

The Philosophy of Aristotle: Applied to the Systemised Self - Part
21, Masters Series.

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(Self/Non-Self Methodology)

Abstract

Aristotle's account of flourishing begins not with a profile but with activity: what a life does, which capacities it develops, and the ends that give its practices meaning. This essay brings his ethics, natural philosophy, and politics into conversation with the Systemised Self, a proposed condition in which algorithmic mediation recursively shapes identity, preferences, and agency. The essay's fictional character Mateo, a bicycle mechanic using a repair work platform, finds that recommendations favour rapid, familiar jobs over complex restoration and teaching. Aristotle's distinctions among ends and means, production and action, habit and judgment, and potentiality and actuality clarify what a throughput metric may leave out. They do not prove that algorithmic assistance alienates, nor make Aristotelian teleology a machine learning theory. Empirical studies establish bounded findings about data inference, platform practices, and ranked feeds; they do not validate the Systemised Self or the proposed Algorithmic Alienation Index. The essay argues conditionally that tools can support skilled activity, yet become alienating when their objectives acquire authority over the goods a practice serves and those affected cannot contest them. Aristotle therefore offers a demanding question: does mediation help people act well, together, or merely make selected outcomes easier to count?

Keywords: *Aristotle, eudaimonia, practical wisdom, habituation, teleology, The Systemised Self, The Hollow Absolute, Algorithmic Alienation Index, Algorithmic Alienation*

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A – LIMITATIONS

This essay is speculative and commentative, and is a contemporary philosophical application, not a claim that Aristotle anticipated artificial intelligence or that his ethics supplies a validated test for digital alienation. His teleology, psychology, and politics remain contested; translating ancient concepts into contemporary institutional settings risks equivocation. The Systemised Self (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) and Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) are sociotechnical theoretical constructs; Algorithmic Alienation (Kanbay et al, 2026) has published theoretical and partial qualitative grounding, while the AAI (Galu & Kairos, 2026c) is an unvalidated operational proposal. The empirical literature cited here establishes bounded findings about digital traces, corporate data practices, and ranked feeds; not, a comprehensive transformation of human character. Mateo is a fictional illustrative case for the purpose of analogy, not a participant or evidence. Calhoun's Universe 25 mouse experiment cannot establish consequences for human workers or platforms. Neither automation, assistance, expertise, disability accommodation, nor delegated routine proves alienation. The essay is not proof of concept, and does not treat autonomy as isolation: flourishing and agency depend on social relations, material resources, and institutions.

1. Introduction

Mateo repairs bicycles at a neighbourhood workshop and takes overflow jobs through a local platform. Its booking suggestions are useful: they connect him to customers and help him plan parts. Over time, however, the system favours quick repairs resembling jobs he has already completed. Less predictable restorations and requests to teach basic maintenance appear less often. A manager begins using completion speed to judge performance. The platform may accurately predict what Mateo does while changing the work he can do next.

Aristotle offers an unusual way to examine that shift. He asks not only what something is made of or what produces it, but what it is for; not only what someone can do, but how activity and habituation form a life. His central ethical question is not whether Mateo's dashboard is efficient in the abstract, but whether efficiency serves a worthwhile human practice. A repair count is a measure of output, not automatically a measure of good work or a flourishing life.

The comparison is interpretive, not historical. Aristotle did not theorize algorithmic platforms. Yet his distinctions among ends and instruments, *technē* (craft or productive expertise) and *phronēsis* (practical wisdom), or habitual action and considered choice can expose a contemporary slippage: a local prediction becomes a standing authority about what activity should be available. The system may learn from yesterday while narrowing tomorrow.

The essay asks when algorithmic mediation helps people act well, and when it quietly substitutes an administratively convenient end for a good that workers and communities might contest. Aristotle's account is valuable because it resists reducing a life to isolated preferences or visible outputs.

2. Aristotle's Intellectual Outline

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) studied with Plato, taught Alexander the Great, and developed investigations across logic, biology, physics, metaphysics, ethics, rhetoric, and politics. The surviving corpus is a complex collection of works and lecture materials, not a single finished system. The familiar separation between a purely theoretical Aristotle and a separate practical philosopher obscures how inquiry into causes, living beings, character, and civic life informs his broader project (Falcon, 2023; Kraut, 2022; Miller, 2022).

His explanations often consider four kinds of cause (*aitia*): material (what something is made from), formal (what it is), efficient (what initiates or produces change), and final (the end or

‘that for the sake of which’). These are explanatory answers, not four successive pushes in time. In a natural organism, the account of what it is and what it characteristically does cannot simply be replaced by an inventory of its components. For artifacts such as bicycles, their purposes arise through makers and users; a designed system’s specified target is likewise not automatically a natural or ethically good end (Aristotle, 1995, *Physics* 2.3, 194b23–195a3).

Aristotle’s hylomorphism treats ordinary living things as composites of matter and form, not as a body containing a detachable software like identity. In *De Anima*, soul names the form or actuality of a living body: capacities such as nutrition, perception, and thought are understood through what living beings can do. A behavioural record captures selected activity; it neither is the person’s form nor measures the flourishing of those capacities (Aristotle, 2017, *De Anima* 2.1, 412a27–b6).

In ethics, *eudaimonia*, often translated as flourishing or living well, is the highest human good, understood as activity in accordance with virtue over a complete life, with external goods and relationships also relevant. It is not a passing feeling, a productivity score, or constant pleasure (Aristotle, 2002, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, 1098a16–18; 1.10). Habituation forms character, while *phronēsis* guides action in particular circumstances. Aristotle calls humans political animals because speech makes possible shared judgment about the advantageous and just (Aristotle, 1998, *Politics* 1.2, 1253a7–18); this is not a theory of modern democratic equality. His politics investigates institutions and practices through which people live together. These terms have contested interpretations; none is simply a modern psychology or software specification.

3. Aristotle’s Key Theoretical Contributions

Aristotle’s ideas generate questions:

Aristotelian distinction	Core idea	Question for Mateo's platform
End and instrument	Means take their value from the good they serve	Is faster completion serving better repair or merely throughput?
Potentiality and actuality	A capacity becomes actual through activity	Which capacities does repeated, ranked work let Mateo develop?
Habituation and character	Repeated action can shape durable dispositions	What habits does platform-mediated work make easier or harder?
<i>Technē</i> and <i>phronēsis</i>	Productive skill differs from practical judgment about action	Can expertise about a repair be reduced to a standard job category?
<i>Eudaimonia</i> and the polis	Flourishing is lived activity within social and civic conditions	Who determines the goods a workshop or neighbourhood values?

Ends are not interchangeable with targets. A final cause explains a thing or activity in relation to an end. For a human practice, an end might be restoring a safe, useful bicycle or enabling another person to maintain one. The platform can be intentionally designed to prioritize speed, revenue, or repeat bookings; that engineered target is a cause of the system's operation, but its existence does not show that it is the practice's proper good. Aristotle's language invites a question about ends; it does not certify a designer's choice.

Potentiality is not prediction. A model may estimate that Mateo will accept quick repairs because he has accepted them before. Aristotle's *dunamis* means a capacity or potential, not a probability score. The possibility that Mateo could become a better teacher or restoration specialist is not disproved because those activities are absent from his recent record. Yet possibility is not unlimited choice: time, income, health, available tools, and the organisation of work affect what can become actual.

Habit is formative, not merely repetitive. Ethical virtue develops through practice; what people repeatedly do can shape dispositions and what they notice. This makes Mateo's work allocation ethically significant without making every routine a danger. The same platform could support

the habit of careful diagnosis, provide access to work, or relieve administrative burdens. Which habits it cultivates depends on its design, working conditions, and Mateo's ability to act and learn.

Practical wisdom is situated judgment, not automated compliance. *Phronēsis* concerns acting well in particular circumstances. It is not reducible to knowing a general rule, maximizing a single value, or sorting options. Aristotle connects practical wisdom with good deliberation and virtuous character, a controversial account that cannot be converted into 'trust the expert' without qualification. A dashboard can provide information to Mateo; it cannot thereby establish that its ranking is wise.

Finally, Aristotle's 'mean relative to us' is not the statistical average. It is a context sensitive judgment about fitting action, a judgment requiring practical wisdom (Aristotle, 2002, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6, 1106b36–1107a8). A model that recommends the modal action is therefore not, in Aristotle's sense, identifying the virtuous mean.

4. A Genealogy of Preceding Theory Informing Aristotle

Aristotle inherits and disputes earlier Greek inquiry rather than beginning from nowhere. Plato's dialogues, Socratic questioning, and Pre-Socratic arguments about nature, change, and explanation inform the questions he reframes. His surviving treatises also engage medical and biological observation, political constitutions, poetry, and inherited civic practice. This intellectual history is not a clean succession in which myth disappears and reason begins; the boundaries between genres, argument, and received tradition remain porous (Kraut, 2022; Falcon, 2023).

Aristotle criticizes Plato's separate Forms while retaining a demanding account of form and intelligibility. He also develops teleological explanations of natural beings, which modern

science often rejects or reconstructs. ‘Aristotelian purpose’ should therefore not be smuggled into a model as if an algorithm possessed the intrinsic ends of a living organism. Historical genealogy can clarify what Aristotle meant; it cannot prove a present day application.

His works reached later readers through complex manuscript, commentary, and translation traditions. Bekker’s 1831 references help identify passages across editions, but translations of terms such as *energeia*, *eidos*, and *telos* differ. Contemporary use should state which sense is being borrowed and where analogy stops.

5. The Systemised Self: Context and Definition

The Systemised Self (SS) is a proposed terminal condition of advanced algorithmic alienation: algorithmic mediation becomes structurally consequential to identity, preference, and agency, while dependence may be experienced as authentic freedom. It is not ordinary technology use, any individual profile, or a validated diagnosis. In the hypothesized loop, activity produces traces, classifications influence options, and later activity feeds the classification (Galu & Kairos, 2026a).

Our fictional character Mateo’s completed repair jobs are genuine evidence. The concern arises if his predicted preference is used to direct future work, shape the manager’s view of competence, and reduce his practical alternatives. Activity then records and helps produce the pattern it is supposed merely to describe. But the platform may also expand his clientele and income. Whether mediation is alienating depends on its role in the person’s options, practices, and relations, not on exposure alone.

Calling this ‘systemisation’ locates the problem in arrangements among workers, customers, platform owners, models, and employers, not in an allegedly defective self. Can Mateo inspect and challenge the categories? Can he reach customers through other means? Can the workshop

define success collectively, or must all actors defer to a platform's legibility? These questions connect subjective experience to power without imagining an unmediated, wholly independent self.

6. The Hollow Absolute: Context and Definition

The Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) is a Hegelian sociotechnical construct for a comprehensive, technologically mediated order in which mutual recognition and collective agency are weakened. It is not a term Aristotle used, a synonym for his Prime Mover, or an established description of digital society. Aristotle's account of the highest good concerns human flourishing; and should not be conflated with this political diagnosis.

The link to Aristotle is indirect, his ethics and politics place human activity in social practices and institutions: flourishing is not simply private satisfaction, while practical deliberation occurs among people with unequal power, roles, and resources. The comparison can therefore ask whether the workshop recognises Mateo as a participant whose reasons matter, or treats him only as a source of measurable output. 'Recognition' in a Hegelian vocabulary is a later conceptual lens, not Aristotle's own theory of reciprocal recognition.

Neurocratic Determinism (Galu & Kairos, 2026b) names governance through the prediction and conditioning of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural formation of preferences, not biological elimination of free will. Hollow Demos describes citizens reduced to data and predicted preferences; Aligarchy names elites controlling the relevant algorithmic infrastructures. These are proposed theoretical concepts. Aristotle may illuminate the goods at stake in shared practices, but he cannot explain platform ownership, contemporary employment law, or algorithmic governance.

7. Contemporary Empirical Context

Digital behaviour can support inferences, and ranked systems can alter what people encounter; these bounded findings do not establish total knowledge or determine character. Kosinski et al. (2013) found that Facebook Likes could predict selected personal attributes. This demonstrates inference from traces under specified conditions, not access to a person's eudaimonia or full intentions.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission's (FTC, 2024) report documents extensive data collection and use by major social media and video streaming services. In a 2020 U.S. election experiment, switching participants between ranked and chronological feeds changed exposure and time spent, while short-term attitudinal and behavioural effects were limited in several measures (Guess et al., 2023). Parry et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis found discrepancies between logged and self-reported media use. Logs measure activity more directly than recall, but not its purpose, meaning, or practical quality.

Evidence	Supports	Does not establish
Digital-trace prediction (Kosinski et al., 2013)	Selected personal attributes can be inferred from Likes	Complete knowledge or certain prediction of a person
FTC report (2024)	Extensive corporate data collection and use	Uniform effects across services or users
Feed experiment (Guess et al., 2023)	Ranked and chronological feeds can change exposure and activity	Inevitable, lasting transformation of character
Usage-report meta-analysis (Parry et al., 2021)	Self-reported and logged activity can diverge	That logs reveal intention, skill, or flourishing

These sources motivate inquiry into recursive classification but do not test Aristotle's ethical theory, validate the AAI, or establish a Systemised Self. The empirical question is not whether

a platform can count our character Mateo's completed jobs. It is whether ranked work changes meaningful opportunities, learning, deliberation, and control, and under what conditions.

8. Formula and Boundary Conditions – Algorithmic Alienation Index

(AAI)

Algorithmic Alienation (AA) has a published theoretical foundation and partial qualitative empirical grounding (Kanbay et al., 2026; Arkan et al., 2026). Arkan et al. report four focus groups with 20 participants; this is exploratory qualitative evidence, not validation of a scale or of the Systemised Self. The proposed AAI operationalises dimensions of that framework but remains unvalidated. The Systemised Self is a further hypothesis, not a synonym for AA or the index.

$$AAI_{base} = 0.30(DAu) + 0.25(IAm) + 0.25(EDm) + 0.20(EDc)$$
$$AAI_{adjusted} = AAI_{base} \times (1 - RA)$$

- *DAu is Diminished Autonomy*
- *IAm, Identity Ambiguity*
- *EDm, Eroded Decision-Making*
- *EDc, Emotional Disconnection*
- *RA, Algorithmic Resistance*

Each is provisionally scaled from 0 to 1. The weights are theory derived hypotheses, not validated parameters. The proposed candidate boundary is adjusted $AAI \geq .95$ with $RA \leq .05$; it is exceptionally restrictive. At $RA=.05$, a maximum base score of 1.00 only just yields .95. This threshold is an exploratory research screen, never a diagnosis.

Dimension	Provisional question for Mateo	Aristotelian caution
DAu	Can he set work priorities beyond ranked offers?	Independence is not the same as flourishing
IAm	Does he experience the platform's preferences as his own?	Preference authorship does not exhaust character
EDm	Can he consider options beyond those surfaced?	Good deliberation is more than slow choice
EDc	Does platform-directed work feel engaged, useful, or empty?	Feeling is important but not a complete account of the good
RA	Can he correct, refuse, or work outside the ranking?	Constraints may be institutional, not failures of will

If our fictional character Mateo's provisional dimensions were $DAu=.50$, $IAm=.40$, $EDm=.30$, and $EDc=.20$, his base score would be .365. With $RA=.40$, the adjusted score would be .219. This arithmetic illustrates the proposal; it is not a measurement of Mateo. A single summary may obscure distinct experiences, and the resistance adjustment may conceal serious pressures. Report base and adjusted scores and each dimension separately.

At the proposed Systemised Self terminus, subjective report alone may be insufficient because dependency could be experienced as freedom. Yet this theoretical possibility must not be used to dismiss a participant's account. Candidate classification would require subjective phenomenology plus independent behavioural evidence of dependence, friction response, and cognitive reaction. Test item validity, factor structure, reliability, invariance, weights, and alternative explanations; revise or abandon the model if evidence fails to support it.

9. Aristotle, Calhoun, and the Digital Behavioural Sink

Calhoun's 'Death Squared' reports disruptions in a mouse population in a crowded, provisioned enclosure (Calhoun, 1973). It can prompt a narrow question about whether material abundance alone ensures flourishing; it cannot predict human workplaces, cities, or

platforms. Aristotle's human good depends on forms of activity, habituation, relationships, and political association, not simply the density of an environment.

The contrast may sharpen a design question: does Mateo's workshop provide tools and work while displacing opportunities to teach, deliberate, or exercise craft? But Calhoun's population is neither a model of Aristotle's polis nor evidence of a digital 'sink'. Recommendations might expand access, support disabled workers, or ease routine scheduling. Evaluate the actual environment, institutional choices, and participants' experiences; do not infer human collapse from a mouse study.

10. Direct Synthesis: Aristotle and The Systemised Self

The central analogy is not 'Aristotle's telos equals the platform's objective'. It is that asking about ends reveals that an objective is never ethically self-justifying. The platform has measurable targets; Mateo's craft has goods that may not fit one measure. If speed is treated as the final definition of good repair, a means of organising work has silently become its end.

Consider one repair, a customer books a quick adjustment; Mateo's platform recommends the same job type again. The suggestion may be right. But if only quick completions receive visibility, longer restorations and teaching disappear from the record, and the record becomes a forecast of what work he should receive. The platform does not merely ignore a capacity; by allocating opportunities, it may help make that capacity harder to develop. That is a possible mechanism, not a finding established by the ancient text or the cited platform studies.

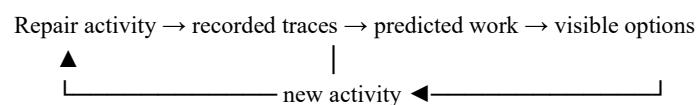
Aristotle's distinction between *poiēsis* (production, whose end is a product beyond the activity) and *praxis* (action whose end is in doing it well) can illuminate the issue. Producing a repaired bicycle is not separate from judgment about how the work is done, nor from the social practice of teaching and maintaining shared equipment. The categories are not airtight: useful

production can be intrinsically fulfilling and ethically valuable. Their analytic value is to ask whether a dashboard registers only completed outputs while ignoring excellences internal to activity.

Habituation deepens the question. Mateo's repeated diagnosis, careful repair, and explanation to customers can develop skill and judgment. Repeatedly accepting the most visible tasks may also become a habit, but the ethical interpretation depends on context: he may rationally choose the reliable income, or the work may narrow what is available. Aristotle's account directs attention to formation without blaming the worker. Habits are shaped by institutions, time, training, and material security as well as individual choice.

Practical wisdom prevents an easy technological verdict. A recommendation can help Mateo attend to scarce parts or manage a crowded schedule; practical judgment might tell him to accept it, adapt it, or refuse it in a particular case. Whether a system can support that judgment depends on what information it offers and whether his reasons can affect its categories. A list of 'best practices' is not *phronēsis*, and a click is not proof that the user endorses the system's ends.

The recursive process can be represented schematically:



The loop can support learning or constrain it; the outcome is empirical.

Aristotle's flourishing is also political. The workshop's goods are not defined by Mateo alone: customers need affordable transport, trainees need instruction, and workers need fair conditions. If a platform becomes the practical gatekeeper and those affected cannot shape its priorities, private effort cannot repair the public imbalance. Appeals, transparent objectives,

collective bargaining, alternatives, and limits on employers' use of rankings become relevant: not because Aristotle specified them, but because the normative question concerns shared activity and institutional conditions.

The key distinctions are therefore: an actual past choice versus a forecast; a forecast versus an assertion of character; a system objective versus the human good it is meant to serve. A responsive tool can help Mateo flourish when it supports skilled activity and leaves room for judgment. It risks alienation when a partial measure governs opportunity as if it were the complete good, especially where dependence is difficult to resist. These are testable social claims, not conclusions guaranteed by Aristotelian metaphysics.

11. Main Critics and Key Critiques of Aristotle

Aristotle's final causes explain nature through ends; modern science generally does not accept a universal account of natural processes in those terms. Applying telos to a commercial model would confuse a system's designed objective with an organism's natural development. Here it serves as a question about purposes and values, not a causal machine.

The 'function' argument is contested. The *Nicomachean Ethics* derives a human good from characteristic rational activity, but philosophers dispute whether that move succeeds or unfairly privileges one conception of human life (Aristotle, 2002, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, 1097b24–1098a20; Kraut, 2022). Aristotle's elevation of contemplation in Book X also raises questions about the standing of practical and civic life. A digital metric should not be judged by forcing everyone into one standardized ideal of activity.

Aristotle's politics is exclusionary, his defence of natural slavery and restrictive roles for women are indefensible; his ideal political community excludes many people from equal citizenship (Aristotle, 1998, *Politics* 1.5–7; Miller, 2022). His social account cannot be adopted

without critique. Flourishing cannot be limited to those already empowered to deliberate publicly.

Virtue ethics can understate structure, emphasis on character may obscure poverty, disability, exploitation, and concentrated platform power. People can make prudent choices within conditions that deny them meaningful alternatives. Accommodation and delegation can enable flourishing; treating resistance as a virtue requirement would unfairly shift responsibility to individuals.

Aristotle's categories can expose a normative gap between platform targets and human goods. They cannot tell us whether an interface changes habits, how often workers are misclassified, or whether an appeal system works. Those require empirical and institutional investigation.

12. Discussion and Future Work

Research should test both harms and benefits. A longitudinal study with workers using varied job-allocation tools could examine recommendation exposure, task diversity, income security, skill development, independent choice, and worker defined quality. Compare systems and settings; do not assume the same feature has the same effect on every occupation or person.

Where feasible, controlled-feed experiments could vary ranking transparency, user-set goals, and appeal options, measuring access to desired work and ability to pursue participant defined aims. Interviews and workplace observation could identify goods omitted by platform metrics. Include disabled workers and participants who value automation; co-design measures, protect data, and distinguish an accessible delegation choice from coercive dependence.

The AAI requires separate validation: preregister constructs, compare weights and models, examine group invariance, and report dimensions plus both scores. Test the candidate Systemised Self only with independent behavioural evidence and a justified account of

phenomenological inversion. Self report remains essential; it should be combined with, not overridden by, behavioural and contextual evidence. Null effects, expanded opportunity, or stable user defined flourishing should count against the proposed mechanism.

Finally, ask who can contest institutional ends. Measures of successful repair, customer safety, learning, appeal costs, restored access, and worker control can disclose different goods. A better interface alone cannot substitute for fair labour conditions or collective governance. Aristotle helps formulate the question of what work is for; workers and communities should have authority in answering it.

13. Conclusion

Aristotle asks us to look beyond what is counted to the activity, character, and shared goods that a count claims to represent. His account is neither an algorithmic ethics manual nor an uncritical ideal: its teleology is contested, and its politics sharply excludes. Yet its distinctions help show why means and ends, predicted patterns and cultivated capacities, output and flourishing cannot be collapsed.

Our character Mateo's repair history may help him find work. It does not decide what work he can become capable of doing, or what his community should value. A system supports human activity when its objectives remain answerable to the goods they are meant to serve and to the people whose lives they organize. When its measure quietly becomes the end, the question is no longer whether it predicts well, but who still has the power to say what 'well' means.

14. Glossary of Technical Terms

AA (Algorithmic Alienation): A published theoretical construct describing alienation associated with sustained algorithmic mediation, with partial qualitative empirical grounding.

AAI (Algorithmic Alienation Index): A proposed, unvalidated operationalisation of selected algorithmic-alienation dimensions and resistance.

Eudaimonia: Human flourishing or living well, understood by Aristotle as activity in accordance with virtue over a complete life.

Final cause (telos): The end or “that for the sake of which” something is done or understood; not equivalent to any measured system objective.

Habituation: The formation of character and dispositions through repeated activity and practice.

Hollow Absolute, the: A Hegelian social-critical construct for apparent systemic completeness alongside weakened recognition and collective agency.

Hylomorphism: Aristotle’s account of ordinary substances as composites of matter and form.

Potentiality (dunamis): A capacity or potential for being or activity; not a model’s statistical prediction.

Practical wisdom (phronēsis): Reasoned, situation-sensitive judgment about acting well.

Systemised Self, the (SS): A hypothesised terminal condition of advanced algorithmic alienation; not a score or validated diagnosis.

Technē: Knowledge or skill concerned with making or producing.

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