

The Function Argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*

Roy C. Lee

Abstract: This paper reconstructs the function argument of Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* ii 1. The argument (1) seeks to define happiness through the method of dichotomous division; (2) shows that the highest good is better than all four of the goods of the soul, not only two, as commentators have thought; and (3) secures its conclusion without invoking the human function, sidestepping a fallacious inference alleged of the *Nicomachean* argument.

Unlike the well-studied function (*ergon*) argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) i 7, the argument in *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) ii 1 has received relatively little attention.¹ This paper reconstructs the function argument in the *EE* and documents some differences with the *Nicomachean* argument. In doing so, it defends three claims about the *Eudemian* function argument. First, Aristotle's method in the argument is the method of division. The strategy of the argument is to narrow the genus of humanly achievable goods down, with a series of successively more specific predicates that, taken together, uniquely identify the highest good, happiness. Taking division as the method explains the circuitous course of the argument and demystifies the notion of the highest good used in the *EE*. Second, though Aristotle explicitly names four goods of the soul in the course of his divisions—capacities, states, activities, and processes—previous reconstructions of the *Eudemian* function argument have taken there only to be two. This simplification makes the argument unduly modest and ultimately misleads readers about the role and significance of inferences at the argument's core about the function of the human soul. Rejecting this

¹ I am aware of three full, step-by-step reconstructions of the *Eudemian* function argument: Hutchinson 1986, 39–45; Simpson 2013, 233–238; Woods 1992, 85–90. For partial, or less formal, discussions: Berryman 2019, 60–61, 66–67; Buddensiek 1999, 116–144; Cooper 1986, 144–147; Dirlmeier 1962, 219–227; von Fragstein 1974, 53–59; Karbowski 2019, 109–135; Kenny 2016, 198–200; Majithia 2005, 371–374. For the enormous literature on the *Nicomachean* function argument, see Baker 2015, 260n66; Barney 2008, 293n1 for references.

simplification reveals a more fitting aim for this controversial section of the argument. Finally, the *Eudemian* argument, as a result of its method, defines the highest good without placing weight on the notion of the human function. This sets it apart from the *Nicomachean* argument, is often understood to explicate the highest good in terms of the human function. As a result, the *Eudemian* argument avoids entirely an objection that interpreters of the *Nicomachean* argument have addressed in differing ways. A considered judgment of the relative superiority of the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian* function arguments lies outside the scope of this paper.

To summarize the argument's strategy, Aristotle arrives at an account of the highest good, happiness, by appealing to general axiological principles to compare various classes of human goods and single out the best one of them. These axiological principles are not themselves ethical first principles. They are premises of a more general nature—consistent with Aristotle's broader scientific and metaphysical views—that support an argument toward ethical first principles. While Aristotle argues for some of these axiological principles in the passage, for others, an argument must be inferred, sometimes from similar views defended in other works. The function argument's key move is to show, using these principles, that the activity of the virtue of the soul is better than any other activity, process, state, or capacity of the soul, making it the best humanly achievable good internal to the soul. Since goods internal to the soul are better than goods external to the soul, the activity of the virtue of the soul is the best species, or kind, of thing that humans can achieve in action. So, the argument shows, through a systematic and exhaustive series of comparisons, that one good is better than all the others.

Section 1 explains what the method of division is and how to recognize whether Aristotle is following it in the argument. Section 2 presents my reconstruction of the argument and explains its departures from other commentators' interpretations. Section 3 considers what might

be distinctive about the *Eudemian* argument.

1. The Method of Division

I take Aristotle to identify the definition of happiness in the *Eudemian* function argument by the method of division. This connection has not previously been made in the literature, which has often kept the reconstruction of the argument separate from questions about the method of the *EE*.² The method of division seeks a thing's definition by identifying its genus and dividing it with a finite series of narrowing differentiae that, taken together, uniquely pick out the definiendum.³ Each step in the division introduces two mutually exclusive predicates that together exhaust the class being divided. Of the two predicates, the definiendum must be described by one of them; that predicate is appended to the genus and to the other differentiae that have been derived through previous iterations of this process. This procedure continues until the resulting verbal formula uniquely identifies the sought-after species.

In my reconstruction, Aristotle uses dichotomous division. But an important passage in *Parts of Animals (PA)* i 2–3 argues against dichotomous division, in favor of dividing by multiple differentiae. Aristotle says that dichotomous division cannot get at the indivisible species of the animal or any other kind (643a17). But the other kinds he has in mind are the objects of the inquiry of the *PA*. The criticisms of dichotomous division in the *PA* amount to a local norm of inquiry—appropriate for the task of distinguishing the various species of living things and their parts.⁴ But the kind of division appropriate for this task is not appropriate for

² The notable exception is Karbowski 2019, 110–122, who argues that the method of the *EE* is closer to the scientific method of the *Posterior Analytics (APo.)* than to the dialectical method of the *Topics (Top.)*. On the *Nicomachean* argument's method, see also Natali 2010.

³ The method is described in several works: *Prior Analytics* i 31, *APo.* ii 5, 13, *Metaphysics (Meta.)* vii 12, and *Parts of Animals* i 2–4.

⁴ See Lennox 2011, who distinguishes local norms that apply to objects within a specific domain of inquiry from the (relatively fewer) general norms that apply to all objects of inquiry.

ethical inquiry, which seeks only one definition, that of the single highest good, and is not interested in delineating species of goods less valuable than the highest good. So, the criticisms of dichotomous division do not carry over to the context of *EE* ii 1.⁵

The best reason for thinking that Aristotle uses the method of division in the *Eudemian* function argument is that the argument proceeds by introducing a series of six pairs of mutually exclusive predicates, shown in section 2. Each of these pairs introduces an exhaustive division of the class represented by the preceding differentia. After each of these divisions, Aristotle decides which of the two freshly divided classes is better. Since the highest good is the best thing, it always belongs to the better class. Aristotle stops when there are no further divisions that would distinguish the good he has identified from any other good, since that is the unique, indivisible species. Some commentators have remarked that the structure of the *Eudemian* argument seems needlessly complex. For instance, Simpson 2013, 237: “The necessary premises are there, explicit or implicit, but they are not brought together in neat syllogisms.” But if Aristotle is using the method of division, then we should not expect neat syllogisms; we should expect iterated divisions and comparisons.

Additionally, though Aristotle does not say at the start of the *Eudemian* function argument that he is using the method of division, after the argument, he pivots to canvass evidence that the “genus and definition” (τὸ γένος καὶ τὸν ὅρον, 1219a39)⁶ have been given

Karbowski 2019 applies this distinction to ethical inquiry and further distinguishes norms of inquiry that apply to a specific topic within a given domain.

⁵ Cf. Balme 1992, 104; Falcon 1997. Aristotle may be additionally motivated to adopt dichotomous division if his argument’s target audience comprises Academics (argued below), who would be familiar with Plato’s *Sophist* and *Statesman*.

⁶ Greek text of the *EE* from the OCT Walzer and Mingay 1991, with modifications noted. Translations are mine, but often based on Inwood and Woolf 2013. Translations of the *EN* on Broadie and Rowe 2002; other texts of Aristotle’s, Barnes 1984.

correctly. In the *Topics*, Aristotle’s primer on dialectic, definitions are composed of a genus and differentiae and indicate the essence of the thing.⁷ Dialectic proceeds with a questioner asking a series of dichotomous questions, so the process of giving a definition in dialectic closely mirrors the method of dichotomous division. Aristotle’s claim at *EE* ii 1 that he has provided the genus and definition of happiness, then, suggests that he may take himself to be providing a dialectical definition—one obtained precisely by taking a genus and adding differentiae until it is distinct from everything else. However, producing a dialectical definition does not necessarily entail that Aristotle is using the dialectical method throughout the *EE*, since division can help in searching for scientific definitions, without demonstrating them (*APo.* ii 13, 96a20–23). So, division cannot rule out the possibility that Aristotle uses the scientific method in some way here. Taking the function argument as proceeding through division may help with, but does not settle, whether the *EE* proceeds with the dialectic or scientific method.⁸

Division does, however, yield conclusions about the notion of good used in the argument. The genus to which happiness belongs is identified at *EE* i 7, 1217a40, as the genus of goods achieved in action by a human; of such goods, happiness is the best. In *EE* i 8, Aristotle argues that the genus of humanly practicable goods—not the Platonic Form of the Good or the common good—is the genus appropriate for a definition of happiness. I leave those arguments aside here. But this characterization of the genus tells us about its members. Happiness cannot be a Platonic Form because “the assertion that all things that exist strive for some single good is untrue. Each thing strives for its own good (ιδίου ἀγαθοῦ)—the eye for sight, the body for health, other things

⁷ For definition’s relation to essence in the *Top.*, see 101b38. For definition’s relation to division and differentiae, see 139a28–29 and 153a15–22.

⁸ Such a pursuit would have to address the remarks of *EE* i 6, which fall outside the scope of this paper. For recent work, see Devereux 2015; Falcon 2019; Karbowski 2019; Zingano 2007.

for other goods in the same way” (1218a30–33). The notion of good here is relational. It is a notion of good-for, not good from the point of view of the universe. Additionally, the relata of the good-for relation are kinds. If Aristotle is identifying a genus suitable for definition, and definitions are of universals, then the passage must be talking about what is good for *kinds* of things: the good of the eye, the body, at the universal level, not some particular eye or body. So, the claim that happiness is the best thing for human beings (1217a22, 1218b25) should also be understood as relating universals. But, as ἰδίου suggests, the notion of good-for in question is a personal one—it is the agent’s own happiness that is good to pursue. There is no tension in saying that the notion of good-for is personal but the relata of the good-for relation are universals, not particulars. Aristotle is not thinking about what is good for an aggregate or collective of humans. Rather, it is a generic, or typical, notion: for any representative particular human being, that person’s own happiness is their highest good.

2. Reconstruction of the Function Argument

The function argument begins at *EE* ii 1, 1218b32. I list the steps of the argument first, as a preliminary outline of the argument, before turning to examine each more closely:

1. All humanly achievable goods are either within or external to the soul. [1218b32, premise]
2. The goods internal to the soul are more choiceworthy (better) than those external to it.
[1218b33, premise]
3. The goods within the soul are states (*hexeis*) or capacities (*dunameis*), activities (*energeiai*) or processes (*kinêseis*). [1218b36–37, premise]
4. If something X has a function, then the virtue of X is the best disposition (state or capacity) of X. [1218b37–1219a1, premise; from induction, 1219a1–5]
5. If state S₁ is better than state S₂, then the function F₁ of S₁ is better than the function F₂ of S₂.

[1219a6–8, premise]

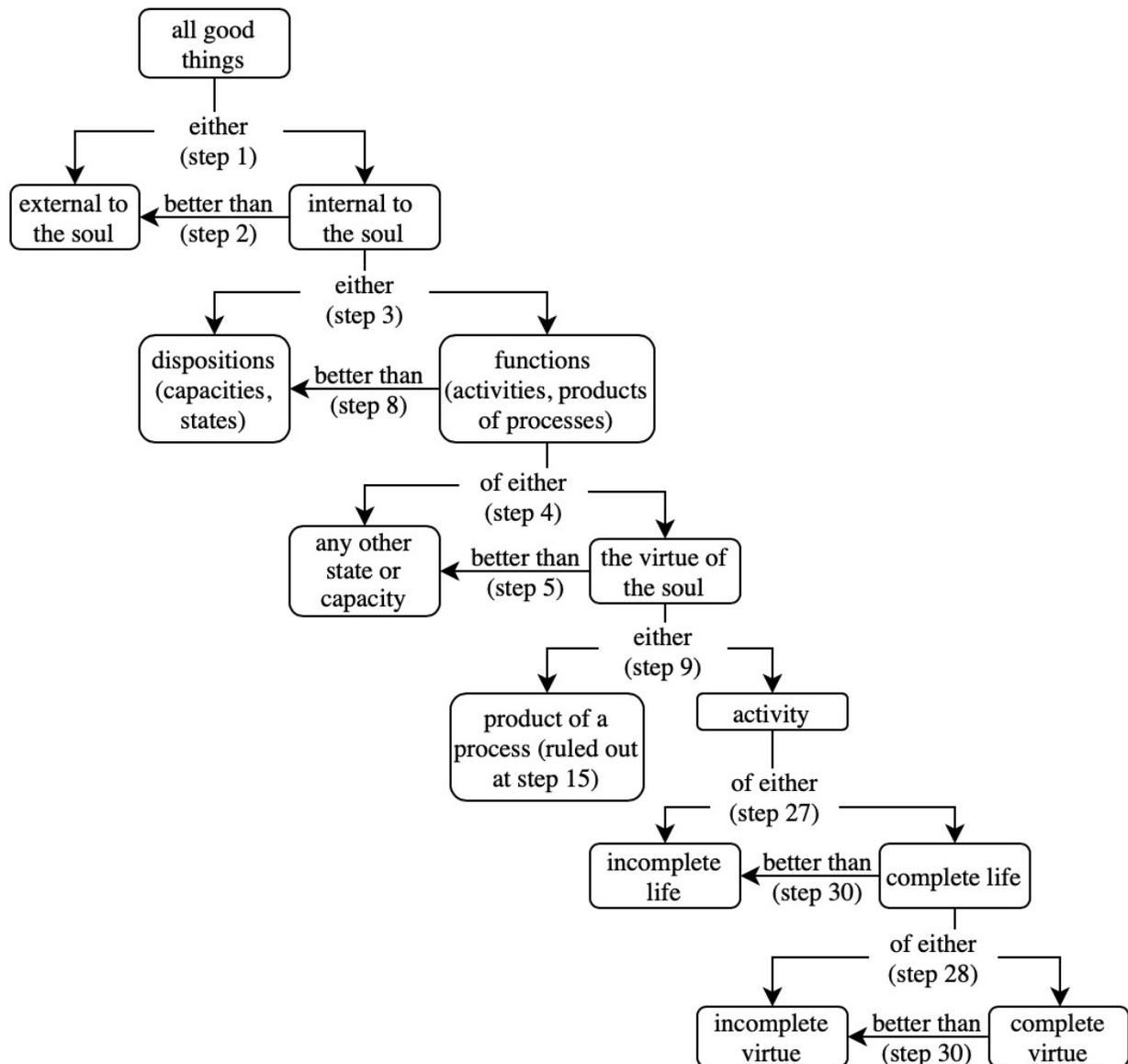
6. The end of each thing is (identity, not predication) its function. [1219a8, premise]
7. The end of a thing X is X's best and most final (*eschaton*) good, such that every other good of X is for the sake of X's end. [1219a10–11, premise]
8. The function of a thing is better than its states or dispositions. [1219a9, a12; from 6, 7]
9. If F is the function of a thing X, then either F is the use (*chrêsis*) of X and so an activity, or F is something other than the use of X and so the product of a process, but not both. [1219a13–17, premise]
10. If something has a function which is a use and so an activity, that activity is better than the state of which it is a use. [1219a17–18, from 8, 9]
11. If something has a function F₁, then its virtue also has a function F₂, which is the same as F₁, but F₂ is excellent. [1219a19–23, premise]
12. The soul has a function, which is to effect living. [1219a23–24, premise]
13. To effect living is a use (*chrêsis*) and being awake. [1219a24–25, premise]
14. The function of the soul is an activity, not the product of a process. [from 9, 12, 13]
15. The function of the virtue of the soul is a use and so an activity. [1219a27, from 11, 14]
16. Happiness, being the best thing [1219a29, a34], is the greater good (of each successive division). [1219a27–28, premise]
17. The best thing is internal to the soul. [1219a29–30; from 1, 2, 16]
18. The best thing (happiness) is either a state or an activity. [1219a30–31; from 3, 17; process ruled out by 15; capacity by the induction at 4; non-function activities or processes by 6–7]
19. An activity is better than its disposition (state or capacity). [1219a31; from 10]
20. The best thing is an activity. [from 16, 18, 19]

21. The best activity is the activity of the best state. [1219a32; from 5 (*energeia* substituted for *ergon*, from 9, 15)]
22. The best thing is the activity of the best state. [from 16, 20, 21]
23. The best state of the soul is its virtue. [1219a32–33; from 4]
24. The best thing is the activity of the virtue of the soul. [1219a33–34; from 22, 23]
25. Happiness is the activity of the virtue of the soul. [1219a27–28; from 16, 24 (*ergon*, at 1219a27, becomes *energeia* by 1219a35)]
26. Happiness is something perfect. [1219a35–36, cf. 16]
27. Life is complete or incomplete. [1219a36, premise]
28. Virtue is complete or incomplete. [1219a36–37, premise]
29. Happiness is the activity of complete or incomplete virtue over a complete or incomplete life.
[from 25, 27, 28]
30. The activity of what is incomplete is itself imperfect. [1219a37–38, premise]
31. Happiness is the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue. [1219a38–39;
from 26, 29, 30]

The steps of the argument can be divided into four groups. Steps 1–10, tracking 1218b31–1219a18, lay out the sequence of the first four divisions and the axiological principles that determine, for the first three divisions, which newly divided class of goods is the better one. Steps 11–15, following 1219a18–1219a27, bring in psychological premises to address the fourth division, showing that the function of the virtue of the soul is an activity, rather than the product of a process. Steps 16–25 follow the inferential sequence from 1219a27–34, yielding the intermediate conclusion that happiness is the activity of the virtue of the soul. These steps trace the premise that happiness belongs to the better class through the divisions made in steps 1–10.

The final section of the argument, steps 26–31, ends the argument by adding two further divisions to the intermediate account of happiness at step 25, that it be over a complete life and in accordance with complete virtue (1219a34–39). Taken together, then, the function argument identifies a definition of happiness through six divisions, represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Divisions of the Function Argument



My reconstruction departs from others by following the method of division, which in turn reveals other substantive differences. Most significantly, other commentators oversimplify step

3, which leads them to misunderstand the role of the controversial psychological premises in steps 11–15. By avoiding the oversimplification, my reconstruction better explains the significance of the fourth division and the psychological claims that follow it.

2.1 The First Four Divisions (Steps 1–10)

In the first ten steps, Aristotle introduces a series of four divisions, each dividing the prior class with two mutually exclusive predicates. Steps 1, 3, 4, and 9 introduce the first four divisions. Then he says which class is better after each division. Steps 2, 8, and 5 identify the better class of the first three out of the four divisions; the fourth division is addressed differently in the second part of the argument, steps 11–15.

2.1.1 Internal Over External Goods (1218b31–36)

Step 1 introduces the first division: the highest good is either internal to the soul or external to the soul.⁹ Though seemingly tautological, it embeds the non-trivial assumption that the highest good cannot be a composite of both. This rules out from the first step of the argument that Aristotle has a kind of inclusivist account that takes the highest good to be a composite of virtuous activity and external goods.¹⁰ At step 2, Aristotle argues that goods internal to the soul are more choiceworthy, or better,¹¹ than goods external to the soul. The reason for this is that out of wisdom, virtue, and pleasure, some or all of these seem to everyone to be the end, and all three are internal to the soul. Aristotle first claims at *EE* i 1 that wisdom, virtue, and pleasure are

⁹ In *EN* i 8 and *Politics (Pol.)* vii 1 this division of goods appears with a third item: bodily goods, which would here seem to count as an external good. See Inwood 2014.

¹⁰ The *EE* does not have passages parallel to *EN* i 8–12 that suggest (defeasibly, perhaps) that external goods like beauty and good children are parts of one's happiness. Irwin 1999 notably defends the inclusion of external goods to happiness.

¹¹ I gloss ἀρετώτερα (1218b33) as “better” to clarify that Aristotle is not shifting from one axis of evaluation to another, which would introduce equivocation. All of the better-than claims (steps 2, 8, 5, 30) must be transitive.

said to be the greatest goods (1214a32–33). If we grant, as Aristotle does,¹² that what seems to everyone to be the case actually is the case, then, since it seems to everyone that the final end is internal to the soul, we can infer that it is.

This first division has some fairly strong consequences that tell against intuitive thoughts we may have about happiness. Insofar as we understand the success of our actions, or the consequences that follow our actions, to be strictly external to the soul, they are cannot be parts of happiness. The same goes for the happiness of others, like friends or family members, since these, too, are external to the soul. It is possible, of course, that some goods internal to the soul depend on external circumstances. For instance, friendship, an internal state, presupposes the availability of external friends. But while external goods may be instrumentally valuable for the sake of the highest good, they cannot themselves constitute, or be constituents of, happiness. Aristotle specifically warns against mistaking the necessary conditions or means of happiness with happiness itself (1214b24–27).

2.1.2 *Functions Over Dispositions* (1218b36–37; 1219a8–11)

Step 3 makes the next division: goods internal to the soul are either capacities and states on the one hand or activities and processes on the other (1218b36–37). Aristotle’s distinction here is between two kinds of potentiality and two kinds of actuality. Shortly after introducing this distinction, Aristotle refers to states and capacities with the umbrella term “disposition” (διάθεσις), and he contrasts dispositions with the functions that arise from them (step 5), which are, in turn, divided into activities and products of processes (step 9). Though Aristotle does

¹² See *EN* x 2, 1172b36–1173a1. This assumption seems weak to us but may suffice for his (perhaps *ad hominem*—see section 2.3) purposes here. At *Pol.* vii 1, 1323a38–b11, there is a standalone argument in defense this premise: the goods in the soul are more final than the external goods because the latter face a limit on their usefulness at high levels of accumulation, while the former do not, making the latter inapt for unqualified pursuit.

occasionally group the two potentialities and the two actualities together, an advantage of my reconstruction will be that it can show that the argument has the resources to explain why happiness is better than each of the four goods. The other reconstructions of the argument have all opted to take this four-way division of goods in the soul as a two-way division instead. Michael Woods is most explicit in saying why.¹³ He thinks that the key inference of the function argument is invalid with the four-way division. Aristotle, he thinks, only argues that the activity of the virtue of the soul is the best activity, better than other states or capacities; he does not show it is better than all processes, the fourth good of the soul. The main attraction of collapsing the four-way division lies in avoiding this outcome. I argue below that Aristotle's argument actually does have the resources to show why happiness is not a process or capacity. It is a significant consequence of my interpretation that the *Eudemian* function argument is actually more ambitious than commentators have thought. The two-way reading is encouraged by Aristotle's statement at 1219a30–31 (step 18) that the goods in the soul are states or activities, but this, I show below, is based on misleading punctuation that, when clarified, reveals that the statement is an inference following from, not a restatement of, step 3.

Of these goods of the soul, step 8 claims that the function (activity or product of a process) is better than the state, and more generally, the dispositions (1219a9, a12). Step 8 follows from two premises, steps 6 and 7. Step 6 identifies a thing's end with its function (1219a8).¹⁴ This is a distinctly Aristotelian claim, fully consistent with the doctrine of final causation expressed elsewhere in the corpus.¹⁵ This step is explained by (γὰρ) step 7, which adds

¹³ See Woods 1992, 87. It is fair to say that the two-way division is the scholarly consensus. See also Hutchinson 1986, 40; Karbowski 2019, 122; Kenny 2016, 198; Majithia 2005, 372; Simpson 2013, 234. I am unaware of any reading that takes the four-way division.

¹⁴ I take the (implied) "is" to identify the end with the function, not to predicate one of the other.

¹⁵ See *Phys.* ii 8. Dirlmeier 1962, 223 also notes the connection to *Meta.* ix 8, 1050a21–22.

that a given thing's end is better than all of its other goods: "For it is established that the end is the best and final (ἔσχατον) thing; everything else is for its sake" (1219a10–11). The fact that something is the end implies that it is more valuable than those things which are there for its sake. This is the view defended in *EE* i 8, that the highest good causes the goodness of other things by their being arranged for its sake (1218b10–11), as their end, or final cause.¹⁶ It is easier to see how step 7 explains step 6 if we supply the thought, familiar from elsewhere in the corpus, that a thing's *ergon*, or function, is its best achievement.¹⁷ Combining steps 6 and 7, then, step 8 yields the intermediate conclusion that a thing's function is better than its states or capacities, which are for the sake of the function. Step 10 provides a more specific instantiation of step 8 in light of the fourth division, of functions into activities or products of processes. When the function is an activity in particular, the activity is better than the state of which it is the use.

When Aristotle says that states and capacities are for the sake of their functions in steps 8 and 10, the for-the-sake-of relation has its instrumental sense, i.e., the sense of "promotes" or "enables." States and capacities enable virtuous activities. The instrumental understanding of the for-the-sake-of relation is the only appropriate one here. It is hard to see how the mere possession of states and capacities are parts of their function, as an inclusive understanding of for-the-sake-of would say here, or how states and capacities approximate virtuous activities.¹⁸ These non-instrumental accounts of the for-the-sake-of relation are influential in understanding the *EN*, but they are excluded in the *EE* argument by its clearest example of the for-the-sake-of relation.

¹⁶ See also *Phys.* ii 7, 198b8–9 and *Top.* iii 1, 116b23–26.

¹⁷ See Baker 2015.

¹⁸ For the inclusive interpretation, see Ackrill 1980. For the analogical or approximation interpretations, see Charles 1999; Lear 2008.

2.1.3 The Function of Virtue Over Functions of Other States (1218b37–1219a8)

Marking the third division, step 4 claims “concerning virtue, that the best disposition is either a state or a capacity of each of the things that has some use or function” (1218b37–1219a1).¹⁹ I take “best disposition” to refer to virtue. So, considering each of those things that has some use or function, the best of its dispositions (states or capacities) is its virtue. The division here is between the virtue and any other, inferior states or capacities. This step is defended by induction on cloaks, ships, and houses—all of which have functions and whose virtues are their best states.²⁰ In the inductive examples, each item’s virtue is its best state, never a capacity; after this, Aristotle takes virtue consistently to be a state, not a capacity. The induction, then, shunts capacities to the non-virtue side of the division. The point of distinguishing the best state from the others in step 4 is to compare the value of the different functions which arise from those states in step 5. Step 5 is the claim that the function of the virtue of the soul is better than the function of any other state (1219a6–8). This step provides a way of comparing the value of two functions that are the actualities of two different states: if one

¹⁹ ταῦτα δὴ οὕτως ὑποκείσθω καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ βελτίστη διάθεσις ἢ ἕξις ἢ δύναμις ἐκάστων, ὧσων ἐστὶ τις χρῆσις ἢ ἔργον. I depart here from the standard translation, which takes ἀρετὴ to be the implied subject of the ὅτι clause, so that there is a three-way disjunction: e.g., Inwood and Woolf 2013: “Let it be assumed further, concerning virtue, that it is the best disposition or state or capacity of each of the things that have some use or function”. *Categories* 8 distinguishes dispositions, states, and capacities from one another, but here I take ‘disposition’ in a non-technical sense, as an umbrella term for either a state or a capacity. My approach has two advantages. First, ‘disposition’ is not given in the division of goods at 1218b36–37, so the standard translation has Aristotle introducing a new good of the soul here for no reason. Second, at 1219a31–32, “disposition” and “state” seem to be used interchangeably. But at 1219a12, Aristotle refers to the “state and disposition.” There, “disposition” must include capacities for the argument to be valid and would be redundant if it only meant “states.”

²⁰ The induction shows that *if* something has a function, its virtue is its best disposition. This step presupposes, and does not try to prove, that some things have functions. Berryman 2019, 67 takes the point to be that anything with a virtue must also have a function. But γὰρ (1219a3) implies that the argument runs from a cloak’s function to its virtue, not the other way around.

state is better than another, then the function of the first is better than that of the second.²¹ The best function, then, will be that of the best state.

But what counts as the best state in step 5's comparison? Are the only things that can be states the individual virtues, like courage or temperance, each considered by itself? Likely not. Some virtues discussed later are composed of several other states or parts of other states: general justice is complete (*teleia*) virtue, but in relation to other people (1129b25–27); theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) is understanding (*nous*) plus scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) (1141a18–19); and *kalokagathia* is composed of each of the particular virtues previously discussed (1248b8–11). What these examples show is that some of the virtues are defined in reference to other, more basic states. So, when Aristotle is comparing the value of states in the function argument, he has in mind not just simple states but compound states as well, so that the best state would turn out to be a composite of many basic virtues. This is supported by the gloss later in the function argument at 1219a37 that complete (*telea*) virtue is virtue whole (*holê*): a composite (but not a simple) state is easily understood to have parts. All this would have the likely result that the functions of compound states would themselves be compound. Moreover, if we take Aristotle only to be referring to simple states here, the argument would fail to rule out the possibility that the function of some composite of states is better than any of the simple states whose functions are compared here in step 5.

2.1.4 Activities, Not Processes nor Their Products (1219a13–18)

The fourth division is step 9: functions are divided into activities and products of

²¹ Having set this premise down, Aristotle does not defend it here. But the argument at *Meta.* ix 9 that actuality is better than potentiality (1051a4–17) may prove instructive: an actuality inherits all the positive value of its potentiality without the disvalue of the potentiality's compresent contrary. If the value of an actuality is transferred in this way from the potentiality, then the better the potentiality, the better its actuality. See, e.g., Makin 2006, 221–231.

processes, so the function of the virtue of the soul must be one or the other. The subsequent steps of the argument will show that the function of the virtue of the soul must be an activity, not the product of a process. However, commentators who take the division of goods in the soul at step 3 to be only states and activities have a hard time seeing this, because they assume that Aristotle implicitly collapses the distinction between activities and processes.²² It is strange that he should spend several lines illustrating this distinction with examples:

But function is said in two ways. For some things, its function is other than its use (*παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν*)—for instance, the function of the art of housebuilding is a house, not the act of building the house, and the function of a doctor is health, not healing. For others, the use is the function—for instance the function of sight is seeing and the function of mathematical knowledge is contemplation. So, necessarily, of things whose function is their use, the use is better than the state. (1219a13–18)

The two kinds of function distinguished here are those that are other than their use (*chrêsis*) and those that simply are their use. Aristotle does not explicitly say that the two kinds of functions map onto activities (*energeiai*) and processes (*kinêseis*), introduced at step 3. But accounts of activities and processes elsewhere in the corpus (*Meta.* ix 6, 1048b18–35; ix 8, 1050a23–b3;²³ *EN* x 4) support this connection. For instance, in *Meta.* ix 6 Aristotle distinguishes activities and processes, explicitly using the words *kinêseis* and *energeiai* (1048b28), which track a related distinction he introduces between complete and incomplete actualities. Processes are incomplete

²² For instance, while Woods includes this distinction in his reconstruction (his step 12), the only inference it supports, his step 13, is a slightly more specific formulation of his step 11. Though step 13 supports step 21, he could have cited his step 11 for that just as well. This makes it an idle distinction whose inclusion complicates the argument for no discernible purpose.

²³ See Gonzalez 2019 on the status of the *Met.* passages.

because there is a limit whose completion marks the end of the activity; the point of engaging in the process is to attain the result, or product, of the process. Activities can, in principle, be done continuously forever; their enactment just is the point. Since actualities are either complete or incomplete, the distinction between processes and activities is exhaustive. These passages also share examples in common: housebuilding is a process; seeing or perceiving and thinking are activities.

Note that the distinction in *EE* ii 1 is not, strictly, between activities and processes, but between activities and *products* of processes. In *EE* ii 1, the examples of a house and health are actually products of processes; the processes themselves are housebuilding and healing. So, the fourth division says that the function of the virtue of the soul could either be the product of a process or an activity. Though Aristotle does not give any examples here of processes whose products are internal to the soul, some examples would be learning a craft or becoming courageous. Aristotle's goal in the argument is to identify the most valuable humanly achievable good through comparisons with other goods, but the value of a process lies in the value of its final product (steps 6–7), not in the value of working or making progress to the final product. Since the product of a process is more valuable than a process, if happiness is something better than the product of a process, then *a fortiori* it would be better than the process.

2.2 The Psychological Section (Steps 11–15)

After introducing the fourth division, Aristotle develops two inferences from three new premises about the function of the soul (1219a18–27); I group these steps together, calling them the Psychological Section. On my reading, this section's primary aim is to address the fourth division, showing that the best function in the soul is an activity. Briefly, the argument of the section is this: the function of the soul is to effect living, which is a use (*chrêsis*), so the function

of the soul must be an activity, not the product of a process. The function of the soul and the function of the virtue of the soul are the same (except in one irrelevant respect). So, the function of the virtue of the soul must also be an activity. My reading departs from other commentators'. They think that the section's primary aim is to show that the function of the virtue of the soul is an excellent life. I think this inference is, instead, a secondary aim of the section: it allows Aristotle to account for the *endoxon* that doing well and living well are the same as being happy (1219b1–2). While it confirms the definition of happiness after it has been found, this inference does not help find the definition. If we think the primary upshot of this section is equating the function of the soul's virtue with an excellent life, then we struggle, as Woods does, to see how this section fits into the argument.²⁴ The rest of the argument does not come back to the notion of the excellent life. Additionally, showing that the activity of virtue is an excellent life does not, by itself, entail that such activity is the highest good. I make sense of this passage instead by assigning to it a different, indispensable role in the argument. Since my interpretation does not collapse the four-way division of internal goods to just states and activities, as others do, it remains an open question at this point whether the function of the soul's virtue is a process (or its product) or an activity. This section shows that it is an activity, because the function of the virtue of the soul is a use. Commentators who take the step 3 division to be two-way rather than four-way cannot see that steps 11–15 eliminate a candidate for the highest good, because they assume

²⁴ See Hutchinson 1986, 44–45; Simpson 2013, 235–237; Woods 1992, 87. Woods calls this section subsidiary and concludes that it is “distinct and isolated from the rest.” Hutchinson thinks that the intermediate conclusion that happiness is an excellent life is needed to support the inference in the final steps of the argument that happiness is the perfect good life. But, I show below, steps 26–31 do not depend on premises from the Psychological Section. Simpson takes its import to be in securing the conclusion that “happiness is the activity of a good soul” (1219a34–35), but this slips from “the function of X’s virtue” to “the function of a good X.” I translate that sentence differently, below, which avoids the problem he tries to solve. Cf. Kenny 2016, 199, but his two-way division at step 3 makes this section redundant.

that candidate was not in consideration from the beginning.

The argument in the Psychological Section relies on three new premises. Step 11 is the claim that if something has a function F_1 , then its virtue also a function F_2 , which is the same as F_1 , but F_2 is excellent (1219a18–20).²⁵ To take Aristotle’s example, the function of the shoemaker’s art is a shoe. If it has a virtue, that virtue’s function will be an excellent shoe. We can decompose step 11 into two parts: there is a similarity claim (F_1 and F_2 are the same) and a dissimilarity claim (except F_2 is excellent). On my view, it is the similarity claim that carries the argument forward in step 15: if life is an activity, then an excellent life must be an activity as well. The additional fact of its excellence from the dissimilarity claim helps address the *endoxon* at 1219b1–2 but is not itself significant for the argument.

Step 11 is a variation of the sentiment familiar from the *Republic*’s function argument. Socrates asks Thrasymachus, “Could the eyes accomplish their function well if they did not have the virtue proper to them?” (353b9–c2). The familiar thought is that something performs its function well when it has its proper virtue because of the virtue’s contribution to the function. Aristotle reformulates this thought by introducing the notion of the virtue’s function, a phrase which appears neither in the *Republic* nor the *EN*.²⁶ This distinction opens a gap between accomplishing one’s function while possessing one’s virtue and accomplishing the function of the virtue.²⁷ It is not enough for the shoemaker merely to possess their proper virtue while

²⁵ λέγωμεν ὅτι τὸ ἔργον τοῦ πράγματος καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡσαύτως. While Casaubon’s conjectured <τὰντὸ> after ὅτι makes for easier reading, the sentence of the MSS reads fine without it: “The function of a thing is also [the function] of its virtue, but not in the same way.”

²⁶ It does, however, appear again later in the *EE*: 1220a7 and 1221b29–30.

²⁷ Aristotle’s point need only be that there is a qualitative difference between actualizing one’s function while merely having one’s virtue, and actualizing one’s virtue—not that the function of a thing’s virtue is a different thing altogether from the thing’s own function. Another motivation for this distinction could be to leave open the question of whether it is possible to misuse virtue, to which *EE* viii 1 returns.

making a shoe, to produce an excellent shoe. They may be in a hurry or making a cheaper shoe than usual. Being able to make shoes quickly or cheaply may be valuable qualities to have, but these qualities are not necessarily part of the shoemaker's proper virtue.

Steps 12 and 13 are two further premises about the soul: "Further, let the function of the soul be to effect living, and such a function is a use and a waking state, for sleep is idleness and rest" (1219a23–25).²⁸ Step 12 identifies the function of the soul: to effect living (*to zên poiein*). Aristotle has already helped himself to the assumption that the soul has a function in the argument (1219a5), but the premise is not defended in the *EE*.²⁹ Given that the notion of function was given earlier (steps 6–7) in evaluative terms, as a thing's end, which is best for it, the claim that the soul has a function relies only on the intuition is that some achievement of the soul is better than all the others and so is its end. The further identification of its function with living is a generic description, not an essential account, of the soul's function, since living is also shared with animal and plant souls.³⁰ This claim should be familiar from the *Republic* function argument, where Socrates explicitly adds living (*to zên*) to management, ruling, and deliberation as functions of the soul (353d9).

²⁸ ἔτι ἔστω ψυχῆς ἔργον τὸ ζῆν ποιεῖν, τοῦ δὲ χρῆσις καὶ ἐγρήγορις· ὁ γὰρ ὕπνος ἀργία τις καὶ ἡσυχία. The τοῦ of the MSS has tempted editors to emend, but I do not think this is necessary, since τοῦ, when combined with δὲ, can take the force of a demonstrative (Smyth 1984, 1106, 1112). Now, if τοῦ δὲ [implied: ἔργον], referring to τὸ ζῆν ποιεῖν, is possessive, then the sentence refers to two functions: τὸ ζῆν ποιεῖν, which itself is the soul's function, and which in turn *has* a function that is a χρῆσις καὶ ἐγρήγορις. It is better instead to take the genitive as appositional (like the English phrase, "the task of reading the paper," which identifies the task with reading): the ἔργον of this, i.e., the ἔργον which *is* effecting life, is a use and waking state. This has the same sense as Dirlmeier's τοῦ<το> but without the textual change.

²⁹ The *EN* i 7 argument is often taken to contain an argument that humans (not just their souls) have a function. See Barney 2008.

³⁰ In Aristotle's psychology, generally speaking, all of the capacities of the soul are, in the first place, capacities for living the kind of life appropriate to the ensouled creature. For some higher creatures, the soul's capacities may also be for living well (see, e.g., Leunissen 2010).

Aristotle establishes that effecting living is the function of the soul, in order to show that the function of the soul is a use, so an activity, rather than the product of a process. But what makes the soul's function be a use, rather than the kind of function distinct from its use? Aristotle's explanation, that sleep is a kind of idleness (*argia*, 1219a25, b19–20), hints at an answer: the soul's sleep is uncharacteristic of performing its function. It is not just that sleep is incidental to the accomplishment of one's function, but it is uncharacteristic of it (*argia* is a nominalized privative of *ergon*). If the soul's function were something other than its use, then whether the soul is at rest should have no bearing on whether it achieves its function. We cannot infer from the fact that the housebuilder is asleep that they have not accomplished their function. The achievement of the housebuilder's function depends on whether the house stands—not on whether the builder is, at the moment, using the art of housebuilding, rather than resting. But a thinker who is asleep is, by that fact, not performing the activity of their thinking. The fact that sleep *is* the privation of the soul's function implies that the soul's function is not distinct from the soul's use, but instead is its use.

Since, from step 9, the function of a thing that just is its use amounts to an activity, rather than the product of a process, (step 14) the function of the soul is an activity. Since the function of the virtue of the soul is the same as the function of the soul (step 11's similarity claim), if the function of the soul is an activity, then the function of the virtue of the soul is also an activity. So, step 15 answers that the function of the virtue of the soul—left open in the fourth division as either the product of a process or an activity—is an activity. The inference that the function of the virtue of the soul is an excellent life also follows from combining the difference claim of step 11 with step 12, but, again, this inference is not needed for the conclusion that the activity of complete virtue over a complete life is the highest good.

2.3 *The Inferential Section (Steps 16–25)*

The next section of the argument, which follows 1219a27–35, is often taken as a summary of the argument that has preceded.³¹ But more than summarizing what has preceded, this section actually draws inferences from the earlier premises. It introduces for the first time in the argument the premise—one we should expect, if Aristotle is following the method of division—that happiness is the greater good. In other words, happiness belongs to the better class of each successive division. This premise enables Aristotle to infer that happiness belongs to the better of each divided class from the first four divisions, allowing him to arrive at a preliminary definition of happiness.

Additionally, this section contains indications of Aristotle’s argumentative target, which helps explain features of the passage. Aristotle’s focus in this section is to attack a specific thought: that the cause of all good things, happiness, is a state rather than an activity. Aristotle considers his rejection of this view to be a significant upshot of his argument. He first poses the question in *EE* i 4 whether happiness is a quality (*poion*) of the soul—an idea he attributes to the old and the wise—or if it is manifested more in the soul’s actions (1215a20–25). As I read *EE* ii 1, he answers this by saying that happiness is an activity (1219a33–34). Then at the end of *EE* ii 11, he repeats his previously secured claim that happiness is an activity rather than a state (1228a13–14; a17). What I think explains Aristotle’s repeated interest in this claim is its *ad hominem* force against an Academic assumption. Someone who thinks that happiness is *having* one’s soul in the right condition, or that virtue is what makes someone’s life happy, would be such a target.³² Immediately prior to the function argument, *EE* i 8 argues against selecting the

³¹ For instance, Karbowski 2019, 121; Simpson 2013, 236.

³² Let me set aside the question of whether Plato himself held such a view (cf. Nussbaum 2001, 318–372, esp. 493n4). Even if he did not, it is easy to see how some members of the Academy

Form of the Good as a starting point for defining happiness, so *EE* ii 1 can easily be understood as continuing his engagement with ideas from the Academy. Positing such a target has two advantages. First, my approach suggests an alternative translation for a concluding sentence of the passage that saves Aristotle a *Nicomachean*-sounding conclusion that does not actually follow from the premises of the *Eudemian* argument. Additionally, it explains why Aristotle in this section states that the goods of the soul are states or activities. He is not repeating his earlier assumption at step 3 (which included two other goods of the soul omitted here); rather, he is narrowing the goods of step 3 from four down to two so that he can specifically address his disagreement with the Academic view. This supports an alternate reading of the primary textual evidence for the two-way interpretation of step 3, which I reject.

My reconstruction of the Inferential Section is based on the following construal of the text, with numbering added to map the passage onto steps 16–25:

τοῦτ' ἄρα ἐστὶ τὸ πλέον ἀγαθόν, ὅπερ ἦν ἡ εὐδαιμονία. δῆλον δὲ ἐκ τῶν ὑποκειμένων· ἦν μὲν γὰρ ἡ εὐδαιμονία τὸ ἄριστον, τὰ δὲ τέλη ἐν ψυχῇ καὶ τὰ ἄριστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν, αὕτη δὲ ἢ ἕξις ἢ ἐνέργεια. ἐπεὶ βέλτιον ἢ ἐνέργεια τῆς διαθέσεως, καὶ τῆς βελτίστης ἕξεως ἢ βελτίστη ἐνέργεια, ἡ δ' ἀρετὴ βελτίστη ἕξις, τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐνέργεια ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄριστον εἶναι. ἦν δὲ καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία τὸ ἄριστον. ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐνέργεια.³³

might be attracted to it. For instance, *Top.* ii 6 attributes to Xenocrates the view that the “happy person is one who has (*echonta*) an excellent soul” (112a37–38). See Lawrence 2001, 454–7. Proclus (centuries later) shows how a sympathetic reader of Plato’s might think that potentiality is better than actuality—on the grounds that what can perfect other things is itself more valuable. See *Institutio Theologica* 77.1–4. Cf. *In Platonis Rem Publicam Commentarii*, i 26.10–12.

³³ The Greek text I use departs from the OCT, though it hews more closely to the MSS. Most significantly, I add a semicolon after ὑποκειμένων (a29) and remove the parentheses that enclose the following three clauses (a29–31). As a result, there is no need to follow the OCT in obelizing αὕτη (a30). Its antecedent is εὐδαιμονία. So, ἐπεὶ (a31) begins a new sentence, as a hypotactic

(25) This [the function of the virtue of the soul], then, (16) is the greater good, which is what happiness is. This is clear from what was established: for given that happiness is the best thing, (17) the ends in the soul are the best of goods, (18) and it [happiness] is either a state or an activity. (19) Since the activity is better than the disposition, and (21) the best activity is [the activity] of the best state, and (23) virtue is the best state, (24) the soul's activity of virtue is the best thing. And again, (16) happiness was the best thing. So, (*25) the happiness of a good soul is an activity. (1219a27–35)

My reading of step 16 identifies happiness with the result of taking the greater good from each division.³⁴ The first sentence of the passage does not conclude an argument that has just preceded. Rather, it is supplying a premise (step 16) that ties the preceding divisions together, while prospectively stating a preliminary formulation of the conclusion (step 25) that the subsequent inferences will support. So, this section does not summarize the argument for a

conjunction (Denniston 1950, xl). For this usage, see *Problemata* 949a24–27, cf. *De Anima* 427b27–29, *De Caelo* 306b32–307a3. Additionally, I keep PC's ἐνέργεια ἢ (a33) over Bonitz's ἐνέργειαν (it is the subject of a new sentence). So, εἶναι is no longer governed by δῆλον and must take a finite sense. It is possible to understand εἶναι to be finite without emendation. The finite verb of the apodosis of a conditional may be expressed in an infinitive or participle (Smyth 1984, 2350; also cf. Smyth 1984, 2630). If this usage is rejected, we may emend the text: either (1) obelize εἶναι (“trading” εἶναι away to keep αὐτὴ at a30 would still enable a good reading of the text with fewer changes to the MSS than the OCT), or (2) emend ἄριστον εἶναι to ἄριστόν ἐστιν. The upshot of my reading is that it removes the implication that the sentence “it is either a state or an activity” lists a previously established assumption. It is actually an inference, not an assumption already granted.

³⁴ I keep πλέον from the codd., while the OCT adopts Bekker's τέλειον. If the argument proceeds through division, πλέον makes better sense of the argument's frequent comparisons. Further, τέλειον does not appear in any premises until the final section (steps 26–31), which itself is self-contained and does not need to refer back to this stage of the argument. While “more” may perhaps be a more usual translation of πλέον, with an article, πλέον can also be used to pick out the greater of two things (see *Timaeus* 75c2). This is the sense I use here. With that said, τέλειον would not be a problem for division. Happiness's perfection also entails that it would belong to the better of each divided class.

conclusion that has already been secured, as commentators have thought.³⁵ Rather, it shows how what was already established earlier supports the conclusion at step 25, and it shows this by drawing the inferences from the established premises to the conclusion. So, the purpose of steps 17–24 in the passage is to draw inferences to the conclusion, not to restate the assumptions.³⁶

Step 17 makes the inference from the first division, that all goods are either external or internal to the soul, and internal goods are better, so the best of goods would be internal to the soul. Step 18 (“happiness is either a state or an activity”) is not, as commentators assume, a restatement of step 3, which marks the second division between functions (activities, products of processes) and dispositions (states, capacities). Rather, it is an intermediate conclusion that follows from step 3 only after two of the four goods of the soul have been eliminated from contention. The possibility that happiness is a process was eliminated at step 15, when it was established that the function of the virtue of the soul was an activity. And the possibility that happiness is a capacity was eliminated after the induction at step 4 found that the virtue of things with functions are their best states. So, step 18 narrows four goods of the soul down to two: activities, his own preferred candidate, and states. Why two and not just one? Aristotle is summarizing the early results of his argument to isolate the more controversial inference and frame his disagreement with the Academic who is also happy to eliminate processes and capacities but who thinks that the best thing for a human is a state, rather than an activity.

Step 19 establishes that of the two kinds that remain, activities are better than states. It

³⁵ Representative of the reading I am resisting, Karbowski 2019, 121 says of 1219a25–28: “After drawing this conclusion, Aristotle offers a summary of the preceding argument.” Interpreters appear to be misled by the OCT’s parentheses after ὑποκειμένων, which I excise.

³⁶ Steps 19, 21, and 23 do repeat previously stated assumptions, but these steps are now put in terms of “activity” rather than “function”—this substitution is possible only after identifying functions as activities or processes (step 9), and the highest good as an activity (step 15).

repeats step 10 (the culmination of steps 6–8) but omits from its formulation the condition that the function be an activity, since this has already been satisfied. Step 20 follows from 18 and 19: the best thing, happiness, is an activity, rather than a state. Step 21 addresses the third division, restating step 5 in terms of activities rather than functions: the activity of the best state is the best activity. From this, step 22 supplies the inference that the best thing is the activity of the best state. Step 23 recalls the induction from step 4, which showed that the best state is the virtue of the soul. Substituting “virtue” in for “best state” at 22, step 24 infers that the best thing is the activity of the virtue of the soul. And substituting “happiness” back in for “best thing” in 24 gets the argument to the conclusion prospectively stated at the beginning of the passage: the function—specifically the activity—of the soul’s virtue is the best thing, happiness.

I have marked an additional step *25, which I do not think is the conclusion of the passage but simply restates the controversial inference that happiness is an activity. While the prospective statement of the conclusion at 1219a27–28 defines happiness as the function of the virtue of the soul, here, *25 reminds us that this function is specifically an activity.³⁷ It is an explicit answer to his Academic target, who holds that happiness is a state. The standard translation of *25 (“So, happiness is the activity of a good soul.”) makes the argument slip from “the activity of the virtue of the soul,” which is the formulation permitted by step 11, to “the activity of a good soul” in the conclusion. But Aristotle does not say in the *EE* argument that a soul with its proper virtue is a good soul. As I argued above, the *EE* formulation leaves it open that a shoemaker or human might perform their function while possessing but without using their virtue. It is only in the *EN* function argument (1098a7–15) that Aristotle equates the function of a

³⁷ I take the genitive phrase ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς with happiness rather than activity: happiness is an activity, at least for a good soul. This is an important qualification because for a bad soul, happiness first requires acquiring virtue (a process) before the agent can activate their virtue.

good human or citharist with that of a human or citharist who has their proper virtue. My translation of *25 avoids committing to this unstated assumption. This avoids attributing to the *EE* argument a conclusion which does not follow strictly from the premises provided.

2.4 The Final Two Divisions (Steps 26–31)

The last six steps of the argument add to the intermediate conclusion at step 25: happiness is not only the activity of the virtue of the soul, but the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue. This section has struck some commentators as hasty, but if we take division to be Aristotle’s method, his argument here is clear. Here is the passage:

And since (26) happiness is something perfect (τέλειόν), and (27) life is either complete or incomplete (τέλεα καὶ ἀτελής), and (28) virtue likewise, for it is either a whole or a part, and (30) the activity of what is incomplete is itself imperfect (ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀτελῶν ἐνέργεια ἀτελής), so (31) happiness would be the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue (ζωῆς τελείας ἐνέργεια κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν). (1219a35–39)

I imagine this translation will strike some readers as controversial because I translate the same word, *teleon*, alternatingly as “perfect” and “complete” within close proximity. Since the translation of the *Nicomachean* argument’s corresponding *teleiostatên* (1098a18) is fraught,³⁸ it may seem that I am illicitly skirting controversy by refusing to translate that word consistently in this passage.³⁹ I concede that my translation does not preserve the unity between “perfect” and “complete” that is signified by a single Greek word, but I think that Aristotle *is* trading between different senses of the word, without equivocating between two meanings to make his argument.

Both being perfect (being evaluatively best) and being complete (having all of its parts)

³⁸ See Irwin 2012, 508–509.

³⁹ In contrast, Inwood and Woolf have “complete”; Hutchinson has “perfect” throughout, which obscures the connection to part and whole in the passage.

are ways of being *teleon*—that is, characterized by attaining the thing’s end.⁴⁰ But happiness is *telea* in a different way than one’s virtue or life can be *telea*—to make this clear, Aristotle glosses the latter two as *telea* by being whole, not a part.⁴¹ Such a gloss might not be necessary if the meaning of *telea* as applied to life and virtue were already unambiguously clear. The problem with translating *teleon* as “complete” throughout is that it does not follow straightforwardly from the fact that happiness is something complete that one should also have a complete life and complete virtue. A dinner party can be complete or incomplete (say, if it lacks dessert), and the dinner party, too, can be (a small) part of a life that is complete, or one tragically cut short. The fact that a proper dinner party is something complete has no bearing on whether it belongs to a complete life or to a shortened one. Happiness, it may be countered, is unlike a dinner party, because happiness has, as its proper subject, a person’s whole life. But that response begs the question against someone who thinks that an incomplete life can still be happy.

Seeing Aristotle as using the method of division here helps us avoid this problem and to better understand Aristotle’s justification for adding two completeness qualifications, which commentators have worried are ad hoc or otherwise unjustified. For instance, Woods 1992, 90:

There is no argument offered for the view that happiness is an activity in accordance with complete or total virtue; all that the preceding argument has established is that happiness is *an* activity of a good soul, and there is no reason given for supposing that the activity is one which requires complete excellence.

Why should happiness be of complete virtue over a complete life? Here is a payoff of reading the

⁴⁰ Hence Kenny 1992, 5 coins the English word “endy.” Buddensiek 1999, 136 uses the German “zielhaft” for *teleon*.

⁴¹ It may seem that the contrast between whole and part applies only to virtue at 1219b37, but in responding to the Solonic *endoxon* at 1219b6–8, Aristotle clarifies that, on his view, one who has not yet reached the end of life only has imperfect happiness because his life is not (yet) a whole.

passage through division: steps 27 and 28 introduce two further divisions to the intermediate conclusion at step 25. Since the sequence of divisions stops only when it has identified an indivisible species, Aristotle needs to add the two further completeness qualifications because he thinks he has not yet reached the indivisible species without them. So, the method of division helps explain why happiness must be the activity over either a complete or incomplete life, of complete or incomplete virtue. Without addressing these further divisions, the definition will be inadequate because it will not have reached an indivisible species.⁴²

Step 26 provides the assumption, necessary to this whole division sequence, that happiness is something perfect: since it is the best thing, it would belong to the better of each division (cf. step 16). So, the final definition of happiness would have to include the better differentia of each complete or incomplete virtue and life. What reason does Aristotle have to declare complete life and virtue better than their incomplete counterparts? The best hint to identifying such a reason is the claim that complete life and virtue are wholes, not parts (1219a37). If complete life and complete virtue are wholes, then they have all of their parts, and their parts are structured so as to promote the natural end of the whole.⁴³ Because a whole is itself value-laden, and mere parts would lack the value of the whole, complete virtue and a

⁴² How do we know that the lowest species Aristotle identifies cannot be divided further, e.g. with or without contemplation, with or without children? There may be some strategies for resisting additional divisions. Some proposed predicates, like the inclusion of contemplation, can be subsumed under previously established divisions. Since contemplation is a virtuous activity, it is already covered under the complete virtue predicate. For predicates that cannot be subsumed under previous divisions (like the inclusion of children), Aristotle should demand some further, appropriately grounded axiological principle to decide which predicate is the better one at the universal level—like the general axiological principles cited at 2, 8, 5, and 30. In the absence of such a principle, then neither predicate can be said to further specify a better species of good, and so a new division cannot be truly called for.

⁴³ Aristotle in *Meta.* v 26 contrasts a whole with a mere agglomeration or total (*pan*), whose parts stand in no particular relation to one another. Cf. *PA* i 5, 645b14–20. See also Buddensiek 1999, 91, 139–140; Irwin 1988, §192.

complete life are better than their incomplete parts. Accordingly, step 30 echoes the claim in step 5 that the function of a better state is itself better, except instead of addressing the value of a state, compared to other states, it addresses the integrity and duration of the best state. So, the conclusion at step 31: happiness must be the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue. It is not the case then, as Woods thinks, that Aristotle has no argument for virtuous activity's completeness in life and virtue. Rather, the method of division structures the final steps of the argument: whole virtue and a whole life improve the activity of the soul's virtue and so must be added in order to reach the indivisible species of the best good. This, then, concludes the argument. Aristotle turns next to survey *endoxa* to confirm that he has given the genus and definition of happiness correctly (1219a39–40).

The function argument's conclusion is not Aristotle's considered account, or final definition, of happiness in the *EE*. Later in *EE* ii 1, Aristotle reiterates the need, where the identity of virtue is concerned, to move from what is spoken of truly but unclearly to what is both true and clear (1220a16–18), echoing the methodological remarks at *EE* i 6, 1216b32–35. Naming virtue as the best state is not enough; the inquiry has further to go before its result is adequate, by the lights of the method of the present inquiry. In *EE* viii 3, he again echoes his commitment to an account that is both true and clear (1249b5–6) in the context of a discussion about *kalokagathia*, which he calls complete virtue (1249a16–17). An adequate picture of what happiness is, then, requires a clearer, true grasp of what the activity of complete virtue is. So, progress on a fully adequate account of happiness continues until the end of the treatise. However, after the function argument, the inquiry into virtue will use other methods. The conclusion of the function argument is as far as the method of division, which started with the specification of the genus in *EE* i 7, will allow him to go for now, without turning to new topics

and taking new starting points. The end of the function argument marks a transition from the inquiry about happiness and the highest good that fills *EE* i, to the sustained inquiry into the virtues that occupies much of the remainder of the treatise, framing this subsequent inquiry.

3. Human Function and the Highest Good

The conclusion of the *EE* function argument is that the highest good is the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue. An agent who wishes to achieve the highest good should enact the activity of complete virtue, a diachronic attainment comprising a lifetime of particular virtuous actions. This conclusion comes very close to that of the *Nicomachean* function argument, which accounts for the human good as the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, specifically, the most perfect or most complete (*teleiostatên*) virtue, in a complete life (1098a16–18). I have already noted several differences with some interpretations of the *EN* argument over the course of my exposition. Importantly, while the conclusion of the *Nicomachean* argument is famously open to various competing dominant-end and inclusive-end interpretations, the conclusion of the *Eudemian* argument is clear that happiness includes activities that express the whole of virtue, not just the single best virtue. Further, the *Eudemian* account excludes the mere possession of external goods from happiness. To be clear, these observations do not tell in favor of or against any particular interpretation of the *Nicomachean* text, in the absence of a fuller account of the relation between the two treatises.

There is a more significant difference between the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean* function arguments, not in the formulation of their conclusion, but in their arguments for it. Aristotle conceives of the relationship between the two concepts the human function and the highest good differently in the two arguments. In brief, the *Nicomachean* argument uses the notion of the human function in the explication of the highest good, while the *Eudemian* argument does not.

The notion of the human function is prior in definition to the notion of the highest human good in the *Nicomachean* argument; the order is reversed in the *Eudemian* account. One result of appreciating this difference is that the *Eudemian* argument has resources around a persistent objection lodged against the *Nicomachean* argument that its interpreters have labored to resolve.

The *Nicomachean* argument has been interpreted in so many and such widely divergent ways, that it can be difficult to generalize about it without addressing specific interpretations. Still, interpretations of the *Nicomachean* function argument tend to agree that Aristotle uses some notion of the human function in the course of explicating the human good, from the text: “For all those who have some function or action, the good—their doing well—seems to reside in their function; likewise for the human being” (1097b26–28). The straightforward way most interpreters understand this is that Aristotle uses information from some antecedent conception of the human function in order to arrive at a conclusion about the highest human good. It is controversial how full or thin a conception of the human function Aristotle invokes turns out to be—whether, for instance, Aristotle imports a notion of the human function from his psychology, or if the only content he gives to this notion is just that it consists in rational activity.⁴⁴ Even if Aristotle’s point here is only to forge a conceptual link between the human function and the highest good,⁴⁵ the task of clarifying the one notion of the highest good entails making progress on both notions simultaneously. In the *Nicomachean* argument, then, determining the highest human good requires first, or, at least, together, determining the human function.

However, the *Eudemian* argument formulates an account of the highest humanly achievable good without invoking the human function in the course of the account. Some of the

⁴⁴ See, respectively, Irwin 1988, §194–8; Lawrence 2001.

⁴⁵ For instance, Broadie 1991, 34–39, who thinks we are to fill in the notion of the highest good by supplementing our antecedent knowledge of virtue.

premises granted in the first four divisions make reference to the functions of things in general, or of states in particular, but not to the specifically human function. The closest Aristotle comes to mentioning the human function is step 12's claim that the soul's function is to effect living. This claim, however, is not an essential account of the function of the human soul, but rather a description of it also shared with animal and plant souls, used only for the purpose of showing that the highest good is an activity, not the product of a process. The *Eudemian* argument, on my reading, defines the highest good without invoking the specifically human function in the course of the account.

This difference between the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian* function arguments points to divergent views about the definitional priority and independence of the two notions, the human function and the highest good. Ultimately, this is a question about which notion is more conceptually basic in Aristotle's ethics. Since the *Nicomachean* argument invokes the human function in the course of defining the human good, the notion of the human good is definitionally dependent on the notion of the human function. But because the *Eudemian* argument arrives at an account of the highest human good without invoking the human function, the notion of the highest good is not definitionally dependent of the notion of the human function at all. This point begins to explain some of the other differences between the two arguments. To take just one example, the *Nicomachean* argument searches for the function peculiar (ἴδιον, 1097b33–34) to a human being, which has proved to be controversial.⁴⁶ This search, however, has no parallel in the *Eudemian* argument. This is not surprising if the *Eudemian* argument defines the highest good specifically without appealing to the human function.

Additionally, a persistent objection to the *Nicomachean* argument that its interpreters

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Kraut 1989, 312–322; Nagel 1980; Whiting 1988.

often face is that Aristotle fallaciously elides two notions of good that do not align: the good human, that is, a human who performs their function well, and what is good *for* the human.⁴⁷ According to this objection, Aristotle assumes that being a good instance of one's kind is the same as doing the best one can do. But this assumption is vulnerable to a certain intuition: suppose that a male spider of a certain species is eaten by its partner after mating. The spider might enact its function well, being a good instance of its kind, by courting its partner and contributing genetic material, but if doing so leads it to be eaten, then being a good instance of its kind might not be the best thing a spider can do for itself, especially if its mate has some other nourishing meal at hand. The worry is that such a gap—between being a good instance of one's kind and achieving one's highest good—exists also in the human case. What guarantees that doing our essential activities is good for us, or that doing them well is best for us? Interpreters of the *Nicomachean* argument have diverged on ways to solve this problem,⁴⁸ but it is valuable to see why the *Eudemian* argument does not need to address this problem at all. Since the *Eudemian* argument searches for the best humanly achievable good by carving up the genus of all humanly achievable goods through division, there is no slipping between being a good instance of a human and the good a human can achieve. Aristotle begins and ends the argument focusing only on the best thing a human being can achieve. Further, although Aristotle does not himself make this inference, steps 6–7 (a thing's function is its end, which is best and most final) permit him to identify the highest human good, discovered through the *Eudemian* argument, with the human function. In other words, Aristotle's definition of happiness in the *EE* is still a

⁴⁷ An early version of this complaint is presented by Glassen 1957. Wilkes 1980 is an influential answer to this objection, but her response appeals to facts about *phronêsis* and the other virtues that are not yet available in the *EN* i 7 argument.

⁴⁸ For instance, Lawrence 2001; Whiting 1988; Wilkes 1980 all address this objection explicitly but in different ways. Cf. Baker 2015.

specification of the human function, but the *EE* argument infers that virtuous activity is the human function from the evaluative fact that virtuous activity is the best thing human beings can do. It does not infer that we should perform the human function from the fact that it is characteristic of human beings.

Whether the *Eudemian* argument is better or worse than the *Nicomachean* argument is not, I think, obvious just from these points. The *Eudemian* argument is itself burdened by its axiological principles, some of which represent quite specific Aristotelian commitments that may be unappealing to contemporary thought. But it does show an alternate strategy Aristotle had in mind at one point in his thinking about ethics, and the path that such a strategy might carve.⁴⁹

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