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Divine Activity and Human Life

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Abstract: The following article is a contribution to the rich debate concerning happiness or fulfilment (*eudaimonia*) in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. It argues that *eudaimonia* is *theōria* in accordance with what Aristotle repeatedly says in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, happy life (*eudaimōn bios*) is a complex way of life which includes not only theoretical activity but also the exercising of other virtues including the so-called moral or social ones. The article shows that Aristotle differentiates between *eudaimonia* on the one hand and the happy or fulfilled life (*eudaimōn bios*) on the other, and shows how this distinction clarifies Aristotle’s account of *eudaimonia*.

Keywords: Aristotle; *eudaimonia*; happiness; happy life; bios; activity; *theōria*.

1 Introduction

The following article is a contribution to the rich debate concerning happiness or fulfilment (*eudaimonia*) in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹ I will argue that *eudaimonia* is *theōria* in accordance with what Aristotle repeatedly says in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. On the other hand, happy life (*eudaimōn bios*) is a complex way of life which includes not only theoretical activity but also the exercising of other virtues including the so-called moral or social ones. To put my claim in the language traditionally used in the discussion of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle, my account of *eudaimonia* is strictly exclusivist: *theōria* and only *theōria* counts as *eudaimonia*.² However, my account of happy human life

1 In the following text I leave the terms εὐδαιμονία and θεωρία untranslated, since any translation might cause unwarranted assumptions about the meaning of the terms.

2 For the usage of terms “inclusive” and “exclusive” interpretation see Keyt (1983), pp. 365–66. The current discussion uses analogous labels of “inclusive end” and “dominant end”, see e. g. Dahl (2011), p. 68. The interpretation which is labelled “exclusive” considers *eudaimonia* to be *theōria*, and accordingly claims that the happy life is a *bios theōrētikos*. In that sense the *theōria*

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includes practical virtues and other components associated with our social life. It is clear by now that I want to reject the idea that according to Aristotle, happiness is a happy life.³ This definition might perhaps amuse Socrates,⁴ but it lacks textual support and it generates unnecessary troubles in interpreting Aristotle's moral philosophy.

Aristotle – though having plenty of space and opportunities in his ethical treatises – never says that *eudaimonia* is life (*bios*) or some kind of life (*bios tis*). We find him saying that *eudaimonia* is a kind of living (*zōē*, *Metaph.* Θ.8 1050^a34–b²) and suggesting something similar in the *Eudemian Ethics* as well (II.1 1219^a35–39). The terms *bios* and *zōē* come close in the meaning, but I will show that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle uses these terms with different meanings (cf. section (4) Life and living). I will argue that besides the common meaning of “lifespan”, the term *bios* is used in a specific meaning of the way we live our lives. Throughout the paper, I will use translations “living” for *zōē* and “life” or “way of life” for *bios*. The terms *eudaimonia* and *bios* are used very often in proximity,⁵ however, the text never explicitly equates the two. Therefore, I will rather focus on what Aristotle repeatedly says, namely that *eudaimonia* is *energeia*.⁶

My second assumption is that Aristotle must be taken seriously when he says that *eudaimonia* is *theōria* (1177^a17–18, 1178^b32). I will argue that this conclusion is not surprising, and I will try to show that Aristotle paves the way for it from the first book through the middle books, till the explicit version in the last book of the treatise.

should the “dominant end” of our life. All other goods are excluded from Aristotle's final account of *eudaimonia* and happy life. Cf. Cooper (1975), chapters 1 and 3 for the clear exposition of this view. On the other hand, the so-called inclusive interpretation claims that *eudaimonia* and correspondingly the happy life combine both theoretical and practical aspects. The best human life would be a combination of theoretical and political life.

3 The widespread but mistaken claim that happiness is a certain kind of life is to be found for example in Ackrill (1997), pp. 182, 184; Heinaman (1988), p. 32; Lawrence (1993), p. 18; Farwell (1995) p. 259; Sherman (2002), pp. 467–8; Dahl (2011). On the other hand see Kraut (1989), p. 297: “we must not run together (a) the question of what a happy life or person must have and (b) the question of what the happiness is.”

4 Cf. Plato, *Hip. maj.* 287E where Hippias answers upon the question “What is the fine?” that “A fine girl is a fine thing”. A similar point is made by Crisp (1994), p. 114.

5 See esp. Arist, *NE* I.5, further e. g. 1097^b14–16, 1100^b8–10, 1153^b14–15, 1176^b27–30, 1177^b24–26 and 1177a9–10 discussed later.

6 Aristotle claims that *eudaimonia* is activity (*energeia*) at: 1100^a14, 1100^b10, 1102^a5, 1102^a17, 1144^a6, 1153^b11, 1169^b29, 1169^b31, 1177^a12, 1177^a17, 1178^b7. One could further say that being happy then lies in living and being active (ἐν τῷ ζῆν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν, 1169^b31).

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle remarks:

... in all the other cases where there is no other product in addition to the actuality (*energeia*), the actuality is in them, for example, seeing in the one seeing and contemplation in the one contemplating and living in the soul, which is why *eudaimonia* is also; for it is a kind of living (ζωὴ γὰρ ποιά τις ἐστίν). (*Met.* Θ.8 1050^a34–^b2; transl. S. Makin)

This passage says that *eudaimonia* is a kind of *zōē* and my interpretation will try to provide a clue as to why Aristotle might have made this suggestion. I will argue that *eudaimonia* is a certain activity (*energeia*) and this activity is *theōria*; in this respect it is one of the activities of living (*zōē*). This activity is basically the same for the gods as well as for humans. The difference comes in terms of the way of life (*bios*). Generally speaking, while *eudaimonia* is the same for gods and humans, a good human life is proprietary to and typical for human beings and for no one or nothing else.⁷

2 Human *ergon*, *sophia* and *phronēsis*

The core of the exclusivist – inclusivist debate is about the relation between *theōria* and the moral or social virtues discussed in the middle books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This problem can be traced back to the so-called *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.⁸ At 1098^a7–8 Aristotle says that human *ergon* is the activity of the soul in accordance with reason or following reason. Aristotle first shows how this *ergon* can be done so well so that the one who does well his *ergon* will be good in this respect (as a good guitar player is the one who plays well), and he then concludes that the human *ergon* is a certain living (*zōē*), namely activities and actions of soul informed by reason (1098^a13–14). The structure of the sentence suggests that the activities and actions of the soul *are* the living which constitutes human *ergon*.⁹ Doing this *ergon* well then suffices for the good of human being (*to*

⁷ See Curzer (1991), p. 51 for a similar point which, however, is developed differently than my interpretation.

⁸ From the extensive literature on this argument, the following are most relevant to my following argument: Clark (1972); Wilkes (1980); Korsgaard (1986); Whiting (1988); Brüllmann (2011); chapter 3; Brüllmann (2012); Kraut (1989), chapter 6.1–3; Reeve (1992), pp. 123–128; and Reeve (2014a). For the list of problems related to the *ergon* argument see Achtenberg (1989), p. 37.

⁹ In all these cases “living” stands for activities within our lives. The same characterization of *zōē* as activities of living appears at two places within *De anima* II.1–2 (412^a14–15, 413^a22–25).

anthrōpinon agathon, 1098^a16), which is the subject of Aristotle's present study (cf. *NE* I.13 1102^a13–15).

One of the problems is the relation of the *ergon* argument to the ethical intellectualism in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7–8, namely, to the thesis that *eudaimonia* is *theōria* (1178^b32). First, during the *ergon* argument itself, Aristotle uses a condition according to which the *ergon* in question must *properly belong* to the subject whose *ergon* is discussed (1097^b34). Therefore, the human *ergon* cannot be a plain living, since the activity of living is shared with all living beings and even the living based on perception does not qualify as human *ergon* because it is shared with all other animals. Apparently *theōria* does not satisfy this condition either: it belongs in the first place to the gods, and humans only somehow derivatively share in it (1178^b21–22, 25–27).¹⁰ Secondly, the *ergon* argument combined with the intellectualism in *NE* X leads to the highly incredible thesis of “strict intellectualism”, which allows for immoral acts for the sake of *theōria*.¹¹ However, at the same time the *ergon* argument seems to open the discussion of practical virtues in the central books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. On this interpretation, the activities in accord with the practical or political virtues would not be constitutive parts of *eudaimonia*, but only means to *theōria*.¹²

The first step towards the solutions of some of the problems stated above comes already in Book VI, where Aristotle discusses the relation between the theoretical and practical virtues. To give an account of theoretical or intellectual virtues, Aristotle comes back to the division of the rational part of the soul into two (*EN* VI.1 1139^a3–17). The rational part of soul is divided into two sub-parts, according to their respective objects. The one concerned with objects that have the unchanging *archai* is *epistēmōnikon*, the other that is about the objects with variable *archai* is labelled *logistikōn* (1139^a12). Aristotle will then proceed in the following way:

We must, then, learn what is the best state of each of these two parts; for this is the virtue of each. The virtue of a thing is relative to its proper work (*ergon*). (1139^a15–17, transl. Ross & Brown)¹³

¹⁰ Broadie (1991), p. 36; Whiting (1988), pp. 36–38; Williams (1972), p. 59.

¹¹ For the concept of “strict intellectualism” see Keyt (1983), p. 368. For the worry of unethical deeds done for the sake of *theōria* see e. g. Meyer (2011), p. 61; I will show why there is no such a worry while interpreting the phrase *teleia eudaimonia* from 1177^b24–25, cf. 3.1 *Theōria* as *eudaimonia*.

¹² For this interpretation see Grant (1885); Cooper (1975); Kenny (1978).

¹³ Unless specified otherwise, for the *Nicomachean Ethics* I use the translation by David Ross, revised by Lesley Brown from Oxford World's Classics, 2009.

Already during the *ergon* argument at *NE* I.7, Aristotle mentions that each *ergon* is accomplished well when “it is done in accordance with the own virtue” (1098^a15).¹⁴ The virtue makes a given entity good or even best in its *ergon*. Moreover, in the cases of *erga*, which are not different from the activity itself, one could say that virtue of the given entity manifests itself at work within this activity.¹⁵

A second passage echoing the *ergon* argument comes later in Book VI, where Aristotle discusses the relation between practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and theoretical wisdom (*sophia*). He asserts that practical wisdom is inferior to theoretical wisdom (1144^b34). The reason of its inferiority remains unclear¹⁶ till the end of Book VI. Practical wisdom is not predominant “over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being; it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it” (1145^a6–9). This explanation of the priority of theoretical knowledge over practical wisdom helps us to understand the complex relation between *ergon*, virtue, and *eudaimonia*.

One could say that both practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom, as virtues of the two rational parts of the soul, are choice worthy because of themselves, and as such they do not make anything else. However, according to Aristotle, that would be wrong:

... they do produce something, not as the art of medicine produces health, however, but as health produces health; so does philosophic wisdom produce *eudaimonia*; for, being a part of virtue entire, by being possessed and by actualizing itself it makes a man happy. Again, the work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with practical virtue; for virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom makes what leads to it correct. (1144^a3–9)

¹⁴ Both passages entail the same point made about *ergon* and *aretē* in Plato’s *Republic* I 353B–C.

¹⁵ Cf. *EE* II.1 1219^a13–18, according to Aristotle, there are two types of *erga*, (a) the external ones such as the *ergon* of architecture, which is a house external to the activity of building, and (b) the activity itself, such as the *ergon* of sight which is the very activity of seeing.

¹⁶ The entire sentence is quite complicated, *NE* VI.12 1143^b33–35: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄτοπον ἂν εἶναι δόξειεν, εἰ χείρων τῆς σοφίας οὕσα κυριώτερα αὐτῆς ἔσται· ἢ γὰρ ποιούσα ἄρχει καὶ ἐπιτάττει περὶ ἕκαστον. I believe the translation by David Ross and Lesley Brown is closest to the meaning of the sentence: “Besides this, it would be thought strange if practical wisdom, being inferior to philosophic wisdom, is to be put in authority over it, as seems to be implied by the fact that the art which produces anything rules and issues commands about that thing.” This corresponds to the lines 1145^a6–9, which I will discuss later in this section.

The two virtues are productive in a certain sense of the term.¹⁷ They are not efficient causes as medicine is for health. Health or being healthy produces health as its formal cause. Theoretical knowledge brings about *eudaimonia* and practical wisdom in the same way that secures the achievement (*apoteleitai*) of the *ergon* of man. Theoretical wisdom is a formal cause of *eudaimonia* which is achieved by actualization (*energeia*) of this wisdom. The formal cause of human *ergon* has two components, practical wisdom and practical virtues. The human *ergon* then consists in their actualization as living in accordance with virtues.

The two analogies involving medicine and health must not be confused since they illustrate two different points. First, the recent example at 1144^a3–9 serves to illuminate the relation between theoretical wisdom and *eudaimonia*. Secondly, the example at 1145^a6–9 uses the same analogy in order to illustrate the relation of practical and theoretical wisdom. The art of medicine is an efficient cause of health since it works towards health. The medical prescriptions are for the sake of health, but they do not govern the health itself. In the same way, practical wisdom works towards the theoretical wisdom and it prescribes for the sake of theoretical wisdom, but it does not prescribe to it.

However, now it seems that *eudaimonia* cannot be so easily clarified by the *ergon* argument, since *eudaimonia* and human *ergon* have two different formal causes (theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom) which stand to each other in a hierarchical relation. So far it seems that doing the human *ergon* well stands for human good (and possibly a good human life), which leads towards *eudaimonia*, “produced” or “secured” by theoretical wisdom in the sense discussed above.¹⁸ I will explain the nature of this relation by an interpretation of the relevant chapters of Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the subsequent sections.

¹⁷ In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle offers us a classification of three types of production: “Things are productive of other things in three senses: first as being healthy produces health; secondly, as food produces health; and thirdly, as exercise does – i. e. it does so usually” (*Rhetoric* I.6 1362^a31–34, transl. Rhys Roberts)

¹⁸ See Richardson Lear (2004), pp. 115–122 for further support of this conclusion. My line of argumentation suggests that Aristotle anticipates the conclusion from *NE* X.7–8 in VI.12–13 as well as in IX.8 (cf. 1168^b34–1169^a3 quoted in 3.1). For an opposite view cf. Cooper (1987), pp. 189–190, 200.

3 *Theōria*

3.1 *Theōria* as *eudaimonia*

The text of *NE* X.7–8 leaves no possible doubts about the concept of *eudaimonia* in these chapters. It is an activity (*energeia*), and specifically it is *theōria*. This conclusion is clearly stated three times in the text and it does not allow for much of alternative readings.

If *eudaimonia* is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. ... the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect *eudaimonia*. That this activity is contemplative we have already said (*hoti esti theōrētikē, eirētai*). (1177^a12–18, translation amended by JJ)¹⁹

... but the activity of reason, which is contemplative ... it follows that this will be the perfect *eudaimonia* of man. (1177^b19–25, translation amended by JJ)

Eudaimonia extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of *theōria*; for this is in itself precious. *Eudaimonia*, therefore, must be some form of *theōria*. (1178^b28–32)

There are three arguments supporting the conclusion that perfect *eudaimonia* is *theōria*.²⁰ First, Aristotle picks up on the idea that *eudaimonia* is an activity in accordance with virtue (1177^a13; cf. 1098^a16–18). It could be deduced with the help of *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13 1144^a3–9 (quoted above) that the virtue, whose activity is in question, is the theoretical wisdom (*sophia*).²¹ This is confirmed a bit later at 1177^a24 where Aristotle claims that the activity of the philosophical wisdom is the most pleasant of all virtuous activities. However, Aristotle uses a different line of argument. Since the readers of the *Nicomachean Ethics* saw that there are

¹⁹ I change the translation so that τέλειος is translated as “perfect” in all its occurrences, though it of course combines meaning of ‘final’, ‘perfect’ and ‘complete’. I will come back to this later in 3.1. A relevant analysis of the term *teleion* is in White (1990), p. 106–115.

²⁰ Here I argue against Kraut (1989), p. 45 ff, who claims that *eudaimonia* can be identified with two distinct activities. By the same token, I disagree with Cooper (1987), p. 202, that *eudaimonia* involves “all of a human being’s natural works being done in accordance with the virtue or all the virtues appropriate to each.” However, see sections 4.2 and 5 for an interpretation, in which, despite the singularity, the concept of *eudaimonia* allows for a complex best life.

²¹ Suggested already by Burnet (1900), p. 461.

many virtues, the virtue in question must be the highest one and thus it will be the virtue of the best part of ourselves (1177^a13–14).²² Aristotle further wonders whether this part of ourselves is reason (*nous*) or something exhibiting characteristics of reason, and whether this part is divine itself or only the most divine part of ourselves. Despite Aristotle's current hesitation which signals the upcoming tension between the divine and the human, it already has been said in the discussion on self-love that we are our reason (*NE IX.8 1168^b34–1169^a3*).²³ Therefore, the activity constituting *eudaimonia* will be the activity of reason which is *theōria*.

The second argument relies on the agreement between criteria of *eudaimonia* in the *NE I.7* and the characteristics of *theōria* presented in *NE X.7*.²⁴ In *NE I.7* Aristotle characterizes *eudaimonia* as (i) a final goal, (ii) which is always desired in itself and never for anything else, and finally (iii) it is self-sufficient. Within a longer passage that describes *theōria* (1177^a18–1177^b26), we read not only that the wise person is the most self-sufficient one (1177^b1), but also that “the already mentioned self-sufficiency” belongs to *theōria* (1177^a27–28). Moreover, *theōria* is the only activity “loved for its own sake alone” (1177^b1–2).²⁵ Over and above these characteristics, which correspond to the criteria of *eudaimonia* in *NE I.7*, Book X adds that *theōria* is the best activity, the most continuous, the pleasantest of virtuous activities, and a leisurely one as well.

The third argument at 1178^b7–23 starts with the *eudaimonia* of gods, which are considered supremely blessed and happy. Since *eudaimonia* is activity (*energeia*), what kind of activities or actions can be ascribed to gods? According to Aristotle, gods do not do any action (*praxis*), and therefore they do not possess any action related virtue (i. e. practical virtue):

If we were to run through them all, the circumstances of action (*ta peri tas praxeis*) would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, everyone supposes that they live (*zēn*) and therefore that they are active (*energein*). (1178^b17–19)

²² See esp. *NE I.7 1098^a16–18*: “Human good turns out to be activity of the soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.”

²³ Cf. *NE IX.4 1166^a19–29* as well.

²⁴ Curzer (1990) argues that the criteria of happiness in *NE I.7* differ from those in *NE X.7–8*. I hope this paper shows that he has overestimated the differences. Otherwise, concerning the relation between book one and ten I agree for example with Kraut (1989), pp. 17, 239–240 or Pakaluk (2002) and Pakaluk (2011).

²⁵ The term ἀγαπάω is used with the same function as αἰδέω (resp. αἰπετός) cf. 1096^a9 and 1096^b11.

Now if gods are without any action, what kind of activity is left? According to Aristotle, it must be only the highest theoretical activity: *theōria*.²⁶ Therefore, if that the gods are happy and *eudaimonia* (happiness) is the activity and that the only possible activity of gods is *theōria*, it follows that *eudaimonia* must be *theōria*.²⁷

One possible objection would be that *theōria* is one of many activities and desirable things, whereas *eudaimonia* is said to be “not counted as one good thing among others” (1097^b16–17). Yet again, I will bring up the difference between the question what *eudaimonia* is and what constitutes the best life. I argue that *theōria* is the most important and essential component of the best life, in the sense that it shapes and forms this life (cf. 4.2 and 5). However, the answer to the first question is that *eudaimonia* is *theōria* to which nothing else must or can be added. *Eudaimonia* is neither complex nor one good thing among many; it is the best one.²⁸

The second objection to my interpretation might be that Aristotle at *NE* X.7–8 talks about *teleia eudaimonia*, which must be distinguished from the *eudaimonia* generally discussed in Book I²⁹ and, moreover, this perfect *eudaimonia* demands a certain lifespan. Here is the most troublesome passage:

the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the perfect happiness of man, if it be allowed a perfect term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is imperfect). (*NE* X.7 1177^b19–26 translation amended by JJ)

²⁶ All other cognitive capacities involve a bodily element and change which seems to be a disqualifying condition here, cf. *DA* III.5 430^a17–18 and *Phys.* VII.3 247^b1–6.

²⁷ This passage actually explains a puzzling remark made earlier in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “This is why god always enjoys single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found more in rest than in movement.” (*NE* VII.14 1154^b26–28) This statement seems *prima facie* to contradict that *eudaimonia* is an activity (*energeia*). But Aristotle does not deny that the supremely happy god is active; he merely denies that the god is in motion (*kinēsis*). Burnyeat (2008) argues that the distinction between *energeia* and *kinēsis* as known from *Metaphysics* Θ.6 1048^b18–35 actually originates from one of the ethical treatises; cf. Skemp (1979), p. 240.

²⁸ Here I disagree with Ackrill (1997), p. 186, in reading the lines 1097^b16–17 and their context. Ackrill concludes that “*eudaimonia*, being absolutely final and genuinely self-sufficient, is more desirable than anything else, in that it *includes* everything desirable in itself.” However, *eudaimonia* being *energeia* can hardly “include everything desirable”. Secondly, the fact that the best life includes many good components does not mean that *eudaimonia* includes many good things. Here is the weakness resulting from Ackrill’s assumption that *eudaimonia* is a kind of life.

²⁹ Cf. for example Cooper (1987), p. 206.

There are two related problems here in the *NE*. First, what does the phrase *teleia eudaimonia* mean and does it differ from *eudaimonia* without qualification? And secondly, doesn't the demand that the perfect *eudaimonia* be given a perfect length of time threaten my distinction between the *eudaimonia* as *energeia* on the one hand and *eudaimōn bios* on the other?

Since *eudaimonia* is *energeia*, I believe it is appropriate to see in what sense an *energeia* can be *teleia*, if one wants to know what *hē teleia eudaimonia* at 1177^b24 means.³⁰ The phrase *teleia energeia* occurs twice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and does not seem to occur in the rest of Aristotle's works.³¹ Aristotle says at 1153^b16 that no activity is perfect when it is impeded. However, further on in X.4 – i. e. in the chapter revising the account of pleasure immediately before the chapters on *eudaimonia* as *theōria* – we find Aristotle's own account of what counts as *teleia energeia*:

Since every sense is active in relation to its object, and a sense which is in good condition acts perfectly in relation to the most beautiful of its objects, for perfect activity seems to be ideally of this nature (τοιούτου γὰρ μάλιστ' εἶναι δοκεῖ ἡ τελεία ἐνέργεια); whether we say that it is active, or the organ in which it resides, may be assumed to be irrelevant, it follows that in the case of each sense the best activity is that of the best-conditioned organ in relation to the finest of its objects. And this activity will be the most complete and pleasant. (*NE* X.4 1174^b14–20)

This seems to be the general account of *teleia energeia*, since after stating what seems to be the nature of perfect activity, Aristotle goes on to say that pleasure does not perfect the activity in the sense introduced above (1174^b24 ff). Therefore, the two aspects of perfect activity, namely the good condition of the subject and the finest objects of the activity, seem to capture Aristotle's opinion on what counts as a *teleia energeia*.

If it is the case, what is the meaning of *teleia eudaimonia*? First, the subject of the activity must be in a good condition or well arranged (*eu diakeimenēs* says the text above). What or who is the subject of *eudaimonia*? According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is the soul since *eudaimonia* is called “activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue” (*NE* I.13 1102^a5–6).³² Therefore, the soul must be in a

³⁰ The ancient commentators used the phrase *teleia energeia* in contrast to *energeia atelēs* which stands for *kinēsis*; cf. Burnyeat (2008), p. 237 n. 45.

³¹ A possible further occurrence is in the *Protrepticus* fr. 87 (= Iambl. *Protrep.* 58.15, Pistelli) which yet again shares the ethical context.

³² Notice that the *Eudemian Ethics* II.1 1219^a35–39 entails the same account, except that it has *zōē* instead of *psychē*: the *eudaimonia* is the activity of perfect living in accordance with perfect virtue (ἡ εὐδαιμονία ζωῆς τελείας ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετὴν τελείαν).

good condition.³³ I believe that the good condition of the soul means that it is virtuous (cf. *NE* I.7, I.13 1102^a13–18, 1103^a3 ff). The good virtuous soul will be virtuous in all its parts as described in *NE* I.13,³⁴ including, of course, reason as its highest part. Therefore, I take it that *teleia eudaimonia* requires the soul to be in good condition so as to allow for its best possible activity, i. e. *theōria*. The perfect *eudaimonia* is *theōria* as it is claimed at 1177^b24, but as far as I understand the text, it presupposes or assumes some kind of perfection of the entire soul.

Secondly, the perfect *eudaimonia* must be directed towards the best possible objects (*pros to kalliston* or *pros to kratiston*); therefore, the objects of *theōria* must be the most noble one and the best possible one. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7 1177^a19–21, the objects of reason are the best possible objects of any cognition. I believe that the objects of reason stand here for the best objects of *theōria*. Nevertheless, as it will be clear from the following section, Aristotle does not restrict *theōria* for unchanging, eternal objects, principles or abstractions, it functions over a much broader domain (cf. (3.2) Human *theōria* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*). However, the perfect *theōria* will *theorein* the objects which are most suitable and in this sense perfect for it.

Now I will move to the second trouble in passage *NE* X.7 1177^b19–26 quoted above. Aristotle says that the perfect *eudaimonia* is *theōria* given the perfect or whole term of life (*mēkos biou teleion*). The condition concerning the length of time comes from the *ergon* argument discussed above.³⁵ Furthermore, it is important to observe the context of the claim, especially the following explanatory clause: “since nothing attributed to happiness is imperfect or incomplete.” The passage lists certain attributes or qualities of *teleia eudaimonia*, which includes a certain term of life. Firstly, of course, it means a certain length of time, since we need to be adults. Secondly, we need time for learning and other activities, including time for gaining moral virtues and related social activities, since we saw that the *teleia eudaimonia* presupposes a virtuous soul.

However, the length of life is not everything, the temporal aspect is not the most important one as it will be clear from a discussion of the second happy life. In the temporal sense all lives are complete at their death. This cannot be what Aristotle has in mind, and thus *teleios* cannot mean here complete or final purely in a temporal sense. In a small remark in *Physics* II.2, Aristotle says that it is silly

³³ Cf. Aristotle's claim in the *Eudemian Ethics* II.1 1219^a35 that happiness is the activity of a good soul (ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐνέργεια).

³⁴ The lowest part of the soul presents a problem of how to call a good or bad state it could be in, but I believe one could possibly talk about its health or strengths.

³⁵ Similarly recently Reeve (2014b), p. 346, note 842 or already Stewart (1892), p. 448.

to talk about the *telos* of a human being in temporal terms (i. e. as an end of one's life, *to eschaton*), since the true *telos* of a human life is the best (*to beltiston*, *Phys.* II.2 194^a31–33).³⁶ Even the famous saying that “one swallow does not make a summer” (*NE* I.7 1098^a18–19) fits with “perfect life” as well as “(temporally) complete life”, for nothing excludes the possibility of long, complete life with one or two “swallows” in it, i. e. with rare and isolated occurrences of *theōria*. However, the perfect life suggests a predominant and leading role of *eudaimonia* – i. e. not only many “swallows”, but as I will explain in my interpretation of *bios theōrētikos*, a life organized for the sake of “swallows”. The term *teleios* here has not only a temporal meaning but also one that covers the quality or form of a given life.

Finally, there might be a third possible objection to the thesis that *eudaimonia* is *theōria*, and its discussion will clarify my previous claim. This objection concerns Aristotle's description of the second best life introduced at *NE* X.8 1178^a9–22. I will discuss the passage in detail later ((4.2) *Bios* as the way of life), here I would like to focus on crucial lines 1178^a19–22:

Being connected with the passions also, the moral virtues must belong to our composite nature; and the virtues of our composite nature are human; so, therefore, are the life and the happiness which correspond to these (καὶ ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία).

What *eudaimonia* could be related to the virtues of our composite nature if *eudaimonia* is *theōria*? And if this is the only human *eudaimonia* in the sense of the *eudaimonia* for human beings (cf. *anthrōpikos* at lines 1178^a10, 14 and 21), then the *teleia eudaimonia* interpreted above would be a divine (perhaps unachievable) goal; therefore, true human good would lie in the activity of moral virtues and thus within the political life.

First, nothing in the text suggests that the perfect *eudaimonia* mentioned earlier should be abandoned in our lives, Aristotle explicitly urges against such a “merely human” perspective (1177b31 ff). Secondly, what can be said about *eudaimonia* in the second best life, *eudaimonia* as related to the social and political activities? Clearly it is neither *teleia eudaimonia* nor perfect *eudaimonia*. The difference is analogous to the one Myles Burnyeat sketches between *hē haplōs energeia* and *energeia atelēs*: not the difference between two different kinds, but the difference between X “in the full sense of the term and one from which you

³⁶ Cf. *Eudemian Ethics* II.1 1219^a10–11: τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὗ ἕνεκα τὰλλα πάντα. Thus according to the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *telos* is the best in the sense of the final thing for the sake of which everything else is done.

cannot expect everything you would normally expect” from X.³⁷ What is missing from the *eudaimonia* of the political life? I believe it misses its formative function – the life of the politician does not have *theōria* as its goal which would give it a form.³⁸

Even the politician, the one who lives the second best life, can *theōrein* sometimes in his life. This *theōria* is *eudaimonia*, however it does not mean that this politician could be properly called happy or happy in the highest sense of the term. There occur instances of happiness in his life; however, his life can be happy only to the second possible degree – as it is not shaped by *theōria* as its goal. This is emphasised in the *Nicomachean* as well as the *Eudemian Ethics*, that the best life or happy life is *kat' aretēn teleian*, i. e. that in accordance with not any but the perfect virtue (*EE* II.1 1219^a37–38; *EN* I.13 1102^a5–6).

Therefore, neither the phrase *teleia eudaimonia* nor Aristotle's attribution of some *eudaimonia* to the second best life threatens my interpretation that *eudaimonia* as *theōria* is different from happy life.

3.2 Human *theōria* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

One possible question might be what Aristotle means by *theōria* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Is it an activity strictly limited to the unchanging, most valuable objects or structures of the Aristotelian universe? If so, how could it appear within the second, political kind of life? Therefore, in this section I examine the meaning of *theōrein* and *theōria* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³⁹ The traditional view is that

³⁷ Burnyeat (2008), p. 264. Here I compare *teleia eudaimonia* to *eudaimonia* (possibly labelled *eudaimonia anthrōpikē*) analogously to *hē haplōs energeia* and *energeia atelēs* in Burnyeat's article; for the terminological difference, someone could object that *eudaimonia anthrōpikē* seems to be the standard case and *teleia eudaimonia* would be some superb state or even higher than standard case. Yet again, Aristotle's insistence that the *teleia eudaimonia* applies to human beings (1177^b31 ff) suggests against this understanding. Moreover, it would create a strange pattern within Aristotle's metaphysics, since it would postulate a third level of *energeia* (there would be *energeia atelēs*, i. e. *kinēsis*, then *energeia* as such and newly above it a mysterious *energeia teleia*), which is not attested to in Aristotle. The ancient commentators use *energeia teleia* to describe simply *energeia* proper in contrast to *energeia atelēs*; cf. n. 30 above.

³⁸ The goal structures the life as its final cause; the life is lived for the sake of pleasure, honour (and practical virtues), or *theōria*; at the same time there is a practical counterpart to it, cf. Meyer (2011) p. 52: “A genuine end ... must structure or regulate the pursuit of subordinate goals”.

³⁹ Here I am indebted to Roochnik (2009), with whom I mostly agree; in the following I hope to supplement Roochnik's analysis with several new points. My interpretation opposes Kraut (1989), pp. 15–16 n. 2, where he claims that Aristotle uses *theōria* in two different senses. I will

theōria concerns only the highest and most noble eternal objects of thought.⁴⁰ This view is supported by *NE* X.7 1177^a19–21, according to which not only is reason the best in us, but also the objects of reason are the best possible objects of any cognition. Aristotle uses here his common method when he correlates the characteristics of the object of cognition to the characteristics of the proper cognitive activity (cf. *NE* VI.7 1141^b1–3). However, I argue that this is not the entire concept of *theōria*. In my view – and as far as I can see in Aristotle’s view as well – *theōria* is not an exclusive cognitive activity related only to eternal, unchanging and highest possible objects. It surely is the *proper* cognitive capacity for these objects, i. e. it is the best (and perhaps the only) activity that can engage with these objects. but it is not restricted to these objects.⁴¹

First of all, the *Nicomachean Ethics* shares the general meaning of *theōria* with *De anima* II.1, which draws a difference between the possession of knowledge (*epistēmē*) and the exercising knowledge (*theōria*). At *NE* VII.3 1146^b31–35 (probably at 1175^a1 as well), Aristotle distinguishes two senses of knowing: (a) someone is a knower because he has knowledge but he is not using it or (b) he is knower since he uses it. The second, active exercise of knowledge is *theōrein*.

The verb *theōrein* is used throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* simply as “investigating”, thus we can *theōrein* the nature of a virtue (1106^a25), reasonableness (1140^a24–25), incontinence (1149^a25), pleasure and pain (1152^b1), laws, constitutions, and generally political matters (1181^b8, ^b20 ff). The magnificent man is said to contemplate what is fitting and he spends large sums accordingly (1122^a34–35). This usage seems to disturb the traditional view concerning *theōria*. At least two passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* state that *theōria* is possible not only about the noble and eternal but also about changing and perishable entities:

And let it be assumed that there are two parts which grasp a rational principle – one by which we contemplate (*theōrein*) the kind of things whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things. (1139^a6–8)

We all suppose that what we know is not even capable of being otherwise; of things capable of being otherwise we do not know, when they have passed outside our *theōria*, whether they exist or not. (1139^b19–22, translation amended by JJ)

argue that *theōria* covers a wide range of objects (despite that some might be more proper for it). Further, the fact that according to Aristotle theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) does not engage in *theōrein* what makes human being happy (1143^b18–20) does not contradict the claim that *theōria* is *eudaimonia*. A similar but brief account is given in Dudley (1982), p. 408.

⁴⁰ Examples of this view are to be found in Nussbaum (1986), p. 375; Kraut (1989), p. 16 and 73; Nightingale (2004), p. 238; Rorty, (1980), p. 379; Charles (1999), pp. 216–217.

⁴¹ This position is defended Whiting (1986), p. 83 as well.

The activity of *theōria* is said to be characteristic of a *phronimos*, the practically wise person (1141^a25–26, cf. 1140^a24–25).⁴² When Aristotle gives an example of someone who is considered practically wise, he chooses Pericles. The reason is that Pericles was capable of *theōrein* both what was good for him and for other people (1140^b7–11). It is because of *theōria* of these goods that people became good in managing the household as well as the state.⁴³ This explains how there could be some *theōria* and thus *eudaimonia* in the second best life (cf. interpretation of 1178^a19–22 above).

Similarly, the noun *theōria* does not seem to be reserved for the investigation of the highest and most noble objects. In one of its few occurrences outside *NE* X.7–8, it is used for the investigation of incontinence (1146^b14), and it concerns ethical matters (1103^b26) despite the fact that it is not the goal of an ethical study (we should aim at doing good, not merely knowing good).⁴⁴ *Theōria* is used as a counterpart of action (*praxis*) when Aristotle wants to express the complexity of a happy person's life: he directs both his actions and *theōria* according to virtues – presumably the former according to practical virtues and the latter according to *sophia* (*NE* I.10 1100^b18–22).

Finally, *theōria* is the key concept used in Aristotle's argument concerning the happy man's need of friends (*NE* IX.9, interpreted below at 4.1). As Aristotle explains, a happy man needs friends, "since his purpose is to *theōrein* worthy actions and actions that are his own, and the actions of a good man who is his friend have both these qualities" (1170^a2–4). The activity of *theōria* relates here to actions, not to any unchanging eternal objects.⁴⁵

However, if I am right and Aristotle uses the term *theōria* in the same meaning in Book VI as well as in Book X,⁴⁶ then it might be objected that this blurs the dif-

⁴² This point is made already by Monan (1968), p. 74.

⁴³ Heinaman (1988), p. 35, argues that Aristotle considers Pericles happy but never mentions him exercising theoretical wisdom. However, Heinaman overlooks that according to Aristotle Pericles *theōrein* what is good and *theōria* is the activity of the highest soul part. It is possible that Pericles was generally considered to be *phronimos* and the example just reflects a common opinion, however, there is no textual source for this characterization earlier or contemporary to Aristotle.

⁴⁴ In the *Eudemian Ethics* I.8 1217^b36 ff. *theōria* is a learned examining in any possible field of knowledge (similarly *EE* II.3 1220^b37 and I.5 1216^a38).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Met.* E.1 1025^b25–28 according to which *theōrētikē epistēmē* can be about what can change and alter.

⁴⁶ Nothing in the text seems to suggest such a change; moreover, at X.7 1177^a19–21 Aristotle talks about the best, most fitting objects for *theōria* and the context suggests that there are other less perfect objects of this activity as well. Further, at X.8 1178^a19–22 Aristotle talks about *eudaimonia* related to moral virtues and social life; since according to Book X *eudaimonia* is *theōria*, there is some *theōria* concerned with changing and perishable entities in Book X as well.

ference between the first, best life and the second best life of social and moral virtues.

At the end of the previous section (3.1), I have shown the differences between *eudaimonia* as *theōria* found in the best life and in the second best one: in the second best one it is not perfect, *teleia eudaimonia*, and moreover it does not function as a goal shaping the form of a given life. It is important that the second best life is a social or political life directed by virtue and the related honour as its goal. This second best life is not “organized” for the sake of *theōria* which merely occurs in course of this life. One further feature must be mentioned, the best life as well as *theōria* in this best life is said to be self-sufficient (1177^a27–28). As we have seen, the second best life is not self-sufficient. *Theōria* in this second best life is not its goal and therefore it is not self-sufficient in this sense either.⁴⁷ Therefore, despite a continuity between the meaning of the *theōria* at Book VI and Book X, there is a justified distinction between the two lives.

In the end, there seems to be plenty of opportunities for *theōria* to be exercised within the second best, i. e. political way of life. At the same time, it seems that particular occurrences of *theōria* do not suffice to constitute the best life. As I will argue in the next section, the life must be shaped or formed by *theōria* as the highest goal in order for it to be counted as happy. However, this does not threaten Aristotle’s claim that *theōria* is happiness, there is simply a difference between happiness as *energeia* on the one hand and the way of life (*bios*) on the other – or so I will argue.

4 Life and living

My interpretation allows us to accept Aristotle’s definition of *eudaimonia* as a theoretical activity. At the same time, I want to avoid the pitfalls of strict intellectualism and I do not necessarily accept that Aristotle is guilty of an inconsistency between *NE* I.7 and X.7–8 concerning the unique status of human *ergon*. To support this interpretation, I will distinguish Aristotle’s usage of *zōē* (living) and *bios* (lifespan or way of life), upon which a coherent interpretation of *eudaimo-*

⁴⁷ The dependency of the second best life is nicely shown within its description in *NE* X.8 1178^a9–22: all its aspects are connected with our body and other changeable and perishable aspects of our nature; the life and *eudaimonia* in the second best life are dependent on our composite nature, the *eudaimonia* of the best life – on the other hand – is separate, i. e. it is self-standing and self-sufficient (cf. 1178^a21–22: καὶ ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία. ἡ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ κερωρισμένη).

nia and a happy life can rely.⁴⁸ Of course, the verb “to live” (*zēn*) goes together with life (*bios*) so that one lives a certain life (e. g. 1097^{b9}). At another occasion, Aristotle says that “no one would choose living (*zēn*) with the intellect of a child throughout his life (*bios*)” (1174^{a1–2}), and a person who is asleep for his entire life would “lead a life of a plant” (*phytōn zōnti bion*, 1176^{a33–35}).⁴⁹

4.1 Activity of living in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

In *NE IX.9*, Aristotle argues that even a happy person needs friends. He starts by presenting several general reasons: friends are thought to be the greatest of external goods (1169^{b9–10}), the happy person will need people to bestow his goodness on them (1169^{b12–13}), man is naturally political and social (1169^{a18–19}),⁵⁰ and it is clearly better to live among friends than strangers (1169^{b20–21}). However, the opponent who claims that a happy person does not need friends has a serious counterargument (1169^{b22–28}): it follows from what was said that a friend is a useful thing. Now, a happy person already has the goods one needs for being happy. What for does a happy person need a friend? Such an opponent sees that a happy person does not need friends for their usefulness and assumes that consequently a happy person does not need friends at all.

According to Aristotle, a happy person needs friends and they are for him naturally desirable. In order to demonstrate this claim, Aristotle presents several arguments; I will focus on the argument which can help us in understanding Aristotle’s concept of *zōē* (*NE IX.9*, 1170^{a25–1170^{b8}}).

Before the argument starts, Aristotle says that now we look at the matter in a *physikōteron* way and we see that a virtuous friend is naturally (*physei*) desirable

⁴⁸ Some still valuable accounts are Keyt (1989). Cf. Curzer (1991), p. 51, which sketchily distinguishing between *bios* and *eudaimonia*; Dudley (1982), p. 402, makes a difference between *theōria* and *bios theōrētikos*; Lawrence (1993), p. 14 and 18, which mentions the distinction between *eudaimonia* as *theōria* and happy life (*bios*) but fails to develop it; Reeve (2012), p. 239 comes close to my interpretation in understanding *zōē* as biological life processes and *bios* as “a sort of life ... a biographer might investigate”; and Lockwood (2014), p. 352 writes that the relationship between *energeia* and *bios* is “the central philosophical problem looming behind Aristotle’s treatment of the contest of lives.”

⁴⁹ Notice here that the term *bios* is not limited to human beings; even plants and animals have their lives (1141^{a26–28}). However, Aristotle never says that god leads a life (*bios*) despite the fact that the god is alive, in *Met. Λ.7* he chooses *diagōgē* to denote god’s life.

⁵⁰ Aristotle uses the term *syzēn* (1169^{b18–19}) in order to describe the social component of human nature.

for the virtuous person (1170^a13–14). The emphasis on nature (*physis*) suggests that the argument will work with natural characteristics of human beings and show their relation to the ethical framework. It is important for my argument that the key general term which Aristotle uses for the natural activities throughout his argument is living (*zōē*; cf. *DA* II.1 412^a14–15 and II.2 413^a22–25).

According to Aristotle, human “living” properly understood is then the activity of perceiving and thinking.⁵¹ Thus when Aristotle further says that living is naturally good and pleasant, he means that the activities in question are naturally good and pleasant for us. Thus being alive is naturally perceived as good and pleasant (1170^a25–26). We enjoy our living activities such as perceiving, hearing, walking, or thinking *per se*. However, Aristotle singles out the case of those people who are good and blessed (*epieikeis kai makarious*, 1170^a27). Their life or way life (*bios*) is the most desirable one. Therefore, people naturally differ not in experiencing and evaluating their living which is by nature good (1170^b1–2, cf. 1170^a22), but they differ according the way of life (*bios*) they lead. One could object to my interpretation that in the very same passage Aristotle calls “living” (*zōē*) supremely blessed as well (*makariōtatē zōē*, 1170^a28–29). If that is the case, the experience of plain activities of living would differ as well. I agree, but I do not see this as threatening my interpretation. Living is said to be good by nature or naturally (*physei*, 1170^b1–2) which allows for exceptions. According to the text, such exceptions occur in extreme cases of moral goodness and wickedness.

Our living specified here in terms of different activities is naturally good and pleasant for us. This is a natural or perhaps even a biological fact, which is the same for all men regardless of their moral status. Living seems pleasant to all “unless their living is wretched, wicked or they live in pain” (*mochthēran zōē kai diephtharmenēn ... en lypais*, 1170^a23). The term *mochthēros* is quite common in *NE* and it stands for serious moral wickedness. On the other hand, being wretched or destroyed (*diephtharmenē*, from *diaphtheirō*) is used quite rarely to describe the very extreme case of human badness, one which is not only morally wrong but also endangers and possibly destroys one’s entire existence (1138^a13, 1140^b13, 1140^b17, 1150^a2, 1170^a23, 1176^a24). In this case, *diephtharmenē* strengthens *mochthēros* and the badness in question is such that it makes unpleasant the very living in question. In conclusion, living is naturally good and pleasant for us. However, if one lives a blessed life, he even enjoys living more. On the other hand, the state of extreme badness endan-

51 *NE* IX.9, 1170^a19: τὸ ζῆν εἶναι κυρίως τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἢ νοεῖν.

gers one's existence and thus makes even the living activities unbearable and unpleasant.⁵²

Finally, let us return to *NE* X.7–8 and check whether the text complies with my interpretation of *zōē* from *NE* IX.9. Aristotle uses the verb “to live” three times within the discussion of *eudaimonia* at *NE* X.7–8. The first occurrence is within the polemic passage concerning what is fitting for human beings. Some say that humans should think human thoughts (1177^b32). Aristotle disagrees and claims that “we must, as far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live (*zēn*) in accordance with the best thing in us” (1077^b33–34). The advice is basically to *theōrein* – we must be living in accordance with reason. Our activities ought to be guided by reason. The two other occurrences are in the passage discussing gods and the nature of their constitutive activity (1178^a17–21). Aristotle claims that any action (*praxis*) is unworthy of gods. However, he adds that “everyone supposes that they live (*zēn*) and are active (*energein*)”. Now if from being alive one takes away doing (*prattein*) and producing (*poiein*), the only *energeia* that remains must be *theōria*. Thus, the living of the gods rests in a single activity of *theōria*.⁵³

Based on the evidence gathered so far, I conclude that (i) the term *zōē* stands for “activities of living” and Aristotle tries not to conflate this meaning with *bios*. Further, (ii) *zōē* is an activity (*energeia*) and, as such, (iii) it provides the basic and fundamental link between the gods and human beings. The essential activity of gods is *theōria* (*EN* X.8 1178^a17–21 and *Met.* Λ.7 1072^b22–30). Now if *eudaimonia* is *theōria*, it follows not only that the gods are supremely happy, but also that our *eudaimonia* is this divine activity and as such it does not differ from the essential activity of gods. The *theōria* in the case of gods is continuous and eternal – indeed god is this activity – it is gods’ living or so to say their being. Yet, human beings engage in *theōrein* only temporarily since, whatever they do cannot be eternally continuous and thus always limited (*EN* X.4 1175^a4–5; cf. *Met.* Λ.7 1072^b24–26, 28–30). This temporal limit is the only difference mentioned so far. To explain the

⁵² Another passage that combines the terms *zōē* and *bios* is 1100^b22–28, which discusses the role of chance (*tychē*). According to my understanding based on the difference between *zōē* and *bios*, Aristotle claims that chance does not affect the balance of living activities, but a multitude of great things coming by chance can affect the blessedness of one's way of life (*bios*).

⁵³ In *DA* II.2 413^a22–25, Aristotle says that the presence of any one of the activities of living suffices to call a given activity alive; i. e. the god can be called alive while being only a single activity. This conclusion agrees with Aristotle's description of the unmoved mover in *Metaphysics* Λ.7. Aristotle claims that god is living (*zōē*), since the actuality of thought is living (*hē gar nou energeia zōē*) and the god is that best and eternal actuality (*Met.* Λ.7 1072^b26–28). This conception entirely corresponds to the living of gods described in *NE* X.7–8.

specific nature of a human happy life and its relation to divine being, I will turn to *bios* and examine its usage within the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

4.2 *Bios* as the way of life

I will discuss two passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to help us understand the meaning of *bios*. The first passage is *EN* I.5, where Aristotle discusses three different ways of life. The second is, yet again, *NE* X.7–8, since the crucial difference between gods and humans is spelled out in the terms of ways of life. Before I turn to these key passages, I will clarify my understanding of the concept of *bios* with several remarks Aristotle makes about *bios* throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will show how the concept of *bios* differs from *zōē*, which I characterized in the preceding section.

Matters related to *bios* are said to be the purpose of political community (1160^a11, 23).⁵⁴ This is a distinctive feature of mankind, since all the other animals unite only for the sake of reproduction. Matters related to *bios* are the additional purpose of human togetherness (1162^a22). The term *bios* here clearly refers to a specifically human way of life involving – among others – society with friendship and politics.

By the end of *NE* X.6, Aristotle argues that the activity of a better part of us (or of the whole of human being) is superior over the activity of the lower parts in the sense that it is more constitutive of *eudaimonia*. For example, bodily pleasure is not *eudaimonia* since a slave enjoys bodily pleasures no less than the best person, “but no one assigns to a slave a share in *eudaimonia* – unless he assigns to him also a share in life (*bios*)” (1177^a8–9; translation amended by JJ). Now *bios* seems to be the framework or prerequisite within which *eudaimonia* occurs. The condition that a slave might have a share in *bios* is purely rhetorical. Aristotle argues that since a slave cannot share in *eudaimonia* but he can enjoy bodily pleasure no less than the best person, bodily pleasure is not *eudaimonia*. Therefore slaves, according to Aristotle, do not have *bios*. Since no one would dispute that slaves are alive,⁵⁵ the term *bios* must have a special meaning which applies only to free citizens.

A *bios* is a matter of choice (1178^a4), and we have the possibility to choose our way of life. To be able to choose, there must be something to choose from. In

⁵⁴ The meaning is clear despite the lacuna in the text at line 1160^a23 after the phrase *all' eis hapanta ton bion*.

⁵⁵ E. g. *Pol.* I.4 1253^b32 where the slave is characterized as ‘ensouled possession’.

NE I.5, Aristotle introduces three general ways of life (*bioi*). Most men, including the most vulgar ones, think that the good and *eudaimonia* consist in pleasure, which could be judged from the way they live (*ek tōn biōn*). They live a life of pleasure and consumption (*apolaustikos bios*, 1095^b14–16).⁵⁶ Most men are slavish and choose the way of life suitable to cattle rather than to humans (1095^a19–20).

The energetic men of taste consider honour to be the good and *eudaimonia*, since that is the goal (*telos*) of the political way of life (*politikos bios*) which they live (1095^a22–23). But this cannot be the good Aristotle is looking for. Honour depends on the honouring person rather than on the person honoured, whereas the good in question belongs to the good person in question. Moreover, these political men do not want honours from basically anyone undistinguished, nor do they want these honours for nothing. They actually want to be honoured by the practically wise men (*phronimos*) and on the basis of their virtue (*aretē*, 1095^a26–29). Therefore, virtue seems to be more important in this respect, and one could even say that virtue is the proper goal (*telos*) of the political life (1095^a30–31).

Concerning the third, theoretical life (*theōrētikos bios*), Aristotle only says that it will be considered later (1096^a4–5).

These ways of life (*bioi*) primarily differ in their goals (*telē*). The three general ways of life are not characterized by any specific actions or aspects. Aristotle distinguishes the three *bioi* according to their respective conceptions of the good, which figures as the goal of life for the people who live in this way. Most people consider pleasure to be the chief good and therefore they act to maximize the pleasure in their lives. Nothing is said about the particular actions or types of actions chosen to reach this goal. On the one hand, Aristotle is clearly dismissive about this way of life; on the other, he mentions that defining the good as pleasure is not without reason (*ouk alogōs*, 1095^b15). Similarly with the *bios politikos*, the political man sees honour or virtue as a goal (*telos*) of his life, and whatever he does in accordance with the life he lives fits into the hierarchy of ends with honour or virtue on the very top.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Aristotle further adds that this consideration is not unreasonable (1095^b15). This is a reference either to the authorities living the hedonistic life mentioned couple of lines later (1095^b21–22), or to the doctrine of pleasure in NE X.1–5, according to which pleasure in a certain way belongs to *eudaimonia*.

⁵⁷ In this respect, each man can live only one *bios* at a time according to the highest goal he subscribes to. However, a person needs not live one *bios* throughout his entire adulthood, as one can change one's life. Therefore, I agree with Keyt (1983), pp. 373–374, that a certain *bios* can be lived only for one phase of life; however, I differ in interpreting how different ways of life relate to each other.

I claim that the term *bios* also plays an important role in the *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7–8, since the two crucial discussions concerning the implications of *eudaimonia* as *theōria* are conducted in the terms of the different ways of life. First, Aristotle compares divine with human way of life (1177^b26–1178^a8) and then he describes the relation between the *bios* in accordance with *nous* and the second best human life, namely *bios politikos* (X.8 1178^a9–1178^b7).

Aristotle claims that the activity of *nous*, *theōria*, is the perfect *eudaimonia* of man (1177^b24–25) and a *eudaimōn* person must live in accordance with it. However, life such as this would surpass the human way of life, since:

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. ... If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life (*bios*) according to it is divine in comparison with human life (*bios*). (1177^b26–28, 30–31)

The difference between divine and human is described as a difference between two ways of life.⁵⁸ It is not a difference in the activity constituting *eudaimonia*. *Theōria* is *eudaimonia*; but we saw that a person is *eudaimōn* if he lives a *bios* within which *theōria* has its proper place. Aristotle does not worry here whether a human being can *theōrein*. Our *theōria* might be limited when compared to the gods' (cf. 1178^b23, 27), but it is essentially the same *energeia*.⁵⁹ The question is whether we can live a life more divine than human. After expressing the worry, Aristotle answers with a counterargument that ought to defeat it (1178^a2–8). The life (*bios*) in accordance with reason is the human life since a man is reason (*nous*).⁶⁰ This life is said to be

⁵⁸ Cf. Long (2011) on the human and divine in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁵⁹ Here I disagree with the thesis of Burger (1990) and Lawrence (1993), p. 20. I believe that the confusing conclusion that Aristotle advocates as human *eudaimonia* something that is not achievable by humans comes from the failure to distinguish between *eudaimonia* and *eudaimōn bios*. The fact that humans share the same activity with gods does not mean that they should share the same life (cf. further n. 63 below). Moreover, as I have shown, there is plenty of evidence within the *Nicomachean Ethics* that human beings engage in *theōrein*, and Aristotle never disputes that point. However, Aristotle is rightly unwilling to equate the life of men with the divine *diagōgē*. Broadie (1999), p. 234, makes a similar point against the impossibility of human happiness, cf. Broadie (1992), pp. 406–407.

⁶⁰ Aristotle says that we should do everything in order to be living (*zēn*) in accordance with what is the most powerful among the things that are in us (κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ, 1177^b33–34). Each man then is this “best in us”, since each man is the authoritative and better part of him (δόξειε δ' ἄν καὶ εἶναι ἕκαστος τοῦτο, εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον, 1178^a2–3). Here Aristotle expresses a general thesis of his top-down philosophical framework: a complex entity is defined in accordance with its best part, see *NE* IX.8 1168^b31–32: “just as a city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is a man.” Cf. Scott (1999), p. 232, n. 22.

the most pleasant one since it is proper to us and, finally, it will be the *eudaimon-estatos*, the happiest or most fulfilling life (1178^a5–8).

We should live the life in accordance with reason, since it is the *bios* which is proper to us. Does it mean then that it is the life of the gods? I claim that it is not the case. We are beings different from gods; in a way we are much more complex than gods and accordingly our best life will be a far more complex one. The living of gods is simply one single activity, *theōria* (cf. 1178^b7–32).⁶¹ Our living (*zōē*) necessarily consists of different activities, since our nature is complex while the that of the divine is simple compared to ours.⁶² Accordingly, our happy life is analogously complex, which – of course – does not mean that it is any better than the *diagōgē* of the divine.⁶³

For while the whole life of the gods is blessed, and that of men too in so far as some likeness of such activity belongs to them. (1178^b25–27)

As we saw, the gods do not do anything else than their essential activity of *theōrein*; indeed, this essential activity is what they are. Our life can be called *makarios* or *eudaimōn* only in so far as it shares in the same activity. Yet this *eudaimōn* life will be necessarily more complex, since our nature is not self-sufficient for constant *theōria* given of our bodily needs (1178^b33–35).⁶⁴ But this complexity does not mean that we should give up on living in accordance with *nous* and its virtue.

The way of life which corresponds to our complexity and does not reflect upon the fact that *nous* is our proper self is called “second” or “secondary” (*deuterōs*, 1178^a9). The comparison is explicitly made between two kinds of life (see the article *ho* at 1178^a9 and *bios* at 1178^a21). Aristotle says that the secondary life is lived in accordance with “the other virtues and the activities based on these are human” (1178^a9–10). These virtues naturally belong to us and, in this sense,

⁶¹ Cf. *Met.* Λ.7 1072^b7–8, 23–25.

⁶² This complexity and interrelatedness of the human are highlighted in the text itself: not only are the actions exemplifying moral virtues done “in relation to one another” (*pros allēlous*) and our nature is composite (*synthetos* used twice at 1178^a20), but the passage describing this composite human nature uses four verbs starting with the prefix *syn-* suggesting a complexity of relationships (1178^a14, 15, 16, 19). Opposed to this, there stands reason which is said to be separated (*hē de tou nou kechōrismenē*, 1178^a22).

⁶³ Since, strictly speaking, the gods do not have *bios*, I use the term as Aristotle does at *Metaph.* Λ.7, 1072^b14. *Diagōgē* here in this passage means “a way of life”, as analogously to *bios* in the case of human beings. Cf. Elders (1972), p. 181, referring to Aristotle, *Pol.* 1334^a16, 1338^a10, 1339^b17–19; and *Met.* 981^b18, 982^b23 for this context of διαγωγή.

⁶⁴ Compare Aristotle’s discussion of body and external goods in relation to *eudaimonia* at 1178^a9–23 and 1178^a23–1178^b7.

they are not “merely human” – they are human virtues. At the same time, nothing suggests that Aristotle wants to give up the idea that we should live a divine-like life in accordance with *nous*, which is the best part in us. But to live this *eudaimonestatos* life, we must fulfil the goals of this secondary life as well. We are not gods and, as Aristotle says, we are far from being the most perfect entities in the world (1141^a34–^b2). Moreover, unlike the gods, our nature is not self-sufficient for *theōria*.⁶⁵ Therefore, I think we need the secondary life (besides its own value) to establish conditions within which we could realize the *bios theōrētikos*.⁶⁶

Practical wisdom, *phronēsis*, is the prominent virtue within the secondary life. According to Aristotle, *phronēsis* and practical virtue accomplish human *ergon*, whereas it is *sophia*, the virtue of *nous*, whose activity is *theōria* that leads to *eudaimonia* (VI.12 1144^a3–9). The secondary life is a good life, but not the best available for a human being.

5 Conclusion: *eudaimonia* and *eudaimōn bios*

It is stressed that human beings differ from gods because of our composite nature (1177^b29, 1178^a20). As such we cannot engage permanently in *theōrein*, unlike the continuous and everlasting activity of *theōria* requires. Even our best way of life must include the care of the body, which results in necessary activities of the practical virtues as well as in need of some external goods.⁶⁷ However, by now it must be clear that this does not affect the thesis that *eudaimonia* is *theōria*. What remains to be explained is the complexity of the best human life, which at the same time reflects the composite human nature and respects *nous* as the most important and leading part of us. In the previous sections, I have suggested that the relation between the best life and the secondary life is twofold.

First, the secondary life is necessary to create an environment within which one can lead the best life (cf. *NE* VI.12–13 and X.6–8). Secondly, the secondary life

⁶⁵ Cf. similarly Reeve (2014b), pp. 215–216, n. 63.

⁶⁶ Aristotle indisputably acknowledges that some things can be valuable both in themselves and as means for something else (1096^b14–19, 1097^b2–4). The first passage lists reasoning, seeing, and some pleasures and honours; the latter includes honours, pleasure, reason, and all the virtues. Therefore, I do not see a problem with practical virtues and the entire secondary *bios* being valued both as means for something else and in themselves. The activity of these virtues and the practical life are *per se* valuable for us. At the same time, they are valuable as means to allow for *bios theōrētikos*.

⁶⁷ Aristotle summarizes this thesis at 1178^b33–1179^a9, cf. 1178^a9–23 for the practical virtues naturally related to body and 1178^a23–1178^b7 on the external goods.

is also needed for the completeness of a good human life. Therefore, the secondary life is both valuable in itself and for the *bios theōrētikos*. In other words, the best life has its own goal (*theōria*), which also includes the goals of the secondary life, but the secondary life alone does not entail the best life and does not recognize *theōria* as its goal.⁶⁸

Aristotle insists that a man living *bios theōrētikos* is a human being as well (1178^b5, 33); and as such, he needs the external goods supporting his human living (*anthrōpeuesthai*). It is stated that the practical and political life is for the sake of *scholē*, which might entail *eudaimonia* (1177^b4–6). One cannot properly live the best life without the appropriate political and social environment, which cannot be achieved without proper (virtuous) political and social actions.⁶⁹ Further, this cannot be achieved without satisfying our bodily needs; extreme poverty, hunger or frailty preclude a *eudaimōn bios* since – to begin with – preclude the appropriate social and political life.

The three main ways of life are distinguished by their respective goals (*telos*). The three goals are pleasure, honour and (practical) virtue, and finally *theōria*. From the interpretation above, it follows that the best life necessarily entails practical virtues, but they are not the final goal of one's life. Their instrumental role, however, does not exclude them as being valuable in themselves. Pleasure is one of the things which too is valuable both as a means for something else and in itself (1096^b16–19, 1097^b2–4). However, the way of life which sets pleasure as its final goal is a life of a cattle and not a life proper to men. At the same time,

68 Perhaps an analogy with the relation between the three soul-kinds described in *De anima* II.2–3 might help us to understand the relation of the three kinds of life. According to Aristotle, the different soul-kinds are organized one after each other in a certain order (*ephexēs*, *DA* II.3 414^b29). The so-called lower or more rudimentary kinds of the soul are presupposed by the higher parts of the soul, which cannot be without the former. The only exception is the active intellect, which is said to be “separated” (e. g. 413^b26–27, 430^a17–18, cf. *NE* X.8 1178^a22). Therefore, all animals must have the nutritive part of the soul to have the perceptive part, and humans must have these two to possess reason. On the other hand, the lower soul parts can exist without the higher soul parts (e. g. there is only nutritive part of the soul in the plants). There seems to be an analogous relation among the goals of the three general ways of life discussed at *NE* I.5. For another treatment of this issue cf. Lockwood (2014).

69 As Broadie (1992), p. 392 puts it: “human *theōria* is utterly dependent on practical wisdom for securing it regular conditions”; cf. Whiting (1986), pp. 91–92. I believe Adkins (1978), p. 300 exaggerates the potential inconsistencies between the theoretical way of life and practical affairs. I think Aristotle clearly offers a reason why someone living a theoretical way of life must engage in practical activities: they are necessary means (some of them worthy in themselves as well) to establish the suitable environment – both social and bodily – within which *theōria* can find its proper place.

the best life is said to be naturally the most pleasant one (1178^a6). Moreover, the practical virtues are dispositions to act in the best ways regarding pleasures and pains (1104b27–28). Pleasure and pain are the primary instruments of early habituation of virtues. The best life contains pleasure – not only because it is the most pleasant life, but its achievement requires proper pursuit of pleasure. Of course, pleasure is not the final goal of the *bios theōrētikos*, but it is nevertheless valuable in its own and a valuable instrument, when properly used, in our moral development (NE X.9 1179^b31 ff). In this way, the best life subordinates the goals of the two lower kinds of life while having its own separate.

I have argued that the correct understanding of Aristotle's position should differentiate between talking about *eudaimonia* as such, i. e. about *eudaimonia* as *energeia* on the one hand, and about a happy or fulfilled life (*eudaimōn bios*) on the other. I hope I have made a convincing case that *eudaimonia* is indeed a single *energeia*, namely *theōria*, while the *bios* of a *eudaimōn* man is a complex way of life, which has *theōria* as its goal but entails also many other activities and actions including the practical virtues.

I take it that doing well the human *ergon* makes it possible to reach *eudaimonia*. The *eudaimonia* itself is an activity of *sophia*, the virtue of the highest soul part that humans naturally possess. This activity is *theōria*. The best life (*bios*) of a human being has *theōria* as its goal and accordingly shaped. This *energeia* is the same one Aristotle ascribes to the god. While in the case of god this *theōria* constitutes its entire living (*zōē*), in the case of human beings it has its proper place within a more complex life, which differs from the purely divine way of life. This interpretation allows us to take Aristotle seriously when he repeatedly defines *eudaimonia* as *theōria*. At the same time, it allows for a credible picture of the best life as a complex way of life within a community, with friends and filled with various social and political activities.

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