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Aurelia Maruggi

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Neoplatonic readings of Happiness between the Byzantine and Latin worlds: Eustratius of Nicaea and Albert the Great

Aurelia Maruggi

Happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the main topic of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) was intensely discussed among Byzantine and Latin Medieval commentators.

Between the 11th and 12th centuries, Eustratius of Nicaea and Michael of Ephesus commented on Aristotle's *EN* in Byzantium. Eustratius commented on Books I and VI of the work, while Michael of Ephesus commented on Books V, IX, and X.¹ In the mid-13th century, the entire corpus of Byzantine-Greek commentaries on the *EN* circulated for the first time in the Latin West through Grosseteste's *translatio Lincolniensis*.² Up to this point, the knowledge and reading of the Aristotelian corpus by Latin scholars was confined to inaccurate, corrupt, and incomplete transcriptions of the first three books, known as *Ethica Vetus* and *Ethica Nova*.³ Albert the Great was the first scholar of the Latin world who read and commented, based on the *translatio Lincolniensis*, on all ten books of the *EN* in his first commentary, the *Super Ethica*.

What do we know about Eustratius' account of ethics, particularly regarding his reading of Aristotle's theory of happiness? From which philosophical sources and background does Eustratius interpret the Aristotelian theory of happiness? And how does this relate to his philosophical system, which, as current studies have amply demonstrated, is based on Neoplatonic metaphysics? Finally, how did Eustratius' commentary influence Albert the Great's interpretation of the Aristotelian account of happiness, occurring in the context of the Latin reception of the *EN* during the mid-13th century?

While Eustratius' commentary on the first and sixth books of *EN* is acknowledged in the current literature as expressing typical Neoplatonic revisions of the Platonic Idea of the Good, as well as his theories on the

¹ Mercken (1990) 407-410.

² Mercken (1973).

³ Zavattero (2006) 15.

intellect and epistemology,⁴ little attention has been paid to Eustratius' interpretation of happiness in the first book of the *EN*.

Interest has recently been aroused in the *eudaimonia* debate found within Byzantine commentaries on the *EN* from the 11th and 12th centuries by O'Meara and Ierodiakonou. They have identified Neoplatonism and Christendom as the two core traditions which influenced Eustratius' and even more so Michael of Ephesus' reading of the Aristotelian doctrine of *eudaimonia*.⁵

In this respect, Mercken and Trizio have emphasized the influence of the Eastern monastic culture in Eustratius' account on the figure of the theoretical man and on the contemplative way of life.⁶ They argue that Eustratius relates the Aristotelian wise man to the Christian hermit. Trizio has pointed out some direct affinities between Eustratius' view of the contemplative life and the works of Maximus the Confessor and Theodore Studites, stressing the importance of the latter.

Finally, a brief paper by Papamanolakis draws attention to the importance of the Porfirian framework for the theory of virtues in Eustratius' commentary on the first book of *EN*. However, the author offers neither a detailed analysis of the texts involved nor a philosophical discussion of them.⁷

Hardly any studies are available treating Eustratius' influence on Albert's *Super Ethica*. A first important step forward was made by Celano, who, in an early article, emphasizes the importance of Eustratius for Albert's understanding of the Aristotelian theory of happiness.⁸ Furthermore, studies by Müller have provided important contributions to the understanding of Albert's reading of happiness in his first commentary on *EN*.⁹ Nonetheless, vital questions regarding the sources as well as the theoretical implications of Albert's interpretation of the text remain open.

The first aim of this paper is to show how Neoplatonism underpins Eustratius' interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of *eudaimonia* as well as his account of contemplative happiness. On the basis of textual analysis, I will attempt to demonstrate that Eustratius relates the

⁴ Giocarini (1964); Trizio (2011); Trizio (2014); Trizio (2016) 143-187.

⁵ Ierodiakonou (2009) 198; O' Meara (2008) 49.

⁶ Mercken (1990) 417; Trizio (2016) 211-213.

⁷ Papamanolakis (2007) 240-242.

⁸ Celano (1986) 32.

⁹ Müller (2001); Müller (2009).

Aristotelian doctrine of *eudaimonia* to a Neoplatonic metaphysical framework. This has significant consequences for his interpretation of the relationship between the ethical and intellectual perfection of man, as well as for his reinterpretation of contemplative happiness and the figure of the theoretical man. In this way, I will review the view of Mercken and Trizio, who trace Eustratius' theory of contemplative happiness and the figure of the theoretical man back to Christian monastic literature and the figure of the Christian hermit.

Further, I will attempt to show how Eustratius' reading of contemplative happiness can be fully understood by outlining its theoretical connections with his epistemology and theory of the intellect in the commentary on *EN* VI. I will then show, on the basis of textual analysis, the main sources Eustratius used for his interpretation of Aristotle.

The second aim of this paper is to show that Eustratius' interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of happiness was the main influence behind Albert the Great's Neoplatonic reading of the *EN* in the first and sixth book of *Super Ethica*.

Eustratius on happiness: ethical and intellectual perfection of man

Eustratius introduces Aristotle's theory of happiness in the Prologue to his commentary on the first book of *EN*. The ancient *eudaimonia*-doctrine, the main topic of the Aristotelian investigation in the first book of *EN*, is presented as the goal of human life, which is achieved through the exercise of virtues.

More specifically, Eustratius clearly explains his interpretation of Aristotle's *eudaimonia* doctrine, also introducing an alternative conception of happiness or *beatitudo*:

Eustr., *In I EN*, 4, 25-32

In the first book of the work, he investigates the end to which the virtues, if properly oriented, lead, an end that is called happiness by the ancient sages. This is in fact the goal of human life, in view of which man was created in this world. This goal is from the beginning which orders the unreasonable passions that are firmly attached to us, by persuading us to let ourselves be guided and

moved by reason as by a leader. So leads metriopaty finally to apathy, which is called by us beatitude.¹⁰

Starting from a conceptual difference between the terms *eudaimonia* or metriopaty and *makariotes* or apathy, Eustratius presents his theory of two forms of happiness in the prologue to his commentary.

Eustratius argues that *eudaimonia*, or the reason for which humans have been created in the world, is an end that consist of a specific activity of human soul, namely metriopaty. The significance of metriopaty is twofold: firstly, it inhibits and moderates the irrational passions of the soul, which are then lead by reason. Secondly, metriopaty can lead the human soul to a higher condition, namely apathy, or the absence of passion altogether. Apathy denotes a second kind of happiness that Eustratius calls *makariotes* or beatitude, and which is related to the intellectual perfection of the soul. In fact, for the one who seeks perfection, the purification of the irrational part of the soul is necessary, so that only reason operates in him without being hindered in any way by the irrational component. In this way the human soul can become intellectual by participation at the separate Intellect and can accomplish its supreme intellectual perfection, which consists in the union with God.¹¹

While Eustratius refers Aristotle's doctrine of *eudaimonia* to the ethical perfection of the human soul, whose activity consist in moderating the irrational passions, *makariotes* indicates the contemplative form of happiness, which is pursued by the theoretical man by achieving a complete absence of passions.

How does Eustratius interpret metriopaty and apathy in the Aristotelian sense, i.e. as two activities of the soul according to the virtues? How does he interpret the link between happiness and virtue, i.e. between happiness in the political sphere derived from the practice of virtue on the one hand, and contemplative happiness on the other, that is, as an activity derived from intellectual virtues?

¹⁰ ἐν δὲ τῷ πρώτῳ βιβλίῳ τῆς πραγματείας περὶ τοῦ τέλους ζητεῖ πρὸς ὃ αἱ ἀρεταὶ φέρουσι κατορθοῦμεναι, ὅπερ εὐδαιμονία παρὰ τοῖς πάλαι σοφοῖς ὀνομάζεται. τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ πτέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς, οὗ ἕνεκα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ παρόντι κόσμῳ παράγεται. ἐστὶ δὲ τοῦτο ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν μετριοπάθεια, τὸ ἀγριαῖνον καὶ ἄμετρον τῶν συνεζευγμένων ἡμῖν ἀλόγων παθῶν καταστέλλουσα καὶ ὡς ἀρχηγῶ τῷ λόγῳ ἄγρεσθαι τε καὶ φέρεσθαι πείθουσα, τελευταῖον δὲ καταντᾶ εἰς ἀπάθειαν, ὅπερ μακαριότης παρ' ἡμῖν λέγεται.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 32-37.

The definition of metriopaty and apathy find a further theoretical development in Eustratius' account on virtues:

In I EN, 109, 23-29

But to us these two kinds are most familiar: the political virtue and the cathartic virtue; the first is proper to the soul that collaborates with the body, the second to the soul that is separated from it and free of affective relation to it, so that, in the first case, we have the moderation of the passions, which only corrects the excesses of the passions and preserves as much as is necessary the operation according to them; the other, either leads to the absence of passions in its purification of the soul, or has already led to this end, insofar as the soul has already been purified and has become devoid of any bodily affection.¹²

Eustratius gives us a more accurate explanation of his account on *eudaimonia* and *beatitudo*, or metriopaty or apathy, defining them as the soul's activity according to the political and cathartic virtues: On the one hand, political virtues are proper to the human soul which is in relationship with the body and they achieve the moderation of passions. On the other hand, cathartic virtues achieve the purification of the whole human soul, by bringing about its detachment from the body and its passions. Cathartic virtues, then, completely free the soul from any connection with human passion or concern.

In the last part of the text mentioned above, Eustratius also gives a dual meaning of catharsis as activity of the cathartic virtues: cathartic virtues lead to apathy only insofar as they purify the soul and leave it free from all bodily affection.

Based on the relationship between body and soul, Eustratius relates the activity of the human soul in terms of either political or cathartic virtue to two kinds of life: namely, the political and theoretical respectively.

On the one hand, the political virtues belong to the political man, who lives a political life according to his nature, and who has social and

¹² ἀλλὰ νῦν ἡμῖν τὰ δύο ταῦτα συνέγνωσται γένη μάλιστα, ἡ πολιτικὴ καὶ ἡ καθαρτικὴ, ἡ μὲν τῆς ψυχῆς συμπραττούσης τῷ σώματι, ἡ δὲ χωριζομένης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐχούσης ἀσυμπαθῶς πρὸς αὐτό, ὡς εἶναι τὴν μὲν μετριοπάθειαν, μόνον κολάζουσαν τὰς ὑπερβολὰς τῶν παθῶν καὶ μέχρι τοῦ ἀναγκαίου συντηροῦσαν τὴν κατὰ ταῦτα ἐνέργειαν, τὴν δὲ ἢ εἰς ἀπάθειαν ἄγουσαν ἐν τῷ ἔτι καθαίρεσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν, ἢ καὶ ἤδη ἀπαγαγοῦσαν ὅτι ἤδη καὶ κεκάθαρται καὶ ἀπροσπαθῆς πρὸς τὸ σῶμα γεγένηται. Trizio (2016) 201-202.

bodily concerns, pursuing a life dedicated to the moderation of excessive passions. On the other, cathartic virtues are proper to the theoretical man, who devoting his life exclusively to contemplation gives up all forms of human, earthly activity.¹³

According to Eustratius, Aristotle refers in the first book of *EN* to the ethical perfection of man, which he indicates also as political happiness. This is the highest good for man, for his life, and satisfies the Aristotelian criteria for *eudaimonia*, and especially the criterion of self-sufficiency.¹⁴

Eustratius claims, that the political way of life is a moderate one, insofar as it represents the middle way of living between two extremes, i.e. between a life dedicated to luxury and a theoretical one.¹⁵ According to Eustratius, the theoretical man devotes his life to purely intellectual activity, by giving up all social and bodily concerns. Accomplishing the catharsis of the soul through the cathartic virtues, the soul of the theoretical man prepares itself for supreme contemplation, which is no way disturbed by human passion.

In both texts discussed, we find a revision and transformation of Aristotle's theory of happiness and virtue, which we shall summarize below, before showing the theoretical developments and the sources made by the Byzantine commentator.

In Eustratius' presentation of the Aristotelian text (text 1), we find a broad definition of the εὐδαιμονία-definition of *EN* I as the activity of rational soul in accordance with the best virtue. Eustratius refers the supreme goal of human life to the ethical perfection of man, and denotes which he calls metriopaty. Then, he presents his own conception of contemplative happiness, defined as beatitude or apathy, which leads the human soul to the supreme contemplation of God.

Moreover, Eustratius establishes a relationship between man's ethical and intellectual perfection, namely between metriopaty and apathy, placing in this way the ancient theory of happiness in a complex conceptual framework. According to this, the moderation of passions represents a first and necessary step leading to their absence or purification, enabling the human soul in turn to achieve perfection.

¹³ Ibid., 63,19-25.

¹⁴ Ibid., 64,40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 63, 6-11.

In the second text mentioned, a further development of Eustratius' account on metriopaty and apathy as activity of the soul according to the virtues can be traced. With respect to the political virtues, Eustratius formulates the activity of the ethical virtues using a terminology differing from the Aristotelian one. More specifically, he supports through the doctrine of metriopaty a reformulation of Aristotle's Mesotes-theory, or the definition of ethical virtue as a mean between two extremes, i.e., middle state between a vice of excess and of deficiency.¹⁶ Furthermore, Eustratius develops a conception of theoretical virtues or cathartic virtues, whose activity is expressed in the catharsis of the soul. The achievement of the cathartic virtues means go beyond the ethical dimension of man within the soul of the theoretical man, who practices the theoretical act par excellence, namely, the contemplation of divine realities.

Eustratius emphasizes their purificatory effect and triumph of the virtues in a way that does not reflect Aristotle's account of contemplative happiness and way of life.

By contrast, for Aristotle, the contemplative way of life does not involve social isolation or disinterest in body and external goods.¹⁷

Connecting Line between Eustratius' Conception of Beatitude and the Theory of Intellect and Epistemology in the Sixth Commentary of *EN*.

The purification of the soul through the higher virtues means the overcoming of the ethical dimension of human life and his moving into a higher dimension, the metaphysical one, in which the intellectual activity of the purified soul can be exercised in such a way that its assimilation with God is attained. Only after the catharsis from any bodily and earthly concerns, the human soul is able to move to the higher step of theoretical contemplation.

How does the soul perform its highest intellectual activity after the process of catharsis from the body? How does it achieve the highest intellectual beatitude, namely the high scientific knowledge of the metaphysical contents?

To answer these questions, we shall first focus on Eustratius' analysis of the twofold nature of the human soul, its rational and intellectual ways of thinking, and its cognitive differences from the separate Nous:

¹⁶ Arist., *EN* 2, 1106b 36-1107a3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10, 1178b1-4; 1177a28-34; 1177b21-25; 1178a24-25.

Eustr., *In VI EN*, 303, 19-25

The soul as soul, operates in a folding manner by inferring syllogisms and passing from premises to conclusions; on the other hand, as a participant in the Nous, it attains a simple and immediate comprehension, insofar as it possesses the principles and the definitions as echoes of the intellect with it and, when it goes beyond these it should become of an intellectual nature, it grasps the intelligibles in an intellectual way, but this not uniformly and simultaneously, as the intellect according to existence does, but by grasping each thing one by one.¹⁸

Eustratius claims, that the soul *qua* soul, thus considered in itself, reasons in unfolding way in terms of syllogisms. Discursive thinking, which he calls *metabasis* (passing over), characterizes the natural way of thinking of the human soul. When considered in this second way, then the human soul participates in Nous. Eustratius emphasizes that as a “participant in the Nous” the soul comprehends the principles of knowledge, which it possesses as echoes of the divine intellect. The purely intellectual activity of the soul, however, does not take place in a uniform manner, like that of the Nous. Discursive thinking, which Eustratius, in line with Proclus, calls thinking by *metabasis*, characterizes on the one hand the natural mode of thought of the human soul. On the other, it represents the very basis of its ontological and cognitive difference to the unified thought of the separate Nous. Only the separate Nous is essentially intellect.¹⁹

Nonetheless, participation with the separate Nous allows the soul to achieve its intellectual nature.

In a brief passage, Eustratius states that our intellect is able to participate in the separate Nous only after having fulfilled purification from the passions:

In VI EN, 317, 24-28

When it [our intellect] has been completely purified of the passions, and when it has purified from the passions, and when it

¹⁸ ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ ὡς μὲν ψυχὴ ἀνειλιγμένως ἐνεργεῖ, συλλογιζομένη καὶ μεταβαίνουσα εἰς συμπεράσματα ἐκ προτάσεων, ὡς δὲ μετέχουσα νοῦ ἀπλῶς ἐπιβάλλει, ἔχουσα μὲν καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τοὺς ὅρους ὡς νοῦ ἀπηχήματα, γινομένη δὲ καὶ τούτων ἐπέκεινα, ὅταν νοερὰ γένηται, τοῖς νοητοῖς νοητῶς ἐπιβάλλουσα, εἰ καὶ μὴ ἀθρόως καὶ ὁμοῦ ὡς ὁ καθ’ ὑπαρξιν, ἀλλὰ καθ’ ἓν περιεχομένη τὰ πάντα καὶ νοοῦσα καθ’ ἕκαστον. Trizio (2016) 157-159. provides an extensive analysis of Eustratius' commentary on *EN VI* and on his sources.

¹⁹ Proclus, in *Tim.* 1,246,2-9. Trizio (2016) 151.

has transcended the faculties connected with it, it will be able to acquire its perfection and become itself exclusively. When he has attained such a state he can take hold of the Intelligibility by simple intuitions. But this does not happen in a simultaneous and eternal manner, as it does with the absolute intellect.²⁰

Once again, the motif of catharsis of the human soul from bodily passions assumes primary significance. Eustratius emphasises the role of catharsis for the noetic growth of the intellectual part of the soul: to the extent that the intellect is completely purified from the passions and its connection to the lower faculties, its participation in the *Nous* can take place.

Eustratius points out that in this way our intellect will be able to acquire its perfection and become purely himself. In this state, our intellect can grasp the intelligible contents by means of simple intuitions. This happens, however, not simultaneously and eternally as with the separate *Nous*.

On the one hand, the participation of soul in the separate *Nous* means recognising the epistemological limits of the human intellect, which can only in part overcome its discursive way of thinking. On the other, participation in *Nous* represents the last step of the soul attempting to comprehend the intellectual.

In VI EN, 315, 33-37

The axioms, which are the principles of the sciences are in fact an echo of the intellect. The soul acts in relation to these intellectually, i.e. by imitation of the intellect proper and grasps them with non-syllogistic intuitions, and constitutes the entire understanding of these objects above the syllogistic dimension.²¹

As at the culmination of its intellectual process of ascent to the separate *Nous*, the soul is in immediate contemplation of the intelligible contents: it imitates the absolute intellect and thus grasps the principles of

²⁰ ὅταν δὲ τῆς τῶν παθῶν ἀπαλλαγῆ συγχύσεως καὶ τῶν συνηρητῶν ὑπεραρθῆ δυνάμεων καὶ τὸ τέλειον αὐτοῦ ὑπολήψεται ἑαυτοῦ μόνου γενόμενος, τότε καὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν νοητῶν ἀπλῶς ἐπιβάλλειν δύναται, οὐκ ἀθρόον οὐδ' ἐν αἰῶνι ὡς ὁ κυρίως νοῦς καταλαμβάνων αὐτὰ ἀλλὰ καθ' ἐν καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ μεταβαίνων ἀφ' ἑτέρου εἰς ἕτερον, ὡς προεῖρηται.

²¹ τὰ γὰρ ἀξιώματα ἀρχαὶ ὄντα τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἀπηχήματά εἰσι τοῦ νοῦ. ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ περὶ ταῦτα ἡ ψυχὴ νοοειδῶς, τούτεστι κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ κυρίως νοῦ ἀπλαῖς καὶ ἀσυλλογίστοις ἐπιβολαῖς αὐτοῖς ἐπιβάλλουσα, καὶ ὑπὲρ συλλογισμῶν ἅπαντα τὴν αὐτῶν ποιουμένη κατάληψιν. Trizio (2016) 164.

philosophy, grasping them intellectually. By imitating the separate Nous, the soul grasps these principles beyond syllogistic reasoning, by way of non-syllogistic intuitions and thus realizes the highest activity and perfection of soul.

Eustratius describes his conception of the highest activity and intellectual perfection of the soul as imitating the intellectual activity of the Nous and philosophical knowledge of the intellectual contents of the separate Nous.

Neoplatonic roots of Eustratius' theory of happiness

In his prologue to the commentary on the first book of *EN*, Eustratius presents his conception of two forms of happiness, i.e. the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*-doctrine and his theory of *makariotes*, following a precise conceptual framework, which consists of several steps. Starting with the moderation of irrational passions, the human soul moves to a second step characterized by apathy. The achievement of the intellectual beatitude also requires a gradual growth and ascent of the human soul to God, beginning with its ethical improvement, which enables it to then move to apathy or beatitude. In this state the human soul is able to accomplish its highest level of intellectual activity and, by participating in the separate Nous, reaches the intellectual perfection, which consists in the union or contemplation of God.

Eustratius has in mind here the principles of the Neoplatonic theory of virtues. This, elaborated by Plotinus in his treatise *On Virtues*²², has as its main question how to accomplish the assimilation with God, a point Plato also addresses in *Theaetetus*.²³

According to Plotinus, the human soul starts its assimilation to God by means of its first improvement through the exercise of political virtues, or the four civic virtues of book V of Plato's *Republic*.²⁴ Apportioning a measure and limit to the irrational passions of the human soul in its relationship with the body, political virtues prepare and lead the soul to the achievement of superior virtues or cathartic virtues. Superior virtues consist in the exercise of Theoria. Thus they prepare the soul for the highest contemplation, i.e. assimilation with God.²⁵ Therefore, these

²² Plot. *Enn.* 1 2 [19].

²³ Plato. *Tht.* 176a-c. Thiel (1999) 95-96; Catapano (2006) 31-37; Linguiti (2013) 131.

²⁴ Plato, *R.* 4, 427e-434c; Plot. *Enn.* 1 2 [19] 1. Linguiti (2013) 132.

²⁵ Catapano (2006) 20; Linguiti (2013) 133.

virtues or purifications presuppose the detachment of the human soul from the passions of the body and from every earthly concern. Only once purified, is the soul able to practice contemplation. However, presenting the twofold theory of happiness, Eustratius refers the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* doctrine to metriopaty, while his own conception of beatitude or *makariotes* is defined as apathy.

The Byzantine commentator of Aristotle also identifies the ethical and intellectual perfection of man with the two main levels of Porphyrius' framework of the theory of grades of virtues in the *Sentence* 32 of his *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*.²⁶

According to Porphyrius, metriopaty is the goal of man, who lives according to his nature as a human being. Metriopaty denotes his ethical improvement, and it consists in the moderation of the irrational passions of the soul. Apathy or impassibility, on the contrary, is the goal of the person, who is moving towards intellectual contemplation.²⁷ It denotes a further step, to which the human soul moves after the moderation of the irrational passions.

Following Porphyrius, Eustratius defines metriopaty and apathy as the activity of the human soul according to the political and cathartic virtues, and refers these to two specific kinds of human beings, namely to the political and contemplative one. In Porphyrius' *Sentence* 32 we read, that on the one side, metriopaty is accomplished through the activity of the political virtues. These virtues belong to the political man, and they are intrinsically concerned with the relationship of the human soul with the body. Guided by reason, political virtues restrain the irrational part of the soul.²⁸

On the other hand, apathy is accomplished through the cathartic virtues or purifications. By accomplishing the catharsis, cathartic virtues free the human soul from any relationship with the body and its passions, which is prepared in this way for the contemplation of God.²⁹

²⁶ Porph. *Sent.*32.

²⁷ Ibid. 25, 6-9: ἡ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὰς πολιτικὰς ἀρετὰς διάθεσις ἐν μετριοπαθείᾳ θεωρεῖται, τέλος ἔχουσα τὸ ζῆν ὡς ἄνθρωπον κατὰ φύσιν, ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὰς θεωρητικὰς ἐν ἀπαθείᾳ, ἧς τέλος ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὁμοίωσις.

²⁸ Ibid. 23, 4-6: Αἱ μὲν τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἐν μετριοπαθείᾳ κείμεναι τῷ ἔπεσθαι καὶ ἀκολουθεῖν τῷ λογισμῷ τοῦ καθήκοντος κατὰ τὰς πράξεις.

²⁹ Ibid. 24, 1-4: Αἱ δὲ τοῦ πρὸς θεωρίαν προκόπτοντος θεωρητικοῦ ἐν ἀποστάσει κεῖνται τῶν ἐντεῦθεν· διὸ καὶ καθάρσεις αὐταὶ λέγονται, ἐν ἀποχῇ θεωρούμεναι τῶν μετὰ τοῦ σώματος πράξεων καὶ συμπαθειῶν τῶν πρὸς αὐτό.

By placing *eudaimonia* and *makariotes* within the framework of Porphyrius' theory of virtue, and by identifying them with metriopaty and apathy, Eustratius also revises from a Neoplatonic point of view the relationship between ethical and intellectual perfection in man. Therefore, Eustratius understands metriopaty as a preliminary and necessary step, which leads to apathy. In this way, Eustratius establishes between the two forms of happiness the same relationship that exists, according to Porphyrius, between metriopaty and apathy: Ethical perfection proves to be a prerequisite for the soul that moves toward the intellectual knowledge of God.

As Plotinus had already argued in his treatise, we must practice political virtues to achieve the superior virtues or purificatory virtues, which prepare and lead the soul to assimilation to God.³⁰ The beginning of assimilation with God implies achieving man's ethical perfection, which is also an essential part of the entire metaphysical system in which Eustratius places the Aristotelian theory of happiness. Furthermore, in his explanation of the theory of virtues, Eustratius discusses two moments of the purification of the soul through the cathartic virtues, apporting in his commentary a core idea, that is to be traced once again in the Neoplatonic theory of virtues.

We also read in Porphyrius that purification concerns either what is to be purified or has already been purified. Catharsis is directed, firstly, to the passions that have already been moderated, and it is accomplished in the human soul, which is aware that it is bound to something foreign, namely, the body. It aims to separate itself from this through the cathartic virtues.³¹

In his conception of beatitude, Eustratius integrates the Neoplatonic interpretation of cathartic virtues, which prepare and lead the human soul to intellectual contemplation. In this way, he significantly modifies Aristotle's definition of contemplative happiness, or the highest form of happiness as an activity of the soul according to the virtue of the intellect, which is directed towards contemplative knowledge or philosophy and is realised in the theoretical form of life.

Finally, the Neoplatonic doctrine of virtue is the basis through which Eustratius reads contemplative happiness and the contemplative life, leading to a significant transformation of the figure of the Aristotelian wise man. Following Plotinus and Porphyrius, the higher virtues effect

³⁰ Plot. *Enn.* 1 2, [19] 7.

³¹ Porph. *Sent.* 32, 25, 10-26, 05.

a detachment from all earthly concerns and from the body and its passions, and by doing so prepare the human soul for the activity of the intellect. For Aristotle, on the contrary, the contemplative form of life means neither social isolation nor disinterest in the body and external goods.

Eustratius also basis his conception of happiness on the Neoplatonic theory of virtue. However, he is only concerned with two kinds of virtue mentioned by Porphyrius, namely, the political and cathartic virtues. The virtues of the intellect and paradigmatic virtues, however, play no role in his commentary.

We could instead trace the connecting line between Eustratius' conception of beatitude or contemplative happiness and his epistemological theory in the commentary of the sixth book of *EN*. Here, starting with the investigation of the twofold nature of soul as soul and as participating in Nous, he develops his conception of intellectual perfection as the highest intellectual activity of the human soul. This consists in the intellection of the divine, which may be achieved through two crucial moments, namely through the catharsis of the soul, and its participation in Nous.

Accomplishing the catharsis, the soul of the theoretical man overcomes the ethical dimension of man, and in this way enters a metaphysical dimension. It is in this dimension that intellectual participation in the separate Nous can take place.

The background to Eustratius' doctrine of the intellect is the concept of a divine origin of the human intellect, which at the highest point of its activity, partakes of the Nous, thereby achieving divine knowledge. The participation of the human intellect in the Nous finds its theoretical foundation in the Neoplatonic doctrine of causality, which Eustratius takes over in its essential features from Proclus, while also modifying, illustrating, and systematizing it. As Trizio has shown, Eustratius bases his reading of the sixth book of the *EN* on the core principles of Proclus'

Neoplatonism, combining it with themes from the Christian monastic tradition. In particular, Eustratius accepts the core idea of the Neoplatonic principle of chain, and argues, that in the hierarchy of forms, the human soul is located closest to the separate intellect, and for this reason participates it participates in the latter in a higher degree than that which is more remote from the intellect.³²

³² Eustr., *In II A. Po.*, 257, 35-37; Proclus, *ET* §194, §168-170; Trizio (2016) 178-181.

Eustratius' account on the theory of participation of the human soul in Nous is also of paramount importance with regard to his conception of intellectual beatitude. Through participation in Nous the human soul overcomes, even if in part, the epistemological limits of its discursive thinking by becoming intellectual. And once it becomes intellectual, it may perform the intellectual activity by imitating the separate Nous, as well as by recollecting the knowledge of the separate substances in itself.

Albert the Great on political and contemplative happiness in *Super Ethica*.

The discussion about the nature of happiness as the highest human good becomes particularly relevant for Albert's confrontation with the *EN* in *Super Ethica*. As Jörn Müller' extensive studies have shown, the original meaning of the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* as a practical, human good is given in the first book of the *Super Ethica*.³³ Indeed, Albert here refutes a central thesis of the Latin medieval conception of *eudaimonia*, which entails the reinterpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine based on a Christian-oriented interpretation of happiness as *felicitas futura*.³⁴

Against the philosophical views that reject the identification of a supreme good with a practical good, Albert concludes that the meaning of the term *summum* is twofold: 'Highest' strictly speaking refers to God as *bonum simpliciter*, but in the context of Aristotelian doctrine, it is instead used to refer to the highest as *summum alicui* and to related activities.³⁵ Albert argues at the beginning of his commentary that Aristotle discusses happiness in *EN* I only insofar as it belongs to the realm of the civic (life). Thus, the questions about the absolute good concern rather the metaphysician.³⁶

How exactly does Albert interpret the Aristotelian doctrine of *eudaimonia* in the first book of *EN* and how does he understand the relationship between the two forms of happiness?

³³ Müller (2001) 102-103.

³⁴ Augustinus, *De vita beata* 4.35-36; Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae* 3, 2.2, 2.3, 2.14-15; 3, 3-8, 9-12. Steele (2019)13; Tkacz (2012) 83.

³⁵ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica*, 32, 74-80.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 14, 54-62.

Albert claims that happiness has its founding principle in the human soul, and more specifically in the twofold order³⁷ of the rational soul in its activities as *ratio* and *intellectus*:

Super Ethica, 32, 89-7, 33

And according to this, is there a twofold order in his own activities, because in so far as it is rational, so it is the principle of the exterior works, because the reason is about the contingent; and in this way its best is political happiness. But insofar as it touches the intellectuality, so its activity is the contemplation, and in this way his goal and the best is the contemplative happiness.³⁸ (tr. Maruggi, A.)

In its activity as *ratio*, which deals with the contingent, the human soul produces political happiness as its own *optimum*. But insofar as the soul touches, i.e. has contact with intellectuality, its activity is contemplation, and its goal and *optimum* is contemplative happiness.

According to Albert, Aristotle refers the *eudaimonia*-definition in the first book of *EN* to *felicitas civilis*.³⁹ This takes a central place in the discussion on happiness in the first book of *Super Ethica*, insofar as political happiness is emphasised here, on the one hand, as the best activity of the rational soul, to the extent that it is the peculiar activity of the *ratio*. In fact the *ratio* is what essentially constitutes human nature, and, the *felicitas civilis* is then the highest good of man.⁴⁰

On the other hand, political happiness assumes primary importance as it is closely linked to contemplative happiness. A central aspect of Albert's twofold conception of happiness is the establishment of a close relationship between political and contemplative happiness:

Super Ethica, 33, 7-15

And, so according to the two orders there are two great goods of man, of whom therefore one is related to the other; namely political to contemplative, because every political government is

³⁷ Müller (2001) 99-100.

³⁸ Et secundum hoc est hic duplex ordo in actibus suis propriis, quia in quantum ratiocinativa, sic est principium exteriorum operum, quia ratio est contingentium; et sic est optimum eius civilis felicitas. In quantum autem attingit intellectualitatem, sic actus eius est contemplatio, et sic finis eius et optimum est contemplativa felicitas.

³⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica*, 39, 80-82.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 39, 42-45; 80-82.

required to create calm, in which the contemplation can be free. And in this way its goal and the best is the contemplative happiness, because the one is material and dispositional to the other one.⁴¹

According to Albert, there is a close relationship between the rational and intellectual activity of the soul: political happiness is related to contemplative happiness insofar as it creates the necessary calm of the soul in which intellectual activity can take place unhindered. More specifically, the activity of political happiness consists in moderating the irrational passions of the soul through the exercise of moral, i.e. ethical, virtues, and in doing so removes impediments to contemplation:

Super Ethica, 496, 14-22

And in this way we say that political and contemplative happiness are the good of man, but the political is arranged according to the contemplative as a disposition, which removes its impediments. Therefore the contemplative virtues are immediately arranged according to the contemplative happiness, to which also the political happiness is arranged and through itself all the moral virtues. Thus, all the perfections of man are referred to the ultimate one.⁴²

Albert expresses the relationship between the two forms of happiness as a *dispositio*-relationship. According to this, political happiness is related to contemplative happiness like a disposition, which removes the impediments, namely the perturbations arising by the passions, and in that sense the moral virtues are also connected to contemplative happiness.

In the following passage, we see how Albertus adopts the Aristotelian view, according to which contemplation is called a *non-impeditam*, i.e. an unimpeded activity of the intellect:

⁴¹ Et, sic secundum duos ordines duo sunt summe bona hominis, quorum tamen unum ordinatur ad alterum; scilicet civilis ad contemplativam, quia omne regimen, quod est per civilem, quaeritur propter quietem, in qua libere possit esse contemplatio. Et sic finis eius et optimum est contemplativa felicitas, quia una est materialis et dispositiva ad alteram. Et sic relinquatur, quod tantum sit poni unum optimum hominis.

⁴² Et sic dicimus felicitatem civilem et contemplativam esse bonum hominis sed civilis ordinatur ad contemplativam sicut dispositio removens impedimenta ipsius. Unde virtutes contemplativae immediate ordinantur ad felicitatem contemplativam, ad quam etiam civilis felicitas ordinatur et mediante ipsa omnes virtutes morales. Sic omnes perfectiones hominis referuntur ad unum ultimum.

Super Ethica, 774, 23-31

It is to be said, that to contemplate, according to what here is apprehended, says the unimpeded activity of the intellect, referred to as the limit of happiness. In fact the impediment can arise from the subject and from character. The impediment, which can arise from the subject, needs, that is removed through the moral virtues, which free the human being from the perturbation of passions, through which the work of contemplation is disturbed.⁴³

Contemplation must be an unimpeded activity of the soul. By eliminating irrational passions of the soul, moral virtues allow the intellect to freely exercise its supreme activity. According to Albert, the perturbations or passions of the non-rational soul in its relationship with the body can inhibit the speculative act.

Thus, moral virtues gain importance primarily because they direct their activity towards the ultimate goal, namely towards the higher intellectual moment. Then all the perfections of man refer to the final goal of human life, namely the contemplation of the divine realities of metaphysics.

Albert understands *felicitas contemplativa* as the culmination of the intellectual activity of the soul, which can devote itself to intellectual activity only insofar as it is completely untouched by the passions. In fact, the supreme intellectual activity of the soul consists in the assimilation with God. This is the highest state of the human soul, which can be accomplished through the exercise of the virtues of the purified soul, or *virtutes purgati animi*.⁴⁴ They are the virtues of the spiritual nature of the soul, entirely untouched by the passions.⁴⁵ These virtues have a divine nature and for this reason they are rarely to be found in an ordinary man.⁴⁶ For Albert's understanding of contemplative happiness that means, that through the virtues of the

⁴³ Dicendum, quod contemplari, secundum quod hic accipitur, dicit operationem intellectus non impeditam, relatam ad finem felicitatis. Potest autem habere impedimentum ex subiecto et ex habitu. Impedimentum, quod ex subiecto posset esse, oportet, quod tollatur per virtutes morales, quae liberant hominem a perturbationibus passionum, quibus contemplationis opus perturbatur.

⁴⁴ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica*, 514, 24-33. Albert refers here the meaning of Aristotle's definition of heroic

virtues from *EN VII* to Plotinus' theory of the cathartic virtues. Müller (2001) 193.

⁴⁵ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica*, 516, 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 518, 20-23.

purified soul, the human intellect participates in the mode of knowledge of the separate substances.⁴⁷

But how does the human soul accomplish his intellectual perfection, or how does it achieve its intellectual activity?

In a few passages of the first book of *Super Ethica*, and extensively in the sixth book, we find a significant elucidation Albert makes on the nature of the human soul and its cognitive modalities. These give us a deeper understanding of his conception of contemplative happiness as scientific intellection of God and of the separate substances.

Defining contemplative happiness requires us to investigate the nature of the human soul and its means of apprehension:

Super Ethica, 32, 82-85

In fact, the nature of rational soul, through which man is man, can be considered twofold: either according to itself, and so it is rational, or according its peak, which touches the intellect, because the reason was created in shade and horizon of the intelligences, and so it is intellectual; therefore the COMMENTATOR says, that the soul is intellectual through participation, for only the intelligences are intelligible by essence.⁴⁸

Albert here elucidates his conception of the twofold nature of the human soul: On the one hand, human soul has an essentially rational nature, namely when it is considered *secundum se*. On the other hand, the human soul, when considered *secundum suam summitatem*, partakes in the divine origin in the hierarchy of being and it is connected with the intellectuality of the separate substances through participation in them. By referring to Eustratius as to the *Commentator*, Albert holds, that the nature and cognition of the human soul are essentially different from that of the separate intelligences. The human intellect is not essentially intellect, but is only intellectual through participation. Its proper nature is a discursive and non-intellectual one. The discursive nature of our reason depends on its connection to time and space, for our discursive way of thinking is intimately connected to the world immanence. As the

⁴⁷ Müller (2001) 195.

⁴⁸ *Natura autem animae rationalis, per quam homo est homo, potest dupliciter considerari: aut secundum se, et sic est rationalis, aut secundum suam summitatem, qua attingit intellectum, quia ratio creatur in umbra et horizonte intelligentiae, et sic est intellectualis; unde COMMENTATOR dicit, quod anima est intellectualis participatione, intelligentiae vero sunt intelligibiles per essentiam.*

Commentator says in this book, the soul is only a participant in intellect.⁴⁹

The *ratio* is proper to the human rational soul and its activity is a discursive and reasoning one. The human intellect is not essentially intellectual, but participates in the intellectuality of the separate substances. It follows that every human mode of cognition and therefore every speculation is a rational one, namely a discursive and non-intellectual one.

According to Albert, we cannot overcome the cognitive limits derived from the ontological differences between the separate Nous and the human intellect. Even if contemplative happiness is the best and highest form of intellectual beatitude in this life, our intellect cannot grasp the objects of Metaphysics through a direct apprehension, as the separate substances do.

From this ontological gap, it follows that contemplative happiness implies an intellectual imitation of the divine intellect, and not an immediate vision.

The impact of Eustratius' Neoplatonism on Albert

In Albert's interpretation of the first and sixth books of the *EN*, significant modifications of the Aristotelian text can be traced back, according to my analyses, to the influence of Eustratius' Neoplatonism.

The importance of Eustratius' commentary on Albertus becomes manifest, partly in connection to the difference between Aristotle's doctrine of happiness and that of the theologically orientated Latin Middle Ages. The definition of *eudaimonia* thus assumes its original meaning as the highest human good. Following Eustratius, Albert interprets the *eudaimonia* definition of *EN* I as political happiness. *Felicitas civilis* takes a primary place in Albert's interpretation of the Aristotelian *ergon* argument, and in general in the first book of *Super Ethica*. Thus, my paper answers a question that still remains open in current research about the theoretical reasons and sources for Albert's interpretation of the *eudaimonia* doctrine as *felicitas civilis* in the first book of *Super Ethica*.⁵⁰

A second aspect of Albert's conception of happiness is the *ordinatio* relationship of the *felicitas civilis* to the *felicitas contemplativa*. Political

⁴⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Super Ethica*, 393, 26-33.

⁵⁰ Müller (2001) 103.

happiness gains importance insofar as it creates the prerequisite calm for the intellectual activity of the soul. In the same way, moral virtues gain relevance according to Albertus, primarily because they direct their activity with respect to the irrational passions towards the ultimate goal, namely the higher intellectual moment.

According to my argument, Albertus took from Eustratius' doctrine of happiness its Neoplatonic assumptions, according to which the relation between political and contemplative happiness is considered, emphasising especially the relation of the moral to the intellectual virtues and happiness. In accordance with the Neoplatonic architecture of Eustratius' conception of happiness, Albert conceives of contemplative happiness as the result of a gradual process that includes and presupposes the ethical moment or ethical activity of the soul.

Thirdly, referring to Eustratius as the *Commentator*, Albert explicitly accepts his Neoplatonic account on the twofold structure of the human soul. Eustratius becomes a textual and philosophical source for Albert's interpreting of Aristotle's distinction of the twofold structure of soul as *logistikon* and *epistemonikon*.⁵¹

Through a textual comparison of Albert's text with a passage from the Latin version of Eustratius' commentary, we are able to show how Albert accepts the main thesis of Eustratius' account of the nature of the human soul as soul and as participating at the separate *Nous*:

Super Ethica, 32, 82-85

Natura autem animae rationalis, per quam homo est homo, potest dupliciter considerari: aut secundum se, et sic est rationalis, aut secundum suam summitatem, qua attingit intellectum, quia ratio creatur in umbra et horizonte intelligentiae, et sic est intellectualis; unde COMMENTATOR dicit, quod anima est intellectualis participatione, intelligentiae vero sunt intelligibiles per essentiam.

Eustr., In Eth. Nic., 6, transl. Gross. F. 126 vb (edition yet unpublished by Trizio 167, 75-80): rationalis quidem enim est, quoniam rationem habet propriam, qua utitur, secundum quam discernit et syllogizat, intellectualis autem, quoniam participatione eius qui simpliciter intellectus terminus habet et principia scientiarum, immediate Ipsos conoscens et per hos imitans intellectum.

⁵¹ Arist. *EN* 6, 1139a 6-8.

Albert takes from Eustratius the core idea of the rational nature of the human soul in its essence or when considered *secundum se* within the temporal and contingent dimension. Eustratios, on the other hand, is a strong Neoplatonic influence on Albert's engagement with the Neoplatonic doctrine of causality, according to which our soul has a divine origin in the hierarchy of being and is related to the separate intelligence through participation. Only separate substances have intellectuality as essence. In agreement with Eustratios, the doctrine of the intellectual participation of the human soul in the separate substances also goes back for Albertus to their ontological and cognitive difference. Contemplative happiness is also an intellectual imitation of the separate substances.

Conclusions

Neoplatonism deeply influenced the medieval interpretation of Aristotle's *EN* in the Byzantine and Latin worlds.

Eustratius' reading of happiness as political and contemplative perfection of man contains the main features of a Neoplatonic approach. Placing the Aristotelian doctrine of *eudaimonia* and his account on beatitude in Porphyrius' conceptual framework of the theory of virtues, Eustratius revisits the definition of happiness as theoretical and intellectual activities of the human soul according to the virtues. Following Porphyrius' account on metriopaty and apathy, Eustratius establishes through a Neoplatonic standpoint a new relationship between the ethical and intellectual perfection of man. According to this, ethical perfection accomplished through the political virtues proves to be a prerequisites for the soul that moves to the supreme intellectual activity, namely to the contemplation of God. Following the Neoplatonic system of the theory of virtues, Eustratius points out, that the achievement of the intellectual perfection of man means the overcoming of his ethical dimension: from the moderation of the passions the soul moves to their catharsis through the cathartic virtues. Contemplative happiness can be outlined as the result of a gradual path or grown of the human soul: departing from the ethical perfection, the soul of the theoretical man overcomes the human way of life, and achieves his supreme intellectual beatitude through two correlated steps: the catharsis from human and earthly activities and bodily concerns and the participation at the separate Nous.

The main aim of my present paper is to prove that Neoplatonism justifies philosophically, and not at least textually, Eustratius' reading of the theoretical way of life. This is in agreement with the core philosophical principles of Neoplatonism.

As Trizio points out that Eustratius adopts in a few instances some terminological expressions that were extensively used by Studites and Confessor. In this sense, the author stresses in his textual analysis Eustratius's use of a vocabulary familiar to the Christian ascetic tradition, by showing some terminological affinities with the latter in Eustratius' account on the theoretical way of life. The author argues that Eustratius reinterprets under a Christian outlook the distinction between metriopaty and apathy, which is typical of the commentators of Late Antiquity.⁵² However, in interpreting Aristotle, Eustratius generally does not develop arguments drawn from monastic literature. In Eustratius there is no discussion of Christian virtues and the salvific vision of man purifying himself from a deplorable life devoted to the sins of the body, which are typical of the scholars of the monastic tradition.⁵³

On the contrary, we find a philosophical justification of the theory of happiness and virtues that takes up the key points of Porphyry's theory of virtues and culminates in a theory of contemplative happiness, dedicated to scientific and intellectual knowledge of the realities of metaphysics.

The Latin reception of Eustratius' commentary in the Latin West was not just a textual reception. Eustratius became one of Albert the Great's central sources for reading, understanding, and interpreting Aristotle's theory of happiness through a Neoplatonic filter in the 13th century.

Following Eustratius, Albert integrates political and contemplative happiness into a complex Neoplatonic framework, which understands the intellectual perfection of man as the outcome of an ethical path, culminating in the noetic perfection of the human soul. For the two medieval authors, the ethical moment is the first necessary step, which leads to contemplative happiness. But in itself contemplative happiness involves a complete devotion of the soul to intellectual contemplation.⁵⁴

⁵² Trizio (2016) 202, 213.

⁵³ Thunberg (1997) 55-65; Cholij (2002) 210-220.

⁵⁴ I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my friend Julian Behrens for the linguistic corrections to this article.

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