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**Reconciling Book 8 Chapter 3 of the *Eudemian Ethics*
with the *Nicomachean Ethics* Account of Virtue,
Nobility and the Best Human Life.**

Andrew Tane Glen

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Abstract:

This thesis attempts to find a harmonious interpretation of what are understood to be two major problems in the final chapter of the Eudemian Ethics regarding Aristotle's position on the best life. As in the *NE*, Aristotle spends a majority of the *EE* arguing for the life of virtue as the best human life, before going on in the final chapter to present a two step demotion of this life. He firstly promotes the life of nobility, understood as somehow distinct from full-virtue, before finally settling on the life of contemplation and service to *God* as our best life. Any attempt to reconcile these two divergences, as they are typically understood, presents one with the difficult and ugly task of essentially making sense of a pair of contradictions. A more elegant solution is thus to find a way of interpreting them both as presenting no divergence at all; to find a convincing way of interpreting all of Aristotle's conclusions regarding the best human life, at least in these ethical texts, as unified and coherent; and to this end this thesis is dedicated. The position I come to defend with regards to the full-virtue/nobility distinction consists in the argument that the life of nobility is in fact no different to the life of full-virtue, and that the type of virtue Aristotle distinguishes from nobility in the *EE* is instead just a temporary, compelled form of goodness, exemplified by his Spartan type. The position I come to defend with regards to the contemplation and service to God distinction is that the life of contemplation Aristotle reasonably distinguishes from that of character virtue in the *NE* is exactly the same life that we find Aristotle promoting at the very last instance in the *EE*. I base this position on the argument that god, as a species of agency, just as it is presented in Chapter 8, Book X of the *NE*, is intended by Aristotle to represent no more than an exemplar of contemplation or of human intellectual activity in general, as a kind of agency we should wish to emulate, but certainly not something we should have to serve or exclusively contemplate in order to live the best life. In the development of this final position the scope of my analysis is broadened somewhat to include Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and, to lesser degree, *On the Soul*, the *Physics*, and the *Movement of Animals*, generating the substantial effect of adding, to the initial aim of reconciling the accounts of virtue and the best life in the *NE* and the *EE*, the goal of reconciling the overlapping elements within this broader range of Aristotle's texts and, in particular, Aristotle's discussion of the prime mover god in the *Metaphysics* and how we can best understand this as relating to our best life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. Introduction.....	1
What we take from the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> :	1
2. The First Half of the Final Chapter of the <i>Eudemian Ethics</i>:	3
The Traditional Interpretation the <i>Kaloik’agathoi</i> :	3
Difficulties for Aristotle under the Traditional Interpretation:.....	5
A Solution to the Problems of the Traditional Interpretation:	5
Problems for Broadie’s Solution to the Problems of the Traditional Interpretation:.....	8
An Alternative Characterisation of Aristotle’s Spartan Exemplar:.....	10
Reinterpreting the first half of the final chapter of the <i>EE</i> in light of the Alternative Characterisation of Aristotle’s Spartan Exemplar:.....	20
Distinguishing the Merely-Good Agent from the Disgraceful Agent:	21
Distinguishing the Fine-and-Good Agent from the Merely-Good Agent:.....	21
Upgrading Merely-Good Objects to the Status of Fine-and-Good:	24
A Brief Note on Fine Pleasure:	30
Reconciling the <i>EE</i> Account of Complete Virtue with that of the <i>NE</i> :	32
3. The Second Half of the Final Chapter of the <i>Eudemian Ethics</i>:	35
The Traditional and Standard Alternative Interpretations of Aristotle’s God in the <i>Eudemian Ethics</i> :	35
The Standard Alternative Interpretation of God in the <i>EE</i> :	36
The Health and Medicine Analogy and the Beginnings of a Second Alternative View:.....	39
Governing Principles and Means:	39
A Second Alternative Interpretation of Aristotle’s God in the <i>EE</i> :.....	41
A Principle for One’s Possession of the Natural Goods (and Nobility):	45
A More Excellent Virtue:	47
‘God’ Elsewhere in Aristotle’s Corpus:.....	48
4. God in the <i>Metaphysics</i>:	49
Aristotle’s Aim in the <i>Metaphysics</i> :	49
The Traditional Interpretation of Aristotle’s Prime Mover God:	52
Problems for the Traditional Interpretation:	53
Additional Problem 1: How can the First Heaven Move Itself?	56
Additional Problem 2: Does the First Heaven have a Soul?.....	62
Summing up the Traditional Interpretation and its Problems:.....	66
Broadie’s Alternative Interpretation:.....	67
A Problem for Broadie’s Interpretation:	69
An Alternative Lowercase-g Interpretation of God in the <i>Metaphysics</i> :.....	71
Reinterpretation of <i>Metaphysics</i> Lambda, Chapter 7:	73

1072a19-26: The Prime Mover of the Heavens is an Unmoved Mover.	73
1072a26-36: Objects of Thought and Desire are Unmoved Movers.	73
1072a35-b4: Thoughts Concerning Final Ends are Unchanging Unmoved Movers.	80
1072b4-10: The Prime Mover of the Heavens is also an Unchanging, Unmoved Mover.....	81
1072b10-14: The heavens and the world of nature both depend on the principle of unmoved movement, in the form of the prime mover and thoughts concerning final ends respectively.	82
1072b14-31: The contemplative part of the human soul, when active, takes on the nature of an eternal, unmixed, unmoved mover, this being what we understand the objects of contemplation to be. The gods, being eternally engaged in contemplation, are thus always in this better state of the human soul, and thus represent a species of agency we should aim to emulate.	83
The Best Human Life as we find it discussed in the <i>Metaphysics</i> :.....	87
God as an Exemplar of Intellectual Activity:	89
Placing the Intellectual Exemplar God of the <i>Metaphysics</i> and <i>NE</i> back into the <i>EE</i> :	90
5. Reconciling the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics (and On the Soul, the Physics and the Metaphysics):	91
6. What to make of all of this in the modern context:.....	93
What we know now:	93
A Modern Synthesis of Aristotle’s Best Human Life:	94
Mankind’s Competitive Advantage and the Aristotelian Conception of the Best Human Life we can derive from it:	95
A Non-Specific Ability:.....	96
Partaking in the Foreseeable Future:.....	97
Due Diligence for One’s Intellectual Achievements:	97
Partaking in an ‘Immortal’ Species of Intellectual Endeavour:.....	99
Judgement after the Fact:.....	100
This All Sounds Too Simple:	101
One Final Thought on Aristotle’s Overall Aim in the Ethics:	101
Bibliography:	104

1. Introduction

Aristotle's corpus is generally understood as containing a small number of irregularities, or points at which, amongst vast swathes of perfectly coherent and compatible arguments, he would appear to substantially reverse certain fundamental aspects of his central positions, for no particularly obvious reason. I thus began this thesis as an effort to reconcile some of these divergences, to find, wherever possible, a way of understanding them as being perfectly compatible with Aristotle's other, apparently contrasting, positions.

I began with the divergence one finds at the very end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth the *NE*) in which Aristotle apparently switches, at the very last moment, from the life of character virtue (which he spends practically the entire text up to this point arguing is the best human life), to the life of contemplation, which he goes on to instead hold, at this final moment, as our best life. Analyzing the *NE* at length, one may, however, come to understand this distinction as not so much a divergence in Aristotle's position, as it is a logical conclusion of his initial argument that the best activity of any particular life-form consists in the activity characteristic of that life-form's best life. Contemplation, as our best activity, would therefore constitute the characteristic activity of our best life. Putting this divergence thus to one side, I was able to move on to the analysis of the far more pronounced divergences typically interpreted from the end of Aristotle's second major ethical work, the *Eudemian Ethics* (henceforth the *EE*), and this grew to constitute the entire thesis. Under most interpretations of this text the final chapter presents us with no less than two divergences as regards Aristotle's position on the best life. In what follows I will begin with a brief summary of what we take from the *NE* with regards to Aristotle's conception of the best life, before moving on to a much deeper analysis of the divergences typically interpreted from the *EE*.

What we take from the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Aristotle's conclusion regarding the best life in Book X of the *NE* points us towards the activity of contemplation as the best fit for the strict criteria for what this life should consist in developed earlier in the same book¹. Through the act of contemplation, his argument goes, one utilises the best part of one's soul, and in doing so one also partakes in what is eternal and divine. Performing this activity regularly, to the extent that it would be considered one's characteristic activity, leads to a life that is:

*"...superior to one that is simply human, because someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him. And the activity of this divine element is as much superior to that in accordance with the other kind of virtue as the element is superior to the compound."*²

We take from this passage that there is a divine element within each of us and that the life in which one utilises this element to the extent that its activity defines one's lifestyle is the best human life. This brief characterisation represents the traditional and non-controversial interpretation of Aristotle's primary conclusion concerning the best human life in *NE*. It is often considered that this conclusion represents a significant divergence from the central themes of the *NE*, however, in that this text would appear to lack any significant foreshadowing of this point, and instead appears to

¹ Concisely summarised at: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Book X, Chapter 7, 1177a11-1177b26, Pg. 194-196. All quotations from the *NE* are from the Crisp translation unless otherwise specified.

² *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b28-30, Pg. 196.

strongly suggest the life of full character virtue as the best we can aim for. This divergence is characterised by Broadie as follows:

*"...in the penultimate chapters of the NE, we are suddenly given to understand that the happiness associated with [character] virtue belongs at best to the second rank, whereas happiness in its highest form is found only in the godlike activity of an utterly different sort of virtue, that of purely theoretical wisdom (Sophia)."*³

Aristotle certainly considers one's possession of the character virtues as a necessary requirement for the sustainable maintenance of the life of contemplation, but since *"...happiness seems to depend on leisure, because we work to have leisure, and wage war to live in peace..."*⁴ we should define happiness by what we achieve at our own leisure, rather than by what one does out of mere practical necessity, which, we take it, is what the character virtues provides. To this Aristotle adds that *"...among actions performed in accordance with virtue, those in politics and war are distinguished by their nobility and extent, but they involve exertion, aim at some end, and are not worthy of choice for their own sake..."*⁵, by which we take it that actions related to *work, politics* and *war* all aim at the achievement of leisure, whereas those that are performed at one's leisure, such as contemplation, and which thus have no further necessarily practical aim, are performed purely for their own sake and thus, on Aristotle's account, better and more of the nature of happiness.

An interesting problem one finds in the use of the word 'leisure' in this translation is the fact that in our modern usage this term does not imply the sense of seriousness Aristotle considers fundamental to the characteristic activity of our best life. It is perhaps natural to conflate *leisure* with *amusement* in our modern terminology, yet Aristotle clearly wishes to identify, for *eudaimonia*, an activity that, while not a practical necessity, is still taken up seriously and for its own sake once our practical needs have been met, as discussed in the following:

*"...what seems correct is amusing ourselves so that we can engage in some serious work, since amusement is like relaxation, and we need relaxation because we cannot continuously exert ourselves. Relaxation, then, is not an end, since it occurs for the sake of activity. And the happy life seems to be one in accordance with virtue, and this implies a level of seriousness, and is not spent in amusement."*⁶

One may infer from this passage two basic spheres of human life under consideration by Aristotle, the first in which one acts out of practical necessity and periodically relaxes in order to prepare oneself for more of such drudgery, the second in which one acts according to practical necessity and relaxes as before, but in which one also finds oneself, post-relaxation, with some additional free time in which to carry out one's own *serious* endeavours. It is within this second sphere that Aristotle locates our eudaimonic activity, which we take, above all else, to consist in the intellectual activity of contemplation.

With respect to the fact that Aristotle does not continuously refer to this specific conception of our chief good throughout the *NE*, it would seem reasonable to consider that the difficulties one faces in instilling virtuous dispositions within the souls of one's citizens (as compared with the relative ease one might expect to face in promoting the life of contemplation amongst already virtuous agents) would result in a course primarily aimed at legislators (as we can reasonably understand the *NE* to be) to focus primarily on the finer detail of these dispositions and the nature of their habituation,

³ Sarah Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43 (2005): 97.

⁴ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b4-6, Pg. 195.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1177b6-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, 1176b33-1177a3, Pg. 194.

rather than the less immediately useful details concerning the life of contemplation, which we thus find reasonably relegated to the closing remarks.

2. The First Half of the Final Chapter of the *Eudemian Ethics*:

Looking now to the *EE*, the traditional account of the concluding chapters of this text points one to the appearance of an equally radical transition in Aristotle's account of the best life, but one that is typically understood as different again to that interpreted from the end of the *NE*. Broadie describes this transition as follows:

*"In the EE [...] Aristotle has been overwhelmingly concerned with practical virtue in its different kinds. Moreover, his Eudemian account of happiness, the highest human good, has been couched in terms of practical virtue. Everything until just before the end suggests that in the EE Aristotle unambiguously regards the person of virtue as the very best sort of human being. But in the last chapter we find him demoting virtue. We are suddenly shown a sort of character superior to the virtuous or merely good (agathoi). Beyond them, we are told, are persons of noble or refined goodness, the kaloik'agathoi (literally, fine-and-good). Simple or mere goodness is a necessary condition for refined goodness but is not sufficient. In fact Aristotle speaks of the refined grade as complete or perfect (teleios) virtue, and implies in his preamble to the discussion that it is a sort of whole that contains the ordinary virtue."*⁷

We thus find Aristotle concerned, in both the *EE* and the *NE*, with the same *primary* subject matter, concerning practical virtue and all that this entails, but going on in each case to diverge significantly in his final conclusion; promoting, in the *NE*, the life of contemplation, and in the *EE*, that of nobility, ahead of, in both cases, the life of 'mere' character virtue. In addition to these twists, the traditional account of the very end of the *EE* also sees Aristotle making one further transition, whereby in the final passages one finds Aristotle uprooting his already divergent characterisation of the best life as that of nobility, in order to, at the very last moment, promote the life of *theological* contemplation and service (i.e. the contemplation of, and service to, the Supreme Being God) instead as our best life.

In what follows, both of these twists in the tale of the *EE* (i.e. the transitions from 'mere-goodness' to nobility and from nobility to theological contemplation and service as the best human life) will be analysed in depth, in my attempt to reconcile the *EE* with the *NE*.

To begin with, I will focus on the difficultly one faces with the rather ambiguous merely-good/fine-and-good (or mere-goodness/nobility) distinction made by Aristotle in the first half of the final chapter of the *EE*. I will attempt to show that this distinction between a kind of merely-good life and an apparently better life of nobility coheres with both the story told earlier in this text and the corresponding arguments concerning virtue Aristotle puts forward in the *NE*.

The Traditional Interpretation the Kaloik'agathoi:

We will begin by observing the distinction between the merely-good agent and the fine-and-good agent as Aristotle himself describes it, and then review the more prominent views on this passage. Aristotle makes this distinction as follows:

⁷ Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," 97-98.

“Now a good man is one for whom the natural goods are goods. For the things that are competed for and seem to be the greatest goods, honour and wealth and bodily excellences and good fortune and capacities, are naturally good, but may be harmful for some because of their states of character. For neither a foolish nor an unjust or intemperate man would get any benefit from using them, just as neither will the sick man using the food of the healthy, nor would the weak and deformed using the adornments of the sound and whole person. A person is fine-and-good because, among goods, those that are fine for themselves belong to him, and because he is a practiser of fine things, and for their own sake. Fine things are the virtues and the deeds resulting from virtue.

There is a certain state of a citizen such as the Spartans have, or other such people would have. This is a state of the following sort; there are those who think that one should possess virtue, but for the sake of the natural goods. They are therefore good men (for natural goods are so for them), but they do not have nobility. For they do not possess the things that are fine for themselves...”⁸

Aggregating some prominent interpretations of this distinction, we have it, firstly from Kenny, that:

“This important passage is not altogether clear. Do these people actually possess virtue, in Aristotle's eyes? On the one hand, they are good people, and good people are people who have virtues; it is difficult not to read the passage as implying that they are genuinely virtuous, but virtuous for the wrong reason. But if they do the appropriate actions, but do not do them for their own sake, or because they are noble actions, are they really virtuous? [...] The point surely is that they have acquired these noble things not qua noble, but qua useful, useful for the acquisition of the natural competitive goods. [...]

The Laconian, like any virtuous man, performs virtuous actions for their own sake, because they are the acts that virtue requires; where he differs from the noble person is in the answer he gives to the second-order question 'What is the point of being virtuous?' The kalos kagathos gives the answer 'Because virtue is splendid, fine, and noble'; the Laconian gives the answer 'Because virtue pays'.⁹

Broadie gives a similar interpretation as follows:

“...the point concerns different reflective attitudes to virtue and virtuous action in general. The noble person prizes these because they are noble in themselves. The merely good man certainly cares about virtue: he seeks to inculcate it in his children; he deplores its absence in others; in each situation he wants to know what is right to do so as to act upon it; and he may put even his life on the line in doing what he sees himself called upon to do. He behaves as if good conduct matters most, and his behaviour itself is a judgment to this effect. But when asked why virtue matters, the answer he gives, if he makes anything at all of the question, is that it is for the sake of the natural goods.”¹⁰

Woods gives a third interpretation in a similar vein:

“...the argument is that the dispositions acquired by those who aspire to natural goods are not virtues (in the full sense), since a virtue is necessarily a disposition to act in a certain way for a certain reason (for the sake of the fine). [...] Aristotle now adds [...] that, in the case of the fine-and-good man, even those goods that are mere 'natural goods' become fine. Thus a distinction is imported between those things that are fine simpliciter and those which are fine for the fine-and-good man. It is the former that were introduced at 1248b12., and in terms of them the fine-and-good man was defined. If Aristotle's position is to be free from circularity, some things must be independently

⁸ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics Books I, II and VIII*, trans. Michael Woods (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b-1249a, Pg. 40-41. All quotations from the *EE* are from the Woods translation unless otherwise specified.

⁹ Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 10-12.

¹⁰ Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 379.

recognized as fine (i.e. the virtues and virtuous acts); then, having identified the fine-and-good man, we can identify a further class of natural goods which are fine for him."¹¹

We thus have three fairly similar accounts of the traditional 'merely-good'/'fine-and-good' distinction made by Aristotle at the end of the *EE*, describing the merely-good agent as one who certainly possesses all of the character virtues, but who aspires only to acquire the natural goods and to direct their life towards nothing more than this. The fine-and-good agent, on the other hand, is understood as one who possesses these same virtuous dispositions, but who also aspires to perform fine actions for the sake of, as Kenny puts it, what is '*splendid, fine, and noble*'.

Difficulties for Aristotle under the Traditional Interpretation:

A serious difficulty for Aristotle on this interpretation is that it sees him as describing the merely-good agent as possessing all of the virtues, according to the definitions made earlier in both the *NE* and the *EE*, but then reclassifying such fully virtuous agents as not really *completely* virtuous at all, based on their possession of an incorrect *reflective attitude* towards their virtuous dispositions and actions – an aspect of virtue entirely absent from their earlier characterisations, at least in the *EE*. In order, therefore, to make sense of Aristotle's argument at the end of this text, on the traditional view at least, one must find a coherent way of understanding how an agent can possess all of the virtues and act as the completely virtuous fine-and-good agent would act, but at the same time somehow fail to be *fully* virtuous, according to Aristotle's own definition of what virtue consists in.

In response to the difficulty of this task, Broadie is compelled to ask the question:

*"...what must virtue essentially be, if it can be genuinely possessed by those who value it for the wrong reason[?]"*¹²

This problem can be further understood in the sense that one typically understands virtuous acts as *necessarily including a proper reflective attitude*, in that the virtuous agent would necessarily recognise their own actions and disposition as virtuous under the guise of 'acting as the virtuous agent would act'. This being the case, it is rather difficult to understand how this reflective attitude could ever be removed from an agent's virtue without them losing the virtue altogether. One also finds a difficulty in understanding how, with the addition of a correct reflective attitude to the life of an otherwise virtuous agent, the merely-good agent's life would be in any way improved, if we understand pleasure and happiness as coming only through action, and the merely-good agent as performing all of the same actions as their fine-and-good counterpart.

A Solution to the Problems of the Traditional Interpretation:

Broadie expertly overcomes these difficulties by simply rejecting the contention that the virtuous agent's actions necessarily involve any kind of reflective component relating to their conscious consideration that '*this is the virtuous thing to do therefore I will do it*'. She then goes on to invoke Plato's *Myth of Er* in order to show how a proper reflective attitude towards virtue can indeed be considered a valuable thing for one to possess in addition to mere-goodness.

In developing this argument Broadie begins by reducing the account of virtue to the minimum reasonable standard still compatible with Aristotle's own account, contending that this 'natural' account of virtue tells us only that:

¹¹ *EE*, Commentary, 176-177.

¹² Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," 106.

"...virtue is a firm disposition or set of dispositions to respond appropriately in a wide variety of typical human situations."¹³

She follows this with the argument that:

"If [this] is correct, then anyone is wrong who holds, as some philosophers are said by some interpreters to do, that the virtuous agent always acts from the thought 'This is what the virtuous person so placed would do' or from the thought 'To do this action is to act from virtue or virtuously.'"¹⁴

According to Broadie's argument it is thus straightforwardly possible that one could be 'naturally' virtuous, but at the same time lack any kind of reflective attitude towards one's own virtuous dispositions and actions. Broadie further elaborates on this point as follows:

"I am not sure how many philosophers really themselves believe that the morally admirable agent acts from either of these superfluous thoughts. But for some reason we find philosophers reading this view into other philosophers, not least Aristotle. However, if Aristotle accepts the natural account of virtue – an account which makes neat sense of his "Spartan type" – then (to that extent) the superfluous thoughts are no part of Aristotle's picture of the virtuous agent in action."¹⁵

We thus take, as the central pillar to Broadie's interpretation of Aristotle's merely-good/fine-and-good distinction, that the virtuous agent does not necessarily *consciously* consider their actions as virtuous. We should certainly expect such an agent to be conscious of the fact that their actions are practically wise, or at least that they represent the right thing to do under whatever circumstances they find themselves in, as we must understand the virtuous agent as often consciously choosing action and thus requiring some form of conscious deliberation in order for such decisions to be made, but we take this form of reasoned deliberation to be the only reflective attitude the virtuous agent requires, and one that is clearly distinct from any deeper consideration of virtue itself.

Having thus put this problem of understanding the difference between the merely-good and the fine-and-good agent to one side, we are, however, still left with the question of how a correct reflective attitude towards virtue would function to make one's life better – in the sense that any account of the best life (i.e. that of the fine-and-good agent) should be demonstrably better than any alternative (i.e. that of the merely-good). If we are to understand the merely-good and fine-and-good agents as always performing the same actions and thus experiencing the same pleasures, one struggles to see a compelling reason to value one life over the other.

Broadie responds to this question by arguing (via an analogy to Plato's myth of Er) that it is actually *between lives* (i.e. from parent to child, or legislator to citizen, or between reincarnations as described in this myth itself) that an agent's correct reflective attitude towards virtue becomes important and valuable.

According to Broadie's account of this myth, a virtuous agent's soul is, after death, freed from the bounds of whatever sub-rational habituated dispositions it previously possessed; thus taking on, in the afterlife, a kind of purely intellectual existence. From this state, as reward for their just-completed life of virtue, the agent is given a free choice of fortunes for their next life. From their purely intellectual state, however, totally lacking their former non-rational virtuous dispositions, the agent manifests, rather tragically, some previously hidden hypothetical intellectual conception of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 107.

the best life, namely the life of the greatest despot, in which, unbeknownst to them, they end up devouring their own children.¹⁶ The moral one takes from this myth, apart from the rare chance to appreciate the horrors of cannibalistic filicide, is that only those with a proper *intellectual* appreciation of their virtue, that is, only those who possess *wisdom* in this regard, will ever be freed from this horrific cycle of earthly reincarnation.

From this account, Broadie argues that a proper reflective attitude toward one's virtue, rather than just an understanding of its utility for one's acquisition of the natural goods, would have decisively helped Plato's mythical agent make a better 'life choice' in the absence of their former virtuous sub-rational dispositions. Broadie then correlates this myth with the more realistic scenario of a virtuous agent unaware of the value of virtue to their own life, raising a child. In this scenario it is clearly possible that this agent would fail to properly habituate their child into the same virtuous dispositions they themselves unappreciatively possess. As with the myth of Er, this would constitute a failure to transmit one's virtuous sub-rational dispositions from one life to the next.

From this argument Broadie draws the straightforward conclusion that:

"The right reflective attitude to virtue is required, then, not for possession of virtue by individuals, but for its inculcation in the next generation."¹⁷

Against Broadie's position, one could argue that virtue might in fact be transmitted *by example alone*, whereby a virtuous parent, by simply performing virtuous actions, would likely inculcate the same virtuous dispositions they possess in their offspring – albeit incidentally. In Broadie's defence, however, one must recognise that such a transmission of virtue would be far less likely to occur than if it were intentionally conceived. One also expects that many of the key virtue-demonstrating moments in a parent's life would in fact be intentionally concealed from their children, as the situations in which one's virtuous dispositions are most clearly manifested (e.g. those in which one's courage, temperance or justice are most acutely tested), would be the very situations that a parent would hope to keep their children away from – if they were unaware of the potential importance of such events to their children's development.

In any case, what we see in the traditional interpretation of Aristotle's merely-good Spartan is that this agent considers the chief good of human life to consist in something other than virtue and virtuous actions, namely one's possession of the natural goods. As such, one would certainly expect, for such agents, that some sense of the importance of the possession of these goods to one's life would have been dutifully inculcated into the minds of their young, but that this would have occurred at the expense of any information concerning the importance of the virtues (barring heroic courage), even as these relate to the acquisition of these goods, thus abruptly halting any virtuous legacy the Spartan parent may otherwise have left. Broadie elaborates on this very point as follows:

"The point then for Plato and Aristotle is that when false ideas of the essence of eudaimonia are on the market, ideas that exercise legitimate attraction in that each centers on something – power, prosperity, beauty, strength, good connections – which it is perfectly natural and reasonable for human beings to desire as good – then true and well-articulated reflection is needed to drive back those false ideas. The point is not that an individual in the grip of one of those false ideas cannot be genuinely virtuous in his life, but that his virtue is much less likely to propagate itself across the generations."¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

And one does not need to look far in modern society to find stories of hardworking, successful parents failing to inculcate their own successful work ethic into their children, with their progeny subsequently squandering an otherwise blessed birth.

Problems for Broadie's Solution to the Problems of the Traditional Interpretation:

The first problem we can identify for Broadie's interpretation is that on her account the higher virtue of nobility is simply equated to a form of theoretical knowledge – an attribution for virtue Aristotle argues against at every opportunity. Secondly, one struggles to find any difference between a fine-and-good and a merely-good action when, on this account, they are always performed at the same opportunity and for the same practical reason. If fineness is equated to one's correct understanding of the value of virtue and one's ability to pass this on to further generations, acting 'for the sake the fine' would thus correspond to something like 'acting for the sake of this understanding' or 'acting for the sake of the transmission of this understanding', which is not in itself an easily digestible concept, nor one that convincingly characterises what we would typically call fine or noble. Indeed, calling any particular act or object fine would seem to become a rather redundant attribution on this account if nobility merely connotes one's ability to intentionally inculcate virtue into the next generation – unless one considers such acts and objects as themselves constituting a species of educational device necessary for this inculcation, according to which any virtuous action performed intentionally before an audience of children would thus constitute a fine action. A third problem for Broadie is that this interpretation of nobility would appear to consist in no more than a restatement of the basic tenets of practical wisdom, in the sense that practical wisdom, at least of the political or legislative variety, fundamentally involves knowledge of the human good and the value of the inculcation of virtue into others. This point is most clearly made by Aristotle in Book 6 of the *NE*, as follows:

*"It remains therefore that [practical wisdom] is a true and practical state involving reason, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being. [...] This is why we think Pericles and people like him are practically wise, because they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for people in general; and we consider household managers and politicians to be like this."*¹⁹

If one were to subtract knowledge of the proper value of virtue and the importance of inculcating virtue from the role of Aristotle's paradigm legislator, one is left with very little meaningful work for such an agent to do, as evidenced by this further statement from Aristotle concerning the primary aims of these people:

*"What happens in cities bears this out as well, because legislators make the citizens good by habituating them, and this is what every legislator intends. Those who do not do it well miss their target; and it is in this respect that a good political system differs from a bad one."*²⁰

We see this view also reiterated in the *Politics* as follows:

*"But since we say that the excellence of the citizen and ruler is the same as that of the good man, and that the same person must first be a subject and then a ruler, the legislator has to see that they become good men, and by what means this may be accomplished, and what is the end of the perfect life."*²¹

¹⁹ *NE*, Book VI, Chapter 5, 1140b4-11, Pg. 107.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 1, 1103b2-6, Pg. 23-24.

²¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Book VII, Chapter 14, 1333a11-16, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 2115. All quotations from the *Politics* are from the Jowett translation unless otherwise specified.

It would thus appear that Broadie's account of Aristotle's concept of nobility is, for practical purposes, identical to Aristotle's concept of *legislative* practical wisdom. Furthermore, in the development of her argument, Broadie states that:

*"[In the] Eudemian account of happiness, the highest human good, has been couched in terms of practical virtue. Everything until just before the end suggests that in the EE Aristotle unambiguously regards the person of virtue as the very best sort of human being. But in the last chapter we find him demoting virtue."*²²

If we understand this 'demotion' of character virtue as consisting in no less than the promotion of practical wisdom, even of the rarefied political kind, then this ceases to really constitute any kind demotion at all. It is clearly the case, however, that Aristotle does intend the 'higher' virtue of nobility to constitute something distinct from the 'lower' virtues – including practical wisdom – and not just in the sense of distinguishing between normal 'citizen' practical wisdom and the higher 'legislative' form. We thus take it that when Aristotle makes the following statement, he intends to begin a discussion concerning something he has not already covered in the *EE*:

*"We have spoken earlier about each virtue individually; but since we have distinguished and separated their capacity, we must also articulate the virtue that results from them, which we now call nobility."*²³

In order to make sense of the merely-good/fine-and-good distinction in the *EE*, we thus require an alternative to Broadie's account, one that clearly distinguishes nobility from the other virtues and also avoids conflating this higher virtue with the legislative branch of practical wisdom.

I contend that such an alternative can be found and that the key to it lies in the development of clearer picture of what Aristotle intended with his Spartan exemplar of mere-goodness.

Central to the traditional interpretation of the merely-good/fine-and-good distinction, from which Broadie's account is drawn, is the supposition that Aristotle's example of the merely-good Spartan reflects an agent who is completely and continuously virtuous (i.e. from a deep and unwavering disposition). A closer look at Aristotle's opinion of Spartan society, however, and in particular how he understood virtue and goodness to have been placed within it, will lead us to a rather different picture of these people.

In the picture of Spartan life I will now develop, two rather interesting points concerning their form of goodness will be identified. Firstly, it will be shown that the Spartans acquired and defended their share of the natural goods primarily through the act of war and that they consequently trained their young exclusively for the virtue of courage, under the rather short-sighted supposition that this would best equip them and their society to succeed. Secondly, it will be shown that despite this myopic and plainly incomplete form of virtue, the Spartans remained able to achieve something *resembling* complete virtue, according to the contention from Aristotle that war temporarily compels men to the virtues of temperance and justice, in which case any sufficiently courageous and thus battle-ready agent (viz. the Spartan) would achieve a state of 'mere-goodness' (assuming the virtues of courage, temperance and justice as sufficient for this purpose) whenever they were at war – but not permanently. This conception of mere-goodness will be thus identified as *similar* to complete virtue, in the sense that one possessed of it will act just as the completely virtuous agent acts, but distinct in the sense that it is simply *not permanent* and therefore *incomplete*. It is this

²² Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," 97.

²³ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b8-11, Pg. 40.

temporary form of all-round goodness founded on the single virtue of courage that, I argue, picks out exactly what Aristotle intends with his Spartan exemplar.

An Alternative Characterisation of Aristotle's Spartan Exemplar:

We can begin to develop a better understanding of Aristotle's view of the Spartans by considering the following two observations he makes in the *Politics*:

"The charge which Plato brings, in the Laws, against the intention of the [Lacedaemonian] legislator, is likewise justified; the whole constitution has regard to one part of excellence only—the excellence of the soldier, which gives victory in war. So long as they were at war, therefore, their power was preserved, but when they had attained empire they fell, for of the arts of peace they knew nothing, and have never engaged in any employment higher than war. There is another error, equally great, into which they have fallen. Although they truly think that the goods for which men contend are to be acquired by excellence rather than by vice, they err in supposing that these goods are to be preferred to the excellence which gains them."²⁴

"...even the Greeks of the present day who are reputed to be best governed, and the legislators who gave them their constitutions, do not appear to have framed their governments with a regard to the best end, or to have given them laws and education with a view to all the excellences, but in a vulgar spirit have fallen back on those which promised to be more useful and profitable. Many modern writers have taken a similar view: they commend the Lacedaemonian constitution, and praise the legislator for making conquest and war his sole aim, a doctrine which may be refuted by argument and has long ago been refuted by facts. For most men desire empire in the hope of accumulating the goods of fortune; and on this ground Thibron and all those who have written about the Lacedaemonian constitution have praised their legislator, because the Lacedaemonians, by being trained to meet dangers, gained great power. But surely they are not a happy people now that their empire has passed away, nor was their legislator right.

[...]

Facts, as well as arguments, prove that the legislator should direct all his military and other measures to the provision of leisure and the establishment of peace. For most of these military states are safe only while they are at war, but fall when they have acquired their empire; like unused iron they lose their edge in time of peace. And for this the legislator is to blame, he never having taught them how to lead the life of peace."²⁵

One takes from these passages that, firstly, the Spartans' success, while it lasted, was based primarily on their possession of '*the excellence of the soldier*' (which we take to consist in heroic courage, alongside the various other martial skills), and that the excellences required to '*lead the life of peace*' were, on the other hand, entirely absent from their lives. Secondly, we find Aristotle quite clearly describing how the Spartan legislators (and even those of the Greeks), thought it a good idea to direct their citizens to this single virtue of soldierly courage in order to best sustain their wealth, thus reflecting Aristotle's contention in the *EE*, concerning the Spartans, that "*...there are those who think that one should possess virtue, but for the sake of the natural goods.*"²⁶, now understood not in the sense that these agents possessed all of the virtues, but instead that they believed one should possess just the single virtue of courage in order to best secure one's share of the natural goods. Thirdly, we see that the Spartans would appear to have been ready, despite their deep grounding in the single virtue of courage, to disavow themselves of this excellence once the things gained from it, i.e. the natural goods (viz. the spoils of war), had been acquired, according to the twin claims that,

²⁴ *Politics*, Book II, Chapter 9, 1271b1-11, Pg. 2017.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Chapter 14, 1333b4-1334a10, Pg. 2116.

²⁶ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b40-a1, Pg. 41,

for these people at least, “...these goods are to be preferred to the excellence which gains them...”²⁷ and that “...like unused iron they lose their edge in time of peace.”²⁸ We find this same point reiterated later in the *Politics* (but corrupted at the last moment by a lacuna) as follows:

*“[The Lacedaemonians], while agreeing with other men in their conception of the highest goods, differ from the rest of mankind in thinking that they are to be obtained by the practice of a single excellence. And since these goods and the enjoyment of them are greater than the enjoyment derived from the excellences...[lacuna]”*²⁹

In light of Aristotle’s observation that the Spartans preferred the natural goods to the single excellence which gains them from the previous two passages, we might reasonably expect this third to have originally concluded with a statement to the effect that ‘*because the spoils of war and the enjoyment of them are greater than the enjoyment derived from the excellence employed in their acquisition and defence, the Spartans natural tendency was to cease exercising this excellence once these goods had been secured*’. This hardly represents an unlikely view when one compares the pleasures involved in combat to those derived from one’s employment of the natural goods. It would take an unusual sort of character to prefer the former.

One wonders how an agent could ever stop employing an excellence, however, if it were the kind of deeply held disposition to act in certain ways we understand the Spartan’s form of courage to have been. In response we can argue that one does not typically understand the Spartans to have been perpetually engaged in battle, in constant conquest or in the constant defence of their realm. We instead expect these wars to have been periodic, occurring whenever a potential invader had built up sufficient forces to give it a go, or whenever the Spartans themselves decided it would be a good idea to engage in a spot of neighbourly bloodshed. If we also understand the Spartan form of courage to which Aristotle refers to have been just the heroic form of this excellence manifested in the heat of battle, it would follow that Spartan life during peacetime would have been effectively devoid of such courageous acts and thus, for practical purposes, devoid of virtue. If, therefore, the Spartans *were not always at war*, we can quite reasonably understand how, when in possession of sufficient natural goods, they could have realistically ceased employing their single virtue of heroic courage.

A second way of understanding this sometimes virtuous, sometimes not virtuous nature of the Spartans is to consider the example of a courageous but *exclusively professional* fire-fighter, someone who fights fires with the utmost skill and proficiency in all respects of this trade, *but only when there is financial remuneration involved*. Out of a distinct deficiency in every other virtue except courage, such an agent might choose, when not on a shift, to let a nearby house burn to the ground, simply because there is nothing in it for him. We could not consider this agent as necessarily lacking in courage in the broadest sense, for their inaction is due in no part to any sense of fear or whatever best represents a deficiency of courage, but rather stems simply from the determination to employ their abilities only where there is financial remuneration involved. This example might then be extended to a scenario whereby this fire-fighter receives sufficient money over a period of time to enable them to retire from the fire-fighting profession entirely, at which point such an expert but *exclusively professional* fire-fighter would likely let entire neighbourhoods burn to the ground wherever such a tragedy does not affect the ongoing prosperity of his or her own life.

We can perhaps suppose Aristotle’s Spartan exemplar to have been like this fire-fighter, in the sense that they would never have considered courageous acts and the possession of courage worthwhile

²⁷ *Politics*, Book II, Chapter 9, 1271b11, Pg. 2017.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Chapter 14, 1333b4-1334a10, Pg. 2116.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Chapter 15, 1334a40-1334b4, Pg. 2117.

for their own sake. They would certainly have been courageous, again, in the broader sense of this term (a more detailed analysis of what kind of courage the Spartans actually possess will be presented further on), but their distinct deficiency in all of the other virtues would have enabled them to *choose* when to utilise their single excellence, thus manifesting it only when there is some kind of desirable personal gain to be had.

If this is correct, the Spartans would have been a rather detestable lot, and made no better by their negligent attitude toward the management of their state, as illustrated by Aristotle in the following:

*“Again, the revenues of the state are ill-managed; there is no money in the treasury, although they are obliged to carry on great wars, and they are unwilling to pay taxes. The greater part of the land being in the hands of Spartans, they do not look closely into one another’s contributions. The result which the legislator has produced is the reverse of beneficial; for he has made his city poor, and his citizens greedy.”*³⁰

This characterisation of the Spartan citizen clearly differs from the more romantic picture we hold of these characters in modern times, a view most concisely illustrated by the word ‘laconic’ still found in common use, which refers, in stark contrast to the above account, to a kind of uncomplicated and stoically brave nature, typically understood as just the kind of character one would want to identify as virtuous. This is perhaps a reflection of the rather romantic nature we typically read into historic accounts of heroism, according to which one typically overlooks the less-noteworthy or undesirable properties of otherwise heroic agents. In any case, we are here utilising Aristotle’s own account of the Spartan citizen, so despite any rose-tinted romantic view we might hold for these agents, we can better understand them as having been, on Aristotle’s ancient but fairly contemporaneous account, sorely lacking in anything we could reasonably consider as goodness, nor anything like the incorrectly valued full virtue of Broadie’s or the traditional account, and instead possessing just the single virtue of heroic courage (and then utilising it only for their own material benefit).

In light of this re-characterisation of Spartan virtue which, being based on Aristotle’s own observations, we have reason to consider as rather authoritative, it remains difficult to understand how one could every attribute even mere-goodness to these agents on account of their clear deficiency in all of the virtues except courage. This clearly represents a problem for our understanding of Aristotle’s Spartan exemplar in the *EE*, which we do take to be an agent in possession of the full suite of character virtues, or at least whatever minimum requirement Aristotle considers justification enough for his attribution of mere-goodness.

We can attempt to garner further insight into the type of virtue possessed by the Spartans by analysing the terminology used by Aristotle in his reference to them in the *EE*, in particular his attribution to them of a ‘citizen state’ or ‘civic disposition’ in the following: (my emphasis)

*“There is a certain **state of a citizen** such as the Spartans have, or other such people would have. This is a state of the following sort...”*³¹

The same passage is translated by Solomon as follows:

*“There is also the **civic disposition**, such as the Laconians have, and others like them might have; its nature would be something like this...”*³²

³⁰ Ibid., Book II, Chapter 9, 1271b12-17, Pg. 2017.

³¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, Pg. 41, 1248b36-38.

The terms 'state of a citizen' and 'civic disposition' represent subtly different translations of the Greek term 'hexis politikē'³³, with 'hexis' referring to a state or disposition and 'politikē' meaning roughly what it sounds like in English. Interestingly, in the Solomon translation of the *EE*, which includes the books common to the *NE* absent in the Woods translation, we find the term 'civic' used prominently in two further locations. Firstly, in relation to a form of utility-based 'civic friendship'³⁴, and secondly, with respect to one of the five forms of courage Aristotle also discusses, namely 'civic courage', elaborated in Solomon's translation as follows:

"There are five kinds of courage, so named for a certain analogy between them; for they all endure the same things but not for the same reasons. One is a civic courage, due to the sense of shame; [...]."

*[...] civic courage is the effect of law. But in truth none of these forms is courage, though all are useful for encouragement in danger."*³⁵

We also find this form of courage described in the *NE*, but with the word 'civic' replaced by 'citizen' in the Crisp translation and 'political' (closer to the original Greek) in the Ross translation, as follows:

Crisp: *"Courage, then, is something like this. But the name is applied to five other states of character as well. First comes citizen courage, since this is most like courage proper: citizens are thought to endure danger because of the legal penalties and opprobrium if they do not, and because of the honours they receive. This is why the most courageous people are thought to be those among whom cowards are held in dishonour and courageous people honoured."*³⁶

Ross: *"Courage, then, is something of this sort, but the name is also applied to five other kinds. (1) First comes political courage; for this is most like true courage. Citizens seem to face dangers because of the penalties imposed by the laws and the reproaches they would otherwise incur, and because of the honours they win by such action;"*³⁷

We thus find Aristotle using the term 'civic' (or 'citizen' or 'political') to describe a kind of quasi-virtuous disposition, whereby a 'civic minded' agent acts just as the virtuous agent would act, but only out of fear of punishment or in order to win honours, thus performing what are to all intents and purposes virtuous actions, *but not for their own sake*.

We also find a similar (if not identical) usage of the term 'civic', in relation to a kind of utility based friendship, in the *EE*, as follows:

"...civic friendship is that resting on equality; it is based on utility; and just as cities are friends to one another, so in the like way are citizens. 'The Athenians no longer know the Megarians'; nor do

³² Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Joseph Solomon, Book VII, Chapter 15, 1248b36-38, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 1980.

³³ Richard Kraut, Review of *Aristotle in the Perfect Life*, by Anthony Kenny, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Sep., 1995): 733.

³⁴ Solomon in Barnes, *EE*, Book 7, Chapter 10, 1242a2, Pg. 1968.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter 1, 1229a12-1229b13.

³⁶ *NE*, Book III, Chapter 8, 1116a, Pg. 51.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. William Ross, Book III, Chapter 8, 1116a16-20, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 1762.

citizens one another, when they are no longer useful to one another, and the friendship is merely a temporary one for a particular exchange of goods."³⁸

We thus take the word 'civic', as it is applied to virtues and virtuous actions, to have effectively the same meaning as 'utilitarian', in the sense that 'civic actions' are done only in order to obtain some further good (or to avoid something bad) and never valued for their own sake. We find the same point made in the *NE* during the Book 8 discussion also concerning friendship in which Aristotle distinguishes those who love only for utility (and pleasure) from the better form of friendship based on an appreciation for the other's virtue (although may one take this as simply a duplication of the above passages from the *EE*), as follows:

*"Those who love one another for utility love the other not in himself, but only in so far as they will obtain some good for themselves from him. The same goes for those who love for pleasure; they do not like a witty person because of his character, but because they find him pleasing to themselves. So those who love for utility are fond of the other because of what is good for themselves, and those who love for pleasure because of what is pleasant for themselves, not in so far as the person they love is who he is, but in so far as he is useful or pleasant."*³⁹

In light of the understanding of the term 'civic' drawn from these examples, we might now understand it, as applied to the Spartans, as implying simply that these agents acted virtuously only in order to gain the natural goods and/or to avoid punishment, thus making sense of Aristotle's observation that "...there are those who think that one should possess virtue, but for the sake of the natural goods."⁴⁰, but now understood in the sense that these agents act just as the virtuous agent only when this will help them acquire more of the natural goods – and for no other reason than this.

This further understanding of Spartan virtue does not, however, advance us any further from the position reached above whereby the Spartans were understood as possessing just the single virtue of heroic courage. For what we understand now, in addition to this, is simply that this single virtue was probably only of the civic variety, in which case we would now appear to have *even less* reason to consider them as merely-good, according to the supposition that even in their single minded focus on heroic courage, they still appear to have failed to possess this one virtue in its most complete and noble form. Being heroically courageous, but only in the 'utilitarian' (or 'exclusively professional') sense discussed above, the Spartans would appear to have been even less good than previously thought.

At this point our interpretation thus finds strong agreement with the first part of the original statement in the *EE* concerning Aristotle's Spartan example, contending that "...there are those who think that one should possess virtue, but for the sake of the natural goods..."⁴¹, but we remain some distance from making sense of the very next sentence, assumedly following on from the first, in which we are told that these agents "...are therefore good men (for natural goods are so for them)..."⁴², for it remains the case that Aristotle's Spartan, as we so far understand him, was fundamentally deficient in every goodness-bearing virtue except courage.

One could respond to this problem with the argument that the Spartans simply possessed all of the virtues in this 'civic' sense, whereby they would indeed act justly and temperately, etc., but only in order to avoid punishment or to win honours, in which case they would indeed have possessed

³⁸ Solomon in Barnes, *EE*, Book VII, Chapter 10, 1242b22-27, Pg. 1969.

³⁹ *NE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1156a10-17, Pg. 146.

⁴⁰ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b40-a1, Pg. 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1248b40.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1249a1.

something like full virtue, *'but for the sake of the natural goods'*. We do, however, have reason to consider this as a highly unlikely scenario, for while it may be the case that certain religions promote temperance and justice for the honours (e.g. divine grace) one might hope to receive in return, one does not typically understand this kind of posthumous prize as constituting anything close to the central focus of the Spartan conception of honour-garnering exploits, which we take instead to have been limited to acts of valour on the battlefield. Furthermore, we must not forget that Aristotle makes it rather clear that the Spartans only went in for one virtue, and one virtue alone, under the short-sighted supposition that heroic courage was sufficient means to their ends.

How then can we understand the Spartans as having ever been, in any sense, even merely-good? One further passage from the *Politics* provides us with the beginnings of a solution to this problem:

*"Since the end of individuals and of states is the same, the end of the best man and of the best constitution must also be the same; it is therefore evident that there ought to exist in both of them the excellences of leisure; for peace, as has been often repeated, is the end of war, and leisure of toil. But leisure and cultivation may be promoted not only by those excellences which are practised in leisure, but also by some of those which are useful to business. For many [necessities] of life have to be supplied before we can have leisure. Therefore a city must be temperate and brave, and able to endure: for truly, as the proverb says, 'There is no leisure for slaves,' and those who cannot face danger like men are the slaves of any invader. Courage and endurance are required for business and philosophy for leisure, temperance and justice for both, and more especially in times of peace and leisure, for war compels men to be just and temperate, whereas the enjoyment of good fortune and the leisure which comes with peace tend to make them insolent."*⁴³

From the final sentence of this passage we take it that Aristotle understood there as being some kind of distinction between a man's character at war and at peace, drawn from his observation that the fully virtuous agent's dispositions of temperance and justice are more important at times of peace, because at times of war these dispositions are manifested 'naturally'. Now Aristotle is here not talking about the Spartans, but rather about men in general, in which case it would appear that for any man sent to war the virtues of temperance and justice will be manifested, regardless of their usual deeper peacetime character. I must, however, make clear something that must have been implied by Aristotle in this passage, for it must certainly be the case that only men *in possession of sufficient training and character to actually contribute to war*, such as the *'excellence of the soldier'* the Spartans singularly aimed for, will be capable of also being compelled to the virtues of temperance and justice in this most testing environment. This being the case we would have reason to further qualify Aristotle's final sentence in the above passage to the effect that *'war compels men to be just and temperate – as long as they are actually capable of contributing to war, in the sense of possessing a keen sense of courage and outstanding physical conditioning'*.

Should we not, however, take this as just a further example of Aristotle's conception of civic virtue, here simply extended to the virtues of temperance and justice? It would seem plausible that an agent would wish to act justly and temperately in order to win approbation and avoid punishment when at war and thus be, in a sense, compelled to temperance and justice. It is unfortunate that Aristotle gives no further detail about this compulsion, rendering it impossible to develop an authoritative interpretation of this passage, but against any merely-civic view of this passage, I contend that the compulsion at play in it runs deeper than mere end-based rationalisation and that it is instead more akin to instinct, in the sense that when one is at war at no point would one consider anything but temperate and just actions. In the same way that illness often affects one's tastes for certain foods, I contend that we can best understand the state of being at war as materially altering one's dispositions of character, in which case the man-at-war does not choose to

⁴³ *Politics*, Book VII, Chapter 15, 1334a11-29, Pg. 2116-2117.

act virtuously simply in order to win honours and avoid punishment, but simply because this is what his dispositions of character indicate should be done. One would therefore be more than merely-continent (or 'merely-civic') in this state, for one is not overcoming one's deeper dispositions, but instead just following them. It is thus my contention that when one is at war one finds one's self *temporarily* in possession of the dispositions of justice and temperance – as long as one is sufficiently prepared for this environment.

We can thus consider the Spartans, in their singular pursuit of courage, of at least the civic variety, to have nonetheless remained capable of achieving something like full virtue (assuming temperance, justice and courage as sufficient for this attribution) *whenever they were at war*. We thus have reason to consider the Spartan citizen, in the theatre of war, to have indeed possessed *temporarily compelled* forms of temperance and justice, along with their underlying disposition for heroic courage, according to which we can reasonably consider the *warring Spartan* to be a *merely-good* agent – as one who possesses, if only temporarily, an all-round virtuous disposition.

One could argue that this distinction between the two states of the warring and the peacetime Spartan (or the warring and peacetime man in general, as was Aristotle's argument in the *Politics*) represents too significant a contrast in the dispositional nature of a human being, rendering such a transition of character impossible or at least very unlikely. In response I contend that, firstly, the transition between these states of 'at war' and 'at peace' constitutes what is probably the most radical transition in material conditions a human being could ever experience, thus reasonably qualifying it as a sufficiently radical transition for such a shift in character to be subsequently manifested. Secondly, we can argue that this transition actually represents no change in one's deeper dispositional nature at all, for as soon as peace is restored one would assumedly return to one's true deeper character (unless the war had gone on long enough to materially alter one's character). In this sense we might say that while it is more than likely that one's character is altered in this transition, it only altered on the very surface, thus only *temporarily* taking on the forms of temperance and justice that one cannot help but manifest in times of war.

We can thus define the two contrasting states of the Spartan (viz. battle-ready) citizen as follows:

- 1) Spartan-at-Peace: Possessing a deep sense of courage (primarily for the sake of honour, but unemployed in this state), intemperate, unjust, insolent – sufficiently vicious to qualify as *not-good-at-all*.
- 2) Spartan-at-War: Possessing a deep sense of courage. Compelled to justice and temperance by the fact that they are at war, albeit reliant on their substantial training in this field – sufficiently virtuous in this state to qualify as *merely-good*.

In these two contrasting states of the Spartan citizen we thus see the same kind of duality of personality one often hears about in modern times with regards to a kind of agent who works hard and virtuously during the day, perhaps compelled by the structure of discipline this situation provides, but goes home at night and subsequently sinks into the intemperance of alcoholism and the injustice of violence. We also see this kind of contrast in character in the lives of famous athletes or sportspeople, as agents who are blest with profound skill and grace on the sports field, but often incapable of retaining anything like this 'noble' character outside of this realm. One also finds such a duality of character, perhaps most prominently, in people whose lives most resemble that of the Spartan, namely those of us actually engaged in war as members of our armed forces. There appears to be no end to stories about decorated, formerly virtuous soldiers, struggling to adapt to a life of relative peace back home. This being the case we can understand the state of 'Spartan-at-War' as perhaps not entirely dissimilar to the equivalent modern state of 'Human-at-War', thus reflecting Aristotle's more general attribution of this state given in the *Politics*.

We thus find Aristotle observing an oscillation between virtue and vice in the lives of his Spartan exemplar, with virtue manifested in times of war as the necessities of honour and personal security demand (both tacitly and as explicitly inculcated in their training), and vice returning the moment these demands have been met.

If such a life were the norm in any particular society one would actually see some logic in the inculcation of an extreme sense of courage and valour into one's offspring – in order that they would at least be able to fight their way out of the difficult situations they would be continuously finding themselves in. One might even imagine the Spartan rulers, in realising the compelled forms of temperance and justice their courageous but otherwise vicious soldiers end up with 'naturally' at war, to have specifically legislated against the need to inculcate these other virtues, for such training would be wasted in a society that had little interest in the life of peace, other than for the pleasure and amusement it provides them in between their regular bouts of violence. We would thus have reason to consider Aristotle's observation that *"...there are those who think that one should possess virtue, but for the sake of the natural goods."*⁴⁴, as reflecting an agent who realises that if all one really wants is wealth, then all one really needs is courage. For wealth can be acquired through war, and while one assumedly needs the full suite of virtues (i.e. courage, justice and temperance) to be successful in battle, especially in light of the coordination such an effort requires, these other virtues appear 'naturally' in this environment, rendering their earlier inculcation a needless waste of resources.

Such a society would, however, be doomed to failure if valour was their only tool for survival – and not only for the fact that their intemperance and injustice in peacetime would likely lead to destruction from within. For as Aristotle reflects, the advantage of the Spartan's brutal upbringing and consequent ability to obtain and defend their wealth of the natural goods only existed while other societies, i.e. those they pillaged, failed to train their own children in a similar fashion. Once such training became commonplace amongst their rivals, however, the Spartan's supremacy soon faded, as Aristotle elaborates:

"Of those states which in our own day seem to take the greatest care of children, some aim at producing in them an athletic habit, but they only injure their bodies and stunt their growth. Although the Lacedaemonians have not fallen into this mistake, yet they brutalize their children by laborious exercises which they think will make them courageous. But in truth, as we have often repeated, education should not be exclusively, or principally, directed to this end. And even if we suppose the Lacedaemonians to be right in their end, they do not attain it. For among barbarians and among animals courage is found associated, not with the greatest ferocity, but with a gentle and lion-like temper. [...]"

*It is notorious that the Lacedaemonians themselves, while they alone were assiduous in their laborious drill, were superior to others, but now they are beaten both in war and gymnastic exercises. For their ancient superiority did not depend on their mode of training their youth, but only on the circumstance that they trained them when their only rivals did not. [...] We should judge the Lacedaemonians not from what they have been, but from what they are; for now they have rivals who compete with their education; formerly they had none."*⁴⁵

We thus find further support for the rather unromantic view Aristotle held of these heroic characters of a bygone age (bygone even by the ancient standards of Aristotle's time).

⁴⁴ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b40-a1, Pg. 41.

⁴⁵ *Politics*, Book VIII, Chapter 4, 1338b9-38, Pg. 2123-2124.

With regards to our characterisation of the Spartan type, which we understand as representing a kind of ‘sometimes good, sometimes disgraceful’ agent, in his discussions concerning Spartan society in the *Politics* we find Aristotle making one further distinction with regards to aspect of human agency that will further aid our understanding of the final sections of the *EE*, elaborated in the following:

*“If it is disgraceful in men not to be able to use the goods of life, it is peculiarly disgraceful not to be able to use them in time of leisure—to show excellent qualities in action and war, and when they have peace and leisure to be no better than slaves. That is why we should not practise excellence after the manner of the Lacedaemonians...”*⁴⁶

In this passage we find Aristotle characterising two distinct forms of disgrace, the first representing those who are unable to make any use of the natural goods at all – people assumedly so devoid of basic life skills as to be a danger to themselves and those around them – constituting those generally prone to self-destructive behaviour. The second, which we can consider Aristotle’s Spartan type to have stood as an exemplar, represents those who are able to make use of the natural goods in a reasonable fashion *under certain conditions*, namely at times of war, but who, when such ‘virtue-compelling’ conditions are not present, revert to the mode of self-destructive intemperance characteristic of the first type of disgrace mentioned above, thereby living “...no better than slaves.”⁴⁷ It is in order to avoid this slavish state, when freed from the yoke of external compulsion, that Aristotle contends that:

*“Those then who seem to be the best-off and to be in the possession of every good, have special need of justice and temperance—for example, those (if such there be, as the poets say) who dwell in the Islands of the Blest; they above all will need philosophy and temperance and justice, and all the more the more leisure they have, living in the midst of abundance. There is no difficulty in seeing why the state that would be happy and good ought to have these excellences.”*⁴⁸

We also find an argument along a similar vein in the *NE*, in which Aristotle describes how “...some people have been ruined by wealth, and others by courage.”⁴⁹ It is perhaps fair to say that the Spartans were ruined by both, in a kind of aphoristic hybrid of ‘idle hands make the devil’s work’ and ‘live by the sword, die by the sword’. We can also perhaps consider Aristotle as having this Spartan form of ‘peculiar disgrace’ in mind when making the following statement about the importance of virtue to the lives of those who possess wealth, also from the *NE*, as follows:

*“People who have the advantages of fortune, but lack virtue, cannot justly claim to be worthy of great things, nor are they rightly called great-souled; these are impossible without total virtue. But when they possess the advantages of fortune they become supercilious and wantonly violent, since in the absence of virtue it is not easy to carry such goods gracefully. Being unable to do this and thinking themselves superior to other people, they look down on them, and do as they please.”*⁵⁰

One might consider the history of the Spartans to have offered, in Aristotle’s time at least, a rather fertile example from which to draw countless observations with respect to how *not* to run a society, and such observations would appear to permeate Aristotle’s corpus considerably.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Book VII, Chapter 15, 1334a36-40, Pg. 2117.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1334a39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1334a29-36.

⁴⁹ *NE*, Book I, Chapter 3, 1094b19, Pg. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Book IV, Chapter 3, 1124a26-1124b3, Pg. 70.

Further to our earlier characterisation Aristotle's Spartan exemplar, we can now merge the forms of disgrace just mentioned with the states of the Spartan citizen earlier identified to now define *three* distinct types of agency which, I will argue in what follows, we find Aristotle referring to in the concluding passages of the *EE*, as follows:

- 1) The Entirely Disgraceful Agent: Pathologically vicious, always prone to self-destructive behaviour (even, one assumes, when at war), entirely lacking in 'life-skills', totally unqualified for the possession of even the most basic natural goods.
- 2) The Sometimes Good, Sometimes Disgraceful Agent: Not constitutionally virtuous, but capable of virtue under compulsion, if only temporarily, typically as a result of being at war – assuming they are sufficiently trained for survival in this environment.
- 3) The Always Good Agent: Always virtuous, remaining so even in possession of the greatest natural goods and/or freed from the yoke of wartime compulsion.

Contrasting this account of the Spartan citizen with the account from Broadie discussed above, we now have it that the reflective attitude an agent holds towards their own virtue plays little part in distinguishing the sometimes-good agent from the always-good agent, for when the Spartan exemplar is in their good state, temporarily compelled by war to the excellences of justice and temperance, they will be reflecting on the value of their virtue in just the same way that the always good agent does (which is to say, probably not that much at all). It is the fact that they have chosen to put themselves into this environment and have been specifically trained for it, therein becoming identical to the virtuous agent in all respects, and at other times choose not to, and therein becoming identical to the disgraceful agent, that fundamentally differentiates the *temporary mere-goodness* of Spartan citizen from the *permanent virtue* and hence *nobility* of the fine-and-good agent. We can thus further simplify this distinction to just that between temporary and permanent goodness, with the latter constituting complete virtue and hence nobility and the first, on the other hand, constituting no more than mere-goodness.

In deference to Broadie's account, we can certainly not reject the importance of a correct reflective attitude towards virtue for the purpose of properly inculcating such dispositions into one's offspring, as this obviously plays an extremely important role in the perpetuation of good society, constituting a top priority for politicians and parents alike. But it now seems, according to the account of the Spartan citizen just developed, that this educational or reflective aspect of virtue has very little to do with what Aristotle intends as the primary focus of his Spartan exemplar, and even less so in light of his characterisation of the primary role of the legislator described elsewhere. We instead take it that Aristotle's intention in the corresponding passage in the *EE* was to utilise the Spartan as a class of agent that is not really virtuous at all, *only becoming so temporarily as and when necessity demands*, so that whereas the traditional (Broadie, Kenny, et al) interpretation of the *EE* tells us that the merely-good Spartan possesses virtue only "...'Because virtue pays'..."⁵¹ the above re-characterisation now tells us that the battle-ready Spartan citizen possesses virtue only **when** virtue pays.

In light of this re-characterisation let us now turn our sights upon the remainder of the first half of the final chapter of the *EE*, in order to see what interpretation can now be reasonably made, and most importantly, to see whether this interpretation functions to more closely align the *EE* with the *NE*.

⁵¹ Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life*, 12.

Reinterpreting the first half of the final chapter of the *EE* in light of the Alternative Characterisation of Aristotle's Spartan Exemplar:

At the beginning of Book 8, Chapter 3, before the introduction of the Spartan exemplar discussed above, Aristotle introduces the distinction between the merely-good agent we later find exemplified by the Spartan exemplar, and the fine-and-good agent in the following terms:

*"Being good and being fine-and-good admit of distinction, not only in their names but also in themselves. For, of all goods, those are ends which are worth having for their own sake, while, of these, all that are commended for themselves are fine. For of these things it is true that the actions from them are commended and they are themselves commended – justice, both itself and the actions from it, and those who are temperate; for temperance is also commended."*⁵²

Here we find Aristotle taking a rather liberal approach towards what we should consider as fine, by first distinguishing, within the broader category of goods, those that are also worth having for their own sake as *ends*, reiterating the distinction we see elsewhere between instrumental goods used merely so serve some other purpose and those we value simply for their own sake, i.e. those that are properly considered as ends. From within this set of goods '*worth having for their own sake*' Aristotle then picks out only those that are also '*commended for themselves*' as fine. Aristotle then provides us with the virtues of justice and temperance, along with just actions, as paradigm examples of things that are worth having for their own sake and commended for themselves, thus constituting *exemplars of fineness*. Aristotle then contrasts these exemplars with two further examples of ends that are *not* commended as such:

*"...health is not something commended; for neither is its function. Nor is <acting> with strength, for strength is not, either. But though they are not commended, they are goods."*⁵³

Aristotle has thus provided us two examples of goods (explicitly) *worth having for their own sake and commended for themselves*, (i.e. the virtues of temperance and justice which we thus take as exemplars of fineness) followed by two examples of goods *not commended for themselves* (i.e. health and strength). It would be fair to consider Aristotle as making only one distinction at a time in these examples, according to which we can infer that the examples of goods not commended for themselves (i.e. health and strength) would still stand as things worth having for their own sake, i.e. ends. Strength and health thus stand as paradigm examples of goods worth having for their own sake (correlating well with the intuition that one should not require a reason to be healthy, since health is something that is always worth having) but not commended for themselves (correlating well with the additional intuition that one should not be lauded for simply being healthy).

The three distinct categories of goods just discussed can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Goods worth having *for the sake of other things* – i.e. *instrumental* goods.
- 2) Goods worth having *for their own sake* – i.e. goods that are *ends*.
- 3) Goods worth having for their own sake and *commended for themselves* – i.e. goods that are *fine*.

According to Aristotle's paradigm examples, the goods of health and strength thus fit into the second of these categories, as ends or goods worth having for their own sake, and the virtues of justice and temperance thus fit into the third category, as things worth having for their own sake and commended for themselves.

⁵² *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b16-23, Pg. 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1248b23-24.

We might better understand the grammatically questionable term ‘*commended for themselves*’ in the above translation as meaning simply ‘*commended without qualification*’, in the sense that whereas one’s possession of the goods of power and wealth would typically require some further qualification in order to be reasonably respected or otherwise appreciated, one’s possession of virtue and the performance of virtuous acts requires no such enquiry – for excellence is simply excellent. And indeed, the type of qualification one typically requires of those who do possess power and wealth before one can reasonably consider such people in a positive light, does tend to focus on whether or not these goods were earned and are to be employed virtuously by these people.

Distinguishing the Merely-Good Agent from the Disgraceful Agent:

Aristotle next contrasts ‘the good man’ with those who are completely lacking in virtue, who will be generally unable to make use of the natural goods in any way that is not destructive or harmful to themselves and those around them, thus reflecting the kind of ‘*entirely disgraceful agent*’ derived above in our analysis of the corresponding discussion in the *Politics*. Making further use of the paradigm examples of temperance and justice, Aristotle describes this kind of agency as follows:

*“Now a good man is one for whom the natural goods are goods. For the things that are competed for and seem to be the greatest goods, honour and wealth and bodily excellences and good fortune and capacities, are naturally good, but may be harmful for some because of their states of character. For neither a foolish nor an unjust or intemperate man would get any benefit from using them, just as neither will the sick and deformed using the adornments of the sound and whole person.”*⁵⁴

In this we find a clear parallel with the following passage from the *Politics* discussed above, viz.:

*“Courage and endurance are required for business and philosophy for leisure, temperance and justice for both, and more especially in times of peace and leisure, for war compels men to be just and temperate, whereas the enjoyment of good fortune and the leisure which comes with peace tend to make them insolent. Those then who seem to be the best-off and to be in the possession of every good, have special need of justice and temperance...”*⁵⁵

Distinguishing the Fine-and-Good Agent from the Merely-Good Agent:

Now it is clearly the case that within the *EE* passage discussed above (1248b25-34) Aristotle is only discussing ‘*the good man*’, a point we take from the fact that he begins this passage with the statement: “*Now a good man is one for whom the natural goods are goods.*”⁵⁶ We thus take it that for the good agent the natural goods will be useful and constructively employed in the achievement of this agent’s ends, whereas for the disgraceful agent these same goods would likely end up causing harm, or at least being wasted. At 1248b34 Aristotle then introduces the fine-and-good agent as distinct from this merely-good type, in the following:

*“A person is fine-and-good because, amongst goods, those that are fine for themselves belong to him, and because he is a practiser of fine things, and for their own sake. Fine things are the virtues and the deeds resulting from virtue.”*⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b25-34, Pg. 40-41.

⁵⁵ *Politics*, Book VII, Chapter 15, 1334a22-31, Pg. 2117.

⁵⁶ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b25-26, Pg. 40.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1248b34-38.

In this sentence we see three properties specified for the fine-and-good person, separated by the two instances of the word 'and'. The first defines the fine-and-good agent as possessing the goods that are '*fine for themselves*', which we take, at this stage, to be just the virtues (e.g. justice and temperance). The second defines the fine-and-good agent as also practising fine things, which we take to be virtuous acts. Thirdly, and most importantly, Aristotle also defines the fine-and-good agent as practising fine things '*for their own sake*'. It is unclear whether we should infer that these agents also possess the virtues for their own sake, but we at least take this as explicitly defining fine-and-good agents as performing virtuous actions for their own sake. These properties of the fine-and-good can be listed for clearer reference as follows:

Properties of the Fine-and-Good Agent:

- 1) They possess fine things (i.e. the virtues, e.g. justice and temperance).
- 2) They practise fine things (i.e. virtuous activities, e.g. just actions).
- 3) They practise (and perhaps possess) fine things for their own sake.

It is important to note that in the passage quoted above Aristotle separates the terms '*practiser of fine things*' and '*for their own sake*', implying a distinction between the agent who possesses and practices fine things in general and the agent who has and does these same things, *but only for their own sake*.

In considering the last of the above properties of the fine-and-good agent one begins to notice a correlation with Broadie's account of a kind of particular *reflective attitude* the fine-and-good agent must hold towards their virtuous dispositions and actions. But whereas Broadie's was a reflection on the fact that one's actions are good *because they are virtuous*, the fine-and-good agent defined by these three points need not be aware of their own virtue or the virtuous nature of their actions at all. Instead, all that they require on this account is the determination that their actions *feel* right – in the sense of being valued *for their own sake* – and for no other reason than this (apart from the implicit requirements of practical wisdom). This definition thus differs rather significantly from Broadie's illustration, and in fact picks out what is therein described as specifically *not fine*, whereby:

*"...one can be virtuous and reliably come up with the right practical and emotional responses to situations just because one is geared to do precisely that, even though when asked the reflective question 'What is the point of virtue? What should we want virtue for?,' one issues a wrong answer."*⁵⁸

Aristotle's fine-and-good agent, on my interpretation, would also be prone to the very same problem identified by Broadie in her elaboration on the myth of Er, since an agent who performs virtuous acts for their own sake, simply because they *feel* right (and because they are practically reasonable), would likely fail to duplicate any of the virtuous training to which they were initially exposed in the education of their offspring, due to their lack of any proper understanding concerning the value and importance of the virtuous dispositions they nonetheless possess. Against such a problem, as earlier argued, this type of training and the passing down of virtue would in fact be exactly what one should expect the virtuous agent to consciously do, simply because the knowledge and ability to inculcate virtue in others is central to Aristotle's definition of what *practical wisdom* consists in. One would therefore expect both the fine-and-good agent, and perhaps even Aristotle's Spartan exemplar to possess and exercise this kind of educational knowledge pertaining to the importance of the virtuous habituation of one's offspring, although in the case of the Spartans only one virtue would likely ever be transmitted.

⁵⁸ Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," Pg. 105.

Reflecting further on Aristotle's Spartan exemplar, it is clear that these agents would indeed have been aware of the value of their courage, at least as it relates to their acquisition of wealth and honour, and that they would thus have likely been motivated to inculcate this single excellence into their young. It would thus appear that under this interpretation, Aristotle's Spartan exemplar would have been uniquely immune to the problem illustrated by Broadie in the Myth of Er, as their view of courage, with its predominantly rational (end-focussed) nature, would have been just the sort of thing to remain within one's intellectual soul as it traverses Plato's mythical afterlife.

In light of this characterisation we can perhaps now offer an answer to the following question from Broadie concerning the ambiguous nature of the merely-good/fine-and-good distinction:

*"...what must virtue essentially be, if it can be genuinely possessed by those who value it for the wrong reason[?]"*⁵⁹

What we can now say is that complete virtue consists in permanent deep dispositions, and that while an otherwise vicious may might be able to emulate genuine virtue under certain compelling conditions (viz. those of war), we have no reason to consider such an agent as genuinely and completely virtuous, for they are, in this fine-and-good-resembling temporary state, *merely-good*.

In distinguishing Broadie's account of Aristotle's merely-good agent from that just developed, we could expect an agent of my own alternative compelled variety to have in fact questioned the needless dispositional development afforded Broadie's '*genuinely virtuous*' but merely-good agent, for if all one really wants is wealth there is really no need to go to all the effort of developing a complete set of virtuous deep dispositions. All one really needs are whatever virtuous dispositions (i.e. courage) will allow one to enter into situations in which the rest (i.e. temperance and justice) will be 'automatically' manifested, in which case one's virtue inculcation requirements will be reduced to the absolute minimum required to achieve one's ends.

In light of the rather interesting account of human psychology in times of war now drawn from Aristotle's account of the Spartans, and the tendency of these agents to manifest a form of excellence not properly possessed for its own sake, instead possessed only under compulsion and for the sake of natural goods and thus not fine, it is perhaps not entirely surprising to find, immediately after the passages from the *EE* we have just been discussing, Aristotle obliging us with the rather peculiar and ingenious example of the Spartan; peculiar in the sense that these people are historically lauded for their heroic virtue, but on his account not actually virtuous, only compelled to be (and then only occasionally); and ingenious in the sense that these agents illustrate possibly the only way that one could actually be considered *merely-good* under this characterisation (unless one were to find further evidence in Aristotle's corpus of other such temporary virtue-compelling conditions).

Aristotle's exemplars of mere-goodness are thus described, in frustrating brevity, as follows:

*"There is a certain state of a citizen such as the Spartans have, or other such people would have. This is a state of the following sort; there are those who think that one should possess virtue for the sake of the natural goods. They are therefore good men (for natural goods are so for them), but they do not have nobility. For they do not possess the things that are fine for themselves,"*⁶⁰

We thus take it that in the Spartan's occasionally compelled quasi-virtuous state, they would indeed have acted justly and temperately, thus allowing them to make use of the greatest natural goods *in a*

⁵⁹ Ibid., Pg. 106.

⁶⁰ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b38-1249a3, Pg. 41.

good way, but that in the heady days of wealthy peace that would follow, their lack of the more legitimate deep dispositions of 'fine' virtue (other than their heroic-but-civic form of courage) would have led to the inevitable annihilation of any material goods they had previously won, thus exemplifying the *'sometimes good, sometimes disgraceful'* agent defined above and likely serving as the primary target for Aristotle's contention in the *Politics* that:

*"Those [...] who seem to be the best-off and to be in the possession of every good, have special need of justice and temperance..."*⁶¹

In light of this interpretation one might, however, question the point of Aristotle making such a distinction, if it requires such a peculiar example in order to be illustrated. In this light one could indeed argue that if Aristotle's concept of *mere-goodness* inhabits such a small conceptual space, should not its distinction from nobility – a concept that effectively duplicates what we already understand of virtue – be relegated to no more than a side-note, instead of being placed, as we find it, at the concluding apex of the *EE*? One can, however, straightforwardly respond to this argument by simply questioning whether this Spartan exemplar is in fact so unique and peculiar a form of human agency. For war is perhaps the most singularly continuous factor in our long and largely tragic history, and do we not find in our historical accounts, the exploits of even our most ruthless war heroes expounded with even more vigour than those of our greatest philosophers? One typically recognises Aristotle and Alexander as representative of the very highest echelons of their respective fields, but history has named only one of them *Great*.

We should therefore consider Aristotle's Spartan exemplar, illustrating the peculiar aspect of human nature manifested in that most tragically common cauldron of war, as constituting far more than a mere side-note to his central theme of proper and complete virtue. For whatever one thinks about the morality of instigating war, one would be daft to suggest that one should simply throw down one's weapons once a battle and its subsequent tragic and potentially unjust violence has commenced, and it is perhaps for this reason that we find ourselves so perpetually tied up with these things – for the folly of entering into war is soon replaced by the steadfast determination to see it through. But we should not call this steadfast stoicism 'fine', and this would seem to be Aristotle's point, implying that history should not judge individuals or societies by their exploits at war, but rather only by their exploits at peace. And it is for this reason that Aristotle states, as above, that:

*"Facts, as well as arguments, prove that the legislator should direct all his military and other measures to the provision of leisure and the establishment of peace. For most of these military states are safe only while they are at war, but fall when they have acquired their empire; like unused iron they lose their edge in time of peace. And for this the legislator is to blame, he never having taught them how to lead the life of peace."*⁶²

Upgrading Merely-Good Objects to the Status of Fine-and-Good:

Returning to the analysis of the developments made by Aristotle in the final passages of this part of the *EE*, we next see him comparing his earlier characterisation of the fine-and-good agent to his characterisation of the merely-good Spartan exemplar, as follows:

⁶¹ *Politics*. Book VII, Chapter 15, 1334a29-31, Pg. 2117.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Chapter 14, 1334a3-10, Pg. 2116.

*"[The merely-good] do not possess the things that are fine for themselves, but those who possess [the things that are fine for themselves], also choose things fine-and-good for themselves; and not only those things, but also the things not fine by nature, but good by nature, are fine to them."*⁶³

We most naturally take the term '*for themselves*' in the above passage as equating to 'for their own sake', lest we suppose Aristotle to be, rather confusingly, distinguishing the fine-and-good from another type of agent who possesses and chooses fine things *for someone else*. This being the case, we take Aristotle as here distinguishing the fine-and-good agent, as one who possesses the fine things (the virtues) for their own sake and also chooses fine things (virtuous actions) also for their own sake, from the Spartan exemplar who, on the other hand, *does not* possess the things that are fine *for their own sake*, these character traits being only temporally compelled instead of properly acquired and deeply and permanently held.

There appears, however, to be some disagreement over the translation of this particular passage. Let us therefore compare this first translation with some others in order to perhaps develop a consensus view. We find the same passage translated by Solomon as follows:

*"For it is not true of them that they acquire the noble for itself, that they choose acts good and noble at once – more than this, that what is not noble by nature but good by nature is noble to them;"*⁶⁴

In Solomon's translation it appears that the phrase '*that they choose acts good and noble at once*', referring, in Solomon's context, to something '*not true*' of the merely-good, is equivalent to Woods' phrase '*but those who possess them, also choose things fine-and-good for themselves*', which we take, in Woods' context, as referring to something that is true of the fine-and-good. We can thus understand this difference in translation as being simply the same point being made complementary ways.

Continuing along this vein, however, one takes it that the final part of this passage, under Solomon's translation: '*more than this, that what is not noble by nature but good by nature is noble to them*' also refers to the merely-good Spartan, for whom it would thus appear that '*what is not noble by nature but good by nature is noble to them*', which we can really only understand in the sense that what the Spartans possess is simply a distorted and incorrect view of what is noble/fine, according to which any naturally good thing could thus be considered noble *by them*. This implies an entirely different picture to Woods' equivalent contention that only for the fine-and-good '*the things not fine by nature, but good by nature, are fine.*'

A third translation of this same passage, from Rackham, reads as follows:

*"...hence though they are good men (for the things naturally good are good for them), yet they have not nobility, for it is not the case with them that they possess fine things for their own sake and that they purpose fine actions, and not only this, but also that things not fine by nature but good by nature are fine for them."*⁶⁵

Here again we find the sense of '*fine for them*' implying a kind of distorted or mistaken appearance of what is fine in the eyes of the merely-good Spartan.

⁶³ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, Pg. 41, 1249a2-5.

⁶⁴ Solomon in Barnes, *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a1-5, Pg. 1980.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a1-5, in *Aristotle – Athenian Constitution, The Eudemian Ethics, On Virtues and Vices* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1935), 473.

The fact that Woods' translation does not appear to have the same connotation as these later two can be put down to the respective differences in the translation of what one might consider the *transitional part* of this passage, immediately following, respectively, the terms '*fine for themselves*', '*noble for itself*' and '*fine things for their own sake*'. The three different translations of this transition are as follows:

- 1) "...but those who possess them, also choose things fine-and-good for themselves..." (Woods)
- 2) "...that they choose acts good and noble at once..." (Solomon)
- 3) "...and that they purpose fine actions..." (Rackham)

It would appear from this rather divergent set of translations that this passage is simply difficult to translate, possibly due to the context assumed by the translator, or simply due to ambiguities in the original Greek.

While I would not pretend to possess even the slightest ability to translate from the original Ancient Greek, I will suggest a minimum modification to the Woods translation that should both reduce the ambiguity and increase the cohesion of this passage with the context of the earlier part of this chapter (at least as I have interpreted it). In Woods' translation we see the concept of people who '*choose things fine-and-good for themselves*' being distinguished from the concept of people who *possess* things good in themselves, according to which we take it that the fine-and-good agent must not only possess virtue, but also choose virtuous actions *for their own sake*. For this reason we take it that the subject Aristotle is referring to at the end of this passage at 1249a5 is no longer Aristotle's Spartan citizen, but instead the fine-and-good agent. If it is indeed the fine-and-good agent being referred to here, we can therefore take the prior term '*but those who possess them*' as also referring to '*those who possess them for their own sake*' according to our earlier understanding of what constitutes the fine-and-good agent, and as therefore distinct from the initial subject of the passage which we took to be those who do not possess the things that are fine-and-good for their own sake. This implication, that the final subject of this passage is the fine-and-good agent who possesses things fine and good '*for their own sake*' allows us to thus generate a slightly more verbose, but less ambiguous, modified translation as follows:

'[Spartans in the midst of war] are therefore good men (for natural goods are so to them [i.e. not intemperately wasted by them in this state]), but they do not have nobility; for they do not possess the things that are fine for [their own sake – being only compelled to virtue by the conditions in which they have placed themselves in the pursuit of wealth, power and honour]. But those who do possess [the fine things – i.e. the virtues – for their own sake], also choose things fine-and-good [i.e. virtuous actions] for their own sake; and not only those things, but also the things not fine by nature, but good by nature, are fine for them.'

We thus have it from this reinterpretation, as above, that the fine-and-good agent possesses virtue and performs virtuous acts for their own sake and hence has nobility, whereas Aristotle's Spartan exemplar possesses something resembling virtue and performs virtuous acts, but only temporarily, under the duress of war, and hence does not possess nobility.

The final part of this passage tells us that '*what is not fine by nature, but good by nature*' (i.e. the natural goods) are somehow made fine in the hands of the fine-and-good. Woods offers us a simple way of interpreting this point in the following:

"...When [the fine-and-good agent] has [the natural goods] they lead to fine acts (^o13-14), hence his motive for acquiring them is admirable (^o5-6)."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Woods, *EE*, Commentary, 177.

Now we must understand the fine-and-good agent as needing things instrumentally – as all human beings obviously do, and as therefore performing actions purely for the sake of obtaining such goods. But we also understand that that for these agents, at the end of any such chain of practical necessity, there will be some virtuous (for its own sake) end that they have in mind, according to which all prior merely-good actions leading up to this fine finale would be upgraded to the better status of this last step.

The status of these actions would thus appear to be determined by the initial intentions of their agent in the sense that fine actions must be simply good for their own sake and thus directed towards no further end. This obviously has the effect, as earlier mentioned, of aligning this account of fineness with Broadie's own account of 'non-fine' *natural* virtue, according to which the naturally virtuous agent makes use of the natural goods simply because it *feels* like the right thing to do (and is practically feasible) – with this feeling, based on no more than their deeply-held virtuous disposition, being all the that fine-and-good agent requires under the interpretation now made.

Comparing Broadie's account to my own, we can understand Broadie's fine-and-good agent as utilising natural goods both because it feels right and *as a conscious expression of their own excellence*, whereas on my own account, which is, for all intents and purposes, identical with Broadie's naturally virtuous agent, the fine-and-good agent utilises natural goods simply because it feels right. It would thus appear that the fine-and-good agent, on my interpretation, really has no conscious reflective intellectual attitude towards his own virtuous acts at all, except for a deep seated desire to perform them for their own sake – this being the hallmark of fineness on this account. In saying that, it appears to be the case that the alternative account now developed is only subtly different to that given by Broadie. This subtlety is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Broadie's understanding of Aristotle's attitude towards his Spartan exemplar, elaborated in the following:

*"Aristotle's depreciation of the Spartan type may tempt one to infer that we are not meant to view this type as genuinely virtuous. I think we must resist this temptation. Aristotle is writing deliberately here. Had he wished, he could easily have said that the Spartan type seems to be virtuous but really is not."*⁶⁷

While we take it that Aristotle's Spartan type was indeed good – we now take this as referring only to the state the Spartan achieved at war. Overall, which is to say, according to the impermanent nature of their good dispositions, however, we can say that Aristotle's Spartan represented nothing like what we would understand a genuinely virtuous agent to be or, more to the point, anything we should consider fine. We should therefore see no problem in Aristotle *writing deliberately* that the Spartans, *in this state*, were merely-good and would therefore have *appeared* completely virtuous, while this lasted. We should, however, feel warranted in raising a minor quibble with respect to the distinct lack of detail concerning this important point in this text, for it would have helped no end had Aristotle elaborated a little further about what his picture of the Spartan citizen in the *EE* really consisted in, or at least pointed us elsewhere in his own corpus to where this view is more fully elaborated. Perhaps if we were ever to find a schedule of Aristotle's classes we might find that his courses on Ethics were always to be taken concurrently with his papers on Politics and Political History, such that any context required for one's proper understanding of his examples in either course would be fresh in the minds of his students and thus require no further elaboration.

Returning to our consideration of naturally good things in the hands of the fine-and-good agent, we take it that literally any natural good that is properly made use of by such an agent and thus for the sake of a fine end can be understood, by this association, as being itself fine, thus providing a rather

⁶⁷ Broadie, "Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle," 99.

liberal position with regards to what can be *potentially* considered as fine. Aristotle goes on to further characterise the status of the natural goods in the hands of the fine-and-good agent, in the following:

*“For [the natural goods] are fine when that for whose sake they act and choose is fine. So, for the fine and good men, the natural goods are fine.”*⁶⁸

We naturally take the first ‘they’ in the above passage to refer to just the natural goods, since in the first sentence of this passage Aristotle seems to be giving us the conditional statement that ‘X is fine when utilised in a fine way’, followed up in the second sentence with the deduction that ‘therefore naturally good X’s possessed by a fine agent, who by definition always utilises such things in a fine way, will also be fine’. The use of the word ‘whose’ in the first sentence does, however, imply that this sentence’s subject ‘acts and chooses’, and does this for the sake of a fine human being. This clearly constitutes an absurdity, in which case one might reasonably contend that the initial ‘they’ in this sentence should instead be understood as referring to the fine-and-good agent. This re-interpretation, however, leaves ‘for whose sake they act they act’ obscure (i.e. does it refer to the fine-and-good agents themselves, or to some third party who is also fine-and-good) and makes the second sentence seem rather incongruous, in that it would thereby be expressing an entirely unrelated point as if it were a straightforward conclusion to the first.

Looking, therefore, at alternative interpretations, we find this passage translated by Solomon, and then Rackham, as follows:

*“...for objects are noble when a man’s motives for acting and choosing them are noble, because to the noble and good man the naturally good is noble...”*⁶⁹

*“For things are fine when that for which men do them and choose them is fine. Therefore to the noble man the things good by nature are fine...”*⁷⁰

In these two alternative translations it is made explicit that it is just the natural goods that are initially referred to, corresponding to the first ‘they’ in the Woods translation. In the second half of the passage, however, both of these later translations go on to explicitly introduce ‘man’ as the subject that acts and chooses, distinct from the second instance of ‘they’ in the Woods translation, and thus avoiding the awkward person-related ‘whose’. Let us therefore assume that the initial subject of this passage is just the natural goods and that there is something slightly amiss in the Woods translation. As before I will thus offer a minimum alteration that should function to maximise the coherency of the Woods translation, as follows:

‘For [the natural goods] are fine when [the agent who chooses to possess and employ them in action] is fine. So, for the fine and good men, the natural goods [that they possess and use] are fine.’

From this we thus take it, as above, that when a fine-and-good agent makes use of the natural goods for the sake of a virtuous end, these natural goods should also be considered, by this association, as fine. This modified interpretation also coheres with both the Solomon and Rackham translations, from which we take it that if virtuous acts performed for their own sake are fine, natural goods possessed for the sake of virtuous acts are also, by association, fine.

⁶⁸ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a6-7, Pg. 41.

⁶⁹ Solomon in Barnes, *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a5-7, Pg. 1980.

⁷⁰ Rackham, *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a5-7, Pg. 473.

Moving on through the text, we next find Aristotle arguing, now less ambiguously translated, for the fitting/just nature of the fine-and-good agent's possession of our greatest natural goods including "...wealth, noble birth [and] power..."⁷¹. Aristotle then begins to conclude this particular section by rearticulating the status of the natural goods when possessed by the three classes of agent we have been discussing (i.e. the generally-disgraceful, the sometimes-good, sometimes-disgraceful, and the always-good agents), in the following:

*"So, to the fine-and-good man, the same things are both beneficial and fine; but for the many [i.e. generally-disgraceful] there is divergence here. For things good without qualification are not good also for them, but are good for the good [i.e. sometimes-good, sometimes-disgraceful] man. But to the fine [i.e. always good] man they are also fine. But the man who thinks that the virtues should be possessed for the sake of external goods [i.e. the sometime-good, sometimes-disgraceful Spartan], does the fine things incidentally."*⁷²

Here we find illustrated the full range of relationships an agent can hold with respect to the greatest natural goods. Firstly, for those entirely lacking in virtue, these goods will be of no good to them at all. Secondly, for the merely-good agent these goods may be made good use of whenever they find themselves in the state of compelled goodness, and thus only in this state should they be considered good for them. Thirdly, in the hands of the fine-and-good agent, these natural goods are not just good, but fine. The final sentence of this passage also clearly references the earlier discussion concerning the Spartan exemplar who, in their temporary compelled state of goodness, performs the very same actions the fine-and-good agent *always* performs. In this sense we would understand the Spartan, in this temporary state of goodness, as effectively performing fine actions. Aristotle allows that these acts are indeed fine, for they are clearly indistinguishable from the actions of the fine agent, but since they are not performed from a legitimate and properly formed virtuous disposition they are fine *only incidentally* – in perhaps the same sense that an agent who, fearing for their own life, violently kills someone else in self-defence, may technically be labelled a *killer*, but is considered so *only incidentally*.

Aristotle finally completes this section of the text with a statement concisely summing up the nature of the higher virtue of nobility he has now defined in the following:

*"So nobility is complete virtue."*⁷³

On the face of it one might take this as an offhand comment concerning the complete – as in total – nature of nobility, for nobility certainly appears to encapsulate and 'complete' all of the other virtues. Woods describes this line in such terms:

*"1249a15-16: The statement that nobility is complete virtue serves to relate this chapter to the central themes of the E.E."*⁷⁴

This interpretation does, however, imply a certain sense of triviality to this final remark from Aristotle. A different and perhaps more meaningful interpretation, and one that correlates more strongly with the alternative distinction between mere-goodness and nobility developed above can, however, be found by reviewing Aristotle's use elsewhere of the term 'complete' (τέλειος/teleios). We see this term being put to work early in the *EE* during Aristotle's introduction of Eudaimonia, as follows:

⁷¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a9, Pg. 41.

⁷² *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a9-16, Pg. 41.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1249a16-17.

⁷⁴ Woods, *EE*, Commentary, 178.

“Now as happiness was agreed to be something complete, and life may be complete or incomplete—and this holds with excellence also (in the one case it is total, in the other partial)—and the activity of what is incomplete is itself incomplete, happiness must be activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue.”⁷⁵

Further detail concerning what the term ‘complete’ actually means can also be found in the corresponding passage early on in the *NE*, during Aristotle’s initial discussion concerning the properties we should expect of Eudaimonia, as follows:

“Since there appear to be several ends, and some of these, such as wealth, flutes, and implements generally, we choose as means to other ends, it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the chief good manifestly is something complete. [...] We speak of that which is worth pursuing for its own sake as more complete than that which is worth pursuing only for the sake of something else, and that which is never worth choosing for the sake of something else as more complete than things that are worth choosing both in themselves and for the sake of this end. And so that which is always worth choosing in itself and never for the sake of something else we call complete without qualification.”⁷⁶

In the first half of the final chapter of the *EE*, according to the alternative interpretation now developed, we understand Aristotle as having defined the fine-and-good agent as one who possesses virtue and performs virtuous actions *simply for their own sake* (and who is also justifiably furnished with the greatest natural goods for the sake of these actions, although this is obviously not a requirement for nobility, just a helpful bonus). According to Aristotle’s elaboration on the term complete/teleios in the *NE*, if one possesses the virtues and performs virtuous acts always for their own sake and never just for the sake of something else – that is to say that for this agent the virtues and virtuous acts are always worth possessing and choosing and never *just* for the sake of something else – then one possesses *complete virtue* and thus performs *completely virtuous acts*.

If, therefore, we take nobility to be virtue possessed for its own sake, and virtue possessed for its own sake to be complete, then it neatly follows, as Aristotle states, that “...nobility is complete virtue.”⁷⁷

This final sentence from Aristotle, concluding the first half of the final chapter of the *EE*, seems most apt and concise – perhaps even ‘laconic’.

We thus take it, to very briefly summarise the present discussion, that Aristotle, having spent much of the *EE* (and *NE*) describing what virtue looks like, at the very last moment wants to tell us that despite these most detailed accounts, one should not be too quick to assume that everything that appears virtuous is really so, for “...[t]here is a certain [peculiar] state of a citizen such as the Spartans have...”⁷⁸.

A Brief Note on Fine Pleasure:

Following the first major section of the final chapter of the *EE* we have been discussing and before getting into his second major topic, Aristotle briefly reflects on the status of pleasure, in terms of how it can be related to the distinction between goodness and nobility earlier identified. Aristotle describes this relationship as follows:

⁷⁵ *EE*, Book II, Chapter 1, 1219a35-39, Pg. 13.

⁷⁶ *NE*, Book I, Chapter 7, 1097a25-35, Pg. 10.

⁷⁷ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a16-17, Pg. 41.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 1248b38.

*“Concerning pleasure, too, it has been said what sort of thing it is and how it is a good, and that the things pleasant without qualification are also fine, and the things good without qualification are pleasant. But pleasure does not occur except in action; for that reason, the truly happy man will also live most pleasantly, and it is not vainly that people believe this.”*⁷⁹

Woods finds this passage difficult to reconcile with the earlier parts of the chapter, describing it in the following terms:

*“...it is doubtful if this section belongs here at all; a19-20 present an argument that is hardly intelligible as it stands, and is not related in any clear way to the main themes of this chapter, in which happiness is not otherwise mentioned.”*⁸⁰

While it is clearly the case that pleasure has not registered a single mention in this chapter up to this point, one does not need to take Aristotle’s use of the term ‘...it has been said...’ as necessarily implying something that has been said immediately prior to this statement. Indeed, one typically takes ‘it has been said’ to refer, on a broad scale, to nearly anything that may be expected to have been heard outside of the immediate context – from newspapers, people on the street, historical commentators, other writers etc. Without needing quite so broad a scope, we can identify comments made elsewhere in Aristotle’s corpus that will aid our understanding of this passage.

To begin with, in the above passage, Aristotle describes whatever is ‘pleasant without qualification’ as being fine. One might naturally take this as meaning that anything that is *always pleasant* – i.e. not just under certain qualifying circumstances – is to be understood as fine. This would result, however, in even our most base animal pleasures (e.g. those relating to sex, eating, sleeping, etc.) being considered fine, which would seem far too liberal a position for Aristotle to take on account of the definition of fineness he has just developed. In Book X of the *NE* we do, however, find a rather different definition of what might be understood as ‘pleasant without qualification’ which will be of much greater use to our interpretation:

“If this view is right, as it seems to be, and virtue – that is, the good person in so far as he is good – is the measure of each thing, then pleasures will be what appear so to him, and pleasant things will be what he enjoys. And if things that he finds disagreeable appear pleasant to someone, that is not surprising, since there are many ways for people to become ruined and perverted. The things are not pleasant, except to these people, with this disposition.

*Clearly, then, we should say that those that everyone agrees to be disgraceful are not pleasures, except to people who have been ruined. [...] So whether the complete and blessed person has one activity or several, the pleasures that complete these will be said to be the pleasures really characteristic of a human being, and the rest will be so in a secondary and less real sense, as are the activities.”*⁸¹

We can therefore understand ‘the pleasures really characteristic of a human being’ as consisting of the sort of pleasures the virtuous enjoy, and which are thus *pleasant without qualification*. Disgraceful pleasures (assumedly experienced by the ‘Always-Disgraceful’ and ‘Sometimes-Disgraceful’ agents discussed above) would therefore correspond to pleasures we should not naturally expect to find pleasant, being so only when we find ourselves in a corrupted state of character. We can also therefore understand Aristotle’s Spartan, in line with the fact that they

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1249a17-21.

⁸⁰ Woods, *EE*, Commentary, 178.

⁸¹ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 5, 1176a16-29, Pg. 192.

perform fine actions (in their peculiar state of temporary goodness) only incidentally, as also experiencing pleasure that is fine – but also only incidentally.

Aristotle's next contention in the *EE* passage, that '*...the things good without qualification are pleasant...*', would seem to indicate that whatever these are (i.e. one's possession of the natural goods and virtues and virtuous actions) will be pleasant. Anyone versed in Book X of the *NE*, however, (which we might well expect the target audience of the *EE* to also be) will be well aware of Aristotle's contention therein that pleasure only comes with activity, implying that of the things good without qualification, only the subset represented by virtuous actions (i.e. excluding the virtues themselves) will actually be pleasant. Aristotle is thus obliged to make this very distinction in the *EE*, all too briefly considering the power behind this point, with the final statement in this passage:

*"But pleasure does not occur except in action; for that reason, the truly happy man will also live most pleasantly, and it is not vainly that people believe this."*⁸²

We might understand Aristotle as perhaps not wanting to elaborate fully on this point here, relying on its presence elsewhere, but in any case not wanting to mislead his readers and thus positing this point as briefly as possible.

Reconciling the *EE* Account of Complete Virtue with that of the *NE*:

With this alternative interpretation of the first half of the final chapter of the *EE* concerning 'complete' virtue fairly well sketched out, we can now look back at how it compares to the picture of virtue Aristotle develops in the *NE* and at whether these two accounts can now be more easily reconciled. We can approach this by simply applying the alternative account of complete virtue to the passages in the *NE* identified by both Woods and Broadie as contradicting the corresponding *EE* account (at least according to the traditional interpretation). We can, however, briefly reflect on a passage from another paper by Broadie in which she considers the subtle differences in the ways Aristotle describes virtue in the *NE* and the *EE*:

"In presenting goodness through a contrast with disastrous possibilities that the natural goods place in the way of foolish, unjust, and immoderate agents, Aristotle puts uppermost the fact (no doubt implicit but not emphasized in the main Eudemian Ethics account of moral virtue, II. 2-5^[]) that the virtuous man is incorruptible."*⁸³

With the associated footnote:

"[] This account has nothing corresponding to the *NE*'s requirement of a 'firm and unchanging disposition', 1105a33. That idea is touched on at *EE* 1238a12-14, but only as a spin-off from a discussion of firmness of friendship."*⁸⁴

We do perhaps have reason to consider that the *NE* requirement for a firm and unchanging disposition was implied in the account of virtue given by Aristotle in the early parts of the *EE*, and his students may have assumed as much – that this dispositional requirement was implied – but in any case it would appear that Aristotle felt compelled, in the final chapter *EE*, to make it entirely explicit that *complete virtue* should be founded on such a deeply disposed nature, thus implying that this point was perhaps not actually implicit in the earlier discussions concerning virtue. We can therefore

⁸² *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, Pg. 41, 1249a19-21.

⁸³ Sarah Broadie, "The Good, the Noble, and the Theoretical in Eudemian Ethics VIII-3," in *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Sir Anthony Kenny*, ed. J. Cottingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Footnote 15.

understand the *NE* and the *EE* as providing two subtly different methods of describing virtue, with Aristotle presenting each virtue in the *NE* in its most complete and unified senses, and in the subtly different structure of the *EE*, describing each initially in terms of their appearance only, before only at the very last moment introducing the condition for completeness made explicit throughout the *NE*.

With regards to the passages of the *NE* account of virtue that are typically taken as incompatible with that given in the *EE*, both Broadie⁸⁵ and Woods⁸⁶ highlight an apparent contradiction in Aristotle's argument, centred on the following two passages:

*"...courage is a mean in relation to what inspires confidence and fear in the circumstances described; and it makes choices and stands its ground because it is noble to do so, or shameful not to."*⁸⁷

And most explicitly:

*"...courageous people act for the sake of what is noble..."*⁸⁸

Woods and Broadie see these statements as an apparent contradiction of the claim we find in the *EE* that an agent can be considered virtuous but at the same time *not* fine or noble, since it appears, in these two passages, to be part of the definition of virtue that virtuous actions are performed for the sake of what is noble and thus fine *by definition*. We now take it, however, that it would seem wrong to consider the merely-good agent as being really virtuous at all, for while they will *sometimes* perform virtuous actions for their own sake, i.e. when their dispositions have been *temporarily* altered by the environment of war, they will not always do this. So whereas the fine-and-good agent always acts for the sake of what is noble, the mere-good Spartan will do so only sometimes, and then only incidentally.

In addition, we do in fact find evidence for something like the *EE* form of merely instrumental virtue embedded in these very same passages from the *NE* concerning courage. Aristotle first describes the form of civic courage discussed earlier (pg. 12) whereby one is compelled by either fear or shame to perform courageous acts. We take this as constituting the very same kind of heroic courage the Spartans were known for, according to which *"...running away is a disgrace, and death worth choosing in preference to saving one's life in such a way;"*⁸⁹ but we certainly do not take this as constituting the kind of temperance and justice these agents would have been compelled into by environment of war. This form of compulsion is perhaps better represented by the very next form of courage Aristotle describes, as follows:

*"Experience of particulars is also thought to be courage; this is why Socrates thought that courage is knowledge. Some people have it in one situation, others in another, but in war professional soldiers have it,"*⁹⁰

Aristotle goes on to describe how these professional soldiers would be prone to run away from the field of battle once the risks had become too great (or the rewards too little), which would obviously contradict the heroically courageous view of Spartan character earlier developed. We must remember, however, that it is not the Spartans' form of courage that we are here trying to make

⁸⁵ Ibid., Footnote 13, Pg. 7.

⁸⁶ *EE*, Commentary, 175.

⁸⁷ *NE*, Book III, Chapter 7, 1116a10-12, Pg. 50.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1116b30-31, Pg. 52.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1116b19-20.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1116b4-7, Pg. 51.

sense of, for we know this to most closely resemble the citizen/civic type earlier discussed. We are instead trying to understand the forms of temperance and justice the Spartan temporarily adopt. In this case it would indeed seem in part due to their knowledge of particulars, that is, their understanding (tacit or otherwise) of the absolute necessity for temperance and justice in times of war, for their personal survival and the achievement of honours, that they would find themselves compelled to behave as if they properly possessed these virtues. And it would seem that the term 'particular', as opposed to 'universal', further illustrates just the kind of virtue the Spartan possesses, for it is not out of an understanding of the universal value of virtue that they so act, but rather only according to their understanding of the particular circumstances in which such agency is understood as necessary.

We can thus consider Aristotle's Spartan exemplar as further advancing his argument against Socrates' contention that the virtues are simply knowledge, for we can understand the well trained Spartan as likely knowing exactly what temperance and justice consist in, but as employing these virtues only when absolutely and practically necessary. Aristotle describes this corrupt form of virtue in chapter 1 of Book 8 in the *EE* as follows:

*"...if all virtues are forms of knowledge, it would be possible also to use justice as injustice. So the man who does unjust things will act unjustly from justice, just as he will be doing ignorant things from knowledge."*⁹¹

If we were to consider the Spartan's knowledge of virtue as constituting full virtue, they would be, as Aristotle says, acting unjustly from justice and intemperately from temperance when not at war. The argument that virtue is more than just knowledge and more than just one of many potential hypothetical options for one to choose from, would thus appear to further illustrate the nature of the Spartans' peculiar form of mere-goodness.

Aristotle also offers us one further form of virtue, that relating to spirit, which might also be applicable to the Spartan exemplar, elaborated in the following:

*"Now courageous people act for the sake of what is noble, but spirit does help them. [...] This form of courage caused by spirit, then, seems the most natural, and to be courage if it is accompanied by rational choice and directed towards some end."*⁹²

We take Aristotle's meaning of the term 'spirit' from the following passage concerning involuntary action:

*"Again, what is the difference, as far as their being involuntary is concerned, between actions that miss the mark on the basis of calculation and those that miss it on the basis of spirit? For both are to be avoided, and the non-rational feelings are thought to be no less part of human nature, so that actions arising from spirit and appetite are also characteristic of a human being."*⁹³

We thus take it that 'spirit' refers to just the dispositions of one's non-rational soul, and that an agent can be driven to perform courageous acts simply from an overflowing of spirit, as opposed to the purely rational reasons for which the possessor of 'citizen courage' would perform such actions. We can understand the effects of fraternal bonding and nationalistic pride as constituting key sources of such spirit and thus likely contributing to the Spartans' peculiar form of heroic courage. In the same light we might expect the same elements to also have had a similar influence on their

⁹¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 1, 1246a36-39, Pg. 35.

⁹² *NE*, Book III, Chapter 7, 1116b30-1117a5, Pg. 52.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1, 1111a33-1111b3, Pg. 40.

sense of justice, for it would appear to be the case that a strong sense of nationalistic fervour would appear to bind people together more strongly than when no such influence is present. In this sense we might understand one's sub-rational disposition towards justice to be, in part, tethered to one's sense of togetherness, and thus likely to dissipate when such fervour dies down, i.e. at times of peace when, for the Spartans at least, their moral compass would appear to change its message from something like *'all for one, one for all'* to the more problematic *'every man for himself'*.

We might therefore understand the Spartan form of mere-goodness as consisting in a combination of citizen virtue, apparent virtue from knowledge of particulars, and apparent virtue from spirit – a peculiar combination that would have the effect of both driving such people into battle and also keeping them coordinated while they are there – a fairly useful character configuration for people prone to this kind of activity.

We can therefore say that the *NE* account of virtue remains entirely commensurable with the *EE* account of the peculiar Spartan form of goodness, but that Aristotle does not explicitly identify the form of goodness the Spartans experience at war in the *NE*, nor does he do a particularly good job of elaborating on this topic in the *EE*. In this sense it would appear that the *NE* and the *EE* are, in respect to their definitions of virtue, entirely compatible, but that there is one further clarifying yet ambiguous distinction made in the *EE*. One might imagine a student in Aristotle's original *NE* course to have brought up the problematic example of the heroic and apparently virtuous Spartan warrior, or of people at war in general, during one of these lectures, to which it would then have become necessary for Aristotle to add, in that and later classes, the subtle distinction this peculiar example demands. We thus have it that in the first half of Book 8, Chapter 3 of the *EE* Aristotle tells us nothing that is substantially new or different to what we find in the *NE*, but that it simply and subtly reframes his existing position in order to better allow it to deal with certain special cases, namely the peculiar case of the Spartans.

In this light we will now move on to the analysis of the second half of this chapter to see if it can also be better reconciled with the arguments put forward by Aristotle in the *NE* and elsewhere in his corpus.

3. The Second Half of the Final Chapter of the *Eudemian Ethics*:

The Traditional and Standard Alternative Interpretations of Aristotle's God in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

Before developing my own alternative interpretation of these passages it will be worth our while to briefly review the traditional and alternative interpretations of them. On the traditional view they are taken as asserting that one should, as much as practically possible, serve and contemplate the monotheist 'capital-G' God, considering 'the god' in the following passage as just this singular Supreme Being:

*"So if some choice and possession of natural goods—either goods of the body or money or of friends or the other goods—will most produce the speculation of the god, that is the best, and that is the finest limit; but whatever, whether through deficiency or excess, hinders the service and speculation of the god, is bad."*⁹⁴

This monotheistic view is even more pronounced in an older translation from Rackham:

⁹⁴ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b17-20, Pg. 42.

“Therefore whatever mode of choosing and of acquiring things good by nature — whether goods of body or wealth or friends or the other goods — will best promote the contemplation of God, that is the best mode, and that standard is the finest; and any mode of choice and acquisition that either through deficiency or excess hinders us from serving and from contemplating God—that is a bad one.”⁹⁵

Under the traditional interpretation of this passage the term ‘god’ thus constitutes the object of both the contemplation and the service mentioned in the final sentence, according to which one should aim to contemplate and do things in honour of the uppercase-g god (at least in the double-negative sense of not hindering such service and/or contemplation).

The Standard Alternative Interpretation of God in the *EE*:

In the *NE* we find a similarly structured argument to that from the *EE* mentioned above, but it is one in which Aristotle is specifically *not* referring to the uppercase-g god, instead just to the divine (i.e. contemplative) part of the human soul, as follows:

“[The life of contemplation] is superior to one that is simply human, because someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him. And the activity of this divine element is as much superior to that in accordance with the other kind of virtue as the element is superior to the compound.”⁹⁶

If one puts to one side the ‘supreme being’ interpretation of the term ‘god’ from the *EE* it would seem rather straightforward to simply append this passage from the *NE* to the end of the *EE* one from above, and thereby produce an entirely coherent and perhaps even more complete conception of Aristotle’s best life – according to a lowercase-g interpretation of god. The argument that a life in accordance with one’s divine element is the best certainly runs on well from the argument that one should, as much as practically possible, live in accordance with this element. We thus find some scope for an interpretation of the final paragraph of the *EE* which, in contrast to the traditional account, would wholly align with the concluding arguments of the *NE*, as long as one takes ‘*the god*’ in the *EE* as simply referring to the divine part of the human soul.

Woods considers these two contrasting upper and lowercase-g accounts of Aristotle’s god in the concluding passages of the *EE* in his commentary concerning 1249b6-25, as follows:

“This section raises major problems of interpretation. The main disagreement of commentators concerns what ‘the god’ at ^b14 and 17 refers to. On one interpretation, the reference is to the supreme divine being of Aristotle’s metaphysics, the unmoved mover. The phrase that I have translated non-committally as ‘the god’ is one used to refer to the supreme divine being. It is thus interpreted by Verdenius (op. cit.) and Rowe (pp. 68f.). Alternatively, Dirlmeier and During hold the reference is not to anything external to the human soul, but simply to theoretical reason, regarded as the divine element as it is in E.N. X (1177^a 15-16, 1179^a 26-7).”⁹⁷

The traditional and the standard alternative views of Aristotle ‘god’ in the *EE* can thus be summarised as follows:

- The Traditional View: The god is the monotheistic Supreme Being.

⁹⁵ Rackham, *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b17-20, Pg. 477.

⁹⁶ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b27-31, Pg. 196.

⁹⁷ Woods, *EE*, Commentary, 180.

- The Standard Alternative View: The god is the divine contemplative part of the human soul.

Woods points out that these two views are not necessarily at odds with Aristotle's consideration of what our best activity consists in, since:

"...^b16-23 can be interpreted in accordance with either view. It is not in dispute that in the latter section, Aristotle puts forward the activity of contemplation as providing a standard for the choice and possession of natural goods."⁹⁸

We thus take it that according to both of these interpretations the characteristic activity in the best human life remains that of contemplation, but that under the traditional view one is given a specific object for this activity (i.e. the Supreme Being capital-G God), whereas in the standard alternative lowercase-g view, being more closely aligned with the view of contemplation and *eudaimonia* expressed in the *NE*, one is given no such specific target, other than the broader class representing the objects of contemplation in general.

One can, however, identify a problem for the traditional view in the following sentence from this same concluding passage "...but whatever, whether through deficiency or excess, hinders the service and speculation of the god, is bad."⁹⁹ On the traditional view, this sentence unambiguously asserts that the best human life would be characterised not just by the activity of contemplation, but also by one's service to the Supreme Being¹⁰⁰. A significant problem for this interpretation is thus that the act of servitude it centrally promotes (regardless of what such servitude might ever achieve in a practical sense) fundamentally contradicts not just the detailed discussion in *NE* Book 10 concerning the best life in which Aristotle clearly argues that the characteristic activity of this life will be performed for its own sake, but also the argument presented in the first half of the final chapter of the *EE*, according to which fine and noble actions are understood as only those performed only for their own sake – and thus not for the sake of some other being. We thus find in both the *NE* and the *EE* (at least until the final few passages) a rejection of any position considering the best human life as consisting primarily in one's prostration before some higher being, with such a life is considered instead as one that is both ignoble and incomplete – according to Aristotle's accounts of nobility and completeness. This final assertion concerning one's service to the Supreme Being would thus come as something of a surprise to any reader of Aristotle's who had diligently parsed and made sense of the text of the *EE* up until these very final passages.

One could argue in response to this problem that indeed the life of servitude to God is performed instrumentally and is thus not *in itself* noble, but that such a life is lived only in order to achieve divine grace in the afterlife, with such a glorious post-mortem end clearly constituting something that would be valued for its own sake. This final end would thus have the effect of upgrading all prior corporeal acts of prostration to the class of fine and noble actions, according to a sense of nobility that may be attributed to goods used instrumentally in order to achieve a noble end discussed above, and would thereby offer a kind of saving grace for the traditional view. We do, however, take this kind of afterlife, with all of its beatific inducements, to represent an enhancement introduced well after Aristotle's time. Accordingly, such an argument can offer no real support to any interpretation of the much older text.

Woods offers an additional problem for the interpretation of this passage, (reflecting on an argument put forward by Dirlmeier) in that if we are to take the best human life as necessarily

⁹⁸ Ibid., 180.

⁹⁹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, Pg. 42, 1249b18-20.

¹⁰⁰ The original Ancient Greek word 'θεραπεύειν' translated here as 'service' is a verb synonymous with the English terms 'attend to' and 'wait on'.

including some kind of service to 'the god', Aristotle makes it quite clear that this entity is in need of no such help, stating instead that "...the god is in need of nothing..."¹⁰¹. With regards to the Supreme Being interpretation of 'the god' we can straightforwardly understand one's service as in no way benefiting this agent, for one serves the Supreme Being by simply doing whatever it commands, with no necessarily beneficial end (except for one's self) in mind. Woods would appear to allow this point concerning the traditional interpretation of service as such, albeit rather enigmatically, with the single unqualified sentence: "*In fact, there is no need to interpret 'service' too literally.*"¹⁰² With regards to the standard alternative view, however, one is unable to apply such a nature to this remark concerning the service to one's intellect, leading Woods to remark that:

*"This seems to rule out human reason as the referent of the phrase 'the god', for human reason surely can be regarded as a beneficiary of the right use of natural goods mentioned in the concluding sentences of the chapter."*¹⁰³

Against Woods' position, it is in fact possible to understanding the contemplative part of one's intellect as constituting "...that for which practical wisdom prescribes..."¹⁰⁴ while at the same time remaining "...in need of nothing..."¹⁰⁵. We can quite straightforwardly consider ourselves as possessing some kind of faculty to be made use of whenever we have the time, like a musical instrument that one occasionally plays, but which typically sits idle for long stretches of time when we are busy with other concerns. This faculty (or musical instrument) would require a trivial amount of effort in order to be utilised and would generate immense pleasure when utilised well. In order to actually sit down and make use of it, however, one is first required to do a great deal of work with respect to the many practical requirements of human life in order to afford the leisure time in which to do so. In this sense we can clearly understand how such a faculty (e.g. one's capacity to play a musical instrument or to simply contemplate) would itself require nothing (assuming one has been sufficiently trained in its use), but at the same time require a great deal of practical action (i.e. that *which* practical wisdom prescribes) in order to be made use of – and would remain idle as one tends to the reasonable desires of the desiderative part of one's soul. In the light of this consideration we have reason to consider Aristotle as identifying, in the life of contemplation, a kind of best state for one's soul, in which one is effectively *at leisure* but nonetheless engaged in serious activity, consisting in a combination of:

- 1) A *reasonably* idle but well-disposed non-rational or desiderative part.
- 2) An active rational part focused solely on contemplation.

In support of the lowercase-g interpretation of god as just our divine contemplating element, we can thus consider the criterion (*oros*) for one's proper possession of the natural goods as simply the achievement of this state of serious contemplative activity, with this state thus constituting the benchmark or boundary by which the goodness of one's life should be measured. And we indeed find this benchmark referred to by Aristotle as the '*best limit for the soul*' (*psuke oros aristos*) in the following passage presented as a preliminary conclusion to the present discussion:

*"Thus it is for the soul, and this is the best limit for the soul—to be aware as little as possible of the non-rational part of the soul as such."*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b17, Pg. 42.

¹⁰² Woods, *EE*, Commentary, 184.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b15, Pg. 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1249b17.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1249b20-22.

We thus find, against Woods, some room for the position holding human theoretical reason as the referent of the phrase ‘the god’ in the concluding passages of the *EE*, even in light of the relationship it shares with our ‘*right use of the natural goods*’ and the fact that it is indeed in need of nothing.

The Health and Medicine Analogy and the Beginnings of a Second Alternative View:

Within the final passages of the *EE* Aristotle makes use of an analogy to health and medicine. It is therefore perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that the intended context for the term ‘god’ we find later in the same passage should be drawn from this analogy. Aristotle (all too briefly) makes the analogy as follows:

“...since a human being, also, is by nature composed of a thing that governs and a thing that is governed, each too should live by reference to its own governing principle. But that is of two sorts; for medicine is a governing principle in one way, and health in another; for the first is for the sake of the second. Thus it is with the [contemplative] (part).”¹⁰⁷

From this we take it that there are, broadly speaking, two parts of a human being, with ‘*the thing that governs*’ assumedly corresponding to the part with which we reason (i.e. the human intellect) and ‘*the thing that is governed*’ corresponding to one’s body and the part of one’s soul subject to reason (i.e. the non-rational part). To each of these parts we then find attributed two governing principles, with the first, like ‘health’, corresponding to some kind of ideal hypothetical exemplar (e.g. what one refers to when one says ‘the healthy person’), and the second, like ‘medicine’, corresponding to the practical guidelines one utilises in order to approach this exemplar state. The two parts of a human being and the two governing principles for these parts can thus be listed as follows:

The Two Parts of a Human Being:

1. One’s body and non-rational soul.
2. One’s intellect.

The Two Governing Principles Applicable to Each of Part of a Human Being:

1. The Exemplar State (e.g. the healthy person).
2. The Practical Guidelines for achieving or emulating the Exemplar State (e.g. the practical directives of medicine).

Governing Principles and Means:

One is reminded by these two *governing principles* of the example Aristotle makes of Milo in the *NE*, in which he elaborates on two types of *means*, as follows:

“For if ten pounds of food is a lot for someone to eat, and two pounds a little, the trainer will not necessarily prescribe six; for this may be a lot or a little for the person about to eat it – for Milo, a little, for a beginner at gymnastics, a lot. The same goes for running and wrestling. In this way every expert in a science avoids excess and deficiency, and aims for the mean and chooses it – the mean, that is, not in the thing itself but relative to us.”¹⁰⁸

We can understand from this passage that there are two means at play with regards to human health and nourishment, the first constituting the standard by which we say someone is nourished, i.e. ‘*the mean in the thing itself*’ or ‘*the arithmetic mean*’ (e.g. the standard by which we say

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1249b9-14.

¹⁰⁸ *NE*, Book II, Chapter 6, 1106a36-1106b6, Pg. 30.

someone is healthy – *by reference to some kind of exemplar state of human health*), and the second constituting the amount of food any *particular* person needs in order to achieve this standard, i.e. *the mean relative to us* (e.g. how much food do I, Milo, or a beginner in gymnastics need today in order to be properly nourished).

With respect, then, to the two governing principles Aristotle describes in the *EE*, it appears that the *'the exemplar state'* would map fairly well on to *'the arithmetic mean'*, and *'the practical guidelines for achieving the exemplar state'* would map equally well onto *'the mean relative to us'*.

It is clearly the case, however, that Aristotle does not actually use the term 'mean' (*mesos*) at all in the final passages of the *EE* we have been discussing. It is therefore perhaps unreasonable to draw such a close comparison between the way this term is put to use in the *NE* and the way the term 'governing principle' is used in the *EE*. Indeed, Woods does not consider such a comparison at all, preferring instead to draw his interpretation of the distinction between the two forms of governing principle from places elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus where the two senses of *'for the sake of which'* are also distinguished – a strategy Aristotle himself would seem to clearly intend his students to employ in the statement: *"...that for which is of two sorts—they have been distinguished elsewhere..."*¹⁰⁹. Alongside the above reference to Milo in the *NE* we do, however, find a second point in the *NE*, at the beginning of Book 6, at which Aristotle again makes use of the term 'mean' and in which he also uses language more closely aligned with his description of the two forms of governing principles in the *EE*, as follows:

"In all the states of character we have mentioned, and in the others as well, there is a sort of target, and it is with his eye on this that the person with reason tightens or loosens his string. There is also a sort of standard for the mean states, which, as we say, lie between excess and deficiency and are in accordance with correct reason.

*But to say this, though true, is not at all clear. For in all other practices of which there is a science it is true to say that one should exert oneself and relax neither too much nor too little, but to the extent of the mean that is prescribed by correct reason. But having grasped only this, someone would be none the wiser..."*¹¹⁰

Here we see Aristotle describing a kind of target with respect to each of our excellent states of character. Before this point in the *NE* he has avoided any detailed discussion concerning practical wisdom, preferring instead to focus on what each individual character virtue consists in¹¹¹. He finally signals a change in focus specifically to the discussion of practical wisdom and *'what right reason is and how it is related to the other virtues'* in the above passage. We can thus consider Aristotle's initial descriptions of the individual virtues as constituting the sorts of *targets* mentioned in this passage, with each representing an exemplar state we should aim to achieve (i.e. the arithmetic mean for each disposition), and that the relationship each virtue shares with practical wisdom constitutes the *'sort of standard for the mean states in accordance with correct reason'* (i.e. the mean with respect to us) also mentioned in this passage. Furthermore, the term translated by Crisp in this passage from the *NE* as 'standard' is Greek *'oros'*, the very same term used in the final passages of the *EE* in a near identical context to that of the Milo passage in the *NE*, but translated by Woods in the following as 'limit':

¹⁰⁹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b14-17, Pg. 42.

¹¹⁰ *NE*, Book VI, Chapter 1, 1138b20-30, Pg. 103.

¹¹¹ We find this strategy clearly signposted in Chapter 2 of Book 2 with the statement: *"The idea of acting in accordance with right reason is a generally accepted one. Let us here take it for granted – we shall discuss it later, both what right reason is and how it is related to the other virtues."* *NE*, Book II, Chapter 2, 1103b32-1104a1, Pg. 24.

“...for the virtuous man [...] there must be some limit both for the possession and the choice and avoidance of abundance and exiguousness of material goods and of successes. Now as principle (prescribes) is what was said earlier. But that is as if, in matters of nutrition, someone were to say, as medicine and its principle (prescribes). But that, though true, is not clear. So it is needful, as in other cases, to live by reference to the governing thing, and by reference to the state and activity of what governs, as a slave to the rule of the master and each thing to its appropriate governing principle.”¹¹²

In this passage we find a clear parallel with the above passage from the *NE*, but with Aristotle here identifying not the practical mean with respect to any particular virtue, but instead the practical mean with respect to our possession of the natural goods as this relates to the best life. In the same way, therefore, that one deliberates with regards to how much risk is practical in terms of aligning one’s sense of courage with right reason, Aristotle here describes how one should determine the amount of natural goods that would align one’s possession of them with right reason.

It is interesting to also note that in both of these passages Aristotle makes effectively the same comment with regards to the fact that by simply stating that one should act ‘*in accordance with right reason*’ or ‘*as principle prescribes*’ one clearly invites the question of what ‘*right reason*’ and ‘*what principle prescribes*’ actually consist in, for simply asserting that one should be reasonable does not actually help one to be reasonable. What follows this ‘invitation’ in the passages from the *NE* is indeed a detailed account of what Aristotle considers practical wisdom to consist in. In the corresponding passage from the *EE*, however, with Aristotle having already covered practical reason and the individual virtues earlier on in this text, he there goes on to instead identify the standard for our possession of the natural goods. In the *EE* we are thus considering the question of how one should determine a reasonable mean between excess and deficiency for the possession of the natural goods in exactly the same way one considers, in the *NE*, the question of how ‘*the person with reason tightens or loosens his string*’ with respect to virtuous actions in general.

The answer Aristotle gives to the question concerning one’s possession of the natural goods in the *EE* thus represents a kind of inversion of the order in which the corresponding discussion concerning practical wisdom is presented in the *NE*. In the *NE* Aristotle describes the targets (i.e. the virtues and virtuous activity) we are to aim for and use practical wisdom in order to hit before he begins his discussion concerning practical wisdom itself. In the *EE*, on the other hand, we do not yet know, before the final passages, what the target (i.e. the best human life) actually consists in – and it is to this subject that Aristotle turns to at the very last moment.

A Second Alternative Interpretation of Aristotle’s God in the *EE*:

With regards, then, to our interpretation of the two governing principles Aristotle presents us with in the final passages of the *EE*, we can understand the *exemplar state* for one’s body and non-rational soul as consisting in whatever we take the exemplar of good human health and habituation to be, and also that one’s healthy and well-habituated body and sub-rational soul be at rest or at leisure in this state, much like an army that is well trained and well nourished but effectively redundant at times of peace. The exemplar state for one’s intellectual part, on the other hand, simply consists in whatever we can consider the most reasonable exemplar of intellectual activity to be. One would expect an agent in this exemplar state, enjoying the state of practical leisure afforded by their healthy body and well-habituate soul, to be no longer exercising practical wisdom at, and to thus be engaged entirely in the activity of contemplation. Interestingly, we find just such an example of intellectual activity in Aristotle description of a species of agent enjoying this very same disembodied state of leisure, described in Book X, Chapter 8 of the *NE*, as follows:

¹¹² *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b3-12, Pg. 42.

*"We assume the gods to be supremely blessed and happy; but what sorts of actions should we attribute to them? [...] If we were to run through [all of the character virtues], anything to do with [practical] actions would appear petty and unworthy of the gods. [...] Nevertheless, everyone assumes that they are at least alive and therefore engage in activity [...]. So if we remove from a living being the possibility of action, and furthermore the very possibility of producing anything, what is left apart from contemplation? So the god's activity, which is superior in blessedness, will be contemplative; and therefore the human activity most akin to this is the most conducive to happiness. [...] But because the happy person is human, he will also need external prosperity; for human nature is not self-sufficient for contemplation, but the body must be healthy and provided with food and other care."*¹¹³

Here we find Aristotle developing a kind of minimalist hypothetical theology, concerning a species of intellectual agency (i.e. 'the gods') that is quite literally bodiless, and thus free from the earthly corporeal concerns we embodied humans find ourselves so weighed down by, and thus free to pursue whatever activity remains for an intellectual agent to do in such a state. In the formation of this minimalist conception of godliness we can understand Aristotle as arguing against the position that 'the gods' (in a rather confusing semi-plural sense to be discussed below) would ever desire or need to act in a practical sense or influence our own corporeal earthly affairs, positing instead that they would keep entirely to their own realm, concerning themselves only with purely theoretical things. If we understand there to be gods, which we take to be the hypothesis Aristotle is here entertaining, then the activity of contemplation is all we can reasonably understand them as ever performing. According to this minimalist theology 'the gods' therefore constitute no less than *exemplars of intellectual activity*, representing a kind of best state for own merely-human existence, as agents who are always at leisure and thus always engaged in contemplation.

It is important to note the rather confusing combination of singular and plural usages of the word 'god' found across different translations of the above passage from the *NE*. In the Crisp translation given above we see 'god' used as a common noun in '*the god's activity*', referring to a species of agency as opposed to any particular instantiation. In the Ross translation of the very same passage, however, we are given the following subtly different picture:

*"We assume the gods to be above all other beings blessed and happy; but what sort of actions must we assign to them? [...] If we were to run through [all of the character virtues] the circumstances of [practical] action would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, every one supposes that they live and therefore that they are active [...]. Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative;"*¹¹⁴

Here we see Ross initially using the plural common noun sense of 'god', as in the Crisp translation, but then going on to use the specific proper noun instantiation of the Supreme Being capital-g God, thus presenting a clear divergence from Crisp. In light of these grammatically contrasting translations we have reason to perhaps consider Aristotle's original usage of the singular term 'god' as not necessarily implying a singular entity, with the decision to use either the common or proper noun versions of this term being based on nothing more than translator preference, a point we might thus have reason to apply to the final passages of the *EE*, for in the *EE* we also find contrasting translations of god in these final passages.

¹¹³ *NE*, Book X, Chapter VIII, 1178b9-23, Pg. 198.

¹¹⁴ Ross in Barnes, *NE*, Book X, Chapter 8, 1178b9-23, Pg. 1798.

In the Woods translation I have been considering up to this point the term ‘god’ is always prefixed by the word ‘the’, which would seem to imply the kind of common noun usage one hears most commonly in nature documentaries, in phrases such as: ‘the blue whale is quite clearly the largest species of mammal’ or ‘the wandering albatross has a particularly large wingspan’. These examples quite clearly refer to a species rather than to any particular entity while still making use of the singular terms ‘the blue whale’ and ‘the wandering albatross’, in which case we might expect, or at least allow, the same to apply to ‘the god’ as it appears in the *EE*, in the sense of ‘the god qua species’. In the Solomon translation of this same passage, on the other hand, we find a particularly singular form of ‘god’ in use, as follows:

*“...for god is not an imperative ruler, but is the end with a view to which wisdom issues its commands (the word ‘end’ is ambiguous, and has been distinguished elsewhere), for god needs nothing. What choice, then, or possession of the natural goods – whether bodily goods, wealth, friends, or other things—will most produce the contemplation of god, that choice or possession is best; this is the noblest standard, but any that through deficiency or excess hinders one from the contemplation and service of god is bad;”*¹¹⁵

We thus have further reason to consider there to be some degree of translator preference at play in these subtly differing translations, in light of which we have reason to contend that Aristotle’s original intended meaning for the word ‘god’ in these passages was not the singular Supreme Being which we find referred to by him so rarely and then only in certain translations, but instead simply the *species* of godliness we find described in greater detail in the *NE*.

Considering ‘*the god*’ of the final passages of the *EE* as therefore the very same *species* of agency described in Book X of the *NE*, we are able to see how this species of agency might then function to represent nothing more than the *governing principle qua exemplar state* of the intellectual part of the human soul. We can see this in the fact that immediately following Aristotle’s elaboration on the two forms of governing principle in the health/medicine analogy discussed above, as he turns his focus specifically to the contemplative part of the human soul, this exemplar for one’s intellect is exactly what one should expect him to be about to describe, and is, therefore, on my account of ‘god’ as a common noun, exactly what we do find him describing in the following:

*“Thus it is with the [contemplative] (part). For the god is a governor not in a prescriptive fashion, but it is that for which practical wisdom prescribes (but that for which is of two sorts—they have been distinguished elsewhere— since the god is in need of nothing). So if some choice and possession of natural goods—either goods of the body or money or of friends or the other goods—will most produce the speculation of the god, that is the best, and that is the finest limit; but whatever, whether through deficiency or excess, hinders the service and speculation of the god, is bad.”*¹¹⁶

We thus find Aristotle here simply applying the health and medicine analogy to the contemplative part of the human soul, and subsequently identifying ‘*the god*’ as the governing principle, not in the sense, like medicine, of prescribing action, but in the other sense, like the exemplar of human health, of representing what we should wish to emulate with this part. We find this kind of life, in which one effectively lives as a god (i.e. temporarily freed from the concerns of one’s body and engaged in the best activity of the intellect), also described in Book X, Chapter 7, of the *NE*, and in similar terms, as follows:

“Such a life is superior to one that is simply human, because someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him. And the activity of this divine

¹¹⁵ Solomon in Barnes, *EE*, Book 7, Chapter 15, 1249b13-20, Pg. 1981.

¹¹⁶ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b14-20, Pg. 42.

element is as much superior to that in accordance with the other kind of virtue as the element is superior to the compound."¹¹⁷

We can thus understand '*the speculation of the god*' as quite literally meaning 'the speculation that is done by the gods', with this being the sole and constant activity of the gods and thus also the activity characteristic of the best human life. We can then also understand '*the service and speculation of the god*' as describing the combination of practical wisdom and activity required to achieve and maintain the state of one's body and soul required for contemplation, coupled to the godlike activity of contemplation itself. We can understand the nature of this service as including, in the most obvious sense, the maintenance of one's health and one's freedom from other practical concerns, as well as, in a more complex sense, one's engagement in education and discussion concerning the potential objects of contemplation and one's personal experience of phenomena from which to draw the kinds of questions good contemplation should answer, such that when one finally finds the time to contemplate one will have something to immediately begin considering, mirroring Aristotle's contention concerning 'the good person' in Book IX of the *NE*, that "*...he has in his intellect a wealth of subjects for contemplation.*"¹¹⁸

Following the discussion of god as the *governing principle qua exemplar* for one's intellect, Aristotle then broadens the scope of the discussion to include the whole human soul, describing the best state we can hope to achieve for this, as mentioned above, in the following:

*"Thus it is for the soul, and this is the best limit for the soul—to be aware as little as possible of the non-rational part of the soul as such."*¹¹⁹

Recalling Aristotle's contention in the *NE* that "*...human nature is not self-sufficient for contemplation, [since] the body must be healthy and provided with food and other care...*"¹²⁰, we can understand the state of *embodied godliness* one achieves through the activity of contemplation as therefore necessarily requiring that one's body be healthy and that it has been sufficiently provided with food and '*other care*' in order to have achieved this state. Once in this state, however, one will indeed be, if only temporarily, '*aware as little as possible of the non-rational part of the soul*' and thus free to emulate the gods as closely as a human being can. This state of contemplative godliness is obviously not one we can achieve entirely, for we will always have our bodies, but it surely represents a state one's intellect can occasionally achieve, when the rest of one's body and soul has been tended to.

With regards to the standard alternative interpretation of Aristotle's god described earlier, it must be pointed out that this new '*exemplar*' alternative differs only subtly from the earlier account, in that whereas the first tells us that 'the god' is simply the contemplative part of one's soul, the exemplar alternative tells us instead that 'the god' represents the idealised state that one's contemplative part can *only occasionally* achieve. So whereas the first interpretation tells us that one's contemplative part is *always* the god, I contend instead that one's contemplative part *only occasionally resembles* the god. With regards also to the traditional interpretation of 'god' in the *EE*, it must also be pointed out that this intellectual exemplar god remains barely distinguishable from the traditional account of the Supreme Being god, in that both constitute incorporeal, eternally contemplating agents. According to the traditional Supreme Being interpretation, however, 'the god' represents a *unique and singular entity* that we are instructed to worship and serve, whereas in my

¹¹⁷ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b27-31, Pg. 196.

¹¹⁸ *NE*, Book IX, Chapter 4, 1166a26-27, Pg. 169.

¹¹⁹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b20-23, Pg. 42.

¹²⁰ *NE*, Book X, Chapter VIII, 1178b34-35, Pg. 198.

exemplar interpretation, 'the god' is understood as simply a *species of agency* that we should emulate.

We can understand this distinction between the exemplar and Supreme Being accounts as analogous to that which one observes between a relatively virtuous political regime and a more vicious instance of autocratic totalitarianism. In a totalitarian regime one typically finds a cult of personality developed around a single absolute 'divine' ruler – an agent who is therein promoted as a godlike figure one is compelled to serve and worship, but certainly not to emulate. In a more virtuous political regime, on the other hand, of the type we can understand Aristotle to have been promoting in his ethical works, one instead typically finds a species of virtuous ruler whose primary responsibility is to inculcate the very same attributes that make them so great within the character of their citizenry. We can thus consider the first, vicious kind of autocratic political system as promoting a material distinction between the supreme ruler and their subjects, with the governing body acting viciously in order to achieve and retain this position, whereas in the second, more virtuous kind of political system one instead finds the *potential* equality of all promoted and the rulers therein acting virtuously in order to achieve this most noble end.

A Principle for One's Possession of the Natural Goods (and Nobility):

It is interesting to note one additional peculiar aspect of the language used by Aristotle in the final passages from the *EE*. In the first half of the final chapter of Book 8, as discussed above, he discusses fineness at length, concluding that it consists in things '*commended for themselves*', namely the virtues and virtuous actions. At the beginning of the very final section, however, we find Aristotle concerning himself primarily with things '*naturally good but not commended*', which we take as referring to the natural goods, such as the examples of "*...honour and wealth and bodily excellences and good fortune and capacities...*"¹²¹ given us earlier in the same chapter. It is important to also point out that (in the Woods translation at least) we see Aristotle also referring to the natural goods as the things '*good without qualification*', which one might initially take to refer to things that are always good, in the sense of being good for everyone and at all times, which would therefore seem to preclude one's interpretation of them as being just the natural goods, as Aristotle makes it quite clear that these goods "*...may be harmful for some because of their states of character.*"¹²² We need not consider things '*good without qualification*' as any different from our '*natural goods*', however, for recalling our earlier discussion concerning fine pleasure (Page 30), it was there discussed how '*things pleasant without qualification*' are whatever we take to be *pleasant for the virtuous agent*, as opposed to the more questionable class of things that are only pleasant for the corrupt or vicious agent. It is this '*questionable*' nature that we took to constitute the negation of '*without qualification*', whereby for something to be good without qualification it must simply be good for a normal or natural human being. This is, therefore, not to say that the things good without qualification are good for all agents under all circumstances, but rather that they are simply *naturally good* for a human being (*viz.* our *natural goods*), as opposed to something that might be good for a particular agent, but only in an *unnatural* way. We find Aristotle describing the things good without qualification in this sense most explicitly when he compares their effects in the hands of the fine-and-good agent to their effects in the hands of '*the many*', in the following: (my emphasis)

*"So, to the fine-and-good man, the same things are both beneficial and fine; but for the many there is a divergence here. For **the things good without qualification are not good also for them, but are good for the good man.**"*¹²³

¹²¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1248b29-30, Pg. 41.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 1248b30-31.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1249a9-13.

Having decoded this point concerning the things good without qualification, we thus find Aristotle beginning to develop his final argument for the *EE*, concerning the determination of a reasonable level for one's possession of *the natural goods* (viz. the things naturally good but not commended and the things good without qualification), in the following:

*"Now there is some limit [horos] also for the doctor, by reference to which he judges what is healthy for a body and what is not, and by reference to which each thing is to be done up to a certain amount, and (the body) is healthy if it is done correctly, but not, if more or less is done. So too for the virtuous man, with respect to his actions and choices of the things naturally good but not commended, there must be some limit both for the possession and the choice and avoidance of abundance and exiguousness of material goods and of successes."*¹²⁴

We can reasonably understand there being no plausible standard for the determination of how few or how many virtuous actions qualify as *enough*, as it would be absurd for one to consider there being a point in the day where, for example, one's quota of courageous actions has been filled, allowing one to thereafter act as a coward. It is instead the case, with regards to complete and noble virtue, that virtuous actions must always be chosen – and are thus unreservedly commendable. All we therefore know of any kind of limit for the things commended is that they must always be performed (or possessed) *for their own sake*, with this constituting the only kind of boundary for their otherwise unlimited application. In the case of things good but *not commended* (i.e. the natural goods), on the other hand, one finds no such unlimited nature; for we, just as Aristotle in his own time, understand there as being a point at which one's possession of greater strength, wealth, or power would become largely redundant. Accordingly, just as Aristotle's doctor would prescribe a certain amount of exercise and food in order for a particular patient of theirs to become healthy, we can understand there to be a similar limit for one's possession of the natural goods with regards to living the best life – and it is this limit that we find Aristotle describing in the final passages of the *EE*, which we now understand as being whatever best allows for the '*speculation of the god*'. From the following remark Aristotle makes in the *NE* we can also understand that the amount of these goods one needs to live this life (assuming the lowercase-g interpretation of god) would likely appear lower than one would otherwise expect:

*"...a person who is contemplating needs none of [the natural goods], for that activity at any rate; indeed, one might say that they are even obstacles, to contemplation at least. But in so far as he is a human being and lives together with a number of others, he chooses to do actions in accordance with virtue; he will therefore need such things for the living of a human life."*¹²⁵

By identifying how much of the natural goods one requires, Aristotle is thus effectively describing a mean for their possession, in the sense of identifying what amount of the natural goods, between excess and deficiency, one needs to acquire before one can reasonably be at leisure and take time for contemplation. In order to identify this standard (or governing principle, or mean) it is obvious that one first needs to know what one should actually be doing with one's leisure time – which we take from the concluding passages of the *NE* and the passages from the *Politics* discussed earlier, as well as the example set by the hypothetical gods in their disembodied state, to be the activity of contemplation. We can thus consider the final passages of the *EE* as reasonably approximating a much-abridged version of the argument Aristotle puts forward concerning our best life in Book X of the *NE*, in the sense that he gets straight to the point in the statement:

¹²⁴ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249a22-1249b1, Pg. 41-42.

¹²⁵ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 8, 1178b2-7, Pg. 197.

*“So it is needful, as in other cases, to live by reference to the governing thing, and by reference to the state and activity of what governs, as a slave to the rule of the master and each thing to its appropriate governing principle.”*¹²⁶

Aristotle thus forgoes in the *EE* the broader discussion concerning the various contenders for our best life (which we find eventually pared down in the *NE* to that characterised by the activity of our highest element) and instead goes straight to our highest element and the activity of contemplation.¹²⁷

At the very end of the *EE* we find the following conclusion:

*“But let what has been said be enough on the limit of nobility, and what the goal is of things good without qualification.”*¹²⁸

In light of the fact that in the first half of the final chapter of this text we found Aristotle describing what nobility consists in and that in the second we now understand him as having described the governing principles for human life and how these relate to our possession of the natural goods, we can understand this very final sentence as representing a neat summation of these key points, and of Aristotle’s broader discussion concerning the best human life. We thus take it that *‘the limit (qua boundary/horos) of nobility’* is determined by what we understand properly possessed (i.e. not compelled) virtue and virtuous action to consist in and that *‘the goal of things good without qualification’* is determined by whatever amount of the natural goods best allows us to contemplate.

A More Excellent Virtue:

Recall Broadie’s identification of the demotion of what she understands to be full virtue (as possessed by the Spartan) in the face of nobility in the first half of the final chapter of the *EE* in the following statement:

*“Everything until just before the end suggests that in the EE Aristotle unambiguously regards the person of virtue as the very best sort of human being. But in the last chapter we find him demoting virtue.”*¹²⁹

While we now have reason to reject this position from Broadie and instead hold that what Aristotle is demoting (recalling our earlier re-interpretation of Aristotle’s Spartan exemplar) is really not *‘the person of virtue’* at all, we do in fact now have reason to understand Aristotle as presenting us, in these very final passages of the *EE* discussed above, with a different demotion of this sort. In these passages, we find the argument that one’s possession of the character virtues and one’s performance of the corresponding virtuous actions for their own sake is not in itself enough to qualify one for the status of living the best life, for the best human life is instead to be understood as that of contemplation, with contemplation being the best activity of our best element and also the characteristic activity of the gods, and thus characteristic of the best and most divine life. The life of contemplation will obviously include practical and fine actions, and thus necessarily require the character virtues, for no *human* life will ever be entirely free from character virtue-testing and

¹²⁶ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b6-9, Pg. 42.

¹²⁷ In light of my above characterisation of Aristotle’s two types of ‘governing principles’ we might have reason to understand *‘the governing thing’* as the governing principle qua exemplar of intellectual activity (i.e. the god) and *‘the activity of what governs’* as the activity this agent is engaged in. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will hold that this refers simply to the governing part of the human soul and the activity of this part.

¹²⁸ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b23-25, Pg. 42.

¹²⁹ Broadie, “Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle,” 97.

virtue-requiring circumstances, but these practical and fine actions, we now take it, are not in themselves sufficient for the best human life.

We find a similar point with regards to the life of contemplation as compared with the life of character virtue also made in Book X of the *NE*, in which Aristotle distinguishes the life of what we understand to be complete character virtue from the same life but with the addition of philosophy, in the following:

“...the life in accordance with intellect is best and pleasantest, since this, more than anything else, constitutes humanity. So this life will also be the happiest.

The life in accordance with the other kind of virtue is happy in a secondary way, since the activities in accordance with it are human. [...] Some feelings seem in fact to have their origin in the body, and virtue of character in many ways to be closely bound up with the feelings.

Practical wisdom, too, is tied up with virtue of character, and this with practical wisdom, since the first principles of practical wisdom are in accordance with the virtues of character, and correctness in the virtues of character is in accordance with practical wisdom. [...] Because the virtues of the compound are human, so are the life and happiness in accordance with them. The virtue of intellect, however, is separate. Let us leave it at that, since a detailed account would be beyond the scope of our project.”¹³⁰

We thus take it that, according to both the *EE* and the *NE*, one can live the life of character virtue, be noble and perform fine actions, yet still fail to live the best human life, for this life is characterised not by mere character virtue, but by ‘*the virtue of intellect*’, a form of virtue we now understand as being exemplified by the gods, according to the account of Aristotle’s minimalist theology discussed above.

‘God’ Elsewhere in Aristotle’s Corpus:

With all of this in mind, and from the strong correlation now identified between this second alternative lowercase-g interpretation of the final chapter of the *EE* and the *NE* account of the best human life, we thus have a particularly charitable reading of the final passages of the *EE*, in the sense that we have found a coherent interpretation that is both internally consistent within the *EE* and consistent with Aristotle’s other ethical discussions in the *NE*. One might, however, argue that this constitutes no more than a straw-man argument against the traditional view, from the position that this new lowercase-g alternative (or, for that matter, any alternative) offers no more than simply *an alternative*, as opposed to a decisive negation of the uppercase position. At this point, therefore, all we can really say for sure is that there is nothing in the final passages of the *EE* that necessarily renders this alternative exemplar interpretation of ‘the god’ absurd, just as there is nothing that necessarily renders either of the earlier lower or uppercase-g accounts absurd, apart from the problem for the uppercase view that by serving the Supreme Being one would appear to be acting ignobly, according to Aristotle’s own account of nobility.

It must also be observed that for any aficionado of Aristotle’s corpus, the strongest supporting evidence for the traditional uppercase-g interpretation of his god lies not in any part of his ethical works. The most authoritative account of Aristotle’s god (and prime mover), along with the contemplation this entity is involved with (as both subject and object) is instead to be found in the *Metaphysics*, with the concluding passages of the *EE* typically understood as representing no more than a parasitic reference to this original and far more elaborate specification – and thus to be interpreted only in the light of the more authoritative text. If, therefore, we are to give a compelling account of Aristotle’s god as kind of hypothetical idealised exemplar species of intellectual agency to

¹³⁰ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7-8, 1178a7-24, Pg. 196-197.

be emulated, as opposed to a singular supreme being to be worshipped, we would do well to draw such a position from this more authoritative text.

Accordingly, just as the Bible asserts that according to Jesus no one gets to God except through him¹³¹, it is reasonable to suggest that no one gets to a compelling interpretation of Aristotle's god except through his *Metaphysics* – and to this task I shall now turn.

4. God in the *Metaphysics*:

The problem surrounding the proper interpretation of the term 'god' in Ancient Greek philosophy is not restricted to Aristotle's corpus alone. The modern commentator Leo Elders tells us that, in addition to Aristotle:

*"Plato's use of the term 'divine' and 'god' is somewhat confusing since the terms signify a whole range of things from the ideas to the heavenly bodies and good men..."*¹³²

We therefore have reason to suspect that Aristotle's application of this term may also not have been entirely homogenous, likely pertaining to different subjects in different contexts.

In any case, we find Aristotle's clearest conception of god, typically understood as the singular Supreme Being, elaborated in arguably its fullest form in *Metaphysics Lambda*, chapters 6 and 7. In these passages we find Aristotle clarifying his conception of the first principle of efficient causality as this relates to the movement of the heavens and to god. It is the nature of this relationship between the prime mover and god that, I will now argue, will point us towards Aristotle's intended meaning for the term 'god' as we find it in the *EE*.

In what follows I will firstly discuss what I consider to be Aristotle's aim in the *Metaphysics*; secondly, I will elaborate on the traditional interpretation of god as we find it described in this text; thirdly, I will discuss various problems for this interpretation drawn from both within the *Metaphysics* and from a broader analysis of how we find the concepts of god and the prime mover described elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus; fourthly, I will analyse Broadie's powerful alternative interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover god in the *Metaphysics*; fifthly, I will highlight a central issue for this alternative view; and finally, in light of this issue, I will propose and defend my own alternative interpretation.

Aristotle's Aim in the *Metaphysics*:

The conceptualisation of the prime mover or first efficient cause constitutes a central focus for Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, but we find this aim placed alongside the additional parallel discussions concerning the three other causes (final, material and formal) he earlier also identifies, with these four topics altogether constituting the study of first philosophy, or of first principles.

We find these four causes most clearly described at the beginning of *Metaphysics Epsilon*, Chapter 2, as follows:

"We call a cause (1) that from which (as immanent material) a thing comes into being, e.g. the bronze of the statue and the silver of the saucer, and the classes which include these. (2) The form or pattern, i.e. the formula of the essence, and the classes which include this (e.g. the ratio 2:1 and

¹³¹ The Bible, John 14:6.

¹³² Leo Elders, *Aristotle's Theology* (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum & Comp. N. V., 1972), 5.

number in general are causes of the octave) and the parts of the formula. (3) That from which the change or the freedom from change first begins, e.g. the man who has deliberated is a cause, and the father a cause of the child, and in general the maker a cause of the thing made and the change-producing of the changing. (4) The end, i.e. that for the sake of which a thing is, e.g. health is the cause of walking. For why does one walk? We say 'in order that one may be healthy', and in speaking thus we think we have given the cause. The same is true of all the means that intervene before the end, when something else has put the process in motion (as e.g. thinning or purging or drugs or instruments intervene before health is reached); for all these are for the sake of the end, though they differ from one another in that some are instruments and others are actions."¹³³

The basic hypothesis Aristotle subsequently argues from in this text is that for each of these four kinds of cause there must be an origin, or first principle, on which every subsequent step in their respective causal chains is founded. In the case of *material cause*, for example, every material thing will consist of a particular kind of material which will itself consist of a further compound of materials and so on and so forth. At some point, however, the very first material cause (much like the atoms and sub-atomic particles we find described in modern physics) must be found, lest the causal chain go on to infinity. This problem of infinite causal regress is initially discussed with regard to each of these four causes in *Beta*, Chapter 2, as follows:

*"Evidently there is a first principle, and the causes of things are neither an infinite series nor infinitely various in kind. For, on the one hand, one thing cannot proceed from another, as from matter, ad infinitum, e.g. flesh from earth, earth from air, air from fire, and so on without stopping; nor on the other hand can the efficient causes form an endless series, man for instance being acted on by air, air by the sun, the sun by Strife, and so on without limit. Similarly the final causes cannot go on ad infinitum,—walking for the sake of health, this for the sake of happiness, happiness for the sake of something else, and so one thing always for the sake of another. And the case of the formal cause is similar. For in the case of an intermediate, which has a last term and a prior term outside it, the prior must be the cause of the later terms. For if we had to say which of the three is the cause, we should say the first; surely not the last, for the final term is the cause of none; nor even the intermediate, for it is the cause only of one."*¹³⁴

What we thus find in the *Metaphysics* are four parallel discussions primarily focussed on the understanding of each of these causes, with Aristotle therein also aiming to conceive of the 'first knowable' in each case – the single point from which everything we understand and perceive derives – an aim analogous, in the case of efficient and perhaps material causality, to that of the modern scientific project which has thus far yielded 'the big bang' as the most likely candidate. With specific regard to efficient causality, one takes it that while Aristotle would have formed his arguments based on far less precise observations than we have available today, his project was no different from what ours remains today; we have simply developed far greater means for observing and understanding the universe in the intervening millennia, resulting in the prefix 'meta' no longer necessarily applying to this particular line of investigation.

These first principles or causes also constitute, according to Aristotle, the most complete and universal class of objects relating to theoretical wisdom, as he contends in the following:

"We have said in the Ethics what the difference is between art and science and the other kindred faculties; but the point of our present discussion is this, that all men suppose what is called wisdom

¹³³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. William Ross, Epsilon, Chapter 2, 1013a24-1013b4, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 1600. All quotations from the *Metaphysics* are from the Ross translation unless otherwise specified.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Beta, Chapter 2, 994a1-19, Pg. 1570.

*to deal with the first causes and the principles of things. This is why, as has been said before, the man of experience is thought to be wiser than the possessors of any perception whatever, the artist wiser than the men of experience, the master-worker than the mechanic, and the theoretical kinds of knowledge to be more of the nature of wisdom than the productive. Clearly then wisdom is knowledge about certain causes and principles.”*¹³⁵

We thus take it that Aristotle considers all knowledge to be quite literally predicated on one's understanding of these first principles, and that without such understanding one would therefore possess only *particular knowledge*, of seemingly random events and objects not grounded in necessity – in which case one would really have no theoretical wisdom at all. We thus find, at the end of *Alpha*, Aristotle making the following rather startling claim concerning the state of all of our purported wisdom (at least as it concerns efficient causality) if we are unable to properly understand the corresponding first principle:

*“...whence did movement come? If we cannot answer this the whole study of nature has been annihilated.”*¹³⁶

While this might at first appear a rather extreme position to take, as just discussed, we take it that any knowledge not properly grounded in necessity (in the sense of things that cannot be otherwise) represents no more than mere *particular knowledge*, as opposed to the more robust and eternal form of *universal knowledge* pertaining to theoretical wisdom or *sophia*. Considering the ancient history of wisdom as we find Aristotle himself discussing it, we can understand this threat to theoretical wisdom as a necessary effect of the Pandora's Box originally opened by Thales “...the founder of [the] school of [first] philosophy”¹³⁷, although the term ‘*annihilated*’ might be better understood under the less dramatic guise of simply ‘*rendered particular*’.

Fast-forwarding through the text, by *Lambda* Aristotle has largely completely his account of the first *efficient cause*, with his eventual position in this regard reasonably abridged into the following two points:

1) There is an eternal unmoved substance:

*“...we must assert that it is necessary that there should be an eternal unmovable substance. For substances are the first of existing things, and if they are all destructible, all things are destructible. But it is impossible that movement should either come into being or cease to be; for it must always have existed. Nor can time come into being or cease to be; for there could not be a before and an after if time did not exist.”*¹³⁸

2) The eternal unmoved substance exists as constant and eternal activity causing the constant and eternal movement of the first heaven, being a substance that is *eternal actuality*, absent of both spatial magnitude and physical matter:

“Nothing, then, is gained even if we suppose eternal substances, as the believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause movement; and even this is not enough, nor is another substance besides the Forms enough; for if it does not act, there will be no movement. Further, even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its substance is potentiality; for there will not be eternal movement; for that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a

¹³⁵ *Metaphysics*. Alpha, Chapter 1, 981b25-982a2, Pg. 1553.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, 992b8-9, Pg. 1568.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, 983b20, Pg. 1556.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Lambda, Chapter 6, 1071b4-9, Pg. 1692-1693.

principle, whose very substance is actuality. Further, then, these substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, at least if anything else is eternal. Therefore they must be actuality."¹³⁹

These two passages represent a concise summary of Aristotle's discussion concerning *the first efficient cause of the motions of the heavens*, the conclusion to which, at the end of *Lambda* Chapter 6, he considers strong enough to warrant the statement:

*"This, accordingly, is the character which the motions actually exhibit. What need then is there to seek for other principles?"*¹⁴⁰

We can thus consider one of the primary aims of the *Metaphysics*, relating to the development of an account of the first *efficient* cause, to have at this point been largely accomplished, with the simple conclusion that this entity consists in a kind of *prime mover* with the following necessary properties:

- Causes the circular motion of the first heaven without itself being moved.
- Exists as eternal actuality and must therefore be a substance without matter or magnitude.

Aristotle elaborates more thoroughly on these two points at the beginning of Chapter 7 as follows:

*"There is, then, something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heavens must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves them. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is a mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality."*¹⁴¹

We can thus understand the problem highlighted by Aristotle in the earlier statement: "...nor [...] can the efficient causes form an endless series, man for instance being acted on by air, air by the sun, the sun by Strife, and so on without limit..."¹⁴² to have now been answered with a statement to the effect that 'the first heaven is acted on by the prime mover, which is not itself acted on by anything else, thus constituting the origin of all heavenly movement'. In this conclusion we find a fairly straightforward way of understanding the origin of the motions of the heavens. One must, however, raise the question of how this peculiar entity, having no magnitude, is able to actually *act* on the first heaven, for one typically understands 'acting on' or 'imparting motion' as necessitating some kind of physical contact or presence. The discussion concerning this particular puzzle will form a large part of what follows.

The Traditional Interpretation of Aristotle's Prime Mover God:

According to the traditional theological view, Aristotle's prime mover causes the motion of the first heaven by being an object of the heaven's desire. The first heaven is thus understood as being able to form or possess some kind of desire for the prime mover and as a result of this, move in a circular fashion. To this it is added that what the first heaven finds desirable about the prime mover is its pure and total understanding of the universe and also that the prime mover is eternally engaged in the contemplation of this complete knowledge. According to this view, the first heaven thus *moves itself* in a circle due to its eternal love for the prime mover's divine contemplative nature. It follows that the prime mover must therefore contemplate, with this being all it does (and the activity of contemplation being effectively all that it is), and that the first heaven must be able to perceive and

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1071b14-22, Pg. 1693.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1072a17-19, Pg. 1694.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Chapter 7, 1072a19-26, Pg. 1694.

¹⁴² Ibid., Beta, Chapter 2, 994a4-6. Pg. 1570.

recognise the perfection of this contemplation in some way and thereby form a desire based on this understanding and henceforth move in a circular fashion.

We thus find Aristotle's prime mover, on the traditional view of the *Metaphysics* account, understood in much the same way we find the gods described in the *NE*, considered in both cases as no more than a purely contemplative being, that is always engaged in contemplation, incorporeal, and with no practical concerns to think of – although to this we find added in the *Metaphysics* the rather incongruous contention that this eternal act of contemplation somehow motivates the first heaven to move in a circle. The traditional interpretation of the prime mover thus correlates fairly well with the 'exemplar of intellectual activity' interpretation of god in the *EE* developed above, but with the first heaven in the *Metaphysics* emulating the purely contemplative prime mover god in the same way the intellectual exemplar interpretation of the god in the *EE*, as the governing principle for one's intellectual part suggests that we should (although humanity obviously possesses an intellectual capability far more suited to this task).

According to the traditional view of the prime mover god and the movement of the first heaven, we thus have it that, far from being a simple transferral of momentum between two objects, the causal origin of the movement of the first heaven consists in an attraction the first heaven holds for the purely contemplative prime mover god, with the subsequent circular motion resulting from its determination to indirectly emulate the intellectual perfection of this Supreme Being.

Ross reflects on this rather confusing position as if its acceptance were a matter of historic fact:

*"The doctrine that the motions of the stars were due to the desire to imitate the perfection of the divine nature lasted long. There was much discussion among theologians of the question whether the stars are conscious. St Thomas [...] sums up by saying that Origen and Jerome held them to be conscious, Basil and John of Damacus denied the consciousness, and Augustine was neutral."*¹⁴³

Problems for the Traditional Interpretation:

In adopting the view that the prime mover causes the movement of the first heaven as an object of its conscious desire, alongside the contention that the prime mover is itself conscious – and that this is what is so desirable about it – two significant problems are, however, projected onto Aristotle's thoughts, as Laks highlights in the following:

*"This makes one think that, in addition to the desiring intellect of the first heaven, there also is a 'final' intellect which constitutes the object of this desire. But Aristotle nowhere alludes to such a second intellect. A second difficulty is this: how are we to understand why the motion which arises from the desire of the intellect for the first unmoved mover should take the form of rotary motion (since the motion which needs to be explained is the eternal motion of the first heaven)? This is a question that Aristotle does not go into either. It is this double silence that the imposing tradition which begins with Theophrastus' *Metaphysics* and continues through the Greek commentators throughout the middle ages, has sought to overcome."*¹⁴⁴

The problems for the traditional view do not stop there however. Broadie, in her paper aptly named 'What does Aristotle's Prime Mover do?' points out that under the traditional interpretation, the prime mover does not in fact function as an efficient cause of the motion the heavens at all, since

¹⁴³ W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 375.

¹⁴⁴ André Laks, "Metaphysics Λ 7," in *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda*, eds. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 220-221.

the impetus for this motion lies instead within the soul of the first heaven, drawn from its desire to imitate the prime mover's perfection, described by Broadie in the following:

*"Movement of the first sphere arises because a soul or spiritual entity which is not the Prime Mover loves or desires the Prime Mover or the latter's contemplative activity. This other spirit, as an expression of love, gives rise to a physical image of eternal contemplation – which physical image is the eternal movement of the sphere. [...] The efficient cause, then, is the distinct sphere-soul, which must now be understood as referred to in any passages dealing with the efficient-causing of the primary motion. The story is that the sphere-soul, from love, seeks to imitate the divine contemplation, and eternal motion is the best it can do in this regard."*¹⁴⁵

According to Broadie's argument, we must therefore understand the prime mover, under the traditional view, as constituting just the *final cause* of the first heaven's motion and specifically not its efficient cause, since we understand the efficient cause as lying within the first heaven itself, as it propels itself in a circular motion out of a desire to imitate the prime mover, a questionable position which draws the rather pointed observation from Broadie, with regards to these passages that, in fact, "*...Aristotle says nothing about imitation here.*"¹⁴⁶

Broadie goes further still, arguing that even this status of *final cause* is perhaps too much to attribute to the prime mover, and characterising this entity as instead constituting really only the *exemplary cause* of the first heaven's motion. Her attribution of this exemplar status is based on the supposition that the first heaven wishes only to imitate the prime mover's contemplation – considering the prime mover as no more than a good example to follow – and that by some happy coincidence this imitation functions to generate its eternal circular motion. Broadie considers this point in the following:

"Then what about motion? On this view, all we can say is that motion occurs as a spin-off from pure contemplation. The motion is not desired by its so called agent, since the latter's noetic activity is not geared to produce physical change. Then the motion simply happens – a cosmic eternal accident. There is nothing outside the divine contemplator that could trip him into inadvertently causing motion, nor any mechanism within him that could respond in that way to an external stimulus. For ex hypothesi this contemplator contains no mechanism for anything but contemplation.

[...]

*Divine contemplation, on the present account, is not the final cause of motion strictly speaking, but its exemplary cause. The final cause, as already observed, is the property (belonging to the sphere-soul or sphere) of actively being as similar as possible to a perfect contemplator."*¹⁴⁷

Now it is in fact the case that in *On the Soul* Aristotle briefly and rhetorically considers the identification of thought with circular motion, specifically in his discussion concerning the relationship between movement and soul proposed by Plato in the *Timaeus*¹⁴⁸. In these passages he is, however, arguing *against* Plato, positing instead that thought really does not constitute any form of physical movement at all. We thus have reason to follow Broadie's appraisal from above, in holding that the circular nature of the first heaven's movement is unrelated to the contemplative nature of the prime mover, except by the rather incongruous connection drawn under the

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Broadie, "What Does Aristotle's Prime Mover Do?" (paper presented to SAGP, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, December 28, 1994), Pg. 2. Kindly supplied by the author.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Pg. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. John Alexander Smith, Book I, Chapter 3, 406b26-407b26, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 648. All quotations from *On the Soul* are from the Smith translation unless otherwise specified.

traditional view, that it is a by-product of the first heaven's desire to emulate the contemplation of the prime mover. But are we to therefore understand the efficient causation emanating from the first heaven as due simply to some kind of incongruous 'cosmic eternal accident'? We should perhaps remind ourselves of the statement from Aristotle discussed above in which he dramatically ponders:

*"...whence did movement come? If we cannot answer this the whole study of nature has been annihilated."*¹⁴⁹

According to Broadie's characterisation of the traditional view, the annihilation of all our knowledge of the natural world would appear to be the case.

An alternative view of the function of the prime mover propounded by Judson, whereby the prime mover can indeed be reasonably understood as functioning as efficient cause of the first heaven's movement, should be briefly mentioned here. He argues in his paper 'Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover' that the prime mover can still be understood as both the efficient and final causes of the first heaven's motion under the traditional view, from the straightforward position that a final cause can only be properly understood as such *by actually being good*. In this sense the goodness of the prime mover, a central aspect of it on the traditional account, would serve as the efficient cause of any reasonable desire for it, such as that held by the first heaven.¹⁵⁰ On this view the prime mover would indeed function as an efficient cause. According to this argument, however, as well as the traditional view of the prime mover god, the impetus for movement still lies within the first heaven itself, a position we have reason to doubt *if it is impossible for the first heaven to power its own motion eternally*.

This particular issue will be discussed at length in what follows, but putting this and Judson's alternative position to one side for now, Broadie goes on to identify a further problem projected onto Aristotle by the traditional view, with the point that if the motion of the first heaven is caused by the first heaven's desire to imitate the prime mover's perfect contemplation, the prime mover need not actually exist at all, as follows:

*"...such a God need not already exist for the soul [of the first heaven] to aspire to be godlike in its own way. Aristotle should know better than to expose the divine Prime Mover to this objection, because in the Metaphysics one of his reasons for complaining that Plato's forms (perfect exemplars) fail to account for change is that they might as well not exist for all the difference they make."*¹⁵¹

One could argue in response to this problem that, perhaps, the first heaven, rather anthropomorphically, possesses a very poor capacity to remember things, or indeed possesses no memory at all, and thus necessarily requires the constant and eternal presence of the divine exemplar in order for its imitation (and incidental movement) to occur. Broadie suggests, rhetorically, an even more convoluted response to this position, with the argument that, perhaps:

*"...the [first heaven], by engaging in its kinetic activity, ensures the actual existence of that which it is supposed to imitate."*¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Metaphysics*, Alpha, 992b8-9, Pg. 1568.

¹⁵⁰ Lindsay Judson. "Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," in *Self Motion – From Aristotle to Newton*, eds. Mary Louis Gill and James G. Lennox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 164-166.

¹⁵¹ Broadie, "What Does Aristotle's Prime Mover Do?," Pg. 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

In light of such a supposition one must, as Broadie goes on to do, question how the movement of the first heaven could possibly thereby function to bring about the existence of the prime mover in any reasonable way. One is also left wondering how this argument would any way work to retain the position that the prime mover functions in any sense as an origin of causation, if it exists simply as an unrelated by-product of a circular motion that is itself a seemingly unrelated by-product of an act of imitation concerning the very entity this act brings to life. Rather than helping us to understand the eternally circular nature of the movements of the heavens, does this not simply highlight the eternally circular nature of this line of reasoning? In following these arguments, one thus develops a sense that we are either dealing with a less than charitable interpretation of the text, or that Aristotle had simply lost the plot in developing this position.

Broadie makes the point, in reflecting on the convoluted nature of the traditional view, that:

*“At every point of pressure one is forced to countenance one or another multiplication of entities unmentioned by the text. [...] All this suggests some single central error whose effects may be containable by one means or other, but always at the expense of the text and of theoretical simplicity.”*¹⁵³

Broadie goes on to suggest a powerful solution to this apparent mess, but before considering her view, two additional problems for the traditional interpretation will be discussed. The first relates to what exactly can cause the motion of the first heaven according to Aristotle, and the second to whether or not, again according to Aristotle, the first heaven can be reasonably understood as possessing anything like the kind of soul that the traditional view requires of it.

Additional Problem 1: How can the First Heaven Move Itself?

According to the traditional view, the prime mover stands as a kind of final or exemplary end to the first heaven. The first heaven desires to emulate the prime mover and subsequently moves itself in a circular fashion eternally. This being the case the *motive power* for this rotation must lie within the first heaven itself, so that in the same way that when, for example, I desire something sweet, I tap into the electrochemical energy stored within my own body to move my limbs in such a way as to obtain a sweet thing, the first heaven, in wishing to emulate the perfection of the prime mover, must tap into its own source of motive energy in order to rotate eternally. As Broadie points out, however: *“It is embarrassing for [the traditional] interpretation that lambda never mentions a spiritual agency that both moves the sphere and is other than the Prime mover.”*¹⁵⁴

Reflecting in part on Broadie’s statement, but also on an additional consideration to now be discussed, a further problem for the traditional interpretation can be identified in the fact that Aristotle argues rather pointedly that, firstly, the first heaven has a finite magnitude, and secondly, that nothing of finite magnitude can power motion eternally. Combining these two points it follows that the first heaven cannot possibly power or sustain its own eternal movement – and it is specifically for this reason that Aristotle argues that the prime mover must have no magnitude at all.

Aristotle’s argument *that nothing of finite magnitude can power movement eternally* is elaborated most fully in *Physics*, Book VIII Chapter 10, as follows:

“We have now to assert that the first mover must be without parts and without magnitude, beginning with the establishment of the premisses on which this conclusion depends.”

¹⁵³ Ibid., Pg. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Pg. 2.

One of these premisses is that nothing finite can cause motion during an infinite time. We have three things, the mover, the moved, and thirdly that in which the motion takes place, namely the time; and these are either all infinite or all finite or some—that is to say two of them or one of them—finite and some infinite. Let A be the mover, B the moved, and C infinite time. Now let us suppose that D moves E, a part of B. Then the time occupied by this motion cannot be equal to C; for the greater the amount moved, the longer the time occupied. It follows that the time F is not infinite. Now we see that by continuing to add to D I shall use up A and by continuing to add to E I shall use up B; but I shall not use up the time by continually subtracting a corresponding amount from it, because it is infinite. Consequently the part of C which is occupied by all A in moving the whole of B, will be finite. Therefore a finite thing cannot impart to anything an infinite motion. It is clear, then, that it is impossible for the finite to cause motion during an infinite time.”¹⁵⁵

This argument, beginning with an initial hypothesis and followed by a systematic refutation, can be summarised as follows:

Hypothesis:

Finite mover A moves finite object B for infinite time C.

Let D be a smaller mover than A.

Let E be a smaller moved object than B.

Step 1:

D will move E for a time less than infinity, that is, less than the movement of B caused by A.

Let F be the finite time of E’s movement.

Step 2:

By incrementally increasing the sizes of both D and E, one will eventually reach the original sizes of A and B. But by correspondingly incrementing the size of time F, one will not have arrived at C.

Aristotle’s argument here effectively posits that if a finite mover imparts motion upon a finite object for a finite time (which we are to take as a given as this is the character most motions exhibit), then by incrementing the size of any finite mover by any finite amount, the time of the movement the mover causes will only ever be incremented by a similarly finite amount. It thus follows that if any finite mover can be understood as the sum of many smaller movers, each producing finite movement for a finite time, it will therefore be impossible for any larger but still finite mover to cause motion for infinite time, for one will always be able to identify an equivalent mover made up of many smaller finite movers that definitively cannot cause infinite motion.

Aquinas, obviously a key proponent of the traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s prime mover god, summarises this argument in a similar fashion, as follows:

“By subtracting from the whole mobile object and the mover, and by adding to their parts, at some time the whole mobile object and the whole mover will be exhausted such that the whole which was in the whole is added to the part. Therefore it follows that, by proportionally adding to the time, a

¹⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, Book VIII, Chapter 10. 266a10-24, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 444. All quotations from the *Physics* from the Hardie/Gaye translation unless otherwise specified.

finite time will result in which the whole mover will move the whole mobile object. Hence, if the mover is finite, and the mobile object is finite the time must be finite."¹⁵⁶

Against Aristotle's position (and Aquinas' fundamentally similar interpretation), however, one could posit that if one starts from the premise that there is a finite mover that causes infinite movement, as he clearly does in this example, then according to the fact that infinity divided by any amount will still equal infinity (such is the infinite nature of infinity), any smaller proportion of such a mover would, by this simple logic, still cause infinite motion. It matters not, however, whether one considers a smaller proportion of an infinite-movement-generating-mover as also causing infinite motion. Instead it matters only that one accepts that there are finite movers that cause finite motion, which there clearly are, and that by incrementing any such mover by a finite amount one would always be able to reach whatever finite value one initially assigns to the hypothetical infinite motion causing mover. The corresponding motion of such a finitely incremented mover will not, therefore, ever increment to *infinity*¹⁵⁷. It thus follows that if any finite mover can be replicated by a finite number of finite motion causing movers, then no such mover will be able cause infinite motion. The movement caused by A on B in Aristotle's example cannot, therefore, be infinite. The original hypothesis is thus refuted.

A clarification is needed, however, with regards to what exactly the prime mover must be if it is not itself infinite. It is clearly the case that the prime mover does not impart infinite *momentum*, in the sense of imparting an infinite velocity, upon the finite heavens, as it is clear that they move at a finite rate. The prime mover simply generates motion for *infinite time*, in which case it is perhaps better to understand it as imparting *constant velocity* for an infinite time rather than anything resembling the basic concept of momentum transferral.

A problem for this view lies in the fact that it would effectively render the size of the mover irrelevant, or at least unexplained, since both a large mover imparting a large velocity for infinite time and a small mover imparting a smaller velocity for infinite time would be equally plausible. In which case any part of A from the example above, affecting a smaller velocity than the whole of A, would be equally capable of sustaining this velocity eternally. It must therefore be the case that the magnitude of the mover is unrelated to the velocity that it imparts, which would necessarily follow from Aristotle's contention that the prime mover must have *no magnitude at all*.

It thus appears to be the case that in this discussion Aristotle is operating at a kind of conceptual boundary whereby the motion imparted upon an object by a mover is proportional to something like the physical magnitude or mass of the mover (not in the sense of momentum as we have it from modern classical mechanics), but that this proportionality somehow ceases to apply if the mover is of zero magnitude. In this sense we see a conceptual disconnect between Aristotle's conception of the transferral of motion and the modern concept of momentum, whereby under Aristotle's ancient view physical mass is not necessarily required of a mover in order for it to impart motion, but if the mover does have physical magnitude this somehow limits the amount of motion it can impart. It is as if the modern physical law pertaining to the conservation of momentum whenever two physical objects come into contact with one another is being dutifully observed by Aristotle in most instances, but that in certain other cases it somehow becomes possible for an object of zero mass to possess a non-zero momentum or some other movement-generating attribute, and thus impart motion – a position obviously rendered absurd by modern physics, but understandably necessary for Aristotle if there is to be an unmoved mover.

¹⁵⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath and W. Edmund Thirkel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), Book VIII, Lecture 21, Point 1142 Pg. 572.

¹⁵⁷ This seems to be a point Graham gets stuck on in his commentary on this passage in: Aristotle, *Physics Book VIII*, trans. Graham, D. eds. J. L. Ackrill and Judson, L. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 168-170.

In justice to Aristotle we should note, however, that he could just as well argue that the sudden appearance of all of the universe's energy, supposed by the modern big-bang theory, is an equally absurd concept. Just as modern scientists argue that this unexplained occurrence must have nonetheless occurred in order for us to make the sense of the Universe, Aristotle has equal right, according to his own ancient observations, to argue that the unmoved mover's mass-less transfer of momentum is possible, and indeed necessary. Despite all of our modern scientific advances, we thus remain as reliant on the appearance of uncaused motive energy as Aristotle himself was more than two millennia ago, in order to make sense of all that we perceive.

Aristotle continues on in the *Physics* with several variations on this 'nothing of finite magnitude can power motion eternally' argument before concluding the entire text with the following:

*"Now that these points are established, it is apparent that it is impossible for the first and unmoved mover to have any magnitude. For if it has magnitude, the magnitude must be either finite or infinite. That there cannot be an infinite magnitude has already been proved in the Physics. That a finite magnitude cannot have infinite power, and that something cannot be moved for an infinite time by a finite magnitude has just now been proved. But the first mover causes everlasting motion for an infinite time. Plainly, then, it is indivisible and without parts, and it has no magnitude."*¹⁵⁸

Understanding the first heaven as possessing a finite physical magnitude, and thus replacing 'a finite magnitude' with 'the first heaven' in the above passage, it follows, as before, that the first heaven cannot have infinite power, and that, therefore, nothing can be moved for an infinite time by the first heaven – including itself and all subsequent heavens.

In light of the rather serious implications this conclusion has for the traditional view, which centrally holds that the first heaven *moves itself* out of its desire to emulate the prime mover, it is not surprising to find Aquinas making a rare argument *against* Aristotle on this point, asserting that he has in fact erred in formulating this view. Aquinas borrows from Avicenna the argument that although Aristotle's argument *logically follows*, the fact that nothing can ever be subtracted from a celestial body would render Aristotle's conclusion irrelevant with respect to such *indivisible bodies* as the first heaven. Aquinas reformulates Avicenna's argument in the following terms:

*"It can be said more briefly, however, that when Aristotle uses removal or subtraction in his proofs, the dissolution of a continuum by subtraction must not always be inferred, for this is impossible in a celestial body."*¹⁵⁹

It must not be forgotten, however, that Aristotle refers not only to the *subtraction from a body*, but also to the *addition to a body* (i.e. "...that by continuing to add to D I shall use up A and by continuing to add to E I shall use up B..."¹⁶⁰), according to which, as above, by incrementing the size of a finite mover and a finite moved object, along with the corresponding time of movement, one will eventually reach the finite size of any celestial body, including the first heaven, along with its corresponding movement, which will clearly not be infinite.

In justice to Aquinas, however, it must be observed that the contention that the prime mover is the only thing capable of possessing the force and imparting the motion required to sustain the eternal motion of the first heaven, according to which the prime mover rather clearly constitutes the efficient cause of this motion, is not a conclusion typically accepted by modern commentators

¹⁵⁸ Graham, *Physics Book VIII*, Pg. 36.

¹⁵⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, Book VIII, Lecture 21, Point 1143. Pg. 572.

¹⁶⁰ *Physics*, Book VIII, Chapter 10. 266a19-20, Pg. 444.

either, if at all. In Daniel Graham's commentary on these concluding passages of the *Physics* we find evidence of a historic confusion with regards to what exactly it was that Aristotle meant in the fundamental points expressed in this text. The first of two main interrelated points of confusion Graham discusses refers to how we are to understand the physical location of the incorporeal prime mover as having any significance, since attributing location to an entity that has no physical magnitude would seem paradoxical. We find this problem expressed by Graham as follows:

*"From the [ancient] commentators we can infer at least (i) that there was no authoritative interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine in the Peripatetic tradition; and (ii) that the understanding of the unmoved mover as an incorporeal being without a unique location emerged only slowly and with difficulty. Aristotle, for his part, does not seem to have worried about the danger of assigning to this unmoved mover a place on a moving body, or about the further paradoxes of assigning it a location at all..."*¹⁶¹

The second point of confusion relates to how this entity, without magnitude or location, actually imparts motion to the first heaven, expressed, again by Graham, as follows:

*"The rejection of physical sources of motion [i.e. that the unmoved mover has no physical magnitude] seems to eliminate the possibility that the unmoved mover pushes or pulls the outermost sphere of the cosmos. But how does it cause motion? Curiously, Aristotle does not say anywhere in this treatise. Is it because the explanation of how the first unmoved mover operates goes beyond physics to first philosophy, i.e. metaphysics? Of course, Aristotle does supply an answer to the question in *Met.* A7, where he makes the unmoved mover a final cause of motion. But why could he not say that much here, even if he cannot go on to fill in the account by discussing the divine life that the unmoved mover enjoys? The scheme of the four causes is very much a part of physics proper, having been expounded in *Phys.* II. 3 and 7 and applied innumerable times throughout the *Physics* and other works of natural philosophy."*¹⁶²

Graham also points out that a further pair of commentators, Simplicius and Ammonius, argued at length that the first unmoved mover could indeed function as an efficient cause, but adds that despite their efforts *"One curious fact remains: that Aristotle never acknowledges the alleged fact that the unmoved mover is an efficient cause (a problem of which Simplicius is well aware [...])"*¹⁶³ Graham concludes this part of his commentary by stating that, regardless of such arguments in favour of the prime mover as an efficient cause, *"...Physics VIII itself does not supply adequate evidence for [this] view."*¹⁶⁴

We have reason to question this assertion from Graham, however, for if it is part of Aristotle's definition of the unmoved mover in *Physics* VIII that only it can possess the infinite power necessary to impart eternal motion upon the first heaven, it becomes difficult to understand how anything else could possibly stand as the efficient cause of this movement. We may therefore question the assertion that *Physics* VIII does not supply adequate evidence for the prime mover as the efficient cause of the motion of the universe, at least according to the argument that it is the only thing that can efficiently cause such motion. Aristotle obviously makes no explicit statement to the effect that the prime mover is the efficient cause of the first heaven's movement in this text, but he does make it quite clear that there is nothing else that can be reasonably understood as possessing the power to cause this motion eternally, which would seem to constitute evidence in favour of the first view –

¹⁶¹ Graham, *Physics Book VIII*, Pg. 178.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Pg. 179.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Pg. 180.

a conclusive argument against all alternative efficient causes stands as a fairly strong argument in favour of the first.

We also find significant support for the claim that the uniquely powerful and motive properties of the prime mover expounded in the *Physics* remained central to Aristotle's account of the prime mover in the *Metaphysics*, for in the concluding passages of *Metaphysics* Lambda Aristotle makes as clear a reference to the argument put forward in *Physics* VIII as one could reasonably expect to find, in the following:

*"It has been shown also that [the prime mover] cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible. For it produces movement through infinite time, but nothing finite has infinite power. And, while every magnitude is either infinite or finite, it cannot, for the above reason, have finite magnitude, and it cannot have infinite magnitude because there is no infinite magnitude at all. But it is also clear that it is impassive and unalterable; for all the other changes are posterior to change of place. It is clear, then, why the first mover has these attributes."*¹⁶⁵

To digress for a moment, a rather disappointing effect of this rejection of the 'heavens moving in circle based on some form of attraction' interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover, is that this model does in fact quite closely resemble the kind of motion Newtonian physics actually predicts for the heavens. Elementary mechanics tells us that any movement in a circle will require a constant acceleration towards the centre of this rotation in order to be achieved. An object of mass rotating in a circle, such as the first heaven, would thus require a constant force to be applied to it in the direction of towards the centre of rotation (i.e. a centripetal force) in order for it to retain this circular course continuously – *and this is exactly what gravity does.*

It is but a small step from this 'simple' realisation of the necessity of a centripetal force for circular motion, along with a few basic empirical measurements concerning the actual movements of the stars, to the predictive power of Newton's law of universal gravitation (although this also requires the paradigm shift from the geocentric to the heliocentric view of the universe – which was not a step taken lightly, as Copernicus would have attested).

Gravity is an attractive force, whereby objects are attracted to one another by their possession of mass and a shared proximity to each other. Earth's orbit around the Sun is based on such an attraction, but was made possible only by the fact that its initial 'pre-orbit' direction of movement was not directly towards the Sun, alongside the additional serendipitous fact that its initial velocity perpendicular to the sun was (and remains) enough to counteract its gravitational force, but not enough to escape this influence – thus allowing for its effectively eternal circular motion. Such a gravitational orbit, however, has nothing to do with the very first movements of the universe, since such an orbit requires a perpendicular momentum prior to the gravitational force in order to be initiated. The initial motion of the Earth must therefore have been caused by something other than just the gravitational pull of the sun and most likely consisted of a vast number of simultaneous gravitational forces with a fairly linear net-effect. The big-bang, by contrast, tells us the very first movement was in fact significantly repulsive, with everything exploding away from everything else, thus moving us even further away from the idea that the first movement was in any way necessarily circular.

A basic attraction model thus describes roughly how the movements of the heavens actually work, both as we see them today and as Aristotle would himself have seen them, but fails to successfully account for the origin of heavenly motion, accounting instead simply for the ongoing continuation of this movement. Had this gravitational effect been fully realised in Aristotle's time, which is not a wild

¹⁶⁵ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1073a5-13, Pg. 1695.

suggestion considering the level of knowledge the Ancients did actually possess, it would have represented perhaps the most radical instantaneous advance in thought ever achieved, and one can only wonder what the world would look like today if the radical advancements of the 17th and 18th century European enlightenment had occurred more than two millennia earlier.

Regardless of such speculation, according to the argument that the first heaven cannot be self-powering, we thus find a serious problem for the traditional view.

Additional Problem 2: Does the First Heaven have a Soul?

Another pillar of the traditional view is the contention that the first heaven consciously holds the prime mover as an object of desire. If so, then, as well as constituting the physical matter we see orbiting us in the sky at night, the first heaven also possesses some form of soul that is capable of both desiring and understanding the prime mover. If this is indeed the case, one should expect Aristotle, in his discussions concerning the heavens and the soul individually (i.e. *On the Heavens* and *On the Soul*), to have at some point made reference to the *soul of the first heaven*.

In *On the Soul* Aristotle mentions the heavens sparingly, making reference to the relationship between the heavens and soul primarily as it is considered by writers other than himself, directly linking the heavens with soul in his own speculation only once, in the following passage:

*“Further, the cause of the revolution of the heavens is left obscure. It is not the essence of soul which is the cause of this circular movement—that movement is only incidental to soul—nor is the body its cause. Again, it is not even asserted that it is better that soul should be so moved; and yet the reason for which God caused the soul to move in a circle can only have been that movement was better for it than rest, and movement of this kind better than any other. But since this sort of consideration is more appropriate to another field of speculation, let us dismiss it for the present.”*¹⁶⁶

Here we find a passage that, on first glance, would appear to constitute prime evidence for the ‘contemplative god consciously determining the state of the universe’ interpretation of Aristotle’s prime mover. We have reason to doubt that this constitutes Aristotle’s own firm opinion, however, for in spite of the fact that this passage appears in a section of the text in which Aristotle is discussing movement with respect to soul, it is actually located in the part of this section that Aristotle dedicated to the consideration of views already expressed by other philosophers in this regard. The next two paragraphs in this text begin respectively with the sentences: *“The view we have just been examining, in company with most theories about the soul, involves the following absurdity...”*¹⁶⁷ and *“There is yet another opinion about soul, which has commended itself to many as no less probable than any of those we have hitherto mentioned...”*¹⁶⁸; accordingly we have reason to consider the above passage as consisting of no more than counterfactual conjecture.

Elsewhere in *On the Soul* we find Aristotle defining soul in such a way as to actually rule out the heavens as possessing such a thing, as follows:

*“If, then, we have to give a general formula applicable to all kinds of soul, we must describe it as an actuality of the first kind of a natural organised body.”*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *On the Soul*, Book I, Chapter 3, 407b7-13. Pg. 649.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 407b14-15.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4, 407b27-28. Pg. 650.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 1, 412b3-5, Pg. 657.

Broadie actually takes up this very point against the heavens possessing a regular kind of soul in response to an objection to her own interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover (which we shall soon turn to), arguing that while the attribution of 'soul' does indeed appear to be exclusively the domain of 'natural organic bodies' and would thus appear to exclude both the first heaven and the prime mover itself, the kind of life the first heaven or prime mover might represent so differs from earthly animal life as to quite understandably require an entirely new term, distinct from 'soul', in order to be properly made sense of. Accordingly, Broadie concludes that "...it would be natural for [Aristotle and those around him] to restrict the term [soul] to its usual biological context."¹⁷⁰ We thus find the first inklings of an argument in support of the position that the first heaven possesses something like a soul, but not of the normal 'natural organised body' variety.

Looking now to *On the Heavens*, Aristotle mentions 'soul' even more sparingly in this text than he mentions 'heaven' in *On the Soul*. In Stocks' translation of *On the Heavens* the word 'soul' appears just three times, and all within the confines of the following single paragraph:

*"Nor, again, is it possible that [the all-inclusive singular heaven] should persist eternally by the necessitation of a soul. For a soul could not live in such conditions painlessly or happily, since the movement involves constraint, being imposed on the first body, whose natural motion is different, and imposed continuously. It must therefore be uneasy and devoid of all rational satisfaction; for it could not even, like the soul of mortal animals, take recreation in the bodily relaxation of sleep."*¹⁷¹

It would appear that Aristotle here unambiguously considers the heavens to be absent of anything like a soul, at this point of the text at least. However, there are two further points in *On the Heavens* typically cited as evidence for the position that the heavens do indeed have souls. The first, in Book II, Chapter 2, is as follows:

*"Since we have already determined that functions of this kind belong to things which possess a principle of movement, and that the heaven is animate and possesses a principle of movement..."*¹⁷²

The term 'animate' in this translation comes from the Greek 'ἔμψυχος', generally meaning 'having life' in which we clearly see the Greek 'ψυχή' for 'soul' as a constituent part. It is inferred from this that since everything animate must possess a soul, the heavens, being animate, must therefore possess a soul.

This particular passage in *On the Heavens* is in fact referred to by Judson in his paper concerning heavenly motion for this very purpose, and as justification for the slightly broader claim that "Aristotle's view in the *De Caelo* is that the outermost heavenly sphere is intelligent and alive..."¹⁷³ Now we can reasonably consider Judson as being justified in identifying the first heaven as alive according to this passage and the above inference, but it would seem a step too far for him to infer from it that the first heaven is also *intelligent*, or at least intelligent enough to understand the perfectly contemplative nature of the prime mover as the traditional view would have us believe it does. Being animate, as we understand all of the lower animals and plants to be, clearly does not necessitate anything resembling the form of higher intellect required for one to comprehend and perceive the activity of contemplation, especially as it is performed by the rather mysterious prime mover on the traditional account. The kind of soul we thus find applied to the first heaven in *On the*

¹⁷⁰ Broadie. "What Does Aristotle's Prime Mover Do?," Pg. 8.

¹⁷¹ Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, trans. J. L. Stocks, Book II, Chapter 1, 284a26-33, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 470. All quotations from *On the Heavens* are from the Stocks translation unless otherwise specified.

¹⁷² Ibid., Chapter 2, 285a28-29, Pg. 472.

¹⁷³ Judson, "Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," Pg. 157.

Heavens is clearly not the kind of perceptive intellectual soul necessitated by the traditional view of the first heaven's imitation, but rather one we can understand as consisting of no more than a singular *mindless* desire to move in a circle forever, like some demented animal chasing its own tail, or a bindweed twining anti-clockwise upwards.

The second purported instance of evidence for the heavens' possession of soul (and intellect) in *On the Heavens* comes a little later in Book 2, in Aristotle's argument that:

*"We think of the stars as mere bodies, and as units with a serial order indeed but entirely inanimate; but we should rather conceive them as enjoying life and action. On this view the facts cease to appear surprising."*¹⁷⁴

This passage is typically taken as evidence for the view that Aristotle actually considers the heavens as enjoying life and action and that this is in fact the correct way for us to conceive of them. It would, however, appear that this attribution of soul really stands as no more than an *analogy* made by Aristotle in order to help us make sense of the complex and varied movements of the heavens. Aristotle goes on to qualify this passage as just such an *analogy* in the statement that: *"We must, then, think of the action of the stars as similar to that of animals and plants..."*¹⁷⁵ This *similarity* is located not in the sense that the heavenly motions constitute the outcome of a complex interplay of needs and desires, but rather that they are just similarly complex and yet orderly in appearance.

We thus have it from these two instances of apparent evidence for the first heaven's possession of a soul in *On the Heavens* that such an attribution was either intended by Aristotle to have no more than metaphorical value, or that any kind of soul it might actually have would be insufficient for the kind of intellectual appreciation of the prime mover's contemplation required of it on the traditional view. It thus seems that only by reading the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics* back into *On the Heavens* can one find any substantial support for the first heaven's possession of anything but a very minimal kind of soul. Moreover, as Judson illustrates in the following, it would appear to be the case that Aristotle, *later in his career*, went on to actually rule out the very possibility of the first heaven possessing its own principle of movement, in the arguments presented in both the *Physics* VIII and the *Metaphysics*:

*"The traditional view sees Aristotle in De Caelo as tracing the movement of all things back to the motion of the outermost heavenly sphere, and as taking this motion to be entirely self-generated, in the sense that it depends upon nothing else whatever for the production or maintenance of its eternal, circular motion. At some later point Aristotle decided that this sort of self-motion [...] was impossible. The motion of the [first heaven], he now thought, had to be caused by something else, which must itself (on pain of merely pushing the problem back a step) be unmoved. And this is the argument of Phys. VIII [...]. In the third phase, in Meta. Λ.6-10, Aristotle elaborates the notion of the primary unmoved mover by giving a more detailed account of its nature and activity. [...] The traditional account, therefore, sees the third phase (the main part of Meta. Λ) as an elaboration of the position arrived at in the second, but sees the second as involving a relatively sharp break with the first."*¹⁷⁶

Now whilst it can really be regarded as no more than unfounded speculation to suggest any kind of detailed chronological order for Aristotle's works, where there appears to exist a contradiction between two works of any philosopher it would seem the charitable thing to do to simply allow that over the period of their career they might have perhaps evolved a position on a certain subject, with

¹⁷⁴ *On the Heavens*, Book II, Chapter 12, 292a19-22, Pg. 481.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 292a32-292b1.

¹⁷⁶ Judson, "Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," Pg. 155-157.

such an evolution in thought culminating in their later, *more authoritative*, works. This being the case, we do perhaps have reason to doubt that the first heaven in the *Metaphysics* actually possesses the minimal kind of soul we find attributed to it in *On the Heavens*, since this attribution is based on the heaven's possession of its own principle of movement (as distinct from any higher form of intellectual life) which, as discussed above, we find ruled out in the 'later' text of the *Metaphysics*. One must, however, recall that the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics* tells us that this text provides its own evidence for the first heaven's possession of a soul – based on the view that the first heaven perceives the perfection of the prime mover and thus moves out of imitation. In this sense we find significant divergence in the kinds of heavenly soul traditionally inferred from *On the Heavens* and the *Metaphysics*, according to which it would seem problematic to consider the first as prime evidence for the second. We thus have good reason to disregard the argument for the first heaven's possession of a soul for our broader purpose of interpreting the *Metaphysics*.

With regards to the kind of chronological priority suggested by Judson, it is interesting (as it is confusing) to note a far more explicit chain of priority mentioned by Aristotle himself in these texts. Firstly, in Book II of *On the Heavens* Aristotle makes the following statement regarding the question of whether the concepts of left and right should be applied to the heavens:

*"These principles have been analysed in the discussion of the movements of animals..."*¹⁷⁷

We thus find in *On the Heavens* reference being made to an assumedly earlier text. This passage is considered by Stocks as a reference not to the *Movement of Animals* as one might otherwise expect, but instead to the *Progression of Animals*. Interestingly, however, we then find in the very first sentence of the *Movement of Animals* the following rather explicit reference to *Progression of Animals*:

*"Elsewhere we have investigated the movement of animals after their various kinds, the differences between them, and the causes of their particular characters (for some animals fly, some swim, some walk, others move in various other ways); there remains an investigation of the common cause of any sort of animal movement whatsoever."*¹⁷⁸

What we then find in the *Movement of Animals* is a particularly explicit rendering from Aristotle of the position that the heavens do not possess their own principles of movement, in a discussion concerning the key differences between the motions of the heavens and the motions of animals, thus reflecting Aristotle's 'later' position as we find it in the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, as follows:

*"...if we except the movement of the universe, things with life are the causes of the movement of all else, that is of all that are not moved by one another by mutual impact."*¹⁷⁹

We take from this statement that all movements, with the exception of the movements of the heavens and things moved by simple collision, are caused by 'things with life', quite clearly indicating that the heavens are in fact *inanimate* in the sense of not actually possessing life nor, therefore, a soul.

¹⁷⁷ *On the Heavens*, Book II, Chapter 2, 284b13-14.

¹⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Movement of Animals*, trans. A. S. L. Farquharson, Chapter 1, 698a1-6, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 1087. All quotations from the *Movement of Animals* are from the Farquharson translation unless otherwise specified.

¹⁷⁹ *Movement of Animals*, Chapter 6, 700b11-701a1, Pg. 1091.

What is most telling in this passage, however, is that the term translated in it as *'things with life'*, which we see attributed therein to *everything except the heavens*, is the very same Greek word *'ἔμψυχα'* translated in the above passage from *On the Heavens* as *'animate'*, but attributed in that case to *the heavens*, albeit in a very minimal and non-intellectual sense. We thus find Aristotle attributing a minimalist kind of animate nature to the heavens in *On the Heavens*, but in the *Movement of Animals* quite clearly negating this view, thus illustrating either a contradiction in Aristotle's view or, as earlier discussed with regards to Judson's suggestion, evidence that over the course of his highly productive career his view on this particular matter simply 'matured'. If we take Judson's position that the first heaven does not itself generate the first movement constitutes Aristotle's more mature view, it would appear that the position expressed in *Movement of Animals* represents a more advanced view than that expressed in *On the Heavens*, to be thus considered alongside of that of the *Metaphysics*.

This effectively returns us to something like the view indicated by Broadie, whereby Aristotle is said to not actually consider the heavens as possessing anything resembling an animal-like soul, but goes even further than her suggestion that there is perhaps a distinct heavenly species of soul possessing its own principle of movement, to say simply that *the heavens possess no principle of movement at all*. With respect, then, to the way in which Aristotle discusses soul in *On the Heavens* and the heavens in *On the Soul*, and also the movements of the heavens and things with souls in the *Movement of Animals*, we now have reason to seriously doubt the contention that Aristotle considered, especially in his later writings such as we understand the *Metaphysics* to represent, the first heaven to actually possess a soul.

Summing up the Traditional Interpretation and its Problems:

We now have a fairly strong case against the traditional interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover made up of the many points raised by Broadie and these final two points concerning the unique capability of the prime mover as the source of the first heaven's motion and the fragility of the position that the first heaven possesses a soul.

The key elements of the traditional interpretation, as well as the points for and against it, can be summarised as follows:

Key Elements of the Traditional Interpretation:

1. God is the prime mover.
2. The prime mover causes the motion of the first heaven by being an object of its desire.
3. The prime mover's activity is primarily contemplative.
4. What the first heaven finds desirable about the prime mover is its perfectly contemplative nature, according to which it constitutes the simultaneous understanding of all universal knowledge.
5. The first heaven is able to perceive the prime mover and understand its perfection.
6. The first heaven is able to move itself eternally in a circular orbit as an act of imitation.

Points For the Traditional Interpretation:

1. Provides a coherent account of Aristotle's discussion concerning the prime mover and God in *Metaphysics Lambda*.
2. Provides a compelling object for our contemplation, in that it allows us indirect access to total universal understanding, hence making neat sense of the traditional interpretation of god in the *EE*, according to which it is contended that one should contemplate the prime mover/God as much as is reasonably possible.

3. Provides an excellent focal point for religious worship, in that the prime mover god constitutes both the cause of all activity in the universe and the end of our own best activity – a kind of all-in-one package of awesomeness.

Points *Against* the Traditional Interpretation:

1. Aristotle makes no mention in *Metaphysics Lambda* of the first heaven actually imitating the prime mover.
2. Aristotle makes no mention in *Metaphysics Lambda* of “...a spiritual agency that both moves the sphere and is other than the Prime mover.”¹⁸⁰
3. Requires the following three attributes Aristotle makes no mention of in the *Metaphysics*:
 - I. That the first heaven possesses a conscious soul that is capable of perceiving and comprehending the activity of the prime mover. This is not specifically discussed in *Lambda*, nor is it clear that Aristotle considers this to be the case anywhere else in his corpus.
 - II. That the first heaven is capable of moving itself.
 - III. That the first heaven’s soul be capable of forming a desire to imitate the perfection of the prime mover and in doing so make itself move in a circular motion eternally.

I will now discuss a powerful alternative interpretation of Aristotle’s prime mover in the *Metaphysics* proposed by Broadie, and then discuss a central problem for this view, before finally proposing and defending my own alternative thesis.

Broadie’s Alternative Interpretation:

Reflecting on the many problems faced by the traditional view, Broadie makes the point that:

*“At every point of pressure one is forced to countenance one or another multiplication of entities unmentioned by the text. [...] All this suggests some single central error whose effects may be containable by one means or other, but always at the expense of the text and of theoretical simplicity.”*¹⁸¹

Broadie goes on to suggest a potential solution to this apparent mess with the following:

*“The mistake, in my view, lies in supposing the Prime Mover’s activity contemplative. If, on the contrary, we suppose it essentially kinetic, we immediately cancel the need for a distinct efficient cause of motion. And without that distinct efficient cause, there is nothing to which the Prime Mover must stand as exemplar; and nothing that requires to be understood as active twice over in different ways and with different objects.”*¹⁸²

Broadie elaborates further, contending that rather than the first heaven desiring to emulate the prime mover and thereby moving itself, it is in fact the prime mover that desires this heavenly motion. The prime mover’s desire, in combination with its unlimited power, thus gives us a straightforward way of understanding how the motion of the first heaven results, with this movement thereby simply constituting “...the visible aspect of [the prime mover]’s noetic activity, since this (I shall now assume) is an activity of desiring that movement.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Broadie, “What Does Aristotle’s Prime Mover Do?,” Pg. 2.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Pg. 4.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Pg. 5.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

We thus have it from Broadie that the prime mover's activity remains intellectual (viz. noetic), but that rather than this activity consisting solely in its total understanding and contemplation of all universal knowledge, it instead consists *primarily* in the act of desiring the circular motion of the first heaven, although Broadie does go on to broaden her conception of the prime mover's desire to include an appreciation for all that this movement causes.

Considering the infinite power the prime mover possesses Broadie is thus perfectly justified in stating: "...that motion results is immediately intelligible..."¹⁸⁴ based on the straightforward premise that when an agent desires something that is within their power to achieve, and nothing stands in their way, it straightforwardly follows that this will be done. Broadie further elaborates on this point that "...to desire the movement is already actually to generate it..."¹⁸⁵ in the following:

*"The case we are considering lies at the conceptual limit where there is no disengaging the eternal motion from the noetic act of generating it, nor the act of generating from the pleasurable awareness of itself."*¹⁸⁶

We thus take it from Broadie that the first heaven possesses no intellect or soul of its own, thus avoiding the issue surrounding the question of whether it is even possible for it to possess such a thing, and that it instead constitutes nothing more than an inanimate object to be continually acted upon by the all-powerful prime mover. Accordingly, we see a reflection of the conclusion drawn above from *Physics VIII* (discussed on page 56) in which it was shown that only the prime mover can power the motion of the first heaven, but with the additional clarification from Broadie that the prime mover both desires, and derives pleasure from, this motion. Broadie goes on to specify the status of the prime mover as effectively equivalent to that of a kind of desiderative soul of the first heaven, but still distinct from the first heaven, in the following:

*"Now the Prime Mover, on the view which I am advocating, is related to the sphere which it immediately moves in something like the way in which soul is related to body in an organism."*¹⁸⁷

And further:

*"On the account which I am proposing, the Prime Mover is identical with what I have so far referred to as the soul of the first sphere."*¹⁸⁸

As already pointed out, however, Aristotle does not actually specify this kind of relationship between the prime mover and the first heaven in which we find the first heaven understood as equivalent to a body and the prime mover acting as its soul. Broadie thus goes on to argue that the lack of any explicit mention of the first heaven possessing a soul (and of the prime mover being this soul) does no damage to her interpretation, as the kind of entity the prime mover represents (as discussed above) would fail to qualify for any regular attribution of the term 'soul' as it is applied elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus, as follows:

*"For Aristotle and those around him, there would be a natural conceptual boundary between the animal soul and the other two cases [the prime mover or a transcendent spirit]. Thus it would be natural for them to restrict the term 'psuchē' to its usual biological context."*¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Pg. 6.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Pg. 8.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Pg. 8.

We thus have from Broadie an interpretation that appears, in terms of simplicity at least, superior to the traditional view. By simply equating the first heaven to a corporeal body and the prime mover to a kind of all-powerful incorporeal desiderative soul of this body, it becomes straightforward to understand how the first heaven's motion is eternally generated, and thereby avoid the "...multiplication of entities unmentioned by Aristotle in the original text"¹⁹⁰ that so plagues the traditional interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover god.

A Problem for Broadie's Interpretation:

While it is difficult to fault Broadie's interpretation of Aristotle's prime mover god in terms of the simplicity with which it makes sense of the relevant discussions in the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics* and *On the Soul*, it must be remembered that our reason for analysing Aristotle's conception of the prime mover god in the *Metaphysics* is in fact to make sense of how this term is put to use in the *EE*. The central passage from the *EE* which initially led us to the *Metaphysics* in order to find this clearer conception of 'the god' is the following:

*"So if some choice and possession of natural goods—either goods of the body or money or of friends or the other goods—will most produce the speculation of the god, that is the best, and that is the finest limit..."*¹⁹¹

The concept of god one derives from Broadie's interpretation of the *Metaphysics* is a straightforward one, but it is rather difficult to relate it in any meaningful way to the best human life, or to the *finest limit* for one's possession of the natural goods. Considering the prime mover god as *primarily* consisting in the eternal noetic activity of desiring the circular motion of the first heaven, it becomes difficult to comprehend how the contemplation of and service to this entity, as we find interpreted in the traditional view of the *EE*, would act to enrich one's life in any meaningful way. Against such a problem, however, Broadie goes on to argue that her interpretation of *Metaphysics* Lambda does not preclude Aristotle's god from engaging in contemplative activity, stating instead that contemplation is simply not the prime mover's only activity, as follows:

*"...it does not follow from the present account that Aristotle cannot consistently hold that God contemplates. My contention is not that Aristotle never recognises a contemplative divinity, but that contemplation is not what constitutes God Prime Mover according to the Lambda account. Since, however, Lambda is primarily concerned with the eternal motion and its ultimate cause, rather than with the topic of divinity as such, the claim just made amounts to the claim [...] that Lambda has no place for a purely contemplative God."*¹⁹²

According to Broadie's account, the '*God Prime Mover*' is therefore not purely contemplative, but it remains plausible that it could possess some kind of contemplative nature. One still struggles, however, to consider this mere-allowance as reason enough to consider the prime mover god as a compelling target of our own contemplation and service. Broadie does go further, however, to offer a way in which we can in fact consider the prime mover as *necessarily contemplative* according to her schema, from the position that in order for the prime mover to properly consider the rotation of the first heaven as an end, it must first understand what this movement entails, including the influence it eventually has on animal (and thus human) life, as follows:

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Pg. 4.

¹⁹¹ *EE*, Book VIII, Chapter 3, 1249b17-19, Pg. 42.

¹⁹² Broadie, "What Does Aristotle's Prime Mover Do?," Pg. 6.

“...something like [the movement of the first heaven] could hardly be an end at all unless it were an end for an intellect; to be brought into being, it has to be understood. And we can see that the sheer rotation itself, so easy to describe in physical terms, is not what is centrally aimed for; instead (as Aristotle argues in detail in *Physics* VIII) the rotation is simply what the intellect knows must take place if there is to be an eternal world-making movement – the Prime Mover’s true objective. Add to this that it cannot be by accident that the effect of the primary rotation pervades the entire universe, not only contributing to the motions of the inner sphere, but thereby eventually providing the ongoing conditions (though not the particular structures and forms) of all that takes place in the sublunar domain. The Prime Mover is not the soul of the world, if by this we mean a single principle that steers all things so that the life of all things is its one life. Rather, it is a spirit that acts to make possible the generations of many independently natured substances through infinite time. But such a general end could not be an end except to one capable of grasping it intellectually.”¹⁹³

With respect to the passages from the *Physics* Broadie refers to here, it is clear from Aristotle that the extent to which the prime mover and the subsequent heavenly movements influence our own natural world on Earth reaches only so far as the influence the Sun, Moon and stars have on our environment¹⁹⁴. The prime mover god, on this account, is thus responsible for the seasons, the tides, and whatever other mystical influences one might attribute to things such as the signs of the zodiac and the alignments of the planets, but it clearly does not determine the self-originating motions of plants and animals. The prime mover does not, therefore, pervade all things absolutely, but rather stands, as Broadie says, as just “...a spirit that acts to make possible the generations of many independently natured substances through infinite time.”¹⁹⁵

As an object of our contemplation and service, Broadie’s prime mover god thus begins to sound a lot like the object of a kind of sun worship, which is itself typically understood as the act of honouring no less than the “...spirit that acts to make possible the generations of many independently natured substances through infinite time...”¹⁹⁶. The assertion that one should both honour and contemplate this entity thus mirrors the thoughts of our Neolithic ancestors who, as mankind’s first horticulturalists roughly eight millennia before Aristotle’s time, had the sense to recognise the central importance of the Sun to all earthly life and, more specifically, to the survival of their own recently domesticated crops. As the true efficient cause of the worshipped Sun’s perpetual life-giving motion, Broadie’s prime mover is thus the more appropriate (but more abstract) object of worship. In terms of the knowledge this prime mover god actually possesses, however, which on the traditional account amounts to no less than *all knowledge* and thus constitutes a proper object of our awe, it does not appear to follow from Broadie’s account that the prime mover god would possess anything approaching this level of understanding, for nowhere in the *Metaphysics*, nor anywhere else in Aristotle’s corpus, is it suggested that the prime mover designed or constructed the universe and everything in it and set it all in motion to its own plan and specification. On the contrary, as Broadie herself points out, the prime mover simply provides “...the ongoing conditions (though not the particular structures and forms) of all that takes place in the sublunar domain.”¹⁹⁷ The prime mover thus constitutes no more than the desire for, and motive force behind, the motion of the first heaven, with this desire, on Broadie’s account, being drawn from its appreciation of some of the effects this movement produces, but fundamentally not from a deeper understanding of the many complex systems of life and movement these effects include – and is thus devoid of the transcendent knowledge assumed of this being on the traditional account.

¹⁹³ Ibid., Pg. 9.

¹⁹⁴ *Physics*, Book VIII, Chapter 6, 259b8-17, Pg. 433-434.

¹⁹⁵ Broadie, “What Does Aristotle’s Prime Mover Do?,” Pg. 9.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Given my concern with the final chapter of the *EE* and how ‘the god’ is represented in it, a central problem I have with Broadie’s interpretation of Aristotle’s prime mover god is thus that it fails to constitute a convincing exclusive object of our contemplation and service, with any such contemplation and service concerning this entity thereby failing to stand as a convincing end for our earthly toil. Correspondingly, on Broadie’s account of the prime mover god, ‘the god’ cannot stand as an exemplar to human intellectual activity as my own alternative interpretation of god in the *EE* contends it should, for whilst it is certainly important that one appreciates the movements of the heavens and nature in general, it is for the much deeper understanding of such things that the human intellect should be utilised, lest its divine capacity be effectively wasted. Broadie’s prime mover god would certainly have a rightful place in the broader scope of human contemplation, in much the same way that the discussion of this particular topic has a rightful place in Aristotle’s wider corpus. But just as Aristotle finds much more to talk about in his vast body of work, we should also expect to find many more objects of wonder to ponder in our own leisure time than just the prime mover’s desire to move the first heavens and the understanding of the effects this movement has. It is also certainly true that the prime mover, as one of the important objects of first philosophy, does in fact constitute a particularly fundamental element of our own universal understanding of the universe, remembering Aristotle’s contention that the failure to understand this principle would lead to the total annihilation of our study of nature¹⁹⁸, but as above, one would hope the life of contemplation to consist in more than just the study of the prime mover of the heavens, lest it be a thoroughly boring and repetitive life, for there are only so many times that one can revisit the same limited subject matter before one loses interest, or as Aristotle puts it in the *NE*:

*“...some things delight us when they are new, but less later [...]. For at first our thought is stimulated and engages vigorously in activity in relation to them [...]; but afterwards our activity is not like this and we lose interest, and for this reason the pleasure is dimmed as well.”*¹⁹⁹

A god that does not possess and eternally contemplate total universal understanding does not therefore constitute a convincing long-term object of our contemplation and worship or emulation, and thus makes no sense of ‘the god’ as we find it referenced in the *EE*, according to both the traditional view and my own alternative. Considering also that Broadie’s prime mover god can in no way be understood as constituting a part of the human soul – even the divine part – we thus find that there is no viable interpretation of ‘the god’ in the *EE* that allows for her interpretation of the prime mover god in the *Metaphysics*.

In Broadie’s defence, her aim in developing this interpretation was not to in any way broaden the appeal of Aristotle’s prime mover as an object of contemplation, and certainly not to reconcile the prime mover god of the *Metaphysics* with the god of the *EE*, but instead to simply make better sense of this concept it as it is presented within *Metaphysics Lambda*. Our present project does, however, require that we find an interpretation of Aristotle’s god in the *Metaphysics* that coheres convincingly with the sense in which we find this entity described in the final passages of the *EE*. Hence, any view that supports neither the traditional view of Aristotle’s god in the *EE* (which Broadie’s view fundamentally rejects), nor either of the lowercase-g alternatives, must be rejected.

An Alternative Lowercase-g Interpretation of God in the Metaphysics:

Recalling our earlier discussions concerning the concluding passages of the *EE*, the three most viable alternatives for the interpretation of Aristotle’s god in this text are as follows:

- 1) The god as some kind of ultimate compelling object of our own contemplation and service.

¹⁹⁸ *Metaphysics*, Alpha, Chapter 9, 992b8-9, Pg. 1568.

¹⁹⁹ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 4, 1175a5-10, Pg. 189-190.

- 2) The god as the part of the human soul with which we contemplate – i.e. the divine part.
- 3) The god as an exemplar for intellectual activity resembling the best state a human being can reasonably hope to achieve.

In what follows I will make an argument for the third of these options, proposing a reinterpretation of god in the *Metaphysics Lambda* centred on the following series of points:

- 1) The prime mover of the heavens and the objects of our own thought and desire all cause movement without being moved.
- 2) Distinct from the objects of thought and desire in general, those concerning final ends (e.g. what good human health consists in) are unchanging and thus eternally actual.
- 3) The prime mover of the heavens is unchanging and eternally actual, but also unmixed, thus constituting an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover.
- 4) Purely theoretical objects of contemplative thought are also unchanging, eternally actual and unmixed, and thus constitute, like the prime mover, eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved movers.
- 5) When one contemplates, the contemplative part of one's human soul becomes its object (i.e. an unchanging, eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover), according to which when one contemplates one becomes, in part, an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover, and thereby possesses a set of attributes similar to those of the prime mover of the heavens.
- 6) The god (as we find described in *NE X.7*) contemplates continuously and eternally and thus lives 'a life such as the best we occasionally and temporarily enjoy'.
- 7) Because the god is incorporeal and eternally contemplating, it also therefore consists primarily, if not entirely, of whatever its object of contemplation happens to be. The god thus always consists, to some degree, of an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover, and thus shares the same set of attributes with the prime mover of the heavens as we do when we contemplate.
- 8) The prime mover of the heavens possesses no capacity for thought, desire or pleasure. It does nothing other than move the heavens, with this being all that is within its essential nature.
- 9) In *Metaphysics Lambda*, Chapter 7, Aristotle thus *distinguishes* the prime mover of the heavens from our objects of thought and desire, thoughts concerning final ends, objects of our contemplation, the activity of contemplation itself, and the god. These are not all simply the same thing.

My account will thus be drawn from a substantial reinterpretation of *Metaphysics Lambda*, Chapter 7, based on the argument that in this chapter Aristotle does not only describe the prime mover of the first heavens as an origin of efficient causality, but actually discusses four distinct forms of this first principle, as listed below:

Four Distinct forms of the First Principle of Efficient Causality:

- 1) The prime mover of the first heaven.
- 2) Objects of thought and desire in general.
- 3) Objects of thought concerning unchanging final ends.
- 4) Objects of contemplation.

With regards to the god and contemplation, I will argue that after 1072b14 in the text, Aristotle is no longer discussing the prime mover of the heavens at all, and is instead focussed on substantially different subject matter, concerning certain technical details of contemplation as it is performed both by the gods and within the best human life. These details concern, firstly, how through the activity of contemplation one partakes in the objects of contemplation and secondly, reflecting on

the discussion concerning this activity and the nature of our contemplative part Aristotle makes in *On the Soul*, how by partaking as such, one partakes in the nature of an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover. I will then argue that following this discussion regarding contemplation and the best human life, which we might therefore understand as being quasi-ethical, Aristotle goes on to discuss how the gods, who are incorporeal and thus always contemplate, thus always possess the nature of the eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover.

Reinterpretation of *Metaphysics* Lambda, Chapter 7:

In what follows I will argue that the text between 1072a19 and 1072b31 can be divided into the following six sections and corresponding subject headings in which we find Aristotle discussing the interrelated natures of the four distinct types of unmoved movement described above, and does not simply consider them as the same thing:

- 1072a19-26: The prime mover of the heavens is an unmoved mover.
- 1072a26-36: Objects of thought and desire are unmoved movers.
- 1072a35-b4: Objects of thought concerning final ends are unchanging unmoved movers.
- 1072b4-10: The prime mover of the heavens is also an unchanging unmoved mover.
- 1072b10-14: The heavens and the world of nature depend on the principle of unmoved movement, in the form of the prime mover and thoughts concerning final ends respectively.
- 1072b14-31: The contemplative part of the human soul, when active, takes on the nature of an eternal, unmixed, unmoved mover, this being what we understand the objects of contemplation to be. The gods, being eternally engaged in contemplation, are thus always in this better state of the human soul, and thus represent a species of agency we should aim to emulate.

1072a19-26: The Prime Mover of the Heavens is an Unmoved Mover.

At the transition between Chapters 6 and 7 of *Metaphysics* Lambda we find Aristotle giving the appearance of having largely finished his discussion concerning the nature of the efficient cause of the movement of *the first heaven*, summing up this discussion in the following:

*"If, then, there is a constant cycle, something must always remain, acting in the same way. [...] For it was the cause of eternal movement; and something else is the cause of variety, and evidently both together are the cause of eternal variety. This, accordingly, is the character which the motions actually exhibit. What need then is there to seek for other principles? Since this is a possible account of the matter, and if it were not true, the world would have proceeded out of night and 'all things together' and out of nonbeing, these difficulties may be taken as solved."*²⁰⁰

1072a26-36: Objects of Thought and Desire are Unmoved Movers.

Immediately following this conclusion Aristotle takes the discussion in a different direction by then comparing the prime mover of the heavens to our own objects of thought and desire, identifying the latter as also causing movement without being moved, as follows:

"Therefore the first heavens must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves them. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is a mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality. And the object of desire and the object of

²⁰⁰ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 6-7, 1072a9-18, Pg. 1694.

thought move in this way; they move without being moved. The primary objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of wish. But desire is consequent on opinion rather than opinion on desire; for the thinking is the starting-point. And thought is moved by the object of thought..."²⁰¹

This passage constitutes a central pillar for both the traditional view and Broadie's alternative discussed above. According to both of these accounts, the movement of the first heaven is in some way caused by desire, either *the desire of the prime mover to move the first heaven* on Broadie's view or *the desire of the first heaven to emulate the perfection of the prime mover* according to the traditional view. The first point of departure in my own view from these two is thus the contention that *the cause of the first heaven's movement has nothing to do with desire at all*, other than the single aspect of *resemblance* it shares with the movement caused by objects of thought, namely that they both cause movement without being moved.

André Laks, in his commentary on this particular portion of the *Metaphysics*, argues against any interpretation which takes it as describing a merely *likeness* between the movement of the heavens and those caused by the objects of thought and desire, as follows:

*"...one has to emphasize that Aristotle does not give the slightest indication that his analysis might have no more than a metaphorical value. [...] As a consequence the heaven should be, or should have, if not a sensitive soul, then at least an intellect which would be a desiderative intellect."*²⁰²

One must, however, question this assertion concerning the apparent absence of metaphor or mere-likeness in this passage, for when Aristotle tells us that *'the object of desire and the object of thought move in this way; they move without being moved'*, does one not detect the faintest hint of a simile, especially in the light of the qualifying clause *'they move without being moved'* immediately following the semi-colon in this translation? One can reasonably consider this clause as answering an intermediate question concerning the respect in which Aristotle wishes his audience to consider the objects of desire and thought moving in the same way as the prime mover of the heavens. This answering clause – *that they move without being moved* – would thus appear to identify the single property shared by both, curtailing the need for any broader identification between the prime mover of the heavens and the objects of thought. One must also keep in mind the contention that the argument from *Physics* VIII discussed above describes how the first heaven cannot possibly move itself eternally and that it must instead be, in some sense, *moved by something else*, according to which any desire it might hold will be not nearly enough to generate its eternal motion.

In light of these considerations we thus have reason to reject Laks' contention that there is *'not the faintest hint'* of metaphor in this passage, and instead posit that there exists at least a syntactic potential that Aristotle is therein discussing two distinct concepts, thus allowing, at this stage, for the interpretation that the movement of the first heaven does not in any way depend on any form of desire possessed by itself or the prime mover.

In addition, and rather fundamentally with regards to my own interpretation, we must remember that Aristotle's aim in the *Metaphysics* was not simply to comprehend the efficient cause of the motion of the heavens, but in fact to understand the first principle of efficient causality in general (along with the first principles of the three other causes discussed earlier). This being the case, and if we are to understand all animals, including ourselves, as possessing their own principles of efficient causality, as Aristotle certainly considers them to do, then a discussion concerning the first principle of the motion of animate life-forms, such as ourselves, will constitute at least as important a part of

²⁰¹ Ibid., Chapter 7, 1072a23-30, Pg. 1694.

²⁰² Laks, "Metaphysics Λ 7," 220-221.

Aristotle's overall project in the *Metaphysics* as the corresponding discussion concerning the first principle of the motion of the first heaven. The first heaven obviously represents a special case with regards to efficient causality, in the sense that its motion is eternal and unchanging (although I will argue this is not a property entirely unique to the prime mover), but the movement of animals remains no less a mysterious subject for both Aristotle's and our own consideration.

It remains the case, however, with regards to this passage from the *Metaphysics*, that Aristotle does not make it entirely explicit that he is therein comparing two distinct subjects – unless we are to consider the words '*in this way*' at 1272a27 as sufficient for this purpose. It is important to note, however, that in this passage one finds a striking resemblance to a more elaborate but also more explicit argument Aristotle makes with regards to the movements of the heavens and those of animals in the *Movement of Animals*, a portion of which we discussed earlier, as follows:

"For, if we except the movement of the universe, things with life are the causes of the movement of all else, that is of all that are not moved by one another by mutual impact.

And so all their motions have a limit, inasmuch as the movements of things with life have such. For all living things both move and are moved for the sake of something, so that this is the limit of all their movement—that for the sake of which. Now we see that the living creature is moved by intellect, imagination, purpose, wish, and appetite. And all these are reducible to thought and desire.

For both imagination and sensation are on common ground with thought, since all three are faculties of discrimination though differing according to distinctions stated elsewhere. Wish, however, impulse, and appetite, are all three forms of desire, while purpose belongs both to intellect and to desire. Therefore the object of desire or of intellect first initiates movement—not every object of intellect, but only the end in the domain of conduct. Accordingly it is goods of this sort that initiate movement, not everything fine. For it initiates movement only so far as something else is for its sake, or so far as it is the end of that which is for the sake of something else. And we must suppose that a seeming good may take the room of actual good, and so may the pleasant, which is itself a seeming good.

From these considerations it is clear that in one regard that which is eternally moved by the eternal mover is moved in the same way as every living creature, in another regard differently, and so while it is moved eternally, the movement of living creatures has a limit. Now the eternally fine, and the truly and primarily good (which is not at one time good, at another time not good), is too divine and precious to be relative to anything else. The prime mover then moves, itself being unmoved, whereas desire and its faculty are moved and so move."²⁰³

The key points to take from in this passage are as follows:

- 1) With the exception of the prime mover, all movements, apart from those resulting from straightforward mechanical impact or collision, are caused by things with life, according to which it follows that the movement of first heaven is not caused by any kind of desiderative soul, whether it be the soul of the prime mover or that of the first heaven itself.
- 2) All living creatures move for the sake of some final end, such ends being objects of their '*intellect, imagination, purpose, wish, and appetite*', reducible to just objects of thought and desire. Objects of thought and desire thus initiate movement in a living creature's faculties of thought and desire, with this movement of thought or thinking in turn causing the physical movements of these organisms, thus following the two-step process involved in Aristotle's contention that "*...desire and its faculty are moved and so move.*"²⁰⁴
- 3) The prime mover is eternally perfect, divine and good. It thus has no such final end to consider. The prime mover thus causes the eternal movement of the first heaven, without

²⁰³ *Movement of Animals*, Chapter 6, 700b11-701a1, Pg. 1091.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

itself being moved by any object of thought or desire. A living creature's faculties of thought and desire, on the other hand, are moved by their objects of thought and desire, thus initiating their distinct end-based physical movements.

- 4) Objects of thought and desire are thus *analogous* to the prime mover in that they also initiate movement without themselves being moved, and thus "...in one regard that which is eternally moved by the eternal mover is moved in the same way as every living creature..."²⁰⁵), but remain fundamentally different in the sense that the objects of thought and desire initiate *end-based movement* in living creatures, whereas the prime mover's movement has no final end. Thus while the first heaven "...is moved eternally, the movement of living creatures has a limit."²⁰⁶

This passage would appear, more than anything else, to unequivocally support the interpretation of the prime mover I wish to draw from the *Metaphysics*, with Aristotle therein identifying the prime mover as an entirely unthinking entity, lacking any capacity for (or actuality of) thought, and moving the first heaven quite literally, *without reason and without end*, it being too simple and perfect an entity to require or conceive of such a consideration. In addition, as mentioned above, in this passage we see a striking parallel with the passage 1027a26-36 in *Metaphysics* Lambda, with Aristotle herein mirroring: 1) the comparison between objects of thought and desire and the prime mover of the heaven, 2) the subsequent reduction of various mental faculties to just thought and desire (although the passage in the *Metaphysics* goes further in reducing desire to thought as well), 3) Aristotle's concern with respect to objects of desire that are only 'seemingly good' but which also initiate movement in animate things, and finally 4) the contention that it is in fact one's faculty of thought that is moved by objects of thought (i.e. that they cause thought to take place), with this faculty itself being the cause of any subsequent physical movement in animals.

One could plausibly argue that such a constructive reference to the correlation between these two passages should be discarded, from the position that this additional text is entirely irrelevant to our present purpose, being itself focussed on significantly different subject matter (i.e. Aristotle's observations concerning the movements of animals) and fundamentally not concerned with metaphysics. Against this, however, it is reasonably clear from the many references Aristotle makes to his other works in the *Movement of Animals* that, firstly, this text would appear to constitute a fairly mature example of his work, being assumedly written after the various texts it refers to (which include, according to A. S. L. Farquharson's translation, references to the *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, and *On the Soul*²⁰⁷), and secondly, that these external references would imply an intention by Aristotle for this text to supplement the discussions provided in the others (and vice-versa), as opposed to the intention that it should be considered only in isolation.

We thus have reason to consider this passage from the *Movement of Animals* as a powerful source of evidence for the interpretation of the *Metaphysics* Lambda I propose. As earlier stated, however, my interpretation will be primarily drawn from the *Metaphysics* itself, and as such, the function of this passage from the *Movement of Animals* will be simply to provide us with a clearer indication that Aristotle intended the corresponding passage in the *Metaphysics* to represent no more than an *comparison* between the prime mover of the heavens and our own objects of thought and desire, as opposed to a complete identification.

A particularly straightforward account of 1072a26-36 from the *Metaphysics*, in light of this less ambiguous parallel passage from the *Movement of Animals* (700b11-701a1), thus tells us that Aristotle is simply identifying a second class of objects that are also unmoved movers and which are

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Pg. 1089-1091.

therefore similar, but not identical, to the prime mover of the heavens. Reviewing the text now in this light, Aristotle begins this discussion by telling us that, like the prime mover, the objects of thought and desire cause movement without themselves being moved, continuing with the argument that since desire begins with thought, objects of desire are effectively reducible to just objects of thought.

We then find the rather difficult statement, now understood as referring to objects of thought – and specifically not the prime mover of the heavens:

*“And thought is moved by the object of thought, and one side of the list of opposites is in itself the object of thought; and in this, substance is first, and in substance, that which is simple and exists actually.”*²⁰⁸

Aristotle would appear to be here simply defining different categories of objects of thought, identifying the first (or best) as those concerning uncorrupted substances (as opposed to their privations) that are both simple and exist actually, thus appearing, on first glance, to refer simply to objects of contemplation. In order to fully comprehend this statement, however, each term will be analysed individually.

Firstly, from the contention that *‘thought is moved by the object of thought’* we take it that objects of thought simply cause the activity of thought to take place, in the sense that, for example, when X comes to mind, one begins thinking about X and all of the things associated with this object, but all the while X remains entirely unchanged. Ross, in his commentary on this passage, concurs, telling us that *“...[Aristotle’s] meaning with regard to [such an object of thought] is that it stimulates thought without itself being stimulated...”*²⁰⁹

Secondly, with regards to *‘one side of the list of opposites’*, following Ross, we understand the two opposing sides of this list as corresponding to *“...[1:] a positive [...] column including such terms as being, unity, substance, and [2:] a negative [column] including not-being, plurality, not-substance. [...] In each case the negative is not known per se but as the negation of the positive term.”*²¹⁰ By this we take it that Aristotle is referring to a first column of uncorrupted substances and a second column consisting of the privations of these substances. We thus take it that Aristotle understood there to be no *essentially* corrupt substances, only substances that have become corrupted.

The final terms ‘simple’ and ‘actually’ are interrelated and so will be analysed together. To begin with, Ross contends that the term ‘simple’ *“...denotes that a thing is itself in a certain condition, i.e. unmixed...”*²¹¹, by which we take it, in terms of our objects of thought, that unmixed objects of thought consist in nothing but thought, and thus concern only theoretical subject matter. The term ‘actually’ would therefore appear, on the face of it, to relate to the term ‘unmixed’ in the sense that purely theoretical objects are only ever brought into existence as the actuality of thought. There exists, however, another sense of the term ‘actual’ that Aristotle makes use of that is subtly distinct from that implying any kind of activity and which is itself more closely related to the meaning of such assertions as ‘such-and-such is *actually* the case’. A small snippet from Book III of *On the Soul* concerning different objects of thought will lead us towards an interpretation of a subcategory of the objects of thought under this different sense:

²⁰⁸ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072a29-32. Pg. 1694.

²⁰⁹ Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, Pg. 375.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pg. 376.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, Pg. 375.

*“Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical. [...] In the case of those which contain matter each of the objects of thought is only potentially present.”*²¹²

Here we see Aristotle distinguishing objects of thought concerning physical objects from those concerning purely theoretical or ‘speculative’ subject matter. Objects of thought concerning matter are described here as being only potentially present, in the sense that one might, for example, think of a small white dog, but the actual existence of that small white dog will only *potentially* be the case. With regards to purely theoretical knowledge on the other hand, such things are always *actually* existent, or to use an example, if I were to drop a glass of wine, the glass would *potentially* break, but it would *actually* accelerate towards the ground at a constant rate of 9.81m/s^2 , according to the universal law of gravity (in as far as ‘upon or near to the surface of the earth’ counts as universal). In this sense we can in fact see two senses of ‘actual’ at play. As just discussed, certain truths are always *actually* the case, and these universal facts (such as this law of gravity) are thus always *active* and thus always causing change. Such universal truths are thus always *actual* in a sense distinct from the actuality of our own thought which might also contain such truths. We find an extension of this position in Book IX of the *Metaphysics* during Aristotle’s extended discussions concerning the many different senses of actuality, as follows:

*“With regard to incomposites, what is being or not being, and truth or falsity? [...] And they all exist actually, not potentially; for otherwise they would come to be and cease to be; but, as it is, being itself does not come to be (nor cease to be); for if it did it would have to come out of something. About the things, then, which are essences and exist in actuality, it is not possible to be in error, but only to think them or not to think them.”*²¹³

We thus take it that objects of thought concerning unchanging substances which are simple and exist actually constitute the incorporeal, unmixed, universal truths of contemplation, and we take these objects, not just from Aristotle’s argument in the *Metaphysics*, but also from his discussions regarding contemplation in the *NE*, to be *the very best objects of thought*.

Laks interprets this passage from the *Metaphysics* rather differently, however, positing instead (against the view that the prime mover of the heavens and objects of thought are in fact being distinguished by Aristotle in this passage) that all he is saying is that the prime mover of the heavens, itself an unmixed actuality, is therefore the single best object of thought. Laks first alludes to this position in the following:

*“[This] sub-section [...] establishes the identity of the first desirable and the first intelligible. Following the mention of the first heaven, which also is the first object moved, it would seem that the first desirable and the first intelligible should refer to the first mover.”*²¹⁴

Continuing with the following:

*“Aristotle [...] distinguishes within the first term itself, that is to say, generally speaking, substance [...], an absolutely first term. This first among firsts, characterised as ‘non-composite’ and ‘actual’, is none other than the purely actual substance which chapter 6 has identified as the principle of the eternity of motion.”*²¹⁵

²¹² *On The Soul*, Book III, Chapter 4, 430a3-7, Pg. 683.

²¹³ *Metaphysics*, Iota, Chapter 10, 1051b18-33. Pg. 1661.

²¹⁴ Laks, “*Metaphysics* Λ 7,” 223.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Pg. 225.

One must, however, question this assertion from Laks, as it does not appear to be the case that Aristotle considers the class of unmixed actualities as consisting in just one entity, for what else do we understand the broader range of purely theoretical objects of our contemplation as being? – unless Aristotle considers it the case that we only ever contemplate the prime mover. This question is not lost on Laks, however, as we find him later making use of the definition of our many objects of contemplation in order to make one further dubious identification between contemplation and the prime mover as follows:

*“One has to have read [On the soul] to know that only the intellect, or more precisely, the understanding, can be pure actuality...”*²¹⁶

Laks supports this assertion with a reference to the following passage from Book III of *On the Soul*:

*“Thought in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (for always the active is superior to the passive factor, the originating force to the matter).”*²¹⁷

What is most striking about this passage from *On the Soul* is that nowhere in it do we find any mention of any kind of exclusivity with which ‘the understanding’ possesses the attributes of unmixed pure actuality. Indeed, upon reading the full text of *On the Soul* with a reasonable level of attention, one finds that that *nowhere in it does Aristotle explicitly define the active intellect as holding a monopoly on these features*. With regards to our earlier discussion concerning the prime mover in *Physics* VIII (on page 56), we do, on the other hand, appear to have good reason to believe that something distinctly different to the intellect can, or indeed must, exist as unmixed pure actuality, namely the prime mover of the heavens. It thus appears to be the case that in *On the Soul* we find a description of something that is an unmixed pure actuality, and in the *Physics* we find a description of a different entity that also possesses these properties. These similarities do not justify simply conflating the two concepts, however, in which case Laks’ contention that ‘*only the understanding can be pure actuality*’ would appear to stand on shaky ground.

An interesting result of these two problematic identifications made by Laks with respect to the prime mover of the heavens (i.e. that it is both the singular best object of thought and an intellect capable of thinking about itself) is the conclusion that the prime mover (as a contemplative intellect) would therefore only ever hold itself (as the very best object of thought) as its object, reflecting the basis for the traditional theological view of Aristotle’s prime mover as a contemplating being that contemplates its own complete universal understanding. We obviously have reason to doubt this conclusion, however, if, on Laks’ view, the identification of the prime mover with the intellect hinges on the contention that the intellect is the only thing that can be pure actuality, for in *Physics* VIII we find a detailed description (as discussed on Pg. 56) of an unmixed actuality that has nothing at all to do with thought, or with any form of intellectual activity whatsoever, and which is nonetheless specifically defined therein as the prime mover of the first heaven. In addition, a little later on in Chapter 9 of *Metaphysics* Lambda, we do in fact find Aristotle returning to the subject of ‘*divine thought*’, specifically concerning the question of whether or not we should understand the divine contemplative intellect as necessarily holding itself as its only object.

Aristotle begins this additional discussion concerning the primary object of divine thought with the following barrage of rhetorical questions:

²¹⁶ Ibid., Pg. 231.

²¹⁷ *On The Soul*, Book III, Chapter 4, 430a17-19., Pg. 684.

“The nature of the divine thought involves certain problems; for while thought is held to be the most divine of phenomena, the question what it must be in order to have that character involves difficulties. For if it thinks nothing, what is there here of dignity? It is just like one who sleeps. And if it thinks, but this depends on something else, then (as that which is its substance is not the act of thinking, but a capacity) it cannot be the best substance; for it is through thinking that its value belongs to it. Further, whether its substance is the faculty of thought or the act of thinking, what does it think? Either itself or something else; and if something else, either the same always or something different. Does it matter, then, or not, whether it thinks the good or any chance thing? Are there not some things about which it is incredible that it should think?”²¹⁸

Aristotle addresses the problem of what we should understand as the most suitable object of our contemplation by initially supposing (as Laks does) that since the activity of contemplation would itself appear to constitute “...the most divine of phenomena...”²¹⁹, we should perhaps therefore consider the activity of contemplation as itself being the most suitable object for the activity of contemplation, generating the rather interesting conclusion that:

“Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking.”²²⁰

We need not take this point concerning ‘*thinking as a thinking on thinking*’ (i.e. the act of contemplating which holds the activity of contemplation as its object) seriously, however, as immediately afterwards Aristotle tells us instead that “...evidently knowledge and perception and opinion and understanding have always something else as their object, and themselves only by the way.”²²¹ To which he adds the following point, reflecting his earlier discussion concerning contemplation, that:

“As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter [i.e. the unmixed objects of contemplation], they will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought.”²²²

We take from this that while we do not necessarily take on the activity of contemplation as an object of contemplation in its own right, we do take on the *object* of contemplation as the activity of contemplation – a rather subtle distinction. We can thus conclude that while divine thought does indeed represent an important substance, it does not typically constitute its own object.

1072a35-b4: Thoughts Concerning Final Ends are Unchanging Unmoved Movers.

Within this passage Aristotle elaborates on how a particular subset of our objects of thought, namely those concerning final ends, are not just unmoved movers, but are also *unchangeable*; as follows:

“But the good, also, and that which is in itself desirable are on this same side of the list; and the first in any class is always best, or analogous to the best.

That that for the sake of which is found among the unmovables is shown by making a distinction; for that for the sake of which is both that for which and that towards which, and of these the one is

²¹⁸ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 9, 1074b15-25. Pg. 1698.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1074b16.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1074b33-34.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 1075a3-4, Pg. 1699.

unmovable and the other is not. Thus it produces motion by being loved, and it moves the other moving things."²²³

Having earlier described the best objects of thought as those of contemplation, we here see Aristotle turning to the subject of *'that which is in itself desirable'* and *'that for the sake of which'*, the latter of which we find distinguished in the same way described in the *EE*, into, firstly, the beneficiary for which something is done, such as a sick patient, and secondly, the kind of ends for which one acts in order to achieve, such as good health. *'The good'* in this passage would thus constitute the second type of *'that for the sake of which'*, as an end that is aimed for, rather than the beneficiary.

In an additional passage from the *EE* in which the good is described in this way²²⁴, we also find Aristotle defining how such ends will also function as the efficient cause of our own movement, as follows.

*"But that-for-the-sake-of-which, as (it is) an end, is best, and cause of the things falling under it, and first among all (goods). [...] That the end serves as a cause for the things under it, is shown by teaching: (teachers), after defining the end, demonstrate, with regard to everything else, that it is a good; for that-for-the-sake-of-which is a cause. For example, given that so-and-so is what being healthy is, such-and-such must exist, which is beneficial for it: the healthy is an efficient cause of health, but an efficient cause of health's existence, not of its being a good. Again, no one demonstrates that health is a good, any more than he demonstrates any other starting-point, unless he is not a doctor but a sophist;"*²²⁵

Here we find Aristotle describing how one's understanding of an end, such as health, will function as the efficient cause of whatever action is prescribed by, for example, medical science, in order for one to achieve this final end. The importance this holds for our understanding of 1072a35-b4 is that whatever being healthy consists in *does not change* whether we are healthy, sick, or somewhere in between. Health in a particular agent may be sometimes present and sometimes absent, but what health actually consists in will always be the case, effectively acting as an unchanging unmoved mover and reflecting the kind of hypothetical exemplar of human health discussed earlier with regards to the final passages of the *EE*. As distinct from our objects of thought and desire in general, which will also concern temporary and continually changing objects, thoughts concerning final ends such as human health are thus also *unchanging and unmovable*.

We can understand thoughts concerning final ends as therefore being also *actual* in the sense of being always true and as thus also constituting, along with both the prime mover of the heavens and our objects of contemplation, a class of *"...mover which moves without being moved, being eternal [...] and actuality."*²²⁶ We must note, however, one important distinction between thoughts concerning final ends and those concerning contemplation and the prime mover of the heavens, in that the latter two also constitute *'unmixed'* and *'incomposite'* objects, in that they do not refer in any way to any material object, whereas thoughts concerning final ends, such as whatever human health consists in, clearly do, as the goods of animate *corporeal* organisms.

1072b4-10: The Prime Mover of the Heavens is also an Unchanging, Unmoved Mover.

At 1072b4 Aristotle signposts a change in focus for the discussion by beginning the next sentence (in Ross's translation) with the word *'Now'*, a term typically used to indicate a departure, or in this case

²²³ Ibid., 1072a35-b4. Pg. 1694.

²²⁴ Woods, *EE*, Commentary, Pg. 174.

²²⁵ *EE*, Book I, Chapter 8, 1218b10-24, Pg. 10-11.

²²⁶ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072a25-26. Pg. 1694.

a return to, the primary subject of one's discussion. Accordingly, in this sentence Aristotle briefly returns focus to the prime mover of the heavens, as follows:

*"Now if something is moved it is capable of being otherwise than as it is. Therefore if the actuality of the heavens is primary motion, then in so far as they are in motion, in this respect they are capable of being otherwise, – in place, even if not in substance. But since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is. For motion in space is the first of the kinds of change, and motion in a circle the first kind of spatial motion; and this the first mover produces."*²²⁷

Having just argued how certain objects of thought can be understood as unchangeable, Aristotle here applies this property to the list of attributes already identified for the prime mover, now giving the more complete picture that: "...there is a mover [that can in no way be otherwise than as it is] which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality..."²²⁸.

1072b10-14: The heavens and the world of nature both depend on the principle of unmoved movement, in the form of the prime mover and thoughts concerning final ends respectively.

In the passage 1072b10-13 Aristotle then reflects on the necessary existence of unmoved movement *in general* as the origin of efficient causation, and how we can understand this class of prime movers as good without qualification in the sense that they constitute, in the various instances just discussed, "...that which is necessary perforce because it is contrary to impulse, that without which the good is impossible, and that which cannot be otherwise but is absolutely necessary."²²⁹

Reflecting on the ultimate dependency our own movements and those of the heavens have on the first principle of efficient causation, be it the prime mover of the heavens or the objects of our thoughts and desires, Aristotle then states the following:

*"On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature."*²³⁰

The heavens obviously depend on the principle of the unmoved mover in the very basic sense that all heavenly motion is derived from the unmoved prime mover, but we can understand the way in which *the world of nature* depends on such a principle as two-fold. Firstly, as we learnt above from Broadie's appeal to *Physics VIII*, the world of nature depends on the very same unmoved mover that causes the movement of the heavens, in the sense that the prime mover causes the many subsequent stellar, solar, planetary and lunar movements on which earthly life so fundamentally depends. Secondly, the world of nature (at least the animate creatures within it) depends on the form of unmoved movement represented by objects of thought and desire, and especially those concerning final ends, in the sense that such movement is obviously required in order for these creatures to both nourish and nurture themselves. We can thus understand the changes in our earthly environment (e.g. from night to day and those of the seasons) as constituting the absolute final reach of the prime mover of the heavens and all further motion being thereby efficiently caused by the souls of animate organisms, or more specifically, the objects that these souls are attracted to. Objects of thought and desire thus constitute a species of principle on which the world of nature fundamentally depends, lest we all die out of apathy towards and ignorance of our own good, and one that is also clearly distinct from the efficient causality originating from the unmoved mover of the first heaven.

²²⁷ Ibid., 1072b3-10.

²²⁸ Ibid., 1072a25-26.

²²⁹ Ibid., 1072b12-13. Pg. 1695.

²³⁰ Ibid., 1072b14.

1072b14-31: The contemplative part of the human soul, when active, takes on the nature of an eternal, unmixed, unmoved mover, this being what we understand the objects of contemplation to be. The gods, being eternally engaged in contemplation, are thus always in this better state of the human soul, and thus represent a species of agency we should aim to emulate.

Immediately following the discussion focused on the dependency the heavens and the world of nature have on the first principle of efficient causation, now understood as the principle of unmoved motion, and having now discussed in the above sections: 1) the prime mover of the heavens, 2) objects of thought and desire, 3) unmixed, unchanging objects of contemplation and 4) thoughts concerning final ends as instances of this principle, Aristotle now moves the discussion, at 1072b14, towards a primarily ethical end, by beginning to discuss how, through the activity of contemplation, we actually become, in part, an object of contemplation, and thus also become, in part, an unmixed, unchanging, unmoved mover. Considering what one's contemplative capacity becomes when one contemplates, which we take to be whatever its object happens to be, Aristotle is thus justified in contending that the metaphysical attributes possessed by the objects of contemplation thereby also become attributes that we possess, beginning with the following preliminary point:

*"And its life is such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time. For it is ever in this state (which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure. (And therefore waking, perception, and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so because of their reference to these.)"*²³¹

We take the word 'its' in the first sentence of the above passage as referring to neither the prime mover of the first heaven, nor the objects of thought or desire, but simply to the principle that all of these things share specifically referred to in the sentence just prior to this passages in the statement: *"On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature."*²³² One does not typically consider a principle as referring to a specific instantiation (e.g. the prime mover or a specific object of thought), but rather considers such a thing as referring to the broader theory that any particular instantiation might represent which is itself applicable in this broader sense to any number of instances. We can thus understand the first half of the first sentence in the above passage as asserting simply that: *with regards to the nature of the unmoved mover just described, there is an aspect of human life, namely the activity of contemplation, in which one partakes, rather enjoyably, in this nature and whereby one becomes, in part, an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover.*

Before 1072b14 in the *Metaphysics*, no mention is made of the prime mover experiencing any kind of pleasure, and the passage from the *Movement of Animals* discussed earlier describes quite clearly how this could never be the case, since *"The prime mover [...] moves, itself being unmoved, whereas desire and its faculty are moved and so move."*²³³ This obviously does not necessarily preclude the prime mover from enjoying pleasure, but it does make it quite clear that the prime mover does not possess a faculty of desire and thus lacks the faculty required for it to desire the movement that it causes. We instead understand the movement the prime mover causes as being due simply to the fact that *the cause of movement is all that the prime mover is*. In the absence of a faculty of desire it does, however, become rather difficult to understand how the prime mover could ever experience the corresponding pleasure relating to the motion it produces. Pleasure is obviously not predicated on desire, for one occasionally experiences unexpected (and thus undesired) pleasure, but it would seem unlikely for the *eternal* pleasure the prime mover is said to experience under the traditional

²³¹ Ibid., 1072b14-18.

²³² Ibid., 1072b14.

²³³ *Movement of Animals*, Chapter 6, 700b11-701a1, Pg. 1091.

view to be in anyway like this (i.e. eternally incidental and unintended in the light of its undesired causation of the movement of the first heaven). We can thus consider the prime mover's possession of a faculty of pleasure, with no corresponding faculty of desire, an unlikely scenario and thus contend that the prime mover does not in fact experience pleasure or possess any corresponding faculty. We should in fact expect the prime mover to experience *nothing at all*, for it is effectively a mindless, endless mover, and nothing more than this. We thus have reason to interpret the term '*its actuality is also pleasure*' as referring only to a kind of human life or, as I will soon argue, to the ideal, highly pleasurable, intellectual life of the gods which is itself similar to human life in the sense that it is '*such as ours is at its best*'.

With regards, then, to the second half of the first sentence of the above passage, in which Aristotle states that this actuality is one that we can "*...enjoy for but a short time...*", it becomes natural to take this as a reflection of the argument he makes in Book X of the *NE*, as follows:

*"How is it, then, that no one is continuously pleased? Is it that one grows weary? For nothing human is capable of continuous activity, and so no continuous pleasure comes about, since pleasure follows upon the activity."*²³⁴

The fact that no human being can remain continuously active, as opposed to the prime mover of the heavens or, more specifically, the continually contemplating gods, straightforwardly leads us to the conclusion that the state shared by the latter is one we can *only occasionally* partake in.

Continuing with his reflections on actuality and pleasure, Aristotle then says "*...And therefore waking, perception, and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so because of their reference to these.*"²³⁵ For this we also find a corresponding passage in the *NE*, in Book IX, also concerning the pleasures relating to both one's 'present actuality' and one's hopes and memories concerning past and future activities, as follows:

*"What is pleasant is the actuality of the present, hope for the future, and memory of the past; but what is most pleasant is what accompanies the actuality, and similarly it is the most worthy of love."*²³⁶

And further:

*"...such a person wishes to spend time with himself, since he finds it pleasant to do so. For his memories of his past actions delight him and his hopes for the future are good, and so both are pleasant. And he has in his intellect a wealth of subjects for contemplation."*²³⁷

In these passages Aristotle is clearly making an argument concerning *human life* and how the activity one is currently performing (especially, one assumes, that of contemplation) will be more pleasant than one's hopes and memories concerning past and future activities. We thus find a direct reflection of this point, with basically the same terminology, in the *Metaphysics*, but there concerning specifically how in this activity one also partakes in the nature of the eternally actual and unmixed, unmoved mover.

²³⁴ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 4, 1175a3-5, Pg. 189.

²³⁵ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072b14-18. Pg. 1695.

²³⁶ *NE*, Book IX, Chapter 7, 1168a13-15, Pg. 173-174.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4, 1166a24-27, Pg. 169.

Continuing with our analysis of 1072b14-31, we next find Aristotle reflecting on the fact that thought constitutes our best genus of activity, along with the point made at 1072a30-36, that the purely theoretical objects of contemplation are the very best objects of this activity, in stating that:

*"...thought in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thought in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense."*²³⁸

We most naturally take *'thought in the fullest sense'* to refer to contemplative thought – i.e. purely theoretical thought which is not compounded with matter. Aristotle then goes on to describe how thought concerning its best objects (i.e. the activity of contemplation) actually works, detailing how the contemplative part of one's soul actually becomes its object when one contemplates, in the following:

*"And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain..."*²³⁹

What constitutes the *'latter'* and the *'former'* in this passage is not altogether clear, but let us take *'that which is capable of receiving the object of thought'* as most reasonably representing the former, which we can therefore take as constituting the contemplative part of the soul in the sense of it being a capacity to take an object of contemplation – and *'the object of thought'* as therefore representing the latter as the things which thought contains. In this case it follows, rather interestingly, that *'the object of thought'*, as the divine element which *'the activity of thought seems to contain'*, rather than *'that which is capable of receiving the object of thought'*, i.e. one's contemplative capacity, is what we take to be divine in the activity of contemplation. This is to say that one's capacity for contemplative thought (i.e. the contemplative part of one's soul) is not in itself necessarily divine and that it instead *becomes* divine only when one is contemplating, at which point it will have taken on and hence become a *divine object of thought*.

In his commentary on *Metaphysics Lambda* Laks draws a parallel between this particular passage and the position Aristotle develops with regards to the contemplative part of the human soul in *On the Soul*. We will briefly turn to this additional text in order to make better sense of what Aristotle is here discussing in the *Metaphysics*.

To begin with, the status of our contemplative part when we are *not* contemplating can be inferred from the following:

*"...it follows that [mind] can have no nature of its own, other than that of having a certain capacity. Thus that in the soul which is called thought (by thought I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges) is, before it thinks, not actually any real thing. For this reason it cannot reasonably be regarded as blended with the body: if so, it would acquire some quality, e.g. warmth or cold, or even have an organ like the sensitive faculty: as it is, it has none."*²⁴⁰

We take from this that when not active, one's contemplative part, or indeed one's intellect as a whole, consists in nothing more than a capacity with no necessary physical presence, but that it constitutes part of the essential nature of the human soul nonetheless, if only as a capacity. Aristotle

²³⁸ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072b18-20. Pg. 1695.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1072b20-23.

²⁴⁰ *On The Soul*, Book III, Chapter 4, 429a20-27, Pg. 682.

goes on in this passage to describe what this capacity then becomes when it is finally actualised, as follows:

“Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical. [...] In the case of those which contain matter each of the objects of thought is only potentially present.”²⁴¹

Here we see Aristotle describing how, when one engages in contemplation, one’s contemplative capacity becomes identical with its object, which is to say, for example, that when I contemplate ‘eternal truth X’, my contemplative part actually consists in ‘eternal truth X’ for the duration of this exercise.

It is interesting to note that Aristotle also allows for a second kind of actuality relating to our objects of contemplation, corresponding to what we can understand *knowledge* to consist in, as distinct from *active thought*. We find this distinction between active thought and passive knowledge discussed by Aristotle in his development of an analogous distinction between a living person who is awake and a living person who is sleeping, in the following:

“Now there are two kinds of actuality corresponding to knowledge and to reflecting. It is obvious that the soul is an actuality like knowledge; for both sleeping and waking presuppose the existence of soul, and of these waking corresponds to reflecting, sleeping to knowledge possessed but not employed, and knowledge of something is temporally prior.”²⁴²

From this we can infer that our soul remains actualised, to some degree, with any thought one comes to know, according to which we can thus allow that when one comes to know a purely theoretical object of thought, the divine element that this object consists in will in fact remain within one’s self as a kind of passive or ‘sub-conscious’ actuality. As one comes to understand more and more of these divine things, storing them away in one’s soul, one is thereby able to reflect more and more on what one already knows, upon the knowledge and understanding one already possesses, in which case, as Aristotle goes on to describe, one will be, in effect, reflecting on one’s own soul, as follows:

“When thought has become each thing in the way in which a man who actually knows is said to do so (this happens when he is now able to exercise the power on his own initiative), its condition is still one of potentiality, but in a different sense from the potentiality which preceded the acquisition of knowledge by learning or discovery; and thought is then able to think of itself.”²⁴³

We thus find Aristotle describing how, assumedly through learning, one first acquires these divine objects of knowledge, which subsequently remain actualised within one’s soul, to be pleurably reflected on at one’s leisure. From this discussion we can begin to understand something more of the self-sufficient nature of contemplation, in the sense that when one reflects upon knowledge of this kind, one is using one’s own soul as a source of divine contemplative activity. In a similar fashion to how someone who possesses a library of books will occasionally read from these tomes, one who possesses a ‘library’ of divine knowledge will occasionally (i.e. whenever practical requirements allow) partake in these objects. In this we see a reflection of the passage from Book IX of the *NE* mentioned earlier, in which Aristotle contends that the happy person “...wishes to spend time with himself, since he finds it pleasant to do so. For [...] he has in his intellect a wealth of subjects for

²⁴¹ Ibid., 430a3-7, Pg. 683.

²⁴² Ibid., Book II, Chapter 1, 412b22-26, Pg. 656.

²⁴³ Ibid., Book III, Chapter 4, 429b6-9, Pg. 682.

*contemplation.*²⁴⁴ Just like decaying books, however, this passively actualised knowledge fades in time from one's mind if not maintained, as Aristotle describes in the following passage from *On the Soul*:

*"[Actual Knowledge, when separated] is alone just what it is, and this above [all] is immortal and eternal (we do not remember because, while [actual knowledge] is impassible, passive thought is perishable) [...]."*²⁴⁵

We thus have it that while the objects of contemplation are themselves eternal, we cannot partake in them passively forever, *for we forget*. When we do actively partake in them, however, according to the contention that objects of thought function as unmoved movers and the further claim that objects of contemplation thus function as eternally actual, unmixed, unchanging, unmoved movers, one thereby becomes, in part, such an object, which is to say that when one contemplates one becomes, in part, an eternally actual, unmixed, unchanging, unmoved mover.

The Best Human Life as we find it discussed in the *Metaphysics*:

In light of the relationship identified between one's own soul and the eternal objects of contemplation, we can now say that these truths exist separately and eternally and that one merely draws them into one's soul when one contemplates, and in doing so one partakes, in a sense, in what is eternal. One obviously does not take on eternity (and thus become immortal) when one contemplates, but rather, one temporarily holds within one's soul an object that is itself eternal. The part of one's soul with which one contemplates thus becomes something 'actually real' only when one is engaged in the activity of contemplation, with this part constituting nothing more than a capacity the rest of the time. It follows from this and the above point that one's contemplative part exists as either an immaterial capacity for contemplation or as an actual object of contemplation, with the prior state constituting no less than an *immaterial capacity to become an eternal and divine object of contemplation*. It thus follows that no part of the human soul is necessarily divine, but rather only that a part of the human soul possesses the capacity to take on and become something that is itself divine, and it is only through the activity of contemplation that one partakes in such things. This returns us to the conclusion Aristotle draws in Book X of the *NE* with regards to the best human life, as follows:

*"Such a life is superior to one that is simply human, because someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him. And the activity of this divine element is as much superior to that in accordance with the other kind of virtue as the element is superior to the compound."*²⁴⁶

Here we see Aristotle distinguishing a life that is 'merely human' from one that is assumedly also still human, but also divine. We thus find Aristotle here distinguishing the life of character virtue (i.e. 'that in accordance with the other kind of virtue') from the life in accordance with this divine element, the life of contemplation or that in accordance with the virtue of the intellect. We thus take it that the life in which one's contemplative capacity is never utilised, but in which one is otherwise virtuous, will constitute '*one that is simply human*', whereas the life in which one's contemplative capacity partakes in the divine objects of thought will constitute that whereby one lives *in a superior way* insofar as that when one contemplates one 'actually' possesses something divine and thereby partakes in immortality. In the same passage from the *NE* Aristotle also exhorts

²⁴⁴ *NE*, Book IX, Chapter 4, 1166a24-27, Pg. 169.

²⁴⁵ *On The Soul*, Book III, Chapter 5, 430a20-26, Pg. 684.

²⁴⁶ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b27-31, Pg. 196.

us to “...take on immortality as much as possible...”²⁴⁷ which we can now understand more fully in the sense that one should contemplate as much as is practically possible and thereby actually draw the immortal objects of contemplation into one’s soul.

Against this conclusion one might, however, argue that the present position far exceeds the scope of what is actually discussed in the *NE*, and that we should not expect Aristotle to have subtly included the precise detail of our contemplative capacity and the corresponding actuality described elsewhere in both the *Metaphysics* and *On the Soul* in these brief concluding passages. We might therefore equate the ‘divine element’ in the passage above to just our ‘contemplative capacity’, leaving the rather complicated distinction between this capacity and its actuality to the broader scope of these other texts, especially in light of Aristotle’s assertion much earlier in the *NE* that: “*Our account will be adequate if its clarity is in line with the subject-matter, because the same degree of precision is not to be sought in all discussions...*”²⁴⁸

Returning thus to the *Metaphysics*, at 1072b23-24 we find Aristotle concluding this discussion concerning our best activity, i.e. that of thought, and the best objects of this activity, i.e. the purely theoretical objects of contemplation, with the rather unsurprising statement that, therefore, “...*the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best.*”²⁴⁹ We thereby have it that by engaging in the activity of contemplation one becomes, in part, a divine object of thought, according to which one shares, in part, in the principle of the eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover, and thus partakes in the life that is ‘*such as the best which we enjoy*’.

With regards to our broader project concerning god in the *EE*, we have thus made a reasonable interpretation of *Metaphysics* Lambda, up to 1072b24 at least, that actually aligns significantly with both lowercase-g interpretations of ‘god’, in that we now simply have further support for the argument that contemplation is the best human activity, and that it is performed with regards to the broader category of purely theoretical objects of thought, rather than just the unmoved mover of the first heaven.

It remains the case, however, that up until this point in the *Metaphysics* barely any mention of god has actually been made. Immediately after the last quoted passage, however, we finally see a veritable deluge of this term in the following:

*“If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.”*²⁵⁰

Here we find what appears, in the context of the above discussion, to be a radical departure from the previous discussion concerning the first principle of efficient causality, our objects of thought and desire and the activity of contemplation, but which is traditionally understood as the crux of this part of the text and of Aristotle’s ‘theology’, which we can understand as a reasonable interpretation considering the passage concludes with the words ‘*for this is God*’, preceded by a rather specific account of what is traditionally taken to be the monotheistic supreme being. We must recall, however, that in the paragraphs immediately preceding this deluge of references to god, Aristotle provides us with nothing more than a detailed account of contemplation, which itself followed on

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 1177b33.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, Book I, Chapter 3, 1094b19-22, Pg. 4.

²⁴⁹ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072b22-24, Pg. 1695.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 1072b24-31.

from a discussion concerning objects of thought in general, and in both cases we understood Aristotle as no longer discussing the prime mover of the heavens at all, but rather discussing certain things that are analogous to this first principle of the movement of the heavens – primarily based on the simple attribute of being unmoved movers. We thus have reason to consider Aristotle, in this very next paragraph, to not be incongruously revisiting his earlier discussion concerning the prime mover of the heavens. We should instead read him as simply adding further detail to the characterisation of contemplation and the life *'such as the best that we enjoy'* he has just made – a position made even more likely considering Aristotle begins the very first sentence of this paragraph with the deductive sounding *'If, then'*.

In addition, the fact that we are now considering Aristotle as no longer discussing the prime mover in the above passage allows us to also consider the many instances of 'God' in it as not necessarily denoting a singular entity (as the prime mover of the heavens must be), but rather as denoting the common noun sense of this term discussed earlier (on page 42), referring to 'the god' not as a singular Supreme Being, but instead as *a species of agency*, in the same way that we find 'the gods' described in the *NE* (discussed on page 41). In this light we can thus consider the above passage from the *Metaphysics* concerning god, along with the preceding paragraph concerning the finer details of contemplation, as expressing nothing more than the position that, while contemplation is our best activity, we embodied humans cannot do it continuously, whereas the disembodied gods clearly can, this being all that they do and all that they are.

God as an Exemplar of Intellectual Activity:

In considering the structure of this discussion in the *Metaphysics* concerning god *qua species of agency* as it has now been reinterpreted, it is interesting to also note the parallels one observes between the structure of the broader argument here resulting in this depiction of god, and the structure of an argument concerning contemplation and the gods Aristotle puts forward in Book X, Chapter VIII of the *NE*. In the corresponding passages from the *Metaphysics* Aristotle first discusses the finer details of contemplation, and how we can understand this as the best and most pleasant activity, and thus characteristic of the best human life, before going on to discuss how god/the gods are always engaged in this activity. In the corresponding *NE* passage we also find Aristotle, having come to the end of a discussion concerning contemplation as the best human activity, going on to discuss how this corresponds to the only activity we can reasonably attribute to the gods, repeated as follows:

*"...anything to do with actions would appear petty and unworthy of the gods. [...] Nevertheless, everyone assumes that they are at least alive and therefore engage in activity [...]. So if we remove from a living being the possibility of action, and furthermore the very possibility of producing anything, what is left apart from contemplation? So the god's activity, which is superior in blessedness, will be contemplative; and therefore the human activity most akin to this is the most conducive to happiness. [...] But because the happy person is human, he will also need external prosperity; for human nature is not self-sufficient for contemplation, but the body must be healthy and provided with food and other care."*²⁵¹

Here we find Aristotle (to paraphrase our earlier discussion concerning this passage on Pg. 41) discussing how the gods, as incorporeal beings and thus distinct from mere humans, can remain continuously engaged in action and that contemplation is the only activity we can reasonably attribute to them, according to which we should thus expect the gods to be perpetually engaged in contemplation, thus mirroring the statement in the *Metaphysics* that:

²⁵¹ *NE*, Book X, Chapter VIII, 1178b18-35, Pg. 198.

“...the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.”²⁵²

We can thus understand this conception of god shared by the *NE* and the *Metaphysics* as resembling, as earlier discussed (Pg. 41), a kind of minimalist theology, in which the gods are understood as existing entirely separately from our own corporeal realm and spending their eternal lives continually engaged in theoretical thought, thus allowing us to consider them as no less than *exemplars of intellectual activity*.

Reflecting on how, through the activity of contemplation, one partakes in the principle of unmoved movement and how one’s contemplative part in fact becomes its object, we can thus *also* say that these minimalist gods, as eternal contemplators, will always consist in these divine objects, and thus always constitute (in total since there is nothing else to these agents apart from their contemplative actuality), eternally actual, unmixed, unchanging, unmoved movers.

In the *Metaphysics* we thus find a parallel argument to that put forward in the *NE*, but with the addition of two points we can understand as falling outside of the primarily ethical scope of the *NE*. In the *Metaphysics* account Aristotle adds, firstly, how the objects of contemplation function as first principles of efficient causality, i.e. as eternally actually, unmixed, unchanging, unmoved movers, and secondly, how when one contemplates, one’s contemplative capacity becomes its object (and thus an unmoved mover). At the core of Aristotle’s metaphysics we thus find what can be understood as the deeper technical foundations of his ethics, concerning details which are, however, of absolutely no use to a working politician, and which therefore have no place in a purely ethical text.

With respect then to these parallel discussions concerning the god(s), it thus appears in both cases that by comparing the eternally contemplating nature of the gods with the best part of human life, Aristotle is simply making use of the gods as *exemplars of contemplation*, representing *the unobtainable perfection of human life* and living the life ‘*such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy but for a short time*’.

Placing the Intellectual Exemplar God of the *Metaphysics* and *NE* back into the *EE*:

Recalling the broader discussion taking place before the word ‘god’ first appears in the final passages of the *EE*, we found Aristotle there describing how we can understand the two distinct forms of governing principle (the first being the final end that one aims to achieve, e.g. health, the second the practical guidelines one follows in order to get there, e.g. medicine), before then applying this to the intellect. Considering ‘the god’ in this context as constituting no more than an exemplar of contemplation, as earlier discussed, it becomes entirely straightforward to understand it as constituting a kind of broader final end of human life, representing *the governing principle qua exemplar state of the human intellectual soul*, in the sense of it being the ideal state we should aim for and which we most nearly achieve when we contemplate.

Recalling Aristotle’s contention in the *NE* that in living the life of contemplation “...someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him...”²⁵³, by which we take it that a part of the human soul becomes god-like when we contemplate, we would appear to have reason to understand this ‘*intellectual exemplar god*’ as effectively

²⁵² *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072b24-31, Pg. 1695.

²⁵³ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b27-28, Pg. 196.

representing 'human being qua divinity', thus constituting a more realistic final end for us to aim for and to plausibly achieve.

Replacing 'the god' with 'human being qua divinity' in the corresponding passage in the *EE* thus gives us the following:

"Thus it is with the speculative (part). For [human being qua divinity] is a governor not in a prescriptive fashion, but it is that for which practical wisdom prescribes (but that for which is of two sorts—they have been distinguished elsewhere— since [human being qua divinity] is in need of nothing). So if some choice and possession of natural goods—either goods of the body or money or of friends or the other goods—will most produce the speculation of the [human being qua divinity], that is the best, and that is the finest limit; but whatever, whether through deficiency or excess, hinders the service and speculation of the [human being qua divinity], is bad."

5. Reconciling the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics (and On the Soul, the Physics and the Metaphysics):

After much tangential discussion drawn from a broad sweep across Aristotle's corpus we have thus come full circle, returning to the conclusion concerning the best human life originally identified in the *NE*, but with this position now more fully elaborated, including the additional non-ethical details identified in these other texts.

A brief summary of the key points contained within this broader view along with their respective sources can thus be given as follows:

From the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

- Contemplation is the activity of our best element and is thus characteristic of our best life.
- The gods have no need for rest or for practical action, so all we can really understand them as ever doing is contemplating, continuously and forever.
- The gods thus stand as exemplars of disembodied intellectual agency and thus as exemplars for the contemplative part of the human soul.

From *On the Soul*:

- The contemplative part of one's soul is something real only when one contemplates, otherwise constituting no more than a capacity.
- Objects of contemplation are unmixed with matter and exist eternally, separate from the activity of thought itself.
- When one contemplates one's contemplative part becomes one of these objects, i.e. one's contemplative part becomes an unmixed and eternal object of thought.

From the *Physics*:

- In order for the prime mover of the heavens to be infinitely active it must have no magnitude and be therefore unmixed with matter.

From the *Metaphysics*:

- The first principle of efficient causality must be an unmoved mover.
- The prime mover of the heavens is such a mover and therefore an eternally active, unmixed, unmoved mover.

- Objects of thought cause motion without themselves being moved, therefore constituting a second form of the first principle of efficient causality or simply a second form of unmoved mover.
- Objects of thought concerning final ends are unchanging and thus constitute unchanging unmoved movers.
- Objects of contemplation are also unchanging but are additionally unmixed, thus constituting a second species (alongside the prime mover of the heavens) of unchanging (viz. eternally actual), unmixed, unmoved movers.
- When one contemplates one's contemplative part, in becoming an object of contemplation, thus becomes an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover.
- When one contemplates one thus partakes directly in the nature of the first principle of efficient causality, in the sense that one actually becomes, in part, one of these things.
- The living disembodied gods are eternally and exclusively engaged in the activity of contemplation.
- The gods thus consist entirely in objects of contemplation, and thus constitute, in their entirety of eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved movers.
- The gods thus share many attributes with the prime mover of the heavens, itself an eternally actual, unmixed, unmoved mover, but they are not the same thing.
- One should feel compelled to free one's self from one's practical concerns, thus affording time for leisure and thus time to emulate the leisurely existence of the gods at which point one will be free to engage in the most pleasurable activity of contemplation.

From the *Eudemian Ethics*:

- A human being is composed of a thing that governs (one's intellect) and a thing that is governed (one's body and sub-rational soul).
- These parts each have their own governing principles, which are of two sorts: the first being each part's ideal state or exemplar, the second being the practical guidelines for achieving this exemplar state.
- The ideal state for one's body and sub-rational soul is defined by human health and being well habituated, and that they are at rest.
- The ideal state for one's intellect is effectively defined by the gods, in the sense that these divine beings represent exemplars of intellectual activity, being eternally engaged in the activity of contemplation.
- One should utilise character virtue, practical wisdom, and the natural goods in order to afford oneself time to emulate this divine state of contemplation.
- The achievement of this divine state constitutes the ultimate limit for nobility (i.e. one's possession of virtue and performance of virtuous acts) and for one's possession of the natural goods.

Regarding Aristotle's conception of the best human life, we can now draw a hybrid conclusion from the *Metaphysics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, as follows:

Metaphysics: "...the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best."²⁵⁴

Nicomachean Ethics: "If the intellect, then, is something divine compared with the human being, the life in accordance with it will also be divine compared with human life. But we ought not to listen to those who exhort us, because we are human, to think of human things, or because we are mortal, think of mortal things."

²⁵⁴ *Metaphysics*, Lambda, Chapter 7, 1072b22-24. Pg. 1695.

We ought rather to take on immortality as much as possible, and do all that we can to live in accordance with the highest element within us; for even if its bulk is small, in its power and value it far exceeds everything."²⁵⁵

Eudemian Ethics: "So if some choice and possession of natural goods [...] will most produce the speculation of the god, that is the best, and that is the finest limit,"²⁵⁶ (now read as: 'So if some choice and possession of natural goods will most produce the state of divine contemplation, that is the best, and that is the finest limit.')

6. What to make of all of this in the modern context:

We can understand one of the central aims within Aristotle's broader philosophical project to have been the development a naturalistic understanding of the world, in the sense of avoiding, as much as possible, the need to appeal to mythological suppositions in making sense of all that we can perceive, relying instead only on what is reliably demonstrable or logically necessary (or at least logically parsimonious) in the development of his extensive worldview. Many of the significant differences between the outcome of his work and those of the many similarly scientific philosophical investigations taking place today will therefore be due simply to the vastly greater body of demonstrable facts about the world we now have at our disposal. It would thus be reasonable to understand our modern naturalistic view of the world as representing no more than a logical extension, in the light of these new facts, of Aristotle's less informed but similarly rigorous equivalent. In what follows I will attempt to give an account of this extension, by adding to Aristotle's conception of the best human life as it has now been interpreted, two key aspects of our modern knowledge that would likely have further informed Aristotle's own worldview, had he known about them in his own time. In the light of these additional elements I will then attempt to develop a convincing modern synthesis of Aristotle's ancient position.

What we know now:

To begin with, with specific regard to objects of contemplation, despite the significant advances made in all fields of knowledge since Aristotle's time, one thing would appear to have actually become less certain, namely how close we are to knowing anything that is absolutely and universally true – as Aristotle's objects of contemplation are understood to be. It is instead the case that human understanding remains restricted by, amongst other things, the precision with which we can perceive and measure the universe and our capacity to comprehend these observations. Accordingly, we are justified in applying a *reasonable* sense of scepticism towards all of our purported knowledge. As a result of the slowly improving nature of the methods at our disposal for making sense of it all, our knowledge thus advances in an organic and evolutionary manner, with every new revolution in thought becoming eventually consumed by some further revolution, as better ideas and investigative techniques come to the fore. As such, the assertion that through the act of contemplation one partakes in objects of thought that are immortal and eternal would itself appear to be some distance from an immortal and eternal truth. A more reasonable position, in light of our modern scepticism, is thus that when one contemplates, one simply partakes in the *current leading-edge of thought*, partaking of, and possibly adding to, the current state of our continually evolving body of knowledge.

In spite of this reasonable modern scepticism, what remains as central to our modern conception of contemplative thought, as it is to Aristotle's more idealistic conception, is the fundamental

²⁵⁵ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1177b30-1178a1, Pg. 196.

²⁵⁶ *EE*, Book 8, Chapter 3, 1249b17-18, Pg. 42.

difference we observe between the *quasi-universal* objects of contemplative thought and the *merely-particular* variety associated with practical reasoning. While one might reasonably assert that much of our most revered scientific knowledge is not in fact *universally* applicable, there remains a clear distinction between such knowledge and the kind of knowledge one derives from a particular observation made at a particular time and place, namely the difference between *short-term or immediate* knowledge and what we might consider *longer-term* knowledge. With regards, then, to '*partaking in the divine*' and '*taking on immortality*', as Aristotle would have us do in performing our best and most pleasurable activity, it is now more realistic to assert that we should simply aim to partake *in the foreseeable future*, in the sense of directing one's mind to the consideration of thoughts concerning phenomena that are not simply fleeting and random, but those which will instead hold true *for the foreseeable future*, under a vast majority of circumstances (or at least more so than for any competing view). According to this modern pragmatic and sceptical view, objects of contemplation can thus be better understood as objects of thought which, in the light of humankind's current level of precision and comprehension, will likely remain our closest approximation to the absolute truth of the Universe as it 'actually' is, *for the foreseeable future* (but probably not forever).

Secondly, with regards to our best activity, we now understand from the advances made in evolutionary theory, that every particular species of existent life will, of necessity, possess some kind of ability or function from which it derives some kind of unique *competitive advantage*, allowing it to out-compete or better coexist with other species, or simply go on living within its particular environmental niche. Where a species possesses a range of abilities, such as humanity and our closest relatives certainly do, it will be the species' unique ability, setting it apart from any other similar relative, from which it will derive its competitive advantage. In addition, one expects that for a pleasure-experiencing (viz. positive feedback) species such as we certainly are, if a particular ability does indeed offer one's species a significant competitive advantage over one's nearest competitors, then one's genes will have selected for whatever traits function to best generate such feedback when one utilises one's competitive advantage producing ability well. One would thus expect the most definitively human activity to generate significant pleasure, in order that we should find ourselves drawn to perform this activity whenever possible.

Human beings clearly share many attributes with many other animal species, in particular those of our closest relatives in the Hominid family (and, presumably, those of the 'missing link' variety which we have so thoroughly annihilated). In many respects we are in fact at a distinct *competitive disadvantage* with regards to many of these shared attributes, being slower and weaker in nearly every respect. There remains, however, one thing that we do obviously possess in far greater proportion than any of these other forms of life, including those of our closest relatives, namely our cognitive faculty.

A Modern Synthesis of Aristotle's Best Human Life:

In the light of the above, a modern synthesis of Aristotle's conception of the best life can be initially sketched in the following three points which will then be further elaborated on in turn. To begin with, mankind's competitive advantage is derived primarily from our ability to understand long term (viz. quasi-universal) patterns and effects, allowing us to predict and plan for the future with far greater proficiency than any other species. We would thus expect the best and most pleasant human life to be characterised by one's participation in such understanding. Secondly, the most satisfying human life will not be one in which one merely learns of such long term concepts from one's peers, but rather that in which one constructively contributes to their kind – and for no specifically practical reason, but simply because this is an activity that a human being characteristically takes immense pleasure in performing. Such a creative exercise will thus allow one to pleurably *partake in the foreseeable future*, in as much as any powerful new concept within an evolving system will remain

so, but only for so long. Thirdly, the goodness of one's intellectual achievements should thus be determined primarily by their *durability*, relating to the distance into the future we might reasonably expect them to persist. This coefficient of durability will thus render any such intellectual achievement dependent on its ongoing application, in which case an agent's work which, in their own lifetime may have appeared profoundly important and progressive, but after their passing was lost or found to be entirely baseless, would reflect negatively on the goodness of their life, albeit after the fact.

The three points just sketched can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Mankind's competitive advantage is based on the greater durability or universality of our reasoning.
- 2) The best human life will thus be characterised by one's participation in longer term reasoning, not merely in the sense of learning or of coming up with practically useful concepts, but simply in one's contributing to this broad field for its own sake – because this is what human beings do.
- 3) The goodness of one's intellectual achievements (and one's life as a human) will thus be based on their durability.

From these three points we can thus derive a kind of measurement for the goodness of any particular cognitive activity, in the sense that any such activity manifesting a greater reach into the future would count as inherently better than any correspondingly shorter termed activity. This correlates roughly with the distinction Aristotle draws between universal and particular knowledge, but with this distinction now recast instead as a continuum, relating to the durability of one's intellectual achievements, having no immortal or eternal extreme, instead possessing just an asymptotic relationship to this more idealised conception of divine and eternal knowledge. In what follows these three points will be further elaborated on in turn.

Mankind's Competitive Advantage and the Aristotelian Conception of the Best Human Life we can derive from it:

In the *NE* we have it from Aristotle that the best human life will be that in accordance with our intellect, representing the life most naturally or characteristically human, as follows:

*"And what we said above will apply here as well: what is proper to each thing is by nature best and pleasantest for it; for a human being, therefore, the life in accordance with intellect is best and pleasantest, since this, more than anything else, constitutes humanity. So this life will also be the happiest."*²⁵⁷

We also have it from him that the truly flourishing human life will, accordingly, have the activity of contemplation as its primary focus, discussed as follows:

*"...none of the other animals is happy, because they have no share at all in contemplation. Happiness, then, extends as far as contemplation, and the more contemplation there is in one's life, the happier one is, not incidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation, since this is honourable in itself."*²⁵⁸

We thus have it from Aristotle that, amongst the animals, humankind possesses the unique and godlike capacity for contemplation, which, rather fortuitously picks out *the capacity from which we*

²⁵⁷ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 7, 1178a5-8, Pg. 196.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 9, 1178b27-31, Pg. 198.

derive our competitive advantage and, it may be thought, *supremacy*, over all other forms of earthly life.

Many other animals clearly possess the capacity to reason to some degree, and to remember things and realise dangers as they approach. What clearly sets us apart from these other 'thinking' beings is the extent to which we can do this, to the point that the best of our knowledge can be understood as fitting into an entirely different category from that possessed by any other animal, namely that of universals. We can understand all animals as being able to realise when they are hungry and to subsequently search for nourishment. Many other animals are even able to remember where certain reliable sources of food are to be found and thus repeatedly return to these same places, thus ensuring the continued survival of their kind. Mankind, by contrast, is able to comprehend far more than these merely particular spatial features, for we possess the capacity to understand the more universal factors in play in such situations, namely the 'whys' and 'hows' of nourishment, agriculture, weather, seasons, tides, etc. With this 'universal' knowledge we are subsequently able to harness these understood factors in a well-reasoned and predictable fashion, enabling us to design products and systems, such as domesticated crops and farms, that allow us to bypass the relatively random temporal and spatial distributions in which we find nourishment in nature and thus guaranteeing, as far as is 'humanly' possible, the continuation of our species.

Our unique ability to comprehend universal or long term knowledge thus allows us to *predict the future* and hence *plan and design* for it, with these advanced cognitive features clearly constituting those which have allowed us to design and build the many tools and weapons with which we have overcome the many challenges presented to us by the natural world, thereby enabling our near-ubiquity upon the Earth.

We can thus understand the fundamental difference between the knowledge we possess and whatever we understand any other animals as possessing, as simply the durability and reach of this knowledge, in the sense that human kind, uniquely amongst the animals, is able partake in longer term knowledge, or that which will hold true *for the foreseeable future*.

A Non-Specific Ability:

This capacity for long term intellectual activity will not have evolved to solve any particular problem, for whilst any initial benefit derived from such intellectual prowess may have manifested itself in our ability to understand the seasonal variations of food sources, thus allowing our early nomadic ancestors to flourish, the intellectual faculty that allowed for such understanding would surely have evolved as no more than a *fortuitous* ability to predict and understand long term factors, regardless of what they actually are. Accordingly, we should not expect the pleasures derived from such intellectual activities to be limited to only those from which results some demonstrable increase in our survival chances, for we should instead expect such pleasure to be generated from *good intellectual endeavour of this type in general*, with the amount of pleasure experienced based simply on the longevity the results would be expected to manifest. This sense of longevity or durability thus constitutes the aspect our intellectual activity that both determines its goodness and provides us with our greatest competitive advantage.

With respect to our positive and negative feedback mechanisms (i.e. pleasure and pain), we should also expect that possession of such an intellectual capacity to cause within us the very opposite of pleasure in the face of any significant and long-term unexplained phenomena. Despite the negative connotations of this point, we can reasonably understand it as being because of such pain, alongside the corresponding pleasure we derive from successful intellectual endeavour, that our seemingly limitless hunger for knowledge and understanding, relating to even the most obscure but enduring intellectual puzzles, has resulted. Recalling the passage from the *NE* above where we were told that

*"...the more contemplation there is in one's life, the happier one is, not incidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation..."*²⁵⁹, we thus take it that for long term thinkers, such as we are, the development of long term understanding is simply *good in itself*, for we take pleasure in this activity for no greater reason than the simple fact that *contemplators are what we are*.

The characteristically human activity from which we draw out competitive advantage can thus be characterised as: 'coming up with new facts and ideas that will likely persist into the foreseeable future, regardless of their practical relevance'.

Partaking in the Foreseeable Future:

According to the evolving nature of our knowledge and ideas, one would expect, in addition to the immense pleasure drawn from the isolation of some new concept that will likely hold true for the foreseeable future, that one would also experience pleasure in understanding the knowledge and ideas already conceived of by others. In this sense one should expect to be propelled by one's own inquisitive nature, through the existing body of knowledge, and onwards towards the cutting edge of human understanding and creative potential, possibly building up enough momentum to find oneself propelled over the current threshold and into one's own intellectual niche – and henceforth immortalised, *for the foreseeable future at least*.

We can thus distinguish two forms of intellectual activity that we will be characteristically involved in. Firstly, that in which one partakes in the existing cutting edge of understanding by simply learning what is already known, and secondly, that in which one comes up with something new, expanding this existing boundary. This dual activity thus contrasts with Aristotle's more idealistic conception of contemplation, according to which when one contemplates, one partakes in eternal and unchanging truths, in which case there would no difference between the act of uncovering a new truth and of simply understanding what is already known, for in both cases one is merely becoming aware of something that already exists. Applying our modern intellectual scepticism to this ancient conception of contemplation, and thus not considering it in such idealistic terms, we can instead understand this activity as a kind of creative and evolving process in which we do in fact observe a clear distinction between the intellectual activity in which one advances the limit of human understanding, and that in which one merely approaches this limit, with the first, understandably, generating the greater share of pleasure.

Due Diligence for One's Intellectual Achievements:

In order to experience the pleasure corresponding to the act of having partaken in the foreseeable future, it will be fundamentally important that one is able to actually realise that one has achieved as such. It thus follows that in order for a reasonable person to experience this pleasure it will be necessary for them to have performed a kind of due diligence with regards to their own novel ideas, therein testing them in the most rigorous intellectual domains and against the strongest competition available. It is only after such rigorous intellectual testing that one could be reasonably convinced that one's ideas are in fact novel and important, and thus likely to persist into the foreseeable future, in which case one would be expected to experience the corresponding pleasure and satisfaction this brings. We can imagine the example of a scientist, trapped alone on a desert island, but who nonetheless manages to come up with some grand unifying theory for physics. In this environment such an agent would, however, have no outlet for this profound knowledge, nor any ability to test it against the world's greatest scientific minds, or, more importantly, to propagate this understanding into the foreseeable future. Such an agent will obviously take significant pleasure in having come up with such a theory, but the greater satisfaction would have come from seeing this

²⁵⁹ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 9, 1178b30-31, Pg. 198.

theory out-compete all other contenders on the battlefield of science, and from having it thereby propelled into the future. One might expect such a brilliant scientist to have, nonetheless, done their best to immortalise their thoughts, in the form of a stone engraving or whatever other recording implements they might have at their disposal or that they may well invent on the spot, in order to partake, if only tenuously, in the foreseeable future.

Although I have so far only related this '*partaking in the foreseeable future*' conception of human intellectual endeavour to the body of scientific knowledge mankind possesses, we need not consider it as having such a narrow focus, for there is obviously a far broader range of similarly evolving, serious and creative intellectual enterprises that we involve ourselves with. The creative arts, for example, present us with a field of endeavour that is, by its very nature, in a constant state of flux, in which case it becomes even less reasonable to suggest that anyone working in such a field would have ever partaken in immortality. It is, however, surely reasonable to suggest that a particularly successful artist will have partaken in the foreseeable future, for there are clearly old and even ancient masterpieces in arts that remain relevant even in our times, although it remains laughable to suggest that any particular work of art could ever represent the absolute pinnacle of the form and thereby remain eternally relevant. Now despite this lack of eternality one can, however, quite clearly apply the attribute of '*great for the foreseeable future*' to any exceptional work of art that one comes across. Many years later such an attribution may seem wholly misplaced, such is the rapidly evolving nature of this field of endeavour, but at any point any particular piece of art may add something novel, relevant and important to the wider body of art, and one expects the pleasures associated with good art to be associated with this kind niche filling relevant novelty.

In addition to the creative arts, practical innovation or simply 'inventing' also fits well into this conceptual structure. For one imagines there to be a certain amount of pleasure associated with the creation of a solution to some immediately pressing practical problem, but an even greater sense of pleasure to be derived from the development of some kind of novel gadget that will likely remain relevant and useful *for the foreseeable future*.

Out of these two examples of intellectual achievement we can in fact distinguish a second form of evolutionary system, distinct from the form of 'improve and replace' one typically draws from the term 'survival of the fittest', but in which we can also partake in the foreseeable future. This second form is that in which, rather than simply replacing something already in the system, one instead develops something new which *adds* to this existing body. We can understand this 'additive' type of evolution as a fundamental feature of biological evolution as we see it on Earth, for if every new species of life had simply replaced the last, there would only ever have been one form of life present on earth, or perhaps just the latest form along with the former which it is in the process of replacing. In this light we can better understand the constant state of flux in which we find the world or art, (and other such forms of intellectual endeavour) not in the sense that old art is constantly being replaced by the new, but rather that because of the basically limitless nature of what can be considered good art, there is a correspondingly limitless amount of work that can be done in this field without ever necessarily rendering any prior artwork obsolete.

To have partaken in the foreseeable future does not, therefore, necessarily mean that one will have advanced any particular branch of one's field of interest away from its former state, for one might simply have added to this existing position, in the sense of broadening or diversifying one's field of interest, instead of simply pushing it on in a necessarily destructive manner. In this respect we can understand there as being no logical end to such bodies of work, no point at which, for example, the world of art could ever be considered complete, for there will always more to be added and to be done. But in spite of this limitless nature we need not conflate such intellectual endeavour with any sense of futility, for such activity is done simply for its own sake.

In a more general sense, we can observe that practically any field of serious and creative human intellectual activity will fit into this conceptual structure, in which the inherent goodness and corresponding pleasure and satisfaction derived from one's efforts will be determined primarily by the durability of one's achievements. I will henceforth refer to this conception of our uniquely human nature, elaborated more broadly as our partaking in the foreseeable future in any fields of intellectual endeavour, as the concept of 'creativityism'.

Partaking in an 'Immortal' Species of Intellectual Endeavour:

Returning briefly to Aristotle's corpus, it is instructive to note the way in which he describes the other animals as also partaking in the divine, but through an activity that is quite distinct from any type of intellectual endeavour, relating instead to the way a particular species itself remains immortal, as follows:

*"...the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatsoever their nature renders possible."*²⁶⁰

Here we see Aristotle describing how by simply prolonging the existence of one's (assumed immortal) species, one partakes in an eternal, and hence divine, chain of activity. We might understand this chain as analogous to the way in which one participates in a relay race, for it matters little who actually crosses the finish line in such an exercise, only that the individual member of one's team each contribute positively to the overall effort. In this light we can understand the act of procreation as representing a kind of contribution to such an immensely long (for in modern times we understand no species as being necessarily immortal) relay race, with each contributor receiving and subsequently passing on the baton of responsibility for the continued existence of their kind. Relating this notion of an seemingly unending relay race to the continually evolving bodies of intellectual endeavour described above, we can see that by contributing to any such body of work, one will not only have contributed some discrete intellectual object that will persist into the foreseeable future, but will also have contributed to a larger body of work that will itself likely endure to a much greater degree. We can understand such a body of work as representing the *particular kind of evolution* one contributes to, and we can understand such evolving kinds as being far more durable than any discrete contribution made to them. Considering Newton's wonderful metaphor in which he describes himself as having been standing on the shoulders of giants, we might understand this as reflecting the fact that in making such significant and long-lived intellectual advances as he clearly did, he was in fact contributing to an much more long-lived strand of prior intellectual endeavour that we might understand, not in the sense of a giant, but as representative of the summation of the many contributions made by many normal sized individuals – which would, nonetheless, resemble something of immense magnitude.

In this we find ourselves returned somewhat to the way in which Aristotle describes how through our highest intellectual ability we are able to partake in things immortal and divine, but understood now in the sense that rather than any particular item that one might have had the fortune of originating being immortal and divine, it is instead one's *particular field of endeavour*, in the sense of an evolving body of work that is itself, while not immortal, certainly very long lived. In this sense we might say that, while one's own particular intellectual achievements are likely doomed to irrelevancy at some point in the not too distant future, the contribution these achievements represent live on in the continued existence and progression of the broader field of intellectual endeavour. We can thus

²⁶⁰ *On the Soul*, Book II, Chapter 4, 415a28-415b1, Pg. 661.

say that although excellent intellectual activity may, on the surface, allow one to only partake in the foreseeable future through whatever discrete achievements one makes, it is also the case that through such a contribution one also partakes in the broader field of intellectual endeavour, itself as near to immortal as anything can be. We speak quite naturally of Shakespeare's 'immortal lines', regardless of the near certainty that they will not in fact live on for all time and eternity (for it would seem unlikely that even our universe will last this long). As such, we can understand this sense of immortality, not in the sense of representing a mere empty term of endearment aimed at this long-dead author's works, but as instead indicating the profound intellectual achievement encapsulated therein, which we have gone to great lengths to sustain and propagate. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare himself may have had this kind of *contingent immortality* in mind when writing the following fantastically confident couplet we find in his *Sonnet 18*, "*Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day?*":

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

The continued relevance of these lines, more than four centuries after their writing, stands as compelling evidence for their accuracy.

Judgement after the Fact:

Recalling the earlier point that the goodness of one's intellectual activity should be judged by the durability of one's achievements, in the above concept of the evolving body of work we can now also identify a second coefficient for such judgement, drawn not from the durability of one's discrete achievements, but from the durability of the evolving system one contributes to. We thus have reason to consider a contribution one makes that is itself very quickly overtaken *in a positive light* if it has, nonetheless, advanced some field of endeavour which will itself remain relevant for a much longer period. Conversely, we might also consider a contribution that is long lived, but which adds to a field of endeavour that eventually becomes discredited, as having less goodness because of the failings of the particular branch that that was contributed to, rather than anything to do with the durability of the discrete contribution itself.

By extending this sense of the goodness of one's intellectual achievements (and thus one's goodness as a human being in general) to include the durability of the evolving body one contributes to, one begins to see a correlation between this point and the concern expressed by Aristotle's in the *NE* with regards to how the goodness of one's life might be reversed in the face of events that occur after one's death. Aristotle contends that "*...both good and evil are thought to happen to a dead person, since they can happen to a person who is alive but not aware of them.*"²⁶¹ In this regards we can now say that an agent who might have had good reason to think that their life's work would remain relevant and important for years to come and who enjoyed the pleasures associated with good intellectual activity, but whose work was discredited immediately after their passing, should be considered in a poorer light, or at least as less-blessed, than an agent who might have experienced similar successes and pleasures in their life, but whose work and the body they contributed to did in fact endure into the distant future. Conversely, we should expect an agent whose work was thought of in their own lifetime as unimportant and pointless, but which became, after the agent's passing, the basis of some preeminent field of intellectual endeavour, to be considered in a correspondingly better light, due to events thus occurring after their death. We can thus contend that the goodness of one's life, at least under the auspices of creativity-ism, will be dependent on both the durability of one's contributions, and the durability of the evolutionary thread of intellectual endeavour one

²⁶¹ *NE*, Book I, Chapter 10, 1100a17-20, Pg. 16.

contributes to, with these factors thus having the potential to extend well beyond the temporal limits of one's own life.

We might understand this kind of after-the-fact demotion of goodness as representing a most reasonable fear for those who contribute to such fields of intellectual endeavour. For it would be rather horrific if the work one might have spent one's entire life developing, and which looked certain to remain relevant for years to come, were to become suddenly and fatally discredited the moment one passes away.

This All Sounds Too Simple:

One could argue that this concept of partaking in the foreseeable future or creativity-ism amounts to no more than the contention that one should aim to leave some kind of legacy, in which case it would represent so obvious a claim as to render it meaningless. Against this we can argue that if, in one's attempts to develop a more accurate conception of the best human life, one comes up with something that aligns closely with certain common intuitions in this regard, we should not consider this as indicating any kind of fault in one's conclusions, for any theory concerning the best human life should centrally aim to give a full account of such intuitions, for better or for worse.

It may indeed be the case that many other accounts of the best human life will in fact have drawn on the same intuitions on which this concept of creativity-ism is itself founded. The abhorrence of Nietzsche's Übermensch for the mundane and contented life of the masses and the dogma to which they cling, would seem to quite closely resonate with the kind of life in which one is instead determined to fully exercise one's intellectual capacity and to progress some field of creative intellectual output, and in doing so partake in the foreseeable future of some field of 'divine' human endeavour, thus unshackling oneself from the inertia of the past. At any rate, in the concept of creativityism we find a straight forward corollary of Aristotle's more idealistic assertion that we should wish to partake in the eternal and divine.

One Final Thought on Aristotle's Overall Aim in the Ethics:

Aristotle's primary aim in the development of his Ethics is typically understood as having been to provide his students, as future legislators, with the knowledge necessary for them to go on in their political careers to improve the lives of their subjects and to create a better society. In light of his particular interest in the fate of the Spartans, however, and in the many other political systems he analysed, we have reason to consider there to have been an additional, larger and more important, aim in play for him in these studies. For whilst it is certainly important that one makes one's society as good as it can be, a more pressing concern would surely be the *continuation* of one's society, and not only of the future generations of human beings, but also of what might be termed the 'intellectual goodness' contained within, the knowledge, the works of art, or more broadly, the many ongoing species of intellectual achievement we contribute to, the loss of which we might consider as similarly tragic to a great loss of human life. With regards, then, to the ancient Greek society Aristotle inhabited, we could say that a central aim of his efforts to educate the future legislators of this state (and anyone else who might have taken a serious interest) would have been to, insofar as he could, ensure the continued survival of the civilisation in which his intellect had been nurtured and allowed to flourish. We find this point most clearly elucidated by Aristotle in Book 1, Chapter 2 of the *NE*, as follows (my emphasis):

*"For even if the good is the same for an individual as for a city, that of the city is obviously a greater and more complete thing to obtain **and preserve**. For while the good of an individual is a desirable*

thing, what is good for a people or for cities is a nobler and more godlike thing. Our enquiry, then, is a kind of political science, since these are the ends it is aiming at."²⁶²

While we can consider it the case that the ongoing survival of any particular field of intellectual endeavour remains dependent on the continued presence of people willing to promote and support such work, at a broader level we can also understand the survival of any body of intellectual work, or of any human achievement in general, to be dependent, in some form, on the ongoing survival of the civilisation from which it arose. It would be reasonable to consider Aristotle as having been greatly concerned with any potentially unsustainable elements of Greek society, not just for the sake of the society itself, but also for the sake of the great intellectual achievement contained within it. We might understand this concern as similar to that one might hold for the survival of one's home under threat from a nearby forest fire, a concern held not simply for the sake of the home itself, but for the sake of all that the home contains and represents.

If the ongoing survival of one's most divine enterprise is contingent on the ongoing survival of one's society, the maintenance of one's society would represent just as important a concern as the maintenance of this work. Against this position, one might make the observation that in spite of the eventual collapse of Ancient Greek civilisation, we do appear to have in our possession a significant proportion of their cultural output and that this great body of work still functions to enrich our lives today. This being the case, one could argue that the survival of Greek society was not entirely necessary to the survival of, for example, Aristotle's own work. In response we can assert that it would obviously have been a far greater thing had this Ancient society persisted and adapted to a more sustainable form, such that the immense intellectual activity going on within it would have continued, perhaps to the present day, to have no doubt reached an even greater level of progress than we presently enjoy.

Considering our modern situation, we do in fact find ourselves faced with the very same problem Aristotle was attempting to solve, in the sense of our need to develop and propagate a more convincing account of the best human life in order to ensure the stability and sustainability of our civilisation. In addition to Aristotle's probable concern that Athens would likely collapse if its legislators were unable to inculcate intellectual and character virtue into both themselves and their subjects, in modern times we are now faced with the additional worry that by failing to achieve this most noble and godlike end, we will likely end up rendering vast tracts of the Earth uninhabitable, or at the very least reach a point where life as we know it is no longer tenable. The significant advances made by human civilisation since Aristotle's time, whereby our influence now extends over every square inch of the earth, have also brought us rather frightfully near to the point where we may find ourselves standing quite literally on the brink of exhausting all of the Earth's resources, or at least those that are most useful to human life.

It is fortunately not the case that we are simply walking blindfolded to our own demise, however, for we surely possess the diversity of knowledge, resources, and technology to develop a sustainable society without incurring any great tragedy. In addition to this rather non-specific source of optimism, we might also understand this life of intellectual endeavour which has now been synthesised from Aristotle's ancient conception, as representing something of antithesis to the present all pervasive consumer lifestyle paradigm which seems, more than anything else, to be the root cause of our profligate destruction of the world's resources. We might therefore expect that the widespread adoption of something resembling this intellectual lifestyle would function to significantly reduce this consumption and to perhaps even return it to a sustainable level.

²⁶² NE, Book I, Chapter 2, 1094b7-12, Pg. 4.

An additional source of optimism can be identified in the fact that human birth rates, understood as perhaps a second fundamental cause of our profligate consumption, are measurably lower in regions where people have access to education, even that of basic literacy. This being the case we would have reason to correlate the increased access to intellectual endeavour (as one form of our participation in the divine according to Aristotle) to a decreased instance of procreation (as a second form of our participation in the divine on Aristotle's view). Recalling Aristotle's contention in this regard that: "...the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatsoever their nature renders possible."²⁶³ We can now also say that in addition to being limited by what our nature allows in our participation in the divine, we are also limited by our *understanding* in this respect, in the sense that the best life we can aim for will only ever be the best life we have conceived of. Ignorance in this regard would thus have the effect of rendering the truly good life entirely inaccessible. Whatever less-informed conception of the good life one does possess will be adopted and aimed for nonetheless, however, such that as we learn more and more about human life, and come to realise far greater ways of living it, these better ways will become adopted naturally – for why would one choose not to live a better life if such a choice were available?

We can therefore consider it doubly important that we finally finish, or at least continue to advance, Aristotle's project of developing a more complete "...philosophy of humanity..."²⁶⁴, and to perhaps figure out, once and for all, what the best human life really consists in. For if there is such a thing, and if it requires, as Aristotle argues, far less of the material goods than one might imagine, and if it might also offer us a better option than mere procreation for 'partaking in the divine', then it would be certainly worth giving this life a go, if for no greater reason than to see if it does indeed represent a far more sustainable option than our current paradigm. For instead of a single city-state or nation being dependent on this understanding for its continued survival, mankind has now reached a point where the entire planet, or at least the entirety of our near-ubiquitous modern civilisation, has become dependent on the development of a better understanding of the best human life, for no lesser reason than to ensure the survival of human life as we know it. The pursuit of a better conception of happiness is thus no merely academic exercise.

²⁶³ *On the Soul*, Book 2, Chapter 4, 415a28-415b1, Pg. 661.

²⁶⁴ *NE*, Book X, Chapter 9, 1181b15, Pg. 204.

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