

9 Neither Virtue nor Vice

Akratic and Enkratic Values in and beyond the *Eudemean Ethics*

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9.1 Introduction

The task of determining the connections, similarities, and differences between Aristotle's accounts of self-control (*enkrateia*) and lack of control (*akrasia*) in the *Eudemean Ethics* (*EE*) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) is perilous. Aristotle's most sustained discussion of the two conditions occurs in one of the common books, namely in *CB* VII 1–10.¹ We do not possess these books in the form in which they were originally written – there are clear signs of significant alterations which were likely meant to make the original text fit into its new context. Whatever the direction of this editorial process (whether, as seems likely to me, from the *EE* to the *NE*, or *vice versa*), the result is that it is exceedingly difficult to disentangle the original from the new layer. The many controversies surrounding Aristotle's theory of lack of control (and self-control) further complicate any efforts to distinguish two (or more) versions of the theory.²

In order to avoid these problems, I concentrate on Aristotle's claims about *enkrateia* and *akrasia* that occur in the *EE* but outside the *CB*. The *EE* contains two long chapters (*EE* II 7–8) in which self-control and lack of control play a prominent role, as well as a number of interesting remarks in books 7–8 that will prove of crucial importance. Although this selective focus on the *EE* may not yield a distinct theory of either self-control or lack of control, it can significantly enhance our understanding of Aristotle's overall view of the two dispositions. My particular interest is in the self-controlled and the uncontrolled agent's (from now on abbreviated as “S/U”) conception of the good, that is the kind of values that they hold and the kind of ends or goals that they pursue in their decisions. On the face of it, there is little disagreement about this issue in the literature. The S/U have two contrary impulses, one originating in reason, the other in non-rational desires, primarily appetites.³ They know that their appetites (or the actions those appetites urge them to take) are bad, but while the uncontrolled agent acts on her bad appetite and against her (good) decision, the self-controlled agent sticks to her good decision.⁴ Since reason urges them both “correctly and towards the best things” (*NE* I 13, 1102b14–7), it is thought that insofar as their reason is concerned, they are committed to the right values. They have knowledge of the good in view of

which they make their decisions, deciding on their actions with a view to the fine (*to kalon*).⁵ They are just like the virtuous person when it comes to their reason and decisions, but unlike the virtuous person when it comes to their non-rational desires.

The main problem for this view is posed by Aristotle's insistence that it is *only* the virtuous agent that possesses practical wisdom.⁶ If practical wisdom is (or essentially involves) knowledge of the good (*CB VI 5, 1140b20–1*), then Aristotle denies that the S/U have such knowledge. In response, some scholars have argued that the S/U lack practical wisdom because they fail to apply their knowledge appropriately to their circumstances. Terence Irwin's account exemplifies an attractive way in which this can be done.⁷ Even as the uncontrolled agent has the correct conception of the good, he still acts on his (bad) appetite because he does not "steadily recognize the importance of thinking about his life as a whole," thus failing to see acting on his appetite as a mistake. Although the self-controlled agent makes a good decision that he also acts on, he does so reluctantly, believing that the good actions are rather costly, failing as they do to satisfy his appetites. A solution along these lines preserves the idea that the S/U have knowledge of the good but makes their application of that knowledge sufficiently deficient to disqualify them from possessing practical wisdom.⁸

A different kind of solution has been developed by Ursula Coope.⁹ Instead of making the S/U bad at applying their knowledge of the good, it is rather their way of possessing it that is defective. The S/U do not experience the rational kind of pleasures that are connected with the appreciation of what is fine and that are supposed to underlie the possession of knowledge of the good. Consequently, they cannot aim at the fine (i.e. at the appropriate goal of virtuous actions) in their actions, since aiming at something as a goal requires that one finds it pleasant. They might know that the actions they decide on are fine, but they do not decide on them because of that. Rather, they aim at some other goal, such as health, that they find attractive and that the action also attains.

All solutions along these lines face an obvious problem – Aristotle's claims at *CB VI 5, 1140b20–1* (that practical wisdom involves knowledge of the good) and *CB VI 13, 1144b30–45a2* (that one cannot have practical wisdom without virtue of character) seem to concern directly what one knows, rather than how one can execute, apply, or relate to what one knows. The conception of the S/U agent that maintains that they know what is good and fine (but fail to act on it or only act on it with difficulty) does not fit well with the spirit of these statements. This remains so even as one extends the sense of what it means to know is good and fine in a practical context. In recognition of this problem, Agnes Callard has recently (and boldly) argued that, despite Aristotle's claims that directly tie practical wisdom to virtue of character, at least the self-controlled agent should nevertheless be thought of as possessing practical wisdom.¹⁰ If it is agreed that they possess knowledge of the good and that they decide and

act in accordance with this knowledge, there is no good reason to deny them practical wisdom.¹¹

As I will argue, the evidence in the *EE* challenges the view that the S/U have knowledge of the good and that they are rationally committed to the values of the virtuous person. The problem is not that they fail either to apply or to possess their knowledge of it in the right way. Rather, they do not have knowledge of the good at all and, consequently, do not have the same values as the virtuous people. However, they are not vicious either since, as it turns out, they are still committed, although neither in the right way nor with true understanding, to virtue. The view that emerges makes the S/U – insofar as their rationally adopted values are concerned – a peculiar mixture of the intemperate and the virtuous person. Like the intemperate people, they think of the good in terms of bodily pleasure, but they are also, like the virtuous people, committed to virtue.

In Section 9.2, I review the evidence in *EE* II 7–8. I conclude that in these chapters, Aristotle operates with a coherent conception of the S/U, which is also compatible with the evidence in the *NE* and the *CB*. In Section 9.3, I concentrate on two claims from those chapters that tell us about the kinds of things that the S/U care about. As I argue, the *EE* allows us to develop a picture of a person whose reason leads her to make the right decisions but whose rational commitments and beliefs about values substantially differ not only from those of the vicious but also from those of the virtuous agent. In Section 9.4, I explain why rational commitments and values of this sort necessitate bad or excessive desires (i.e. desires that go against the demands of virtue). It is precisely these values and commitments that characterize the S/U. In Section 9.5, I provide two further arguments in favour of this conception of the S/U, extending its application to the *NE* and the *CB*.

The present study is constrained in scope in two significant ways. First, since I am interested in the general characterization of the S/U's rationally adopted ends and values, I am only interested in what they pursue insofar as their deliberations and decisions, but not their actions, are concerned. Accordingly, I do not distinguish between the self-controlled and the uncontrolled agent and so set aside questions concerning their particular characters. Second, I do not offer a theory (or theories) of either the self-controlled or the uncontrolled action. Although my interpretation has consequences for any such theory, their examination is beyond the scope of this chapter.

9.2 Enkrateia and Akrasia in *EE* II 7-8

The first mention of self-control and lack of control in *EE* occurs in Aristotle's discussion of the nature of voluntariness in *EE* II 7–8.¹² Although self-control and lack of control are not under investigation, Aristotle uses various claims about them as premises in arguments about voluntariness. Unfortunately, it is not always clear whether Aristotle is committed to any of these claims. Not only are there identical (or closely related) claims in arguments for contradictory

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conclusions, but these are also accompanied by claims that are unlikely to be Aristotle's. For example, Aristotle appeals to the view that the uncontrolled agent acts against her reasoning in an argument in favour of the thesis that voluntary is that which is in accordance with appetite (*EE* II 7, 1223a36–b3) while in the immediately following argument that denies the thesis (*EE* II 7, 1223b5–18), he appeals to the claim that she acts against what she thinks is best. Both arguments contain questionable claims (insofar as Aristotle's views are concerned). The former that lack of control is wickedness (*mochthēria*), and the latter that if one does something voluntarily, one does it wishing it so. Aristotle does not indicate which premises he accepts and which he rejects. Still, we can determine which claims concerning *akrasia* and *enkrateia* are likely to be Aristotle's by examining their internal coherence in the two chapters. If some appear incompatible, we can determine which to exclude by testing them in relation to the rest of the *EE* or, if this should prove inconclusive, in relation to the *NE* or the *CB*.

In *EE* II 7, Aristotle investigates whether what is voluntary belongs in the category of things that are “in accordance with desire” (*kat' orexin*) (1223a26). Since he divides desire into three types (namely, appetite, spirit, and wish), there are three different options for what “in accordance with desire” can mean and Aristotle discusses them separately: in accordance with appetite (1223a29–b17); in accordance with spirit (1223b18–28); and in accordance with wish (1223b29–36). The investigation continues in *EE* II 8, first by a quick rejection of the suggestion that voluntary is that which is in accordance with decision (1223b38–4a4). Aristotle then concludes that voluntary is to be found “in acting somehow accompanied by thought” (1224a7). This view is, however, only investigated in *EE* II 9. The rest of *EE* II 8 is taken up by an investigation of things done by force. Here, self-controlled and uncontrolled actions feature again prominently (1224b31–5a2) since, on a certain account of what it is to act by force, they appear both voluntary and involuntary.

Rather than analyzing the arguments in detail, I list the claims about self-control and lack of control that occur in them, grouping them (for the sake of easier orientation) roughly by topic:

Ethical claims:

- a) Lack of control seems to be a form of wickedness (*mochthēria*) (*EE* II 7, 1223a37; 1223b32) while self-control is a virtue (*EE* II 7, 1223b11).
- b) The uncontrolled person acts unjustly when acting without control (*EE* II 7, 1223b1–2) while the self-controlled person acts justly (implied at *EE* II 7, 1223b11).

Internal motivational conflict:

- c) In acting without control, the uncontrolled person acts against reasoning (*logismos*) and in accordance with appetite (*EE* II 7, 1223a38–9),

while in acting with self-control, the self-controlled person acts in accordance with reasoning (*logismos*) and against appetite (*EE* II 7, 1223b12–13).

- d) In acting without control, one acts, as a result of one's appetite, against what one believes to be best (*EE* II 7, 1223b7–8).
- e) The uncontrolled person does not wish to do what she does when she acts without control (*EE* II 7, 1223b6–7 and 1223b33).
- f) The self-controlled and the uncontrolled people have two contrary impulses, driving them to opposite actions (*EE* II 8, 1224a33–b10).

Voluntariness:

- g) Self-controlled and uncontrolled actions are both voluntary (*EE* II 7, 1223b2–3; *EE* II 8, 1224b28).

Pleasure and pain:

- h) The self-controlled and the uncontrolled person experiences both pleasure and pain (*EE* II 8, 1224b15).
- i) The self-controlled person drags himself away from appetites for pleasant things and feels pain when he does that (*EE* II 8, 1224a34–35) while the uncontrolled person goes by force against reasoning (*EE* II 8, 1224a35).
- j) The uncontrolled person suffers less pain as he follows his appetite with enjoyment (*EE* II 8, 1224a37).
- k) One who acts with self-control suffers pain in that he is even now acting against appetite but gets enjoyment from the expectation that he will benefit in the future or from the fact that he is even now benefiting from being healthy (*EE* II 8, 1224b16–19).
- l) The uncontrolled person gets enjoyment from getting what he has an appetite for when he acts without control, but suffers pain from an expectation, as he thinks he will fare ill (*EE* II 8, 1224b19–21).

The S/U's reason:

- m) In the case of self-control, reasoning knocks out or drives out (*ekkrouetai*) appetite, while in the case of lack of control, appetite knocks out or drives out reasoning (*EE* II 8, 1224b23–24).
- n) The self-controlled person is motivated towards what he has found persuasive (*EE* II 8, 1224a38) while the uncontrolled person is driven by appetite without having been persuaded (*EE* II 8, 1224b1).

Other claims:

- o) Self-control and lack of control concern not only appetite but also spirit (1223b18–19).

- p) Without qualification, the S/U act in accordance with (their) nature, although not act in accordance with the same one (in each case). Hence, in a way they do not act in accordance with nature (1224b35–37).

Several observations can be made immediately. First, there is no obvious contradiction among claims (a)–(p). This points to the view that in building the various arguments in *EE* II 7–8, Aristotle is operating with a coherent conception of the S/U. Second, statements (c)–(p) are consistent with Aristotle's claims in the *NE* and the *CB*,¹³ in some cases adding details that are not present elsewhere (esp. h–l, m, and p). Third, there is heavy focus on the internal motivational conflict that characterizes both agents. The conflict involves two impulses (f), one of which rests on one's reasoning or belief about what is best (c, d, i, k, l, m, n), while the other involves appetite (c, d, i, j, k, l, m, n) or spirit (o). This focus is understandable. The internal conflict gives rise to the puzzles about uncontrolled and self-controlled behaviour that form the core of Aristotle's investigation of voluntariness in the *EE*.¹⁴ Finally, there is no mention of the most prominent feature of the discussion of lack of control in *CB* VII 1–3, namely that the uncontrolled agent acts against her knowledge. In this respect, the *EE* is consistent with both the *NE* and *CB* VII 4–10 where the uncontrolled agent's knowledge (rather than a belief, decision, or reasoning) is mentioned only once in *CB* VII 10 and even there it is in a passage which rather conspicuously brings up the analogy of the uncontrolled person with those who are mad, drunk, or asleep (1152a14–6) which was made previously in *CB* VII 3.

In its broad outline, then, the picture of the S/U in *EE* II 7–8 is coherent and consistent with evidence in the *NE* and the *CB*. Nevertheless, there are claims that go beyond what we find in the *NE* and the *CB*. I concentrate on a subset of those claims, namely on (a), (b), (k), and (l) since they concern the character of the S/U. Claim (b) can be disposed of quickly. It can be understood in two ways – either as saying that the S/U act with or without particular justice or with or without general justice. The former understanding is unlikely. When Aristotle introduces the claim, he says that *all* vice makes people more unjust (*EE* II 7, 1223a26). This is not true of particular justice since some virtues and vices, such as courage, have nothing to do with the distribution of goods. But it might be true of general justice since justice in this sense is equivalent to virtue as a whole (*CB* V 1, 1130a8–10). Since uncontrolled actions are like intemperate actions, they are also vicious and so could be called unjust in this general sense.

Concerning (a), it is uncontroversial that, in a technical sense, Aristotle treats lack of control, self-control, vice, and virtue as four distinct states of character.¹⁵ Accordingly, (a) is either a non-technical claim that lumps together vice and lack of control as bad modes of life¹⁶ or it represents someone else's view. There is little indication in the chapter as to which of these options is correct. There are, however, two passages in the *EE* in which Aristotle reports or

draws connections between lack of control (*akrasia*) and vice (*kakia*, *mochthēria*, or *ponēria*) (as well as between self-control and virtue). First, there is a passage in *EE* VII 6–7, where Aristotle says that the wretched person (*poneros*) is marked by disharmony just like the uncontrolled person (*EE* VII 6, 1240b14). The disharmony might concern either her past and present actions (*EE* VII 6, 1240b17–19) or her appetite and reason (*EE* VII 7, 1241a20–1). Here, Aristotle likens the vicious person to the uncontrolled one rather than the uncontrolled to the vicious one. He does so in virtue of a certain disharmony that characterizes them both and for which (it seems presumed) the uncontrolled person is especially well known. The passage, however, does not support the view that lack of control is a form of vice (or vice in a more technical sense). At best, it could be used to support the claim that vice is a form (perhaps an especially objectionable one) of lack of control. However, the passage merely states that vice shares a feature with lack of control.¹⁷

The second passage is in *EE* VIII 1. After raising the question of what could produce distortion in one's practical wisdom so as to make one who possesses it act "foolishly" (*aphronōs*) (1246b6), Aristotle asks whether this could happen just as it does in the case of lack of control which "is said to be a vice of the non-rational [part] of the soul (*kakia tou alogou tēs psuchēs*), and as the uncontrolled person is intemperate (*akolastos*) while having understanding (*nous*)" (1246b13–4). The preserved text of the passage is quite corrupt, but the basic idea is clear. In the uncontrolled agent, the bad non-rational part of the soul (i.e. the bad appetites) twists or distorts her reasoning. The agent then reasons in an opposite way to how she would reason normally (i.e. when not experiencing the bad desire) (1246b14–15). Analogically, then, practical wisdom could make one act "foolishly" if it too were, somehow, twisted or distorted by the bad non-rational part of the soul.

Aristotle rejects this possibility, concluding that

it is clear that, at the same time, men are wise and the states of the non-rational parts of their souls are good, and the view of Socrates is correct, that nothing is stronger than wisdom; but in saying that it is knowledge, he was not correct; for it is a virtue, and not knowledge, but another form of understanding.

(*EE* VIII 1, 1246b33–36)

This conclusion rules out the possibility that the S/U have practical wisdom since it correlates "being wise" (*phronimos*) with being good (*agathos*) where being good must be understood as referring to the non-rational part of the soul.¹⁸ However, it does not rule out the possibility that the S/U's reasoning can be twisted or distorted by their bad non-rational desires. But if this were Aristotle's view, it would mean that due to her appetite, the uncontrolled agent comes to (temporarily) judge the bad course of action as good and to be done. Such judgment would immediately imply that she also comes to wish to act in that way. This contradicts claims (c), (d), and (e) according to

which the uncontrolled agent acts on appetite but against her wish and reasoning. Accordingly, the view of lack of control in the passage, one that implies the possibility of distortion of reasoning by bad appetites, likely belongs to Aristotle's opponent who wants to allow for the possibility of misusing practical wisdom. If this is correct, then in reporting the view that lack of control is "*kakia tou alogou tēs psuchēs*," Aristotle does not commit himself to any specific claim about the relationship between vice and lack of control.

9.3 Enkratic and Akratic Ends

This leads us to claims (k) and (l). The S/U experience both pleasure and pain since they satisfy one but frustrate another of their impulses. Ordinarily, it is assumed that the S/U's decision is correct insofar as it picks the right action in the given circumstances and does so for the sake of the right end or goal (i.e. the fine).¹⁹ But this is not what Aristotle says the S/U do. The self-controlled person is not enjoying the fact that she is doing something fine, for example that she abstains (*NE* II 3, 1104b5–6). Instead, her enjoyment centres on benefiting her health and on other future benefits. Similarly, the uncontrolled person is pained by the prospect of future bad consequences (we can assume, sickness) rather than by the shameful of (or lack of fineness in) her action. The language of enjoyment and expectation strongly suggests that this is what they aim at (self-control) or try to suppress (lack of control). The S/U decide on their actions for the sake of health and other future benefits.

This description of the S/U's goals is significant since health is not something the virtuous person particularly cares about (e.g. *EE* VIII 3, 1248b8–37). In particular, it is not the goal that a virtuous person sets for herself in acting temperately. Although it is, obviously, not a bad thing, it does not trump considerations pertaining to the goods of the soul and to the fine (e.g. *EE* VIII 3, 1249b19). Although the virtuous person avoids acting so as to harm her health, she aims at the fine (*NE* III 12, 1119b16), desiring what is healthy and beneficial only moderately and only on the condition that it is not contrary to what is fine (*NE* III 11, 1119a1–20). But she would not pursue health "at the cost of eating anything and everything" (*NE* X 3, 1173b27). Rather, she aims to avoid bodily pleasures (even good ones), setting her sight on more important (i.e. fine) objectives (*CB* VII 12, 1153a26–35). But health is also not something the intemperate person cares about. Her concern is with bodily pleasure, and she pursues it in excess, irrespective of her health (e.g. *EE* III 2, 1230a17–25).

In sum, health is the kind of goal that is pursued by people who do not understand temperance (e.g. *NE* I 4, 1095a22–8) yet act in accordance with it because they see it as providing other benefits, including health. It is thus a goal that is distinct from both the virtuous and the vicious person's goal. Still, if the S/U aim (in their deliberation and decisions) at health, they share similarities with both the virtuous and the intemperate agents. They are primarily concerned with the body and so are more like the vicious, but they aim at its excellent state (health) rather than at unlimited pleasures and so are more like the virtuous.

The following objection will help to clarify this initial picture of the S/U's goals. Aristotle claims that: (1) self-control makes reasoning correct (*EE* II 11,

1227b15); (2) we praise both the self-controlled and the uncontrolled agent's reason (*NE* I 13, 1102b14–7); and (3) in their decisions, the self-controlled and the uncontrolled agent choose the right actions (*CB* VII 9, 1151a33–b4). It is commonly thought that since the S/U have bad non-rational desires, these claims can only be explained if they have the correct conception of the good life: their reasoning is correct and leads to the right action because it starts with the right conception of the end. If so, their end should be the same as that of the virtuous people.

But the *EE* presents us with another possibility. Reason can urge one towards virtuous behaviour even if one does not have any real understanding of the good or of the true nature and value of virtue. There are people who are committed to virtue but not for what it is (or for itself) but, rather, for some *other* reasons. At the end of the *EE*, Aristotle draws a distinction between those who are fine-and-good (*kalokagathoi*) and those who are good but not fine-and-good:²⁰

(a) There is a certain civic state (*hexis politikē*), such as the Laconians have or others like them would have. This is a state of the following kind. **(b)** There are those who think one must (*dei*) have virtue but for the sake of the natural goods. Hence, they are good men (*agathoi andres*)²¹ for the natural goods are [good] for them, but they do not have *kalokagathia* since they do not possess fine things for themselves but those who do possess them for themselves also decide on things that are fine and good [for themselves]. **(c)** And [so for them] not only those things, but also things that are not fine by nature but good by nature are fine. For they are fine when that for the sake of which they act and choose is fine since to one who is *kalokagathos* things that are good by nature are fine. For what is just is fine and that is what is in accordance with worth and this man is worthy of these things. And what is fitting is fine and these things are fitting for him: wealth, noble birth, power. And so to one who is *kalokagathos* the same things are both beneficial and fine. **(d)** But for the many they are in dissonance. For the things that are good without qualification (*haplōs*) are not good for them but are good for the good man. **(e)** But to one who is *kalokagathos* they are also fine since he does many fine actions because of them. **(f)** But one who thinks that virtues should be possessed for the sake of external goods does fine actions incidentally. **(g)** And so *kalokagathia* is complete virtue.

(*EE* VIII 3, 1248b37–a17)

In the immediately preceding passage (*EE* VIII 3, 1248b25–36), Aristotle contrasts someone who is good (*agathos*) with someone who is vicious or foolish (1248b31): while the former is benefited by natural goods (such as honour, wealth, strength, or good fortune), the latter is not (presumably because they use such things foolishly and so to their own harm). In our passage, the good people – understood as people for whom natural goods are good – are divided into two further kinds.²² On the one hand, there are the fine-and-good people

(*kalokagathoi*) for whom the naturally good things are not only beneficial but also fine since they choose them for the sake of the fine, which they value and possess for itself, as Aristotle explains in (c).

On the other hand, there are people like the Spartans for whom the naturally good things are still beneficial but who do not possess the fine things for themselves but, rather, for the sake of the naturally good (or external) things. They thus value the same kinds of things as the fine-and-good people, but in reverse order (the fine for the sake of the naturally good things rather than the naturally good things for the sake of the fine). Consequently, although they too engage in fine (virtuous) actions and although those actions are, as (b) makes clear, beneficial to them, their actions are not fine or commendable (1248b20) since they do not engage in them for the right reasons. As Aristotle says in (f), they perform such actions “incidentally.” For example, whereas the virtuous person would perform a brave act because she is motivated to do so by the fineness of that act (or by the very purpose of bravery as such, whatever that might be), the Spartan kind of person would perform it for the sake of a quality that attaches to brave acts but does not define them as brave, such as honour.

Two conceptions of the Spartan type of agent might immediately come to mind. On the one hand, Aristotle might have in mind people whose commitment to virtue is conditional on their belief that virtue is beneficial (to them). As they pursue their ultimate goal (say, honour, wealth, or reputation), they act virtuously but they only do so to the extent to which doing so is beneficial to that goal. Should, however, virtue prove harmful to it (or non-virtuous actions more useful), they would be ready to discard it. On the other hand, Aristotle might think of people who think not only that virtue is beneficial but also that it is a necessary means to their goal. They act virtuously because they think that if they did not so act, they would inevitably jeopardize what they are striving for. Their commitment to virtue might thus appear more stable since it remains in place as long as they aim at the goal for the achievement of which they consider virtue necessary.

Aristotle’s description of the Spartan kind as people who think that “one must have virtue but for the sake of the natural goods” in (b) suggests the latter picture. Now, it would be misleading to think that since the Spartans have an instrumental commitment to virtue of this sort, they lack genuine commitment to it. Aristotle’s discussion of a condition that he calls “a kind of civic (*politikē*) bravery” is especially helpful for discerning the alternative. The civic kind of bravery is not the virtue of bravery but rather something ordered by law but akin to it (*EE* III 1, 1229a29–30). Although people who are brave in this (non-virtuous) way also face mortal danger, just like the truly brave, they do not do so for the same reason. Rather, they do so from fear of legal penalties or from a sense of shame (*EE* III 1, 1230a16–22). The slightly more detailed, but essentially the same, *NE* description of this condition is particularly informative:

For citizens seem to endure dangers because of legal penalties, [because of] reproaches, or [because of] honors. That is why those seem to be

bravest among whom cowards are held in dishonor and brave men in honor. Homer also depicts people of this sort, for example, Diomedes and Hector: “Polydamas will be the first to heap reproach on me”, and “For one day Hector will speak among the Trojans his harangue: ‘the son of Tydeus fleeing from me’”. This is most similar to the kind [of courage] we discussed previously because it comes about due to virtue since it comes about due to shame and a desire for something fine (since honor is noble) and because of aversion to reproach (since it is shameful).

(*NE* III 8, 1116a17–22)

The Homeric kind of hero that Aristotle describes in the passage is not acting bravely because he sees the act of bravery as itself fine or worthwhile. And yet, his motivation to act in that way is not purely instrumental but also reflective of his values. It is true that he acts as he does because he wants to avoid reproach (*oneidos*) that would result from failing to act bravely (or from acting with coward-ice). If this were all that motivated him, however, he would not be a decent person.²³ He also possesses positive motivation, seeing his action not only as a way of avoiding bad consequences (say, reproach) but also as a way of bring-ing about something he wants, namely, honour. Honour, “the greatest of the external goods” (*NE* IV 3, 1123b20),²⁴ is a naturally good thing even if it is not a thing that is fine by nature, as Passage A reminds us (see also *CB* VII 4, 1148a24–5). In other words, although he is not motivated by the (true) fineness of the action, he nevertheless sees the action as fully belonging to and required by his values.

People who are brave in this civic way, then, reliably perform virtuous (brave) actions on account of (a) an aversion to reproach coupled with (b) a desire for honour. This double motivation is crucial. Although an attachment to honour is an attachment to something good, it need not lead to honourable (brave) actions. One could plot to receive honour even while avoiding the dangers of brave actions.²⁵ The civic kind of bravery is thus characterized not only by a desire for honour but also by an accompanying (internalized) aversion to reproach and disgrace which is responsible for one’s commitment to achieving honour in the right way. Similarly, a mere aversion to reproach could be compatible with, for example, a tendency to avoid situations in which brave actions are called for or with general reluctance to engage in such actions. At the same time, it is not difficult to see why, on Aristotle’s view, such a person is not virtuous. He is not motivated as the virtuous agent is (say, by the quality that defines those acts as brave – the fine) but by a quality that attaches to them incidentally (such as being honourable or praiseworthy). He acts virtuously (or bravely) but only incidentally since it is not the fine (*EE* II 1, 1230a22–32) but honour that motivates him (*EE* VIII 3, 1248a15–6).

Still, there is no reason to suppose that a person who displays the civic kind of bravery can easily dispose of her commitment to it should it prove, in one way or another, inconvenient. The fact that it leads her to perform brave actions shows that this cannot be so. As Aristotle says, people displaying civic

bravery get killed while standing their ground because “fleeing is shameful to them and death more choiceworthy than saving their lives in such a way” (*NE* III 8, 1116b19–20). Although a person of this sort does not exhibit the ideal (i.e. the virtuous person’s) commitment to virtue, her commitment is not disingenuous.

A well-known example of a genuine commitment to virtue, which is nevertheless based on an instrumental (and so misguided) conception of it, can be found in the *Euthyphro*. Euthyphro thinks of pious behaviour primarily in terms of what meets with gods’ approval (or what is commanded by gods). Socrates shows to Euthyphro that in doing so he is not deciding on pious actions for themselves (i.e. for what makes them pious) but, rather, for a quality that they all happen to possess (*Euth.* 11a–b). There is little doubt that Euthyphro treats pious actions as having instrumental value – they are means of pleasing the gods (7a) or of getting rid of (religious) pollution (4c). And yet there is also little doubt about Euthyphro’s sincere commitment to piety. Socrates never doubts it, even as he doubts Euthyphro’s knowledge of piety. In fact, Euthyphro displays commitment to piety that goes well beyond what one could ordinarily expect. Certainly, Socrates finds it surprising that he is willing to prosecute his own father if piety demands it.

9.4 Whence the Bad Desires

We have arrived at an answer to the objection raised at the beginning of Section 9.2. As long as the S/U pursue what they think is good in accordance with the virtues, their reason can be praiseworthy (*NE* I 13, 1102b14–7). They can still engage in reasoning that is correct (*EE* II 11, 1227b15) both in terms of validity and also insofar as it leads them to choose the right actions (*CB* VII 9, 1151a33–b4). They can reliably decide on virtuous action (and, in the case of the self-controlled agent, also perform them), even as they lack the right motivation and knowledge of the good.²⁶ But the S/U are characterized not only by correct decisions, but also by non-rational desires that run contrary to those decisions. How do these fit into the picture?

We can begin by observing that the civic kind of bravery, as Aristotle describes, is only intelligible when people who display it act bravely despite having contrary desires (or at least mixed feelings) concerning the brave actions required of them. Otherwise, they would not need motivation stemming from aversion to legal penalties, reproaches, or shame. It is the very function of shame to prevent one from acting on non-rational desires or feelings that incline one to act in bad ways (*NE* IV 9, 1128b15–21). But is this true in a general way? Does an instrumental conception of virtues necessitate desires that go against the very demands of virtue?

Aristotle holds that once something is desired as a goal, then insofar as it is desired as such, there is no natural limit to its pursuit. He makes this point in his discussion of the difference between two kinds of wealth acquisition: a natural one related to the needs of household management and an unnatural one

aimed at wealth itself. The former kind treats wealth as a means to the acquisition of things necessary for life, thus “filling a natural lack of self-sufficiency” (*Pol.* I 9, 1257a30). Since wealth is treated as an instrument, it is desired only insofar as it is useful for those other things which then provide the limit to wealth acquisition. The latter, however, aims at wealth as its goal and insofar as it does so, aims at it without any limit:

For just as medicine pursues health in an unlimited way, so also every other craft pursues its goal with no limit since each wishes to achieve it as much as possible. But of the things that promote the end there is limit since the end is always the limit.

(*Pol.* I 9, 1257b25–8)

As Aristotle sees it, non-rational desires, and in particular appetites have a built-in tendency to be limitless (e.g. *NE* III 9, 1119a35–b17). This tendency can be, at least to some extent, explained by the fact that their objects are always goals – having an appetite for something means desiring it because one finds it pleasant and that is one way to desire something as an end.

Now the Spartan kind of agent desires honour not only as a goal but also as the ultimate or central goal of her life. Accordingly, she has no higher goal that could restrict her pursuit of honour by providing an upper limit to its usefulness or expediency. To such a person, honour is always attractive. And yet, this agent does not pursue it without limit but in accordance with virtues. Given the place of honour in her system of values, this (virtuous) restriction on her pursuit of honour cannot come from within her desire for it. It must originate in something else, for example in a sense of shame (i.e. an ingrained desire to avoid disgrace and reproach) or in a fear of legal penalties.

It will be useful to revisit the different ways in which the Spartan kind of people and the fine-and-good people relate to naturally good things. For the fine-and-good people, the naturally good things are useful because they pursue them in accordance with the virtues. Since they aim at the fine, they pursue the naturally good things only to the extent to which they are beneficial for the sake of that end (the fine). They thus restrict their pursuit of those goods, but they do so in a way incidentally, as a result of not aiming at them in the first place. In contrast, when the Spartan kind of person restricts her pursuit of honour by virtue, she cannot be doing so in such an incidental way. For her, it is honour and not virtue or the fine that is the ultimate goal. Accordingly, she must be consciously imposing the (virtuous) constraints or demands on her pursuit of honour and doing so despite the fact that honour is her actual and ultimate goal.

This is a precarious condition to be in. It is not just that there is something that appears attractive to one even though one has decided against it (as when, for example, one sees a nice doughnut in a pastry shop but refrains from buying it because one thinks that one has already had enough sweets for the day). Rather, it is a condition in which one has organized one’s whole life around

the pursuit of something that one thinks and perceives as the unconditionally best thing *and yet* one also keeps restricting that pursuit by paying heed to demands (i.e. virtues) that must often appear to complicate, or even prevent one's success in achieving it. This dissonance can, of course, be alleviated, say by a strong sense of shame, an aversion to reproach, or a firm belief that acting in a virtuous way leads to more honour overall. Still, it should be obvious that there is an inherent problem in trying to adhere to the demands of virtues in the belief that doing so will reliably attain other than the properly virtuous goals.

Now, for the Spartan kind of person the ultimate goal is honour. Although this is not a goal of the sort that the virtuous person would elevate to a similar status, honour is still a good thing (as we remarked, the greatest of the external goods). Accordingly, even if the Spartan kind of person should pursue it beyond what virtue dictates, she would not necessarily be blameworthy or open to reproach. The situation is different, however, should one's idea of the good coincide with bodily pleasure. Aristotle tells us that lack of control and self-control are concerned with the same kind of things (or the same pleasures) as temperance and intemperance but in a different way (*CB VII 4*, 1148a12–6). This claim is surprising as it ties the two character states to a specific virtue and vice rather than to virtue and vice overall. Although Aristotle discusses lack of control and self-control in relation to other things than bodily pleasure (*CB VII 4*), he calls them “lack of control” and “self-control” only with qualification. This only adds to the oddity of their classification since virtues other than temperance (or vices other than intemperance) are not called virtues only in a qualified sense. The oddity disappears when we conceive of the S/U as people who pursue bodily pleasure as their good. It is not just that they are self-controlled or uncontrolled in relation to those pleasures, it is also that their lives are organized around them. However, unlike the intemperate or vicious people, they are not seekers of unrestrained pleasures. Rather, they seek pleasures within the limits of temperance which they understand as a way of making sure their pleasures are healthy and socially acceptable (i.e. not open to reproach). But this means that she must be consciously imposing the demands of virtue on her pursuit of pleasure and doing so despite the fact that pleasure is what she regards as the good.²⁷ Her rational mindset necessitates contrary desires.

9.5 Character, Ends, and the Persistence of Bad Desires

The view I have argued for explains why Aristotle ties practical wisdom to virtue of character. If practical wisdom presupposes the correct grasp of the good, the S/U lack it. Not only have they a misguided conception of *eudaimonia*, but they also misconstrue the nature and value of virtues even as they adhere to them. The view thus explains why Aristotle never says that the S/U have knowledge of the good, even as he says that their reason is praised (because it urges them towards good things) and that they reason correctly and decide on the right actions.

Still, one might raise the following objection. The S/U agent is supposed to know that her desire (or the action the desire drives her to) is bad (*CB VII 1*, 1145b12–14) and that she should not act on it (e.g. *NE IV 9*, 1136b8–9). Since on the view I argued for, the S/U do not have knowledge of the good, how could they be said to *know* that their desires are bad? Admittedly, if knowledge is here used in a strict sense according to which they would have to possess the full correct explanation of why their desires are bad, then the S/U do not have such knowledge. Although they know that their desires (or actions on those desires) are bad or shameful since they go against the demands of the virtues and, to that extent, also undermine the kind of life the S/U are aiming for (say, a healthily pleasant one), they do not have the right explanation of the badness (since that would require the correct grasp of the good). It is, however, very doubtful that Aristotle has this sense of knowledge in mind. To begin with, he tells us that it does not matter whether we think of the uncontrolled people as acting against knowledge or belief (*CB VII 3*, 1146b24–6). More importantly, however, it is the S/U's knowledge of their own decisions, reasons why they made them, and the way their desires and actions relate to those decisions that is at stake (*EE II 10*, 1226b21–30).

I conclude with two more reasons for thinking that my interpretation is cor-rect. First, there is a rarely addressed problem about self-control. If the self-controlled person reliably refuses to give in to her bad appetites, how can she have and maintain a stable disposition to have those desires? According to Aristotle's general theory of desire formation through habituation, one forms dispositions to desire certain things through repeated exposure to those things and from developing a taste for them. But as such dispositions are developed, so they are destroyed: if one does not regularly satisfy certain desires, the underlying disposition to feel those desires is appropriately affected, gradually losing its force due to lack of exercise. The desires are bound to lose their urgency and intensity and one's interest in the objects of those desires cannot but wane (e.g. *NE VIII 5*, 1157b5–24; *EE VII 3*, 1245a23–4). How is it, then, possible to have a stable disposition for (not mild but strong) desires that one reliably refuses to satisfy?

The mindset of the S/U agent, as described above, ensures that, at least in their thinking and decisions, they conform to the demands of virtue. But it also ensures that they have desires that go against those demands. Although the self-controlled agent aims at healthy pleasures, her appetites still retain their natural tendency to indefinite growth. As Aristotle recommends, the best way to keep them in check would be to pull away from them (e.g. *NE II 9*, 1109b7–13). On my account, however, the self-controlled person does the opposite – she leans into them. Although she does not go for excessive pleasures, she still satisfies appetites for the same sort of pleasures, enjoying them more than she should (since she enjoys them as one should enjoy what is actually the good). In doing so, she increases her appetites for bodily pleasures in general, just like in enjoying contemplation of some particular truth, one increases one's desire for contemplation in general. The continual presence of strong bad desires is the result of her trying to moderate her pursuit of bodily pleasure even as she pursues such pleasure as her ultimate good.

Second, Aristotle famously (and controversially) tells us that it is the non-rational part of the soul that is responsible for one's character (*NE* I 13, 1103a5–14; *EE* II 1, 1220a5–13) and, in fact, for the end or ends that one pursues in one's decisions (*CB* VI 12, 1144a31–6; VII 8, 1151a15–9; VII 12, 1144a7–9; VII 13, 1145a4–6; *EE* II 1, 1227b22–5; *NE* V 8, 1178a16–9). Since the non-rational part of the S/U is characterized by bad non-rational desires, it should follow that their ends – those that they aim at in their deliberations and decisions – are, ultimately, bad too (i.e. reflect those desires). Any view of the S/U that ascribes them knowledge of the good and decisions that aim at the right ends or values will find these claims difficult to explain. My interpretation avoids this issue since the S/U's rationally adopted end is of the same sort as the end of their non-rational desires, namely pleasure. This makes the S/U also more intelligible and unified as human characters. Although it is possible to imagine people whose rational values and non-rational desires run entirely contrary to each other, it is unclear whether this is, on Aristotle's view, a psychological possibility.²⁸ His description of views that postulate such a radical gap between the value orientations of the two soul parts and yet allow that they can decisively influence each other on a temporary basis as absurd in *EE* VIII 1 should make us wary of it.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, I use “*EE*” to refer to the exclusively *Eudemian* books (i.e. *EE* I–III and VII–VIII), “*NE*” to the exclusively *Nicomachean* ones (i.e. *NE* I–IV and VIII–X0), and “*CB*” to the three common books (i.e. *EE* IV–VI/*NE*V–VII) for which I use the more familiar *Nicomachean* numbering.
- 2 See Müller, 2015a for an overview of some of the major interpretations.
- 3 *NE* I 13, 1102b14–7; *EE* II 8, 1224a33–b10.
- 4 *NE* III 2, 1111b14; *EE* II 7, 1223b14; *CB* VII 11, 1145b12–15; *CB* VII 10, 1151a29–52a25.
- 5 For example: Charles, 1984, p. 174; Pakaluk, 2005, p. 234; or Irwin, 2007, pp. 186–187.
- 6 *CB* VI 13, 1144b30–45a2; *NE* X 8, 1178a16–18.
- 7 Irwin, 2007, p. 186.
- 8 There are, of course, other solutions. For a brief discussion, see Price, 2006, pp. 247–249.
- 9 Coope, 2012. Coope's discussion specifically targets the self-controlled agent and so she might not agree with my extending her thesis to the uncontrolled agent.
- 10 Callard, 2017.
- 11 Callard offers an interpretation of *CB* VI 13, 1144b30–45a2 which hinges on denying that in the passage Aristotle means that it is (full-fledged) virtue of character that is required for practical wisdom rather than merely good ethical condition (i.e. one sufficiently conducive to good conduct). I cannot examine her argument here in detail, but I will note that unless one assumes, as Callard does, that Aristotle *cannot* mean that practical wisdom requires virtue of character, it is exceedingly difficult to read expressions like “being good *kuriōs*,” “being good *haplōs*,” and “ethical virtue” as not signifying (full-fledged) virtue of character.
- 12 In the *NE* books preceding *CB*, Aristotle makes informative remarks about self-control and lack of control only twice: in the argument for the two parts of the soul (*NE* I 13, 1102b14–3a2) and in a short argument against the view that decision is appetite (*NE* III 2, 1111b13–6). Just like in *EE*, there are also interesting remarks concerning lack of control and vice in his discussion of friendship, primarily in *NE* IX 4 and IX 8.

- 13 For counterparts to the internal psychological conflict claims, see: *NE* I 13, 1102b14–3a2; IX 4, 1166b7–8; *CBVII* 1, 1145b12–15; VII 3, 1147a34. For the voluntariness claims, see: *CBVII* 10, 1152a14–6. The pleasure and pain claims (h–l) do not all have direct counterparts. However, that the uncontrolled person experiences pleasure is clear from the fact that she is overcome by pleasure and acts on her appetite (e.g. *CBVII* 6, 1149b1–5 and 25–7) and that she experiences pain can be inferred from the fact that she regrets her action (*CBVII* 8, 1150b30–1). For claims concerning the state of the S/U's reason, see *NE* III 12, 1119b8–10 and *CBVII* 2, 1146a31–b1. Although there is no direct counterpart to (p), see *CBVII* 6, 1149a25–b27 for (o).
- 14 In the *NE* and *CB*, the rational side of the conflict is prominently characterized in terms of (correct) decision (e.g. *NE* III 2, 1111b13–6; *CBVII* 7, 1150a19–27; 7.8, 1151a6–7) rather than, as in *NE* II 7, in terms of reasoning or belief. However, decision is implied at *EEVII* 2, 1238b3, where the virtuous person is said to be potentially useful for the uncontrolled person's decision. This must be the good but abandoned decision (since the uncontrolled agent does not act on decision when acting without control and since the virtuous person could only get behind a good decision in any case). Moreover, in *CB*, the rational side of the conflict is also characterized in terms of belief (e.g. *CBVII* 3, 1146b25–31) or reasoning (e.g. *CBVII* 7, 1150b24).
- 15 *NE* IV 9, 1128b33–4; *CBVII* 1, 1145a15–17; *EE* II 11, 1227b16–7; and III 2, 1231a25–6. Although this much is uncontroversial, it is not obvious how much can be read into the claim that self-control and lack of control are states of character. For example, Coope, 2012 supposes (in line with many other scholars) that self-control is a stable disposition such that one who has it “reliably makes, and acts upon, the right decision” (p. 152). But is this true across the board? Is the self-controlled person self-controlled (i.e. deciding and acting correctly) in *all* situations, independently of whether they require courage, temperance, magnanimity, truthfulness, or wit? If so, why does Aristotle constrain both unqualified self-control and lack of control to bodily pleasures? I revisit this issue at the end of the chapter.
- 16 For example: *Probl.* 949b11–24 and 949b37–50a18.
- 17 For some suggestions about how to understand the disharmony in the case of the vicious agent, see Müller 2015b.
- 18 Although Callard, 2017 discusses *EEVIII* 1, 1246b12–36 at length, she does not take notice of this conclusion, focusing instead on the claim at 1246b23–4 which equates self-control with the ability to turn intemperate non-rational desires towards temperate actions. On her reading, this claim might suggest that self-control is just *phronēsis* but one that has to exercise control over one's non-rational desires. However, even if the short remark about self-control in 1246b23–4 expresses Aristotle's view (as she supposes), it does not imply that self-control is ἡ φρόνησις ἢ ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ. The whole passage expounds the consequences of a view that accepts Aristotle's division of the human soul into two parts (rational and non-rational) and allows that one part of the soul can turn the other part from vice to virtue and *vice versa*. If so, then as Aristotle points out, we should not deny that *phronēsis* could make an intemperate non-rational part act temperately. But once we do that (and this is the sense of the remark), we reduce *phronēsis* to self-control since *phronēsis* would be or do just what self-control is or seems to be or do (ὅπερ δοκεῖ ἢ ἐγκράτεια). This, as he goes on to say, is among the many absurd (*atopa*) results of the view he is examining (1246b26).
- 19 For example, *NE* III 6, 1115b2–3; IV 1, 1120a19–20; IV 2, 1122b6–7; IV 6, 1127a6; or IX 8, 1168a33–5. I set aside the question of what the fine is.
- 20 As often in the *EE*, the text of (A) is exceptionally badly preserved. My translation largely follows the *Oxford Classical Text* (OCT) version.
- 21 It should be noted that “good” (*agathoi*) is an editorial incursion (which I accept). The manuscript reading is *agrioi* (savage, wild, harsh). The manuscript reading seems out of place. There is no obvious reason why Aristotle should call people with an instrumental conception of virtue (one familiar, for example, from Adeimantus' speech in *Rep.* 362e–367a)

“wild” or “harsh” in the context of distinguishing them from, on the one hand, the many and, on the other hand, those who are fine-and-good (*kalokagathoi*). Having an instrumental conception of virtue does not make one similar to a wild animal, one whose aroused spirit makes them act recklessly (*EE* III 1, 1229a25–7). It is also not obvious that such conception of virtue implies exclusive concern with bodily pleasure, which could perhaps lead to such designation (*NE* III 11, 1118b16–26). It is true that in *Pol.* VIII 4, 1338b9–38, there is a discussion of the Spartans valuing brutality or animal ferocity (*to thēriōdes*) over the fine. But Aristotle does not thereby imply that they are savage or uncivilized (even as he denies that brutality amounts to true courage). But even if this connection could be made, the claim in (A) is quite general, concerned with people (who are like the Spartans but not just them) who value virtue (not just courage or courage understood as brutality) for the sake of natural goods. Lastly, even if the meaning should be closer to “harsh” or “fierce” (as in *Pol.* VII 7, 1327b37–28a10 where the guardians are said to be harsh towards those they do not know), the term would remain unmotivated insofar as the discussion that ensues is about how and to what extent different kinds of things are good or fine for different kinds of people depending on their character, and not whether the way they value things makes them wild or civilized or harsh or gentle. However, see Terence Irwin’s chapter in this volume for a defence of reading the passage in a way that preserves the manuscript reading.

- 22 Additionally, there are “the many” mentioned at 1248a12. These cannot be identified with the Spartan kind since neither the naturally good things nor fine things are good or beneficial for them. They are, rather, the vicious or foolish people distinguished earlier.
- 23 As Aristotle says, it would absurd (*atopon*) (*NE* IV 9, 1128b26–8) to think that someone is decent simply on the basis of him or her avoiding disgrace.
- 24 As is, apparently, also friendship (*NE* IX 9, 1169b10).
- 25 Plato’s vivid description of the (undeserved) honours bestowed on the completely unjust man makes this obvious (*Rep.* 361a–62b).
- 26 Although these are the two most extensive discussions of a condition of this sort, Aristotle mentions it in passing in a number of other places. For example, in his account of generosity he says that “if someone does not give to whom they should or gives [rightly] but not for the sake of the fine but for some other reason (*μη τοῦ καλοῦ ἕνεκα ἀλλὰ διὰ τιν’ ἄλλην αἰτίαν*), he will not be called generous but some other sort of person (*οὐκ ἐλευθέριος ἀλλ’ ἄλλος τις*)” (*NE* IV 1, 1120a27–8). Although the remark is brief, it is clear that Aristotle has in mind somebody who reliably (i.e. as a matter of character) does the right (generous) actions but does them for the sake of some other reason than the virtuous person.
- 27 In view of this, it seems to me that, realistically, the condition of the S/U agent and specifically the self-controlled agent, cannot be reliably (or always) leading to correct actions as many scholars (e.g. Coope 2012, p. 152; Cooper, 2009, p. 12) seem to suppose. This need not be a matter of resolving into another character (say, *akrasia* into vice) (e.g. Anton, 2006, p. 60) but perhaps even a matter of occasionally failing to control the desires, perhaps by justifying acting on them by rationalization. Further investigation of this issue is however beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 28 It is worth noticing that in Plato’s description of the various characters in the *Republic* (aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical), such radical breaks between the values of reason and non-rational desires or soul parts occur only as unstable (and perhaps fictional) temporary states in the transitions from one character to another. The characters themselves, including the relevant parts of the soul, are unified around a single value (such as honour, wealth, freedom, or unrestrained pleasure and power). It is the adoption of a wrong value as this central focus of one’s soul that makes the non-ideal characters inherently (and progressively more) conflicted and unstable.

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