Function Argument Rough Notes

Aristotle in I.7 argues that eudaimonia consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accord with virtue (excellence) in a whole life. The controversial part of the function argument for this conception of eudaimonia has three steps. In the first step, Aristotle argues for (or allegedly merely asserts) the Existence of a human function. In the second step, Aristotle argues that the human function is activity of the rational part of the soul. I refer to this claim as Aristotle's claim about the Substance of the human function. In the third step, Aristotle defends (or again, allegedly merely asserts) the Inference from the premise that the human function is rational activity (and so it is excellent rational activity that makes for a good human) to the conclusion that it is excellent rational activity that is good for humans, i.e. that constitutes eudaimonia. Aristotle then argues (controversially, but not relevantly so for this essay) that eudaimonia is such activity in a whole life.

Aristotle's argument (if it is an argument) for Existence consists in three rhetorical questions, where Aristotle asks whether we should think that the human being has no function given (1) we think carpenters and leatherworkers have functions, (2) the alternative is to think that human beings are by nature idle (argon, which has the derogatory sense of "lazy" and "unemployed"), and (3) we think eyes, hands, and feet have functions. If this is in fact an argument for Existence, it is not immediately apparent how it is supposed to work, and much is left for the interpreter to flesh out.

Aristotle's argument for Substance is apparently a disjunctive argument. Aristotle begins "what we are looking for is the special (idion) function of a human being" and proceeds to dismiss first the life of nutrition and growth and then the life of sense perception and locomotion as candidate human functions. Aristotle then concludes that the human function must be rational activity (since Aristotle understands the human soul as consisting of three parts: a nutritive part, a locomotive part, and a rational part).

Aristotle apparently does not write much to defend the Inference, but it is clear that this is necessary for the function argument. Competing interpretations of the function argument variously fill in Aristotle's arguments for Existence, Substance, and Inference.

Existence

One interpretation of Aristotle's argument for Existence takes Aristotle's argument at face value. On this prima facie interpretation, Aristotle's argument is simply that it would be odd to suppose that such things as carpenters, leatherworkers, eyes, hands, and feet have functions, but human beings do not, and also that human beings are by nature idle. This interpretation is uncharitable because it alleges that Aristotle's argument for Existence is hardly an argument at all. There is no logical inconsistency in thinking that each of Aristotle's examples has a function but that humans do not. An opponent of the function argument would also quite readily accept that human beings are by nature idle. Such an opponent could think that human beings are by nature idle, but construct roles to occupy themselves with. So there is no human function as such, but only socially constructed human occupations that, loosely speaking, could be whatever we determine. In other words, there is nothing that human life is for, but there are roles and norms that we construct and govern ourselves by. This is poison to Aristotle because Aristotle will want to maintain that eudaimonia is excellent activity of the rational part of the soul in a whole life, independent of whether humans have so determined. So this argument for Existence is unconvincing. Additionally, if Aristotle intended such an "argument", the choice of examples in the text is odd. Aristotle would have done better to choose living beings rather than professions or body parts. Examples of the former sort would be "closer" to human beings than examples of the latter sort. So we should think Aristotle's argument is more sophisticated than it initially appears.

Existence seems dubious because we ordinarily think it is tools that have functions, these are objects that are used for the sake of some end, but it is odd to think of human beings as some sort of tool used by some mysterious user for some mysterious end. (Barney) (The superficial reading is unsatisfactory because Existence is unintuitive, so the burden of proof should be on Aristotle, and we would hope that Aristotle has some response to the subjectivist who rejects a natural human function.)

(Aristotle's conception of function is normative and not obviously counterintuitive.) It is clear that Aristotle rejects the instrumental conception of function, and instead employs a normative, metaphysical conception of function. In other works, Aristotle situates the concept of function in a teleological framework, i.e. a framework of "for the sake of" relations. Aristotle defends the view that some thing's function is what that thing does that makes it the thing it is, and what that thing is for. For example, the function of an eye is what an eye does that makes it an eye (and not anything else), and what an eye is for, namely seeing. So to attribute a function to some thing is not simply to describe what its capacities enable, or what it is in fact used for, but to make a claim about the essence of such things, and the normative standards that apply to it. For example, to say that it is the function of a flutist to play the flute is to say that a flutist essentially plays the flute (i.e. that playing the flute is

what makes a flutist a flutist), and a set of flute-playing norms apply to the flutist in virtue of his being a flutist. Then, it is not implausible, and perhaps quite natural to say that humans have a function. This is to say that there is some activity that humans do that makes us human, and that there are some norms that apply to us in virtue of our being human. Additionally, Aristotle's conception of function, so understood, implies that the function argument is normative "all the way down" and does not attempt to derive an "ought" from an "is". So Existence is not simply impossible, but Aristotle's argument still needs to be filled in.

(Aristotle's argument still needs to be filled in because we would hope that Aristotle has some response to the subjectivist. We would hope so because the argument from the crafts invites the thought that there is no natural human function or human function as such, but merely socially constructed roles and occupations that humans have imposed on themselves. So the human function, loosely speaking, is up to us to determine. There is no logical inconsistency between this and the superficial interpretation of Aristotle.)

Bostock and Urmson interpret Aristotle's argument for Existence as appealing to the idea of a teleological hierarchy. This interpretation emphasises the examples of the bodily parts. On this interpretation, Aristotle's argument is as follows. It is quite uncontroversial that eyes, hands, and feet have functions (in the normative sense): eyes are for seeing, hands are for manipulating objects, and feet are for walking. So some thing's function is, in some sense, what it is for. Then, suppose that we trace "upwards" in a teleological hierarchy, i.e. a hierarchy of 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 effective operation of the various organs, and so on. Presumably, tracing "upwards" in this way, we will reach a statement of what man as a whole is for. This will be the human function, which Aristotle quite plausibly imagines is a certain way of living. Aristotle's argument for Existence, on this interpretation, seems more plausible, and is certainly more of an argument, than on the superficial interpretation. This interpretation has further merits. First, the teleological interpretation makes some sense of Aristotle's choice of examples. The bodily parts are parts of the human, and this fact is necessary for the teleological argument which relies on the idea of tracing "upwards" from the function of parts to the function of a whole. Second, the teleological interpretation offers some justification for Aristotle's comparative approach to establishing Substance. On this interpretation, each of the "downstream" functions are "inherited" from the human function that sits atop the teleological hierarchy. In other words, the teleological hierarchy specifies a web of "this is for the sake of that" relationships between the different human parts and the human as a whole. So it makes sense to uncover the human function as a whole by understanding the unique arrangement of human parts and the unique corresponding capacities.

This interpretation of Aristotle's argument for Existence seems unsatisfactory because it treats Aristotle's examples of the carpenter and the leatherworker as, at best, distractions from Aristotle's real argument. On this interpretation, Aristotle offers these examples as an expository device, to introduce the idea of a function. But if that was Aristotle's intention, it is odd that Aristotle chooses those examples that invite the worry that some thing's function is socially constructed, and so there is no human function in the strong objective sense that Aristotle requires. A subjective, socially constructed, human function is poison to Aristotle because Aristotle would want to maintain that eudaimonia is excellent activity of the rational part of the soul in a whole life, and this is something that humans have no say in "constructing". So we should hope to find some "argument from the crafts" for Existence that makes sense of these examples.

Barney's architectonic reading of Aristotle's argument for Existence makes full use of Aristotle's examples of the carpenter and leatherworker. On this reading, 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 seems to fit the text well. Aristotle begins the NE by discussing the crafts and this exact relationship of subordination between the crafts. Then, at I.7, immediately preceding the function argument, Aristotle recalls this discussion and writes that eudaimonia is what human endeavour is all for the sake of. On this reading, we find an elegant symmetry between Aristotle's argument from the bodily parts and Aristotle's argument from the crafts. Both arguments, in some sense, find the human function sitting atop a teleological hierarchy. The bodily parts, and the crafts, are ordered around a human function, and are ultimately for the sake of a human function.

A difficulty with the architectonic reading of the argument from the crafts and the teleological reading of the argument from the bodily parts is immediately apparent. It simply 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 stable government is (ultimately) for some un-Aristotelian potentially subjective good. 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. Similarly, it simply does not follow from each bodily part's being functional that the bodily parts are ordered around, and ultimately for the sake of, some functional good. In other words, it could well be that eyes are for vision, hands are for manipulating objects, and feet are for walking, but these are ultimately for some non-functional good. If, for example, it turns out that the crafts and bodily parts are ultimately for wealth or pleasure, then there is no human function, since neither wealth nor pleasure is an activity and so neither can be a function. It seems then, on this reading, Aristotle's arguments for Existence are a pair of dubious and unsuccessful inductive arguments, that are obviously so, and fail to establish their conclusions. So it seems it would be uncharitable to attribute such a weak view to Aristotle.

The proponent of the teleological and architectonic reading of Aristotle would respond that Aristotle appears to recognise and confront this difficulty. 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. So we should think that it is in fact some functional good that sits atop the hierarchy of crafts and that the bodily parts are ordered around. On this interpretation, Aristotle recognises that the argument from the bodily parts and the argument from the crafts are not decisive arguments for Existence, and attempts to shore up these arguments.

The argument from the bodily parts and the argument from the crafts, shored up by the "argon" argument still do not yield the conclusion Aristotle needs. The opponent of Aristotle could respond along the following lines. The "argon" argument establishes the existence of a human function, but this is compatible with a non-functional ultimate good around which the bodily parts are ordered and the crafts are oriented. For example, suppose that this ultimate good is pleasure. So eyes are for seeing, hands are for manipulating objects, feet are for walking, and these in turn are for humans to seek and experience pleasure, and that in turn is for the sake of pleasure. And bridle-making is for the sake of horsemanship, which is for the sake of generalship, which is for the sake of good governance, which is (directly or indirectly) for the sake of experiencing pleasure, which is for the sake of pleasure itself. Then, we could think that the human function is experiencing pleasure, but the highest good is pleasure itself. The human function could well be the "highest functional good" in the teleological hierarchy, and need not be the "highest good and also a functional good". This is antithetical to Aristotle's project in the function argument. Aristotle imagines that the highest good for humans consists in (and does not merely result from) the excellent performance of the human function, and would not accept the human function and the highest good coming apart in this way. So the arguments from the bodily parts and the crafts, even together with the "argon" "argument" do not yield Existence in a way that is acceptable to Aristotle. In fact, it seems the idea of a teleological hierarchy does more harm than good, since it invites the thought that a non-functional good could sit atop the hierarchy, and Aristotle fails to adequately respond to this worry. So it seems we should consider alternative interpretations that do not turn on the idea of a teleological hierarchy.

The argument from the bodily parts can be interpreted less ambitiously as merely raising the possibility that there is a human function to be found in nature. Aristotle expects the reader to find it quite uncontroversial that eyes, hands, feet, and the bodily parts in general have functions, in the Aristotelian metaphysically loaded sense. For example, seeing is what eyes do that make eyes eyes and not something else. After all, human eyes and insect eyes are anatomically dissimilar, but both are eyes because both see. Eyes are for seeing, and a good eye is one that sees well. These are normative claims that specify the role and normative standards of bodily parts, and are not a matter of social construction or contingent on 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 subjective ends. More generally, the bodily parts are functional in the Aristotelian sense, and are naturally so. Then, Aristotle hopes, we will find it conceivable that humans too have a function in the Aristotelian sense, that what humans are for is not a matter of social construction, but to be found in objective nature. On this interpretation, Aristotle does not introduce the idea of a teleological hierarchy, and so does not invite the unwelcome thought that some non-functional good sits atop this hierarchy.

The argument from the crafts can also be interpreted in a way that does not introduce the idea of a teleological hierarchy. On Barney's realisation reading, Aristotle's argument is that the function of each craftsman instantiates or realises the function of each craftsman as a human. Consider Simon the shoemaker. Because Simon is a shoemaker, one of Simon's functions is to make shoes. But on Aristotle's metaphysically loaded, normative conception of function, some thing's function is what it does that makes it what it is. But it is absurd to think that Simon's making shoes as such is part of what Simon does that makes him Simon. We imagine the opposite, that Simon could cease to make shoes without ceasing to be Simon. So the only way to make sense of Aristotle's conception of function and the fact that Simon has the function of making shoes is to understand Simon's making shoes as instantiating or realising some function that is essential to Simon, i.e. some function that makes Simon Simon. We think that humans like Simon are essentially human, i.e. Simon would cease to be Simon if Simon ceased to be human. So if there is a human function, then this function is essential to Simon, i.e. performing this function makes Simon Simon. Simon's making shoes is part of Simon's function because it is an instance of Simon's human function. More

generally, it is quite uncontroversial that humans, in the various crafts, have functions. If these functions are functions in the Aristotelian, metaphysically loaded sense, then humans have these functions only insofar as these functions instantiate or realise an essential, human function. The argument from the crafts, on the realisation reading, reflects our ordinary thinking that, for example, what it is incumbent on me to do as a student, and the standards I am held to in virtue of being a student, derive in part from what it is incumbent on me to do as a human, and the standards I am held to in virtue of that, because my humanity is in some sense embedded in my being a student.

Returning to Aristotle's argument for Existence as a whole, we can identify each of Aristotle's three rhetorical questions as an independent argument for existence.

Substance

Aristotle appears to offer a disjunctive argument for Substance. Aristotle begins "what we are looking for is the special (idion) function of a human being" and proceeds to dismiss first the life of nutrition and growth and then the life of sense perception and locomotion as candidate human functions. Aristotle then concludes that the human function must be rational activity (since Aristotle understands the human soul as consisting of three parts: a nutritive part, a locomotive part, and a rational part).

Aristotle could have been motivated to offer such an argument in an attempt to remain relatively close to the Platonic conception of function. On Plato's account, some thing's function is what it does better than anything else does, and (on some interpretations), what some user does with it better than can be done with anything else. For example, it is possible to prune a vine with a dagger or a carving knife, but we do better to prune with a pruning knife than with either of these (or anything else), so the function of a pruning knife is for pruning foliage and this is not the function of a dagger or carving knife. Plato's instrumental conception of function is clearly comparative, and it implies that functions are mutually exclusive. If the function of a pruning knife is pruning foliage, then it does this better than anything else, and nothing else does this better than the pruning knife, so nothing else has the function of pruning foliage. That Aristotle is so deferent to Plato's conception of function is perhaps unsurprising given Aristotle's professed method of inquiry. Aristotle, throughout the Ethics, begins from the "common beliefs" and "what is clear to us", attempts to resolve the puzzles that accompany these beliefs, and considers his account successful if it preserves as much of the "common beliefs" as possible. Aristotle considers both the beliefs of the many and the beliefs of the wise as such common beliefs.

The disjunctive argument for Substance is apparently unsuccessful because Aristotle's gods also contemplate. Aristotle's gods contemplate, and do this continuously, without tiring, and better than humans can. So it seems if Aristotle's argument is that the human function is the activity unique to humans, Aristotle should have gone on to eliminate contemplation as a candidate for the human function. Then, the only activity that remains uniquely human is the activity of practical reason. This is costly to Aristotle because of an infamous intellectualist streak in Aristotle, where in X.6-9, and (on some interpretations) also in I, Aristotle elevates the activity of contemplation, describing it as a divine activity and also as "complete eudaimonia", and appears to conclude that eudaimonia in fact consists solely in this activity. Even if Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia is not in fact "dominant" or monolithic in this sense, there is no doubt that contemplation features (at minimum) as a constituent of Aristotle's eudaimonia. So if Aristotle's argument for Substance is in fact disjunctive, it is unsuccessful and undermines the conception of eudaimonia that Aristotle appears to eventually defend. More troubling than the fact that the disjunctive argument fails to yield a recognisably Aristotelian human function and eudaimonia because peculiarity in the sense of distinctness that the disjunctive argument employs is simply the wrong criterion for identifying a human function. Suppose it were true that dolphins and martians, like humans, have rational souls. Then, activity of the rational part of the soul would not be uniquely human. So if Aristotle in fact believed that some thing's function is unique to that thing, Aristotle must conclude that rational activity is not the human function. On Aristotle's conception of function then, what the human function turns out to be is contingent on what other beings are capable of. But this is entirely unintuitive, and it leaves the truth of Aristotle's function argument contingent on a fact that we have little reason to think is true, namely that no other being reasons. So the disjunctive argument for Substance seems entirely unsatisfactory.

An alternative "conjunctive" interpretation aims to preserve the apparent motivation behind Aristotle's disjunctive argument. Plausibly, Aristotle's disjunctive argument is motivated (in part) by the role of function (as a concept) in Aristotle's metaphysics. In other works, Aristotle appears to defend the view that some thing's function is what that thing does that makes it the thing it is, and what that thing is for. For example, the function of an eye is what an eye does that makes it an eye (and not anything else), and what an eye is for, namely seeing. This suggests that functions are mutually exclusive. For example, if the function of an eye is seeing, then seeing cannot also be the function of the ears, because then the ears would be eyes and not ears. Then, what goes wrong in Aristotle's argument for Substance is not his treating functions as mutually exclusive and an essentially comparative matter, but apparently the 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. Consider the following analogy. 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 (or at least unmotivated) 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. This interpretation has the advantage of remaining close to Aristotle's apparent motivation for the disjunctive argument, and escaping the contingency that troubled the disjunctive argument. Suppose that dolphins or martians also reasoned, this would have no bearing on the human function because it does not threaten the uniqueness of the human function. Even if dolphins and martians, like humans, had souls with a nutritive, locomotive, and rational part, these parts would be arranged differently within them than within us.

Retreating from a disjunctive to a conjunctive argument (and from a disjunctive to a conjunctive human function) is extremely costly to Aristotle. First, there is little textual evidence that this is in fact Aristotle's argument. So we must interpret the conjunctive argument not as the most charitable interpretation of Aristotle but as a necessary deviation from Aristotle's actual argument to avoid the contingency objection. But the conjunctive argument is hardly more plausible than the disjunctive one. The conjunctive human function is absurd because it implies that human reasoning and human digestion stand "shoulder to shoulder" as parts of a 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.

Aristotle apparently has in mind a hierarchy of capacities. Humans are complex beings and not simply some conjunction of different natures, so the different activities of a human are not simply separate activities going on in parallel in one being, but are coherently structured with relationships to one another. In humans, all activities appear to form a circle of mutual support. For example, sense perception and locomotion support our nutrition and growth by enabling us to get food, and nutrition and growth support our sense perception and locomotion by supporting our good health. Practical reason also supports such activities. But the circle of mutual support is not entirely closed, and all other activities appear to support contemplation directly or indirectly but contemplation does not appear to support any other activity. So contemplation, in a sense, sits atop the hierarchy of human activities, it seems to be what human life is ultimately about.

We can and should interpret Aristotle's claim that we find the human function by searching for what is "peculiar (idion)" to humans as the claim that the human function is that which is essential to humans. The word "idion" can be used, and is in fact used by Aristotle in these two different senses. The claim that the human function is rational activity (or contemplation) is simply false, since Aristotle's gods also reason and 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, so it is quite natural that Aristotle looks for a human function by examining the human soul.

Inference

Even if there is a human function, Aristotle's Inference is dubious. It simply does not follow from rational activity's being the human function (and so plausibly the activity that makes for a good man) that rational activity is good for man. This inference is vulnerable to many counterexamples. Consider, for example, the Unemployed Flutist. It is the function of a flutist to play the flute, and so quite plausibly, a good flutist is one that plays the flute well, so such talents as perfect pitch that enable excellent flute playing make for a good flutist. But nothing seems to necessarily follow about what is good for a flutist. The unemployed flutist could well have been better off had he been tone deaf, and pursued a more lucrative, secure career rather than the career of a musician. The Inference can be stretched to more absurd extremes. It is the function of a kitchen knife to cut food, and so quite plausibly, a good kitchen knife is one that cuts food well, so such qualities as sharpness make for a good knife. But it is absurd to say that sharpness is good for a knife. It seems nothing could be good or bad for a mere inanimate tool. So the Inference seems dubious at best. But there is no doubt that Aristotle requires the Inference for the success of the function argument, so we should prefer to recover if not construct an Aristotelian argument for function rather than uncharitably condemn the function argument to failure.

Wilkes argues that Substance justifies Inference. On Wilke's reading, Aristotle's argument for the Inference is not simply that we can infer from some thing's being a good such thing because it performs its function well that performing its function well is good for that thing. Rather, Aristotle's argument is that there is a human function, rational activity, and excellent rational activity, not excellent human functioning as such, is good for humans. On any plausible interpretation of Aristotle's argument for Substance, the human function is either (broadly) rational activity (including both theoretical reason and practical reason) or the theoretically rational activity of contemplation. Suppose that Aristotle's view is that contemplation is the human function. Aristotle writes in X that contemplation is a divine activity and is accompanied by a divine sort of happiness, and that contemplation is "complete eudaimonia". A person who contemplates is engaging in a complete and divine activity, that makes

this person blessed. So excellently performing the human function of contemplation is good for a person in this sense. Suppose instead that Aristotle's view is that (broadly) rational activity is the human function. According to Aristotle, practical reason is employed in deliberations about "things that are good and beneficial for [the person who so reasons, and] about what sort of things promote living well in general." Then, a person, in practically reasoning, sets about to order his life in order to realise the good for himself in his life. So if rational activity is the human function, then a person who excellently so functions will enjoy the divine good that accompanies contemplation and the other goods that he sets about to secure for himself through his practical deliberations. Excellently performing the human function, whether that is narrow contemplation or broad rational activity, then, not only makes for a good human being, but is good for human beings. The Unemployed Flutist (and the knife) are not counterexamples to the Inference because the Inference turns on the Substantial claim that the human function is rational activity, but the function of the Unemployed Flutist (and the knife) is not rational activity.

Wilkes's response is inconsistent with the text. Aristotle does not seem to take the relationship between, on one hand, some thing's excellently performing its function and its being a good such thing, and on the other hand, what is good for that thing, to be contingent on what its function turns out to be. It seems Aristotle would not think that the Inference fails in the case of the Unemployed Flutist (or any flutist or craftsman). This is evident in Aristotle's consistent use of such examples throughout the function argument. Aristotle at no point pauses to put distance between the craftsmen and the human, to indicate that the last leg of his argument can be completed only by the latter and not the former. In fact, Aristotle seems to think the Inference obvious, and hardly worth stating, and appears to almost conflate the "good of" something with the "good for" something, so it would be odd if there was such a large distance between the two to Aristotle, that was spanned only by Substance. Additionally, it would be odd for Aristotle to make no reference at all to the allegedly relevant concepts of practical reason and contemplation, and to defer the discussion of these to books VI and X. So we should hope to find an interpretation of the function argument that reflects the apparent closeness of the premise and conclusion in the Inference.

Whiting argues that the alleged counterexamples to Aristotle's inference can be blocked. Aristotle can block absurd counterexamples of inanimate objects by simply rejecting that the Inference applies to inanimate objects. In fact, Aristotle makes this claim explicit in the discussion of friendship at IX. 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, precisely because it is absurd to wish good to an inanimate object. Blocking counterexamples like the Unemployed Flutist takes a bit more work. 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. To sum up, Aristotle would think that excellent rational activity is good for a person as such and perfect pitch is good for a flutist as such, but what is good for the person who is a flutist is excellent rational activity because this person is essentially a person but not essentially a flutist, so it is entirely unsurprising that in some cases (a poor economy) perfect pitch is bad for this person, but under no conditions will excellent rational activity be bad for this person.

Plausibly, Aristotle expects us to find the Inference quite obvious. Perhaps the argument for Inference is to be found in Aristotle's comparison to the harpist. We should first note that considerations about wealth, fame, and worldly success as such are irrelevant to the flourishing, or the good for, the harpist as such. Such considerations may be relevant to the good for the harpist as a consumer, or as a breadwinner, but not as a harpist. Then, on careful reflection, it seems we find that the good for the harpist can consist only in his playing the harp excellently. Taken together with the above possible responses to the alleged counterexamples, it seems we have a plausible argument for Inference that takes the Inference to be as obvious as it apparently is to Aristotle.