Aristotle's inference of the definition of *eudaimonia* in the N.E. has been commonly understood in a way which commits him to some form of fallacious naturalism or inference from fact to value.

This view of the *ergon* inference is prompted to some extend by the fact that commentators rarely make an effort to identify the premises of the argument and also by the fact that, as I shall try to show, some key terms employed therein have been misunderstood. The purpose of the present paper is to show by means of a detailed analysis of Aristotle's text that the most commonly held view of the argument cannot be right and that he does not infer the notion of the human good from facts about human nature.¹

I would like to start by presenting the general framework of the view I shall criticize and then add some examples of the more precise form it has adopted recently.

Among Aristotelians it has been rather common to understand the *Nicomachean Ethics* as holding that the human good or human flourishing is simply "the realization of man's nature".² This general contention is taken to receive support from the well-known passage in which, according to W.F.R. Hardie,

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¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at XI Interamerican Congress of Philosophy, Guadalajara, México, in Nov. 1985, at the Dayton Aristotle Colloquium in Nov. 1987 and at a meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy in April 1988. I am grateful to Deborah Achtenberg, Tom Tuozzo and to the editor of *Phronesis* for helpful criticism.

² Cf. e.g. A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, illustrated with essays and notes, 1885 (reprint New York, 1973), Vol. 1, p. 419.
"... starting from the conceptions of powers which are specific or peculiar to men as members of the class of living beings, Aristotle arrives at a tentative definition of the human good (1097a33-1098a20)."

Although the expressions "starting from" and "arriving at" are somewhat vague, there is a suggestion here that a step is taken from an examination of specifically human powers to the ethical notion of the human good.

But, how exactly does that step proceed? What role does the notion of ergon or characteristically human activity play in the determination of the human good? Let us observe two implicit replies to these questions.

In the collection of Essays on Aristotle's Ethics edited by A.O. Rorty K. Wilkes holds that

"A study of man's ergon, then, can tell us what it is to be a good man, once we have discovered just what activities are indeed characteristic of mankind."

Since "what it is to be a good man" stands for an evaluative question, indeed the question which is answered by giving a definition of the human good or happiness, the quotation suggests the idea of a direct inference from the ergon of man to a basic ethical notion.

In the same collection of articles T. Nagel goes even further when he holds that

"The proper ergon of man, by which human excellence is measured, is that which makes him a man rather than anything else."

I am not sure I am being uncharitable in the interpretation of this quotation, but it does suggest to me that the ergon of man is expected to provide something like a measuring rod to determine the value of actions and/or persons. If these accord with the ergon, then they are good; if they accord perfectly, then they are excellent. It would not be difficult to rephrase this kind of relation between a measuring rod or standard and what is thereby measured in terms of premises and conclusion. The only doubt in my mind is whether the premise involving the ergon or characteristic activity of man is conceived by Nagel as descriptive or as evaluative.

Regardless of this last doubt, what seems to emerge from these examples (and more quotations along these lines could be easily produced) is a pattern of interpretation of the ergon argument which could be set out schematically as follows: