Function Argument Reading

Further Condensed Notes on Aristotle, 1999

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

- I.1 Ends and Goods
  - Aristotle begins the Nicomachean Ethics with some preliminary comments about activities, ends, and goods. This is presumably intended as a sort of "hook".
- I.2 The Highest Good and Political Science
  - Aristotle here motivates the inquiry into eudaimonia, that will occupy the remainder of the Nicomachean Ethics, for the political elite who were in Aristotle's audience. There are apparently two reasons for the political elite to follow Aristotle's inquiry. First, knowledge of eudaimonia makes it easier to achieve. Second, eudaimonia is the supreme good, and political science is the "highest and ruling science", so an inquiry into eudaimonia is an inquiry of political science, that the political elite have an interest in.
- I.3 The Method of Political Science
  - Having motivated the inquiry into eudaimonia, Aristotle clarifies the method of this inquiry. Aristotle here warns that the insights from this inquiry will be general rather than universal, and will be relatively imprecise. This is because the normative premises Aristotle begins from are also general and imprecise.
  - Aristotle warns also that the young and the immature will not be good students of the Ethics because (1) such persons will not share the premises of this inquiry, and (2) the inquiry will be of no practical use to such persons who will continue to act on their feelings rather than on reason.
- I.4 Common Beliefs
  - Aristotle's methodological comments continue here. There are many competing conceptions of eudaimonia. It will not be productive to consider each of these in detail. Aristotle is content to consider only the most popular and the most plausible among them.
  - Aristotle's inquiry into eudaimonia will begin from premises that are familiar to us (ethical readers). This is why only a person brought up in fine habits will be a good student of the Ethics, because only such a person will share the premises from which Aristotle begins.
- I.5 The Three Lives
  - Having clarified the method of inquiry, Aristotle returns to consider the conceptions of eudaimonia that are most popular or most plausible. These are embodied in the life of pleasure, the life of political activity, and the life of philosophical 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 Conception of the Good
  - Aristotle rejects the Platonic conception of eudaimonia.
- I.7 An Account of the Human Good
  - The good of an activity is its end, so the human good will be the end of all human action, if there is one.
  - 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?
  - Eudaimonia is divine but not simply bestowed by the gods.
  - Eudaimonia is achieved by cultivation but also requires good fortune. This validates the claim in I.8.
- I.10 Can We Be Happy During Our Lifetime?
  - That eudaimonia requires good fortune, and is evaluated in "a complete life" invites the worry that, because there can be large reversals in fortune towards the end of a person's life, we cannot be eudaimon until we are dead, when we are no longer subject to fortune.
  - Aristotle's first response is that we should consider a person to have been eudaimon while he lived, but only so consider once that person is dead. This does not seem to go far enough, because we are subject to posthumous fortunes.
  - Eudaimonia is grounded in virtue, which is self-reinforcing, so only a long chain of severe misfortune could rob a person of eudaimonia. So eudaimonia is relatively stable.
- I.11 How Happiness Can Be Affected After One's Death
  - One can be made more or less eudaimon by posthumous fortunes, but a eudaimon person could not be made otherwise by posthumous fortunes, nor the reverse.

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 end of some activities is 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

Aristotle, 1999

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

- 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 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, feed, 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 dispensed 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 that we can 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

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".

Bostock, 2000

Bostock, D. (2000) Aristotle's Ethics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 7-29.

- Bostock summarises Aristotle's function argument as follows. There is a human function, the good man is the man who performs the human function well, so the good for man is performing the human function well. The human function is activity of the rational part of the soul (including the subpart that itself reasons and the subpart that does not itself reason but is responsive to reason). So the good for man is excellent (in accord with virtue) activity of the rational part of the soul (in a whole life).
- Aristotle's argument that there is a human function appears to be that it would be odd to think that such things as carpenters (qua carpenters) and leatherworkers (qua leatherworkers) have functions but that persons (qua persons) do not, and that such things as eyes, hands, feet, and each body part has a function but persons do not.
    - This argument supplies prima facie reason to think that there is a human function, but the argument is not sufficient to establish that there is in fact a human function. There is no contradiction in admitting that such things as carpenters, leatherworkers, eyes, hands, and feet have functions and denying that there is a human function.
- Bostock argues that Aristotle's argument is more sophisticated than it appears. Bostock finds in Aristotle's argument several ideas.
    - According to Aristotle, on Bostock's interpretation, some thing's function is essential to that thing. For example, what makes some thing an eye is that it sees, and what makes some thing a heart is that it pumps blood. In other words, some thing's function is what it does that makes it what it is. Why think that it is what some thing does, rather than any other quality of that thing, that makes it what it is? One reason is that it seems plausible prima facie. For example, human hearts and animal hearts are anatomically dissimilar but serve the same purpose, and in identifying both as hearts, we seem to think that it is the latter similarity rather than the former dissimilarity that matters. An analogous argument from the professions can be constructed.
    - We observe that what something does that makes it what it is, is also in some sense, what it is for. This suggests that we can trace "upwards" in a hierarchy of purpose (what things are for). For example, the heart is for pumping blood, pumping blood is for circulating oxygen and nutrients around the body, this circulation is to facilitate the function of the different organs, and so on. Presumably, tracing "upwards" in this way, we reach a statement of what man as a whole is for. Man is for living a certain sort of life, so living this sort of life is the human function.
    - We can trace "downwards" in the hierarchy of purpose too. What the different parts of a man are for, and why they are arranged the way they are in man, is for man to live a certain sort of life, i.e. for man to perform the human function. Because the parts of man are arranged in a distinct (from animals or other living things) way, there is a distinct human function. And the arrangement of the different parts in man reveal the nature of the human function.
    - Presumably then, a good man is a man who performs the human function well.
- Aristotle appears to offer a disjunctive argument for the claim that the human function is activity of the rational part of the soul. Then the good man is the man who performs this function with excellence.
- In I.8-12, Aristotle aims to show that his account of eudaimonia harmonises with the common beliefs. I.13 is best understood as an introduction of the virtues, discussed in subsequent books.

- Bostock alleges that Aristotle fails to adequately distinguish between the good for man and the good man. In I.1-6 and I.7§1-9, Aristotle's claims are about the good for man. Aristotle's claims in I.7§10-16 are about the good man. Aristotle argues in the first part that eudaimonia is what all humans aim at, but does not argue that the human sort of life, of activity of the rational part of the soul, is what all humans aim at.

Wilkes, 1980

Wilkes, K. V. (1980) "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics," in Rorty, A. O. (ed.) Essays on Aristotle's Ethics. London, England: University of California Press, pp. 341-358.

- Wilkes understands the function argument as an argument for an intellectualist dominant if not monolithic conception of eudaimonia as consisting (largely if not entirely) in contemplation, and identifies Inference (from the human function and what makes a human good to human flourishing or what is good for a human) as the primary difficulty in the function argument. Wilkes thinks "[w]e cannot solve this problem without examining the nature of the activities that are characteristic of mankind and hence constitute man's ergon." In other words, Wilkes thinks that the Substance, i.e. what turns out to be the human function will justify the Inference.
  - Wilkes then considers Aristotle's Substantial claim, that the human function is activity of the rational part of the soul.
  - Wilkes considers the objection that favours a conjunctive human function. Wilkes responds that Aristotle has in mind a hierarchy of capacities, which justifies privileging rational activity as the human function.
  - Wilkes then finds that, whether Aristotle is understood as arguing for an intellectualist conception of eudaimonia as consisting in contemplation or Aristotle is understood as arguing for a conception of eudaimonia as consisting in activity of practical reason, Aristotle can maintain that a life so active will be a eudaimon life. In the theoretical case, a life of contemplation is eudaimon because contemplation is a divine activity and makes a man divinely blessed. In the practical case, a life of activity of practical reason will be a good life for man because practical reason is simply reason employed in the pursuit of the (highest) good.
  - Wilkes then discusses Aristotle's reasons for favouring the intellectualist conception of eudaimonia, but argues that these reasons should be rejected. In either case, we find that Substance justifies Inference.
  - Wilkes concludes by meeting the objection that Aristotle's eudaimonia is objectionably self-absorbed and immoral or at best amoral.
- Wilkes notes that Aristotle writes "It seems proper to a prudent person to be able to deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for himself, [...] about what sort of things promote living well in general." (VI.5§1)
- Wilkes interprets the function argument as follows. The function of some thing is what this thing does that makes it the sort of thing it is. For example, the function of a sheepdog is herding sheep because it is in virtue of its herding sheep that it is a sheepdog. The function of some thing is assigned by definition. For example, the function of a sheepdog is herding sheep because what we mean by "sheepdog" is (in part) something that herds sheep. By a similar sort of argument, a good some thing is one that performs the function of such things well. For example, when we say that a sheepdog is a good sheepdog, we simply mean that it herds sheep well. This is also true by definition.
  - The problem in Aristotle's function argument, then, is that the inference from some thing's making a man good to that thing's being good for man, appears to be unsound.
- Aristotle argues that the human function is activity of the rational part of the soul. This conclusion is suspicious because it seems to rest on a definition of man as a being that essentially reasons, i.e. a definition of man under which it is man's reasoning that makes man man. But there seems to be little reason to accept this definition of man over the alternatives. One alternative definition of man is as a being that essentially reasons, and exercises the nutritive and locomotive capacities than man shares with animals and plants.
  - This alternative definition would not be entirely alien to Aristotle. According to Aristotle, a being's soul is the essence of that being, and humans have a composite soul, comprised by a nutritive part, a locomotive part, and a rational part. So it seems even Aristotle has little reason to accept a restrictive definition of man which implies an entirely rational human function.
  - If we understand Aristotle as arguing that the human function is contemplation then this argument is simply unsuccessful because Aristotle's gods also contemplate, so it cannot be our contemplating that makes us human. If we instead understand Aristotle as arguing that the human function includes both theoretical and practical reason, then there seems to be no reason to think that the human function could not also be extended to include the nutritive and locomotive activities we share with other living beings.
- Wilkes seems to respond along the same lines as Nagel (1972, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia").
  - Aristotle has in mind a hierarchy of capacities. Human capacities are coherently arranged to support reason. Even though reason is sometimes employed in the service of other capacities like nutrition, it is reason that is essential to

man. A man who could not eat or move would still be a man, but a being that could eat and move but not reason would be some sort of non-human animal.
    - Suppose that practical reason is the supreme capacity in man, and that the human function is practical reason. Then, the life of a good man is a life consisting in the excellent exercise of practical reason. This is a life in which one deliberates well about things that are good and beneficial to one and promote living well in general, and governs one's life in accord with such deliberations. This is a full and active life, and a life that is good for the person whose life it is. This life will require the exercise of the other-regarding virtues because man is a social creature.
    - There seems to be little reason to think that theoretical wisdom is the supreme capacity in man, and that the human function is theoretical wisdom (though this seems to be Aristotle's view). Theoretical wisdom is shared with the gods, and there seem to be persons who we regard as human who are incapable of contemplation in Aristotle's sense. Further, the exercise of theoretical wisdom does not seem to be good for man in the way that the exercise of practical wisdom is.
- Aristotle's arguments for the supremacy of theoria are the Direct Argument and the Six Criteria Argument in X. The Direct Argument, that theoria is divine and so it is the noblest and best man that engages in theoria, and so engaging yields the most divine happiness.
- Wilkes argues that we should reject Aristotle's apparent intellectualism. First, we have no reason to accept Aristotle's theological beliefs, so we have no reason to accept the Direct Argument for the supremacy of theoria over practical reason. Then, the life of the good man is not necessarily the life of theoria, and the eudaimonic value of theoria is no longer incommensurably greater than that of other goods. So theoria can be an element of eudaimonia without "crowding out" the other more ordinary human goods. Second, we should reject Aristotle's distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom. Human reason is perhaps best understood as "a whole host of techniques and behaviours that are intended to solve problems of various kinds". Third, we should reject Aristotle's idea of contemplation as an activity. It seems neither feasible nor desirable that there is a wholly static activity of mental gazing. Then, there is no need to divide the human capacity to reason as Aristotle does, so the human function is simply reason, and this yields a holistic conception of eudaimonia as a full and active life.
- Aristotle's argument that the life of the good man is a life good for man then is simply that the life of the good man is the life in which reason is excellently exercised, and reason is excellently exercised when it is employed to achieve the best life.
    - But this does not seem to be what Aristotle understands himself to be doing. Aristotle appears to think that the function argument reveals what the best life is. On this interpretation, Aristotle's function argument is merely an argument for the claim that a life consisting in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue (excellence) will be the best life, not an argument that it is what the best life consists in. On this interpretation, Aristotle's view is that the best life consists is a life rich in the goods that the excellent exercise of reason secures, not in the excellent exercise of reason itself.

Whiting, 1988

Whiting, J. (1988) "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense," Ancient Philosophy 8, pp. 33-48.

- Whiting characterises Aristotle's function argument as involving two inferences, first from the human function being a certain sort of life to the good man's life being a certain sort of life, second from the good man's life being a certain sort to a life that is good for man being a certain sort.
    - Whiting characterises a general objection to the function argument. These inferences are apparently vulnerable to counterexamples. For example, it is the function of a flutist to play the flute. Even if a good flutist is one who plays the flute well, so such things as perfect pitch make a person a good flutist, it does not follow that perfect pitch is good for the flutist. It could be that an unemployed virtuoso in an economic downturn would be better off if he had been tone deaf, and pursued an alternative career. So the second inference is unsound.
    - Another counterexample is that the function of a knife is to cut. Even if a good knife is one that cuts well, so such things as sharpness make a knife a good knife, it does not follow that sharpness is good for a knife. It seems absurd to say that anything is good for a knife (or any other inanimate object).
- Whiting characterises three more specific objections to the function argument.
    - The first objection rejects that man has a function. Flutists and leatherworkers have functions because they serve some further ends or purposes. Aristotle would perhaps think that flutists serve to prime the mind for contemplation and that leatherworkers serve to equip an army. Likewise, eyes, hands, and feet have functions because they serve some further ends or purposes. Eyes serve to enable vision, hands serve to enable tool use, and feet serve to enable walking. So each of the examples Aristotle provides is some thing that is instrumental to some further end. But humans are not so, there is nothing that a human as such is instrumental to. So there is no human function.

    - The second objection contests Aristotle's identification of the human function as the peculiarly human activity. That some activity is peculiar to humans seems to be no reason to think it is part of the life of the good man, or that it is good for man. For example, prostitution is a peculiarly human activity, but it is not plausibly part of the life of the good man or good for man (even if it is, it would not be in virtue of its being a peculiarly human activity).
    - The third objection rejects the inference from some activity's being characteristic of the good man to that activity's being good for man. Suppose that being just and brave is characteristic of the good man. It does not follow that being just and brave is good for man because in situations of scarcity and danger, it may be better for a person to be unjust and cowardly.
    - "Behind these objections lies a more general worry—namely, that Aristotle is attempting to move from purely descriptive and non-evaluative claims about what the human function is to explicitly normative conclusions about what is good for men".
- Whiting argues that Aristotle has the resources to dismiss the alleged counterexamples to the function argument.
    - Aristotle can reject that things can be good for inanimate objects. Equivalently, Aristotle would maintain that things can be good for only living beings. This is consistent with Aristotle's discussion of friendship. There, Aristotle distinguishes between love for friends and love for inanimate objects, and maintains that wishing good to one's friends is necessary for friendship, and rejects that wishing good to an inanimate object is necessary for loving that inanimate object, presumably because it is absurd to wish good to an inanimate object.
    - Aristotle can argue that the inference from an activity's being characteristic of the good man to that activity's being good for man is an instance of an inference pattern that is valid only for natural kinds. Then, because human beings are a natural kind, and such things as flutists and prostitutes are not, the corresponding alleged counterexamples are unsuccessful. Some class or category is a natural kind iff all members of that class or category are essentially members of that class of category. For example, if I ceased to be a human being, I would cease to be me, so I am essentially a human being, and all other human beings are too, so human beings are a natural kind. If some category is a natural kind, then some thing's being in that category is an essential property. For example, being human is an essential property. Similarly, if some category is not a natural kind, then some thing's being in that category is not an essential property. For example, being a flutist is not an essential property because some person could cease to be a flutist without ceasing to be the person that he is. Then, some thing could be good for a living being in two ways, either in virtue of its essential properties or in virtue of its non-essential properties. In the alleged counterexample of the flutist, perfect pitch is good for the flutist in virtue of the flutist's being a flutist, i.e. in virtue of the flutist's non-essential properties. These things then, are good in only a contingent way. So the inference from some activity being characteristic of the good man to that activity's being categorically or unconditionally good for man (in the sense of being good for man in virtue of man's essential properties) does not warrant substitution with non-natural kinds.
        - One worry about this response is that Aristotle's eudaimonia then does not exhaust what is good for us. Why should we care about only what is categorically good for us? If something's being good for us only conditionally does not make it any less good for us, why should such goods not stand shoulder to shoulder with the categorical goods in a good life? And if they do stand shoulder to shoulder, then it is possible that a villainous life is good for the villain, but surely this is unacceptable to Aristotle.
- Whiting considers how these resources can be deployed against the three specific objections raised earlier.
    - According to Aristotle, man's function is not some further end that man serves, but the sort of life that, in virtue of being a man, makes a man good and is good for a man.
    - Whiting argues that the second objection is based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle. Aristotle uses the word "peculiar" (idion) in some instances to mean unique but in other instances to mean essential. Aristotle must be understood as using the word in the latter sense in the function argument. If Aristotle was using the word in the former sense, then the claim that the peculiar human function is contemplation is simply and clearly false, since Aristotle's gods also contemplate. Aristotle's immediately subsequent discussion of the parts of the soul also fits an interpretation of "peculiar" as essential. Aristotle understands the soul of a living being to be its essence.
- The third objection remains. Aristotle must defend the claim that some thing's membership in a natural kind in part determines what is good for that thing, i.e. what is good for some thing follows from its essential properties.
    - Aristotle's view is not that some thing's essential properties are non-normative, i.e. that being human can be described entirely by positive claims. Instead, Aristotle thinks that an account of some thing's essence is necessarily normative. This thought is evident in Aristotle's teleology.
    - According to Aristotle's teleology, the final cause of something is the thing (typically an activity) that it is for, and the formal cause of something is the capacity or capacities that enable it to engage in the activity that constitutes its final end. The formal cause of something is its essence. For example, the final cause of a knife is cutting, and its formal cause is its capacity to cut. Aristotle generally associates the final cause of a being with what is good for that being. So a description of the essence of some thing is also a description of what is good for that thing.

    - This response is inadequate because it seems to relocate the difficulty. If Aristotle's account of the human essence is normative, and Aristotle's claims about the good for man turn on this account, then Aristotle's claims about the good for man are plausible only if Aristotle's account of the human essence is independently defensible.
- "An adequate defense of Aristotle's position thus involves three tasks. First, he must argue that there are objective essences belonging to members of natural kinds. Second, he must defend the alleged connection between the essence of a kind and what benefits members of that kind. And third, he must give an account of the human essence. Moreover, since Aristotle wants to appeal to that essence to resolve disputes about eudaimonia and human welfare, he must have some method for determining what our essence is which is (at least partly) independent of our beliefs about human welfare."
    - Whiting does not consider the first task in detail.
    - Aristotle can argue for the second claim by appeal to our intuitions about plants and animals. We think that what is good for plants and animals depends on their essential nature, which includes their structures and functions.
    - Aristotle can give an account of the human essence that is independent of our beliefs about human welfare by a sort of teleological analysis. Aristotle could observe that human beings engage in some activity, and trace "upwards" in a chain of "what is that for?" explanations, to ultimately reach a claim about what human life is ultimately for. Within Aristotle's teleological framework, this is the final cause of human life, and the corresponding capacities are the formal cause of human life and the essence of human life.
- Whiting considers the objection that Aristotle's argument fails to establish an objective rather than subjective eudaimonia. The objector admits that man's essence is rational agency and that man's essence determines the good for man, but rejects that it determines an objective rather than subjective good. The objector argues that Aristotle's function argument fails to yield any substantive conclusions about human welfare, and so does not imply that there is an objective good for man.
- Whiting suggests that Aristotle could respond along the lines of Brink's Normative Perfectionism.
    - "Aristotle might defend this claim by arguing that whatever goals and desires a man happens to have, he has reason to cultivate rational agency by developing those virtues which enable him to pursue his goals (whatever they are) most effectively. For example, practical wisdom or the ability to identify the best available means to his ends will contribute to the effective pursuit of his goals. And temperance or the capacity to control his appetites and passions will make a similar ·contribution."
    - "Similarly, Aristotle can appeal to the connection between a thing' s essence and the conditions for its survival in order to argue that any essentially rational agent (whatever his actual goals and desires) has reason to preserve his capacity for rational agency. For remaining what he is essentially is a condition of his attaining those goals, or indeed, of his receiving any benefits at all."
- Whiting does not think this response is successful because it suffices to show only that excellent (virtuous) action of the rational part of the soul is instrumental to eudaimonia, not that it is constitutive of eudaimonia.
- Whiting pursues the dialectic a little further.

Urmson, 1988

Urmson, J. O. (1998) "The Ideal Life: A Preliminary Discussion," in J. O. Urmson (ed.) Aristotle's Ethics. Oxford, England: Blackwell, pp. 9-24.

- Urmson does not discuss the function argument in detail. Urmson raises two objections against the function argument.
- The first objection rejects that man has a function. Aristotle appears to offer a sort of inductive argument for the existence of a human function. According to Aristotle, such things as sculptors and flutists have functions, so it would be odd to think that man does not. The objector would argue that sculptors and flutists have functions by definition, but this is not the case for humans. A sculptor is a person who performs the function of sculpting, and a flutist is a person who performs the function of playing the flute, but a human being is not in a similar way a being that by definition performs some function. The objector could also respond to the inductive argument over living beings. A horse is not by definition an animal whose purpose is to serve human needs. Human purposes are imposed on the horse by humans. So unless some further being imposes its purposes on humans (Aristotle's gods do not do this), humans do not have a function in the same way that horses do.
    - Aristotle's argument from the body parts seems to resist this objection. According to Aristotle, such things as eyes, hands, and feet have functions. The function of a body part is what it does that makes it the thing it is. For example, the function of the eye is to see, and it is seeing that makes some thing an eye. The function of some thing is also, in some sense, what it is for. Eyes are for seeing, hands are for manipulating objects, and feet are for walking. Suppose that we trace "upwards" in a "purposive hierarchy", for example, asking "what is seeing for?" and then "what is that for?". Then, it seems we will reach some answer about what the human being as a whole is for. That will be the

human function. What we think the human function is will be informed by our understanding of the purposive structure and function of the human parts, i.e. what each part is for, and how the different parts are located in a network of "what is it for?" relationships.
    - Aristotle does not argue that humans, by definition, have some sort of function, or that humans have some sort of function imposed on them by some further being. Rather, Aristotle's argument is that some activities are essential to being human, just as seeing is essential for an eye, and that the structure and arrangement of capacities in a human being reveal what this activity is.
- The second objection rejects that man's performing his function well is necessarily good for man.

Barney, 2008

Barney, R. (2008) "Aristotle's Argument for a Human Function," Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 34, pp. 293-322.

- Barney's aim is to uncover Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function, that Aristotle seems to treat only briefly and rhetorically.
- Barney rejects that Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function is an inductive argument. Aristotle's examples of carpenters, shoemakers, eyes, hands, and feet are neither uncontroversially function-bearing nor obviously similar to humans.
- Barney rejects the less ambitious interpretation of Aristotle as merely offering examples to clarify or illustrate the concept of a function, and not offering an argument for the existence of a human function. This interpretation is unattractive because the examples Aristotle offers are poor analogs for a human function. Aristotle thinks that the human function is essential to humans, and that the human function is not simply the end that humans are instrumental to. Further, Aristotle's examples are of instances of human beings and parts of human beings, so we have reason to suspect that Aristotle is both more careful and more ambitious.
    - Carpenters and shoemakers are "socially constructed kinds of human beings, or roles or identities which a human being may take on."
- So, according to Barney, Aristotle offers two arguments for the existence of a human function, the argument from the crafts, and the argument from the organic parts, and it remains to be uncovered how each of these arguments operates.
- Barney clarifies that Aristotle rejects the modern (and Platonic) conception of function as instrumentality. On this conception, some thing has a function iff it serves as a tool or instrument for some agent toward some end. So, for example, a horse has a function because it serves as an instrument for human travel.
    - That Aristotle does not refer to tools or to animals or other beings used as instruments suggests that Aristotle in fact rejects this conception of function as instrumentality.
    - It is also important for Aristotle's argument to reject this conception of function as instrumentality because Aristotle will argue that the function of a living being is to live a certain sort of life, which is what that living being is for, and so is the good for that living being, and is also good for that living being. Aristotle must also reject Plato's account of how functions are to be attributed because Aristotle will argue that the function of man is contemplation, but this is not peculiar to us in the sense that we do this better than any other thing or being does this, since Aristotle's gods also contemplate (and are better suited to contemplation than humans).
    - The contrast with the modern, Platonic conception of function as instrumentality clarifies Aristotle's conception of function (though it does not yet clarify Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function). According to Aristotle, some thing's function is the thing that it does that makes it what it is, i.e. it is the essential activity of that thing, it also characterises the good of that thing and the good for that thing, and what that thing is for.
- On the biological reading (which Barney rejects) of Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function is that human beings are a biological (natural) kind, and each biological kind has a function, which is the activity that corresponds to its characteristic capacities.
    - This reading is unsatisfactory because the examples of the carpenter and the shoemaker would at best be distractions from Aristotle's real argument for the existence of a human function since carpenters and shoemakers are not biological kinds. Aristotle would have done better to compare humans to other living beings, if this was his thought.
    - This reading also "operate[s] at an unsatisfying remove from the text". Aristotle at no point makes reference to the teleological claim defended elsewhere that biological kinds have functions which are the activities corresponding to their characteristic capacities. We should prefer a reading under which Aristotle's argument is as it appears, i.e. an appeal to obvious facts about carpenters, shoemakers, eyes, hands, and feet.
- Roughly, according to Barney, Aristotle understands a function as a normative claim about "what it is incumbent on certain people to do, and what norms are rightly applicable to them". So Aristotle's argument from the crafts is that "the normativity of social functions must derive from their relation to a function embedded in human nature."

- On the architectonic reading (which Barney apparently supports) of Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function, Aristotle's argument from the crafts is as follows. There is a hierarchy of functions, and some functions are subordinate to others. For example, the function of the bridle maker, which is the activity of making bridles, is subordinate to the function of the horseman, which is the activity of horse riding, since we make bridles for the sake of riding horses. We can trace "upwards" in the hierarchy of functions. For example, the function of the horseman is in turn subordinate to the function of the general, since (in Aristotle's time) men rode horses to win battle. Then, it seems that atop the hierarchy of functions must sit the function of human beings as such. This function is what human endeavour is all, ultimately for.
    - This reading has the advantage of making full use of Aristotle's discussion in I.1 of the crafts and the relationship of subordination between crafts that Aristotle recalls in I.7 immediately preceding the function argument.
- One difficulty with the architectonic reading is that it does not follow from each subordinate function's being for the sake of some superordinate function that what human endeavour is all, ultimately, for the sake of, is also some function. In other words, it (logically) could be that bridle making is for horse riding, horse riding is for winning battles, winning battles is for stable government, and what stable government is for (ultimately) is pleasure or desire satisfaction, or some thing that is not a function in the Aristotelian sense, i.e. it is not a characteristic human activity. Metaphorically, the pyramid of human activity could be built from functional stone but capped by a non-functional apex. In fact, it could be that the functional form of the subordinate goods are a symptom of their being subordinate. The opponent of the architectonic reading could then suggest that on this reading, Aristotle leaves the function argument open to an obvious objection, so it would be uncharitable to so interpret Aristotle's function argument.
    - Barney responds that Aristotle "seems to acknowledge the objection, and to try to stare it down, immediately following his invocation of the crafts". Aristotle's response comes as the rhetorical question "is [man] by nature argon?". The argument here seems to be that it would be absurd to claim that man has no function, because this amounts to the claim that man is by nature idle, and this is an implausibly degrading view of man.
    - Aristotle's argument from the organic parts also serves to undermine the objection that human endeavour is all, ultimately, for the sake of some non-functional end. According to Aristotle, it is uncontroversial that eyes, hands, feet, and the body parts in general have functions, and these functions are in some sense normative. For example, a good eye is one that sees well. These normative claims are independent of subjective attitudes. So a good eye is one that sees well regardless of what any person wishes to do with his eyes, or whether a person's eye's seeing well is instrumental to that person's pleasure. Then some thing's naturally have a certain function. So human social functions could well be natural and objective rather than mere subjective social construction. Aristotle's "invocation of the organic parts then offers reassurance that functions can belong to the realm of nature, and to human nature in particular."
    - "This does not add up to a deductive argument for the function thesis, but it might reasonably be taken to shift the burden of argument against an instrumentalist opponent."
- On Barney's realisation reading of the argument from the crafts, a craftsman's function qua craftsman instantiates or realises the craftsman's function qua person. In other words, it is incumbent on a craftsman to practice his craft, a craftsman is bound by the normative standards of his craft, a good craftsman practices his craft well, and it is good for a craftsman to practice his craft well, in some sense because it is incumbent on a human being (as such) to live a certain sort of life (that is the human function), and doing this well makes a human good and is good for a human.
- Barney takes a detour to defend the "three-place relation connecting functioning well, excellence, and flourishing."
    - The "weak claim" is that if some thing as such has some function, then a good such thing as such is one that performs that function well. The "strong claim" is that if some thing as such has some function, then it is good for all such things as such to perform that function well.
    - The weak claim seems to follow from Aristotle's conception of function, but also from our more ordinary conception of function. We think intuitively that a good carpenter is one that practices carpentry well, a good shoemaker is one that practices shoemaking well, etc..
    - The strong claim seems to follow from the weak claim. We first note that considerations about wealth, fame, and worldly success as such are irrelevant to the flourishing of, or the good for, for example, a carpenter as such. Such considerations may be relevant to the good for the carpenter as a consumer or breadwinner, but not for the carpenter as such. Then, on careful reflection, it seems we find that the good for the carpenter can consist only in his practicing carpentry well.
- The next step in Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function, on the realisation reading, is an application of the "transitivity claim" that "if an x qua x has as its function to φ, then the good [for] the substance which is x consists (at least in part) in φ-ing well." For example, suppose that Simon is a shoemaker, then if a shoemaker qua shoemaker's function is to make shoes, then it is good for Simon to make good shoes. In other words, if it is the shoemaker's function to make shoes, by the strong claim, it is good for the shoemaker to make shoes well, and by transitivity, it is good for the person who is a shoemaker to make shoes well.

    - The transitivity claim seems to follow from Aristotle's conception of a function as what some thing does that makes it what it is. In the example of Simon, if Simon's function is to make shoes, then making shoes is what makes Simon Simon, or what makes Simon a human being (since Simon is essentially a human being). But it would be absurd to think that Simon's making shoes is what makes Simon Simon, or makes Simon a human being, since we imagine that Simon could cease to make shoes without ceasing to be Simon or a human being. Then, the only way to make sense of Aristotle's conception of function and claim that shoemakers have functions is to think that making shoes instantiates or realises a human function.
    - Our ordinary thinking about social functions reveals that we find our rational agency embedded in social roles. If we are essentially rational agents and our function is the exercise of our rational agency, then our ordinary thinking reveals that our function as human beings is realised or instantiated by the functions of each of these social roles.
    - The human function is "the common denominator which gives value to all [human] activities, but is far more fully present in some than others: the exercise of human rationality."
- Aristotle's argument for the existence of a human function, on the realisation reading, "might prompt a kind of aristocratic variant on the instrumentalist objection". This objection concedes that the good of craftsmen is functional, but denies that this implies that the highest good of the best sort of man is functional. This objection is somewhat unnatural, but Aristotle meets this objection by insisting that some thing and a good such thing have the same function.

Pakaluk, 2005

Pakaluk, M. (2005) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, pp. 47-86.

Lawrence, 2005

Lawrence, G. (2005) "Human Good and Human Function," in R. Kraut (ed.) The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 37-75.