Chapter 20
Is Aristotle’s Function Argument Fallacious?

Part 1, Groundwork: Initial Clarification of Objections

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20.1. The Problem

The most notorious problem with Aristotle’s Function Argument in NE 1.7 is the charge that its main conclusion—the conclusion that

the human good (to anthrōpion agathon) is a <reason-involving> activity of soul in accord with its <proper> excellence

—is the result of a fallacious inference. But, for all its notoriety, there is a considerable lack of clarity and precision, among detractors and defenders alike, over what the alleged fallacy is.

Glassen objects that “there can be no doubt that Aristotle did confuse the notion of the goodness of with the notion of the good of man” (1957, p. 322). Ackrill objects that “it is not self-evident that the best thing for a man is to be the best possible man” (1973, p. 20). Wilkes objects that there is a logical gap between “the life of the good man” and “the life that is good for a man” (1978, pp. 343, 345)—that

if happiness is indeed the greatest good for man, excellence of functioning seems neither to entail it nor be entailed by it. (p. 343, my emphasis)

(Wilkes here takes for granted the “nominal” identification of the human good with eudaimonia, success or “happiness,” as also with euçōia and exapraxia, living successfully and acting successfully: NE I.4 1095a19–20; I.8 1098b2–22). So, according to her, if we are to defend Aristotle, we must establish connections between happiness and excellence of functioning a posteriori. At the very least we must make out the connection one way, and argue that a life of excellent human functioning is, as things currently are, the best way to secure the life that is best for a human—that in short “an enlightened prudence presupposes or requires morality” (p. 356): that is, as things are, “moral living” is necessary, even if not sufficient,

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for living happily or as is good for a man, although, if things were to change, who
knows?

These allegations are often run together, but mistakenly so. They differ over
Aristotle's definiendum and over his definiens, and so about the supposed gap
between the two. Glassen's claim is that, while Aristotle is aiming to define the
good of man—identified with the final goal of man's actions, the human end—he
gets confused over the phrase "the good" (to agathon) and produces what is in fact
a definition of the goodness of man, that is, of what it is to be a good human (a
good one of our kind). Ackrill and Wilkes, by contrast, both suppose that Aristotle
is aiming to define what is good, or best, for a man, the thing of greatest benefit to
a human; but where Ackrill supposes Aristotle's answer is 'being the best possible
man,' Wilkes takes it to be "the life of the good man."

These allegations are, I believe, variously the product of two main 'ambigui-
ties' in Aristotle's conclusion. The first is an ambiguity—or apparent ambiguity—in
Aristotle's definiendum, "the human good," between a certain notion of the good of
man and one of what is good for, or of benefit to, a man. If we take "the human
good" as equivalent to the genitive phrase "man's good," then the ambiguity is
between "what is the good of a man?" (i.e., what is his end, point, purpose, use)
and "what is of benefit to a man, good for him?" (the difference being that between
possessive or subjective, and objective, genitive constructions). The second is an
ambiguity in Aristotle's definiens; "<reason-involving> activity of soul in accord
with excellence"—for short, "R-ing well, or successfully"—between so-called first
and second actuality, that is, between the disposition to R well, and actively R-ing
well (as for example in "Gavin sees well" between "Gavin is disposed to see well"
and "Gavin is actually seeing well").

It is simplest laid out diagrammatically.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Definiendum} \\
\text{The human good} \\
\downarrow \\
I \quad 2 \\
\hline
\text{Definiens} \\
\text{is/consists in} \\
\downarrow \\
\downarrow \\
A \quad B
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
The good of man \\
\text{R-ing well (1st Act)} \\
\text{R-ing well (2nd Act)}
\end{array}
\]

As I view their interpretations, Glassen takes the definiendum to be 1 (the good of
man), the definiens to be A (1st act); and the conclusion so viewed fallaciously to
assert:

(i) \( I = A \) (i.e., the good of man consists in being disposed to R well)\(^3\)

—fallacious because what A, as a first actuality, properly defines, or constitutes, is
goodness in a human being, i.e.,

BGH (being a good human) = A.

This, while in itself correct, defines something other than the intended target, 1, and
so, if viewed as Aristotle's actual conclusion, would be irrelevant. Thus Glassen.
By contrast, Ackrill and Wilkes both take the *definiendum* to be 2 (what’s good for man), but Ackrill takes the *definiens* to be A, and the conclusion to assert

(ii) \( 2 = A \quad (i.e., \text{what's good for a man consists in being disposed to } R \text{ well}) \)

(Ackrill agrees with Glassen that BHG = A, that *being disposed to R well, or successfully*, is what constitutes *being a good human, or goodness in a human*; it is just that Ackrill takes this whole point as part of the right hand side, of the *definiens*, viz. that \( 2 = (BHG = A) \), while for Glassen BHG = A itself appears as the legitimate, but argumentatively irrelevant, conclusion.) In contrast to both Glassen and Ackrill, Wilkes, on the whole, takes the *definiens* as B—actually living the life of the good man—and the conclusion as

(iii) \( 2 = B \quad (i.e., \text{what's good for a man consists in actually R-ing well}). \)

For Ackrill and Wilkes the fallacy in the argument is that it is not obvious, respectively, what A, or what B, has to do with 2.

Of (i)–(iii), (iii) is the most plausible, both as regards truth and interpretation, and is, albeit with some charitable adjustment, what such defenders of Aristotle’s argument as Kenny, Wilkes, and Whiting attempt, in their different ways, to make palatable.4 But, in my view, none of the claims, (i)–(iii), actually follow from Aristotle’s argument. However since I shall suppose here that Aristotle’s conclusion asserts

(iv) \( 1 = B \quad (i.e., \text{the good of man consists in actually R-ing well}). \)

I don’t see that concession as an immediate problem for Aristotle.

One further clarification is in order. Urnson, for instance, portrays the alleged fallacy as one in which the consideration of human function—of the “perfect specimen of a human life” (Urmson, p. 20)—will at best show that actual reason-involving activity, R-ing well, “is the good of man, not the good for man” (ibid). And objectors may indeed grant that it is plausibly true that \( 1 = B \), but claim that, since the *definiendum*, the good that is being sought (to *zētōmenon agathon*), is 2, the conclusion must, on pain of irrelevance, be supposed in effect:

\[ 2 = (1 = B). \]

We have here, they may say, another way of characterizing the fallacy, as in effect claiming that *what is good for a man is the good of man*, and an important one since it may explain how Aristotle came to commit it—being himself misled by the ambiguity in “the human good” between 1 and 2, and mistakenly taking the consideration of human function to clarify what is good for a man, i.e., 2, whereas all it clarifies is the good of man, 1.

By contrast I claim here that the *definiendum* is 1, as Glassen says, and that Aristotle’s conclusion asserts \( 1 = B \). Of course I now have to make this plausible as an interpretation of the Function Argument. This is all I shall attempt here. But a fuller defense will require me to show that this interpretation doesn’t save the
Argument at the price of making it irrelevant to Aristotle’s project in *NE* I as a whole. In short, this paper is but Part 1, a *preliminary* foray, to begin sorting out certain muddles. Much of our difficulty in this area stems, I believe, from our lack of an accurate grasp on the grammar—the logical shape and category—of the locutions in the area, especially “the X-an good,” “good for,” and “the good of,” this in a teleological sense that seems largely to have fallen out of modern understanding.

20.2 The Basic Argument and the Inference Problem: Simple Inference or Principle?

In broad outline, the Function Argument’s strategy is—and here I think Glassen is right (pp. 319–20)—(1) first to delineate the function of the human (1097b33–98a7), (2) then that of the good human (1098a7–15), and finally (3) to draw a conclusion about the human good (1098a16–18). And just as at the very beginning of the *NE* Aristotle had exploited a parallel between arts and chosen action, so here again he looks, if not wholly, at least initially and especially, to the *artisan* to parallel the human being. The argument that Aristotle seems to have in mind is this, taking the case of the Lyre-player:

(L1) The function of the Lyre-player is playing the lyre.
(L2) The function of the good Lyre-player is playing the lyre well or successfully, that is, in accord with the excellence(s) pertaining, or proper, to lyre-playing.5
(L3) So the Lyre-player’s good consists in playing the lyre in accord with the excellence(s) proper to lyre-playing.

Applied *pari passu* to the human case, this allows Aristotle to argue:

(H1) The function of the Human is a specific way of being alive or living, viz. a kind of practical life of the part having reason (“R-ing” for short).
(H2) The function of the good Human is R-ing well or successfully, that is, in accord with the excellence(s) proper to R-ing.
(H3) So the Human good consists in R-ing in accord with the excellence(s) proper to it.

The schema of the argument is then, for functional item X:

(X1) The function of the X is to x.
(X2) The function of the good X is to x well or successfully, that is, in accord with the excellence(s) proper to x-ing.
(X3) So the X-an good consists in x-ing in accord with the excellence(s) proper to x-ing.

There is some doubt, as we shall see, over the precise extension of X. But a necessary condition is being an item which has “some function and action” (1097b26).
What justifies the first move, from X1 to X2, and what is its point? Aristotle licenses it by appeal to a principle:

**P1**: the function of a good X is the same as the function of an X, but with the extra phrase "in accord with its excellence" added on to the function (1098a7–12).

—a principle he illustrates by appeal to the skilled (1098a9–12). The point of the move is less easy. It introduces *explicitly* the notions of "a good X," of "x-ing successfully," and the *equivalence* of this with "x-ing in accord with its proper excellence" (cf. a14–15). As a preliminary interpretation we can suggest that the thrust of this is (A) to bring out, or cash out, the way in which the X-an good and success of an X "rests in its function" (1097b25–27: see **P2** below)—that this is a matter not simply of doing what is for an X to do, viz. x-ing, but of course x-ing *successfully*, that is, x-ing as a good X, one with the excellence of an X, would x: so the functioning, or x-ing, at issue is x-ing *successfully* and this is equivalent to x-ing *excellently*. (B) This thrust has an equally important *reverse* side. It had been a standard position to suppose that the X-an good, or success as an X, consisted simply in *being a good X*, in having the excellences of an X (cf. L5 1095b29–96a2; L8 1098b30–99a7; EE I.4 1215a20–25; Lawrence 2001, pp. 455–6). This view is now put in its place—the truth and the falsity in it separated out. The truth is that being a good human, one with the excellences, is *necessary* for attaining the human good, actually R-ing excellently, but it is not sufficient—because, for example, you can be a good human but asleep and not R-ing at all. The human good is a matter of second *actuality*, of realizing human excellence in actually living a human life excellently. So the move is *implicitly* clarifying the logical place of an older, "ancient" view about human success by refining our understanding of it via the distinction between first and second actuality (the critique implicit here is later drawn out explicitly at L8 1098b30–99a7). We see both that the excellence(s) of an X, and being a good X (i.e., one with the excellence(s) of an X) do indeed have a role in an account of the X-an good, and what that role is, that is, how "logically" excellences come in to this account, as constituting the criteria of success in a thing's functioning—cashing out what counts as doing it well or successfully: and it is such excellent functioning that constitutes the X-an good.

The move is *formal* to this extent: from the fact that it is the function of an X to x, it follows only that the function of the good X is to x well or successfully, where "to x well or successfully" is to x in accord with the excellences proper to x-ing (and Xs), *whatever these are*. It is no part of this move to determine what these excellences actually are, and so no part of the argument to yield a *substantial* determination of the good X, i.e., of the X with the excellences of an X, nor of what it is to x excellently. Of course it invites the question of a specification of these excellences as the natural next move; for this will yield a more substantially more substantial specification of the X-an good. And in I.13 1102a5–8 Aristotle makes exactly this point, which then sets the agenda of the books that follow (NE II–VI).

Our puzzle, however, concerns the move from X1 and X2 to X3. What has our functioning as humans—or rather our functioning well as humans, our humaning, or R-ing, successfully, that is, excellently—got to do with our greatest good? This is a
"surprising step" (Kenny 1965–6, p. 54). In fact it may seem a blatant non sequitur, as it does to Glassen, Ackrill, and Wilkes, the last of whom remarks

...it is far from clear...how...the superb functioning of any ergon-bearing creature is relevant to what that creature's greatest good is. (Wilkes, p. 343)

Why should what the good X does—viz. x excellently—determine, indeed constitute, what the X-an good is? Aristotle has already said that the human good, the X-an good where X is human, is generally agreed to be eudaimonia (I.4 1095a17–20), and he has argued that this agreement is correct (I.7 1097a25–b21). Now suppose, as Aristotle later claims, that the human excellences are the traditional virtues, and so the function of the good human would be constituted by acting justly, courageously, etc. Yet is such virtuous activity so obviously necessary in order to live successfully or happily? Many wicked people apparently flourish, and evade, in this life at least, any obvious comeuppance. A certain amount of circumspect dishonesty seems a reliable, though not infallible, way of securing a rather enjoyable, richer life, in possession of many of the truly good things of life—and if not the best life, at least one apparently more enjoyable than the impoverished and constricted life of Honest John on the dole. It may be that virtuous activity is necessary—that such dishonest people are not living happily even though they think they are. But it hardly seems obviously so. Conversely, is acting virtuously sufficient for living successfully, or happily? Surely acting justly or courageously will, in certain circumstances, require the sacrifice of life or the endurance of great torture, deprivation, and general misery, let alone minor annoyance and discomfort. Surely only someone set the task of "defending a thesis" in rhetorical debate would claim that this is their "greatest good," or happiness. 8

Admittedly, as already said, it is no part of the Function Argument itself to argue for this particular specification of the excellences. Yet this is the specification Aristotle will accept. Moreover won't there be analogous worries for any specification of the excellences? For the gap appears to open between the formal notions of living successfully (or happily), and living, or functioning, excellently, because each can appear to be sensitive to different criteria, and so to be at best contingently co-extensional (cf. Wilkes' claim).

However rather than cry non sequitur, let us ask instead what principle would license the inference to X3. A principle that would do the job is that:

Where the X is something with a function, the X-an good—the good or success, of the X as such—is, or consists in, X's function—(i.e., in the X's x-ing successfully or excellently).

However, once formulated, this looks like the very principle that Aristotle himself explicitly offers earlier on in the argument, where he says (1097b26–8):

P2: In the case of things that have some definite function and action, the good and the well/success (to etu) seem to be in the function. 9

Now importantly, Aristotle's point in saying this is not, as Glassen claims (pp. 319, 321), to give us "the drift" of the argument to come, as it were a preview
of it. Rather it is to give the argument’s rationale—to explain why looking to human function might clarify the human good that is being sought ("gar" 1097b25). It is, admittedly, somewhat telegraphically expressed. There are two points of apparent unclarity. (a) First, P2 says simply that "the good and well" of an X are held to "be in the function." This leaves it unspecified, or only implicit, how exactly they are a matter of X’s function. As suggested above, it is this that P1 and the move from X1 to X2 help to cash out. (b) Second, as we shall see below, there turns out to be a dispute over "the good and the well/success." Some understand this as a claim about goodness in an X, or success as an X in the sense of being a good X, an X in a good state, and that it is this that is being said to be a matter of X’s function; that, for example, goodness in a sculptor or a pen is a matter of the sculptor’s sculpting well, and the pen’s writing well. That this, taken a certain way, seems a truism is taken as a welcome result, given that P2 is presented as in itself obvious. However, as I interpret P2, it expresses the “Function-Good” principle that:

FG: Where the X is something with a function, the X-an good (X’s success) is in its function, in the sense of being a matter of its function, of its x-ing.

And in fact, as X2 makes clear, it is a matter of its x-ing successfully or well, and of its actually x-ing (second actuality). Success for an X is not constituted simply by being a good X (although that is a necessary condition).

So interpreted, P2’s role is precisely to license the inference from the specification of something’s function, X1, modulated by X2, to the specification of the good in its case, X3. (Joachim 1951, p. 49, and Reeve 1992, p. 128, also take this view of the role of P2 in Aristotle’s argument.) So in the case of a sculptor, for instance, the sculptor-al good—success for a sculptor (to eu)—lies in the sculpting,10 and consists in the sculptor’s actually sculpting successfully, i.e., in accord with the excellence(s) pertaining to sculpting. In his so acting, the sculptor is realizing and achieving his end, his good or success, qua sculptor (viz. fine sculpting).11 So similarly if we can determine the human function, then a human’s doing that and doing it successfully, i.e., excellently—as the good human would do it—will constitute the human good and human success.

Yet if this is right, the objector may protest that not much is gained. The FG principle seems introduced more or less ad hoc to endow a fallacious inference with the aura of legitimacy, and the doubts that attached to the inference transfer simply to the inference principle. At best, the principle—introduced to give the rationale for the argument—so far from being self-evident, stands just as much in need of its own rationale. Aristotelian apologists will have to look elsewhere to defend it. Objectors, by contrast, will suggest Aristotle has misused himself due to an equivocation on “the X-an good” either in the principle itself and its use in the argument, or else in the relevance he takes the argument’s conclusion to have to illuminating the good he is inquiring after (to zetoumenon agathon). But, either way, we need to consider the FG principle more carefully, and also the nature of the good whose elucidation Aristotle suggests the Function Argument supplies.12
20.3 The Problem of the Definiens. Glassen’s Interpretation of P2: The Good of Man Versus the Goodness of Man

It can, however, be objected that we are not yet at this point, on the grounds that P2—the claim that

P2: In the case of things that have some definite function and action, the good and the well/success seem to be in the function

—when properly interpreted, does not express the FG, function-good, principle (cf. p. 341 above).

Thus Glassen takes the move from X2 to X3 to show that Aristotle is confusing the notion of the goodness of X with that of the good of X. According to Glassen,

from the premise that [H2] the function of a good man is <rational> activity of soul in accordance with excellence, what follows is, not that [H3] the good of man consists in <rational> activity of soul in accordance with excellence, but that [H4] the goodness of man consists in <rational> activity of soul in accordance with excellence (p. 321, my H numbering).

That is, the conclusion Aristotle actually draws, H3, is illegitimate; the conclusion that the premises of the schema really license is H4. To explain this confusion, Glassen suggests locating it in P2. He argues that “the good” in P2’s “the good and the well/success” does not stand for the good of man—which “Aristotle has told us, is the final goal of man’s actions” (p. 320; cf. 319)—but is the substantival use of the adjective “agathos” as that is used to qualify “lyre-player,” etc., i.e., the goodness of a lyre-player (the Penguin indeed translates it this way). If so, P2 is not asserting FG (“a highly dubious proposition,” p. 322), but making a “truiistic” point linking the function of things with their goodness, with their being a good one of their kind—viz. the Function-Goodness principle:

FGness: For all things, X, with a function, their goodness, their being a good X, “is in” their function, x-ing: that is, to be a good X ‘has to do with,’ or consists in, x-ing well or successfully, i.e., in accordance with its proper excellence (p. 322).

This principle licenses what Glassen takes to be the legitimate conclusion,

[H4] the goodness of man consists in <rational> activity of soul in accordance with excellence.13

Glassen’s suggestion is that “the ambiguity of this term [to agathon] then misled Aristotle himself into treating it as if it referred to the final end of action,” and so fallaciously to draw H3 as a conclusion, whereas all the argument licenses is the—irrelevant—H4 (p. 322; cf. p. 321). That is, Aristotle is aiming to define the good of man, or the final end of human action, but all that really follows from his premises is a claim about human goodness, about what it is to be a good human.
However a closer look shows it is not Aristotle, but Glassen, who is confused. To take P2 as Glassen does is to misunderstand Aristotle’s point in asserting it. The context makes clear that P2 gives the rationale for investigating function in order to clarify the good (or to ariston) in the “final end” sense that has been at issue. P2 interpreted as stating the FGness principle clearly does not do this: it elucidates a different connection.14 But there is, to my mind, a definitive objection to Glassen’s interpretation.

Glassen evidently supposes that there is a legitimate inference from:

[H2] the function of a good man is <rational> activity of soul in accordance with its excellence,

to

[H4] the goodness of man consists in <rational> activity of soul in accordance with its excellence.

via the inference principle, P2, understood as expressing:

FGness: the goodness of an X consists in—is a matter of—its functioning well.

The inference and its principle may seem, and are, unexceptionable—as witness:

[Pen2] the function of a good pen is to write well/writing well;
[Pen4] so the goodness of a pen, or its being a good one, consists in its writing well—is for it to write well.

This seems truisic—and Glassen welcomes that (p. 322; cf. p. 341 above). But in fact it turns on an equivocation.

Glassen overlooks the key point that, in Greek as in English,15 there is an ambiguity in the phrases “to φ” or “φ-ing” between first and second actuality. That is, “Gavin sees” or “plays chess” may be used to say that I possess the abilities to see and to play chess (first actuality); or else that I am currently seeing or playing (second actuality), a sense where in English it is often natural to use the form “is φ’ing” (cf. p. 336 above).

Now the sense at issue in the FGness principle, if it is to be true, is that of first actuality. Thus when we say that the goodness of a pen consists in its writing well—or that a good pen writes well (or is one that writes well)—the sense properly at issue is that of first actuality: that is, a good pen is one that can, or is disposed to, write well—is one that has the excellent states proper to writing.16 After all, a pen that isn’t being used but is in a drawer doesn’t thereby lose its goodness or cease to be a good one. Compare Foot’s remark in “Goodness and Choice”:

Where a thing has a function, the primary... criterion for the goodness of that thing will be that it fulfills its function well. Thus the primary criterion of goodness in a knife is its ability to cut well. (1961/1978, p. 135)
As the illustrative gloss shows, Foot uses the phrase "it fulfills its function well" in the first actuality sense of "is able to fulfill its function well," and not the second actuality sense. The goodness of an X then consists not in its actually x-ing successfully, or excellently, but in its being so disposed. If so, the sense of "rational activity done successfully/excellently" that is required for the truth of (H4)—the claim that

[H4] the goodness of man consists in <rational> activity of soul in accordance with excellence

—is that of first actuality, of being disposed to R excellently (i.e., having the pertinent excellence(s)).

But—and here is the rub—the sense of "rational activity of soul in accord with excellence" at issue in the specification of human function in premise [H2]—and so in Aristotle's conclusion [H3]—is, as Aristotle explicitly goes out of his way to clarify, that of second actuality (1098a5–7). Yet if this is the relevant sense, then to draw [H4] from [H2] would involve a category mistake: for the goodness of something consists in a disposition, i.e., a first actuality, not a second. Indeed [H4] only seems to follow because Glassen is misinterpreting [H2], equivocating on the relevant phrase, incorrectly taking it in the sense of "consists in being able to engage in rational activity well." It is Glassen here who is guilty of trading on an ambiguity.

There is indeed something rather odd about Glassen's mistake. For his cry of fallacy to work, he must be assuming that the good of man cannot consist in the goodness of a human: otherwise "R-ing well" in correctly constituting human goodness could equally constitute the good of man (or the final end of action). The reason this assumption is correct turns on the first/second actuality distinction—the two senses of R-ing well. But if you could sense that, you are equipped to appreciate the right way of taking the argument and so avoid this allegation of fallacy!

To sum up. If I am right,

(a) It is not Aristotle who is confusing the notions of the good of X and the goodness of X; and we have been given no reason to suppose he uses "the X-an good" (to X-an agathon) in what Glassen calls the substantival sense of "the goodness of X" here or indeed ever (arete plays that role).

(b) "The good and the well/success" in P2 is to be interpreted, not as the goodness of X, but as the X-an good and X-an success, and this removes a block to construing P2 as FG. The phrase is still open to our original ambiguity, between "good of" and "good for," but a potential further, third, ambiguity, "the goodness of," can be dismissed at least in the present context. If so, Aristotle is not making a careless slip in moving from H2 to H3. He thinks, rightly or wrongly, that this is licensed by an acceptable principle. (Whether it is so, we need to consider.)

(c) Finally, this clearly resolves our question of the definiens in favor of B over A. Interpreters who treat Aristotle as offering an answer in terms of first actuality—of being a good human, or in being disposed to R well—simply go against the
text, and in effect adopt that "wise and rather ancient" position which Aristotle himself is at pains to criticize in EE I.4 1215a20–25 (cf. NE I.8 1098b30–99a7; Lawrence 2001, pp. 455–6).

20.4 The Problem of the Definiendum: Is The Human Good What is Good for a Man?

So far so good. The definiens is clarified and we have banished one misconception of "the good." Yet the notion of "the human good" (to anthropin agathon) which is Aristotle's target, and, generally, "the good" at issue in FG, which I take to be the generalized version, i.e., "the X-an good," are still not immediately transparent notions. (1) What, for instance, is the extension of X in "the X-an good"? (2) And what is this sense of "the good"? Such substantival uses of "good" as "the good" have attracted little modern attention, or rather been avoided. Geach (1956/67) is concerned only with adjectival uses; Ziff (1960) mentions the use, claiming that

By morphologically speaking, such morphological constructions as "The Good," "goodness," "goodly," are derivative from predicative or attributive occurrences of "good" ...

and then proposes to ignore such constructions (pp. 209–210). Vendler (1963) too focuses only on adjectival constructions, as does Thompson (1994). (Von Wright 1963 does address such locutions. But his account turns out to be somewhat idiosyncratic.)

How then are we to understand "the human good" that is the target of Aristotle's elucidation? Well, we know what Aristotle takes as an initial—if somewhat "nominal"—answer to the question he is posing: almost everyone would agree, he says, that "by name" eudaimonia is the human good, and eudaimonia is taken as synonymous with eudaimonia—doing or faring well or successfully—and eudaimon—for the good, or the best possible, human life. It is the answer to this that Aristotle takes to be controversial (I.4 1095a20–28). But what actually is the question? One way of answering it according to Parfit is offered by an Objective List Theory which specifies certain things as objectively "good, or bad, for people," i.e., irrespective of their actual, subjective, desires about them (1984, pp. 493, 499). And indeed many interpreters of Aristotle—detractors and defenders alike (e.g., Ackrill, Kenny, Wilkes)—suppose that, in asking after the human (or X-an) good, Aristotle is asking, and asking objectively:

"What is good for a human being (or X)?"

And it is natural to take this, as Whiting does, as equivalent to the question

"What is beneficial for, or of benefit to, a human being?—what does them good?"

(Cf. Ackrill 1973, p. 20; Wilkes 1978, p. 356). Thus Whiting invites us to consider the ambiguity Aristotle finds in the notion of hou heneka, as this appears in the sentence, "x is for the sake of y":
One is the beneficial sense in which x’s occurring benefits someone. The other is the instrumental sense in which x is instrumental (or a means) to bringing it about that y, and it is a further question whether anyone is benefited by the process: it is simply a matter of causal efficacy. (p. 35, my italics.)

Her idea is apparently that we should gloss the notion of the human, or X-an, good in the first of these senses, as “that which is for the sake of a human, or X, as beneficiary” (pp. 37, 38). For this is clearly the more plausible of these two senses in this context. So when Aristotle asks what the human good is he is asking what is most of benefit to a human. If so, then when Aristotle gives the nominal answer as eudaimonia (or euzōia or eupraxia), we are to understand this as claiming that the greatest good for a human, or what benefits a human most, is a wonderful life—to live successfully, or well.

If the human, or X-an, good is to be understood this way, as the beneficial good, and if P2 is to be taken as expressing the function-good inference principle, FG, then FG must be construed as:

\[\text{[BenFG]}\] Where X is something with a function, the X-an good, in the sense of what is good for, or benefits, an X, consists in X’s doing its function successfully or well.

However this interpretation of the human, or X-an, good, and of the FG principle, is problematic. For a start, as Wilkes says,

... it is far from clear... how... the superb functioning of any ergon-bearing creature is relevant to what that creature’s greatest good is.... (Wilkes, p. 343)

There seems to be a gap between the life of the good man, i.e., a life of excellent human functioning, and the life that is good for man. Aristotle appears to be sliding between two senses of “doing well” or “living well”:

... a man may do or live well, in the sense that he performs admirably the activities that his ergon ascribes to him, with or without doing well for himself or living a life that is good for him. (Wilkes, p. 343, her emphasis.)

Of course, if P2 does express BenFG, then Aristotle explicitly asserts a principle of connection that, formally speaking, closes this gap and removes a possibly fallacious inference. But then why accept the principle? If P2 is supposed to provide the rationale for the Function Argument, it is troubling if this rationale is not self-evident but itself in turn stands just as much in need of its own rationale. Moreover the problem is not simply lack of self-evidence. For if X in “the X-an good” is a beneficiary, then various counterexamples apparently make it clear that, to be plausible, the range of possible substitutions for X in the X1–X3 argument-schema must be a smaller class than simply functional items, and the principle BenFG must likewise be restricted in its scope.

Let us turn to these counterexamples.
(a) The Alleged Counterexamples

We are offered a range of counterexamples. Wilkes offers the sheepdog:

**Example 1:** What the good sheepdog does and what is good for the sheepdog to do have no necessary correlation. (p. 346)

Kenny offers the sculptor:

**Example 2:** Surely, we feel inclined to object, what is good for sculptors (e.g., adequate remuneration and good living conditions) is quite different from what the good sculptor does (e.g., sculpt well). (p. 27)

Whiting (1988, p. 33) gives her version of the two moves of the argument's schema from X1 to X2 and X2 to X3, and then remarks:

The legitimacy of these moves is typically challenged by appeal to the following sort of example. [A] From an understanding of the function of a knife, it may follow that being sharp and cutting well make something a good knife: but it does not follow that being sharp and cutting well is good for a knife. [B] Similarly, from an understanding of what it is to be a flute player, it may follow that some things (e.g., perfect pitch and a sense of rhythm) make someone a good flute player; but it does not follow that these things are good for someone who plays the flute. In a depressed economy, an unemployed virtuoso may wish that he had been tone deaf and instead become a doctor. (p. 34)

This is difficult to disentangle. The range and type of subject that is at issue for being "what is good for an X" is confined (a) to the functioning of the X and (b) that taken as actual functioning, i.e., second actuality ("their performances;" cf. Ackrill quoted in n. 23). Let us simplify and emend Whiting's statement so that her challenge runs:

**Example 3:** It does not follow from the fact that the function of a (good) knife is actually cutting (well) that cutting successfully or well is good for, i.e., benefits, a knife; nor

**Example 4:** that actually playing the flute successfully or well is good for, i.e., benefits a flute player.

Thus, taking *x-ing* to be the function of the X, the schematic form of the worry, at least when cleaned up, is thus:

(W) It is not obvious why *x-ing* well (second actuality)—successful or excellent functional performance—is what is good for, or of benefit to, X.

The function of the X, *x-ing*, is *the exercise of X's essence, or quasi-essence* (in the case of artisans and artifacts): an X's actually doing what it is for an X to do. The worry is that there seems no obvious reason why an X's doing this (*x-ing*), and doing it well, should be of benefit to an X—and given the counterexamples reason to think that in many cases it isn't, or makes no sense.
The counterexamples offered are of several sorts: people in technical roles; animals in technical roles; artifacts. To these we can add the case of parts of the body. What sense is there to the claim that seeing well is good for, or benefits, the eye?\textsuperscript{23}

Now both Whiting and Kenny try to defend Aristotle against this difficulty.

(b) Whiting's Response

Whiting's strategy is to concede the force of these counterexamples, but then to sideline them by arguing that Aristotle disallows precisely such cases as legitimate substitution instances of the X1–X3 schema of inferences (or rather her version of that). Legitimate substitution, she argues, is restricted to the case of animate natural kinds, and thus excludes both artifacts ("inanimate objects") and artisans ("non-natural kinds"). She also offers an explanation of why Aristotle should accept the validity of the inference in the favored cases.

Her argument against the counterexamples (pp. 35–6), as I understand it, is this:

(1) Aristotle distinguishes two senses of "hou heneka," of "x being for the sake of y," the beneficial and the instrumental. It is the human good in the sense of "what benefits a human" that is Aristotle's concern here (cf. pp. 37–38).

(2) Aristotle restricts the class of beneficiaries to living creatures (a claim she bases on NE VIII.2 1155b29–31).\textsuperscript{24}

(3) So this rules out inferences from the X2–X3 schema where X is an artifact, like a knife.

(4) To rule out the cases of artisanal ("nonnatural" living) kinds, like the flute player and the sheepdog, Aristotle must show further that "the move from <X2 to X3> is warranted only in substitutions in natural <living> kinds." And to show this is not ad hoc,

Aristotle must establish some connection between a thing's membership in a natural kind and what is beneficially good for that thing—or...some connection between a thing's essential properties and what is beneficial for that thing. (p. 36)

And Whiting then goes on to characterize this connection in terms of a distinction between conditional benefits and categorical benefits.\textsuperscript{25} Whether or not playing the flute is good for, or benefits, me is conditional on the (subjective) desires and interests I happen to have (e.g., if it is "my sole source of support or personal fulfillment"); whether playing the flute benefits me, or is in my interest, depends on whether it is an interest I happen—subjectively—to have. By contrast, for a (normal) member of a species to realize its end—in living the life that is for it to live—is categorically or unconditionally good for it, "that is good for it whatever its actual interests and desires" (p. 36), i.e., objectively. This way of ruling out the cases of nonnatural living kinds involves Whiting in articulating the validity of the principle of inference for living natural kinds, and then defending it in terms of Aristotelian commitments to essentialism and final cause explanation (cf. Reeve 1992, p. 128).

Thus the way she sidelines the cases of artifacts and of artisans (her "nonnatural kinds") are very different.
Her way of trying to deal with the counterexamples is, I believe, misguided. For a start, too much is asked of the reader. In the argument itself Aristotle makes no move to restrict the proper substitution instances only to functional items of a natural kind; nor to explain the theoretic basis of such a principle. On the contrary, he feels free to appeal precisely to the supposedly controversial examples—artisanal kinds and body parts in the *NE*, artifacts in the *EE*—to illustrate the argument without any explicit suggestion that they are illustrative only of limited points in the argument.26

*Above all,* the very principle of the inference, FG, that links the function of X with the X-an good, is introduced *explicitly* by way of examples of nonnatural kinds (artisans)—and possibly also artifacts:

Perhaps then this *eudaimonia* [the human good] would become *clearer* if the function of the human were grasped. For just as for a flute-player and a sculptor and for every craftsman, and generally for things [*hôn] of which there is some specific function and action, the good and the well-success are held to be in the function, so it would be held also for man, if there is some specific function of him. (1097b25–28)

If “*hôn*” is neuter, as I believe it is, then the principle is being generalized over all functional items, including artifacts; but even if it is masculine, and is generalizing only over humans with some sort of role, wider than the “technical,” yet one can hardly suppose Aristotle is cutting out artisans as legitimate substitution instances in this principle?27

Now, admittedly Whiting doesn’t agree that P2 expresses FG. Like Glassen, she apparently supposes it concerns *goodness* in an X (see n. 21). This means that the principle underwriting the inference from (good) human function to human good, must, on her view, only be *implicit* in the argument. This gives her the freedom to suppose that Aristotle adheres to the BenFG principle only in the restricted form:

*[NatBenFG] Where, and only where, X is a living natural kind with a function, the X-an good, in the sense of what is good for, or benefits, an X, consists in X’s doing its function well or successfully.*

Of course this itself needs defense, as Whiting acknowledges and tries to provide.

But again this is, I believe, too much to expect of the reader—who now has to supply both the needed principle of inference, and the defense and explanation it needs. Moreover, as I have argued in Section 20.3, I think that *given its context, P2 must be taken to express FG, not FGness.* If so, then given FG is explicitly supposed to hold of artisans, we simply *cannot* sideline them in the way Whiting proposes, and must find another way out of the absurdities in which it appears to lands us.

In fact, I think, the proper treatment of the alleged counterexamples demands a double response. For, as I will argue, there are *two* mistakes that get made here.

(c) *Kenny’s Response*

The first is revealed by Kenny. He points to a different way out. He acknowledges our worries about the inference from X2 to X3:
Surely, we feel inclined to object, what is good for sculptors (e.g., adequate remuneration and good living conditions) is quite different from what the good sculptor does (e.g., sculpt well). (1965–6, p. 27)

but then responds:

But presumably Aristotle would reply that this merely showed the difference between what was good for sculptors *qua* men and what was good for them *qua* sculptors. What is good for a man, *qua* man, to do is what the good man in fact does *qua* good man. But what the good man does is what all men should do. . . .

This point—"the *qua* point"—seems completely correct. A thing may have several different functions, and it is important to keep the inherence schema relativized to the function in hand and not equivocate on it, as happens in some of the alleged counterexamples, such as Wilkes' sheepdog and Whiting’s flautist, and (intentionally) in Kenny's own example of the sculptor. (Neither Wilkes nor Whiting seem fully to appreciate this.)

But, although correct, Kenny's point does not go far enough. This is clear from the case of artifacts, which, like the knife, lack any such obvious equivocation. If we are worried, as we should be, about saying that its activity, cutting well, is *good for*, or of benefit to, a knife, it doesn't seem any help to add "well, good for a knife *qua* knife." (We are not concerned here with the possibility of an instrumental loop—where its cutting well happens to keep the knife sharp, and so ensures that it cuts well when used to cut). And pari passu with body parts.

But the problem doesn't stop with artifacts and body parts. For in the examples of the sculptor, sheepdog, and flautist, even when we correct them and take the issue to be not what is good for the sculptor *qua* man, et al., but what is good for, or of benefit to, them *qua* sculptor, et al., the question arises of whether there is any such thing. Indeed what does it even mean to talk of what is *good for* the sculptor as such, or the sheepdog as such? The obvious sense is what *would* (instrumentally) help the sculptor attain their end, or activity, *qua* sculptor. But clearly that is not at issue. Kenny's suggestion is apparently that what is good *for* the sculptor *qua* sculptor to do is what the good sculptor in fact does *qua* good sculptor—that is, good sculpting, their end or activity. But in what sense does good sculpting *benefit* a sculptor as such? It is not that thus they earn money or fame—for such things do not belong to the art of sculpting, *as such.* Good sculpting is success, or perfection, as a sculptor; it is their end as such, it is the good of a sculptor as such. But is attaining, or realizing, this end—their good functioning—*good for them as such*? It is not obvious what sense such a claim has (other than the possibility of an instrumental loop).

We seem here in the territory of the dispute in Republic I between Socrates and Thrasymachus, over who benefits, or gains advantage, (*sumpheron*), from the practice of a skill *as such*—the practitioner as such, or the object of the skill (Rep. 341c4–342e11, etc.). A skill, if it is perfect (*teiria*), and its artisan, if perfect, stand in no need of any benefit (Rep. 1342c4–6), any more than god—the object, or end, of our worship—is a *beneficiary* of it, being already a perfect being in need of nothing (EE VIII.3 1249b13–16; cf. Euthyphro 13a–15a). There is no way to benefit something that is already perfect; for *qua* perfect, it stands in need of nothing.
But doesn’t this miss the point? Isn’t the point that it is a thing’s perfection that benefits the thing—indeed is its greatest benefit? Of course, once perfect there is, as such, no further way left for it to be benefited?

But surely good doctoring—success or perfect actualization as a doctor—benefits the patient as such, and not the doctor as such (though, incidentally he may be the patient (cf. Phys II.1 192b23ff). How would good doctoring—perfect actualization as a doctor—benefit the doctor as such, i.e., as a practitioner of the medical art as such—instrumental loops aside? And whether or not this is universally the case, such examples are enough to throw into doubt the idea that generally their proper activity, their functioning successfully, is something that can be said to benefit, or be good for, things with a function.

But perhaps this is the very line of contrast between artisans and natural organisms. Nature faces inwards, while art faces outwards to the deficiencies of nature in others. The functioning well of organisms, their doing their proper/essential activities, is what is good for, or what benefits, them, whereas the functioning well of artisans, their doing their proper/essential activities, benefits others.

(a) Yet does this really hold up? Why not say rather: with natural organisms operating naturally, they just do their thing—doing that well or successfully doesn’t benefit them, it just is their good, it doesn’t do them good. But art, art steps in where nature fails—to help nature secure its own goals: it benefits things that have natures, where nature has fallen down and needs aid (crude speaking). Art benefits, because art is parasitic and other-directed, but nature is “at home” and not in the business of promoting or benefiting anything, just of being itself and realizing itself. (b) But, even were the above idea to hold up, and to meet the challenge of giving a sense to an organism’s functioning successfully being of benefit to it—to its being the beneficiary of its functioning—nonetheless, given that (1) P2 explicitly applies also to artisans, and that (2) it expresses FG, then (3) the X—an good at issue here in P2 cannot be interpreted as the beneficial good—simply on the grounds of this artisanal parallel with which it is explicitly introduced (unless, that is, a sense of “beneficial good” can be supplied equally for the artisanal case). And the point is even clearer if, as I believe, the P2 principle applies also to artifacts, like knives.

This difficulty should make us query whether we have correctly understood the human, or X—an good, that is the target of elucidation in the Function Argument: is Aristotle’s concern really with what is good for, or benefits, an X? At the same time, the above remarks point to a different way of conceiving the good in question—not as what is good for an X, but as the good of an X.

But before that, I want to dwell a little further on the notion of the beneficial good.

(d) Further Queries about “Good for” and “the Beneficial Good”

This notion of “what is good (or bad) for an X” is somewhat obscure. A natural, and relatively unproblematic, way to understand it is as equivalent to the beneficial,
and to understand the latter, along with its correlative, the *harmful* or *deleterious*, as broadly instrumental, or end relative, viz., very roughly:

B benefits/harms the X in that B, directly or indirectly, promotes/impedes the attainment of the X’s proper ends, or proper functioning.

Von Wright, for instance, takes this instrumental understanding of the category of the beneficial/harmful (1963, pp. 41ff) (although he takes the category of the beneficial as a sub-form of the useful—"utilitarian goodness"—as being what is favorably causally relevant specifically to the *good of some being*, ibid., p. 42). And Aristotle certainly appears to have such a category (cf. I.7 1097a26–7)—of the helpful, the *ôphelimon* (cf. *NE* I.6 1096b10–16), the expeditious, or advantageous/harmful, the *sumpheron/blaberon* (II.3 1104b30–1105a1), the useful, the *chrêsimon* (VIII.2 1158b18–21; see also Plato *H. Ma.* 296d–297d; *Rep.* II 357b4–d2; cf. Von Wright, ibid., p. 41).

So viewed the X’s end, or its good, or success, sets the *horos*—the criterion—for what counts as beneficial or harmful. It is in this vein that Aristotle claims, in *NE* VII.13 1153b17–25, that human *eudaimonia* (success/happiness) is the criterion for goods of the body, and goods that are external and a matter of chance. For these are needed because, but only to the extent that, their presence promotes and enhances, and their absence impedes, the activity (or activities) that constitute human *eudaimonia*. We can view this too as an FG principle, moving from a thing’s function to its good, but in the very limited sense of what is instrumentally good for, or harmful to, it:

[InstBenFG] Where the X is something with a function, the X-an good, in the sense of what is instrumentally good for, or beneficial to, the X, is set by X’s function.

Thus the function of eyes, seeing, determines the ocular good in this sense of what is good for the eyes, i.e., of what instrumentally aids their (successful) function, or impedes it.

But clearly it is not, or not simply, this basically instrumental sense of good for, or beneficial, that could be at issue in the Function Argument. Aristotle is not seeking here to clarify what is beneficial for humans in the sense of promoting, or being advantageous, to their end, but to clarify what that end is (1097b22–5). (Even Prichard (1935, in 1949, pp. 51, 53) who claimed that the former was really Aristotle’s question had to admit that, if so, Aristotle here in the Function Argument expressed himself “in a misleading way” and “misrepresented his own view!” Prichard’s thesis was demolished by Austin 1967.)

So, this still leaves us with the challenge of what sense can be given to the notion of what is good for, or beneficial to, an X in BenFG. What is this sense in which Ackrill and Wilkes find the claim that “X’s functioning well is good for, or of benefit, to it” not self-evident, and in which Kenny and Whiting try to defend it?

Scholars often talk here, and elsewhere, in an undifferentiating way about “the good for Xs” and “what is good for Xs” (cf. Reeve 1992, p. 128; Urmon 1988,
p. 20). In these phrases the "for" is ambiguous between what in classical languages used to be called a dative of disadvantage and a dative of respect: that is, it is ambiguous between the notions of what is good for, or benefits, Xs and the good, with respect to, or in the case of, Xs (Hurka 1987, p. 73, senses something of this ambiguity). We consider this latter notion in the next section. So the dilemma I pose is this:

(1) If we take the "for" as a dative of advantage, the sense of the question "what is good for a human?" appears to be instrumental—and that is not what Aristotle is asking;

(2) If we take the "for" as a dative of respect, the sense of the question is "what is the good in the case of a human?", and this is to take the human good as the good of a human, and not per se to raise questions of benefit and beneficiaries at all.31

One way the opponent can respond to this challenge is to claim that what is good for, or beneficial or advantageous, to an X encompasses more than what is merely instrumental to X's (proper) ends. Thus Brad Hooker, for instance, distinguishes between "instrumental" and "constitutive" benefits:

Something is instrumentally beneficial to someone if it is a means to some further thing that itself constitutes a benefit to that person. ... Different theories of individual welfare—of what makes a person's life go well or badly for him or her—differ over what things constitute benefits to people. (1996, p. 141)

I presume Hooker's idea here is that something may be a benefit to an X not by being an instrumental means, but by constituting their life going well or badly. This seems at least what, nearer home, Whiting has in mind when she claims that Aristotle's view

is that for each species there is an ultimate end such that realizing that end (which Aristotle identifies with living a certain sort of life) is categorically or unconditionally good for any normal member of that species—that is, good for it whatever its actual interests and desires (p. 36),

or as she also says "intrinsically and non-instrumentally beneficial" for it (p. 37). According to Whiting, as we saw earlier (p. 11), such benefits can only be enjoyed by living natural kinds—only they can be beneficiaries. So Aristotle is committed to NatBenFG—or as Whiting expresses it, the claim that

something's membership in a natural kind at least partly determines what is beneficial for that thing (p. 38).32

and this in her sense of "categorically good for it," and not (merely) InstBenFG. Thus, she says, a plant's activity of photosynthesizing is part of the plant's healthy functioning and as such good for it.33

But is this healthy functioning good for, or of benefit to, the plant? Here is this plant doing its planty thing—realizing its nature: is that good for it, of benefit to it? Certainly you could harm or damage the plant by impeding this activity. Yet it seems that if one says that (good) photosynthesizing is good for the plant, the natural way
to take this is that photosynthesizing achieves certain other results that speak to the plant's needs.

My stronger challenge then is that the idea that an organism's realizing its end, i.e., its functioning successfully, is good for, or beneficial to, it—"intrinsically and non-instrumentally" beneficial to it—as yet lacks a sense; my suspicion is that none will be forthcoming (unless being of benefit to something can be heard as being to its good, and this as being part of or constitutive of its good: but this is an extension I find hard to hear in the natural profile of the concept: see further below). Can anything benefit from attaining its own proper end? We found it difficult to see what sense it made to say that good sculpting, or good sheep-dogging, was good for sculptors, or sheepdogs, as such. The same puzzle occurs with living natural kinds: what sense—instrumental loops aside—does it make to say that an organism's living the life-that-is-for-it-to-live is good for, or benefits, it? It is the good of it, but is it good for it? It is its good, its success, but does it do it good?

Initially one might think: "There's really no puzzle. What greater benefit can you give someone than a long happy life? Isn't this the best present the fairy godmother can give—the greatest benefit? And what greater harm can you do to someone than deprive them of this?"

But the good fairy helps you by arranging that the circumstances of your life be such as to allow you to attain (and enjoy) the end of being human (the good of you, in a sense to be explained), and by making sure that those circumstances which would impede or prevent you attaining your good do not arise. She helps to secure—to promote and protect—the human good in your case: and does so for your sake—you are the beneficiary of her actions, while the end of her actions is your eudaimonia/eudaimonia. But this doesn't show that your living or functioning well (your eudaimonia)—your welfare or faring well—itself is good for you, or benefits you. She is benefiting you by promoting, or securing, your good, not by making your good, your living well, good for, or of benefit to, you.

After all, if one said "her noble life was good for her," or "her contemplative life benefitted her," it is hard to see what this could mean, other than that it promoted some other goods. Or again, consider an analog with the living body. Health is the functioning well of the body; and it determines—is the horos—of what is beneficial and harmful to the body. It is success in a body—its end, the good of the body: but what would it mean to say that its healthy functioning is good for, or benefits, the body as such—"intrinsically and non-instrumentally good for it"?

The topic is difficult. But as yet I remain unconvinced that the notion of "what is intrinsically and non-instrumentally beneficial to, or good for, X" has been given a sense. Its defenders presumably would not want to say this is just a baroque way of talking about the good of Xs, their final causes. And indeed they cannot. For in their intended sense of intrinsic benefit only living things can be beneficiaries, whereas, as we shall see, we can talk of the good of X in the case of any and every functional item.

Suppose, however, that I am wrong, and my challenge can be met—that there is, after all, an intelligible question, at least in certain cases, over whether the item's successful functioning is of "non-instrumental" benefit to it. (That Aristotle does so
think may be suggested by the remark at NE IX.8 1169a12–13.) My second, weaker, claim is that, even so, it is not the human (or X-an) good in this "beneficial" sense that can be at issue here in the Function Argument. If, as I believe, the X-an good at issue encompasses items, like the knife, for which this question of beneficial good is agreed not to arise, then it seems either Aristotle is guilty of adopting a fallacious principle or these objectors and defenders both err in their common interpretation of the X-an good. I opt for the latter.

To recapitulate. I think that the idea that X's successful functioning is, at least in certain cases, good for, or of benefit to, it in some non-instrumental way has not been given a sense. And even if it has a sense, it is not such a sense that is at issue in the Function Argument.

20.5 An Alternative Interpretation of the Human Good:

The Good of Humans

There is another way to understand "the X-an good," which avoids the above difficulties, and which allows us to understand FG in the unrestricted way in which it appears to be presented.

As I said above, if we take the notion of the human, or X-an, good as one of "the good for humans/Xs" this is ambiguous between a dative of advantage and a dative of respect. This latter notion—the notion of what is the good with respect to, or in the case of, Xs—is as yet obscure. Indeed perhaps one way to understand it is as asking after what is good for, or what benefits, an X. But there is another way, for which I shall reserve the locution "the good of X." To ask after the X-an good in this sense is to ask after X's end or point (cf. "What's the good of it?"): this is thus a teleological notion of the good (cf. Lawrence 2006, pp. 39–41).34

To ask after the X-an good, or the X's good, would then be ambiguous between asking about what is good for, or benefits, Xs, and asking about what the good of Xs is, their end or point. For example, the ocular good could be either that which is good for, or beneficial to, eyes, or else what constitutes the point or end of eyes.

The X-an good, in this sense of the end or telos of an X, is X's final cause. It is "that for the sake of which [hou hekêa] the rest [ta loipâta alla] are" (cf. I.7 1097a18; cf. EE I.8; EE II.1.1 1219a8, a10–11), where "the rest" are everything else that properly speaking have to do with X. Aristotle here employs that sense of "hou hekêa" which he elucidates as "that for the sake of which, as end" (hôs telos; EE I.8; cf. Phys II.2 194a27; II.3 194b32ff) as against the other sense "that for the sake of whom, i.e., to benefit whom" (which he sometimes glosses with the dative of advantage "hô(i)").35 So, the X-an good in this sense is the final cause of X.

This interpretation is helpfully highlighted by its contrast with Whiting's. She takes the ambiguity Aristotle finds in to hou hekêa to be between "the merely instrumental and the beneficial senses in which we say that one thing is for the sake of the other" (p. 35). To say this is to suppose, in effect, that the contrast is between two senses, or completions, of "good for"—between what is good for achieving
or promoting an end, and what is good for someone (cf. n. 21). But the ambiguity Aristotle is after lies in the “how” of the how heureka, between a masculine and neuter reading: between asking “for the sake of whom?”—i.e., “to whose benefit?”— and asking “for the sake of what?”—i.e., “to what end?” Aristotle’s distinction is thus between end and beneficiary—not means and beneficiary. (Thus god, for example, is that for the sake of which we worship, as the end, not the beneficiary, of our worship: cf. EE VIII 1249b13–16.)

(i) Final Cause as the Principle of Organization

The X-an good in the sense of X’s end or point is that for the sake of which everything else that has to do with, or belongs to, X is. It is thereby equally the principle of organization for everything else that has to do with, or belongs as such, to X. Consider skills, and the skilled. Aristotle says (NE 1097a18–22),

What is the good [agathon] of each [action and technê, or of the just mentioned skills]? Is it not that for the sake of which the rest [ta loipa] is done? And this in medicine is health, in generalship victory, in house-building a house, different things in different things—and in every action and choice, the end: for it is for the sake of this that all do the rest [ta loipa].

The good of medicine—“the medical good”—is its end, health; and it is around this end that everything else in medicine is organized (has its rationale); if it lacks an appropriate connection with health, then it has no place in medicine. Or consider artifacts. Thus the good of a knife—the knife-an good—is its end, cutting. It is this then that is the organizing principle of everything to do with the knife. (When we ask “what’s the good of a knife?” we are asking what its point is, i.e., we are assuming that it has an organizing principle—and is not a mere accidental unity—and asking what that is). It is with reference to this end that various dispositions count as excellences or defects of the knife—so it is this that provides the criterion of what is to count as a good and bad knife. And it is with a view to this end that it has the parts it has, is made of the material it is, is properly held the way it is, needs to be kept in certain ways and not in others, etc. So, unsurprisingly, the good of X, or its end, is the measure for what is good and bad for it, beneficial and harmful (e.g., being used on stone or left out in the rain). That is, the principle that links function with instrumental benefit, InstBenFG holds (cf. p. 352 above). But, as we said, that principle is not at issue in the Function Argument.

And Aristotle finds the same teleological schema in parts of the body—and in organisms as wholes.

(ii) Final Cause and Formal Cause

The final cause is, as Aristotle remarks, in a sense the same, for these things, as their formal cause—the account of what they are (e.g., Physics II.7 198a24–6). The difference, as I understand it, is that the formal cause of something natural (or artificial) says what it is: so a knife is “cutting embodied in steel and wood,” the general formula of such essences being “such and such a Doing, in such and such
matter." But with the formal cause the "such and such a Doing" is a first actuality—
"cutting" in the sense of the ability to cut. For a knife doesn't stop being a knife
when it is no longer actually cutting, and a human doesn't stop being a human when
not actually exercising human life-activities, as when asleep. By contrast, the final
cause is second actuality—the exercise, or fullest actualization, of essence.

It is obviously very important that the end of a knife is cutting as a second actu-
ality. For if its end—the principle of organization of all things knife-ly—had been
cutting in the sense of a first actuality, an ability or disposition to cut, then things
would be very different: for, given that end, it would, say, be good for a knife to
have an unopenable sheath, so that its ability to cut couldn't be damaged.37

(iii) The Final Good and the FG Inference Principle

Now if it is "the human good" in this teleological sense of "the good of man" that
the Function Argument clarifies, then this affects how we need to understand
the inference principle FG. FG gives the rationale of looking to human function to
determine human good. And so we need now to understand it not as [BenFG], but
as [TelFG]:

[TelFG] Where the X is something with a function, the X-an good, i.e., the
good of an X, consists in its doing its function successfully or well.

In types of functional thing, their good—their end and their organizing principle—is
constituted by their function: actually cutting well is the good of—or success (to eu)
in—the knife. So if the human has a function we can get a bead on its good from a
consideration of its function.

On the teleological understanding of the X-an good, the FG principle itself
seems, pace Glassen (p. 322), unpuzzling. (Admittedly there are still questions
about the exact conditions for something's having an ergon: e.g., does a thief as
such have an ergon?) Indeed TelFG has two advantages over BenFG. First it
offers an intuitively self-evident principle about functional items—that with them
their good or success lies in their function, in their actually functioning success-
fully. Such obviousness is needed given FG is supposed to provide the argument's
rationale. Secondly, TelFG holds unrestrictedly of functional things—of knives, and
eyes etc. And Aristotle, read at face value, is not at all concerned to restrict the FG
principle—indeed the flow of his presentation is towards complete generality: "flute-
player... every artisan... and generally everything of which there is some function
and action."38

In short, if we take P2 as expressing TelFG, and understand "the human good"
in the argument's conclusion teleologically, as "the good of man," then Aristotle's
argument seems valid, and sound—at least to the extent that it is plausible to view
humans as having a function, and the one he claims they have.
20.6 Conclusion

As I understand his approach, Aristotle would, where X is a functional item, deny that any notion of X’s interests or welfare could intelligibly come apart from a notion of X’s function or end—its functioning successfully. In the peculiar case of humans it is part of our end, of our proper functioning, to deliberate and work out what constitutes our proper functioning, our acting correctly and successfully, in general and in particular. But there is no room at this level for an opposition between, say, prudence and morality, where the one (whichever) is viewed as our proper functioning and the other, by contrast, as our real interest or greatest good. This doesn’t mean that tensions between considerations of self-interest and justice can’t, or don’t, arise in our working out what counts as acting well, and that humans can’t, and don’t, misconceive how best to act, and do so in selfish ways, etc. Aristotle’s approach here doesn’t prevent such disputes or tensions, but is rather one about their conceptual, or categorical, location (cf. Lawrence 2006).

In short, contrary to Wilkes’ remark that

it is far from clear... how... the superb functioning of any ergon-bearing creature is relevant to what that creature’s greatest good is

I take it that it is precisely Aristotle’s position that with any ergon-bearing thing their greatest good couldn’t be anything but their excellent functioning (and if unqualified, then such excellent functioning in circumstances and situations that are optimal in the case of the thing at issue: cf. Lawrence 1993 passim; see note 8 below).

More defense is required. But I hope some of the initial ground has been cleared.

Acknowledgments  I first read Gerasimos Santas’ work as a student in the early 1970s. Then as now I find his work on Plato and Aristotle admirably provoking and liberating. I am delighted and honored to dedicate this paper to Gerasimos. Its gist was presented at the APA in 2000. I thank my commentator Gabriel Richardson Lear and the Chair, John Cooper. I should also like to thank the editor Georgios Anagnostopoulos, and the colloquium at UC Davis, for their help. Special thanks are due to Julie Tammensbaum.

Notes

1. The long, somewhat anacholitic, sentence (1098a7–18) has already reprised the point that the energia psychés specific to humans is broadly rational—kata logon è mé aneu logon (1098a7–8)—and is a matter of rational actions (praxeis meta logou: 1098a13–14). And so, I take it, Aristotle feels he can leave to the reader to supply this in the conclusion at a16.

2. Plato is an obvious influence on Aristotle here, and attracts comparable charges of fallacious inference. For example, Burnet, in his note on Aristotle’s claim in 14.1095a19 that people judge to eu prattein (and to eu zèn) to be the same thing as eudaimonia, refers to Plato Alcibiades I 116b:

"Whoever acts finely [kalòs] does he not act well?—Yes.—And those who act well are they not eudaimones?—Yes, how could they not be?"

Burnet comments on the “ambiguity of this phrase [sc. to eu prattein]” that:

We must remember that Aristotle is here giving the views of others and is not answerable for the fallacy. He himself gives a very complete proof below 1098a7ff. (p. 15)
However it is not clear to me why Burnet thinks Aristotle’s “complete proof” avoids the alleged fallacy.

The passage from the Alcibiades is not alone. In other passages too Plato accepts the equivalence, or identity, of:

1. living rightly/justly ( dikaiôs) and living finely ( kalôs) or living well ( eu);
2. living well ( eu) and living happily ( makariôs/eudaimonîs).

See e.g., Crito 48b8–9. Of special importance is the precursor of Aristotle’s own function argument at Republic I. 353e–54a. On its influence see further Lawrence (2001, n. 11). For charges of fallacy there, see Ackrill (1973, p. 20) and Irwin (1995, p. 179)—with neither of whom I agree.

3. Though I use “=” for convenience, it is more illuminating to think in terms of an “is” of constitution than one of identity. With the latter, we have an equation, and there is then a question of which way to read it (cf. McDowell 1980, sections 12–13). With the “is” of constitution that question doesn’t arise.

4. This is charitable. It is not clear how far Wilkes or Whiting really appreciate that it is B, not A, that is at issue. (Thus Whiting accepts Ackrill’s description of the inference to be defended as being “the move from… what it is to be a good man to… what is good for a man” (1988, pp. 34, 36); this sounds like 2 = A, and so, in my view, involves a double misrepresentation.)

5. I take the noun understood with “hekaston” as “function” (cf. Reeve 1992, p. 127). If so, Aristotle is here saying that an excellence is oikeia to an activity/ergon, x-ing, rather than to its possessor X, as such. But Aristotle clearly holds the latter as well: cf. NE II.6 1106a15–18.

6. Aristotle assumes the equivalence of “agathos X” (good X) with “excellent X,” i.e., an X with the excellence(s), arete, of an X, and of doing something “successfully or well” ( eu), with doing it “excellently” or “in accord with the relevant or proper excellence” ( kata ten oikeian aretein).

7. For discussion of these points, and again of how substantial even the specification of the excellences is, see further Lawrence 2001, passim, and especially section 7.

8. Actually the point of I. 5 1095b31–1096a2 is that the possession of virtue is not sufficient for eudaimonia; the worry here is whether even the exercise of virtue is always sufficient. This I call “the merely good life” problem: does a life of the exercise of human excellence always count as a eudaimon one, however desperate the circumstances are under which virtue is exercised? If we think of eudaimonia in terms of success, of a person making a success of their life in the circumstances they are given, then I think we will see that “yes, a life of exercised virtue precisely constitutes making a success of one’s life in the circumstances”—but this is compatible with one’s having to qualify the claim that this “was a successful human life” by adding “given the trying and defective circumstances in which it was lived” (cf. Lawrence 1993; 2005, pp. 128–9); it is only a successful life to a secondary, or even more remote, degree. The unqualified claim would be false. The greatest humanly achievable good is an unqualifiedly successful life (although circumstances do not always allow of its realization).

9. Literally:

For just as in the case of flautist and sculptor and every craftsman, and in general of those of which there is some definite function [ ergon] and actions, it is in their function that the good and the well/success is held to be, so it would be held also for a human, if at least there is some definite function of it.

10. Does the sculptor’s good lie in his sculpting well, or in his sculptures being good ones? One could see the phrase “ergon ti kai praxis” as pointed—whether as “product and action” or as “function, i.e., action.” But I think Aristotle is not concerned here with the difference (cf. NE I.1 1094a3–6, 116–18). We are to think primarily, I think, of the action; of course with productions, whether they are successful depends at least in part on whether they result or (tend to result) in good products. (Aristotle later uses the example of the lyre-player perhaps because it is easier to side-step this issue of separate product.)
11. If he does so, will he be a good sculptor? Yes, if he has achieved this end “sculpturally” and not by chance or at the instruction of another: that is, if his work is not merely in accord with the relevant excellences, but done with them, out of his own possession of them (NE II.4 1105a21–26; there are further conditions on possessing excellences of character, 1105a26–33).

12. I believe we already go wrong in supposing that there could, when thought through, really be a gap either between the human good and living successfully as a human, or between living successfully and living excellently. (i) The human good consists in living as it is human to live—actually doing what it is human to do—and doing it successfully; (ii) doing it successfully consists in doing it excellently—where the relevant excellences are those pertinent to the activity at issue, and so which constitute its (material) criteria of success, as also the traits of a success as a member of the kind. Now (i), if not exactly conceptual, seems a clarificatory thesis about the correct logical category of answer: thinking that the human good is, for example, a matter of being a good human is an error of logical category (cf. Lawrence 2001). The other, (ii), seems virtually a conceptual connection, given no substantial view of the excellences is being presupposed. Yet of course not just anything could be said to count as living successfully or excellently and be understood (cf. Pol VII.1 1325a27–29): these are principled concepts. How for instance (pace Erasmus’ joke) could folly, or practical stupidity, be viewed as a human excellence? This doesn’t mean that there mightn’t be great difficulty in working out what was wise or courageous or just to do. These are topics for discussion elsewhere.


> It would be easy, Aristotle tells us in the Nicomachean Ethics, to determine what a good man is if we only knew what the function or characteristic activity (ergon) of a man is. A good pruning knife is one that performs its function well and a good man would be one who performs his function well. (p. 140)

Herein he appears mistakenly to suppose that the object of Aristotle’s Function Argument is to define what a good man is, or goodness in a man. Glassen at least doesn’t suppose that that is Aristotle’s purpose. Again it is unclear whether McLaughlin is alive to the difference between first and second actuality ambiguities in claims of the form:

> The good X is one that performs its function well.

These are between

(i) the good X is one that is so disposed as to x well, i.e., to perform its function well, and

(ii) the good X is one that is actually x-ing well, i.e., is actually performing its function well.

If the claim is supposed to be a constitutive one about what being a good X amounts to, (ii) would be false, in that a knife removed from actual chopping to the drawer would thereby cease to be a good knife. It is true that good knives do actually cut well—at least if certain conditions, e.g., about proper use, are observed: that is, a claim about goodness in an X has conceptual implications about what to expect in actual performance, under normal conditions, or absent interference, etc. So (iii) the good X is one that actually x’s well, i.e., it actually performs its function well, if and when put to use.

But this is rather a criterion of being a good knife, not a constitutive claim. More needs to be said about the relation of explicitly dispositional statements and such conditionals as (iii) (e.g., is (iii) an analysis of a disposition? etc.).

14. We could perhaps modify Glassen’s position and suggest that Aristotle in effect equivocates on P2. We could concede that in P2 Aristotle is asserting FG, but then claim that in FG itself Aristotle is equivocating on the ambiguity of “the good”—asserting it in the “final end” sense of “the good” needed to give the argument’s rationale and to license the inference to the argument’s actual conclusion, H3, while confusingly relying on the substantival, “goodness of,” sense to secure the principle’s obviousness. If so, this is not far from the original accusation of fallacious inference.
15. And in Latin (e.g., Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia2ae, Q 55, third reply; Q 56, first reply).
16. The difference between capacity (dunamis) and state (hexas) doesn’t matter in this connection (cf. EE II.1 1218b38).
17. So too when she says “good knives cut well” must be held to be some kind of analytic statement” (p. 135), she is, I take it, using “cut well” in the first actuality sense of “able to cut well.”
18. Aristotle takes second actuality to be primary. (It is certainly so grammatically: for the first actuality is a disposition or ability with respect to second actuality.)
19. Glassen is not alone. Ackrill makes a similar mistake when, in accusing Aristotle of a slide, he says: “it is not self-evident that the best possible thing for a man is to be the best possible man” (p. 20). As Aristotle would quickly point out, it is self-evident that this cannot be the case: for “being the best possible man” is a dispositional notion, compatible with being asleep, or undergoing great torture. Ackrill’s later formulation avoids this mistake:

   It is not self-evident that the most desirable and enviable life for a man to lead is the life a good man leads. (p. 244)

Nonetheless this later formulation is preceded by the remark.

However, even if such a “function argument” can establish something (very general) about the criteria for being a good man, it is not clear that it thereby establishes anything about the good for man.

He supposes, confusingly, that the argument is in part out to establish something about the criteria for being a good X (a good man). (Neither Wilkes nor Whiting are clear on these issues, as is evident from the variation in their formulations and from the fact that both take what Glassen saw to be making the same objection.)

20. In effect Whiting distinguishes instrumental and beneficial senses of “good for y”—where in the first case y is an end or activity that is instrumentally promoted, and in the second y is someone, or some organism, object that is benefited (cf. McLaughlin 2002, p. 131).

21. In Whiting’s description the moves are:

   ...commentators have often viewed his argument as consisting of two moves—first, the move from (a) what it is to be a man (or the function of a man) to (b) what it is to be a good man; and second, the move from (b) what it is to be a good man to (c) what is good for a man. (p. 34)

She apparently supposes, like Glassen, that the point of P2 concerns a move from an X to a good X: being a good X, or goodness in an X, lies in X’s function—for it is a matter of being able to do that well. In this vein she remarks:

[Aristotle] argues that the good and the (doing) well (tagathen kai to eu) of a flute-player or a sculptor or of anything with which has a function is determined by that thing’s function.... A good flute-player has the virtue or ability which enables him to perform well; a good knife is sharp and able to cut well. (p. 33, my emphases.)

22. Although Whiting confusingly switches from one formulation to another, this formulation of the objection accords with that on p. 35.

   The danger of the slide is not of course apparent in the case of a knife or an eye, since we do not raise questions about the welfare of a knife or an eye, or regard them as deriving benefit from their performances.

24. The point at issue in NE VIII.2 is that there is no friendship with inanimate things (a) because there is no reciprocity of friendship and (b) because there is no wishing for good things for/in the case of an inanimate object (e.g., wine)—unless merely as an intermediate beneficiary, as
one might wish for a wine’s survival or its developing a good bouquet, only ultimately in order that one should enjoy drinking it: by contrast, it is a criterion of a friend that one “should wish for good things for his sake” (1155b31). (There are questions also in this passage over whether the datives (εκεινοι i agathon) are of one’s advantage (“good for”) or of respect (“good in the case of”)).

25. “The potential benefits of playing the flute depend on what desires and interests I happen to have”—and so are “relative and conditional,” as against things that depend on my essential nature (p. 36). In fact Whiting seems to be to be operating with two distinctions here. One is in effect between the subjective and the objective—between benefits that are conditional on desires and interests I happen to have, and benefits that are “unconditional” or conditional on the essential nature of the natural kind at issue. The second is between instrumental and non-instrumental benefits (cf. things that are “intrinsically and non-instrumentally beneficial” for it, p. 37).

26. The NE appeals to “the flute-player and sculptor and every craftsman, and generally of those things of which there is some function and action” (1097b25–6); to the carpenter, cobbler (1097b28–9), and lyre-player (1098a9ff); and to organs of the body (1097b30ff). It does not explicitly mention artifacts, but these may be included in “those things” at b26 (see next note). By contrast, the EE II.1 appeals explicitly (a) to the function of artifacts: the functions of a cloak, a boat, a house and other things (1219a2–3); (b) to the function of skills—house-building, medicine (a13–15); cobbling (a20); (c) of seeing, and of mathematical science (a16–17). The Republic instances (a) horses; (b) organs of the body—eyes and ears (352e5ff); (c) artifacts, pruning hook (353a4).

27. Aristotle gives examples of craftsmen, and then generalizes, first to every craftsman, and then further (holds) to any case where X is “one of those of which/whom there is some function and action” (1097b26). The extent of this last extension depends on whether “hôn” is masculine or neuter. In favor of the masculine is perhaps the fact that Aristotle’s interest in “practi” so far in NE I has been with human rational action (covering technical as well as chosen action). In favor of the neuter are the following. (i) Gauthier/Jolif (Vol. II.1, p. 55) take it as neuter, comparing Plato Rep. 353a and EE II.1 1219a19–20. (ii) If it were masculine, the generalization cannot be that over artisans—for that generalization has already been accomplished by the preceding clause (καὶ παντὶ τεχνῆτικῳ). So one would have to assume that Aristotle was interested here in some even more general notion, say, of a role, or perhaps of knacks as well as skills strictly speaking (cf. Plato’s Gorgias). But I haven’t yet found a parallel in Aristotle for such an interest. (iii) On the neuter reading, the extension would naturally include not only artifacts like the infamous knife, but also body parts—the latter being examples he himself goes on to adduce a few lines later.

Whiting (her n. 4) toys with the idea that the absence of artifactual examples from the NE version is deliberate, thus negating the parallels that Gauthier/Jolif draw. But, first, I think that, given Plato’s use of the pruning hook, and Aristotle’s own use of artifactual examples in the EE, were Aristotle to have changed his mind, and considered that FG did not apply to artifacts, he would have needed to say this explicitly—something easy enough to say. And, second, there is the case of body parts.

But in any case the explicit parallel with the craftsmen suffices for the point against Whiting (although for an attempted emendation, see n. 29).

28. Whiting doesn’t seem fully aware of it; or rather to deploy it in a different way (influenced by Cooper): see her n. 13. Wilkes’ position is more complex. She thinks the inference from what the dog qua dog does to what is good for it does succeed (because of some feedback); but that the inference from what the good sheepdog does to what is good for the sheepdog does not. But, if I follow her argument, this relies on our understanding “good for the sheepdog” as “good for the sheepdog qua dog.”

29. Kenny’s clarification suggests the possibility of emending Whiting’s position, as follows.

(i) Concede that P2 expresses BenFG, but adopt the narrow view of “hôn,” thus limiting the scope of BenFG to natural kinds and artisans and quasi-artisans.
(ii) Still accept Whiting’s way of side-lining artifacts.
(iii) Given Kenny’s *qua* point, deal with the artisanal counterexamples by extending Whiting’s notion of categorical benefits to artisans and quasi-artisans. So playing the flute well will be good for the flautist as such, quite independently of what interests or desires he has as a human being.

But (a) this still asks too much of the reader, and (b) the case of body-parts remains unaccounted for. (See also n. 27 on “hôn”.) Moreover, as I now go on to argue, (c) the claim that flute-playing is good for the flautist as such is itself not unproblematic.

30. Of course it may be the source of much satisfaction, pride, and income to the doctor as a human being. And practicing medicine may benefit the doctor in the sense of honing and improving his medical knowledge and expertise, his skill: but that is to consider imperfect doctors.

31. Earlier I put the ambiguity as one over *genitives* (see p. 336 above). If we take “the human good” as equivalent to “man’s good,” or “the good of man” then this might either be “what is good for, or of benefit to, a human” or “the good that belongs to a human as such”—a sense that I intend by “the good of man.”

32. Cf. Aristotle is making the claim

... that the ways in which a thing can be benefited are at least partly determined by the kind of thing it is and what its essential properties are. (p. 38)

Second he must defend the alleged connection between the essence of a kind and what benefits members of that kind. (p. 40)

33. Whiting conceives of Aristotelian essentialism as normative all the way down (ibid., pp. 38–9).

Aristotle does not think we can give an account of the essence or the function of a kind without introducing some notion of what is beneficial for members of that kind. This is what I had in mind when I said that Aristotle’s account was normative “all the way down.”

In a sense—though one that needs considerable explication—I agree that nature is normative all the way down, but I do not understand why Whiting supposes the normative should be explicated in terms of the beneficial. Certainly there is a good in question here, but I believe it is the good of man, not what is good for man.

34. The question “what’s the good of it?” is itself ambiguous. It can be understood in the sense I had in mind, as asking after the use, or point, of something (cf. “what does it Do?”). But in context it can be used to ask “what’s the good of it to us, in our present need?”—i.e., “what use is it to us?” or “what, help, or advantage, does it offer us?” But even this is to ask what benefit it confers, and not what benefits it.

35. Aristotle advertizes to this double sense of *hôn heneka* several times: *An II.4* 415b2, b20; *Met A.7* 1072b1–3; *EE I.8* 1218b8–10 (where “*hos telos*” is added to “*to hôn heneka*” to disambiguate it—a point Woods fails to register in his translation (1982); cf. *Met A.2* 994b9, 8.3 1249b12–16; *Phys II.2* 194a35–6, with its reference to the *De Philosophia*. (The *Phys II.2* passage may suggest that the beneficiary too can in a certain sense *pôs* also be called an end (*telos*).


36. That is, the X-an good could be either “that which is for the sake of Xs”—i.e., what is good for, or benefits Xs, or else “that for the sake of which Xs are,” in the sense of the point or end of Xs.

37. In fact it is not clear whether, when pushed, this thought holds up. The question is whether the final cause of some thing *could* intelligibly be a first actuality; or whether a first actuality is in a way conceptually dependent on a second actuality. If so, then in the above case with the
knife, it would have to have a kind of actual use—"hanging around being able to cut"—which was its second actuality, and its principle of organization. I suspect that this is so, but will not pursue it.

38. (1) As should be clear by now, I see no reason to suppose that Aristotle is excluding either body parts or artifacts from the class of "what generally has some function and action."

(2) Any hesitancy he has over his strategy is directed rather to whether humans have a function (eiper esti ti ergon auto; tachä de genoit' an...), and so whether the human good that is the end of our rational actions will be illuminated this way. It is the application of the principle to the humans that might be doubted, not the principle itself.

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