ARISTOTLE’S ARGUMENT FOR HIS DEFINITION OF HAPPINESS

Nicomachean ethics, book I

E & S refers to S. Morris Engel, Angelika Soldan, Kevin Durand, *The Study of Philosophy,* 6th ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2007

I. Everything has an end.

A. Every action aims at the good (E & S 191, I. 1).

B. Everything we do except happiness (*eudaimonia*) aims at a further end, happiness (E & S 194).

C. Happiness aims at no further end (E & S 194)

Therefore, happiness (= the human good) is the end of our action (E & S 195).

II. We can infer end from function.

A. A carpenter and a hand have functions (E & S 195, 1097 b).

B. Either a human being is useless, or he has a proper function.

[C. Aristotle’s rhetorical question implies that the human being cannot really be useless]

Therefore, a human being has a proper function.

III. What is the human’s proper function?

A. This cannot be life, for even plants have that.

B. It cannot be perception, for even horses have that.

C. The human being is the rational animal (this is the essence of humanity expressed as a definition).

Therefore, our function and our end are found in the rational principle.

IV. How should human life be lived?

A. Everything is successfully performed when it is performed in accordance with its proper excellence (= virtue).

B. **Therefore, happiness is the (rational) exercise of the soul in accordance with excellence** (E & S 196). (Aristotle doesn’t have to say “rational” explicitly at this point because of the trend of the entire discussion, e.g., the definition of the human as the rational animal.)