

# EIRENE

## STUDIA GRAECA ET LATINA

LIX / 2023 / I-II

Centre for Classical Studies  
Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

## THE DOUBLE *ERGON* SCHEME IN ARISTOTLE'S *PROTREPTICUS*\*

JAKUB JIRSA

The so-called *ergon* argument belongs to the widely studied aspects of Aristotle's ethics. However, only few interpreters make use of the *ergon* argument, as it appears in the *Protrepticus*, VII,41,22-43,25, in their work on Aristotle's ethics.<sup>1</sup> The following article will argue that Aristotle presents in the *Protrepticus* the *ergon* argument with a complicated structure which includes what I call the double *ergon* scheme. I will show that according to the *Protrepticus* there is an *ergon* of a given entity and moreover there is an *ergon* of a virtue proper to that entity as well.

Let me use a general example of what I mean. All human beings think and, let's agree, this thinking is the human *ergon*. Now, only some people think well or excellently (i.e. think with proper intellectual virtue or virtues) and this is manifested by getting even the most complicated and important things right. This "getting things right" is what I call the *ergon* of the virtue. The *ergon* of an entity is thus that what the entity does (or produces) and which is important for the entity or characteristic for it. However, doing the *ergon* of the virtue is better, or as Aristotle claims in the conclusion of the *ergon* argument cited above, it is the best for us. Therefore, one could describe the *ergon* so that the

---

\* I am thankful to Ronja Hildebrandt, Doug Hutchinson, Roy Lee and the participants of the workshop on protreptic strategies in Aristotle (Athens, 2019) for all of their comments on the previous drafts of this text. Their feedback has been an invaluable asset and I take full authorship of the remaining flaws in my work.

<sup>1</sup> REEVE 1992, 136; TUOZZO 1996, 148; BRÜLLMANN 2012, 6-7; HUTCHINSON - JOHNSON 2014, 391-392 and BAKER 2015, 236-238.

*ergon* of an entity is what the entity does, whereas the *ergon* of the virtue is what the entity *ought* to do in order to do the best.

The *Eudemian Ethics* explicitly simplifies the double *ergon* scheme from the *Protrepticus* claiming that the *ergon* of an entity is the same as the *ergon* of a virtue, but not in the same fashion (*Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a18–20). The enigmatic claim “not in the same fashion” signifies a certain difference between the two *erga*. The argument in the *Protrepticus* shows this distinction to such an extent and in such a strict manner that Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* seems to consider it exaggerated, or he may think that this formulation of distinction creates more ambiguities than it resolves. The following interpretation shows how this double *ergon* scheme is used to explain the relationship between what a person does and what a good person does well. In a certain, perhaps anachronistic sense, one can thus understand the *ergon* argument as a crucial step from a description of essentially human activity to a normatively loaded account of human goodness.<sup>2</sup>

The double *ergon* interpretation allows us to see an aspect of Aristotle’s treatment of the *ergon* argument that the *Eudemian Ethics* only hints at and that seems to be hidden between the lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Let us return to the preliminary example of man. Let us suppose that the *ergon* of man is thinking, because – without going into the depths of this argument – it is something that is characteristic of us as human beings. We think about different things, sometimes we’re right, sometimes we’re not. This is a common observation. But it gets complicated, or at least quite complex, when we try to explain what makes our thinking good or excellent. Let us suppose that good thinking means getting things right. However, getting things right seems to be something different from mere thinking, which is often wrong, and moreover, thinking simpliciter should aim at this “getting it right”. So we might even make a conceptual distinction between “thinking” and “getting things right”, and even look for different causes: we think because we have some kind of reason or understanding, but we get things right because we have, say, knowledge or expertise, which is why we get things right. In this way it seems that there is a difference between the *ergon* of a human being, let us say thinking, and the *ergon* of expertise or knowledge, for example getting it right. This, I think, is what Aristotle does with human *ergon* in the *Protrepticus*.<sup>3</sup> All human beings think, that is what makes

---

<sup>2</sup> This problematic relation is discussed in CLARK 1972, 273–274; WHITING 1988; ACHTENBERG 1989, 40–41; NUSSBAUM 1995, 94, 111; needless to say, none of these publications consider the account in the *Protrepticus*.

<sup>3</sup> The *Nicomachean Ethics* considers these two types of *erga* as one, see 1098a8–9, with clear interpretation in CHARLES 2017, 97–98.

us human in a way. However, thinking well, being true about things, getting it right seems to be a different sort of thing.

It is the case that before we know how to live well, we need to know what living is and how to live in the first place as Stephen Clark claims in his pioneering article on the *ergon* argument.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the *ergon* argument relates our living with living well and it opens the discussion of its relation to *eudaimonia*.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, it provides certain objective sense of the good, which could be taken as a starting point for the discussion of normativity in Aristotle's ethics.<sup>6</sup> The double *ergon* interpretation makes these steps in moral reasoning more visible, despite the fact that it actually brings about problems, which, as mentioned above, led Aristotle to simplify the scheme. The *ergon* argument is a transition from the "formal" or nominal account of happiness (what it is by definition) to its substantial account, namely what it "consists in".<sup>7</sup> In other words, before the *ergon* argument, Aristotle discusses concepts and their properties on the basis of their meaning, while the argument is the transition to the discussion which fills these concepts with Aristotle's own content. In the *Protrepticus* the *ergon* argument begins with statements such as "everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue" (41,22-23) or that the most authoritative virtue is that which brings about the perfection of each thing's natural *ergon* (42,2-9).<sup>8</sup> It is within the argument that we encounter the particular soul parts, their activities and the virtues associated with them, which provide the substance for the subsequent discussion of the good life and happiness. As I will show, at the same time as this interpretation, Aristotle arrives at the normative account, i.e. to the account of why this or that is good and in what this good consists. In my interpretation, the double *ergon* scheme rather crudely manifests the two sides of this transition to the normative level. One *ergon* is what we do, the "second" *ergon* stands for excellent "doing what we do", and this is then what we should achieve. This is the beginning of a substantial normative account that Aristotle provides after the *ergon* argument.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> CLARK 1972, 272.

<sup>5</sup> BRÜLLMANN 2010, 119.

<sup>6</sup> See KRAUT 1989, 326 or HUTCHINSON 1986, 68; cf. BRÜLLMANN 2010, 179-183 for scepticism about normativity in Aristotle's ethics.

<sup>7</sup> FERGUSON 2022a, 490 sees the *ergon* somewhat similarly the argument in the *Eudemian Ethics* as specifying a kind or type where *eudaimonia* "falls within".

<sup>8</sup> In the *Nicomachean ethics* before 1,7 we learn that the highest of all goods is *eudaimonia*, we read about characteristics of what qualifies as *eudaimonia* but it is the *ergon* argument which relates the notion of *eudaimonia* to the soul (or specifically one portion of it).

<sup>9</sup> The most common English translation of ἔργον is "function" and therefore the argument

Aristotle's *Protrepticus* has been lost; however the text has been reconstructed to an astonishing extent since the rediscovery of its fragments in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The *Protrepticus* shares the general view that happiness (εὐδαιμονία) is our supreme goal or the highest good in our life.<sup>11</sup> Aristotle's claim in the *Protrepticus* is that regardless of whether happiness is understood as a type of wisdom, virtue or enjoyment, living happily is ascribed either exclusively or primarily to the philosophers. Therefore, Aristotle concludes "everyone capable of it should do philosophy" (*Protr.* XII,59,24–60,10). The *ergon* argument is an essential part of the argument for this conclusion since it explains why philosophy is an exercise of our own, proper activities, i.e. the conclusion of the *Protrepticus* is not imposed on human beings but it is rooted in what human beings really are. Moreover, as I will show these activities are the best activities we can achieve as human beings. The *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus* helps to understand why philosophy leads us towards our own perfection.<sup>12</sup>

The main portion of my interpretation will focus on the text preserved in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*, VII,41,22–43,25, which is included in all modern editions of the work.<sup>13</sup> The *communis opinio* thus seems to be that if any of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* has been preserved these passages belong to it.<sup>14</sup> The language of the

---

itself has garnered recognition under the name "the function argument". Yet, this translation might be misleading, since *ergon* can be, for example, a thing or product (a shoe in the case of shoemaking) as well as the activity itself (seeing in the case of sight). A list of the different possible translations of ἔργον in Aristotle's ethics can be found in BAKER 2015, 229–230.

<sup>10</sup> I have profited greatly from the work done by D. S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson which has been made generously accessible at [www.protrepticus.info](http://www.protrepticus.info). All of Aristotle's text I will use is preserved in Iamblichus' writings. Therefore, I will refer to the *Protrepticus* according to Pistelli's edition from 1888, reprinted by Teubner in 1996; and to Iamblichus' *De Communi Mathematica Scientia* (= *DCMS*) according to Festa's edition (1891) revised by Klein in 1975. On authentication of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* see detailed account in HUTCHINSON – JOHNSON 2005, 196–203 or HILDEBRANDT 2020, 14–17. Most contemporary studies rely on Hutchinson's and Johnson's authentication; the exception is FLASHAR 2006 discussed in HILDEBRANDT 2020, 16.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. ARIST. *Eth. Nic.* I,4 1095a17–20.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle claims at *Protr.* IX,52,5 that: "We exist for the sake of understanding and learning something" (ὁῦλον ὅτι καὶ ἐσμὲν ἕνεκα τοῦ φρονῆσαι τι καὶ μαθεῖν). This claim is not a part of the *ergon* argument which I discuss, yet the argument helps to understand Aristotle's reasons for this claim.

<sup>13</sup> MONAN 1968, 30–34 presents an interpretation of this passage; Monan leaves out the discussion of *ergon* entirely. Moreover, I believe that his brief interpretation is erroneous since, according to him, knowing is the best form of human activity *because* all men love thinking and knowing most of all. However, as my interpretation will clearly demonstrate, the line of thought is inverse here: all men love thinking because it is their best activity.

<sup>14</sup> IAMB. *Protr.* VII,41,22–43,25 (PISTELLI) = Fr. 6 WALZER and Fr. 6 ROSS; B61–70 DÜRING. Most translations are based either on Walzer / Ross or Düring and thus cite these passages as

entire passage seems to be rather technical and the style is quite dry and more scientific compared to the other fragments. The text is almost entirely devoid of examples or similes and the three examples presented in the argument are only mentioned in two or three words (see humans and other animals at 41,28 and doctor or navigator at 42,19–21). Aristotle simply lays down one claim after another, building up the entire argumentative structure of a technical apodictic form which differs from more dialectical style of the other fragments.<sup>15</sup>

### The Analysis of the *Ergon* Argument

The *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus* opens with following lines.

(1) 41,22–42,4

And everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue, for to have obtained this is good. Moreover, it's when a thing's most authoritative and most estimable parts have their virtue that it is mostly well disposed, for the natural virtue of that which is better is naturally better.<sup>16</sup> And that which is by nature more of a ruler and more commanding is better, as a human is than the other animals; thus, soul is better than body (for it is more of a ruler), as is the part of the soul which has reason and thought, for this kind of thing is what prescribes and proscribes and says how we ought or ought not to act. Whatever, then, is the virtue of this part is necessarily the virtue most valuable of all as such, both for everything in general and for us; in fact, I think one might actually set it down that we are this portion, either alone or especially.<sup>17</sup>

---

Aristotle's. The idiosyncratic versions of the text by Schneeweiss and Flashar include the text as well, see SCHNEEWEISS 1966, 206–207, 211–213; SCHNEEWEISS 2005, fr. 59, 66; FLASHAR 2006, 60–62.

<sup>15</sup> DÜRING 1961, 236 suggests that the phrase ἀλλὰ καθ' αὐτὸ λεγόμενον in 42,6 might be Aristotle's apology for using technical jargon. If Aristotle saw the *ergon* argument as the key part of his argumentation, he might have adjusted the style; in the case of a dialogue it might have been one long, uninterrupted exposition.

<sup>16</sup> Hutchinson and Johnson connect the sentences using “therefore”. However, my understanding of the particle ἄρα is that it presents the reason for and not the consequence of the former sentence. In agreement with Vendruscolo, I understand the sentence in that τὰ μάλιστα precedes εἶ διαέκεται, on textual problems in 41,25–27 see VENDRUSCOLO 1989, 304.

<sup>17</sup> The English text is HUTCHINSON – JOHNSON'S translation with a couple of changes indicated in the footnotes. The main change in terminology is translating φρόνησις as “understanding” instead of their “intelligence” or traditional “wisdom”. The notion of φρόνησις will be explained later, see n. 47.

Hutchinson and Johnson suggest that Aristotle's own argument starts with the claim that "everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue" (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετήν). The proper virtue is a virtue which makes a given entity good *per se*, so that it makes a knife good as a knife, human being as a human being. Aristotle will explain this assumption using the *ergon* argument in order to elucidate the concept of οἰκειῖς.<sup>18</sup> He further argues that the virtue of a better entity is better than the virtue of a presumably lesser entity. Based on which criteria does Aristotle judge what is better? It is clear from the text that the relevant aspect here is whether the given entity is naturally in control or ruling (ἀρχικός, ἡγεμονικός, 41,27–28). What is naturally ruling and commanding is better (βελτίων) than what is ruled and commanded, i.e. the virtue of the ruling part is always better than virtues of the ruled part (compare the same reasoning earlier at *Protr.* VI,37,11–22 and 38,14–15).<sup>19</sup>

Aristotle goes on to say that for human beings, it is naturally reason and thought (λόγος and διάνοια) which tell us how we ought or ought not to act. This is then the best part of the soul and therefore the soul is better than the body, since it is more naturally a ruler over the body.<sup>20</sup> The virtue of the most valuable part in us is thus the most valuable virtue as well. Aristotle adds: "I think one might actually set it down that we are this portion, either alone or especially" (καὶ γὰρ ἂν τοῦτο, οἶμαι, θεῖη τις, ὡς ἦτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν τὸ μῦριον τοῦτο, 42,3–4).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in the opening passage of the

<sup>18</sup> For the notion of "proper virtue" see PLATO, *Resp.* 353c6–7 and compare with 353e2.

<sup>19</sup> According to *Protr.* VI,37,11–22, ruling is related to the ability to use correctly that which is ruled, and the true good is located in that which is more dominant in this sense. The criterion of rule, understood as correct use, is correct judgement, the use of reason, and the consideration of the good as a whole. Philosophical knowledge has all three and is therefore able to rule unerringly. In 38,14–15 this is applied to soul and body; the soul knows the body through knowledge of medicine and athletics, which presumably allow it to use correctly a body, and so the soul is better (more like a ruler, says Aristotle) than the body.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle does not use such strongly political terminology when he talks about the relation of the soul parts or the soul and the body in other treatises; yet one could compare it to *Eth. Eud.* VIII,1 1246b11–12, where the virtue of the ruling element (in the soul, presumably) uses the virtue of the ruled elements. The language is, of course, reminiscent of Plato's political vocabulary used to describe relations between the soul and body or between the parts of the soul in several dialogues (e.g. *Phd.* 79b–80a, 94b; *Resp.* 353d; *Ti.* 45b; or *Leg.* 689b); for the idea that the soul is a natural ruler over the body, see also *Ti.* 34c; *Alc.* 130b or *Leg.* 726a.

<sup>21</sup> Using the phrase τὸ μῦριον τοῦτο does not signal a reference to Plato's conception of parts of the soul as DÜRING 1961, 236 claims, nor is it convincing that οἶμαι is a reference to Plato. Cf. DIRLMEIER 1999, 551–553 for a discussion of this passage which tries to position it in an entirely Platonic context. According to D. S. Hutchinson, in private communication,

argument, Aristotle presents his general rule that the order of the inferior parts in a complex whole is always organized with reference to or in favour of the ruling elements (41,18-20). It can already be deduced that intellect and thought somehow function as a goal or a reference point around which all parts of a human being are organized.

This line of thought is put to use in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well. Aristotle says that we should do everything we can in order to live in accordance with what is the most powerful among the things that are in us (κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ, *Eth. Nic.* X,7 1177b33-34).<sup>22</sup> Each man is even said to be this “best in us,” if it is true that this is the authoritative and better part of himself (1178a2-3). Here Aristotle expresses the general thesis of his top-down philosophical framework: a complex entity is defined in accordance with its best part: “Just as a city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is a man” (*Eth. Nic.* IX,8 1168b31-32).<sup>23</sup> This methodological reduction of a complex entity on its most authoritative element is absent from the *Eudemian Ethics*.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of “proper” or “own” virtue (οἰκεία ἀρετή, 41,23) offers yet another comparison between this part of the *Protrepticus* and the *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The passage 1098a12-16 within which Aristotle mentions “proper virtue” is excluded by Bywater in his edition of the text, yet it remains in all translations at my disposal.<sup>25</sup> The passage is repetitive, but it does bring to light at least one new point. Aristotle repeats that the *ergon* of man is a certain kind of living, namely the activity and action of the soul that has reason, which a good man will do well, since “any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the proper virtue (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν

---

the most probable explanation of the first-person verb οἶμαι is that it is a part of the dialogue that Iamblichus did not remove

<sup>22</sup> See COOPER 1975, 169-170 on the parallel passages as well.

<sup>23</sup> See ARIST. *Eth. Nic.* IX,8 1169a2 as well. Unless stated otherwise, the translations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from ROSS - BROWN 2009. For a discussion of these passages see SCOTT 1999, 232, n. 22 and JIRSA 2017, 231. GERSON 2004, 63-64 discusses this passage together with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, X,7 1177b30-1178a8.

<sup>24</sup> The *Eudemian Ethics* recognizes a hierarchy within the human being, but even the most explicit description of this hierarchy (*Eth. Eud.* VIII,3 1249b6-12) emphasises that human being is by nature a composite of inferior and superior (ἄνθρωπος φύσει συνέστηκεν ἐξ ἄρχοντος καὶ ἀρχομένου, 1249b10-11). On the other hand, the *Nicomachean Ethics* points out that man is properly identified with his most authoritative part (*Eth. Nic.* IX,8 1168b31-32, quoted above).

<sup>25</sup> See HUTCHINSON 1986, 19-20 for an argument against this exclusion.



ἀρετήν)” (*Eth. Nic.* I,7 1098a15).<sup>26</sup> Later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that “the virtue of a thing is relative to its proper *ergon*” (ἡ δ’ ἀρετὴ πρὸς τὸ ἔργον τὸ οἰκεῖον, 1139a15–17). This suggests an additional parallel between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Protrepticus*, since the *Protrepticus* puts forth that each *ergon* has its own peculiar virtue, which is the only relevant virtue for the given *ergon* (42,9–13, cf. ὁ πέφυκεν ἔργον ἐκάστου at 42,5).

This is, of course, a different line of thought from the one in the *Eudemean Ethics*, where the relevant virtue was καλοκάγαθία, the complete or perfect virtue, which subsumes both practical and intellectual virtues. The definition of happiness in the *Eudemean Ethics* is that it is “the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue” (1219a38–39).<sup>27</sup> The perfect virtue, καλοκάγαθία, is then composed of all the partial virtues discussed thus far in the treatise (*Eth. Eud.* VIII,3 1248b8–10).

The interesting implication of using the concept of “proper virtue” in the *Protrepticus* as well as in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the relation to a single virtue and a single *ergon*. In fact, Aristotle introduces the notion of a “proper virtue” in the *Protrepticus* right before his deliberation on whether human beings are simple living beings or composed of several capacities (*Protr.* VII,42,13–19) which concludes that in both cases there is always one best *ergon* and virtue. Similarly, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle concludes the *ergon* argument by saying that “human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most perfect” (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ’ ἀρετήν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην, 1098a16–18). Aristotle explicitly reflects on the possible plurality of the relevant virtues and suggests that in the case of this plurality the best and most perfect one is the relevant one. This step in the argument suggests that, akin to the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle seeks a single, best virtue which is relevant to the given part of the soul.<sup>28</sup> It is telling that such a reflection is yet again absent from the *Eudemean Ethics*, where Aristotle considers the complete virtue to be composed of particular virtues.

<sup>26</sup> See MEEREN 2011, 170–171, n. 11 on the conception of proper virtue in relation to the *ergon* argument; cf. HILDEBRANDT 2021, 161.

<sup>27</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations from the *Eudemean Ethics* are from KENNY 2011. See FERGUSON 2022a, 478–480 on particular problems related this account of *eudaimonia*.

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posits that, in a way, the human being is this soul part: *Eth. Nic.* IX,8 1168b34–1169a3 describes this part as τὸ κυριώτατον of human being; cf. *Eth. Nic.* IX,4 1166a19–29; see n. 23 above as well.

## The *Ergon* of a Human Being According to the *Protrepticus*

After establishing that the part of the soul which has reason and thought is the most valuable part of us and thus its virtue is the best and highest virtue for us, Aristotle puts the concept of *ergon* to work.

(2) 42,4-9

Furthermore, when the natural *ergon* of each thing is brought to perfection not by coincidence but properly speaking in itself, that is when one should say that it (sc. the *ergon*) is good, and the most authoritative virtue should be reckoned the one by which each thing naturally fashions this.

The most authoritative virtue is said to achieve the natural *ergon* (πέφουκεν ἔργον) in the most perfect manner possible for the *ergon* in question. As a result, the *ergon* is done well – it is good (τοῦτο ἀγαθὸν εἶναι). Furthermore, this means that the given entity can be considered to be “well disposed” (εὖ διακείται), as alluded to in the opening lines of the argument quoted above: “Everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue, for to have obtained this is good” (τὸ γὰρ τετυχηκέναι ταύτης ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ, 41,22-24). Ταύτης refers to the proper virtue and it is now clear that acquiring this proper or own virtue is good for the given entity.

I consider this to be Aristotle's first exposition of the core of the *ergon* argument which he subsequently applies to human beings.<sup>29</sup> Given that whatever is done in accordance with nature is better than that which is done unnaturally, Aristotle talks about natural *ergon*. This *ergon* is perfected in the most beautiful way (κάλλιστα ἀποτελεῖ) by “the most authoritative virtue” (ταύτην τε ἀρετὴν κυριωτάτην, 42,6-8). It is my understanding that this phrase refers to the concept of the best virtue discussed in the preceding lines. The term *ergon* is not defined in the preserved passages of the *Protrepticus*. What we can infer from the text is that it is clearly something a given entity does. It is always an *ergon* of an entity capable of doing or acting. Aristotle speaks about the *ergon* of a capacity

<sup>29</sup> I accept the conventional dating of the *Protrepticus* which puts its composition in the late 350s. Hutchinson and Johnson convincingly claim that it is a polemic response to Isocrates's *Antidosis*, positing that Aristotle wants to defend the value of theoretical philosophy over its rather utilitarian understanding as an instrument of prosperity in the social and political life of the polis. HUTCHINSON – JOHNSON unpublished; compare COLLINS 2015, 255ff. DÜRING 1955, 85 believes that the *Antidosis* is criticism directed against Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.

as well (*Protr.* VI,39,24). Should an entity have several *erga*, Aristotle is interested in the best or most authoritative one (42,20–25, sections [3] and [4] below).

The next step in his argument involves making a distinction between composite and simple natures in respect to their *ergon* and virtue. This distinction, together with the previously explained concept of *ergon*, is then applied to human beings:

(3) 42,9–22

So something that is composite and partitioned has many other activities, but something that is by nature simple and whose substance is not relative to anything else (τοῦ δὲ τὴν φύσιν ἀπλοῦ καὶ μὴ πρὸς τι τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχοντος) necessarily has a single virtue in itself in the strict sense (τὴν καθ' αὐτὸ κυρίως ἀρετήν).<sup>30</sup> So if a human is a simple animal whose substance is ordered according to reason and intellect, there is no other *ergon* for him than only the most precise truth, i.e. to be true about existing things;<sup>31</sup> but if several capacities are ingrown in him, it is clear that, of the several things he can naturally bring to perfection, the best of them is always *ergon*, e.g. of a doctor health, and of the navigator safety. And we can name no *ergon* of thought or of the reasoning part of our soul that is better than truth.

A complex entity has several activities (ἐνέργειαι),<sup>32</sup> whereas an entity of a simple nature has only one proper virtue. Moreover, it is said that the simple entity is a self-standing entity which is not dependent in its being on anything else, i.e. it is not to be understood merely as a part of a larger whole. This is the meaning of the phrase that the substance of a simple entity is not relative (μὴ πρὸς τι τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχοντος).<sup>33</sup> Here Aristotle wants to avoid the possibility that a virtue of a simple entity, which is essentially related to a larger whole, would be a virtue specified by its relation or position within the larger whole.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> I believe that the phrase τὴν καθ' αὐτὸ κυρίως ἀρετήν is not only about “the strict sense” or “in the full sense of the word” as translated by Düring. I think that the term κυρίως harkens back to κυριωτάτην earlier in *Protr.* VII,42,8 as well. A single entity then has a single most important virtue which is related to its single *ergon*.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase “to be true” better corresponds to ἀληθεύειν as a verb meaning an activity and not a state or a product, compared to “tell the truth” in Hutchinson and Johnson’s translation.

<sup>32</sup> On ἐνέργεια and this passage see a detailed analysis in MENN 1994.

<sup>33</sup> DÜRING 1961, 237 glosses the phrase μὴ πρὸς τι τὴν οὐσίαν as “common in logical and ontological classification”, characterizing the dependence of a given entity. The πρὸς τι is a label for one of the categories which classifies things being related to something else (see ARIST. *Cat.* 6a36).

<sup>34</sup> I will illustrate this worry by the example of a part of an artefact, namely the arm of the

We are not told that a simple entity necessarily has a single activity. The text says that it has a single virtue (42,12). Yet, in the following lines, Aristotle deduces that if a human being is a simple entity it must have one single *ergon*. I thus understand this to be a preliminary suggestion that a simple entity has one *ergon* and one virtue specific to it. The number of virtues is dependent on the number of activities of the given entity since virtue is understood as that which elevates the given activity to perfection.<sup>35</sup>

Aristotle then applies this distinction to a human being as a living entity. A human being can be viewed either as a simple animal (ἀπλοῦν τι ζῷόν, 42,13) or as a complex of several capacities (ἐκ πλειόνων δυνάμεων συμπεφυκός, 42,16). The distinction is exhaustive in that a human being must be one or the other. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the distinction might obstruct one important detail. The simple animal is said to have its substance ordered according to reason and intellect (κατὰ λόγον καὶ νοῦν τέτακται αὐτοῦ ἢ οὐσία, 42,14). The idea of being “ordered” or “put into order” suggests ordering a multitude. It seems that the simple animal is simple because it is ordered by reason and intellect.<sup>36</sup>

For the argument being made in the *Protrepticus*, it does not matter whether a human being is simple or complex in the above-mentioned sense.<sup>37</sup> If it is simple,

---

catapult. The virtue of the arm is its strength and flexibility since a strong and flexible arm would work well. However apart from the catapult as a whole, it is basically a log of wood. The strength and flexibility remain its qualities, but there is no reason to call them “virtues” of this log. The virtue of the arm of the catapult is derived from its position within the larger whole. In this respect, the arm is not a simple entity according to the passage above.

<sup>35</sup> This principle seems to be confirmed in the *Eth. Nic.* VI,2 1139a15-17.

<sup>36</sup> This unity by means of ordering a plurality is missed by VENDRUSCOLO 1989, 307-308 who therefore sees unnecessary problems in this passage. Further, interpreters seem to have missed an obvious reference here, namely the mythography passage from the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates explains his lack of a certain kind of self-knowledge. Socrates does not know whether: “Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?” (PLATO, *Phdr.* 230a3-6, transl. NEHAMAS - WOODRUFF). Socrates maps out two radical options: the monstrous Typhon on the one hand and a simpler animal with a share in the divine on the other. Similarly, as in the *Protrepticus*, the simpler animal cannot be entirely simple since it has a share in divine and gentle nature.

<sup>37</sup> Of course this distinction might play a crucial role within wider context of Aristotle’s work since if human being is a simple animal and a simple entity is not essentially a part of a larger whole, *Protrepticus* may conflict with the idea that human beings are somehow naturally part of political communities (see *Polit.* I,2). Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* sometimes leaves certain options open when the differences are irrelevant to the outcome of the argument. Compare the overall structure of the argument about the need of philosophy: whether happiness is wisdom, virtue or enjoyment, living happily is ascribed either exclusively or primarily to the philosophers (*Protr.* XII,59,24-60,10). Similarly here it does not matter whether the human being is a simple or composite entity, in both cases there would be one single activity and virtue to focus on.

Aristotle continues, he has no other *ergon* than truth or the activity of “being true” about existing things (τὸ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀληθεύειν, 42,16). The sentence suggests that Aristotle does not understand ἀλήθεια here to be a product but rather an activity expressed by “being true” (ἀληθεύειν), i.e. getting things right.<sup>38</sup>

If, on the other hand, a human being is composed of several capacities, the best thing which he can bring to perfection will be his *ergon*. The examples given of these best things are health for a doctor and safety for a navigator.<sup>39</sup> According to this interpretation, a human being is capable of several activities and, as we have seen, these activities can be ordered based on their value. The two principles of ordering that we have discussed thus far are: what is in accordance with nature is better than what is against nature (IX,50,16–19) and, furthermore, ruling is better than being ruled, i.e. a ruling nature is better (VI,38,14–15, VII,41,27–28). At the beginning of the argument, Aristotle claims that the part of a complex human being’s soul which has reason and thought is the ruling element. Therefore, Aristotle considers the activity of this part of the soul to be the *ergon* he seeks. He maintains that there is no better *ergon* of this part of the soul than ἀλήθεια.<sup>40</sup>

### *Alētheia* and *Phronēsis*: The Double *Ergon* Scheme

The claim that ἀλήθεια is the *ergon* of the relevant part of the soul is the peak of the argument so far (42,20–22). What is more, Aristotle continues specifying the virtue related to this activity, namely ἐπιστήμη.

(4) 42,23–43,5

Truth therefore is the most authoritative *ergon* of this portion of soul. And it performs this (sc. *ergon*) with knowledge as such, and it performs this more with

<sup>38</sup> CRIVELLI 2004, 45 claims that Aristotle uses the term “truth” here for the act of believing. According to Aristotle in the *Eth. Eud.* II,4 1221b29–30 as well as the *Eth. Nic.* VI,2 (= *Eth. Eud.* V,2) 1139b12–13, the truth is the *ergon* of both the theoretical as well as the practical part of νοητικόν and every part has a virtue that is responsible for reaching the truth. For further commentary on truth as *ergon* see VAN DER MEEREN 2011, 175, n. 32–33.

<sup>39</sup> The *Eudemian Ethics*, II,1 1219a15 says that health is the *ergon* of the doctoring art rather than of the doctor; however, this should not be read as signalling a substantial difference in the conceptions of art, knowledge or *ergon*. Health is the *ergon* of a doctor qua being a doctor, i.e. due to the doctoring art, cf. *Ph.* II,3 195b21–24.

<sup>40</sup> See list of passages suggesting Aristotle’s conviction that truth is linked to goodness and falsehood to badness in CRIVELLI 2004, 63, n. 62.

more knowledge; and the most authoritative goal for this is contemplation. For when of two things one is valuable because of the other, the one on account of which the other is valuable is better and more valuable; for example, pleasure is better than pleasant things, and health than things conducive to health, for the latter are said to be able to produce the former. Thus<sup>41</sup> nothing is more valuable than understanding, which we say is a capacity of the most authoritative thing in us, to judge one condition in comparison with another, for the cognitive part, both separately and in combination, is better than all the rest of the soul, and knowledge is its virtue.<sup>42</sup>

Before introducing the formal scheme of the *ergon* argument presented in this passage, I want to address two preliminary points. Aristotle illustrates his teleology of value here. The entity which leads us to call another entity valuable is better and more valuable, since the latter entity derives its value from the value of the former. The value of pleasant things is dependent upon the pleasure they produce and the value of medical procedures is dependent on the health they produce. According to Aristotle's work in the *Protrepticus*, a goal (τέλος) is always better since everything that comes to be always comes to be for the sake of some goal (*Protr.* IX,51,16–18). Therefore, pleasure is better than pleasant things and health is better than things which produce health.

Second, when Aristotle talks about the cognitive part of our soul (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος), he adds “both separately and in combination”. I believe that this addition is made in reference to the two possibilities concerning human beings in 42,13–20. The claim regarding the cognitive part of our soul is valid – as we have seen – when it is considered separately or in combination with other parts and capacities of the soul.

The passage quoted above, introduces formal relations which allow me to draft a scheme of the *ergon* argument as presented by Aristotle thus far. The en-

<sup>41</sup> This sentence begins at 43,1 with οὐκοῦν which suggests an inference from previous passage. What is the inference? Aristotle infers the value of understanding from the value of the soul-part of which it is a capacity (on the value of this soul part see 41,29–42,4). Aristotle names the *ergon* of this soul part (42,22–23), its virtue and goal (42,23–25) and then its capacity (43,1–3). Thanks to Roy Lee for pointing out this issue to me.

<sup>42</sup> The final clause of the text reads τούτου δὲ ἐπιστήμη ἀρετή, which is a clear identification between knowledge and virtue. Against my translation it might be suggested that it means “its knowledge is virtue (namely understanding)”. However, it would be rather strange to cryptically suggest at this point that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is understanding (φρόνησις), since these two terms are not equated anywhere else in the text, and moreover, as I will argue later, understanding does not seem to be a virtue in this argument and its context.

tity whose *ergon* is discussed is that of a human being (ἄνθρωπος), yet Aristotle methodologically restricts the entity in question to the best or most important part of us with which we can be identified (42,4-5). This part is called “the cognitive part” (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος, 43,3) or διάνοια, more precisely “the reasoning part of the soul” (τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς, 42,21). The most authoritative *ergon* of this part of the soul – regardless whether the human being is this soul part entirely or for the most part – is said to be ἀλήθεια, being true (ἀληθεύειν, 42,15–16.22–23).<sup>43</sup> The virtue of this soul part is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 43,5).<sup>44</sup> This, I believe is assumed already at 42,23–24 where Aristotle says that the part of the soul in question performs its *ergon* with knowledge “and it performs it more with more knowledge”.<sup>45</sup> This would amount to the classical scheme of the *ergon* argument: we have a given entity, its “function”, i.e. *ergon* and a virtue which perfects this *ergon*.

However, the *Protrepticus* version gets complicated since Aristotle adds that the goal (τέλος) and ultimate aim of this knowledge is contemplation (θεωρία, 42,25).<sup>46</sup> And he names a further important capacity of this part of the soul, which is understanding (φρόνησις, 43,1–3).<sup>47</sup> The understanding – when active – does the judging on behalf of the cognitive part of the soul (43,1–3).<sup>48</sup> We are thus presented with two cognitive processes, namely contemplation and understanding, whose relation remains unclear so far.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that Aristotle mentions ἀλήθεια as the *ergon* of the intellectual virtues in the *Eudemian Ethics*, II,6 1221b29–30.

<sup>44</sup> VENDRUSCOLO 1989, 309–310 identifies ἐπιστήμη as virtue. Vendruscolo believes that the passage suggests that φρόνησις relates to ἐπιστήμη in the same way as capacity relates to virtue which perfects it. The φρόνησις is the capacity of the most authoritative part in us, which is the contemplative part of our soul. The ἐπιστήμη is said to be its virtue (43,5). However, this does not seem to explain the relation between φρόνησις and ἀληθεύειν.

<sup>45</sup> The expression “more knowledge” is not clear, but if knowledge is virtue, it may be nothing more than a suggestion that one can be more virtuous than another. The *ergon* of an entity is then done “more” with more virtue and “less” with less virtue.

<sup>46</sup> Θεωρία appears as the goal (τέλος) of theoretical knowledge in IAMB. DCMS 23 72,4–6, which Hutchinson and Johnson attribute to Aristotle as well.

<sup>47</sup> On the interpretation of φρόνησις in the *Protrepticus* see JAEGER 1948, 81–84; GADAMER 1928; NEEDLER 1928 and DÜRING 1961, 191, 206. Following Gadamer, Needler and Düring, I do not see reason why to treat φρόνησις as a Platonic *terminus technicus*; at the same time, it seems that Aristotle makes a difference between φρόνησις and theoretical wisdom (*Protr.* V,36,9–11); however, I do not find anything close to the conception of φρόνησις as a practical wisdom from Book six of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (= Book five of the *Eudemian Ethics*). Therefore, I opted for a neutral translation of φρόνησις as “understanding” and τὸ φρονεῖν as “to understand”.

<sup>48</sup> On the method of judging see DÜRING 1961, 239–240.



The passage begins by saying that truth is the most authoritative *ergon* in question, and further specifies that the most authoritative goal is contemplation. Why then does Aristotle go on to discuss understanding or productive knowledge in the following parts of the argument (texts [5] and [6] analysed below)? The argument reaches its climax in lines 42,23–25, which introduce the most authoritative *ergon* and goal of the human being. As I understand it, the following text explains the concept of *ergon* in question and its relation to understanding (text [5]) and knowledge (text [6]). However, it is precisely in these texts that the problem of the double *ergon* appears most clearly, and I will discuss it in detail in the section “The Problem of the Double *Ergon* Scheme” below.

The account seems perhaps too convoluted or rather unpolished, as it introduces several features which are *prima facie* redundant and make the argument unnecessarily complicated. I will start with a simplification which lends itself most readily. I think it is not necessary to look for the difference between τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος and τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς, as these two names clearly refer to the same part or portion of soul. I find no need to accuse Aristotle of inconsistency as he does not have a clear vocabulary for parts of the soul in the *Protrepticus*. The vocabulary of the soul parts is quite complex and complicated. Aristotle's consistency even in the *De anima* itself remains an open-ended issue.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Protrepticus* does not exhibit established psychological terminology. Moreover, I have not found anything in the text that would suggest any difference between τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος and τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς.<sup>50</sup>

I will now proceed with lines from Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* 43,5–25 (sections [5] and [6]) which close the *ergon* argument and offer further clues to solve the problem mentioned above.

(5) 43,5–18

Therefore,<sup>51</sup> its *ergon* is none of particular virtues, for it is better than all of them and the final creation is always superior to the knowledge that produces it. Nor is every virtue of the soul an *ergon* in that way, nor is it *eudaimonia*; for if it is

<sup>49</sup> See CORCILIOUS – GREGORIC 2010 on the complications and problems posed by this terminology.

<sup>50</sup> Similarly DÜRING 1961, 239–240 who equates τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος with νοῦς.

<sup>51</sup> The particle ἄρα signals a consequence or a succession: the previous lines (43,1–5) claimed that nothing is more valuable than understanding and knowledge is its virtue, hence the extraordinary status of the *ergon* of this virtue.



to be productive,<sup>52</sup> other ones will produce other things, as the building skill (which is not a portion of any building) produces buildings; however, understanding is a part of virtue and of *eudaimonia*, for we say that *eudaimonia* either comes from it or is it. Thus according to this argument too, it is impossible for this to be a knowledge that can produce, for the goal must be better than its coming to be. And nothing is better than understanding, unless it is one of the things that have been mentioned;<sup>53</sup> and none of those is an *ergon* other than it.

One point which is made clear here is that Aristotle is not discussing particular virtues and their *erga*. He is concerned with the highest virtue, i.e. the virtue of a human being, and its *ergon*. This virtue is the virtue of the highest or best part of us.<sup>54</sup>

The previous passage (4) concluded in 43,1–5 that nothing is more valuable than understanding, which is the capacity of the most authoritative part of us, and that knowledge is the virtue of this part of our soul. The text continues that “its *ergon* is none of particular virtues” (οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶν ἔργον αὐτῆς οὐδεμία τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν, 43,5–7). This sentence poses two problems which can hardly be resolved with any certainty. First, what is the meaning of saying that an *ergon* is not a particular virtue? And second, perhaps more importantly, what does the feminine αὐτῆς refer to here? Namely, which *ergon* are we talking about now?

The contrast of this particular *ergon* with other, particular virtues of the soul is mentioned again a couple of lines later at 43,8–10.<sup>55</sup> The very fact that Aristotle contrasts *ergon* with virtue is interesting. The contrast suggests that the *ergon* in question has something to do with a virtue, since it must be singled out from particular virtues. Does it mean that this *ergon* is virtue? We already

<sup>52</sup> Here I differ from the translation by Johnson and Hutchinson who translate “for if it is to be a skill that can produce” reading “skill” into the Greek εἰ γὰρ ἔσται ποιητική. The “skill” is presumably derived from οἰκοδομική (building skill) in the next line.

<sup>53</sup> Something from the things mentioned (τι τῶν εἰρημένων) refers to virtue and *eudaimonia* few lines above. This suggests that the text does not treat understanding as one of the virtues.

<sup>54</sup> DÜRING 1961, 77 understands τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν as referring to “moral virtues”; yet the phrase κατὰ μέρος related to virtue suggests rather a distinction between particular virtues and a general, perfect or complete virtue, esp. *Eth. Eud.* VIII,3 1248b8–12, the same in *Mag. Mor.* II,9; further see *Eth. Nic.* 1129b25–9, 1130a30–b2, 1141a9–22 as well; for an interpretation of the clause κατὰ μέρος in agreement with mine see TESSITORE 1996, 47; LEAR 2004, 109; NATALI 2010, 91; CURZER 2012, 276.

<sup>55</sup> *Protr.* VII,43,8–10: οὐδὲ μὴν ἅπασα τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετῆ οὕτως ἔργον οὐδ’ ἡ εὐδαιμονία.

saw that *ergon* and virtue are unmistakable components of the basic structure of the *ergon* argument. If *ergon* were the same as virtue, the basic structure of the *ergon* argument as we know it from Aristotle's *Ethics* and Plato's *Republic* would break down.<sup>56</sup> These sentences (43,5–7 and 43,8–10) are problematic, but offer a fairly simple understanding: no other particular virtue “does” what this *ergon* is. Thus, this *ergon* is achieved only by what the feminine αὐτῆς (43,6) refers to, not by any other particular virtue.

If any of the preceding lines were missing, it would be impossible to determine the referent. Previous drafts of the reconstruction by Hutchinson and Johnson separated the text at 43,5 into two fragments and the lines 43,5–8 were marked as Iamblichus' summary and not as a direct quote from Aristotle's text. This could suggest that Iamblichus skipped a part of the original text, meaning that the referent of αὐτῆς cannot be determined. On the other hand, Iamblichus probably would have noticed and would have substituted the pronoun with the appropriate term. The 2018 edition by Hutchinson and Johnson presents the *ergon* argument in one block from 41,6 to 43,25 and the lines 43,5–8 are marked as Aristotle's. I will suppose that the passage runs continuously: “thus nothing is more valuable than practical wisdom, which we say is a capacity of the most authoritative thing in us [...] for the cognitive part [...] is better than all the rest of the soul, and knowledge is its virtue. Therefore, its *ergon* is none of particular virtues” (43,1–7).<sup>57</sup>

The possible references of the feminine αὐτῆς are understanding (φρόνησις), soul (ψυχή) or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) as its virtue (ἀρετή).<sup>58</sup> It is said that the *ergon* in question is not one of the particular virtues, “for it is better than all of them.” The argument rests on the premise that the given *ergon* is *better* than all particular virtues and I believe that this statement may even echo the evaluation made in the previous passage (4). This passage claimed that nothing is more valuable than understanding and that the cognitive part of the soul is better than the entire rest of the soul. Further, if a virtue perfects or strengthens a given activity (42,23–25, opening of section [4]), its *ergon* would be better than what is being perfected or strengthened.

<sup>56</sup> See for example BARNEY 2008, 293 for a short summary of common basic structure of these arguments.

<sup>57</sup> DÜRING 1961, 76 breaks Iamblichus' text at 43,5 into two fragments, therefore leaving αὐτῆς without any certain reference. WALZER 1934, 36 and ROSS 1955, 36 have a continuous text within one fragment.

<sup>58</sup> If knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is virtue (ἀρετή), deciphering which is the grammatical referent does not impact the argument.

It seems *prima facie* natural to assume that Aristotle has understanding in mind here and αὐτῆς refers to φρόνησις, understanding.<sup>59</sup> If that is the case, the *ergon* in question is the *ergon* of understanding. At *Protr.* VI,39,25 Aristotle talks explicitly about the *ergon* of understanding (φρόνησις). However, this passage says that the *ergon* of understanding as a capacity is φρονεῖν. So simply when understanding is at work, when it is activity and not a capacity, it φρονεῖν and there is no suggestion that there would be any further *ergon* different to understanding as an activity.<sup>60</sup> Further, φρόνησις itself is called *ergon* at 43,18 and the concept of an *ergon* of an *ergon* does not look very promising. Therefore, understanding is not a good candidate for the reference of αὐτῆς at 43,6.

We saw that the second evaluation conducted in the previous passage was an evaluation of the cognitive part of the soul.<sup>61</sup> The cognitive part of the soul (τὸ γνωστικὸν μέρος) is, of course, grammatically neuter, but one could argue that the referent is ψυχῆ, mentioned in 43,5, taking into consideration Aristotle's claim that the best part can stand for the complex entity. The cognitive part of the soul is the best part of the soul and therefore its *ergon* is the proper *ergon* of the entire soul. The *ergon* of the soul cannot be of one of the parts of the virtue, since it is the *ergon* of the entire soul, namely the *ergon* of its best part. The reference of the feminine αὐτῆς would be the soul *via* its highest part and thus the *ergon* in question would be the *ergon* of the soul. Yet, even this suggestion has its serious flaws. First, I see no reason as to why Aristotle would not refer directly to the part of the soul with the neuter pronoun. Second, several lines earlier, Aristotle firmly establishes that there is no better *ergon* of the highest part of our soul than ἀλήθεια (42,15–16.22–23) and there is no mention of ἀλήθεια in the present context.

The third possibility is that αὐτῆς refers to the virtue in question, i.e. to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).<sup>62</sup> This reading could actually explain the occurrence of ἔργον τῆς ἀρετῆς, i.e. the *ergon* of a virtue, in 43,21, which most editors follow-

<sup>59</sup> DÜRING 1969, 65 and BERTI 2000, 43 make φρόνησις the reference of αὐτῆς.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly at X,56,4–7 where Aristotle talks about seeing which he understands as the *ergon* of the eyes (43,22–25). At 56,4–7 Aristotle says the *ergon* of sight is to discriminate between visible objects, yet this is no activity different from sight itself. Similarly as in the case of φρόνησις and φρονεῖν. When sight is active, when we see, we discriminate between visible objects – and it is one and the same activity.

<sup>61</sup> ROSS 1952, 35 seems to translate the αὐτῆς as a reference to the part of the soul; this reference is made explicit in CHROUST 1964, 28.

<sup>62</sup> This possibility is found in the French translation by DES PLACES 1989, 73 as well as in FOLLON 2006, 26; similarly in SCHNEEWEISS 2005, 127.

ing Düring amend to ψυχῆς, despite the manuscript reading.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, this reading would create a doubled scheme where we would have (i) the *ergon* of the entity (human being or soul) coupled with (ii) an *ergon* of the virtue which would secure the first *ergon*. The situation could be illustrated by an example: “the function of sharpness is to perfect the function of eyes, namely the sight” where we have a separate *ergon* of the virtue, namely perfection itself, over and above the *ergon* of a given entity.<sup>64</sup>

None of the readings suggested above are entirely unproblematic and a conclusion can scarcely be formed solely on the basis of the text here. In the subsequent interpretation of the *ergon* argument, I will refer to the lines 58,3–10 where the *ergon* argument reappears. These lines support the third reading, namely that αὐτῆς in 43,6 refers to the virtue and that Aristotle thus presents us with a scheme of two *erga*: the *ergon* of a given entity and the *ergon* of a virtue.<sup>65</sup> This conclusion is only strengthened by Aristotle’s contrasting the given *ergon* with the other, particularistic virtues I discussed above (43,5–7 and 43,8–10).

At one point Aristotle says in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

Having made these distinctions, let us say that the work of a thing is the same as the work of its goodness or virtue, but not in the same fashion.

τούτων δὲ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον διωρισμένων, λέγομεν ὅτι <ταὐτὸ> τὸ ἔργον τοῦ πράγματος καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡσαύτως (*Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a18–20).

The illustrative example is quite simple: the *ergon* of a shoemaker is a shoe. When the shoemaker has the relevant virtue, i.e. is in his best disposition as a shoemaker, what is the *ergon* of this virtue? What change does the virtue bring about into the picture of the shoemaker and the shoe as the outcome of his shoemaking activity? The answer is that the *ergon* of the virtue is a good shoe

<sup>63</sup> DÜRING 1961, 76 suggests an emendation of ἀρετῆς to ψυχῆς on doctrinal grounds (he refers to the *ergon* of the soul in his B85, i.e. *Protr.* IX,58,3–4) as he glosses over the fact that αὐτῆς in his B68 (= 43,6) might refer to the virtue; neither Ross nor Walzer see any need for such a change. The emendation ψυχῆς is adopted by Chroust and Schneeweiss. Hutchinson and Johnson retain ἀρετῆς, which is read by FLASHAR 2006, 61; BOBONICH 2007, 166 and VAN DER MEEREN 2011, 167, 179 as well. For a different argument in support of reading ἀρετῆς in 43,21 see VENDRUSCOLO 1989, 313–314.

<sup>64</sup> This example is mine, the example with seeing introduced later in Aristotle’s text (43,23–25, end of section [6]) is a simple one, which makes no mention of the possibility of a double *ergon*.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. VENDRUSCOLO 1989, 306.

(1219a20–23).<sup>66</sup> Woods does not understand the claim that the *ergon* of a given thing is the same as the *ergon* of thing’s virtue “but not in the same fashion”.<sup>67</sup> I believe that this clarification quite clearly concerns the quality or value of the *ergon*. An eye sees. A good, virtuous eye sees well or, one could say, sees excellently.<sup>68</sup>

Since the *Eudemian Ethics* holds that there is the *ergon* of an entity as well as the *ergon* of its virtue (see 1220a7 and 1221b29–30), what is the difference to the *Protrepticus*? After making several distinctions at the beginning of the second book of the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle signals that now comes another point, which is not a distinction but rather a clarification or, as I read it, a simplification (see τούτων δὲ τούτων τὸν τρόπον διωρισμένων, λέγομεν ὅτι at 1219a18–19). Then he states two times that the *ergon* of an entity must be the same as the *ergon* of its virtue (1219a19–20 and 25–27). The only difference is that the *ergon* of the virtue is the *ergon* of an entity done well.

I would like to highlight the contrast with the *Protrepticus* where Aristotle introduced two distinct *erga* in this regard: the *ergon* of the entity and a different *ergon* of its virtue. Aristotle, I think, uses this more complex scheme to clearly separate our own, specific activity from the virtuous or excellent performance of that activity. If, for example, understanding is the activity proper to human beings and truth (or being true) is the activity that we ought to attain and towards which understanding ought to be directed by the help of the relevant virtue, then the conceptual distinction between the two activities will emphasize this difference and the normativity involved.

The *Protrepticus* uses different terms for these two *erga* and it is never suggested that these two *erga* are somehow one and the same.<sup>69</sup> This problematizes the conclusion of Aristotle’s argument, as he has to reconcile how the *ergon* of

<sup>66</sup> See ROWE 2023, 22: “The sense clearly is ‘the ἔργον of the thing [is] also [the ἔργον] of the ἀρετή [of the thing].’”

<sup>67</sup> WOODS 2005, 89.

<sup>68</sup> LEE 2022, 202–203 correctly sees this line of thought related to Plato’s use of the *ergon* argument in the *Republic*. However, despite pointing out that the *Eudemian Ethics* works with virtue’s *ergon*, Lee does not refer to the *Protrepticus* and does not explain the need for this argumentative step. This explanation is needed since, as Lee rightly mentions the concept of virtue’s *ergon* appears neither in Plato’s *Republic* nor in the *NE*.

<sup>69</sup> On the relation between the two *erga* in the *Protrepticus* see 43,20–21 interpreted below; I understand these lines as claiming that understanding, the *ergon* of an entity, together with contemplation (θεωρία) is the *ergon* of virtue (this virtue being ἐπιστήμη). In this brief remark Aristotle does not phrase the relation so that the *ergon* of the virtue is the *ergon* of an entity done well. The wording is that it is the *ergon* of an entity *plus* something else, which makes it the *ergon* of a given virtue.

virtue relates back to the original entity, namely our soul or its highest part. Second, the introduction of a double *ergon* obscures the fact that both *erga* must be somehow same activity of the corresponding soul part, i.e. that the virtue's *ergon* must be the good or virtuous activity of the relevant soul part. If there were a different activity of the virtue itself apart from the activity of a given entity, the virtue would not be a virtue *of* that original entity and would not be the betterment of its activity. Designating the *ergon* of the entity and the *ergon* of the virtue as two different activities would separate the entity and the virtue, thereby obscuring the relation between the two.

Therefore, I understand the claim that the *ergon* of a given entity is the same – but not in the same way – as the *ergon* of its virtue to be a reaction to the problem which arose from the concept of a double *ergon* in the *Protrepticus*.<sup>70</sup> In both texts Aristotle talks about the *ergon* of an entity and the *ergon* of its virtue. However, the *Eudemian Ethics* stresses that these *erga* are the same with merely a qualitative difference. From the *Protrepticus*' point of view, it is much easier to understand why Aristotle explicitly introduces this claim and why he adds the qualification in the *Eudemian Ethics*' version of the *ergon* argument.<sup>71</sup>

(6) 43,18–25

Therefore, one should say that this kind of knowledge is a theoretical one, since it is surely impossible for a creation to be its goal. Hence to understand and to theorize is an *ergon* of the virtue, and this of all things is the most valuable for humans, comparable, I think, to seeing for the eyes, which one would choose to have even if there wasn't any other thing that was going to come into being through it beyond the sight itself.

We know that the *ergon* in question (regardless of whether it is an *ergon* of the cognitive part of the soul or an *ergon* of its virtue) must be exercising of a cognitive capacity and Aristotle is now vying to specify what kind of cognitive ca-

---

<sup>70</sup> One might try to mitigate the difference between the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Protrepticus* by interpreting the *Eudemian Ethics* as introducing the type identity of the *ergon* of the entity and the *ergon* of its virtue. Understanding and truth could then also be of the same type and the distinction would be blurred. But this interpretation is unconvincing in both its parts. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, the identity of type is not even hinted at; the text is clear that they are the same thing, see Rowe quoted above n. 66. Then again, in the *Protrepticus*, it is not even implied that understanding and truth are of the same type. The *Eudemian Ethics* emphasizes the identity of the *ergon* of entity and its virtue, while the *Protrepticus* operates with their difference.

<sup>71</sup> See FERGUSON 2022b, 354–355 for another link between the *Protrepticus* and the *Eudemian Ethics*.

capacity it is. It is not ποιητική in the sense that it does not create anything, as if it were to produce something other than itself, it would not be a part of what was produced, given that the skill of building is not a part of the house *stricto sensu*.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it cannot be productive knowledge (ἐπιστήμη ποιητική), since the goal (τέλος) is always better than the entity or process which belongs to the goal (*Protr.* IX,51,16–23 interpreted above), and the cognitive capacity in question should be *ergon* where the highest good of a given entity is to be found (42,5–9). Aristotle is convinced that nothing is better than understanding and therefore, he concludes understanding is the *ergon* (οὐδὲν ἕτερον αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἔργον, 43,18).<sup>73</sup> An obvious question arises: did Aristotle or Iamblichus, if he is responsible for the muddiness of the text, just forget that the *ergon* was being true just a couple of lines earlier? (42,15–16; 42,22–23). I do not believe this to be a case of confused terms, the argument of the *Protrepticus* operates with two *erga*, namely the truth and understanding.

Given that the knowledge in question cannot be productive, i.e. such knowledge does not have an outcome different from itself, it must be theoretical knowledge. To understand and to theorize is said to be the *ergon* of the given virtue, i.e. of knowledge (τὸ φρονεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν ἔργον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐστί, 43,20–21). Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) was the only virtue mentioned thus far and no other virtue is introduced in the text. Düring and others consider the term ἀρετῆς to be an obvious mistake in the text and change it to ψυχῆς.<sup>74</sup> I will show that such emendation is not necessary. Here, Aristotle concludes that this, namely the activity of understanding and theorizing, is the most valuable for humans. It is something so natural to us – as is sight for the eyes – that we should choose it for its own sake and not for any possible effects.

Further possible duplication here is between virtue's *ergon* (τὸ φρονεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν, 43,21) and its goal (θεωρία, 42,25). What is the relation between understanding and contemplation? Is this not an unnecessary complication of the argument?

<sup>72</sup> This is a part of Aristotle's argumentation against the utilitarian understanding of philosophy according to Isocrates.

<sup>73</sup> It is already clear that Dumoulin's classification of cognitive capacities in the *Protrepticus* is misleading; Dumoulin essentially lists instances of a given capacity in the text without proper context and suggests no relations between the capacities, despite the fact that these relations are suggested in the text; see DUMOULIN 1981, 119–120.

<sup>74</sup> This is discussed above in n. 63, Düring's main argument rests on the clause ψυχῆς ἔργον at 58,3–5; Düring cannot make sense of the feminine αὐτῆς at 43,6 and has to change the text at 43,21 against all available manuscripts.



This potentially problematic relation is yet again explicitly re-examined in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Aristotle abolishes this distinction when he claims that the *ergon* of each thing is said to be its goal (τέλος, *Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a8). The *ergon* argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not entail this premise.<sup>75</sup> According to Woods and Hutchinson, this premise combined with the claim that the goal of each thing is the best for that thing (1219a10–11) yields the conclusion that the *ergon* is better than the corresponding state or capacity (1219a11–13). Another possible reason for identifying *ergon* with a goal might simply be the solution of the conundrum from the *Protrepticus*. In the *Protrepticus* version, one has to assume that contemplation and “being true” are closely connected or are somehow one and the same, otherwise the logic of the argument is jeopardised. When Aristotle explicitly identifies *ergon* with the goal, no such speculation is needed.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, I not only understand the identification of *ergon* with the goal to be an explanation of what Aristotle means by *ergon*, but I see it as Aristotle’s concerted effort to simplify the structure of the *ergon* argument in order to avoid the complications posed by the *Protrepticus* version. The *Eudemian Ethics* simplifies the complicated structure of the *ergon* argument from the *Protrepticus* by (a) explaining that the *ergon* of an entity and the *ergon* of its virtue is one (*Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a18–20) and (b) by identifying *ergon* and the goal (*Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a8). This suggests that the *Eudemian Ethics* reacts to the *Protrepticus*, since the remarks are quite confusing in the text itself, as noted by some commentators, but they make good sense as corrections of the earlier account.<sup>77</sup>

### The Problem of the Double *Ergon* Scheme

It is clear that Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* says that both truth and understanding are *erga*. Truth or being true was called *ergon* at 42,15–16 and 42,22–22. The understanding is confirmed as *ergon* at 43,17 and 43,20–21. The question concerns the relation between understanding and being true. Aristotle talks about the

<sup>75</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find the claim that “virtue both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the *ergon* of that thing be done well” (ῥητέον οὖν ὅτι πᾶσα ἀρετή, οὗ ἂν ἢ ἀρετή, αὐτό τε εὖ ἔχον ἀποτελεῖ καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ εὖ ἀποδίδωσιν, *Eth. Nic.* II,6 1106a15–17), though this is as close as Aristotle comes to describing the relation of the *ergon* to its completion or perfection, which could be related to the goal of a given entity.

<sup>76</sup> See ARIST. *Metaph.* IX,8 1050a21 for the same account.

<sup>77</sup> WOODS 2005, 97–98.



*ergon* of the contemplative part of our soul, i.e. the most authoritative part of ourselves (42,19–20) and about the *ergon* of virtue (43,6.21). What are the possible interpretations and what support do they find in the rest of the *Protrepticus*?

An easy way out would be to say that it is too much to expect an elaborate account of the *ergon* argument from the text. The dialogue calls for rhetorical exercise and allows for some terminological liberties.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, Aristotle is just in using a bit of flowery language for the cognitive capacity in question, while keeping the scheme of the *ergon* argument as simple as the *Republic* most likely taught him.<sup>79</sup> First, we are considered to be essentially the cognitive part of the soul. This restriction is based on several methodological assumptions introduced above. The main or proper capacity of this part of the soul is thought – and it is immaterial as to whether Aristotle calls it φρόνησις, θεωρία, ἀλήθεια or uses the corresponding verbs. The virtue of this part of the soul is ἐπιστήμη and it perfects the cognitive capacity so that it does this job well.

The obvious disadvantage of this simplistic interpretation is the complexity of the text. Why would Aristotle present a scheme as simple as the one described in such a complicated and muddled way? Furthermore, if it were merely a simplistic scheme, Aristotle (or perhaps Iamblichus) would be guilty of mistakenly writing ἀρετῆς instead of ψυχῆς in 43,21.

The other alternative, which I will try to develop, is to take the text seriously. As I have said, the text seems quite technical compared to other fragments of the *Protrepticus*. What is more, some later fragments of the text seem to operate with two levels of cognitive capacities which correspond to the two *erga* introduced here. I understand the *ergon* of the virtue as something a given entity *ought* to do, i.e. not merely as an *ergon* which a given entity naturally does (better or worse).<sup>80</sup>

There are *prima facie* two possible interpretations which will be examined in the following sections. According to the first interpretation, being true is the *ergon* of the contemplative part of the soul. This basic capacity for truth – like the natural drive for cognition at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* – is perfected

---

<sup>78</sup> Support for this view can be found in Gadamer's analysis of the terminology used in the *Protrepticus*, GADAMER 1928, 148.

<sup>79</sup> On Aristotle's style of public discourses compared to his treatises, see AMMON. *In Cat.* VI,29–7,4. In relation to public discourses Ammonius mentions, for example, “overelaboration of speech and metaphor” or changing style according to the speaker, he never suggests that Aristotle would be guilty of using several notions for a single entity. I am thankful to the anonymous reader for the reference.

<sup>80</sup> I do not say that I endorse this scheme of the *ergon* argument and I have claimed that Aristotle himself saw it as problematic and rectified it at *Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a18–20.

by the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) whose *ergon* is understanding, i.e. the understanding is ultimately the highest and most valuable activity of human beings. Second, the understanding is the capacity of the contemplative part of the soul which is perfected by knowledge whose *ergon* is truth or being true. Being true is thus understood as understanding coupled with theorizing and it is the most authoritative *ergon* of human beings.

### Interpretation A: Understanding over Truth

First, let us assess the evidence for reading the structure of the *ergon* argument so that the understanding (φρόνησις) is the higher *ergon*, i.e. the *ergon* of the virtue which perfects the basic human capacity for being true (ἀληθεύειν). The evidence for this scheme is not only quite numerous, but moreover it is the rare explicitness of the passages which makes them highly significant.

Aristotle says that nothing is more valuable than understanding (43,1-3) and that nothing is better than understanding (43,17). Why does he think so?

At 43,12-13 (text [5] above) Aristotle calls understanding a part of virtue and *eudaimonia*. This suggests a high status of understanding, especially since truth is not explicitly associated with *eudaimonia* in the text. Further, at 44,24-26 Aristotle writes that “understanding is more valuable than it (sc. sight) and all the other,<sup>81</sup> including living, and it is more authoritative than truth.”<sup>82</sup> This reading clearly suggests that understanding is above truth, that it is superior to it. Therefore, it makes sense for Aristotle to say not only that “to understand is the main pursuit of all humans” (ὥστε πάντες ἄνθρωποι τὸ φρονεῖν μάλιστα διώκουσι, 44,25-26) but that it is “the goal” (τέλος) of our living (*Protr.* IX,52,5), i.e. the goal we live for, as well.

Similarly, a few lines above Aristotle claimed that “to understand will be more valuable than having opinions truly” (μᾶλλον αἰρετὸν τὸ φρονεῖν ἔσται τοῦ δοξάζειν ἀληθῶς, 44,8-9), since true opinions are valuable not because they are opinions, but because they are true. And because true opinions exist more in someone who understands, then understanding is more valuable. Indeed, it seems that true opinions could hardly exist within anyone or anything that is not understanding, i.e. without φρόνησις. This argument presupposes that under-

<sup>81</sup> The phrase τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν could be either “all the other senses” or even more generally “all the other activities” mentioned earlier in the argumentation.

<sup>82</sup> Pistelli’s text at 44,24-26 is ταύτης δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν αἰρετωτέρα καὶ τοῦ ζῆν ἔστιν ἢ φρόνησις κυριωτέρα τῆς ἀληθείας. The grammatical problems will be discussed below.

standing always possesses the truth, since it is on account of this truth that it is akin to the true opinions (44,4-7). The opinions must be qualified by the being true, but true opinions are generally similar to understanding based on the truth.

At 45,15-16 it is repeated that understanding is the most valuable thing of all and Aristotle adds that even if someone had everything but his understanding was sick or non-functioning, his life would not be valuable, since “none of his other goods would be useful” (45,16-20). It is understanding that makes everything in our life useful and not harmful.<sup>83</sup>

There are two rather poetic passages which show Aristotle’s high appraisal of understanding. At 48,9-11 Aristotle makes Heraclides say that “nothing divine or blessed belongs to humans apart from just that one thing worth taking seriously [...] insight and understanding.” Even if the speaker is Heraclides,<sup>84</sup> the idea is congruent with Aristotle’s argument. In his treatises, Aristotle tends to separate intellect (νοῦς) from the realm of nature (φύσις).<sup>85</sup> Therefore, if the term τὸ θεῖον refers to νοῦς and φρόνησις in our humane context, Aristotle might maintain that these are somehow separate from nature, though the philosopher should study both aspects of reality. The philosopher should then investigate, looking into nature as well as the divine, namely νοῦς and φρόνησις in the case of human beings.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, when Aristotle wants to beat the Pythagoreans on their own turf, he writes:

For just as the poets who are wise claim that in Hades is transported to us the bounty of justice, likewise, in the Isles of the Blessed is the bounty of understanding, in all likelihood (53,12-15).<sup>87</sup>

I take the above-mentioned passages (43,12-13, 44,4-9, 44,23-26, 45,16-20, 48,9-11, 52,5, 53,12-15) as the best evidence for the interpretation of understanding (φρόνησις) as the higher or normative *ergon* of the virtue which perfects our capacity for truth.

<sup>83</sup> For platonic version of this idea see PLATO, *Meno*, 87e-89a; *Alc.* I 133d-134a; *Euthyd.* 281b-d.

<sup>84</sup> The identification of the speaker is adopted from the edition by Hutchinson and Johnson; it is further supported by HUTCHINSON - JOHNSON 2018.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. ARIST. *Part. an.* I,1 641a32-b10 and *Gen. an.* II,3 736b5-7; this difference is suggested as well at *DA* II,1 413a3-7, III,5 430a17-18, 430a23; cf. *Metaph.* XII,3 1070a24-6.

<sup>86</sup> See WALKER 2010, 149-150 for an excellent analysis of this passage; Walker assumes that the references are to the divine νοῦς ordering the universe; I am not certain that this cosmic reading is necessary, though it is not untenable.

<sup>87</sup> On the Pythagorean allusions see BURKERT 1972, chapter IV.4, and n. 72.

## Interpretation B: Truth over Understanding

What evidence is there for the opposing interpretation which takes understanding (φρόνησις) to be a capacity of the cognitive part of our soul which is perfected by knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) whose *ergon* is truth or being true (ἀλήθεια, ἀληθεύειν)?<sup>88</sup>

First, within the *ergon* argument (passages [3] and [4]) Aristotle says that no *ergon* of reasoning is better than ἀλήθεια and it is the most authoritative *ergon* of this part of the soul (42,20–23).

The concept of *ergon* reappears later in the *Protrepticus* when Aristotle concludes why perfect living (τελέως ζῆν) belongs to those who understand and theorize (φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν) in accordance with the most precise knowledge:

Now of a soul, too, thinking as well as reasoning is the only *ergon* of the soul, or is most of all. Therefore it is now simple and easy for anyone to reach the conclusion that he who thinks correctly is more alive, and he who is most true (ὁ μάλιστα ἀληθεύων) lives most, and this is the one who understands and theorizes according to the most precise knowledge;<sup>89</sup> and it is then and to those that living perfectly, surely, should be attributed, to those who are using their understanding, i.e. to the understanding ones (*Protr.* XI,58,3–10).

First, Aristotle is clearly referring to the *ergon* of the soul here; indeed, this is the passage which convinced Düring that the expression “an *ergon* of virtue” must be a mistake. The *ergon* of the soul is introduced here in the general sense as thinking and reasoning (τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι). Both stand for the activity of the cognitive part of the soul called διάνοια or τὸ διανοούμενον τῆς ψυχῆς (42,21, end of section [3]), which is why Aristotle uses τὸ διανοεῖσθαι here. Already in 41,10–11, i.e. before the *ergon* argument itself, Aristotle associates understanding with λογίζεσθαι. Therefore, when Aristotle talks about the *ergon* of the soul in terms of thinking and reasoning, he unfurls what he means by the term φρόνησις, which was introduced as *ergon* in 43,18.

<sup>88</sup> What would it be to live with an understanding (*phronēsis*) not-yet-perfected by the virtue? Unperfected understanding does not mean living in deception or living with constantly false opinions (see 44,4–9). However, unperfected understanding does not provide the right guidelines in life (39,9–40,1; 55,1–3), further it does not provide a correct understanding of the important subjects as just and unjust or nature (38,1–2; here cf. *DCSM* 23 72,24 as well).

<sup>89</sup> Precision is one of the features according to which Aristotle judges the value of ἐπιστήμη, the other being the worth of its objects, see Iamblichus, *DCMS* 23 71,26–73,5 which Hutchinson and Johnson attribute to Aristotle's *Protrepticus* as well.

Being true is clearly the highest possibility mentioned in the text. The one who thinks correctly (ὁ διανοούμενος ὀρθῶς) is said to live more (ζῆν μᾶλλον) compared to someone ignorant. Yet, the one who ἀληθεύειν, who is being true, lives the most of all (μάλιστα πάντων) and is someone who “understands and theorizes according to the most precise knowledge” (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην).<sup>90</sup> This suggests a hierarchy between those living more than someone else and those living most of all (including the ones living more). Those living more are the ones who think correctly, who exercise their διάνοια. Yet, those living most of all are the ones being true. Exercising one’s διάνοια, i.e. generally speaking φρονεῖν (if I am correct in that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι stands for φρόνησις), does not seem to be sufficient grounds for being true. For being true one has to understand and theorize in accordance with the most precise knowledge, i.e. with the virtue.<sup>91</sup>

The one who most lives true (ὁ μάλιστα ἀληθεύων) is said to be the one who understands and observes according to the most precise knowledge (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην, 58,7-9). It suggests that being true is our own natural activity perfected by the given virtue. It is the *ergon* of human beings (42,9-22, section [3]), not in the sense of the *ergon* we do, but – as I have put it above – in the sense of the *ergon* we ought to do, i.e. the normative *ergon*. It is then only fitting that Aristotle describes the *ergon* of our virtue as τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν as well (43,20-21). My claim that truth is our *ergon* in the sense of a normative *ergon* of the corresponding virtue is corroborated by Aristotle, who describes both being true as well as the *ergon* of virtue as τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν.<sup>92</sup>

Earlier I have listed lines 44,4-9 as evidence for understanding being above truth since it was said understanding is more valuable than true opinions. However, if we examine the background for this claim, I believe that it can be actually read in favour of truth being above understanding, i.e. truth being the normative *ergon* and the understanding being the capacity of the cognitive part of the soul. Aristotle explains at two occasions (42,25-29 and 43,27) that if  $x$  is valuable because of  $y$ ,  $y$  is better and more valuable than  $x$ , because if, for example,  $z$  has more  $y$  than  $x$ ,  $z$  is more valuable than  $x$  on account of  $y$ . As Aristotle explains, if one chooses to stroll, because it is healthy, and if sprint-

<sup>90</sup> MANSION 1960, 68 writes that “the activity of knowing truth is nothing else than life itself at the maximum of its perfection”.

<sup>91</sup> Here EINARSON 1936, 265 seems to be right in that the φρόνησις of the *Protrepticus* is not the Socratic virtue but rather a theoretical science or generally knowledge.

<sup>92</sup> Similarly in VAN DER MEEREN 2011, 179.

ing is even more healthy, one chooses to sprint because of the health in it. The health is of highest value here and strolling and sprinting are valuable merely as providing health.

Aristotle argues that true opinions are valuable in that and insofar as they are similar to understanding because of truth (διὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 44,7). Therefore, the opinions are valuable because of truth. The truth is the value compared between true opinions and understanding. If truth is more in understanding than in true opinions, it is more valuable than true opinions (44,7-9). However, we see that Aristotle here treats understanding as valuable because of truth. This finally suggest – based on the general principle that if  $x$  is valuable because of  $y$ ,  $y$  is more valuable than  $x$  – that truth is more valuable than understanding. The understanding is more valuable than true opinions, but since it is because of truth, the truth itself is more valuable than understanding. Aristotle later in the *Protrepticus* offers an analogous argument: being awake is more valuable than sleep because the soul of a person who is awake is true more than the soul of a person who is asleep (46,4-7). Again, the truth is the decisive value *because* of which is being awake more valuable than being asleep.

At 36,9-11 Aristotle admits that animals have small glimmers of understanding but theoretical wisdom is shared only by humans and gods. Aristotle allows for two different ways of sharing the activities of living.<sup>93</sup> The first one is the familiar scheme of earthly life forms building up on each other: living of animals entails the basic characteristic activities of plants (nourishment, decay and growth) and human beings move and perceive which are the activities primarily distinguishing animals from plants. Finally, human beings reason and think, and the cognitive activities are their living. However, some animals to some degree share activities characteristic for human beings.<sup>94</sup> It would be absurd, if any of the lower life form could share in the highest possible activity of the higher life form, e.g. in the familiar vocabulary of the *Nicomachean Ethics* an animal sharing in theorizing, or here in the *Protrepticus*, an animal sharing in theoretical wisdom. Therefore, if animals share in understanding, understanding is not the highest possible capacity of human beings. This sharing with animals suggests that understanding is a capacity of a reasoning soul-part which has to be perfected by virtue so that a human being reaches the highest possible *ergon*.

What can be done about Aristotle's claim that understanding is part of virtue and *eudaimonia* (43,12-13 [text 5 above])? Understanding as a part of *eudaimo-*

<sup>93</sup> On activities of living see *DA* II,1 413a20-25; cf. JOHNSON 2018, 58-59 on this passage.

<sup>94</sup> ARIST. *Gen. an.* I,23 731a24-b14; *Post. An.* II,19 99b36-100a3 and further examples in *Hist. an.* VII,1 588a25-31, IX,5 611a15-21; cf. LLOYD 2013.

*nia* is not a problem, provided that understanding is our *ergon*, as in this case, exercising it would undoubtedly be part of our *eudaimonia*. The scheme where truth is the *ergon* of a virtue assumes that understanding as a capacity of a cognitive part of the soul which is perfected by the virtue. However, if understanding is “a part of virtue”, does it not mean that it cannot be further improved or done well because of a virtue?

I admit that the reference to the part of a virtue is puzzling and remains problematic. One of the reasons behind such confusion is that nothing else in the *Protrepticus* suggests that Aristotle uses the concept of a complex virtue composed of several parts which would themselves be virtues, akin to perfect virtue (καλοκἀγαθία) from the *Eudemean Ethics*.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, when Aristotle lists suitable candidates for *eudaimonia* both in 41,11–15 and 59,26–60,1, the virtue is a separate candidate from understanding and it is only the puzzling passage in 43,12–13 that suggests that these two candidates for *eudaimonia* could actually be consolidated into one.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, when being true is supposed to be above understanding, is there any way how to deal with the claim that “understanding is more valuable than it (sc. sight) and all the other, including living, and it is more authoritative than truth” (44,24–26)? The first problem is grammatical, Pistelli’s text is ταύτης δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν αἰρετωτέρα καὶ τοῦ ζῆν ἔστιν ἡ φρόνησις κυριωτέρα τῆς ἀληθείας (44,24–26). What is to be made of τοῦ ζῆν and how is the syntax of this sentence to be understood?

Ross accepts a conjecture proposed by Jaeger: κυριωτερα (ουσα), and his translation is “but practical wisdom is preferable to it (vision) and to all the other senses, and to life itself, since it has a stronger grasp of truth.”<sup>97</sup> This is a fair attempt, as Aristotle previously claimed that living was valuable because of

<sup>95</sup> Aristotle writes at 43,6–7: “Its (sc. virtue’s) *ergon* is none of those particular virtues” (οὐκ ἄρα ἔστιν ἔργον αὐτῆς οὐδεμία τῶν κατὰ μέρος λεγομένων ἀρετῶν). However, this phrase is not enough to justify any conclusion positing that there is a complex or complete virtue which is made up of particular virtues. The above-quoted sentence is the result of the previous argument that the *ergon* of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is higher and above the *ergon* of any particular virtues, since knowledge is the virtue of the best part of the soul, namely the cognitive part. Therefore, the contrast here is not between a complete virtue and particular virtues as its components, but between the best virtue as the virtue of the best part of ourselves and the particular, lower virtues.

<sup>96</sup> One possible solution, suggested by an anonymous reviewer, is to take lines 43,12–13 as suggesting that understanding is “part of virtue” as a capacity is “part of” its virtue, as that which the virtue perfects. The following lines 43,12–13 correspond to this rather loose speaking about parts and wholes.

<sup>97</sup> Ross 1952, 37. Note that there is no “practical” in the Greek text.



sensation and cognition is a form of sensation (44,17–19). Since understanding provides more truth than sensation, it is more valuable and thus more preferable to vision and all other senses. As I have argued above, this reading acknowledges truth as the value because of which understanding is valuable in the first place.

However, as noted by Doug Hutchinson,<sup>98</sup> the term κύριος cannot mean “stronger grasp” and the phrase “life itself” is an overtranslation as there is no “itself” in Greek.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, it is prudent to say that practical wisdom is preferable to other forms of cognition, but what does it mean to say that practical wisdom is more valuable than living (ζωή)? If we read ζωή as its colloquial meaning of “living”, it is possible to understand the claim as the result of the previous argument that living is valuable because of cognition to the effect that living without cognition would not be worthy living at all. Therefore, if one were to choose between living without cognition and not living at all, one ought to choose not living at all. As affirmed later in the text: “Nobody would choose to live having the most private property and power over people if, however, they ceased to be understanding or were insane” (*Protr.* VIII,45,6–9).<sup>100</sup>

In the latest working draft of their translation, Hutchinson and Johnson suggest to construe the text as saying: “Understanding is preferable to it (sc. vision) and to all the other senses, and it has more authority over living than truth does.” Their interpretation of the passage does not lend itself to a reading of understanding as having authority over truth *tout court*, as this claim would be incompatible with the argumentation thus far. Their interpretation means that truth alone is not a motivational factor; it needs to be accessed, so to say, by some cognitive capacity. According to this understanding, one is motivated by understanding, which is the internal authority, and not simply by something being true.

Therefore, to conclude, the lines 44,24–26 do not pose a problem for this second interpretation of the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus*. In both proposed readings of the passage, i.e. based on Jaeger’s emendation of the text as well as the reading proposed by Hutchinson and Johnson, truth (ἀλήθεια) is *ergon* of virtue which perfects understanding (φρόνησις) which is the *ergon* of the cognitive part of the soul.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> In private communication, cf. notes to this passage at [www.protrepticus.info](http://www.protrepticus.info).

<sup>99</sup> Ross reads another conjecture here which he fails to mention, namely Düring’s suggestion to read (αὐτοῦ) τοῦ ζῆν in his fragment B77, DÜRING 1961, 78.

<sup>100</sup> According to Hutchinson and Johnson, the speaker here might be Heraclides, though I believe that he is summarizing the preceding argument made by Aristotle.

<sup>101</sup> As noted already above, the *Eudemian Ethics*, II,6 1221b29–30 names “truth” as the *ergon* of intellectual virtues; see LEE 2022 on this passage without a reference to the *Protrepticus*.



## Conclusion

I have presented a detailed interpretation of the *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus*. The *ergon* argument in the *Protrepticus* has two aspects in common with the other versions in the *Eudemean* as well as *Nicomachean Ethics*. First, it is an argumentative step from the “formal” or nominal account of happiness to its substantial account, i.e. discussion of our soul (as our own or most authoritative self), its parts, activities and virtues. We saw that the opening lines began with set of propositions such as “everything is well disposed when it is in accordance with its own proper virtue” (41,22–23) or that “natural virtue of that which is better is naturally better” (41,25–27). The *ergon* argument facilitates the transition in the argument to the explication of what these virtues and activities are, what they consists in and finally, what might be the content of happiness (though the *Protrepticus* does not arrive at conclusive definition of happiness).<sup>102</sup> Second, the *ergon* argument also clarifies the normative aspect of the interpretation of human happiness. The argument not only describes, for example, our own activities and the components of the soul, but shows which components of the soul are (in the context of ethical discussion) superior to others, what the role of virtue is, and what activities we should aim at. Moreover, we see in the *Protrepticus* that Aristotle makes a very significant (and very problematic) attempt to distinguish our own activity from our own virtuous or excellent activity, which is our goal.

Within this interpretation I have claimed that the scheme of the argument is more complex than the argumentation known from the *Eudemean Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, I have pointed out that the *Eudemean Ethics* twice simplifies this complexity (*Eth. Eud.* II,1 1219a8 and 1219a18–20). One of these complexities is caused by introducing two different *erga*: the *ergon* of a given entity and moreover the *ergon* of relevant virtue. This is what I have called the double *ergon* scheme.

In the last part of the article I have presented two possible interpretations of this double *ergon* scheme. Based on the evidence gathered above, I finally opt for the interpretation B: Aristotle introduces understanding (*φρόνησις*) as the capacity of the most authoritative thing in us, i.e. the capacity of the highest part of our soul (43,1–5; it is called *ergon* at 43,18). At the same time, truth or being true (*ἀλήθεια, ἀληθεύειν*) is the most authoritative *ergon* of this part of

---

<sup>102</sup> The conclusion defended in the *Protrepticus* is that, regardless of whether happiness is understood as a kind of wisdom, virtue or pleasure, living happily is either exclusively or primarily ascribed to philosophers (*Protr.* XII,59,24–60,10).

the soul (42,22) and contemplation (θεωρία) is the goal of its activity (42,25). I believe that combining understanding and contemplation in the description of truth is well justified (58,8, cf. 43,20–21). The contemplation elevates understanding, so to say, and reaches the truth.<sup>103</sup>

Aristotle seems to be aware that these two *erga* cannot be entirely separate. This is the reason why he explicates both “being true” as well as “the *ergon* of a virtue” in terms of φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν. Being true is φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν in accordance with the most precise knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).<sup>104</sup> The virtue strives to reach a perfected state of the cognitive capacity; it strives for the truth. In this sense, the truth is the highest *ergon* of a human being. However, at the same time we can see why “having understanding would be the best of all” (52,11–12; see further 43,1–3.17). Without understanding one would not reach the truth and one could not do philosophy (39,25–40,3), which is the key to *eudaimonia*. The *ergon* argument actually shows that it is through philosophy that one exercises his own, proper activities at the highest level.

## Bibliography

- ACHTENBERG, D. 1989, “The Role of the *Ergon* Argument in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 9, pp. 37–47.
- BAKER, S. H. 2015, “The Concept of *Ergon*: Towards an Achievement Interpretation of Aristotle’s ‘Function Argument’”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 48, pp. 227–266.
- BARNEY, R. 2008, “Aristotle’s Argument for a Human Function”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34, pp. 293–322.
- BERTI, E. 2000, *Protreptico: Esortazione alla filosofia*, Turin.
- BOBONICH, CH. 2007, “Why Should Philosophers Rule? Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*”, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 24, pp. 153–175.
- BRÜLLMANN, P. 2010, *Die Theorie des Guten in Aristoteles’ “Nikomachischer Ethik”*, Berlin – New York.
- BRÜLLMANN, P. 2012, “Ethik und Naturphilosophie: Bemerkungen zu Aristoteles’ Ergon-Argument (EN I 6)”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 94, pp. 1–30.

<sup>103</sup> DÜRING 1955, 82: “Contemplation of the universe [...] is the highest form of φρόνησις.”

<sup>104</sup> Cf. the argument on the double value of contemplation in WALKER 2010; for more on θεωρία in the *Protrepticus* see HUTCHINSON – JOHNSON 2014, 389–390.

- BURKERT, W. 1972, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, Transl. by E. L. MINAR, JR., Cambridge (Mass.).
- CHARLES, D. 2017, "Aristotle's Nicomachean Function Argument: Some Issues", *Philosophical Inquiry*, 41, pp. 95–104.
- CHROUST, A.-H. 1964, *Protrepticus, A Reconstruction*, South Bend (IN).
- CLARK, S. 1972, "The Use of 'Man's Function' in Aristotle", *Ethics*, 82, pp. 269 to 283.
- COLLINS, J. H. 2015, *Exhortations to Philosophy: The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle*, Oxford – New York.
- COOPER, J. 1975, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Cambridge (Mass.).
- CORCILIOUS, K. – GREGORIC, P. 2010, "Separability vs. Difference: Parts and Capacities of the Soul in Aristotle", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 39, pp. 81–120.
- CRIVELLI, P. 2004, *Aristotle on Truth*, Cambridge.
- CURZER, H. J. 2012, *Aristotle and the Virtues*, Oxford – New York.
- DIRLMEIER, F. 1999, *Nikomachische Ethik*, Berlin.
- DUMOULIN, B. 1981, *Recherches sur le Premier Aristote*, Paris.
- DÜRING, I. 1955, "Aristotle in the *Protrepticus*", in: A. MANSION – L. J. DE RAEYMAEKER (eds.) *Autour d'Aristote: recueil d'études de philosophie ancienne et médiévale offert à A. Mansion*, Louvain, pp. 81–97.
- DÜRING, I. 1961, *Aristotle's Protrepticus: An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Göteborg (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, 12).
- DÜRING, I. 1969, *Der Protreptikos des Aristoteles*, Frankfurt am Main (Quellen der Philosophie. Texte und Probleme, 9).
- EINARSON, B. 1936, "Aristotle's *Protrepticus* and the Structure of the *Epinomis*", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 67, pp. 261–285.
- FERGUSON, D. 2022a, "The 'Belonging to a Kind' Reading of the Eudemian *Ergon* Argument", *Ancient Philosophy*, 42, pp. 471–492.
- FERGUSON, D. 2022b, "The Best Is the *Telos*: An Argument in *Eudemian Ethics* 1.8", *Phronesis*, 67, pp. 338–369.
- FLASHAR, H. 2006, *Fragmente zu Philosophie, Rhetorik, Poetik, Dichtung*, Berlin – Darmstadt.
- FOLLON, J. 2006, *Invitation à la philosophie*, Paris.
- GADAMER, H. G. 1928, "Der Aristotelische Protreptikos und die Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Betrachtung der Aristotelischen Ethik", *Hermes*, 63, pp. 138–164.
- GERSON, L. P. 2004, "Platonism and the Invention of the Problem of Universals", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 86, pp. 233–256.
- HILDEBRANDT, R. 2020, "What Is Philosophy in the *Protrepticus*?", in: A. P. MESQUITA – S. NORIEGA-OLMOS – C. J. I. SHIELDS (eds.), *Revisiting Aristotle's*

- Fragments: New Essays on the Fragments of Aristotle's Lost Works*, Berlin – Boston, pp. 11–48.
- HILDEBRANDT, R. 2021, *Why Philosophy? Aristotle's Defense of Philosophy in the Protrepticus*, PhD dissertation – Berlin.
- HUTCHINSON, D. 1986, *The Virtues of Aristotle*, London.
- HUTCHINSON, D. – JOHNSON, M. R. 2005, “Authenticating Aristotle's Protrepticus”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 29, pp. 193–294.
- HUTCHINSON, D. – JOHNSON, M. R. 2014, “Protreptic Aspects of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*”, in: R. POLANSKY (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, New York, pp. 383–409.
- HUTCHINSON, D. – JOHNSON, M. R. 2018, “Protreptic and Apotreptic: Aristotle's Dialogue Protrepticus”, in: O. ALIEVA – A. KOTZÉ – S. VAN DER MEEREN (eds.), *When Wisdom Calls: Philosophical Protreptic in Antiquity*, Turnhout, pp. 111–154.
- HUTCHINSON, D. – JOHNSON, M. R., unpublished, “The Antidosis of Isocrates and Aristotle's Protrepticus”.
- JAEGER, W. 1948, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, Oxford.
- JIRSA, J. 2017, “Divine Activity and Human Life”, *Rhizomata: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 5, pp. 210–238.
- JOHNSON, M. R. 2018, “Aristotle on the Meaning of Life”, in: S. LEACH – J. TARTAGLIA (eds.), *The Meaning of Life and the Great Philosophers*, London – New York, pp. 56–64.
- KENNY, A. 2011, *The Eudemean Ethics*, Oxford.
- KRAUT, R. 1989, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Princeton.
- LEAR, G. R. 2004, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Princeton.
- LEE, R. C. 2022, “The Function Argument in the *Eudemean Ethics*”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 42, pp. 191–214.
- LLOYD, G. 2013, “Aristotle on the Natural Sociability, Skills and Intelligence of Animals”, in: V. HARTE – M. LANE (eds.), *Politeia in Greek and Roman Philosophy*, Cambridge, pp. 277–293.
- MANSION, S. 1960, “Contemplation and Action in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*”, in: I. DÜRING – G. E. L. OWEN (eds.), *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century: Papers of the Symposium Aristotelicum Held at Oxford in August, 1957*, Göteborg, pp. 56–75.
- MENN, S. 1994, “The Origins of Aristotle's Concept of Ἐνέργεια: Ἐνέργεια and Δύναμις”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 14, pp. 73–114.
- MONAN, D. J. 1968, *Moral Knowledge and Its Methodology in Aristotle*, Oxford.
- NATALI, C. 2010, “Particular Virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle”, in: R. W. SHARPLES (ed.), *Particulars in Greek Philosophy: The Seventh S. V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Leiden (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 120), pp. 73–96.

- NEEDLER, M. C. 1928, "The Aristotelian *Protrepticus* and the Developmental Treatment of the Aristotelian Ethics", *Classical Philology*, 23, pp. 280–284.
- NUSSBAUM, M. C. 1995, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics", in: R. HARRISON – J. E. J. ALTHAM (eds.), *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge, pp. 86–131.
- DES PLACES, É. 1989, *Jamblique: Protreptique*, Paris.
- REEVE, C. D. C. 1992, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford.
- ROSS, W. D. 1952, *The Works of Aristotle: Select Fragments*, Oxford.
- ROSS, W. D. 1955, *Fragmenta selecta*, Oxford.
- ROSS, W. D. – BROWN, L. 2009, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford.
- ROWE, CH. 2023, *Aristotelica: Studies on the Text of Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics*, New York.
- SCHNEEWEISS, G. 1966, *Der Protreptikos des Aristoteles*, Bamberg.
- SCHNEEWEISS, G. 2005, *Protreptikos: Hinführung zur Philosophie*, Darmstadt (Texte zur Forschung, 85).
- SCOTT, D. 1999, "Aristotle on Well-Being and Intellectual Contemplation: Primary and Secondary Eudaimonia", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 73, pp. 225–242.
- TESSITORE, A. 1996, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*, Albany.
- TUOZZO, T. M. 1996, "The Function of Human Beings and the Rationality of the Universe: Aristotle and Zeno on Parts and Wholes", *Phoenix*, 50, pp. 146–161.
- VAN DER MEEREN, S. 2011, *Exhortation à la philosophie: le dossier grec*, Paris.
- VENDRUSCOLO, F. 1989, "Due frammenti Aristotelici (*Protrepticus* 6 e 15 Walzer – Ross): Note testuali e spunti per una ricostruzione", *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 38, pp. 293–330.
- WALKER, M. D. 2010, "The Utility of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*", *Ancient Philosophy*, 30, pp. 135–153.
- WALZER, R. 1934, *Aristotelis dialogorum fragmenta*, Firenze.
- WHITING, J. 1988, "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense", *Ancient Philosophy*, 8, pp. 33–48.
- WOODS, M. 2005, *Eudemian Ethics, Books I, II, and VIII*, Oxford.

## Summary

The article presents the first comprehensive interpretation of the *ergon* argument in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. It further argues that Aristotle in this argument distinguishes the *ergon* of an entity from the *ergon* of its virtue thus presenting a complicated argumentative structure which is explicitly simplified in the *Eudemian Ethics*. Based on the latest attempts to reconstruct the *Protrepticus*, the article shows the relation of the *ergon* argument to its other versions in both *Ethics*. This account not only clarifies the relation of the *Protrepticus* to Aristotle's other ethical writings, it shows that Aristotle intends the argument as a transition between describing what human being does and what a good human being does well, namely a natural transition from the descriptive to the normative.

JAKUB JIRSA  
Charles University  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Jan Palach Square 1/2  
116 38 Prague 1  
Czech Republic  
jakub.jirsa@ff.cuni.cz

# EIRENE STUDIA GRAECA ET LATINA

ISSN 0046-1628

Founded 1960

*Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina* is an international refereed scholarly journal of classics which is published by the Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague. It welcomes and publishes original research on classics, reception of Antiquity and classical traditions. It also brings up-to-date reviews of scholarly literature on these subjects. ■ The journal accepts submissions in English, German, French and Italian. All contributions (except for reviews) are sent anonymously for peer-review. ■ *Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina* is abstracted / indexed in following scientific databases: *L'année philologique*; The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (CEJSH); European Reference Index for Humanities (ERIH PLUS); Modern Language Association International Bibliography; Scopus; Web of Science; EBSCO. ■ For manuscript submission guidelines, contents of previously published issues and more, please visit the journal's homepage: <http://www.ics.cas.cz/en/journals/eirene>. ■ All article submissions and subscription / exchange orders (back issues are also available for purchase) are to be sent by e-mail to: [eirene@ics.cas.cz](mailto:eirene@ics.cas.cz). Books for review and other correspondence should be mailed to:

*Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina*

Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy  
of the Czech Academy of Sciences

Na Florenci 3

110 00 Prague 1

Czech Republic

tel.: +420 234 612 330

fax: +420 222 828 305

# EIRENE STUDIA GRAECA ET LATINA

LIX / 2023 / I–II

© Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy  
of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Prague 2023  
ISSN 0046-1628

Editor-in-chief  
PETR KITZLER  
Centre for Classical Studies,  
Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

## Assistant Editors

JAN BAŽANT (Centre for Classical Studies, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)  
- JAN N. BREMMER (University of Groningen) - KATHLEEN M. COLEMAN  
(Harvard University) - SIEGMAR DÖPP (University of Göttingen) - HERMANN  
HARRAUER (University of Vienna) - STEPHEN HARRISON (Corpus Christi  
College, University of Oxford) - HERBERT HEFTNER (University of Vienna) -  
BRAD INWOOD (Yale University) - IRENE J. F. DE JONG (University of Amsterdam)  
- DAVID KONSTAN (New York University) - WALTER LAPINI (University of  
Genova) - GLENN W. MOST (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa / University of  
Chicago) - LISA C. NEVETT (University of Michigan) - JIŘÍ PAVLÍK (Charles  
University, Prague) - ROSARIO PINTAUDI (University of Messina) - ILARIA L.  
E. RAMELLI (Angelicum - Sacred Heart University - Oxford) - DOUG REED  
(University of Rhode Island) - ALAN SOMMERSTEIN (University of Nottingham) -  
DMITRY VL. TRUBOTCHKIN (Russian University of Theater Arts - GITIS, Moscow)

Managing Editor  
JAKUB ČECHVALA  
Centre for Classical Studies, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

cover and graphic design © Markéta Jelenová  
typesetting © Jana Andrlová  
print © Karolinum Publishers