Aristotle on Vice and Misery

Jonny Robinson

BTh (Hons.), MRes

Contents

Abstract

A huge body of work is devoted to understanding Aristotelian virtue. By comparison Aristotle's views on the nature of vice have been somewhat neglected. This thesis aims to develop a new approach to Aristotelian vice, outlining its peculiarities in comparison with modern conceptions of vice, delineating the boundaries between vice and other deficient character states, and discovering why it is that Aristotle believes vice to be problematic. To give some shape to the investigation, I ask a guiding question: why is Aristotle's vicious person miserable?

In Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the vicious agent as one who hates their own life because of their vice. The vicious agent is full of regret, utterly miserable, and is even suicidal according to some translators. But Aristotle does not give a detailed explanation as to why this might be the case. It is the task of this thesis to comb through Aristotle's statements about vice, piecing together an account that makes sense of this misery.

First, I survey the character states who share a deficient soul in various ways and to various degrees. Here I turn to the enkratic, akratic and brutish agent to show how they fail to be virtuous and how their failure is different to that of the vicious.

Second, I posit a character state in-between akrasia and vice which I will call the 'in-between state' and suggest that Aristotle himself might make room for such a person. In looking at the in-between state we see a character who behaves with remarkable surface similarities to the vicious agent and give an account of why such a person is not properly vicious.

Third, I will turn more closely to Aristotle's specific discussions of the vicious agent, here outlining the *badness of* vice and explaining why vice is *bad for* the agent. The second half of this task turns to study vicious misery. Here I will offer a novel account of vicious misery, arguing that the ends of the vicious agent cannot be met for teleological reasons and moreover that the ends of the vicious person fail to satisfy an innate desire for the true human good.

Finally, I look at some potential counterexamples to this thesis and attempt to defend it against them.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that this thesis entitled 'Aristotle on Vice and Misery' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institutions other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and has been written by me. Any assistance I have received in the preparation of the thesis has been appropriately acknowledged.

Finally, I certify that all information sources and literature used have been indicated in the thesis.

Jonny Robinson

Acknowledgements

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A chance correspondence with Anthony Price led to a relationship that transformed the thesis. No one person could catch all the errors I have made (and I no doubt failed to respond adequately to many that were brought up), but he has certainly made all the difference. Anthony answered every email of mine with generous and brilliant thoughts that I wish I could have just inserted as they were. Unfortunately, it would have made the rest of the writing much shoddier by comparison. He read the entire thesis twice and gave notes of detail, patience, and perception. He has been the best tutor that one could wish for and I am remarkably fortunate to have received his sustained attention (and to have been on the right side of it!). I cannot imagine the thesis without his friendship.

Gabriele Taylor's work first got me interested in vice. Her book, *Deadly Vices*, opened my eyes in many ways to the possibility of more research in this area. Her work is marked by philosophical clarity and psychological insight, engaging with literature and life, and I hope I have been able to bring even a small bit of that to my thesis here. I am very grateful for a meeting with Gabriele, for a lovely long and varied conversation, and the ability to spend some time with the person who I believe has foundationally shaped the growing discipline of vice ethics.

My little daughters still cannot believe that I am really going to work when I head into my study, and in a sense they are probably correct. In finishing this thesis, I will soon have a new answer to the question, asked very often in their three- and four-year-old voices, when they see me with a book: 'Are you reading Aris*tot*le?' I have loved working with them nearby. Thanks to my parents and family and friends for supporting me in doing this over the years. And thank you most of all to Al, for many millions of things.

Chapter 1

Introduction:
A Robust Theory of Vice

1. Introduction

Aristotle on vice and misery. It is not a cheery thought. Why should we spend time pondering these things? They are not, on the surface, pleasant ideas in world filled with enough despair already. In my view, however, Aristotle's remarks on vice and the vicious person provide incredible insight into how we might go wrong in our attempts to live well and I, like many people, am very interested in living well. I hope this investigation will illuminate Aristotle's ideas about how a person can go seriously wrong, and if we shine some indirect light on the right path that will be good, too.

In 'The Unknown Citizen' Auden spoke about recapturing the 'modern sense of an old-fashioned word' (2009: 93). Talking about vice in this study, however, my aim is to capture the ancient sense of a modern word, for 'vice' is not quite what Aristotle had in mind throughout his ethical project, certainly not in the sense in which it is used today. These days vice has been largely demoted to those social vices such as smoking or swearing or,[1] if it is dragged back into its ancient context, it still retains some of the stain left by this modern creation and produces a moral category that is only partially Aristotle's own concern in speaking of 'vice'.

It is often in highly contested areas of definition that participants in the debate (if they can resist the dogmatic poles) become comfortable with nuance and tweaking and revision and

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[1] In an earlier time again, take for instance the work of Edward Crapsey, who, in musing over the brothels of New York, concluded, 'In the facts thus far narrated, we have the first of the causes which have made New York a reproach to all the nations' (1872: 6). The title of his work was *The Nether Side of New York, or, The Vice, Crime, and Poverty of the Great Metropolis*. By Crapsey's stringent moral standards, he probably ought to have self-censored his own name.

a plurality of even strongly competing interpretations sitting side by side. This has certainly been the case for conversations about virtue, function, *eudaimonia*, and those other headline concepts looming large over Aristotelian scholarship. And so, given the comparative lack of work on the topic of vice and an absence of frenetically competing interpretations, it would not be unusual to feel that the questions surrounding our ideas about vice have been roughly solved. If this is not written explicitly, in general there appears to be tacit agreement about vice, or what I can only assume is tacit agreement because of the relative silence on theoretical issues. It may equally be a sort of seething, silent disagreement. I cannot be sure, though I assume the former is more likely since philosophers are prone to raise their hand if they spot an opening.

Opinions generally swing between two poles. On the one hand we have Dorothea Frede writing that, for Aristotle, 'as far as the basic conditions are concerned, vice and the vicious are treated like mirror images of virtue and the virtuous' (2015: 23). And on the other side of this, and with a splash of the dramatic, take Francis Sparshott's opinion: 'One has to conclude that Aristotle has no consistent theory of vice, and in fact nowhere really confronts the problem' (1994: 292). My own view not quite so bleak as Sparshott's, but neither do I think vice is simply the mirror of virtue, permitting a simple extrapolation, the reversal of the facts. Vice for Aristotle is a relatively consistent notion although it will take some digging to get clearer, and I will muddy the waters even further before we get there.

2. The Aim and Scope of this Study

As one begins to look more deeply into the concept of vice, the contours and scope of a general theory bear a close resemblance to the story of a general theory of virtue. Since many hundreds, maybe even thousands, of books and articles have now been written on Aristotle's productive ideas about virtue and still have not exhausted the topic, one can quickly see that even a very devoted investigation into vice will be incomplete in many respects. A study that tried to do everything would almost certainly not do everything well. A study that tried to do everything might end up with nothing. Given this, I believe the best way to contribute to the relatively new field of Aristotelian vice studies is to focus on one part of it (and for others to do the same).

Aside from momentary mentions in commentaries and an occasional paragraph in select books and essays, the main research into Aristotelian vice appears across eight articles by Di Muzio (2000), Irwin (2001), Brickhouse (2003), Roochnik (2007), Müller (2015b), Grönroos (2015a), Elliott (2016), and Nielsen (2017). Placed into a single short sentence, the body of

work dedicated solely to vice looks unusually slim. Thankfully, though, the existing work is at least of a very high quality. Each author presents with a particular focus. Di Muzio asks whether it is possible for a vicious person to be cured of their vicious character. Brickhouse and Roochnik tackle an apparent inconsistency in Aristotle's depiction of the vicious person whereby she first has a psychological harmony so robust she is unaware of her vice and later experiences psychological turmoil so severe that she is suicidal. Müller's article disputes that Aristotle ever presented the vicious agent as psychologically unified, and Elliott's reply to Müller objects to this reading. Irwin and Nielsen both offer the broadest studies, attempting in a short space to provide a relatively comprehensive theory of the vicious person in Aristotle, though Irwin looks more closely at the reason of the vicious agent and Nielsen delves into the inconsistency considered by Brickhouse and Roochnik. Finally, Grönroos attempts to explain why Aristotle's vicious person is depicted as deeply miserable in Book IX of the *NE*, though Grönroos admits himself that he cannot, in the end, truly answer that question using the model he puts forward. Grönroos's theory of vicious misery is presented primarily in an essay titled 'Why is Aristotle's Vicious Person Miserable?' (2015a), but the ideas upon which it is founded are also worked through in depth across two more innovative and pioneering articles from (2015b) and (2016). This trilogy of essays will be very important for my own work, as will become most clear in Chapter 6.

It is my aim in this present study, perhaps the first full-length study of vice in Aristotle, to take up Grönroos's question and to discover why and how Aristotle's vicious person is miserable. While I touch upon a number of topics in order to make my case, it is vicious misery that is the focus here. Why is Aristotle's vicious agent miserable? I believe this question strikes at the heart of Aristotle's ideas about happiness, virtue, and vice, and therefore offers important ideas to anyone interested in these topics in Aristotle and more widely. It is also a question that remains in many ways unanswered. To tackle the question about the relationship between vice and misery I will take a wider look at Aristotle's dealings with many types of deficiency before providing a novel account of vice proper and applying this to the question about vicious misery.

I now need to say something about the type of account I will offer. For where some have taken vice to be simply a lack of virtue, I argue against these deflationary models, outlining a robust theory of Aristotelian vice.

3. A Robust Theory of Vice

The scholastics had a tag which ran, *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu*.[2] As Bretzke explains it, 'The moral good of an act comes from its causal integrity (act plus intention); moral evil comes from any defect (in either act or intention)' (2003: 18-19). In other words, while the good must be perfectly good, the bad is anything less than the perfectly good. With dazzling brevity, this serves the dual and dispiriting purpose of making the good seem unattainable and the bad seem unavoidable.

Overlooking the fact that this tag was popularised many centuries after Aristotle's death, Aristotle himself does allow that every person who is not excellent is therefore bad in the broad, normative sense, in respect to the standards of what it is to be a good or bad human *qua* human. But unlike the scholastic tag, however, not every person who fails to be virtuous is *vicious* on the Aristotelian scheme. For although it is the case that Aristotle paints everyone who fails at virtue with the broad brush of deficiency (to varying degrees), *vice proper* is a subset of the wider category of deficient character types and presents with its own specific qualities over and above mere lack of virtue. If one understood any failure of ideality to be *vice* in the robust sense, the sentiment is not one to which Aristotle himself would consent. At least, this is what I shall argue.

In making such a case I will be offering a *robust* theory of vice whereby vice is a something – an active quality – as opposed to a *deflationary* theory whereby vice is any failure of ideality. As example of the former we have this comment from Kenny: '[O]nce again, Aristotle is setting the bar of injustice ridiculously high' (2011: 166). And the latter is exemplified by Hutchinson: '[O]rdinary human vice is all too common' (1995: 215). There is some unclarity among the commentators as to which position Aristotle held. Richard Kraut has suggested that we might understand 'vice' as a broad term of departure from the ideal of virtue, and a narrow vice as referring to the properly vicious (a subset of general deficiency).[3] Susan Sauvé Meyer also says that Aristotle at times has a wider scope in mind with the terms 'virtue' and 'vice' (2011a: 29). Jolif and Gauthier use 'strict vice', as far as I understand, to refer to the

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[2] Thanks to Anthony Kenny for bringing this phrase to my attention. See Aquinas 18.4 (2007). Much more recently Trianosky has written, 'A harsh standard of vice might insist that almost any shortcoming, however slight, was vicious. A tolerant standard might hold that only very substantial shortcomings, far along the continua, were vicious' (1986: 36).

[3] This was suggested to me in conversation. Kraut almost uses this language in Section 4 of 'Aristotle's Ethics' (2014).

properly vicious in contrast to the generally deficient (1970: 733-735). In Jolif and Gauthier we also find the admission that not all bad character traits are vices in the strict sense, and some are better labelled harmless defects, 'défauts inoffensifs' (1970: 272). And Stewart says that *mochthēros* in *NE* IX appears in the wider sense, not referring to vice proper (1892: 364). Though I take issue with his consigning *mochthēros* to the wider category here, I concur with Stewart that there does exist wide and narrow categories of deficiency even if we disagree on what belongs in each. In the following thesis I will refer to the idea of a wider sense of failure as 'deficiency' and will reserve the term 'vice' only for the properly vicious.[4] Such is the backbone of the robust account.

There are three ways in which Aristotle deals with failure of virtue, progressing in their degree of both exclusivity and severity. But by those select few who have written on vice in Aristotle, these ideas have not been sufficiently made clear. In fact, they are hardly acknowledged if at all. It is my belief that Aristotle himself makes use of such classifications, and our picture of the Aristotelian vicious person will be considerably flawed without them. By looking at a range of notions concerning vice and deficiency in Aristotle's ethics we build a fuller picture of the properly vicious person both negatively (discovering what deficiencies they do not possess) and positively (articulating the specific defects they do possess). I offer here a very brief account of Aristotle's three main ideas about non-virtue. These will be expanded throughout the study.

> *Category One*. The first and most inclusive type of deficiency is a general deficiency dependant on the condition of a person's soul. Aristotle uses *aretē* (singular) to indicate the well-functioning soul in general. This is different to the individual virtues (*aretai*, plural, e.g. generosity, bravery) that are signs of the well-functioning soul. Just as there is a well-functioning soul and individual excellences of character, so too there is a bad-functioning soul and individual deficiencies of character. There are in fact only two options at this level: good or bad. At this very general level the deficiency is normative, concerning a failure to attain the human ideal of a fully rational, excellent, soul. This category will therefore contain most people.

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[4] This is in contrast with Philippa Foot, for instance, who, in a non-Aristotelian context it must be said, writes that vice is a natural defect (Foot, 2001: 116). Aristotle conceives of all less-than-virtuous states as defects, but vice is more than a mere defect. It is an active failure as we shall see.

Category Two. Aristotle makes distinctions between the various kinds of people with deficient souls: not each of them is deficient in the same way or to the same degree. While a well-functioning soul is attained only by the virtuous, the deficient soul is possessed – albeit in different ways – by the enkratic, akratic, brutish, and by a character type theoretically placed between the akratic and the vicious that I will tentatively call the in-between state. These broadly deficient (that is, non-excellent) characters are tarnished with the language of deficiency, *kakos*, *phaulos*, and, occasionally, the more decisive *kakia*, often by way of comparison or insult.[5] But it is not only a linguistic connection that unites them. We discover that these characters all fail in different ways to possess the excellent soul requisite for the virtuous ideal.

Category Three. Here we arrive at the most infamous of the deficient characters, coming face to face with the properly vicious person most often introduced with *mochthēria* and cognates. Even at this stage, though, I will argue that Aristotle distinguishes between those people who merely possess a vice by definition and those with a vice progressing to something more serious. Not all vice is equal. I will reserve a fuller examination of the properly vicious character for the subsequent chapters even though in Chapters 2 and 3 I refer to the vicious agent by way of comparison.

As one reads through the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* where Aristotle's main pronouncements about both vice and deficiency are found, it becomes evident that there is a shared vocabulary between the two concepts. Context will determine whether the shared vocabulary refers to deficiency in general, or to vice in particular, but I believe Aristotle himself does intend to make the distinction. It will be the task of the next chapters to demonstrate in more detail how this is the case, but I open by making a note about this use of language and how the direction of my argument will proceed with it.

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[5] See below for a note on Aristotle's vice terminology.

4. A Note about Language

To start sharpening my argument for a robust account of vice, I need to make a preparatory note about Aristotle's use of vice language. This is not the most exciting way to begin an examination of a sensational topic like vice, but it is essential for our purposes.

Aristotle's vocabulary of deficiency primarily includes *kakia*, *mochthēria, phaulos,* and *ponēros*.[6] Irwin, in discussion of *kakia*, *mochthēria*, and *phaulos* writes that he 'cannot find any interesting difference, for our present purposes, in the use of these terms' (2001: 74).[7] Arianna Fermani, adding *ponēria* into that mix, also writes that these words 'must be considered synonymous' (2014: 242). It is true that Aristotle's employment of these words is not systematic and to argue for a rigid delineation of the terms would be forced. At some paragraphs we find a number of the words mixed together and it is left to translators to render at will. But we should not throw the linguistic baby out with the bathwater, for it is not the case that there is no difference whatsoever between Aristotle's use of the words as we find them in context, nor should we ignore their frequency or the order of their appearance in Aristotle's overall argument. To put it another way, at times Aristotle intends no difference between the various words and at times he does. This seemingly platitudinous claim will take some defending.

I suggest that the noun *kakia* and plural noun *kakiai* (and cognates) primarily indicate the robust state of vice proper where the behavioural and psychological requirements are met for vice. *Kakia*, then, is the category whereby an agent has met the theoretical threshold (soon to be determined) for the attribution of vice proper.[8] The translation 'vice', therefore, is suitable. Aristotle also and less regularly uses the word in varying strengths of connection with the akratic and the enkratic, often by way of comparison, but also and occasionally, to show the close proximity of these states to vice proper.

The adjectives *kakos* and *phaulos* (and cognates) are applied more widely than *kakia*. Early on in the *NE* they appear with non-moral shades, at times describing bad builders and bad harpists, and elsewhere depicting bad people in the sense of both non-moral deficiency

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[6] Add to this the regular and disparaging references to the masses (*tois pollois*) as inferior. Note also that Aristotle uses *pepērōmenōn* ('deformed' or 'imperfectly developed') and *atelōn* ('defective' or 'incomplete') at *DA* 452a9–10. These terms do not appear with any regularity in ethical contexts.

[7] He writes elsewhere that perhaps *phaulos* is weaker than *mochthēria* but that this is not generally true (1999a: 352).

[8] This is consistent with the notion that vice is in the category of a quality (*NE* 1096a25, *Cat.* 8b25–29).

and, less often, something stronger, perhaps moral if we are careful to understand that word. Translation of 'vice' or 'bad' or 'base' will depend on the context. *Phaulos* has the freest range in Aristotle and out of all the terms used for deficiency it seems most of all to depend upon the context. For example, at *NE* 1127b10–12 *phaulos* is less severe than *kakos*, at *NE* 1121a 26–27 *phaulos* is stronger than *kakia*, and throughout Book VIII *phaulos* and *mochthēria* are usually equivalent. I take it that Aristotle's audience would have understood the intended strength of this common term by the way in which Aristotle used it and with the surrounding information about the person who is described as such.

Giles Pearson recently argued for a distinction between the noun *thēriotēs* (brutishness) and adjective *thēriodēs* (brutish) along similar lines to what I have just sketched. He writes that the noun 'refers primarily to a certain state individuals possess owing to an originally bad nature (whereas the adjective […] marks a quality/attribute that can be ascribed to states or people whether or not they possess the state of brutishness)' (Pearson, 2018: 125, see also fn. 4). It is my view that something like this happens with the noun *kakia* reserved for the state of vice (and comparisons with it), and *kakos* and *phaulos* as more loosely and widely applied adjectives.[9]

One term in particular, *mochthēria*, is used almost exclusively to refer to the strictly vicious and denotes something more serious.[10] Where *kakia* indicates a state fulfilling the (at least minimal) constraints necessary for vice, and *phaulos* and *kakos* connote the generally deficient and occasionally the vicious, the *mochthēros* displays harmful and/or shameful behaviour symptomatic of a vice that has progressed to something more serious. The term almost always refers to vice and moreover to vice that is severe. But there has been a bit of confusion over *mochthēria*, concerning its severity and range of meaning, and given that the

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[9] I do not see in Aristotle the same contrast between the noun *mochthēria* and the adjective *mochthēros*; both of these terms are reserved for the strictly vicious.

[10] A natural way to render the Greek word would be 'vicious' since the word is used in connection almost exclusively with vice proper. But since we also have *kakia* to indicate that state and since *kakia* is more readily used in connection with the akratic, enkratic to show their proximity though not identicality to vice proper, we might think that the more narrow term, *mochthēria*, requires its own translation distinct from 'vicious'. We could translate as 'wretched' for this purpose. 'Wretched', I am aware, strikes a slightly archaic chord, but I am throwing my hat in the ring, bearing in mind Kenny's admonition that transliteration is commonly a mark of cowardice in translators (2013: xvi). 'Wretched' does two things well. First, it allows the sense of despicability or lowness that is implied by the passages expounding the badness of the *mochthēros*. The OED gives, 1. 'Distinguished by base, vile, or unworthy character or quality; contemptible', and 2. 'Of persons, etc.: Contemptible in character or quality; despicable, reprehensible; hateful'. Second, it captures the misery or dejection that we will come to. The OED gives, 1. 'Of persons, etc.: Living in a state of misery, poverty, or degradation; sunk in distress or dejection; very miserable or unhappy', and 2. 'Of conditions, etc.: Marked or distinguished by misery or unhappiness; attended by distress, discomfort, or sorrow.' For the sake of consistency with other discussions and translations I will translate *mochthēria* as 'vicious' while retaining the division between vice that meets the minimal threshold for attribution and vice that progresses to something more severe and warranting *mochthēria*. I will say more about this distinction in the following chapters.

word is a dominant focus in our investigation, I need to say some more about this. Take the opinion of Garrett, for example (1993: 177):

> The point is not that [*phaulos*] has [a] connotation of innocence in Aristotle, but that it often has a less condemnatory sense than the other negative terms, especially, as it turns out, *mochthēros*. Thus, at 1148b 2–4 Aristotle distinguishes certain forms of excessive behavior from ethically serious excesses, labelling the former [*phaulos*], but the latter *mochthēros*.

Irwin, by contrast, writes that, while one might think *phaulos* is sometimes weaker than *mochthēros*, this is not generally true – they are, for Irwin, equal (1999a: 352). Irwin is half-correct. For though it is the case that *phaulos* can refer to the properly vicious, *mochthēria* almost *always* does and therefore more consistently and intentionally carries the narrow sense of vice. To put it another way, and bringing in the fuller list of vocabulary, *mochthēria*, *ponēros*, *phaulos*, *kakos*, and *kakia* can at times all refer to vice in the strict sense and carry a strongly condemnatory power. However, where *phaulos* and *kakos* also very often apply to non-moral cases (e.g. deficient builders and harpists) as well as to the broader range of deficient character types, *mochthēria* and *ponēros* (the rarer of the two) almost entirely indicate vice in the strict sense.[11] I say almost entirely because there are one or two passages in the *NE* that make use of *mochthēria* not in reference to the strictly vicious person even though the sense is still extreme (see *NE* 1148b18 and 1154a11). This does not destroy the whole theory. For it is not the case that *mochthēria* is a technical term reserved only for connection with the strictly vicious. Instead, we ought to take the term as a signpost and realise that where it does appear there is a very good chance the ideas in question refer to the vicious, the most ethically severe subset of the deficient characters. The following table attempts to make this linguistic break-down a bit clearer:

Word	Possible Senses of Meaning
Kakia	The robust state of vice, referring to both the person with a vice by definition (meeting the

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[11] *Kakia* also indicates the state of vice proper though it does not carry precisely the emotive power of *mochthēria*, appearing as it does most frequently in reference to a category and not a person.

	minimum conceptual standards), and also at times the person with a more advanced and morally problematic vice.
Kakos	Non-moral deficiency (bad melodies, bad water, etc.), broad deficiency of character (enkrateia, akrasia, the in-between state),[12] and, occasionally, vice.
Kakon	Evil, typically evil suffered *by* the agent.[13] Because this kind of evil does not by definition make a person bad it will not be a focus in my investigation.
Phaulos	Non-moral deficiency (bad melodies, bad water, etc.), broad deficiency of character (enkrateia, akrasia, the in-between state), and, occasionally, vice.
Ponēros	The in-between state, the akratic (*hēmiponēros*),[14] and the vicious.
Mochthēria	Almost exclusively vice and, even more so, the shameful and harmful vicious person.

In light of the foregoing, I will cautiously suggest that in paying careful attention to the vocabulary we will see Aristotle's various ideas about deficiency unfold.

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[12] I will explain where I believe the in-between state fits in Chapters 2 and 3. For now, I include it without explanation merely to fill out the table.

[13] Evil is a tricky word to employ given that it can mean: 1) anything bad; 2) anything morally wrong; 3) an extreme moral wrongdoing. For this three-fold division of evil, see Formosa (2008: 217). I do not return to the word throughout the thesis and so will not spend time on possible translation alternatives. 'Evil' is given by the translations of Irwin and Crisp, for example (*NE* I.10), and taken to mean ills that befall an agent.

[14] The akratic should not be labelled as *ponēros* without qualification,

5. The Plan of this Study

The study is divided into six chapters, with the real work beginning in Chapter 2, after this Introduction. Although I will leave the main task of articulating my account to the actual chapters themselves, let me offer a very brief survey of the overall route.

Chapter 2 opens with a look at Category One, the condition of a person's soul which can be good or bad (i.e. not good). Aristotle understands any soul which is not virtuous to be deficient. But even though Aristotle takes any person who is not virtuous to be deficient in the broad sense of the term, he does not count every deficient person as deficient in the same way or to the same degree. Category Two helps to bring out the colour in these important differences, and here we meet the idea that there are various deficient characters in Aristotle's ethics: the enkratic, the akratic, the brutish, and the vicious.

At this stage I want to introduce a problem for the purpose of examining these characters and also for building up our understanding of the boundaries of vice. I will posit a type of character who bears a surface resemblance to the vicious agent (i.e. they perform the same actions with the same regularity) but who does not appear to meet the psychological conditions for vice proper outlined by Aristotle. Aristotle says that the vicious person acts according to *prohairesis* (often translated choice), a kind of rational desire arrived at after deliberation. But many people who perform apparently vicious actions do not act in accordance with any rational desires arrived at after deliberation. What sort of character should we attribute to such a person, then, without the requisite psychological elements? We will turn to the enkratic, akratic, and brutish to see whether they are suitable categories in which to place such a person. Since I do not think they are, I propose an alternate category, a character type sitting theoretically between the akratic and the vicious, and I will call it the in-between state.

In suggesting that there is a character type who performs vicious actions but is not vicious since they do not act according to Aristotelian choice (*prohairesis*), I will need to give an account of a technical concept, choice, that makes sense of this pronouncement. I take such a detour in Chapter 2, outlining Aristotelian choice in such a way that, hopefully, we can see why many people who perform apparently vicious actions with regularity, but not according to choice, ought not to be considered properly vicious.

In Chapter 3, with our understanding of *prohairesis* and, by extension, some of the key psychological conditions for vice, strengthened, we can ask whether the person who regularly performs the same actions as the vicious agent but who does not meet the psychological conditions for vice should be considered instead enkratic, akratic, or brutish. I will argue that

none of these categories are suitable for such a person and, in doing so, I will also give a picture of why Aristotle considers each of these character types to be deficient. We are building up a picture of the vicious agent negatively, learning what sort of deficiencies she does not possess.

Since neither the enkratic, akratic, nor the brutish agent suitably depict the character type I describe who performs the same actions as the vicious agent but without the requisite psychology, I propose we establish a character type outside of the more famous enkratic, akratic, and brutish. We can call it the *in-between state*, and I think that Aristotle himself may have been aware of such a category. People with in-between character traits perform the same actions as the vicious person, with regularity but not according to choice (*prohairesis*).

After introducing and defending this in-between state, I ask whether I have been too rash in dismissing vice as a suitable category for our in-between character all along. However, I will suggest that vice demands certain psychological conditions that are not met in by the in-between character and try to show where this is the case. At the end of this chapter, we shall have an understanding of why the enkratic, akratic, in-between, and brutish agents are all deficient. We shall also have an understanding of why they are not properly vicious. Once again, our picture of the vicious agent is therefore built up negatively. It will fall to the subsequent chapters to construct a positive account.

In Chapter 4 I outline how the positive account of vice will be structured. A question has been asked of Aristotle by some commentators as to whether he is interested in giving an account of *the human good* or the *good human*. It is probably the case that this division is anachronistic, and Aristotle intended for both ideas to be answered almost at once. But the categories are useful for the purpose of scrutiny and this will be the lens through which I build an account of the vicious person. Reversing the categories for our attention on vice instead of virtue, Chapter 5 will look at how and why vice makes for a bad human – we shall see what is bad about vice in Aristotle's eyes. And in Chapter 6 we shall see why vice is bad for humans, ending this study with an analysis of the relationship between vice and misery.

In Chapter 5 I offer some reasons as to why the vicious agent is bad as well as explaining what sort of interest Aristotle has in the term 'bad' in respect to vices. Since the vicious agent displays a harmony between their desires and their rationality, it seems at first that the vicious agent bears an odd similarity with the virtuous agent. But a closer look betrays a serious gap. I show in this chapter where the vicious agent fails both in their behaviour and their rationality to be a good example of the human species and also why vice very often presents a danger to those around the vicious agent. However, if we expect that Aristotle takes vice to be bad primarily because vices harm others or manifest some sort of wickedness, we might be

surprised. After all, the person who fails to take proper pleasure in food, sex, or the person who regularly but mildly boasts is strictly vicious but hardly wicked because of that. The vicious agent is bad because she fails to hit the virtuous mean with her feelings and actions and she does this according to choice (*prohairesis*), in line with what she takes to be living and acting well.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we shall analyse the relationship between vice and misery. I begin by looking at consequential and psychological explanations for vicious misery before outlining what I take to be Aristotle's teleological account of vice and misery. According to Aristotle's teleological account, the vicious agent pursues an end or ends that fundamentally cannot attain for them *eudaimonia* given the nature of humans and the nature of vicious ends. At some stage, (1) the thwarted expectations of *chosen* goods turning out to be bad for the agent since they are used and ordered wrongly, (2) the existential crash that comes from the failure of one's eudaimonic wish-choice (*boulēsis-prohairesis*) pairing failing to attain the good aimed for, (3) the propulsion of a wish-choice pairing encouraging the agent to continue in the face of repeated failures, (4) the near-impossibility of curing advanced vice and (5) a degree and species of self-awareness sufficient to regret one's state but not enough to make possible meaningful change, work together to produce an experiential state of deeply negative feelings that I have called *misery*.

Chapter 2

Varieties of Deficiency

1. Introduction

To get to grips with vice in Aristotle, we need to be clear about his broader understanding of what it is to be deficient. The first and most general type of deficiency concerns the condition of a person's soul who is not virtuous. In the previous chapter I placed this type of deficiency in Category One (of three). First, I shall give an account of what it is that Aristotle takes to be a soul in excellent condition before showing what it is to be deficient. Second, we will see that Aristotle does not take all deficient souls to be deficient in the same way or to the same degree. To build out this notion, Aristotle introduces a number of distinctly deficient characters, the enkratic, the akratic, the brutish, and the vicious. Third, by way of beginning to analyse these characters I ask whether Aristotle has left one off the list. Here we consider the agent who performs the same surface actions as the vicious agent but does not do so according to choice (*prohairesis*), a defining psychological element for Aristotelian vice. To argue for this, I take a detour into the concept of choice (*prohairesis*) as given by Aristotle. At the end of this chapter we shall see, I hope, that the character I have introduced who performs the same surface actions as the vicious agent does not do so according to choice (*prohairesis*) and therefore it would be strange to call them vicious on the Aristotelian scheme. Should we instead call them enkratic, akratic, or brutish? That question will be taken up in the next chapter. For now, let us begin with this broader notion of deficiency.

2. Category One: The Condition of the Soul

Here is the bedrock. Upon it we will build a taxonomy of deficient characters all united by the condition of their soul or, more accurately, the condition of soul they fail to attain.

At this foundational level Aristotle's ethical project divides people into two broad categories: excellent and deficient. Octavius Freire Owen described virtue as 'the life of the

soul' and vice as 'the destruction of the soul's health' (1853: 401, fn. 407). On the *spoudaioi/phauloi* divide, Gerald Else writes, 'The dichotomy is, by the nature of the case, absolute and comprehensive. All men who act – i.e. all men engaged in the practical life – are necessarily either [*spoudaioi*] or [*phauloi*]' (1957: 77). In a sense, Aristotle does conceive of humanity in roughly two camps. In his own words, at *Poetics* 1448a he writes, 'Differences in character you see derive from these categories; since it is by virtue [*aretē*] or vice [*kakia*] that people are ethically distinct from one another'. Sinaiko translates this latter clause, 'since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind' (1998: 178). If Sinaiko takes some liberty with the text, it is at least in accord with the spirit of Aristotle, for Lyons also notes in Aristotle's theory of tragedy an 'extremist, dualistic tendency' along the divide of virtue and vice (1999: 128). In what follows I want to try and show that this division was not only for the purpose of narrative simplicity in Aristotle's theory of poetry but also extends to the ethical project and how we are to understand humanity in general.[15] But this carving up of the world was not peculiar to Aristotle. The philosophical realm in which he travelled was quite comfortable with the dichotomy.

Socrates' division between knowledge and ignorance forced a particular species of ethical dualism into the background of Aristotle's intellectual world. Plato's Socrates declared, 'Therefore, in a word, all that the soul undertakes and endures, if directed by wisdom, ends in happiness, but if directed by ignorance, it ends in the opposite' (Plato, 1997b: 88c), and 'with respect to all the things we called good in the beginning, the correct account is not that in themselves they are good by nature, but rather as follows: if ignorance controls them, they are greater evils than their opposites' (Plato, 1997a: 281d).[16] One might ask: is this ignorance merely an absence of knowledge, or does it refer to something more – something *active*? In a telling footnote, Brickhouse and Smith write, 'The mere loss of virtue is not sufficient, of itself, to make someone wretched. Wretchedness requires something further, namely, the *acquisition of vice*' (1994: 119, fn. 130, emphasis added). Socrates himself admits that he lacks knowledge and does not claim to be virtuous, but this does not make him automatically vicious.[17] Irwin advises that the 'aim that [Socrates] *is* capable of achieving is being as virtuous as he can' (1995: 75, fn. 19, emphasis added).[18] While Socrates' own precise moral standing is not

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[15] We can also note that Aristotle's *Poetics* had a distinctive ethical outlook and was not unrelated to his ethical project. For more on this see Carli (2015) and Halliwell (1998, esp. ch. 5-7)

[16] Commentary on Plato's views on vice and evil is scarce. For examples see Hackforth (1946), Gooch (1971), and Prior (2012).

[17] I would like to thank Thomas Brickhouse for pointing this out to me.

[18] For more on Socrates' apparent disavowal of knowledge, see Irwin (1995: 122, fn. 121).

precisely explained, the Socratic moral dualism is somewhat softened by the notion that there is a middle ground between virtue and vice in the strict sense; this is the ground Socrates himself claims to occupy.[19]

Now, one the one hand, it is not unhelpful to turn to those philosophers with whom Aristotle and his audience were familiar, for in the absence of intentional redescription or disagreement we might suppose that an audience well-versed in Socrates, Plato, and their colleagues, would naturally import these philosophical frameworks into Aristotle's own teaching as they sat and listened to him. In the broad and conceptual sense, Aristotle's *kakia* has commonalities with the above positions and he does not spend much time refuting his contemporaries on these particular points. But, on the other hand, Aristotle remakes as many philosophical concepts as he inherits, and we cannot rely solely on the existing philosophical atmosphere to analyse his ethical categories. One must go directly to the text. In the subsequent section I will try to show how Aristotle's depiction of the excellent soul might allow a contrasting portrait of the deficient one. We will also go on to see that Aristotle eschews the more extreme dualism of the Stoics (see fn. 19), nor does he rest content with the Platonic knowledge/ignorance divide, explicitly making room within the larger category of deficiency for a variety of deficient character types and offering subtle psychological portraits as well as philosophical criteria for assessment.

2.1 Vice, Eudaimonia, and Function

Start with virtue.[20] The story is familiar, told many times over many years. But it is both a point of departure and a point of comparison for our project and proves to be useful in this way. How

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[19] The Stoics were not so accommodating. The Stoic view of vice is bleak and unforgiving, revolving as it does around two characters: the sage and the common person. The sage does everything in accordance with correct reason and virtue, while the common person (read: everyone else) does everything badly and in accordance with all the vices (*Stob.* 2.66,14–67). I am using the passages from Stobaeus given in Long and Sedley (1987). The wise person differs from the common person not in degree but in kind entirely (Rist, 1969: 83). The sage cannot improve upon their state of moral perfection and anything falling below this hard line is considered vicious. What we have is basically a very high bar for virtue and a very low bar for vice. A typically upbeat Stoic saying teaches us that someone who drowns two feet below the surface of the ocean is just as drowned as someone who drowns many fathoms down. (Less dramatically, a piece of wood is either straight or it is not.) Even more worrying and less metaphorically, the common person is said to possess all the vices. The Stoic understanding of virtue was unified; a person is either virtuous (the sage) or not (the common person). Their notion of vice was also unified. Seneca (2011) writes, 'For, as we say, all fools are bad and he who has one vice has them all' (5.15.1) and 'If he is a fool he will also be a bad man, and because he is bad he will lack none of the vices (4.26.2).

[20] This will inevitably be a simplification with many details omitted as my aim is not to offer a comprehensive interpretation of Aristotle's entire ethical project but rather to give an overview so to reveal the place and nature of vice.

does virtue come onto the scene? It is proposed as an answer to the question, 'What is the human good?'

From the outset Aristotle works from the assumption that rational action aims at happiness, *eudaimonia* (*NE* I.4).[21] He goes on to unpack that notoriously opaque word, saying that most people understand it to be 'living well and doing well' (*NE* 1095a 17).[22] The vague consensus about living and doing well is where the consensus ends, however, and, looking around, Aristotle notes that lives of pleasure, honour, and money are taken (wrongly, in his opinion) to be constitutive of this good life (*NE* I.4–5). Recognising that people will disagree over the specific form of this 'living and doing well', Aristotle attempts a more explicit definition relying on a formal argument. At *NE* 1097b 22–28 he starts:

> But presumably the remark that the best good is happiness is apparently something [generally] agreed, and we still need a clearer statement of what the best good is. Perhaps, then, we shall find this if we first grasp the function of a human being. For just as the good, i.e., [doing] well, for a flautist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and [characteristic] action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function.

Aristotle begins with function (or 'characteristic activity', Crisp trans.). Humans, so the logic goes, would not be equipped with particular abilities if there were no precise function for them; nature does nothing in vain (*DC* I.4.271a33) . Aristotle takes the human good – as with fish and eyes and knives and everything else, in fact – to be understood in terms of function or characteristic activity (*ergon*), namely, that for which a thing exists. The argument used to reach the conclusion is controversial, and it has not gone unnoticed that the comparison of

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[21] *Eudaimonia* is often translated as 'happiness' (possibly from the medieval Latin, *felicitas*) though Urmson has written that 'everyone agrees this translation is misleading' (1988: 11). He suggests we transliterate and explain. It has been variously rendered as 'flourishing', 'doing well', or 'fulfilment'. Irwin writes that Aristotle would not conceive of a person being in *eudaimōn* for a few minutes and then ceasing to be *eudaimōn*. At times, then, he suggests 'welfare' might do better than 'happiness' since we can take happiness to be a temporary and rapidly changing state (Irwin, 1999a: 1-33; see Irwin, 1999b: 45). For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is not a transient feeling but instead a *whole life* lived well. For a range of views on Aristotle and happiness/*eudaimonia*, see Kenny (1965-1966), Ackrill (1980), Broadie (1991: 3-56), and Price (2011b: 33-84). Nonetheless, and with the preceding qualifications understood, I will often use 'happiness' in discussing the life of the vicious person since it is at least clear enough what is at issue. At the end of Chapter 6 I will ask some questions about what it is to have a happy life.

[22] Irwin reminds us that Aristotle does not only consult common wisdom and also makes use of a theory of natural substances outlined in his other works (Irwin, 1980a: 50-51). He elsewhere notes that Aristotle's ethical theory is mix of argument and common wisdom (Irwin, 1988: 358-360).

humans *simpliciter* with, say, sculptors, is not perfectly neat (see, for example, Barney, 2008; Kraut, 1979a; Lawrence, 2006).[23] The term 'sculptor', after all, refers almost exclusively to a profession where an obvious task/function/purpose is at play, and claiming to speak for something as complex and diverse as humanity in general is quite different. But to modern ears who shudder at the seeming naiveté or arrogance (or both) of the idea of a *human function*, let me make two brief points before moving along. The first is these fighting words from Jonathan Barnes (2000: 122):

> Aristotle associates ['in order to'] primarily with function, and he sees function in nature. He is surely right. Natural objects do contain functional parts and do exhibit functional behaviour; the scientist who is unaware of such functions is ignorant of a major part of his subject-matter.

Second, Aristotle does not rest idly upon a God's-eye-view of the universe from where he might stand and make definitive and objective pronouncements about human nature and its ideal condition.[24] He *argues* for his conclusions just as other ancient writers argued for their own views about what is best for humans given the specific powers they possess and develop. Annas reminds us that 'nature' in respect to human development and potential is not a brute fact but a normative one. She writes (Annas, 1993: 137):

> Thus ancient theories are not open to the objection that they over-simplify or trivialize ethics by treating ethical issues as soluble by a quick examination of 'the facts'. For ancient ethics, the facts in question are neither simple nor attainable by a quick glance; they are facts which take some finding and the discovery of which involves making evaluative distinctions.

Aristotle's function argument is not an appeal to brute biological facts alone but is moreover a normative argument making use of biological facts among others. What, then, is the peculiar human function according to Aristotle's arguments? After ruling out nutrition and growth (also shared with plants) and sense perception (shared with horses and oxen, etc.), Aristotle gives

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[23] Barney writes, 'So read, the passage as a claim to be – among stiff competition – Aristotle's very worst induction ever' (2008: 295-296). But even if one feels that Aristotle's belief is badly supported by his arguments, it is still the case that it is his belief.
[24] In fact, Aristotle did *not* like his theses to sound counter-intuitive (Annas, 1993: 69).

his famous and extremely compressed answer concerning the relationship between function, virtue, and goodness (*NE* 1098a 8–19):

> Now we say that the function of a [kind of thing] – of a harpist, for instance – is the same in kind as the function of an excellent individual of the kind – of an excellent harpist, for instance. And the same is true without qualification in every case, if we add to the function of the superior achievement in accord with the virtue; for the function of a harpist is to play the harp, and the function of a good harpist is to play it well. Moreover, we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be activity and actions of the soul that involve reason; hence the function of the excellent man is to do this well and finely. Now each function is completed well by being completed in accord with the virtue proper [to that kind of thing]. And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one.

There is much to unpack here, but for our purposes it is enough to note two things. The peculiar human function is activity of the soul (*psuchē*) involving reason, and only a good soul performs this function well.

Without providing a detailed metaphysical sketch of the soul ('It does not matter for present purposes', *NE* 1102a30–32), Aristotle relies on a generally accepted view understanding the soul as divided into two parts, rational and a non-rational.[25] Though the terminology does not suggest it, having reason (*to logon echon*) means that *both* parts of the soul function in accord with reason.[26] The non-rational part of the soul is not therefore *irrational* and, when in a good state, is actually very attentive to reason ('in a way it shares in reason', *NE* 1102b13–14, and 'it both listens to reason and obeys it', 1102b32). This is quite different to the non-rational soul of a non-rational animal. The rational part of the soul, as the name suggests, is concerned with deliberation and choice, technical terms soon to be sharpened up. Conflict between each part, though potentially common, will not qualify as excellent (if the

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[25] The soul is taken to be the cause of life in an animal and has no explicitly religious overtone. At *EE* II Aristotle writes that speaking of 'parts' is not entirely necessary, and we must only be able to distinguish the various capacities of the soul. I use the term 'parts' aware of this sensitivity.

[26] Although, at *NE* 1103a1–3 Aristotle says one part has reason fully and the other listens to reason as to a father. And so, 'if we must say that this too *logon echei*', *to logon echon* will be dual'. Thanks to Anthony Price for this note.

conflict results in good action the agent is *enkratic* or continent; if bad action the agent is *akratic* or incontinent).[27] In the excellent soul, there is no conflict, only harmony: the desiderative part of the soul is ever ready and listening for directions from its rational counterpart and provides energy through proper feeling.[28] There is something of the romantic, even the optimist, couched in Aristotle's cool biological imperatives. He is not interested in *mere* function, but in the ideal, the radical fulfilment of humanity's promise. And everything that cannot hit the mark is thrown into sharper relief.

Having touched upon this idea of an excellent soul, we must be clear about Aristotle's double usage of *aretē*. Due to our contemporary familiarity with the virtues, it is likely that we more readily take both 'virtue' and 'virtues' in connection to the *individual virtues*, those states that are an excellence in a particular domain. But we could not replace the word 'virtue' in Aristotle's wider definition of the human good with any of the individual virtues (i.e. human excellence is activity of the soul in accord with *bravery*, etc.) since this hardly seems to be a sufficient description of the best state of the soul.[29] In association with the human good, then, *aretē* must refer to something more all-encompassing than the individual virtues of character or intellect. The singular is intended to capture the condition of the soul that functions excellently (Gill, 2015: 96-97; Lear, 2004: 94; C. C. W. Taylor, 2006: 1, 221).[30] It is the all-encompassing condition required for *eudaimonia* and the ideal functioning of a human (*EE* 1219a1; 1219a25–39).[31] Mariska Leunissen repeatedly underscores the need for a '*unified* psychological state' and 'one single condition of the soul' if the agent is to be properly considered virtuous (2017b: xvii, see also 107, 129, 137-138, and 178). This unified psychological condition is *virtue*, comprising practical and theoretical wisdom and the virtues of character together.[32] Given that the same word 'virtue' is used to refer to this unified excellence more broadly *and* the individual virtue*s*, one must be clear about which sense is intended at various times.

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[27] I use transliterated terms throughout so as to avoid connotations of urinary tract excellence or otherwise.
[28] Since there is harmony in the vicious soul, is it therefore excellent? I will turn to this question in Chapter 5.
[29] That is, we say that the proper function of a human is an excellent soul and not a, say, brave soul.
[30] Thanks to Christopher Taylor for his help on this point. Note here for instance Gill's deliberately eye-catching phrase: 'Virtue is a state of the soul' (2015: 96).
[31] Aristotle deliberately moves between the singular and plural, as Rapp notes, playing off the ambiguity and range of meanings (2006: 102). In that famous sentence at *NE* 1098 Aristotle switches to the nominative plural, *aretai*. Rapp points out that 'in connection with happiness the word is mostly used in the singular' (2006: 101).
[32] The adjective correlating to the state is *spoudaios*, excellent or 'an equivalent to good' (Irwin, 1999a: 328). The person with a soul in the state of *aretē* is *spoudaios*. Other translators have 'serious' or the 'serious man' since the word *spoudazein* can be understood as something to be taken seriously (e.g. Peters, 1967: 62). Broadie and Rowe give both 'serious' and 'excellent' beside *spoudaios* (2002: 455).

We can also place the individual virtues of character into the picture. The actions and feelings of the individual virtues are *manifestations* of the well-functioning soul (see Rapp, 2006: 102), indicators of the overall virtuous state just as a healthy liver can be a sign of overall health. One might also say they are *proof* of the soul's health just as a healthy apple is proof of the healthy tree. The rational part of the soul is excellent when it has virtues of thought (*dianoetikē*, intellectual virtues) such as comprehension and prudence. And the non-rational part of the soul is excellent when it has virtues of character (*ēthikē*, the ethical or moral virtues, for example, generosity and temperance).

2.2 The Deficient Soul

Notwithstanding the lurking dangers of exegesis, especially in areas where we feel the relevant concept is undeveloped, I want to try and reconstruct the doctrine of the *deficient* soul out of the raw materials left to us from the account of the excellent soul, and it seems to me that we are justified in this project.

At *NE* I.7, Aristotle's function argument makes use of the example of a good harpist. The goodness in question here is normative but non-moral, indicating just what it is to be a good harpist by relatively apprehensible musical standards. Following directly on the heels of this example comes the mention of good humans and we have been given no reason to move from a normative to what we might call an exclusively moral judgment; the vocabulary is identical for both good harpists and good humans. General excellence of the soul is a normative ideal based upon Aristotle's view of human nature. This general excellence does of course contain within it (among other things) moral virtues as vitally constituent signs (e.g. generosity, justice, etc.), but it is not in itself a moral concept. Rather, it is a larger category containing within it a variety of moral and non-moral ideals.

I submit that something comparable can be said for general deficiency of the soul. In the opening of Book II, we find *phaulēs*, *kakoi*, and *kakos* in respect to bad political systems, harpists, and builders. The usage here is again non-moral, depicting objectively poor cases of the relevant examples.[33] This limited range of linguistic options, good or bad, comes across a little bit blunt, but Aristotle's concern is primarily in articulating the ideal: the bad builder is

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[33] This non-moral usage continues (though not exclusively, as we shall see) throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* (e.g. 1170a, the skilled musician is pained by bad [*phaulois*] melodies; 1175b, people throw nuts in the theatre when the actors are bad [*phauloi*]; 1181a, the distinction between a well and badly [*kakōs*] made product; 1142a, the fact that heavy water is bad [*phaula*]).

just not the good one; the bad harpist is just not a good one. Later, when we come to vice proper, Aristotle makes room for cases that go beyond mere deficiency and towards something closer to moral badness, but his aim in these opening moves is to argue that humans, like builders, can be good or, and by extension, not good.[34]

While it is the case that the bad human may end up producing morally problematic behaviours, we must be careful not to confuse the potential for bad moral activity in a bad human with *what it is* to be a bad (or deficient) human on the bird's-eye view.[35] At this higher level Aristotle is not making a moral claim: just as there are bad builders, actors, and harpists, there are also bad humans, and at the heart of this failure to achieve the human function is – to varying degrees – a deficient soul. As Aristotle credits the opposing excellence to the state of one's soul (*NE* 1098a 16–20), so, too, is deficiency found here.[36]

General deficiency for Aristotle will later be seen to play out rather differently in different humans and in this way is more psychologically realistic than the views of some contemporaries. However, Aristotle does hold to the notion that anything outside of the virtuous ideal is non-virtuous and this is unquestionably a life that Aristotle will not recommend to his students. 'But happiness,' he writes, 'as we saw, is the best state of all things; consequently, happiness is the activity of a good soul', and he concludes, 'happiness is the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete virtue [*aretēn*]' (*EE* 1129a33–39).

We can place our thoughts about general deficiency so far into an illustration. Possessing quick and nimble fingers (i.e. one individual excellence) does not *ipso facto* make one an excellent concert violinist. One must also have a good musical ear, the gift of interpretation, a musical memory, etc. This is, roughly speaking, general excellence. However, the possession of slow and clumsy fingers (i.e. one individual deficiency) *does* make it *impossible* to be a concert violinist. Return the illustration to Aristotle: whether one possesses deficiencies in a non-moral

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[34] This is quite different to the notion of original sin in Abrahamic religions, or the 'original illness' in later thinkers such as De Maistre (1993: 34) where the 'deficiency' in question is an active, causal fault responsible for the moral and spiritual corruption of the agent. Famously in Nietzsche, too, the very possibility of vice is founded upon a pre-existing depravity: i.e. once a person is destroyed, this state of affairs is *followed* by vice (Nietzsche, 1998: 27, 30-31). Aristotle does not take such a grim view of general deficiency. The bad human and builder and melody is, first and foremost, just not *good*.

[35] With an eye on virtue rather than vice, A. W. H. Adkins writes that in the function argument Aristotle 'has not justified the appearance of any word with the meaning of the English "virtue"' (1984: 32). (We will reach a similar conclusion about vice.) In fact, Adkins admits that the conclusion of the argument contains no moral content (1984: 33). Kraut also writes, 'Not a word is said in the function argument about the particular virtues that occupy so much of Aristotle's attention in the later portions of the *NE*' (1989: 322).

[36] For a similar thought in Plato, see Gavrielides's argument to the effect that any soul not perfectly ruled by the *logistikon* is degenerate (2010).

or morally narrower sense (soon to be discussed), or possesses one or multiple vices, these are deficiencies that make virtue unattainable, just as a single defect is enough to bring down a concert violinist. Though Aristotle does not discuss it in so many words, these defects are manifestations of a deficient soul that fails to reach its *telos*, just as the virtues are manifestations of an excellent one.[37] But careful readers may object here. Do we really say that the *bad* concert violinist is anyone who is not Paganini, analogous to the conclusion that anyone who is not virtuous (the excellent ideal) is vicious? Would it not be more accurate to say that the bad violinist is the one who plays badly rather than simply fails to match Paganini? To reply, Aristotle's use of 'bad' pertains to a negative quality before it is a positive one. The 'bad' violinist is, more truthfully, not the excellent one and is not at this stage a slow or lazy or tone-deaf one. Likewise, we must say that for Aristotle the 'bad' human is first and foremost not excellent before we import any positive qualities on top of this. For the various deficient character states, active bad qualities of varying degrees will be seen soon enough.

If we acknowledge a social prejudice in Aristotle (and I think it is rather difficult to deny),[38] the division between virtue and vice may be thought to come down to an elitist vision of class: the free male Greek aristocrats on one side, and everybody else on the other. But while it is fair to say that Aristotle's social prejudices are quite clear, his character states are not based upon this set of beliefs. Rather, Aristotle grants virtue to the agent in possession of all the virtues of character and intellect. This, and only this unapologetically lofty ideal, is indicative of a truly excellent soul. It is also useful from the outset to restate that deficiency is not a category for which Aristotle reserves particular scorn and is, primarily at least, a category by default: it fails to be excellent. Aristotle is patently more interested in figuring out how to be excellent and what it takes to flourish than he is in humiliating those who miss the mark. It is another question

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[37] To avoid the charge of idealisation of character, I will make clear that I do not take Aristotle's virtuous person to be a *perfect* one. Curzer (2005) argues against this nicely. Aristotle clearly has the category of heroic virtue over and above virtue, and so we might reasonably assume that human virtue is, to put it plainly, *human* (see, for example, *NE* 1173a 20–22; 1132a 2–4; 1134a 16–23). When I talk about the divide between excellence and deficiency, then, the excellent person is one who is disposed to perform actions in the right way, at the right times, etc. Excellence is a disposition, not a promise. Similarly, the enkratic person is *disposed* to do the right thing even against their base appetites. And the akratic is *disposed* to act wrongly even while their conception of the good dictates otherwise.

[38] Wolfsdorf writes that Aristotelian character excellence is, 'more precisely, the excellence of the free male Greek aristocratic citizen' (2017: 31). After making clear that Aristotle's account of perfect practical reason ruled out women, slaves, and many foreigners, Mariska Leunissen writes, 'And it is quite clear from Aristotle's ethical treatises that this kind of upbringing [necessary for virtue] can realistically only be achieved through the laws of an ideal city that is ruled in an almost totalitarian way and that involves a eugenics program' (Leunissen, 2017a: 41). Whether or not the reality is this extreme, it is true that Aristotle's vision for human excellence is utopian and appears to exclude a large majority of people who do not fit his seemingly elitist vision. See also MacIntyre (2016: 86). See W. W. Fortenbaugh for Aristotle's views about women (1977: 139).

as to whether Aristotle is guilty of the sort of 'Utopian engineering' which Popper charged to Plato (Popper, 1947: 138-148).[39] We do know that Aristotle was well aware of the need for a dividing line between what he called heroic virtue belonging to divine beings and the sort of virtue that humanity, with all its quirks and inferiorities, ought to aim for.[40] Furthermore, the virtue in which Aristotle is interested is strongly connected to the sort of rationality that will help us to live good lives and is not primarily occupied with ideas about the destruction and degradation of lesser humans.[41] Recent wars and crimes have made this a more insidious possibility when we talk about an ideal humanity. We ought to keep Aristotle's own intentions in mind, however, as we proceed with the broader category of deficiency in his ethical project.

2.3 An Objection

Careful readers may object again. Recall the language chosen to describe the vicious agent: *kakos*, *phaulos*, *ponēros*, *mochthēros*. I have said that *kakos* and *phaulos*, while retaining a moral lens in many places, are often used non-morally and certainly begin in this way in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But even a quick scan shows that *ponēros* and *mochthēros* do not carry this sense for Aristotle.[42] These two words take on a more significant force (Rackham provides, 'morally bad [*mochthēra*]') and Reeve, 'depraved' (even though Reeve takes it to be 'much the same as vice' (Reeve, 2014: 242)). *Mochthēria* is often used in connection with blame and refers to the agent whose state and behaviour is severe (i.e. *NE* 1129b7, 'The worst person [*mochthēria*], therefore, is the one who extends his vice [*kakistos*] toward himself and his friends as well [as toward others]'). Among other things, *mochthēria* is used to describe the kind of actions that can make a person suicidal upon reflection (*NE* 1166b10–15), the incurably vicious (1165b17–20), excessive vice that causes a friendship to dissolve (1165b35), the kind of *son* from which a parent may withdraw (1163b23–25), and an unpardonable blameworthy condition (1146a1–4). Elsewhere we see *mochthēria* as the extreme end result for the *phauloi*: the friendship of base people (*phauloi*) sharing base pursuits (*phaula*) makes them grow more and more vicious (*mochthēros*) (*NE* 1127a). We might, then, understand *mochthēria* as a failing

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[39] See Ojakangas (2016) for a wide-ranging examination of this.
[40] Whether heroic/divine virtue exists in the *NE* for any other reason than symmetry, providing a formal opposing category to brutishness is at least an open question (Cooper, 2009: 18-19; Eliasson, 2015).
[41] See, however, Leunissen's analysis of the production of ideal male offspring and Aristotle's ideas about deformed children (2017b: 82-90). She is comfortable in calling this a 'eugenic theory' (Leunissen, 2017b: 86).
[42] *Ponēros* is the least frequent of the vice terms. It normally appears in the context of wickedness or morally bad actions, but is also used to describe bad laws (*NE* 1152a). I will focus my analysis of moral badness on *mochthēria* since it is the more frequent and, I believe, more intentionally used.

that is over and above the broadly and non-morally normative. Would we call it a moral failing? I recognise the potential for anachronism in using the unqualified term 'moral' and that Aristotle would not have written with precisely the modern conception of morality in mind.[43] It is by now a truism that the Greeks were not exactly like us in every respect. But in a fit of political correctness one may go too far in the other direction and suppose that the Greeks were completely unlike us in *any* respect. It is only a few thousand years that separate us, and there is no reason think this is an insurmountable gap in the scheme of human history. Simply because we do not find phrases like 'duty to one's fellow man' and 'categorical imperative' it does not mean that the Greeks had no relevant and comparable conception of 'morality' even while we acknowledge the differences between Greek and modern theories of it. In fact Crisp has demonstrated that the notion of 'ought' in Aristotelian and modern ethics is built upon the very same underlying metaphor of constraints or debts (2004b: 86-87).[44] And language aside, psychologists have shown that children today are able to recognise a form of life over and above the merely conventional (Machery, 2012). At times it is quite clear that Aristotle has in mind something stronger than non-moral reproach when he speaks of certain vices and the vicious agent. Mulhern notes that a word like *kakia* has a 'dyslogistic emotive force' comparable to its English counterpart, 'vice' (2008: 251). Related translation choices such as 'wicked' and 'morally bad' are understandable attempts to capture this feeling and in the next chapter I will discuss the word and options for translation a bit more.[45] Slipping into the grammar of 'moral', then, should not be taken for absolute equivalence, but there are indeed strong essential similarities.[46]

Return to the stronger objection: we do not often suppose that a thing's failure to attain its ideal state is *ipso facto* a 'moral' failing. There is a clear difference between a thing not reaching an *ideal* and a thing behaving *wickedly*.[47] Falling short of an ideal and falling into an

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[43] For a discussion of Aristotle and the moral domain, see Wolfsdorf (2017), Irwin (1985), and Annas (1996). Natali writes that 'it does not seem to me completely certain that Aristotle distinguishes a moral sphere beyond a sphere of praise and blame, typical of a shame society' (2009: 113). One can only note that the terms will be imperfectly used and aim to be consistent in their application.

[44] For more on the Greek *dei* see Price (2011b: 240) and Kraut (2006).

[45] Furthermore, 'moral character' is a relatively common phrase for work on *hexis ēthikē* (Audi, 1997: 174, 'moral virtue'; Broadie, 1991: 160ff; Cooper, 1986: 140; Kenny, 2013: xix; Leunissen, 2017b).

[46] 'Virtue of character' or the near-transliteration 'ethical virtues' is probably a better *overall* category label than 'moral virtue', but Aristotle, I believe, does at times want to get at something like the moral in his denunciations over vice. Thus, I will use 'moral' where I think Aristotle is relying on something with that force. Anthony Price said to me that Anscombe and Williams both gave content to this issue by relating the 'moral' to the idea of a moral *law* and, without that, the issue seems foggy. I accept that the issue is somewhat foggy but believe even the foggy notion of 'moral' still captures something recognisable in ordinary language and conversation.

[47] I will refrain from using the terminology of natural law in regards to Aristotle's theory. For a discussion on the compatibility or otherwise of Aristotle and natural law see Corbett (2009) and Burns (2011).

opposite state are not identical trajectories. We expect that moral badness is not only a passive failure to be perfect but an active quality. Is the person with a broadly deficient soul therefore wicked (*mochthēria*)?[48]

To answer this question, we must take Aristotle very seriously at his word when he says that 'there are many ways to be in error (*hamartanein*) (*NE* 1106b 30)'. And a few lines later we read, 'And so for this reason also excess and deficiency are proper to vice (*kakias*), the mean to virtue; "for we are noble in only one way, but bad (*kakos*) in all sorts of ways"' (1106b 34–35). The conceptual category of deficiency contains many variations on the theme of error, and the enkratic, akratic, brutish, the in-between state (soon to be defined), and the strictly vicious are painted with this broad brush. In what follows, Aristotle's devotion to common sense mollifies his apparently austere biological groupings as we turn to the second layer of deficiency, meeting character types with 'bad' souls of varying orders and severities.

3. Category Two: The Assembly of Deficient Characters

The deficient side of the split is established first and foremost by default, in light of Aristotle's heavily defined and much more significant virtuous ideal. The deficient soul at this broad level is not given a thorough treatment in the text because it is not really a something; it is rather a *lack*, defined by what it is not more so than what it is. But the dichotomy is not a caricature. Aristotle is realistic enough to see that this larger category of deficiency admits of distinctions and does not rank every character in this broad category as a moral – or immoral – equal. There are, after all, and significantly, many ways to go wrong.

The broader category of the deficient soul contains within it every state of character that is not virtuous since anything less than the excellent soul is a deficient one, so understood. These various characters called enkratic, akratic, brutish, truly vicious, and the soon-to-be-examined in-betweeners are all found huddled under the banner of deficiency in the broad sense.

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[48] As I understand it, a position was held by Aquinas whereby failures in human nature were in fact moral failings closer to what we understand by the term. For Aquinas, 'the nature of a thing is chiefly the form from which that thing derives its species. Now man derives his species from his rational soul' (Aquinas, 2007, 1-2, q71, a2). Following this thread, for Aquinas whatever is contrary to the nature of man is immoral (or evil). In Jean Porter's memorable phrase, for Aquinas 'the moral "ought" cannot be separated from the anthropological "is"' (1990: 44). See Haldane (2011) for a fascinating examination of the unbounded moral domain in Aquinas.

In analysing the various deficient characters, I have two tasks to achieve, attacking both problems in the one argument. I first hope to make clear the specific deficiencies of the various individual character types that are not virtuous. Second, I also want to solve a puzzle about whether another character type should be added to the more established taxonomy (and perhaps Aristotle himself already makes room for such a person): the aforementioned *in-between state*. These two goals are closely linked and will in the end also help us establish the boundaries of the properly vicious person.

Let me begin by stating the puzzle for the purpose of mapping out the journey:

(a) Aristotle outlines strict theoretical and psychological conditions for vice

(b) There are people in the world who act reliably badly and appear vicious but who do not seem to meet these psychological conditions for Aristotelian vice.

(c) If these reliably bad agents are not to be considered vicious, what character state should we attribute to them?

Regarding this puzzle, it will be my aim in what follows to (a) state some initial theoretical and psychological conditions for Aristotelian vice, (b) argue that many people who act reliably badly do not appear to meet these conditions, (c) ask whether we might attribute to one of these agents a deficient character state other than vice (here positing the potential of a deficient character state not included in the familiar and recurring taxonomy).

We begin with an example showing a person who exhibits the same surface behaviours as the vicious agent but who does not meet the psychological criteria. Consider two people with the trait of boastfulness. One we will call the *regular* boaster and the other, the *resolved* boaster.

Importantly (in my example, at least), neither the regular boaster nor the resolved boaster values their behaviour under the heading of 'boasting'.[49] We must allow that the bad person may very often think they are doing the *right* thing. Suppose someone believes immigrants do not deserve equal opportunity in the workplace. They will probably not call this racism but

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[49] In this way they are not like Milton's Satan. Although it is at least debatable whether or not Milton's Satan has either 'good' or 'evil' as the explicit content of his attitude and perhaps force of the attitude of striving for something, or the formal end of any kind of striving is always – especially on an Aristotelian view – taken to be a 'good' (see Tenenbaum, 2013).

rather patriotism or honesty or something similar. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in *Between the World and Me*, presents this Arendtian view (2015: 97-98):

> There are no racists in America, or at least none that the people who need to be white know personally. In the era of mass lynching, it was so difficult to find who, specifically, served as executioner that such deaths were often reported by the press as having happened 'at the hands of persons unknown.' In 1957, the white residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania, argued for their right to keep their town segregated. 'As moral, religious, and law-abiding citizens,' the group wrote, 'we feel that we are unprejudiced and undiscriminating in our wish to keep our community a closed community.' This was the attempt to commit a shameful act while escaping all sanction, and I raise it to show you that there was no golden era when evildoers did their business and loudly proclaimed it as such.

While the sort of person Coates has in his sights may value their behaviour, they do not value it under the heading of vice or racism more specifically. More than simply not knowing what is wrong, then, it is also possible that such persons (falsely) believe their actions to be *right* or at least justifiable. Where *virtuous* people might often understand their actions as the *right* thing to do, it does not seem that bad people should necessarily understand their actions as the *wrong* thing to do.[50] Furthermore, if negative character attribution was wholly dependent on the agent's own consent to the label, the terms would probably cease to exist.

Caveat acknowledged, let us continue to examine the *regular* and *resolved* boasters. We can view them through the lens of a conversation.

> Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know. Why are you doing this?

> Regular Boaster A: Really? I had no idea. I don't think I was.

Or:

> Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know. Why are you doing this?

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[50] It is of course possible that some people intentionally aim at the bad (evil for evil's sake). But this is not Aristotle's primary focus. His ethics mainly concern people who are trying to live well. The vicious person is simply wrong about this.

Regular Boaster B: Oh, right. I felt a bit inadequate in that room of doctors. I just tried to tell a few stories to fit in.

Even though Regular Boaster B gives a reason where Regular Boaster A does not, I will try to show that it is not the right kind of reason to be counted as vice for Aristotle.[51] Now watch the resolved boaster at work:

Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know.

Resolved Boaster: No, no. It's called confidence, Plato.[52] People loved the stories, I watched them smiling. You should try it.

Plato: Why are you behaving like that?

Resolved Boaster: It's important to have a healthy self-esteem. If you can't command attention like that, you'll never make a good impression and you'll never get ahead. I'm going to get the fellowship.

Plato: You want the fellowship?

Resolved Boaster: Well, it provides job security and respect – everything I'm looking for in life.

What is the difference between the regular and the resolved boaster? I will argue in what follows that only the *resolved* boaster meets the psychological conditions that Aristotle sets out for vice. While the regular boaster performs the same actions as the resolved boaster, and while contemporary moral theory may be comfortable in attributing the trait (or vice) of boastfulness

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[51] Crucially, the reason itself (or the statement of said reason) is not what constitutes vice, but the underlying psychology which the reason represents.

[52] Note that the resolved boaster, even though he labels his behaviour (behaviour *x*) as confidence and not boasting, still thinks that the behaviour (behaviour *x*) is the thing to do. Again, this does not mean that boasting or acting unjustly can never be the intentional object of the vicious agent. But often the labels used will be for something more palatable and justifiable in the eyes of the vicious agent who believes they are correct to act in such a way.

to the regular boaster, I want to try and show that Aristotle would not consider their behaviour as vicious. The robust Aristotelian theory of vice demands something more.

Why should we not consider the regular boaster vicious on the Aristotelian reading? The primary reason is that such a person, while performing boastful actions, does not do so according to choice (*prohairesis*). This claim demands defence and unpacking. It is the task to which I turn as we continue to explore the puzzle introduced. I will first explore the psychological conditions required for vice proper before returning to the puzzle and restating the problem with a clearer understanding of the issues.

3.1 Vicious Psychology: The Puzzle Introduced

The puzzle begins with conditions that must be met in vice proper and the thought that a vice is a *hexis prohairetikē*, a state according to choice.

Aristotle writes that 'our *choices* [*proaireisthai*] to do good and bad actions, not our beliefs, form the characters we have' (*NE* 1112a2–3, emphasis added). He writes later on, 'Now a virtue of character is a state that chooses; and choice is a deliberative desire […] That is why choice requires understanding and thought, and also a state of character; for acting well or badly requires both thought and character' (*NE* 1139a21–35). The idea that a vice is also a *hexis prohairetikē* is likely implied by the description of virtue in these terms at NE II.5 since vice appears right alongside virtue in that paragraph as an implied opposite. But for those who are sceptical of this analogy and this leap given that the word 'vice' does not itself appear in the specific sentence where virtue is called a *hexis prohairetikē* (only in the same wider paragraph), we can supplement that reference with others showing more conclusively the relationship between vice and *prohairesis*.

Aristotle's first mention of the most exclusive term for vice proper, *mochthēros*, occurs slightly after the doctrine of the mean, in Book III at *NE* 1110b28 where he declares that though the vicious (*mochthēros*) agent is clearly ignorant about what is beneficial, this does not make their action involuntary.[53] It is notable that *mochthēros* and *mochthērias* should make their

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[53] In Book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explains that an involuntary act is brought about either through external force or through ignorance of some relevant fact about the situation. However, 'voluntary action seems to be what has its principle in the agent himself, knowing the particulars that constitute the action' (*NE* 1111a 23). Freedom, as Irwin notes, is defined negatively: 'I am responsible for an action if and only if I do it neither by force nor because of ignorance' (1980b: 117). The account is attractive in its simplicity, unburdened as it is by nagging questions about genuine freedom and metaphysical quandaries.

    The nature of the voluntary and involuntary is important to the study of character since these are conditions for praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. Aristotle writes (*NE* 1109b 30–35): 'Virtue, then, is about feelings and actions. These receive praise or blame if they are voluntary (*hekousion*), but pardon, sometimes pity,

debut at this point for the first appearance of *mochthēria* comes in the same breath as *prohairesis*. And it is the first time Aristotle has mentioned explicitly (that is, not as the implicit mirror-image of virtue, i.e. *NE* II.5) that vice requires choice (*prohairesis*): since the bad actions and feelings of the vicious are in line with their choice (*prohairesis*) there is cause for blame (*psegontai*). Consider also *NE* 1135b20–25 where the link between vice and choice is unequivocal:[54]

> If he does [harm] in knowledge, but without previous deliberation, it is an act of injustice; this is true, for instance, of actions caused by spirit and other feelings that are natural or necessary for human beings. For when someone inflicts these harms and commits these errors, he does injustice and these are acts of injustice; but he is not thereby unjust or wicked [*ponēroi*], since it is not vice [*mochthērian*] that causes him to inflict the harm. But whenever [*prohairesis*] is the cause, he is unjust and vicious [*mochthēros*].

And to underscore the point:

> *NE* 1150b29–30: The intemperate person, as we said, is not prone to regret, since he abides by his [choice] when he acts.

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if they are involuntary (*akousion*). Hence, presumably, in examining virtue we must define the voluntary and the involuntary.' Virtue, we might suppose, is praiseworthy and vice blameworthy. Aristotle does understand virtue and vice to be voluntarily acquired (*NE* 1114b 20; 1113b 7). The states are 'simply enduring dispositions which are produced by performing actions of the voluntary kind' (Furley, 1977: 49). (Confirming this notion of vice being in our power, there is a remarkable passage at *NE* 1113b, 7–16 that uses all the vice terminology in one place. It is tempting to think that the words appear in ascending order of severity, concluding with *mochthēria*, but it is unlikely Aristotle intended anything quite so neat: 'Hence virtue is also up to us, and so also, in the same way, is vice [*kakia*] […] But if doing, and likewise not doing, fine or shameful [*aischra*] actions is up to us, and if, as we saw, [doing or not doing them] is [what it is] to be a good or bad person [*kakois*], being decent or base [*phaulos*] is up to us. The claim that "no one is willingly bad [*ponēros*] or unwillingly blessed" would seem to be partly true but partly false. For while certainly no one is unwillingly blessed, vice [*mochthēria*] is voluntary'.)

But in discussing the nature of what is voluntary, Aristotle's primary concern is not to show that virtue and vice are acquired voluntarily (even though this is the case). Susan Sauvé Meyer writes, 'Aristotle's account of the praiseworthiness of virtue makes it quite clear that virtue is praiseworthy because of its causal powers. He does not claim that virtue is praiseworthy because of its causal antecedents' (2011a: 45). And the same can be said for vice by extension. The blameworthiness of vice will be in those voluntary actions produced by the state. (See, for example, *EE* 1219b 8–9, *NE* 1101b 14–16, and *NE* 1101b 31–32 on the relationship between the praiseworthiness of *virtue* and its products.)

[54] At *NE* see also 1150b29–30. In the *MM* see 1203a27–29. At *Rhet.* 1355b we read that sophistry is not a matter of ability, but of deliberate choice. And at *Rhet.* 2.5 Aristotle writes, 'for the unjust person is unjust by deliberate choice'.

Rhet. 1355b: [F]or sophistry is not a matter of ability but of deliberate choice [of specious arguments].

Rhet. 1382a: [F]or the unjust person is unjust by deliberate choice.

MM 1203a27–29: In the intemperate, then, there is a bad principle. For inasmuch as he does bad acts and reason assents to these, and it seems to him that he ought to do these things, there is in him a principle which is not a sound one. Wherefore the incontinent would seem to be better than the intemperate.[55]

If in light of the foregoing passages we are content to label vice a *hexis prohairetikē*, a state issuing in choices that promote one's end or ends, for those who are familiar with Aristotle's ethics it will not be surprising to hear that a person acting in an apparently virtuous way is not necessarily virtuous. Certain psychological conditions allow us to peek behind the surface of actions, to distinguish sham-generosity from its genuine counterpart, for instance. 'Between the act and [the agent], a chasm opens' (Kundera, 1988: 24). One demands something *behind* the action in order to suitably grasp the character. But, a question. It makes good sense to have checks and balances in place for virtue. If the virtuous person is to be reasonably considered as an ethical standard in and of themselves, it seems fair that we ensure their conception of the sort of life worth pursuing is both correct and plays a role in guiding their practice (see Frede, 2015: 24-25, 29). But what sort of normative constraints should we put in place for *vice*? Do we really need people to jump through psychological hoops in order to 'earn' their vices? Aristotle himself understands that both decent and base people can and do perform bad actions (*NE* 1132a2–5; 1137a22–23). Many would be content to call a man cruel for intentionally kicking a child in the face while laughing and would not need to wait around for the permission provided by extra psychological facts. Further, if the virtuous ideal is seen in one's ability to put into practice the correct conception of the good life, would not the vicious ideal be diametrically opposed to this state of affairs, namely, seen in a failure to engage with a conception of the good life at all, and not – as is the case we have before us – a position whereby the vicious agent displays an impressive commitment to practically realising their mistaken

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[55] I use Stock's (1915) translation. It is well outside my expertise to judge whether or not the *Magna Moralia* is a genuine work of Aristotle's. I use it here for emphasis and where it harmonises with the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Cooper on these issues (1973).

conception of the good life? So, once again, what does choice add in the case of the vicious? Or, to put it another way: why is Aristotelian vice constrained by choice?

The answer to this question turns almost entirely upon what is meant by 'choice'. Since *prohairesis* is one of the defining ingredients in Aristotelian vice, the primary element distinguishing the vicious from those who merely *appear* vicious, and an intricate concept in its own right, we need to get a grip on this slippery term in order to figure out its role in respect to vicious character. This sidestep into *prohairesis* will help us return to the given puzzle a little more clear-eyed and, I hope, better prepared to answer it.

4. Choice

Where wish is of the end, choice is that which promotes the end (*NE* 1113a14). A closer look reveals some complexities.

Choice (*prohairesis*) is a technical term for Aristotle, partly of his own making since the term is used as a noun only once by Plato (*Parmenides* 143c) and it does not here bear the load there that it is forced to carry in Aristotle's project.[56] It cannot mean simply 'choice' in a looser and conversational sense for Aristotle has *hairesis* for this. With *prohairesis*, the Greek almost explains itself, '[what is decided, *prohaireton*] is chosen [*haireton*] before [*pro*] other things' (*NE* 1112a16–17). A passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1226b6–15) serves to reinforce:

> The very name makes it plain. For choice is not simply selection, but selection of one thing before another [*heterou pro heterou*] […] About the end no one deliberates (this being fixed for all), but about that which tends to it – *whether this or that tends to it* […] No one chooses without preparation and deliberation about *what is better and worse*.[57]

Choice is of the means to a given goal and, where there are alternatives, of the best means.[58] Kenny writes that *prohairesis* 'is in every case a choosing of A for the sake of B, A being what

[57] The translation is from Price (2016: 437).
[58] Price is impeccably careful not to collapse the very fine line between a choice to φ and a judgment that φ-ing is the thing to do. These, he counsels, are different in their 'logical grammar' even while they 'always accompany each other' (*NE* 1112a3–5) (2011b: 121). It is why, I believe, Broadie goes ahead and calls *prohairesis* an 'all-things-considered judgment of what to do', or 'something practical to which one is committed' (2002: 42).

is chosen (τί) and B being that for the sake of which the choice is made (τίνος ἕνεκα)' (1979: 72-73) (*EE* 1226b6–15).[59] The point of mentioning these things is to underscore the particular kind of intention with which *prohairesis* operates. Meyer explains, 'Aristotle is telling us something about the efficient-causal motivation characteristic of virtue [and vice]: the virtuous [or vicious] agent is moved to act by a desire that is informed by his understanding that this action realizes or promotes a particular goal' (2016: 48). A *prohairesis* is to choose A for the sake of B or, if a range of options present, to choose A (the best means) instead of C, D, E, etc. for the sake of B at the end of deliberation. Already we catch a glimpse of a more restrictive notion of 'choice' at play, and see we are not concerned with those things that are chosen in the sense that an agent just acts intentionally (e.g. Davidson, 1980, see essays 1, 3, and 5), nor are we *merely* discussing voluntary actions since animals and children can act voluntarily but do not 'choose' on this technical conception (*NE* 1111b 5–10; what is chosen is voluntary, though what is voluntary is not necessarily chosen).[60] It is further ruled out that Aristotle would consider those things chosen *suddenly* as properly chosen given that sudden actions do not generally take the reasoned form of A instead of C, D, E, etc. for the sake of B,[61] and we explicitly read that voluntary actions done on the spur of the moment are not chosen (*NE* 1111b9–10), 'actions done from spirit are least of all thought to be in accordance with rational choice' (*NE* 1111b18–19, Crisp trans.), and nobody chooses suddenly (*EE* 1226b3–4).[62] The boundaries of *prohairesis* are crystallising.

We have said that choice is choosing A instead of C, D, E, etc. and for the sake of B. Two questions arise for immediate engagement. First, how does one come to pick A over, say, C? And second, what is the nature of B?

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[59] But Bobzien rejects the idea that choice is between alternatives: 'It is since *prohairesis* requires reason, that *prohairesis* is of what is preferable to other things' (Bobzien, 2014: 94, fn. 38). Even still, this seems to suggest the preference of reason and thus the existence of alternatives.

[60] Aspasius reminds us, 'That is why [Aristotle] says: "for choice is with reason and with intellect" (1112a15–16), and not a result of bare desire; but the voluntary sometimes arises by *mere* desire' (71.3–5). I am using Konstan's (2006) translation.

[61] At *MA* 700b17–18 we find, 'Now we see that the movers of the animal are reasoning and *phantasia* and choice and wish and appetite', listing choice among a range of options for movers. It is clearer again at 701a4–5, 'For the animal moves and progresses in virtue of desire *or* choice' (trans. Nussbaum), again giving choice as one option and not the mover in every case.

[62] Aristotle's talks of the 'stir and impulse of spirit' (*NE* 1116b31, Crisp trans.); this is not the kind of impulse with which choice is made.

4.1 Choice and Deliberation

First, choice is reached or decided upon at the end of a process of deliberation (*bouleusis*), and is often – perhaps always, though we shall see in a moment – a plan of action intended to realise an agent's wish (*boulēsis*) (*NE* III.4). We can augment the above definition of choice to now reflect this: choice is choosing A for the sake of B, or A for the sake of B instead of C, D, E, etc. and for the sake of B *after deliberation*. In light of an agent's wish (their desire for an end), and after deliberation (*bouleusis*), choice (*prohairesis*) is about what best promotes the given end.[63]

But we want to know now whether Aristotle sees deliberation as an explicit process. That is, does the agent actively deliberate before each and every choice? If so, an agent is going to be spending a lot of time each day deliberating in order to produce a choice and so to promote their wish.

There are three ways to read Aristotle's thoughts about deliberation:

(1) Aristotle would allow that a person's reasons, when made explicit, 'constitute a deliberative argument […] *as if* one had actually deliberated' (Cooper, 1986: 10).

(2) Aristotle just does require explicit deliberation to produce a choice, however impractical and theoretically unfortunate this may be.

(3) Instead of requiring deliberation for each and every prohairetic action, the agent could deliberate at an earlier time, make a prohairetic commitment to actions of a certain kind and behave accordingly to promote the relevant wish without (necessarily) deliberating again.

Here is John Cooper making his case for (1):

[I]f a person does have reasons for acting, they will, when produced, constitute a deliberative argument in favor of the decision actually made; hence one can regard

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[63] At *DA* III.10–11, Aristotle gives only the term *boulēsis* to cover the broader category of rational desire and *prohairesis* is not given a position (Moss, 2009: 144, fn. 150). Nevertheless, in the ethical works *prohairesis* is taken to be a – if not *the* – defining ingredient in character, and I follow this finer distinction in my account of both virtue and vice.

that argument as lying behind and supporting the decision even though it was not actually gone through in advance. In this hypothetical guise, then, deliberation might be said to lie behind every moral decision, even those not actually reached by explicit calculation. (Cooper, 1986: 9)

It is tempting to attribute to Aristotle Cooper's philosophically credible (1), allowing for metaphorical deliberation, giving reasons *as if* one had deliberated, and for these reasons to count as requisite deliberation. Unfortunately, though, Aristotle does not see things this way, palatable as it may be for a practical moral theory. Throughout *NE* III.3 deliberation appears as a verb, not a noun or label that simply springs into action, applied when the relevant reasons are given; deliberation is something that one *does*. We learn from Aristotle that deliberation is placed alongside examination (*skepsis*) as those things necessary for producing choice (*EE* 1226b8), that the deliberator must 'inquire and analyse' (*NE* 1112b20), deliberation is a type of inquiry (*NE* 1142a31–32), the deliberator 'rationally calculates' (*NE* 1142b2), and that one deliberates 'a long time' (*NE* 1142b4–5). Even where deliberation takes place quickly, the agent takes the correct steps and makes the correct inferences (*NE* 1142b23–27). The picture given is deliberation 'temporally extended', to borrow Pearson's phrase (2016: 198), and not as a symbolic label given to moral decisions backed by reasons.

If (1) is not feasible we ought to try (2). From what I can see, Aristotle makes no apologies for demanding temporally extended deliberation and whether one wishes to make further use of this unfashionable aspect of the theory or not, it is nevertheless Aristotle's position on the matter. But can we soften the demandingness of requiring deliberation before *every* choice and chosen action while remaining sensitive to the realities of the text?

Let us try (3). (3) is built upon (2), accepting its insistence on temporally extended deliberation but asking what this means more exactly, where it takes place and how. Instead of requiring deliberation for and before each and every prohairetic action, perhaps the agent could deliberate at an earlier time, making a prohairetic commitment to an act or actions of a certain kind, and behaving accordingly to promote the relevant wish without (necessarily) deliberating again.[64] To put it another way, the deliberations made for the attainment of an end will not necessarily take place *at the time of* each of the many individual actions that make up such a commitment, just as the man who chooses to renovate his house at the end of deliberations will

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[64] At *Phys.* 199b26–27 Aristotle says it is ridiculous for someone to deny purpose to an action simply because they cannot see planning. Once a skill is acquired, one does not need to plan for it each time. Something similar may be said with deliberation here.

not need to deliberate about each brushstroke and hammer hit he undertakes in the attainment of that reasoned end. But Cooper objects to this way of thinking, and his objection is worth quoting in detail:

> [I]t still seems too much to claim that all actions done by virtuous persons for moral reasons are done after deliberation. For even with this clarification, Aristotle would have to maintain that the calculations *were* actually performed at some time: that, for example, the courageous man at some time actually works out policies for various types of situation where there is a threat of danger, and adopts these policies quite explicitly, as the outcome of a process of deliberation. And not only does this seem a false general account of the virtuous man's adoption of the policies in which his virtue expresses itself, but Aristotle's own theory of moral development seems to suggest a quite different, and indeed more plausible view. Aristotle holds that we become just (etc.) by being repeatedly made to act justly. (Cooper, 1986: 8)

Cooper's main concern has some bite. Saying that the deliberation does not take place prior to each action but at an earlier time still means that deliberation apparently always actually takes place, and this may strike some people as unrealistic. To begin answering this criticism it should be admitted that, yes, it is probably unrealistic to think that for any choice made there will have been temporally extended deliberation at some time, *but* it is not *as* unrealistic as saying that *every* prohairetic action will be (roughly) immediately preceded by a stretch of real-time deliberation. We have, at least, avoided the most impractical conclusion of the two. But there is another point to be made, further rescuing (3) from the greater inconvenience of (2).

Since character determines how an agent feels and acts, some actions will be established by character and will not require *any* deliberation. Aristotle makes it clear that we only deliberate when the 'outcome is unclear and the right way to act is undefined' (*NE* 1112b10). To suggest that *every* action *ever* will require a preceding stretch of deliberation – and to reject explicit, temporal deliberation on those grounds – is to ignore Aristotle's remarks on the matter. He expects that some situations will provide no uncertainty; character will proceed undaunted. The courageous man of Cooper's example need not have deliberated about *every* courageous act, but only those actions requiring deliberation. Of course, this still suggests that all *prohairetic* action will be connected in some way to deliberation and one may feel that this requirement remains overly stringent. But I do not think it is outrageous to suppose that a choice or a set of choices designed to promote a given wish for *eudaimonia* – living and doing well –

will have been produced by deliberation at an earlier time, especially if we allow deliberation to produce a range of interconnected behaviours and do not limit the arithmetic to *one* prohairetic action per stretch of deliberation. Let me try to give an example.

Jack is on the airplane about to drop into Afghanistan. He possesses the vice of cowardice, among other traits, and this vice sets his view of what is worthwhile. The thing to do, Jack thinks, is to be safe at all costs, and perhaps he uses the word '*careful* at all costs' so as to make himself feel better about it. On the plane Jack deliberates about the best way of achieving his wish since he does not want to go into the situation thoughtlessly, nor fail to achieve the goal – a failure which could in this case result in serious harm. After deliberation he forms the following choices: do not be first on or last off the field; do not take risks; do not volunteer unless asked; protect yourself first, then protect others if it is not too much trouble. Combined with his vice (a pattern of thinking, acting, and feeling), this stretch of deliberation sets Jack up for the next few months of duty. He will not need to deliberate before every one of these choices, as if he would steal away for a few moments on the battlefield to work through his options, since the work has already been done for this particular end. Nothing prohibits further deliberation, of course, but neither is it necessary before acting. The distance between deliberation and choice has been given some space. And we can widen that distance again by making a similar point about choice (*prohairesis*).

A vicious *prohairesis* should not be thought of too discretely, as if it only referred to single, one-time actions, each one needing a stretch of deliberation before going ahead. Chamberlain, for this very reason, offers 'commitment' as a translation of *prohairesis* instead of the more localised 'choice'.[65] The translation rescues *prohairesis* from being only and ever a mental state connected to direct single actions, even while it certainly can be that.[66] But choices for actions here and now promoting a wish can be for *patterns* of action and actions in *stages*. The choice to here and now quit smoking might be made up of a number of stages and take some time. Jack, our cowardly soldier in the example above, forms a choice to protect himself first before others. He is not concerned with only one single action even while it is a choice to here and now act in that way. The choice is of a set of actions playing out over a

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[65] Cooper gives it as 'a commitment to act, backed by desire, produced by deliberation' (1986: 47, fn. 59). Price suggested to me that commitment, however, is an unsuitable translation in general since it entails nothing about deliberation, or uncertainty, or better and worse.
[66] The idea of a commitment also helps us to understand vices like rashness that *seem* to produce behaviours on the spur of the moment and without careful consideration. But if the agent has committed to a certain end at an earlier time, the vices that best attain this end need not be actively thought through in the moment of action. The impracticability of this goes without saying. The same can be said for other hot vices such as intemperance, just as it can for more calculated vices like miserliness; each can be committed to and carefully considered at an earlier time. Behaviour in the moment will eventually become habituated.

number of weeks or months, the result of a deliberation made on an airplane many weeks prior. Seen in this way the bond between deliberation and action is widened again since, not only can deliberation take place at an earlier time, but choice can also be for actions as part of a bigger and more complex commitment than one-time actions alone. Taken altogether, (3)'s demand for temporally extended prior deliberation *where it is needed* may not be the smoothest piece of Aristotle's moral theory, but it is not ridiculous.

4.2 Choice and Wish

Our second larger question: what is the nature, or the end, of B? Choice is that which promotes a wish. 'Wish, we have said, is for the end' (*NE* 1113a15). What sort of end does Aristotle have in mind?

There is an interpretation given by some commentators whereby a wish is a rational desire for *eudaimonia* and the two are tied together necessarily. On this reading, each and every wish just is a wish for *eudaimonia*:

> What is [*boulēton*, wished for] is ranked and valued as part of the agent's overall life plan. (Nussbaum, 1985: 336)

> Aristotle suggests that the primary object of wish is happiness (*EN* 1111b26–30). (Irwin, 2007: 173)[67]

> [T]he goal of any rational desire is happiness. (Meyer, 2011a: 25)

> Following Plato, Aristotle takes rational desires to be desires directed at the good *(to agathon).* He makes this claim about both wish and decision [*prohairesis*]. The good in question is happiness *(eudaimonia)*, the greatest good for a human being. (Meyer, 2011a: 24-25)[68]

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[67] At footnote 47 on this page, Irwin writes, '[Aristotle] does not say this is the only possible ultimate object of wish, but he does not suggest anything else.' But in fact in the passage he quotes Aristotle lists health and happiness as two possible objects of wish, as we shall discuss momentarily. See also Meyer's point in the below footnote.

[68] Meyer elsewhere writes that one might wish for health or an end to world hunger (2008: 69).

[W]ish is a desire for the good as the ultimate end of life, or for happiness and […]
a person must form an action-guiding conception of the good in order to achieve it.
(Grönroos, 2015a: 158)

Now our question about this was: what does Aristotle suppose 'will' [*boulēsis*] to
be? Why, we asked, shouldn't we say that the uncontrolled man has a 'will' for the
pleasure he hopes to obtain from seducing his neighbour's wife? The answer we
get suggested by the passage in Book IV is: the uncontrolled man is not prepared
to say: 'This is the my idea of good work [*eupraxia*], this is the kind of life I want.'
(Anscombe, 1981: 70)

I cannot find it written anywhere by Aristotle that a wish is by definition for *eudaimonia*. In
potential *conflict* with the commentators above, however, is *NE* 1111b27-29 where Aristotle
gives health *and* happiness as examples of objects of wish, ostensibly understanding them to
be distinct (at *EE* 1226a8-11 he gives a similar phrase).[69] Price has pointed out that these need
not be equivalent objects of wish (2016: 442, fn. 14), but still this does not rule out the
possibility that each is a valid example of a wish nonetheless.[70] And if health is allowed, why
not honour, pleasure, and wealth, etc? Following this line of thought, the floodgates open and
a wish can be for a much wider variety of objects. Is there a limiting condition on what properly
counts as an object of wish (*boulēton*)? Or can wish be equally for happiness or health or a
glass of whisky or a manicure? We are (1) at risk of having no lower-level limit on an object
of wish and (2) apparently do not possess a unifying feature common to all wishes that might
help to define the concept. Giles Pearson offers a non-*eudaimonia*-based account of the
connection between *boulēsis* and the good, but falters at exactly this point, wondering what the
ends of various *boulēseis* have in common and so to differentiate *boulēsis* from other species
of desire, *epithumia* and *thumos*. To put it another way, if the object of wish is now for a wider
variety of objects and not only *eudaimonia*, what now marks out the distinct ends of *boulēsis*,
enough so to make *boulēsis* a discrete concept? Eugene Garver is blunt about this: 'Wish, as I
said before, is defined by its object, and its objects have *literally nothing in common*, not even
bare possibility, and hence the unity of wish as a faculty is what Aristotle calls the unity of a
heap' (1984: 491, emphasis added).

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[69] See Pearson's discussion of this (2016: 156-157; 162).
[70] Aristotle certainly sees happiness as superior to health (*Top.* 116b30–36).

But Pearson attempts a unifying solution, without offering textual support, suggesting that 'the ends of *boulēsis* are grouped together in so far as they are objects of serious concern, and are so in a way that marks them out as distinctively human concerns' (2016: 164). To tighten up this thought, Pearson says that 'serious concern' captures Aristotle's focus on 'substantial goals', and the 'distinctively human' element is designed to rule out all non-rational creatures and non-rational desires (2016: 164-165). The idea of 'substantial goals', however, requires its own defence or at least clarification since one might decide that, after a trying day, getting a glass of whisky is a pretty substantial goal in their eyes. And while the condition of being 'distinctively human' and therefore rational correctly limits who might possess a *boulēsis*, it apparently does not tell us what a *boulēsis* is *for*. Pearson will return to the latter worry in a moment.

We can begin to address both initially stated worries tied to this rejection of the essential connection between *boulēsis* and *eudaimonia* – (1) that there is now no lower-level limit on the object of wish nor (2) a unifying feature common to all wishes – by turning to the text. Aristotle says that a wish is for an object the agent takes to be *good* and not only pleasant or expedient (*Rhet.* 1369a3–4; *Top.* 146b5–6; *EE* 1235b23). One could not be said to wish for a glass of whisky simply because one wanted it; one would need to see it as a good end.[71] This does not yet limit the content of a wish since one may in fact take a glass of whisky to be good, but it does mean one cannot go for the glass as merely pleasant or expedient. Wish is for an object the agent takes to be good.[72] We further enhance this idea by remembering that wish is a rational desire. And what makes it rational? Is the desire formed by reason, or is it responsive to reason? Pearson takes a different route, drawing a parallel with the *ergon* argument where human rationality is defined as that which cannot be shared with plants or animals. For wish, too, it is rational because the *object* of desire is that which only a human could want. But, we may object, humans and animals can both desire healthy things, a carrot or a drink from a lake. Do animals, too, have rational desires, then? Pearson replies that we must understand the 'object of desire' to be the basic end of the desire and not the particular object of it (2016: 192).

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[71] This does not mean that the end is conceived of as morally good. A particularly evil agent could see torturing a cat as a good end in their eyes and also know that it is morally bad.

[72] It is an important question, though one that would take me too far afield, as to whether pleasure, too, is seen as good by the agent who desires it. Indeed everything that an agent desires is taken to be *good* on some readings. See an account arguing for this by Jessica Moss (2012), and Benjamin Morison's strong critique of it (2013: 301-309). The point I wish to make, though, is that there is something important about wish for Aristotle whereby an agent could at times see it as good and *not* pleasant. That is, an object of wish may be pursued for rational and moral commitments that have nothing to do with pleasure (even though pleasure may be a proprium of the good that all practical wish pursues). So while it is possible that the pleasurable is also good, I want to make clear that wish, taken to be good, maintains a distinct role in the pursuit of a life the agent thinks best.

Non-rational creatures may desire what is healthy for them, but only rational creatures will desire what is healthy *qua* healthy (2016: 194). The good end of wish is a good end that only rational creatures could desire *under the relevant description*. Second, and continuing to refine, a wish must be for an end that is desirable in itself (*NE* 1094a18–22), either as final, most final, or final without qualification (*NE* 1097a15–1097b21). Examples given of those things we desire for themselves are honour, pleasure, understanding, health, and virtue (*NE* 1097b2–4; 1111b27–29). Whether or not this puts an absolute limit on what can be a proper object of wish may be asking for more precision than can be specified with an ethical concept, but there is enough here to rule out those objects pursued for the sake of something else. We ought also to pay attention to the kind of examples Aristotle gives (honour, pleasure, understanding, health, and virtue), for he does not offer much aside from these as viable candidates for ends in themselves. Potential candidates for objects of wish should therefore be measured against these sorts of things even if not limited completely by them.

If we are content to put those two worries now to one side, we continue to put pressure on the idea that wish and *eudaimonia* need not be connected in every case. Aside from the possible textual rejection of the essential connection between wish and *eudaimonia*, the view would also demand that a person's *idle* wishes must be for the sake of *eudaimonia*. This is not absolutely impossible, but it does restrict or (re)define what it means to be 'idle' since even the idle wish on this reading must in some way be connected to *eudaimonia*. Is every idle wish really for living and doing well? A defendant of this line might say the connection between idle wishes and *eudaimonia* exists simply in virtue of someone wishing for *anything*. But this lowers the bar dramatically for what it is to count as a wish for *eudaimonia*.

Further, while there is always the danger of reading into Aristotle what is not there given his reluctance to provide an abundance of conclusive details, notice how Aristotle's first linking of wish with the end in itself is a psychological supposition (*NE* I.2), not a statement of fact.[73] Across Book I, Aristotle says that the Many *think* happiness is various things (pleasure, honour, etc.), but he does not say that they *wish* for happiness as pleasure, honour, etc.[74] Is a wish for *eudaimonia*, then, something different to simply casually aiming at it with voluntary actions or thinking about it loosely as pleasure or honour? If so (and the answer, I believe, is yes), it would mean that both *prohairesis* and *boulēsis* are more restrictive concepts for Aristotle.

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[73] Aristotle's 'we' could also be read as coming from a position of privilege, in reference to his more fortunate audience and their shared advantages. On such a reading one would not apply the pronoun indiscriminately. See Cooper (1986: 94)

[74] True, Aristotle has not yet got to distinguishing between the species of desire. Thanks to Anthony Price for the thought.

Instead of pressing for this essential connection between wish and *eudaimonia* one could say instead that not all wishes do in fact aim at *eudaimonia*, but where a *choice* is involved it *will* derive from a wish aimed at *eudaimonia*. Not every wish will produce a choice. Some wishes are idle, and some may have as their object health. But the presence of *prohairesis* in connection with a wish signifies a certain sort of wish – a wish for *eudaimonia*. For we know that all choice (*prohairesis*) aims at the good and, ultimately, the most final good (*NE* 1094a1– 2). And we know that this most final good is *eudaimonia*, living and doing well (*eupraxia*). Aristotle himself holds that not just any old voluntary action aims at the most final good but only prohairetic action. Since both *praxeis* (actions in the technical sense) and *prohairesis* (choice) are both denied to children and animals and are each a more narrow subset of the voluntary, McDowell reads a connection between them to the end that *praxeis* issue from a *prohairesis* and, therefore, the actions issuing from a choice will aim at *eudaimonia*, living and doing well (*eupraxia*) (1988: 5-6). Aristotle writes that 'happiness is a starting-point, since it is for the sake of it that we do all the other *actions* that we do' (*NE* 1102a2–3, trans. Reeve). Here making use of the technical term for actions, the passage permits us to rule out the idea that any merely voluntary action aims at *eudaimonia*, reserving the category of eudaimonic actions for *praxeis* that issue from a *prohairesis*.[75] In turn a *prohairesis* aims to promote the achievement of a wish for this ultimate good, living and doing well.[76] Here we circle back to the idea of limiting the connection between wish and *eudaimonia*. A wish will be for *eudaimonia* when it aims at living well (i.e. *eudaimonia*), and we shall have some idea of when such a wish exists by the presence of relevant actions (*praxeis*) from a choice (*prohairesis*) aiming to promote it.[77] Since virtue and vice issue in choices, virtue and vice will be those states with – among other things – a rational wish, an aim to live well according to one's conception of what this entails. Connecting rational wishes to the notion of living and doing well need not mean that an agent cannot have a wish for health and pursue it with a *prohairesis*. It only means that where she does pursue health with a *prohairesis* she will be pursuing it not only as *merely* good, like in any and every case of wish, but *as good for the sort of life she wants to have*. That is, it is a good concerned with a good life, *eudaimonia*.

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[75] Roche calls this theory Weak Psychological Eudaimonism and disagrees with it, believing it mainly to reduce the conflict between the existence of akrasia and Aristotle's eudaimonist stance articulated here (1992: 47, fn. 44). But that is not the only reason for severing the alleged bond between *eudaimonia* and every voluntary action. At least one very good reason is that Aristotle himself may not hold such a view, an idea I am testing above.

[76] At *NE* 1097b2–4 one might suppose that we choose all manner of things, not only *eudaimonia*, but Aristotle does not use '*prohairesis*' for the act of choosing in this passage, and so we might still be able to retain that exclusive connection between *prohairesis* and *eudaimonia* found in the opening sentences of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

[77] See Reeve (1992: 91), Irwin (2001: 80), Nielsen (2017: 15), and Echeñique (2012: 59).

But things may not be quite as simple as this. We have tried to answer the question 'What is the nature of B?', that is, what is choice *for*? One answer is that choice is for the object of a wish for *eudaimonia*. Even though not every wish is for *eudaimonia*, where a *choice* is present, it *is* a wish for *eudaimonia*. But now we must turn to the objections of David Charles and Anthony Kenny who reject any necessary connection between *prohairesis* and *eudaimonia*. It seems we have not made any progress. But in fact we are still moving in the right direction and in grappling with this protest we shall continue to polish our notion of *prohairesis* and its place in an account of vice.

4.3 Ethical and Technical Choice

David Charles takes issue with the Anscombian construal of choice and its connection to *eudaimonia*. He relays Anscombe's view that all preferential choice (*prohairesis*) is based on the agent's conception of well-being, and he attempts to refute the idea (1984: 151-152). His attack is made with a two-step hit, first stating that choice is what is judged best after deliberation and, second, showing that not all deliberation is concerned with well-being. So the logic goes, if some deliberation is not concerned with well-being and all choice comes after deliberation, it follows that not all choice is concerned with well-being. In support of this he offers the examples of persuasion (*NE* 1112b13), strength (1140a28), and the acquisition of some goods (1226b28) which have partial goals (1140a27, 1142b29) that are the goals of a person *qua* doctor, rhetorician, trainer, etc. These are good examples of deliberation not concerned with well-being. But the attack on the whole is misdirected, for it is evidently the case that we do *not* choose everything we deliberate about even if we deliberate about everything we choose (see Cooper, 1986: 47-48, fn. 59; Pearson, 2016: 184). Only deliberation productive of choice aims at well-being and this will not happen with every case of deliberation. We can therefore can readily accept that not all deliberation aims at well-being without needing to relax the special bond between *choice* and well-being.

But what if, for the sake of argument and in order to strengthen the objection, an agent *did* produce a choice at the end of deliberation that had nothing to do with their general ideas about well-being? For instance, could a choice be for that which an agent takes to be best in a given context where there is no consideration of *eudaimonia*? Kenny writes that even while the akratic does not have a *prohairesis* to produce pleasure (as does the intemperate man), 'this does not rule out his having a προαίρεσις to, e.g., add a touch of garlic for the sake of making a dish more pleasant' (Kenny, 1979: 99). Kenny concludes that based on the standards given

in *NE* III and *EE* II he sees 'no reason to deny that the [choices] of an incontinent man exercising skill are [*prohaireseis*]' (1979: 99). From what I understand, Kenny is not debating about those akratic actions clearly failing to abide by choice, but those actions performed by a person with an akratic character who nonetheless skilfully deliberates about the best way to make a meal, forms a choice to do so, and successfully acts in line with it. And he earlier writes more generally, 'Moreover, must there not be many choices which fulfil the definition of [*prohairesis*] as a conclusion of deliberation which are performed by human beings who do not fulfil Aristotle's rather strict conditions for being [*agathos*] or [*mochthēros*]?' (Kenny, 1979: 97). And again, 'And in general, it seems possible to take decisions in aid of particular short-term goals without having any thought-out overall policy of how to spend one's life' (Kenny, 1979: 100). Here we are toying with the idea that there are two types or two levels of *prohairesis*, one tightly linked to *eudaimonia* (in varying degrees of articulacy, as we shall see) and another meeting the conditions for *prohairesis* initially given at *EE* II (preferring A for the sake of B and after deliberation) but connected to a more local and non-eudaimonic goal such as adding garlic to meal. Since the ostensible connection between *eudaimonia* and choice is made in places like *NE* 1094a1–2 and 1139a32–34 and not in the definition of *prohairesis* at *NE* III and *EE* II, one can see how Kenny and Charles might spot room for a less eudaimonic *prohairesis*.

It may be that Aristotle does want to retain a conception of *prohairesis* where it is linked to *eudaimonia* (the obvious concern of his ethics), but it is difficult to conclusively rule out a lower-level iteration of it. It has been well noted that Aristotle's momentary, even fleeting, focus upon apparently important terms leaves plenty of room for varied interpretations even of central points in his ethical theory (e.g. Frede, 2015: 16).[78] But I propose the following accommodation. Since Aristotle's account of *prohairesis* is anything but systematic, it may be that there is both a technical *prohairesis* and an ethical *prohairesis* at various points.[79] A technical *prohairesis* fulfils the criteria of *NE* III.2 whereby a choice is made for what is best at the end of deliberation and for the attainment of that which the agent takes to be good.[80] An

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[78] And for this view in respect to choice see Sorabji's discussion in (1973-1974: 107-109).

[79] We see something like this in Troels Engberg-Pedersen: 'It is true that the most important form of *prohairesis* in the ethical context is the one that results in genuine *praxis* and is therefore, as we shall see, directly related to *eudaimonia;* but there is no reason to believe, as Anscombe herself does throughout her "Thought and Action in Aristotle", that this is the only form of *prohairesis* allowed for by Aristotle. Aristotle develops his concept of *prohairesis* (in *EN* III.iii) by drawing on the notion of *technical* deliberation. Technical justification will therefore be sufficient to qualify a want as a *prohairesis* – even technical justification as had by the incontinent man when he has deliberated about how to reach a goal that he wants only incontinently' (1983: 21, fn. 27).

[80] Kenny suggests the reason that not all *prohairesis* connects to an agent's wish is because not every *prohairesis* is a *prohairesis haplōs*. Just as health, victory, and cooking are ends but not ends *haplōs*, that is, unqualifiedly

ethical *prohairesis* is made for what is best at the end of deliberation to promote a wish for living and doing well (e.g. *NE* 1139a33–34), that is, for *eudaimonia*.[81] Importantly, ethical in this sense is the opposite of *non*-ethical, not *un*ethical. This means that the ethical *prohairesis* of the vicious agent can be at the same time *un*ethical since it is often (though perhaps not knowingly) morally wrong.

Virtue and vice have an especially close relationship with ethical *prohairesis*. Virtue and vice are both defined as a *hexis prohairetikē*. Although this fact is stated at *NE* 1107a1, it is basically dropped and left unexplored in that passage, and Aristotle's best explanation of the idea is found at *EE* 1230a27–29: 'But since every virtue implies choice (in the manner earlier explained: it makes a man choose everything for the sake of some end, and the end is what is [fine]), it is clear that courage being a particular virtue will make a man endure what is frightening for the sake of some end […] he will do it because it is [fine]'. Aristotle refers to the discussion of choice 'in the manner earlier explained' where we have learned that virtue 'makes the end correct and the choice faultless' (*EE* 1227b12–13) by causing a choice to 'be made for the sake of the mean' (1227b37–38) and 'makes a man choose everything […] because it is [fine]' (1230a29). Jessica Moss clarifies the definition, 'Virtue is a prohairetic state in that its function is to make [choices] correct' (2011: 210). On the other hand, vice 'makes choice be a choice with a contrary purpose' (*EE* 1228a3–4). Moss advocates the view that 'our ends themselves are set by our ethical characters' (2011: 205). She promotes this account against an intellectualist reading whereby it is our intellect that sets ends, taking seriously those passages where Aristotle plainly talks about *virtue* making the goal right:

[F]or virtue makes the goal correct, and [*phronesis*] makes things promoting the goal correct. (*NE* 1144a7–9)

[Choice] will not be correct without *phronesis* or without virtue – for [virtue] makes us achieve the end, whereas [*phronesis*] makes us achieve the things that promote the end. (*NE* 1145a5–7)

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good ends, *prohairesis*, being connected to qualified and unqualifiedly good ends, takes its status from that (Kenny, 1979: 99).

[81] This is not the same as Nielsen's distinction between preferential *prohairesis* and teleological *prohairesis* where the former is choosing one thing over another and the latter is choosing *for the sake of* an end (2018: e.g. 211). I would say that both technical and ethical choice can be teleological, but my question is really about the nature of the end. If it is for *eudaimonia*, it is an ethical (and teleological) choice.

> Does virtue make the goal right or things toward the goal? We suppose the goal, because there is no syllogizing or *logos* about this. Instead, this must be laid down as a starting-point. (*EE* 1227b23–25)[82]

> For virtue preserves the principle, whereas vice corrupts it; and in actions the end we act for is the principle, as the assumptions are the principles in mathematics. Reason does not teach the principles either in mathematics or actions; [with actions] it is virtue, either natural or habituated, that teaches correct belief about the principle. (*NE* 1151a15–19)

And we can add the following about vice:

> And this [best good] is apparent only to the good person; for vice [*mochthēria*] perverts us and produces false views about the principles of action. (*NE* 1144a35)

> For the principles of things achievable in action are their goal, but if someone is corrupted because of pleasure or pain, no [appropriate] principle can appear to him, and it cannot appear that this is the right goal and cause of all his choice and action; for vice [*kakia*] corrupts the principle. (*NE* 1140b16–20)

This notion that our ends are set by our ethical characters helps to make sense of an important passage at *NE* 1139a35 where Aristotle says that choice requires character.[83] 'But if character is the source of wish', writes Moss, 'and wishes are for ends, then the claim that [choice] requires "*nous* and thought and also a character-state" is most naturally taken to mean that it requires character as the source of the end' (2011: 224). Choice requires character because it depends upon a wish determined by character.

 Moss worries that there is one strong piece of evidence in favour of an intellectualist reading. Aristotle sometimes speaks about people choosing (*prohairoumenoi*) a specific way of life (pleasure, politics, philosophy) (*NE* 1095b19–22; *EE* 1215a35–b1). This seems to tell against the idea that virtue sets the end. But given the evidence Moss has just cited to the contrary where virtue sets the end, she is 'inclined to treat these as non-technical uses of

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[82] The translation of this passage is from Moss.
[83] For less obvious explanations, see Anscombe (1981: 70-71) and Kenny (1979: 100).

[*prohairesis*]' (2011: 226). It is unclear to me, however, if there really is such a non-technical sense in Aristotle given that he could perhaps use *hairesis* if he needed something more common, and in the very opening line of the *NE* he uses *prohairesis* in connection with action promoting the good, establishing its philosophical position in the work. But even if the word is allowed its full technical sense, I do not think the passages pose a threat to virtue's role as a goal-setter. We can agree that *eudaimonia* is an end. And where the end that is *eudaimonia* may indeed be set by character, we might say it is clarified or refined, perhaps even first really shown to the agent through the process of deliberation and choice. The problem here revolves around the level of determinacy that one takes the end set by character to be. Perhaps the end set by character is something like urges in a certain direction. When the agent begins to examine these urges determined by character and how to satisfy and promote them, she deliberates and makes a choice as to the best way to do this. And she chooses a way of life or, more commonly, something less broad and more immediate. In this way, choice is (a) constrained by the end set by character but is also (b) a way for the agent to ascertain and then promote that end. Choice is not the *only* thing that determines the end; it has been *set* by character in a potentially vague but certainly in a foundational sense which choice helps to refine. Such is the reciprocal relationship between character and choice.

Now, what sort of wishes will be promoted by an ethical *prohairesis*? For a technical *prohairesis* the goal will be that which the agent takes to be good, and an ethical *prohairesis* promotes a goal of living and doing well, *eudaimonia* (*NE* 1139b1–5). We can supplement our preceding discussion about wish with this information. Recall, it was questioned whether every wish was a wish for *eudaimonia* and we saw that Aristotle does not hold this to be true. Instead, a proposal was made to link wish and *eudaimonia* where a choice (*prohairesis*) was present. That is, a wish will be for *eudaimonia* when it is promoted by a choice. But the idea that choice must in every case be for *eudaimonia* was questioned by Charles and Kenny. To accommodate their objection as well as the evidence from Aristotle's definition of *prohairesis* at *NE* III.2, we suggested that *prohairesis* be split into two categories, technical and ethical. Taken together, a wish will be for *eudaimonia* when an *ethical prohairesis* aims to promote it as the result of deliberation.

An ethical *prohairesis* will very often issue from a virtue given that virtue aims at the fine (*NE* 1099a21–24; 1115b13; 1120a23–24), doing well in action.[84] And vice, too, aims at a

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[84] For a discussion of the fine see Chapter 5.

mistaken conception of the fine: 'For each state [of character] has its own view of what is fine and pleasant' (*NE* 1113a32). During the discussion of (ethical) *prohairesis* at *NE* 1139a31–1139b5, Aristotle states that acting well, *eupraxia*, a philosophical synonym for *eudaimonia*, is the goal in question. And at *NE* 1151a15–19 where the link between virtue and vice and the goal was drawn, since Aristotle does not specify whether he has in mind only limited particular goals in particular situations, it is likely that he also has in mind the ultimate goal of *living well* to various levels of articulacy and immediacy (see Moss, 2011: 225). The natural overlap between acting well and living well (taken together at *NE* 1095a 19–20) is seen in the sort of wishes that proceed from a virtue or a vice. The intemperate man, for example, has a wish (*boulēsis*) for certain kinds of bodily pleasure and is prepared to say: 'This is my idea of good work (*eupraxia*), this is the *kind of life* I want' (Anscombe, 1981: 70, emphasis added).

But a question: are virtue and vice the only states from which an ethical *prohairesis* might issue? That is, can a person with any sort of character in the broad sense act in accordance with an ethical *prohairesis*? Kenny follows Greenwood in taking 'moral character' (*ēthikē hexis*) to refer to 'any condition of the affective part of the soul' and not only the more narrowly defined states of virtue and vice (1979: 98).[85] Could, therefore, the affective part of the soul in *any* condition issue an ethical *prohairesis* to promote *eudaimonia*?

I am actually unsure whether Aristotle would allow an ethical *prohairesis* to issue from the affective part of a soul in any sort of condition. However, we can at least note the ways in which virtue and vice will be particularly conducive to ethical *prohaireseis*, promoting wishes for living and doing well in a way that other states of character (i.e. akrasia and enkrateia) or just 'moral character' more idiomatically cannot match.

First, virtue and vice promote wishes for *eudaimonia* reliably since they are habituated states of character. If we are talking about 'moral character' as an idiom for the affective part of a person's soul, there is no guarantee that the agent will have consistent wishes for *eudaimonia* or, if they do have such a thing, whether the conception of *eudaimonia* to which the wishes speak will be consistent. When Aristotle says that most people change their mind depending on circumstance, he seems to be highlighting the reality that many people do not have consistent wishes for a stable conception of *eudaimonia* (*NE* 1095a23).[86] And since *eudaimonia* is not only single wishes or single actions but rather a life made up of certain

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[85] See Greenwood (1909: 176).
[86] This is not yet to say anything about the articulacy of such a conception.

activities (and results), occasional wishes for *eudaimonia* will not be sufficient to achieve it.[87] One swallow does not make a spring (*NE* 1098a19–20). Agents with virtues and vices are more likely to piece together a coherent whole thanks to the reliable traits setting reasonably coherent ends, though if the virtuous agent ends up in spring, the vicious agent may construct for themselves a very trying winter.

Second, and relatedly, virtue provides an unqualifiedly good end and vice a bad one (*NE* 1144a7–9 and 1140b16–20). Whether this end is understood to mean the ultimate end, *eudaimonia*, or more immediate and practical ends, the many wishes determined by the reliable state of virtue will build towards a happy life and the many wishes determined by the reliable state of a vice will build towards an unhappy one.

Third, both the virtuous and the vicious act *according to* their *prohairesis* and do so desiring the relevant behaviours. This is unlike the akratic who fails to abide by choice or the enkratic who acts according to choice but in the face of conflicting desires to act wrongly (or, at least, not well). Because the reason and desire of the vicious agent are in harmony, they are more likely to obtain the object of their wishes than the akratic who fails to stick to their choices, and the enkratic who may give up in the face of strong appetites pulling them aside.

Fourth, since an ethical *prohairesis* is a commitment to here and now promoting *eudaimonia* expressed in rational wishes, and because the state of vice is called a *hexis prohairetikē*, essentially defined by this fact and phrase, vice may be principally considered as *a state aiming to promote one's conception of happiness*. In piecing together that sentiment, we can agree with a conclusion like Meyer's (2011a: 26):

> Aristotle thinks that the distinctive feature of moral agency is not simply the possession of a conception of happiness, or even the ability to form desires based on a conception of happiness, but rather the disposition to act in accordance with that conception. In calling a virtue or a vice a *hexis prohairetikē*, Aristotle means that it is a disposition in which one's capacities for feeling and doing are disposed to be exercised in a way that expresses one's conception of happiness. The distinctive feature of a moral agent, on Aristotle's view, is that he acts for the sake of his happiness.

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[87] See also Charles (1984: 154-155). Reeve writes that choice and acting well depends upon states that are 'sufficiently robust to last through a life that is long enough to count as complete' (2013: 121).

While we cannot conclusively rule out the potential for ethical choices to issue from moral character more broadly, since Aristotle understands virtues and vices to be states intimately connected with happiness and the human good, the prohairetic states of virtue and vice will characteristically issue in ethical choices to promote the ends set by the virtue or vice.

4.4 Vicious Choice

We have said that a virtue or a vice is a state issuing in choices. However, now we wish to know, is *every* choice of the vicious agent a vicious choice? If not, what makes a choice a vicious choice? The question is actually surprisingly nuanced.

Start with the thesis that choice will *reveal* character since choice *depends* upon character. Kenny writes (1979: 98, emphasis in original):

> But Aristotle's point is that a person's προαίρεσις will always *reveal* his moral character: trace a man's practical reasoning up to the end which he sets himself, and you will discover whether he is virtuous, vicious, brutish, foolish, incontinent or whatever.

The idea that prohairetic action will expose an agent's character is seen clearly in two important passages. The first is in the *Rhetoric*, 'What these [kinds of character] are will be grasped from what has been said above: for characters will become clear (*phaneros*, visible, manifest) by deliberate choice (*proairesin*), and deliberate choice is directed to an end' (1366a), and the second is in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, '[F]or choice seems to be most proper to virtue, and to distinguish characters from one another better than actions do' (1111b5–6). Reading the passages raises two questions. First, what is meant by moral character? Second, how specifically does choice reveal it?

First, what is meant by character? Let us once again follow Kenny who follows Greenwood in taking 'moral character' (*ēthikē hexis*) to refer to 'any condition of the affective part of the soul' and not only the more narrowly defined states of virtue and vice (1979: 98). He recognises that this could possibly trivialise the thesis connecting choice to moral character since every person will therefore be in *some* sort of *hexis*, but he reminds us of the essential point: *prohairesis* reveals character. Moral character could be as specific and narrow as virtue and vice, or it could refer perhaps to something less determinate, a person's desires, beliefs,

values, and habits that cannot easily be traced to an Aristotelian character state for whatever reason.

Second, how does *prohairesis* reveal character? The thinking here is that 'if we know both *that* an action was chosen and *what* it was chosen "for the sake of", we are in a position to make an inference about the agent's character' (Mele, 1981b: 414, emphasis in original).[88] Since one's *prohairesis* promotes one's view of the end we get a good picture of what an agent is aiming for, possibly even an idea of what they are aiming for in respect to their conception of *eudaimonia*. At this point David Bostock worries that if all choice reflects character then we are forced either to discover some probably artificial and possibly insignificant information about a person's character from, say, a wish to sail a yacht from England to France, or else to accept an increasingly narrowed understanding of choice where it is tied only to wishes for *eudaimonia*.[89] Bostock's criticism can be diluted, I believe, with our distinction between technical and ethical *prohairesis*. He is right to say that scouring a technical *prohairesis* ('decision after deliberation' as Kenny puts it) for some insight about a person's character could at times become quite an unnatural exercise, reading something meaningful into an action that is not really there. But we do not need to be as sceptical about the power of an ethical *prohairesis* to reveal an agent's character since this speaks to their conception of living and acting well, their ideas about *eudaimonia*, and their willingness to here and now promote it in a given action or set of actions. For Aristotle, one's choices to promote well-being are the defining elements of a character state; *prohairesis* gives us a look into the core condition of an agent's soul. There is nothing that can really be said, though, to entirely fend off Bostock's complaint that this notion of ethical *prohairesis* is 'over-inflated'. Even if one rejects the slightly insulting label Bostock bestows, the substance of the criticism must be taken on board since the concept for Aristotle is a normative one,[90] and its exclusivity intentional, unapologetically reserved for those who deliberate with a view to the attainment of *eudaimonia*.

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[88] See *EE* 1227b36–37. Price has suggested to me that this is a bit optimistic. One needs also to know the context, and what alternatives the agent had. The practical syllogism, said Price, provides a skeletal structuring of an action, or of a sequence of intentions, and not full exposition of reasons.

[89] Better in Bostock's mind would be to reject the 'over-inflated' notion of choice inherited largely from Anscombe and work with the idea of practical reasoning (reason + desire) that can be made up equally of any type of desire – *boulēsis*, *epithumia*, or *thumos* –combined with reason and leading to action. But Aristotle nowhere connects *prohairesis* to *epithumia* or *thumos* since these desires are non-rational and do not have as their object suitably rational ends.

[90] Bostock recognises this but still does not want to take seriously what he calls the 'careless generalizations' on Aristotle's part which he thinks would lead to a position like Anscombe's (2000: 80-81).

How does having said this help us with our initial question, wondering whether every choice of the vicious agent is vicious? Let us take what we have learned from each of the above points respectively and place them into our answer.

First, Aristotle does not press for a 'unity of the vices' thesis whereby an agent in possession of one vice must therefore be in possession of the all. A vicious agent may display only one Aristotelian vice, let us imagine it is cowardice alone.[91] Aside from the sole vice of cowardice, the agent's moral character (*ēthikē hexis*) in general will be made up of other desires, beliefs, values, and habits that are not Aristotelian vices. Some of these desires, beliefs, values, and habits will be good, some bad, and others neither good nor bad. We probably could not make the same point with the virtuous agent whose character is fully virtuous and whose entire moral character is made up of virtue, but the vicious agent is a less unified type (in this respect). What this all means is that some choices issuing from the vicious agent's moral character will not issue directly from a vice since vices are not the only things which comprise the moral character of the vicious agent.

Second, and taking Kenny's practical advice, if we trace the *prohairesis* of a vicious agent up to the given end which has been set, there is a wide range of them that will present. Linguistically, the agent in possession of one vice is 'vicious' since no unity of the vices is required for the application of the label, but *psychologically* the state of the agent's soul is not entirely vicious due to the possession of that one vice, say it is cowardice, and some choices might therefore reflect other elements of the agent's complex psychology. Kenny has written, 'Vicious choice results from the uncontrolled pursuit of the objects of the passions' (1979: 80). Kenny mistakenly *equates* the vicious agent with the intemperate one, but even though not all vicious choice will be for the objects of the passions, he is correct insofar as he outlines the formal goal of vicious choice. Choices issuing from an individual vice are bad because they are attempts to attain vicious wishes (*boulēseis*).[92] Vicious wishes, in turn, are those whose object is not truly good for a human *qua* human. We have seen Aristotle argue for a specific human good founded upon our natural capacities and the ideal fulfilment of them. Misguided conceptions of the human good cannot lead to *eudaimonia*. If the wish is wrong the choice will

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[91] I think the possession of one vice is psychologically implausible, but conceptually useful for the time being.

[92] Anthony Price asked me about the sort of case where one adopts a fully acceptable end (say, to devote one's life to philosophy), but adopts disreputable means (say, killing one's aunt in order to get her money and so to spend all one's time doing philosophy)? And yet murder may never become for this agent an *end in itself*. It this still vice without a vicious wish? I can only reply that Aristotle does not seem to recognise an action as properly vicious unless it is connected in the right way to one's misguided conception of the good just as a truly virtuous action also requires the agent to choose it for the right reasons. Perhaps Aristotle has not fully thought through these possibilities. But, for Aristotle, the fundamental problem of the vicious agent is not that they will behave badly (which they may do), but that they will miss out on happiness by aiming at the wrong things.

not be a good one. As Kenny states, 'Erroneous choice is possible […] because [wish] is not a faculty like sight which cannot be used except upon its proper object' (1979: 79). Where virtue is a state issuing in good choices that the practically wise person would affirm, vice – in light of its faulty conception of the good – will produce bad choices: bad for humans *qua* humans and not endorsed by the person of practical wisdom (see Broadie, 1991: 80). Now, it is unreasonable to suppose that in an agent whose psychology is not entirely vicious (even if the idiomatic label is applied) *every* choice will be a choice to promote a vicious wish. This would be giving an unrealistic amount of power to the vice or vices they possess. Even if some vicious agents produce *mostly* vicious choices, there is nothing about their psychology that makes this a necessity or, rather, absolutely precludes otherwise.[93] Some choices set by the broad moral character of the vicious agent will be designed to promote non-vicious wishes and will not issue from a vice trait.[94] For instance, an agent who has the vice of cowardice may also, as part of their broader character, possess some mental state dispositions concerned with caring for their family. If they produce a choice to attend to a family funeral and comfort the grieving widow, it seems patently false to say this must have something to do with their vice of cowardice.

If we allow the vicious agent the potential to act according to some choices that do not directly reflect a vice but instead some other element of their psychology (character), could the

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[93] This, again, is quite different to the fully virtuous agent whose unified virtuous psychology produces virtuous choices.

[94] Spotting a vicious choice is difficult given that the very same bad action could be performed with or without choice. An epistemic limitation presents. In trying to discern a vicious choice, though, we can begin, as Aristotle does, with a common sense and a basically rough and ready agreement about bad character traits and actions. Lesley Brown has written that the vice labels themselves indicate problematic feelings and actions (Ross & Brown, 2009: 216). Echeñique, too, remarks that while the vice terms are semantically associated with excess and deficiency, they are also evaluative and pejorative labels ('*connotaciones peyorativas, y por ende evaluativas*') (2017: 103). I think this is a good picture of Aristotle's view on the matter, defined by the standards of everyday usage and believing we are in basic agreement as to what constitutes bad behaviour. Recall that the specific examples Aristotle chooses to illustrate vices are understood without a substantial defence to be both immoral and undesirable. We are all expected to agree about the moral status of adultery and theft, for instance ('Hence we must already in some way have a character suitable for virtue, find of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful', *NE* 1179b31). For those who are uninterested or who actively desire evil, Aristotle does not spend (read: waste) time trying to convince them otherwise. Burnyeat points out that the lectures are not sermons aimed to convert bad behaviour (1980: 81). See Smith (2000) on Aristotle's audience. Vasiliou's (1996) essay is also insightful on the vital role of good upbringing in Aristotle's project.

 The first step in identifying a vicious choice, then, is to spot bad behaviour by the standards of common agreement. Once done, we can ask the agent why they are acting in such a manner. Perhaps we are told that it produces pleasure. If the agent offers relevant reasons for pursuing pleasure, connected in some way to her ideas about what is good (that is, not simply what she finds pleasant), she is intemperate and therefore vicious. If the reasons do not match up with the action, she may be akratic. And if no such reasons are forthcoming, perhaps the act reveals nothing about stable character at all. For *vicious* choice we have an alignment of reason and desire, spotted first of all in ordinarily accepted vicious actions, and directed to a conception of the good life – one's wish or *boulēsis* – that is not truly good.

vicious agent also act according to some choices that are *good*? The answer to this question turns on what one understands to be good.

Fully virtuous action requires the agent to act from a 'firm and unchangeable state' (*NE* II.4) and the vicious agent certainly does not possess any virtues like this (it is denied by the reciprocity of the virtues thesis). But neither does the agent who is *trying* to become virtuous and we allow that such a person acts well even if not unqualifiedly well. If every choice of the imperfectly virtuous agent is not contaminated to the point where we cannot even call the act qualifiedly good, could we say the same for the vicious agent?

If one instead accepts that some choices will reflect more general facts about the agent's character and that other choices, those revelatory of virtue and vice, will reveal a wish for *eudaimonia*, we can have it that the vicious agent may have some choices that are not entirely contaminated by their vice even if that choice is not unqualifiedly good.

Return to our initial question for this section: is every choice of the vicious agent a vicious choice? If we take 'vicious agent' as a linguistic label applied to any person with at least one vice and recognise that such a person will also possess a complex psychology in addition to their one vice, we can say that the vicious agent may on occasion act according to choices that neither directly reflect their vice of character nor reveal it at all. These choices from a vicious agent may even be qualifiedly *good*. If, however, we take 'vicious agent' to refer to the individual vice or vices that the agent possesses, then every choice that issues from this specific state will be vicious and therefore bad since it aims to promote a vicious wish. To give an example of the latter, if the agent is in possession of the sole vice of cowardice, every choice that issues from this individual vice trait will be vicious.

5. Conclusion: Review of Choice

We have proposed that while some choices at the end of deliberation will have no connection to an agent's conception of well-being, *in the case of virtue and vice* it often does have such a connection.[95] At these times we have an ethical *prohairesis* rather than a technical one.[96]

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[95] We might point out, however, that even where the goal is not an explicit connection to well-being, for proper deliberation to occur there must be a relatively stable aim of some sort. Aristotle writes, 'That is why those who have no fixed aim do not go in for deliberation' (*EE* 1226b 29). Mele concludes unequivocally, 'This implies […] that one is not in a position even to deliberate, much less choose, unless one has a conception of the good' (1984: 148). This hard-line approach is obviously directly opposed to Charles.

[96] Once more, ethical in this sense is the opposite of *non*-ethical, not *un*ethical. This means that the ethical *prohairesis* of the vicious agent can at the same time be *un*ethical since it is often morally wrong.

Reading *prohairesis* this way primarily underscores just what sort of character traits Aristotle thinks the virtues and vices are. They are those states connected in some way to a conception of *eudaimonia*, and one's *prohairesis* will reveal this since it is a commitment to promoting and attaining it.[97] As the old saying goes, *prohairesis* is the window to the soul. Real life investigations into character and reasoning demand more 'patience, humility, and trust' than we usually get from one choice (Price, 2011a: 158). The foregoing is suggestive, designed only to illustrate idealised and over-simplified theoretical cases.

Prohairesis on this reading is both something that is available to most people on some level in the technical sense at the end of deliberation (in this way not an incredibly rare and thus impractical piece of moral psychology) *and* also something that only the virtuous and vicious reliably display (when it is a certain kind of *ethical* – that is, not *technical* or *non*-ethical – *prohairesis* tied to a wish for *eudaimonia*, etc.).[98] For the revelation of virtue and vice *prohairesis* is not merely a casual ingredient in action (Halliwell, 1998: 151); it is rather the all-things-considered commitment to attaining one's wish for living and doing well and it reveals one's character state through this.[99] Putting the idea another way, on this proposal not every instance of *prohairesis* requires virtue or vice, even while every virtue or vice requires *prohairesis*. And again, not every *prohairesis* reveals virtue or vice, but every virtue or vice is revealed by *prohairesis*.

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[97] Dirk Baltzly has suggested to me that while *prohairesis* does reveal character, so too does the pleasure or pain that people take in their actions. This is certainly true, and there will be other things that provide an insight into people's character, but Aristotle is clear to call virtues and vices prohairetic states (not, say, emotion states) and he says repeatedly (as we have seen) that choice reveals character.

[98] I take it that Nielsen, for example, would reject this overly accommodating, centrist proposal, instead taking a narrower view of *prohairesis* and its appearance *only* in cases of virtue, vice, and its connection to ends pertaining more directly to happiness. Nielsen writes, 'Not just any desire that arises as a result of deliberation counts as a *prohairesis* on Aristotle's score: an acratic agent, who acts contrary to his choice, may nevertheless be skillful in calculating means to the satisfaction of his nonrational desires […] But he does not, for all that, decide to indulge his desires, for he does not deem this end to be good in light of his life overall. Only deliberation that proceeds from a wish – a rational endorsement of an end as good – can result in a decision [*prohairesis*]' (2011: 407). And again, 'What Aristotle in fact argues in *EE* 1.2 is that some people are incapable of leading a life in accordance with their own προαίρεσις, and that these people need not bother articulating a conception of happiness with reference to which they choose all their acts. Thus, they either have a προαίρεσις which reflects their conception of the good, but fail to adhere to it in practice, or they lack it altogether' (2017: 21).

[99] Wiggins writes, 'The only straightforward way to see it as cardinally or conceptually prominent fact about choice that it accurately or generally distinguishes good from bad character, and has a certain constitutive relation to vice or virtue, is to suppose choice to be a fairly inclusive notion which relates to different specifications of man's *end*. The choices of the bad or self-indulgent man, the *mochtheros* or *akolastos*, would seem to be supposed by Aristotle to reveal this man for what he is because they make straightforwardly apparent his *misconceptions of the end*' (1975-1976: 31). Wiggins obviously slots in at the Anscombian end of the scale.

6. Looking Forward: Return to the Regular and Resolved Boaster

We have examined the notion of choice in Aristotle and are left with the idea that choice constrains vice properly speaking. In other words, an agent cannot possess a vice if their behaviour is not done according to choice, which is a certain sort of commitment reached after deliberation to promote a wish (for an object the agent takes to be good) here and now in action.

But now, returning to the puzzle earlier stated, a fly in the ointment. If vice does require choice, it appears that many people who act badly do not do so according to this Aristotelian conception of it. People act badly, and reliably so, without any seeming commitment to the behaviour, nor any hint of previous deliberation. By extension, many people who seem to be acting viciously will *not* in fact be vicious.[100] Consider again the regular and resolved boasters and apply the concept of choice just defended.

The *resolved* boaster behaves as such in order to bring about their wish for *eudaimonia*, acting and living well. The resolved boaster behaves as such in order to make a good impression at the party, gain the promotion, and live the good life as they see it. In Aristotelian terms we can say that the resolved boaster behaves as such according to choice. That is, her behaviour is part of a commitment to bring about the good life as she sees it. Just how extensive this conception of the good life need be will be addressed below. For now I only need to make clear that the resolved boaster believes that behaviour *x* (behaviour she will perform under the heading of 'confidence' or 'self-belief' or perhaps with less linguistic clarity, for example, 'behaviour *x* that is required to bring about the good as I see it') will at least partially bring about the good as she sees it. In sum, the resolved boaster is vicious.

The *regular* boaster also regularly boasts. However, she does not *seem* to do it according to choice. To clarify based upon the lines just drawn, she does not boast thinking that behaviour *x* (labelled 'boastfulness' by an observer) is 'the thing to do' nor the sort of behaviour that will make her the kind of person she believes she ought to be or achieve the sort of life she wishes to have. She may display behaviour *x* without even being aware of it; it is thoughtless, certainly not intentional, perhaps a natural character trait. The actions, being clear and consistent, still issue from a firm and unchangeable state. The woman who is consistently and clearly (that is,

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[100] Julia Driver, for instance, goes so far as to claim that moral vices have no connection to intentional action (2001: 107), citing the examples of negligence and insensitivity. But Driver goes too far in saying that no vices – or, to be more accurate, vicious *actions* – are intentional. Some agents will perform bad actions with intent even if not under the explicit heading of vice. Some will go further, behaving viciously and entirely aware of their immorality. Driver actually agrees with this elsewhere, noting cruelty as an example of this kind of vice (2004: 847).

unambiguously and reliably far from the mean) boastful therefore possesses a *hexis* even if it is not a *hexis prohairetikē*. In daily life we are satisfied with this kind of consistency in order to attribute a character trait. In the case of many *bad* character traits it is very possible that there just is no accompanying intentional psychology resembling Aristotelian choice.[101] In many instances of repeated failures constitutive of dispositions we will find the defective psychology of neglect rather than intention. Think of Battaly's bumbling king who attempts to help his citizens but reliably harms them (2015). Since the king did not mean to harm his people, perhaps we spare him the attribution of 'cruel' (if our understanding of cruelty includes the intention to harm), but his repeated error reveals an unwillingness to think carefully about the effects of his behaviour upon people to whom he has a responsibility. His refusal to learn from his mistakes and to continue in error could reveal a character trait of laziness, callousness, ignorance, selfishness, or whatever one thinks the particulars imply. The king's actions lead to bad effects, but it is his psychology – what he values and, importantly, *fails* to value – that we also take to be foundationally defective.

Again, this is displayed when a father carelessly leaves his baby alone in the bath to go and make a drink. Angela Smith gives the example of forgetting to call a friend on her birthday and, though she did not choose to forget this, a (relatively) critical response is justified. Smith writes that 'we often take what a person notices and neglects to have an enormous amount of expressive significance' (2005: 242). At these times it is not only the act (though the behaviour of the negligent father is very serious), but the psychology that we find problematic. The father should *value* his baby over a drink and think more carefully about the child's safety. Friends should value birthdays and be mindful of them; repeatedly forgetting a friend's birthday signifies a lack of care and attention. We do not (necessarily) find the soldier's motives flawed if he does not volunteer for an extra scouting mission; it is a supererogatory matter.[102] But we do find the father's motives defective when he leaves the baby alone in the bath. This is because he, first, owes the baby his attention in light of their relationship and, second, is not preventing a (possible) harm he can reasonably prevent. The doctor owes the patient her attention during the operation. The truck driver owes fellow drivers a concern for their safety, and repeated

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[101] Requiring that the *virtuous* person must choose their virtuous actions knowingly fits with many of our intuitive assumptions about virtuous people. This may not mean the virtuous person thinks in terms of, say, compassion explicitly. 'It is enough,' writes McDowell, 'if he thinks of what he does when […] he shows himself to be kind, under some such description as "the thing to do"' (2003). In fact, as Bernard Williams has pointed out, on some occasions over-awareness of a particular virtue strikes us as incongruent with the possession of it (1981: 49). Humble people who incessantly consider their humility and act explicitly out of humility rather than, say, the rightness of the act, appear to be less humble because of it. Such introspection really does seem to be 'a misdirection of the ethical attention' (Williams, 2011: 12).
[102] See Kamm (1985) and Crisp (2013).

failures in this area (accidental or not) reveal a psychology that does not value things it ought to value. Surely we can say that repeated failures in these areas reveal or are constitutive of a bad disposition, vicious *prohairesis* or not.[103] Is such a person to be considered vicious according to Aristotle?

Having put the problem in these terms, we might ask which Aristotelian character type we are justified in attributing to the regular boaster? Is the regular boaster enkratic, akratic, brutish, or something in-between these states? Or, is the regular boaster in fact vicious all along, and our reading of choice (*prohairesis*) ought to have included something like implicit choices as well as explicit ones?

This is the question and answer to which we now turn. I will engage with the enkratic, akratic, and brutish agents to ask whether the regular boaster could reasonably be placed into one of these categories. At each point I will also show why Aristotle considers each of these character types to be deficient in their own unique ways. However, since I do not think Aristotle would find any of these character types to appropriately describe the regular boaster, I will go on to suggest that character type in-between the akratic and the vicious should be clarified and into which we will place the regular and – so understood – non-resolved boaster. Marking the boundaries of this regular boaster will help us begin to see the boundaries of vice and Aristotle's distinct view of it.

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[103] Adams (2006: 36-37) and Hurka (2001: 92-96) also recognise vices of indifference and vices of intent.

Chapter 3

Solving the Puzzle:
Deficient Characters

1. Introduction

We have set the scene for an investigation into a puzzle. I have described a person, the regular boaster, who appears to act in regularly vicious ways but who may not meet the psychological criteria for vice (acting according to choice, *prohairesis*). What character state should we attribute to such a person if not vice? It will be the task of this chapter to find out. If it is confirmed in the end that vice is not a suitable character attribution for the regular boaster, we will have made important progress in delineating the boundaries of the vicious agent. We will be able to draw a line between truly vicious and only apparently vicious people and explain why this is the case.

In order to try and attribute a character state to our regular boaster, I will examine the character states of enkrateia, akrasia, and brutishness given in Aristotle's taxonomy to see whether any are a good fit. At each stage I will also try to show why these character states are considered by Aristotle to be deficient, giving us a better picture of the 'many ways to be in error' (*NE* 1106b30) and how somebody could be in error but not be considered properly vicious.

As will become clear, since I do not think that the following states are suitable attributions for the regular boaster, I will propose a state in-between akrasia and vice where the regular boaster might comfortably sit. For the sake of clarity, I will label this state the in-between state and try to give a picture of it.

Finally, for the sake of fairness and also to further our knowledge of the state of vice, I will re-examine the state of vice to see whether the resolved *and* the regular boaster ought to actually be considered vicious according to a more relaxed interpretation of vice, or if we were initially correct to only place the resolved boaster under this heading. It will be shown once more that I do not think that the regular boaster is vicious, and that the in-between state is a

more suitable place for them. Once all these other deficient characters have been discussed and we have therefore defined vice negatively (examining deficiencies the vicious person does *not* have), we will be ready to turn directly to the vicious character and build a positive account in subsequent chapters.

2. Enkrateia, Akrasia, and Brutishness: Potential Candidates

As we move through these deficient characters, I want to ask two questions of each. First, in what way should this character be considered deficient? Second, is this deficient character a good fit for our regular boaster? We begin with enkrateia.

2.1 Enkrateia

At the top end of the character scale, sitting closer to virtue but definitively below it, is enkrateia. Enkrateia and akrasia 'involve conflict between *bad* passions and *good* principles' (Curzer, 2012: 343). Both the enkratic and the akratic correctly realise the virtuous course of action. But, very generally, where the akratic acts wrongly, in line with their base appetites and against reason (more than most people), the enkratic acts rightly, according to reason, (more than most people) and against their base appetites (*NE* 1152a25–27). Price has written this 'does not entail, insanely, that he *always* succumbs' (2018b: 120-121, fn. 139), but nonetheless he does do so more than most people (*NE* 1152a 25–27) and is disposed to do so. Aristotle is admittedly comparatively pleased with the enkratic agent (*NE* 1151a25–29). But even in saying this, the enkratic fails to meet the ideal standards of virtuous action (see Drefcinski, 2000: 115-116). Where the virtuous agent chooses virtuous activity as pleasurable for its own sake, the enkratic must be persuaded by reason and against appetite. One might plausibly wonder why it is not at least equally impressive to do the right thing under siege from rebellious appetites. Carol Gould calls this 'the labour theory of moral virtue', where virtue represents a victory of will over passion (1994: 174).[104] Gould recalls Wittgenstein's comment upon the celebrated virtue of G. E. Moore as 'not the kind a man has fought for' but rather 'from an absence of temptation' (Gould, 1994: 174). If it is meant as an insult, it is not one to which Aristotle would

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[104] For Montaigne the very word virtue 'presupposes difficulty and struggle, and something that cannot be practised without an adversary' (1958: 174). It is also a Kantian picture.

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take offense. To be in a state of *eudaimonia*, as Urmson reminds us, 'is to be well off, to have what is most desirable, not to be praiseworthy' (1988: 12). The enkratic may well impress modern moralists, but Aristotle, concerned as he is with *eudaimonia* above all else, can hardly recommend to his students a state of internal conflict over the harmony of virtue.

Aristotle is comfortable in using the language of deficiency to describe the enkratic, writing that such a person 'knows that his appetites are base' (*NE* 1145b 14), has 'strong and base (*phaulas*) appetites', 'excessive and base (*phaulas*) appetites' (*NE* 1146a 10–15), and, again later, the enkratic do nothing against reason but yet possess 'base appetites (*phaulas*)' (*NE* 1152a 1). We should not assume that pleasures of those with base appetites are true pleasures since these people are in a bad [*kakōs*] condition (*NE* 1173b 21–25). 'Further', he goes on, 'if [enkrateia] makes someone prone to abide by every belief, it is bad, if, for instance, it makes him abide by a false as well [as true] belief' (*NE* 1146a 17–18). Contrasting the enkratic with the temperate person, Aristotle says, 'For the temperate person is not the sort to have either excessive or base appetites; but [the enkratic person] must have both. For if his appetites are good, the state that perverts him from following them must be base, so that not all continence is excellent' (*NE* 1146a 12–15). As for the enkratic agent who defiantly replies that their appetites are not in fact base but only weak (that is, not excessive or strong), Aristotle bursts their bubble quickly, declaring that enkrateia with weak but not base appetites is 'nothing impressive' (*NE* 1146a 15) since he is hardly overcoming anything. And just in case the enkratic agent decided therefore to go out and get some base appetites for noble conquest,[105] Aristotle writes in the very next line that enkrateia with base and weak appetites is 'nothing great'. Lose-lose, for the enkratic agent. In the end, we find this measured summation: 'So much, then, for [enkrateia] and [akrasia] and for pleasure and pain, what each of them is, and in what ways some [aspects] of them are good and others bad (*kaka*)' (*NE* 1154b 32–34).

Can we add the enkratic agent to our assembly of deficient characters? The enkratic agent is a very good example of the wide varieties of deficiency in Aristotle, for there are a number of places where the enkratic is *commended* for their state (*NE* 1145b8–9 ('[enkrateia seems] to be good and praiseworthy'); 1151b28; *EE* 1227b18–19), and this will not happen for the akratic, the brutish, or the vicious. Anges Callard (2017) argues that the dividing line between choiceworthy and non-choiceworthy character states is more properly between the enkratic and the akratic, not between the virtuous and the enkratic. She is probably correct as far as marking the practical boundary between character states enabling a person to live

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[105] Epaminondas or Metellus do something like this, for instance. See Montaigne (1958: 175).

relatively well and characters states that do not. And Callard points to those places where the enkratic agent is called excellent (*NE* 1151a29). But there is a larger theoretical category at play here, and this comes down to ideal character and falling short of it. The enkratic agent is surely better than the akratic and the vicious, but her appetites are base and problematic. Here is an agent acting comparatively well but full of internal conflict. We have a very good example of Aristotle's assertion that there are many ways to be in error. For even the person who acts reliably well but must fight conflicting appetites cannot represent the ideal. One may think that the term 'deficient' has a rather loose application in this regard, but that is also precisely the point. The deficient characters are all deficient in different ways and to different degrees. The enkratic agent can be called excellent in the way that they act and because of their aims, but their desires and appetites do not reflect a perfectly harmonious soul with reason and appetite in balance, and by extension do not display the human ideal. As previously noted, and as we shall see with vice, this is not determinately a matter of moral wickedness. Like all deficient character types, while the enkratic may at times be worthy of blame, they very often deserve our pity. But whether we pity or blame, it is not a character type that Aristotle can hold up to his students as the paradigm of morality. Annas has written that even while we might have some respect for the person who battles internal conflicts in order to act well, we admire their 'overcoming a handicap without thinking it preferable to have that handicap' (1993: 54). This seems to me a very Aristotelian way of conceiving of character. Into the deficient assembly, then.[106]

Is this category a good fit for the regular boaster? To put it another way, is the regular boaster enkratic? Let me quote an interesting passage from Reeve in discussion of the enkratic agent (1992: 93):

> Now there are many different types of enkratic [continent] people. At one end of the spectrum, there are the very enkratic in whom wish is opposed by appetite on every occasion requiring decision and action. Such types are no doubt extremely rare. At the other end of the spectrum, there are the minimally enkratic in whom wish is opposed by appetite in only one type of occasion. The minimally enkratic

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[106] Jeanette Kennett suggested to me that the person who has some experience of temptations and struggles might, for example, be better placed to understand others' struggles. They could therefore end up wiser and more generous than the person without any experience of conflict. I think this is true, but better still would be to have a useful experience of conflict and *not* to remain in that state. Therefore it would be better to be virtuous after having learned from one's trials than to be enkratic and *currently* struggling with conflicting desires to do the wrong thing.

have only one type of appetite that opposes wish – the desire for chocolate as it might be. Such types are also extremely rare. In between, there are the more common garden variety enkratics in whom appetite opposes wish on some occasions but not on others. And surely all actual ethical agents, all fairly decent but non-saintly people, are in fact common or garden enkratics (see 1179b 16–20). For their habituation has neither succeeded completely in making them virtuous nor failed completely.

I am not entirely sure how Reeve reaches the fuller conclusion about the ubiquity of enkrateia based on the passage he cites (*NE* 1179b 16–20), especially since Aristotle earlier writes, '[Enkrateia] and [akrasia] are about what exceeds the state of *most people*; the [enkratic] person abides [by reason] more than most people are capable of doing, the [akratic] less' (*NE* 1152a 25–27, emphasis added). The first part of Reeve's argument, though, has the ring of experiential plausibility. It is probably the case that a few people fight contrary appetites at every turn, and a few people fight them at every turn in respect to one specific weakness (i.e. a desire for too much chocolate). But overall, Aristotle's theoretical and therefore defining categorisation of the enkratic agent is as an agent with a *stable* ethical disposition to act *reliably* well (contra. Drefcinski, 2000: 115-116; Halper, 1999). Here is Ursula Coope (2012: 151-152):

> Aristotle himself never suggests that self-control [enkrateia] is radically unstable […] To be self-controlled is to be someone who is *such as* to have bad desires and *such as* not to be led by them (1152a1ff). The self-controlled character is prone to bad appetites, and yet reliably makes, and acts upon, the right decision (προαίρεσις). Of course, these remarks are compatible with the view that self-control is not quite as stable a character trait as virtue.

In light of this, it would be strange to call our regular boaster enkratic since the enkratic agent acts reliably *well* (even if their motivations are conflicted) and our regular boaster acts reliably *badly*. Further, the regular boaster does not recognise a conflict between reason and desire where the enkratic certainly does. The enkratic agent also has the correct view of the good.[107] Aristotle writes, 'For in the [enkatic] and the [akratic] person we praise their reason, that is to say, the [part] of the soul that has reason, because it exhorts them correctly and towards what

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[107] See Halper (1999: 132).

is best' (*NE* 1102b14–16).[108] Where some people act reliably because of unthinking habit or with a natural trait, the enkratic's reliability is based upon an aim to act rightly, according to reason and in line with what they know to be best. This knowledge of what is best is a correct view of the good even if their grasp of it may not be quite as clear as it is the for the virtuous agent in possession of practical wisdom.[109] Being the case, it would be unusual for an agent with the correct view of the good to have a *regular* trait of boastfulness that was not picked up on their ethical radar. Ethics of course is not an exact science, as Aristotle himself is happy to remind us, and so it is not empirically impossible that an enkratic agent might possess the reliable trait of boastfulness. For most enkratics, though, we would expect the reliable resistance of such a trait. In the interests of building a theoretical taxonomy, though, the category of enkrateia is not a good spot for the regular boaster. She does not fit the mould for enkrateia as it is described by Aristotle.

2.2 Akrasia

Turn now to akrasia and ask our two questions. First, why should akrasia be considered a deficient state of character? Second, could we place our regular boaster into the category of akrasia?

Work on akrasia (or weakness of will) has become a powerful industry of its own, with no signs of slowing down and leaving vice firmly in its wake. Both in connection to akrasia in Aristotle (Charles, 2009, 2011; Dahl, 1984; Erginel, 2016; Fairbrother, 1897; Lorenz, 2009; Mele, 1981a, 1985; Moss, 2009; Rorty, 1970, 1980) and akrasia in philosophy more broadly (Arpaly, 2000; Davidson, 1980; Kennett, 2003; Mele, 2010, 2012; Milevski, 2017; Watson, 1977), an enormous body of literature can be consulted.[110] My goal is only to show that

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[108] At *NE* 1144a31–34 Aristotle writes that the best good or the best end is only apparent to the good person. This perhaps excludes the enkratic from possession of a correct view of the good. But Price is right to qualify that the best end will only be *reliably* apparent to the good person acting with practical wisdom (Price, 2018b: 120, fn. 139), and is still at times available to the enkratic and akratic for whom it is possible to act well and according to reason since the principle is preserved in them. It is also possible that Aristotle intends to attribute practical wisdom 'in its developed state' to the virtuous agent alone, but to permit a grasp of the good end to 'the good person', that is, anyone who is not vicious (*mochthēria*), as this comparison is immediately given. (Rowe's translation 'the person who possesses excellence' for 'the good [*agathon*] person' does not permit this.) Irwin at first writes that the demanding conditions for good deliberation rule out the enkratic and akratic from possession of the right conception of the good (1999a: 253). But later, in light of *NE* 1151a25–26 (not to mention 1102b14–16), he says the two ideas could be reconciled 'if we recognize that (i) the incontinent reaches the right conclusion in his decision, but (ii) he does not reach it by exactly the right deliberation, and therefore has an incomplete conception of the ultimate end' (1999a: 266).
[109] See previous note.
[110] For the difference between more strictly Aristotelian and modern uses of the term, see Müller (2015a: 1, fn. 3)

Aristotle conceives of the akratic as a deficient type of character, and to ask whether our regular boaster should be considered among the akratic.

An obvious place to begin in making a case for akrasia being counted a deficient character state is the opening of *NE* Book VII where it is listed alongside vice and brutishness as a condition of character to be avoided. In contrast to the enkratic who acts well in the face of appetites pulling her off track, the akratic acts badly. Two kinds of akrasia are mentioned: impetuosity (*propeteia*) and weakness (*astheneia*). Interpretive problems abound in these distinctions, but for the purpose of a relatively straightforward summation, the weak akratic completes her deliberation but fails to act in accordance with it, following instead her appetite, and the impetuous akratic does not deliberate in the moment, acting straight away with passion. Aristotle takes the impetuous to be better than the weak given that the weak agent (theoretically) has a less intense feeling, actually deliberates, and still acts badly (*NE* 1151a1–4). In each case the akratic has a leg up on the vicious, though, in that she actually has a correct conception of the good but fails to act in line with it. Because the akratic has a correct view of the good (*NE* 1102b14–16; 1151a25–26),[111] she eventually comes to see clearly, awaking from a 'moral hangover' (Nielsen, 2017: 10). A more persistent problem for the akratic is that the preceding moral drunkenness is not 'out of character'. Aristotle has akrasia as a character state, not only an occasional behaviour (even while it is defined by occasional – that is, not constant – bad behaviour, and for some may be only occasional).[112] Even if the individual behavioural failures of akrasia are episodic, likened to epileptic seizures in this way, the condition of either failing to abide by one's deliberation or failing to deliberate at all occurs with enough regularity to be considered a state of character (*NE* 1145a15–19; 1150b33–35).[113]

Because of this it should not shock us that Aristotle does not shy away from using vice vocabulary in connection with the akratic agent, and it is unrealistic to expect that such common words like *phaulos* and cognates will never touch a character type who is deficient in a number of ways.[114] Consider:

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[111] On the difference between the virtuous and akratic agents' view of the end, see the very perceptive discussion in Moss (2012: 225-226). Price is sceptical that the akratic has a correct view of the good and writes that the akratic may only continue 'to respect it as a general rule (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸπολύ) even as he fails to apply it effectively' (2018b: 128, fn. 150). I think this is quite likely given that the akratic fails to abide by their decisions, but it does not speak against the notion that they do in fact possess sch a conception even while it fails to get them to act well. See also fn. 108.

[112] This point was helpfully pressed upon me by Jozef Müller.

[113] Anthony Price suggested the example to me that it is *characteristic* of Magnus Carlsen to win at chess.

[114] Aquinas says the akratic possesses vice in the incomplete sense since they are not wicked in aiming for evil with their reason (1993: 7.4.1359).

NE 1145b 13, 'The [akratic] person knows that his actions are base (*phaulai*).'

NE 1148a 3–4, 'A sign in favour of what we say is the fact that [akrasia] is blamed not only as an error (*hamartia*) but as a vice (*kakia*), either unqualified or partial, while none of these conditions [akrasia about victory, honour, wealth, etc.] is blamed as vice.'

NE 1149b 18–20, 'If, then, [akrasia] about appetite is more unjust and more shameful than [akrasia] about spirit, it is simple [akrasia], and vice (*kakia*) in a way.'

NE 1151a 5, 'Evidently, then, [akrasia] is not a vice (*kakia*), though presumably it is one in a way.'

NE 1151a 29 'It is evident from this that the [enkratic] person's state is excellent,[115] and the [akratic] person's state is base (*phaulē*).'

NE 1151b 29–30, 'If [enkrateia] is excellent, then both of these contrary states must be base (*phaulas*), as indeed they appear.'

NE 1152a 16–17, '[The akratic] is not base, since his decision is decent; hence he is half base (*hēmiponēros*).'

NE 1154b 32–34, 'So much, then, for [enkrateia] and [akrasia] and for pleasure and pain, what each of them is, and in what ways some [aspects] of them are good and others bad (*kaka*).'

Instructively, for our purposes, Aristotle writes that we should not assume the pleasures of those with base appetites are true pleasures since these people are in a *bad condition* (*NE* 1173b 21–25, emphasis added). The akratic – to underscore that last remark for those who missed it – is in a *bad condition*.

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[115] See the above discussion of enkrateia for a thought about the qualified use of 'excellent' in the case of the enkratic agent.

Can we add the akratic to our assembly of deficient characters? A person who knows what ought to be done but fails due to an overpowering appetite is hardly the paragon of humanity that Aristotle wishes for his students to emulate. One who fails to deliberate at all is also going to end up in situations that she regrets. Even though at *NE* 1102b14–16 and 1151a24–26 we learn that the akratic has a better view of the good life than the vicious agent and so at least has the chance of hitting upon happiness if she follows that route more reliably (Aquinas, 1993: 7.4.1359), she still has bad appetites *and* acts badly. This is not as serious a condition as the truly vicious who act badly and in line with their appetite *and* choice, but in the broad sense the akratic agent does not manifest an excellent soul and is deficient because of that.

Is the category of akrasia a good fit for our regular boaster? To confuse the akratic and the regular boaster is to confuse an agent's condition with their behaviour. Even though the akratic agent is reliably unreliable by virtue of their character state, it does not mean their bad behaviour will be stratified into traits (i.e. cruelty, anger, or boastfulness) in the same way as our regular boaster's non-episodic boasting; the akratic may simply characteristically fail to abide by reason in a variety of spheres of action and feeling. Furthermore, Aristotle tells us that '*every* [akratic] person is prone to regret' (*NE* 1150b31, emphasis added) when they eventually see that they have acted badly; this is a mark of the condition. The regular boaster, on the other hand, may possibly be shown through reason that she has offended somebody with behaviour *x* and so *in this way* regret it, but she will not regret that she failed to live up to her better judgments, as does the akratic. Unlike the akratic, the regular boaster has no set moral path to which she might return and see how far she has deviated. And so, as with enkrateia, while we cannot forbid the attribution of akrasia to our regular boaster on the grounds of possible experience, the theoretical case does not match up very cleanly.

2.3 Brutishness

Unlike intemperance, where one overindulges in natural pleasures, the state of *thēriotēs* has a problematic relationship to unnatural ones.

It is possible that brutishness (*thēriotēs*) is not a unified type (*eidos*) but rather a set of related traits or behaviours, speaking as Aristotle does of *hexeis*, plural, rather than a *hexis* (*NE* 1148b19). Nevertheless, for Aristotle, it is a wickedness with aetiological origins in either a backward culture, natural corruption, illness, or habit. It bears pointing out that this is quite a broad list and we might suppose that a clearer picture of the type will come from an

examination of its symptoms instead of its causes. This would be a vain enterprise, however, for here we find mention of cannibalism, plucking hair, chewing nails, eating earth, and sexual intercourse between males.[116] The latter half of this list hardly comes across 'more frightening' (*NE* 1150a) than strict vice unless, for instance, we are to have in mind an extreme form of nail-biting to the point of profuse bleeding and self-harm, as suggested by Pearson (2018: 130).[117] Pearson also wonders how we are to reconcile plucking hair and biting nails with the experience of (an unnatural) *pleasure* since these things are perhaps painful, offering a possible parallel with a person who has eczema and takes pleasure in the scratching that will later bring suffering (2018: 128). However, it may be that Aristotle's association of brutishness with unnatural pleasures is supposed to bring to mind an implicit connection to both unnatural pleasure *and* pains, just as his discussion of virtue and vice is dependent upon one's view of the pleasant *and* painful (*NE* II.3). If so, this would make sense of his later example of the man deeply terrified by a mouse (*NE* 1149a6–12) since here the agent finds unnatural pain, not unnatural pleasure. In another example, as with Phalaris the tyrant, the agent takes pleasure in the torturing of other people. But if one rejects this notion that brutishness encompasses unnatural pains as well as pleasures, the example of the mouse might be considered as 'brutish cowardice' and not brutishness *simpliciter*.[118] At any rate, the brutish person exhibits particularly problematic passions and desires, so much so that it is said to go outside the limits of vice which concerns a mistaken valuation of natural pleasures and pains (*NE* 1145a34, 1149a1). In what way does the brutish agent go *beyond* the vicious one? Aristotle answers the question in a direct comparison between *thēriotēs* and *kakias/kakian*.

Where in the vicious *to beltiston*, 'the best part', is corrupted, for the *thēriotēs* it is absent altogether (*NE* 1150a). Natali follows 'almost everybody' in saying that the absence of *to beltiston* is the absence of reason (2009: 123). Sedley is a notable exception to this pack, claiming that the absence of *to beltiston* is 'with regard to the goal' (1999: 166). In other words, the *thēriotēs* has 'no hold on any goal' or view of the end worth pursuing (1999: 166). Kontos may be also be closer to Sedley, describing in the brutish a '*total lack of access to practical principles*' (2014: 225, emphasis in original). This sounds like a more restricted failure than an

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[116] Even while homosexual activity may have been approved by some members of Greek society, it appears that Plato and Aristotle found it to be unnatural and worthy of condemnation. See Finnis (1993-1994) and Dover (1978: 154-159).

[117] Although at a time only marginally closer to Aristotle own, John Gillies could write about this list, 'Such depravities, whether originating in natural corruption, custom, or malady, exceed the limits of vice, and cannot be approached with epithets characteristic of merely human pravity, except by way of metaphor or similitude' (Gillies, 1797: 317). Others, then, have been immediately horrified by the examples.

[118] Note also Aristotle's repeated 'Other states […]' (*NE* 1148b 25–30), which may be indicative of quite different classes of brutish states and further indicate the fragmentary nature of *thēriotēs.*

absence of reason *altogether*. In saying that the brutish character lacks reason altogether Natali et al. have considerably narrowed the category, really leaving room only for the insane.[119] The claim of the opposing camp is more modest, suggesting that *thēriotēs* lacks the sort of goal that would give them an end worth pursuing.[120] There is something intuitively plausible about Sedley's angle. After all, what is it to have no reason whatsoever? Making and defending exhaustive claims about *thēriotēs* is outside the scope of this study. There is something to be said for the views of both Sedley and Natali. But what we have seen is enough for us to make two important observations about the brutish person.

First, the behaviour of the brutish agent is strongly reminiscent of vice. By way of rationalisation, or for the sake of order, one might label brutish actions with vice terminology. Aristotle describes the brutish as those with vice (*kakian*) beyond the human level (*NE* 1145a34), as having base (*mochthēras*) natures (*NE* 1148b 18), as possessing a brutish and not a simple vice (*mochthēria*), and with a badness (*kakion*) lacking a principle (*NE* 1150a1–9). At *NE* 1149a5, Rackham has, 'Indeed folly, cowardice, profligacy, and ill-temper, whenever they run to excess, are either [brutish] or morbid conditions [*pasa gar hyperballousa kai aphrosynē kai deilia kai akolasia kai chalepotēs hai men thēriōdeis hai de nosēmatōdeis eisin*]'. Natali translates the list as 'All the excesses of [vice]' (2009: 111). What does this mean? I think it means that a vice, even though it takes a given emotion to excess or deficiency, is not unnatural. The soldier who runs from the battle and leaves his comrades in danger has performed a *base* action but not an unnatural one. It is in fact all too human to protect oneself even at the expense of others, and this 'mere nature', to borrow Annas's phrase (1993: ch. 4), must be overcome by the inculcation of virtue. An excess of vice is seen where the emotion is taken beyond the merely natural, base iteration and becomes *un*natural (contrary to nature). Aristotle tries to capture this with examples like a desire for human flesh or a crippling fear of weasels. It is not

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[119] And insanity would be a very strong and misguided charge for every homosexual.

[120] There may be a contemporary parallel with Frankfurt's wanton (1971). I am unsure as to whether Aristotle takes the brutish to lack second-order desires and whether they are a bystander to their own wills as is the case with Frankfurt's wanton. Kennett has suggested something similar of psychopaths (2015: 116ff). She notes the studies of Hare (1993) and Cleckley (1955) where psychopaths have been shown to lie and confabulate, produce completely inconsistent evaluations in direct succession, behave in ways utterly at odds with their explicitly stated views, and show no signs of discomfort when these contradictions are pointed out. Cleckley recalls a patient, Pete, who was involved in a number of criminal activities. Pete seemed not to act from real motives in himself, but acted rather 'as a lazy man might swat a fly' (1955: 109). He sincerely desired to be a vestryman at his local church, explaining that religion was not overly important to him and then, in the next breath, that he believed every word of the Bible. When various inconsistencies where pointed out to Pete, he was unmoved. Cleckley wrote that, 'It was not hard to get the feeling that he had never been on any track at all, that he had not really been committed to his first proposition and so had nothing to withdraw' (1955: 120). Kennett's claim is that without internal pressure toward coherence there will be no diachronic unity and, essentially, no diachronic self (2015: 119). The results of this can be extreme depending on the opportunities that present; almost anything is possible or, at least, very little is deliberately forbidden.

strictly vice, since vice is for base and natural appetites, but by calling the behaviour an excess of vice we have a frame of reference.

Second, even though the brutish goes beyond vice in the sense that their behaviour is more extreme and unnatural, Aristotle still ultimately considers vice to be the more dangerous state. 'For in each case,' he writes, 'the badness of something that lacks an internal principle of its badness is less destructive than the badness of something that has such an internal principle; and understanding is such an internal principle. It is similar, then, to a comparison between the injustice of [a brute] and an unjust human being; for in a way each [of these] is worse, since a bad human being can do innumerably more bad things than a [brute]' (*NE* 1150a3–9). We can here imagine the kinds of people whose cleverness and drive deliver greater evils than those without such qualities.

But Howard Curzer puts forward two ways in which he thinks the brutish person is in a worse condition than the vicious. First, he says brutish people are less curable than vicious people, that 'brutish people are unpersuadable because they *cannot* hear attempts to persuade them. Their deafness is an inability; it is the result of a disease' (Curzer, 2018: 110). Second, he thinks brutishness is more harmful to the agent than vice. 'People who eat too much chocolate and drink too much claret gain weight and hangovers,' he writes, 'but people who eat dirt and foetuses (1148b19–21, 28) suffer worse fates' (Curzer, 2018: 210).

As to the second, Curzer is not incorrect to say that eating a large bucket of dirt, for instance, is probably worse than drinking a large bucket of wine (though I cannot make any definitive medical pronouncements on the issue), but this is a slightly tangential and constricted way to think about Aristotelian unhappiness. It will be the focus of Chapter 6 to show why I think the vicious agent is especially miserable, but here it should be pointed out that both Aristotelian happiness and misery take a longer view of things than individual moments of pleasure and pain. Happiness cannot be properly marked, says Aristotle, until one can look at a person's life *as a whole* (*NE* 1098a17–20). Given that happiness is synonymous with one's final end, it does not make sense to reduce it to an admittedly bleak Saturday morning where one awakens to find too much dirt in one's stomach. Regarding Curzer's first point, it is true that the brutish person at the extreme end of rational deficiency may be incapable of specifying a final end and so incapable of attaining happiness. If one is ranking characters according to their capacity for *eudaimonia*, the brutish would probably be the lowest. But plants and animals cannot attain *eudaimonia* properly speaking and Aristotle does not consider them miserable. This is because Aristotelian happiness, even while it is concerned with one's objective specification of the end and therefore does 'not depend on my say-so', it 'still implies a positive

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view of one's life. If our final good is happiness this does at least rule out conspicuously miserable or frustrated ways of life' (Annas, 1993: 46).[121] Happiness, an objective final end, is at least partially concerned with one's positive experience of that end. To pick up on Annas's use of the word 'frustrated' in that quotation, Aristotelian happiness is intimately connected to how an agent views the good and how closely one comes to attaining the good that they seek. The brutish person who does not or *cannot* formulate any conception of the good to seek will obviously not attain it, but neither will they suffer the deep frustration of failure to attain a good aimed for, nor the attainment of a good that turns out to be a great evil, as does the vicious (*NE* 1142b19–21).[122] The brutish are insulated by a cushion of ignorance that the Aristotelian vicious agent cannot fall back on.

Let me turn this discussion of the brutish person to the two questions we have asked of the deficient characters so far.

Can we add the brutish person to our assembly of deficient characters? The answer here is quite clear. Brutishness is a dramatic failure to realise the human ideal given that the excellent human perfects their rational nature and brings their desires into line with it. Natali concludes his own analysis by suggesting that 'we must place [brutishness] in the one of the inferior circles of the Aristotelian hell, not very far from vice' (2009: 122). When we talk of the bad or deficient human, the brutish must be included as one of the possibilities, however rare it may be.

Is the category of brutishness a good fit for our regular boaster? Given that the brutish state is not covered in any great detail, neither in Aristotle's ethics nor in the secondary literature, it is tempting to think that its haziness permits one to postulate within this category the answers to some remaining puzzles in Aristotelian ethics. After all, it is difficult to say whether we would be *conclusively* right or wrong about various theories concerning the brute, and that very open-endedness at least allows the logical possibility of a 'yes'. But this idea of a 'Schrödinger's Brute', while it may or may not be an escape route for other problems, does not offer us a good fit for the regular boaster. She cannot be consigned to this category under the comforting fog of ambiguity. To my mind there are three reasons for this. First, the examples of brutishness given are intended to capture unnatural desires. While there is something unlikeable about the trait of boastfulness, for instance, it is nonetheless an excess of a *natural* desire to acknowledge one's qualities 'without exaggeration or belittling' (*NE*

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[121] Aristotle himself makes the point pretty clearly at *NE* 1153b19–21. Anyone who claims a person could be happy on the rack is 'talking nonsense'.
[122] In Chapter 6 I will make clear why I take such a failure to be a serious problem for the vicious agent.

1127a27). Second, the regular boaster need have no serious rational deficits. Many or most people we know with reliable and unappealing character traits are perfectly capable of reasoning well about life and formulating a plan for their lives. Whether or not they do so is another story of course. But the image of a person who behaves so irrationally as to be considered animal-like and frightening does not fit the ordinary profile of many boasters we all know. Third, Aristotle opens his remarks about the brutish person by saying he is 'rare among human beings' (*NE* 1145a30). Experience seems to show that reliably boastful people, however, are not rare among human beings. In fact, reliably bad character traits like boastfulness are pretty common. Taken together, the regular boaster is probably not brutish.

2.4 An In-Between State

I have so far rejected enkrateia, akrasia, and brutishness as suitable categories in which to place the regular boaster. Before re-examining the suitability of the attribution of *vice* for such a person, I want to ask whether a character state in-between vice and akrasia on the character scale might be more appropriate. And before asking whether a character state in-between vice and akrasia is a more appropriate fit, we need to first ask whether a character state in-between vice and akrasia even exists at all. I want to offer three positive reasons for the existence of an in-between state based on the characteristics of people like our regular boaster.

First, it is unlikely that every person in the world will have some conception of *eudaimonia*, the good life and living well. But ideas about the good life are what some commentators attribute to each of the Aristotelian characters. Norman Dahl writes, 'If each state of character carries with it its own conception of the good, and the good is what the good person takes to be good, then each state of character will have its own conception of who the good person is' (1984: 54). We can allow that the virtuous, enkratic, akratic, and strictly vicious have some sort of conception of the good life and the good person, and they act either in line with it or against it as the case may be.[123] But Aristotle also recognises that many people just do not think well, or at all, about these kinds of things.[124] At *NE* 117911–15 Aristotle admits that most

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[123] It is debatable that the brutish can think about things in such a way, but this may be precluded on psychological grounds and not as a moral failure. Hence, the brutish will not be included in all my discussions on this and related points going forward.

[124] Aristotle does say that 'most people are rather bad' and 'human beings usually do wrong when they can' (*Rhet.* 1382b). I do not think that this is *necessarily* a statistical claim, although it might be. More importantly it is an *ethical* claim delineating 'the masses' from the virtuous. And since these people have no notion of a noble life, perhaps they are also distinct from the enkratic, akratic, and (the misguided) vicious.

people do not even have a notion of the fine. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he warns against the failure to properly conceive of the good life (*EE* 1214b6–11):

> All this considered, everyone who has the power to live according to his own choice should set up for himself some object for a noble life – whether honour, or reputation, or wealth, or culture – with a view to which he will govern all his conduct, since not to have one's life organised with reference to some end is a mark of great folly.

Now, why should Aristotle warn us of this potential folly if it is the case that every character in the Aristotelian typology already possessed a built-in conception of the good life? In order to justify the warning, it must be possible for a person to lack the conception. Further, if, as Dahl suggests, the characters in the famous Aristotelian taxonomy do possess a conception of the good, it turns out that this typology is not exhaustive since, as the passage above has shown, not all people do in fact possess such a conception. Might there exist a character outside of the virtuous, enkratic, akratic, and strictly vicious?

But it is not entirely clear whether Aristotle *does* actually hold that some people have no conception of the good whatsoever. At *NE* I.4 and I.5 we read that most people – that is, the inferior masses – think happiness is pleasure, wealth, or honour. Even if no priority is being assigned in these cases, and even if the end is variable (1095a23-5), this sounds like a conception of the good life in some sense of the idea. However, there is also something rather unfalsifiable about saying that each and every person has a conception of the good, or is trying to gain clarity about one, simply in virtue of their living *any* sort of life. And according to this view that every person has a conception of the good, behind every action and feeling is then apparently vital information revealing that conception of the good – explicitly or implicitly – and it is quite difficult say otherwise. Even with the man who says, emphatically, '*I have no conception of the good life*', or '*I have no ideas about what is living well*', the philosopher who believes otherwise can spot in that very remark something on which to rest his opposing case. If, then, one way of viewing conceptions of the good life is potentially at risk of raising the bar too high, those who attribute a conception to everyone simply in virtue of the fact that they are living *any* sort of life whatsoever may have dropped the bar onto the floor.[125]

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[125] See Price's explanation of what it is to have an implicit conception (2011b: 235). I will say more about this at the end of this chapter.

Now it may also be that these people do not think about pleasure, wealth, or honour in the right way, whatever that is taken to mean, and so their conceptions do not properly count as a "Conception of the Good Life". But does dismissing such a person's conception of the good because it is not "Conceptions of the Good Life" in the desired and robust theoretical sense have the ring of casuistry? Maybe. And so perhaps Aristotle does not dismiss them outright. He may instead recognise that most people have some sort of idea of what they take to be good, but it is not an end that is a wish for *eudaimonia* nor a commitment to its attainment. Of these people we read, 'Indeed, the same person often changes his mind; for when he has fallen ill, he thinks happiness is health, and when he has fallen into poverty, he thinks it is wealth' (*NE* 1095a23–24).[126] This line cannot speak to the virtuous, enkratic, or the akratic, all who aim (with varying degrees of success) at their conception of happiness based on reason and not due to whatever circumstances in which they find themselves.[127] Either we are to say that there are people with no conception of the good life whatsoever because whatever conception they possess does not meet Aristotle's theoretical standards, *or* we are to say that most people do have some type of conception but it is not the sort required for virtue, enkrateia, akrasia, and vice. I am actually unsure as to whom Aristotle would unequivocally attribute a conception of the good life. His claims about conceptions of the final good apparently oscillate, without clear signposting, between 'psychological description and ethical advice' (Irwin, 1980a: 47). At times the standards appear high, and only the best and worst people are driven by their end for good and ill respectively. At other times Aristotle rather more liberally distributes some idea about the good life to people (*NE* I.4 and I.5), if only in order to hit them over the head with it for thinking about things wrongly. In the end, though, since not everyone will have a conception of the good shown in a wish for *eudaimonia* productive of a choice designed to attain it, we might posit a distinctive type of character outside of the virtuous, enkratic, akratic, and vicious since those characters do possess such a wish and deliberate to various degrees of success about how to attain it.[128]

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[126] It is important to note that while Aristotle does describe the vicious agent as unstable, this is not in connection to their view of the end (*NE* 1172a9). It is rather a comment upon their reliability and fitness for friendships (see also Irwin, 1999b: 18).

[127] I have previously shown this for enkrateia and akrasia, and I will show it for vice across Chapters 5 and 6.

[128] I *think* (though I may be mistaken) that it is a separate question as to whether all our actions are *for the sake of* happiness. If everything we do either contributes to our happiness or takes away from it, this does not require any conscious aiming for happiness or living well (just like when I formulate a proposition I need not aim at truth and yet the proposition is a truth-bearer. Thanks to Jozef Müller for that analogy.) See Meyer's analysis of this relation in (2011b: esp. 47-50).

Second, recall it is the akratic whose episodic weakness of will fills them with regret, and it is the enkratic who works to overcome appetites contrary to virtue and to act correctly. But a quick look at those around us is enough to notice that not every person is in a state of either conflict or regret when they fail to act virtuously or feel that their desires (or appetites) are pulling them too strongly in the wrong direction.[129] The regular boaster is neither filled with regret as if she had acted against her better judgment and view of the good, nor filled with conflict as she struggles to act in line with her view of the good. We must be looking at a character who is not akratic or enkratic, then.[130]

Interestingly, because of this lack of painful conflict or regret, one might plausibly wonder if it would not be preferable to be one of the unconflicted in-betweeners rather than striving to be virtuous, missing the mark for whatever probable reason, and ending up one of the conflicted enkratic or regretful akratic. The explorer venturing into new lands has the chance of glory and the chance of death. The one who stays home has a shot at neither but is at least safe with a book and a warm blanket. *Audaces fortuna juvat*; but fortune is hardly gentle with those who try and fail. This lack of conflict and regret in the in-between state is particularly pertinent to Aristotle's ethical project that ranks the happiness of the agent very highly and aims to attain a state of being *eudaimon* more than it is concerned with fighting to uphold a moral law. Anthony Kenny has written in another context that agnosticism might be the safest position, and the remark fits here, too (2005: 109). Unlike the Pascalian wager where there is only salvation or damnation, Aristotle admits a middle ground. Would it not, then, be better to refrain from certainty about the true good and the best way of acting (that is, a kind of agnosticism about the good) and so be free of potential failure and conflict?[131] I can only assume that Aristotle would prize the potential for virtue as a far better goal than the non-committal safety of not aiming for virtue and, in that way, the failure to become all that a person can be.

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[129] Anthony Price pointed out that if there is a certain sense of shame, the agent must also have a conception of a better way of life, even if he does not try to attain it himself. However, if the agent is shameless, why should he not commend the behaviours to others in his situation? I would reply by saying that such a person, if they do feel shame, does not necessarily feel it because of a conception of a better way of life but because they are occasionally made to feel ashamed by the rebuke of friends. And they do not recommend the life to others because they are not very aware of the trait in themselves or its connection to living life well. It is not chosen in any meaningful way.

[130] The regret of the vicious agent (soon to be examined in Chapter 6) is quite different to the regret of the akratic and concerns among other things the despair of having one's fundamental life goals frustrated. Since the in-betweeners do not have life goals in the same way as the virtuous and vicious, once again they are spared this species of regret.

[131] Though perhaps strict agnosticism about the good is ruled out by the fact that any actions are a commitment to some kind of thinking about what is good. However, see my comment above concerning the triviality of an understanding of or commitment to the good on this reading.

At any rate, and for the purpose of this point, the experiential evidence admits the existence of a non-conflicted and non-regretful character where the conflict and regret is due to a failure to abide by a conception of living well or a battle to overcome conflicting desires in order to live well and not simply the regret that comes from social rebuke or something similar.

Third, return to my initial portrait of the regular boaster where it was proposed that she acted without choice (*prohairesis*). Here we have a person who acts in certain ways regularly, perhaps according to habit or a natural vice, but does not aim at living well, does not intend to realise the good life in her actions, and does not act according to her deliberations about the best way to achieve the good life. In a moment I will ask whether I have set the bar for choice too high and if the regular boaster should in fact be considered to act with choice. But for now I present her lack of choice as a positive reason for proposing an in-between character state. Unlike the resolved boaster who would admit to behaviour *x* but under the heading of self-assuredness or confidence or whatever else, the resolved boaster may be surprised to know that she reliably performs behaviour *x* at all.

Together, then, I have posited a character who does not fit into the categories of enkrateia, akrasia, brutishness, and one who does not have wish for the good life and a commitment (*prohairesis*) to its attainment, for they do not experience regret or conflict when they fail to act in line with their conception of the good life (which they do not possess as the result of choice and deliberation), and they do reliably act badly without choice. (The reliability here is made possible by habit or natural vice and not by a regulating conception of the good.)

What character state ought we to attribute to such a person? The middle ground of Aristotelian character typology is a shadowland and the extremes are more easily defined by their extremity. But Aristotle himself may actually speak of people who do not fit into the more familiar and rigid taxonomy. We turn now to Aristotle's ideas about 'the Many'.

3. The Many and the In-Between State

Throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* there are numerous references to 'the Many' (*hoi polloi*) or 'ordinary people', depending on how one translates the relevant terms. Could the regular

boaster be placed into the category of 'the Many'?[132] If so, we have a shot at solving the puzzle and finding a suitable home for a character that does not appear to be enkratic, akratic, brutish, or vicious. But before we drop the regular boaster on the doorstep of the Many, we should do the responsible thing and find out just who the Many are.

Jan Edward Garrett's (1993) theory about the Many is one of the most developed and interesting. I engage with it here because, although I do not entirely agree with his conclusions, he is correct in positing the Many as a character state (or, as I will argue, group of characters) between the akratic and the vicious. Here is Garrett's take on the Many.

We begin with another author, Gerald Else, who takes the primary aretaic dichotomy in Aristotle to be between the *spoudaioi* and the *phauloi*. These are not dispositions, he believes, but rather *attitudes* toward virtue. The *spoudaioi* strive for it and the *phauloi* do not. He writes: 'The dichotomy is, by the nature of the case, absolute and comprehensive. All men who act – i.e. all men engaged in the practical life – are necessarily either [*spoudaioi*] or [*phauloi*]' (Else, 1957: 77). Else also equates the *phauloi* with the many (*polloi*). Taking contraries found across Greek literature, he writes, 'The [*spoudaioi*] are the heroes, the [*phauloi*] are [*hoi polloi*], the great mass of ordinary earthlings' (Else, 1957: 78). Jan Edward Garrett follows Else and builds this argument out, arguing that *hoi polloi* (the Many) and *hoi phauloi* are *synonymous*. Here we are presented with the notion that there may be another character outside of the traditional six (heroic virtue, virtue, continence, akrasia/incontinence, vice, and brutishness).[133] Garrett labels this character 'the Many' or, since the two are the same, the '*phauloi*'. In Garrett's account, the two are said to be synonymous because the Many and the *phauloi* are described in the same way by Aristotle. Here are three of Garrett's main examples to make the case.

The first reference to 'the Many' in the *Nicomachean Ethics* comes at 1095a23–24 where we read that the many think happiness is pleasure, wealth, or honour. But their conception of the good is not stable: 'Indeed, the same person often changes his mind; for when he has fallen ill, he thinks happiness is health, and when he has fallen into poverty, he thinks it is wealth'. They live by their passions (*NE* 1179b13), and do not make distinctions between those pleasures that are worth pursuing (*NE* 1172b3–4). 'In the many, however, pleasure would seem to cause deception, since it appears good when it is not' (*NE* 1113a35). And at *NE* 1179b11–

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[132] I follow Garrett (see below) in capitalising 'Many' so as to distinguish between the noun (and adjective).
[133] Curzer offers an interesting and creative longer list of character types that include tragic heroes and slaves (2012: 367-387). It would take me too far afield to examine those. I have set myself a specific task in trying to find a place for the regular boaster and not to offer an exhaustive list of Aristotelian characters. However, it is worth looking at Curzer's work for the potential of a longer list.

15 Aristotle explains that the Many do not act out of love for the fine; they in fact have no notion of it:

> For the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the source of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and [hence] truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it.

Garrett calls this the 'radical instability' of the Many (1993: 175). He places a fairly heavy emphasis on the fact that *hoi phauloi* and *hoi polloi* are synonyms (or theoretical synonyms at the very least), turning to *NE* 1113a26 to make the philosophical point that the *phauloi*, like the Many, also have an unstable conception of the good: 'For the excellent person, then, what is wished will be what is [wished] in reality, while for the base person (*phaulos*) what is wished is whatever turns out to be [that appears good to him]'. If both have an unstable conception of the good, so the thinking goes, perhaps the same class of people is at issue. (Note here that Garrett is not only making use of the plural, *phauloi*, and ropes in *phaulōn*.)

Garrett's second attempt to connect the *hoi phauloi* and *hoi polloi* comes from *NE* 1099a12 where Aristotle explains that those things pleasing to the Many will conflict since they are not pleasant by nature. Immediately, Garrett takes this conflict between competing goods to be the same psychological conflict found much later, at *NE* IX.4, where we read of inner turmoil even to the point of hating oneself. As above, an earlier passage in the *NE* with similarities to a later one is taken to therefore concern the very same person.[134]

A third argument invokes *NE* 1168b15–21, depicting the kind of self-love that gratifies appetite and the non-rational part of the soul. This is, says Aristotle, the character of the Many

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[134] It should be said that this is quite a precarious passage on which to make the basis of one's argument; it is the scene of heated debate for a number of reasons. But here is Garrett's reasoning, nonetheless. He starts with *NE* 1166b3, 'The many, base (*phaulois*) though they are, also appear to have these features [of being a friend to oneself]'. Jolif and Gauthier are correct to point out that this first mention of *phaulois* cannot be the akratic for they could never delude themselves into contentment (1970: 735-736). But neither do these lines speak of Garrett's conflicted Many since they explicitly mention self-approval and the almost certainly mistaken feeling of decency. Self-approval and a feeling of decency are not marks of conflict, though, and it is precisely conflict that Garrett has just attributed to the Many (recall *NE* 1099a12). Garrett takes the next mention of *phaulois* to continue this thought while in fact the *phaulois* mentioned in 1166b6–7 are set up as a *contrast* to those in line 3; these ones *do* experience conflict between appetite and wish (i.e. where the others have not). Jolif and Gauthier and Grönroos (2015a: 149-150), who have differing interpretations of the rest of the passage, both at least agree that these lines do refer to the akratic; the picture of an agent choosing what they know to be harmful, shrinking from what they know to be best, is strongly reminiscent of the akratic. I focus on this passage in Chapter 6.

(*hoi polloi*), and, earlier, the base person (*phaulos*) (*NE* 1168a30). Garrett concludes, somewhat optimistically, that this 'confirms the essential identity of the classes called *hoi polloi* and *phauloi*' (1993: 176). Once again Garrett makes use of the wider '*phaulos*', effectively claiming *phaulos* and all its cognates as potential synonyms with the *hoi polloi* and not only the *hoi phauloi*.

Even if one took the above theoretical points to be more convincing than I do, the main reason that I do not follow Garrett in all this is because the argument relies too heavily upon a precise appearance of *phaulos* that I do not see in Aristotle. I do not take *phauloi* and *hoi polloi* to be entirely synonymous because I do not take *phaulos* to have such an exclusive range. It is not unusual that simple words with many applications are prone to ambiguity. This is not in the sense of basic verbal confusion (whether one has a bat used for cricket or a bat that flies and bites, etc.), but to say that in using *kakos* to pick out a bad house and a bad man, while it is clear what we are to think of the house and the man (we can picture a bad house or a bad man, generically speaking), we may have less of a well-bordered notion of *kakos* itself given that its identity constantly shifts to whatever object it is attached. But Aristotle must be allowed this fluid usage. These may be lecture notes, after all, filled with shorthand and primed for elaboration. And so, while it would be careless to force these words into synonymy, it would be equally strained to expect perfect technical terms designed to light up on the page (or in the mind, as the case may be), and containing within them a multitude of information beyond their place in the sentence. In the prying hands of a philosopher, a word that is not designed to bear weight may be leaned upon too heavily and it either crumbles to nothing or creates problems where none previously existed.

To give 'the Many' exclusive rights to *phaulos* in virtue of that word's appearance in some passages concerning the Many is to commit a naturistic fallacy of sorts. Garrett is correct to point out that some appearances logically connect to recurring sketches of the Many. But elsewhere *phaulos* and its cognates describe bad water (*NE* 1142a23, *phaula*), bad music (*NE* 1170a11, *phaulois*), and bad actors (*NE* 1175b12, *phauloi* – see also bad actors at *NE* 1148b8, *kakon*). And at other times it carries an ethical sense in relation to the akratic or properly vicious. *Phaulos* cannot sustain its own unequivocal category or character state – it turns up in too many places not connected to character. Even if one were to grant that the *hoi polloi* are broadly *phauloi* in the conversational sense of that word (i.e. the Many are ethically bad/deficient), it does not automatically give licence for the converse whereby an appearance of '*phauloi'* in the text always indicates *hoi polloi*.

Garrett himself is aware that Aristotle's references to 'the Many' are not uniform. As Irwin points out, *polloi* at times has a statistical sense rendered by 'most people' (*NE* 1150a12, 1151a5, 1152a26), and elsewhere is a pejorative indicating the failures of the masses in implicit contrast to the virtuous (*NE* 1095a16).[135]

Recall, however, I am not trying to discover the fundamental identity of the Many. I am trying to solve a different and specific puzzle. My aim is to discover what character type should be attributed to the person who behaves reliably badly and in ways with remarkable surface similarities to the vicious agent but who may fail to meet the psychological standards for vice imposed by Aristotle.

To that end, I propose that within the non-homogenous group of people that make up the Many, people with the reliably bad trait of boastfulness may be found. The regular boaster possesses an in-between state. To be clear, the Many contains within in it this state but does not contain *only* those with that state.[136] In other words, 'the Many' and 'the regular boaster' would not have the same extension. I am not entirely sure what other states are to be found within this broader church of the Many. But I do not need to give a perfect account of that. I am only suggesting that given Aristotle's own recognition of a non-homogenous group of inferior people called the Many, we might place the regular boaster there.[137]

3.1 In-Between Character Traits

If we recognise a type of character between the akratic and the vicious (the so-called in-between state housed within the larger category of the Many), what individual character traits are appropriate for attribution? I have already attempted above to show that Aristotle himself does in fact make room for a character *type* between the vicious and the akratic. I am now trying to find some language that captures this idea for us in respect to the individual *character traits* such a person might possess.

In everyday speech we call a person a boaster if they have a consistent disposition to boast. This is just what it is to be a boaster even if the agent does not choose the behaviour

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[135] Reeve translates both the statistical and pejorative sense as 'ordinary people' (2014: 207). See also Woods on the many kinds of multitudes with which Aristotle is concerned (2017).

[136] This fundamentally non-homogenous view is unlike that of Garrett who takes the Many to be primarily though not exclusively the *phauloi*, and of Curzer who thinks that the Many are 'moral beginners' with the potential for virtue (2012: 332, fn. 328, 369 (fn. 335)).

[137] I wonder if this is what Aristotle has in mind when he writes about people who are neither decent nor base. At *NE* 1157a16–20 (emphasis added), he writes, 'Now it is possible for bad people (*phaulous*) as well [as good] to be friends to each other for pleasure or utility, for decent people to be friends to base people (*phaulois*), and for someone with *neither character* to be friends to someone with any character'.

under the heading of boasting and may even be unaware of it. Would we now say, though, that the woman who drinks too much on too many nights etc. is not intemperate because she does not act according to choice (*prohairesis*)? This is just what it is to be intemperate, vicious choice or not. To refrain from attributing bad character simply because it does not appear in line with vicious choice will mean an awful lot of character traits are ruled out that common sense would be happy to rule in. Since we are aware of people who possess relatively stable character traits that tick the conceptual boxes of excess and deficiency in a given sphere, we must make room for this category of character that is *consistent* in their excessive of deficient actions or feelings but is not strictly vicious because the behaviours are not according to choice.

In order to maintain Aristotle's standards for vice and choice while at the same time admitting common sense notions about what constitutes the everyday character trait of boasting, I suggest we draw a line between the boastful person and (what will soon be more clearly delineated) the vicious boastful person. We have, then, what I will call 'the deficient character trait of boastfulness' and 'the Aristotelian vice of boastfulness'.[138] The former is a characteristic pattern of thought, feeling, and behaviour and would be counted as a vice by many contemporary virtue ethicists who define virtues and vices in this way,[139] while the latter is a characteristic pattern of thought and feeling with behaviour chosen to promote a (*misguided*) wish for living and acting well. Such are the categories I propose: deficient character traits and Aristotelian vices.[140] The former refers to the traits of the regular boaster

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[138] Remember that Aristotle himself is aware of natural character traits, even bordering on natural vices but not to be properly considered vices. He also attributes personality traits to animals, describing them as 'dispositions toward emotions or actions that play a role in the survival of the individual animal or its young' that are different to human personality traits only in *degree* (Leunissen, 2017b: 10, 12). To that end, lions are courageous (*HA* IX 29 629b10–20; b35), as is the sheepdog (*HA* IX 1 608a30–31), dolphins are mild and gentle (*HA* IX 48 631a8–20), sheep and octopuses are stupid (*HA* IX 3 610b22–23), swallows are skilful (*HA* IX 7 612b21–27; `11 615a19), and elephants are perceptive (*HA* IX 46 630b19–21) (I owe these references to Leunissen, 2017b: 9-15). These traits are not virtues or vices, but they still speak to reliable patterns of thinking or behaviour or both. And in people, too, we need not eliminate the step between not possessing any particular trait and the possession of a virtue or a vice. I think we are in Aristotelian waters in positing deficient character traits and Aristotelian vices as two different stages (though the former need not become the latter).

[139] See Battaly (2014) and van Zyl (2015), for instance.

[140] Even if these qualities are not taken to be choice states (*hexis prohairetikē*), they can still be *hexeis*. That would mean a person could possess a *hexis* consistently displaying excess or deficiency *without* choice, as common sense confirms when we look around and see people doing so. A *hexis* is understood to be a stable feature of a person. Irwin is correct in saying that both 'habit' and 'disposition' are not perfect translations of the word *hexis* (1999a: 349). 'Habit' does not quite go far enough in capturing the essence since the non-virtuous might possess a (reliable) habit of acting in a certain way but possess none of the feelings or knowledge requisite for virtue. The non-virtuous can habitually act in a superficially good way by accident, for reward, or for a less than noble purpose. 'Disposition' is also partially misleading since Aristotle elsewhere makes a point of distinguishing a *hexis* from a disposition (*diathesis*). In *Categories* (1938) Aristotle writes, 'Let [*hexis*] and [*diathesis*] here constitute one kind of quality. The former are unlike the latter in being more lasting and stable. Comprised among what we call [states] are virtues and all kinds of knowledge' (*Cat.* 8b 26). Both *hexeis* and *diatheseis* are qualities (*poiotēs*, *Cat.* 8.25) but refer to two separate notions. The relationship between states and dispositions is also not quite a two-way street. Aristotle writes, '[States] are also dispositions; dispositions are not always [states]. While those who have

and the latter the resolved. And so, where Aristotle writes, 'It is not a person's capacity, but his choice [*prohairesis*], that makes him a boaster; for his state of character makes a person a boaster (*NE* 1127b15–16)',[141] we should think of him referring to 'the Aristotelian vice of boasting' – a reliable pattern of thought feeling, behaviour A chosen over C, D, E etc. for the sake of B where B is a conception of the good. Contextually this is justified, for he is discussing vices within the framework of virtue leading to *eudaimonia*.

Importantly, I believe this is in fact exactly what Aristotle has in mind when he writes, 'All these means [of modesty, friendliness, dignity, etc.] are praiseworthy without being virtues, and their opposites are not vices either, *because choice is not involved*' (*EE* 1234a24–

[states] are disposed in some manner or other in consequence, those who are some way disposed have by no means in each case a [state]' (*Cat.* 9.10). While a state is then indeed a kind of disposition, a person with a disposition does not necessarily possess the qualities of the person with a state (*hexis*). A state is more than a disposition, or, if one wishes to retain a stronger link between states and dispositions (and depending on their translation of the two words), a state is a certain kind of disposition. One of the ways in which it is different has been mentioned: dispositions are said to be relatively easy to move or change. To provide Aristotle's own examples, a warm man may soon become cold and a well man may soon become sick. Vices, then, being states, are relatively permanent, not shifting from moment to moment. It is a deep and lasting feature of a person. In common language we may call it a 'stable identity' (Carlisle, 2014: 19). The Stoics disagreed with Aristotle on this point, preferring instead to call virtue a *diathesis* rather than a *hexis* (*SVF* 1.202; 2.393, in von Arnim 2016 (Arnim, 2016a, 2016b)). But Aristotle forges ahead, explaining that vices are only under our control at the initial stages (*NE* 3.5.14; 3.5.22). Once properly habituated, the vice is settled and very difficult to shift.

   Hexeis are also understood to be a kind of having that is very close to a kind of being. *Hexis* stems from *echein* (the infinitive 'to have', and the root, *echo*, 'I have') and must be read with this in mind. *NE* 2.5.6 can be more literally rendered, 'If then neither feelings/passions neither capacities the virtues are, it remains you *have* them [*ei oun mēte pathē eisin hai aretai mēte dynameis, leipetai hexeis autas einai*]'. 'Have', as the remaining option, must be emphasised: virtues are not felt, for example, but *had*. This 'having', however, is anything but passive. Rodrigo quotes Émile Benveniste who observed that the supposedly transitive function of the verb 'to have' which distinguishes it from the infinitive 'to be' ('the state-verb *par excellence*') is illusory. Benveniste writes (1960: 194-194, 197, cited in Rodrigo, trans. Carlisle):

> 'To have' has the construction of a transitive verb, but nevertheless is not one. It is a pseudo-transitive [...]. Within Indo-European languages, it is a late acquisition, which took a long time to become established, and which remains partial. The more standard expression of the connection indicated in our languages by 'having' is expressed, on the contrary, by 'belonging-to' [*être-à*], which constitutes the grammatical object of the verb 'to have' as the subject [...] 'To have' is nothing other than an inverted 'belonging-to'.

Aristotle confirms Benveniste's diagnosis. At *Cat.* IV.2 Aristotle writes, '*echein de hoion hypodedetai, hōplistai*', which we can translate as, 'And to have is like: he is shod, he is armed'. Here the categories of 'having', 'belonging', and 'being' are blurred. A man who *has* shoes *is* shod just as a man who *has* weapons *is* armed. Rodrigo writes that 'the category of having denotes a mode of fulfilment that ultimately concerns the subject himself' (2011: 9). The *having* of the character trait is now intricately bound up with the *being* of the agent. And given that this having of the *hexis* is so close to the being of the possessor, Aristotle seems justified in stating that *hexis* is a *normative* construct, reflecting (even revealing) the state of the possessor as excellent or otherwise Application of this principle to character traits is confirmed by ordinary usage of the relevant language: one *has* the vice of cruelty and one *is* cruel. Aristotle gives the example of possessing a garment, writing that 'between the man who has a garment and the garment which is had, there is a "having"' (*Met.* 5.20). Alexander of Aphrodisias (2013) in his notes on *Met.* Chapter 20 suggests we are to understand this *having* as an activity between the possessor (the man) and the possessed (the garment). It exists only in the relationship between the two parties. This, I believe, is the sense in which Burnet remarks that *hexeis* are not only qualities but relations (1900: 90).
[141] Irwin explains, 'These different people have the same capacity for exaggeration, but different states of character' (1999a: 225).

26, emphasis added). Aristotle is comfortable in using the designator or trait label 'modesty', but it is not the Aristotelian virtue of modesty. Similarly, Aristotle is comfortable using the designator or trait labels of 'shameless' and 'bashful', but it not the Aristotelian vice of 'shamelessness' or 'bashfulness' since, as he writes explicitly, choice is missing.

One may at this point wonder if I have not moved the goal posts, so to speak. For in order to accommodate Aristotle's ideas about vice into a modern scheme perhaps I have made a tricky linguistic move, giving Aristotelian vice its own special name so it can sit beside 'deficient character traits' or 'the deficient character trait of boasting' as a separate if related entity. But it is very possible Aristotle just has something rather different in mind in discussing vice than what is at issue for modern virtue ethicists. The linguistic division proposed, then, gives proper credit to Aristotle's theory of character.

To see whether this is the case, we turn to vice and ask whether we should have put our regular boaster into that category all along.

4. Vice Reconsidered

Let us take stock of a forceful and, to my mind, enlightening objection.[142] One might think that the regular boaster is in fact exhibiting an *implicit* choice (*prohairesis*) of sorts, and therefore the line between the resolved and regular boaster is obliterated – both agents are now vicious. The regular boaster, on this reading, ought to have been placed in the category of vice all along since she acts with the required *prohairesis*, here just implicitly. If we allow that the regular boaster is part of a family and a community, possesses relatively normal mental capacities, sees the effect of their boasting on others, is potentially and occasionally reprimanded for this regular boasting by people they trust, and continues to do it to the degree that it is part of their stable character, it could be said that their values are made clear. Even if the regular boaster is not aware that they have been performing behaviour *x* in quite the same way as the resolved boaster who is committed to behaviour *x* in order to bring about their wish for *eudaimonia* (acting and living well), the regular boaster person seems to be living life in such a way that their own values are prioritised; a commitment *of sorts* has become visible.

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[142] Thanks to Paul Formosa for raising it.

Consider again Angela Smith's claim that that 'we often take what a person notices and neglects to have an enormous amount of expressive significance' (2005: 242). Or, take Richard Yetter Chappell and Helen Yetter-Chappell's belief that what one finds salient indirectly reveals their moral character (Chappell & Yetter-Chappell, 2016: 449, 451). Or, Segvic's reasonable scepticism of the person claiming weakness of will or some such excuse when their repeated actions, upon closer inspection, seem to accord quite well with their apparent "principles" (2009a: 122, the scare quotes are from Segvic). Has the regular boaster indirectly revealed their moral character to the point of displaying an implicit *prohairesis*, a commitment to a vision of the way life ought to be lived? If so, does this now threaten the integrity of the resolved-regular barrier which is principally built upon the very division between possessing and failing to possess a *prohairesis*?

The objection has teeth because it gels with common sense – people intentionally and unintentionally reveal their values and character in action, particularly regular actions. But the answer to the question – at least, as I see it in Aristotle – will remind us just what it is that Aristotle takes vices to be. And that answer may not fit so neatly into modern expectations of the concept.

Once more, then, the question is whether the regular boaster displays an implicit commitment to actions for the attainment of a certain kind of life that ought to be considered a *prohairesis* and, by extension, ought to be (re)considered as vice.

4.1 Vice and Reason

In the subsequent chapters I will talk more about the psychology of the vicious person, particularly as it pertains to their misery. For now, though, I need to say a bit about it by way of delineating the properly vicious person from those people with surface similarities.

Virtue does not require only acting as the virtuous person acts, although one must certainly do that. Moreover, the truly virtuous person 'must be in the right state' when she performs virtuous actions (*NE* 1105a32). Aristotle also understands the vicious agent to be in a certain kind of state: 'But doing acts of cowardice or injustice is not doing these actions, except coincidentally; it is being in a certain state when we do them' (*NE* 1137a22–23). What is this state? Kraut gives a good example with the virtue of temperance, the virtue whereby a person chooses certain pleasures of taste and touch and rejects others (*NE* III.11):

The proper reason for choosing certain pleasures and rejecting others is that the former facilitate and the latter impede our efforts to live a life whose ultimate end is practical reasoning. Only the person who uses this standard chooses in the right way. For example, if someone thought that the ultimate end of human life is health, or some aggregate of health, longevity, and physical fitness, he might make precisely the same choices among pleasures as the person who has the right intellectual standard. Even so, he would not count as a temperate person, according to Aristotle, since real temperance cannot exist in the absence of practical wisdom ([*NE*] VI.13 1144b16–17), and this person's faulty conception of the ultimate end shows that he lacks the intellectual virtue. He acts as the temperate person would, but not for the right reason, and so he is not a temperate person. (1989: 336)

I think this can be applied to the vicious agent with a reasonable tweak. While virtue is constrained by a true view of the end given by practical wisdom, vice is constrained by a false view of the end given by (at least) the absence of practical wisdom, sometimes indicated with *aphrosunē* (*NE* 1146a27–31; *Rhet.* 1371a13, 1378a10, 1382a11, 1410a8; *Pol.* 1281b27).[143] Even though her goals will not have the same content as the virtuous person's goals, the vicious agent is still ultimately guided by her conception of the good, however misguided.

This of course does not perfectly answer our question, for we are wanting to know if one's conception of the good life can be exhibited *implicitly* or it requires an *explicit* striving towards its attainment.[144] We must continue the investigation, then.

There are two ways in which we might read the claim that the vicious agent is guided by her conception of the good. The first is what has become known as the 'Grand End' view (Broadie, 1991: 198-202). The Grand End view understands Aristotle to say that the virtuous (or vicious) agent has 'an explicit conception of his own good or eudaimonia' (Pearson, 2016: 153), a 'fully worked-out picture of what *eudaimonia* consists in' (Bostock, 2000: 84), a 'blueprint of the good' that guides its possessor in all her deliberations, 'and in terms of it his rational choices can be explained and justified' (Broadie, 1991: 198). Opposing that view, Broadie argues that it goes against common sense, demanding an unrealistic standard for the virtuous agent, essentially requiring that she engage in high-level philosophical thinking to establish a

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[143] I owe these references to Kontos (2014: 223)

[144] It is good to remember, at least, that reliability is not alone sufficient; Aristotle does expect psychological conditions to be met.

Nicomachean-style blueprint of the good life. Broadie writes, 'The conditions for assigning [virtue labels] become utterly unrealistic if, in addition to moral virtue's entailing practical wisdom, practical wisdom entails possession of a true, comprehensive articulate picture of the human good' (1991: 201).[145] For those who take the Grand End view to be implausible,[146] application of it to the vicious agent may be seen as an especially ridiculous move. And here is Mele to offer us such a critique[147]:

[This view] has the preposterous result that the *akolastos* or self-indulgent agent, whenever he intentionally goes for the nearest pleasure, has his *eupraxia* or happiness explicitly in mind. Surely, self-indulgent persons often act quite impulsively, without consciously attending to such a grand thing as their ultimate aim in life. (1984: 144)

So Mele worries that someone who acts or reacts as quickly the intemperate agent cannot be reasonably said to have her explicit goal of happiness in mind. Of course, this line of thought must in theory be drawn against the courageous or the generous who similarly will often act very quickly, and necessarily so. Must they, too, be barred from the possession of an explicit conception of the good life on these grounds? A more plausible criticism of the Grand End view in relation to the vicious agent would be to say that if a wise person should struggle to form a comprehensive and articulate picture of the human good then how much more improbable would it be to expect such a thing from the vicious agent? This criticism, however, depends upon the idea that the vicious agent, though lacking true wisdom, cannot possess significant intellectual abilities, and there is no reason to build this into the definition of vice.

But let us leave the vicious agent for a moment and turn to the most famous defender of the Grand End view in general. Richard Kraut admits it would be an implausible account of the Grand End view that required an agent at every waking moment to be simultaneously aware of what happiness consists in and what they must do in particular circumstances to attain it. 'What is essential to the Grand View', however, he writes, 'is a thesis about the justification of decisions: if a person of practical wisdom is asked to state his reasons for making a decision,

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[145] Broadie is influenced here by Hardie (see especially, 1980: 252).

[146] See for instance Price who writes that the relevant passages have probably been '*over*-interpreted' (Price, 2011b: 200-205).

[147] Mele is specifically refuting the Anscombian view discussed above.

then the full justification must begin with a substantive and correct view of happiness' (Kraut, 1993: 362).[148] Kraut rests his opinion primarily upon *EE* 1214b6–11:

> (A) All this considered, everyone who has the power to live according to his own choice should set up for himself some object for a noble life – whether honour, or reputation, or wealth, or culture – with a view to which he will govern all his conduct, since not to have one's life organised with reference to some end is a mark of great folly.

Bostock, who also sees a Grand End view advocated in Aristotle (even if he himself thinks the idea is impractical), also points us to *NE* 1140a25–28:

> (B) It seems proper to a prudent person to be able to deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for himself, not about some restricted area – about what sorts of things promote health or strength, for instance – but about what sorts of things promote *living well in general*.

'Here the phrase "living well in general"', says Bostock, 'evidently refers to the supreme end, eudaimonia, and clearly the wise man must have some conception of what this is if he is to work out what conduces to it' (2000: 84). Bostock also gives *NE* 1142b29–32:

> (C) Further, our deliberation may be either good without qualification or good only to the extent that it promotes some [limited] end. Hence unqualifiedly good deliberation is the sort that correctly promotes the unqualified end [i.e., the highest good], while the [limited] sort is the sort that correctly promotes some limited end.

Bostock comments: 'Once more the phrase "what is unconditionally the end" (t*elos haplōs*) is naturally taken to be the supreme end, *eudaimonia*' (2000: 84).

In (B) and (C) it is the case that Aristotle means 'living well in general' and 'what is unconditionally the end' to refer to *eudaimonia*. We concur with Bostock on this front. But Aristotle does not give any more information about how exhaustive one's conception of *eudaimonia* needs to be. It is a leap, unjustified by the text, to argue that since Aristotle advises

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[148] See also Inglis (2014: 266).

us to deliberate about what is conducive to *eudaimonia* that we must have an exhaustive and detailed conception of *eudaimonia*, a coherent blueprint of the good life which we might consult. Even while Aristotle unquestionably and repeatedly does set *eudaimonia* as the goal of good deliberation, he does not demand a Grand End view of *eudaimonia* where the whole thing is perfectly mapped *before* one gets going. The strongest evidence that Aristotle may have advocated such a position, I believe, is (A). But is (A) really sufficient to ground the Grand End view?

Price finds this particular passage inadequate to support a Grand End reading of a conception of *eudaimonia*, writing that the one 'goal for the noble life' may not be one's only goal, nor 'exhaust one's conception of *eudaimonia*' (2011b: 203). Even if one's life does revolve around a primary goal or set of goals it does not therefore follow that one is 'exclusively fixated upon them' (Price, 2011b: 203). In (A), Aristotle is advising us to find a worthy priority, but this again does not require an exhaustive blueprint of what it is to live well in light of such a priority. The man who values his family above all else need not have in his mind an exhaustive conception of the good life where family is prioritised, but he will instead go through life deliberating and making decisions as they arise with a foundational sensitivity to how these deliberations and decisions will affect his family first and foremost. If he is asked to give reasons for his decision, he still need not refer to a substantive picture of the good life, but he will explain his actions in light of his devotion to family, the primary end for which he acts and around which his life often revolves.

The Grand End view is doubly implausible when one recalls that Aristotle's *eudaimonia* refers to a person's whole life and not only discrete time-slices (*NE* 1098a19–20). An agent cannot be reasonably said to have a complete picture of the good life without living some significant portion of it. Though he is not attacking the Grand End view at this particular point, another thought of Price's could be applied where he writes, 'At no time will anyone (save God), seeing a life in detail and as a whole, have access to all the information relevant to a total assessment' (1980: 351). A Grand End view, if it is to be even possible, will require temporal experience, providing a better view of the *life* to which living well refers. It is (in most cases?) not the sort of thing a person can conjure up from the dining room table divorced from a good deal of living.

If a defender of the Grand End view found this discussion of the demand for a blueprint-quality picture of the good life to be an unfair characterisation of their theory, part of the issue will come down to what is to be considered a 'substantive and correct view of happiness', to quote Kraut. If the Grand End view does not in fact call for a relatively exhaustive conception

of happiness but just a priority suitable for dictating and regulating behaviour, then perhaps we are not so far apart and the label 'Grand End' will now just refer to the primary – and not necessarily the only – end for which an agent deliberates and acts. It probably comes down to what one considers 'substantive'. Meyer is right to say that a doctor with a substantive view of what constitutes health does not therefore possess such a conception 'so complete and exhaustive that no exercise of judgment is required about how to treat particular patients' (2013: 575). It is possible on that score to have both a substantive view of happiness and for this substantive view not to provide a blueprint for every decision that will need to be made, but where one lands on the scope of and level of detail in that substantive conception is up for review.

It is my opinion, as we shall see, that one's conception of *eudaimonia* grows as their virtues or vices grow, and the end is clarified and refined over time by the virtues or vices one possesses. I will return to the thought in a moment.

Instead of saying that the vicious agent has an explicit conception of the good life, then, it is more important to say that the vicious agent *explicitly, that is, knowingly acts in order to act and live well as she conceives of this*. Even while the conception is not necessarily perfectly explicit (although it surely can be), she will explicitly, that is, knowingly, act for her conception of the good, however clear or unclear that conception is to her at the time. When an agent chooses (in the technical sense) an action, she is doing so in order to attain her wish; when an agent chooses to act for the promotion of a wish, the wish that produces prohairetic action is for *eudaimonia*, living well.[149] Deliberation and choice designed to promote a wish for *eudaimonia* happen explicitly, that is, knowingly. The vicious agent will be able to produce relevant reasons for action upon request (*NE* 1105a31–35), however inarticulate they might be,[150] but the actions need not reference a substantive view of happiness *if* this means a Grand End blueprint. Instead the reasons will reflect an explicit aim to live well according to the agent's conception of that.

When an agent is acting according to choice and for the sake of a wish for *eudaimonia*, she will (be able to) say: 'This is my idea of good work [*eupraxia*], this is the kind of life I want' (Anscombe, 1981: 70). And Heda Segvic has written, 'Deliberation is ethical if the agent's overall moral outlook guides his perception of the situation on which he acts, activating

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[149] We have here an ethical *prohairesis*. For the distinction, see Chapter 2, section 4.
[150] See also Lear (2004: 111, fn. 147)

this or that part of it' (2009c: 159).[151] (Remember that vicious deliberation is ethical as a contrast to *non*-ethical; it may still be *un*ethical deliberation!) Together we have the idea that an agent's idea of living well guides her ethical deliberation and that she will be able to say at such a time, 'This behaviour is the thing to do in respect to living well in general'.

But, how can a person know that their view of living well is at issue when they do not have a clear or complete idea of what their conception of living well *is*? To illustrate this problem allow me to reference a well-known parable.

A group of blind men wish to learn about a mysterious new creature, the elephant. None of them know anything about the animal, and placing their hands upon it, seek to study it. Since each man takes a different part of the elephant, each describes it based on his partial experience. The elephant is like a pot says the man who feels the elephant's head. It is a winnowing basket says the man who touches its ear. It is like a ploughshare says the man who grabs the tusk. And so on. We are supposed to see in this the possibility that our own knowledge is partial. But the story has been criticised for its hidden claim to the very certainty it decries.[152] Somewhere, after all, is the narrator (or the king, in a variant) standing outside of all the ignorance and apparently able to see that the creature really is an elephant. Apply this to our agent who has at least some sort of view of the good: unless one has a grasp of the whole, how can one know that they are consulting any one part of it?

I think the answer to this question can be found in Aristotle's views about moral development and education. Though it is the case that Aristotle thinks the virtuous or vicious agent must be guided by their conception of *eudaimonia*, he does not think the virtuous or vicious agent will *start* with this perfectly chiselled conception of *eudaimonia* before she does anything else whatsoever. Instead, 'Aristotle's view is that a proper understanding of the good and a tendency or disposition to pursue the good grow together' (Mele, 2017: 172). The *way in*, so to speak, to a conception of the good is from the ground level. The vicious agent begins with individual vicious actions, the actions begin to form a disposition, and the disposition has a natural focus on certain ends. Katsafanas, writing more broadly on ethical character, makes the following observation:

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[151] Segvic does not herself subscribe to the Grand End view. She writes, 'It is not [Aristotle's] view that one explicitly consults one's whole conception of the good life. Not all of it is explicit or available for scrutiny […] [Aristotle's] thought rather is that one's overall evaluative outlook on the conduct of life should be on call in every situation' (Segvic, 2009c: 158).

[152] The point was well made by the missionary and theologian Lesslie Newbigen, among others. See Hick (1995: 49)

I have said that character traits influence, constrain, or determine choice [non-Aristotelian non-technical choice]. It is easy to see how: they can operate by determining the goals that appeal to the person or by modifying the way in which the person pursues these goals.[153] Part of the difference between the impetuous or the cautious person is that different possibilities occur to them, different options strike them as the thing to do, different things appear possible (Katsafanas, 2017: 135).

And MacIntyre writes:

For it is only in making practical judgments and choices, through exercise of the virtues, that each of us discovers in our own lives a certain kind of directedness toward a final end that is our own, toward perfecting and completing the lives that are our own, by living out what in terms of our particular abilities and circumstances we judge to be the best possible life for us (MacIntyre, 2016: 53-54).[154]

The intemperate person, by virtue of her intemperance, will begin to form a view of the good that centres on pleasure. The cowardly, in virtue of their cowardice, will begin to form a view of the good that centres on their security even at the cost of the safety of others. And so on. Segvic concludes that 'the virtuous and the vicious will be distinguished as much by their goals as by their distinctive vision of the world' (Segvic, 2009a: 136). All this will take time and work. Mele warns that if virtues are to be open to real human beings, they will not develop quickly (2017: 173). And Segvic describes the journey to a conception of the good as a 'painstaking struggle' (2009b: 109). As the cowardly agent, for instance, grows in her cowardly disposition, she will both *develop* and *refine* her conception of the good life in ways that are significantly informed by that cowardly disposition itself.

I once heard the novelist Don Delillo say that the larger structures and themes of his novels are often not available from the outset. They present themselves as he goes along. And the *way in* to these larger story arcs is sentence by sentence by sentence.[155] Something similar

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[153] If character can determine goals.

[154] This is the sense in which Curzer (with some exaggeration, no doubt) writes that 'a virtue may go so far as to generate a full-blown moral theory' (2013: 88).

[155] In *Tell Them of Battles, Kings, and Elephants* (2018), Mathias Énard makes the same point about Michelangelo; the *way in* to his bigger ideas for sculpture is through drawing after drawing.

happens with a life. Actions produce habits that produce traits that produce patterns of thinking about and seeing the world that produce aims and broader aims and eventually produce aims concerned with living a life well and in some perhaps rare cases, after a time, a relatively cogent and overarching conception of the good life.

A perfectly clear conception of the good is not open to moral beginners. Perhaps it is only a regulative ideal in its most textbook form. At any rate, return to the question just posed: unless one has a grasp of the whole, how can one know that they are consulting any one part of it? To reply, the vicious person's conception of the good will *not* be absolutely clear from the outset. Rather, it is developed by the vices one begins to inculcate just as that conception of the good in turn develops the vices that call it into being. Such is the cycle of moral – or immoral – development. As a vicious disposition becomes more entrenched, the conception of the end becomes clearer; as the conception of the end becomes clearer, the vicious disposition to attain it becomes more entrenched. It is a truism to say that life must be lived, but the point carries with it a great truth about the nature of real-time chronology and its relationship to the human experience by which it is bound. One's apprehension of one's self unfolds across hours and minutes and, in the case of more meaningful knowledge, years. In the majority of cases there seems to be no way of fast-forwarding lived experience; it just has to be lived.

4.2 Is the Regular Boaster Vicious?

Come back to the regular and resolved boasters, using the above interpretations in making an important distinction between them.

Does the regular boaster exhibit an implicit commitment to a certain kind of life that ought to be considered a *prohairesis* and, by extension, ought to be (re)considered as vice? In light of the above, I think Aristotle would answer in the negative. The regular boaster, when asked to give a reason for her behaviour will not be able to give one, or if she does, it will not be the right kind of reason that indicates a grasp of *why* she acts and for what sort of *end*. She will say nothing of the connection between her behaviour and her view of living and acting well. In fact, it is more than possible she will not be very aware of her behaviour at all since it is not chosen nor is it part of any rational wish that justifies its position in that plan for its attainment.

The resolved boaster, by contrast, when asked to give a reason for behaviour *x*, will explain it (with varying degrees of articulacy) with respect to its connection to her view of the good and living well. She possesses a rational wish for *eudaimonia* and, after deliberation about

how to attain it forms a choice to here and now promote its attainment in action. She will be able to say: 'This is my idea of good work [*eupraxia*], this is the kind of life I want'. Her view of this good life will be developed and refined by the vicious dispositions which influence, constrain, and determine that view of the good by virtue of their specific interests and spheres of attention. In turn, her vicious dispositions will become more stable and entrenched as her view of the good is developed and refined, determining those feelings and actions (i.e. vicious dispositions) that are necessary for its attainment.

Return to our somewhat lifeless conversational example designed to display that distinction:

Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know. Why are you doing this?

Regular Boaster A: Really? I had no idea. I don't think I was.

Or:

Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know. Why are you doing this?

Regular Boaster B: Oh, right. I felt a bit inadequate in that room of doctors. I just tried to tell a few stories to fit in.

Even though Regular Boaster B is able to give *a* reason, unlike Regular Boaster A who is surprised to hear she has behaved in such a way, it is not a reason connected in any way to B's view of the good life or the sort of person she thinks she ought to be to attain it.[156] The regular boaster could be iteration A or B and still not exhibit a *prohairesis* that reveals a character state founded upon one's view of living well. Now take the resolved boaster:

Plato: You've been boasting all week, you know.

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[156] It is possible that feeling inadequate is not something Regular Boaster B wants, and so she boasts to avoid that. Thus, she has *some* minimal conception of what is good. However, in my example I take it that Regular Boaster B does not think about boasting in terms of living well. Her behaviour in the room is a *reaction* to a negative feeling she does not like and not a behaviour aimed at a particular way of living.

Resolved Boaster: No, no. It's called confidence, Plato. People loved the stories, I watched them smiling. You should try it.

Plato: Why are you behaving like that?

Resolved Vicious Boaster: It's important to have a healthy self-esteem. If you can't command attention like that, you'll never make a good impression and you'll never get ahead. I'm going to get the fellowship.

Plato: You want the fellowship?

Resolved Vicious Boaster: Well, it provides job security and respect – everything I'm looking for.

Not every resolved vicious boaster will be as articulate or nakedly ambitious as the agent in the above example. But where the *content* of their answer to Plato's question will vary from agent to agent as their conversional abilities naturally vary, the *form* of their reply will in some way resemble the above, with a connection to their view of the good that is developed and refined over time. Regular Boaster B just wishes to avoid feeling inadequate because she does not enjoy the sensation, whereas Resolved Vicious Boaster desires a good sense of self-esteem because it fits in with the sort of life she is aiming at and the behaviours she considers to be good for the attainment of this.

Having explained the difference between the regular and resolved boaster in this way, I propose that we ought *not* to attribute an implicit *prohairesis* to the regular boaster and, by extension, that the regular boaster ought *not* to be placed into the category of vice. The regular boaster can remain where she was placed a moment ago, her character labelled as an in-between state nestled within the non-homogenous category of the Many.

All of this does mean that Aristotelian vice will probably be a rarer state of character than the in-between state and the individual deficient character traits that go along with it. But just as virtue is a rare excellence of character, I read Aristotle as holding that vice will be a rare non-

excellence given its relation to a particular conception of the good life and a commitment to attaining it.[157]

I could not agree more strongly with Urmson's painfully neglected warning that 'if we think that the words "virtue" and "vice" in translations of Aristotle have the meaning we should naturally expect, we shall be, and ought to be, greatly perplexed' (1988: 5).[158] 'Those readers who are not so surprised', he writes in typical style, 'have probably just failed to assimilate what they read'. With Urmson as an indirect ally, then, I argue that the split between 'the deficient character trait of boasting' and 'the Aristotelian vice of boasting', while it may appear as an *ad hoc* linguistic confabulation to make room for Aristotle's idiosyncratic ideas (or my interpretation of them), is actually intended to be a good and necessary way of showing the foundational differences between Aristotelian vice and vice in modern moral theories.[159]

As an example of this, Aristotle holds vice to be a worse character state than akrasia because its misguided view of the good takes the agent further from *eudaimonia*, the best life, and not because the vicious agent will necessarily do the worst actions (although the correlation is sensible enough, as we shall see in Chapter 5). Aristotle says that good and bad people can do bad things (*NE* 1132a3–3), and that not all cowardly actions are indicative of cowardice (1137a22–24). I can envisage a situation where an agent acting on a vicious *prohairesis* lacks wit (read: *is* a bore) but does not harm anyone, and another situation where an akratic, overpowered by appetite, kills a person. But vice is still worse on the Aristotelian schema because the vicious person thinks their behaviour is good and, in line with their *prohairesis*, will attain for them what they take to be the good end. Since it will not do this, the vicious person will be worse off than the akratic who at least holds the correct view of the good. And so, where modern moral theories are often concerned with vices and the resultant 'bad' behaviours,[160] Aristotle (not *not* interested in bad behaviours, of course) is foundationally interested in states that lead to the good life. This, recall, is why he does not recommend enkrateia. It is not because passions contrary to virtues are primarily 'immoral' but because the

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[157] Leunissen calls both virtues and vices *perfections*, pointing to *Phys.* 246a13–17 and 246b21–247a3 (2017b: 110-112).

[158] Urmson's suggestion of 'flaw' for vice is too passive, though I understand what he is driving at (1988: 5). Crisp *defines* vice as a defect or flaw but retains the *translation* 'vice' (2004a: 205).

[159] This is quite compatible with Annas's criticism of those persons who believe some serious leap has been made in the translation of *aretē* to 'virtue' instead of the less theoretically loaded 'excellence' given that *aretē* appears in both moral and non-moral contexts. She writes that 'non-moral applications of *aretē* and *virtus* are quite irrelevant to their application to the moral virtues' (Annas, 1993: 131). To be clear, I am not attempting to throw out the category of moral vice in Aristotle, but rather to underscore the fact that his ideas about moral vice (or vices of character) are founded upon different considerations to those authors who write about moral vice or vices of character in contemporary virtue ethics in particular.

[160] See Driver (2001), Baehr (2010), and Battaly (2010a, 2014), for instance.

enkratic agent will be worse off than the virtuous, struggling as they do with contrasting passions and guilt.

4.3 Review of the In-Between State

I have proposed that there may be people in the world who behave reliably badly, who may not possess a conception of the good and a eudaimonic wish for it, will not be conflicted when acting against a conception of the good that they do not possess, and whose reliably bad behaviour is not according to choice. I have said it does not make sense to call such people akratic since their behaviour is reliable and not episodic, because this type of person does not act *against* a more rational conception of the good, and because they do not feel regret due to their failure to act according to their better judgments. It does not make sense to call such people enkratic since the enkratic experience a conflict where wayward passions begin to rise, and because the enkratic acts reliably *well* and would (or should) notice the regularity of bad behaviour constituting a trait. It does not make sense to call them brutish since brutishness is rare, concerns unnatural passions, and is possibly indicative of an illness. And it would not make sense, according to what I have argued, to call such people vicious on an Aristotelian reading since they do not act with a choice (*prohairesis*) connected in the right way to their wish and in this way do not have a *prohairesis* revelatory of vice. I suggested we place this state in-between akrasia and vice into the non-homogenous category of the Many and call this state *the in-between state*. The individual character traits possessed by persons with this in-between character state can be consistent and clearly excessive or deficient in a given sphere of feeling and action without being considered as vices, so understood. By way of distinguishing between robust vice and the character traits possessed by in-betweeners, I labelled the former, for example, 'the Aristotelian vice of boasting' (or, in the context of this investigation, 'the vice of boasting') and the latter, for example, 'the deficient character trait of boasting'.

More will be said about Aristotle's aim in talking about vice proper over the next chapters. For now, it is enough to say that Aristotelian vices are not the only thing lurking at the poles of excess and deficiency in a given sphere of action and feeling. In the same dark corners, at the extreme and deficient ends of the mean, we find everyday deficient character traits that are not Aristotelian vices even while they are indicative of a deficient character. To put it succinctly, not every miss of the virtuous mean is a vice even though every vice is a miss of the virtuous mean. I hope I have been able to show why this is the case.

5. Summary of the Deficient Assembly

So far I have confined my discussion to the continent, the akratic, the in-betweeners, and the brutish, touching upon vice and *prohairesis* primarily by way of comparison and to outline the difference between reliably bad character traits and Aristotelian vice. The foregoing arguments surrounding the shared use of vocabulary and the philosophical portraits that map these varied failures to achieve the human function come together to form one argument for our present purposes: all character types who fail to be virtuous are described linguistically and philosophically under the broad heading of deficiency.

We have also seen, however, that the characters who fail to attain the human ideal are not all deficient in the same way and so cannot be consigned to a one-size-fits-all label. The continual repetition of the vocabulary of deficiency in connection with the various character types under scrutiny demonstrates that 'deficiency' of character is a wide-ranging concept not found exclusively in reference to strict vice, nor as a blanket term admitting no distinctions between the aforementioned types of deficient characters. I have tried to give a picture of these character states, showing the way in which each falls short of the ideal.

Finally, I examined a character who bears the closest surface similarity to the vicious agent and attempted to clarify the difference between this character and the properly vicious. The state I have called the in-between state comprises people who exhibit reliably bad behaviour in a given sphere but do not do so according to their view of the good and, by extension, according to their choice (*prohairesis*). Because of this, I have argued such a person cannot be properly considered vicious. Since I also aimed to demonstrate that the categories of enkrateia, akrasia, and brutishness were also not fitting homes for the reliably bad person, so construed, I proposed we place them into the non-homogenous category of the Many, a group referenced numerous times by Aristotle but never plainly defined. The lengthy examination of the in-between state was primarily designed to highlight the psychological conditions necessary for vice proper, a character state that is specifically connected to an agent's (misguided) view of the good life and a commitment to attaining it. It further underscores the distinction between the vicious person in Aristotle's ethical project and the vicious person more commonly seen in contemporary virtue ethics.

We might take a final note here, however, already briefly touched upon. In calling these characters broadly deficient I am referring to the characters as categories in a theoretical taxonomy. As individuals, of course, it is possible that an akratic man may be morally worse than a vicious one, for instance, murdering a child while overcome by anger and seriously regretting it while a particular vicious man might only be rude but is so consistently and according to his principles about what is good for him to do. We must be clear that the ranking of Aristotle's character taxonomy does not speak to an individual's capacity for immorality (of which the entire taxonomy may very well display) but rather the proximity of their state to a correct view of and plan to attain *eudaimonia*.

With these pieces on the board, we can now turn to vice in the strict sense and continue to fill out our picture.

Chapter 4

The Vicious Agent: A Roadmap

1. Introduction

It is the task of the next two chapters to put together a positive picture of the vicious person. Roughly speaking, and to offer a bumper-sticker summary, I will ask whether Aristotle's vicious agent is bad or sad. It will be seen that I think she is both.

To get some clarity on this, there is a related and more established debate concerning these questions in relation to virtue. It has been asked whether Aristotle is interested in the *good for* humans or the *good of* humans and suggested that maybe he was not quite sure himself where his focus lay. That debate is a helpful place to begin and will in turn set up the overarching categories through which I will examine the vicious person in the following two chapters. Instead of looking at the *good for* and the *good of*, we shall look at the *badness of* and the *bad for*. To phrase that as a question, is vice (part of) the *badness of* humans or is vice *bad for* humans? Since I think that Aristotle does not wish to remain silent on either of those issues but rather intends for his writing on vice to speak to them both, the subsequent two chapters will each take one of those ideas for a closer look. Chapter 5 will try and show why vice makes for a bad human (and to explain what is meant by that over and above general deficiency) and Chapter 6 will explain how vice is bad for a human. Before starting to fill out that picture, however, this shorter chapter will first offer a roadmap, setting up the examination and showing that the bad/sad disjunction is a viable route for analysis.

2. Aristotelian Equivocation: *Badness of* or *Bad for*?

In 1957 Peter Glassen believed he had spotted a fallacy in Aristotle's argument about the good.[161] In essence, Aristotle had apparently confused the notion of the *good of* man with the *goodness of* man. Here, from *NE* 1.7, is the function argument broken down:

> The function of man is activity of soul implying a rational principle.

> The function of a good man is activity of soul (implying a rational principle) in accordance with excellence.

Therefore:

> The good of man is activity of soul (implying a rational principle) in accordance with excellence.

And Glassen writes, 'Now the first thing that ought to strike us about this argument is that the conclusion is a *non sequitur*' (1957: 320). Aristotle makes the same point in relation to lyre-players, and Glassen's criticism is clearer in respect to that example. He says of it (Glassen, 1957: 320):

> From the statement that the function of a good lyre-player is to play the lyre well, or in accordance with excellence, what follows is, *not* that the *good* of a lyre-player is playing the lyre in accordance with excellence, but rather that the *goodness* of a lyre-player consists in playing the lyre in accordance with excellence. Since 'the good' is not a term occurring in the premise, in cannot validly occur in the conclusion.

Returning the point to humanity, Roger Crisp has written (2014: 241):

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[161] It was Roger Crisp who suggested I apply Glassen's work ('Glassen's Gap') to vice to see what came up.

We might accept that a good specimen of humanity, one living fully in accordance with its nature, will live virtuously. But this leaves open whether living the life most characteristic of one's nature will in fact be the life that is best for one.

And we could also ask the question from the other side: if the virtuous life is what is good for humanity, will it also be what makes a good specimen of humanity? It is true that if Aristotle intends for two distinct theses – one about the goodness of man and a second about the good for man – to arise out of the one Function Argument, he may be guilty of what Aurel Kolnai called 'Aristotelian equivocation' (1978a: 66).[162] But is this what Aristotle intends? Is he trying to sneak two quite distinct ideas into the one line of argument?

In a formidable essay by Kathleen Wilkes, she proposes that charging Aristotle with a degree of equivocation may be an anachronistic move. Both Plato and Aristotle, she writes, shared a conviction that 'nothing can be an *aretē* unless it benefits its possessor' (Wilkes, 1978: 571). In answer to the question, 'Why should I be moral?', Wilkes's Aristotle would reply, 'Because no other course of action is in your interests, placed in the circumstances in which you are' (Wilkes, 1978: 571). To put this another way, 'the foundation of morality is identical with that of enlightened prudentiality' (Wilkes, 1978: 571). This goes against the grain of much in contemporary moral theory but that, I take it, is precisely Wilkes's point. Importing modern divisions into Aristotle's thought is problematic if one expects him to have answers to questions that he is not asking. It is quite possible, then, that *the human good* is synonymous with the *good human*, that is, the person who attains the human ideal. The same virtues that perfect our nature also make our lived experience the best it can be.

Having looked at this question through the lens of virtue, we can now see this reversed dynamic at play in the deficient characters that we have so far examined. The akratic is overpowered by appetites, acting against what they know to be good and experiencing shame and regret once the appetites subside. The enkratic struggles against base appetites, behaving rightly but experiencing the mental struggle, and probably the guilt, of psychological disharmony. These deficient states make one's daily life less than ideal. Since these characters are 'bad' in the sense of 'deficient', we see an example of deficiency of character being at once bad for the agent and the badness of that agent. And if we take bad in this way, without an especially moral

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[162] Kolnai goes on, 'To blur the distinction between "the good" pursued and the moral goodness of conduct (of the will, of the agent) is as much an ineradicable tendency in man's mind as to make that distinction expresses an ineluctable finding of his consciousness' (1978a: 66).

edge at least from the outset, we can resolve the apparent tension between the *bad for* and the *badness of* humans. The bad human is one who does not fulfil the human *qua* human ideal *and* this is bad for humans who must then live either with the conflict that arises from an imperfect loyalty to reason, an imperfectly developed practical rationality, and an absence of a right goal to aim for and eventually take hold of. 'Aristotelian equivocation' is a fair charge if these two notions are intended to be separate and proven with the same argument, but it is unlikely Aristotle means for this in his theory.

3. A Qualification for the Strictly Vicious

I have argued that vice in the robust sense is an exclusive subset of general deficiency. What defines the vicious over and above those who merely fail to be virtuous in various ways? To ask that question using the terms now employed, what is the *badness of* the vicious person and what is the *badness for* them?

Let me start with the opinion of one scholar who heavily emphasises the *bad for* side of things. Stephen Salkever warns us against viewing the vicious person as morally bad. Instead, he argues, we ought to translate *mochthēros* as something close to misery. I will quote the relevant passage in full since it is an important view to wrestle with (Salkever, 1990: 220-221, fn. 235):

> In general, Aristotle's terms of moral blame cause serious translation problems, and can block our access to the text in important ways. In particular, we need to avoid giving terms such as *mochthēros*, *ponēros*, *kakos*, and *phaulos* a Christian gloss by translating them as "vicious" or "wicked". One not need wholly accept Nietzsche's distinction between master and slave moralities to see that such words have nothing to do with sin and power (though others such as *deinos* and *panourgos* are closer); they instead call to mind wretchedness, misery, and being burdened by toils. A good example of the importance of this issue is the way in which different translators render in English the important claim in the discussion of the causes of crime at *Pol.* 2, 1267b1 that, "*ponēria* is insatiable among human beings. *Ponēria* is rendered as follows: Lord: "wickedness," Irwin: "viciousness," Sinclair: "depravity," Jowett: "avarice," Rackham: "baseness," Barker: "naughtiness." The first three suggest satanism or mental illness; "avarice" is too limited; "baseness is

close but hopelessly archaic; and "naughtiness," while etymologically accurate, coming as it does from "having naught" and implying a falling short rather than a going too far, in modern English suggests harmless schoolboy high jinks as the paradigm of nonvirtuous conduct. I do not know that there is a single good solution to the translation problem, but somehow the notion of misery or wretchedness needs to be included in our reading of Aristotle's (and Plato's) terms for bad character. Otherwise, we can make no sense of how difficult Plato seems to think it is, for example, for Socrates to persuade others that tyrants are *phauloi*, though he would have no trouble in gaining agreement that they were *deinoi*.

We can add to this interpretation Garrett's findings in the LSJ. While *phaulos*, he explains, does not have the 'etymological connections with notions of hard labor or drudgery' (Garrett, 1993: 177), *mochthēros* is cognate with *mochtheō*, to be distressed or weary with toil, and *ponēros* with *poneō*, to work hard, suffer, toil, and also with *ponos*, hard work. But, we might reply, LSJ also shows that *mochthēros* is very often used in a moral sense for wickedness or depravity. And *ponēros* carries similar moral shades quite commonly with political connotations (Aristotle connects it with tyranny). This is all well and good. One can hardly dispute the lexicons, and both wicked and miserable readings can be justified by appeal to their appearances in other authors. But context is king. What picture does Aristotle mean to give of the properly vicious person?

Throughout Aristotle's discussions of the vicious person, there is a clear pattern whereby the vicious person is bad, doing harmful and shameful things worthy of blame, and in a miserable state; Aristotle's vicious person is both bad *and* miserable.

Just as with the above deficient characters, we might say that the vicious agent lives a life that is *bad for* a human and one that is also indicative of the *badness of* a human. However, where for the broadly deficient characters this badness was, to various degrees, a failure to be virtuous, in the case of the vicious we must read 'bad' with a slightly different, and stronger, edge. As we shall see in the following chapters, the badness of the vicious agent is repeatedly spoken of by Aristotle as something harmful, shameful, and worthy of reproach sometimes. It is a badness closer to what we ordinarily think of when we imagine a morally bad person in

various guises.[163] But the vicious agent is also miserable, even to the point of despair (*NE* 1166b). Irwin admits that for Aristotle the vicious person will be miserable, though he does not see misery as built into the meaning of the term vice (1999a: 339). It is, for Irwin, a philosophical or contextual point whether misery arises. Garrett and Salkever, on the other hand, suggest that misery is implied by the very word itself. But it is not as though Aristotle has no words available to him to indicate misery more directly (*athlios* does this for him fairly often: *NE* 1100a 9, 29; 1100b5, 34; 1102b7; 1105b5; 1166b27). And to argue on grammatical grounds that *mochthēros* has the exclusive connotation of misery is to essentially redefine the word or to give unequal weight to one of its possible definitions over others.[164] At any rate, and aside from this linguistic point, Aristotle is quite clear that the vicious person will *also* be likely miserable. Where the broadly deficient person failed to attain the flourishing life displayed by the virtuous person, the misery of the vicious person is more serious than this and is, if left unchecked, a significantly destructive force in such a person's life as we shall see.

4. Category Three: The Vicious Person

We have arrived at the peak of Aristotle's deficient characters: the vicious person.[165] I will examine them through the lens of the *badness of* vice and its *badness for* the vicious person. The positive or robust account of vice works with the hypothesis that the badness of vice and its badness for the vicious person will be different to those same categories applied to the other deficient characters. That is, the badness of vice is of a different order to the badness of enkrateia, akrasia, brutishness, and the in-between state. And vice is bad for a person quite differently to the ways in which enkrateia, akrasia, brutishness, and the in-between state are bad for them.

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[163] I will use 'bad' and refrain from 'wicked' since the vicious person often performs shameful or harmful acts that are not strictly wicked. However, in connection with the vicious person, 'bad' must still be read with something stronger in mind that the default position whereby one fails to be virtuous. See Rachana Kametkar's argument against reading vice in Aristotle purely as a kind of psychic disease to be pitied or cured, as in Plato's *Timaeus* (2019). I mention this more in Chapter 5, section 9.2.

[164] Note also that even good people can be come into miserable circumstance through external misfortune and still retain their nobility through it all (Nussbaum, 1992: 285). Aristotle either believes that the good person themselves is not strictly miserable but only their circumstances, or he thinks that the good person is miserable but not quite as miserable as the person who has caused their own downfall through wickedness. LSJ has *athlios* as a state, and a good person cannot, categorically speaking, have the same state as a bad one.

[165] Category One and Category Two were the focus of the previous chapters.

In putting together this robust account of Aristotelian vice it will become clear as we go along that Aristotle has in mind a character state quite different to what is often thought about when contemporary moral theories talk about vice. Aristotle is interested in states that make leading the good life possible or impossible, and vice presents its own particular and serious roadblocks to the leading of a good life. Vice makes a human bad both in their actions and feelings and in their rationality and reasoning about what it is to live and act well. Vice is bad for a human as it leads to an experiential state of deeply negative feelings that I think is best described as misery. It will be the task of the following two chapters to show how this is so. Let us begin with the first category, the *badness of* the vicious person.

Chapter 5

The Vicious Agent: Part One

1. Introduction

Vices are bad. That statement seems rather obvious. But it may be less obvious precisely why Aristotle understands the vices to be bad. In this chapter I will aim to give an account of this, as well as to show that Aristotle's problems with vice are not precisely the same as those of contemporary moral theory.

To discover more about the *badness of* vice, we can begin by reminding ourselves of what a vice *is*. From there we will be in a better position to understand why, to Aristotle, the vices are bad.

Virtues and vices are not feelings (*NE* 1105b30) since we praise or blame a person for their virtues and vices but not their feelings (to a degree, *NE* 1106a1). They are also not capacities since we are not praised or blamed for what we are simply capable of (*NE* 1106a7). Of the three potential conditions of the soul, then, the remaining option is a state (*hexis*).[166] What sort of state do we have here, though?[167]

Virtue is a state that causes its possessor to perform its function well (*NE* 1106a16). We assume by contrast that vice does not do this, perhaps going so far as to do the opposite. '[T]he virtue of a human being', says Aristotle, 'will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well' (*NE* 1106a23–24). And so, to ensure we are in fact discussing those states that enable the peculiar *human* function to be performed well, we must confirm that we are not mixing into our thinking any states that gods or animals might also possess. Virtues and vice must be states of the soul about feelings and actions (*NE* 1106b16). Here the gods are excluded since 'anything that concerns actions appears trivial and unworthy of the gods' (*NE* 1178b17); their entire existence is contemplation. All things concerned with action – the feelings that produce actions as well as the actions themselves –

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[166] Sometimes translated 'disposition'.
[167] In writing this section I am indebted to Meyer's wonderfully clear explanation of virtue and vice (2011a: 19-27).

are no concern of the gods. But the capacity for feeling (*pathos*) is very much a vital element of virtue and vice for Aristotle. He writes:

> By states I mean what we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings. If, for instance, our feeling is too intense or slack, we are badly off in relation to anger, but if it is intermediate, we are well off; the same is true in other cases (*NE* 1106b25–28).

Virtues and vices are states that determine when, why, and how one's feelings will be felt and shown in action. For virtue, having these feelings 'at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way' is proper (*NE* 1106b21–23). Vices, as we shall see, display feelings and actions in a given sphere either excessively or deficiently.

Aristotle's emphasis on action in virtue and vice has already ruled out the gods, but his narrow conception of action with a strict connection to reason, also rules out children and animals. He writes (*EE* 1224a27–30, trans. Rackham):[168]

> In man both [reason and desire] are present – that is, at a certain age, the age to which we attribute action in the proper sense; for we do not speak of a child as acting, any more than a wild animal, but only a person who has attained to acting by rational calculation.

Here both children and animals are barred from the possession of virtue and vice on the grounds that they cannot properly reason. Remember, Aristotle allows that there are praiseworthy natural virtues which are not full virtues, and blameworthy conditions that are not proper vices because the element of choice (*prohairesis*) is missing (*EE* 1234a24–26). To our understanding of virtue and vice we must add the notion of reason; these are states that are exercised in choice (*hexis prohairetikē*) (*NE* 1105a31–3; 1107a1).

Aristotle refers to two rational desires, wish (*boulēsis*) and choice (*prohairesis*). Right out of the gate in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in the very first lines, he makes clear that 'every action and rational choice (*prohairesis*), is thought to aim at some good' (*NE* 1094a1–2, trans. Crisp). The good at which rational choice aims is happiness (*eudaimonia*) (*NE* 1094a1822;

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[168] I use Rackham here who gives 'acting' instead of Kenny's 'conduct'.

1097b1–5). Where wish is (more) for the end, choice is for that which promotes the end (*ta pros to telos*) (*EE* 1226b7–17; *NE* 111lb26–9). Both these rational desires are crucial to virtue and vice, but Aristotle builds choice, in particular, into the very definition of these states. The demand for choice and not only wish is Aristotle's way of making clear that virtues and vices 'must not simply dispose one to have desires based on a conception of happiness. It must dispose one to execute those desires in one's actions' (Meyer, 2011a: 26).

In the harmonious soul, the agent is pleased to feel and act according to reason. The aim of their rational desires is unbegrudgingly supported in action and feeling. Unlike the enkratic agent who acts well but must regularly do so against conflicting desires, or the akratic agent who, when she acts badly, fails to act according to reason in the face of conflicting desires, the virtuous and vicious agent both feel and act in line, directed by reason. Furthermore, both the virtuous and the vicious *enjoy* their behaviour (*NE* 1104b28–1105a7), perhaps not always for the pleasure of the act itself (though this is certainly possible), but importantly because they see it as *good* and for the sake of living well.

One might ask what is the real difference between the virtuous and the vicious in all this? From a particular angle, in the right light, the virtuous and the vicious bear a remarkable similarity. Each apparently possesses a soul in harmony. But obviously the picture cannot be this simple. There is more to the virtuous and vicious agents than *mere* harmony between reason and desire. We now need to look more closely at the vicious agent to see how everything we have just mentioned – actions, feeling, pleasure, and reason – can go wrong. Virtue and vice, at first glance so alike, begin to drift apart quite dramatically.

2. Actions, Feelings, and the Doctrine of the Mean

Both virtues and vices, says Aristotle, are about feelings and actions. But where the feelings and feeling productive of actions for virtue will be 'at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way' (*NE* 1106b21–23), vice exhibits feelings and actions in a given sphere either excessively or deficiently (NE 1107a2–6). What is it that keeps the actions and feelings of virtue on target? The answer is that the virtuous person aims for the fine or the noble (*kalon*) (*NE* 1099a21–24). At *NE* 1120a23–24 we read,

'All actions in accord with virtue are fine, and aim at the fine',[169] and at 1115b13 that the virtuous person acts 'in the right way, as reason prescribes, for the sake of the fine, since *this is the end aimed at by virtue*'. Virtue, we are told, aims at the fine. This end, the fine (*kalon*), is the praiseworthy intermediate point between the failures of excess and deficiency in a given sphere of action and feeling. Richardson Lear writes, 'I believe that what makes morally virtuous actions intermediate and thus worth choosing for their own sakes is, in Aristotle's account, the very same thing that makes them fine' (Lear, 2004: 124). But just what is the fine?

The term *kalos* as a standard of value has a wide range in Greek and Aristotle probably would not object to the thought that the *kalos* in respect to right actions has something in common with the *kalos* in respect to aesthetic beauty and also that which is broadly praiseworthy (see Dover, 1974: 70). Since it is used in such tight connection with virtue, it is worth noting that the term is not *equivalent* to moral action since, as Crisp notes, while '[a]ll morally right actions (τὰ δίκαια) are [fine] (καλός)', 'not every καλός thing is a morally right action' (2014: 232) (the word was commonly used in connection with aesthetic value, for instance). We get more of an idea about Aristotle's intentions for the word by looking at its opposite, *aischron*, often translated as 'shameful'. The virtuous agent avoids what is shameful and pursues the fine. To the virtuous, the fine is the greater good, and she will sacrifice money or even her own life for the sake of it, seeing that the fine or noble life is to be preferred over everything else (*NE* 1169a26–34). Aristotle's deliberately broad notion of the fine, existing in the nexus between praiseworthiness, admirability, aesthetic value, and moral approval 'is ideally suited to provide the foundation for a bridge between happiness and virtue' and in this richness it can more reasonably be understood as its own reward (Crisp, 2014: 242).[170]

Irwin correctly adduces that the vicious agent cannot properly choose actions *because* they are fine since they do not take the virtuous person's attitude towards them (2001: 86). But, contra Irwin, it would be too large a leap to suppose that the vicious had no interest in the fine whatsoever (2001: 82). Aristotle himself writes that 'each state [of character] has its own distinctive [view of] what is fine and pleasant' (*NE* 1113a31). According to this passage, the character state of vice has an idea, almost certainly mistaken, but there nonetheless, about what is fine. Consider also the repeated assertions that rational desire is for what the agent believes to be *good* and not only pleasant or beneficial (*NE* 1113a15–27; 1136b7–8; *Rhet.* 1369a2–4);

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[169] Meyer argues that this need not mean every single action has something fine or shameful at stake. This opens up a 'space of permissions' that are nonetheless regulated and limited by one's commitment to the *kalon* (Meyer, 2011b: 58-59).

[170] This need not be taken to mean that virtue is sufficient for happiness.

it is not only advantage or pleasure that motivates the vicious agent. True, Aristotle does think the vicious agent, or some vicious agents, will be at times motivated by advantage (*NE* 1169a2–6). But this need not be the motivating factor in every activity; it would be a very extreme case if it were so.

Further, just as the virtuous will prefer the fine over self-interest or expediency where there is a conflict between them (*NE* 1169a26–34), I cannot see why this must be denied to the vicious *tout court*. It is of course true that the vices are naturally self-focussed traits, as we shall see in a moment, and are not conducive to self-sacrifice in the same way as the virtues might be, but we can easily construct an example to show the possibility of a vicious agent acting against immediate self-interest because of what they *believe* to be good and fine. Consider the racist who is terrified of public speaking but believes giving a speech at the large rally is the right way to protect jobs and borders. Taking pleasure in his overall goal and the knowledge that he is doing the right thing even while he does not find immediate pleasure in the speaking itself, he gets up on the microphone at personal cost. Whatever one thinks of the overall goal, we can recognise that in the mind of the vicious agent, vicious acts need not be chosen under the heading of vice and may even be chosen at personal cost for the sake of a (misguided) greater good. I do not say this to paint the vicious agent as an ill-advised moral crusader. Many vicious agents will act for their own benefit even in the face of the suffering of others.[171] (Aristotle does write that the base person avoids pain *in general*, *NE* 1154a20.) The point of the above example is to underscore that this is not a necessary focus of vice, however; the apparent pursuit of the fine and vicious goals are at least compatible.

So much for the vicious agent's view of things. Their actions could be done in ostensible pursuit of the fine, however misguided. But Aristotle holds an objective standard for what is truly good and those who take something to be good which is not truly good are likened to those whose sickness deludes them into tasting sweetness or bitterness where it is not really there (*NE* 1173b21–24). Unfortunately, the vicious – however they might protest – act in shameful ways. The reason for this is articulated by the notorious Doctrine of the mean.

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[171] And there is space between acting as an ill-advised moral crusader and acting for personal benefit. Blair Cottrell – an Australian neo Nazi leader who campaigns against non-white immigrants – may get no personal advantage from seeing African youths suffer but he is unmoved by or even enjoys their suffering. Thanks to Jeanette Kennett for the point and example.

3. The Doctrine of the Mean

In the Doctrine of the mean, each sphere of action or feeling (e.g. fear and confidence, pleasure and pain, getting and spending, honour and dishonour, etc.) can be thought of as a continuum where virtue is neither too much nor too little of the actions or feelings in that given sphere. Virtue achieves the *meson* (relative-to-us). It is a *mesotēs* or between-state that aims at the fine between excess and deficiency. While the chorus in Greek tragedy may often press upon the hero a concern for moderation, this is not the goal for Aristotle since at times it will be right to feel intense anger.[172] And at such a moment the virtuous will feel the right amount of intense anger, while the vicious will feel anger even excessively beyond this, or deficiently. Significantly, the vices do not 'shade into' the virtues. Lesley Brown has written (2014: 72):

> A triad of vice-virtue-vice does not form a continuum. The sense in which a virtue is "between" a vice of defect and one of excess is derivative from each of them being related to responses – whether actions or passions or both – which are, in the primary application, either too little or just right or too much.

The continuum mentioned above is a scale of *feelings and actions*, not a scale of virtuous and vicious dispositions.[173] To be clear, too little courage does not shade into cowardice, since there is no such thing as too little courage; courage is, by definition, the mean state.[174] Excess or deficiency is seen in *actions and feelings* in the sphere of fear and confidence: too little of these feelings is cowardice, too much is rash, and courage is the mean.

Where from a distance virtue and vice can both look like states producing rationally chosen feelings and actions, a vice state does not produce fine (*kalon*) feelings and actions. Perhaps contrary to what is aimed for in the mind of the vicious agent, the vicious agent displays *shameful* (*aischron*) feelings and actions that fail to hit the mean (*NE* 1128b1).

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[172] The view that the doctrine of the mean essentially amounts to advising moderation has led to its ridicule in some quarters. Bernard Williams was unimpressed, calling it 'a substantively depressing doctrine in favor of moderation' (Williams, 2011: 36). For varied discussions of the doctrine, looking at many more intricacies than I have space for here, see Hursthouse (1980-1981, 2006), Losin (1987), and Urmson (1973).

[173] I am very grateful for a conversation with Lesley Brown where this point was patiently clarified. Christof Rapp has written similarly, 'Since virtues are good and vices are bad dispositions, there is no continuous transition from virtue to vice' (2006: 115). And Broadie (1991: 99) writes, 'Virtue is not intermediate between vices because it is a mixture of the vices!'

[174] Aristotle's view is different therefore to contemporary discussions where the virtues can go to some kind of problematic excess. See for instance Watson (1984) and Wolf (1982). Aristotle would just not consider this sort of thing properly virtuous. Idiomatically we also speak of too little courage, for instance. But this is not a theoretically correct application of the term since for Aristotle a virtue just is the mean state.

Through discussion of the various vices of character, we learn, for instance, that it is shameful to fail to stand firm in a battle (*NE* 1117a17), the intemperate person desires shameful things (*NE* 1119b5), the person who holds onto their wealth has a shameful love of gain (*NE* 1120a11–15; 1122a2), and the boaster who does not properly love the truth fails to avoid shameful falsehoods (*NE* 1127b5–9).

Straying from the mean very often results in feelings and actions that are obviously problematic. A person who is very deficient in the sphere of fear and confidence will be very cowardly, perhaps deserting their squadron on the battle field and putting the rest of the soldiers in danger. In this way it is clear that missing the fine fails to be virtuous. But if we comb through the doctrine of the mean and the subsequent discussion of the vices of character a bit more carefully, we notice that Aristotle regularly makes concessions when discussing these excessive and deficient states, recognising that harsher descriptors (e.g. *mochthēros*, even *phaulos* sometimes) and strong reproach will not be suitable in cases where the behaviour does not cross a relevant threshold.

4. Excess, Deficiency, and Vice

Let us begin with an example. Imagine that Immanuel, a salesman, boasts regularly, more than he should. If Immanuel talks about a big deal he made, his friends assume it will be exaggerated. It is, in fact, a bit of a joke between friends and Immanuel is sometimes in on it. Nobody would call him truthful, but no one is harmed, and no one is really offended. Imagine further that, as per the psychological requirement for vice already outlined, Immanuel does this boasting according to his *commitment* (*prohairesis*) to behave in such a way, projecting a certain confidence and selling success, etc. Even though, and crucially, he does not value behaviour *x* under the heading of boastfulness, he thinks that behaviour *x* is *good* – it is the thing to do. Unlike the akratic, he feels no regret about talking up his deals in unrealistic ways. What is bad about basically harmless and regular boasting according to choice? We know that Immanuel is 'bad' in the sense that he is not *excellent*, failing as he does to behave finely in respect to truthfulness. But what about the *badness of* vice that must go over and above this general deficiency? To put it another way, is choice (*prohairesis*) a necessary and sufficient condition for the *badness of* vice? Mild manifestations of vice, like Immanuel's, are not Aristotle's primary concern, at least judging by the time allotted to the discussion of examples of this sort, and he spends more and more time discussing progression of vice into a

behaviourally problematic state. But if vice is to become worthy of serious reproach, does it need to cross a more extreme behavioural threshold?

We have already made the point one does not possess a vice simply by straying into the excessive and deficient poles of a given sphere of action or feeling. Some people will possess clear and consistent character traits that admit of excess and deficiency, but they will not be properly vicious since they lack choice.[175] We called this the in-between state.

But just as not all excess and deficiency is *vicious* on the Aristotelian account, not all vice proper is wicked or equally problematic. For Aristotle, vice (*kakia*) as a state will include those who possess it primarily *by definition* (missing the mean according to choice) and also those who deserve a stronger condemnation due to more severely harmful and shameful behaviours. Jiyuan Yu has suggested wisely that the categories of excess and deficiency must not be taken strictly as *extremes*, but as general headings under which all deficient characters and actions must necessarily be placed (by virtue of their *not* being a middle state) (2007: 88). We should not expect every miss of the mean to be extreme, therefore, and we find Aristotle's discussion in concord. Begin with wastefulness to see this play out:

> *NE* 1121a 26–27, 'This is why the wasteful person seems not to be base [*phaulos*]
> in his character; for excess in giving without taking is proper to a foolish person,
> not to a vicious [*mochthērou*] or ignoble one.'

Wastefulness and ungenerosity are excesses and deficiencies about wealth. They are vices (*kakias*), plain and simple, missing the mean and according to choice (*prohairesis*). Looking closely, though, Aristotle later describes the wasteful person as *not* base (*phaulos*) or vicious (*mochthēros*), but instead foolish (where foolish is still considered vicious, by definition). He allows that we attribute the state of vice (*kakia*) but not to allocate serious reproach. And so, we have wastefulness as the deficient 'failure' to be magnificent even while the wasteful person is not – as Aristotle himself notes – *mochthēros* with this alone. 'Vicious' is not an ideal translation of *mochthērou* in this sentence since the wasteful person is, by definition, vicious. The implication rather is that this person does not yet have a vice that makes them wicked or wretched (*mochthērou*), something going beyond *mere* viciousness. One who argues that the

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[175] See my discussion of the in-between state in Chapter 2 and 3. Also, an interesting passage at *NE* 1148b sees Aristotle remark upon Niobe going to excess, even fighting the gods for her children. But Aristotle declares that 'there is no vice [*mochthēria*] here, for the reason given, since each of these things is naturally choiceworthy for itself, though excess about them is bad [*phaulai*] and to be avoided'. See also *EE* 1231a21–23.

wasteful person must necessarily possess a serious moral failure merely because wastefulness appears in the category of 'vice' opposed to the mean of generosity has misunderstood Aristotle's realistic appraisal of wasteful behaviour as well as the point of conceptually marking out the vicious poles primarily in order to clarify the virtues. It is of course possible for the vice of wastefulness to become more severe, eventually producing harmful and shameful actions and earning a description like 'morally bad' or *mochthēria*. Aristotle may not admit this possibility here because it is not empirically common or just not on his radar. But he would be wrong to preclude it on theoretical grounds, as if the wasteful person was incapable of becoming *mochthērou*.[176]

Concerning truth, and continuing, we are presented with the boaster, the straightforward, and the self-deprecator. 'If someone claims to have more than he has,' writes Aristotle, 'with no ulterior purpose, he certainly looks as though he is a base person (*phaulōs*), since otherwise he would not enjoy telling falsehoods; but apparently he is pointlessly foolish rather than bad (*kakos*)' (*NE* 1127b10–12). The self-deprecator, on the other hand, can sometimes even appear sophisticated if he only denies qualities that are 'not too commonplace or obvious' (*NE* 1127b31). Once again, these states are vices (*kakias*), and the boaster is technically vicious, yes, but not yet worthy of serious reproach. And neither is the person *kakos* or a *phaulos* simply in virtue of their possession of these vices except in the general sense of deficient.

Vulgarity and stinginess, sitting either side of magnificence, are said quite clearly to be vices (*kakias*) by definition. But since they do not harm one's neighbour, they do not bring reproach and are not too disgraceful (*NE* 1123a33–34).[177] Once more, lack of harm or disgrace

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[176] We find a clue a little earlier as to what might constitute the merely vicious wasteful person who has not yet harmed others. At the beginning of Book IV, Aristotle writes that 'the wasteful person is meant to have the single vicious feature of ruining his property; for someone who causes his own destruction ["lays waste" to himself, and so] is wasteful, and ruining one's own property seems to be a sort of self-destruction, on the assumption that our living depends on our property'. The vicious wasteful person *to phtheirein tēn ousian*, wastes one's own substance or causes their own destruction. This is actually quite a good way of describing the *modus operandi* of vice in general (see Chapter 6).

[177] At *NE* 1108a14–16 (emphasis added), Aristotle writes, 'Hence we should also discuss these states, so that we can better observe that in every case the mean is praiseworthy, *whereas the extremes are neither praiseworthy nor correct, but blameworthy*'. Here it appears that *any* extreme state is considered blameworthy (see Meyer, 2011a: 45), potentially counting against the view that there are 'mere' vices or bad dispositions. But Aristotle says a little later (and we have seen the passage already above) that in the case of vulgarity and stinginess, for example, we have clear examples of categorical vice (*kakia*), yes, but *not* ones that bring reproach since no harm is done to one's neighbour (*NE* 1123a33–34). What are we to make of the apparent conflict between these two passages?

Before attempting an answer, consider two other passages potentially in conflict. First, Aristotle asks, 'How far then, and in what way must someone deviate to be open to blame? It is not easy to answer in a [general] account; for the judgment depends on particular cases, and [we make it] by perception' (*NE* 1126b3). Here it looks that the criteria for blame is connected to severity and not the mere exhibition of excessive or deficient actions or feelings. It is implied (by the very need for the question) that there will be some deviations *not* open to blame. But

is enough to exclude a quality from being considered for serious reproach. Irwin is right in saying that to claim that the vices of vulgarity and stinginess do no harm whatsoever is an overstatement, probably unjustified (1999a: 220). Aristotle can say that they characteristically do not involve the *intent* to harm, but whether or not these bad qualities, when taken their vicious extremes, cause harm, will depend on the situation and the precise outworking of the state.

Similarly, the pusillanimous and the vain who stand on either side of the magnanimous person are not considered to be base people (*kakoi*) since they do no harm to anyone (*kakopoioi*).[178] They are instead in error.[179] The pusillanimous deprives himself of the goods of which he is worthy, and the vain is foolish and does not know himself.

Wit has had a hard time justifying its place in the canon of virtues (see Halwani & Layda, 2014). But, following the pattern I have laid so far, it is no great problem to defend Aristotle's appointment of the buffoon and the boor to the categories of excess and deficiency, for it does not mean these people are necessarily morally bad. It is a vice, of course, but in the general and conceptual sense, stable character according to choice. Aristotle readily admits that

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a few lines later Aristotle writes, 'The excesses and deficiencies are blameworthy, lightly if they go a little way, more if they go further, and strongly if they go far' (*NE* 1126b8–9). Here no option is given for *no* blame, only degrees of it from light to strong. In the first passage, then, the criteria of blame seems to be the degree of deviation, while in the second the criteria seems to be any voluntary excess or deficiency with the recognition that different sorts of vice will merit different sorts of blame. The second passage gels well with Aristotle's other statements about virtue and vice being those states that are open to praise and blame (e.g. *EE* 1223a9–18; *MM* 1187a18–23; *NE* 1101b31–32). It is my view that Aristotle's question about when blame is appropriate, then, is an epistemic question and not a normative one. It is always the case that an agent exhibiting excess or deficiency in feelings or actions is blameworthy even though identifying precisely where the boundary lies between the mean and excess or deficiency is not straightforward in practice. This does not mean, however, that Aristotle has a one-size-fits-all conception of blame. Some vices are not open to reproach since they rarely harm others. If we allow, as I have suggested, that people can possess the character trait of stinginess without the vice of stinginess, we might also say that this state, too, does not bring reproach unless it causes harm. Reproach is proper in cases of vice where the agent performs severe, often harmful or shameful actions and takes pleasure in them.

    This suggests something like the distinction between being blameworthy and blaming someone (see A. M. Smith, 2007; 2008), even if Aristotle conceives of this distinction along the lines of degrees of blame rather than a conceptual difference between blame and blame*worthiness*. On this reading, missing the mean is considered blame*worthy* in that the agent is responsible for the behaviours and the behaviours are at least minimally bad; the agent meets the standard for this objective (and potentially unexpressed) judgment. In the case of an externally *problematic* vice, we would be justified in holding attitudes of resentment and sanctioning the vicious agent in some way over and above making the objective judgment that the agent is blameworthy. And so, while Aristotle considers all voluntary deviations from the mean to be blameworthy, the outworking of this is different depending on the nature of the behaviours in question. We can further allow that the blameworthy status that accompanies deviations from the mean is quite different for those who deviate by failure to attain virtue and those who are vicious according to choice and who harm others.

[178] Rackham translates, 'These also are not thought to be actually vicious', which could be a little misleading, breaking apart as it does the noun and adjectival forms of the word (vice/vicious). If 'vicious' is used as a purely unconnected adjective, it might make sense to say that the person with the state of vice due to pusillanimous acts and feelings is not vicious in the sense of serious badness. But if 'vicious' is taken to be the strict adjectival form of the state of vice, Rackham would be better to use 'evil' or 'morally bad'.

[179] The person who does harm is also in error. But the point is that the vicious mentioned here are *only* in error.

acts differ in degrees or decency and badness (*phaulotēti*) (*NE* 1175b25). Whether the buffoon and the boor (and anyone mentioned above) become wicked will call for something more than simply straying from the mean.[180] Chesterton, in his scathingly perceptive portrait of Whistler speaks about a lack of wit descending into something darker (Chesterton, 2007: 132):

> The truth is, I believe, that Whistler never laughed at all. There was no laughter in his nature; because there was no thoughtlessness and self-abandonment, no humility. I cannot understand anybody reading 'The Gentle Art of Making Enemies' and thinking that there is any laughter in the wit. His wit is a torture to him.

In reading this one might suppose that *pride* or *arrogance* is a more accurate diagnosis of Whistler's inaptitude for humility and self-abandonment, but Chesterton is right at some level to point out the brittle sense of self that a lack of generous wit often tries to protect. It is possible, then, to see where a lack of wit indicates a deeper issue.

Urmson fairly objects to the overly high-minded categorisation of deficiency in the sphere of natural appetites as a 'moral vice' (1973: 224):

> We have here, incidentally, one very good reason in addition to many others for not accepting the thoughtless traditional translation of *ethikē aretē* and *kakia* as 'moral virtue' and 'vice.' No doubt the fact that the great translator Cicero translated *kakia* as *vitium* should be enough to warn us off those English translations. For in classical Latin *vitium* does not mean 'vice.' But, more relevantly, it is an insult to Aristotle's good sense to make him say that taking insufficient pleasure in the pleasure of food, drink, and sex is a moral vice, though he regards it as an *ethikē kakia*.

I agree with Urmson that the mere fact that a person who is deficient (even consistently so) in respect to these pleasures does not amount to a serious moral failure even if it is to be conceptually and linguistically counted as a vice (*kakia*) if it is a stable disposition according

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[180] Richard Kraut (2006) extrapolates from the case of wit that in fact all of the virtues should be freed of explicitly moral overtones. I do not pay much attention to the nature of the virtues here, but it is certainly plausible to suggest Aristotle has no intentional list of moral and non-moral virtues.

to choice with the aim of living and acting well.[181] It is important, I think, to be prepared to pull apart 'vice' and 'moral vice/moral failure', admitting, at least, that the two will not *always* go hand in hand even while it is surely possible for them to combine.[182] Imagine a man lacking interest in food and left with a smaller range of food options than, say, a boisterous television chef.[183] This may even be done with choice, according to a rational plan about what he thinks is good for him. Would he be happier if he had the understanding and enjoyment of a connoisseur? Perhaps. But, while he may not hit the mean that could make him even happier in regard to these pleasures, he is – by the standards of common sense, at least – not wicked in this respect. I can envisage a scenario where this focus becomes more of a controlling and ultimately disabling force, eventually impacting relationships. It would in this way become morally bad, so understood. But this is only an extreme case of excess or deficiency.

To be clear, the metaphysical basis of, say, the vice of cowardice and its morally problematic manifestation are not distinct. A person with the vice *ipso facto* possesses the potential for it to spiral into a more severe expression. But we must make room in our moral practice for the possession of a vice by definition and the possession and presentation of a vice that is harmful in more serious ways. Aristotle himself writes that 'the more brutal a crime, the greater [the wrong]. And the more premeditated a crime [the greater the wrong]' (*Rhet.* 1357a). Given the enormous variety of human experience, people's unique combinations of beliefs and desires, and the situational forces and requirements that are put upon them, whether or not a vice by category spins into something more serious is dependent on more than the mere possession of it. This does not mean we cannot say what, for example, cowardice *is*: it is a vice (or character defect) typically manifesting in certain ways *xyz*, etc. We can also with relative accuracy diagnose the trait in certain persons. But the possession of the vice of cowardice (meeting the

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[181] Regarding the translation of *vitium*, *Cassell's Dictionary* gives blemish, fault, or imperfection (Simpson, 1959/2007: 646). If one imputes a moral failure into this, it will have to be justified on grounds over and above the grammar alone.

[182] Bostock, I think, concurs with the sentiment, writing, '[David] Ross begs a question by translating *ethical* [in ethical virtues] as "moral"' (2000: 35). Yu also writes that translating *kakia* as vice is now misleading given all the associations with which the latter term is saddled (2007: 88). I think with some qualification the term 'vice' serves its purpose, though I admit it comes with some irrelevant baggage. 'Character defect' is probably closer to what Aristotle has in mind when talking about the general category of states that miss the virtuous mean according to choice, given that contemporary familiar with the word 'vice' collides with a number of other notions, some stronger that what Aristotle has in mind by those states that are primarily not-virtue, and some much weaker than what Aristotle has in mind, such as the social vices of smoking and taking drugs, etc. A 'moral vice' is now a fairly loaded term and lines up better with those vices that have progressed into a state causing external harm or shame.

[183] Derek Parfit comes to mind. And it would be tantamount to blasphemy in analytic circles to suggest that Parfit's attitude to food was a vice. But Aristotle, I believe, would not withhold the label and neither would he consider this vice immoral.

psychological requirements) and possession of the morally problematic vice of cowardice can be quite different things in practice.

We can also at this point rule out a distinction that hopes to make sense of Aristotle's various concessions. I am talking here of the notion of minor vices and major vices akin to the notion of major and minor virtues (Kenny, 2016: 24).

It is not because wastefulness, for instance, is a 'minor vice' that Aristotle does not subject it immediately to harsher moral criticism. It is because the wasteful person *in his example* is closer to the generous person than is the ungenerous person. But we could tweak the example to depict a man giving less to his own family than he spends or gives away. He may spend and spend, even with a motive close to generosity, significantly failing to provide for his children in the process. There is nothing minor about this sort of issue now. And we can reverse the process looking at a 'major vice' like rashness (ostensibly major since it is the deficiency related to the major virtue of courage). The rash are boasters, pretending to be brave (*NE* 1115b30). The rash person wants to appear to have the attitude towards frightening things seen in the truly brave person and so he imitates this. Underneath the façade, however, says Aristotle, is often something closer to cowardice. But I fail to see how this amounts to wickedness, something very harmful or shameful, even though we might clearly say it misses the mark of virtue by way of both choice and consistency. On the front lines of a battle or in command of a nuclear submarine there is the possibility of a rash person becoming a real liability. Even less demanding scenarios could see the rash person as a source of increasing harm. But a person pretending to be overly brave, boasting at first and losing confidence when the danger is close, need not be wicked simply with the possession of the trait. Pears paints the rash person as one failing to possess an all things considered desire, acting instead on an impulsive desire that vanishes in the face of real danger (1978: 280). This idea comes in part from Aristotle's own description of the rash person exuding a false confidence while the brave person remains still until the danger presents and is then ready for action. But this very masculine portrait of the silent brave man seems irrelevant to true bravery or otherwise. Even if it is the case that the rash person fails to maintain the stiff upper lip, the transition from vice by definition to something morally problematic will take more than mere possession of the trait. And so I disagree with an analysis such as Kontos's, calling intemperance (*akolasia*) *simpliciter* a 'radical ethical vice' (2009). On my view intemperance is a radical ethical vice just in case it is a radical ethical vice. That is, the vice can become particularly harmful to the agent and those around her if the intemperance results in severe alcoholism, sex addiction, or

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drug abuse (or all three). In situations where it is mild (even though, categorically, still intemperance, and in this way a vice) it is a mild vice. We can think here of the agent who does not hit the mean, instead having too much wine a couple of nights each week – there is nothing *radical* about that even if it is a vice. Kontos is right to say that *Aristotle* describes intemperance quite radically (and perhaps this matches some kind of majority in true-life instances of the vice, however this is to be determined), but I do not think it must be so by theoretical or psychological necessity.

5. Vice and Extreme Excess and Deficiency.

If the excess and deficiency of vice is not in every case worthy of serious reproach, Aristotle still believes that the feelings and actions produced by the vices will often enough be problematic to both the possessor and those in the possessor's sphere of influence. Here are three ways in which Aristotle contends that the feelings and actions of the vicious agent will *often* go beyond merely missing the fine and head towards something more severe, even extreme.

5.1 Vicious Behaviour and Injustice

In the lengthy analysis of justice, we come across the division between general injustice that harms people accidentally and special injustice that harms intentionally or essentially.[184] We are used to thinking of vice in respect to special injustice since we commonly think of the vicious person taking from another in various ways, but Aristotle also gives a list of vices (*mochthērias*) that produce episodes of general injustice (*NE* 1130a): cowardice that makes one throw away their shield and endanger fellow soldiers, irritability that makes one revile someone, or ungenerosity that makes one fail to help someone with money. Even where vice does not intend to harm another, situations where a vice causes collateral damage are not uncommon. Aristotle does obviously conceive of the link between vice and general injustice as relatively tight. Unsurprisingly, he does not speak of the virtues in this light, unintentionally causing harm in the midst of an attempt to be, say, generous. There is nothing that necessarily

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[184] See Sherman (1999) for a very clear discussion of this. He calls the injuries that occur through general injustice 'collateral' (D. Sherman, 1999: 244).

precludes this from going on, and we can imagine a scenario where it happens. But unlike virtue, the nature of vice is intrinsically suited to a move from self-serving to other-harming; in fact, these are often two sides of the same coin.

Because of the strong potential for vice to cause harm, we find the repeated mention of correction and prohibition in relation to vice.

> *NE* 1113b25, 'For they impose corrective treatments and penalties on anyone who does vicious [*mochthēra*] actions, unless his action is forced or is caused by ignorance that he is not responsible for.'

> *NE* 1129b20–25, 'Now the law instructs us to do the actions of a brave person […] and prohibits actions in accord with the vices [*mochthēras*].'

> *NE* 1130a24, '[F]or the law prescribes living in accord with each virtue, and forbids living in accord with each vice [*mochthērian*].'

Sherman says that 'the terms do not have a distinctly judicial sense' and refer only to the expression of virtue and vice (1999: 240), though Broadie takes the law to refer to both written statutes and customs and social norms (Broadie, 2002: 337; see also, Lee, 1937: 139-140; Yankah, 2013). Aristotle also advises that legislation is one potential method of helping young people to cultivate virtue (*NE* 1179b34). True politicians are advised to treat moral education as a serious concern of theirs, and the Spartan and Cretan legislators are said to be very good examples of it (*NE* 1102a7–13). I think it is likely Aristotle does have in mind judicial legislation against vicious actions because of their inherent potential to do serious harm to others in the community. Obviously this cannot mean legislation against *mere* failures to hit the mean, even ones that would see someone clearly in possession of a disposition. The person who denies themselves fine food does not need legal action taken against them. And so again it appears that the truly wretched person whom Aristotle worries about is one who holds out the real possibility of harming those around them either intentionally or unintentionally due to an excessive and misguided focus on their own interests, often at the expense of others.

The vicious will be worse than the akratic and the in-betweeners in this arena. Where the akratic can cause collateral damage in pursuit of a base goal, they will regret it and the behaviour should be only episodic. Where the in-betweeners act similarly, they will not be pushed along by their ideas about what is good and a desire to attain it, vindicating the relevant

behaviour or demanding its regularity. The vicious, on the other hand, *choose* behaviours that often-enough cause collateral damage even if they do not choose the collateral damage itself. Vicious agents take themselves to be justified in their behaviour by their own conception of the good, putting in place no constraints to stop the damage reoccurring.

5.2 Unqualifiedly (Haplōs) Bad Feelings and Actions

The doctrine of the mean depicts the vices as excesses or deficiencies of feelings or actions in a given sphere. There is no excess or deficiency of the vice of cowardice itself, then, for instance, since the vice of cowardice *is* an excess of fear and a deficiency in confidence. One might suppose that while the vices themselves do not permit of excess and deficiency, every action or feeling does. But Aristotle does not see things that way. 'Not every action', he says, 'admits of the mean' (*NE* 1107a10).

Some actions and feelings, as evidenced by the very labels we give them, 'automatically include baseness'. Examples of feelings in this category are spite, shamelessness, and envy, and representative actions are adultery, theft, and murder. Such things cannot be done well (morally speaking, at least – there may indeed be a proficient adulterer), and in every instance of them the agent is in error.

Allowing that some actions and feelings are always wrong, however, does not actually mean that we are no longer in the realm of excess and deficiency, even while some commentators have taken it to mean this. For example, C. C. W. Taylor writes, 'Here […] the key notion seems to be that of inappropriate, not excessive or deficient, response to the demands of the situation' (2006: 112). But in answer to those who would see *phthonos* [spite] et al., and *moicheia* [adultery] et al. as exceptions to the doctrine of the mean (i.e. that a passion or act that is wrong displays excess or deficiency), Price, in an intriguing unpublished note on *NE* 1108a35-b6, reminds us that '*phthonos* and *epichairekakia* are in fact presented as opposed extremes (the first an excess, the second a deficiency)' (2018a: 1). While Price does take this to be Aristotle's view, he is not himself entirely convinced that the two are really opposed extremes, suggesting the negative influence of *Systemzwang* at work in the composition. Nevertheless, there we have some textual evidence. But conceptually, too, we need not avail ourselves of the language of excess and deficiency simply because spite et al. and adultery et al. are always wrong. After all, we might say that these feelings and actions are always wrong *because* they are in every case excessive or deficient.

In the preceding discussion of general injustice Aristotle realises that the vices will often necessitate or permit a web of related actions that are always wrong. Each vice does not exist in a vacuum, as if the intemperate man only performed base actions in the sphere of pleasures and pains of the body. Incidental actions outside of the sphere of the vice itself will be possible. To satisfy the goals and suggestions of the intemperate trait, the agent may need to drink more than is safe, yes, but also to steal money in order to pay for the drink, to lie to a partner about their habits, to fight a friend while impaired, etc. Just as the coward throws away his shield and so indirectly allows the killing of his fellow soldiers, the intemperate man might commit adultery when suitably inebriated.[185] These inherently wrong actions need not be a natural manifestation of a given vice like intemperance, but can be permitted and demanded by a vice with a regularity and an apparent justification not seen in the akratic or in-betweener. Given vice's essential focus on the self, one does not need a vivid imagination to see how inherently wrong feelings and actions are called for by various vices.

5.3 Vicious Behaviour and the Worst Kinds of People

Aristotle speaks about people that are selfish in friendship, beyond our help, unsafe to be around, and at times best to cut out of our lives. Such exacting pronouncements cannot refer to those people who do not take pleasure in eating; again, we are focussed on more severe manifestations of vice.

There has been a great deal written on Aristotelian friendship and it is outside the scope of my study to say anything much here.[186] My far more modest aim is to show that it is the vicious person who bears the brunt of Aristotle's most critical remarks in respect to our relationships.

At the beginning of Book VIII Aristotle wonders, 'For instance, does friendship arise among all sorts of people, or can people not be friends if they are vicious [*mochthērous*]?' The answer is obviously that they can since they do, but that the quality of this friendship will be very different to a good one. Aristotle provides an analogy with forms of government. 'The transition from kingship is to tyranny', he writes, '[f]or tyranny is the degenerate condition of monarchy and the vicious [*mochthēros*] king becomes a tyrant (*NE* 1160b10–11).' Oligarchy,

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[185] This will not be done according to choice, and so Aristotle may not count it as a strictly vicious action. But we are not interested only in technically vicious actions. Any harm is worth worrying about, and whether we apply the label of Aristotelian vice is another matter.

[186] For excellent and detailed treatments see Price (1989) and Pangle (2003).

too, comes in for a hit: 'Hence the rulers are few, and they are vicious people [*mochthēroi*] instead of the most decent (*NE* 1160b16).' And democracy itself is not immune: 'Democracy is the least vicious [*mochthēron*] [of the deviations]; for it deviates only slightly from the form of a [genuine] political system (*NE* 1160b 19–20).' What do tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy have in common? They are deviant forms of government. Yes, but why? It is because tyranny and oligarchy do not aim at the common good and instead, often ruthlessly, seek the good of the rulers.[187] Even democracy, faintly praised as the least bad option, waters down greater possibilities in order to satisfy the various and lesser goals of the elected rulers and their constituents (see Lintott, 1992). Aristotle sees commonalities between these deviant forms of government and deviant friendship, though he paints relationships that include vicious people as something much closer to tyranny (or perhaps oligarchy) than democracy.

Here, in his own words, is Aristotle's view on the worth of vicious friendship:

NE 1157a20, '[F]or bad people find no enjoyment in one another if they get no benefit.'

NE 1157b2, 'Base people [*phauloi*] will be friends for pleasure or utility, since they are similar in that way.'

NE 1159b9–11, 'Vicious people [*mochthēroi*], by contrast, have no firmness, since they do not even remain similar to what they were. They become friends for a short time, enjoying each other's vice [*mochthēria*].'[188]

NE 1167b 10, 'Base people [*phaulos*], however, cannot be in concord, except to a slight degree, just as they can be friends only to a slight degree.'

Though it is generally the case that across Book VIII *phaulos* indicates the strictly vicious person, Aristotle does continue to use *mochthēros* in pushing for something stronger:

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[187] Curzer notes that tyranny, for instance, could be good for people but only incidentally (2012: 253). It is quite clear that if the tyrant's own pleasure was compromised, the accidental common good would be remedied.
[188] See fn. 250 on this passage.

NE 1168a32–33, 'Indeed, the base person [*phaulos*] seems to go to every length for his own sake, and all the more the more vicious [*mochthēroteros*] he is; hence he is accused, for instance, of doing nothing [for any end apart] from himself.'

And again:

NE 1172a9–10, 'Hence the friendship of base people [*phaulōn*] turns out to be vicious [*mochthēra*]. For they are unstable, and share base pursuits; and by becoming similar to each other, they grow vicious [*mochthēros*].'

I am unsure as to whether Aristotle means that the base person grows in their extant viciousness (quantitatively) or whether the base person becomes vicious (qualitatively), explicitly drawing a boundary line here between the *phaulos* and the *mochthēros*. Even if he is making that sort of break between them in this passage, it cannot mean the *phaulos* is always a less worrisome category since Book VIII is a fine example of Aristotle using the words interchangeably and across a relatively consistent context. *Phaulos*, as noted at the beginning of Chapter 2, has a wider range of application in Aristotle than *mochthēros* which always indicates the strictly and severely vicious. At any rate, the friendship of the vicious is not given much worth. But this is hardly the most aggressive announcement Aristotle makes on the subject. He goes on, warning good people that friendship with a vicious person can be precarious.

NE 1165b13–18, 'But if we accept a friend as a good person, and then he becomes vicious [*mochthēros*], and seems so, should we still love him? Surely we cannot, if not everything, but only the good, is loveable. The bad is not loveable, and must not be loved; for we ought neither to love the bad nor to become similar to a base person [*phaulō*], and we have said that similar is friend to similar. Then should bad friendship be dissolved at once [as soon as the friend becomes bad]? Surely not with every sort of person, but only with an incurably vicious person [*mochthērian*].'

In speaking to whether we should still be kind to those friends who have become less decent, he writes:

NE 1165b34–35, 'Just as we think we must do some kindnesses to friends more than strangers, so also we should accord something to past friends because of the former friendship, whenever it is not excessive vice [*mochthērias*] that causes the dissolution.'[189]

And if vice causes the dissolution of a friendship, it is not a friendship worth maintaining. The reason for this is twofold: it can hurt both the decent person and the vicious person.

NE 1169a14–15, 'But the vicious person [*mochthēron*] must not love himself, since he will harm both himself and his neighbours by following his base feelings. For the vicious person [*mochthērō*], then, the right actions conflict with those he does.'

I take it that giving a vicious person what he wants will ultimately harm him since his desires and pleasures are misguided. Their goals, unbeknownst to them, are taking them further and further from *eudaimonia* and any help that they receive in achieving these goals from decent friends is essentially or ultimately kindling for a fire that will in time catch anyone close to it.[190] It is for this reason that Aristotle also recommends not repaying favours to vicious people (*mochthēron*).

The grim finale to all this talk of the perils of vicious relationships is Aristotle's acknowledgement that a father may even have to cut off his own son due to vice:

NE 1163b24, 'At the same time, however, it presumably seems that no one would ever withdraw from a son, except for one who was far gone in vice [*mochthēria*]. For, quite apart from their natural friendship, it is human not to repel aid. The son, however, if he is vicious [*mochthēron*], will want to avoid helping his father, or will not be keen on it.'

This is presumably for the good of the son as well as the family. As we have noted above, giving a vicious person precisely what they ask for will only get them to where they want to go faster. As they have a corrupted view of what is worthwhile, it would be a perilous thing for a vicious person to get all that they desire. But this denial is surely also a form of protection

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[189] Either *mochthērias* itself indicates excessive vice, or it is possible to have an excess of *mochthērias*.
[190] Julia Annas speak about conventional goods aiding the evil of a vicious person and adding nothing by way of virtuous realignment (1999: 41-44).

for the family. We have said that the behaviour of the vicious person is not always intended to harm those people around them. But the vicious in the Aristotelian scheme nonetheless poses a threat to the people around him. There is the real possibility of collateral damage for those who get too close.

Now, we cannot suppose that these warnings concern the person who does not properly delight in food and sex, nor the harmlessly consistent and unambiguously boastful person simply because such people *merely* fail to hit the virtuous mean. The friends and relatives we cut out of our lives do not have dispositions we find *unappealing*. It will need to go a bit further than that. Turning these dispositions from vices into severely problematic vices requires the agent's choice coupled with the harmful or shameful behaviours that eventually manifest.

Lorraine Smith Pangle references an interesting question raised by Laelius (the Roman statesman and focus of Cicero's *Laelius de Amicitia*) (2003: 119, emphasis added):

> Laelius even wavers on the question of whether friendship does not sometimes *justify* the actual indulgence of vice: "Even if by some chance the wishes of a friend are not altogether honorable and require to be forwarded in matters which involve his life or reputation, we should turn aside from the straight path, provided, however, that utter disgrace does not follow"[191]

Is it the case that every friendship must accommodate or *justify* the indulgence of some degree of 'vice'? My response to this would be to say that a person who fails to be altogether honourable may have a vice (*kakia*) by definition but not the sort of vice that Aristotle has been mainly warning us about. Many friendships will have to put up with imperfections that do not lead to 'utter disgrace'. In fact, without ordinary trials it is difficult to know whether a friendship is worth much more than its utility. These dispositions may be considered as categorical vice (*kakia*) or could refer to the more modern 'social vices' like smoking, drinking, gambling etc., but neither of these pertains to Aristotle's primary interest here. We are considering now those qualities that make friendship *impossible* (ultimately, if not at first) as well as dangerous to both the decent and the vicious person.

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[191] For a contemporary discussion of this view see Cocking and Kennett (1998, 2000).

Take a step back to ask a question about plausibility. Why is Aristotle dishing out these heavy warnings about vicious friendship? I suppose if a person really was dangerous and hateful and malicious it might make sense for even a father to turn them away in the right – or wrong – circumstances. But what has this to do with *vice*? Is there any reason why vice should produce this extreme sort of case with any regularity justifying Aristotle's intensity, or are the rare cases of relational breakdown with which he is interested no more likely to be an aberration of vice than of akrasia or the in-between state than they are of vice?

Right away we admit that Aristotle is indeed interested in extreme cases, and he says as much with the qualification 'excessive vice' (*NE* 1165b35). However, while the cases in question here are extreme, this does not make them by extension *unusual* since extremity may in fact be the natural path for any vice allowed to freely progress. So, does unimpeded vice naturally take the extreme forms mentioned here, or are these exceptional instances?

Unlike contemporary vices which require only the reliable disposition to think, act, and feel in a certain way, Aristotelian vice is a goal-directed state whereby the vicious agent is pulled along by their view of the end and a desire to attain it. Aristotelian vice sees the agent *aiming* at something and developing whatever traits are necessary to attain it. The vices do not bear a distant or incidental relationship to the agent's goals but rather determine, constrain, and develop them. We have said that, for instance, the intemperate person, by virtue of her intemperance, will form a view of the good that centres on pleasure, and the cowardly person, in virtue of their cowardice, will form a view of the good that centres on her security, even if others are harmed, etc. As these dispositions themselves develop in order to try and attain the goal they have set (or had a role in setting), I think it makes sense to say that the vice becomes 'worse'. Just as a good character trait becomes 'better' where the agent is able to understand it and to use it more proficiently, a bad character trait that becomes more deeply engrained in an agent's psychological and behavioural patterns is 'worse'.[192] Colloquially we say, for example, that a person is 'more and more intemperate', signalling both the progression of the trait and the increasing badness of it. Since the vices are bad character traits, a vice that has become especially powerful will have negative implications for those caught up in it. At these times there is a pretty good chance that a developed or developing vice will harm or shame others or even the agent herself.

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[192] I am obviously using 'worse' in a moral sense. It is also possible to speak of the immoral agent in terms of excellence as when a cat burglar has 'excellent' skills of deception and climbing, etc. But I am calling developed vices 'worse' because they are morally worse than underdeveloped vices and with the understanding that a very developed vice could still be impressive in some instrumental respects.

There is no rule in place to ensure that this must happen; Aristotle repeatedly warns us against looking for absolute precision in ethical matters. But with an end that must be attained, and concerning dispositions that naturally develop and increase, a vice unchecked will often worsen, so understood, in order to reach that end.

6. Mid-Chapter Summary

Let us take a breath and recap. The feelings and actions of the vicious, even while rationally chosen, fail to be fine. This does not always mean that the actions will be wicked and severe, but Aristotle seems to think it will often get to that point. The feelings and actions of vice are in every case excessive or deficient, chosen because the agent takes them to be good, and will in many but not all instances be harmful, outright bad (admitting no mean), and worthy of serious reproach (perhaps even the dissolution of family relationships). Taken together, the feelings and actions of the vicious agent are bad, and the foregoing has given us an account of why.

7. Corrupted Rationality

I have tried to show how the actions and feelings of vice are bad even if one might have thought that any rationally chosen and enacted behaviour should amount to something good. But the actions and feelings of the vicious agent are not in fact good on closer inspection. The gap between virtue and vice is made evident.

We turn now to the examine the rational aspect of the vicious agent. Here, too, even though the agent acts in line with their rational choices, the corruption of vice has spread.

7.1 Vicious Wish

Wish (*boulēsis*) is a rational desire for an end one takes to be good. We have already mentioned the symbiotic relationship between ends and character. The cowardly agent, for example, because of her cowardice, forms a view of the good that centres on her security even at the cost of the safety of others or her reputation in battle, etc. And as the disposition naturally progresses, she will both *develop* and *refine* her conception of the good life in ways that are

essentially determined by the cowardly disposition itself. On the back of our investigation into the way in which the feelings and actions of the vices are often wicked and can be dangerous to others, one can extrapolate that the ends given by those vices will be similarly bad.[193]

In his early discussion of misguided conceptions of the good, Aristotle mentions those who take it to be health (*NE*1095a21–24) or pleasure or honour (*NE* I.5) and so on. But here he does not brand such people as *vicious*, nor does he predict that their ideas about happiness will lead to significant harm and injustice and all the terrible things we have just read about above with vice and vicious people. It must be inferred, then, that it is not this sort of misguided end which is sufficient for vice since Aristotle does not appear to see things that way. The wish, or wishes, of the vicious agent will be for those ends set or refined by cowardice or intemperance or stinginess or boastfulness and the other vices of character (*NE* 1140b20; 1144a35–36). I think it is certainly possible that the wish of a vicious person could eventually become quite broad and overarching, especially if a given vice begins to dominate the way in which an agent views the world; personality can often have a leading note like this. At such a time the wish might be for something as broad as 'honour at any cost', and all else in the agent's life is subsumed by this overarching end. Pakaluk calls this sort of wish one's 'principle wish' (1998: 175). It is in the nature of vices to become rather consuming, as we shall see in the next chapter, and Aristotle himself knows that smaller ends are usually nested in larger ones. But here the rational foundations and the *why* of the end are just as important as the end itself (the *what*). It is not simply 'honour' which is the strictly vicious end, but rather honour aimed for as the vicious trait of greed becomes more and more entrenched, demanding greater respect and power and honour, etc. Whether the wishes of the vicious agent are for an overarching end such as honour or a more immediate, restricted end such as getting behind the house and out of the way of gunfire, the agent sees each as good. Whether the wishes are more immediate or more overarching, those ends emerging from traits that miss the fine and display shameful excess or deficiency will be bad for the vicious agent and those around them.

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[193] In what sense, though, is the agent responsible for their view of the end worth aiming for? 'But someone may say', says Aristotle raising the objection himself, 'that everyone aims at the apparent good, and does not control how it appears, but on the contrary, his character controls how the end appears to him'. His answer: '[We reply that] if each person is in some way responsible for his own state [of character], he is also himself in some way responsible for how [the end] appears' (*NE* 1114b1–4). Seen in this light, the wish of the vicious agent is at least partially and initially in her power to the degree that we might sensibly (and sensitively, given the particulars of their situation) hold them responsible for what they aim at.

The ends of vice, however, do not only call for bad behaviours in the sphere of the given vice; the demands spill out and over into other areas of life.

It is often said that the virtuous agent is in possession all of the virtues. For Socrates, as virtue and wisdom (*phronēsis*) were one and the same, the virtuous agent must necessarily possess all the virtues, or complete virtue, if they truly possessed wisdom. Aristotle realised that such a theory reduced moral capacities to nothing more than rational capacities (Deslauriers, 2002: 102). Instead, he held moral virtues and *phronēsis* to be distinct even while the moral virtues could not be possessed without *phronēsis*, nor could *phronēsis* be less than complete virtue or all of the virtues. Where the Socratic thesis is often called the Unity of the Virtues because of the conceptual oneness of the virtues and wisdom, Aristotle's account has come to be known as the Reciprocity of the Virtues where an agent in possession of one virtue must necessarily possess them all.

Unlike virtue, there is no controlling psychological or intellectual state possessed by the vicious person that would necessarily manifest in the possession of *all* the vices.[194] It does not seem that Aristotle holds an analogous thesis about the reciprocity of the vices. In the *Rhetoric* (1368b) he allows that a person with 'one or more depravity' are depraved and wrongdoers, suggesting that the threshold for vice is not the possession of all vices. Theoretically, one might suppose that the two *opposing* vices in each sphere of action and feeling actually preclude the possession of all the vices anyway. After all, how can a person be cowardly *and* rash, for instance? But possession of both traits (cowardice and rashness) does not require acting upon them both *at once*. (If that were so it would obviously be impossible to possess contradictories.) However, since the vicious agent does not possess the virtue of bravery which dictates the mean in the sphere of fear and confidence, it is quite plausible to imagine them behaving in a cowardly manner at one time and rashly at another. Without virtuous wisdom, what is there to restrict such behaviour? Suetonius describes Caligula in this way (2007: 172):

> I am convinced that this mental illness accounted for his two contradictory vices—
> overconfidence and extreme timorousness. Here was a man who despised the gods,
> yet shut his eyes and buried his head beneath the bedclothes at the most distant

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[194] A lack of practical wisdom is sometimes indicated with *aphrosunē* (*NE* 1146a27–31; *Rhet.* 1371a13, 1378a10, 1382a11, 1410a8; *Pol.* 1281b27), but this does not import any idea of possession of every kind of failure.

sound of thunder; and if the storm came closer he would jump out of bed and crawl underneath.

I do not think it problematic to theorise that the agent who lacks practical wisdom and the relevant virtue in a given sphere of action or feeling may inculcate both apparently opposing vices for their apparent benefit at different times. There is nothing that necessitates the possession of all the vices as we have is in the case of virtue, but lacking the relevant virtue allows an agent to go to either extreme easily enough.

Although Aristotle does not argue for the reciprocity of the vices, he does however think that the behaviour of the vicious agent will rarely be confined to one sphere of action and feeling. An example might serve to clarify this.

Jack believes that the good life is having money. Part of this thought pertains to the security it brings him, partly the potential (and often only the potential) to buy what he desires and 'needs', and partly as a symbol of his prudence and skill. Most of his energy is spent thinking of ways to generate and hold on to his money. As a young child this idea was engrained in his mind as he watched his father work long hours, spending as little money as possible, worrying about the state of their finances, and speaking in degrading ways about the fate of those who had nothing stored away for a rainy day. Jack's foundational principles were inherited from his father's vision of the good life. And as he grows older these principles work their way into Jack's own view of the good, resulting in an aim to create wealth that implicitly or explicitly underlies the majority of decisions made for himself and his family. A dominant character trait inculcated as both a symptom of this wish and as a way of attaining it is miserliness. Jack consistently worries that he is overspending, keeping detailed lists of the family's budget and checking and rechecking them. Concerned about not having enough money for an emergency, Jack rejects his wife's suggestion for their first overseas holiday. For similar reasons he asks his daughter to wear her brother's old school shoes instead of buying new and more suitable ones. When it comes time for his son's rugby team to travel interstate, Jack finds it is cheaper to drive him up and to stay with relatives rather than pay for the flight and hotel room which the rest of the team will enjoy. Many similar behaviours could be outlined. We can see the choice (*prohairesis*) in light of his wish at work: retain wealth, do not go on holiday (A for the sake of B), etc.

But now, the miserliness, initially attributed because of Jack's obvious behaviours in the sphere of getting and spending, also spills out into other areas of his life. For instance, although his children are very tired after school, Jack, following the pattern his father set before

him, gets them jobs at the supermarket where they can begin to save their own money.[195] When Jack's brother asks for cash to pay for overdue bills, Jack refuses, believing that it is too much to give away and arguing that his brother was foolish not to save properly for such a time. Miserliness has now resulted in callous behaviours. Jack watches his neighbour, Tom, buy a new car even while they have the same job at the university and, as far as he knows, the same salary. Thinking over this, Jack oscillates between envy and resentment, believing that Tom has either been given a bonus that he himself has not received, or is spending his equal pay recklessly. Being a foundational concern in Jack's life, he cannot stop thinking about either the injustice of making less money than Tom (and the implications this may have for his own security) or the reckless spending of his neighbour. Their relationship deteriorates as Jack's interactions with him are guided by either envy or resentment.

While it is quite clear that Jack's miserliness is connected to his wish and manifests as a result of his choice, it is not so easy on an Aristotelian scheme to say the same for his callousness, envy, and resentment. For although Aristotle could see that a decent person may commit an act of miserliness or cowardice, it does not make them a *coward* properly speaking unless they are in the right state (*NE* 1132a1–5; 1137a20–25). Aristotelian cowardice, remember, is not only the cowardly act but, more specifically, a cowardly disposition according to choice and in line with an agent's wish (say, their desire to be safe at all cost).[196] What this means, then, according to that stricter theory, is that Jack's callousness, envy, and resentment are not to be properly considered as Aristotelian vices but are only incidentally bad actions encouraged (or demanded) by the controlling Aristotelian vice of miserliness.[197] This rubs against our intuitions since we might feel that envy and resentment are morally worse than miserliness and should therefore be considered as vices due to their moral standing. However, once again I submit that this highlights the difference between contemporary theories of vice in virtue ethics and Aristotle's own concerns. Even if envy and resentment are morally worse behaviours (and even if Aristotle agreed with that assessment), the only behaviours fulfilling the criteria for Aristotelian vices are those connected more directly to the miserliness.

Of course, whether the callousness, envy, and resentment are strictly vices or only incidentally bad actions is not itself an incidental problem in respect to articulating the badness

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[195] It would perhaps surprise Jack to be charged with self-centeredness, believing as he does that he is doing the right thing for his family. But in fact he has allowed his own fears and beliefs and desires to overrun the real needs of his children and his wife, not taking their opinions or autonomy seriously, and is in this way putting himself above them.

[196] I am grateful for a discussion with Jay Elliott on this point.

[197] Note also that envy and resentment are passions for Aristotle and not vices of character (*NE* 1108a31–1108b10). But even in saying this, the passions are not chosen and are only incidental.

of vice. Even if it is the case that the only true vice on Aristotelian terms is miserliness, it is still the case that the one and only Aristotelian vice in Jack's possession makes him act badly in other areas of his life. The badness of vice is on full display as we watch miserliness spreading like an infection, working its way into other areas of Jack's life in order to attain his misguided wish and to enact his vicious choice in light of it

We ought to make a clarification here, too. The self-focus of vice is rather different to the personal benefits that many writers believe the virtues can bring.[198] Aristotle, for instance, holds that virtue will make the possessor happy. But the virtuous person acts well even if this runs counter to her immediate self-interest (*NE* 1174a4–11).[199] Aristotle's project is *not* formally egoistic since it takes the ethical framework to be prior to any considerations of what will please the agent. It is evidently the case that Aristotle thinks the good *of* humans will also be good *for* humans, but the latter reality is, almost always, coextensive with the former and does not stack the deck, so to speak, first of all dictating what it is to be a good person by the lights of what will be good for them in daily life.

The ends (or wishes) of vice calling for bad behaviour are not the only problems caused by vice. These also set the vicious agent up to fail in a very specific way. I will reserve a fuller discussion of this topic for the next chapter where I argue that the relationship between wish and choice is of enormous significance to the misery of the vicious person. But here it is enough to point out that Aristotle takes there to be a good for humans set down by the very nature of their humanity. The vicious person fails to make this true good the object of their wish and therefore fails to aim for it with their choice. But unlike states of character that do not give much thought to the human good, the vicious agent not only fails to aim for the human good but actively strives towards lesser goods, working with a misguided end, a plan of action to attain something that is not truly good, and an expectation that it will be good. Given that Aristotle's ethics is foundationally concerned with *eudaimonia*, the vicious person who actively works to obtain that which is not the true good for a person *qua* person, will be the furthest from *eudaimonia*, *actively* heading away from it.

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[198] For an interesting distinction between the self-regarding and other-regarding virtues see Taylor and Wolfram (1968).
[199] On Aristotle, virtue, and egoism, see McKerlie (1998), Gottlieb (1996), Gardiner (2001), and Chapter 2 of Kraut (1989).

7.2 Vicious Deliberation

There is a superficial sense in which the vicious agent is rational and deliberates in a roughly correct way in order to obtain the object of their desire. In the vicious agent we see the non-rational part of her soul obeying the rational part (since she is not akratic) and the non-rational part *agreeing* with the rational part (since she is not merely enkratic) (Irwin, 2001: 79).

But Aristotle is careful to call this sort of deliberation good only in a qualified sense, for in the case of unqualifiedly good deliberation there is no separation between the way in which one deliberates, the object of deliberation, and the effects of the object of deliberation upon the agent. Adding to an already difficult chapter, Aristotle admits various kinds of 'correct' deliberation, writing (*NE* 1142b16–22):

> But good deliberation is a certain sort of correctness in deliberation. That is why we must first inquire what [this correctness] is and what it is [correctness] about. Since there are several types of correctness, clearly good deliberation will not be every type. For the [akratic] and the base [*phaulos*] person will use rational calculation to reach what he proposes to see, and so will have deliberated correctly [if that is all it takes] but will have got himself a great evil. Having deliberated well seems, on the contrary, to be some sort of good; for the sort of correctness in deliberation that makes it good deliberation is the sort that reaches a good.

In this passage one can highlight two related ideas that provide an insight into the vicious agent's deliberations. First, in cases where the vicious agent successfully reasons their way to the attainment of some apparent good, it is very often an evil for them. Foot was very sceptical of this assumption, though I shall try to defend it in the next chapter (2001: 92, fn. 14). But, for now, to strengthen the arm of a vicious man is often to aid him in the harm of himself and those around him. All goods are liable to misuse if virtue or a near equivalent is not on hand with the constraints of wisdom, and this is exactly what the vicious agent lacks. And the greater the good, the greater the potential for serious misuse (*Rhet.* 1355b).[200] Aristotle is comfortable using tough language to warn that the vicious person who obtains their vicious goal will have 'got himself a great evil' (*NE* 1142b20).

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[200] In fact, Aristotle believes that most vice comes from an excess of goods and is not done out of necessity (*Pol.* 1267a13–15).

Second, and relatedly, the vicious agent's deliberation is not good in and of itself. The previous point underscored the instrumental dangers to which the vicious agent is prone in deliberation. We can add to this the intrinsic failure of vicious deliberation. Consider this from Agnes Callard: 'Reduced to seeking out causal connections to the object of desire, such a person's reason seems to have become a caricature, a shadow of its true self' (forthcoming). It is not that the vicious agent only consciously aims for momentary pleasures, 'causal connections' without reference to any sort wider plan, since the vicious is capable of both delayed gratification and relatively long-term and overarching planning. Recall, it is the akratic who battles with overruling passions, and it is the in-betweeners who live without reference to a reflective and action-guiding conception of the good. Instead, the deliberative reasoning of the vicious is necessarily 'reduced' or diminished in the sense that it is 'alienated from its very capacity to function in accordance with its proper mode of operation' (Callard, forthcoming), namely, in the service of obtaining what is good for a person *qua* person. (This is quite different to the akratic whose reason is only sporadically compromised.) In this sense the deliberation of the vicious agent is reliably or entirely off course with a consistency not seen in the akratic or the in-betweeners, and is only matched, conversely and ironically, by the virtuous.

Any choice (*prohairesis*) made at the end of this kind of deliberation will be deeply infected by these preceding problems.

7.3 Vicious Choice

Choice reveals character. But the window is transparent not invisible; the existence of a *prohairesis* itself will tell us something. Choice is the result of deliberation concerning the best way to promote a given end one takes to be good. Where a choice is produced, the wish will be for *eudaimonia*, living and acting well, and will often be triggered by a more immediate, concrete object that gets the deliberation going.

But humans are not computers, and choices do not automatically spit out of a human's mind simply because the wish + deliberation algorithm has been put in motion. If an end is immoral, many agents will not proceed past the process of deliberation. In fact, many will not go beyond idle wishing. The agent who deliberates about how to achieve a vicious end and forms a *prohairesis* in order to attain it has gone beyond wishing, beyond deliberation, and is now acting or preparing to act upon an instrumentally rational desire to attain that vicious end. The *prohairesis* of the vicious agent reveals a person who wants to act here and now to attain

a vicious end.[201] The wish is not idle. The deliberation is not speculative. A commitment is in place. Judged purely on grounds of internal rational harmony this would seem to be an improvement upon the akratic who fails to act on her choice. But the vicious agent would actually be better off taking a leaf from the akratic's book at this point, failing to act upon their rational desires. The vicious end, being bad for a human, and possibly also immoral or dangerous, will not serve the agent. It will in some cases have profoundly negative consequences.

In light of the preceding, there is no cause for celebration in saying that the vicious agent has harmony between their rational and non-rational elements. Asserting that the rational desires and deliberation of the vicious agent are in harmony with her actions and feelings is as good as saying that the car now driving off a cliff has an excellent harmony between the steering mechanisms and the engine. The internal logic of vice, quite happy within itself, cannot defend against the wider realities of a world which, for natural or social or psychological or practical reasons, ultimately does not condone this behaviour nor legitimise its ends. Just as the feelings and actions of the vicious agent were seen to be bad upon closer inspection, the rational desires of the vicious agent are also bad, and any apparently impressive harmony between the rational and non-rational parts of the vicious soul is, in truth, not good. The virtuous and vicious agent, on first glance oddly similar, are revealing themselves to be very different. Virtue and vice now more closely resemble those opposite poles by which they are known in ordinary conversation.

The startling harmony allowed by the foregoing is central to explaining the consistency of vice ('For vice [*mochthēria*] resembles diseases such as dropsy or consumption, while incontinence is more like epilepsy; vice is a continuous bad condition, but incontinence is not, *NE* 1150b35–35). Nothing gives them pause, at least in the moment of action, for no conflict arises. As we shall see in the next chapter, clues about the true value of the vicious person's ideas about living and acting well will come further down the line when it is harder to make changes to one's character and the repercussions are more severe.

A rather large objection must be dealt with here. Jozef Müller (2015b) argues that throughout the whole *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle's vicious agents lack stable and rationally endorsed

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[201] Price has written that 'the *chosen* is of a kind to be *done* (it is thus neither more nor less than *an act*)' (2018b: 104).

commitments, nor do they possess a unified soul.[202] Instead of acting on rational commitments, then, and in contrast to the picture I have sketched above, Müller argues that the vicious agent is conflicted and that this is the *only* picture of the vicious offered by Aristotle. It will be important to engage more deeply with Müller's position since a foundational piece of my argument states that the psychic harmony of the vicious agent, closely tied up with their stable commitment to their view of the end worth pursuing, is a factor in their misery. If this is not the case, my major argument cannot proceed much further. I need to turn more closely to Müller's thesis to see if I can get past it and so continue my story.

8. An Objection: The Conflicted Vicious Person

Müller argues against a reading that he calls the Principled Vicious Person (PVP) in favour of the Conflicted Vicious Person (CVP). According to scholars who favour PVP, the vicious agent 'enjoy[s] a harmony between what they find pleasant and what they take to be good'. This matches what we have said so far about psychic harmony. Müller also quotes Rorty who says that the vicious person is self-indulgent 'as a matter of principle' (1980: 272), and includes this passage from Annas:

> Aristotle's bad man is like his good man in so far as both display unity of thought and feeling when they act; the bad are those who have had their grasp of the principles a man should follow in action corrupted by bad training or the effect of previous bad choices. Aristotle's bad man is someone who has come to have systematically perverted ends, who believes in what he is doing, unlike the Platonic bad man, who is never really given the belief that what he is doing is right, and is thus always presented as a pathetic mass of conflicts. (Annas, 1977: 554)[203]

It is at least debatable whether Aristotle has in mind at any point action-guiding or prescriptive principles in the sense that we would understand the term in contemporary vernacular.[204] From

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[202] I am grateful for a conversation with Müller where he helped me to understand in more detail some elements of his position. At the end of the discussion I was much more sympathetic to his carefully wrestled theory even though we ultimately, and agreeably, disagree.

[203] Müller mistakenly quotes the following from *The Morality of Happiness*.

[204] Thanks to Anthony Price for a discussion about these very complicated issues. See for example Nielsen who argues that Aristotle does give 'ethically imbued' principles and also 'rules of conduct' (2015: 37-38), or Leibowitz (2013) and Price (2006; 2011b: 206-209) who favour more particularist readings of Aristotle.

what I can tell, in general Müller's use of 'principle' is more idiomatic than the foregoing and questions whether the vicious agent is *principled* that is, rationally committed to a certain way of living. It is precisely this stability that Müller denies. The best summary of the repudiation is found in Müller's abstract:

> In this paper, I argue that the widely held view that Aristotle's vicious agent is a principled follower of a wrong conception of the good whose soul, just like the soul of the virtuous agent, is marked by harmony between his reason and non-rational desires is an exegetical mistake. Rather, Aristotle holds – consistently and throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* – that the vicious agent lacks any real principles of action (or conception of the good) and that his soul lacks unity and harmony even more than the soul of the uncontrolled (akratic) agent. (Müller, 2015b: 459)

And so, should we follow him in this?

To make his case, Müller first notes Aristotle's three states of undesirable character: vice, akrasia, and brutishness (*NE* VII.1). Each of these correspond to a desirable opposite: vice and virtue, akrasia and enkrateia, brutishness and heroic virtue. Where others have taken this pairing to primarily signify that virtue and vice are opposites of one another, Müller ranks all six states according to their unity of the soul. In fact, Müller rightly observes that errors often made by previous attempts to articulate a theory of Aristotelian vice are due to the unnecessary belief that the vicious person must be the 'polar opposite' of the virtuous person. Avoiding this, then, Müller lines up all six character states in order of their unity of the soul. He does this assuming that Aristotle treats the unity of the soul as a criterion for goodness of character (*NE* 1102b17–18). The akratic agent does not obey reason and is overcome by pleasure (*NE* 1150a14), the enkratic and temperate listens to reason (*NE* 1102b26–28), and in the virtuous the soul finally achieves a state of harmony between desire and reason. Following this, Müller argues that vice must therefore be a state in which we find *kakophōnia*, discord between reason and desire where the non-rational desires do not listen to reason. He finds evidence for this idea in *NE* III.10–12 with its discussion of the uninhibited or intemperate person (*akolastos*) as one with their appetites out of control, 'For when someone lacks understanding, his desire for the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction. The [repeated] active exercise of appetite increases the appetite he already had from birth, and if the appetites are large and

intense, they actually expel rational calculation (*NE* 1119b7–10). In the vicious person, reason ('insofar as its possession of the principle of one's actions is concerned', (Müller, 2015b: 464)) is destroyed (*ptherei*, could also be 'corrupted' and, I think, produces fewer problems this way). Müller, against the view that the vicious agent acts on principle, writes, 'This means neither that vicious people lack reason nor that they merely have the wrong view about what is good. Rather, it means that they have no stable, rationally grounded principle according to which they would act and which would, in turn, explain their actions' (2015b: 464). Here, Müller advances his main exegetical weaponry. At *NE* 1146b22–23 (emphasis added) Aristotle seems to provide a clear ground-level illustration of a vicious principle: 'For the intemperate person acts on [choice] when he is led on, since he thinks it is right in every case to *pursue the pleasant thing at hand*'. The statement, 'Pursue the pleasant thing at hand', may come as close to an example of a principle that Aristotle offers.[205] But Müller needs to dismantle this possibility, and he says *NE* 1146b22-23 can be translated in two ways:

(1) For the [intemperate person] acts having decided to do so, *always thinking that one should pursue the pleasant thing at hand*, but the [uncontrolled person] does not think that, but pursues it nevertheless.

(2) For the [intemperate person] acts having decided to do so, *thinking that one should always pursue the pleasant thing at hand*, but the [uncontrolled person] does not think that, but pursues it nevertheless.

Translation (1) does not demand that the vicious agent has an explicit principle stating 'always go for the pleasure at hand'. 'It merely requires,' writes Müller, 'that anytime the vicious person finds something pleasant, she thinks she should go for it' (2015b: 465).[206] This, Müller continues, may be a *practice* to go for what seems pleasant but is not a carefully distilled conception of the good. He admits it may be a kind of principle but only one reflective of their current interest and inclination. Translation (2) conversely does require an explicit principle where it is always right to pursue pleasure at hand. Müller rejects (2) on exegetical grounds, but writes more generally that 'it is hard to imagine that any explicit hedonist […] would ever formulate so stupid a principle when even a brief reflection reveals that it is not always in one's

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[205] Anthony Price has written to me that is it no accident that this principle is not only corrupt, but appallingly simple.
[206] I think Müller's vicious agent is like Frankfurt's wanton (1971).

interest to pursue immediate pleasure' (2015b: 466).[207] Müller's case essentially suggests that 'always' (ἀεί, *aei*) should modify 'thinking' (νομίζων, *nomizōn*) instead of 'pursue' (δεῖν, *dein*); the adverb modifies the *preceding* verb.[208] (In fact, no matter where the *aei* is placed, Müller thinks it should modify the preceding verbal form.) This is because there are four verbal forms in sequence and, in order to make clear what Aristotle is modifying, the ἀεὶ (adverb) is taken to be emphatic, drawing attention to the preceding and, apparently, central verb.[209]

Without a stable conception of the good, the vicious agent does not struggle in the presence of (potentially harmful) desires for pleasure and allows herself to be *persuaded* by inclination (*NE* 1151a12–14). The vicious agent comes to regret her actions not because they went against her rational commitments but because of the pain they caused; if her action did not lead to pain, there would be no regret. In this way, writes Müller, the vicious agent can look back over her life and come to hate it, seeing that it is a life full of pain that could depress any rational person. Such a life is, as Aristotle described, 'utterly miserable' (*NE* 1166b28) from both the objective and subjective points of view.

How does Müller respond to the passages appearing quite clearly to support the idea of the principled vicious agent? To begin, Müller makes a list of the features of the vicious agent

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[207] Whether Aristotle understands the vicious agent specifically as a hedonist is at least debatable. We might instead follow Irwin who writes that the 'vicious person prefers one action over another simply because it appeals to him, not because of some further conviction about its value [...] This would be misleading if it meant that the vicious person is in principle less likely than other people to forgo immediate pleasure for some strategic reason. Nothing about vice seems to make a vicious person indifferent to strategic considerations' (2001: 89).

[208] If, as Müller suggests, *aei* is modifying *nomizōn*, Aristotle could have just as easily placed the adverb before the modified verb as seen, for instance, in Isocrates' *Archidamus* VI.15.1 where *aei* (adverb) precedes *nomizōn* (verb). Nielsen, a critic of this thesis, says Müller is 'exploiting the syntactical ambiguity in the placement of the adverb ἀεί—ever a source of mischief, and so of opportunity, in Aristotle scholarship' (2017: 22). She believes the passage much more simply conveys the opposite of what Müller is pushing for, as do I.

[209] However, as an exercise for beginners, for example, Mastronarde (2013: 170), following common usage, gives an example where the adverb modifies a succeeding verb even though the adjective sits between two verbs (ὁ δίκαιος τοὺς πολίτας ὠφελεῖν ἀεὶ λέξεται). Müller does recognise that it is more common for the adverb to precede the verb but makes the case that there are examples to the contrary. However, where we see examples of the contrary it is usually the case that the verb intended to be modified is clear. To take an example, in 2 Corinthians 6.10 the adverb (*aei*) modifies the preceding verb because there is no direct succeeding verb that could potentially confuse us. In Aristotle, however, there is a succeeding verb (*dein*) and to modify this is the more conventional use of adverb, as Müller admits himself. But Müller suggests that if Aristotle intended to modify *dein*, he could have reserved the adverb until the final clause (*to paron hēdu diōkein* [τὸ παρὸν ἡδὺ διώκειν], i.e. *after dein*) so we might know precisely what the adverb 'always' is referring to. Müller gives Plato's *Laws* (2004) (740b4 and 963a2) as an example of shifting the adverb (*aei*) after the verb *dein* and says that if this was Aristotle's intention (to modify *dein*) it would have been easy enough to make it clear in this same way. But in *Laws* 740b4 there is only one verb and so it is not unclear here what the adverb is modifying. In *Laws* 963a2 once again the adverb is modifying the only verb. As Müller is aware, in *NE* we are faced with the problem of many verbal forms and the question as to which the adverb is modifying. Müller justifies his claim by stating the placement of the adverb (*aei*) is emphatic. But this can be the case even if it is modifying *dein*, as is more common. Perhaps since there are four verbal forms it could be suggested that Aristotle makes use of the adverb to draw attention to the *final* verb (*dein*) form and not the third ('always pursue' instead of Müller's 'always thinking'). Picking the third appears more arbitrary than picking the fourth and final verb.

that he takes to come out of *NE* Book VII (2015b: 468-469) where the main data for these ideas is drawn:

(1) The vicious person performs her vicious actions according to choice (*NE* 1146b18–24; 1148a15–20; 1150a17–25; 1150b29–51a7).

(2) The uninhibited kind of vicious person always thinks that it is right to pursue the pleasure at hand (*NE* 1146b18–24).

(3) The vicious person sometimes pursues excessive pleasure with a mild or absent appetite (*NE* 1148a15–20).

(4) The vicious (intemperate) person is persuaded to pursue excessive pleasures, thinking this to be correct (*NE* 1151a11–20).

(5) The vicious person is not remorseful and sticks to her choice (*NE* 1150a17–25; 1150b29–30).

(6) Vice is a continuous condition or state (*NE* 1150b32–51a7).

(7) The vicious person does not know she is vicious (NE 1150b32–51a7).

(8) The vicious person does not possess the principle of actions (that for the sake of which – namely the human good) since it has been destroyed (or corrupted) (*NE* 1151a11–20).

He says right away that (2), (4), (5), and (8) support a conflicted vicious agent rather than a principled vicious agent. For Müller, obviously quite a lot hinges on his interpretation of *NE* 1146b22–23 being correct. But since the scholars who argue for a principled vicious agent do not in fact depend very heavily upon *NE* 1146b22–23 for their view, does Müller's translation, if correct, even successfully speak for the rest of Book VII? Let us, for the sake of a more fruitful discussion, grant that his translation does in fact support (2), (4), (5), and (8) (I take this to be very doubtful, by the way). Now, is his case adequate to answer the remaining four features, (1), (3), (6), and (7)?

Begin with (6): vice is a continuous condition. The implication is that a continuous condition requires a stable psychology and therefore a lack of conflict which could bring the agent in and out of the harmonious state. One may take this as a point in favour of the idea of a principled vicious agent. But Müller correctly notes that Aristotle calls akrasia episodic (like epilepsy more than dropsy) while also clearly understanding it to be a consistent state of character in *NE* VII.1. Could vice, too, entail regular episodic conflict (i.e. a lack of psychic harmony) *and* be a settled, continuous disposition? To argue for this, Müller draws a line between 'stable' and 'settled' dispositions, proposing that the latter can refer to a settled state of – and which is nevertheless – foolish, frivolous, or unprincipled (2015b: 470). Such a person can even be reliably foolish or unreliable. But a *stable* disposition, Müller believes, reveals a firm and principled commitment. And this is precisely what he does not want to attribute to the vicious agent.[210] It is true that there are no express depictions of the vicious agent as principled,[211] but for Aristotle's vicious agent, their pleasure, appetites, actions, *prohairesis*, deliberation, and wish all point in the same direction, just as these elements do in the virtuous agent (albeit directed towards better ends in the case of the latter). We can therefore only answer this objection by looking at the broader point already given several times now that vice is a *hexis prohairetikē*, a state issuing in choices which are the result of deliberation about how an end one takes to be good (wish) may be attained.[212] If this is not a rational commitment in Müller's view, I do not know what else would be sufficient. Furthermore, even while the vicious agent will eventually come to psychic conflict (as we shall see), it is not the conflict of the enkratic where one's rational choices are made in the face of base appetites to the contrary, nor is it the conflict of the akratic where one fails to act in line with their rational choices due to the sway of appetites. The vicious are more like the virtuous on this score, consistently acting in line with their rational choices and without conflicting appetites and pleasures. The precise nature of vicious conflict will be the subject of the next chapter.

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[210] Broadie also says that she knows of no passage that speaks of the vicious agent as a unity of thought and feeling (Broadie, 1991: 177, fn. 41).
[211] This is if we discount *NE* 1146b22-23. We also find an instructive simile at *NE* VII.10 comparing the akratic with the base (1152a 20–24):

> In fact the incontinent person is like a city that votes for all the right decrees and has excellent laws,
> but does not apply them, as in Anaxandrides' taunt, 'The city willed it, that cares nothing for laws'.
> The base person, by contrast, is like a city that applies its laws, but applies bad ones.

One does not want to read too much into a picture, but it is not a stretch to suppose that the image of applying laws corresponds to the idea of applying rational commitments (or principles in modern vernacular). It certainly suggests that something considered and relatively binding is happening; the vicious is not led along by appetites alone. They are instead following a law or principle, however misguided it may be.
[212] This, too, is a large part of Jay Elliott's argument against Müller's position (Elliott, 2016).

As we have also said earlier, this sort of rational harmony makes the vicious agent worse than the akratic and the enkratic. Irwin has a good example to illustrate: 'Aristotle is thinking of someone whose anger makes him think it is all right to shoot the offender, not of someone whose anger blinds him to the fact that he is shooting, or that he is shooting this person' (1999a: 204). It is, all things considered, worse to be bad on rational commitment than on impulse.[213] Chesterton said there was more simplicity in a man eating caviar on impulse than grape-nuts on principle (2007: 74). I think this is true and, applied to vice, it is not so much the severity of the actions that makes them problematic, but the supposedly rational grounds on which they are justified. The man who breaks a friend's jaw overcome by fear or rage is not as bad as the man who plans to wound a friend with a carefully timed insult even if an insult is not as serious as a broken jaw when comparing the bare actions. To be clear, it is not the planning that makes him bad since in some cases there will be no planning. The real concern is that he thinks insulting the friend is 'the thing to do' and is therefore in his own eyes justified.[214] Remember also that Müller is not after a general principle but rather the notion of being *principled*, or rationally committed. The vicious agent's idea that insulting the friend is the thing to do, then, is not a general principle but a rationally endorsed behaviour based upon his ideas of acting and living well.

Consider now (7), the vicious person does not know she is so. For this to be the case, Müller suggests that the vicious person would need to be persuaded about the way she should act and in possession of a stable conception of the good that she had reflected upon. He goes on to say that, in order to possess a conception of the good, one must be capable of reflecting upon the good and the fine. The vicious, however, are not capable of reflecting on the good and the fine, says Müller. 'Vice escapes notice', he writes, 'because it is not a condition in which one reflects on one's character in view of any conception of goodness or fineness' (2015b: 471). (7), Müller wishes to make clear, therefore, does not support the idea of a

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[213] In fact, a few lines later, Aristotle suggests that vicious acts have no spirit, that is, no overwhelming impulsiveness due to an emotion, and are the result of forethought. At *NE* 1135b 30–31 he writes that with actions caused by anger, we do not dispute about whether the fault took place (since it clearly did), but about the presence or otherwise of forethought. With commercial transactions involving planning or deceit, however, we do dispute whether or not the bad action took place or if it was simply due to forgetfulness or error. If the bad action took place, it is considered vicious (*mochthēron*) since these sorts of intentionally deceitful acts are done with forethought. Joachim disputes Burnet's proposal that the exception is in cases where the act of deception is done due to forgetfulness. He writes instead, 'But what Aristotle actually means is "Unless they do it—i.e. dispute about the fact – owing to forgetfulness." The point is: "In cases of dispute, where the contending parties dispute about the fact, one or other of them must be a knave – unless one of them has simply forgotten what happened"' (Joachim, 1951: 158).
[214] We discussed this in respect to the regular and resolved boaster. The latter, though not necessarily valuing their behaviour under the explicit heading of a vice, still chooses it for the sake of their view of what is good.

principled vicious agent. But it need not be the case that an agent must be able to reflect on the good and fine in the way that a *virtuous* person does so in order to hold a conception of the good that is action-guiding and reflective. After all, the vicious agent could well be persuaded to follow an *incorrect* conception of the good precisely because they are unable (or unwilling) to reflect upon the true good and the fine. In fact, Aristotle does believe that the vicious follow their own view of the fine as he writes that 'each state [of character] has its own distinctive [view of] what is fine and pleasant' (*NE* 1113a31).[215] And the vicious go beyond passively conceiving of the fine; they are also actively committed to its attainment. To have a wish is to see a particular end as *good*, and one's choice (*prohairesis*) is their desire and commitment to the attainment of it. Vice, fundamentally, is a state issuing in these choices. In saying this, we also deal with (1) since the idea of choice speaks directly to the issue of rational commitments and therefore against Müller's thesis. Müller relies upon a non-technical reading of *prohairesis* in an attempt to avoid all these implications. But this goes against a pretty strong tide given that vice is fundamentally defined as a *hexis prohairetikē* and is nowhere spoken of as a different type of *hexis prohairetikē* than virtue.

(3), the vicious person sometimes pursues excessive pleasure with a mild or absent appetite. Müller does not say much about this feature, but I take it to be quite important for establishing whether the vicious person is rationally committed to their vices. Müller admits Aristotle's point that the uninhibited person will go for anything slightly appealing, perhaps without pleasure, but then repeats his position that this does not imply a *rational commitment* since it would be absurd to believe that one should go for these things even if one does not particularly feel like it at the time. There are many reasons why someone might go for something without a motivating appetite, says Müller, and these may have nothing to do with principled commitments. But Aristotle clearly describes a sort of person who pursues what is pleasant 'because this is what he is persuaded and decides to do' and who acts on 'rational calculation' (*NE* 1146a31–b2). Aristotle also thinks that both the virtuous and vicious pursue the object of their wish because they see it as good and not (only) because they see it as pleasant. Aristotle has at his disposal a tripartite distinction of desire whereby *boulēsis* (wish) is a desire for the good (or apparent good), *epithumia* is a desire for the pleasant, and *thumos* is a roughly retaliatory desire.[216] Where the pursuit of pleasure is a commitment of the vicious agent's, to be properly vicious she must pursue pleasure *as good* and is therefore not beholden to fleeting

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[215] If we note the plural used in this passage these could be particulars. Still, the vicious agent is conceiving of these things as fine. Thanks to Anthony Price for pointing this out.

[216] The best discussion of these desires I know of is Pearson's (2016).

appetites for the motivation to attain it; rational calculation has already set the course.[217] Müller, contrary to Aristotle it seems, takes it to be ridiculous that one should formulate any kind of explicit hedonistic commitment since any sort of reflection should show that it is not always in one's interest to pursue pleasure (Müller, 2015b: 466). But why should the vicious not be able to hold such a rational commitment while at the same time recognising instances where it would not serve them well to go for a particular or particularly damaging pleasure? A commitment is not universally or physically binding, after all. Further, the vicious person need not suffer from 'diachronic akrasia' and so is not unable to implement long-term plans requiring the forfeit of immediate pleasure to gain a greater future pleasure (Grönroos, 2015a: 152). Irwin similarly points out that the insidious, corrupt, ruthless, and malevolent components of vice will be difficult to carry out without 'the sort of the foresight, planning, and self-restraint that are needed to carry out long-term aims' (2001: 80). The vicious are not bound by the pursuit of pleasure in the way that animals may be. Nor are they *overcome* by appetite as in the case of the akratic.[218] The commitment to pleasure can be a commitment like any other, offering general guidance and admitting of situational sensitivities.[219]

It should also be said in closing here that we ought not to get entirely hung up on intemperance since it is not the only vice Aristotle discusses. Intemperance is a good choice for Müller since it is proably the hardest to square with the idea of a rational commitment, even though I have tried to show that a rational committment to plasure is not ridiculous. But moving along from intemperance for a moment, it does not require such imagination to picture the vicious agent rationally committed to stinginess and their views about money, cowardice and their views about self-protection, buffoonery and their views about behaviour at social gatherings, and irascibility and their views about getting worked up over wrongs. The agent will view none of these under the headings just given, but it is not hard to see that an agent who

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[217] Anthony Price suggested to me that if one has no principle to beware of pleasures of a kind, even a mild desire for a given pleasure might well prompt indulgence in the absence of limits and discernment. I think this is absolutely true, and the vicious person who has an incorrect view of what is good and fine will certainly pursue pleasures that are bad for her.

[218] One thinks of thoughtful expressions of hedonism, for instance in Crisp (2006: 98-111). Such theories do not depend on an overwhelming and current appetite for pleasure to ground them. Whether the vicious agent possesses such a careful theory is at least an open question, but the possibility is there.

[219] The characterisation I have offered does not resemble the kind of enslavement to pleasure that, if taken to an extreme, expels *logismos* (*NE* 1119b10). But one should take the text on face value here, and *if* the appetites are large and intense' they may expel rational calculation. This happens only where 'appetites increase' and, as I have written above, intemperance will be a radical ethical vice just in case it is a radical ethical vice. Elsewhere it will be intemperance by definition but need not be so severe as to expel rational calculation.

   Though he is more sceptical of the idea that the vicious pursues pleasure on a rational commitment, Anthony Price wrote to me that even if it is odd to think of the intemperate agent on acting *on* a universal principle, not just *with* but also *out of respect for* that principle, we can imagine him thinking of others more straight-laced, dismissing them as fools or cowards who have failed to grasp and embrace the best that life offers us.

is rationally committed to these behaviours could try to follow through on them even without an appetite for it on a given occasion.

I do not think Müller's objection succeeds. The picture of the vicious agent with an alignment of passion and reason still stands. Vice *is* a state that reflects the agent's conception of what is good and worth pursuing, produces deliberation about how to achieve that good, and issues in choices to here and now promote the attainment of the apparently good end. I will soon explore the sort of conflict and misery that does befall the vicious agent, but will try to make clear that such conflict is *specifically because* of their incorrect conception of the good and the choices made in light of this, designed to attain it.

9. The Origins of Vice

What is it that produces the bad feeling and actions, the harmful and shameful behaviour that swallows up those around the vicious agent and spills out beyond the sphere of the original trait, the bad ends set by cowardice and stinginess and intemperance and the rest, the doomed deliberation about the best way to fulfil these ends, and the commitment to here and now promote these vicious ends? The answer is a slow and steady one. Vice is not given from the top down in sweeping blueprints about the best way to live and act or determined by a rational map made *before* the journey begins, accepted in one fell swoop. In Raphael's *The School of Athens*, Aristotle fittingly points to the ground. Raphael almost certainly did not have the notion of ethical character in mind, but the painting correctly shows how Aristotelian vice comes *from the ground up*. It begins with actions and repeated actions here and there, starts with the materials given by natural personality, one's home life and social environment, relies upon the pleasure one takes in acting well or acting badly (and the way this pleasure is permitted or discouraged), looks to the role models one is given or seeks, and the education one receives or misses out on. Aristotle calls this long and embodied process of acquiring character *habituation* and it comes from the ground up.

Talk about what virtue (and vice) *is* apparently cannot be easily separated from talk about how a virtue (and a vice) is *acquired*. If we are to discover the nature of vice more precisely, it will involve exploring the path to its acquisition. This much is seen at the very beginning of Book II where Aristotle launches into his discussion of virtue proper. At *NE* 1103a15–18 the

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opening statement quickly and intentionally blurs the notion of virtue with the notion of its acquisition:

> Virtue, then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching; that is why it needs experience and time. Virtue of character results from habit; hence its name 'ethical', slightly varied from 'ethos'.

Speaking about acquisition in this way enables Aristotle to make a crucial point about what the virtues are, namely, that they are not natural to us (unlike the senses) and arise instead through repeated action (*NE* II.1). It also reinforces an intentional move away from Plato's intellectual account of virtue and towards Aristotle's own commitment to a practical ethical project; the repetition of virtuous actions or habitual respect for certain reasons (to be applied contextually) not only develops virtue but is also constitutive of it (*NE* 1104a28–34). Aristotle's doctrine of habituation is not given a great deal of textual space in the overall theory, however. Kristjánsson states that a 'moral educator without other resources would starve on it' (2016: 33). It will not be my aim, then, to provide a substantial reconstruction of the doctrine of habituation but merely to reference it in such a way that some observations about the acquisition of vice might be made.[220]

A well-known passage in *Politics* (1132a39–1132b10) offers some clues:

> There are three thing which make men good and excellent; these are nature, habit, reason. In the first place, everyone must be born a man and not some other animal; so, too, he must have a certain character, both of body and soul. But some qualities there is no use in having at birth, for they are altered by habit, and there are some gifts which by nature are made to be turned by habit to good or bad. Animals lead for the most part a life of nature, although in lesser particulars some are influenced by habit as well. Man has reason, in addition, and man only. For this reason nature, habit, reason must be in harmony with one another; for they do not always agree; men do many things against habit and nature, if reason persuades them that they ought. We have already determined what natures are likely to be most easily

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[220] For more on Aristotle and habituation, see Sherman (1999), Kristjánsson (2015), Angier (2010), and May (2010). Annas gives a very good modern and less textually dependent interpretation of the doctrine (2011).

moulded by the hands of the legislator. All else is the work of education; we learn

some things by habit and some by instruction.

Here are the big three: nature, habit, and reason. These factors make people excellent. And the same can be said for those factors making them bad. Let us take a brief look at each of them.

9.1 Nature

For the vicious agent they are first of all born with natural traits, akin to personality, (i.e. impulsivity, aggression, lack of awareness, etc.) pushing them in the direction of vice.[221] Some have read out of (or into) *NE* 1144a1–17 the idea that all are born with natural virtues (Grönroos, 2015a: 162; Leunissen, 2017b: 129), though all that Aristotle says explicitly is that we are born with whatever type of character we have by nature. Since the examples he gives in this passage are temperance and bravery, it has been assumed, I think, that these must be the very sorts of things present in everyone. But I take it that these are only illustrative, and a person could actually possess any trait as part of their natural character, good or bad. At any rate, it is unlikely that a person would possess only natural vices. Further, the possession of natural virtues or natural vices is no guarantee that either will progress to full virtue or full vice since the conversion demands habit and reason. The best – or worst – that the pull of natural vice can do is make it initially more pleasant or easy to perform the requisite actions since the natural vice would, naturally, produce these.[222] The complete transition from natural vice to full vice demands the gritty and prosaic work of just doing the action and doing it again and doing it again. The transformation of natural vice into full vice calls for the repeated labour of habit, and there is no shortcut.

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[221] Leunissen's work on natural character in Aristotle is exceptionally thorough and clear (2017a, 2017b). See Curzer (2012: 305-306) and Kraut (1989: 247-249) on the view that natural virtue, present in children, is not true virtue and will not become so without determined habituation. Virtue does not come for free merely in the absence of corruption. In discussion of natural virtue, Aristotle himself writes that a child's natural character could go either way, harming or helping them (*NE* 1144b).

[222] More fatalistic accounts of one's ability to overcome any element of their inborn character are found in Schopenhauer (2005: 49ff; 2007: 374-374). This has echoes in Strawson's Basic Argument (1994).

9.2. Habit

But the bare performance of habitually repeated actions alone is not sufficient for virtue or vice since a person can perform a virtuous act by accident or with the wrong motives. Aristotle is well aware of this and so he does not leave the definition hanging there. An action is, say, temperate, when it is performed in the way in which a temperate person would perform it. There is a hint of circularity to the prescription. If one becomes virtuous by performing virtuous actions they would, presumably, already be virtuous in order to perform the virtuous act in question. To break this cycle, we must allow that there are various ways of understanding virtuous action. Virtuous action can refer to performing (a) the sort of action that the virtuous perform, performing (b) the right sort of action in the way that a virtuous person would perform it, and (c) performing the right sort of action in the way that a virtuous person would perform it from a firm and unchanging state.[223] It is Aristotle's contention that an agent who begins with (a) will eventually become an agent who can perform (b) and from (c) (Pakaluk, 2005: 104). Aristotle is correct to distinguish between (a) and (b) and (c), and further, to require that the virtuous agent display (b) and (c). He writes (*NE* 1105a31–35):

> Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does [the actions]. First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.

This account of the development of virtue is slightly more difficult to apply directly in the case of vice. Where it makes sense to suggest the would-be virtuous agent intentionally copies the behaviours of the truly virtuous agent, first purely by replication and later with a proper motivation and appreciation for them, it is unlikely that the would-be vicious agent admires the truly vicious agent and intentionally copies their behaviours *as vicious* until they can properly make them their own. One does not get the impression anywhere in Aristotle that the would-be vicious agent watches the genuinely vicious agent and believes their actions *as vicious* to be fine and noble and worthy of imitation. Aristotle often writes intimating that bad character traits are relatively obvious to all and therefore most people should be able to spot intemperate or miserly behaviour for what it is – vicious, unattractive, and unworthy of emulation. The

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[223] Thanks to Paul Formosa for his suggestions on this.

moral exemplar theory has little explanatory power in respect to the causal story of Aristotelian vice.[224]

A passage at *NE* 1114a12–14 might seem to pose trouble for this thought, however. Aristotle writes, 'Again, it is unreasonable to think that someone who does unjust actions does not wish to be unjust, or that someone who does intemperate actions does not wish to be intemperate' (Crisp trans.). In what sense does the unjust person actually wish to be unjust? Well, we must remember that Aristotle takes all rationally chosen actions to aim at the good. This means that even where an agent clearly emulates intemperate behaviour, he or she takes that behaviour to be good. The idea that an agent *wants* to be unjust is compatible with the notion that an agent who wants to be unjust (*de re*) does not view the relevant behaviours under the explicit heading of injustice but rather courage or patriotism or ambition (*de dicto*), etc. Yes, it would be strange to say that the person rationally choosing unjust actions does not wish to be unjust since the actions are rationally chosen, but we need not jump to the thought that such a person sees those chosen actions under the heading of injustice. It means instead that they do desire the character state constituted and inculcated by the relevant actions. Rachana Kamtekar has recently showed the difference between Plato's account of vice in the *Timaeus* and Aristotle's in the *NE*. Plato construes vice as a psychic disease to be cured, not a condition primarily to be blamed. He famously, perhaps simplistically, holds the thesis that nobody is willingly evil (*Tim.* 86b-87b.) Kamtekar correctly sees something quite different at work in Aristotle, focussing on his thoughts about the voluntariness of vice at *NE* III.5, and she writes, 'The idea that one could be passively conditioned into vice is a fantasy' (2019: 78). But this sentiment needs to be carefully handled. While it is the case that vicious dispositions are built by voluntary and therefore blameworthy actions, the agent need not view those voluntary actions under the heading of vice.[225] There is, for sure, no passive conditioning, and this partially accounts for the badness of vice; it is not purely a disease that blindsides the unfortunate. But neither Plato *nor* Aristotle provide us with a picture of the vicious agent doing evil willingly *as evil*.[226]

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[224] On the moral exemplar theory see Zagzebski (2010, 2017). Nevertheless, it is not impossible for someone brought up in a family where shoplifting is admired or telling lies is permitted to grow up wishing to perform exactly these things and knowingly.

[225] See fn. 52 on the voluntary.

[226] Aristotle does not forbid this reading, however, as Plato seems to.

9.3 Reason

The habits established either by these natural traits or through emulation of another become virtues and vices once they are taken on board for the proper reasons (*NE* 1105a 31–35), namely, that the given behaviours are *the thing to do* in a particular scenario in order to realise the desired end. While the reasons of the vicious agent will not be correct insofar as they do not pick out the true good for a human *qua* human, the vicious agent, like the virtuous, takes ownership of their traits on the basis of reasons. The agent reasons that they are pursuing the 'correct' course of action, not only copying the behaviour of those around them or acting in line with natural and undeveloped vices. There is the incontrovertible presence of situational determinism in the possession of virtue and vice. But most moral theories have to face the challenges of moral luck. Moreover, Aristotle does not blame the vicious agent for the natural vices or the warped upbringing that they receive. Where vicious choice reveals the *badness of* the vicious agent, it is not simply wagging a judgmental finger at their upbringing and natural tendencies, but rather towards their *acceptance* of these things and the additional support shown in the way that these behaviours and traits fit into their view of what is worth pursuing. It is here that natural vice blossoms into true vice. This is quite different to the akratic agent whose bad actions are not chosen and are not performed according to reason. It is also unlike the in-betweeners who, though they behave in reliably bad ways, have not moved beyond either natural vice or shallow habit in the habituation process. Even though the vicious agent need not choose their behaviour under the explicit heading of vice, they have taken ownership of their natural vices, habits, and upbringing, moving along in the process of habituation to view their actions as contributing to their views about living and acting well.

9.4 Pleasure

In addition to the guiding of natural traits, the encouragement of habits, and moral education, Aristotle advises the education of pleasure and pain. 'That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing – right from early youth, as Plato says – to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is correct education' (*NE* 1104b11–13). Pleasure can play a helpful role in grasping good reasons. If a student learns to take pleasure in the fineness of their actions, they may in turn focus on what makes an act fine.[227] Furthermore, very early on in

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[227] I owe this point to Anthony Price.

Aristotle's remarks about virtue and vice, he advises us to 'take someone's pleasure or pain following on his actions to be a sign of his state' (*NE* 1104b5), and continues on to say that 'virtue is the sort of state that does the best actions concerning pleasures and pains, and that vice is the contrary state' (*NE* 1104b28–30). Camus' Clamence cuts to the heart of the matter: 'No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures' (2006: 41).[228] The pleasure that the vicious person takes in their actions is a sign that something is wrong. We object to the person who finds bad actions pleasurable and good actions painful, and it is worse to do something bad while enjoying it than to feel conflicted. Outside of the more mundane cases where a miser is very pleased with his ability to buy cheaper materials to make an inferior product, for instance, there are sinister instances where the presence of pleasure alongside vicious behaviour becomes rather frightening or at the very least unsettling. The pleasure taken by the vicious person in their actions will also make it easy for them to continue in them. Unlike the enkratic who acts rightly but in the absence of pleasure, the vicious agent experiences a harmony between their reason and their pleasures.

9.5 Education

Towards the end of the longer passage quoted above from *Politics* (1132a39–1132b10), Aristotle slips in a further and final qualification regarding education in the habituation process – 'all else is the work of education'. Aristotle's spotlight on education is the recognition that virtue or vice do not and cannot be inculcated by the work of only the agent themselves. Habituation relies upon outside counsel. If 'all else' in this passage is intended to refer to everything else educators and lawmakers do to develop a person's character outside of nature, habit, reason, and pleasure, the term 'education' will be a pretty broad idea encompassing the lawgivers' arrangement of marriages (*Pol.* 1334b30–38), the timing of when parents ought to start having children (1335a3–6), and – perhaps most controversially – the inspection and assessment of the sort of offspring who will have the best chance at success (1335b20–21). And, as the agent is growing, Aristotle also recommends exercise (Pol. 1336a12–21), diet (Pol.

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[228] It would be a strange view of the connection between virtue and pleasure, of course, if it demanded the agent take pleasure in every virtuous action in and of itself. There is nothing inherently pleasurable for the courageous man in facing the firing squad. Aristotle admits: 'It is not true, then, in the case of every virtue that its active exercise is pleasant; it is pleasant only insofar as we attain the end (*tou telous ephaptetai*) (*NE* 1117b15–16). Viewed this way, the courageous person is not pleased by the prospect of death or the loss of an arm (those things by means of which the end is achieved) but in doing something that is good and in doing something that achieves for him the good end he aims at (Echeñique, 2012: 183-184).

1336a3–8), and musical education (Pol. 1339a20–25; 41–42), for instance, in building desirable character. Clearly these educative processes are the special privileges of the wealthy and well-positioned in society. The education of virtue, if it is to be understood as a rare excellence, will require every advantage that is available. But the education of *vice* will either be a lack of these things, or these things done poorly, or a case of the agent taking these things the wrong way. Since vice is not only a lack of virtue but the possession of an active state requiring reason and choice, it is possible that there has been some kind of educative process gone awry and used to rationally justify misguided ends. However, I do not think the process need perfectly mirror the very fortunate education of the virtuous.

Once more, readers may worry that there is now an elitism mixed with a healthy dose of moral luck, but remember Aristotle only blames the agent and attributes wickedness where the trait moves from shallow habit and natural vice and heads toward full vice underwritten by the agent's own rational commitment and their understanding that the given behaviours (constitutive of traits) are the thing to do given the ends that they wish to attain.

10. What is Necessary and what is Sufficient?

To finish, I want to ask whether it is necessary for every vicious agent to display harmful and shameful actions *and* to possess a corrupted rationality, *or* whether one without the other is still sufficient for vice. To put it another way, is corrupted rationality with a very mild behavioural component sufficient for vice? In answering this question, we will get a better grip on what it is that Aristotle sees as especially *bad* about vicious people.

Aristotle spends a great deal of time talking about vice that progresses into something more serious; vice that is excessive, causes harm, causes shame, often merits legal reproach, chooses the objectively bad (and not only the relatively excessive), and destroys relationships. And, so, a question: is the morally problematic behaviour of vice a necessary element for the *badness of* vice, or is the psychological component necessary and sufficient? In other words, why focus on more extreme cases of vice when we have already learned that choice is a – perhaps *the* – defining element in the constitution of vice?

Without choice (*prohairesis*), one cannot say that an agent possesses a vice in the strict sense given that true vice (and virtue) is thought to be a manifestation of one's conception of the end and their commitment to carry it out. In this way choice is indeed necessary. The choice

constraint also maintains the vibrancy of the boundaries between the akratic and the in-betweeners and the vicious. Where the akratic feel regret as their appetite and choice come apart, and the in-betweeners feel none since there is nothing to go against, the vicious act with choice and desires in harmony. Lacking this, quite simply, we do not have a choice state, the sort of character that rationally aims at happiness and the sort of character that Aristotle takes to be morally relevant and indicative of vice. But is choice sufficient to alone constitute the *badness of* vice, or must quite a severe behavioural element also be present?

First, as mentioned, it is worse to be bad according to choice than to be overcome by appetite or some other involuntary state of affairs and this is just what the vicious do. Second, as mentioned, choice is actually an internal mechanism by which a person's behaviour is made consistently, and often increasingly bad. Since vice is a special kind of missing the mean, vice does not take hold the moment an agent begins to act on choice; the proper progression of vice is gradual and cumulative. The vicious agent, growing more convinced of their ideas about living and acting well, will become more certain that the behaviours required are justified. Certainty breeds comfort and the vicious will increasingly act in line with their vices, primarily self-focussed in nature and detrimental to relationships.[229]

But neither of these observations *guarantee* that the behaviour will come to anything more than simply a disposition according to choice and failing to hit the mean. We can look at this from a different angle, using virtue as an analogy. The person who continues to perform virtuous acts according to choice becomes virtuous. But it does not mean that their acts become more and more *extreme*, as if the generous person will eventually be giving away cars and houses and more blood than is advisable, etc. The growth that takes place is not an infinite scale of ever-increasing and terrifyingly generous acts, but rather an increase towards appropriate ('mean') generosity and a pleasure in performing it. With vice, the goal is often a self-serving happiness, often at the expense of others, and the longer that one lives in line with vice, the more corrupt their view of the end and its worthiness will become. But even saying this cannot promise that the behaviour will become increasingly bad, and in many cases I

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[229] This is rather a different self-focus to that of virtue. While Aristotle holds that virtue will make the possessor happy, the virtuous person loves virtue for its own sake and will perform virtuous acts even if they run counter to his immediate self-interest (*NE* 1174a4–11). On Aristotle, virtue, and egoism, see McKerlie (1998), Gottlieb (1996), Gardiner (2001), and chapter 2 of Kraut (1989).

believe it will not. What then, is the moral status of a person who acts and feels viciously according to choice but only with very mild behavioural outputs?[230]

One might think the badness of vice is in the *way* one does something and not simply the actions that one performs, the severity of these or otherwise. On this account, doing vicious acts *according to choice* sufficiently constitutes the badness of vice. There is something very Aristotelian about this thinking and he does write explicitly that cowardice and injustice are not merely doing these actions but being in a certain state when we do them (*NE* 1137a22–23). But Aristotle does devote most of his energy and textual space to vice that goes beyond merely the *way* in which someone acts and instead looks at severe physical presentations of the vice in question. This on its own might only reflect Aristotle's own daily experience of vicious people and does not constitute a theoretical comment on the nature of vice. But it is still seriously questionable whether a person who takes less pleasure in food and sex than the virtuous person is doing something wicked or shameful even if it is according to choice.

Trying again, if the vicious agent themselves is negatively affected by vice according to choice, perhaps this is enough to constitute the *badness of* vice even if the harmful effects of the vice do not extend to others and remain only with the agent. Taking this view, though, essentially obliterates the *badness of/bad for* division since here they are one and the same: the *badness of* vice just is its *badness for* the vicious agent. And while some may argue that this is precisely the Aristotelian spirit of things, it should be noted that claiming that the badness of vice is simply in its badness for the agent (and nothing more than this) is considerably more extreme than saying the *badness of* vice and its *badness for* the agent are closely related, feeding into one another, but still distinct. In order to maintain their separation, one could say that the harmful effects of vice upon the agent alone are still *morally* problematic and are in this way the moral *badness of* vice. This obviously depends on where one takes the boundaries of morality to lie.[231] If morality refers only to behaviour that affects other people, choice may

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[230] It may be empirically unlikely that a vice will remain contained to its sphere of action and feeling, as Aristotle's discussion of general injustice shows. But for theoretical purposes, I proceed with the question.

[231] Gert defines morality as 'an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and includes what are commonly known as the moral rules, ideals, and virtues, and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal' (2001: 424). Following Hobbes, he writes that 'morality is primarily concerned with the behavior of people *insofar as that behavior affects others*; it prohibits the kind of conduct that harms others and encourages the kind of conduct that helps them' (Gert, 2005: 9, emphasis added). Julia Driver takes a position similar to Gert, understanding morality as our dealings with others. She writes that prudential virtues enable us to pursue our self-interest while moral virtues 'enable us to do things that help others, and thus realize our social or other-directed capacities' (Driver, 2001: 102). Soon after she writes, 'I believe that moral virtues benefit others *primarily* [emphasis added]' (2001: 104). Driver defines vices as traits which 'produce bad states of affairs' (2001: 74). For Driver, a prudential vice harms the possessor. A moral vice, then, primarily harms *others*. Haidt and Kesebir wonder whether philosophers and psychologists working with the harm and fairness conception of morality have actually constructed a rather parochial morality that works for educated, secular Westerners and

not be necessary and sufficient given the fact that a person's vice may have no negative effect on others. If, on the other hand, the boundaries of morality also extend to an agent's (in)ability to flourish, their state of misery and self-destruction, and the way in which they harm and shame themselves both physically and psychologically, then perhaps choice is necessary and sufficient for morally problematic vice, so understood. Whether or not anyone beyond the Aristotelian will take such a person to be *bad* will depend on one's view of the importance of both motives and flourishing in ethical appraisal.

Or, one might say that the psychological component is necessary but *not* sufficient for the *badness of* vice, and that an advanced behavioural element must be at play. It is tempting to think of the behavioural component of vice as merely an epistemic guide, signalling the presence of the requisite rational elements. It does achieve that, of course, but to see it solely in this light would be to downplay its significance. Aristotle is not really interested in slight misses of the mean, nor does he talk much about clear and consistent misses of the mean that are not, or not yet, harmful or significantly shameful. Aristotle allows that extreme love of family, for instance, is bad but not vicious. He also allows that vulgarity and stinginess need not bring reproach even though each disposition *is* a vice (*kakia*) (*NE* 1123a33–34). But when he speaks about the *mochthēros*, he mainly connects them with those things that most people reasonably recognise as bad, harmful, and shameful.

What option shall we choose, if any? Two ideas must be held in tension because Aristotle plainly espouses both: it is the case that the *way* a person acts (according to choice) makes them vicious and not only what they do, *and* it is the case that some vices are not severe enough to bring reproach or to warrant labels such as 'wickedness'. Since it is made quite clear that doing bad things on rational commitment is worse than doing them when overcome by appetite or emotion, we might begin by saying that the vicious person who acts on choice is

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excludes a great deal valued by the others. It has elsewhere been written that such authors risk making their definition 'ethnocentric' (J. Graham, Haidt, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008: 270). Kant many years earlier had recognised duties to oneself. Graham et al. revealed that people have actual concerns far broader than just harm and fairness, extending to relationships between individuals and authorities and institutions, the way in which one treats their own body (as 'playgrounds for pleasure or temples created by God, and with 'purity of mind' (2011: 380, 367). This empirical plurality of conceptions led Haidt and Kesebir to talk about the *function* of morality rather than its content (2010: 800). However, those who prefer a more narrow conception might suppose the functionalist approach is confusing morality with ethics. The distinction between ethics and morality made by Bernard Williams may serve to pry apart Gert's definition from that of Haidt et al. Williams takes ethics to refer to a broader range of normative issues and morality to be narrower, largely concerned with specific obligations (2011: 7). On this view one might just say that for Gert ethics falls outside of morality while for Haidt et al. ethics is really a part of morality. But this sort of distinction actually highlights the problem. Williams' division of terminology cannot be assumed from the outset. As is argued by Haidt et al., empirical conceptions of morality are *in fact* diverse and many include both ethics and morality with no division (or, at times, indeed any acknowledgement that one's conception combines two terms). Williams' suggestion only reveals that his own conception of 'morality' is comparatively narrow.

worse than the akratic who does the same action not according to any rational commitment or inciting conception of the life worth living. But vice can get worse from that ground level. The agent whose vice progresses to a problematic behavioural level, with harmful and shameful actions according to choice, is worse than the agent who performs mild actions according to choice. Sensibly enough, Aristotle's more aggressive indictments are reserved for those agents whose vice progresses to a state causing shameful or harmful behaviour, both to the agent themselves and to those around them. Therefore, even if the *badness of* vice is itself a matter of degree dependent on the kind of acts performed, every vicious agent acting on choice is still worse than those who do not act according to choice.

11. Conclusion

I have tried to give an idea of why Aristotle considers the vicious agent bad, and to give an account of that badness that goes beyond the deficiency of the enkratic, akratic, brutish, and the in-betweeners. We have seen that the actions and feelings and the rational element of the vicious agent are both corrupted, differing significantly from the virtuous agent who at first appeared to bear some interesting similarities. The vicious agent will very often act in shameful and harmful ways that negatively impact others. But Aristotle also counts comparatively mild behaviours that reliably miss the virtuous mean according to choice (*prohairesis*) as vicious, and he does so because these states will also be bad for the vicious agent who thinks that living and acting in such a way will be good for them. Already now we can see that the boundaries between what makes vice indicative of a bad human and the ways in which vice is bad for a human are blurred. We are ready, then, to look directly at the ways in which Aristotle sees vice to be bad for a human. As promised by the overall title of this study, we now turn to Aristotle's thoughts on vice and misery.

Chapter 6

The Vicious Agent: Part Two[232]

1. The Miserable Vicious Person

Consider these statements from Kraut and Crisp respectively:

> To be miserable (*athlios*) is to be in the opposite condition of the person who is *eudaimon*, and these two poles must not be mistaken for moods or feelings […] Happiness consists in just one type of good – virtuous activity – and so misery, the opposite of happiness, must consist in the opposite condition: the miserable person is one who lacks any perfect virtue (ethical or intellectual) and who instead has and exercises the vices of character […] Unhappiness is activity in accordance with the vices. (Kraut, 1989: 260-261)

> It is important not to lose sight of the conclusion of the *ergon* argument: human happiness consists in the exercise of the virtues. This has the radical implication that a vicious or immoral person literally has nothing to live for, and indeed that they might be best advised to commit suicide (since viciousness constitutes unhappiness). (Crisp, 2004a: xiv)

The passages are tantalising, first in their brevity (nothing much more is said on the topic by either writer), but also in their remarkable severity (the vicious person is miserable, even to the point of suicide). In this chapter I engage with these sentiments from Kraut and Crisp,[233] and will try to show in more detail why Aristotle takes the vicious person to be miserable. Making this case will rely upon much of the work we have done so far in building up an account of vice

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[232] This chapter is based on Robinson (2019b). Unfortunately, I already think the argument in that essay probably goes too far, failing to distinguish between misery and leading an unhappy life. See the end of this chapter for the distinction.
[233] Ignoring all other implications from these passages other than the mention of misery and vice.

and a picture of the vicious agent. And here, as the title of the thesis signals, we come to examine the relationship between vice and misery in Aristotle's account.

We have already wrestled with the views of Salkever and Garrett who argued for an interpretation of *mochthēros* that primarily recognised misery. I have in the previous chapter tried to show that Aristotle also very clearly intends the word to capture a state producing harmful and/or shameful actions worthy of reproach, even total rejection. Through that lens we were able to see the *badness of* vice. But Salkever and Garrett are certainly correct in pointing to misery as an essential element of vice and so we are now rightly interested in vice as *bad for* the vicious agent.

To view Aristotle's portrait of vicious misery in all its detail, let us turn to the Magna Carta of Misery at Book IX (*NE* 1166b2–29). I will quote the passage in full here since it is significant for our study going forward:

> The many, base [*phaulois*] though they are, also appear to have these features. But perhaps they share in them only insofar as they approve of themselves and suppose they are decent. For no one who is utterly base [*komidē phaulōn*] and unscrupulous either has these features or appears to have them.
>
>   Indeed, even base people [*phaulois*] hardly have them. For they are at odds with themselves, and have an appetite for one thing and a wish for another, as [akratic] people do. For they do not choose things that seem to be good for them, but instead choose pleasant things that are actually harmful; and cowardice or laziness causes others to shrink from doing what they think best for themselves. And those who have done many terrible actions hate and shun life because of their vice [*mochthērian*], and destroy themselves.
>
>   Besides, vicious [*mochthēroi*] people seek others to pass their days with, and shun themselves. For when they are by themselves they remember their many disagreeable actions, and anticipate others in the future; but they manage to forget these things in other people's company. These people have nothing loveable about them, and so have no friendly feeling for themselves.
>
>   Hence such a person does not share in his own enjoyments and distresses. For his soul is in conflict, and because he is vicious [*mochthērian*] one part is distressed at being restrained, and another is pleased [by the intended action]; and so each part pulls in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart. Even if he

cannot be distressed and pleased at the same time, still he is soon distressed because he was pleased, and wishes these things had not become pleasant to him; for base people [*phauloi*] are full of regret.

Hence the base person [*phaulos*] appears not to have a friendly attitude even toward himself, because he has nothing loveable about him.

If this state is utterly miserable, everyone should earnestly shun vice [*mochthērian*] and try to be decent; for that is how someone will have a friendly relation to himself and will become a friend to another.

Whatever one's intuitive response to a passage like this, whether it is psychologically accurate or hopelessly dramatic, there is first a textual question to deal with. Who is Aristotle talking about here?

Jolif and Gauthier take the whole passage to concern the akratic, bar lines 11–13 (1970: 733-735, own translation). Here are Jolif and Gauthier, then, providing one side of the debate:

> The word *phauloi* 'bad people' refers here [1166b7] to the akratic whom Aristotle is going to sketch, whereas three lines above, 1166b3, the same word *phauloi* 'bad people' meant the vicious. Whatever Stewart may say, it is difficult to free Aristotle from the reproach of contradiction addressed to him by Grant. Certainly, Grant is wrong to believe that Aristotle, in what follows, will describe the strictly vicious. There is no doubt that throughout the passage, except lines 11-13, Aristotle describes the akratic. The use of the word *mochtheria*, which in Book VII designates vice in the strict sense, must not deceive us: Aristotle takes it here in a broad sense, and Stewart is right about this. But he is mistaken to believe that Aristotle already refers to the akratic at line 1166b3 with 'bad people', and the vicious on line 1166b5 with *komide phauloi* 'radically bad people'. This is not possible, for the akratic cannot delude themselves and be content like the evil people of 1166b3; good conscience in evil is the characteristic of the strictly vicious.

By contrast, where Jolif and Gauthier take 11–13 as a change in focus toward the vicious, Grönroos takes the characterisation of the akratic from 8–11 to be a momentary digression from a general discussion of the vicious (2015a: 150). The first mention of the *phaulois* (1167b3) on his reading is in reference to the generally inferior (what we have called the Many). Line 5 (*hoi*

komidei phauloi) for Grönroos concerns a particular kind of inferior person, the entirely inferior. Line 8 gives the akratic as a comparison (*hoion*), and line 11 returns to the main event: the vicious person.

I think Grönroos closer to the mark than Jolif and Gauthier. First, contra Jolif and Gauthier, *phaulois* at line 3 cannot mean the vicious since it is prefaced with 'the Many' and 'the Many' and 'the vicious' are not coextensive. But I am unsure what Grönroos means by the 'entirely inferior' at line 5. In the context of a preceding discussion on friendship, I suggest that *komide phaulōn* refers to those people just mentioned who are far gone in vice, justifying the dissolution of a friendship (*NE* 1165b17–35). Aristotle is saying that such vicious people do not have 'these features' at all, where 'these features' refers back up to the marks of true friendship given at *NE* 1166a14–19. At line 7 Aristotle continues to focus on the vicious (*phaulois*), here a less severe case of vice but vice nonetheless, first remarking that in fact all vicious people theoretically lack the features of true friendship to themselves, and, second, elaborating on this through comparison to the akratic with their struggle between wish and appetite.[234] It is not a problem using *phaulois* for both the vicious and the Many since Aristotle uses *phaulois* in line 3 almost by concession, as in: 'The many – I recognise that they, too, are *phaulois* – have these features'.

Both Jolif and Gauthier and Stewart understand *mochthērian* to have a wider sense than in Book VII, and in fact they need this to be true if the passage is to be dedicated to the akratic as they suggest (Stewart, 1892: 364). But this is unnecessary, at least for this passage.[235] We do not need to allow the word a wider meaning here because it makes more sense to give line 11 back to the strictly vicious, speaking as it does of behaviour so serious that one could hate their own lives. It will be the task of this chapter to explain just how the vicious, replete with

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[234] David Ross renders the akratic struggle as that between appetite and wish: 'But Aristotle elsewhere shows himself alive to the existence of a moral struggle, a conflict between rational wish and appetite, in which the agent has actual knowledge of the wrongness of the particular act that he does' (1995: 232). On the contrary, Broadie has written in two places that this struggle is *not* of the akratic but of the vicious (Broadie, 1991: 161; 2002: 420). For, where the akratic struggle between reasoned choice and appetite, the vicious fight between wish and appetite. Wish need not be practical, but it is the failure to attain this for which the vicious hates themselves. For my purposes it is not of ultimate importance whether these lines are for the akratic or the vicious. The main point to be made is that the passage, in general, concerns the vicious and not the akratic. If more lines are to be attributed to the vicious, as Broadie argues, all the better.

[235] At *EE* 1223a35 and b30 Aristotle does in fact use *mochthēria* in connection with the akratic, saying that 'all wickedness makes a man more unrighteousness, and lack of self-control seems to be wickedness' and, 'lack of self-control seems to be a sort of wickedness' (Rackham trans.). In the second passage, the use of *tis phainetai* has echoes of NE VII where akrasia is repeatedly described as close to vice but not quite there. If we wanted to retain a narrow use of *mochthēria* across all of Aristotle's ethics, we could say that the *EE* passages are merely *likening* akrasia to *mochthēria* but is still being careful not to muddle them up. If we are happy to allow for a wider usage in general but not in the context of the *NE* account, we can permit the *EE* passages the use of the word just as it appears. Thanks to Dirk Baltzly for pointing me to those references.

psychological harmony, could ever come to be filled with such regret, but assuming this for the moment, to my mind the episodic failures of the akratic are not of the right sort to create a sustained pattern of behaviour leading reliably, decidedly, and ultimately to a miserable life. Aristotle's use of *mochthērian*, *mochthēroi*, and *mochthērian* once more brings our attention to this more severe character and its effects. We are, I propose, in the firm territory of the vicious agent.

2. A Problem: The Possibility of Psychological Conflict

If we accept that the passage describes the vicious person, there is now a larger philosophical problem at play: how and why does the vicious agent feel regret? After all, and remember, the vicious person acts on choice in order to promote their wish for *eudaimonia*, and their reason and desire is in a wondrous if worrying harmony. What is the cause of this remorse, then, strong enough to cause a civil war in the mind of the agent?[236] Furthermore, if the vicious person experiences a degree of conflict, ostensibly the character now 'veers towards moral weakness' and we might suppose the Aristotelian typology – separating the vicious from the akratic – crumbles to dust (Roochnik, 2007: 210). Take John Thorp's fiery charge here: 'But the account of vice is not only implausible; it is ultimately incoherent' (2003: 684).

To give Thorp his due, let me remind us of the passages likely to produce this sort of response. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we come across – at least on the surface of things – a strange conflict in the way the vicious person is described in two key places. In Book VII, Aristotle contrasts the vicious with the akratic. The latter acts in ways they know they should not; their reason and desire are conflicted. A bad action performed by the akratic emanates neither from his choice nor disposition (*NE* 1145b11–14; 1146b19–24; 1151a20–22). It is the result of an overpowering appetite. When it subsides, regret takes hold. And it is this very regret that reveals an admirable concern about doing the right thing. Roochnik writes, 'For this reason he is not genuinely vicious: he is not bad through and through for he still cares about being good' (2007: 208). The vicious, however, feels no such regret. Both his reason and his desires push him in the same wrong direction. His reason is corrupted by vice (*NE* 1140b20; 1151a15) and, for that reason, his soul is paradoxically harmonious. The vicious person falsely believes their actions to be good, has no conflicting motivations, and feels none of the regret of the

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[236] This civil war ('la guerre civile') is suggested by Jolif and Gauthier, evoked by the Greek.

akratic. Being the case, such a person is continuously or generally bad (*NE* 1150b30–35); the situation is much more serious. But the vicious person is not always described by Aristotle in this way. As we have just seen, a different picture is painted altogether in Book IX: '[H]is soul is in conflict, and because he is vicious one part is distressed at being restrained, and another is pleased [by the intended action]; and so each part pulls in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart'. Aristotle then states quite unequivocally that such a person is 'full of regret' (*NE* 1166b25). The harmonious soul, it appears, is long gone. What are we to do with the apparent inconsistency between these two pictures of the vicious person?

Enter the scholars. Inconsistency is very interesting to a philosopher, just as a murder is to a detective. And, as we might expect, philosophers – though far fewer than one might imagine for such an illustrious case as Aristotle – descend upon the scene trying to make sense of it (Annas, 1977: 553-554; Brickhouse, 2003; Elliott, 2016; Gauthier & Jolif, 1970: 733-735; Irwin, 2001; Müller, 2015b; Nielsen, 2017; Roochnik, 2007; Stewart, 1892: 364).

Most recent attempts to tackle this problem readily accept that the passage at hand does speak to the vicious agent and in fact this admission is the very foundation for recent attempts at synchronization between the harmonious vicious agent of Book VII and the conflicted agent of Book IX. (There would obviously be no need for attempts at synchronization if it was not supposed that both Book VII and IX spoke about the vicious agent in apparently different ways.) Attempts vary, however, in making sense of the apparent contradiction between the sure and steady vicious agent of Book VII and this character in Book IX who hates and shuns life because of their vices. Let me give some examples from the commentators.

Julia Annas, stating that 'Aristotle's bad man is someone who has come to have systematically perverted ends, who believes in what he is doing', suggests that the discourse at Book IX on friendship and the bad man belongs to an earlier composition, added into the *Nicomachean Ethics* and improperly edited to smooth out the mismatched ideas (1977: 553-554). The attitude is refreshingly realistic, recognising as it does that ancient works were commonly edited and perhaps in the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics* even posthumously so. Aristotle's work should not be taken as inerrant, divinely inspired; we respect but do not worship him.[237] And so there may indeed be a mistake in the characterisation of the vicious between the two Books (even through Aristotle's own hand). But the whole house of cards need not come crashing down if we charge Aristotle with this sort of fault (as some religious

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[237] Martha Nussbaum once remarked that simply because Aristotle believed something does not make it to be true, but does make it a plausible candidate for truth (1988: 34).

persons might think should be the case with their own inspired texts). It only means that one must judiciously sort through the conflicting portraits deciding which one better matches the general spirit of the rest of the work or seems more philosophically plausible. But freeing as this outlook is in our general approach to ancient texts, I do not think this particular passage in Book IX is a contradiction or editorial mishap. In fact, I think it makes very good sense of the psychology of vice. Let me turn to some commentators who also hold this line, offering their own harmonising accounts with varying degrees of success.

Roochnik submits that the account of Book IX is an attempt to normalise or humanise the vicious person from Book VII. It is, as I understand it, a sort of meta-theory on offer whereby Book IX reveals the vicious person as the 'students of ethics' see him (Roochnik, 2007: 218). If the vicious person did not feel conflict, he 'becomes a monster whose very existence is too difficult to acknowledge. He is too much for us to bear or admit in our ranks' (Roochnik, 2007: 216). And so, Aristotle offers us Book IX as an emotional coping mechanism, apparently rendering the vicious person intelligible to the rest of us. I do like the imagination at play here, but I think there are less elaborate ways to read the text.

The proposals of Nielsen and Brickhouse bear a resemblance to one another. Brickhouse attempts a reconciliation with a two-stage development of vice revolving around the growth of appetites. Initially, the vicious person is able to regulate her appetites with some degree of success. But appetites grow and in time cannot be controlled. 'With increasing frequency', writes Brickhouse, 'the vicious find themselves acting to gratify appetite without the benefit of prior deliberation about whether they should do so' (2003: 22). Even a powerful tyrant in such a state fears that the next appetite will force him to sacrifice everything simply to satisfy the craving. The libertine takes excessively dangerous risks to placate sexual desire. The glutton ruins his appetite by eating before the feast. On this account, the vicious person can at times stand by their deliberation, and, at times, after the influence of a particularly strong appetite, feel horrified at what she has become. Brickhouse concludes, 'The description of the vicious soul's calmly deliberating combined with that of soul riven by faction form a single coherent story of how the vicious make themselves miserable through their own choices' (2003: 23). Nielsen writes that the vicious find themselves on a 'hedonic treadmill' which ultimately forces them to seek out more and more degenerate pleasures. 'They are horrified, for instance, and shun themselves, when they realize that their pursuit of sex has led them to sleep with underage prostitutes, or when they find themselves shooting up in a crack house in New York […] All the while, they still cling to the view that the happy life consists in letting their desires have their fill' (Nielsen, 2017: 13).

Nielsen is correct in saying that Aristotle is not committed to 'the view that the intemperate do not experience pain or regrets of any sort; all that is required for Aristotle's taxonomy is that, if they regret their actions, this is not because they recognize a conflict between the acts that they naturally do and the acts recommended by their rational principles. Nothing Aristotle says precludes other types of pain and regret, for instance pain or regret stemming from their pursuit of bad ends' (2017: 8).[238] Pakaluk calls this a 'minimal harmony', basically existing at the time of action but promising no extended immunity (1998: 177). Aristotle admits that for some wrongdoers the pleasure is immediate and the pain comes later (*Rhet.* 1372b). But this is quite different from the 'moral hangover' experienced by the akratic (Nielsen, 2017: 10). The vicious person does not wake up at last thinking clearly. Rather, they regret that things are not going well for them. In this sense the remorse is largely practical rather than moral or principled.

But we ought to question one aspect of both Brickhouse and Nielsen's theories. Each of them boils down to some form of diachronic akrasia whereby the vicious agent fails to avoid what will be harmful to her in the future or does not stick to a plan that will be better for her. Since, I presume, very few people plan to end up with an underage prostitute or in a New York crack house, this thesis presents the vicious person losing control, completely at the mercy of an ever-increasing need for pleasure or whatever vice is in question. But there is no need for the vicious person to necessarily suffer from this sort of diachronic akrasia or radical intemperance. Quite a number of vices require 'foresight, planning, and self-restraint' that are needed for 'long-term aims' (Irwin, 2001: 80). Cleverness (*deinotēs*), remember, is often present in both virtuous and vicious people (*NE* 1144a25–35). It cannot be that every instance of vicious regret requires the agent to reach a boiling point at the crossroads of untameable desire and the pain of raging passions gone awry.

A more serious problem emerges, however, when we attend to the depth and severity of the regret specified by Aristotle. Pakaluk sounds the alarm:

> The more troubling apparent inconsistency involves Aristotle's remarks here about
> vice. If self-loathing is a typical concomitant of badness, as he here claims, then,

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[238] And Curzer thinks similarly on this point: '[The vicious] do not regret their actions, although they may regret their situation. That is, even if the vicious are discontent with the way things have turned out in their lives, they do not make moral progress, because they do not believe they have acted wrongly' (Curzer, 2012: 372). They blame those around them for their failures, continuing in their way of life.

contrary to what seems to be suggested in Book VII, a vicious person would possess some residual recognition of what virtue is and what it requires, with enough psychological force, even, to impel him to commit suicide (cf. VIII. 13, 1162b34–6, IX. 5, 1167a18–21, *Pol.* 1253a16–18). (1998: 177)

Whether or not every case of vicious regret in practice reaches the point of contemplating suicide, Aristotle at least understands this sort of psychic turmoil to be either a strong possibility or perhaps even the logical outworking of vicious misery allowed to fester or proceed to its natural, extreme terminus. What Pakaluk then questions is how a person who is apparently blissfully unaware of their vice could suddenly be filled with such self-loathing as to contemplate suicide. Self-loathing, so the inherent logic goes, requires some insight into one's nature, how it is supposed to be, and how it *is*. But Book VII appears to deny this kind of self-perception to the vicious agent who is portrayed as unaware of their vices (*NE* VII.8). How is it that a person with a minimal psychological harmony (offering protection from regret in the moment of action and an insulation from the true knowledge of one's own moral condition) might come to be filled with a self-loathing apparently hinting at a degree of self-knowledge?

The answer, as I shall try to argue, is seen in Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between vice and human nature. The misery of the vicious agent relies upon a teleological connection between vice and misery rather than (or, at least, in addition to) a psychological or consequential one.[239] In the next section I will briefly remark upon what we might call consequential and psychological theories of vicious misery. While I take these ideas to be plausible and also helpful in thinking through the relationship between vice and one's chance at happiness, to my mind Aristotle goes beyond them, positing teleological as well as psychological and consequential reasons for the misery of the vicious agent.

3. Consequential, Psychological, and Teleological Theories of Misery

There are three ways to explain vicious misery. The first two can be accepted even by those who do not subscribe to an Aristotelian view of the human good or the strict psychological

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[239] Even while in the teleological theory of vicious misery there are still certainly psychological and consequential effects.

components requisite for vice. Let me begin with consequential and psychological theories of misery before trying to give an account of the teleological strand and how it is seen in Aristotle.

If Anscombe and Foot ushered in the renaissance of virtue ethics, the godmother of vice ethics must be Gabriele Taylor who has concentrated primarily on these dispositions.[240] Vices, she writes, by their very nature focus 'primarily on the self and its position in the world' (G. Taylor, 2006: 1). 'In different ways and to different degrees [vicious agents] can all be described as moral solipsists: their self-preoccupation is complemented by other-indifference' (G. Taylor, 2006: 127). The vicious agent takes a specific view of themselves, of their status in the world, what they believe it ought to be or would like it to be. But we can also point out that vices are destructive to the self precisely because the self is their primary field of engagement. To put it another way, and importantly, the self is in the firing line when things go wrong *because the self is the focus of attention*.[241] This self-focus has implications for those people in the vicious person's sphere of influence. To see this, we can continue to fill out the descriptions of the various traits just mentioned.

The coward aims to protect herself, even at the expense of others in similar peril. The arrogant are guilty of a moral solipsism, taking the 'I' to be vastly more significant than 'you' or 'they' (G. Taylor, 2006: 75). The miser is obsessed with his own possessions and their security. He will not give to others in need if this conflicts with his plan of maintaining wealth. The boorish and the bully is infatuated with her own opinions. She will not bite her tongue if the potential to embarrass another conflicts with her desire to show off. The envious wishes for a higher self-esteem and will either destroy the other's advantage or severely impair relationships with those they envy (and those caught up in the storm). The vainglorious man desires his own greatness. One does not need to look very hard to see the wreckage left by single-mindedly ambitious men throughout history. And so on. The vices are, by their very nature, primarily concerned with the self even at the expense of others. To borrow an understated phrase from Edmund Pincoffs, the vicious person gives 'undue weight to his own interests' (1986: 95).[242] And here is Auden putting the point with more colour (2012: 69):

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[240] A second godmother of vice ethics was Judith Shklar with *Ordinary Vices* (1984).

[241] This cannot be guaranteed as a psychological necessity. Some vices aim to harm others. But Aristotle (and Taylor) are both interested primarily in vices that aim to promote the good of the agent and not the suffering of another.

[242] We have already said that while the vicious person might value their behaviour, they do not often value it under the heading of vice. More than simply not knowing what is wrong, it is possible that such persons (falsely) believe their actions to be right, often making use of 'ethical sophistry' and selective interpretation (Kolnai, 1978b: 96). Arendt's study of Eichmann (1963) shows that not all wrongdoing is the product of a certain kind of psychology.

'Narcissus does not fall in love with his reflection because it is beautiful, but because it is *his*. If it were his beauty that enthralled him, he would be set free in a few years by its fading.'

All this will inevitably or eventually take a toll on relationships. Once a vice reaches this stage, and the relational or more broadly social fallout begins, the vicious person is typically unhappy because of it. Suetonius's Nero is a clear illustration, ending up as he does a public enemy of the state, paranoid and weeping, and begging Sporus to set a good example by killing himself first (Suetonius, 2007: 238). Aristotle is realistic about this behavioural component of vice, advising that we ought to dissolve friendships with excessively vicious people (*NE* 1165b13–18), and that a father may even need to cut off a vicious son (*NE* 1163b24). Severe social exclusion, reproach, and the devastation of relationships is enough to make most of us unhappy.[243] We might call this the *consequential* relationship between vice and misery whereby vice tends to have bad consequences in the world.

Additionally, the consequential relationship between vice and misery is evidenced in the inability of vice to justify itself to others as a way of living. Nussbaum has convincingly argued that we are social creatures, dependent upon the approval and support of others for happy lives.[244] She writes:

> The possibility of winning approval and reaching agreement is fundamental to our
> life and projects, since self-respect in a community of men is, for us, a basic good.
> We therefore must ask ourselves not simply, 'What is a good life for me?' but
> 'What is a good *human* life' – i.e., what life can I hope to commend as good to my
> fellow citizens? (Nussbaum, 1985: 103)

If human life is lived in cooperation even partially reliant upon the justification of our projects and values to others in order to garner their support and services (relational, financial, social, etc.), one must present a conception of the good life (or some related plan, perhaps less articulate) that a sufficiently large group of others will respect. Generation of respect is most likely to come about with goals and projects that do not harm or shame those hit by them as intentional or accidental collateral, and vice surely cannot promise this. The cowardice,

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[243] Irwin elsewhere appears to link this misery more directly to the vicious person's failure to be a friend to themselves (2016: 106), and I think it is true that myopic vices often fail to take proper care of the agent.

[244] Related ideas come from the sciences: 'In a nutshell, individual selection favors what we call sin and group selection favours virtue' (Wilson, 2014: 179). Whether or not Wilson is justified in using the labels 'sin' and 'virtue' so sweepingly in summarising the needs of the individual verses the group, the good life certainly requires one to sensitively calibrate between these broad roles of self- and other-service in order to prosper.

stinginess, and intemperance of the vicious agent strike me as very weak candidates for justification to others, and the agent who pursues goals in line with these vices – under the explicit heading of these vices or not – will soon find that they lack the support of those around them, even facing direct opposition where the vices in question threaten to harm or shame those in vicious person's sphere of influence. Increased isolation and failure to achieve projects dependent upon a wider network of friends and community will take a toll on the vicious agent who, in cases where the agent is in possession of a relatively normal psychology, will feel the force of rejection and censure. Censure is especially painful to the vicious agent who cannot clearly see that their goals are misguided, nor for that reason can they appropriately understand their culpability in causing relational breakdown and probably leave these encounters feeling particularly victimised.

There is also, second, a *psychological* toll intrinsic to vices whereby vice tends to lead to misery even where it does not necessarily produce negative effects in the world (as in the *consequential* case). Gabriele Taylor presents the idea that the vices are essentially 'corruptive to the self' (1994), paradoxically destroying whatever good they seek. I wish I had space to go into more detail on Taylor's remarkable work, but I will here limit myself to a bare outline. In essence, the misguided aims of the vicious agent cannot be satisfied and in many cases fight *against* their ultimate goals. The miser desires absolute security through wealth but this cannot be attained in a world of shifting fortune; she therefore feels less and less secure. The conceited desires the favourable opinions of others but opinion is fickle at best; his self-esteem therefore takes continual hits. The vainglorious desires fame and honour but this is not his to give. The envious desires self-esteem, continually focussing on *the other* who highlights their own lack. In this they do nothing to solve their motivating issue and actually exacerbate the underlying cause. Taylor says envy of this kind aims to change the world by magic (1994: 149). 'Concerned as she is with self-esteem she has yet left herself no clear view as to how it ought to be based and how it could be fostered' (G. Taylor, 2006: 50). A related principle is shaped nicely by Adorno: 'Overly shrewd concentration on self-interest results in a crippling of the capacity to look beyond the limits of self-interest and this finally works against itself' (1994: 47). And so on. Instead of facing reality, writes Taylor, the vicious create a 'web of self-deception which will only further entangle them in their confusions and prevent them from finding a route of escape' (G. Taylor, 2006: 52).[245] The aims of this kind of vicious person

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[245] In Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time*, he has Shostakovich think similarly in respect to cowardice: 'But it was not easy being a coward. Being a hero was much easier than being a coward. To be a hero, you only had to be brave for a moment—when you took out the gun, threw the bomb, pressed the detonator, did away with the tyrant,

cannot be satisfied, resting as they do upon a deception about what is possible for them. The vice destroys the good it seeks. If all that sounds serious, I think it is because it is supposed to be. The common destination of an agent in the grip of a vice is a paradoxical psychological turmoil.

Although the consequential and psychological stories are certainly plausible, there is still another sort of unhappiness that I want to look at. In order to distinguish between the consequential and psychological stories just mentioned and a different vicious experience I will presently unfold, I will label this account the teleological theory of misery where the vicious agent is made miserable by their vices for teleological reasons closely tied up with human nature and what is truly good for a human *qua* human. After I have explained this theory, I will try to defend why I think the word 'misery' is appropriate and is indeed more suitable than a term like 'unhappiness'. Finally, I will show that there is an important distinction in Aristotle's ethics between the experiential state of misery and the objective state of unhappiness in respect to a person's life. Aristotle believes that the vicious person will *usually* be miserable but that vice is *constitutive* of an unhappy life. That is, the vicious person is *often* miserable and *always* unhappy. Since we can perhaps think of counterexamples to the latter claim, I will need to show how Aristotle conceives of happy and unhappy lives and where this differs from modern conceptions. But first, let me begin by detailing the teleological account of misery that Aristotle attributes to the vicious agent.

3.1 Vicious Psychology Once More

In Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle invokes a particular desire for the end called *boulēsis*, often translated 'wish', and locates it in the rational part of the soul.[246] In order to distinguish wish from mere appetite, Aristotle makes clear that we pursue the object of our wish not (only) as pleasant but as *good* (*NE* 1113b1). But precisely whose good is at issue here, we may ask? The answer to this is important.

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and with yourself as well. But to be a coward was to embark on a career that lasted a lifetime. You couldn't ever relax. You had to anticipate the next occasion when you would have to make excuses for yourself, dither, cringe, reacquaint yourself with the taste of rubber boots and the state of your own fallen, abject character. Being a coward required pertinacity, persistence, a refusal to change—which made it, in a way, a kind of courage' (Julian Barnes, 2016: 158).

[246] '[F]or in the part concerning reasoning there will be wishing, and in the irrational part wanting and passion' (*DA* III.9 432b5–6), and, 'For wish is a desire, and when anyone is moved in accordance with reasoning, he is also moved in accordance with wish' (*DA* 433a23–25).

In Book II of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle says that the ends of given pursuits are good by nature (*EE* 1227a18–31):

> The end is by nature always a good […] However, contrary to nature, and through perversion, something that is not the good but only the apparent good may be the end […] Both health and disease are objects of the same science but not in the same fashion: the former is its natural object, and the latter unnatural. Likewise, the good is the natural object of volition, but contrary to nature evil too is its object. By nature one wills what is good, but against nature and through perversion one wills evil.

The ends of medicine, explains Aristotle, are in accordance with nature when they produce health. At work here is the comparative notion that what one wishes by nature is for the true good (*hē boulēsis physei men tou agathou esti*) and not whatever one happens to think is good, and contrary to nature one wishes for what is in fact not good. Aquinas tells us that 'every natural faculty has some object determined by its nature' (1993: 3.10.491). Wish, concerning the natural faculty of the will, possesses by nature a desire for the good for human beings, namely, rational activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. The virtuous person chooses what is good for her by nature: 'For as we have said, what is good by nature is good and pleasant in itself for an excellent person (*NE* 1170a15)'. And the bad person does not wish for what is good for themselves *qua* human.[247]

An apparently obvious problem surfaces here, however, since Aristotle also holds that people wish for what they *believe* to be good (*NE* 1136b7–8). In the dilemma raised at *NE* III.4, the suggestion that a person with an incorrect view of the good would thereby not possess a wish is taken to be unpalatable ('hence what he wishes is not wished, which is self-contradictory', *NE* 1113a20). But how can the person with an incorrect view of the good be said to have a wish if they do not wish for the good by nature? Aristotle solves the problem by stating that, while the good person's object of wish is the good without qualification, the bad person's object of wish is the apparent good and an object of wish in a qualified sense, that is, in relation to himself (Broadie, 2002: 318).[248] By analogy, a sick person may indeed wish for

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[247] This comes out clearly in the anonymous paraphrase of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 193.33–37 (Konstan, 2001).
[248] Relatedly, Aristotle distinguishes between that which is good without qualification and that which is good for a certain person (*NE* 1152b26–27). Anthony Price suggested to me an analogy with Anscombe's intentional and material objects of desire. To illustrate, a man is hunting and shoots his father, mistaking him for a stag. The stag is the intentional object of his shot, his father the material.

what is good for a sick person. However, even if the sick person obtains what is good for the sick person or the drug addict what is – to their own foolish thinking – 'good for' the drug addict (i.e. more drugs), it does not mean that they have attained what is good for their nature as a human. Foundational needs are still to be met over and above the drugs that an addict sees as good, and in fact the desires of the addict may conflict with these.

Gösta Grönroos suggests that a Socratic spirit permeates this line of thinking: a person may pursue what they believe they desire even while it is not what they truly desire (e.g. *Gorgias* 466c9–468e5; *Laws* 9, 860d1–861d9). In respect to wish, a person may wish for what they falsely believe to be good even while this very pursuit is motivated by a basic desire for what is truly good by nature. Grönroos writes, 'In case the *representation* of the good is erroneous, the agent will pursue the wrong things, but the source of the *motivation* will still be the desire for the human good' (2015b: 74, emphasis added).[249] Support for this view comes from Aristotle's remarks that all creatures 'pursue not the pleasure they think they pursue nor that which they would say they pursue, but the same pleasure; for all things have by nature something divine in them' (*NE* 1153b31–2). And further, and importantly, we turn to *NE* 1173a4–5 which Grönroos translates as, '[S]imilarly, in bad people too there is something by nature good, which is greater than what they are in themselves [i.e. qua bad], and which longs for [*ephietai*] its own proper good' [*isōs de kai en tois phaulois esti ti physikon agathon kreitton ē kath' hauta, ho ephietai tou oikeiou agathou*] (2015b: 79).[250] There are echoes here of Aquinas who translates the same passage, 'Perhaps in evil men there is some natural good better than themselves which seeks their own proper good'. Aquinas goes on to say that 'in evil men there is some natural good that tends to the desire of a suitable good; and this natural good is better than evil men as such' (1993: 10.12.1977). Not only is there a true good for humans, then, there is also in each person a basic inclination towards it motivating the pursuit of true and not only apparent goods (Grönroos, 2015b: 72).[251] In an examination of *NE* 1173a, Grönroos writes more explicitly (2016: 489):

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[249] Perhaps it is less controversial to speak of the 'need' or 'urge' of the rational part of the soul rather than intentional desire.

[250] For a very good defence of this translation see Grönroos (2016)

[251] Here is Price writing similarly: 'Suppose we say the following: only the agent whose desires are properly oriented can hope to grasp what in human life is truly worth while. This implies that there is a *truth* about what in human life is worth while. Yet if this implication is to be more than hollow, there must be a cognitive point of view, accessible to human beings, from which that truth can be ascertained. Hence, even if the condition that constitutes possession of that point of view can only be achieved through the development of desire, it must itself be a cognitive state, involving the correct application of concepts that have a sense which yields them an objectively determinable extension' (2011a: 142). For a related suggestion see Dahl (1984: 48).

The point of 1173a4–5, then, would be that even in bad people there is something greater than what they are in themselves, that is, *qua* bad or vicious, which aims at what really is good for them, their proper good […] What Aristotle probably has in mind here is that the rational part of the human soul has a desire of its own, namely wish […] which is for the good […] The idea is that, even if bad people fail to achieve their proper good, they still, in virtue of being human beings, desire it. But they fail to form a successful action-guiding conception of their proper good and, on account of failing to fulfil their wish for the good, bad people are miserable.

Grönroos can see how it goes against established convention to speak of desire, which is not a fully intentional state, directed towards an intentional object.[252] But, he explains, if we also assign to desires certain natural functions (thirst and hunger for survival of the individual, sexual desire for the survival of the species), the suggestion is that the urge-component of a desire carries this function, but that the representation-component of the desire is needed to give it a direction. In the case of *boulēsis*, which is a desire for the human good, the idea is that even in the vicious person, the urge-component of *boulēsis* carries the natural inclination for one's good, but that it takes the representation-component do direct that inclination in the proper way.

I think Grönroos's account is intriguing and important, but one might still feel there is something odd about specifying the intentional object of all rational desire.[253] There is a vast difference between saying that all humans have within them an intrinsic urge for the human good and saying that just in case a person has a wish for the human good (a eudaimonic wish) this desire is motivated by a desire for the true good and can only be satisfied by that. The claim of this second interpretation is not quite so strong and still clearly reflects the psychology of the vicious agent. Recall, the vicious agent forms a choice after deliberation to promote here and now their rational wish for *eudaimonia*. Following the softer reading, the vicious agent has an incorrect wish for the good motivated by a desire that only the true good can properly meet. Aristotle is in essence making two claims: (i) the vicious agent has a wish for the good (a formal and abstract intentional object) in that she wishes for what she thinks to be good; (ii) there is such a thing as the good (whose nature is not purely formal), towards which all people have a

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[252] Personal correspondence, August 2017.

[253] Price thinks the claim 'all men have something of the good' to be a 'special instance of an assumption about man's relation to the truth: "Everyone has a natural aptitude (*oikeion ti*) for grasping the truth [*EE* 1216b30–31]"' (1989: 129). In this he follows Jonathan Barnes (1980: 509-510). Price, though, has also written that the conflict arising in the vicious agent could be due to some sort of virtue present in all people (forthcoming).

natural orientation and which lies behind the vicious agent's wish for the apparent good, motivating its pursuit.[254]

Take appetite as an analogous case. According to Aristotle, the person who misrepresents the object of a given appetite and fails to satisfy it is still motivated by the desire for the proper object of that same appetite. Consider the intemperate person (*NE* III.11). In this sphere there is a natural appetite, the desire for nourishment (*trophē*). Grönroos reminds us that this natural appetite is framed objectively, without recourse to pleasure, and concerns the replenishment of a lack (2015a). Even where the intemperate person views the food and drink as pleasant, then, whatever pleasure is obtained is not the criterion of fulfilment of this natural appetite. An intemperate person often believes that they have satisfied this desire with the pleasure of food and drink, but the desire is truly for *nourishment*, and overindulgence brings about 'especially slavish people' (*NE* 1119a20).

Apply this to the vicious person who, according to Aristotle, has a false view of the good, perhaps as pleasure. For Aristotle, the human good is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue bringing human nature to the ideal performance of its function. Even where the vicious person successfully obtains pleasure (her mistaken representation of the good), therefore, she will not have the object of that which *motivates* this pursuit of pleasure since that is a life in accordance with virtue. Even where she does obtain pleasure successfully, then, she will not have achieved the natural object of wish.[255] Many years earlier, in a epigrammatic foreshadowing of Aristotle's theory, Ahiqar had warned, 'Pity a man who does not know what he [wants]! (1983: 506 [177])'. Such is the Aristotelian theory in a nutshell.

We can see this idea now at work in the text. At *NE* 1166b7–8 Aristotle describes the vicious person as experiencing a conflict between wish and appetite (*diapherontai gar heautois, kai heterōn men epithymousin alla de boulontai, hoion hoi akrateis*). The mention of this conflict is the introduction to Aristotle's remarks on vicious misery. But how can it speak to the vicious person who has an *alignment* of appetite and their rational wish? For the vicious agent both of these things point in the same direction. We need to find a way to explain the struggle that does not rely on a superficial conflict between what one's appetites demand and

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[254] Thanks to Anthony Price for helping me to clarify this phrasing.

[255] This is different to the appetite and nourishment case in an interesting way. If one loses their appetite, or does not eat, one gets sick. This is not so in the case of pleasure/virtue. And so, we see that the in-betweener who fails to obtain the true object of wish for the good life is not miserable because *she does not aim for it*. Furthermore, she does not need to aim for it in quite the same way as she needs to aim for nourishment. That is, failing to aim for it will not make her sick or unhappy since this pursuit is optional, even while it has a natural object. The vicious agent, however, does aim for the object of their wish for the good life and, being mistaken about the true good, ends up disappointed. Thanks to Paul Formosa for raising this issue with me.

what one wishes for as good. This would be an easy way of making sense of the passage, but it would not be a proper characterisation of the vicious agent who has their desires and their wish in line.

The first thing to note in giving an answer is that appetite (*epithumia*) is a stand-in for the pursuit of pleasure: the vicious agent in this instance pursues pleasure by appetite and by wish. This, of course, is not the only object a vicious person may desire, but the intemperate libertine is usually the worst sort of person Aristotle can conjure up, starkly contrasted with the rational and upright man of his ideals. I take it that appetite (*NE* 1166b7–8) and finding something pleasant (*NE* 1166b24–25) are *examples* in this passage, then, and while appetite is not the only thing that can be in conflict with wish, it is a good enough illustration in making the story clear. Now, although the vicious person believes she is pursuing what she has wished for, it is not what she *really* wishes for (Grönroos, 2015a: 156). Remember that a wish productive of a choice (ethical *prohairesis*) will very often be a wish for *eudaimonia*, and, since vice is a state issuing in choices, the vicious will have such a wish for *eudaimonia*, acting and living well. But the vicious agent's explicit wish for *eudaimonia* will be erroneous in the sense that her representation of the good (perhaps it is pleasure) is not the true good she desires (*eudaimonia*, truly living well as a human being). Regardless of this error, the wish for the true good will still be *motivating* the agent's misguided pursuits at such a time, and *this* wish for the true good will *not* line up with the accompanying appetites. The true object of a wish for *eudaimonia* is not pleasure; the appetite and wish of the vicious agent will not really be aligned, so understood. A conflict has begun to set in.

3.2 Vice and Misery

If we accept this account of wish, why does vice so specifically lead to misery? If Grönroos is correct in saying that *all* people by nature have a motivational wish for the true good, why are they not in the same state as the vicious when they fail to achieve it? Or, if it is just in case a person has a wish for *eudaimonia* that they will have a wish for *eudaimonia*, it is still very likely that many persons will not achieve it, either through failure or lack of interest. Why, out of all the people who do not achieve their wish for *eudaimonia*,[256] then, is the vicious agent miserable?

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[256] And if *eudaimonia* comes in degrees we cannot be referring to the person who is close though not quite fully there, but rather the person who is still far off though not necessarily miserable like the vicious.

The answer, to my mind, comes from earlier depictions of vice the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Notably, there is the alleged discrepancy between the consistency and mental harmony foundational to the vicious person in Book VII and the sudden admission of severe misery and psychological conflict in Book IX. Regret (*metameleia*) is expressly denied to the vicious agent at *NE* 1150a21 and rather forcefully ascribed at 1166b24–25. But where some commentators see a problem in this ostensible contradiction, I see an answer. Unlike Grönroos, who hangs his account almost entirely on Book IX, believing it to contain Aristotle's 'more considered view' (2015a), I hold that the misery of the vicious is facilitated precisely by the lack of conflict apparent in the vicious agent of Book VII, in this way linking together two apparently incompatible accounts and, more importantly, arguing for the necessity of Book VII in illuminating Book IX. Resisting the comfort of an editorial-inconsistency account of the discrepancy between Books VII and IX on the one side and the hedonic-treadmill account on the other, there is another way out of the struggle between Books VII and IX, and that is by leaning even harder into the direction of the trouble. Rather than a tolerant if unenthusiastic acceptance of the harmonious/conflicted dichotomy in the vicious, I argue for the *necessity* of Book VII in making good sense of Book IX. Free from the strictures of conscience in the moment of action, the vicious person pursues a mistaken conception of the good (possibly also against the advice of friends), and would not be able to chase such a conception of happiness so fully if they were hindered by the sort of mental conflict seen in the akratic, nor would their strivings be so consistent if they lacked the wish-choice pairing missing in the in-betweeners. This is the psychological component of vice out in full force. Precisely because it does not cause distress in the moment of action, its grip is ignored, innocuous at first and becoming increasingly tight over time to the point of asphyxiation, metaphorical or otherwise.

Now why is it that Aristotelian vice causes no psychological problems in the moment of action? If this state of affairs is to be tendered as the primary explanatory factor of vicious misery, what makes it possible?

Aristotelian vice demands more of the agent than merely dispositional vice in that there is more to the possession of an Aristotelian vice than the disposition to think, act, and feel in certain ways. Aristotle's virtues and vices are choice states (*hexis prohairetikē*). It is a particular focus of Aristotle's to underscore that virtues and vices are dispositions manifesting a person's conception of the good not only in desires but, importantly, in action and feeling. He writes that 'our *choices* to do good and bad actions, not our beliefs, form the characters we have' (*NE*

1112a2–3, emphasis added). We have already looked at this in detail at Chapter 2 section 4. Importantly, though, unlike any person who may possess a wish for *eudaimonia* (either instilled by nature or through some other more intentional process), the vicious person's wish for *eudaimonia* results in a choice to here and now promote it with action. Going further than those persons with either an idle wish for *eudaimonia* or a wish that just does not produce a choice for whatever reason, the vicious agent acts here and now to promote their wish and such a choice comes with an expectation that they will achieve their goal. The vicious agent is committed to achieving their wish for living well, believing that their actions will attain it successfully.

Furthermore, unlike the akratic agent who, overpowered by appetite, acts against what they know to be truly good, the wish, desire, and choice of the vicious person are aligned, producing a remarkable psychological harmony. It plays out in precarious ways, and goes a long way in explaining the consistency of vice ('For vice [*mochthēria*] resembles diseases such as dropsy or consumption, while incontinence is more like epilepsy; vice is a continuous bad condition, but incontinence is not' (*NE* 1150b35–35)) and the unawareness of the vicious person ('For the vicious [*kakia*] person does not recognise that he is vicious, whereas the incontinent person recognises that he is incontinent' (*NE* 1150b3–5)). Nothing gives the vicious person pause, *at least in the moment of action*, for no conflict arises. This in turn makes the condition continuous; it is uninterrupted by conscience. By contrast, Broadie writes that the akratic's potential for reform is due to their 'deplorable inconsistency' (2009: 158). The presence of conflict is still indicative of a weak knowledge of what is right, burning gently within. 'We are weak,' wrote Kolnai, 'beyond any dispute; but this very fact demonstrates the existence in us of something more than mere weakness which is the cause of our discontent' (2004: 151) The vicious, on the other hand, is very difficult to reform due in large part to their 'deadly consistency' (Broadie, 2009: 158).[257]

Taken together, the vicious person's wish produces a choice, an expectant commitment to here and now promote that wish for *eudaimonia*, and this choice aligns with their desires, yielding a psychological harmony encouraging them to continue on. But now the real problem surfaces for our vicious person. The minimal psychological harmony does not provide full inoculation from every possible trouble.

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[257] At *NE* 1159b9–10 Aristotle writes, 'Vicious people, by contrast, have no firmness, since they do not even remain similar to what they were. They become friends for a short time, enjoying each other's vice.' In context Aristotle is talking about consistency in friendships. I take it that Aristotle is saying the vicious cannot be relied upon as friends and not that their character *qua* vicious is inconsistent. I argue that the vicious person's character *is* relatively consistent, and this precisely what facilitates their misery. See Chapter 6 for this account.

In a fascinating and fascinatingly underdeveloped essay by C. S. Lewis called, 'First and Second Things', he writes, 'The man who makes alcohol his chief good loses not only his job but his palate and all power of enjoying the earlier (and only pleasurable) levels of intoxication' (1970: 280). He suspects this is a universal law. 'It may be stated as follows: every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made' (1970: 280). The idea is not advanced much further, but presumably Lewis cannot mean that pursuit of any lesser good at any time will have disastrous consequences.[258] If this was so, we would never be able to pour a glass of whisky or read a detective novel. Rather, the lesser good must be pursued in such a way that it is seen as the greater good. Because lesser goods cannot perform the role of the greater or greatest good, however, the person expecting a lesser good to deliver that which only proceeds from the greater good is pursuing an end that categorically cannot be fulfilled. The result is the loss of both the lesser and greater goods.[259]

Now, postulating a universal law is ambitious. But the idea is not something Aristotle himself shies away from, and the internal logic of the argument can be recognised even if one finds the teleology doubtful. As a qualification, I am unsure whether Lewis's ideas here depend on a kind of religious safety net whereby the preference of the greater good (i.e. God himself, or submission to a command), even and especially in the face of tempting surface reasons to the contrary, is rewarded by a God who is pleased with the relevant obedience. In this state of affairs the greater good would take on a moral dimension, providing human happiness not only with its own intrinsically satisfying nature but with the additional rewards given by God in light of the preference or, at least, pursuit of it. Whether or not Lewis relies on this mechanism (and he makes no outright claim to it), Aristotle does not, pushing neither a cosmic teleology nor a notion of obedience and reward.[260] The human good, for Aristotle, is itself sufficient for happiness. And so, *if* there is in fact a human good (or goods) by nature, there will also, by extension, be those goods the pursuit of which does not constitute *eudaimonia*.[261]

Take, for example, the vicious agent choosing reputation over virtue and inculcating the vice of envy. Since, according to Aristotle (and common-sense), reputation is a lesser good,

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[258] Thanks to Jeanette Kennett for helping to clarify this point.

[259] Again, one might plausibly wonder if it would not be better to care nothing about the good rather than to chase a mistaken conception of it and face the resultant consequences.

[260] On the denial of cosmic teleology in Aristotle see Nussbaum (1985: 81).

[261] I cannot get lost in the important but enormously complex maze of trying to articulate or defend a view about just what Aristotle takes to be the human good. My thesis states only that if there is one, vice will not attain it.

envious behaviour, even while it may provide a temporary gratification, will in the end fail to satisfy the motivational wish instilled by nature. Envy also fails to achieve its own, more immediate goal of self-esteem, protecting as it does an unhealthy self that is unwilling to examine the true causes of despondency. The greater good is forfeited for the lesser one, and the lesser good of reputation through envy turns out to be toxic. The vicious agent misses out twice.

Or, consider the vicious agent choosing wealth and displaying the vice of miserliness or 'penny-pinching' as the gentle bishop, Polycarp, had it (1987: 119). Wealth is a lesser good even where it can make a person feel temporarily secure and powerful. But since there is no point in a person's life where he can be completely immune from circumstance and misfortune, the person seeking such things from wealth, writes Taylor, 'will always have to be on his guard against threats and incursions, constantly and obsessively concerned with keeping his hoard intact' (2006: 37). The poet Martial, with characteristic insight and uncharacteristic sincerity, wrote, 'The wealth you give away is the only wealth you'll never lose' (2015: 99 [95.42]). For the penny-pinching miser, the greater good is forfeited for the lesser one, and the lesser good of wealth in this case turns out to be an interminable rod for the miser's back. Once again, the vicious agent misses out twice.

The ends of the vicious person cannot by definition be satisfied. In the teleological order, lesser goods cannot take the place of greater ones. Pleasure, for instance, is not intrinsically bad, but it is not the human good on Aristotle's view, and a person choosing it under this heading will not fulfil the motivational wish instilled by nature, stirring the very pursuit in which they are engaged. A second similarity with the Socratic spirit is also on display here, I believe, in that a thing's value is determined by the use made of it by virtue or vice (see Annas, 1999: 42). Vicious people treat pleasure incorrectly, expecting it to do something for them which it cannot do, namely, function as the natural object of their desire for the good. In 'The Shakespearean City', Auden thinks it an illusion to suppose we can 'break' a spiritual or moral law any more than a man can break a physiological law by getting drunk; the most he can do is to defy them (2012: 193). Vice in the Aristotelian scheme is not so far from this. The vicious person is not primarily breaking a moral law (although they may do, eventually) but defying a teleological one. Proof that such a person has failed to attain the true good is shown in experience. Since what is really *eudaimonia* is only determinable with reference to human nature, a life that fails to be *eudaimōn* should be testable by finding whether it is found fulfilling. Where the vicious agent is made miserable by the pursuit of lesser and toxic (because misused) goods, she has shown that these things are not good for her nature.

All this is particularly damaging for the vicious person. The price of teleological defiance is eventually high. Recall that the choice of the vicious person is desire in action, involving an expectation that their *prohairesis* will achieve the object of wish. Since pleasure, for example, is not the human good, though, the person who is *committed* to attaining it, expecting it to do what it cannot do, will be disappointed, confused, and, ultimately as we shall see, miserable. Within the destructive insulation afforded by a harmony between choice, wish, and appetite, the vicious person has no sense that their goals are problematic. 'Carry on', the incantation of a vicious choice, is the only instruction she has. And as she continues along a ruined path, she will become increasingly despondent that the good aimed for is not turning out to be as good as she believed it would be; given the nature of humans it *cannot* be the good for her. But unlike the akratic she has no true conception of the good to return to (nor could she hear it easily with such corrupted principles). And so she continues with her wish-choice pairing, attempting to cure the misery with the very same poison that is causing it.

This Aristotelian picture paints the vicious agent as one who will be ultimately made miserable because of her vices. It does not mean, as we saw, that she will come to ruin in the immediate moment of action, or even very soon after; a greedy act is more likely to bring about some relatively instant (albeit temporary) pleasure than ruin. And so the Aristotelian view of vice is a long-term one. Since character traits are reliable, durable features, it makes sense to understand the effects of them as taking some time to make an impact. Misery, just like the growth of character, takes time.

Before moving on to discuss why misery is an appropriate label for the vicious experience, I want to make one more point about the teleological theory and how it differs from the psychological account of vicious misery.

Taylor rightly asks whether the misery as she details it is 'a consequence not of possessing this or that particular vice, but a consequence rather of the excess' (2006: 9). We have already wondered, for instance, what is the issue with a moderate but regular trait of boastfulness or perhaps, to take an example of Taylor's, a very mild but unequivocal slothfulness. Taylor's reply to the question is to say that 'even if [one] acts viciously only occasionally she will have a share, even if only a small one, of the excess exhibited by the paradigm' (2006: 12). She goes on to explain that having a share of the excess 'means being at least on the threshold of some potentially harmful state of ignorance and confusion' (2006: 12). This reply is however still an admission that the ignorance and confusion will kick in only when the threshold is crossed. Even if the seed of excess is planted in every case of vice, it may

never come to fruition. We are left with the feeling that only very excessive vice on this reading will cause the sort of psychological damage that Taylor details so well.

For Aristotle and the teleological account, however, we begin with a vicious agent who must meet some baseline conditions to be considered properly vicious in the first place and this will make the connection between vice and misery stronger than in the (purely) psychological account. The vicious agent on the Aristotelian scheme will possess a wish for the good life (*boulēsis*), a commitment to here and now promoting that wish in action (*prohairesis*), and desires and appetites in line with this. All this takes time. The component pieces of vices do not spring into action at once producing a fully formed off-the-rack vicious agent, but there is nonetheless a theoretical expectation that the vicious agent just is the sort of person with a character state comprised of an explicit wish the good life (*boulēsis*), a commitment to attaining it (*prohairesis*), and desires in line with this. What this means is that a properly vicious agent on the Aristotelian scheme will attempt to secure the good life from something that cannot deliver it. Just why this should make them miserable rather than, say, sad, will be discussed in a moment, but for now I want to highlight the strong connection between what it is to possess a vice on the Aristotelian scheme as I read it, and the inability to attain those ends given what it is to be human and fulfil the motivational wish for living well instilled by nature. Where the psychological account roughly predicts that the seed of vice will eventually progress into something extreme enough to cause misery, the teleological account rests upon the necessary relationship between the ends of the vicious person and their inability to fulfil a foundational human desire with an objective target.

Furthermore, the teleological account does not require the vice itself to be extreme if it is to bring about misery. Taylor's envious agent, obsessed with status, obsessed by the other, and obsessed by the comparison, hopes to destroy the other (either truly or in her imagination) to redress her own shortcomings. The miser is eternally fearful of loss, of falling victim to circumstance, and is constantly looking for ways to become secure. Idiomatically, in conversation, we say that such people are *very* envious and *extremely* miserly. And this is what gives the vice power on the psychological account. But the teleological theory shows us that even an agent with a relatively mild vice could nonetheless be made miserable by it. This is because it is not the severity of the *behaviours* that lead to misery (unlike the consequential account) but instead the expectation that the vice will achieve the good life or the relevant part of it. It is the failure of vice to build the good life which is aimed for, and not first and foremost the terrible and increasingly complex web of deception outlined by Taylor, which gives the teleological account its connection to misery. This does not mean that the psychological and

consequential accounts cannot work alongside the teleological one (which I think they can), but does mean that, for the teleological account, facts about human nature are doing the work in explaining where the vicious agent goes wrong.

But, now, why should this result in *misery*?

4. Misery or Unhappiness?

In the consequential and psychological accounts I argued that dispositional vice as a sustained and ingrained pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting will, because of that stability and pervasiveness, typically lead to consequential and psychological problems. The path of the vicious person is torturous because of the self-serving and increasingly isolating nature of the vices themselves, and it will often be case that the pursuits of the vicious person come at great personal cost in the form of reproach and broken relationships. In all this, as Howard Curzer has pointed out, the vicious may very well blame this erosion of relationships on the friendships themselves, attributing their misfortune, drinking problems, and loneliness to someone else (Curzer, 2012: 373). Aristotle's vicious person is subject to all this. But the non-flourishing in the case of Aristotle's vicious person is also very deep in a psychological sense and that, I think, is better described as a state of misery.[262]

In order to defend this idea that the vicious person is miserable I want to first take a closer look at *what* misery *is* before turning to ask *why* the vicious person should be so.

4.1 Misery as an Experiential State

I shall try to show that Aristotle understands the misery of the vicious person as a deeply negative experiential state. The term which Aristotle uses for 'miserable', *athlios*, does not itself give us a definitive answer as to whether it intends to capture something objective or subjective in its every appearance (see Nussbaum, 1992: 285). The word can probably signify either, depending on the context (*NE* 1100a9; 1100b5; 1100b34; 1101a6; 1102b7; 1150b5). But before we reach *athlios* at our passage, *NE* 1166b27, Aristotle sets up the lens through which it should be read in this context by depicting the vicious person with strongly negative

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[262] I am not the only one to use the word. Kraut and Grönroos describe the vicious agent in this way, certainly directed in this by Aristotle's own description of the close-to-suicidal vicious agent of Book IX.

feelings towards themselves. Let me walk through *NE* 1166b with a view to showing this, quoting the text and elaborating upon it underneath each section:[263]

> The many, base though they are, also appear to have <u>these features</u> (*phainetai de ta eirēmena kai tois pollois hyparchein, kaiper ousi phaulois*). But perhaps they share in them only insofar as they approve of themselves and suppose they are decent (*ar' oun hē t' areskousin heautois kai hypolambanousin epieikeis einai, tautē metechousin autōn*).

The Many appear to have '<u>these features</u>', that is the marks of true friendship to oneself mentioned above (being of one mind with oneself, wishing goods and apparent goods for oneself, acting for the sake of oneself, and achieving this in action, *NE* 1166a14–19). But perhaps more truthfully it is only because the Many seem pleased enough with themselves that they appear to be a true friend to themselves.

> For no one who is utterly base and unscrupulous either has <u>these features</u> or appears to have them (*epei tōn ge komidē phaulōn kai anosiourgōn oudeni tauth' hyparchei, all'oude phainetai*).

The vicious who are far gone in vice cannot even be said to appear to be true friends to themselves since they very clearly lack '<u>these features</u>', that is the marks of true friendship at *NE* 1166a14–19 (and *not* in reference to the features of the Many just described), and are not really of one mind (in respect to appetites and wish), do not wish true goods for themselves, and do not achieve true goods for themselves in action. Whether this means that the agent suffers unpleasant feelings because of this is not yet made absolutely clear, but I think it is fair to say the experience of bad friendship, which is the relationship of the vicious person to himself, is painful and not pleasant. Though it is certainly possible for bad people to be friends (*NE* 1157a15–20), Aristotle says that the vicious agent is not a true friend to himself for the reason that he is not really giving himself what is good.

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[263] Is *NE* IX.4 our best and only text for this idea? Well, if central concepts like *wish* and choice are only given limited space, we should not be surprised that something subsidiary like the misery of the vicious agent is confined primarily to one chapter. If central concepts like wish and choice at some points require speculation and reconstruction (Frede, 2015: 16; Price, 1985: 152), vicious misery should be no exception. The best one can do is to be attentive to the textual evidence we do have, and ensure that any careful speculations are consonant with other established doctrines which they shall no doubt need to sit up against.

Indeed, even base people hardly have them. For they are at odds with themselves, and have an appetite for one thing and a wish for another, as incontinent people do. For they do not choose things that seem to be good for them, but instead choose pleasant things that are actually harmful; and cowardice or laziness causes others to shrink from doing what they think best for themselves.

I have already explained that the vicious agent will undergo mental conflict with possible physical ramifications. As a bad friend to himself, the vicious agent goes after what is not truly good. He does this having a wish for *eudaimonia* and with a choice to here and now achieve it in action. But he pursues that which is not truly good and so the end he sets cannot be properly met. The mental conflict results in the subjective experience of severe disappointment as the wish fails to bring the good aimed for.

And those who have done many terrible actions hate and shun life because of their vice [*mochthērian*], and destroy themselves.

Perhaps this is a throwaway line, an exaggeration delivered with a bit of swagger to men of good standing in Aristotle's lecture hall, making a mockery of those wicked people who will inevitably try to kill themselves because that is where wickedness is assumed to lead. But if it is entirely serious, it can only mean that those people who have performed extremely bad deeds in their vice will become overwhelmed by that knowledge, hating their lives enough to commit suicide. Not every vicious person will be in this camp since not all vice demands extremely harmful and shameful behaviour, as we have seen. Does this self-hatred imply a self-awareness indicative of cure, though? I do not think so. All it means is that the vicious come to realise that their wishes continually fail to bring about the good aimed for, and in the event that they have done terrible things in trying to achieve these failed wishes and, if they are reasonably responsive to the disapproval of more virtuous friends and the wider community, feel a sense of distress and shame mixed together. It does *not* mean that the vicious have a way out of the ethical nightmare, and this no doubt compounds the problem.

Besides, vicious people seek others to pass their days with, and shun themselves. For when they are by themselves they remember their many disagreeable actions, and anticipate others in the future; but they manage to forget these things in other

people's company. These people have nothing loveable about them, and so have no friendly feeling for themselves. Hence such a person does not share in his own enjoyments and distresses.

In the silence of solitude there is very often the creeping voice that comes to the vicious person, questioning, doubting, regretting, criticising, worrying about the future, etc. Instead of facing up to these issues she distracts herself with other people, pushing the problems aside. Aristotle's assessment is that the vicious do not have genuine friendly feelings to themselves, and do not share in enjoyments or distresses, as true friends do. There is no sense in the vicious being alone, then, since he is only with herself at such a time and this means he is not with a friend in the truest sense of the word.

> For his soul is in conflict, and because he is vicious one part is distressed at being restrained, and another is pleased [by the intended action]; and so each part pulls in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart (*stasiazei gar autōn hē psychē, kai to men dia mochthērian algei apechomenon tinōn, to d' hēdetai, kai to men deuro to d' ekeise helkei hōsper diaspōnta*). Even if he cannot be distressed and pleased at the same time, still he is soon distressed because he was pleased, and wishes these things had not become pleasant to him; for base people are full of regret. Hence the base person appears not to have a friendly attitude even toward himself, because he has nothing loveable about him.

This regret, the wishing that these things were not pleasant for him, sounds a lot like akratic conflict. However, since I think the language of the previous sentences is clearly depicting vicious agents, the regret here is a vicious agent with an instrumental regret, not a moral one. Things are just not working out (they almost *cannot*) and his thoughts run something like this: 'Stupid *x*, I should never have bothered with it.' It does not mean that there are any superior options in mind, nor does it mean he regrets it all because it goes against his better moral judgment, as with the akratic. Importantly, since we are making notes about the experiential state, the conflict experienced by the vicious agent here causes *distress*. I do not think there is any sensible way to read this outside of a subjective, negative feeling.

> If this state is utterly miserable (*ei dē to houtōs echein lian estin athlion*), everyone should earnestly shun vice and try to be decent; for that is how someone will have a friendly relation to himself and will become a friend to another.

Finally, we come to the pure mention of misery, the word *athlios* used to summarise what has been said. Taking into account the preceding sentences, this misery refers to an experiential state of deeply negative feelings. This is the conclusory statement regarding the feeling to which the vicious person is subject.

Therefore, although Aristotle certainly relies on the notion of a happy or unhappy life based on objective conditions (as we shall see in a moment), the misery of the vicious agent at *NE* 1166b concerns the subjective experience of deeply negative feelings. I have called this subjective experience misery.

4.2 Misery over Unhappiness

I want to now go on and with five reasons defend why I have chosen the label *misery* rather than unhappiness or non-happiness. These reasons rest upon what I have pressed as a meaningful connection between Books VII and IX. Recall, the *prohairesis*, wish, and desires of the vicious agent make sense of their psychological harmony in Book VII, but the very nature of *prohairesis*, its commitment to and connection with the agent's conception of the good life, also leads them steadily away from happiness and in pursuit of lesser goods resulting in misery. Just why it is misery that ensues is the question at hand.

(a) The Loss of Goods and Lesser Goods

First, Aristotle's vicious person experiences the loss of a carefully aimed for good they were expecting *and* suffers the toxic nature of this lesser good (where it is taken to be the greater good). The envious person misses out on the good they are expecting *and* ends up with an increasing inability to redress their lack of self-esteem and a cycle of depressing comparisons between themselves and the people around them. The miser misses out on the good they are expecting *and* ends up with the relentless task of trying to maintain a security that cannot be maintained with money in a world of changing fortunes. Not only are the ends of the vicious unattainable, they also produce unexpectedly toxic results, and the shock of this must be underscored, particularly as the cycle repeats perpetuated by a commitment (*prohairesis*) to

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attaining that given end and an absence of better plans. This state of affairs is different to a merely dispositional (non-Aristotelian) vice and different to those in the in-between state where there is not necessarily an expectation that the vice will attain specific goals, nor is the agent working towards them. The vicious wish-choice pairing, comprised by a conception of the good and a plan and desire to attain it, is a substantial problem for the vicious agent. They suffer a double-blow: the toxic results of lesser goods along with the failure of their calculated, action-guiding, and long-term efforts to attain that apparent good.

(b) An Existential Crash

Second, because the failure of the vicious person is connected to their wish-choice pairing, it strikes directly at the heart of their governing view of what sort of life is worth pursuing,[264] their engagement with it, and the justification of their goals. This is not to say that a vicious person can fully reckon with this, blinded as they are by corrupt principles. But instead of a more compartmentalised failure like a party going badly, the wish-choice pairing of the vicious person is an umbrella governing all that sits underneath it. If the wish is for something fairly small, the impact of its failure could be accordingly small. But if the wish or set of wishes are tied to the agent's long-term goals or broad picture of the good life, its failure could infect all the subsidiary elements impacted by these. While there is no guarantee that a vicious agent will possess such a wish, relatively broad goals are not uncommon and the agent who, over time, spends time thinking about what it is to act and live well may across the months and years develop some overarching goals.[265] Even if the scope of the wish is not large, though, ideas concerned with acting and living well can still take on a deep qualitative significance. Once more, then, the failure of even quite localised goals pertaining to how an agent wishes to act and live well can hit hard, reflecting as they do their values, view of the world, and their relationship to the world. Such a picture leads me to call it a holistic or existential misery. It will be good to remind ourselves here of Price's warning that a conception of the good need not boil down to a psychologically unrealistic (or worrying) 'monomania' excluding all other considerations, and it need not prevent an agent from having 'periodic ends' (such as writing a book or getting into shape) that take priority at different stages in a person's life (Price, 2011b:

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[264] Whether or not this conception of the good is as detailed as a perfectly detailed blueprint is at least questionable. We have looked into this at Chapter 3, section 4.1.
[265] Think again of Pakaluk's idea of a 'principle wish' (1998: 175).

203, 205). Nevertheless, the eudaimonic wish of the vicious agent is still a *priority* that speaks to their view of what it is to live and act well in general.[266]

(c) A Perpetual Cycle

Third, where ordinary vices are in many cases due to negligence and often contain no special motives to behave in the relevant way, Aristotelian vice is pulled along by a view of the end or goal. Because Aristotle's vicious person is trying to *achieve* something with and expects a result from the vice in question, she is more committed than a person with a merely dispositional or negligent vice. The commitment of an Aristotelian vice is not compartmentalised, based as it is on their view of the good, a relatively overarching project. Where the ends of the vicious are by definition unattainable, the vicious person, equipped with no other options, resolves to continue down this path, perhaps even doubling down on her efforts in order to guard against repeated failures. The spiral secures an ongoing misery, increasing as plans for attaining happiness or the good life fail time and again in a sort of Sisyphean cycle of exhaustion. Furthermore, if the agent does decide to try even harder in an attempt to avoid a second or third disappointment, the external manifestations and psychological effects of the vice or vices can very easily become more severe.

(d) Curability or Incurability

Aristotle provides an analogy between acquiring character, throwing a stone, and getting sick (*NE* 1114a11–20): one can decide whether they will throw a stone or not; but once thrown, it cannot be taken back; one is free to become sick by ignoring a doctor; once sick, the illness takes control; one is free to do good or bad actions productive of character, but once a character trait is inculcated, the agent 'is no longer free not to have it [now]'. Couple this passage to the following, and we could start to think Aristotle holds that a vicious person, once made properly vicious, cannot be cured:

> (A) Then should bad friendship be dissolved at once [as soon as the friend becomes
> bad]? Surely not with every sort of person, but only with an incurably vicious
> (*mochthērian*) person (*NE* 1165b 17–18).

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[266] '[Aristotle's] prescription is not vapid, for not all lives display any unifying and distinguishing avocation; yet it is neither eccentric nor extraordinary' (Price, 2011b: 203).

(B) Some (as, presumably, the gods) can have no excess of them; others, the incurably evil (*aniatōs kakois*), benefit from none of them, but are harmed by them all (*NE* 1137a29).

(C) That is why legislators must, in some people's view, urge people toward virtue and exhort them to aim at the fine – on the assumption that anyone whose good habits have prepared him decently will listen to them – but must impose corrective treatments and penalties on anyone who disobeys or lacks the right nature, and must completely expel an incurable (*NE* 1180a 6–10).

(D) He is intemperate; for he is bound to have no regrets, and so is incurable, since someone without regrets is incurable (*NE* 1150a21–22).

If the lens of *NE* 1114a11–20 is used in a different way, though, passages A–D might also need some re-examination. Di Muzio leans harder on the example of illness, pointing out that Aristotle does not say that sick man *cannot* become well again (this would go against medical common sense in many instances), but that he cannot become well *simply by wishing* (2000: 209). He writes, 'Aristotle wants to make this clear by stressing that mere wishing is causally ineffective when it comes to changes in moral states, just as it is ineffective when it comes to changes in health' (Muzio, 2000: 211). Wishing – and wishing alone – that one's character might suddenly revert to a better state is as useful as wishing that a stone might return to one's hand once it has been thrown. If *NE* 1114a11–20 need not be read quite so fatally, what are we to make of A–C?

A–C could be read in one of two ways. Either, the adjective 'incurable' (*aniatōs*) is used to pick out a certain subset of vicious people (incurable ones), or it is built into the very foundation of the concept of the vicious person (i.e. an-incurable-vicious-person). It is my opinion that the former makes more sense since *aniatōs* does not commonly appear with *mochthēros*. More sensibly, we ought to assume that there will be some people who are incurably vicious for particular reasons, and at *NE* 1121b12–13 we read such an argument about incurable ungenerous people. The reason Aristotle gives for their incurability is old age and incapacity. Some older people just do not have the time to embark on the long process of reforming their character, and they suffer from some age-related disabilities making re-education difficult, perhaps impossible. Di Muzio writes helpfully, 'Aristotle calls a vice

"incurable" on the basis of contingent reasons and not purely on account of its being a vice'
(2000: 214). Even passage D, highlighting the lack of regret in an intemperate agent, could be
understood along similar lines. Just in case an intemperate person has no regrets and continues
to pursue an excess of bodily pleasures, there will be no time at which she reconsiders her
character state since she will have no reason to do so. Not every intemperate agent will be this
lucky. We are in the midst of examining *NE* 1166b where an agent's appetite for pleasure
causes a serious conflict with their wish for the true good. The strength of regret and misery is
enough to cause suicidal thoughts, and with the reasons offered above I have tried to justify the
force of that misery. But where such a struggle has not yet begun, the intemperate agent will
have no reason to hunt for a cure. They are not *necessarily* incurable, of course; it is a not a
logical impossibility. But such a person cannot be cured where they see no reason for it,
refusing to begin the arduous process of character re-education.

   Two questions arise from the foregoing. First, if the vicious agent is not always
incurable, *how* can she be cured? Second, how many vicious agents are on the incurable side
of the scale, and how many are curable?

   In answer to the first, confusion surrounding the curability or otherwise of the vicious
person arises precisely because Aristotle does not say much about it, save for a few
pronouncements about the problem of incurable people. But at *NE* 1146a31–35 we come across
the idea that reason might play a role in the conversion: 'Further, someone who acts to pursue
what is pleasant because this is what he is persuaded and decides to do seems to be better than
someone who acts not because of rational calculation, but because of [akrasia]. For the first
person is the easier to cure, because he might be persuaded otherwise.' Di Muzio dismisses this
passage by presenting *NE* 1151a15–19 where the conviction of the vicious person destroys
their ability to see the end correctly. 'Contrary to what is stated in the *aporia*, then,' he writes,
'the self-indulgent man is not morally better off than the incontinent man' (Muzio, 2000: 212).
Reeve sees a flat contradiction in *NE* 1146a31–35: 'This conflicts with what appears to be so,
since vice (involving the deliberate choice of what is bad) is prima facie worse than lack of
self-control. The *phainomenon* has not been listed earlier' (2014: 290). But I think *NE*
1146a31–35 is as unassuming as it sounds: where a person acts on reasons, we have a shot at
convincing them otherwise with reasons. There is in fact no explicit mention of the vicious
person here, and Aristotle could rather be making a more general comparison between the
akratic who pursues pleasure without rational calculation and *any person* who pursues it
because of general reasons. If the vicious person *is* at issue here, it cannot refer to a vicious
person who is 'far gone in vice' (*NE* 1163b24), whose vision of the end is entirely corrupted,

but instead to someone who is just starting to act upon reasons justifying their vice. Such a vicious agent might be caught early on, before a disabling corruption takes over. It must be said that Aristotle is not overly optimistic about the power of reason alone to convert bad behaviour (*NE* 1179b4–31). But maybe a mixture of argument *and* a friend showing them a better way of life could do the trick:

> *Cat.* 13a23–30, For the bad man, when once introduced to new modes both of living and thinking, may improve, be it ever so little. And should such a man once improve, even though it be only a little, he might, it is clear, make great progress or even, indeed, change completely. For ever more easily moved and inclined is a man towards virtue, although in the very first instance he made very little improvement.[267]

Bondeson notes that the passive voice used here may indicate the bad man is being morally reformed by someone other than himself; a friend has come on board (Bondeson, 1974). Aristotle places a high value on friendship and the power of a good friendship to improve the lives of those involved. He does however recognise that some friendships will have to be given up because of incurable and excessive vice (*NE* 1165b1–35). Interestingly, at *NE* 1166b Aristotle says that vicious people *want* to spend time among others in order to avoid whatever remaining threat conscience may pose when alone. If vicious people seek out others it is presumably not very often the case that these gatherings result in conversions of the vicious person from vice to virtue. I presume that painful and moralising conversations are not the sort of thing to which a vicious person would wilfully expose themselves. If it does happen, I think it does not happen often, and will take place between vicious people and very close friends who have that remarkable ability to speak in a careful and honest manner that does not enrage the vicious friend right off the bat.

Most conversions (or attempted conversions) from vice to a state somewhere closer to virtue will, I believe, take place because the agent herself is miserable in her vice and wants to take a different path. *NE* 1166b paints the picture of an utterly miserable person, hating their life but not possessing a way out of the ethical maze. As in almost all cases of self-

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[267] Curzer takes this passage not to refer to the vicious but to the 'bad man' in general (2012: 372). I think that is plausible since Aristotle uses *phaulos* and not a more restrictive term like *mochthēros*. Nonetheless, even if Aristotle does want to speak about the vicious person here, I do not think great numbers will be converted to virtue simply through exposure to better ways of living by a friend.

improvement, the motivation must come from the agent themselves; advice from the outside is rarely enough on its own to make a lasting difference. Whether there is any hope for the vicious agent to truly change, however, will depend on the circumstance. And this brings me to the second question: how many vicious agents are on the incurable side of the scale, and how many are curable?

Whatever answer one gives to such a question will obviously be imprecise. However, working with the conception of the vicious agent given by Aristotle across the *Nicomachean Ethics* in particular, I take it that moral reform, away from a proper Aristotelian vice, will be quite difficult even for the agent who sees that vice is not delivering for them the results they had hoped for. Vice works at both ends of a person's life to make reform difficult. From one end it begins with repeated actions that become habitual that become deeply engrained, eventually ratified by reason. From the other end, vice sets or resets a person's view of the end worth pursuing. Where akrasia on the other hand has a (truly good) Plan A, stumbles into Plan B at times, and gets back onto the path of Plan A, vice has a (misguided) Plan A and *only* a (misguided) Plan A regardless of the success of that plan and, as we know, even in the face of ultimately guaranteed devastation through it. The vicious agent may well feel that her actions (perhaps even her goals) are not paying off as she expected, but unlike the akratic she has no better principles to which she might return, nor a better vision of the good for which she might strive. Behind and in front are the machineries of vice. When Aristotle speaks of vice as a corrupting force, he means that the further one goes along in it, the more difficult it is to change. Character is regularly understood as the fundamental aspect of our practical identity, the deepest and in that sense truest part of who we are (Sripada, 2016; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014). Since it affects – even controls and refines – a vast network of physical, psychological, social, and practical elements, it is an exceedingly cumbersome caravan to manoeuvre. A momentous redirection is even more difficult, perhaps close to impossible, when the agent has no other, better, moral path to aim for. There is no doubt a feeling of misery that comes with the claustrophobia of being stuck with one's vices even in the face of their repeated failure to bring about the good aimed for. The vicious agent who has no desire to change will run headlong into repeated failures. But the vicious agent who *does* wish to change still may not be able to make much progress in this arena where vice has taken a deep hold of both ends of her life – daily habits and larger aims. She suffers the compound pain of a failure to attain the good life through vice and a failure to move on from that very vice causing the trouble.

(e) Self-Aware but not Self-Aware

What I have just spoken about may seem to imply a degree of self-awareness. A puzzle about vicious misery is shot through Grönroos's concluding admission that his own theory does not answer all the questions he hoped it would:

> Admittedly my suggestion offers no conclusive explanation of the remorse and the suicidal condition of the bad person. Since remorse, and particularly the suicidal condition, seem to presuppose not only that the agent feels uneasy about her present condition and that she has a vague sense of violating important values, but that she realizes in some fuller sense that what she has done is bad, and even degrading, why does she not attempt to revise her conception of goodness or at least abandon it? Moreover, if the bad person is aware that she violates an important value, then she seems to be in the same situation as the akratic person who acts against her knowledge of the good. (Grönroos, 2015a: 163)

We saw this sort of worry stated above by Pakaluk who wondered whether intense self-loathing required some clear-eyed insight into one's nature, how it is really supposed to be, and how it really *is*. Do we then need clear-eyed vice for misery? Well, self-awareness is certainly not a *necessary* condition for misery. Vicious misery requires no deep or true knowledge of *why* it is happening, even while the misery does depend on a *kind* of knowledge, namely, the knowledge of what one takes to be good and an expectant commitment to attaining it. But the colossal framework of nature, the objective desires of human nature, and the teleological order will stand effective regardless of whether a person apprehends them correctly or not. Whether one clearly sees the truth about human nature and teleology or fails to see it entirely, human nature and teleology will work well for those who make good use of it and crush those who misunderstand it. As Eliot put it, 'Though you forget the way to the Temple, There is one who remembers the way to your door' (1954: 107). Here is the idea: nature will not be outrun.

But saying that vicious misery does not require self-awareness does not mean that a variety of self-awareness is never available to the vicious agent. Grönroos's worry about the boundaries between vice and akrasia collapsing if the former is allowed to feel regret is unfounded, for vice does not cease to exist the moment an agent feels the pang of self-awareness, nor does it suddenly morph into akrasia and thereby abolish the boundary line

between the two. The plain regret of *NE* 1166b cannot be overlooked and must be accounted for.

Aristotle says that the vicious agent is deeply miserable because of her vice. Crucially, this does not mean she is suddenly able to pinpoint the vice in her life since vice is unaware of itself (*NE* 1150b3–5); she does not credit the cause of her misery to vice under the heading of vice. But she regrets that her choice (*prohairesis*) did not attain the wish (*boulēsis*) she believed she was aiming for. She may also regret doing some terrible things in order to promote her wish (*NE* 1166b11–14), and still the good aimed for did not turn out to be the good as she expected. She regrets where she found something pleasant and it turned out to be bad for her even if she cannot explain exactly why (*NE* 1166b20–25), and even if she cannot point to a better way forward. The akratic regrets their shortcomings, wishing to be better in view of them. The vicious agent, too, may well wish to be better, seeing *something* in her way of life and her goals that do not deliver, but unhappily in her condition she has no other options to turn to, no poster of the virtuous agent on her wall, no backup set of ideals and principles in her pocket, and no partially habituated good character (if we allow that the akratic might possess such a thing) that might help her through the mess. If, through an intensifying sense of dread about her chosen goals and commitments, a vicious agent was to begin to seriously question her plans in the face of repeated failure to be made happy through them, the very lack of true self-awareness and only a partial ability to see above the fog will be its own suffocating kind of misery where a better self-awareness, an understanding of virtue and the true good, might have offered the hope of change and moral fresh air. Knowing – or starting to know – that one's happiness will not be attained, produces a consuming futility for the relatively rational person who can see the disjunction between their aims, their results, and their available options.

One reason why the vicious agent may *intentionally* eschew a creeping sense of self-awareness and so contribute to a proliferation of unaware vicious agents as depicted by Aristotle is that the pain of shining a light directly onto one's failures would make these failures even harder to bear. This is exactly how the vicious agent is described by Aristotle at *NE* 1166b15–19. A degree of self-deception becomes increasingly beneficial to the vicious agent who must make a decision about continuing in the face of repeated instances where her apparent good fails to deliver. Self-deception becomes a protective cover. Gabriele Taylor describes this well:

> Self-deception inevitably spreads. At least it does so where it occurs in the area of central wants and assessments, as it does in the case of the vicious. Because they have to protect their feelings of conviction these have to become ever more embedded in their whole system of feelings and thoughts, to achieve the kind of coherence attained by those whose beliefs in the truth of their assessments is well supported. (G. Taylor, 2006: 68)

We can in the end qualify the kind of self-awareness available to the vicious agent, recognising that it is severely hamstrung by years and years of misguided habituation and an absence of any better principles or conception of the good that might act as a remedy.

4.3 Summary

I have argued that the misery of the vicious person is an experiential state of deeply negative feelings based upon (1) the dashed expectations of *chosen* goods turning out to be toxic since they are used and ranked incorrectly, (2) the holistic or existential crash that comes from the failure of one's eudaimonic wish-choice pairing failing to deliver, (3) the constant drive of a wish-choice pairing pushing the agent onwards and even in the face of repeated failures, (4) the extreme difficulty of curing advanced vice even where the agent wishes to make some change, and (5) enough self-awareness to regret one's state but not enough to make meaningful change. And so, if for teleological, biological, or psychological reasons there is a human good or goods, allowing or even encouraging people to pursue vicious goals will see them miss out on the greater good or goods as well as the immediate and lesser good they are trying to attain. Aristotle explains that vice, ignorant of the true good, takes an agent further and further from *eudaimonia* even and especially where the vicious agent believes they are correct. Therefore, while the vicious agent may achieve a limited or temporary good, the very vice that makes this possible is also the very vice that takes them further away from the truly good life and towards misery.

5. A Note on Happy and Unhappy Lives

There is another reason why I think we ought to use the term 'misery' and not 'unhappiness' to describe the experiential state of the vicious person, and that is because Aristotle uses the

terms 'happy' and 'unhappy' to refer to more objective conceptions of the good life or lack of it. 'Happiness' here is a translation of *eudaimonia*, and a person is either *eudaimon* (happy) or not *eudaimon* (unhappy). We must be careful not to confuse the *experience* of happiness or unhappiness with the notion of an altogether happy or unhappy life. Or, more accurately, and so as not to double up on importantly distinct terminology, we must not (entirely) conflate the *experience* of good feelings with the notion of a happy life and the *experience* of miserable feelings with an unhappy one.

The categories of happiness and unhappiness are larger and more foundational to Aristotle's project than the categories of good feelings and misery which are (or, at least, could be) constituent parts of the happy or unhappy life more broadly. In contemporary ethics where happiness is more readily understood as a subjective experiential state,[268] for Aristotle 'happiness applies to my life as a whole, and does not depend on my say-so, because happiness is a thin specification of my final end, and *this* applies to my life as a whole […] and does not depend on my say-so. Happiness is stable, active and objective because the final good is' (Annas, 1993: 46).[269] This means that one can look over a person's life and make a relatively impartial judgment about whether it was a happy or unhappy life. Without going so far as Solon who was reluctant to make any definite pronouncement about a person's life until they had died and all could be properly taken into account (*NE* I.10), Aristotle at least sympathised with the idea of looking across a person's life and not only at moments in time or discrete emotional states to get an idea about their happiness.[270]

Thinking about happy lives in this way helps us to engage with a potential counterexample to the idea that vice brings misery to the vicious agent. Consider the following case. What would Aristotle make of the person, perhaps he is a tyrant of some sort, who was certainly vicious by Aristotelian standards but also, disconcertingly, appeared *not* to be miserable? As Bernard Williams wrote, 'There is also the figure, rarer perhaps than Callicles supposed, but real, who is horrible enough and not miserable at all but, by any ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing' (2011: 52).[271] To

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[268] See the excellent discussion in Haybron (2008), especially Part II.

[269] And Lear writes that happiness is not a feeling of contentment but instead 'the goal or end for the sake of which the happy person acts' (2004: 1).

[270] See Irwin (1999b).

[271] Or think of Foot's example of Z, the wicked Nazi involved in the death camps who is nonetheless apparently in good spirits (2001: 90). Annas is partly skeptical as to whether such people even really exist or if our imagination has simply conjured them up (2011: 167). Anthony Kenny also asked me who I thought would be a contemporary and clear example of the problem. Regardless, the theoretical case gives us a good objection.

respond to this objection, we need to make use of the distinction between misery and an unhappy life.

Responding to Williams's thought, Julia Annas writes, 'We can always, of course point to evil people having what they take to be enjoyable lives; but clearly by now this misses the mark if thought of as a counterexample to the present claim' (2011: 167). When Aristotle talks about a happy life (*eudaimonia*) he has in mind *living well* (*eupraxia*). The person who fails to be virtuous is just not living well and she therefore fails to live happily, so understood (Annas, 2011: 167). Now, in saying this, one might worry that we have ended up with a special philosophical use of the concept of a happy life (Foot, 2001: 93). But I think ordinary thoughts about what it is to live well, even what it is to have a happy life, will find something recognisable in this line of argument. When we say that we wish for our children to have happy lives we are not merely saying that we wish for them to feel happy in whatever they do. If one's child ended up addicted to drugs and working in an abusive brothel but somehow enjoyed the experience, very few of us would be comfortable in saying that it was a happy life or indeed the sort of happy life we had wished for our child. Richard Kraut is correct, I think, in saying that there is a difference between 'happiness' and 'a happy life', or to sharpen that idea again, a difference between 'feeling happy' and 'leading a happy life' (Kraut, 1979b: 189). Aristotle is interested in leading a happy life and, while this certainly involves positive feelings towards oneself and their circumstance, this is hardly a sufficient condition for leading a happy life. If virtue is a necessary condition for living a happy life (as Aristotle argues), the vicious agent cannot be happy.[272] Vice rules out *eudaimonia* and has a constitutive relationship to unhappiness. Whether or not one takes virtue to be sufficient for a happy life or only necessary,[273] we can at least say that vice is *sufficient* for an unhappy life.

To return to Williams's question about the wicked man with a bright eye and gleaming coat, we reply that they are *not leading a happy life* (*eudaimon*) regardless of their own positive feelings towards their wickedness. Just as we would not say that the person who has positive feelings while addicted to hard drugs and working at an abusive brothel was leading a happy life, neither would we say it about the tyrant who happens to feel good as he exploits his

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[272] And consider this from Annas: 'If virtue is necessary for happiness, then someone who fails to live virtuously is not happy, however much stuff she has and however many feelings of pleasure and satisfaction she has. This is a position we need to be persuaded of by philosophical argument; it does not just emerge from reflecting about virtue and happiness. We should note, though, that we need argument to reject it also; everyday reflection does not just rule it out, though philosophers surprisingly often think that it does and that argument is not necessary here. Given the complexity of our conceptions of virtue and of happiness, this is not surprising' (2011: 167).

[273] It seems that Aristotle did not go so far as Plato in believing that virtue was sufficient for happiness, mistrusting the notion that a man being tortured or losing his entire family to a great tragedy should be considered conclusively happy simply because of his virtue (*NE* 1153b15–24). See Cashen (2012).

subjects. (Whether or not the tyrant will agree with our assessment is probably unlikely, but also irrelevant.) In discussion of good and pleasant lives, Aristotle writes of a vicious life: 'But we must not consider a life that is vicious [*mochthēran*] and corrupted, or filled with pains; for such a life lacks definite order, just as its proper features do' (*NE* 1170a24–25). It is not the case that Aristotle uses 'or filled with pains' as synonymous with '*mochthēran* and corrupted', but the close link is intentional: this kind of life is corrupt *and* miserable. In fact, because we will probably not get a very honest answer from the apparently contented tyrant as to how he really feels about his life, it is quite possible that the good feelings he projects are not the whole story. Consider this very idea from Plato.

Plato spends a great deal of time in the *Republic* building a case for why the tyrant is actually filled with fear, surrounded by enemies, devoid of any true friendships, totally unfree because of his commitments and desires, and actually poor in light of all the goodness he lacks (*Rep.* 571a1–580a6). Socrates concludes, 'And so, my dear Glaucon, isn't his condition completely wretched, and isn't the life of a tyrant even harsher than the one you judged to be harshest?' (579a5–6).[274] And Aeschylus warns similarly, 'For foul mistrust of those that serve them best, breathes its black poison into every tyrant's heart' (1821: 14). I think it is very likely that the unhappy life, even while it occasionally provides feelings of pleasure, also presents with negative feelings, just as leading a happy life often comes with positive ones. But negative feelings need not be quite as severe as *misery*. Let us now return to misery directly to look more closely at this prospect.

Every vicious agent is living an unhappy life, so understood. Can we make the same claims about vice and misery? Plutarch thought so. He argued that vice was sufficient for misery, writing, 'Vice makes all men completely miserable (*pagkakōs*), since as a creator of unhappiness (*kakodaimonias*) it is clothed with absolute power, for it has no need of either instruments or ministers' (1939: 365). Plutarch's argument for the sufficiency of vice to cause misery is based upon the idea that vice needs no external help such as branding-irons or wedges to make a person miserable. He recognised that one's own grief, due to vice, 'without any apparatus, when it has joined itself to the soul, crushes and overthrows it, and fills the man with grief and lamentation, dejection and remorse' (1939: 498D). As far as this goes, however, while Plutarch shows that vice does not depend upon external implements for its power, it does not prove a necessary link between vice and the experiential state of misery. And I doubt that such a thing can be conclusively done. I have spent quite a lot of time in this chapter showing why

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[274] Reeve trans. (2004).

and how the vicious agent will often be miserable. According to Aristotle's teleological account, the vicious agent pursues an end or end that fundamentally cannot attain for them *eudaimonia* given the nature of humans and the nature of vicious ends. As we have seen, (1) the thwarted expectations of *chosen* goods turning out to be bad for the agent since they are used and ordered wrongly, (2) the existential crash that comes from the failure of one's eudaimonic wish-choice pairing to attain the good aimed for, (3) the propulsion of a wish-choice pairing encouraging the agent to continue in the face of repeated failures, (4) the near-impossibility of curing advanced vice and (5) a degree and species of self-awareness sufficient to regret one's state but not enough to make possible meaningful change, work together to produce an experiential state of deeply negative feelings that I have called *misery*. But we cannot guarantee that an agent will be in such an experiential state. Perhaps we could say, counterfactually, that if the apparently contented vicious agent were to one day see the truth about what is truly good and what they had mistakenly pursued, they would recoil in horror and be plunged into misery.[275] But in the absence of scales failing from the eyes of every vicious agent, will they necessarily be miserable?

At minimum I think that cases of the perfectly contented vicious agent will be almost non-existent. As with Plato's portrayal of the tyrant, it is likely that every vice comes hand in hand with an undercurrent of trouble, psychological or physical, and that the agent knows this at some level even if she cannot articulate it. Rebecca Solnit's remarkable portrait of Donald Trump, getting everything he wanted and simultaneously paying the price for it, tells just such a story (2018). Furthermore, I think Aristotle's teleological account of vicious misery is psychologically credible, and those agents with an Aristotelian vice, aiming to achieve a good life through vicious ends, will be subject to a combination of the above (1)–(5) problems as their commitment to the ends set by vice and their expectation of fulfilment progress. But none of this is guaranteed as a psychological necessity and we must admit the possibility, however rare, of the contented vicious agent who is not experiencing deeply negative feelings which we might label 'misery'. We *can* still say that they are not leading a happy life, as we argued above, but cannot in every case pronounce misery.

Conceding this, I have tried to make the connection between vice and misery as strong and plausible as possible. Aristotle's account of vicious misery explains how vices, according to his conception of them, bring about deeply negative feelings. Whether the miserable vicious agent is more common than the apparently contended one, though, requires some sort of

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[275] Thanks to Jeanette Kennett for this suggestion.

empirical data that I do not possess. Perhaps we should not expect neat answers anyway, given the complex nature of human psychology, the lies people tell to themselves and others, the distorting influence of vice traits on our perception of what is truly valuable, and the time it takes for the corruption of vice to have a perceptible impact. I think Aristotle would be comfortable with a conclusion of that kind.

6. Conclusion

There is no easy rule by which we can judge vice in practice and Aristotle is not looking for one. We should not expect vice, bound as it by the complexities and messiness of human life, to reveal itself with perfect clarity in every case. Professionals spend many expensive months working with clients to obtain accurate diagnoses of personality. We cannot and probably should not rush to judgment with the pronouncement of vice on the Aristotelian scheme. If and where we do find it, however, the vices of the vicious agent will often bring misery to some degree. I have given an account of the teleological relationship between vice and misery where the vicious agent pursues an end (or ends) that cannot be met given the nature of humans and the nature of vicious ends. The vicious agent, aiming to live and act well with their vices, will fail at this because of those very vices.

The foregoing describes a textbook case of vice and its effects on the agent, but there is of course no mathematical certainty or logical guarantee that every instance will unfold in such a way. Even the impartial reliability of the natural world still allows for variation, surprise, and injustice. Not *every* acorn becomes an oak (*Phys.* II.5196b10–13). The sciences have long been content to hold together the dependability of a theory *and* the prospect of outliers. To some minds the exceptions prove the rule.

Chapter 7

Final Thoughts

I think it is fair to say that Elizabeth Anscombe's (1958) call for a renewed focus on character and the agent in moral philosophy has been answered with a resounding flood of work on the virtues.[276] But the revival of virtue ethics has been primarily that: a recovery of interest in virtue. Vice for the main part has remained in the shadows. In this modern renaissance of virtue, the number of philosophers who have attempted to provide an analysis of vice is not overwhelming. Discussions of virtue vastly outweigh those of vice.

Many times, and with a few passing remarks, vice is simply taken to be the other side of the same coin; whatever is said of virtue can conversely be said of vice. Christian Miller's definition of virtue ends with the comment that 'parallel remarks' apply to the vices (2014: 35). The dominant thesis of Mary Midgley's *Wickedness* is that 'vice is simply the reverse of virtue' (1984: 95). In other instances, vice is entirely omitted from the discussion. This is the case in Philippa Foot's very famous essay *Virtue and Vice* which, in spite of its title, offers no conception of vice (2003). Pincoffs saves himself a lot of work, admitting that 'for simplicity I ignore the vices' (1986: 83). The notion of virtue and vice as a kind of 'package deal' has led to the arguably unnecessary inclusion of the word 'vice' to many titles. Kristjánsson's *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology* (2013) and James Wallace's *Virtues and Vices* (Wallace, 1978) certainly do not contain the balanced discusion of each topic implied by the titles. After a few thousand years of work on the virtues by a great many writers, in 1989 Christine McKinnon remarked that the many existing books on virtue theory revealed an 'almost total silence on the subject of vice' (1989: 319).[277] Two years later, in 1999, she said again that '[r]emarkably little has been written by philosophers directly on the subject of vice' (1999: 39). In 2007 Christine Swanton acknowledged, 'It is a frequently voiced complaint in virtue theory that only the virtues are discussed' (2007: 693). A short time after this, in 2010, Heather Battaly concurred, writing that considerably less had been written on vice when compared to virtue

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[276] Coope goes so far as to say our modern understanding of virtue ethics is 'more or less' thanks to the work of Anscombe and Phillipa Foot, 'The Somerville Two', (2006: 21).

[277] Mary Midgley also expressed her surprise that weakness of will had received so much more attention than vice (1984: 60).

(2010b). The sentiment was echoed by Gilead (2011: 272). And in 2014 Battaly once again concluded that studies of moral and epistemic vice have 'largely been overlooked' (2014: 51).[278]

In this study I have aimed to contribute to the small but increasing number of studies devoted to vice. More specifically, I have confined my discussion to vice in Aristotle, offering the first full-length examination of the concept. However, in a study with an intentionally limited focus, there will undoubtedly be questions that I have not been able to answer here. Of course, given that the study of vice in Aristotle is still a relatively new endeavour, and since there are very few other places where one might turn to find their questions about vice settled, it is quite likely that these questions have not been answered anywhere. I hope that this work might provoke more related research, then, since it is a fruitful avenue of analysis in getting to grips with Aristotle in areas that have not yet received much sustained attention.

Having acknowledged that this study cannot be a complete and exhaustive account of vice in Aristotle, I hope nevertheless that I have been able to further our understanding of Aristotle's ethical project, what it is to lead a happy life, how Aristotle conceives of vice, and how vice gets in the way of the good life. If these ideas have been developed, even incrementally, there is something to continue to build upon. In general, three goals that have guided my enquiry:

1. To make clear Aristotle's broader thoughts about deficiency of character. Every character that fails to have their soul in an excellent condition has a soul in a state of deficiency to various degrees. The various degrees of deficiency are seen in the enkratic, the akratic, the brutish, the in-betweeners, and the vicious. Where the enkratic fails to desire the good even though their reason commands it, and the

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[278] When I say that philosophical work on vice is comparatively rare, I do not mean to say that *no* work is being done in the area. And attention on vice has increased. But what we do have currently and predominantly are a growing number of studies focussing on *specific vices*. (There is also an enormous body of literature on evil. I take the concepts of vice and evil to be distinct.) Battaly (2010a) and Baehr (2010) have written on the individual vices of epistemic self-indulgence and epistemic malevolence respectively. Battaly has also looked at epistemic insensibility through the lens of Aristotle (2013). To do this she does (briefly) provide a more general conception of vice itself in Aristotle whereby the vicious person consistently performs actions which are in fact bad and does so because they have a false conception of the good. I will say more on this in a moment. Other recent considerations of specific individual vices include lust (McCluskey, 2014), gluttony (Kruschwitz, 2014), avarice (Pinsent, 2014), cruelty (Robinson, 2019a), sloth (DeYoung, 2014), anger (Cogley, 2014), envy (Perrine & Timpe, 2014), pride (Boyd, 2014; Roberts, 2009), moralism (C. Taylor, 2012), procrastination (Baker, 2010; Tenenbaum, 2010), indifference (Lillehammer, 2014), curiosity (Manson, 2012), and the political vices (Button, 2016). The emphasis of these works is predominantly normative and they aim to show why (or why not) certain vices are unhelpful patterns of behaviour. Overall approaches are found in Taylor (2006), McKinnon (1989, 1999), Shklar (1984), and Barry (2013).

akratic fails to act well even while their reason commands it, both at least have a correct understanding of what it is to live and act well (and this understanding will be more and less articulate in different people at different stages of life). The brutish have no considered view of what it is to live and act well, possesses unnatural desires, and may in some cases have almost no reasoning capacity at all. The in-betweener appears to act similarly to the vicious agent but does not do so according to choice (*prohairesis*), failing to connect what they are doing to intentional thoughts about living and acting well. And the vicious agent has a corrupted view of what it is to live and act well, pursues this end according to choice, and is therefore moving furthest away from *eudaimonia* given that they are actively *aiming* at the wrong things, expecting these things to do what they cannot.

2. To give an account of what is particularly bad about vice in Aristotle's view. Where the harmony between desire and reason in the vicious agent at first suggests a remarkable similarity with the virtuous agent, we saw that the rationality of the vicious agent was actually corrupted by their vice and accompanied by bad behaviours, either excessive or deficient when lined up against the virtuous mean.

3. To show why vice is bad *for* the vicious agent. Here we looked at the relationship primarily between vice and misery, but also the connection between vice and leading an unhappy life. In the teleological account developed here, the vicious agent pursues an end or ends that by definition cannot attain for them *eudaimonia* given the nature of humans and the nature of vicious ends. We offered five reasons as to why this failed pursuit should often cause deeply negative feelings that can be suitably labelled 'misery'.

I have quoted this earlier, but I feel that Urmson's words are fitting as we move to a close. He writes that 'if we think that the words "virtue" and "vice" in translations of Aristotle have the meaning we should naturally expect, we shall be, and ought to be, greatly perplexed […] Those readers who are not so surprised have probably just failed to assimilate what they read' (1988: 5). In contemporary moral theories vices are character traits that either produce bad effects, or possess bad (blameworthy) motives, or are a combination of these (Battaly, 2014, 2015). But Aristotle's conception of vice is not limited to blameworthy motives and bad actions. For Aristotle, vices cannot be meaningfully spoken about outside their connection to living and

acting well or, more accurately, the way in which vices preclude this. If the vicious agent in contemporary moral theory is one who acts badly, often with blameworthy motives, Aristotle's vicious agent is one who aims at living and acting well with a misguided notion of what this means and, importantly, will fail to attain *eudaimonia* since vice is teleologically incapable of leading there. A large part of the present study has been given to showing why this failure can produce negative feelings in the vicious agent suitably labelled *misery*. And although vice is bad first and foremost for the vicious agent, we have also seen ways in which the vices are bad for those in the vicious person's sphere of influence. In sum, vices make *eudaimonia* difficult all around.

Let me finally finish with a few lines from Yeats's 'A Man Young and Old', bleakly underscoring the power of vice both to critically disappoint the vicious agent and also to bring trouble on those in vicious person's sphere of influence (2017: 46):

A mermaid found a swimming lad,
Picked her for her own,
Pressed her body to his body,
Laughed; and plunging down
Forgot in cruel happiness
That even lovers drown.

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