hostile bacilli is a calamity, but not a malfunction of mine, hence not to be weighed in counting me eudaimon or not."
  - But the hostile bacilli certainly does cause a malfunction of some sort. This malfunction, which includes all the physical symptoms, we would ordinarily describe as my malfunction. It is not clear what reason there is for thinking this malfunction does not belong to me. So fortune-sensitivity is inadequate grounds for resisting a broader conception of the human function.
- Aristotle's argument, interpreted as a disjunctive one, is unsound because it rests on the false implicit premise that the human function is either nutrition and growth, or sense perception and locomotion, or reason. If we dispense with this false premise, Aristotle appears committed to attributing to humans a conjunctive function.
  - A combination corkscrew and bottle opener serves two purposes; it removes corks and it opens bottles. But it shares the former with ordinary corkscrews, so its removing corks is not its essential function. And it shares the latter with ordinary bottle openers, so its opening bottles is not its essential function. If we falsely assume that its function is either removing corks or opening bottles, we are led to a contradiction. If we do not so assume, it is natural to think that its function is the conjunction, removing corks and opening bottles. Analogously, if we dispense with the false implicit premise in Aristotle's disjunctive argument, it seems natural to conclude that humans have a conjunctive function that includes nutrition and growth, sense perception and locomotion, and reason.
- But this conclusion is absurd because it implies that human reasoning and human digestion stand "shoulder to shoulder" as parts of human's essential function. In other words, our digesting well and our reasoning well are in themselves equally important to our functioning well hence to our lives being good for us.
- So Nagel thinks we should abandon the disjunctive interpretation of Aristotle altogether. "The operative idea is evidently that of a hierarchy of capacities. The life capacities of a complex organism are not all on a level: some serve to support others." The different activities of a human are not "separate activities going on side by side in the same individual", our functions are "coherently organised". So the essential human function is not the mere conjunction of component human functions but some coherent organisation of these component human functions.
  - Plausibly, Aristotle's view is that non-rational human activity serves rational human activity. In other words, "the highest-level account of a human life puts all the other functions into a supportive position in relation to rational activity. And although reason helps us to get enough to eat and move around, it is not subservient to those lower functions." On this view, rational activity "is what human life is all about".
  - In the human life, all activities, including practical reason, support theoretical reason, and theoretical reason does not support any other activity. So theoretical reason seems to sit atop the hierarchy of human activities, as what human life is ultimately about.
  - "As [Aristotle] says at 1177b33, we should not listen to those who urge that a human should think human thoughts and a mortal mortal ones. Rather we should cultivate that portion of our nature that promises to transcend the rest. If anyone insists that the rest belongs to a complete account of human life, then the view might be put, somewhat paradoxically, by saying that comprehensive human good isn't everything, and should not be the main human goal. We must identify with the highest part of ourselves rather than with the whole."
- Nagel anticipates two responses. The first rejects that the human function hence eudaimonia is some coherently organised whole, and maintains that it is some conjunction without orderings of support and priority. The difficulty with this response is that it "leaves us uncertain how to draw the line against good digestion as a component of eudaimonia (rather than just as a contribution to it.)" The second offers an alternative coherently organised whole as the human function.

Pakaluk, 2005

Pakaluk, M. (2005) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, pp. 316-331.

- Pakaluk identifies puzzles in Aristotle's discussion of eudaimonia.
  - First, Aristotle appears to maintain a sort of indecision between a monistic eudaimonia and a pluralistic eudaimonia throughout the first and middle books. But Aristotle then appears to decide without argument in favour of a monistic eudaimonia at X.7.

    - Second, it is not clear what is meant by "teleia eudaimonia" and "eudaimonia deuteros" in X. Aristotle maintains that eudaimonia is the ultimate end, so it is not clear how some end could be more end-like than another. "eudaimonia deuteros" also appears to be a merely honorific title.
- Pakaluk considers one interpretation under which Aristotle in X.6-8 is presenting a comparison of the three lives, the life of pleasure, the life of politics, and the life of philosophy. There are several difficulties with this interpretation.
    - First, the discussion in X.6 does not appear to be a discussion of the life of pleasure first mentioned in I. The later discussion seems to center around pleasant amusements such as playing games and joke-telling while the earlier discussion seems to center around the bodily pleasures of food, drink, and sex. The earlier discussion summarily dismisses such pleasures on the ground that they are slavish and animalistic. The later discussion dismisses such pleasures (as candidates for eudaimonia) by arguing that they serve further ends.
    - Second, there seems to be no reason to think that Aristotle has failed to resolve the comparison of the three lives in I.5, and that the matter should be opened again in X.
    - Third, Aristotle is clear in VI that practical wisdom requires a "target" and that this "target" is study. In other words, practical wisdom guides deliberation about practical matters only if there is some goal around which practical wisdom should structure or arrange a person's practical matters, and this goal is study. So the life that Aristotle describes as "eudaimonia deuteros" seems oddly incomplete.
    - Fourth, the life that Aristotle describes as "teleia eudaimonia", if it is a life consisting solely in study in accord with theoretical wisdom, seems to lack any constraints.
- Pakaluk argues that Aristotle's intention in X.6-8 is to give an outline of eudaimonia, drawing on the material discussed in I and in the middle books, and not introducing new material.
    - So Aristotle's outline "would require mention of four elements": study, practical deliberation, sufficiency of material goods, and security against misfortune.
- Pakaluk concludes with a brief discussion of Nicomachean Ethics in general.

Price, 2011

Price, A. W. (2011) Virtue and Reason in Plato and Aristotle. London, England: Oxford University Press, pp. 69-80.

- Aristotle's claim at I.7 that eudaimonia consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue in a full life, and that if there are multiple such activities, it is the most complete one, and Aristotle's claim at X.7 that "teleia eudaimonia" is contemplation in accord with theoretical wisdom suggest a monistic conception of eudaimonia. On this conception, contemplation is the only genuine component of eudaimonia, so only contemplation is intrinsically eudaimonically good.
- One worry about this conception of eudaimonia is that it is an immoral one. It seems to suggest that one eudaimonically should commit even moral monstrosities if doing so promotes one's contemplation.
- Price claims that even if some other activity (moral action) is not a component of eudaimonia, doing it could be necessary to achieve eudaimonia. "To kill one's aunt in order to accelerate an inheritance invaluable for philosophy might be, as Heinaman has put it, 'to be burdened with evil that puts eudaimonia out of reach'."
    - The argument for this claim seems to be found elsewhere (that Price fails to point to).
- Price claims further that even if moral action had no effect on eudaimonia, "it could still be that [such] acts might still do enough to enhance a life, without enhancing its eudaimonia, to be worth performing."
- "In any case, as most interpreters agree, this reading of Aristotle is insecurely grounded in the texts." I.7 at best leaves the question of which activity and virtue is "best and most complete", so it falls short of the claim that eudaimonia consists in contemplation. At X.7, contemplation in accord with theoretical wisdom is described as "teleia eudaimonia" not unqualified eudaimonia, because it most shares in the "marks of eudaimonia". Aristotle here could be interpreted as thinking that contemplation is privileged among the components of eudaimonia, not that contemplation is the sole component.
    - "Nothing follows about how the peculiarly intrinsic value of contemplation compares with the mixed values of other components of eudaimonia." The value of contemplation is peculiarly intrinsic in the sense that contemplation is sought for its own sake, and it is in accord with theoretical wisdom, not in virtue of its having any sort of consequences. In contrast, the value of virtuous practical action is mixed in the sense that such actions are sought for their own sake but are virtuous in virtue of their having certain sorts of consequences.
- Price attends to one puzzle in Aristotle's argument from the marks of eudaimonia. In this argument, Aristotle writes that contemplation "alone would seem to be loved for its own sake", since "nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating", whereas "from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action". This seems to mean that because practical activities have good consequences, they are not sought for their own sake, but are in a sense, instrumental. But we think that virtuous actions are sought for their own sake, and Aristotle writes at II.4 that one acts virtuously only if one chooses one's act, and chooses it for its own sake. Then, it seems, there are no virtuous practical actions. But this is absurd, and Aristotle devotes much of the middle books to discussing exactly such actions.
    - Price argues that "we have to apply the phrase 'for its own sake' differently in the two contexts". Virtuous practical actions are sought for their own sake, but are virtuous in virtue of their consequences.
- Aristotle also writes that contemplation is divine and most truly human, and that humans should as far as possible strive to be divine. Price characterises Aristotle's thought here as follows. "We are above all reason in that the structure of our psychic capacities can be explained as subserving the exercise of reason within a body. The question ‘Why do we have appetites and perceptions (many of them distinctively human)?’ must be partly answered by reference to reason; ‘Why do we have reason?’ cannot be properly answered by reference to appetite and perception (whose general features are shared with the lower animals). Reason is the teleological focus of our humanity."
    - This argument seems similar to Nagel's, and establishes that the essential human function is theoretical wisdom.