Political and Theoretical *Eudaimonia*

An Analysis of Michael of Ephesus' Interpretation of *Eudaimonia* in his Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics X*.

Master Thesis Classics and Ancient Civilizations: Classics

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Content

Introduction

What is happiness and how can we achieve it? It is an age old question that we still have not been able to answer conclusively. In attempts to answer this question, some people refer back to antiquity, which led to, for example, the rise of modern Stoicism.[1] Naturally, not only the ancient Stoics were concerned with the question of *eudaimonia*, often translated as 'happiness'.[2] The question of *eudaimonia* is also central to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, a philosophical work that dates back to the third century BCE. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is concerned with the best way to live for human beings. In order to answer his questions, he explores different topics, such as virtue, friendship, and finally, *eudaimonia*.

But a difficulty arises when Aristotle sets out a definition of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle describes *eudaimonia* as an activity, something that is self-sufficient, complete, and desired for its own sake.[3] Aristotle states that an understanding of the human function (ἔργον) would provide a clearer idea of what *eudaimonia* is.[4] This suggests that *eudaimonia* is intertwined with the function that is specific to humans, which is reason or intellect. Therefore, *eudaimonia* is the activity of the reason, which is reflective activity, or contemplation.[5]

However, reason is divine and therefore, contemplation is also divine. Due to this, it is difficult to achieve *eudaimonia* through contemplation.[6] To resolve this problem, Aristotle introduces a second, more human kind of *eudaimonia* in book X of the *Nicomacehan Ethics*. This second *eudaimonia* is based on the ethical activities of humans, instead of the reflective activities.

The introduction of a second kind of *eudaimonia* is problematic, since it implies that at least one of the kinds of *eudaimonia* is not complete (τελείος), as Aristotle state before. This problem is a point of discussion not only in modern scholarship, but is also plays an important role in the twelfth century commentary by the Byzantine scholar Michael of Ephesus.

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[1] For example, *The Daily Stoic* by Ryan Holiday, where Stoicism is used as a 'tool' for living the good life. For more on this, see Sherman 2021.

[2] For the difficulty of translating the Greek term *eudaimoniai*, see 1.1.3.

[3] Arist. Eth. Nic 1097a20-21, see **1C**.

[4] For the relation between *eudaimonia* and the human function, see Hutchinson 1986, 39-72.

[5] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177a17-18.

[6] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177b26-31. Also see Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1178b21-23.

Michael of Ephesus' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics X* is the only surviving commentary on the tenth book of Aristotle's work.[7] The Greek commentary was translated by Robert Grosseteste into Latin in the mid-thirteenth century, which made the commentaries available for the Latin scholarship in Europe.[8]

The commentary by Michael of Ephesus was commissioned by the Byzantine princess Anna Comnena.[9] Michael wrote multiple commentaries on Aristotelian treatises, including the *Nicomachean Ethics* V, IX and X, and his coworker Eustratius of Nicaea wrote commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* I and VI.[10]

In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* X, Michael of Ephesus describes Aristotle's division between the two type of *eudaimonia* as a distinction between theoretical *eudaimonia* and political (or practical) *eudaimonia.* This terminology is not used by Aristotle, but stems from the Neoplatonic tradition.[11] The division is reminiscent of Aristotle's division of virtues into intellectual virtue and moral virtue, but is also similar to the Neoplatonic scale of virtue, in which different grades of virtue are separated, including political and theoretical virtue. Neoplatonism is not only present in the commentary by means of this terminology, but Michael of Ephesus also refers to Plato and the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus.[12] Although it is clear that the commentary is influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition, but Michael's attitude towards Neoplatonism is ambivalent.[13]

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[7] The *Nicomachean Ethics* was not often commentated on, since Plato's ethical theory was dominant. The commentaries from antiquity on the *Nicomachean Ethics* that are transmitted are by Aspasius, who write commentaries on books I–IV and VII–VIII. See Tuominen 2009, 237-238.

[8] Due to the scope of this thesis, I will not go into the translation by Grosseteste and the reception of the commentary in Western European philosophy. See Mercken 1973, 30-66.

[9] For more on Anna Comnena and her role in the rival of Aristotelian scholarship, see Browing 2016, Kaldellis 2009 and Frankopan 2009.

[10] Michael of Ephesus commentated on many works by Aristotle that had not been commentated on often, such as *De Partibus Animalims, De Motu Animalium, De Incessu Animalium* and *Parva Naturalia*. Michael's focus on these physical treatises resulted in the suggestion that he might have been a physician, see Ierodiakonou 2009. Michael had a large scope of interest and also commentated on Aristotelian works that were traditionally studied, such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*. Also see Browning 2016 and Mercken 2016.

[11] See Ierodiakonou 2009, 195.

[12] Plato is mentioned at 536,17, 537,13, 542,27 etc. Plotinus is mentioned explicitly at 529,21.

[13] See Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, 5.

The Neoplatonic terms in the commentary on the Aristotelian work resulted in attempts to label Michael as either an Aristotelian or a Platonist. Praechter, for example, contrasts Michael of Ephesus the Aristotelian, with Michael Psellus the Platonist.[14] Mercken considers Michael of Ephesus' an Aristotelian, but calls his Aristotelianism 'never a militant one', as Michael never seems to attack Platonic doctrine.[15] Steel also refers to the 'Neoplatonizing interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics*' in the commentary, suggesting a more Platonic attitude.[16] In a more recent translation and commentary on Michael of Ephesus' commentary, Wilberding and Trompeter stress Michael of Ephesus' ambivalent attitude towards Neoplatonism and show that some aspects of his philosophy are influenced by Neoplatonism, while other remain untouched.[17] Ierodiakonou emphasizes the (Neo)Platonic influences of Michael of Ephesus' thinking, but also recognizes his Aristotelian attitude. Therefore, she argues that it is difficult to label Michael either an Aristotelian or Platonist.[18] Agreeing with Ierodiakonou, I will argue that the focus on trying to label Michael of Ephesus as either an Aristotelian or a Platonist drives away from the actual goal of the commentary, which is to understand Aristotle's text.

In this thesis, I will look into Michael of Ephesus' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* X, focussing on the passage of in which the two types of *eudaimonia* are discussed in an attempt to answer the question how we can best understand the Byzantine commentary regarding the question of eudaimonia.

In order to answer this question, I will first close read the passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle discusses *eudaimonia*, focussing on book I and X. Then, I will analyse how Michael of Ephesus understands this passage and how he deals with the problem of the two types of *eudaimonia*. Finally, I will look into how Michael relates himself to his predecessors, examining the use of Neoplatonic terminology in this passage in the commentary and placing Michael of Ephesus in the socio-political and historical context of the twelth-century Byzantine Empire. I will compare Micheal of Ephesus'

[14] Praechter 1931. Also see Mercken 2016, 469.
[15] Mercken 2016, 469.
[16] Steel 2002, 56.
[17] Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, 5.
[18] Ierodiakonou 2009, 201.

interpretation of *eudaimonia* to the Neoplatonic tradition, aiming to answer the question: Considering Michael of Ephesus' interpretation of *eudaimonia* in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics X*, what is the best way to approach Michel of Ephesus as a commentator on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics X*?

1. *Eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle examines the best way to live for humans. This inquiry is centred around the question of what εὐδαιμονία is. The work is divided into ten books, each covering different topics. The term *eudaimonia* is discussed mainly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* books I and X. In the first book, *eudaimonia* is described as something complete and final. In book X, however, Aristotle distinguishes between two types of *eudaimonia*: *eudaimonia* in the political life and *eudaimonia* in the contemplative life. This distinction is striking, considering the outline of a definition of *eudaimonia* given by Aristotle in book I. The question of how there can be two kinds of *eudaimonia*, when *eudaimonia* is complete and final, is central to this chapter. Before close reading the relevant passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I will first give an overview of the work.

The public at which the *Nicomachean Ethics* was aimed is important for the interpretation of the work. The public for which Aristotle wrote is a point of discussion amongst scholars. Is the work compiled from lecture notes, or is it a polished work meant for the greater public? Hughes claims that many of Aristotle's works, including the *Nicomachean Ethics*, were not meant for a larger public but consisted of notes that Aristotle used while giving lectures.[19] Natali, on the other hand, states that the styles of the books in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* with the exception of the so-called 'common books'[20] are 'fluent, clear and well-organized'[21]. While Natali considers the books to be polished and believes that they were intended to be read by the general public, Hughes is convinced the work comes across as chaotic. This disorderliness is enhanced by the fact that the traditional division into different books and chapters is not made by Aristotle himself, but by later editors.[22] Hughes also points out that there are

[19] Hughes 2013, 22-23. The idea that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a collection of unpolished notes is also found in Hutchinson 1995, 197.

[20] Books books V-VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are also part of Aristotle's *Eudaimonian Ethics*, and are therefore called the common books. For the relation between these works, see Broadie & Rowe 2002, 4.

[21] Natali 2007, 368.

[22] Natali and Hughes agree that the division is not made by Aristotle. Natali states that the division into chapters is not made until the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, 370 n. 18, and also points out that the division into books does not match the structure of the arguments, as some arguments end in different books than they started, or end before the book ends (368). Hughes 2013, 23 suggests that the work is structured by Aristotle's son Nicomachus (from whom the work gets its name) or a later editor, and reaffirms that the

multiple inconsistencies in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he uses as an argument that the work should be considered a 'work in progress'.[23]

The inconsistencies in the work are difficult to interpret if the *Nicomachean Ethics* is approached as a polished work. However, inconsistencies are not rare within the oeuvre of Aristotle. Although some passages in the work are concise and difficult to interpret, which might point to work being a 'work in progress', the overall work is systematic and precise, suggesting that it is not just lecture notes, but rather a complete, well-organized work. The chaos that is stressed by Hughes is enhanced by the fact that the chapter layout is not made by Aristotle, but by later editors. This leads me to believe that the *Nicomachean Ethics* are a complete work, rather than a work in progress.

If the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a polished work rather than a compilation of lecture notes, it is important to take a closer look at the inconsistencies in the work, such as the problem of the two types of *eudaimonia*.

To examine the two types of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is important to have an overview of the complete *Nicomachean Ethics*, so the question of *eudaimonia* can be placed within the context of the work. I will briefly highlight the most important issues in each book.[24]

In the first book, Aristotle introduces the aim of his research, asking what the best way is for humans to live and what humans reach for in life, which is *eudaimonia*. Virtue (ἀρετή) plays an important role in achieving *eudaimonia*, and Aristotle distinguishes between two types of virtue: moral virtues and intellectual virtues. The moral virtues are defined in book II and examples of moral virtue are discussed in the third until the fifth book. In book VI, Aristotle discusses intellectual virtue and divides the intellect into two parts: the contemplative and the calculative part. I discuss the intellectual virtues *phronesis* (φρόνησις) and *sophia* (σοφία) that play an important role in the seixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* more elaborately in 1.1.2. The seventh book is concerned with pleasure and the connection between virtues and vices, and good and bad choices. The main topic of book VIII

division into books and chapters is not made by Aristotle. The division into books in likely based on the amount of text that fits on one book scroll.

[23] Hughes 2013, 23.

[24] For a more elaborate but concise overview of Aristotelian ethics, see Hutchinson 1995.

and IX is friendship, discussing the different kinds of friendship as well as the need for friendship. In the last book, Aristotle discusses pleasure, and returns to the question of *eudaimonia*, before introducing the topic of legislation, which functions as a transition to the *Politics*.

In section 1.2, I will go into the first and last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in more detail, but first I will explain the Greek terms that are important in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1.1. Finally, I will look at the two types of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle distinguishes and introduce the idea of the inclusive and the dominant interpretation of *eudaimonia*.

1.1 *Eudaimonia, Phronesis,* and other Greek terms

In this section, I will briefly introduce some Greek terms that are used by Aristotle that either play an important role in the *Nicomachean Ethics* or are difficult to translate from Greek to English, due to the different connotations associated with the term.

1.1.1 Arete

Arete, ἀρετή, often translated as 'virtue' or 'excellence', is an important notion in the *Nicomachean Ethics.* Aristotle distinguishes between two types of *arete*, namely moral virtue and intellectual virtue:

1A

διορίζεται δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν ταύτην· λέγομεν γὰρ αὐτῶν τὰς μὲν διανοητικὰς τὰς δὲ ἠθικάς, σοφίαν μὲν καὶ σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν διανοητικάς, ἐλευθεριότητα δὲ καὶ σωφροσύνην ἠθικάς.

Virtue also is differentiated according to this division [of the soul]. We call some forms of virtue intellectual virtues, others moral virtues: *sophia*, *phronesis* and *sunesis* are intellectual virtues, and liberality and prudence are moral virtue.[25]

Arist. *Eth. Nic*. 1103a 3-7.

[25] The translations of Aristotle are my own.

Both types of virtue correspond with different aspects of the human soul (ψυχή). The first type of virtue, ἀρετὴ διανοητική, can be translated as 'intellectual virtue', and corresponds to the part of the soul that Aristotle identifies with reason. The second part of the soul 'listens to' reason. The second type of virtue, ἀρετὴ ἠθική, corresponds to this part of the soul. The Greek ἀρετὴ ἠθική can be translated as 'moral virtue' or 'ethical virtue', but it is important to note that the Greek adjective ἠθικός comes from ἦθος, which means both 'character' and 'habit'.[26] Broadie and Rowe (2002) therefore translate it with 'excellence of character', where 'excellence' is the translation of ἀρετή.[27] The moral virtues are gained through ἦθος, habit, from which it gets its name, while intellectual virtues are taught (ἐκ διδασκαλίας ἔχει).[28] The two types of virtue are not completely separate, as moral virtues are only possible through the intellectual virtue *phronesis*.[29]

1.1.2 *Phronesis* and *Sophia*

Aristotle distinguishes between two intellectual virtues: *phronesis* (φρόνησις) and *sophia* (σοφία). S*ophia* is theoretical wisdom and focuses on theoretical studies, whereas *phronesis* is practical wisdom. The use of *sophia* is limited to only the theoretical part of the soul and with this, Aristotle gives the Greek word a different meaning than the usual meaning. While *sophia* can be translated as 'wisdom' in the general sense, in the context provided by Aristotle, it is often interpreted as 'theoretical wisdom' or 'theoretical knowledge'.[30] *Sophia*, theoretical wisdom is contrasted with *phronesis*, practical wisdom. While 'practical wisdom' is a standard translation for *phronesis* in Aristotle's text, the word usually has a different meaning. The word is derived from φρονέω, which means 'to think', and the word can be translated as 'prudence' or 'wisdom'.[31]

The two types of wisdom, *sophia* and *phronesis*, relate to the two types of virtue, intellectual and ethical virtue, as well as to two parts of the soul. The first part of the soul that corresponds with *sophia* deals with necessary and universal truths, while the practical part of the soul concerns itself

[26] Both the etymology and the meanings are taken from Montanari 2015.
[27] Broadie and Rowe 2002.
[28] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1103a14c-18
[29] For a more elaborate discussion of *arete ethike*, see Broadie and Rowe 2002, 17-23.
[30] Also see Bostock 2000, 77 for an overview of how to translate *sophia* and *phronesis*.
[31] Both the etymology and translations are taken from Montanari 2015. Montanari 2015 offers more possible translations of these terms, but I choose these as they stay close to the translations often used in rendering Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*

with contingent and particular situations.[32] Furthermore, there is an interaction between ethical virtue and *phronesis,* where ethical virtue is impossible without *phronesis* and vice versa.[33] Both *sophia* and *phronesis* contribute to *eudaimonia*.[34]

The distinction that Aristotle makes in book VI between two types of reasoning, *phronesis* and *sophia*, and how they relate to two types of virtue as well as to different parts of the soul, is interesting when looking at the commentary by Michael of Ephesus. Michael stresses the two-fold nature of the soul, which he dervives from Aristotle. Based on the two-fold nature of the soul, Michael distinguishes between two types of virtue two types of *eudaimonia*. I will discuss this more elaborately in chapter 2.

1.1.3 *Eudaimonia*

The term *eudaimonia*, εὐδαιμονία, is central to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but remains difficult to translate. The Greek term comes from the word εὐδαίμων ('happy, fortunate*, of pers. and things*' or 'prosperous, rich, abundant').[35] This term is a compound of the words εὖ ('well') and δαίμων ('divinity, god, goddess; divine power'). The term εὐδαιμονία, then, literally means something like 'with a good daimon' or 'having a good guardian angel'[36].

The translation of *eudaimonia* in the Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek is 'happiness, success' or 'prosperity, wealth, fortune, *of men'*, and traditionally *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is translated as 'happiness'. However, this translation can be misleading. While the term 'happiness' implies something that could be called *eudaimonia*, the Greek term also denotes success, well-being, and accomplishment. When Aristotle first introduces the term *eudaimonia*, he also offers 'living well' and 'doing well' as synonyms:

1B

ὀνόματι μὲν οὖν σχεδὸν ὑπὸ τῶν πλείστων ὁμολογεῖται· τὴν γὰρ εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ οἱ χαρίεντες λέγουσιν, τὸ δ᾽ εὖ ζῆν καὶ τὸ εὖ πράττειν ταὐτὸν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τῷ

[32] See Bostock 2000, 77.

[33] See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 17-18 and 50.

[34] For a more elaborate explanation of the term *phronesis* and *sophia,* see Broadie and Rowe 2002, 46-54.

[35] Both the etymology and translations are taken from Montanari 2015.

[36] This is the literal translation given by Bostock 2007, 11 n.10. Bostock also stresses that Aristotle does not necessarily take the etymological background into account.

εὐδαιμονεῖν. περὶ δὲ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας, τί ἐστιν, ἀμφισβητοῦσι, καὶ οὐχ ὁμοίως οἱ πολλοὶ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἀποδιδόασιν.

Now, the name is agreed on by most people: for the ordinary people as well as refined people call it *eudaimonia*, 'living well' and 'doing well' are accepted as the same as being happy (εὐδαιμονεῖν). But they disagree about what *eudaimonia* is, and the ordinary people do not define it in the same way as the wise.

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1095a17-22.

Aristotle describes *eudaimonia* as 'living well' and 'doing well', showing the different connotations that the term has, including happiness, but also success and well-being. A more appropriate translation of *eudaimonia* might be 'flourishing', as this connotes success and accomplishment in addition to happiness. However, due to the difficulty in translating the term, I decided to leave the term untranslated.

Now that I have elaborated on the most important terms in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* I will focus on the problem of the two types of *eudaimonia.* In the following sections, I will elaborate on *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, specifically in book I and X.

1.2 Eudaimonia in book I and X.6-X.9

1.2.1 Book I

Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* by stating that every investigation is aimed at something and that there is a difference in the ends at which these undertakings aim.[37] Since there is a difference in these ends, Aristotle concludes fact that some goods are subordinate to others. He makes an essential distinction between *some* good and *the* good, where *the* good is the topic of practical philosophy and ethics.[38]

[37] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1094a1-3. Also see Bostock 2000, 8.

[38] See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 262.

Aristotle states the highest human good (τὸ ἄριστον) is *eudaimonia*. Although it is agreed that *eudaimonia* is the highest good, the exact definition of this is a point of discussion, as is seen in **1B**. The highest good is the goal of politics, and it is the same for individuals and the state in the sense that the question of the highest human good plays at both the private and communal level simultaneously.[39] This reveals the connection between ethics and politics, that is also present in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the topic of legislation is introduces as a transition to Aristotle's *Politics*.

In the discussion about the definition of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle recognizes three different points of view. The first group thinks that *eudaimonia* lies either in pleasure, wealth, or honour (ἡδονὴν ἢ πλοῦτον ἢ τιμήν)[40], the second group of people believes that what is good differs depending on their condition, while the last group believes that the good is good *in itself*. This final point of view refers to Plato's Idea of the Good, which is refuted by Aristotle.

Based on these three different definitions of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle distinguishes between three different types of life: the life of enjoyment (βìος ἀπολαυστικός), the political life (πολιτικός), and the contemplative life (θεωρητικός).[41] Aristotle postpones the discussion of the contemplative life to book X.[42] After introducing these three possible interpretations of *eudaimonia* and their corresponding types of life, Aristotle lays out a provisional definition of *eudaimonia*.

1C

τέλειον δή τι φαίνεται καὶ αὔταρκες ἡ εὐδαιμονία, τῶν πρακτῶν οὖσα τέλος.

Eudaimonia, then, appears to be something final and self-sufficient, being the end of practical undertakings.

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[39] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 264.

[40] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1095a24.

[41] Sedley 2017, 325 compares the three lives that Aristotle distinguishes to the tripartite soul in Plato. Interestingly, this is not the only similarity between Plato and Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

[42] τρίτος δ' ἐστὶν ὁ θεωρητικός, ὑπὲρ οὗ τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν ἐν τοῖς ἑπομένοις ποιησόμεθα, "The third is the theoretical life, about which I will make an investigation in what follows." Arist. *Eth. Nic* 1096a4-5. Broadie and Rowe 2002, 268 links this to the discussion in X.7-8, which I will discuss in the next section.

Arist. *Eth. Nic* 1097a20-21.

Aristotle ascribes two characteristics to *eudaimonia:*[43] *eudaimonia* is final (τέλειος)[44] and self-sufficient. It is final in the sense that it is chosen for its own sake and not as a means for something else. Things such as honour, pleasure and virtue are chosen for their own sake, but also for the sake of *eudaimonia*, whereas *eudaimonia* is chosen purely for the sake of itself and never for the sake of something else. Additionally, *eudaimonia* is self-sufficient, meaning that it does not lack anything.[45] This suggests that *eudaimonia* includes all good things, otherwise it could become more complete when other goods are added to it.

In addition to these two characteristics, Aristotle also states that *eudaimonia* is an activity rather than a passive state. *Eudaimonia* is doing well in life, *eupraxis,* which is a form of activity, *praxis*.[46] *Eudaimonia* is not found in any activity, but in the activity that is specific for humans. According to Aristotle's function argument, that all things can find their well-being in their function. Therefore, the highest good for humans can be found in the human function.[47] The life that is particular to humans, is the life that possesses reason, meaning that it both has reason as well as that it can think itself. The function that is in line with this type of life, is the activity of the soul in accordance with reason. This activity follows or implies a rational principle within human beings.[48]

The human good, then, is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, specifically, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue. This is discussed more thoroughly in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

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[43] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 275 suggests that Aristotle offers a third reason why *eudaimonia* should be considered the highest good by stating that it is most desirable and should not be counted with other goods. See Arist. *Ethi. Nic.* 1097b16-20. According to Broadie, *eudaimonia* cannot be counted alongside the other goods, meaning that it cannot become more desirable when other goods are added to it.

[44] Τέλειος can, amongst other things, be translated as final, complete or perfect. Compare Bostock 2000, 13, esp. n.8.

[45] This suggests that the highest good is *inclusive*, see Broadie and Rowe 2002, 275. I will explain the inclusive and the dominant interpretation in section 1.3. Also see Bostock 2000, 14.

[46] See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 276.

[47] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 276 points out that the outline Aristotle gives refers to the chief good and not necessarily to *eudaimonia.*

[48] Arist. *Eth Nic.* 1098a3-18.

After giving this outline of a definition of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle states that it is a rough sketch. The details will be filled out throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics,* and the term slowly becomes more defined throughout the work. In book X, the definition of *eudaimonia* is revisited and *eudaimonia* is the main subject of book X.6-X.8, which will be discussed in the next section.

1.2.2 Book X.6-X.8

After discussing pleasure in the first half of book X, Aristotle returns to the question of *eudaimonia* in section X.6-X.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle stresses, as he stated in the first book, that *eudaimonia* is not a disposition, but rather an activity. *Eudaimonia* is an activity that is desirable in itself, not for the sake of something else, and therefore, Aristotle describes it as something complete and self-sufficient. Aristotle explains that activities that are desirable in themselves are in accordance with virtue and therefore, *eudaimonia* is an activity in accordance with virtue.[49]

Since *eudaimonia* is in accordance with virtue, Aristotle assumes it is in accordance with the highest kind of virtue, which seems to be intellect:[50]

1D

Εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὔλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην· αὕτη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. εἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι, ὃ δὴ κατὰ φύσιν δοκεῖ ἄρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἔννοιαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θείων, εἴτε θεῖον ὂν καὶ αὐτὸ εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θειότατον, ἡ τούτου ἐνέργεια κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν εἴη ἂν ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία.

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[49] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1176b, esp. 6-8.

[50] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 441 offers two explanations to Aristotle's comment 'Whether then this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature'. In the first explanation, Broadie states that intelligence is both practical and theoretical, based on the passage in VI.6 where Aristotle distinguishes two parts of the rational soul. The second explanation leaves open whether intelligence is the highest virtue or not. In this explanation, Aristotle also remains unclear about whether or not this is something divine, or rather an approximation of the divine. I opt for Broadie's first explanation and I interpret the highest kind of excellence as intelligence, based on what is said in X.7: κρατίστη τε γὰρ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια (καὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν γνωστῶν, περὶ ἃ ὁ νοῦς. "For contemplation is at once the highest form of activity (since the intellect is the highest thing in us, and the objects with which the intellect deals are the highest things that can be known)." Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177a20-22 (trans. Broadie and Rowe).

If *eudaimonia* is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable to say it should be in accordance with the most excellent virtue: this will be the virtue that is best. Whether this is our intellect or something else, that is thought to rule and lead, and have a sense of what is good and divine, whether it is divine itself too or what is the most divine in us, the activity of this sort in accordance with personal virtue will be complete *eudaimonia*.

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177a12-17.

Aristotle describes *eudaimonia* as the activity in accordance with the highest virtue. Since the highest virtue is found in the intellect, the activity that Aristotle describes should be the activity of the soul which is reflective (θεωρητική) activity, or contemplation.[51] Contemplation is self-sufficient and can be done almost without interruption, since it requires minimal physical activity. Theoretical activity is also pleasureable, according to Aristotle. Furthermore, it is the only activity that is loved for its own sake and not for the sake of something else. Since contemplation has no results other than the act itself, it is done purely for its own sake. Aristotle concludes that complete (τελείος) *eudaimonia* can be reached through contemplation:

1E

ἡ τελεία δὴ εὐδαιμονία αὕτη ἂν εἴη ἀνθρώπου, λαβοῦσα μῆκος βίου τέλειον· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀτελές ἐστι τῶν τῆς εὐδαιμονίας.

This, then, will be complete *eudaimonia*, provided a complete length of life: for nothing that belongs to *eudamonia* is incomplete.

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177b24-26.

[51] Sedley 1999, 327 claims that Aristotle never explicitly explains what contemplation is, but that he clearly considers the contemplative life as (an idealization of) the philosophical life. Although contemplation might not have the same metaphysical status in Aristotle as it has in Plato, contemplation is likely the same intellectual activity in Platonic and Aristotelian thougt.

Aristotle stresses that nothing about *eudaimonia* is incomplete. However, the life of contemplation and the *eudaimonia* that comes with it rises above human life.[52] Aristotle considers intellect to be divine, and humans can only reach the *eudaimonia* that comes with the activity of the intellect in so far as they have something divine within them:

1F

ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος ἂν εἴη βίος κρείττων ἢ κατ᾽ἄνθρωπον· οὐ γὰρ ᾗ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν οὕτω βιώσεται, ἀλλ᾽ ᾗ θεῖόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει· ὅσον δὲ διαφέρει τοῦτο τοῦ συνθέτου, τοσοῦτον καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν. εἰ δὴ θεῖον ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦτον βίος θεῖος πρὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον. οὐ χρὴ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινοῦντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐφ᾽ ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, δυνάμει καὶ τιμιότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει.

But such a life will be better than the human life: for one will not live in this way in so far they are human, but in so far as there is something divine within them: to the degree that this surpasses the compound, to that degree will its activity too surpass that in accordance with the rest of virtue. If, then, intellect is divine compared to the human, the life according to it is divine compared to the human life as well. One must not follow those who advise ‘you are human, think human thoughts’ or ‘you are mortal, think mortal thoughts’, but, as must as possible, become immortal and do everything with the aim to live in accordance with what is highest in them. Because, even if it is small in size, the degree to which it prevails in power and honor is far greater

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1177b26-1178a2.

[52] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 443 points out this paradox. Because humans contain something divine, namely the intellect, the happiest life for humans is higher than human life itself.

Aristotle describes the intellect as something divine within a human being. The life in accordance with the intellect will therefore exceed the human life. Although the life in accordance with intellect exceeds the human life, one must nonetheless attempt to live a contemplative life. Aristotle stresses that one should not be held back by thinking that they are human, but instead, they ought to try to become immortal as much as possible, in other words, they have to try to become as much as God as possible.

The idea of 'becoming as much as God as possible' is reminiscent of Plato's *Theaetetus*, to which I will return in chapter 3. The fact that Aristotle mentions becoming like God suggests a continuity between Aristotle's thoughts an Plato's thoughts, as Sedley points out.[53] Although Aristotle disagrees with Plato earlier in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is important to note that he is, in certain aspects, a Platonist.[54]

Sedley stresses the fact that Aristotle was Plato's student when important works that discuss the ideal of godlikeness were produced.[55] Aristotle also seems to have taken inspiration from Plato's *Timeaeus*, where Plato also formulates an end (*teilos*) that is identified with *eudaimonia*.[56] Aristotle's formulation of the ideal of becoming as much as God as possible in **1F** seems to refer to Plato's *Theaetetus* (see **3A**). Sedley even argues that the context of the passage in the *Theaetetus* is essential for understanding Aristotle's remark about immortality, as it explains that the intellect is the only immortal part of human beings.[57]

While contemplative *eudaimonia* is preferable, it is difficult to obtain, since contemplation is divine and exceeds what is achievable for human beings.[58] Aristotle introduces a second form of *eudaimonia*, which can be achieved through moral virtues.[59] Whereas the first *eudaimonia* is divine reached through

[53] Sedley 2017, 325.
[54] Also see Sedley 2017, 325-326.
[55] Sedley 1999, 324.
[56] See Sedley 1999, 324.
[57] Sedley 1999, 326.
[58] See Sedley 2017, 322.
[59] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 444 suggests that Aristotle is uncertain about what activity is characteristic fort his secondary *eudaimonia*. It is either political activity and a political life as is suggested in X.7, or life in accordance with the rest of excellence, that being practical excellences, in X.8. Also see Bostock 2000, 201.

contemplation, this secondary *eudaimonia* is strictly human and attained through moral virtues, which are strictly human:

1G

Δευτέρως δ᾽ ὁ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν· αἱ γὰρ κατὰ ταύτην ἐνέργειαι ἀνθρωπικαί.

But the life in accordance with the rest of virtue [i.e. moral virtue] comes secondly; for human activities are in accordance with this.

Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1178a9-10.

Unlike the first type of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle discussed, this second type is connected to the body. Aristotle explains that the moral virtues are connected to emotions, as well as to the human as a compound. This compound refers to the fact that humans have godlike intellect and animal-like bodies.[60] This connection to the body makes the second types of *eudaimonia* less self-sufficient than the first, since the intellect and *eudaimonia* in accordance with it can be seen as separate from the body.[61] Aristotle also suggests that the life of moral virtues relies on external goods more than the life of contemplation. For this, he gives an example of a generous person who needs money, an external good, in order to be generous. A person who contemplates, on the other hand, does not depend on external goods, and Aristotle states that external factors might even interfere with contemplation.

While contemplation requires minimal effort from the body, Aristotle does recognize that even for this self-sufficient activity, humans are still dependent on their external circumstances, such as health and nourishment. Aristotle believes, however, that the gods will bless people who dedicate themselves to contemplation.[62] Therefore, the person who lives a contemplative life is not only happiest, but also blessed with external goods.

[60] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 443 suggests a second possible interpretation of the compound, where it refers to Aristotle's theory that the soul consists of two parts, the rational part of the soul and the irrational part of the soul.

[61] See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 445.

[62] Broadie and Rowe 2002, 447 points out that this is a reinterpretation of piety: what makes someone most loved by the gods (piety) is living a contemplative life.

To complete his argument that *eudaimonia* resides in contemplative activity, Aristotle refers to the gods and their *eudaimonia.* According to Aristotle, since people believe that the gods are happiest, it is reasonable to assume that the activity they engage in is the activity that provides the most *eudaimonia*. The gods must engage in activity because they are believed to be alive. This activity cannot be an activity of moral virtue, since the gods do not have moral virtue. The only activity that can be done by the gods, then, is contemplation. The human activity that resembles the activity of the gods the most will produce the most *eudaimonia.* The happy life, Aristotle concludes, is the life that comes closest to the life of the gods, and therefore the happy life is the life of contemplation and *eudaimonia* can be achieved through the contemplative activity.

In this section, I discussed how Aristotle interprets and defines *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* X.6-X.8. In this passage, Aristotle seems to make a distinction between two types of happy life: the life of contemplation and the life of moral virtue. The relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia* is disputed. Although it is commonly accepted that contemplative *eudaimonia* is superior to political *eudaimonia*,[63] Aristotle never explicitly explains how these two types of *eudaimonia* relate to each other. One possible interpretation of the relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia,* is by distinguishing between an inclusive and dominant reading, which is first suggested by Hardie.

1.3 Inclusive vs. dominant *eudaimonia*

In *EN* X.6-8, Aristotle seems to suggest that there are two types of *eudaimonia*. This is problematic, since Aristotle also describes *eudaimonia* as something that is *teilos*, which is often rendered as 'complete', 'perfect' or 'final'. Aristotle even explicitly states that 'nothing that belongs to *eudaimonia* can be incomplete (ἀτελές)' (**1E**). Nonetheless, he describes two types of *eudaimonia*, suggesting that one of them is, or even both are, incomplete. In this section, I will discuss the interpretation of Hardie,

[63] For example, Sedley 2017, 322-323 argues that the contemplative life is superior to the political life. Kullman 2010, 210 interprets the political life as both independent as well as supplementary to the contemplative life. The two types of life are not complementary, but the political life is inferior to the contemplative life, see 217.

who introduced a division between *eudaimonia* as an inclusive and a dominant interpretation of an end.[64]

The inclusive reading of *eudaimonia* includes multiple ends, all pursued and desired for their own sake while recognizing that some are more important than others.[65] The importance of the different desires is ranked in a long-term plan that ultimately attempts to fulfil them all harmoniously, insofar as this is possible.[66] For example, imagine you are on a holiday. The weather is sunny, the food is delicious, and the company is nice. All these things are desirable for their own sake, but together they make for the perfect holiday. Similarly, in life, people partake in activities that are worthwhile in themselves, such as friendship and moral action, but all things combined lead to *eudaimonia*.[67]

The dominant interpretation, on the other hand, sees one goal as the primary goal and disregards the other ends if they do not contribute to the main goal. Hardie argues that the confusion in X.6-X.8 about the two types of *eudaimonia* is caused by Aristotle's failure to distinguish explicitly between the dominant and the inclusive ends.[68] Because Aristotle fails to give an analysis of the concept of ends and means, he presents the final good as a dominant end instead of an inclusive end, which causes a paradox.[69] By recognizing the different readings of *eudaimonia,* this paradox can be resolved.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, with a focus on *eudaimonia* in book I and book X.6-X.8. In book X, Aristotle distinguishes between two types of *eudaimonia,* one that can be achieved through contemplation and one that can be achieved in the life of moral virtue. This distinction is problematic, since Aristotle also states that *eudaimonia* is complete and that nothing that belongs to it can be incomplete. This creates a discrepancy that is discussed by modern scholars. I discussed how

[64] Hardie 1965 offers one possible solution. For other possible solutions see, for example, Reece 2020, who argues that Aristotle does not distinguish between two types of happiness (*eudaimonia)*, but rather between two ways of being a proper human being.

[65] Hardie 1965, 279.

[66] Also see Bostock 2000, 21.

[67] Ackrill offers multiple examples to explain the dominant and inclusive reading. See Ackril 1981, esp. 18-20.

[68] Hardie 1965, 281.

[69] Hardie 1965, 283-285.

modern scholarship has engaged with Aristotle's distinction between the political life and the contemplative life, introducing the view proposed by Hardie that there is a dominant and an inclusive interpretation of *eudaimonia*.

In the next chapter, I will look into the interpretation of this passage by Michael of Ephesus, in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* X.

2. The Commentary by Michael of Ephesus

The twelfth century commentary *In Ethica Nicomachea Commentaria X* (*In Eth. Nic. X*) by Michael of Ephesus is the only commentary transmitted on the tenth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The commentary was likely commissioned by the Byzantine princess Anna Comnena, along sides other commentaries. The new commentaries might have functioned as an addition to the ancient commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics.*[70]

Writing in the twelfth century, Michael is heir to a long tradition of commentaries on both Plato and Aristotle that influence his look on Aristotelian philosophy. Benakis states that Michael of Ephesus is especially influences by the Aristotelian philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria.[71] Although Michael of Ephesus uses terminology that is derived from the Neoplatonic tradition, his attitude towards (Neo)Platonism is ambivalent. Michael's interpretation stays close to Aristotle, but the commentary has been influenced by the philosophical tradition. In this chapter, I will discuss the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics X* by Michael of Ephesus, focusing on his interpretation of *eudaimonia.*

In his discussion of *eudaimonia,* Michael of Ephesus often uses Platonic terminology. Michael's description of the contemplative activity is reminiscent of the Platonic Ideas and of Neoplatonic thought.[72] For example, when Michael explains Aristotle's view that *eudaimonia* is an activity of the soul, his description of the activity of the soul is reminiscent Neoplatonic thought:

2A

[70] According to Steel 2002, 51, Comnena ordered Michael to write commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* book V, IX and X, while his coworker Eustratius of Nicaea was responsible for the commentaries on books I and VI . These commentaries functioned as an addition to the ancient commentary on book VIII by Aspasius (second century CE) and the anonymous scholia on book II-V. In addition to his commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Michael of Ephesus was also responsible for commentaries on multiple other, biological works by Aristotle, including *Parva Naturalia* and *Generation of Animals*, as well as a commentary on *Sophistical Refutations* and *Politics*. The latter is only partially transmitted.

[71] Benakis 2009, 65.

[72] Also see Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, 5.

> λέγει δ' αὐτός, ὅτι ἐπεί ἐστιν ἡ εὐδαιμονία τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια, εὔλογον αὐτὴν μάλιστα λέγειν κατὰ τὴν ἀκροτάτην τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν. ἡ δ' ἀκροτάτη αὐτῆς ἐνέργειά ἐστιν ἕνωσις πρὸς τὰ κρείττω καὶ "ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν", ὥς φησιν ὁ Πλάτων, ἀνθρώπῳ.
>
> [Aristotle] himself says that since *eudaimonia* is an activity of the soul, it is reasonable to say that it is mostly in accordance with the highest activity of the soul. And its highest activity is union with the better and 'resemblance to God as much as possible' for man, as Plato says.[73]
>
> *In Eth. Nic. X* 579,1-5.

Here, Michael not only uses the Neoplatonic idea of 'union with the better' (ἕνωσις πρὸς τὰ κρείττω)[74], but also explicitly refers to Plato. According to Neoplatonic thought, this 'union with the better' can be accomplished through different kinds of virtues, organized in the scale of virtues, as I discuss in chapter 3. This scale is first introduces by Plotinus in *Ennead 1.2*, which is also known by the fitting title *On Virtue*, where Plotinus introduces the idea of 'political virtue'(πολιτικαὶ ἀρεταί).[75] This idea of 'political virtue' is also important to Michael's interpretation of Aristotle's ethics.

In the description of the two kinds of *eudaimonia*, Michael uses the terms 'theoretical *eudaimonia*' (θεωρητικὴ εὐδαιμονία) and 'political *eudaimonia*' (πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία) or 'practical *eudaimonia*' (πρακτικὴ εὐδαιμονία). These terms are not used by Aristotle, as Ierodiakonou points out, but rather come from the Neoplatonic tradition.[76] Michael bases these two types of *eudaimonia* on two types of virtue that he distinguishes, namely ethical or political or practical virtues, and theoretical virtues.[77] This distinction seems to be drawn from Aristotle's distinction between intellectual and ethical

[73] All translation of the commentary by Michael of Ephesus are taken from Wilberding & Trompeter 2019 and adapted to my own understanding.
[74] This is a reference to Plato's *Theaetetus* 176B, as is pointed out by Trompeter and Wilberding in their translation (2019).
[75] Plotinus 1.2.16-17. See O'Meara 2003. Later Neoplatonic thinkers develop this scale of virtue further, as I will discuss in chapter 3.
[76] Ierodiakonou 2009, 194-195.
[77] *In Eth. Nic.* 571.31-572.12.

virtues that are discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics.* I (**1A**), but the terminology come from the Neoplatonic tradition, rather than the Aristotelian tradition.

Similar to Aristotle, Michael of Ephesus distinguishes between two types of virtue and two types of *eudaimonia.* These distinctions are based on the idea that humans are two-fold (διττός):[78]

2B

διττὸς γὰρ ὁ εὐδαίμων, ὅ τε πολιτικός, ὅστις δεῖται καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθῶν, ὅπως ἀνεμποδίστως ἐνεργῇ, καὶ ὁ τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῶν ὄντως ὄντων μάλιστα προσανέχων.

For the happy person is two-fold: there is both the political person, who stands in need of goods deriving from chance, too, in order that they are unhindered in their activity, and the person who devotes themselves mostly to the contemplation of the real Beings.

In Eth. Nic. X 529,7-9.

Michael of Ephesus distinguishes between the political person and the person who is devoted to contemplation. The description of contemplation has strong Platonic connotations. [79] However, the passage also has Aristotelian elements. Michael of Ephesus differentiates between a person who lives a political life and a person who lives a theoretical life, a distinction that is also made by Aristotle in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as I discussed in the chapter 1.2.1.

This idea that the nature of human beings is two-fold is introduced by Michael in his summery of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* at the beginning of the commentary. He distinguishes between a part consisting of the body and soul, and a part that is the intellect. In his description of the intellect, Michael of Ephesus refers to other works by Aristotle, such as the *Magna Moralia, De Anima*, and the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in order to show that this thought is derived from Aristotle.[80] This

[78] The two-fold nature of humans is often stressed. See 571,23; 576,25; 578,17; 580,6; 588,34; 590,31; 591,18; 598,9; also see Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, n.8. The word διττός is used by Aristotle as well, for example at 1102b29, 1103a2,and 1103a14, where Aristotle discusses the two-fold division of the soul (the rational part and the non-rational part of the soul) and the two types of virtue, intellectual and moral virtue, which are connected to the different parts of the soul.

[79] Also see Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, n.8.

[80] See Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, 139 n.332.

part that is the intellect is also referred to as 'the human being in the highest and primary sense'.[81] The first part, the compound of the body and soul, is inferior to the intellect. Michael ascribes this view to Aristotle,[82] who describes the soul as two-fold (διττός).[83] The idea that human nature is compound can also be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[84]

Michael of Ephesus concludes that, since human nature is two-fold, *eudaimonia* is also two-fold: on the one hand, there is intellectual and complete *eudaimonia*, and on the other hand, external and political *eudaimonia*. The first types of *eudaimonia* belongs to the political person that is described in **2B.** This type of *eudaimonia* depends on external factors, such as health, and it 'blossoms upon the virtues'[85]. This is called political or practical *eudaimonia* by Michael and it is equated with Aristotle's description of *eudaimonia* in the politically active life (**1G**). The second kind of *eudaimonia* belong to the person who is devoted to contemplation. This type of *eudaimonia* is called theoretical *eudaimonia* and it is equated with *eudaimonia* through the activity of contemplation (**1D**).

2C

> διττὸν γὰρ τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὗτος ὁ φιλόσοφος δοξάζων [...] διττὴν καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν εὑρίσκει, τὴν μὲν νοερὰν καὶ τελείαν, ἣν καλεῖ θεωρητικήν, τὴν δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑφισταμένην. ἐκτὸς δὲ λέγουσι τήν τε τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν, τὴν τῆς ὕλης χορηγίαν, τὴν εὐγένειαν καὶ τὴν εὐτεκνίαν.
>
> For this philosopher [i.e. Aristotle] is of the opinion that human beings are two-fold [...] And so he discovers that *eudaimonia*, too, is two-fold: the one [kind] is intellectual and complete, which he calls 'theoretical', and the other [kind] is exists together with external [factors]. It is

[81] τὸν ὄντως καὶ μάλιστα καὶ πρώτως ἄνθρωπον, *In Eth. Nic. X* 580,6-7.

[82] For example, at 571,35 and 576,30.

[83] Aristotle describes the two-fold nature of the soul in *Eth. Nic.* 1102b-1103a.

[84] Aristotle describes the human nature as compound (σύνθετος) in *Eth. Nic.* 1177b26-30 and 1178a20-22.

[85] *In Eth. Nic. X* 571,22. Reading ἐπανθοῦσα ταῖς ἀρεταῖς instead of ἐπανθοῦσα ταῖς ἡδοναῖς. See Wilberding & Trompeter 2019 n.282.

said that the 'external [factors]' are the health of the body, material resources, noble birth, and being blessed with children.

In Eth. Nic. X 571,34-572,6.

Although the similarities between Aristotle's description of *eudaimonia* and Michael's distinction between theoretical and political *eudaimonia* are evident, the terms 'political *eudaimonia*' and 'theoretical *eudaimonia*' are not used in Aristotle's description of *eudaimonia*. Still, Michael explicitly connects his description of the two types of *eudaimonia* with Aristotle's division of *eudaimonia.*

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the relation between the two types of *eudaimonia* is debated, as I discussed in chapter 1. While there seems to be a ranking in *eudaimonia*, where *eudaimonia* in the life of contemplation is more preferable than *eudaimonia* in the life of political activity, Aristotle does not explicitly state the hierarchical relationship between the kinds of *eudaimonia*. Michael of Ephesus is more explicit about the relationship between the two. According to Michael of Ephesus, political *eudaimonia* is the end of political virtue, meaning that it can be achieved through political virtue.[86] Political *eudaimonia* is in its turn the measure and end of theoretical *eudaimonia*, revealing the relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia*.

In Michael of Ephesus' interpretation of the two types of *eudaimonia,* he recognizes the hierarchical relationship between political and theoretical *eudaimonia* explicitly, connecting theoretical *eudaimonia* to the 'real and primary human being'.

According to Michael of Ephesus, political *eudaimonia* is the end of political virtue, meaning that it can be achieved through political virtue.[87] Theoretical *eudaimonia* is in its turn the measure and end of political *eudaimonia*, revealing the relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia*.

2D

τῆς μὲν γὰρ ἀρετῆς μέτρον καὶ τέλος ἡ πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία, τῆς δὲ πολιτικῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἡ θεωρητικὴ εὐδαιμονία.

[86] *In Eth. Nic. X* 571,30-34.

[87] *In Eth. Nic. X* 571,30-34.

For political *eudaimonia* is the measure and end of virtue, but contemplative *eudaimonia* is [the measure and end] of political *eudaimonia*.

In Eth. Nic. X 579,9-10.

In **2D** Michael of Ephesus states the relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia*, suggesting that theoretical *eudaimonia* is superior to political *eudaimonia.* However, theoretical *eudaimonia* it is not independent of political *eudaimonia*. Since human nature is two-fold and one part of the human being, the intellect, is superior to the other, it follows that one kind of *eudaimonia* is higher and more complete than the other. Michael establishes the hierarchical relationship between the two by stating that theoretical *eudaimonia* supervenes on political *eudaimonia*.[88]

2E

ἐν μὲν τῷ πρώτῳ βιβλίῳ εἶπε περὶ πολιτικῆς εὐδαιμονίας, καθ' ἣν ὁ πολιτικὸς εὐδαίμων κοσμεῖ τὰ χείρω τῷ λόγῳ, ἐν τούτῳ δὲ λέγει περὶ τῆς θεωρητικῆς εὐδαιμονίας καὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτὴν εὐδαίμονος, ὅς ἐστιν ὁ πρώτως καὶ ὄντως ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ ἀληθινὸς ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν δηλονότι νοῦς καὶ ἐπιγινόμενος ὁ τοιοῦτος εὐδαίμων τῷ πολιτικῷ εὐδαίμονι.

In the first book Aristotle discussed political *eudaimonia*, by which the politically happy person arranges the worse [parts of his soul] with reason, and in this book he discusses theoretical *eudaimonia* and the man who is happy according to it, and this is the primary and real human being and the true human being – the intellect within us, clearly – and this kind of happy person supervenes on the political happy person.

[88] 'Supervene' is the translation of the Greek ἐπιγίνεσθαι. As Lautner 2021 stresses, this term does not relate to the modern philosophical notion of supervenience. Instead, this term explains that theoretical *eudaimonia* builds upon political *eudaimonia*, creating a relationship between the two types of *eudaimonia* in which theoretical *eudaimonia* is dependent on political *eudaimonia*. This relationship is causal to a certain extent. See Lautner 2021, 216-217. Lautner also suggests a different interpretation of ἐπιγίνεσθαι, where he compares the relation between the two kinds of *eudaimonia* to the relation of form and matter. For this interpretation, see Lautner 2021, 218.

In Eth. Nic. X 578.18-23.

Since theoretical *eudaimonia* depends on political *eudaimonia,* theoretical *eudaimonia* can only be achieved after political *eudaimonia* has been reached. Because theoretical *eudaimonia* can be achieved only after political *eudaimonia*, Michael seems to suggest that the relationship between political *eudaimonia* and theoretical *eudaimonia* is causal. The causal relationship between the two comes from the conviction that the practical virtues are needed to create a suitable condition for theoretical *eudaimonia.*[89] The practical virtues are responsible for moderating the passions and emotions and only after the passions and emotions are regulated, humans can enjoy theoretical *eudaimonia.*[90] One of the functions of political *eudaimonia*, then, is to lead humans to theoretical *eudaimonia.*[91] While political *eudaimonia* is needed in order to obtain theoretical *eudaimonia*, it is no longer necessary after theoretical *eudaimonia* has been achieved.

Michael of Ephesus recognizes an hierarchical relationship between political and theoretical *eudaimonia*, where theoretical *eudaimonia* is superior to political *eudaimonia.* However, theoretical *eudaimonia* also depends on political *eudaimonia,* as it can only be achieved after political *eudaimonia* has been reached. Because of the interconnectedness of the two types of *eudaimonia*, Lautner suggests that Michael considers a mixed life to be the supreme *eudaimonia.*[92]

In **2E,** Michael of Ephesus refers to the 'primary and real human being and the true human being'[93]. This is the part of the human being that is the intellect, which has been described as the human being in the highest and primary sense earlier in the commentary. Michael states that the activity of this 'real and primary human being' is the most excellent and complete, and therefore it is holier (σεμνότερος) than political *eudaimonia.*[94] With this Michael of Ephesus returns to the question of piety

[89] *In Ethic. Nic. X* 578,30-579,1.

[90] See Lautner 2021, 217-218.

[91] See Lautner 2021, 222.

[92] Lautner 2021, 223.

[93] ἐστιν ὁ πρώτως καὶ ὄντως ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ ἀληθινὸς ἄνθρωπος. *In Eth. Nic. X* 578,21.

[94] *In Eth. Nic. X* 580,5-12.

in the *Nicomachean Ethics X*, where Aristotle stated that people who engage in contemplation are more loved by the gods and that the gods will benefit people who engage in contemplation.

Michael provides another reason why political *eudaimonia* is lesser than theoretical *eudaimonia*, concerning the self-sufficiency of *eudaimonia*. Political *eudaimonia* has a goal, namely to ensure theoretical *eudaimonia* for citizens. Therefore, political *eudaimonia* is not choice-worthy for its own sake, but rather for the sake of something else. So, while political *eudaimonia* is an end in itself, it is not the most complete end. Since political *eudaimonia* is chosen not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of something else, it is less self-sufficient that and less complete than theoretical *eudaimonia*, which is chosen only for its own sake. This argumentation is in line with Aristotle's view of *eudaimonia* in the theoretical life and in the political life.

It is clear that Michael of Ephesus recognizes a hierarchical order in the two kinds of *eudaimonia* that he describes. Where political *eudaimonia* is the result of virtue, theoretical *eudaimonia* can only be achieved after political *eudaimonia* has been achieved. Michael also considers theoretical *eudaimonia* more complete and more self-sufficient since it does not depend on external factors and is chosen purely for its own sake, while political *eudaimonia* does depend on external factors and is chosen not only for its own sake but also for the sake of ensuring theoretical *eudaimonia* for citizens.

In this chapter, I discussed *In Ethica Nicomachea X*, the twelfth-century Byzantine commentary by Michael of Ephesus on the tenth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this commentary, Michael of Ephesus distinguishes between two types of *eudaimonia*: theoretical and political *eudaimonia*. These two types of *eudaimonia* correspond to two types of virtue: theoretical and political virtue. This distinction into two is based on Michael's view that human nature is two-fold, where a human being consists of, on the one hand, body and soul, and on the other hand, intellect. This second part, the intellect, is considered to be the real and primary human being. The activity that is proper to this real and primary human being is theoretical activity and this activity results in the most complete kind of *eudaimonia*, theoretical *eudaimonia*. Political *eudaimonia* is viewed as lesser, since it has a goal and therefore is not choice-worthy purely for its own sake, thus creating a ranking between the two kinds

of *eudaimonia*. Michael of Ephesus also suggests that the two kinds of *eudaimonia* have a certain causal connection, since political *eudaimonia* is necessary in order to obtain theoretical *eudaimonia*.

The terms 'theoretical *eudaimonia*' (θεωρητικὴ εὐδαιμονία) and 'political *eudaimonia*' (πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία) are not used by Aristotle, but the two kinds of *eudaimonia* evidently refer to the types of *eudaimonia* that Aristotle discusses in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: *eudaimonia* in the contemplative life and *eudaimonia* in political life. The connection that Michael of Ephesus makes between the two kinds of *eudaimonia* and the two different kinds of virtue suggests that he has been influenced by Neoplatonic thought. The connection with Neoplatonism is enhanced by the fact that Michael of Ephesus uses Neoplatonic terminology and refers to Plato and Plotinus. The different kinds of virtue and the Greek terms that are used are reminiscent of a development in Neoplatonic thought, namely the scale of virtues. In the next chapter, I will look into the Neoplatonic scale of virtues and compare the use of this scale of virtues to the use of the terms in Michael of Ephesus.

3. The Neoplatonic Scale of Virtues

In the previous chapter, I discussed Michael of Ephesus' interpretation of *eudaimonia* and the division he makes into two kinds of *eudaimonia*: political *eudaimonia* (θεωρητικὴ εὐδαιμονία) and theoretical *eudaimonia* (πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία). These terms are not used by Aristotle, but rather find their origin in Neoplatonic philosophy. The terms are related to the scale of virtues, which is first introduced by Plotinus and developed by later Neoplatonic philosophers. In this chapter, I discuss the Neoplatonic scale of virtues, from which the terms Michael of Ephesus uses are derived. I will first discuss the development of the scale of virtues, before analyzing Michael of Ephesus' interpretation of the scale.

3.1 Development of the Scale of Virtues

The scale of virtue describes the various stages of what O'Meara describes as 'the progressive divinization of the human soul'.[95] Divinization (θέωσις) is defined by the Neoplatonic philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius as the assimilation and unification, as far as possible, to god.[96] Neoplatonists consider this divinization of the soul as the goal of philosophy. This ideal of divinization is already found in earlier Platonists, such as Alcinous, and might even go back to Pythagoras. [97] The ideal of assimilation to god is found in Plato's Theaetetus:

> **3A**
>
> διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν.
>
> Therefore, it is necessary that one attempts to escape to the other world as soon as possible: and escaping is becoming like God as much as possible.[98]
>
> Pl. *Tht.* 176B 1-2.

[95] O'Meara 2003, 40.

[96] ἡ δὲ θέωσίς ἐστιν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσίς τε καὶ ἕνωσις. Ps. Dionysius Areopagita, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, I, 3, 376a.

[97] O'Meara 2003, 31-32.

[98] The translations of Plato are my own.

The ideal of assimilation to god is not only found in Plato and Platonist philosophers, but also in later Greek philosophers, such as Epicurus, Stoics, and, as I discussed in chapter 1, Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the ideal of divinization is present in the discussion of the theoretical life in **1F.**

In his description of the theoretical life, Aristotle states that humans must attempt to become immortal as much as possible, which is a reference to Plato's *Theaetetus*-passage.[99] Aristotle describes the intellect as something divine, and therefore the life in accordance with it is divine, as well its activity. By partaking in contemplation, one can become immortal as far as humans can become immortal.

The divinization of the soul is a goal in many philosophical schools after Plato, and it often has a political dimension as well.[100] In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this political dimension becomes clear in the discussion of *eudaimonia*, when Aristotle distinguishes *eudaimonia* through contemplation from political *eudaimonia* through political activity.[101]

For the Neoplatonists, divinization of the soul is connected to Plotinus' metaphysical theory of the three levels of divinity, also known as the three hypostases: soul, intellect, and the One.[102] According to Plotinus, the lower levels exist only in virtue of the higher levels, meaning that all levels are connected to each other. Since everything is derived from the One, there is a direct link between the human soul and the One. Therefore, the soul is divine in relation to the higher levels of divinity. In later Neoplatonism, the more levels of divinization are added.[103] The different stages of divinization correspond to the different grades on the scale of virtues.

The scale of virtues is first introduced by Plotinus in *Ennead* 1.2. It begins with political virtue and advances to 'higher' virtues (μείζων ἀρετή). Plotinus recovers the idea of 'political virtue' from the description of the cardinal virtues in Plato's *Republic.* In Plotinus' interpretation of the description,

[99] See Sedley 1999 324-328.

[100] See O'Meara 2003, 33.

[101] Aristotle's distinction into two types of happiness implies a political dimension in the divinization of the soul. This connection is even stronger in Michael of Ephesus, who believes that theoretical *eudaimonia* can only be achieved after political *eudaimonia* has been attained.

[102] For a more detailed overview of Neoplatonism, see Remes 2008.

[103] See O'Meara 2003, 36-39.

the virtues are seen as the proper functions of different parts of the soul.[104] The cardinal virtues are interpreted by Plotinus as political virtues, which are considered to be lesser compared to other, higher virtues. While these lesser, political (or civic) virtues relate to the life of a good citizen or a good human, the other, greater virtues are associated with purification that is divine.[105] Plotinus here differentiates between the lesser political virtues and the greater purificatory virtues, creating a hierarchical ranking in the different types of virtue. The purificatory virtues are found in Plato's *Phaedo* and these lead the soul to the Intellect.[106]

The similarities of Plotinus' view of virtues and Aristotelian virtue is described by O'Meara.[107] O'Meara stresses that there is no hard proof that Plotinus read the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but also points out that Plotinus only explicitly mentions Plato as his source, and never refers to other philosophers by name.[108] While it is nearly impossible to be certain, it seems quite likely that Plotinus was familiar with Aristotle's *Ethics*, at least to some extent. O'Meara suggests that the division into political and purificatory virtues that Plotinus makes is based on the Aristotelian division of moral and theoretical virtues.[109] O'Meara compares the Aristotelian distinction between the practically happy life and the theoretically happy life with Plotinus' division into different virtue, that correspond to different levels of happiness.[110] For Plotinus, the different reaches of life are related to the scale of virtues.

Although the similarities between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plotinus' theory of virtue and happiness are telling, there are also major differences, specifically concerning the metaphysical background of the different ethical theories. Nonetheless, as O'Meara states, later commentators such

[104] See O'Meara 2003, 40.

[105] See Tuominen 2022, 368.

[106] See Finamore 2012, 113.

[107] O'Meara sets out different aspects in Plotinus' ethical theory that show similarities with Aristotelian ethics, where sometimes Plotinus criticizes Aristotelian ethical thinking, while at other times, including certain ideas into his own theories. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the main principles and issues of the ethical theories of Aristotle and Plotinus are similar. The metaphysical background of their theories, however, is dissimilar. For an elaborate discussion of the influence of Aristotelian ethics on Plotinus' ethical theory, see O'Meara 2012.

[108] O'Meara 2012, 54.

[109] O'Meara 2012, 56.

[110] O'Meara 2012, 61.

a Michael of Ephesus applied the Plotinian terminology of 'political virtue' to Aristotelian ethical thinking in their commentaries.[111]

Plotinus, however, does not mention theoretical virtue explicitly. This types of virtue is added by Plotinus' student Porphyry. Porphyry expanded this ranking of virtues to four levels of virtue. These four levels are political, purificatory, theoretical and paradigmatic virtue.

Porphyry's student Iamblichus developed the scale even more in his treatise *On Virtue*, which did not survive to this day, but likely was still around in 11th century Byzantine.[112] Iamblichus adds three more grades of virtue to the scale. He places natural virtue as the lowest level of the scale and he also adds ethical virtue, which he places between natural virtue and political virtue. As O'Meara mentions, the notion of ethical virtue in Iamblichus is reminiscent of Aristotle's idea of moral virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics.*[113] However, Aristotle's moral virtue employs practical insight (*phronesis*), unlike Iamblichus' ethical virtue. Nonetheless, Iamblichus' interpretation of ethical virtue is connected to reason. Iamblichus' ethical virtue is explained by Finamore as behaviour taught to a child, and children use lower-level reasoning.[114] Iamblichus believes that natural virtues are genetically determined, whereas ethical virtues are learned through repetition and are, to a certain extent, rational.

At the highest level of the scale of virtues, Iamblichus adds hieratic or theurgic virtue, creating a scale of seven levels in total:[115]

1. Hieratic/Theurgic (ἱερατικαί /θεουργικαί)
2. Paradigmatic (παραδειγματικαί)
3. Contemplative (θεωρητικαί)
4. Purificatory (καθαρτικαί)

[111] See O'Meara 2012, 66. As I have shown before, Michael of Ephesus uses terminology which seems to have been taken from Neoplatonic philosophy, especially the terminology concerning virtue.
[112] O'Meara 2003, 46 suggests that the work was available to the 11th century Byzantine commentator Michael Psellus. If this is the case, it is fair to assume that the work by Iamblichus was available to Michael of Ephesus as well.
[113] O'Meara 2003, 46-47.
[114] Finamore 2012, 117.
[115] This list is taken from Finamore 2012, 114.

5. Political (πολιτικαί)
6. Ethical (ἠθικαί)
7. Natural (φυσικαί)

The higher the virtues are placed in the scale, the more they relate to reason. Reason plays an important role in regulating the lower parts of the soul in political virtue.[116] The virtues relate to different stages of divinity. The higher the virtue, the closer it bring one to divinity.

3.2 Scale of virtues in Michael of Ephesus

In the previous section, I discussed the development of the Neoplatonic scale of virtues and I examined the Aristotelian background of the division of virtues. It is clear that Michael of Ephesus takes the terms in his description of virtue from the Neoplatonic tradition. The terms 'ethical virtue' and 'political virtue', as well as the term 'theoretical virtue', that are used by Michael of Ephesus are derived from the Neoplatonic scale of virtues. However, Michael of Ephesus distinguishes between only two types of virtue, following Aristotle's distinction into moral and intellectual virtue, see **1A.** As I discussed in the previous section, this might be the inspiration for Plotinus' initial distinction between political virtues and higher virtues.

Michael of Ephesus sates that virtue, like the soul, is two-fold. He offers two possible interpretations of virtue, one Platonic interpretation and one Aristotelian interpretation.

3C

δείξας δή, ὅτι ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἐστιν ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετήν, ἐπειδὴ ἡ ἀρετὴ διττή, ἥ τε πρακτική, ἣν καὶ ἠθικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν οἱ ἐκ τοῦ Περιπάτου καλοῦσιν (οἱ γὰρ Πλατωνικοὶ ἑτέρας εἶναι λέγουσι τὰς πολιτικὰς τῶν ἠθικῶν)· ἐπεὶ οὖν διττὴ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ἀρετή, ἡ μὲν ἠθική, ἡ δὲ θεωρητική, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία διττή.

After having shown that *eudaimonia* is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, since virtue is two-fold – practical virtue, which the Peripatetics call both 'political' virtue and 'ethical' virtue (for the Platonists say that the political virtues are different from the ethical

[116] Finamore 2012, 118.

virtues); since, then, virtue is according to them two-fold – ethical virtue and contemplative virtue, for this reason *eudaimonia*, too, is two-fold.

In Eth. Nic. X 578,12-17.

Michael of Ephesus explains that practical virtue is the same as ethical virtue and political virtue for the Peripatetics, while the Platonists consider these to be different types of virtue. This division into the Platonists and the Peripatetic shows that Michael is aware of the Neoplatonic scale of virtue, as he states that the Platonists differentiate between ethical and political virtue. Although he uses (Neo)Platonic term, Michael of Ephesus opt for the more Aristotelian interpretation of the two options. He states that he uses the two-fold distinction between practical/political/ethical and theoretical virtue that is used by the Peripatetics.

While Michael of Ephesus uses Neoplatonic terminology in his description of virtue, he does not adopt the Neoplatonic framework of the scale of virtues. Instead, he opts for the interpretation of virtue that he ascribes to the Peripatetics.

Michael of Ephesus describes different interpretation of virtue, but he does not argue in favor of one of the two interpretations. He does not take a side in the discussion between Platonists and Peripatetcs on the different types of virtue. Instead he simply outlines the different traditions, explaining both the Neoplatonic interpretation of the different virtues and the Peripatetic interpretation, without judging either tradition, see **3C**.

In his commentary, Michael of Ephesus opts for the Peripatetic interpretation of the different virtues, because that is the interpretation that is closest to Aristotle's own distinction between intellectual and moral virtue. It is worth noting that in **3C**, Michael of Ephesus talks about Peripatetics and Platonists, instead of 'us' and 'them'. This shows that Michael of Ephesus does not consider himself to be neither a Peripatetic nor a Platonist, but he approaches the discussion by highlighting different interpretations of the virtues. He does not suggest that one of the interpretations of virtue is better

than the other, but rather, he chooses the interpretation that stays closest to the original text by Aristotle.[117]

The reason that Michael of Ephesus picks the Aristotelian interpretation is in line with the principle aim of the commentary: to explain Aristotle's text. To achieve his goal, Michael relies on terminology and theories from philosophical traditions that he and his contemporary readers would have been familiar with, such as the Neoplatonic tradition. By using familiar terminology, Michael of Ephesus is able to explain Aristotle more easily to his readers.

Michael of Ephesus not only refers to Neoplatonism in **3C,** but connects Neoplatonic ideas to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics a*t multiple points in the commentary, for example in **2A.** According to Michael, the political virtues play a role in controlling the human passions, while intellectual virtues contribute to contemplation and the Neoplatonic ideal of divinization, see **3A**. Although Michael of Ephesus refers to Plato in **2A**, it becomes evident in **3C** that he is not reading Aristotle in a 'Neoplatonizing' way, as Steel calls it. [118] Michael of Ephesus is simply rephrasing Aristotle and explaining his text, since this ideal of divinization is already present in Aristotle, although he phrases it differently, in **1F**. This 'Neoplatonizing' element does not come from Michael of Ephesus, but is already present in Aristotle and simply made explicit by Michael.

3.3 Conclusion

Michael of Ephesus is not, then, reading Aristotle in as a Platonist nor an Aristotelian. Rather, Michael uses other philosophical traditions to explain Aristotle's text. Aristotle often refers to Plato's philosophy, either to argue against Plato, for example in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,[119] or

[117] Wilberding & Trompeter 2019, 5 claims that Michael of Ephesus rejects the scale of virtue. Although it is clear that he does not adopt the Neoplatonic framework behind the scale of virtues, he does not necessarily reject it. Instead, he simply explains the difference between the Aristotelian and Platonist interpretation of virtue and uses the Aristotelian interpretation, since this serves the purpose of his commentary best.
[118] Steel 2002, 56.
[119] In *EN* I.6 Aristotle discusses the idea of a universal good, clearly referring to Plato's Forms, and argues against this idea.

to employ similar ideas, such as the idea of the divinization of the soul. These references are explained by Michael of Ephesus, as I have shown.

Michael does not 'force Aristotle in a Platonic mould', as Mercken describes,[120] but refers to other thinkers and theories in order to explain Aristotle's philosophy. He also uses terminology that is not found in Aristotle, but finds its origins in other philosophical schools, for example the different types of virtues. Michael does not adopt a Neoplatonic framework, but instead draws from different philosophical traditions in order to explain Aristotle's work. This is not surprising, considering the philosophical tradition of commentaries.

[120] Mercken 2016, 470.

4. Context of Commentary

Michael of Ephesus' commentary is often taken together with the commentaries on Aristotle and Plato in late antiquity. This results in attempt to label Michael of Ephesus as a Platonist or an Aristotelian. However, the context in which Michael of Ephesus wrote his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* is vastly different than the context of the commentaries written in late antiquity. In this chapter, I will first look at the commentary tradition in late antiquity, before considering the historical context of the twelfth-century Byzantine Empire in which Michael produced his commentary.

4.1 The Commentary Tradition in Late Antiquity

The first commentaries on philosophical texts were written around the third century CE,[121] but the tradition of writing commentaries on Aristotle really started taking form in the first century CE. The earliest surviving commentaries on Aristotle are by Alexander of Aphrodisias from the second century CE.[122] The early commentaries were written by Aristotelians within the context of the Peripatetic school. Fazzo refers to these commentators as 'Aristotelian commentators on Aristotle'.[123] While these commentators have been considered unoriginal for a long time, more recent scholarship recognizes the commentaries as a way of doing philosophy.[124] Working in the commentary tradition offered philosophers the possibility to anchor innovative ideas in Aristotle's authority. [125]

The commentary tradition was essential to the development of Aristotelianism.[126] Commentaries had two functions: it ensured the preservation of the original text, as well as the opportunity to develop

[121] Diogene Laërtius mentions Crantor of Soli, who lived in the third century BCE, as the first commentator on Plato, see Tarrant and Baltzly 2024, and Dillon 1996, 42-43. The oldest surviving commentary is an anonymous commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, written between the first century BCE and the second century CE.

[122] See Sorabji 2016, 1.

[123] Fazzo 2004, 7.

[124] See Sorabji 2016, 26-29. Sorabji recognizes the philosophical potential of the commentaries and stresses the originality of certain ideas in the commentaries. Fazzo 2004,7 refers to the commentaries as reworkings of Aristotle's philosophy, which reveals both the connection to Aristotle's philosophy as well as the presence of original thought.

[125] For the concept of anchoring innovative ideas, see Agut-Labordère and Versluys 2022, for example: "Often, but not always, as a process of creative friction through which convention and divergence, tradition and innovation are mediated through anchoring." Agut-Labordère and Versluys 2022, ix.

[126] See Fazzo 2004, 3.

original ideas based on the Aristotelian doctrine. Thus, the goals of the commentators was also two-fold. They not only strove for internal coherence of Aristotle's oeuvre, but also competed amongst each other concerning their rival interpretations of Aristotle's words. Nonetheless, the authority of Aristotle overshadowed the individual commentator, and the main purpose of the commentaries was to explain Aristotle's text.[127] Due to Aristotle's authority, the commentaries were considered impersonal, resulting in the fact that many commentaries that are transmitted anonymously.

As Christianity and Neoplatonism became increasingly popular, Neoplatonic references began appearing more often in the commentaries on Aristotle. The commentators strove for a harmony between Aristotle and Plato. In order to create this harmony between Aristotle and Plato, the commentators and philosophers had to formulate new ideas, resulting in philosophical thought that was a mixture between the two original philosophies.[128]

The harmony between Plato and Aristotle was accepted by most commentators, but Sorabji names two commentators on Aristotle as exceptions: Themistius (317-390)[129] and Michael of Ephesus.[130] He claims that these two commentators 'remained more Aristotelian than Platonist'[131]. Sorabji mentions Michael of Ephesus as an exemption to the Neoplatonic reading of Aristotle, considering him to be an Aristotelian rather than Platonist.

I already mentioned the trend to refer to Michael of Ephesus in terms of 'Aristotelian' or 'Platonist' in the introduction, and many scholars consider Michael of Ephesus to be an Aristotelian, but also recognize his Aristotelian attitude.[132] However, it is important to remember that Michael of Ephesus is heir to the tradition of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle, which results in Neoplatonic influences that are present in the commentary. Despite the nearly eight centuries between the two commentators, Sorabji names Michael of Ephesus together with Themistius. This reveals the pitfall

[127] See Fazzo 2004, 4-5.

[128] See Sorabji 2016, 5.

[129] See Blumenthal 2016 for more on Themistius as the 'last' Aristotelian commentator.

[130] Sorabji 2016, 3.

[131] Sorabji 2016, 3.

[132] For example, Praechter 1931, Sorabji 2016, Mercken 2016, Steel 2002, and Wilberding & Trompeter 2019.

when examining Michael of Ephesus as a commentator. Since he is often put together with The commentators from late antiquity, Michael of Ephesus is often labelled either an Aristotelian or Platonist, instead of recognizing him as a Byzantine scholar.

4.2 The Byzantine Context of the Commentary

Michael of Ephesus wrote his commentary in the twelfth century in the Byzantine empire, which is a very different context from which the earlier commentaries on Aristotle were written. Where previous commentators on Aristotle were often directly connected to the Peripatetic school, Michael of Ephesus is not. Instead, he is a scholar and he is not trying to defend one philosophical school over another, but rather, he attempts to explain what Aristotle's text means. Therefore, the commentary should be approached as a scholarly commentary, rather than a philosophical commentary.[133]

Throughout the commentary, Michael of Ephesus' goal is clear: to explain Aristotle's doctrines. Staying close to Aristotle's text, Michael avoids digressions and opinions.[134] Neither does he take a stance in defending one school of thought, as becomes clear in **3C**, where he discusses the disagreement between the Peripatetics and the Platonists. Michael does not seem to prefer one over the other, but simply picks the explanation that fits Aristotle's interpretation best, which is the interpretation of the Peripatetic school.

The production of Byzantine philosophical commentaries in the twelfth century was in line with the flourishing classical scholarship. Scholar not only wrote philosophical commentaries, but also produced commentaries on poetry.[135] The goal of these commentaries was to understand the text, which is clearly also the principle aim of Michael of Ephesus' commentary.

The focus of the twelfth century commentaries was on scholarship. The commentaries on Aristotle commissioned by Anna

[133] This is also argued by Kaldellis 2009, 37.

[134] See Kaldellis 2009, 38.

[135] For more on the commentaries on poetry, see Kaldellis 2009.

Comnena were used as a framework for innovation, anchored in Aristotle's thought.[136] The commentaries also reflect Christian values, which causes Frankopan to suggest that Comnena's interest in Aristotelian philosophy was an attempt to reconcile the pagan world with Christianity.[137] Although the Christian values are certainly noticeable in Michael of Ephesus' commentary, they remain in the background and they do not interfer with Michael of Ephesus' primary goal, which is to explain Aristotle's text.[138]

When the commentary was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century, it became available for the Latin scholars in Western Europe. The commentary by Michael of Ephesus had a lasting influence on interpretations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[139]

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the context in which Michael of Ephesus wrote his commentary and compared this to the context in which commentaries were written in late antiquity. While there are certain similarities, for example the fact that both the Byzantine and the ancient commentaries use Aristotle's work as an anchor for their own innovative ideas, there are also many differences. The most important difference is the primary aim of the commentaries between the commentaries from late antiquity and the commentaries from the Byzantine empire. The commentaries written in late antiquity are linked to a philosophical school and focus on justifying inconsistencies, while also trying to harmonize the Aristotelian and Platonic tradition. The Byzantine commentaries, however, are written in a different context and attempt to explain the Aristotelian doctrine. While Michael of Ephesus uses Neoplatonic terminology, he does not attempt to reconcile Plato and Aristotle. Instead, he simply explains Aristotle's text, while drawing on his philosophical predecessors.

[136] See Frankopan 2009, 54.

[137] Frankopan 2009, 54.

[138] Kaldellis 2009, 38. In addition to Christian values, there are also references in the commentary to Proclus, who was considered a 'dangerous pagan philosopher', see Steel 2002, 51 for an elaborate discussion of Proclus in the commentary by Michael of Ephesus.

[139] See Steel 2002, 56.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I aimed to answer the question what is the best way to approach Michael of Ephesus as a commentator on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* considering his interpretation of *eudaimonia*. To answer this question, I focused on the discussion of *eudaimonia* in the tenth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Michael of Ephesus interpretation of these two types of *eudaimonia* in his commentary on the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between two types of *eudaimonia*, one in the life of contemplation and one in the life of ethical virtue. Contemplation is the activity in accordance with the intellect, which is divine, and therefore, e*udaimonia* through contemplation is an attempt to become as much as the gods as possible. Aristotle states that nothing that belongs to happiness is incomplete but the division into two types of *eudaimonia* suggests that at least one of the forms of *eudaimonia* is incomplete. This division is a point of discussion in modern scholarship, where one solution is offered by Hardie, who distinguished between an inclusive and a dominant interpretation of *eudaimonia*. The division, however, is not only discussed in modern scholarship, but also by the Byzantine scholar Michael of Ephesus in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics X*.

Michael of Ephesus explains the division in Aristotle's text with terms that are derived from the Neoplatonic scale of virtues. Political and theoretical *eudaimonia*, as Michael of Ephesus calls the two types of happiness, can be obtained by practicing their respective types of virtue, political and theoretical virtue. These types of virtue are placed in the Neoplatonic scale of virtues, which is first introduced by Plotinus and expanded by later Neoplatonist philosophers. The fact that Michael of Ephesus uses this Neoplatonic terminology, as well as has the fact that he explicitly refers to Plato and Plotinus, has resulted in attempts to frame Michael of Ephesus in term of 'Aristotelian' and 'Platonist'.

The goal of the commentary, however, is not to defend a certain philosophical school, but rather, to understand Aristotle's text. In order to explain Aristotle as well as possible, Michael of Ephesus relies on multiple philosophical traditions, borrowing their terminology without adopting their philosophical framework. It is not surprising that Michael of Ephesus uses Platonist and Aristotelian doctrine alongside each other, as he is heir to a long tradition of commentaries that are trying to

harmonize Plato and Aristotle. When it comes to virtue, the link between Aristotle and Neoplatonism is also not surprising, considering that Aristotle's distinction between moral virtue and intellectual virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* might have been the inspiration for Plotinus' distinction between political virtue and theoretical virtue.

It is important to note that Michael's references to Plato and Plotinus are used to explain Aristotle's ideas, not to debunk them. He does not prefer one philosophical school over another, but, as a neutral scholar, explains Aristotle's text according to his abilities and using terminology that he deems fit. Therefore, it is better to regard Michael of Ephesus as neither an Aristotelian nor a Platonist, but rather to recognize him as a Byzantine scholar and philosopher.

When it comes to Michael of Ephesus, it is best to approach him a Byzantine scholar and philosopher. Considering the context in which Michael of Ephesus wrote his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is evident that he differs greatly from the commentators on Aristotle from late antiquity. In his commentary, Michael of Ephesus shows himself not as an Aristotelian nor as a Platonist, but rather as a learned scholar, who is able to explain Aristotle's text. With the Latin translation by Robert Grossesteste, the commentaries by Michael of Ephesus were spread to the Latin speaking scholars in Western Europe, influencing our interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to this day.

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