The Function Argument in *Nicomachean Ethics*

I. RELEVANT TEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1098a8</td>
<td>&quot;the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1098a16</td>
<td>&quot;human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete.&quot;</td>
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| 1102a1 | "happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with complete excellence"

II. THE ARGUMENT

1. The function of a human being is to reason.
2. Human good is an activity of the soul with complete excellence.
3. But we commonly think that the greatest human good = happiness.
4. Therefore, happiness is an activity of the soul with complete excellence.

III. EXCELLENCE (VIRTUE) IN BOOK II

A. The human who fulfills her function well is a good (non-moral) human.
B. But Aristotle needs to argue that she will also be a MORALLY good human. How can he do this, and avoid the problem Plato had with the "harmonious thief", the good reasoner who uses her reason to commit crimes well?
C. The essence of a human being is rational agency.
D. Rational agency involves having a proper conception of oneself as a rational agent.
E. A proper conception of oneself as a rational agent involves seeing the self as existing over time: past, present, future.
F. The vicious person has no proper self-conception.
   1. If she chooses outright vice, she must change her behaviors and character states to get what she wants; hence, she has no stable state of character.
   2. If she chooses prudent vice, she must still randomly select inconsistent character states.
   3. Either way, she is not conceiving of herself as a stable rational agent.
   4. But this is inconsistent with the rational agent's self-concept as a rational agent.
   5. Therefore, no truly rational agent who knows she is rational will act viciously.
   6. Hence, the vicious person has no proper self-conception as a rational agent.
G. Hence, the virtuous person understand who she is correctly, and acts according to her true nature (rationally and morally correctly). The vicious person, however, does not so act.

IV. VIRTUE AND RESPONSIBILITY

A. Virtue expresses our essential nature.
B. If we are essentially rational agents, then we are responsible for our actions and states- so far as they originate in states under our control as rational agents.

Forming our desires, aims, decisions = exercising our capacities = becoming candidates for praise and blame = being moral agents.

Our good is happiness, which consists in being rational, and that entails developing the virtues, both those of intellect and those of character (moral virtues or excellences). Why need we develop both kinds? While our essence is rational agency, the HUMAN FORM (Aristotelian form, not Platonic Form) is rational agency in a soul that also has nutritive and perceptive capacities. And moral (character) virtue is the means by which we respond to and keep
V. KINDS OF VIRTUES

A. Intellectual: philosophical wisdom, practical wisdom (1103a6)
B. Moral: liberality, temperance (1103a7); justice (1105b5); bravery, magnanimity, proper pride, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness (II.7).
C. A second way of mapping the virtues: other-regarding vs. self-realizing or eudaimonic. Are the self-realizing virtues, the ones that enable us to realize our essential rationality, also other-regarding?
D. Aristotle claims that virtues of character as a whole are also the ones that lead to other-regarding behavior (JUSTICE): at 1130a 8-13 virtues of character are justice, so that each such virtue is part of general justice in that it aims at the fine. So one cannot have these virtues without also acting in such a way as to benefit others.
E. In short, both intellectual and moral virtues aim at self-realization, and both result in good for others.
F. Virtue in the full sense is not possible without wisdom, as well (the intellectual virtues- see 1144b32-1145a2), so that the virtues won't give conflicting advice.