

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* lays out, and elaborates upon, the nature of human actions, ends, purposes, and much more. For the present, I will be discussing the argument that entails the purpose of human life, and, more specifically, the means and ends of a 'good' human life. While there are multiple arguments relevant and important to the question at hand, it explicitly asks for the relation between Aristotle's function argument and the "highest good". As such, I will argue that Aristotle successfully asserts that the "highest good" is derived from the function of a human—that is the 'excellent' function of a human—because of the way he defines and uses the terms 'good' and 'function' to facilitate the premises in accordance with the conclusion.

Now, we must begin laying the foundation and context and defining the terms that are necessary for us to interpret Aristotle's argument in its entirety. First, something that isn't requisite to the argument in itself, but will help to dispel some minor objections; this is 'happiness', or in the original terms "eudaimonia". While it is generally translated to happiness, it isn't exactly thought of in the same way as we would think of happiness (as a feeling or state of emotion), rather 'eudaimonia' is more precisely used to denote a life in accordance with excellence or virtues. Since happiness could be thought of as a very subjective and temporary term i.e., one could be happy they got paid, or that the weather is nice, whereas for eudaimonia it's subjective only insofar as one's virtues, which Aristotle clearly lays out for us with the 'Doctrine of the Mean' where the excellences/virtues are presented as the mean, or average, states between deficiency and excess (e.g., courage is the mean between recklessness and cowardice); all of which is presented in Book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Next let's examine Aristotle's idea of the 'good'. Generally, he specifies the good of an activity as the end or the product of an activity; a particular phrase he uses a lot is 'for the sake of' (coming from his discussion of 'causes' in the *Physics*). For example, he gives us "In medicine this [the good] is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and choice the end..." (1097<sup>a</sup>18-21). He goes on to differentiate 'ends' and 'complete ends', for there exists ends that are chosen for the sake of something else (he gives "wealth, flutes, and in general

instruments” 1097<sup>a</sup>26). Those of which are less complete than those that are both done for the sake of themselves and of something else (‘honour, pleasure, reason, and every excellence...’ 1097<sup>b</sup>1-2); which are less complete than that which is always and only done for the sake of itself—for if there were not some highest good or chief good, that is done only for the sake of itself, we would simply have a series in perpetuum of goods done for the sake of another good, evidently then, there must be some good, done only for the sake of itself, which will be the ‘highest good’—Aristotle asserts this to be happiness since all other ends are, ultimately, done for the sake of happiness (1097<sup>b</sup>4-5). This, however, is adjacent and beyond the argument at hand, since we are primarily concerned with how the human function relates to the highest good and not what that function or good is. Aristotle further elaborates that the most complete good must be ‘self-sufficient’, this he defines as “...that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing...and further we think it most desirable of all things” (1097<sup>b</sup>15-18) and as such happiness he says to be self-sufficient. Considering that that which is self-sufficient is lacking in nothing, it’s necessary that it must be counted separate from the other goods and not as “one good thing among others” (1097<sup>b</sup>18); if it were able to be denoted as such the addition of any good would make it more desirable, but we know that it is lacking in nothing—this would be a contradiction because if it could be made more desirable then it would, in fact, be lacking in something (that being desirability). Now we have cemented the idea of the highest good, as that for which the sake all else is done (the end of all action), as being self-sufficient (the most desirable and lacking in nothing), and as complete for it’s always done for the sake of itself—Aristotle attributes these qualities to happiness. Finally, the most imperative requisite for understanding, supporting, and defending this argument is Aristotle’s usage of ‘function’ and how he asserts that humans do, in fact, have a function.