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The Highest Good and the Best Activity: Aristotle on the Well-Lived Life

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THE HIGHEST GOOD AND THE BEST ACTIVITY:

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When zeroing in on the primary points in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at which Aristotle explicitly discusses the nature of *eudaimonia*, Book I.1-5; 7 and Book X.7-8 are always singled out as the most crucial sections. While the entire text is filled with discussions that variably shine light on how Aristotle conceives of *eudaimonia*, it is the aforementioned passages that must be fully addressed and accounted for in any study of this topic. The importance of Book X rests on Aristotle's overt claims about *eudaimonia*, such as "*eudaimonia* is coextensive with *theoria*" (*NE* 1178b28), and the argument that the practical virtues[1] only attain a "secondary" form of *eudaimonia* (*NE* 1178a8). These very clear statements about *eudaimonia* would rightfully puzzle a person initially approaching this topic from the outside since it seems for Aristotle there is no ambiguity about his characterization of *eudaimonia*, and if Aristotle had placed these passages at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this would seem even more to be the case. The controversy over interpretation arises, however, because of the characterization of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle gives in Book I. Here Aristotle works through a discussion about the relationship between activities and their ends to a conclusion that *eudaimonia* is the highest of all possible ends, and that *eudaimonia* is ultimately "an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue" (*NE* 1098a16), which Aristotle identifies with the human *ergon*, translated as "function" or "characteristic work." Book I, then, seems to argue for a broader characterization of *eudaimonia* that is composed of virtuous

[1] The phrase "practical virtues" will throughout this paper be used to designate the case of the active exercise in a particular action of any of the practical virtues as this action arises from habit as per Aristotle's designation of virtue.

activities in general, typically assumed to be a mix of *theoria* and the practical virtues, and as the discussion continues over the intervening books, it is obvious that Aristotle highly values the practical virtues. The claims about *eudaimonia* in Book X, therefore, leave many readers puzzled as to why Aristotle singles out *theoria*, or contemplation, as the pinnacle activity of *eudaimonia* while relegating the practical virtues to a secondary position since *prima facie* both would seem to satisfy the description of *eudaimonia* given in Book I.

Due to the unexpected manner by which Aristotle concludes Book X, as viewed through the lens of Book I, interpreters have roughly divided themselves into two camps: those that read Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* with an exclusivist sense and those that read it with an inclusivist sense. Now what exactly is meant by each of these terms has some internal divergence, sometimes significant, in how each sense is understood. In general, however, the exclusivist reading takes it that *eudaimonia* is a single good, emphasizing the claim made in Book X that "*eudaimonia* is coextensive with *theoria*," while the inclusivist reading takes *eudaimonia* as a composite of goods, namely, *theoria* together with the practical virtues. The intent of this paper will be to reconstruct Aristotle's central argument about the well-lived life, or *eudaimonia*, as it is presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* for the purposes of clarifying why Aristotle comes to privilege *theoria* in Book X. The course of this study, however, will be to reveal how the claims in Book X are informed by Aristotle's account in Book I and to demonstrate why Aristotle concludes that both *theoria* and the practical virtues are able to attain *eudaimonia*. The position that will be forwarded herein is then best represented with the designation of being a "dominant inclusive" reading in which *theoria* and the practical virtues are both

understood as being able to attain *eudaimonia* and are both necessary to the well-lived life, but due to the nature of *theoria* it is able to attain a superlative measure of *eudaimonia* and so will be favored, although not exclusively so.

Aristotle's account of the well-lived life is unique in that it seeks to unify two initially disparate intuitions, namely, that *eudaimonia* is something that is aimed at, that is, it is an end goal at which point there is nothing further to obtain, and that *eudaimonia* is necessarily active and is therefore something that is engaged in, pursued, or, quite simply, done. On this account, the well-lived life is, as it were, both the race and the medal won. Understanding this unity, and understanding why Aristotle appeals to the human *ergon* as the locus for this integration in Book I, is the crucial element for any interpretive account of the well-lived life from the text because it reveals the necessary and sufficient conditions for *eudaimonia*. Building upon the analysis of this unity, I will argue that the claim made in Book X that "*eudaimonia* is coextensive with *theoria*" gains meaning or significance only in light of Aristotle's conception of the human *ergon* as virtuous activity. This is meant to counter the problem with certain exclusivist readers of *eudaimonia* that, in trying to find a place for the practical virtues, integrate them from the starting place of *theoria*, that is, they seek to justify the practical virtues in light of *theoria*. I will argue that instead the proper approach is to understand how *theoria* and the practical virtues are both able to satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions that Aristotle enumerates for *eudaimonia* as virtuous activity, and in that sense both are able to fully and independently attain *eudaimonia*. In doing so, it will, nevertheless, also be important to point to why *theoria* is privileged, namely, because it is able to more fully satisfy these criteria due to its particular nature. The practical virtues are *eudaimonia* in a

"secondary" sense not because they are an analogue to *theoria*,[2] or because they are a teleological approximation of *theoria*,[3] or because they promote *theoria*.[4] Instead, the practical virtues are just as able to attain *eudaimonia* as *theoria* insofar as they instantiate virtuous activity; however, they are only able to attain a "secondary" sense of *eudaimonia* because they are not able to be consistently performed so as to satisfy the important but often overlooked criteria of *eudaimonia* as something practiced over a complete lifetime (*NE* 1098a18). On this account, the practical virtues, when taken alone, are understood as being a satisfactory instantiation of *eudaimonia* insofar as they are a form of virtuous activity, but they only attain a "secondary" form of *eudaimonia* because they are unable to be continuously practiced. The person who is striving to attain a well-lived life then has open to him or her two means for fulfilling the demand of *eudaimonia* that it be a form of virtuous activity. When exercised in conjunction with *theoria*, the practical virtues can then be understood as an alternative means by which the human person, while striving to be divine by means of *theoria* but being unable to do so fully because of his or her human nature, is nevertheless able to satisfy the demand that the well-lived life be something continually and actively engaged as virtuous activity. Given human nature, the well-lived life would then be one that is necessarily composed of both *theoria*, as the best instantiation of *eudaimonia*, and the practical virtues, as the mode of virtuous activity found in everyday sociality.

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[2] David Charles, "Aristotle on Well-being and Intellectual Contemplation" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 73 (June 1999): 205.

[3]Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 195.

[4] Richard Kraut, "Reply to Professor Roche" in *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature* ed. May Sim (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 145.

With Aristotle's conclusion in Book I that the highest good is *eudaimonia*, and that *eudaimonia* consists in the "activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue," it is important to first have a clear understanding of what Aristotle means by a good. Aristotle takes it that all purposive human activities have some end that they are seeking to realize in virtue of their particular natures as activities. Using the example of a craft that Aristotle cites, bridle-making, this craft aims to produce bridles for riding horses, and the craft of bridle-making is wholly determined by its product, the bridle. When a person engages in an activity, in this case the craft of bridle-making, that person is doing so in order to bring about a particular end, namely, the end that is determined by its respective activity. While all activities have an end that they seek to bring about and at which they aim, every end is also that for the sake of which the activity is chosen. The ends of these activities are then the good that is sought by undertaking the activity. In the case of crafts, the fact that we refer to their products as goods, that is, as material wares, bolsters Aristotle's conclusion that the end an activity seeks to realize is a good. However, the sense of "good" that Aristotle is invoking is not merely a material good. Rather, Aristotle is making a claim about human desires. When a person desires something, again consider the example of a bridle, one is able to satisfy that desire by engaging in activities that are aimed at attaining the object of desire, in this case engaging in bridle-making to attain a bridle. The end at which an activity aims, the product, then converges with the object that the human being desires, the good (*NE* 1094a18). The observation that each activity has a particular good that it results in and that is that for the sake of which a person engages in that activity is what yields the definition of the good as that at which all things aim (*NE* 1094a3).

While every purposive human activity has an end, and therefore every activity has a good, for Aristotle, not all goods are equal. Instead, activities can be grouped into hierarchies depending upon whether the goods that they are seeking to realize are subordinate to some further activity and its respective good (*NE* 1094a6-15). For example, Aristotle understands the good of bridle-making, namely, a bridle, to be subordinate to the good of the activity of horsemanship due to the fact that a bridle's purpose is to be used for riding horses. The value of each activity can then be measured by the place its particular good occupies in a hierarchy of goods. The higher the activity in the hierarchy, the higher its good is relative to other goods, and so the designation of the highest good would, then, be the end of the best activity. Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia* as the highest good (*NE* 1095a15-17), and so the principal focus becomes what human activity aims at or has its end in *eudaimonia*, that is, what activity is the highest or best activity. The analysis, however, is not that simple as a problem arises with the fact that *eudaimonia* does not relate to an activity in the same way that a product relates to its craft. Instead, Aristotle points out that *eudaimonia* is itself an activity, it is "the same as "living well" and "doing well"" (*NE* 1095a19). If living-well is the highest thing a person can desire, as per its nature as the highest good, *eudaimonia* is equally a living, that is, it is something actively exercised by a person since living implies activity of some kind. Paradoxically, it would appear that in order to determine in what *eudaimonia* consists, Aristotle will need to discover an activity that, unlike most activities that aim at some end or product, instead aims at further activity.[5]

[5] It is important to point out that the relationship in *eudaimonia* of an activity aiming at activity is not the same sort of relationship that is found in the case of the crafts in which, for example, the activity of bridle-

Metaphysically, Aristotle is able to appeal to his concept of *energeia*, or actuality, as a means for satisfying the need for something that is both an activity and an end. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle first references the idea of *energeia* when he is discussing the varying ways in which ends relate to their respective activities (*NE* 1094a3-4),[6] but his independent treatment of *energeia* occurs in *Metaphysics* Theta 6. Corresponding to the division between a *kinesis* and an *energeia*, Aristotle asserts that an end can relate to its activity in one of two ways. In the first case, that of a *kinesis*, or motion, the end is a product that exists outside of the activity and is something towards which the activity is working to complete (Metaph. 1048b19). The activity-end relationship of a *kinesis* can most readily be seen in productive activities such as house-building and, to use Aristotle's example from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, bridle-making. In these cases, the end that the activities are aiming at is the completed product of a house or a bridle, respectively, and the activity is undertaken for the sake of the end product. The activity itself is not complete until the end product is complete; one cannot say that one has built a house until the house is complete in all of its parts, and the same goes for a bridle. Contrasted with a motion, or *kinesis*, an *energeia*, or actuality, has its end internal to the activity itself and the end is realized in each instantiation of the activity (Metaph. 1048b22-25). Rather than working towards some end beyond the activity, the end of an *energeia* is just the activity itself, and the activity is pursued for its own sake. In this way,

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making aims at the activity of horsemanship insofar as the product of bridle-making, the bridle, is used by the horse rider. In the case of crafts, the activity aiming at activity relationship is only indirect by means of the intervening good. For *eudaimonia*, the activity aiming at activity relationship is a direct one; the initial activity is only chosen for the sake of the activity and not because it has a product that is used by the further activity.

[6] Aristotle also utilizes his concept of *energeia* at length in his discussion of pleasure in *NE* Book X. 4.

simply doing the activity is enough to claim that one has attained the end for which one has sought by engaging in the activity. One example of an *energeia* that Aristotle cites is that of "seeing," in which the end of having had a perception of something is always fully contained within each instance of seeing. One cannot, as it were, see more than what one is already seeing in any individual moment; subsequent acts of seeing may allow a person to get a better view of some particular object or scene, but each moment of seeing does not contribute to a further, more complete perception in the way that each moment of building contributes to a more complete building. Seeing, as with all other *energeia*, fully attains the end that is sought in each instance of that activity.

Among activities, every *energeia* is its own end, and the active exercise of an *energeia* never fails to realize its end. This characteristic of *energeia* is then the essential element in understanding why Aristotle ultimately identifies the human *ergon*, or virtuous activity, as the highest good. When setting out the necessary characteristics of an agent performing virtuous actions, Aristotle argues that the person "must choose to act the way he does, and he must choose it for its own sake" (*NE* 1105a32). Virtuous actions are their own end, that is, in order to engage in a virtuous action one must intend to perform the virtuous action for no other reason than that it is virtuous. The human *ergon*, then, is unique in that it is both an activity and an end; by engaging in virtuous activity, one is also aiming at successfully completing virtuous activity insofar as one must chose to do it for its own sake. Virtuous action can, then, never fail in realizing its end because each instance of acting virtuously is completely fulfilling the end that is sought by engaging in it. If a virtuous action were somehow to fail to fulfill its end, which is what would occur if the action were engaged with the intention of some material gain, for example, then it

would cease being an instance of virtuous activity. By focusing on the human *ergon*, Aristotle puts his analysis in the singular position of being able to identify something that will both respect *eudaimonia*'s active element and also satisfy the condition that *eudaimonia* be an end, which satisfies the need for an activity that, while aiming at its end, is in fact aiming at further activity. Yet thus far the appeal to the nature of the human *ergon* as an actuality or *energeia* has only satisfied the dual demands of *eudaimonia* being both an activity and an end. Aristotle's overall argument is not just that virtuous activity aims at some good but rather that it aims at the highest good, and in aiming at the highest good also is the highest good. What is it about the nature of the human *ergon* that leads Aristotle to conclude that it will bring about *eudaimonia* for that person?

Clues about why Aristotle singles out virtuous activity for *eudaimonia* can be found just prior to his presentation of the *ergon* argument when he first introduces the idea of a human *ergon* (*NE* 1097b33-1098a7). Here Aristotle considers various candidates for the *ergon* of man that echo his hierarchy of the soul in *De Anima* (DA 413a20-b26). In this text, Aristotle singles out and identifies various faculties, or *dunameis*, of the soul that living things possess dependent upon their level of complexity. At the most fundamental level, all things that are living are considered as being ensouled, and so the first *dunamis* of a living thing is simply living. Aristotle then works up from this most basic *dunamis* to identify the faculties of nutrition and growth, which all plants and animals share, and then sense perception, which distinguishes animals from plants, as subsequent levels in the hierarchy of the soul. The top of Aristotle's hierarchy is inhabited by *nous*, or mind, which is the distinctive faculty that humans possess over and

above the other *dunameis* of plants and animals and is what allows a person to know and understand.

The argument for a human *ergon* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* relies heavily upon this psychological framework. Aristotle considers each faculty in turn as a possible candidate for the human *ergon* but rejects those *dunameis* of the lower hierarchy because they are not peculiar, or *idion*, to humans. It is only the rational soul, of which *nous* is a part, that is distinctive of humans, and it is specifically the active exercise of the rational element that Aristotle identifies with the human *ergon* (*NE* 1098a5-7). The qualification that it be the active exercise and not merely the possession of the rational element is of course crucial for satisfying the requirement that *eudaimonia* be something that is actively done.

The fact that the human *ergon* resides at the top of the hierarchy of the soul also discloses that of the various activities of the soul with which a person can be engaged, it is the active exercise of the rational element that is the best activity a person can undertake. In the case of the human *ergon*, Aristotle not only identifies what is distinctive of humans but he also points out what is the best activity that can be done by a person. Although engaging in the activities of nutrition, growth, movement, and sense perception are crucial to a person's well-being, if this is all that a person does he or she would fail to be truly human. The reason is that these other operations of the soul do not depend upon or require the exercise of the rational part of the soul, while the active exercise of the rational element is the best activity in a hierarchy of activities because the rational element is the highest faculty of the soul. Yet Aristotle adds a caveat. It is not just the active exercise of the rational element that is the best activity, but rather it must be the

active exercise of the rational element "in conformity with excellence or virtue."[7] While performing the human *ergon* is good, it is only the well performed *ergon* that can be considered best. It is now apparent why Aristotle turns towards the human *ergon* in order to further clarify *eudaimonia*. If *eudaimonia* is the highest good obtained through action, then it would be most reasonable to assume that the best activity performed in the best manner possible would aim at the highest good. Aristotle's purpose in discussing the human *ergon* is then to establish the best activity of a human being so that we can better understand its characteristic aim. In this manner, Aristotle's analysis reflects another important methodological feature of the *De Anima* in which, having identified the faculty of the soul, Aristotle goes on to analyze the activity of the faculty and its respective object. In the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the faculty of the soul that is of concern is the rational element, which furnishes the activity of the human *ergon* and its object, *eudaimonia*, as a central concern of his text.

Situating the *ergon* argument in the context of Aristotle's understanding of *energeia* reveals how Aristotle was able to consider *eudaimonia* as both an activity and an end. Furthermore, by understanding how the human *ergon* is situated in the hierarchy of the soul, it becomes clear why Aristotle considered virtuous activity as the best activity and as the highest good, namely, *eudaimonia*. The major turns in the argument of Book I.1-7 can then be set out in the following manner:

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[7] All actions involving the rational element are such that they can be done in conformity with virtue or excellence because, unlike digestion, for example, activities like bridle-making require an element of decision for their exercise. Digestion happens whether one thinks about it or not, while activities such as crafts can be undertaken with the requirements of excellence in mind, namely, that they be done by one "who sets high standards for himself" (*NE* 1098a8). Virtuous actions are, then, necessarily actions that involve the rational element.

> [E1] The human *ergon* is an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence or virtue.
>
> [E2] Virtuous activity is an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence or virtue.
>
> [E3] Virtuous activity is chosen for its own sake and can only be chosen for its own sake (by definition of virtue).
>
> [E4] Virtuous activity has its end in successfully acting virtuously (on account of being an *energeia*).
>
> [E5] Virtuous activity is the best activity that a person can engage in (due to its place in the hierarchy of the soul as the human *ergon*).
>
> [E6] The highest good is the end of the best activity (parity of activity and ends).
>
> [E7] The end of the best activity is acting virtuously (from E4 and E5).

Therefore, the vision of the well-lived life that Aristotle is forwarding in Book I.1-7 is:

> The highest good is acting virtuously, and the well-lived life consists in and aims at virtuous actions.

Aristotle made significant strides in providing a determinate content to *eudaimonia* by appealing to the human *ergon*; yet, curiously, upon concluding the *ergon* argument in Book I.7, he thinks that the most that he has provided is an outline or sketch of the good, the details of which can be filled in at another time (*NE* 1098a20). The shortcoming with the analysis up to this point is that even though Aristotle has identified the specific type of human activity that will attain *eudaimonia* for a person, which is virtuous activity, he has still not sufficiently concretized the activity in a particular action that can be engaged in. Virtuous activity is only a type or category of action, but it in itself is not something that can be actively done by a person; in the same way a living being cannot simply be a mammal, but instead it must be a particular type of mammal such as a dog. The actions that a person performs may be a virtuous action, but one

cannot do virtuous activities *simpliciter*. To call a particular action virtuous is to claim that it has certain features, or more precisely, the agent performing the action must have certain characteristics, namely, that the agent deliberately chooses to act in that way and that the action is chosen for its own sake (*NE* 1105a32). Yet these types of characteristics can be applied to a person performing a number of different actions, including facing an enemy that is threatening one's homeland, contributing to the benefit of one's friends and neighbors, or thinking about the relationship between a triangle's sides, to name just a few. Although these activities are similar in kind insofar as they can all be performed virtuously, and would thus be acting courageously, being generous, and contemplating, respectively, one could not and would not say that therefore they are the same actions. Virtuous activity needs to be sufficiently concretized in particular actions that a person can undertake. *Eudaimonia*, then, needs to be realized in particular virtuous actions since virtuous activity, as a type of action, cannot itself be undertaken.

In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle works to develop his conception of *eudaimonia* further by identifying the best concrete action that satisfies the criteria of the best type of activity – virtuous activity. Toward this end, Aristotle opens chapter seven of Book X by looking for the highest human virtue since, if *eudaimonia* is activity in conformity with virtue, "it is to be expected that it should conform with the highest virtue" (*NE* 1177a12). The concern with virtue, and in particular a highest or best virtue, directly harkens back to the conclusion of the *ergon* argument in Book I.7 where Aristotle indicates that *eudaimonia* is not only an activity "in conformity with excellence or virtue," but he also added the stipulation, "and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete" (*NE* 1098a16). By discovering the highest,

or best, virtue of the human soul, Aristotle reasons that one can identify the best activity that a human can engage in by singling out that activity that is associated with the best human virtue. Aristotle then looks to identify the highest virtue by relying upon his teleological reasoning. Assuming that the highest virtue would correspond to the highest faculty of the soul, Aristotle identifies the part of the soul that "is itself divine or most divine thing in us" (*NE* 1177a15), namely, the intellect or *nous*, as the highest part of the soul. From this, Aristotle deduces that it is the activity of this part of the human soul, the best part, in conformity with its particular virtue that would constitute *eudaimonia*. Aristotle then singles out *theoria* as the activity of the highest part of the human soul, namely *nous*, and therefore *theoria* is the activity that best realizes *eudaimonia* as a virtuous activity (*NE* 1177a18). Since *theoria* is an activity of the soul that arises solely from the intellect, or rational element, then it seems that Aristotle has easily identified the concrete activity that will attain *eudaimonia* for human beings. It was pointed out earlier, however, that all virtuous activity involves the active exercise of the rational element in some sense, and thus the concern voiced by some commentators as to why Aristotle uniquely privileges *theoria* since many other actions would be able to fulfill the criteria for *eudaimonia* set out in Book I, especially the practical virtues. The comparisons that Aristotle provides between *theoria* and the practical virtues in Book X will rise to the forefront in determining why Aristotle privileges *theoria*, and the conclusion argued here will be that the most substantial argument that Aristotle has for favoring *theoria* is that it can be more easily practiced continually, and thus it can more easily satisfy the demand that *eudaimonia* is coextensive with the active exercise of virtuous activity.

Now before continuing, it is important to be clear what Aristotle has in mind when he argues that *theoria* is the best human activity. The typical translation of *theoria* as contemplation brings with it particular connotations that exist for the English word "contemplation" that do not exist for "*theoria*." Aristotle indicates that the activity of the intellect, or *theoria*, is the most divine thing that a human being can engage in, and he considers it as divine both because it is the action that is attributed to the gods (*NE* 1178b21) and because the objects of *theoria* are the most divine things (*NE* 1177a20). These divine objects are commonly identified with the fundamental principles of what Aristotle considers the contemplative sciences, such as theology, mathematics, and physics. For example, *theoria* would be concerned with such things as the stars and their motions or the basic properties of numbers or figures and their relationships such as are found in geometry. In this regard, Aristotle appropriated the noun *theoria* as a technical term developed from the more commonly used verb *theorein*, which had the meaning "to speculate" in the sense of "to observe a spectacle."[8] *Theoria* translated as "contemplation" is accurate insofar as it indicates a manner of gazing thoughtfully upon an object, but is inaccurate at least insofar as contemplation can indicate one's thoughtful reflection upon any number of different objects. For Aristotle, *nous,* of which *theoria* is the activity, is only concerned with the most fundamental principles of the universe (*NE* 1141a9-20) and not, for example, a pleasant ocean vista. However, understanding the particular objects of *theoria* is only a part of what Aristotle has in mind when he invokes

[8] Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy:* Theoria *in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

theoria as best activity; it is also important to understand the metaphysical underpinnings of *theoria*'s operation.

In *De Anima* II.5, Aristotle distinguishes various degrees of potentiality and actuality in his metaphysics and applies this schema to human knowledge. At the lowest level, that of first order potentiality, a human being has knowledge in the sense that a human being is capable of having knowledge (DA 417a22-23). The person does not yet have any particular piece of knowledge, but he or she has the potential to know things in virtue of being a human who has the proper faculties of soul for knowledge. At the next level, that of a second order potentiality-first order actuality, a human being has knowledge of a particular discipline, such as geometry. In this case, the human being actually possesses a particular piece or collection of knowledge but the person may not be actively utilizing this knowledge, for example, because the person is studying seashells left along the shoreline instead of the principles of geometry. This form of knowledge is then potential knowledge in the sense that the person does possess the knowledge and could recall it to mind, and it is actual knowledge in the sense that the person does in fact have knowledge of some object or body of learning. At the top of this hierarchy, for Aristotle, is the active contemplation of knowledge, such as would be the case of the geometer presently thinking his or her knowledge of the particular relationship between the sides and angles of a triangle (DA 417a27). Here, the human being as a knower is fully actualized by the person actively thinking about a piece of knowledge that is known with certainty.[9] Aristotle's characterization of *theoria*, or contemplation, is then very

[9] One key supposition of Aristotle is that actual knowledge is always true, that is, something is only known when in fact it is true. "We understand a thing *simpliciter* whenever we think we are aware both that the

specific in that it is not just an indeterminate pondering about an object, such as is the case of someone contemplating a pleasant view, but rather it is the active and deliberate thinking about a particular piece of knowledge that is in fact known by the person contemplating. Only this active exercise of thought can be considered as an instance of *theoria*.

Earlier in the discussion, it was pointed out how, in setting up the problem of in what *eudaimonia* consists, Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia* must be something that is actively and consistently practiced since it is not just an end state that is achieved but is also a life to be lived. Aristotle then relies heavily upon his concept of *energeia* in order to single out an activity that achieves its end in each instance of its exercise. Understanding *theoria* as the active contemplation of knowledge squarely situates *theoria* as an *energeia* insofar as it is the active thinking of some object that always achieves its end in thinking about the truth of some object. The strength of *theoria*'s candidacy for *eudaimonia*, then, comes from the confluence of its nature as an *energeia* that instantiates the human *ergon* and its orientation towards what is best and most divine. Yet following the criteria set out in Book I, *eudaimonia* is something that can be realized in any activity, insofar as that particular activity satisfies the criteria of being a virtuous activity. On this point, while *theoria* may be the best instantiation of virtuous activity that a person can undertake, it is far from obvious that it is the only virtuous activity as there are many human activities that can be actively engaged in. For this reason, Aristotle admits that actions in accordance with the practical virtues, those of self-control, courage, and

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explanation because of which the object is is its explanation, and that it is not possible for this to be otherwise" (PA 71b9-11). *Theoria*, as an active exercise of knowledge, is then always correct, and therefore it is the active thinking about things that are already known and that are known with certainty.

generosity, to name a few, all equally satisfy the criteria of a virtuous activity and, therefore, they can be understood as aiming at *eudaimonia*; however, he only affords them the distinction of attaining *eudaimonia* in a "secondary" manner (*NE* 1178a8).

It was already pointed out that Aristotle favors *theoria*, at least in part, because it is the most divine activity that a human being can engage in. As an activity of the intellect, *theoria* is divine because it consists in the solitary exercise of the intellect, or divine part, of the human soul. Aristotle follows similar reasoning for valuing the practical virtues to a lesser degree, namely, because none of the practical virtues stem solely from the best part of the human soul (*NE* 1178a13-14) but instead involve a mix of the intellect in the form of practical wisdom and the excellences of character and the emotions, which are derived from the composite nature of human beings. Furthermore, the practical virtues are ultimately concerned only with what is human in that they aim at personal well-being rather than aiming at what is divine, and so in that sense are not the best that can be attained by human beings. After establishing that virtuous activity in general is at the top of the hierarchy of all possible human activities, Aristotle introduces a second, derivative hierarchy that depends upon whether the activity is solely the product of the intellect or not. However, the mere fact that the practical virtues stem from the composite nature of humans, and not solely from the "most divine" part of the soul, should strike one as a less than satisfying reason for not considering the practical virtues equally as an instantiation of virtuous activity given that they nevertheless do involve the highest part of the soul. If being a virtuous activity of the best part of the human soul is enough for an action to qualify as *eudaimonia*, then it should not matter if one activity is found in the sole exercise of the intellect while another is mixed with other parts of

human nature. Perhaps Aristotle sensed this dissatisfaction when he introduces further criteria for *eudaimonia* in Book X.7-8, but whatever the case may be it is clear that this discussion is important for understanding why *theoria* is considered as that activity that best attains *eudaimonia*.

Besides considering *theoria* as the best concrete instantiation of virtuous activity, Aristotle also considers *theoria* to be superior to the practical virtues because its exercise is more final, more self-sufficient, and it can more easily be performed in a continuous manner. The first two criteria, those of finality and self-sufficiency, were first introduced in Book I.7 just prior to the *ergon* argument when Aristotle was attempting to support his conclusion that *eudaimonia* is the highest good. It is commonly assumed, then, that when Aristotle returns to these criteria in the discussion on *theoria* in Book X that he is merely extending the discussion already started in Book I about the character of *eudaimonia*.[10] The criterion that *theoria* is more continuous is not introduced explicitly prior to Book X, but it can be seen implicitly in the demand that *eudaimonia* be something that is actively exercised and therefore that the best activity must be continuously active to qualify for *eudaimonia*. All of the criteria that Aristotle discusses about *theoria* must be considered in concert in order to understand why it attains its privileged position since *theoria* is not

[10] While this does seem to be true for the most part, there does appear to be some ambiguity in how he utilizes these two criteria between Book I and Book X that could reflect an uncertainty Aristotle had in privileging *theoria*, as some inclusivists have argued. It is especially apparent in the case of self-sufficiency whereby in Book I Aristotle defines self-sufficiency as "that which taken by itself makes life something desirable and deficient in nothing" with the qualification that "we define something as self-sufficient not by reference to the "self" alone," that is, he assumes that the highest good would include "parents, children, a wife" etc. along with other external goods (*NE* 1097b10-15). When Aristotle then reintroduces this criterion into the discussion of Book X he indicates that the person possessing *theoria* "is able to study even by himself," thereby implying that social relationships are not as important when he states "*perhaps* he could do it [*theoria*] better if he had colleagues to work with him" (*NE* 1177a34, italics mine) and how he says in regards to external goods that "one might even go so far as to say that they are a hindrance to study" (*NE* 1178b4).

only the best, but it is also the most final, the most self-sufficient, and the most easily practiced continuously.

The first of these criteria, the finality criterion, is built on the argument that *theoria* is the only activity that is pursued for its own sake. Aristotle states that "*theoria* seems to be the only activity which is loved for its own sake. For while we derive a greater or a smaller advantage from practical pursuits beyond the action itself, from study we derive nothing beyond the activity of *theoria*" (*NE* 1177b1-4). Since this argument is in fact making two points, one about *theoria* and one about the practical virtues, each will need to be considered in turn. In the case of *theoria*, it is an oft repeated dictum that Aristotle considered *theoria* as something that is "useless" because it is concerned only with the changeless, eternal things of the universe rather than the more immediate things of a person's day to day existence. The knowledge that is actively thought about in *theoria* is entirely without regard for any practical import and instead it is pursued exclusively for the sake of knowing. Aristotle also closely ties this claim to his genealogical account of the development of philosophy in *Metaphysics* Alpha.1 wherein he argues that "it was when almost all the necessities of life were supplied […] that such thinking [contemplation] began to be sought" (Metaph. 982b24-25). The fact that *theoria* is the most final activity of humanity is then revealed in the fact that one only is able to pursue it when one has already addressed all of one's practical needs. According to these points, then, Aristotle argues that *theoria* is the superlative instantiation of *eudaimonia* because it is pursued solely for its own sake and by its very nature one is not able to derive any additional practical value from its exercise, which thus makes it more final or end-like of any activity. However, the argument in Book X.7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*

also makes an additional claim about the practical virtues that must be considered in turn to fully understand how Aristotle utilizes the finality criterion.

The second half of the argument, the claim about the practical pursuits, is quite puzzling in that it seems to be in direct contradiction to the characterization of virtue that Aristotle has built up over the entire *Nicomachean Ethics*. Now to be clear, Aristotle's argument cites practical pursuits in general and not actions performed in accordance with the practical virtues. The problem, however, is that if he is ignoring here the clause from his initial definition of *eudaimonia* that it be an activity "in accordance with virtue or excellence" (*NE* 1098a15), then at most he is producing a straw-man for his argument by comparing the virtuous activity of *theoria* with the general class of practical actions, including those actions that are not undertaken solely for their own sake such as currying favor. *Eudaimonia,* it has already been established, must be a concrete virtuous activity, and so any argument comparing the theoretical to the practical must ultimately reference the virtuous practice of both and not merely their general exercise.

Considering this argument as a comparison between *theoria* and the practical virtues, though, still runs into the problem that Aristotle is seemingly singling out the practical virtues as having an inherent practical value to them beyond the characteristic that all virtuous actions must be chosen for its own sake and not because of some further end that might be attained. If Aristotle is now intimating that the practical virtues are less final than *theoria* because they might, or even that they often do, result in some further good beyond simply being practiced for their own sake, which implies that they can and often are chosen for this practical value and not for their own sake, then it does not seem that his argument is making a satisfactory comparison between the two. Although it is

admittedly true that one could derive various advantages from the practical virtues, it is not altogether clear that this is anymore of a necessary aspect of the practical virtues than it is for *theoria*. If Aristotle wants to argue that the practical virtues aim at some further end beyond themselves, for example, that a person will be admired and gain social benefits by being generous, it is clear that a person could equally be admired and granted social benefits for being an exceptionally talented philosopher, Aristotle's quintessential practitioner of *theoria.* The argument that *theoria* is more final is quite a bit more ambiguous than might first appear, even if Aristotle is known to consistently claim that *theoria* is something that is "useless."

The second of the criteria, the self-sufficiency criterion, in some degree provides stronger support for *theoria*, but it also produces a similar problem that arose with the finality criterion in that the manner by which Aristotle introduces his comparison ends up being less than satisfactory. Aristotle argues that *theoria* is superior to the practical virtues in the case of self-sufficiency because even if a person engaging in *theoria* requires the same necessities for living as any other person, the person who engages in actions in accordance with the practical virtues will need various external goods in order to exercise the practical virtues (*NE* 1177a27-33). Again, Aristotle's argument has two claims, one about *theoria* and one about the practical virtues, and each needs to be considered in turn. It is true that *theoria* will not require any external goods beyond the basic necessities that are required for human sustenance. *Theoria* is solely derived from the intellect, and, as such, it does not need any material goods in order for it to be exercised since its operations do not rely upon the composite nature of humans. While Aristotle admits that perhaps one might be better at *theoria* if one has companions (*NE*

1177a34), it is obvious that in order to think actively about knowledge of divine objects one does not need any outside goods. By identifying *eudaimonia* with *theoria*, Aristotle is able to provide an account of a well-lived life that is relatively simple in the requirements necessary for its successful attainment.

Aristotle juxtaposes the fairly minimal requirements of *theoria* with those of the practical virtues, which he argues not only rely upon the satisfaction of a person's basic needs but also by definition require other goods for their successful exercise. Even if one could potentially engage in more *theoria* with more external goods, it is clear that they are not necessary components for its practice. In the case of the practical virtues, conversely, these actions by definition require external goods to be successfully practiced. As examples, Aristotle points out that "a just man still needs people toward whom and in company with whom to act justly, and the same is true of a self-controlled man, a courageous man, and all the rest" (*NE* 1177a30-32). One could see how the practical virtues require more external goods than *theoria,* especially in the case of generosity, say, where a person would require more than what would satisfy his or her basic needs in order to be able to give to others in addition to the need of the generous person to have friends and compatriots with whom to be generous. Yet, even in this case, it is not entirely unambiguous that to practice the practical virtues one would need more external goods since some of these virtues are actively exercised exactly when a person has fewer than his or her basic necessities met. For example, one could imagine a situation where a person exercises self-control during a time of famine, or in even less extreme of a case, when a person exercises self-control being satisfied with only having his or her basic needs met. In at least some of the cases of the practical virtues, it is then

apparent that no more external goods are needed than in the case of the practitioner of *theoria*. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in order to be able to exercise the practical virtues consistently one would require more external goods than for *theoria,* since, for example, to be continually generous, one would continually need to have material goods that can be given away to others. This leads directly into the third criterion of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle cites in Book X.7, namely, that the activity be continuous, and it is this criterion that seems to be undeniably the strongest in favor of *theoria*.

Aristotle is very specific in characterizing *eudaimonia* as the active exercise of virtuous actions and not merely as the possession of a virtuous disposition. *Eudaimonia* is something that is done, and so is only attained when a person is actively engaging in the activity that brings it about. While the identification of *eudaimonia* with virtuous activity pointed to its existence as an actuality or *energeia* that contained both an activity and an end, Aristotle also consistently emphasized the fact that *eudaimonia* is something performed continually and "over a complete life." *Eudaimonia* requires the continuous exercise of virtuous activity in order for it to be realized since it exists only insofar as one is actively exercising virtuous activity, and the fact that Aristotle believes this is confirmed when the claim that "*theoria* is coextensive with *eudaimonia*" is immediately followed up with the assertion that "the greater the opportunity for *theoria*, the greater the *eudaimonia*" (*NE* 1178b30). The claim that *theoria* can be practiced more continually than the practical virtues ties in closely with the argument that *theoria* is more self-sufficient. Consider first the case of the practical virtues. Actions performed in accordance with the practical virtues are necessarily circumscribed by the dictates of the actions. For example, one can only be actively generous insofar as one is in the process of

providing another person with a material benefit. Once the external good has been granted, the person can no longer be said to be actively engaging in the practical virtue of generosity insofar as the specific act of generosity is no longer being exercised. That person may be referred to as a generous person due to his or her developed habit of being a virtuous person, or at least he or she can be viewed by others as being generous if he or she is lacking in the virtue, but for *eudaimonia,* the activity must be actively exercised. *Theoria*, on the other hand, can seemingly be practiced in any situation as long as the person is able to maintain his or her concentration long enough to be continually thinking about the highest objects of thought. Since *theoria* is not similarly circumscribed by external conditions, one is able to practice in a greater number of situations and over a longer period of time. In this case, at least, *theoria* is unambiguously best suited to fulfill the conditions of *eudaimonia* as something that is actively done over a complete life.

After drawing in these additional criteria, it becomes obvious that *theoria* is considered as the superior instantiation of *eudaimonia* to the practical virtues not only because Aristotle considers it as the highest or best activity according to his teleological reasoning. While there is some ambiguity as to how well the additional criteria support *theoria*, it is clear that at least taken as an aggregate, the practical virtues are, for the most part, less final and less self-sufficient than *theoria*. It is ultimately the criterion that *eudaimonia* be continuous that pushes the support for *theoria* as the best instantiation of *eudaimonia* over the practical virtues. Aristotle admits that both the practical virtues and *theoria* are able to attain *eudaimonia* as both are a type of virtuous activity; however, even if Aristotle's intentions are just to provide a guide to attaining *eudaimonia*, he cannot overlook the fact that of these two activities one of them is clearly more suited to

the task. Yet in referencing Aristotle's clear privileging of *theoria,* it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the practical virtues are also able to attain *eudaimonia*, and that as such, as an activity that is able to attain the highest good obtainable through action, the practical virtues should be highly valued. The key is then not to consider the practical virtues as somehow failing to achieve *eudaimonia*, but rather to understand that they are sufficient for *eudaimonia,* even if not the superlative instantiation of *eudaimonia.*

After the foregoing analysis, it should be undeniable that Aristotle did value *theoria* as the best activity for *eudaimonia*, and, in that sense, the exclusivist readers seem to be correct. However, a problem arises in that Aristotle's discussion of the relative merits of *theoria* and the practical virtues for *eudaimonia* occurs on two levels, with one level being concerned solely with the individual activities and the other with these activities as part of a fully lived life. Expressed another way, it may be true that *theoria* attains the best measure of *eudaimonia* for a person, but it is not obvious that one should dedicate his or her whole life entirely and exclusively to *theoria* as exclusivist readers have argued. It is this point where most, but not all, of the disagreement has arisen between the inclusivist and exclusivists camps. Even though many inclusivist readers have couched their arguments in the claim that the activity of *theoria* should not be valued over the practical virtues,[11] ultimately, their concern is over what the well-lived life will look like according to Aristotle and not simply what is the best activity a human can engage in. The majority of exclusivists have come to argue that because *theoria* is the

[11] Ackrill argues for a moderate inclusivist position that is similar to my own. He is concerned with "treating the one [*theoria*] as more important but not incomparably more important than the other [practical virtue]." J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.33.

better activity, *eudaimonia* should therefore be understood exclusively in terms of *theoria,* with the practical virtues relegated solely to a support position. In this final section, I wish to challenge these exclusivist readers that find a place for the practical virtues only in the shadows of *theoria*. In its place, I will put forward a conception of the well-lived life from Aristotle that focuses on the significance of *eudaimonia* being a continuous activity over a complete lifetime in order to understand how the practical virtues are a necessary component for the well-lived life. In brief, the practical virtues are a crucial aspect of a well-lived life not because they support *theoria*, although they may, but rather they are valued as a means by which a human being can continually engage in a virtuous activity even in the times at which the person cannot be engaging in *theoria*. While with the activity of *theoria* a person is able to strive "to become immortal as far as that is possible and do [his or her] utmost to live in accordance with what is highest in us" (*NE* 1177b33), Aristotle admits that "such a *life* would be more than human" (*NE* 1177b26, emphasis mine). For those times when a person must be "merely human" and lives in the company of other people, the practical virtues provide a means by which the person can continually engage in virtuous activity (*NE* 1178b6). It is for this reason that I label this reading as a "dominant inclusive" sense in that, while both *theoria* and the practical virtues play a part in the well-lived life, *theoria* nevertheless does have a privileged position in this conception because of its ability to be practiced more continually.

For the exclusivist, the discussion in Book X about the superiority of *theoria* culminates in Aristotle's claim that "*eudaimonia* is coextensive with *theoria*" (*NE* 1178b28). The well-lived life in Aristotle is on this account wholly composed of the time

a person is engaging in *theoria*, and as long as that person is engaging in *theoria*, then that person can be said to be living well. But the question remains as to the role of the practical virtues on Aristotle's account, and to this one prominent exclusivist, Richard Kraut (1989 and 1995), argues that the practical virtues will serve a purely supportive role for *theoria*. Referencing Aristotle's claim that the person engaging in *theoria* will need to have a modicum of external goods in order to be able to satisfactorily perform *theoria*, Kraut argues that the practical virtues role in attaining *eudaimonia* will be to ensure that a person has the stability necessary for the continuous exercise of *theoria*.[12] The reasoning goes that since the practical virtues are derived from the composite nature of humans, their exercise already is in the realm of material well-being and therefore that one would expect that their particular role in *eudaimonia* would be to support the prime activity that is *theoria*. *Theoria*, when taken in isolation, is unable to obtain for a person the necessary material well-being due to the fact that it is concerned wholly and exclusively with the knowledge of "impractical" objects. Unable to be fully divine, human beings must utilize the excellences of the practical virtues in order to ensure that they can strive to the best of their ability for true *eudaimonia*, which is composed of *theoria* alone.

The perennial problem for an exclusivist reader is that in highlighting how Aristotle privileges *theoria*, the exclusivist does so by valuing *theoria* to such an extreme that the practical virtues are interpreted solely in light of *theoria*. While it may be true that the practical virtues can support the free exercise of *theoria*, it seems wrong to thereby argue that they must be understood solely in this function and therefore be valued

[12] Kraut, "Reply to Professor Roche," 145.

only in light of this supporting role. To do this is especially problematic since Aristotle has consistently argued that the practical virtues are to be valued as a concrete instantiation of virtuous activity in general, in much the same way as *theoria*. It is then clear that the practical virtues are not to be valued in light of *theoria*, but that instead they stand on their own as valuable in virtue of being a type of virtuous activity. Another exclusivist reader, Gabriel Richardson Lear (2004) has attempted to skirt the exclusivist problem of devaluing the practical virtues in light of *theoria* by arguing that the practical virtues can be understood as being both intrinsically valuable and instrumentally valuable because they are a "teleological approximation" of *theoria*. By "teleological approximation" Richardson Lear means that "the activity of practical reasoning is structurally analogous to the activity of theoretical reasoning,"[13] that is, they are both instances of the reasoning well about the truth. It is her hope that by understanding the relationship between *theoria* and the practical virtues due to their analogous structure, one will be able to overcome what she terms the "problem of middle-level ends," which is, as she considers it, the problem of how the practical virtues can be desired both for their own sake and for the sake of *theoria,* here identified exclusively with *eudaimonia* (Richardson Lear 9). The problematic assumption with her analysis, however, is in thinking that *theoria* has this exclusive claim when Aristotle clearly indicates that the practical virtues, when taken alone, can also achieve *eudaimonia*, even if admitted a "secondary" form of it. The practical virtues are valuable ultimately not because they are analogous to *theoria*, but rather *both* are valuable because they are instances of virtuous

[13] Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, 107.

activities, and that is the conception of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle that Richardson Lear overlooks.[14]

Contrary to these exclusivist attempts to fill out what a well-lived life would look like, I want to sketch a picture of a "dominant inclusive" view of the well-lived life that draws upon what I take to be a latent view of Aristotle's in Book X. After having argued extensively for the superiority of *theoria* in Book X.7, Aristotle gives an aside that can be quite disappointing to someone who would hope to live a life in the manner that Aristotle sets out. In short, Aristotle argues a life solely composed of *theoria* is in some sense impossible for humans to live completely, or at least, that it would be something superhuman and so therefore extremely difficult for the vast majority of people to hope to live out (*NE* 1177b26-28). The problem, as Aristotle points out, is that the human person is a composite of both divine and animal life, and insofar as a person must live his or her life as a human being and not in emulation of the gods that person will have need of human virtue. As Aristotle puts it himself, "insofar as he is human and lives in the society of his fellow men, he chooses to act as virtue demands" (*NE* 1178b5-6). Instead of subjugating the practical virtues to the supremacy of *theoria*, Aristotle admits that there will be gaps in a person's ability to engage in *theoria* continuously. If *eudaimonia* is indeed strictly to be identified with *theoria*, then it would seem that any time not spent in *theoria* would have to be understood as time not well-lived. The practical virtues, though,

[14] The consistent issue with exclusivist readers is that they attempt to find the value of the practical virtues in *theoria*. To do as such, however, rewrites the relationship that *theoria* and the practical virtues have to one another. *Theoria* is only valuable, that is, desired for its own sake, because it is an instance of virtuous activity. In much the same way, the practical virtues are valuable only as an instance of virtuous activity and expressly not because they somehow derive value from their relationship to *theoria*.

give Aristotle a means to ensure that the person striving for perfect *eudaimonia* by means of *theoria* will not be thrown back upon him- or herself when unable to do as such.

While Aristotle encourages his audience to seek to live the divine life of *theoria* as much as possible, he never leaves behind the essential fact addressed in Book I that *eudaimonia* will be found with any virtuous activity. If *theoria* is all that a person has to turn to in order to achieve *eudaimonia*, then it seems that everyone will need to resign themselves to a woefully broken existence in which a person living-well is constantly punctuated by times in which he or she cannot fully engage in *theoria*. As an alternative to this picture of the well-lived life, integrating the practical virtues into a complete life, which also achieve *eudaimonia*, would provide a more consistent picture of what a well-lived life would be like. The practical virtues are able to function as a stopgap means by which a person can continue to fully engage in an activity that qualifies for *eudaimonia* even at times when he or she can only be "merely human" and not engage in *theoria*. Here, the well-lived life for Aristotle will not look conspicuously different than the life of the average person. The *eudaimon* person will interact publically with friends and fellow citizens in a virtuous manner while privately the person would be able to dedicate his or her time fully to *theoria*. The interaction with other people is inevitable since the human being is by nature social, and the appeal to the practical virtues is a means by which the person can continuously and unreservedly live a well-lived life engaged in virtuous activity. How much or how little a person dedicates to *theoria* will, like all virtues, be partially dependent upon the constitution of that person's soul. However, the fact that Aristotle even took the time for the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, instead of just

engaging in *theoria* himself, demonstrates that the social dimension of human life with the practical virtues are as crucial as a life fully engaged in *theoria*.

The heart of Aristotle's account of the well-lived life is the claim that one can attain *eudaimonia* only by means of virtuous activity. Those activities that fulfill the criteria of a virtuous activity will be unique in that they will be a locus of both the highest good and the best activity due to their nature as an *energeia*. Yet in searching for a concrete activity that humans can engage in in order to achieve *eudaimonia*, Aristotle in fact comes across two activities – *theoria* and the practical virtues. While *theoria* will, as it were, get better mileage as a means by which a person can continually live out a life fully engaged in *eudaimonia*, it is clear that the essential demand of the well-lived life is that it be one that is lived out virtuously. When *theoria* or the practical virtues are taken alone, it is true that the more fulfilling well-lived life will be the one that has the greatest extent of *theoria*. However, even that life will have gaps in which the person is unable to engage fully in *theoria*. The superlative well-lived life, as a life that is fundamentally marked by virtue, will then rely upon the practical virtues as a means by which a person can continually engage in virtuous activity even when he or she cannot engage in *theoria*.

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