

# *Meson* and *Mesotes*: Plotinian and Aristotelian Perspectives on the Soul's Inner Privacy and Virtue Ethics

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# *Meson* and *Mesotes*: Plotinian and Aristotelian Perspectives on the Soul's Inner Privacy and Virtue Ethics

Ioanna Patsioti and Giannis Stamatellos

## I. Introduction

The concept of privacy is a rather contemporary one that has gained a lot of attention since the twentieth century and constitutes by now a fundamental moral principle in our civilized world, which is also legally established. Several modern scholars have argued that notions such as subjectivity and privacy have not been systematically discussed in the history of philosophy earlier than Descartes' epistemic turn.<sup>1</sup> Considering this view, the aim of this paper is not to offer a discussion of the history of the philosophy of privacy, but to embark into an examination of this concept in antiquity with reference to Plotinus and Aristotle, and particularly their notions of *meson* and *mesotes*, in relation to the soul's inner privacy and virtue. Our discussion of the concept of privacy in Plotinus and Aristotle would have certain limitations, which mostly originate with the way this concept is defined today. For example, Warren and Bradeis<sup>2</sup> hold that privacy is the right to be let alone, and Westin<sup>3</sup> takes privacy as the claim of individuals to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others. Similarly, Parent<sup>4</sup> defines privacy as the condition of not having undocumented personal knowledge about one possessed by others. In this paper, our interpretation focuses on a moral psychology perspective of privacy in terms of the Plotinian inwardness of the soul and the Aristotelian virtue ethics of the *spoudaios*. It is suggested that Plotinus' *meson* could be related to the Aristotelian *mesotes* in the virtuous life of the *spoudaios* and the formulation of a private inner space where the soul is self-determined by gradually apprehending the higher intelligible realm.

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<sup>1</sup> Burnyeat, M (1982); Fine (2003); Remes (2007b).

<sup>2</sup> Warren and Bradeis (1890) 193-220.

<sup>3</sup> Westin (1967) 7.

<sup>4</sup> Parent, W. A. (1983) 273.

In regard to Plotinus and by revisiting the claim made by Philip Cary about the difference between Plotinian and Augustinian inwardness of the soul<sup>5</sup>, it is claimed that an initial conception of soul's inner privacy could be related to the Plotinian discussions of: (1) the middle region of the soul (*to meson*) and the soul's gradual apprehension of the higher intelligible realm (*Enneads* I.1.8.1-8 and 11.1-15; VI.1.25-28; V.3.36-45); (2) self-determination and the soul's contemplation of unity in solitude (*monos pros monon*) (*Enneads* VI.8.1-7; VI.9.11). This paper focuses on the first discussion and the use of the Plotinian *meson* in the *Enneads*. It is suggested that the soul's progressive inwardness in Plotinus signifies a non-spatial, private, intelligible region of the soul where the higher intelligible reality of *Nous* is gradually apprehended and contemplated. Considering Aristotle's virtue ethics, it is argued that the concept of privacy can be traced in the following main areas: (a) the doctrine of the mean, where *mesotes* is taken subjectively ("*pros hemas*"), with emphasis on the process of moderating the relevant emotions, making a moral choice, and internalizing the truth, since *areti* as *mesotes* has a truth value. (b) The way the above discussion is connected to the human being as *kyrios* of one's actions (*peri eph' hemin*), and (c) the *spoudaios* man, as the kind of person who combines a contemplative and a practical life which highlights the individuation (or the privacy) of the moral process as performed by the agent. In other words, the concept of privacy is traced both in the way a person gets closer to the actualization of one's potential through a life of contemplation and in choosing what to do as a process of internalization of truth.

## II. The Plotinian *meson* and soul's inner privacy

Plotinus conceives the soul as an intelligible entity rooted in the world of the Forms. The *psyche* is described as an "amphibian" which lives a "double life" (IV.8.4.19) between the intelligible world of *Nous* and the perceptible world of the senses (IV.8.8). Plotinus' philosophical psychology is underlined by his theory of dual-aspect selfhood<sup>6</sup>: the soul's intelligible self that is related to the higher inner part of the soul and the perceptible self that is related to the lower outer part of the soul.

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<sup>5</sup> Cary (2000); cf. also Remes (2008).

<sup>6</sup> For Plotinus's use of dual selfhood, see Stern-Gillet (2010); Remes (2007a) 23-59. For the dual aspect theory, Stubenberg (2010). See also Helleman-Elgersma (1980).

Plotinus particularly emphasizes the soul's inward turn to its intelligible self (*epistrophe pros heauton*) and its quest for self-apprehension of its divine origins, internal self-determination, and its ultimate unity with the One (*Enneads* I.6.8; VI.8.1-7; VI.9.11). Plotinus' conception of the inner self plays a significant role in the philosophical development of the notion of the self as inner space. Plotinus' inwardness of the soul seems to influence Augustine's thought (*Confessions* VII.16) and his concept of the inner self as a "private space". Philip Cary in his study *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* stresses the importance of the Plotinian inwardness in Augustine. Augustine's favorite passage of the *Enneads* in *Confessions* is I.6.8.1-8 *On Beauty*.

But how shall we find the way? What method can we devise? How can one see the "inconceivable beauty" which stays within the holy sanctuary and does not come out where the profane may see it? Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendors which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image.

[  
Trans. Armstrong]

For Cary, Augustine adopted and modified Plotinus' *epistrophe* of the soul to conceive the notion of "private inner space", later, developed by John Locke.<sup>7</sup> Cary particularly suggested a distinction between the Plotinian and the Augustinian inwardness: "Augustine's inward turn requires a double movement: first in then up. In contrast to Plotinus, the inner space of the Augustinian soul is not divine but is beneath God. So, turning into the inside is not all there is to find God. We must not only turn inward but also look upward, because God is not only within the soul but also above it. In the interval between turning in and looking up one finds oneself in a new place, never before conceived: an inner space proper to the soul, different from the intelligible world in the Mind of God. The soul becomes, as it were, its own dimension—a whole realm

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<sup>7</sup> Cary (2000) 6.

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of being waiting to be entered and explored”<sup>8</sup>. For Cary, as we move from Plotinus to Augustine, “we find the world shrinking”, the inward turn reduces soul’s divine intelligibility and horizon, from the divine inner self of Plotinus, to the individual inner self of Augustine and finally to the enclosed self, described as a “dark room” in Locke.<sup>9</sup> Divinity and reality are progressively externalized from the soul’s inner realm, and, as Remes notes, this is “a process of privatization, and it leads to the Western understanding of the self as an inner and private space”<sup>10</sup>.

Plotinus' conception of the inner self predates Augustine's notion of the privatization of the inner realm, which is still, however, shared and common.<sup>11</sup> Plotinus' concept of the inner private space of the soul could be further revisited in light of two interrelated areas of his philosophy: (1) the soul's middle region (*meson*) and the gradual apprehension of the higher intelligible realm in *Enneads* I.1.8.1-8 and 11.1-15; VI.1.25-28; V.3.36-45, and (2) the soul's self-determination and the contemplation of the ultimate unity of the One in solitude (*monos pros monon*) (*Enneads* VI.8.1-7; VI.9.11). This paper focuses on the first area (1), and what Plotinus conceives as the middle region of the soul in-between the higher reality intelligible world and the lower perceptible reality of the senses.<sup>12</sup> It is particularly suggested that the Plotinian inwardness does involve a progressive intelligible movement and that Plotinus' conception of privacy should not only be conceived in relation to a private noetic space of the soul in terms of disclosure or individuation. Plotinus' inwardness passes progressively from different stages of purification: the inward turn of the soul's apprehension of being to a middle transitory intelligible region, and then an upward turn of the soul's pure completion of the Forms to a higher and purest intelligible region.<sup>13</sup> It is argued that the inner movement of the Plotinian soul, first inwards to its middle region (conscious apprehension) and then upwards

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<sup>8</sup> Cary (2000) 39.

<sup>9</sup> Cary (2000) 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Remes (2007a) 6-7, n. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Remes (2008). Despite the Augustinian innovation of the concept of privacy, as Remes (2008) notes “Plotinus’ influence in the history of the inner self is even deeper than it has been acknowledged in the research literature”, p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> An earlier version of this discussion has been presented in the seminar "Plotinus on soul’s inner privacy" at the University of Oxford (Corpus Christi College) on the 24th of November 2015 and the project Power Structuralism in Ancient Ontologies, directed by Dr. Anna Marmodoro.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Remes (2008).

to its higher region (pure contemplation), anticipates the Augustinian double movement of the soul and the conception of the inner self as a private space. Plotinus' inward turn of the soul is an intelligible return, an intelligible "journey", from the corporeal to the incorporeal in a progressive ascent and not an immediate deification. Moreover, Plotinus' conception of the inner private space of the soul should be found in the soul's self-constitution and particular in the soul's conscious apprehension of being. This view offers a fruitful insight into the consideration of privacy as a necessary value for a person to develop a concept of the self as a purposeful, self-determining agent.<sup>14</sup>

Plotinus describes the soul in terms of ontological unity and homogeneity: as a single intelligible and formative power that animates all living beings (IV.8.71 IV.8.4-8). The soul is the third hypostasis of being, it is an expression of the divine *Nous* that animates the world and the individual bodies of perceptible reality. Plotinus divides (in theoretical but not ontological terms) the hypostasis of the soul into the world soul and the individual souls (IV.8.2). Whereas the individual souls govern with struggle the lower in purity and unity perceptible bodies, the world soul cares and directs the higher universal body with pure intelligible power. The world soul animates the corporeal bodies with its *logoi* (III.6.19.26-29; IV.3.10.35-42; V.1.6) and illuminates with its intelligible light the perceptible universe (III.8.4). Thus, for Plotinus (IV.8.8.11-16): "for every soul has something of what is below, in the direction of the body, and what is above in the direction of intellect". The Plotinian *psyche* has something of what is "down" in the direction of the body (= the lower perceptible part) and of what is "up" (= the higher intelligible part) in the contemplation of Intellect. Plotinus' metaphor of the soul as a "double city" is noteworthy; the higher self is a city above, self-ordered and self-organized, and the lower self is a city below, "set in order by the powers above" (IV.4.17.30).

Furthermore, Plotinus distinction between a higher and a lower self does not entail an ontological division between two different realities, nor a clear-cut distinction between the two selves. He frequently describes a middle region of the soul (*meson*) in-between the higher intelligible and lower perceptible self, usually identified with the soul's *nous* (the discursive intellect, soul's *logos* and conscious apprehension) (I.1.8.1-8, 11.1-15; VI.1.25-28).<sup>15</sup> The soul's intellect is the principal

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<sup>14</sup> For modern discussion of privacy and self-determination, see Westin (1967); Gerstein (1978); Shoeman (1984); Kupfer (1987); Stamatellos (2011).

<sup>15</sup> Schibli (1989)

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part of the soul in a "middle region" between two powers: the higher activity of Intellect and the lower activity of sense perception (V.3.36-45). For Plotinus, what "we are" is our soul's acts of our own intellect in discursive reasoning directed either "up" to the reality of the Forms (=higher act) or "down" to the reality of the senses (=lower act) (35-37). Plotinus' discussion of the soul's intellect and Intellect as the second hypostasis of being is rooted in the distinction between the passive and the active intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima* (III.4-5) and the relevant Peripatetic interpretations on this question, such as the one maintained by Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the middle region of the soul is related to the conscious apprehension of the soul (*antilepsis*). In *Ennead* I.1.11.1-8 *What is the Living Being, and what is Man?* Plotinus explains:

While we are children the powers of the compound are active, and only a few gleams come to it from the higher principles. But when there are inactive as regards us there is directed upwards: it is directed towards us when they reach the middle region. But then does not the "we" include what come before the middle? Yes, but there must be a conscious apprehension of it. We do not always use all that we have, but only when we direct our middle part (*meson*) towards the higher principles or their opposites, or to whatever we are engaged in bringing from potency or state to act.

[Trans. Armstrong]

It has been argued that in the above passage Plotinus uses Peripatetic terminology to describe its conception of the *ego*, our inner consciousness, our *antilepsis*, reflectively apprehends the soul as shared and united in "we"; our *antilepsis* is formulated and refined as we grow up and we become conscious of our higher self and the perfection of the intelligible realm. He maintains that our *antilepsis* is directed either upwards to the Intellect or downwards to the perceptible realm; it is a power that can go both directions: towards the intelligible beings and the perceptible world. Hence, the Plotinian consciousness has been properly illustrated as a noetic "eye" of the soul directed either down to the perceptible world or up to the intelligible world, and, in the words of Dodds, it is a "fluctuating spotlight of consciousness".<sup>17</sup> Following the ascending upward direction, the soul moves from inward upward, purified through the constant contemplation of the intelligible realm of

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<sup>16</sup> Nyvlt (2012) 104 ff.; Stamatellos (2015) 135.

<sup>17</sup> Dodds (1960) 5; See also Gurtler (2005)

the Forms and the recognition of its own element of noetic perfection and goodness (IV.3.30, I.4.10.6-16). As Hutchinson notes, “once we apprehend our intellectual activity and realize that we are this activity (1.4.9.29-30), the recovery of the noetic self begins”<sup>18</sup>. In Hutchinson's analysis, Plotinus' theory of consciousness is “multi-layered”: First layer: *sunaisthêsis* and *sumpatheia* = physical self; Second layer: *antilêpsis* and *parakolouthêsis* = dianoetic self; Third layer: *sunaisthêsis* and *sunesis* = noetic self. It could be suggested that while the first and the third layer correspond to the lower and the higher selves respectively, the second layer could be related to the middle self, the discursive part of the soul, that of reason and consciousness. Our conscious apprehension of being plays a crucial role in our realization of our higher self, where the “I” progressively meets the “We” where our noetic self recognizes its relation to all other souls and to the higher intelligible world. The Plotinian “ego” is an intelligible region that opens a horizon of the individual soul to all souls, i.e., the world soul and the intelligible place where the hypostatic soul is an intelligible entity, common and particular at the same time (I.1.8.1-8):

But how are we related to the Intellect? I mean by “Intellect” not that state of the soul, which is one of the things which derive from Intellect, but Intellect itself. We possess this too, as something that transcends us. We have it either as common to all or particular to ourselves, or both common and particular; common because it is without parts and one and everywhere the same, particular to ourselves because each has the whole of it in the primary part of his soul. So we all possess the forms in two ways, in our soul, in a manner of speaking unfolded and separated, in Intellect all together.

[Trans. Armstrong]

In this passage, Plotinus marks the unity between the higher Intellect (the Forms), Intellect itself and soul's intellect. Likewise, the soul, as an expression of the higher Intellect, is a unity-and-plurality. The Soul includes the Forms in *logoi* that proceed from the *en-polla* of Intellect to the *en-kai-polla* of the Soul (V.1.8.25-27). The soul is an intelligible *homoimeria*, an ontic similarity between the parts and the whole; a unified plurality expressed in the multiplicity of the *logoi* in the soul. Each soul has a *nous* that is particular (*idion*) and common (*koinon*) at

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<sup>18</sup> Hutchinson (2018) 111.



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the same time: *koinon* because our higher part is related to the totality of the soul, the world soul and the *omou panta* of the hypostatic Intellect (itself), *idion* because each living soul has some particular elements of differentiation.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, Plotinus also distinguishes between the inner and the outer man, as for the inner and the outer soul. The inner *anthropos* is purely intelligible and remains unaffected from the events of life. It is the outside “shadow” of man that is prone to bodily affections and sufferings: The bodily life of the outer-man is a “role” in earthly life, while the inner man is identified with the *endon psyche* (III.2.15.47-50):

For really here in the events of our life it is not the inner soul but the outside shadow of man which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way on a stage which is the whole earth where men have in many places set up their stages.

[Trans. Armstrong modified]

The human being is a living rational being which has, on the one hand, a lower part *mikton* related to animal nature and, on the other, a higher part related to the “true man” which reasons and understands at the middle region of consciousness its higher ontological status as inhabitant of the divine world (I.1.7.14-24):

From these forms, from which the soul alone receives its lordship over the living beings, come reasonings, and opinions and acts of intuitive intelligence; and this precisely is where “we” are. That which comes before this is “ours” but “we,” in our presidency over the living being, are what extends from this point upwards. But there will be no objection to calling the whole thing “living being”; the lower parts of it are something mixed, the part which begins on the level of thought is almost the true man (*alethes sxedon*): those lower parts are the “lion-like,” and altogether “the various beast”. Since man coincides with the rational soul, when we reason it is really “we” who reason because

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<sup>19</sup> For an enlighten discussion about the Greek terms *idion* and *koinon* in relation to ownness, cf. Remes (2007b), p. 79 ff.; for the Plotinian soul’s acts as self-directed, cf. also Remes (2007b), pp. 92-93.

rational processes are activities of soul. [Trans. Armstrong modified]

The inner man is not immediately recognized as the higher part of the soul, the awareness of the man starts from the middle region (inwards) and reasoning and then moves higher (upwards) to the contemplation of the higher self. The middle region of the soul is the inner man's *nous*, reasoning, and intelligence: the intelligible place of inner consciousness and awareness of the ego/we. The inward turn of the soul leads *sxedon* to the "archetype of man", the final movement of the soul is accomplished when the middle region of the soul is directed and identified with the higher intelligible world of the Forms where the *anthoropos* is completed.

The higher self is the true man completed and purified. At the end of the process of purification, the soul has changed, becoming a higher and purified self: a true intelligible self, in touch with the divine world, unaffected by fears and weaknesses, but complete and self-sufficient in the excellence of virtue (I.4.14-20). At this highest intelligible level, the higher soul is beyond reasoning, memory, and even consciousness of itself. However, for Plotinus, the soul seems to keep its individuality and unity even within the totality of the world soul. This brings us to the controversial discussion about the question of the Forms of Individuals in Plotinus<sup>20</sup> (V.7.1.1-5):

Is there an idea of each particular thing? Yes, if I and each one of us have a way of ascent and return to the intelligible, the principle of each of us is there. If Socrates, that is the soul of Socrates, always exists, there will be an authentic Socrates in the sense that, in so far they are soul, individuals are also said to exist in this way in the intelligible world.

[Trans. Armstrong modified]

This passage clarifies the difference between the soul of Socrates and Socrates himself (*autosocrates*). Plotinus' understanding of the inner private space of the soul is to consider inwardness as related to soul's self-constitution; to become what we are, to "sculpt the statue of ourselves" and self-improve through a virtuous life: (I.6.9.8-15):

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<sup>20</sup> See Kalligas (1997); Vassilopoulou (2006). It should be noted that it is not in the aims of this section to offer a discussion of the controversial issue of forms of individuals in Plotinus.

Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop “working on your statue” till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see “self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat”.

[Trans. Armstrong modified]

Virtue purifies the soul in its inward noetic ascent (I.4) and leads the soul to the awareness of its inner self, which then leads upwards to the contemplation of the true self in the higher intelligible world (VI.9.11).<sup>21</sup> The final step is the unity of the individual soul with the supreme unity of the One, recognition of the highest ontological unity in itself beyond any form of the plurality either perceptible or intelligible (VI.9.11.35-51).

### III. The Aristotelian *mesotes* and virtue ethics

Having examined the concept of privacy in Plotinus, the paper proceeds to explore how this concept can be traced in Aristotle's virtue ethics, with emphasis on virtue as *mesotes pros hemas*, the idea of a moral agent as the origin of one's action (*eph' hemin*), and the way the *spoudaios* person individuates man's best function as well as experiences a state of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), that is experiencing a state of privacy in both *theoria* and *praxis*.

In terms of Aristotle's discussion of *mesotes* (NE, B6, 1106 a 26 – b7), it is argued about an implicit privacy of the moral agent, as one comes to discern the right thing to do and apply the objective standard in their own way. Aristotle defines *arete* (virtue) as “Virtue then is a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it.” (NE, B6, 1106 b 36 – 1107 a 20).<sup>22</sup> According to this definition, virtue is a developed state of character, (B4, 1105 a 32 – 33), a dynamic source of energy, which can be reflected in

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<sup>21</sup> For a virtuous and autonomous agent, as Hutchinson describes (2015) 170, “capable of self-determination and self-sufficiency, awareness is required to turn inwards, ascend upwards, and establish right reason in charge of our embodied lives”.

<sup>22</sup> NE: the abbreviated form for *Nicomachean Ethics*.

action at any given moment. As a disposition of the soul, virtue possesses a certain moral value, given that it is praiseworthy as opposed to *kakia* (vice), which is blameworthy (A13, 1103 a 9 -10; B5, 1105 b 28 - 32, 1106 a 1 - 2). For Aristotle, *arete* as an *hexis* is both a *dynamis* (capacity) and an *energeia* (activity); through habituation this activity is directed towards the perfection of the relevant capacity (B1, 1103 a 26 – b 22). This implies an internal aspect of the Aristotelian conception of virtue, which relates it to the modern notion of value.<sup>23</sup> As the philosopher says: “our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities. Hence it is necessary for us to control the character of our activities, since the quality of these depends on the quality of our dispositions” (*NE*, B1, 1103 a 32 -33). The essence of virtue lies not only in its dynamic dispositional element but also in the quality of the disposition (*NE*, B1, 1103 a 32 -33). In this sense, virtue also possesses a certain moral quality (B6, 1106 a 14 - 15), and a capacity that fulfils its purpose in the best possible way (1106 a 16 – 17).

At the same time, the Aristotelian virtue is a mean (*mesotes*) between two extremes in the way a particular emotion is manifested. Virtue as a mean is the essential characteristic of *arete*, what in fact distinguishes it from any other disposition. The philosopher indicates that virtue “in respect of its substance and the definition that states what really is, is the observance of the mean, in point of excellence and rightness it is an extreme” (B6, 1107 a 6 – 8). In reality, the notion of the mean shows the contrast between virtue and vice given that the totality of the moral virtues constitutes the moral essence of a person. It is important to note that Aristotle distinguishes between two aspects of *mesotes*: the objective one (*kat’ auto to pragma*; “with respect to the thing itself”) (B6, 1106 a 26 – 36), and a subjective one (*pros hemas*; “in relation to us”) (B6, 1106 a 28 – b 7), the former referring to the idea of mean as an objective standard and the latter to the way this standard applies in each case by each person separately. As he particularly states: “But relative to us the intermediate is what is neither superfluous nor deficient; this is not one and is not the same for all” (1106 a 32). One problematic raised by scholars regarding the doctrine of the mean, has to do with whether the mean refers to the mean-state as virtue or the mean in passion and action at which virtue aims. Most of the scholars who examined the relationship between these two means take the position that virtue is a mean, since it achieves a mean-state of the

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hartmann (1962) who considers the Aristotelian virtues as values as opposed to wickedness which is a vice.

emotion involved in action.<sup>24</sup> It is also accepted that when Aristotle discusses the idea of virtue as a mean, he refers to a state of character (as an activity of the soul), developed through habituation that enables the moral agent to act in a moderate way in relation with a certain emotion. Another problematic concerns the phrase, “the mean relative to us”, about which most commentators have followed the interpretation that Aristotle uses it in the sense of “what is relative to individual agents”<sup>25</sup>. A different interpretation is attempted by Brown<sup>26</sup> who takes this phrase to refer to “what is relative to us as human beings”, attaching to it a normative aspect in relation with human nature, its needs and purposes. Brown’s point is that in the given passage, Aristotle takes the trainer to be the one who assigns a prescribed diet to an athlete and not the athlete to himself. Discussion of the best possible interpretation would go beyond the scope of this paper and its main theme, but what should be indicated is that in presenting the mean as an intermediate between excess and defect (1106 a 26 – 29), Aristotle appears to emphasize the way each of us demonstrates the appropriate feelings and actions that are neither too much nor too little. Whether following Brown’s interpretation or that of previous commentators, in interpreting the passage of 1106 a 33 – b7, there seems to be an emphasis being paid on the moral agent who comes to personalize the feelings as expressed in any particular situation as well as the truth-value of the *endoxon* that he as *phronimos* person would be expected to apply in deciding about what to do. So, whether it is the trainer or Milo (the athlete) that Aristotle has in mind here is not that important, since what matters is that a moral agent is expected to moderate one’s emotions (the character as *ethos*) as well as particularize the truth of the situation and act accordingly (the character as *praxis*) in a manner that is purely personal and internalized, in a form of privacy.

Thus, it has been thought that with his distinction between the objective and a more "personalized" conception of the mean, Aristotle

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hardie (1964-65) 185-6; Urmson (1973) 225; Broadie (1991) 101; Brown (2014) 64-80. In responding to Hursthouse’s (1981: 57-72) position that Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean is rather non-realistic or silly, as it provides an extraordinary mathematical symmetry, Fischer (2018) 53-76, argues that character virtues dispose the moral agents to experience appropriately intense passions, and such a passion is one that has an intermediate intensity, which is neither excessive nor deficient (74-5).

<sup>25</sup> Sherman (1989) 37; Cf. Kraut (1989) 328, who considers the mean for one person in one situation to differ from the mean for another person in a different situation.

<sup>26</sup> Brown (1997) 77-99.

attempts to recognize the need that each person is different and unique, and also the mean or intermediate as applied to each of us is subject to adjustment, just like a good craftsman applies the mean as a standard to their various productions. And given that virtue is higher and more accurate than any other form of art, its application in any single situation by a person should be relative to that person only. It is us as characters who reflect virtue as a mean “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (1106 b 21 – 22). As Martha Nussbaum<sup>27</sup> indicates in her discussion of the fragility of the good, there is a kind of an Aristotelian moral realism that acts as a forerunner of the Neokantian “internal realism”, and which possesses an anthropocentric character.

As Broadie<sup>28</sup> indicates, Aristotle presents the concept of excellence as a mean linked to what is a practical prescription to parents, educators, or political community leaders with regard to how to breed good moral qualities as well as to how the kind of appropriate moral behavior the morally endowed people will eventually present. Each person will be expected to particularize their response, to demonstrate their own moral behavior in any given situation. For example, in the case of somebody who has just found out that he has suffered an unfair dismissal by the employer, the idea of virtue as a mean would expect that if this person has a virtuous disposition, he would be expected to behave in a moderate way given that he has been morally trained to develop such a disposition. However, the appropriation of the response, that is, exactly the way his disposition would allow his emotions to be displayed, would be in a more “personalized” way that might differentiate his behavior from that of another (virtuous) person in a similar situation. He would be right to be angry for something as outrageous as this, and he would show his disappointment in a certain way; how moderate or morally appropriate the way will be, will vary from person to person. It can be claimed that on Aristotle’s view, virtue could be achieved by overriding some part of our nature, but in a way that is our “own”.

Thus, it has been noticed that there is a “private” way that virtue is manifested in action as a *mesotes*, which functions as a mixed set, since each set gives rise to a state of the soul that is called “median”, “excessive” or “deficient” after its cause.<sup>29</sup> The point made here is that

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<sup>27</sup> Nussbaum (1986) 240-5.

<sup>28</sup> Broadie (1991) 97-98.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

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the set of responses a person has on a given situation, say in that of courageous acts, spring from the virtue of courage and are expressed as a mixed set which is reinforced and adapted each time. In other words, each moral agent who is courageous has developed a mixed set of behavioural responses in every situation that this state of the soul arises, i.e., that of courage, which vary in the way that are expressed not only because of the particular state of affairs, but also in the way an agent has personally, “privately”, developed the moral virtue, and “privately” expresses one’s responses in action.

Another aspect that it would be considered is that virtue as *mesotes* can be connected to the concept of privacy is its truth-value. In particular, Aristotle confirms the truth-value of *mesotes* and considers it as what describes truth<sup>30</sup>. As mentioned above, this element of *arete* also includes a qualitative aspect, since what *mesotes* implies is an evaluative assessment of the way the various passions or emotions are manifested. The antithesis of the two extreme kinds of conduct, which are opposed to each other from a quantitative point of view, is brought into a synthesis by the evaluative assessment of *arete* as a mean. For example, the contradiction between the fear a coward experiences and the absence of fear in a bold person is brought into a new state of affairs by the evaluative character of *mesotes* as manifested in the acts of a courageous man (B6, 1107 a 5 – 8).<sup>31</sup> The very activity of identifying the good of the situation, moderating the relevant emotions, and making a moral choice, involves a process of internalization of truth, since *arete* as *mesotes* has a truth value (cf. *NE*, A7, 1108 a 20), that involves the concept of privacy. By internalizing the truth, the moral agent functions on his own; he individuates (or, “privatizes”), the truth-value of a certain virtue in deliberating and choosing the *prakton agathon* (A7, 1097 a 23).<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the way action is internalized is also a manifestation of privacy in so far as action depends on us, as Aristotle advocates. On the one hand, it is thinking of the good as a cause of movement directed to it, and on the other, it is the cause of action, what determines the means to be used for attaining the good (Γ2, 1111 b 26 - 27), In this sense,

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<sup>30</sup> *NE* A7, 1108 a 20: “In truth-telling, then, let us call the intermediate person truthful, and the mean truthfulness.”

<sup>31</sup> Hartmann (1962) also indicates that the Aristotelian virtue as a mean is an evaluative synthesis of two opposed states (442).

<sup>32</sup> It should also be noted that this truth applies *hos epi to poly* (for the most part) (A3, 1094 b 19 – 25).

*prohairesis* is the free choice of the moral agent, who is expected to deliberate before he proceeds with a moral choice (Γ3, 1113 a 2 – 5). And, as Aristotle observes: “if the moral choice is to be good, both the reasoning must be true and the desire right” (Z2, 1139 a 23 – 25). He also indicates that man is the origin of his actions (Γ3, 1112 b 31 - 32); we are the ones who choose to act in virtue or in wickedness, for where we are free to act we are also free to refrain from acting, thus if we are responsible for doing an act, we are also responsible for not doing it, when not to do it is wrong, and if we are responsible for rightly not doing an act, we are also responsible for wrongly doing it (Γ5, 1113 b 6 ff.). The voluntary agent “knowingly” chooses to act in a certain way and not in another one. Broadie<sup>33</sup> refers to the *Eudemian Ethics* where Aristotle gives a carefully grounded account on what constitutes a voluntary act. The voluntary agent is *kyrios* (in control) of his effects (1223 a 5 – 7), since it depends on him whether an act shall be rather than not.

Throughout Aristotle’s analysis in the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he stresses the voluntary, personal aspect of our choice. In the process of making their choices, human beings are autonomous (*kyrioi*), they function as ends-in-themselves (...*ton praxeon ap’ arches mechri telous kyrioi esmen, eidotes ta kath’ hekasta*) (1114 b 31-33). It is thus in our power (*eph’ hemin*), in our own territory, to be in control of things. In developing virtue, a person will have performed his function at his optimum level, since “the virtue of the human being will be the state that makes a human good and makes him perform his function (*eautou ergon*) well (B6, 1106 a 23-25). After all, the process of making a moral choice is in relation with things that relate to us (*prohairesis peri ta eph’ hemin*).<sup>34</sup>

Regarding the expression *eph’ hemin*, Remes<sup>35</sup> indicates that “Aristotle instigates it in an ethical context by noting that our action is in our power when its *arche* is in the agent”, but she claims that he does not specify in which way the agent must be the origin. It can be responded that Aristotle takes the agent to be the *arche* of his actions – at least – in terms of the following senses: (a) as the person who performs a deliberative process, which leads to a certain conclusion that can be converted into action (being *kyrios* of a certain choice); (b) as the

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<sup>33</sup> Broadie (1991) 149-150.

<sup>34</sup> *NE*, Γ2, 1111 b 31-32.

<sup>35</sup> Remes (2007b) 89.



ethical *arche*, the ethical universal reflected in a virtue (eg. a courageous person not only has a certain character disposition but also possesses the truth-value of courage; (c) as the ethical *endoxa*, the *kath' hekasta*, which are used as the starting-points of any syllogistic process.<sup>36</sup> To further exemplify the difference between sense (b) and sense (c), it is stated that the former refers to *arche* as *katholou* (the ethical universals), what serves as the major premise in a practical syllogistic process, and the latter to *arche* as the *kath' hekasta*, that is the minor premise in such a process.<sup>37</sup> For example, the former would denote the ethical principle of *andreia* and any derivative guidelines of conduct in relation with it, and the latter to any particular situation of a courageous act, which the moral agent should carefully identify and proceed with a choice about what to do. In a way, the former sense would refer to the *phainomenon agathon* as opposed to the *agathon einai*. There is also one more sense that we would add: (d) as the actual starting point of action (*arche* as *praxis*). In particular, we would refer to the *NE* Γ3, 1112 b 23-24 (“*and the last thing in the analysis would seem to be the first that come into being*”).<sup>38</sup> Also, regarding the phrase *eph' hemin*, the Aristotelian commentator Eustratius indicates that “*peri ta eph' hemin ai praxeis kai ai bouleseis, ha eisin endechomena, peri ha kai i phronesis...*”.<sup>39</sup>

Following the above discussion, another point that should be addressed in the analysis of an Aristotelian conception of privacy in terms of his virtue ethics theory is what exactly is meant by the “internalization of truth.” By stating that the human being is the origin of his actions, and in general, making a moral choice is *peri ta eph'*

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. *NE* Z11, 1143 a 35 – b5, where Aristotle refers to the starting points of a practical syllogism as performed by the practical intellect in the domain of action and refers to them as *archai gar tou hou heneka autai*, which are *tou eschatou kai endechomenou kai tis heteras protaseos*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Taylor (1990) 135, who indicates that what Aristotle means in 1143 b 4-5, is that the *kath' hekaston* is that for the sake of which we act (the *hou heneka*), since the ethical universals originate with the ethical particulars. What Taylor means here is that in our moral development we start with what is familiar with us, that is, the particular cases, and we (inductively) proceed with the formation of the ethical universals. In this sense, the ethical universals originate with the particulars. In choosing what to do, we apply (deductively) the universal *arche* to the particular one, since action is about what to do in a particular case. Cf. Aristotle’s *De Motu Animalium* 701 a 32-33.

<sup>38</sup> This last sense would also relate to the idea of *arche* as *genesis*. See particularly *Metaphysics* Δ1, 1013 a 7-10.

<sup>39</sup> Eustratius (C.A.G.XX: 377.4-5, 8-9)

*hemin*, would this refer to (i) a process of a “subjective” state of affairs, hence touching upon the issue of subjectivity in ancient philosophy as examined by Fine and other thinkers in relation with Hellenistic philosophy,<sup>40</sup> according to which, a person (as subject) perceives in their own way what is external, common, and objective, or (ii) a process of particularizing moral truth and placing it in a certain context with a view to reaching a conclusion about what to do, that is, combining the ethical universal with the ethical particular with a view to defining the *hou heneka* at hand; or (iii) both these processes? In other words, what is it exactly that virtue as *mesotes pros hemas* involves as a process? The third option will be underlined by claiming that in a way process (ii) involves process (i), that is, a moral agent who as a practically wise person perceives the situation at hand and evaluates it in relation with what to do, applies his own judgement in an individuated manner; it’s a person’s “own” understanding of the moral situation and a person’s “own” choice how, to what extent, with whom, an action should take place. As Aristotle indicates, a virtuous person who displays one’s conduct will do so (*to d’ ote dei kai eph’ hois kai pros hous kai hou heneka kai hos dei*) (B6, 1106 b 21-22). For example, a courageous person would be in a position to decide to what extent one may endure a situation, or what one should be fearful about for the right purpose and in the right manner and at the right time (Γ7, 1115 b 14-16).

Moreover, going back to the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Z8 1142 a 23-30, and in Z11, 1143 b 4-5, it can be noticed that a practically wise person employs *aisthesis*, which as intuitive perception is expected to grasp the *kath’ hekaston* (or *eschaton*). This function is performed by *nous*, as practical intellect in the domain of action. In grasping the truth of the situation, to put it plainly, the intellect becomes conscious of a certain state of affairs and whatever this involves, and processes it in a manner that gives way to an understanding that what “I perceive as φ”, is to “my understanding a φ”, which will be used as part of a deliberative process about what to do.<sup>41</sup> So, the overall process of the practical

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<sup>40</sup> Fine (2003) 192-231. Fine refers to the argument promoted by Burnyeat (1982) that the ancients do not think that there are truths, beliefs, or knowledge about the subjective. She argues that the Cyrenaics think that there are subjective states, and that there are truths, beliefs, and knowledge about them (193).

<sup>41</sup> On this Eustratius indicates: *Aisthesis men, oti aisthetikos energon katalamvanei ta kath’ hekasta, nous de, oti ephistanei ton oikeion noun hois aisthanetai...kai to oikeio logo anapheron ta dia tis aistheseos auto gnorizomena, kai skopon..* . (C.A.G. XX, 379.20-26)

intellect of identifying the particular *eschaton* at hand, connecting it to the universal rested in the mind, and making the choice about a certain action, involves an internalization which is of a “personal”, more individuated character. In fact, the whole experience is “private”; it is internalized. For example, the ethical universal of *andreia* entails moral truth, which has an objective validity and can be shared by other moral agents within a political community, but the way this virtue unfolds in the domain of action as exercise of *prohairesis* (and moderation of a *pathos*) is an internal, private process operated by the agent himself who *autonomously* as *kyrios* in his *oikeion* way experiences it. This process would not relate to a state of subjectivity of truth but rather to a “private” internalization of (a) the truth-value of virtue as *mesotes pros hemas*, (b) the way an agent expresses one’s behavioural responses in any similar situation, and (c) how the *eph’ hemin* is perceived and leads to action in any given situation.

Also, following the above interpretation of the conception of privacy in Aristotle, it could be claimed that this would be best manifested in the Aristotelian *spoudaios*, i.e., the person who individuates man’s best function as well as experiences a state of self-sufficiency (a state of *eudaimonia*). Aristotle refers to the *spoudaios* man as the person whose judgement is the standard and measure of right action (Γ4, 1113 a 24-34. Cf. A8, 1099 a 24). The Stagirite connects the actualization of the function of man, i.e the state of ultimate happiness, to the life of the *spoudaios* (the man of advanced ethical posture). He refers to *spoudaios* as the person whose judgement is the standard and measure of right action. It is the kind of person who embodies both a virtuous disposition and the right choice in action, since he can identify the good of the situation (*ho spoudaios to alethes en hekasto horan*) (Γ4, 1113 a 33-34). The philosopher also takes the *spoudaios* to be the person who voluntarily chooses to act in a virtuous way as opposed to the wicked man. In particular, he states that “whether a man’s conception of his end, whatever it may be, is not given by nature but is partly due to himself, or whether, although his end is determined by nature, yet virtue is voluntary because the *spoudaios* man’s actions to achieve his end is voluntary...” (Γ5, 1114 b 15-20). The *spoudaios* would be the person to distinguish between the *katholou* and the *kath’ hekaston* and apply the former to the latter, i.e, define the margins of the principles’ applicability in relation with a certain moral situation (*NE*, Γ4, 1113 a 29-33). Such a person would be able to apply an *arche* in all the senses of the term as explained above. It would also be relevant to refer to the *Metaphysics*,

A1, 993 a 30-b4, where Aristotle indicates that even though it may be difficult for a person to identify the truth, the human beings perceive it, each one in his own way, hence contributing to its overall understanding.<sup>42</sup>

What follows is that such a person would be the one to choose the *telos di' auto*, which is *oikeion* (one's own) and *autarkes* (self-sufficient).<sup>43</sup> As Aristotle states, "for being is good for the *spoudaios*, and each person wishes for goods for oneself (*heauto*)" (I4, 1166 19-20). It is also noteworthy that the philosopher refers to the *spoudaios* man as *makarios* (blessed), who rejoices with virtuous actions and gets distressed with the wicked ones (I9, 1169 b 35-1170 a 14; K5, 1176 a 15-29). In all activities, such a person experiences a state of fulfillment that is achieved *kata ten oikeian areten* (in accordance with one's own virtue),<sup>44</sup> or under *oikeia hedone* (one's own pleasure).<sup>45</sup> Emphasis on the "ownness" (or appropriation) of the virtue at its highest state as experienced by the *spoudaios* is given by Aristotle in his second account of *eudaimonia* in the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he states "what is honourable and pleasant is what is so to the *spoudaios*. To each person the activity that accords with his own proper state (*oikeian hexin*) is most choiceworthy; hence the activity in accord with virtue is most choiceworthy to the *spoudaios*." (K6, 1176 b 25-27)<sup>46</sup> This culminates in the phrase "For what is proper to one's nature (*to gar oikeion hekasto*) is supremely best and most pleasant for it; and hence for a human being the life in accord with understanding will be supremely best and most pleasant, if understanding, more than anything else, is the human being" (K7, 1178 a 5-7).

Following our interpretation, the privacy aspect can be traced in the way man's potentiality for ethical and intellectual excellence is actualized, as well as in the way one comes to particularize moral truth in purposeful action, being in control of one's choice. It's the person who autonomously – in a private, composite, and fully conscious way – chooses to act, which is in conformity with *kalokagathia* (MM, B14, 1212 b 18 – 20). This is also why the *spoudaios* as *philautos* would not demonstrate any form of selfishness, because, as Aristotle indicates, the

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. *EE*, A6, 1216 b 26-36.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *NE* A5, 1095 b 26; A7, 1097 b 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* A7, 1098 a 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, K5, 1175 b 27.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. K7, 1177 a 17.

*philautos* would even sacrifice his own wealth, honours and contested goods, if he was to benefit his fellow-humans (*NE*, I8, 1169 a 25 – 31). As Reeve<sup>47</sup> indicates, the virtuous person would not be an egoist about values. On the contrary, since the *spoudaios* is the person who acts in accordance with what “*nous*” dictates (I8, 1169 a 16 - 18), he has high moral standards and exhibits humanitarian feelings (E9, 1136 a 20 - 22), so he would be close to the state of *theoria*. As a person who invests character in action, he is also in a state of *praxis*. This combination of a contemplative and a practical life that the *spoudaios* embodies, would be a kind of a moral conscience (*syneidenai*), which highlights the individuation (or the privacy) of the moral process as performed by the agent. In other words, the concept of privacy can be traced in both the way a person gets closer to the actualization of one’s potential through a life of contemplation (it is a personal process en route to eudaimonia) and in using one’s *phronesis* for choosing what to do in a particular situation (it is a process of internalization of truth). The *spoudaios* embodies this combination.

Through this interpretation, it should be also stressed that the privacy aspect embodied in the Aristotelian *spoudaios* would further highlight the connection between *theoria* and *praxis* in his Ethics. Various commentators<sup>48</sup> have been trying to detect a sort of a dichotomy in Aristotle’s account of *eudaimonia*, connecting the first account of the function argument with the domain of *praxis* where the moral agent is expected through a life of virtue and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to make such choices that would be conducive to the ultimate end, and the second account to the domain of *theoria*, at which man experiences a contemplative life as culmination of the faculty of *sophia* (theoretical wisdom). It is also argued that both accounts of *eudaimonia* complement each other. Both as “an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue” (A13, 1102 a 5 – 6), and as “the most complete and sufficient for itself end” (A7, 1097 b 1 - 6), *eudaimonia* is the life of virtuous activity (K8, 1179 a 8 – 9), the entelechy of man’s best function, which attaches significance to the human existence. In so far as it employs the practical intellect during life in a political community, it is the culmination of purposeful action, and in so far as it is an activity in accordance with the highest virtue, the best part of us, that is the theoretical intellect (K7, 1177 a 12 - 17), it relates to *vita contemplativa*. Either way, it is a

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<sup>47</sup> Reeve (2001) 176.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Cooper 1975/1986 187-216; Nagel (1980) 252-259; Kraut (1989); Reeve (2012).

“personal” process that takes place through living with the other in society, and a kind of a “personal” end we reach. In other words, either as an activity or as an end, it is experienced by each of us in a private way. *Eudaimonia* is the *hou heneka*, the end of action, what makes action purposeful and life meaningful, and in that sense, it cannot be either a comprehensive or an inclusive end<sup>49</sup> actualized in all people the same way. Either as an activity or as a self-sufficient end, it is what provides a moral agent the possibility of actualizing his inbuilt purposeful action, a person’s main function, but in a way that is unique to each person. To that effect, the *spoudaios* is what would be close to that state of affairs that Aristotle is establishing, because he reflects virtue, practical wisdom, and theoretical wisdom as they could be accomplished by a human. However, the way this actualization will take place remains quite personal. Whether as contemplation of the virtuous moral agent who hits the mean in action, or as contemplatio in a pure spiritual process, the *spoudaios* experiences the advantages of this state of affairs in a personal, internalized way, which cannot be shared with somebody else no matter how similar the ends they would pursue are. After all, experiencing a state of *autarkeia* can only be a personal process. Thus, even though we would acknowledge that there seems to be a kind of a “dichotomous anthropology” in Aristotle’s consideration of human nature, there is not really a conflict between the two accounts of *eudaimonia* in the first and the tenth books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As Thorsrud<sup>50</sup> also indicates, our capacity for theoretical reasoning may not be easily accommodated in the daily affairs of a political community. It is however this complementary distribution that makes human nature so significant. There may not be a single best life for us to live, but the way we choose to live through practical reasoning in our social lives and the need to accommodate higher ends through theoretical reasoning, is a personal process that singles out each of us as a unique being, a person in a fuller sense. Therefore, both *theoria* and *praxis* are experienced privately.

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<sup>49</sup> Kenny (1992) 23-42, provides the interpretation that *eudaimonia* cannot be a comprehensive good, a sort of an inclusive one, since it would not choice-worthy for itself. White (1990) takes the position that “*eudaimonia*” is inclusive, since it involves more than one component, and it is not only contemplation. It is what provides the complete performance of man’s proper function as well as a state of contemplation, as self-transcendence.

<sup>50</sup> Thorsrud (2015) 346-367.

#### IV. Conclusion

Plotinus' inward turn of the soul does involve an inner intelligible turn, from the dianoetic self to the middle region of the soul, and then to the noetic self, the higher region of the soul and the divine *Nous*. The inward turn is a return of the soul from the corporeal to the incorporeal, but not an immediate deification of the soul. The purification of the soul and its noetic ascent is not immediate but progressive. The Plotinian inwardness passes from the different stages of purification: a first inward turn of the perceptible soul is followed by the conscious apprehension of the soul in its middle region and finally the upward movement of the soul in pure completion of the Forms. For Plotinus, the anthropos *shedon* becomes progressively, through contemplation, the archetype of *anthoropos*. The soul's inner realm should not be conceived in spatial terms. The Plotinian soul is a purely intelligible entity, and its inner turn is a movement to a non-spatial region of intellection, a private place of contemplation and self-constitution. Thus, the private inner space of the Plotinian soul is an inner intelligible region where the *ego (to idion)* meets the *hemeis (to koinon)*. The inward turn of the soul into itself is the first step of the conscious apprehension of the higher self that leads to the unity of the soul and the upward movement to the true self that lies in the higher intelligible world. Plotinus inner journey of the soul from the dianoetic to the noetic self, anticipates Augustine's conception of the inner self and its private space. The private space of the Plotinian soul could be seen as the holy sanctuary in *Ennead* I.6, a holy *oikos* of the psyche contemplating the Forms. Moreover, following our interpretation of the Aristotelian texts, it has been claimed that Plotinus' *meson* could be related to the Aristotelian *mesotes* in the virtuous life of the *spoudaios* and the formulation of a private inner space where the soul is self-determined by gradually apprehending the higher intelligible realm. By internalizing moral truth in the domain of action, the *spoudaios* as the virtuous and autonomous agent experiences one's *oikeia arete* in a private way, and by actualizing it in the domain of contemplation, he reaches his self-sufficiency. Aristotle's journey towards *eudaimonia* is a personal one, which takes place within a political community. The *arche* as *katholou* has to apply to the *kath' hekaston* and *eph' hemin* and gradually elevate the agent to the life of contemplation. *Theoria* and *praxis* complement each other in an effort to support an agent towards the accomplishment of man's best function.

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