

ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF *PHYSIS*  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HIS ETHICS

CANSU AKARSU

BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

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ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF *PHYSIS*  
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Cansu Akarsu

Boğaziçi University

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## ABSTRACT

### Aristotle's Notion of *Physis* and Its Implications for His Ethics

This thesis aims to analyze Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*, human well-being, with a view to his understanding of *physis*, nature. It focuses on the effects of Aristotle's teleological understanding of nature on his ethical doctrine presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The second chapter elaborates on the relationship between the natural constitution of human beings and the basis of Aristotle's system of ethics. An analysis of the function argument and Aristotle's classification of the rational and non-rational parts of the soul in *De Anima* is provided to explain Aristotle's conception of the good and its role on his notion of *eudaimonia*. This analysis particularly aims to clarify the way in which Aristotle conceives the ultimate goal of human beings through their political and physical nature. The last chapter investigates Thomas Nagel's and John Lloyd Ackrill's opposing accounts of *eudaimonia* focusing on the question of whether Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* is suggestive of a life of theoretical contemplation as it is defended by Nagel's intellectualist account, or it comprehends the excellence of the different activities of human beings which have a composite nature. In the final analysis, the latter account which is discussed through Ackrill's inclusive account is defended to explain Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* which stands for the ultimate goal of human beings in agreement with the political and physical nature that are essentially belonging and determinative over their ultimate good.

## ÖZET

### Aristoteles'in *Physis* Kavramı ve Etik Doktrinine Etkileri

Bu tez, Aristoteles'in *Nikomakhos'a Etik* adlı eserinde sunduğu etik doktrini bağlamında *physis* (doğa) kavramının, insan "mutluluk"–"iyilik"ini *eudaimonia* kavramı çerçevesinde oluşturduğu teleolojik etik sistemine etkilerini analiz etmeyi hedefliyor. İkinci bölüm Aristoteles'in işlev argümanı ve *Ruh Üzerine* adlı eserinde belirlediği ruhun rasyonel ve irrasyonel kısımları ayrımı üzerinden, insanın doğası gereği sahip olduğu yapı ve Aristoteles'in etik sistemi arasındaki ilişki üzerinde duruyor ve bu ilişki çerçevesinde *eudaimonia* anlayışında belirleyici rol oynayan "iyi" kavramını açıklıyor. Bu analiz bilhassa Aristoteles'in insanın politik ve fiziksel doğası üzerinden nihai hedefinin belirlenmesi arasında kurduğu bağlantıyı açıklamayı hedefliyor. Son bölüm Thomas Nagel'in ve John Lloyd Ackrill'in birbirlerine zıt düşen *eudaimonia* incelemelerini ele alıyor. Burada, Aristoteles'in *eudaimonia* anlayışının Nagel'in savunduğu üzere temaşadan meydana gelen bir teorik hayata mı, yoksa insanların karmaşık doğalarından kaynaklanan farklı etkinliklerin mükemmeliyetinin hedeflendiği, bir diğer deyişle teorik ve pratik etkinlikleri aynı anda kapsayan bir hayata mı işaret ettiği sorusuna odaklanıyor. Son tahlilde, Ackrill tarafından ele alınan kapsayıcı anlayışın, insanın özünden kaynaklanan ve nihai iyiliğinde belirleyici rol oynayan politik ve fiziksel doğası da göz önünde bulundurularak, Aristoteles'in *eudaimonia* kavramını açıklayabildiği savunuluyor.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Aristotle opens up his ethical discourse in the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the discussion of the notion of “the good” which he considers to be the most fundamental property that humans seem to attribute to the ends for the sake of which each and every of their action aims at. So for Aristotle, all human action is motivated by a certain insight of the good. However, if there is a category so comprehensive that it can be explanatory of the ground of the ultimate end of human practices, how can we explain the almost limitless multiplicity of the senses of the good that are pursued for different ends? Despite this plurality, Aristotle claims, every particular choice is built upon the idea of *eudaimonia*, happiness; which is chosen for itself and stands for the last circle of the chain of reasoning when one tries to give an account of his actions that head towards an end.<sup>1</sup> It is the ultimate end which is desired for its own sake; being as such, all the other categorizations of good belong to a lower class because they are instrumental and intended to be conducive to this chief good. This is the main task of both ethics and politics: discovering what is good for men so that it may become operative for leading a good life.

Aristotle’s understanding of a happy life and his theory of ethics and politics are constructed on the basic assumption that “the good of man resides in the function of man, if he has a function” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1097b23-25). This account is grounded on his teleological account of nature according to which everything in the nature has an end which is traceable through the corresponding initially embedded function. The term “function” [*ergon*], is associated with the final cause which

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<sup>1</sup> *Eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία) is also translated as the well-being of the soul.

explains the ultimate purpose of a thing. This notion is crucial inasmuch as it is expository of the essential identity of any kind of being. Nevertheless, it is not possible to give a full account of a thing unless several kinds of causes responsible for the actual constitution of a given entity are also taken into account (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1044a33-1044b3). Following this line of thought, Aristotle anticipates the function of man as the activity of the soul [*psyche*] implying a rational principle. The rational part of man, which is the peculiar capacity discriminating man from all other forms of living beings must be what sustains this function. Thus, active use of rational capacity will be an inextricable element for *eudaimonia*. *Areté*, which is the expression of “excellence”, “goodness” of a thing is conceived through the proper function of a thing, responsible for the thing’s essential nature. The *telos* which corresponds to the purpose of an entity can be determined through the essential nature of the entity in question. Accordingly, activities that are in accordance with the anticipated purpose concerning the being in question are considered to be good. When we bring together the idea of excellence as the fulfillment of any given form through its immanent capacities with the presupposition that the virtue of human beings can be understood in terms of the rational capacity that is responsible for the definition of the human form as the unique feature that grounds its specific nature, we may come to a hasty conclusion that human virtue lies within the intellectual activity. This conclusion would be specious with regard to the misconception of Aristotelian understanding of human nature, and correspondingly wrong in terms of its conclusion reducing human virtue merely to the active use of reason. We shall focus on the part “the active exercise of the soul’s faculties” of the definition concerning the function of man stated in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as “a certain kind of life, . . . an activity or action of the soul implying a rational

principle” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1198a10-11). The measure or the criterion of this exercise is its conformity with the principles of reason. What generally is expected from a theory of ethics centers upon the latter part of the definition that basically offers objective principles that justify ethical values offered by the theory in question. However, Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia* which stands as the touchstone of his ethics cannot be evaluated independently of the former part of the definition which offers a multipartite constitution of the human form. This definition is suggestive of the different capacities of the soul that work collaboratively in accordance with the principles of reason. So in order to grasp Aristotle’s principles that are explanatory of his account of *eudaimonia*, we may pursue the following steps:

(i) What does Aristotle’s account of “human nature” comprise in so far as it is determinative over his ethics? This shall provide us with the explanation for Aristotle’s inference of “the function argument”—which is based upon the presupposition that human beings have an essential nature which is definitive of their function, thus, what is good for them—and its role on the development of the notion of “virtue.” Is this transition from a descriptive account of nature to the normative account of virtue legitimate in Aristotle’s theory of ethics?

(ii) Aristotle’s discussion of the *physis* of human beings will introduce us to two main axes that are operative throughout Aristotle’s ethical project: the “rational” and the “political” aspects of human beings that are definitive of their essential nature in such a way that the former will be explanatory of the “intellectual virtues” and the latter of the “moral virtues.” Moral virtues as virtues of character are directly related to the particular actions of individuals through rational choice. How do these two definitions of virtue differ from and contribute to each other? Given these two

basic features that Aristotle holds responsible for the human form, namely “the rational part of the soul” and the “irrational (appetitive) part of the soul”, do their workings or actualizations exclude or include each other? If the latter is the case, which suggests that moral excellence (as an ideal expression of the political nature) is inclusive of intellectual excellence (which can also be imagined to be achieved independently of exercising moral virtues), we may reformulate the former problem focusing on the composite nature of human beings which Aristotle investigates under the inseparability of the rational and the appetitive capacities of the soul.

(iii) After having clarified the constitutive notions of *eudaimonia*, we shall go back to the point where we have started; namely, to the question as to what sort of an ethical ideal this notion suggests? There are two main interpretations concerning Aristotle’s conception of *eudaimonia*. The intellectualist interpretation of *eudaimonia* makes an analysis of the term focusing on the function argument and holds that human excellence is composed of the activity of contemplation per se as the functioning of the rational part of the soul, which is the most final and complete activity that a human being can engage in. By contrast, the inclusive interpretation suggests that *eudaimonia* as the expression of human excellence consists of a multiplicity of actions that are valuable including the activity of contemplation. In the final part, we will finally discuss these two conflicting views within the scope of the intellectualist account of Thomas Nagel and the inclusive account of John Lloyd Ackrill with a view to Aristotle’s understanding of human nature.

## CHAPTER 2

### *EUDAIMONIA* AS THE NATURAL END FOR HUMAN BEINGS

#### 2.1 On the relationship between the natural constitution and “the good”:

What is the nature of a human being?

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle classifies what he mentions by the term *physis*, nature, under six categories. Nature is (i) the genesis of growing things, (ii) that immanent part of a growing thing, from which its growth first proceeds, (iii) the source from which the primary movement in each natural object is present in it in virtue of its own essence, (iv) the primary material of which any natural object consists or out of which it is made, which is relatively unshaped and cannot be changed from its own potency, (v) the primary mode of composition and (vi) the essence of things which have in themselves a source of movement (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1014b16-1015a12). The first definition of nature holds being as a whole subject to constant change; nature as the totality of the processes of generation of the physical bodies that are bound to growth and decay. The second one indicates the efficient cause of a living being. Efficient cause is in the first sense the nature itself and when we are in the domain of individual living organisms, it is the internal principle of movement. The expression “from which its growth first proceeds” seems to point out the capacities that are essentially responsible for the substantial character of a living being. When human beings are at stake, the source of movement is the appetitive part of the soul which produces movement by pursuing or avoiding things; however, the way in which humans are capable of producing change is different from other living beings that are non-rational. The rational capacity, in terms of its role in producing movement, functions as a calculative faculty working on the multiplicity of objects

the appetitive part of the soul tends to pursue. So both the appetitive and the intellectual capacity of the soul account for the efficient cause throughout the process of producing actions for rational beings. The third definition is suggestive of the formal cause. Every living being has an essence in virtue of which it has the capacities that make available for it the movements it performs for the maintenance and the actualization of its being. It is hard to differentiate the second definition from the third one in the sense that they are constitutive of each other. A definition consists in expressing an entity's essential constitution and has to include reference mainly to the formal cause as well as to the efficient cause, which is an intrinsic principle of movement in living beings. So it has to refer both to the formal cause and also the efficient cause through which the entity will develop. Nevertheless, while in the former definition the emphasis is more upon the unique substantial nature of an individual being qua informed matter, the latter refers to the essential characteristics of a species qua secondary substance which is the form. The fourth definition takes into consideration the material cause of being. The matter out of which any natural being is constituted is also said to be its "nature" as a potentiality which is subject to generation through both internal and external principles of change. The second, third and fourth definitions comprise the main principles by means of which Aristotle basically comprehends the living elements of nature. The last two definitions which explain nature as the "essence" of natural objects may be assessed under a separate category because they are more than principles in the sense that they establish the basis of Aristotelian teleological understanding of nature. These definitions are explanatory for the first definition of nature as "the genesis of growing things"; this generation, the way things come into being and perish, is understood in terms of these principles. The fifth definition explains nature as the essence of natural objects

qua their primary mode of composition. According to this principle, individual living beings are indebted for their formal and material principles to that from which they are generated. As in the case of human beings and other animals, the offspring owes its natural composition, its essential form, to its parents. The last definition corresponds to the embedded form which is compounded with matter in such a way that it is the source of movement of the natural object. For instance, a newly born human baby, even if it is not yet able to use its capacities properly, its natural constitution endows it with the capacities that are being actively used in a mature human being. Hence, in Aristotelian terms, a baby is a “potential” human being within the process of becoming a “complete” human being, who nevertheless is the precursor of this completeness before having achieved it, through the potential its species evinces. The completeness is understood through the actualization of the presupposed form which is responsible for the essential nature of the being in question.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of “substance” is central in Aristotle’s system of thought in the sense that it is the ultimate principle of his metaphysics as the primary ontological unity. Both the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics* opens up with the claim that in order to know things, we must inquire into the principles and causes of things which are universals; however, these principles are located within the individual substances qua informed matter as Aristotle expresses as follows: “Things have a nature which have a principle of this kind. Each of them has a substance; for it is a subject, and nature is always in a subject” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 192b33-34). Substances are particular individual beings which are the grounds of themselves; they cannot be predicated of any other substance and bear the principles that are definitive of their individual

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<sup>2</sup> Fully completeness is not possible but only becoming an instance of a developed form—no individual substance can be complete in the fullest sense because that would render change and motion impossible.

character. To know the essential nature of any particular entity, i.e. (according to the most common norms) substance, we must give its account through the causes and categories which are shared with individual substantial unities in such a way that they apply universally to particulars. Even if primary substance cannot be known *per se*, because of the fact that it undergoes constant change, it can be explained through these principles and the form that it shares with other substances. Essential “whatness” of a thing is known through the formal character of the thing in question.

Nature is both the first matter, and the form or substance, which is the end of the process of becoming. And from this sense of “nature” every substance in general is in fact, by an extension of meaning, called a “nature”, because the nature of a thing is one kind of substance (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1015a8-13).

Individual substances, qua formed matter, harbor within themselves the end of their process of becoming.<sup>3</sup> Thus, when the account of a thing is given in terms of a complex explanation bringing together the principles of composition such as the material cause, formal cause, efficient cause and final cause, we will be said to have grasped the nature of that thing. What Aristotle has in mind when he offers the function argument leans on the credence that the knowledge of the nature of a thing necessarily comprehends its end. Hence to know the nature of a thing necessarily involves knowing its purpose [*telos*]. This end at the same time corresponds to what is good for the thing at stake. The transition from “is” to “ought”, from fact to value, owes its sources to this teleological system of knowledge where the account of the essential nature establishes the basis of normative principles. Let us take a simple example Aristotle himself offers within the discussion of the relationship between the notion of function and virtue–excellence. The function of the eyes is to see; so we can infer that the essential character of the eye is sight, the activity of seeing.

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<sup>3</sup> Here, what is mentioned by individual substances concerns not the objects of productive sciences whose principle of movement is not in themselves but in the producer, but the objects of natural sciences whose principle of movement is in themselves, like plants, animals and human beings.

Correspondingly, the measure of normativity which will determine what is good or bad for the eye is already grounded in its constitution through its function. The eye, which is defined in terms of the capacity to see will be said to be a good eye insofar as it fulfills its activity well.

Aristotle's approach for creating an account of being is then mainly determined with this teleological grasp. This leitmotiv is not just dominant in his works on nature but also in his treatises on ethics and politics. Even non-human living beings of nature lacking the capacity to choose and being determined by their internal elements of motion are subject to teleological evaluation. This account allows Aristotle to make a distinction between what is good or bad for any kind of organism, regarding the congruence of its activities with its essential nature which bears its *telos*. Thus the nature of a thing in the first place is determinative of its end, what is best for that thing. This principle of final cause serves as the fundamental ground of normativity in Aristotle's accounts of both nature and morality; in this sense, nature both in the general sense and in terms of the nature of specific substances, itself is the norm when it is taken as the principle of finality that each thing is endowed with. Besides the products of nature, this teleological account also holds for the artificial products. Accordingly, artifacts, tools or any object produced by human beings have distinctive essences in virtue of which they serve their function. In other words; they each have an excellence [*arête*] as the measure of their proper functioning corresponding to their activities. Let us consider a magnificent pen, produced with a completely appropriate material, it is neither too heavy nor light, tall or small, it has all the necessary properties that are expected from a pen but because of a millimetric deviation of its nib, it does not write properly. This object is not a pen for Aristotle. Because "penness" belongs to the objects with which one can

write properly. Even if the form (qua shape) and material of this object is identical with the other pens, the failure of its function undermines its essential being and impedes it from being a pen. It may be a potential pen, but in so far as it cannot write, it is not what it materially and formally seems or promises to be. Hence, actuality [*entelekheia*] qua proper functioning, activity, is the most determinative principle for the essential whatness of entities. This line of reasoning is quite conceivable, even commonsensical when we are in the domain of artificial products. However, when it comes to human beings, thinking in these Aristotelian terms calls to mind several tough questions and it is important to take them into account because Aristotle himself opens his discussion on the well-being of human beings with the question of “what is the function of man?” and builds his political theory on the same basis.

What is the function of man? Can we attribute a fixed function to human beings in such a way that it would give their essential nature wherein lies also their *telos*? Apparently this is not as easy as when we were dealing with the example of pen, whose essential nature is limited with a single, definite capacity. What is more, the function of any artificial product is not a complicated enigma in the sense that it is already ascribed within the process of its production by the producer. Human beings have several capacities whose peculiar nature is to be explored; as a matter of fact, when we think about “our” nature, we can hardly promote one capacity over the other in such a way that it would be distinctively essential.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, after having stated that the excellence of a human being must be an activity of the soul in accordance with complete excellence, eliminates the nutritive, the vegetative and the perceptive capacities of the soul on

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<sup>4</sup> Here, with the expression “distinctively essential”, I mean the characteristics that are not shared with any other species in such a way that they belong only to the human species.

the grounds that they cannot be manifestations of human excellence because of the fact that they are also shared by other living beings (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1097b23-1098a16, 1102a33-1102b13). The capacity that is unique to human beings is the rational capacity; hence, Aristotle concludes, human excellence should be an active life of the soul that participates in the rational principle. This is the first statement concerning the essential nature of human beings which has significant implications on the issue of what is the best possible life for a human being. The second statement takes part in the first book of the *Politics*. Here, Aristotle starts with reminding us the function argument which designates the nature of a thing through its end. Without making reference to the idea of *eudaimonia*, which was stated as the ultimate end of human beings in his ethics, Aristotle now introduces that the final cause of human beings which also is comprehensive of what is best for them, is “being political” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1252b32-1253a4). Thus, being part of a state is the second essential assertion Aristotle refers to for making plain the other indispensable characteristic of human nature.<sup>5</sup> As it stands, Aristotle’s theory of ethics and politics seems to stand on the assumption that there is a direct transition, a sort of necessary connection which stems from nature, between the active use of human beings’ distinctive capacity i.e. rational capacity in the political community [*polis*] and *eudaimonia*. So the ultimate source of ethical and political values lies within what is supposed to be the natural constitution of human beings; in other words, the answer of what we “ought” to do already “is” in our nature. However, the question we formerly have posed still remains: what is the nature of human beings? Another question concerns how Aristotle justifies this presupposed transition between what is

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<sup>5</sup> The absence of a direct reference to *eudaimonia* in the definition of the *polis* is negligible, because what characterizes the *polis* is its being directed to the good life, whose expression is *eudaimonia*, for Aristotle.

factual and what is ethical.<sup>6</sup> How can nature give us normative standards? The Ancient Greek notion of *physis*, which has a different content and distinct connotations from our modern understanding of nature and thus have significant implications for Aristotle's use of the term within ethical and political context, may pave the way for a better understanding of the basis of his conception of *eudaimonia*. Through this analysis of the notion of *physis*, we shall see how Aristotle justifies his ground for normativity and the principles that are derived from this ground.

The Greek notion of *physis*, which is today translated as “nature” from the Latin equivalent original *natura*, has the meaning of “to grow, to produce, to spring up, to come into being” (Naddaf, 2005, p. 12). Naddaf states that the term is predominantly used in the context of vegetation, signifying the whole process of growth from its coming into being to maturity (Naddaf, 2005, p. 12). Hence, the term seems to be broadly comprehending the six categories that are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, under which Aristotle treats *physis*; nevertheless, the core meaning is equivalent with Aristotle's first categorization that is “the genesis of growing things” that mainly refers to the process of change itself. Accordingly, the nature of a thing can only be understood when all the elements that are responsible for its coming into being and its process of maturation are clarified as a whole.<sup>7</sup> The precondition of knowing the nature of a thing then suggests a very demanding task.

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<sup>6</sup> This question i.e. “is-ought problem” constitutes one of the most prevalent issues of moral philosophy since Hume, pondering whether any kind of ethical inference from a factual statement is possible. Aristotle's account excludes this question because of the specific understanding of nature which is built upon the notion of *eidos* that is implicitly loaded with what is ‘good’ for the being in question. So this discussion will be limited with how Aristotle's system of thought can account for the idea of nature with an intrinsic principle of good and the teleological understanding of process. On the discussion of the evaluation of different systems of thought concerning the same subject matter see MacIntyre, A. (1991). Précis of whose justice? Which rationality. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 51, pp. 149-152.

<sup>7</sup> Werner Jaeger elaborates the conception of nature as being significantly determinative over the whole Greek thought, speech, action and the art in the Introduction of the *Paideia*: “Long before they conceived it, they had looked at the world with the steady gaze that did not see any part of it as separate and cut off from the rest but always as an element in a living whole, from which it derived its position and its meaning. We call this the organic point of view, because it sees individual things as elements of a living whole”. See *Paideia* I, xx.

To understand what a thing is, one shall have the knowledge of the principles that are responsible for the change that it has been through. These principles of change give the account, the definition of the thing in question through determining the limit, the end of that thing. We have already stated that the *telos* of a thing is the most definitive principle which explains the function of that thing. This function is explanatory not only for the thing's whatness per se qua primary substance, but also exhibits the role of that thing within the web of relations that it is a part of. This principle which stands for the final cause is the most basic, indispensable element of explanation for Aristotle, because the absence of the idea of a limit will indispensably result in an infinite regress:

Further, the final cause is an end, and that sort of end which is not for the sake of something else, but for whose sake everything else is; so that if there is to be a last term of this sort, the process will not be infinite; but if there is no such term there will be no final cause. But those who maintain the infinite series destroy the good without knowing it. Yet no one would try to do anything if he were not going to come to a limit. Nor would there be reason in the world; the reasonable man, at least, always acts for a purpose; and this is a limit, for the end is a limit . . . Those who speak thus destroy knowledge; for it is not possible to have this till one comes to what is indivisible. And knowledge becomes impossible, for how can one think things that are infinite in this way? (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 994b9-994b32).

The problem of infinite regress not only abolishes the possibility of knowledge, but also the notion of the good, and hence the possibility of action. The idea presented in this passage provides us two arguments that will play a significant role in understanding the notion of *eudaimonia* and its justification through the function argument:

- (i) Knowledge of a thing requires limits.
- (ii) These limits determine both the end of a thing and the reason for action.

These two arguments suggest that there is a direct transition between the causes which function as the definitive limits of a thing and the good of that thing as its end. We have scrutinized these causes and have stated that the essential nature of a thing is specified through these principles. When this mode of understanding was applied to human beings, we have concluded that there is a tension which stems from the inability to reduce its multiple capacities to a single essential one in such a way that its actualization would promise its well-being. However, the arguments derived from this passage seem to add a necessary condition for the possibility of *eudaimonia* which may rule out the tension. If knowledge is possible with the limits (that is, knowledge is of the things that are circumscribed and demarcated) and these limits are directly related to the goodness of things, then a human being who is both capable of reaching the knowledge of these limits and directing his actions according to this knowledge, shall indispensably have the knowledge of its own limits which are determinative of the conditions for the possibility of his own well-being. What is crucial here is that what Aristotle has in mind when he talks about the nature of a human being is not limited with the capacities that give the account of its individual substance but its political nature. As it is explained through the content of the notion of *physis*, for Aristotle it is impossible to apprehend what exactly is a human being, if he is isolated from the whole that he is a part of. Hence, when we are aspiring to the human good, we must bear in mind that Aristotle's human can achieve his excellence only in so far as he is part of a political community.<sup>8</sup>

So far we have seen the way in which we can explain Aristotle's functional account of being where there is an intrinsic connection between the natural constitution of the being and its good. Thus, in order to be able to discover what sort

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<sup>8</sup> "He who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity". *POLS*, 1252b32-36.

of a life can be considered as the most valuable one, we concluded that we first need to give a comprehensive account of that being which will include its *telos* as the guiding principle for its good. Lastly we have concluded that if we give a full definition of human beings, the characteristic of “living-together” cannot be excluded from this definition so that Aristotle takes the political character to be a part of their natural constitution. Before moving to the question of what kind of an effect this claim about human beings’ political nature has upon Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*, we shall first take a look at his conception of the human soul where he explains the capacities that are operative within the production of movement. This brief exposition shall help us clarify Aristotle’s definition of virtue as “the active exercise of the soul’s faculties in conformity with the rational”. Because *eudaimonia* will be consisting of “doing well” and “living well”, and human beings have the efficient causes of their actions intrinsically in their souls, one of the most important levels of knowledge that have the potential to contribute to *eudaimonia* will have to concern the principles of the functioning of these capacities in the way in which they contribute to actions.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 The rational and the non-rational parts of the soul

In the third book of the *De Anima*, Aristotle presents an account evolving around the problem of the sources of production of movement in living beings; separate and co-operative roles of different capacities that can be considered responsible for the cause

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<sup>9</sup> Knowledge of the principles of the soul is indispensable to be able to figure out the best possible life for human beings. Aristotle reminds us of this stressing the fact that the one, i.e. the politician, who aims to establish a just community shall know the facts about the soul: “By human excellence we mean not that of the body but that of the soul; and happiness also we call an activity of soul. But if this is so, clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about soul, as the man who is to heal the eyes must know about the whole body also; and all the more since politics is more prized and better than medicine; but even among doctors the best educated spend much labour on acquiring knowledge of the body. The student of politics, then, must study the soul.” *EN* I.13, 1102a10-1102a25.

of movement are introduced to explain the origination of movement. The apprehension of the principles he set to explain the way these capacities function will be important in the sense that they encapsulate the most basic rationale operative in Aristotle's employment of the term *areté* within the grounds of human practical sciences. The reason for this is that even though Aristotle rejects the possibility of acquiring certain knowledge about the issues concerning ethics and politics, he seems to take his account concerning the way in which human beings produce action as the anchor for his theory of virtue.<sup>10</sup> Thus Aristotle expands his theory of ethics on the analysis of the particular reasons of actions instead of putting forward a universal formula within which one can find general principles that serve to justify the moral worth of individual actions. The centrality of the idea that the main purpose of ethics is not "knowing what is good" but "acting good" prompts Aristotle to build an account of ethics which can be illustrative of the way in which human beings are motivated to act. Therefore, in order to be able to figure out the best life or the criteria of the worth of actions, Aristotle suggests, one shall first have the knowledge of the general principles of movement that apply particularly to human beings.

Soul is "substance in the sense which corresponds to the definitive formula of a thing's essence" (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 412b). It is the source of powers that characterize the living being. So Aristotle's categorization of living beings is organized mainly on the idea that they have different capacities in virtue of which they sustain their being. These capacities are classified either according to their objects or their specific function. I will focus on the distinction between the two capacities Aristotle uses to characterize animals that belong to the genus of which human beings partake as a species. The soul of animals has two distinct powers

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<sup>10</sup> See *EN* I.2, 1094b13-19. "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of; for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts."

namely the capacity for discrimination and the capacity for originating local movement (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 432a). The capacity for discrimination is considered to be functioning as the calculative part of the soul because what it does is in a sense regulating, ordering the data grasped through thought and sense. This capacity is also called “the rational part” of the soul for it operates through comparing or reasoning within the scope of the content available to it. Other capacity that is responsible for the origination of movement is called “the appetitive part” of the soul. While the rational part affirms or denies, non-rational part of the soul pursues or avoids the objects that are identified as pleasurable or painful. However, even though these two parts of the soul seem to be characterized with an unequivocal distinction concerning their impact on producing movement when we are in the domain of action, the appetitive part of the soul manifests itself as wish [*boulēsis*] (which is found in the calculative part of the soul), desire [*orexis*] or passion [*epithumia*] (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 432b). Wish is differentiated from desire in the sense that it participates in the rational calculation; but if the movement is produced without any collaboration with the intellectual faculty, then Aristotle claims that this sort of appetitive manifestation is called desire or passion which is also shared with non-human animals.<sup>11</sup> So even though the rational part as speculative per se is not the cause of movement; when what is affirmed by intelligence and what is pursued by appetite coincide, the origin of the action seems to be shared by both parts.

Both of these then are capable of originating local movement, mind and appetite: (1) mind, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. mind practical (it differs from mind speculative in the character of its end); while (2) appetite is in every form of it relative to an end: for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of mind practical; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of the action. It follows that there is a justification for regarding these two as sources of movement, i.e. the appetite and practical thought; for the object of appetite starts a movement and as a

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<sup>11</sup> This distinction will be treated in detail in the third section of this chapter where the impacts of the elements of reason and desire are discussed within the framework of the action.

result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of appetite being to it a source of stimulation (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 433a).

Accordingly, the virtues of the soul are examined under two categories:

Virtues of character and virtues of intellect. In the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains what the specific functions and objects of different sorts of virtues belonging to the capacities of man are. Immediately after having made the distinction above, he reminds us that we need to take into account the virtues of the intellect by making some remarks about psychology. Aristotle here pursues the same root with his account in the *De Anima* about the parts of the soul effective on the origination of movement and implements the same divisions extending them to the idea of virtue. We have already said that when we are in the domain of human actions both the calculative power as a division of the rational part and the appetitive part of the soul are responsible for the action. The rational part of the soul is operative either on the invariable first principles or on things which admit variation. The former deals with the objects of scientific knowledge and the relations they establish are explained with necessary connections (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 88a). So it is plain that the sort of excellence we aspire to regarding human conduct cannot be explained merely with the excellence of the rational part of the soul that deals with the first principles. Aristotle's notion for the virtue of character, called "prudence", however, displays a sort of excellence regarding the rational part of the soul which is operative upon changeable things. When we are in the domain of practical wisdom, the excellence should concern the capacities that are responsible for the moment of choice which gives way to action. Actions deal with particular things; even though one is motivated by different thoughts or objects, eventually choice involves a focus on a single object (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1141b23-1141b29). The appetitive part of the soul, which also is the principle of movement, is the source of multiplicity among

the motivations as the basis of human conduct. Even if desire always seeks to do well, whenever it is not in a sense organized, limited by a principle; it is subjected to the arbitrariness of pleasures. So practical wisdom functions as a law-giver for desires but it does not do this like a tyrant who subjects the appetitive part of the soul under dominion through the rule of the rational part.<sup>12</sup> This is an active process, where thought re-organizes the knowledge coming from experience and re-constructs it according to the ultimate end which is the source of motivation behind the desire for a further projection. The origin of the tension mentioned in the very beginning of the study, i.e. the problem of the several senses of the good, is based on this distinction. Appetites have determinative effects over the actions and direct agents to the object of appetite; however, the rational part of the soul calculates the means to the ends in question. If there is no ultimate end beyond the immediate object inclined by the appetitive part, or the desire for this object is so powerful that it can be destructive of the anticipated ultimate end, then practical reason fails either in determining or acting in accordance with the “real” good and ends up with acting upon the “apparent” good.<sup>13</sup>

The former case within which the individual is overcome by the compulsion of desires is what Aristotle tries to stress by the expression of the “despotic rule” of appetites over the soul. He associates this sort of disposition which expresses a sort of weakness towards what is pleasurable with a slavish character who voluntarily

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<sup>12</sup> The rule of appetites and intellect over the soul is expressed by two sorts of law that are in an opposite relationship with each other, namely intellect’s constitutive rule which works with a regulative principle and appetites’ despotic rule which serves through exercising force: “At all events we may firstly observe in living creatures both a despotic and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotic rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule.” *POLS* I. 5, 1254b5-8. Aristotle develops this distinction between the rules exercised by the soul’s faculties in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he classifies characters accordingly to this relationship.

<sup>13</sup> “Thought is always right, but appetite and imagination may be either right or wrong. That is why, though in any case it is the appetite which originates movement, this object may be either the real, or the apparent good.” *DA* III. 10, 433a26-29.

prefers a life suitable to beasts (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1095b13-18). This by no means implies that pleasures can only be seemingly good; contrarily, pleasures have a perfecting role over the activities. Nevertheless, leading a life that is reduced merely to pleasures is almost non-human for Aristotle. Remembering the function argument may be of help at this point. Living under the hegemony of pleasures would be contrary to human nature first because this kind of a life can hardly allow the flourishing of the rational capacity which is unique to human kind and secondly it would be an impediment before the exigencies of being part of a political community. However, sketching the life of pleasure as such would be too much of a caricature and may disguise an important distinction that would play a significant role in grasping what Aristotle means by *eudaimonia*.

As stated earlier, within the Aristotelian corpus, the nature of a thing is accounted for by its capacities and these capacities which are responsible for the essential definition of the thing at issue characterize the purpose of that thing. Among the capacities that human beings have, the rational capacity is considered to be the constitutive element of human well-being in being the unique capacity belonging to human species. Every individual being who shares the capacities common to human beings without doubt will be classified as a member of this species. That being said, someone who prefers to live a life of pleasure is not deemed non-human or beastlike in the literary sense of the term but as someone who fails to fulfill the potential its essential nature bespeaks. This distinction made between the given nature and the achieved nature marks the Aristotelian ethical ideal of *eudaimonia*. Accordingly, inclining towards what is pleasurable is in a sense inevitable for all living beings that have sense-perception, including human beings. Even the most basic activities that are performed in order to survive are accompanied

with pleasure, hence pleasure is good in the sense that it essentially belongs to the natural order of sentient animals. Being as such, it also should be a constituent element of the well-being of human beings together with the principles of reason. However, the composite nature of human beings admits of various objects of pleasures which are most of the time in opposition with each other. They may be in conflict because they are their own measures bearing an intrinsic value; this is the reason why the nature of desire is unlimited and indeterminate.<sup>14</sup> It seems that Aristotle's model of the human soul investigated under two capacities, namely the rational part and the irrational part of the soul, suggests two distinct measures belonging to each capacity. While the rational part is responsible for the calculation with the principles of reason, the appetitive part of the soul takes what is pleasurable as its measure. The analogy of the tyrant with the nature of the measure of the appetitive part may be interpreted through Aristotle's analysis concerning political regimes that share the characteristics of tyranny:

A tyrant, as has often been repeated, has no regard to any public interest, except as conducive to his private ends; his aim is pleasure . . . That tyranny has all the vices both of democracy and oligarchy is evident. As of oligarchy so of tyranny, the end is wealth (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1311a5-10).

If we imagine the composite human *psyche* as a sort of community, whose constitutive elements are different capacities of the soul, the role of the indeterminate rule of pleasures may be taken as analogue in two ways: it may be under a despotic rule of pleasures through the tyranny of the desire for wealth and power in such a way that all the actions of the agent are regulated to serve the ultimate end of getting wealth subordinating the rational part of the soul under this sole rule. Another

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Politics*, Aristotle brings forward the problem of greed stemming from the unlimited nature of desires when he discusses the issue of property regulation and holds that it is the main cause of sedition and revolution: "The avarice of mankind is insatiable; at one time two obols was pay enough; but now, when this some has become customary, men always want more and more without end; for it is of the nature of desire to be unlimited, and most men live only for the gratification of it." *POLS* II.7, 1267b5-9.

analogue may be illustrative of Aristotle's sketch of man of pleasures: in this case there would not be a definite ultimate principle but rather a disposition towards the arbitrary inclinations motivated solely by bodily pleasures. This would correspond to a sort of deficient form of democracy—whose extreme form Aristotle considers to be a tyranny—where there is no justice but again the despotic rule of arbitrary passions.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle investigates different moral states according to the relationship of human beings towards pleasures and pains. Instead of making a categorization in terms of the moral significance of the characters as 'moral' or 'immoral' in the absolute sense, Aristotle presents a catalogue within which the nuances that differentiate them are pondered focusing on the distinction between the objects of desire and the dispositions of the agents towards these objects and settles six moral dispositions in opposition to each other as three pairs. Accordingly, morally favorable states are excellence [*arête*], continence [*enkrateia*], super-human excellence [*yper hemas, heroiken / theian*] and vice [*kakia*], incontinence [*akrasia*] and brutishness [*theriotes*] stand respectively in opposition to these positive states (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1145a14-27). Super-human excellence and brutishness are considered as excessive and very rarely encountered moral states; both states in a sense fall outside of the human definition. These characters, compelling the limits of excellence from two opposite directions, render impossible to be placed within the range of virtues as they undermine the very definition of virtue.<sup>15</sup> While the former is regarded as "non-human" in the positive

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<sup>15</sup> This is why Aristotle also faces difficulties within the discussion of whether it is possible to talk about a human being whose moral excellence cannot be evaluated within the limits of virtue; only god should be beyond the limits of excellence as Aristotle mentions in the *Magna Moralia*, "for god is superior to excellence and it is not in the way of excellence that his goodness lies". *MM*, 1200b9-19. The idea of excellence is directly related with a limited nature which allows to determine a measure as the standard for a value. Hence, like brutality obliterates the standards of virtue through a qualitative paradigm shift where the actions of the brutal man do not allow for a categorization under human standards, super-human excellence similarly compels the categories of virtues determined accordingly to the shared human values. This is why, we shall take the element of divine as a sort of analogy here

sense, that is, it being more god-like than human, transcending the limits of the definition of human, the latter is a form of extreme moral deficiency which opens the way to the degeneration of the basic essential human characteristics. This emphasis upon the notion of limit will be significantly elucidatory and determinative over Aristotle's systematization of the main principles of his ethics, concerning with his transition from human nature to ethical values; so we shall now try to see according to which standards Aristotle designates of different moral states.

### 2.3 The role of pleasures and reason: Determining the limit

So far we have mentioned two features attributed as naturally belonging to human beings; namely, the rational and the political nature. Before coming into the discussion of the significance of the political nature of human beings, operative within the development of Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*, it will be of help to evaluate what is the role of the rational part of the soul as regards its operation with pleasures. Aristotle mentions the intrinsically good nature of being several times and holds that the good life must be desirable and pleasurable.<sup>16</sup> Hence it is no coincidence that both in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter where he introduces the moral characters and in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter where he meditates upon whether the life of contemplation or the political life of moral virtues is the most favorable life to be chosen, the issue of pleasure is a dominant theme of the discussions at stake. He presents two main reasons in order to explain the significance of the role of pleasures within the framework of ethics: first, pleasure is an inseparable part of human nature and secondly it is in itself an object of choice (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1172a19-23). As it stands, the element of pleasure seems to be satisfying two main principles that

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referring to the perfect nature which does not admit limits. The problem of limit concerning the notion of virtue is also discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See *EN*, I. 12, 1202b10-26.

<sup>16</sup> See *EN* II.3, 1199a12-1, *EN* IX.9, 1170a12-21, *EN* IX.9, 1170a25-1170b20.

Aristotle appeals to justify his norms of value, namely, being part of the essential definition of a given living being and self-sufficiency serving as the necessary components of a complete activity. Pleasures are inseparable from the substantial account of human beings in the sense that they seem to be the strongest candidate for justifying by itself the reason for a given action impelling the agent to the object of choice in question. This relationship between the object of choice and the reason underlying the origin of action qua pleasurable cannot always account for the explanation of action if it is reversed. Inclining to an object of choice or to an activity that generates pleasure is considered self-sufficient in the sense that both activities are not chosen as a means to a further end but rather as ends in themselves. However, it is not the case that all good and choice worthy activities shall originate pleasure. Some actions head towards non-pleasurable or even painful objects because their usefulness in the long term. A medication that has a bad taste or pain causing effects does not prevent someone from using it. Something painful is in that sense good through its usefulness, promising a good state. Similarly, something that is admitted as pleasurable by the general opinion may be painful or may have future painful effects for a particular person. It is possible for a person to admit dessert non-pleasurable regarding the variety of personal tastes; or eating dessert would harm someone who is diabetic even if the experience itself gives pleasure. Aristotle raises concern over the problem of whether we like what is really good or what is good for us within the discussion of friendship and concludes that we pursue things either because they are good, useful or pleasant. He immediately adds that we can treat what is useful under the category of the good or the pleasant because in any sense useful is taken to mean productive of some good in accord with his claim that all human actions are directed to some good (either the apparent or the real good)

(Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1155b17-1156a5). Being as such, pleasures seem to be incommensurable in the sense that it is not the intrinsic value of the object of choice that determines the standard but rather the particular person who makes the choice in question. Each particular person being his own measure, pleasures seem to belong to a highly subjective domain; so when we take into consideration this inference with the formerly stated arguments regarding the nature of pleasures namely that pleasure itself is an object of choice and that they intimately belong to the natural human constitution, the need for a further standard arises. Otherwise we shall deal with the question if pleasures belong to our nature and pleasurable activities are self-sufficient then why can they not be the ultimate goal for leading a good life? Yet we have already stated that Aristotle strictly rejects the idea that the life of pleasure according to which the ultimate good is identified with the pleasure can be considered as a candidate for a well-lived life, enouncing that this type of life which is suitable for the beasts can only be chosen by “the ones who are slavish in their tastes” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1095b13-18).

In the 7<sup>th</sup> book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle investigates the virtues of character in relation to the role of pleasures, he centers upon the question of the criteria which are determinative of our treatment of moral characters. The main theme of the discussion rests upon the idea that the way a person is disposed towards the objects of pleasure determines one’s moral character to a significant extent. In a sense in this chapter Aristotle tries to find the roots of the standard required in further that has arisen as a question to be answered within the discussion of the incommensurability of the objects of pleasure to be able to make a discernment among the multiplicity of pleasures. In fact, the origin of this discussion resides in the previous book where Aristotle gives an account of the mean as the

right principle [*orthos logos*] which is considered to be the standard of the right choice. The definitive formula of the right principle is its being a mean where excess and deficiency are avoided. We have already concluded that the measure of pleasures is subjective in the sense that each particular individual is his own measure, but not the object itself. So the right principle seems to vary for each person with different capacities and objects of choice. The attainment of truth concerning practical choice [*tou praktikou he aletheia*] thus concerns the ability of determining the right desire [*orexis orthe*] which will motivate one to act in accordance both with one's own desires and capacities peculiar to each person. Aristotle sets forth three faculties that are operative within the process of the attainment of truth regarding action, namely, sensation, thought and desire (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1139a17-1139a18). Among these capacities, he argues, sensation cannot be the originator of the action because it is a faculty which is also shared by animals who are not capable of action. What differentiates the principle of movement of human beings from that of animals is that while the animal movement is determined by the object of appetite through sensitive imagination, humans are capable of producing movement through deliberative imagination which allows them to make calculation between the objects of choice (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 434a6-9). This capacity provides human beings with the privilege of discriminating between the real good and the apparent good belonging to the objects of choice offered by the images of the appetitive and the imaginative capacities. So a movement can only be said to be an action in so far as it participates in the calculative activity of the practical thought, that necessarily is the result of a choice so that it can be considered voluntary, not contingent. To explain the way in which action is produced, Aristotle makes reference to the function argument and states that we shall first ascertain which faculties play role within this process so that

we can figure out the best possible disposition viable to the capacity of being responsible for our actions. Accordingly, the object of appetite is the stimulant of the practical thought as the originator of the movement (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 433a9-21). At the first stage, this object appears to be the final end of the movement; but instead of setting the agent immediately in motion, it becomes the object of calculation and the result of the calculation has the potential to replace the final cause of the movement by making its efficient cause the reconsidered choice. Hence, action is always the result of a functioning of the appetitive and the rational capacities of the soul directed to some end. In respect to this co-functioning, Aristotle gives the account of choice as “either desiderative thought or intellectual desire, and such an origin of action is a man” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1139b4-6).<sup>17</sup>

Before coming into the discussion of the criteria for determining the right manner of conduct through the examination of the favorable moral states illustrated in the 7<sup>th</sup> book, let us first clarify what sort of knowledge Aristotle contends practical choice results from. First distinction that is to be taken into account concerns the difference between the way in which we get the knowledge of scientific facts that are admitted to be “non-variable” and “demonstrable” by Aristotle, and the way in which we aim at truth regarding the matters of conduct. As a matter of fact, the source of this distinction is not to be found in the faculty of knowing itself, but in the objects of knowledge. So when Aristotle talks about two rational faculties qua scientific faculty and calculative faculty, he mentions that the operation of the intellect differs in the sense that while scientific faculty deals with the unchanging principles, the

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<sup>17</sup> In H. Racham’s translation the expression is more clear in terms of the way in which it points out to the relationship between the appetitive capacity and the rational capacity with respect to choice: “Choice may be called either thought related to desire or desire related to thought; and man, as an originator of action, is a union of desire and intellect.”

calculative faculty operates upon things that admit variation.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the intellect is responsible for affirming or denying the propositions formulated with the principles of reason, the formulation of the practical syllogism also involves desire which is desiderative upon the end of action at issue, together with the same principles of reason but instead of affirmation or denial resulting with pursuit or avoidance. This operation then while attaining the truth in its results of the calculations, may go astray regarding the pursuit or avoidance of the object of choice if the results of the intellectual faculty do not overlap with that of the appetitive faculty which seemingly has a privileged role as the originator of the movement. However, this privileged position, when engenders opposition with the results of the calculations of the intellect, becomes a dominant element threatening the genuine good of the individual which can only be achieved through the agreement over the object of choice. This tension can be overcome only if the two sources of motion generate movement in virtue of some common character that is, wish corresponding to a sort of appetite which does not involve tension with the calculations of the intellect (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 433a21-433b4). Hence, wish operates as a salient feature of the faculties involved in the generation of action that has a linking, even a sort of reconciliatory force upon the conflicting data produced by the rational and non-rational faculties of the soul that will play a significant role to clarify Aristotle's choice of human nature" as the starting point to introduce his system of ethics.

A succinct analysis of Aristotle's different moral characters may help to substantiate in what respect the functioning of the rational and non-rational parts of

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<sup>18</sup> The idea that there is no actual difference between the scientific and the calculative faculty as if they are two different parts of the intellect but that we may suppose this sort of division with respect to the difference of the objects of knowledge is available within Aristotle's expression concerning this division: "It has been said before that the soul has two parts, one rational and other irrational. Let us now similarly divide the rational part, and let it be assumed that there are two rational faculties." *EN* VI. 1, 1139a5-7.

the soul, as the extension of the function argument, is determinative over the excellence of character or *eudaimonia*.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle's analysis of the moral states is characterized according to three main factors in accordance with the elements held to be determinative within his account of action, namely, appetites, reason and action. At the first level of analysis, Aristotle focuses on the essential characteristics of the moral states that are associated neither with excellence, nor wickedness; namely, continence, incontinence, endurance and softness (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1145a28-1145b7). Continence and endurance are categorized under the praiseworthy moral states even if they are not considered as manifestations of excellence and similarly incontinence and softness are blameworthy states of moral character in the sense that even if they cannot be evaluated as forms of wickedness, they are not favorable but blameworthy. In the final analysis, what determines the worth of the moral state is the choice that is embodied in the action. However, if Aristotle's assessment of values had been limited solely with actions qua expressions of the complex operations of the rational and non-rational capacities of human beings, then we would certainly have fewer distinction concerning categories of moral characters. It would thus be insignificant to make room for both the element of desire that grounds individual's motivation for action and also the process of reasoning. As far as the action had been considered to be worthy, the process of reasoning would have been disregarded as long as it produces the right action independently of its right or wrong directedness. Still, the way action is produced matters for Aristotle. Let us then think over the distinctive features of temperance, continence and incontinence which all share the characteristic of having the right reason. What differentiates continent person from the incontinent one is that, both possessing bad and strong appetites, the

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<sup>19</sup> Whether these two expressions are equivalent to each other or *eudaimonia* is suggestive of a different sort of excellence will be discussed in the next chapter.

former is able to act according to the right reason but the latter fails to act in accordance with what he knows to be right. The more interesting distinction is made between the temperate and the continent person. Even if both characters choose to act in accordance with the right reason, continent person's action involves a sort of inner tension where his excessive appetites manifest opposition with the calculations of his rational part; in contrast to the incontinent person, he chooses to obey what is suggested by the rational faculty. On the contrary, the temperate person does not have to resist the rules of reason because his appetites are already in agreement with what is suggested to be right by the rational part:

If continence involves having strong and bad appetites, the temperate man will not be continent nor the continent man temperate; for a temperate man will have neither excessive nor bad appetites. But the continent man must; for if the appetites are good, the state that restrains us from following them is bad, so that not all continence will be good; while if they are weak and not bad, there is nothing admirable in resisting them, and if they are weak and bad, there is nothing great in resisting these either (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1146a10-16).

This analysis, taken together with the distinction between continence and incontinence, seems to be pointing out two distinctive features of Aristotle's understanding of ethics:

- (i) The ultimate value of the action cannot be reducible to the compatibility of the action with the principles of reason.
- (ii) Having the grasp of the right principle by itself is not sufficient in terms of the excellence of character which is attributed to persons through their actions.

In the first conclusion, what is meant by "the ultimate value" of the action shall not shade the intrinsic value of the action in question, because, as we have stated, even if continent behaviors are not considered as the manifestations of the excellence of character, they are deemed to be "praiseworthy". This reveals the

political aspect of the value attributed to the actions of individuals. Each and every action is necessarily subject to the evaluation within the domain of commonly shared values wherefore it can be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. This ascription of praise and blame establishes the structure of the ground of the very concept of “value” itself within the Aristotelian framework. Hence the first determinative factor inevitably concerns the value of the action either as worthy to be praised or blamed according to the common ground of values which must be established with an insight of justice through which the worth of individual actions shall be comprehensive of the common good.<sup>20</sup> So the continent person seems to be competent with regard to practical deliberation whereby he is able to arrive at what is commonly accepted to be good. This sort of an individual deserves to be praised in terms of his awareness and motivation to act in accordance with the commonly shared values, even if they raise tension with the individual’s subjective motivations of action. However, the resistance exercised by the individual against his own desires seems to be taken as an indicator of a sort of not political but personal injustice.<sup>21</sup> Aristotle’s position concerning the excellence of human beings crystallizes at this distinction between the personal and the political injustice. He apparently favors temperance over continence considering the fact that even if the continent character seems to be—and actually is—praiseworthy in terms of the effort done for the sake of the common good, given that it requires a sort of resistance in the continent person, it would necessarily lead to a personal injustice which is a hindrance before a happy [*eudaimon*] life par excellence. The temperate character, by contrast, is both just to

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<sup>20</sup> It would be of help to bear in mind that Aristotle’s conception of the individual is held to be independent from the community it belongs to; especially when we are in the domain of ethical values: “The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.” *POLS* I.2, 1253a19-20.

<sup>21</sup> “We call those acts just that tend to produce and preserve happiness and its components for the political society.” *EN* V.1, 1129b24-25.

himself and to the political community he is a part of. In this respect, Aristotle's analysis of *eudaimonia* and justice exhibits a similarity in terms of the parts and the whole relationship. Just as he thinks that, referring to a political community, "the whole cannot be happy unless most, or all, or some of its parts enjoy happiness" and that "the good of things must be that which preserves them," he also believes that personal justice which demands an agreement between the desires and the deliberation of a person—as the expressions of the two parts of the soul—is required for the good of the whole qua human being (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1261b9, 1264b17-22). The incontinent person in this case, is both unjust to himself and to the political community he is a part of. Only temperance is a genuine form of justice considering the fact that it is generative both of personal and political well-being. This discussion can be re-articulated recalling the function argument whereby the good of a being is determined with the capacities essentially belonging to it through its natural constitution. We have come to the conclusion that within the Aristotelian corpus, the function of human beings must be investigated under two main axes without which the account of the natural constitution of human beings would be deficient; rational and political nature. In the final analysis, Aristotle prioritizes the political nature as the standard of measure because of the fact that human beings by nature belong to a community within which the principle of justice should be considered as a precondition of the well-being of a particular individual. Political communities are not coincidental or artificially formed totalities but rather organic unities which owe their identity to each individual person as their constitutive parts.<sup>22</sup> Hence for

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<sup>22</sup> In the first book of the *Politics*, Aristotle makes an analysis of the state making an implicit reference to the function argument claiming that in order to be able to have the clearest account of a thing, whether it be a state or any other thing, one shall investigate the thing at issue in its first growth and origin. He argues that state must be a creation of nature and man by nature a political animal following three sorts of necessary unions each implying the following unity as its end. The first natural union he claims to be is that of between the male and the female where the linking motive is to

Aristotle the priority of the well-being of the political community secured by the principles of justice is as uncontroversial as the well-being of a body's being prior to that of the finger. This is the reason why someone who chooses to live according to his own measures—whether it be pleasure, honor or wealth—cannot be considered to be manifesting the excellence of character in so far as this measure is not compatible with that of the community. Continence is in that sense a praiseworthy moral state regarding the fact that the continent person is ultimately persuaded by the values that enhance the flourishing of the community, instead of his own private motives. In the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle focuses on the notion of justice he further advocates that the best man is not the one who exercises his excellence towards himself but towards another; thereby the praise bestowed on the continent person is indisputable (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1130a1-13). However, Aristotle's distinction between the temperate person whose desires are already in the same line with what the principle of reason indicates and the continent person who needs a further resolution to curb his desires that engender tension with the rational principles favors the former in the sense that such a person would also derive pleasure out of his actions instead of exercising them as requisites of a higher order.<sup>23</sup> This order is not—or at least ideally should not be—external or arbitrary for any individual that is part of the political community whose *raison d'être* already is

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preserve and continue the species. Out of this necessary union arises the family established with a view to supply everyday wants. Villages are formed in respect to the goods that are beyond the daily needs and when several villages come together they form a complete political community, *polis*, which aims at the good life that is self-sufficient and the best. So Aristotle's final argument amounts to the claim that political community is a form of natural unity for each and every union between human beings which aim to lead a good life. Here, the term *nature* signifies both what is inseparable, essential and what is to be achieved. *POLS* I.2, 1252a24-1253a4.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Cooper explains this arguing that being persuaded with the idea of being or becoming virtuous cannot be procured solely by a sort of rational deliberation where there is no preconception of an understanding of the good. So virtue in any sense presupposes an affiliation with the common principles of value through which the individual strives in order to become virtuous even if it is at the expense of his personal desires. In this sense, continence may be considered as a transitory state between incontinence and temperance. See, Cooper, John M. (2010). *Political Community and the Highest Good*. In Lennox, J. G., & Bolton, R. (Eds.), *Being, nature, and life in Aristotle: essays in honor of Allan Gotthelf*. (pp. 212-265). New York: Cambridge University Press.

comprehensive of the ultimate well-being of the citizens. That is the reason why, while explaining the operation of the appetitive part that shares in reason, Aristotle uses the analogy of someone's taking notice of his father's or friend's advice (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1102b29-1103a3). Otherwise the analogy should have been the relationship between the master and the slave or the despot and the subject. Still, even for someone who is willing to live with the principles of political justice, making equivalent the personal limits with the limits of the community is a considerably demanding task. A temperate person is the illustration of this ideal model. This sort of a moral character, rather than considered to have appropriated the principles of the community, becomes himself the measure of what is right and just.<sup>24</sup>

The second conclusion uncovers the ultimate decisiveness of the appetitive part of the soul over the rational part. Incontinent character may serve as a model for understanding what Aristotle mentions by the ineffectiveness of knowledge or theory per se concerning our actions. Action is the result of choice which is the product of the cooperation of desire and reasoning directed to some end (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1139a32). We have stated that three characters, namely incontinence, continence and temperance, share the knowledge concerning what is the best way to act; nevertheless, while the latter two are able to act in accordance with this formula, the incontinent person fails in choosing what he thinks to be right.<sup>25</sup> If there were no such decisive force of the appetitive faculty over the action, then the explanation

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<sup>24</sup> See *EN* II.6, 1106b36, VI.5, 1140a24-1140b19.

<sup>25</sup> Concerning the nature of the knowledge the incontinent person has, Aristotle makes a distinction between potential knowledge and actual knowledge and puts forth that the way we say the incontinent man has the knowledge can be compared to have knowledge in the state of sleep, madness or drunkenness. He also adds that being under the influence of strong passions make a similar effect over the state of the body which hinders one from actualizing what one in fact knows. See *EN* VII. 3, 1146b31-35. However, Aristotle considers the incontinent man as at least to be cognizant of the 'fundamental principle as the highest part of man'. This is what differentiates incontinence from the self-indulgent man who acts voluntarily, without any reliance of the right principle or a feeling of regret. See *EN* VII.8 1150b29 – 1151a20.

regarding what exactly accounts for the different attitudes of action of these three characters would become blurry. However, Aristotle makes explicit through presenting the notion of “wish” that each and every kind of action is originated with desire [*orexis*] which may manifest itself either in the form of wish [*boulésis*], passion [*epithumia*] or emotion [*thumos*]. Only wish is the expression of desire guided by the rational part; the other two forms of desire are also capable of producing movement but as extensions of the irrational part of the soul. Accordingly, while the incontinent person’s actions are produced as effects of passion and emotion, continent and temperate actions are the products of wish. Aristotle’s explanation concerning human action thus seems to be centered upon the notion of wish which operates as the key element through which we may make sense of how it is possible to reconcile different appearances or conceptions of the good in opposition, suggested by the rational and the appetitive faculties both constituting our essential nature. One final remark may play a critical role functioning as a linking step between Aristotle’s account of human nature as a composite of rational and appetitive faculties and his idea of *eudaimonia* which will be discussed in the following chapter of the present work.

In the first section where we have discussed the relationship between the nature of a thing and the good of that thing, we have concluded that knowing the essential nature of the thing in question will be inclusive of its purpose. This teleological approach, in the Aristotelian system of thought, necessarily involves the notion of the good as the end that is strived for. However, we have also stated that what allows us to make this inference from what is factual to what is normative is possible with knowing the limits. The formal cause provides the most general definition demarcating the basic features that explain the way we are able to form

classes that comprehend plurality of entities, despite each being different but sharing the same name. This is the reason why Aristotle calls the formal cause also “secondary substance”. Primary substances are the particular entities which are elements of the classes that share a common definition through secondary substances. Being as such, even if it is possible to know what is the purpose of a class of beings which participate in the same capacities, it is hard to claim that this general notion of the good can be implied to each particular member of the class. If we go back to our discussion of the relationship between knowledge and action, this conclusion introduces the complexity of moral knowledge. Aristotle owes his distinction between the knowledge of the universals and particulars and its implication over the moral action to this line of reasoning. Unless one has the knowledge of a particular thing which will make it worthy of being chosen to act upon, the knowledge of the universal applying to the action in question remains insignificant.<sup>26</sup> We should also note that the knowledge of the particular concerning the object of choice will necessarily presuppose a sort of an individual knowledge which includes one’s own limits that allows one to categorize things as good or bad in terms of their destructive or enhancing effects over one’s own body or character. What Aristotle sees as defective in the incontinent person, apart from his being weak over his passions, seems to be the lack of the individual, specific knowledge concerning one’s own limits. The impossibility of specifying universally applicable general principles concerning human conduct is directly related with the uniqueness of the knowledge in question. Becoming good thus requires first the knowledge of one’s own limits which will make it possible to determine the right reason as the

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle explains this by claiming that there is a double possibility of error in deliberation: “error in deliberation may be either about the universal or about the particular; we may fail to know either that all water that weighs heavy is bad, or that this particular water weighs heavy.” *EN* VI.8, 1142a22-1142a22.

guiding principle and acting in accordance with this principle peculiar to each and every individual. Aristotle associates the incontinent person with the people who quickly get drunk with very little wine; this amount of wine is actually a reasonable measure in the sense that most of the people do not get drunk with such amount, however, what is defective about the incontinent person is his appropriation of the wrong measure issuing from the ignorance of his own limits (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1151a1-6). That being said, we may apply what we have formerly stated about the requirements of knowledge to the moral knowledge, which, as we have shown is dependent on (i) that moral knowledge requires the knowledge of one's own limits, and (ii) that these limits determine both one's ends and the reason for action.

## CHAPTER 3

### ON *EUDAIMONIA*

#### 3.1 The sources of the problem of different interpretations

##### 3.1.1 Rival definitions of *eudaimonia*

Aristotle's main project in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to figure out what is the best possible way of life for a human being to live. The main motivation behind this endeavor rests upon his belief that an investigation over the different senses of the good may provide us the knowledge of the supreme good which will necessarily work as the ultimate end for our practices and what is of the utmost significance is that this knowledge would guide us within our practical conducts (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1094a20-25). Hence, the theory of ethics revolves around the question of the best possible life as the common concern of each and every human being and the conditions that may provide the life as such is primarily concerned with the practical aspect of the issue. The practical concern is highly dominant throughout the treatise; the purpose of ethics is not knowing the principles of a good life but acting over them (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1094a20-25). This concern is expressed mainly under two aspects: firstly, that knowledge per se is insufficient to originate action and secondly, that our ethical claims should conform with the facts; the principles should be appropriate to be practiced.<sup>27</sup> It is possible to notice the significance of the latter aspect of the nature of the ethical knowledge in the methodology Aristotle establishes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As we have already discussed in detail in the previous chapter, his starting point is the nature of human beings which is suggestive of the fact that only within the limits of the capacities that a living being has its

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<sup>27</sup> See *EN* I.3, 1095a14-25, I.3, 1095a28-30, I.4, 1095b1-5, I.6, 1096b30-1097a3, I.7, 1097a20-23, 1098a35-1098b3, I.8, 1098b10-13, 1098b20-22.

ultimate end or good can be revealed. So after having determined the essential features of *eudaimonia* as being final self-sufficient in the sense that it is the ultimate end at which all actions aim, Aristotle gives the definition of *eudaimonia* linking it with the function argument as the practical life of the rational part of man which is the “activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and the most complete” (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1098a15-18). Without giving a clear account of *eudaimonia* within which there is an explanation concerning the standard of excellence and the activity or activities that are expected to provide a *eudaimon* life, Aristotle first evaluates the possible candidates that also seem to be sharing the feature of being valuable in themselves; such as pleasure, honor, intelligence and virtue. He argues that even if we also choose them for their own sakes, there still remains the ultimate end of *eudaimonia* within which all the other ends are subordinated even if they share the characteristic of self-sufficiency. Aristotle seems to be suggesting that these candidates do not satisfy the criterion of finality, without which the idea of the ultimate end would be groundless. Therefore, he admits these features as complementary parts of a flourished life that are necessary but not sufficient. The first chapter is concluded with the exposition of the function argument over the discussion of the two parts of the soul in terms of which Aristotle suggests different forms of virtue under the categories of intellectual virtues and virtues of character. If we depart from the idea that this bipartite constitution of the soul supports the possibility of the existence of more than one excellence, then Aristotle’s definition of *eudaimonia* can be read as: activity of the soul in conformity with the excellence of the rational part. The definition is still obscure; this is the very reason the present chapter of the study will aim at elucidating this obscurity.

Aristotle gives us more reason to be suspicious about the exact meaning of the definition of *eudaimonia* in the 10<sup>th</sup> book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The definition we have suggested in the final analysis may be interpreted as a sort of virtuous life within which the excellence of the rational part is exercised through the rational choices of the person that are directed to what is good.<sup>28</sup> In this case, *eudaimonia* cannot be understood merely in terms of the excellence of the rational faculty whose equivalent within the domain of action is contemplation, but in terms of the excellence of character which is inclusive of the former. On the other hand, having paid attention to the arguments concerning Aristotle's comparison between moral virtue and intellectual virtue, one may also claim that Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* points to the activity of theoretical contemplation as the production of the most perfect and complete capacity human beings have. In this case, contemplative activity plays the role of the ultimate end of all other human activities and virtues of character shall be treated as inferior or subservient to the activity of contemplation. Aristotle's postulation of a hierarchical order over moral excellence and intellectual excellence in the 10<sup>th</sup> book, which provides the basis for the latter interpretation, is as follows:

If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper excellence will be complete happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1177a18-1177b26).

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<sup>28</sup> Here, the expression "what is good" corresponds to the object of the right choice, which can be determined by practically wise person. According to Aristotle's account, the right choice can only be the result of practical wisdom which is a sort of character that is the result of, but not reducible to the rational faculty. See *EN*, VI.12, 1144a12-37, VII.10, 1152a7-24, X.8, 1178b7-23, *POLS*, VII.1, 1323b20-35.

Especially in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> sections of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, Aristotle concentrates on the possibility that the good life must amount to a life of theoretical contemplation which is the activity that belongs to the best capacity of human beings. Aristotle seems to have left aside his concerns regarding his remarks on the fact that ethical claims agree with the facts specifically within these sections. This conclusion is a radical one in the sense that it does not make contemplative activity a necessary component of the good life but admits it to be the ultimate aim in the sense that any other activity can only be considered as a means to achieve this ultimate end even if they are activities harboring their ends in themselves (Ackrill, 1980). Morally virtuous actions seem to satisfy the criterion of being self-sufficient in the sense that they also carry an intrinsic worth but not the criterion of “being the expression of the best capacity”. The source of moral virtue is one’s passions; virtue of character is directly related with the way in which one’s actions are produced in terms of their motivational source. We have already stated that each and every action is originated by a form of desire; either in the form of wish as having share in the rational character or in the form of passion or emotion as non-mediated expressions of the appetitive part of the soul. Hence, Aristotle states, moral virtues can manifest *eudaimonia* only in a secondary degree; because they are the expressions of our “human” character (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1178a9-10). The ability of making moral judgments and acting over them owes itself primarily to the limited aspect of human nature. By contrast to this, intellectual excellence is associated with the “relatedly divine part” of human beings which promises a more complete form of excellence. Theoretical contemplation is then the best activity; firstly, in terms of its objects that are unchanging and eternal and secondly it is complete and self-sufficient in the sense that it is undertaken for its own sake. Aristotle’s formulation of *eudaimonia* in

the 10<sup>th</sup> book, as it stands, contains some controversial aspects that are originated from the inconsistencies of the arguments grounded on the account of human nature. So let us reformulate the two rival definitions of *eudaimonia*, tracing back to Aristotle's analysis of the human good in the first book.

### 3.1.2 Human nature and the problem of self-sufficiency

In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle summarizes the main task of the book as following: "Clearly the excellence we must study is human excellence; for the good we are seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness" (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1102a14-15). Right after this statement, he clarifies two elements of controversy which we have just introduced within the discussion of the contrasting definitions of *eudaimonia*; concerning the decisive feature of human beings which will provide a basis for the most comprehensive and authoritative account of excellence. First, he asserts that non-rational faculties of the soul that have no share in reason do not constitute any complication; they are shared with non-human animals hence cannot provide a standard for the way of living that is specific to human beings. Human excellence therefore cannot be explained in terms of bodily functions; it rather should be the excellence of the soul (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1102a16-17). Aristotle's use of the term "soul" comprehends the commonly shared capacities by each and every member of the species of human being such as the faculty of thought, the faculty of sensation and the faculty of originating movement.<sup>29</sup> Both the faculty of sensation and the faculty of originating movement are necessarily dependent upon the body; so Aristotelian conception of the soul does not have a reference to a sort of separable substance. Aristotle discusses at length

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<sup>29</sup> See *DA* III.3, 427a17-18, III.4, 429a20-22, III.9, 432a15-432b4, III.10, 433a9-21.

whether the thinking part of the soul is separable by virtue of becoming all things; however, given that what is at stake for the present study is the well being of a human being qua substance, we shall treat *psykhe* as a composite of these faculties.<sup>30</sup> One of the causes which gives rise to the tension between two definitions of *eudaimonia* seems to be stemming from Aristotle's knotty analysis of the soul in the third book of the *De Anima*. We have inquired into the part of the analysis which is concerned with practical thought; therefore, have focused on the faculty of wish which has a decisive role in the production of moral action as having a common character with the rational faculty. In the same book, Aristotle asserts that unlike practical thought, speculative thought does not have share in the process of the origination of movement; "it never says anything about an object to be avoided or pursued" (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 432b27-30). This distinction between the practical thought and the speculative thought is crucial for understanding Aristotle's account of human nature and the explanation of action. It points to the unique human nature which on the one hand is condemned to move or act because of its imperfect and limited nature and on the other hand has the possession of a capacity, namely the rational capacity, which is self-sufficient and complete in its character. Aristotle maintains that movement is an activity of what is imperfect; living beings always move for the sake of which they lack (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 431a6). By contrast, the object of the speculative faculty is complete and perfect in such a way that it is not subject to change. The distinction between the nature of the objects of speculative thought and practical thought finds its expression within the discussion on the imperfect nature of human beings in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1140b31-1141a8). According to that, being affiliated with the

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<sup>30</sup> See the conclusive part of the section "On Ackrill's Inclusive Account of *Eudaimonia*" for a detailed explanation concerning the consequences of treating different parts of the soul separately from each other over Aristotle's doctrine of ethics.

unchanging objects of speculative thought does not render human beings complete or perfect. If this was the case, human beings would have been the best thing in the world. What Aristotle means by the perfection of the objects of speculative thought is expressed with an example in the same passage. Unlike the variability of what is healthy or good for each individual or each species of living beings, which are the objects of practical thought; “what is white or straight is always the same.”<sup>31</sup> The stability of the latter sort of objects of thought allows for exactness with regard to speculative thought. This is the reason why while speculative reasoning is always right, appetite and imagination, whose objects are the stimulants of practical thought, can be either right or wrong in terms of their inclination through the apparent or the real good (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 433a9-433b5). This analysis puts forth the different natures of knowledge due to their objects. The element of exactness places speculative thought in a higher position than practical thought whose objects do not promise certainty in terms of their being subject to constant change. The second basis of the argument that supports the hierarchy between two forms of reasoning rests upon the fact that the difference concerning the nature of the objects belonging to each faculty also implies a distinction between their ends. The activity of the speculative form of thought does not produce movement; it is its own end. On the contrary, what is pursued or avoided is determined after the calculations of the practical form of thought. Hence, practical reasoning functions for a further end; its calculations are always “for something” other than the activity itself. In this sense, practical form of reasoning is inferior from speculative form of reasoning in terms of its self-sufficient character. However, Aristotle owes the distinction, and thereby the hierarchy between two forms of reasoning to the different nature of their objects. So

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<sup>31</sup> The expression of “what is white or straight is always the same” is open to misinterpretation. Here, what Aristotle mentions is that straightness or whiteness qua qualities cannot be changed as universals that apply to particulars.

it is not the case that human beings have two separate faculties of reasoning that can be ranked one under the other; but rather that the rational faculty has the capacity to operate on two different sets of objects differing in their character. An interesting indication Aristotle makes in the *De Anima* provides reason to be suspicious of considering the speculative and the practical form of reasoning as two separate faculties:

That too which involves no action, i.e. that which is true or false, is in the same province with what is good or bad: yet they differ in this, that the one is absolute and the other relative to someone (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 431b10-11).

The way we ascribe truth or falsity is analogous with the way we ascribe goodness or badness to things in terms of both operations' being the result of the functioning of the rational faculty. What differentiates these operations from each other is that the latter form of knowledge is relative in the sense that an object cannot be said to be good independently from the circumstances. What is meant by the circumstances may embrace a multiplicity of factors like time, place or quantity. Aristotle seems to be suggesting a basic realist approach as follows: a box of ice is considered good for cooling a drink warmed by the heat in a hot summer day but when the sun descends and the causal element that warms the drinks is removed, the reason rendering ices good disappears as well. Similarly, for someone who prefers warm drinks there will be no reason to attribute ice the quality good. However, the quantity, the shape or the temperature of the ice at a particular moment will be "absolute" in the sense that they will be measured by the same standards shared by each individual.

What is at stake here is to clarify in what sense the way in which Aristotle treats this distinction may help us resolve the problem of the discrepancy between two definitions of *eudaimonia*. In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, after

having stated that the main concern of the book is to give an account of the human good, Aristotle reminds us of the composite nature of human beings, in his terms composed of the rational and the non-rational part and soon after makes a remark concerning this distinction (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1202a5-32). He suggests that even if the way in which we analyze the activities of human beings involves such a distinction, the question of “whether these two parts are really distinct or distinguishable in thought” is of no significance for the subject of inquiry at hand (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1002a26-32). These distinctions, made according to the specific workings of each capacity, allow us to explain what is a human being. We owe both the account of the substantial definition of human beings and the account concerning their good to the knowledge of the operations of these capacities, very similarly to the way in which we give the account of living or non-living substantial unities through the causes that explain the way in which a unity is composed from different parts.<sup>32</sup> The reason why Aristotle states the insignificance of the problem of the separability of the different parts of the soul when we are in the domain of ethics can be explained by the fact that, in the final analysis, what constitutes the goodness of a being at issue cannot exclude any part that belongs to the unity. Thus, even if we can assign a hierarchical order to different capacities in such a way that some of them have a higher value in terms of their activities, the functioning of these capacities is dependent upon the subsistence of the unity they constitute. They may be said to be excellent or virtuous in terms of the function they bear as parts; but the excellence or virtue of the unity cannot be reduced to a single function. The same

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<sup>32</sup> See *PA* I.1, 639a12-640a11. “Furthermore, the causes concerned in natural generation are, as we see, more than one. There is the cause for the sake of which, and the cause whence the beginning of motion comes. Now we must decide which of these two causes comes first, which second. Plainly, however, that cause is the first which we call that for the sake of which. For this is the account of the thing, and the account forms the starting-point, alike in the works of art and in works of nature. For the doctor and the builder define health or house, either by the intellect or by perception, and then proceed to give the accounts and the causes of each of the things they do and of why they should do it thus.”

problem finds its expression in the first book of the *Politics* within the discussion of the relationship between the individual, family and the state through Aristotle's assertion that "the excellence of the part must have regard to the excellence of the whole" (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1260b12-19). The way in which individuals as parts form a family as a unity is different from the way in which the rational and the non-rational parts constitute the soul as a unity; however, Aristotle considers these unities analogous in the sense that each and every form of unity manifests a higher end than its constituent parts. In this sense, if we reconsider the distinction between the speculative form of reasoning and the practical form of reasoning with a view to their ends, we may say that each has a peculiar excellence in terms of their specific functions; nevertheless, given that human excellence concerns the soul as a whole, even if the speculative form of thought is considered to be the best function of this unity, it cannot account for the human excellence in the ultimate sense. The most basic explanation for this is that the essential constitution of human beings, wherein lies their ultimate end, itself does not allow for the exercise of the speculative reasoning in its complete and perfect form. Aristotle explicitly expresses his concerns over this discrepancy in the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where the discussion about the best possible life for human beings reaches its climax. The main body of the argument in the seventh section of the last book that is the origin of the dilemma in question can be formulated basically as following (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1177a18-b26):

- i. *Eudaimonia* consists in activity in accordance with excellence.
- ii. It should be activity in accordance with the highest excellence.
- iii. The activity in accordance with the highest excellence is found in the rational part of human beings.

- iv. Therefore, *eudaimonia* should consist in the activity of the rational part; which is theoretical contemplation.

This line of reasoning seems to be legitimate if one has already accepted the validity of the function argument; however, when we take into account the fact that the rational part of the soul has two different operations, the transition from the activity of the rational part to the activity of theoretical contemplation needs to be examined. We have discussed in the first chapter the reasons regarding Aristotle's claim that the rational part of the soul is the best capacity human beings have and that *eudaimonia* must concern the distinctive feature of human beings which is responsible from their essential constitution; but we have also noted that the ultimate good of a being can be understood only after giving an account of *physis* of the being in question. Because of the fact that the nature of an artifact is different from that of a living being in the sense that the purpose, thereby the virtue, of the former is predetermined only by its physical constitution, human beings are determined by the external factors in addition to the capacities they are endowed with by nature: they are part of a community. Aristotle therefore postulates the character of living in a political community as a natural feature to human beings and adds that if we want to illustrate the *eudaimon* person, whose nature is to live with others, we cannot imagine him to be solitary (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1169b8-10, 16-19). If Aristotle had not indicated the necessary connection between the nature of a being and the virtue of the being in question, then the idea that the activity of the excellent part of human beings per se had to be considered as the expression of *eudaimonia* could be legitimate. Nevertheless, the way Aristotle introduces the nature of human beings embraces the character of together-living, without which the formulation of the best possible life would be inadequate. We have discussed that the parts that constitute

the whole can be considered separately from each other and can also be attributed different virtues as Aristotle does in the case of the treatment of the human soul under the rational and the non-rational parts. Separating these parts in thought renders understanding the way in which these parts function, either independently from each other or in co-operation, possible. However, preservation of the unity of the whole is the precondition for the operations of the parts; because of the fact that in an organic unity the parts are for the whole whereby the whole is of necessity prior to its parts (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1253a19-125a39). So when we analyze the human soul through Aristotle's catalogue of the different parts, the speculative form of thought as the activity belonging to the rational faculty is distinguished from the other activities by its self-sufficient character which Aristotle associates with the idea of divinity. What is divine must be complete and self-sufficient; within Aristotle's teleological system of thought the idea of completeness cannot meet with the idea of motion because of the fact that movement is always for the sake of something lacking (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 431a6). The speculative form of thought approximates the divine character in terms of its objects, and the continuity of its activity: contemplative activity is self-sufficient in the sense that it does neither require an additional element nor aspires to a further end. By contrast the practical form of thought functions with a view to action which will either pursue or avoid something with respect to what is lacking. Contemplative activity does not have a further objective apart from the activity itself; however, as it is mentioned, because it is an activity that belongs to a human being as one of its capacities, it presupposes the well-being of the human being who undertakes the activity. Aristotle thus concludes that such an activity would be higher than human level:

He will also need external prosperity, since he is a human being. For his nature is not self-sufficient for contemplation; rather, he needs his body to be healthy and he needs to provide it with nourishment and other care (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1178b33-35).

This train of thought does not exclude the idea that the best capacity human beings have is the rational part of the soul wherein we shall search for the element that promises *eudaimonia*; but the best activity of the rational part qua solely theoretical contemplation cannot account for the excellence of human beings when we take into account that the excellence we are searching for would apply to the composite nature of a human being, which, together with the rational capacity that has a divine share, has a limited nature with its non-rational capacities.

### 3.2 Nagel's Intellectualist Account of *Eudaimonia*

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* is treated under two main interpretations due to the different receptions of the term virtue. Thomas Nagel, in his article entitled *Aristotle on Eudaimonia*, opens his discussion with this distinction which he treats under the categories of the comprehensive account and the intellectualist account (Nagel, 1980). The intellectualist account basically suggests that *eudaimonia* corresponds to the activity of theoretical contemplation as the functioning of the best part human beings have. The comprehensive interpretation is, in congruence with what we have concluded at the end of the last section, based on the idea that in order to understand the excellence that can be manifested by human beings, we must take into account human nature in its complexity including the non-rational part of the soul as well as the rational part. Nagel defends the intellectualist position, suggesting that every action apart from theoretical contemplation is exercised in order to prepare a ground

for purely theoretical activity in such a way that the lower functions serve the best one (Nagel, 1980). Ackrill, in his article which shares the same name with that of Nagel's, takes the opposite position; he claims that the activities that are ends in themselves as a whole constitute *eudaimonia* and thereby holds that Aristotle's doctrine of *eudaimonia* is an inclusive account in contrast with a monolithic account where the ultimate end consists in a single activity that is valuable in itself (Ackrill, 1980). The present chapter will explore the different employments of the function argument with respect to the explanation of *eudaimonia* focusing on Nagel and Ackrill's articles. The discussion will follow the steps taken in the previous chapter and will engage with Nagel and Ackrill's articles with the aim to resolve the confusions concerning Aristotle's account of human nature and to suggest a solution for the problematic doctrine of *eudaimonia*.

Nagel sets out from the function argument just like Aristotle, in order to clarify in what human beings' ultimate good consists within the limits of Aristotle's conceptualization of the term. He immediately points out the difficulty originating from the formulation of the function argument linked with the idea of the good: If the excellence of an entity is measured by its proper function which is unique to the being in question, the probability that any other being who does not share the capacities common with non-human animals but only the rational capacity, would invalidate the peculiarity of this capacity for human beings and would thereby annihilate the definition of the human being (Nagel, 1980). What Nagel suggests is this: suppose that an artificial intelligence which is able to do speculative reasoning without having the lower capacities that are shared with non-human animals is invented. This would not render it a human being because it would lack the irrational parts of human beings which are part of the essential human nature. Moreover, with

the emergence of such a being, the possession of the rational capacity would be no more peculiar to human beings. In such a case the condition of peculiarity of Aristotle's function argument would fail to account for the explanation of the human nature over its rational part that discriminates it from other living beings. Nagel's hypothetical illustration seems to be logically valid. Such a case would render the function argument vulnerable when we take into account the way in which Aristotle eliminates the capacities that are common with other living beings hinging on the idea that the peculiarity of the possession of a capacity should be the indicator of the *telos* of the being at stake. Nevertheless, Nagel's criticism is not strong regarding its limited scope of the relationship between the function argument and *eudaimonia*; thus, we shall reconsider the criticism concerning Aristotle's employment of the function argument with a view to *eudaimonia*.

After pointing out difficulty concerning the function argument, Nagel notes that the weakness of the aspect of peculiarity leads us to expect an account of human function which puts forward the distinctive way in which human capacities are organized with respect to the end peculiar to human beings (Nagel, 1980). He elaborates his criticism with two further examples. The first example of a combination corkscrew and bottle-opener is introduced in order to disclose the difference between a conjunctive function of a mechanic organization and the irreducibility of human function to one of its capacities as the result of the interdependence of the different functions to each other in an organic structure such as the human soul. We have referred to the special character of the organically structured unities in the previous chapter; the elimination of the function of pulling corks from the combination of corkscrew and bottle-opener would not have any effect over the function of opening bottles with crown caps whose work is

independent from the function of pulling corks. However, just as the elimination of the digestive function from a human being is not possible, its malfunctioning would have a deteriorative effect over all other functions and thus over the unity of the being whose good is at stake. After having cleared this distinction, Nagel discusses the hierarchy between the capacities of a complex organism through the example of giraffe and explains that the excellence of a giraffe is “the optimal functioning of the total system in the giraffe’s life” which is possible with the coherently organized functioning of the separate capacities of the giraffe (Nagel, 1980). What separates human beings from giraffes, he adds, is the capacity of rational activity which is involved in the workings of perception, locomotion and desire (Nagel, 1980). Up to this point, Nagel’s arguments seem to support the comprehensive account of *eudaimonia*; however, in the final analysis, he concludes that even if the rational faculty may support the other faculties’ workings, it is not subservient to these lower functions because of the fact that the ultimate end of this faculty cannot be reduced to its “caretaker” function. This line of reasoning drags Nagel into a radical point where he claims that the unique function of the rational part which is beyond the ordering of practical life constitutes evidence for the ability to transcend individual concerns in such a way that human beings’ time is “too valuable to waste on anything so insignificant as human life (Nagel, 1980, p.12).”

The primary reason to be suspicious of Nagel’s interpretation of *eudaimonia* resides in the paradoxical conclusion he draws from the function argument and without a subtle philosophical analysis. The main motive of Aristotle’s treatise of ethics is to find out the best way of living within the possibilities defined by the capacities human beings have. It would thus be incomprehensible to suppose that a theory which is dedicated to investigating on the best way of living would admit

human life to be insignificant. Nagel's radical conclusion seems to be the result of the absolute authority he attributes to the function argument within the scope of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle indubitably assigns a central role to the function argument with respect to its decisive role in determining an entity's purpose, thereby what is good for that entity. However, while single-purposed organisms admit of a non-compound account of the good, it is not possible to determine what is good in the unqualified sense when dealing with for complex unities that embody more than a single function, like human beings. Thus, even if the function argument provides us with considerable knowledge concerning the capacities which operate as a guiding principle to determine what is good, it is not decisive in the absolute sense by virtue of the different natures of the capacities that belong to the same unity. Nagel rejects the idea that this tension can be resolved through a sort of reconciliation between the capacities with conflicting ends when considered separately. This position leads him to disregard the fact that these capacities are already at work within a unity whose excellence is at stake in the first place. The possibility to transcend the individual practical concerns enabled by the workings of the rational part of the soul, namely through the speculative form of reasoning by virtue of its prowess of self-sufficient activity, is a legitimate reason for Nagel to ignore the lower functionings of the other human capacities. Nevertheless, the notion of *eudaimonia* concerns the well-being of human beings within their substantial unity; this removes the possibility of treating their essentially constitutive capacities separately in such a way that this treatment would threaten the subsistence of this unity. Nagel's intellectualist account can be read as an analysis of the speculative form of reasoning independently from Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*. In such a case he would be free of the specifications Aristotle made to explain the elements *eudaimonia* consists in and this would have

constituted not an account of *eudaimonia* but an account of the different functions of the human soul. However, this being the case, Nagel's account of *eudaimonia* excludes in the first place Aristotle's principles of completeness and his statements concerning the purpose and the nature of the ethical knowledge and consequently ends up with an account through which it is not possible to grasp the content of the notion of *eudaimonia*.

We shall discuss the aspect of "completeness" in the following chapter within which there will be an analysis of the comprehensive account of *eudaimonia* through Ackrill's perspective. Before this, let us clarify the way in which Aristotle structures his thoughts concerning the best possible life for human beings which he combined under the conception *eudaimonia*.

### 3.3 Ackrill's inclusive account of *eudaimonia*

In the very beginning of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces the problem of the multiplicity of the senses of the good depending upon the ends for the sake of which human beings pursue different activities (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1094a1-1094a17). What seems for Aristotle to be the matter of distress is that without there being an ultimate end which can be explanatory for the worth of these actions, each action can be considered merely as a means towards an end which itself shall necessarily be a subordinate end for a further action. This would vitiate the intrinsic value of the notion of an end, which is considered to be good because it is final in such a way that its worth cannot be explained by something other than itself, rendering it reducible to a mere means. Things that are deemed to be good are thus in the first level categorized according to their being pursued for the sake of something else or for their own sake. This distinction is not sufficient to answer the

question of the ultimate end because plurality of the things that are pursued for their own sake, like pleasures, intelligence, sight or honors, gives rise to the idea of the need for a final principle which would also include the activities that are ends in themselves. Nagel conjoins the principle of finality with the function argument's implication that human beings' best capacity is the rational part of the soul and thereby illustrates *eudaimonia* as a linear sequencing of activities at the end of which theoretical contemplation lies. This picture, in the first place undermines the intrinsic value of the activities other than the activity of speculative reasoning; this goes against Aristotle's conception of the good for, even if he prioritizes the intrinsic value of the activity of theoretical contemplation per se, he denies neither the essential worth of moral action nor that of pleasures.<sup>33</sup> In this section, we will first evaluate Ackrill's alternative "inclusive" approach, and then consider the causes and the consequences of both accounts of *eudaimonia* with respect to Aristotle's practical concern which suggests that the primary purpose of a theory of ethics is doing well rather than having the knowledge of what is good (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1094a20-25).

In his article *Aristotle on Eudaimonia*, Ackrill explores two main questions which he considers pivotal with respect to the ambiguity they invoke vis-à-vis Aristotle's ethical doctrine. The first one concerns the criterion of right action and the second one, which will be our center of attention, focuses on the determination of the content of the notion of *eudaimonia*. Unlike Nagel, Ackrill attributes the difficulty not to an obscure account of human nature on Aristotle's part, but to the existence of two alternative definitions of *eudaimonia* without an explicit formulation regarding how they relate them to each other (Ackrill, 1980). Ackrill

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<sup>33</sup> For the statements and examples that constitute textual evidence, see: *EN* I.8, 1099a12-17, *EN* VII.4, 1148a23-28, *EN* VI.5, 1140b20-21, *EN* VII.12, *EN* IX.7, 1167b35-1168a9, *EN* 1153a9-13, *POLS* I.5, 1254a33-1254b9.

investigates the notion of *eudaimonia* in the two conflicting interpretations; the “dominant” and the “inclusive.” The dominant account converges with Nagel’s interpretation of *eudaimonia* in identifying the ultimate aim of a good life with theoretical contemplation. The latter appears as a monolithic end which consists in a single valued activity; by contrast, the inclusive doctrine comprehends an understanding of *eudaimonia* which consists of a variety of valuable aims and interests (Ackrill, 1980). In this chapter, we will discuss Aristotle’s qualification of completeness in terms of his definition concerning the *eudaimon* life through the analysis of Ackrill’s “inclusive” interpretation of the term. We will finalize the discussion of the tension between two accounts of *eudaimonia* by suggesting a comprehensive explanation taking into account Aristotle’s ethical doctrine exposed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle gives an account of the different senses of the good with a view to the notion of *eudaimonia*, he posits two fundamental principles without which the definition of the term would be deficient. The first principle concerns the practicable character of the ultimate good, which he expresses as follows: “if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1097a22-24).” The second principle emphasizes the complete and the self-sufficient character of an ultimate end; both in conceptual and empirical terms. Taken together with the former principle, the idea of an ultimate end presupposes that it is identified as the ultimate good on the grounds that there is no other good that can be added to it; given that in such case additional good would constitute another end which transcends what was formerly taken as the ultimate end. This consequence justifies the second character of self-sufficiency and

completeness of *eudaimonia*. Any additional good that attests to the lacking element of an end rules the character of being ultimate of the end in question. Aristotle argues upon this paradox appealing to Plato's argument that good cannot solely be identified with pleasure on the basis that if the pleasant life is more desirable with wisdom, then the mixture would be the most desirable form of life for the good cannot be rendered more desirable by any addition to it (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1172b27-35). The same line of reasoning also proves that if the theoretical life of contemplation, combined with valuable actions and interests, is more desirable than the theoretical life of contemplation per se, then this sort of a life would satisfy better the fundamental characteristics of a *eudaimon* life. Ackrill similarly argues that if we presuppose that there is a final and complete end which can account for every other end that are pursued with a view to this ultimate end which stands for *eudaimonia*; then one can neither claim that *eudaimonia* is seek for the sake of anything else, nor that *eudaimonia* plus any additional good is preferable to *eudaimonia* itself (Ackrill, 1980).

The principles of self-sufficiency and completeness seem to play a double role concerning whether one attributes these qualities to activities that are ends in themselves or to the notion of *eudaimonia* itself. Nagel's interpretation of *eudaimonia* is based on the former position. One possible objection to Nagel's attribution of these qualities merely to the contemplative activity might be to suggest pleasurable activities as candidates to be considered as complete and self-sufficient in themselves in the sense that pleasure can also account for the criterion of finality. The element of pleasure shares in the idea of self-sufficiency in terms of its being explanatory of its own ground which can be stated as the final reason of the activity in question. The series of questions that are posed to find out the final end, thus the

ultimate good of an activity, can be ceased satisfactorily with the question concerning the reason of choice of the activity that is merely pleasurable: choosing what is pleasurable per se is a final choice in the sense that one does not need any additional cause for following what is pleasurable beyond the intrinsic value of the pleasure itself. However, this objection would be deficient first in the sense that pleasurable activities cannot be considered as self-sufficient in terms of the element of mediation that is required for the activity at issue. In contrast with activities of pleasure, the activity of contemplation does not require an additional or mediatory element like an external object as means. Thus, pleasurable activities may share the criterion of finality with the activity of theoretical contemplation as a reason to act but the latter supersedes the former in terms of its being self-sufficient without requiring any additional element other than the already existing elements of the speculative form of reasoning of the rational part of the soul. Nagel would also be right to claim that considering the pleasurable activities with the activity of contemplation at the same level would be misleading to understand the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* primarily due to neglecting the function argument which has a decisive role within the determination of what is ultimately good for human beings. Hence, even if pleasurable activities share in the characteristic of finality that may render them rival against the activity of contemplation which also is final in its character, they fail to pass the test of function argument which presupposes that as long as there is a distinctive feature that can be explanatory for the definition of a species, it should be definitive over the excellence of the species in question. When we take the criterion of finality within the domain of the activity per se, then, contemplative activity seems to fit better to the definition of *eudaimonia* due to its uniqueness to human beings, the inclusive account of *eudaimonia* provides an

explanation within which one may also incorporate the principle of completeness into the definition. According to Nagel's intellectualist account, every action that can be considered as valuable in itself plays a subsidiary, subordinate role in such a way that the ultimate end of the activity in question is promoting the activity of contemplation other than its intrinsic end. Following this line of reasoning, one shall also hold that the activity of, for instance, playing flute is ultimately conditioned by the purpose of theoretical contemplation. However, it is very hard to trace a necessary causal relationship between playing an instrument and engaging in the activity of contemplation. These two activities seem to be completely independent activities with the exception of both activities being their own ends. Thus, using *eudaimonia* and the activity of theoretical contemplation interchangeably causes such discrepancies concerning the multiplicity of actions and engagements that are explicitly considered to be valuable in themselves throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>34</sup> When we accept the inclusive account, it is reasonable to claim that *eudaimonia* is final and complete in the sense that it will be counted as a final end for the explanation of each and every action. Given that according to this account, the completeness of *eudaimonia* is due to its being composed of several activities some being subordinate and some being ends in themselves, the totality of these activities would be constitutive elements of *eudaimonia* as the ultimate end which is directly in accordance with Aristotle's statement that "every good is more worth of choice along with another good when taken alone (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1172b27-29)." Nevertheless we should also note that the activity of contemplation is an indispensable part of a *eudaimon* life; firstly because of its being the most perfect, self-sufficient and final activity among other activities and secondly by reason of its

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<sup>34</sup> See *EN* X.6, 1176b21-1177a2. "To do noble and good deeds is a thing desirable in its own sake. Pleasant amusements are also thought to be of this nature; we choose them not for the sake of other things."

being peculiar to human beings. The peculiarity of the capacity of theoretical reasoning plays a crucial role for the function argument; but the intricacy of the relationship between the function argument and the concept of *eudaimonia* can be resolved with Aristotle's treatment of the activity of contemplation with a view to his comprehensive account of human nature.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle reconsiders the application of the function argument on the notion of *eudaimonia* which he had been elaborating from the very beginning of the treatise to be able to find out the best possible life suitable for human beings. In the 5<sup>th</sup> section we are reminded that "each animal is thought to have a proper pleasure, as it has a proper function" just after Aristotle's inference that due to the fact that human beings are incapable of continuous activity, pleasure cannot be present continuously in their activities; however, given that they all aim at life, all human beings seek pleasure to accompany their activities (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1176a4-5). The discussion culminates in the comparison between the activities that are held to be good and noble and the activity of contemplation as the activity that belongs to the best and the most divine element in human beings. Aristotle holds the latter in higher regard from the former, in terms of its complete and self-sufficient character stemming from its share in the divine, supporting his claim with the analogy that it would be absurd to ascribe the acts of justice, temperance or liberality to gods. Thus, for Aristotle the activity of theoretical contemplation is superior over other activities that are valuable and ends in themselves without hesitance. However, what is at stake is that whether this hierarchy of worth between the activities will imply that *eudaimonia* consists of the activity of contemplation per se, as it is defended by Nagel's intellectualist account. Aristotle's hierarchical order is compatible with his account of the parts of the soul

within which it is indicated that the rational capacity of the soul is higher than the non-rational capacities in terms of its being capable of ordering rule to the latter part. This parallelism however, merely suggests that there is a differentiation between the capacities human beings possess and that the rational capacity of the soul which has a share in the divine must be higher than the non-rational capacities that are also shared with non-human animals. Nevertheless, the capacity of theoretical contemplation is taken to be shared with the god, so that it also is not a unique feature of human beings as it is in the case of non-rational capacities which are common with non-human animals. Aristotle's concerns about the practicability of the life of contemplation as it is illustrated within Nagel's intellectualist account find expression in the way in which he meditates upon the human nature independently from the conceptual implications of the function argument considered with the hierarchy of the different parts of the soul. Given that human nature essentially has share in both what is divine and complete and what is limited and incomplete, human excellence can only be provided inclusively of the activities that belong to human nature qua human beings, not qua what is divine.<sup>35</sup> When we take into account the composite human nature together with Aristotle's claim that even if there exists a separable idea of the good that has an independent existence, it would not be attainable by human beings, and thus it would not belong to the theoretical domain of ethics within which what is sought for is something attainable by action (Aristotle, trans. 1991, 1096b27-1097a14). With a similar line of reasoning, Ackrill defends that the radical claim that every decision of practical wisdom is determined by the single objective of promoting contemplative activity would amount to undermine the

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<sup>35</sup> See *EN X.7*, 1178a8-1178b7. "But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of excellence."

intrinsic worth of moral actions. Man as “a sort of compound, an animal who lives and moves in time but has the ability occasionally to engage in an activity that somehow escapes time and touches the eternal” can only have a *eudaimon* life living in accordance with the principles of the practical reason, trying to maximize contemplative activity as a part of his life (Ackrill, 1980, p.31).

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Aristotle's ethical discourse is mainly motivated with the aim to provide a comprehensive perspective within which the multiplicity of the senses of the good are examined with a view to the question of the best possible life for human beings. His starting point for the inquiry concerning human good is fundamentally shaped by his insight of nature, given that he suggests to discover the function of human beings in order to find out what is good for them. According to the function argument, if one can achieve a lucid account of being's essential nature, the good of the being in question can be recognized within the definition itself. This is the very reason why Aristotle departs from the question "what is the nature of a human being?" in the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The fundamental aim of the present work is to elucidate the decisiveness of the essential nature over Aristotle's ethical doctrine and throw light on the transition from the factual to the normative.

In the first chapter, we analyzed Aristotle's different uses of the term nature in order to prevent misinterpretations that may arise from reducing the connotations of the term to its contemporary use; also to be able to understand how Aristotle structures the epistemological principles that are operative in providing the account of a thing. This analysis, concerning the way in which Aristotle gives the account of a thing through the four causes, revealed that the purpose of a thing can be explained with the final cause which points out to the ultimate purpose of the thing in question. The ultimate purpose of an entity is significant due to the fact that it has a decisive role upon determining what is good for that entity as it is suggested by the function argument. In the second level, we have derived that in order to determine the final

cause of a being, one must take into consideration the efficient, formal and the material cause as well. This being the case, the Aristotelian teleological understanding of nature requires a subtle inquiry into the complex nature of the substantial beings, which are both pre-determined and limited with their capacities and also move towards what is good for themselves with respect to these capacities. The explanation of these principles has helped us understand Aristotle's conception of nature and its relationship with the notion of the good. Following this, we have given an account of the function argument which Aristotle uses to explain the transition from human beings' nature to the exploration of the best possible life. Aristotle's approach to the ethical issues concerning the worth attributed to things and activities within the social and personal realm of human beings is considerably parallel to the way in which he treats the elements of nature; given this, the function argument enters the discussion as a central element of explanation. The function argument assumes that the capacities human beings have by nature, which can mainly be treated under the categories of the rational and the non-rational parts of the soul, are decisive for what is ultimately good for human beings. In order to grasp in what respect Aristotle considers the essential nature of human beings responsible for their good, we have explored Aristotle's conception of the parts of the soul focusing on the relevant parts of the *De Anima* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a view to the influence they have over the idea of the excellence or virtue of human beings. Aristotle's analysis of the rational and the non-rational parts of the soul, of their interaction with each other in their functionings and finally his way of discriminating the favorable and unfavorable moral dispositions enabled us to see that Aristotle's systematization of the main principles of his ethical doctrine is grounded on the political nature of human beings as well as the function argument. The function

argument by itself fails to meet the necessary conditions for the explanation of the nature of human beings in agreement with Aristotle's statements regarding the political nature of human beings. In the last chapter, where we discussed Nagel's intellectualist interpretation of *eudaimonia*, we saw the consequences of treating Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* solely within the scope of the function argument. Leaving the political nature of human beings out of his account, Nagel fails to see the way in which Aristotle attributes intrinsic value both to moral and pleasurable activities springing from human nature. As a final step, we have contrasted Nagel's analysis of *eudaimonia* which considers insignificant all the activities other than theoretical contemplation with Ackrill's inclusive account of *eudaimonia* and concluded that intellectual interpretation of *eudaimonia* excludes Aristotle's principle of completeness with regard to the *eudaimon* life and disregards Aristotle's ethical project's primary aim of finding out the best possible life to be practiced within the possibilities of its limited nature.

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