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Aristotelian Practical and Theoretical Dispositions:

The Path to Virtue

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

by

Vaheh Shirvanian

2026

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Aristotelian Practical and Theoretical Dispositions:

The Path to Virtue

by

Vaheh Shirvanian

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Calvin G. Normore, Chair

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates two forms of bad dispositions (*hexeis*), namely incontinence and vice, and two forms of the highest dispositions, namely magnanimity and contemplative excellence.

The first chapter argues the ‘unqualifiedly’ incontinent agent is one whose acquired rational dispositions for psychic pleasures match those of the virtuous, but who nevertheless acts badly due to the presence of non-rational innate dispositions for inappropriate bodily pleasures. Such an agent is supposed to threaten the Socratic thesis that a possessor of ethical knowledge

ought not to be able to behave badly. To defend his thesis, Socrates denied the existence of incontinence altogether. But Aristotle thinks this flies in the face of common sense. So, his proposal is that an incontinent agent lacks the ability to resist inappropriate non-rational bodily pleasures whereas the virtuous agent is disposed to resist such pleasures and so cannot act incontinently.

The second chapter proposes some vices are less bad than opposing vices because they resemble the manifestation of the virtue, i.e. the part of virtuous activity that is essential to virtue, more so than the opposing vice. Moreover, manifestations of virtue give rise to rational ethical pleasures whereas the non-manifestations of virtue give rise to no such pleasure. Further, the pleasures of the lesser vice are of the same species as the pleasures of the manifestation of virtue.

The third chapter argues honor has a special conceptual connection to excellence which is reflected in the special kind of self-knowledge the magnanimous agent must have to be able to appropriately accept honors. And since Aristotle has two mutually exclusive honor-relating virtues, there must be two levels of virtue in the Aristotelian framework, one for the statesman and the other for the philosopher.

The fourth chapter elucidates type-identical theories of human and divine contemplation. After making room for type-identical views, it canvasses three such views based on sameness of act, of actuality, and of form. It concludes that, though not without its difficulties, the view based on sameness of actuality is the most plausible.

The dissertation of Vaheh Shirvanian is approved.

Adam David Crager

Gavin Lawrence

Alexander Jacob Julius

Calvin G. Normore, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

To my mother Kanarik who made me all that I am.

To my father Zaven who always supported me.

To my sister Loussineh who always loved me.

To my partner Melissa who shared her life with me.

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VITA / BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

1985-1989	Armenian School of Kuwait
1990-1992	Ecole Miollis
1992-1994	Colombus Elementary School
1995-1996	Toll Middle School
1996-2000	Herbert Hoover High School
2000-2005	UC Berkeley
2005	Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley
2024-2026	Instructor, Auburn University

Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with elucidating the highest excellences (magnanimity and theoretical contemplation) and the failure to reach excellence (incontinence and vice), both in the practical and the theoretical domain, as understood by Aristotle.¹

In his ethical works, Aristotle describes a multitude of dispositions (*hexeis*) which fall short of perfect virtue, some of which he thinks are commendable (e.g. continence) while others are extremely reprehensible and/or blameworthy (e.g. brutishness, vice). But there are two kinds of bad dispositions that receive the bulk of the attention. The first of these is incontinence (*akrasia*), a disposition as a result of which an agent chooses to do an ethically bad action even though there is a sense in which she (at least partly) grasps what the ethically right action amounts to. Aristotle, for the most part, discusses incontinence in the first ten chapters of Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*). The other bad disposition that Aristotle discusses at length is vice (*kakia*), a disposition where the rational part of one's soul is not as it should be in the sense that one has a mistaken conception of how to live. The vicious person acts in accordance with reason, but their reason is corrupted. Vice is mostly discussed as part of his catalogue of the particular virtues in Books III-V but also in passing in other parts of *EN*.

The aim of Chapter I of this dissertation is to provide an account of incontinence that takes seriously Aristotle's insistence that 'unqualified' incontinence only has to do with (some of) the pleasures we are prone to in virtue of our animality, i.e. the pleasures of food, drink, and sex. This is on the face of it a puzzling claim since incontinence with respect to honor or wealth are structurally similar to 'unqualified' incontinence. But we will argue that the pleasures of

¹ Throughout this Introduction, we have relied on the Barnes translations of the texts we discuss.

food, drink, and sex are crucially different from the pleasures of honor or wealth in the sense that the former are innate non-rational pleasures whereas the latter are acquired rational pleasures. Going wrong with respect to rational pleasures entails one's rational dispositions are not as they should be whereas going wrong with respect to non-rational pleasures does not necessarily entail that one's rational dispositions are not as they should be.

We understand the 'problem' of incontinence to be an ethical problem rather than an action-theoretic one. The incontinent agent is supposed to be somebody whose rational dispositions by and large match the dispositions of the virtuous agent, but who nevertheless fails to act as she should. Her existence is supposed to be a counterexample to the claim that a virtuous agent cannot voluntarily act badly. The existence of an incontinent agent who acts badly in the pursuit of rational pleasures does not serve as a counterexample because her rational dispositions are not as they should be. But the existence of an incontinent agent who acts badly in pursuit of non-rational pleasures is a counterexample since it is possible for her rational dispositions to be as they should. Thus, the psyche of the agent who acts in pursuit of non-rational pleasures by and large matches the psyche of the virtuous, but she fails to act as she should. We take this to be the ethical problem that the existence of the incontinent agent gives rise to. The solution to the problem, we contend, is that the incontinent agent lacks a disposition that is possessed by the virtuous agent, namely the disposition not to be affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures. And so, Aristotle can maintain that a virtuous agent cannot act badly while nevertheless acknowledging the existence of an incontinent agent.

Chapter II is concerned partly with another kind of agent who falls short of virtue, namely the vicious. For Aristotle, each practical virtue is flanked by two opposed vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency. When Aristotle discusses particular vices, with respect to

many of them, he tells us that one or the other of two opposed vices is worse than the other. The objective explanation he gives for this phenomenon is that one vice is worse because it less closely resembles virtue than the other vice. The chapter aims to understand the exact sense in which one vice can be said to resemble virtue more than the opposing vice. After showing that the standard way of understanding this claim fails, we go on to make a distinction between the manifestation of a virtue and its mere instantiation. That is, we try to account for the asymmetry between Aristotelian vices by way of introducing an asymmetry within the virtues. A manifestation of virtue is essentially constitutive in the sense that its exercise reveals the essence of the virtue to which it belongs. The instantiation of a virtue is merely constitutive in that it does not reveal the essence of the virtue to which it belongs. We then claim that one part of virtue involves manifestations while the other part involves instantiations. And we also claim that the vice that resembles the instantiation of virtue is worse than the vice that resembles the manifestation of virtue.

We then go on to consider the distribution of the various pleasures that are characteristic of the Aristotelian virtues. We maintain that the proper rational pleasures of a virtue belong to the manifestations of a virtue whereas the instantiations of virtue either do not give rise to pleasure or do not give rise to rational pleasures. For instance, giving money when one should, the manifestation of liberality, involves the rational pleasure of giving money whereas not giving money when one should not, the mere instantiation of liberality, does not involve a rational pleasure. The vices themselves are asymmetrical in virtue of how they relate to these rational pleasures of virtue. Since the prodigal person and the liberal person both take pleasure in giving money, they resemble one another more and so prodigality is the lesser vice. Since meanness and liberality do not share the same species of pleasure, meanness is a worse vice than prodigality.

We then suggest that what makes an action a manifestation of virtue is the presence of the pleasures that attach to them whereas what makes an action a mere instantiation of virtue is the fact that they possess no proper rational pleasure that attaches to them. To summarize, Chapter 2 aims to discover the reason for the asymmetry of vices in respect of badness but in the course of investigating this problem, we discover many important things with respect to the nature of the virtues that they flank.

Having coped with some of the problematic aspects of incontinence and vice, the two bad states of character that Aristotle is most concerned about, and having in the process learned something about the practical virtues, Chapter III turns its attention to understanding a particular virtue, in fact the greatest virtue of character, namely magnanimity (*megalopsychia*). This is the greatest of the virtues because its possessor in some sense lives the highest practical life it is possible to live. We begin with an analysis of honor, suggesting that it has a special conceptual connection to ethical excellence. More specifically, honor is something that is in non-defective cases given to those who possess ethical excellence. Since the magnanimous person has the highest ethical excellence, he is concerned with and is especially worthy of the greatest honors. To be able to accept honors as he should, he needs to possess a certain kind of self-knowledge, namely that he is in fact virtuous. But Aristotle maintains that to be worthy of such honors, the magnanimous person must be superlatively good. That is, he is in possession of all the other particular virtues. In fact, we are even told that magnanimity makes all the other virtues greater. That is, the magnanimous person must have the ethical virtues in a superlative form. As we understand him, the magnanimous person stands at the pinnacle of Greek society. He is amply supplied with all the external goods that he might put to use for the sake of a virtuous society.

And he receives the greatest good, namely honor, for his accomplishments so long as there exist those worthy of honoring him. His deeds are great, even monumentally so.

Aristotle mentions a second nameless virtue involving honors, but moderate and small ones. We maintain such an agent will not be magnanimous but will only have a lesser form of the virtue concerning honors. That is, the magnanimous person will be worthy of the greatest honors while the nameless agent will be worthy of moderate and small honors. But if an agent is worthy of honors commensurate to his excellence, then the magnanimous person will have the highest level of excellence while the nameless agent, while virtuous, will have a lesser form of excellence.

One plausible interpretation of the higher excellence of the magnanimous person is to think of him as a great statesman who has done many things for the city and may have even saved it on occasion. It is in virtue of this fact that he is worthy of the greatest honors. Though some commentators have suggested the magnanimous person is one who leads a contemplative life, such a proposal does not seem to cohere with the many things that Aristotle says and does not say about such a person. First of all, there is no mention of any kind of contemplative activity that the magnanimous person engages in. And his concern with the greatest honors, which requires great acts, seem to go against Aristotle's claim that the contemplator will be modest in terms of the external goods that he requires for the purposes of contemplation.

In fact, the magnanimous person seems to be diametrically opposed to the contemplator. He may appreciate the end of contemplation as valuable and may arrange things in the city so as to promote and even maximize contemplation for all those who wish to partake in it. In fact, it is likely that he will do so in order to be a good statesman. But contemplation, as Aristotle maintains, is useless and so no honor attaches to it. The magnanimous person, as somebody

concerned with honors, will not himself contemplate since his time and resources are needed for running the city in the right way. If he were to decide to pursue the contemplative life, he would need to retire from pursuits that brought great honors. That is, he would need to stop being magnanimous, retire as a statesman, and pursue contemplation as his new chief pastime.

The relationship between the life of magnanimity and the contemplative life is best exemplified by the lives of Alexander the Great and Aristotle. The latter was a *metic* in Athens. He did not have full political rights, and he could not participate in Athenian politics. Given this, only the contemplative life was open to Aristotle, at least in Athens, though he would have of course likely chosen such a life regardless of where he lived. Given his status in Athens, Aristotle was likely not talking about himself when he was describing the life of the magnanimous person. He had other exemplars of magnanimity in mind, most likely Alexander the Great.

Alexander, meanwhile, though versed in philosophy, did not spend his life in the pursuit and exercise of contemplation. He likely knew about contemplation from Aristotle and also understood its value. But he saw himself as first and foremost a statesman. His role was to arrange things in his empire in such a way that it made it possible for those who wished to contemplate to be able to do so. But Alexander likely did not spend his leisure time (if he had any) engaging in contemplation. The greatest worldly honors and historical immortality were the prizes which he reserved for himself.

Of course, Aristotle would likely advise Alexander to consider immortalizing his soul and to not rest content with worldly immortality. But there are always those practically-minded individuals who value practically excellent deeds, especially on a wide scale, as higher than

contemplative activity. But perhaps if Alexander had lived longer than he did, he would have eventually abdicated and turned to the contemplative life as his chief pursuit.

Chapter IV aims at elucidating certain ways of understanding the relationship between human and divine contemplation. First, it marks a distinction between type-distinct views, views where human contemplation is not the same type of activity as divine contemplation, and type-identical views, views where human and divine activity are in an important sense the same kind of activity. It maintains that since Aristotle tells us to immortalize ourselves as much as possible by way of contemplation, this injunction makes more sense within the context of type-identical views since doing the same type of contemplative activity as God is more likely to lead to human immortality than if human contemplative activity were to consist in something other than God's contemplative activity. On a type-distinct view, it would be hard to say why human contemplation rather than any other kind of excellent human activity (say ethical excellence) should produce immortality. A further advantage of type-identical views of contemplation is that they allow for closer union on the part of human beings with the divine whether this amounts to assimilation with the divine or just sharing the divine form. Finally, type-identical views are in a better position than type-distinct views to explain why Aristotle thinks contemplation is the best human activity rather than just one good activity among many. Less justification must be given on type-identical views as to why human beings should contemplate most of all rather than pursue the highest honors that statesmen strive after.

After mounting a general defense of type-identical views of contemplation, Chapter IV goes on to argue that there is at most a single self-subsistent immaterial being in the Aristotelian universe. That is, it argues that all active intellects mentioned in *De Anima* are really one being and that, furthermore, this being is identical to divine nous. Moreover, this one self-subsistent

being plays a crucial role both in ordinary cognition as well as in contemplation. That is, without the divine, nothing in the Aristotelian universe is capable of cognition no matter how ordinary. Further, Chapter IV argues that divine nous plays a dual role when it comes to human contemplation. It provides both the form of contemplative thought but also its content. That is, human intellect is doubly beholden to divine nous for the activity of contemplation.

After this, we introduce the first of the three type-identity views under consideration, namely the Strict Identity View. According to it, passive nous or the human intellect is capable of literally becoming any intelligible. This includes divine nous, which exists as an immaterial pure actuality. When divine nous provides passive nous both its form and content, passive nous literally becomes divine nous. That is, it ceases to be a mere potentiality and becomes literally identical to the pure actuality that is divine nous. In addition, when it has become identical with divine nous, it engages in literally the same act of contemplation that divine nous always engages in.

This view posits the strongest possible kind of metaphysical unity between divine and passive nous, namely one of numerical identity. It also gives an easy answer as to how human beings can become immortalized, namely by becoming the very same thing as divine nous. Finally, it is able to explain how human contemplation is divine since it is no different than the contemplation of divine nous. But this view also has its difficulties. Firstly, by having passive nous transform into divine nous, it in effect destroys the human being as a subject of contemplative experience. In addition, it collapses the acts of multiple distinct subjects into one since numerical identity is transitive. If Plato's contemplation is identical to the divine contemplation and so is Aristotle's, then Plato's and Aristotle's acts of contemplation must be identical.

A second type-identical view of contemplation is the Participation View. According to it, distinct subjects and their distinct acts participate in the same divine actuality. Divine nous possesses the divine actuality essentially and self-subsistently whereas human contemplators participate in it derivatively and non-essentially. By participating in the divine actuality in this way, human intellect gains immortality by being eternally sustained by divine nous. On this picture, a given passive nous becomes as actualized as is possible without flipping into pure actuality.

The view has several advantages. Firstly, it avoids the collapse of the human subject by refusing to transform passive nous into pure actuality, i.e. have it become identical to active nous. Secondly, it preserves a strong form of union between passive and divine nous, since the former participates in the actuality of the latter. Thirdly, it provides a clear way in which passive nous can gain immortality as a result of its interactions with divine nous. As for its disadvantages, the Participation View requires that a single actuality be participated in by a multiplicity of subjects, a position that brings with it possible metaphysical difficulties. A second possibly problematic aspect has to do with the kind of immortality that is achieved by passive nous on this view. Passive nous remains perishable but continues to exist eternally because it is sustained eternally by active nous.

The Formal Identity View, meanwhile, maintains that divine nous and human intellects all share a formal structure that is transmitted to human intellects by divine nous. Thus, each individual passive nous has its own act as well as its own potentiality, but each receives the form of self-thinking from divine nous.

This view has the advantage of preventing any kind of subject collapse since each human intellect engages in her own distinct act of contemplation. But the view also makes it difficult to

see how immortality could be gained under such conditions. Further, the metaphysical union between human intellect and the divine is much weaker than with the other views.

Contemplation is a kind of experience that most human beings have likely not had. At the very least, most are not aware of themselves as having experienced contemplation. Though Chapter 4 does not describe what contemplation amounts to, as it were, from the inside, it does provide insight as to what it might be in terms of a human being's relationship with the divine. This, we hope, is enough to show the value of contemplative activity both as something good in itself and in terms of its ability to grant immortality to the agent who achieves it. In the end, our aim is to show that to reach the highest pinnacle of human activity, it is not enough to not be incontinent or vicious, nor is it enough to reach the highest possible level of practical activity, as the magnanimous person has done. More is required in the sense that one must commune with the divine to achieve the highest happiness in this life and immortality in the next.

CHAPTER I: ARISTOTELIAN INCONTINENCE

I. Introduction

Aristotle devotes the greater part of Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) to the phenomenon of incontinence (*akrasia*).² Though his discussion has generated significant scholarly interest, much of it has been directed towards the discussions on the Socratic problem of whether knowledge is possible and on the kind of knowledge possessed by the incontinent agent. This emphasis has tended to obscure other features of Aristotle's account that are equally important for understanding incontinence.³ This essay advances an interpretation of incontinence that will show that several parts of Aristotle's discussion that have received less attention are indispensable for explaining why he limits 'unqualified' incontinence to bodily pleasures.

In his discussion, Aristotle places two defining conditions on what counts as 'unqualified' incontinence. (1) He tells us that 'unqualified' incontinence is limited to the sphere of the bodily pleasures (1148b11-3). (2) He takes 'unqualified' incontinence necessarily to consist in failing to stick to some (ethically) *correct* decision rather than any decision whatsoever (1151b2-3). That is, he does not count as "incontinence" cases of "reverse" incontinence, where one fails to stick to what seems to her the good but is in fact bad. In limiting incontinence in these ways, Aristotle is best understood as taking himself to be reflecting the ordinary Greek usage and application of the term "*akrasia*". These limitations, however, are not arbitrary but follow from Aristotle's distinction between innate appetitive capacities and acquired rational

² Throughout this chapter, we use the Broadie and Rowe translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the Barnes translations of the *Magna Moralia*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Eudemian Ethics*.

³ A notable exception is David Charles's "Akrasia: The Rest of the Story?" (2011).

capacities. In any case, some scholars have either ignored or criticized these limitations. For the purposes of this chapter, we will set aside the second limitation in order to focus on the first. That is, our aim is to articulate the perspective from which it would seem natural to limit ‘unqualified’ incontinence to the sphere of the bodily pleasures.

Part One advances an account of incontinence explicitly geared towards showing that Aristotle’s limiting is neither arbitrary nor irrelevant and is best explained by his psychology of rational and non-rational capacities. ‘Unqualified’ incontinence involves an agent whose rational dispositions concerning distinctively human goods match those of the virtuous agent (apart from the presence of moderation). Such an agent fails to act virtuously due to being affected by an inappropriate bodily pleasure arising from an innate appetitive capacity that has not been properly habituated. We maintain that ‘unqualified’ incontinence is possible because only bodily appetites can preserve the coincidence between the incontinent’s rational dispositions towards distinctively human goods and the virtuous person’s rational dispositions towards such goods.

Part Two builds on the account developed in Part One to tackle a variety of interpretive issues relating to incontinence. First, we explain why Aristotle, as part of his discussion of incontinence, raises the question of whether somebody who possesses ethical knowledge can nevertheless do a bad thing. We then highlight the essentially ethical nature of incontinence and argue that once we abstract away from the ethical domain and consider the phenomenon purely as a problem in the theory of action, incontinence is reduced to a standard case in which mutually exclusive desires compete and the stronger prevails.⁴ This will provide the conceptual resources

⁴ In making this claim, we are supposing that Aristotle is committed to a strong form of the doctrine of “the guise of the good”, namely that whenever an agent acts intentionally, she does so in light of what she, at the time of acting, takes to be the best thing to do. Thus, even an incontinent action is

needed to interpret Aristotle's discussion in VII.3 and make sense of the way the incontinent agent can be said to have knowledge.

PART ONE

II. The Charge of Arbitrariness in the Limiting of Incontinence

Aristotle restricts “unqualified” *akrasia* to the sphere of the bodily pleasures. In discussing the virtue of moderation and the corresponding vice of self-indulgence, he distinguishes “between pleasures of the soul like love of honor and love of learning, and those of the body” (1117b29). A bodily pleasure is one that “belongs to us not insofar as we are human beings but insofar as we are animals” (1118b3).

At *EN* VII.4, Aristotle asserts that “we must take un-self-controlledness and self-control to be solely those [cases] having to do with the same things as moderation and self-indulgence” (1148b11-13), namely “what relates to food and the need for sex” (1147b27). Unqualified cases of incontinence (and continence) only concern the bodily pleasures associated with food and sex. Phenomena exhibiting the same pattern of conflict between competing pleasures but involving non-bodily pleasures, e.g. incontinence with regard to honor or profit, are called ‘lack of self-control’ merely “because of a resemblance to the way the un-self-controlled person is affected” (1148b7-8).⁵

taken to be the best thing to do by the agent at the time of acting. It is of course possible to deny the strong form of the doctrine and to even view instances of incontinence as counterexamples to it. Understanding incontinence in this way provides one with a middle ground from which incontinence is understood neither as an essentially ethical phenomenon nor as a standard case of conflict. For the purposes of this chapter, we leave such views to one side.

⁵ According to Broadie (1991), bodily pleasures occupy a privileged place with respect to *akrasia* because, unlike in the case of the pleasures of the qualified forms of *akrasia*, failing to forego bodily pleasures is base because we have them *qua* animals in a way that failing to forego the others is not.

Some commentators have regarded this restriction as unmotivated. For instance, Annas complains:

“Aristotle makes things comparatively easy for himself by limiting *akrasia* proper to the area of behavior concerning the moderate and self-controlled agents: the area of bodily pleasures. He emphasizes at length that behavior in this area alone is properly *akrasia*...But this is extremely artificial, and Aristotle does recognize cases that have the same structure as the cases that he is prepared to call *akrasia*, denying them the name somewhat arbitrarily.” (“Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness”, 1980, p.294)

We seek to show Aristotle’s limiting of incontinence makes good sense and that the accusation of arbitrariness is groundless. We suggest that Annas’s criticism rests on assumptions about *akrasia* that Aristotle himself does not share. Consequently, his restriction naturally appears arbitrary from her perspective.⁶

To answer the charge of arbitrariness, we compare bodily and qualified *akrasia*. Our claim is that Aristotle’s distinction is best explained by the capacities from which the competing pleasures arise rather than merely by the formal structure of motivational conflict—that is, the fact that one affection overrides another and determines action. Because the distinction ultimately rests on Aristotle’s division of the soul into rational and non-rational capacities, our argument begins with his psychology.⁷ The key claim is that pleasures arising from rational capacities presuppose acquired rational dispositions, whereas bodily pleasures arise from innate appetitive capacities. Only the presence of inappropriate bodily appetites, we shall argue, allows the incontinent agent’s rational dispositions to remain, apart from moderation, identical with

⁶ According to Charles (2011), “while Aristotle is clear in NE 7.4 that there are central and derived cases of *akrasia*, he does not defend his choice of a central case. Nor does he show why there has to be a central case at all.” (p.197) In the course of this chapter, we hope to provide the rationale for why there’s a central case of *akrasia* and why it is *akrasia* with respect to bodily pleasures.

For Bobonich (2009), “this limitation of the pleasures and pains relevant to moderation...to those of touch and, perhaps, taste is surprisingly restrictive.” (p.133)

⁷ As we shall later argue, not every non-rational capacity occupies the same place within Aristotle’s psychology, which explains why temper receives an intermediate treatment.

those of the virtuous agent. This, we shall argue, provides a principled explanation for Aristotle's restriction of unqualified *akrasia*.

III. Reason and Appetite

At *EN* I.13, we are told “one aspect of soul is non-rational, while another possesses reason” (1102a27-8). Every basic psychic capacity belongs primarily to one or the other part.⁸ In Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, we are informed: “As all potentialities are either innate, like the senses, or come by practice, like the power of playing the flute, or by learning, like artistic power, those which come by practice or by rational formula we must acquire by previous exercise but this is not necessary with those which are not of this nature” (1047b32).⁹ Aristotle thus treats rational capacities as capacities that *must* be acquired (through learning or habituation) if they are to be possessed.¹⁰ For our purposes, by capacity, we mean a psychological potentiality. As Aristotle's examples confirm, the three kinds of rational capacities discussed in *EN*, namely theoretical, technical, and *prohairetic*,¹¹ *must* all first be acquired in order to be possessed. In this respect, they differ from the innate capacities to grow and digest food.¹²

⁸ Lorenz (2006) argues that “even though it is part of his [Aristotle's] moral psychology that all of a human being's cognitive and motivating conditions are rational in a way, this leaves intact a clear sense in which appetite and spirit are non-rational forms of motivation, and also a clear sense in which at least some of the cognition involved in such motivation is non-rational.” (p.117) We agree with Lorenz on this point.

⁹ We here use Ross's Oxford translation of the *Metaphysics*.

¹⁰ As we understand it, one acquires the intellectual virtues through learning and the practical virtues through habituation.

¹¹ A *prohairetic* capacity is any practical rational capacity that is non-technical.

¹² Of course, this assumes we do not suffer from natural defect.

Not every kind of rational capacity, however, is relevant for our investigation. Since incontinence involves actions, we set theoretical capacities to one side. Moreover, since it involves a conflict between pleasures, we also set aside capacities involving technical expertise since “no pleasure is the product of expertise” (1153a24).¹³¹⁴ And so, the conflict between reason and appetite that is the mark of ‘unqualified’ incontinence involves some acquired *prohairesis* capacity and some non-rational capacity.

Of non-rational soul, we are told it “appears to be double in nature” (1102b29-30), one being “the plant-like aspect of soul” and the other “the appetitive and generally desiring part” (1102b31). Among capacities belonging to “the plant-like aspect”, Aristotle includes those “responsible for the taking in of food and for increase in size” (1102a34). Since these are “in all things that take in food, and in embryos, and this same one too as being in them when they are full-grown” (1102b1-3), we need not first acquire them to possess them; they belong to us innately. As for capacities belonging to “the appetitive and generally desiring part” of non-rational soul, Aristotle informs us that appetite also “accompanies and is present in us from

¹³ We take Aristotle not to be saying that technical expertise never has the production of pleasure as its aim. For instance, he would likely concede that a cook aims to bring about gustatory pleasure and a masseur aims at tactile pleasure. Rather, his point is that the *doings* of activities manifesting technical expertise are not pleasurable (unless they are also taken to have non-instrumental value).

¹⁴ Angier (2010) tells us that “it is true that in craft-evaluation we tend to concentrate on ‘results’ (whether internal or external), treating their psychological antecedents as (at most) of instrumental worth. In virtue-evaluation, by contrast, we do not maintain such a ‘restricted focus’ looking far more to the intentions and character of the agent involved.” (p.45) We take this to mean that technical expertise can be exercised well even by someone with a bad character, whereas practical wisdom essentially requires ethical virtue. One cannot have *akrasia* in relation to technical expertise because *akrasia* has to do with acting badly as a result of a defect in ethical character.

birth” (*EE* 1224b31).¹⁵ And so, both nutritive and appetitive parts of non-rational soul consist of innate capacities.

The various other basic capacities characteristic of the non-rational soul (e.g. perception (*Met.* IX 1047b32)) are also innate. Throughout the texts under consideration, Aristotle consistently presents the basic capacities of non-rational soul as natural, while the capacities he identifies as acquired are rational. It is therefore likely the case that the fundamental capacities belonging to the non-rational part of the soul are natural or innate.

Further, since no rational capacity is innate, something possessed simply by nature cannot already be a rational capacity. Aristotle's division of basic potentialities in *Metaphysics* IX is likewise exhaustive: every basic potentiality is either natural or acquired. Thus, any basic psychic capacity immediately possessed by nature rather than acquired through learning or habituation belongs to the non-rational part of soul.¹⁶

Finally, capacities whose possession depends upon learning or habituation belong to rational soul. Nutrition, growth, perception, appetite, and similar capacities are already present before education begins. A capacity possessed only after learning or habituation belongs to the rational aspect of soul. Aristotle introduces the distinction between natural and acquired capacities as an exhaustive division of powers in *Metaphysics* IX. His examples of acquired capacities are all rational capacities, while his examples of natural capacities are capacities

¹⁵ We take Aristotle to be using the locution “the appetitive and generally desiring part” in order to also make room for the spirited element of the soul (*thumos*). For the purposes of this chapter, we shall not separate appetite (*epithumia*) from temper (*thumos*) until our discussion of incontinence with regard to temper in section X of Part One.)

¹⁶ We maintain that even passive intellect (*nous*) is acquired as a second potentiality through learning rather than innately possessed.

belonging to non-rational soul. Since he nowhere introduces an acquired non-rational class, in the absence of textual evidence for such a class, Aristotle's distinction is best understood as exhaustive.

Aristotle's texts thus suggest that acquisition functions as a reliable indicator of rational powers (and vice versa), while innateness functions as a reliable indicator of non-rational powers (and vice versa). On this interpretation, the mode of acquisition provides us with a marker for determining the rational status of some capacity.

Though both nutritive and appetitive parts of non-rational soul consist in innate capacities, they importantly differ. Aristotle tells us “the plant-like aspect of soul does not share in reason in any way, while the appetitive and generally desiring part does participate in it in a way, i.e. in so far as it is capable of listening to it and obeying it” (1102b30-2). How can appetite and the generally desiring part, being non-rational, nevertheless “participate in reason in a way”? Our account suggests understanding Aristotle's claim in the following way: though appetitive capacities are innately present and so non-rational, they are “rational in a way” because they are acquired in a way. By “listening to reason”, we understand Aristotle as saying they can be molded by reason. But if they are molded by reason, then this means that the properly formed condition of the capacity must be acquired since it was not innately there. This is because since habituation is itself an acquisition, the perfected state of the capacity is acquired. Since listening to reason consists in being shaped through habituation, we suggest Aristotle's remark is best understood as meaning that participation in reason manifests itself precisely through the acquired condition of an otherwise innate capacity.

Consider the nutritive capacity to grow one's limbs on the one hand and the appetitive capacity to be affected by the pleasures of food on the other. Though both belong to non-rational

soul since they are innately present, each relates differently to the process of habituation. The capacity to grow limbs neither can nor needs to be modified or developed through habituation.¹⁷ Barring natural defect, it will already be as it should prior to habituation. The capacity to take pleasure in eating, however, is something that can and needs to be modified through habituation to be as it should.

A moderate agent will have learned through habituation to resist being affected by the inappropriate pleasures of food and will only be affected by the appropriate ones.¹⁸ The capacity to be affected by the pleasures of eating is innate, but its properly ordered condition is acquired through habituation, since habituation was required to modify and complete it. We take this to be what Aristotle means when he says appetite, though non-rational, 'is capable of listening and obeying reason'.

But appetitive capacities are only acquired or rational 'in a sense'. To see this, compare the capacity to be affected by the pleasures of food with that of being affected by the pleasures of giving money. The pleasure attached to wealth is not present from birth in the way hunger is present in an agent. Only as a result of habituation do we acquire the determinate capacity to value wealth *qua* wealth. Such a capacity is therefore rational in the full or strong sense. The capacity relating to the pleasures of eating, on the other hand, though it can be modified or developed through habituation, is only rational 'in a sense' because it is not through habituation that it first comes to be present in an agent. We are now in a position to explain that the conflict

¹⁷ Except perhaps in a very indirect sense.

¹⁸ In using the term 'resist', we do not mean to imply an agent will first be affected/tempted by some pleasure and then resist the temptation to set off in its pursuit. Rather, the pleasure in question will not even affect the agent because of her possession of a capacity that prevents this from happening.

between reason and appetite taking place in cases of ‘unqualified’ incontinence is one between some fully acquired *prohairetic* capacity and some innately possessed capacity that can nevertheless be modified or developed through habituation. We have now argued for the psychological distinction upon which the explanation in the next sections depend.

IV. Virtue, Vice, and *Prohairetic* Dispositions

Aristotle defines ethical virtue as a *prohairetic* disposition.¹⁹ The texts also suggest that he understands the ethical vices in this way. In Book VII, the point is made explicitly when we are told “lack of self-control is not badness (though perhaps in a sense it is), because the one [lack of self-control] is contrary to decision, the other [badness] in accordance with it” (1151a5-7; see also 1148a17-9 and 1139a35). If badness is according to decision, then vice belongs to the class of *prohairetic* states rather than to non-rational impulses.

Since ethical character is acquired through habituation, and *prohairesis* expresses settled character, *prohairetic* dispositions are likewise acquired rather than innate (1103a17–26). Any ethical *prohairetic* disposition that fails to hit the mean must either go to excess or be deficient with respect to affections or actions. Since Aristotle characterizes vice precisely as such excess or deficiency, all ethical *prohairetic* dispositions that fail to hit the mean are vicious. Vice is no less than virtue ordered by *prohairesis*, albeit badly ordered.²⁰²¹

¹⁹ That all the virtues must be *prohairetic* (acquired) dispositions is important in understanding the special way in which moderation is a virtue. As we shall see, this feature of moderation is what allows for the possibility of ‘unqualified’ incontinence and continence with respect to bodily pleasures, possibilities (most) other virtues do not allow for.

²⁰ In a later section, this feature of vices will be used to argue that most ‘qualified’ cases of incontinence (e.g. with respect to honors, wealth) do not properly speaking count as genuine cases because they are instantiations of vice.

²¹ As will be made clear, what we say here is somewhat in tension with certain things Aristotle says in *EN*7.4, namely that “there is no badness of character involved in relation to [going wrong with

V. Becoming and Being Moderate

Towards the end of Book III, Aristotle tells us the activities of children “have a certain resemblance to self-indulgence” (1119b1)—the vice of excess opposed to moderation. Like the self-indulgent, “children too live according to appetite, and especially in them is the desire for the pleasant” (1119b7).²² The self-indulgent err towards excess in relation to moderation. Children, meanwhile, naturally tend toward the kind of excess that, once habituated into character, constitutes self-indulgence.²³ Since we naturally tend towards excess when it comes to bodily pleasure prior to habituation, moderation will typically involve the development of the disposition to *resist* being affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures (see 1109b8-12).²⁴

Of the moderate agent, we are told that “such things as conduce to health or fitness and are pleasant he will desire moderately and in the way one should, as he will any other pleasures if they do not impede these” (1119a16-9). Aristotle has in mind the following picture. The bodily pleasures which an unhabituated human child is receptive towards tend to exceed those of a well-habituated adult agent both in range and intensity (see *EN* II.9). The typical aspiring moderate agent must therefore be habituated not to be affected by certain inappropriate pleasures and to be less affected than she is by overly intense bodily pleasures. Once she acquires moderation,

respect to honor or profit]” (1148b2). For the purposes of this chapter, we make no attempt to alleviate this tension.

²² According to Sherman (1989), “by tutoring the child’s vision of the world, by instructing him to attend to these features rather than those, desires become focused and controlled in specific ways.” (p.169)

²³ Even if the dispositions of a child matched those of the virtuous person, this matching would be merely *per accidens*.

²⁴ The reason Aristotle takes moderation to generally involve learning to *resist* being affected by bodily pleasures is that insensateness, i.e. being disposed to enjoy bodily pleasures less than one should, is a rare occurrence and usually the result of natural defect.

inappropriate pleasures cease to move the person as pleasures.²⁵ And since moderation is constitutive of virtue, if a child is to become virtuous, she must not only acquire the dispositions to be receptive to the various “psychic pleasures” (e.g. of victory, wealth, contemplation) but also learn to resist the various inappropriate (in any of the categorial ways) bodily pleasures to which she was previously naturally open.

Aristotle treats hunger, thirst, and sexual appetite as natural bodily appetites present from birth, whereas concern for wealth arises only through habituation and social life. In this respect, moderation is markedly different from liberality for it relates to the pleasures proper to its sphere differently from the way liberality relates to the pleasures of giving money. When it comes to being liberal, it is in situations where a virtuous agent is being affected by the ethically appropriate pleasures of giving money that she paradigmatically manifests this virtue.²⁶ But moderation is not paradigmatically manifested in situations where a virtuous agent is being appropriately affected by bodily pleasures. It is rather paradigmatically manifested whenever she *resists* being affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures towards which she was receptive prior to habituation.²⁷ (By paradigmatic instantiations of a virtue, we are referring to those instantiations of a virtue that most fully manifest the essence of that virtue. By non-paradigmatic instantiations of a virtue, we are referring to those instantiations of a virtue that do not fully manifest the essence of that virtue).

²⁵ That is, her appetites will be filtered through and contoured by her rational conception of a good human life.

²⁶ This is of course not to deny that liberal agents will not give money when they should not. It is just that such actions are not paradigmatic manifestations of liberality.

²⁷ By receptive dispositions, we are referring to dispositions to be open to certain affections. By resistant dispositions, we are referring to dispositions to be closed to certain affections.

This is consistent with Aristotle's claim that the virtues are *prohairetic*. For though the disposition to be affected by ethically appropriate bodily pleasures is something a virtuous agent will necessarily possess since its lack would imply insensateness (a vice), she did not have to acquire it through habituation. It is not through repeated acts of eating and having sex that a human agent comes to be able to enjoy the pleasures of food and sex. If we are non-defective, we are already so disposed. Since the disposition to be affected by ethically proper bodily pleasures is not acquired (in the strong sense), it is not itself what we take to be the paradigmatically *prohairetic* aspect of moderation, though it remains an exercise of the virtue. Thus, even the virtuous agent's appropriate enjoyment of some bodily pleasure (e.g. eating a healthy meal) is not the paradigmatic manifestation of virtue.²⁸

The disposition to resist being affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures, meanwhile, is acquired through habituation (in the strong sense). Being naturally non-defective does not guarantee its possession; for one may be perfectly healthy and yet not have been properly brought up. Because it is an acquired non-technical practical disposition, it is *prohairetic*, making it suitable for identification with moderation. That is, an agent paradigmatically manifests moderation when she is unaffected by some inappropriate bodily pleasure present in a practical situation.

A certain background but nevertheless contentious assumption underlies such an understanding of the Aristotelian virtue of moderation. One might instead think the appetites

²⁸ Broadie (1991) tells us that "it is characteristic of these desires [appetites] automatically to tend to their own satisfaction without mediation by reflective thought." (p.107). This suggests that appetite, though it may be responsive to rational guidance, does not itself become fully rational. Our view also views appetites as less than fully rational even after habituation.

come to be thoroughly suffused or permeated by reason as a result of the process of habituation such that very little if any distinction remains between appetitive and other kinds of desires. On such a picture, a virtuous person eating a healthy sandwich (when this is permitted) in some situation would be acting no less *prohairetically* or virtuously than were she to financially help a friend in need (when she should) in some other situation.²⁹ Such a view would make it difficult to draw the distinction we have proposed between moderation and liberality. Thus, the picture of incontinence we are proposing maintains that appetite never loses its character as appetite, even though it becomes obedient to reason. That is, we take appetite to stand alongside rather than become fully rationalized even after the process of habituation has been successfully completed. Our interpretation therefore departs from readings according to which reason fully permeates appetite.

The moderate person's appropriate enjoyment of bodily pleasure is an exercise of the virtue of moderation. Nevertheless, what habituation principally contributes is not the basic capacity to enjoy such pleasures, which is innate, but the acquired disposition governing that capacity, especially its ability to resist inappropriate bodily pleasures. Moderation differs from virtues like liberality because moderation regulates an already existing bodily appetite whereas liberality gives determinate ethical shape to domains not grounded in an innate appetite. Because the appetitive capacity already exists naturally in the case of moderation, habituation cannot create it but only govern it. And because moderation regulates an antecedently existing appetite rather than creating a new evaluative orientation, failures of moderation exhibit a distinctive

²⁹ McDowell (1998) maintains that virtue transforms an agent's whole conception of how to live and so would likely challenge our claim that appropriate enjoyment of bodily pleasures is not paradigmatically virtuous and that only resisting inappropriate pleasures is. But we are not certain.

psychological structure. This difference will help explain why bodily *akrasia* is itself psychologically distinctive.

VI. 'Necessary' vs. 'Desirable in Themselves' Pleasures

Aristotle remarks that “some of the things that produce pleasure are necessary, while others are desirable in themselves” (1147b25) and that “it is the bodily sort that are necessary...while the other sort are not necessary but are desirable in themselves” (1147b26-39). We suggest Aristotle is best understood as distinguishing activities that function merely as necessary means for life from those that are constituents of living well. Since he contrasts what is 'necessary' with what is 'desirable in itself,' the contrast is naturally read as one between activities pursued for the sake of something else and activities pursued for their own sake. This does not strictly follow from the terminology alone but is the most natural reading of the contrast in the present context.

The bodily activities are necessary because human agents must eat and drink if human life is to be maintained at the biological level. And maintaining biological life is a prerequisite for doing activities that are desirable in themselves. We want to maintain that ethically virtuous actions are pleasant and desirable in themselves. And it is for the sake of these activities that a virtuous agent engages in the necessary activities since the biological continuation of life is itself a necessary condition for the exercise of virtue.³⁰

³⁰ According to Kraut (1989), a certain type of virtuous person “thinks that happiness is activity in accordance with such practical virtues as justice, courage, and temperance. His conception of happiness, in other words, is to a large extent correct, for he makes virtuous activity of the rational soul his ultimate end, and he desires external and *bodily goods for the sake of this one highest end.*” (p.53)

Some modern readers may be taken aback by Aristotle's seeming prejudice against bodily pleasures and doubt whether his distinction between two kinds of pleasure-producing activities carves nature at the joints. Such doubt is unwarranted. To see this, consider two virtuous agents with identical lives except one enjoys more generous actions in her lifetime. All else being equal, the life of the agent who enjoyed more generous actions is better.

Now consider instead two virtuous agents with identical lives except one requires two meals daily and the other six (and assume both remain equally healthy). One agent comes to enjoy a greater amount of bodily pleasure by way of her activities over her lifetime, but we would not say her life went better because activities producing bodily pleasure contributes to life instrumentally rather than constitutively. In fact, it might be better to need to indulge in activities bringing bodily pleasures as infrequently as possible so as not to devote more time on them and attend instead to the more important distinctively human virtuous activities. That it takes one agent less to maintain life at the biological level takes nothing away from her living well. These scenarios illustrate the fundamental difference regarding the way we relate to these two kinds of pleasure-producing activities, and especially with respect to the status we accord them in the context of living a good distinctively human life.

One objection to consider: when it comes to lovers of bodily pleasures, one might make the distinction between the "gourmand", who enjoys eating to excess, and the "gourmet", who enjoys a refined sensitivity to gustatory pleasures. One might then concede that eating more food (in the manner of the gourmand) over a lifetime does not make life any better but argue that greater enjoyment of the most refined gustatory pleasures (in the manner of the gourmet) over a lifetime does make life better. And from this, one might conclude some activities producing bodily pleasures are not merely necessary but also desirable in themselves. But Aristotle appears

not to classify them as desirable in themselves. He appears to treat some activities characteristic of sight and hearing as belonging to the class of pleasures desirable in themselves, but he does not appear to regard the activities having to do with the bodily pleasures involved in temperance as desirable in themselves. Thus, he likely would not regard them as activities whose performance is itself a constituent of *eudaimonia*. Although moderate eating is an exercise of virtue, the activity of eating is pursued primarily because biological life is a necessary condition for the exercise of the highest human activities.

VII. The Instrumentality of Appetitive Pleasure

Although the activities relating to the pleasures of touch are only instrumentally necessary, they nevertheless produce pleasure. And pleasure presents an activity to the agent as at least partly intrinsically worthwhile. For pleasure itself has intrinsic worth.³¹ Insofar as something is regarded merely as a means, it is not pleasant *qua* mere means since “no pleasure is the product of expertise” (1153a24). That is, one cannot derive pleasure merely from a *kinesis* (process). Pleasure, properly speaking, only attaches to *energeia* (actuality). One does not typically find the *kinesis* of tightening screws pleasurable, and if one does, this means one also finds some intrinsic worth in it besides its instrumental worth; one partly views it as *energetic*.³²

If the touch-related activities are merely instrumentally necessary for the virtuous person, why does she feel pleasure in doing them? The virtuous cannot be mistaken as to what

³¹ It should be noted that the claim that pleasure has intrinsic worth is not uncontroversial nor is it necessarily Aristotle's conception. But for the purpose of this chapter, we shall assume that it is true.

³² Broadie (1991) maintains that, for Aristotle, “all pleasures (including gross ones) are activities rather than processes, and that this is so even when the pleasurable activity happens also to be a process.” (p.328)

constitutes a good human life. How then do they derive pleasure from touch-related activities if they take them to only have instrumental worth within a good life?

We maintain that just as Aristotle thinks touch “belongs to us not in so far as we are human beings but in so far as we are animals” (1118b3), so do the touch-related pleasures. Insofar as humans enjoy them, they do so not *qua* humans but *qua* animals.³³ On this view, the human soul is comprised of two sets of dispositions, namely those possessed innately and whose activities produce bodily pleasures, and those distinctively human dispositions whose activities produce psychic pleasures. Each is organized around its own natural end. And as Aristotle himself stresses, “each of the parts [of soul] can move it [the body]” (1147a35).

The innate dispositions have nutrition and reproduction as ends. The exercise of these activities in an unhindered way is therefore experienced as pleasant.³⁴ Meanwhile, such activities as contemplation or accepting honors do not present themselves as objects of appetitive attraction. Our acquired dispositions, meanwhile, have the unimpeded exercise of the virtues as their end. They are ordered toward those activities producing psychic pleasures. The rational part represents touch-related activities as merely necessary. Were reason itself to endorse touch-related activities for their own sakes, as with self-indulgence, the agent in question would be “fonder of such pleasures than they deserve” (1119a20-1).

To illustrate what happens in the soul in the case of nutrition: the pleasurable attraction belongs to appetite. The judgment that eating is merely instrumental belongs to reason. And the

³³ Lorenz (2009) tells us that “of all the things that people are seen to lack control over, the pleasures of touch caused by ingesting nutriment and having sex are most clearly external to, because they are remotest from, who we truly are.” (p.100)

³⁴ See *Eudemian Ethics* 1.2, where Aristotle tell us that for animals, there is living well or badly, but not in the same sense as for human beings.

whole person experiences both simultaneously without contradiction because pleasure is not itself a judgment. This does not produce psychic conflict because the rational judgment concerns why the activity ought to be performed, whereas the pleasure concerns how the activity is affectively experienced. The subject of pleasure for both of these parts of the soul is the whole person.

Since a virtuous agent does not get things wrong about the worth of particular goods, it is not her rational but appetitive part that is attracted to and takes pleasure in touch-related activities.³⁵ For Aristotle tells us that “it is only incidentally that the processes restoring one to the natural state are pleasant; the activity in the case of the appetites belongs to one’s residual natural disposition” (1152b3-7). We want to suggest “residual natural dispositions” are those innate dispositions shared with other animals that are modified but not stamped out by habituation. Bodily activities are pleasant because of dispositions left over from our pre-habituated state.³⁶³⁷ Thus, the pleasures relating to touch-related activities are a kind of bonus, given that a virtuous agent would still need to occasionally pursue such activities even if no enjoyment accompanied them.

VIII. Making Room for Unqualified Incontinence

³⁵ Annas (1980) expresses a similar idea when she writes that bodily pleasures are “pleasures whose appeal is most independent of the agent’s conception of the good” (p.295).

³⁶ In the next section, we shall see that it is because human agents are disposed to be affected by certain non-*prohairesis* pleasures lying outside the rational or distinctively human part of the soul that ‘unqualified’ incontinence becomes possible.

³⁷ To say that dispositions are “left over” from our pre-habituated state is not to imply they have not in a way been molded by reason in the virtuous agent.

Having elucidated the structure of moderation and the differences between appetitive and rational pleasures, we can now explain why Aristotle limits ‘unqualified’ incontinence to bodily pleasures.

Consider a situation affording mutually exclusive possibilities of either giving money to a friend in need (acting rightly) or indulging in some inappropriate bodily pleasure. Our agent’s rational disposition regarding generosity is correct but she is disposed to be affected even more strongly by the bodily pleasure. And so, she sets off in pursuit of the bodily pleasure. Now, consider instead a situation affording mutually exclusive possibilities of either giving money to a friend in need (acting rightly) or accepting some inappropriate honor. Our second agent’s rational disposition regarding generosity is also correct but she is disposed to be affected even more strongly by the pleasure of the inappropriate honor. And so, she sets off in pursuit of honor.

In many structural respects, the situations are identical. Both involve conflict between two pleasures, one appropriate, the other inappropriate. In both, the agent is overcome by the inappropriate pleasure, causing her to act badly. Moreover, each agent was disposed to be affected as one should by the pleasure of the ethically correct action, but an even stronger affection prevented them from acting in accordance with it. Since virtue entails hitting the mean both with respect to affections and actions, neither agent is virtuous. Each errs towards excess given that each is open to affections beyond the ethically appropriate.

But an important difference exists between the inappropriate pleasures in the two situations. Intuitively, going wrong with respect to honor is valuational in a way that going wrong with respect to appetite is not. In Aristotelian terms, the first involves conflict between the acquired *prohairetic* pleasure of giving money and some innate bodily pleasure that ends up carrying the day, a case of appetite overpowering reason. But the conflict in the second situation

is between two *prohairetic* pleasures given that the pleasures of giving money and accepting honors are affections towards which we had to learn to become receptive. Here, reason is pitted against itself.

Because the offending disposition in the second situation is rational, its presence in some agent entails her rational part is not as it should be. Reason is what led her astray. But the presence of the offending disposition in the first situation, i.e. the disposition to be affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures, does not entail that its possessor suffers from some defect to her rational part.³⁸ In this case, appetite and not reason is not as it should be.

This leaves open the possibility of the existence of an agent whose rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures are as they should be and so match those of the virtuous agent, but who nevertheless fails to act as she should. Such an agent is not virtuous because the virtuous are not open to being affected by inappropriate pleasures. But nor will she be vicious, since vices are *prohairetic* whereas the disposition to be affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures is not. On the proposed account, it is to this kind of agent that the term “unqualifiedly incontinent” refers. Such an agent is “not bad without qualification, since the best in him, the fundamental starting point, remains healthy” (1151a25-6). The incontinent agent is not vicious (‘bad without qualification’) because reason (‘the best in him’) is as it should be (‘healthy’).³⁹

Though the incontinent “relate to the same things as the self-indulgent and the moderate, they do not relate to them in the same way; the difference lies in whether the agent acts from

³⁸ In subsequent sections, we will argue that such an agent does not suffer from a defect to her receptive dispositions but does suffer from a defect to her resistant dispositions.

³⁹ The claim that reason in the incontinent agent is as it should be is qualified in later sections.

decision or not” (1148a17-9).⁴⁰ Whereas the actions characteristic of moderation (e.g. resisting being affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures) and self-indulgence flow forth from an acquired *prohairetic* disposition, the actions characteristic of incontinence (i.e. being affected by and acting on some inappropriate bodily pleasure) flow forth from an innate non-*prohairetic* disposition belonging to the non-rational part.⁴¹ Moreover, Aristotle tells us the incontinent agent “is not a bad person, since what he decides on is decent; so he is half-bad” (1152a17-8). Her decisions or *prohairetic* dispositions are as they should be and recommend the ethically correct action even though she ultimately ends up acting badly.

What is essential about incontinence for Aristotle is that it involves (a) an agent being affected by some inappropriate pleasure that causes her to stray from the ethically correct action and (b) that agent’s rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures nevertheless matching those of the virtuous. Being affected by either non-rational or rational pleasures can lead an agent to act badly and satisfy condition (a). But the presence of inappropriate rational pleasures in an agent necessarily entails her rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures do not match those of the virtuous. Being led astray by rational pleasures is therefore not genuine incontinence because condition (b) is not satisfied. The two conditions can only be simultaneously satisfied by

⁴⁰ Unqualified incontinence is defined at the stage before bodily appetite has reshaped *prohairesis*. Once the rational dispositions themselves become corrupted, the agent ceases to be incontinent and becomes self-indulgent (*akolastos*).

⁴¹ It is perhaps possible to imagine that habituation itself might in some cases be the cause of some agent becoming appetitively incontinent, e.g. being spoiled by one’s parents. This possibility merits discussion beyond what we are able to provide in this chapter. We will only say that our view forces us to understand such cases as vices and not instances of unqualified incontinence given that the dispositions operative in such agents are acquired and therefore rational.

the presence of pleasures that exist alongside reason but are not integrated with it, i.e. by innate non-rational pleasures.

It is therefore possible to figure out which affections allow for the possibility of ‘unqualified’ incontinence by reflecting on the kinds of affections human agents are innately receptive towards or share with the brutes. For Aristotle, the only such affections are bodily pleasures, bodily pains, and temper (*thumos*). Since, for Aristotle, incontinence conceptually implies being led astray by the temptation of pleasure rather than the distress of pain, bodily pains can be left to one side.⁴² And so, the only genuine candidates for ‘unqualified’ incontinence are those involving bodily pleasure or temper, though Aristotle ultimately reserves the title ‘unqualified’ incontinence for bodily pleasure and treats incontinence concerning temper separately.⁴³

IX. ‘Qualified’ Incontinence as a Vice of Excess

Armed with an account of incontinence, we can now see how ‘qualified’ cases differ from the ‘unqualified’. Aristotle tells us that those excessively affected by ‘psychic’ pleasures (e.g. those relating to wealth or honor) “we do not call unqualifiedly unself-controlled... on the basis that they are different, and called un-self-controlled by virtue of resemblance” (1147b31-5). Since they are led astray by rational pleasures, the ‘qualifiedly’ incontinent differ from the

⁴² For Aristotle, an agent who acts badly as a result of avoiding pain rather than pursuing pleasure is not incontinent but suffers instead from softness (*malakia*).

⁴³ Though Aristotle in the end takes incontinence of temper to be ‘qualified’, one should not think its status is the same as that of the other ‘qualified’ forms. One clue is that his treatment of it in *EN* is separate from that of the other ‘qualified’ forms. Also, in the *Magna Moralia* (*MM*), we are told that “among the so-called incontinences with respect to other things [than appetite], that which is concerned with anger is the most blameworthy” (1202b10-3). The exact difference between incontinence of temper and appetite is discussed in a subsequent section.

‘unqualified’ in that their rational part fails to match that of the virtuous. Since such matching is essential for ‘unqualified’ incontinence, incontinence with respect to a psychic pleasure cannot count as ‘unqualified’. The name ‘incontinent’ is given to agents who excessively pursue psychic pleasures only by virtue of a resemblance they bear to the ‘unqualifiedly’ incontinent, namely that both satisfy condition (a) described in the last section.

But if ‘qualified’ incontinence is only incontinence in virtue of resemblance, what is its status? Any disposition relating to psychic pleasures is *prohairetic* because it must be acquired. A *prohairetic* disposition is a virtue if it is receptive to the appropriate pleasures and closed to the inappropriate ones, i.e. if it lies between excess and deficiency. If it fails to let in all appropriate pleasures, it will be a vice of deficiency. And if it lets in inappropriate pleasures, it will be a vice of excess.

A ‘qualifiedly’ incontinent agent is receptive to an inappropriate pleasure, one to which a virtuous agent would be closed. So, she cannot be virtuous; her disposition errs rather towards excess. Given this disposition is *prohairetic*, we can understand it as a vice of excess.⁴⁴ Whereas a virtuous agent gets things right with respect to both affections and actions, the ‘qualifiedly’ incontinent characteristically gets things right with respect to neither affections (since she is

⁴⁴ At *ENVII.4*, Aristotle does say that qualified forms of incontinence are not in fact forms of badness. This section stands in tension with our proposed understanding of qualified forms of incontinence as vices. We will not attempt to resolve the tension within the limits of the present chapter.

receptive to inappropriate pleasures) nor actions (since her affection leads her to act inappropriately).⁴⁵⁴⁶

X. Incontinence with respect to Temper

Since Aristotle takes both bodily pleasures and temper to be affections towards which we are innately receptive, the mere presence of inappropriate bodily temptation does not itself imply a defective *prohairesis* disposition, whereas receptivity to inappropriate psychic pleasures does. Still, Aristotle does not think temper and bodily pleasures are on equal footing when it comes to being incontinence in the most ‘unqualified’ sense. In Book VII, he says the following about incontinence of temper:

“Let us then observe the fact that lack of self-control with regard to temper is less shameful than the form relating to the appetites. For one’s temper in such cases seems to hear what reason says, but to mishear it, like hasty servants who run out of the room before they have heard everything being said to them and then fail to carry out the instruction, and as dogs bark at just a sound, before discovering if it’s a friend who’s there; just so a hot and quick nature means that temper hears—but does not hear the order, before rushing to vengeance... So temper follows reason in a way, but appetite does not. In that case not being able to control it is the more shameful, in so far as the person behaving uncontrolledly with regard to temper is in a way giving in to reason, whereas the other sort is giving in to appetite and not to reason.” (1149a25-b4)

For Aristotle, both appetite and temper belong to the non-rational but “rational in a way” part of the soul. We innately possess the capacities to be affected by appetite and temper but come to be disposed as we should in relation to them through habituation. Becoming so disposed involves

⁴⁵ One interesting consequence is that certain forms of vice (but not self-indulgence) will be ethically less bad for Aristotle than being incontinent with respect to bodily pleasures since he makes it clear that he takes ‘unqualified’ incontinence to be a worse thing than ‘qualified’ incontinence (see 1148a1-5 and *EE* 1231a24). In fact, as a general rule, Aristotle considers those blameworthy dispositions that make us behave more like animals (e.g. ‘unqualified’ incontinence, self-indulgence) as being worse than those blameworthy dispositions that make us behave badly, but in distinctively human ways.

⁴⁶ According to Lear (1988), “it is on account of pleasure and pain that, Aristotle says, men act badly. However, the pleasures of a bad man are badly distributed. For the virtues are those states of character which contribute to our flourishing as human beings. So, in acting badly we are literally acting against our nature: we are acting so as to diminish our chances of living fully.” (p.169)

coming to resist inappropriate affections while remaining receptive to appropriate ones. A feature shared by both sorts of incontinent agents is that both have failed to acquire a disposition of this kind. Yet incontinence of temper is less shameful because temper ‘follows reason’ in some way that appetite does not.⁴⁷ As a result, the agent who acts incontinently because of temper is in a sense ‘giving in to reason’ whereas the other is not. How is this to be understood?

Aristotle’s comparison of the temper of the incontinent to a ‘hasty servant’ is a clue. If the temper of such an agent is a ‘hasty’ servant of reason, that of the virtuous will be a good and obedient servant. That is, temper in the virtuous will serve the ends of reason. In discussing courage, Aristotle suggests an instance of temper doing this when he remarks that “brave men act for the sake of the noble, but temper (*thumos*) aids them” (1116b31-3) and that “the ‘courage’ that comes about through temper does seem to be the most natural form, and to be courage once the factors of decision and the end for the sake of which have been added” (1117a4-7).

Aristotle seems to have the following picture in mind. Temper is an affection we are innately disposed to feel in certain distressing and dangerous situations. Its characteristic tendency is to retaliate against or confront the perceived source of injury. As it happens, there are situations where the action temper typically inclines us to perform coincides with the ethically correct action. For instance, the instantiation of courage sometimes requires charging the enemy. Since enemy soldiers are a source of distress, agents in such situations are affected by temper. But that means there are situations where human agents are already naturally disposed to perform what amounts to the correct action, e.g. charging the enemy. This is the result of some affinity

⁴⁷ According to Broadie (1991), “Aristotle ranks incontinence in this respect alongside those other [qualified] forms because, like Plato, he sees anger as a distinctively human function: it is our emotional response to what we take to be unwarranted assault.” (p.269)

between reason and temper that makes it possible for the rational part to use temper for its own purposes. In other words, it is sometimes the case that the positive manifestation of temper amounts to the paradigmatic instantiation of virtue.

The chief difference then between temper and appetite is that whereas temper can sometimes be integrated into paradigmatic virtuous action (being similar to ‘psychic’ pleasures in this respect), appetite can accompany virtuous action but never constitutes the source of its virtuous character.⁴⁸ An appetite will either be inappropriate or appropriate. If inappropriate, the agent will not be virtuous since virtue entails resisting being affected by inappropriate appetites. But even if appropriate, the action will not be a paradigmatic instantiation of virtue. For it is accidental to the nature of appetites that they happen to conform to what reason demands. Thus, appetite does not itself constitute paradigmatic virtue, whereas temper can sometimes be recruited into paradigmatic virtuous action.⁴⁹ We see that reason relates differently to appetite and temper. Appetite is something reason regulates lest it obstruct virtuous action, whereas reason can sometimes positively enlist temper in carrying paradigmatically virtuous action into effect.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ According to Tieleman (2009), “irascibility, being impulsive, typically excludes plotting, operating as it does in a transparent way. So it is not unjust. Appetite, by contrast, is pictured as a natural schemer, and hence unjust.” (p.179) This is another important way in which temper differs from appetite.

⁴⁹ See *MM* 1202b24-8: “this [incontinence with respect to appetites] differs from the former [incontinence of temper] owing to the injunction of reason to abstain, which it nevertheless acts against; for which reason it is more blameworthy than incontinence due to anger”.

⁵⁰ Lorenz (2006) notes that “since spirit follows reason in a way, whereas appetite does not, the person who is overcome by anger is, in a way, defeated by reason, whereas the person who is overcome by appetite is defeated simply by appetite, and not by reason.” (p.191) We are in agreement with Lorenz on these points.

The point can be put differently. Bodily pleasures are useful in maintaining life at the biological level, which is in turn useful for living a distinctively human life in accord with the virtues. But temper is more immediately useful to the execution of particular paradigmatically virtuous actions. This suggests what reason positively employs in virtuous activity is closer to virtue than what reason merely tolerates as necessary. Temper functionally resembles the dispositions associated with psychic pleasures because all remain present in a virtuous agent for the sake of distinctively human ends. Appetite, on the other hand, remains primarily because human beings are embodied animals, even though virtue regulates and perfects its exercise. Going to excess with respect to temper is therefore in one sense akin to going wrong in a distinctively human way even though temper is an innate disposition. An incontinent agent who succumbs to appetite, meanwhile, goes wrong not in a distinctively human way but by succumbing to the animal aspect of her nature considered independently of rational governance, something Aristotle regards as shameful.

Further, psychic pleasures arise from acquired *prohairetic* dispositions, whereas temper is not itself *prohairetic* but becomes instrumentally rational insofar as reason recruits an innate affection for virtuous action. Thus, on the proposed interpretation, incontinence regarding temper occupies an intermediate position between genuine incontinence and incontinence with respect to psychic pleasures.

PART TWO

XI. Incontinence and Moderation

To summarize the account arrived at thus far, an act for Aristotle is an instance of unqualified incontinence if it involves (a) an agent straying from the ethically correct action as a result of being affected by some inappropriate pleasure and (b) that agent's dispositions towards

psychic pleasures matching those of the virtuous agent.⁵¹ On the proposed interpretation, since every acquired disposition concerning psychic pleasures belongs to the rational part and is therefore *prohairetic*, the disposition to be affected by an inappropriate pleasure must be non-rational if condition (b) is to be satisfied. This leaves bodily pleasure as the paradigmatic case of unqualified incontinence, while temper occupies the intermediate position discussed in the previous section.

According to Aristotle, Socrates denied the existence of incontinence because he denied the practical knowledge of the virtuous could be overpowered by inappropriate affections.⁵² This is important because the investigations into incontinence undertaken both by Socrates and Aristotle are not (merely) for their own sakes but (also) in the service of determining whether it is possible for a possessor of practical knowledge, a virtuous agent, to act in a way she should not as a result of her practical knowledge being “overpowered” and “dragged about like a slave” by some inappropriate affection (1147b15). On the proposed interpretation, the unqualifiedly incontinent is introduced as somebody whose rational parts with respect to psychic pleasures matches that of the virtuous but who nevertheless fails to act as she should because of the presence of an inappropriate affection. Her existence is meant to serve as a challenge to any thesis maintaining the impossibility of a virtuous agent acting badly. Socrates denied the existence of genuine incontinence because acknowledging it would appear to undermine that

⁵¹ Although matching the virtuous in rational dispositions with respect to rational pleasures is necessary, Aristotle will argue that this does not yet amount to possessing full practical knowledge.

⁵² Lear (1988) argues that Socrates made “a conceptual argument designed to show that we cannot make sense of a man's knowingly choosing a course of action when he considers an alternative action both available to him and better for him. For if he genuinely considered an alternative action to be better, how could we explain his not doing it? Thus, Socrates concluded, a bad act must be clone in ignorance, under the false belief that it is for the best.” (p.175)

thesis. But Aristotle thinks this forces Socrates “to say something at odds with what patently appears to be the case” (1145b28).

Aristotle's central problem with regard to incontinence can be put this way: Is it possible to affirm the existence of incontinence and yet maintain the thesis that the practical knowledge possessed by the virtuous cannot be overpowered by inappropriate affections? And so, Aristotle's aims turn out to be (at least) twofold in his discussion of incontinence. He first seeks to establish the existence (and delimit the range) of those cases that do in fact appear to present a challenge to the thesis regarding practical knowledge. He then seeks to demonstrate that such cases do not amount to having (full) practical knowledge. It is clear that by the end of Book VII, Aristotle takes himself to have satisfied both aims. And so, an interpretation of his notion of incontinence also ought to be able to satisfy them. So far, we have been concerned mostly with the first of these aims. The next section turns to Aristotle's treatment of practical knowledge, explaining how the proposed account allows him simultaneously to preserve incontinence while denying that full practical knowledge is ever genuinely overpowered.

XII. Incontinence and Knowledge

At *EN* VII.10, Aristotle tells us “nor is it possible for the same person at the same time to be wise and un-self-controlled; for one has been shown to be excellent in character at the same time as one is wise” (1152a6-8). Ethical virtue and incontinence cannot be simultaneously present within a single agent because “one is not wise merely by virtue of having knowledge, but also by being the sort of person to act on one's knowledge” (1152a9–11). Here, Aristotle is making a distinction between the mere possession of knowledge and its active exercise. The virtuous agent possesses some disposition permitting her to actively exercise her practical knowledge in situations also affording some ethically inappropriate bodily pleasure. This

disposition is lacking in the incontinent, and so despite the fact that the practical knowledge associated with her rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures matches that of the virtuous, she is unable to exercise it and merely has it potentially.

This disposition must be an acquired rational disposition given Aristotle thinks it is an acquired constituent of ethical virtue.⁵³ In fact, this is the disposition partly constitutive of moderation, namely to resist being affected by inappropriate bodily pleasures. On the proposed interpretation, it functions by preventing such pleasures from interfering with a virtuous agent's dispositions towards psychic pleasures, thereby allowing the latter to be exercised.⁵⁴ Since it is acquired, it belongs to the rational part. And since it is a constituent of virtue, it is a disposition that belongs to practical knowledge. The incontinent lacks this disposition and therefore lacks the practical competence characteristic of the virtuous. This makes it possible for Aristotle to maintain the knowledge constitutive of ethical virtue is not the kind of thing that can be overpowered by inappropriate affections while also acknowledging the existence of incontinence.

What the incontinent lacks is a disposition not to be affected by improper innate bodily pleasures rather than a disposition having to do with psychic pleasures. One can thereby maintain that in a situation affording incontinence, the incontinent's rational dispositions concerning

⁵³ McConnell (1975) also maintains that the incontinent person lacks an acquired disposition: "The implication is that even if rational principle has the correct end in mind, it is at least possible that the failure to be properly habituated can cause an agent to fail to be virtuous or do what he ought to do" (p.12). Further, he holds that the incontinent person "has not properly trained himself so that he can overcome certain temptations" (p.15).

⁵⁴ Aristotle hints at this "protective" role of the disposition constituting moderation when he remarks: "That is why we give *sophrosune* [moderation] its name, as something *sozei ten phronesin* [preserves wisdom]. And it does preserve the sort of belief in question" (1140b12-14).

psychic pleasures exactly match those of the virtuous. At the same time, when it comes to practical competence, the incontinent agent is relevantly different since she lacks the right resistant disposition with respect to appetites. It turns out, then, that the incontinent suffers from a cognitive defect absent in the virtuous agent.⁵⁵ Incontinence is therefore a kind of ignorance, thus recovering an important Socratic insight (1145b28).⁵⁶ But it is a cognitive defect that does not concern the agent's evaluation of psychic goods.

XIII. Incontinence as an Essentially Ethical Phenomenon

Because of the way we take Aristotle to have characterized incontinence, the 'issue' or 'puzzle' of incontinence does not generate an action-theoretic problem over and above its ethical one. By this, we mean incontinence is an essentially ethical phenomenon. Once abstracted from ethics, no distinctive action-theoretic puzzle remains. Any attempt to characterize what is distinctive about incontinence without recourse to ethical concepts fails to capture the specifically Aristotelian phenomenon. For on our proposed account, to abstract away from the moral domain and to consider incontinence solely at the level of action is to reduce it to an ordinary kind of practical conflict between two mutually exclusive pleasures where the stronger carries the day. Such an account would fail to capture what is distinctive about Aristotle's notion of incontinence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ McDowell (1998) rejects the idea that the incontinent possesses the very same practical knowledge as the virtuous at the moment of action. According to McDowell, "the match with the practical thinking of a practically wise person has to be imperfect" (p.47). The incontinent's perception of the situation is partially "clouded" (p.54).

⁵⁶ According to Robinson (1977), "it does not happen that a man sets himself to consider, in its totality and all its parts, an argument forbidding him to do a certain act, while at the same time he yields to a strong desire and does as the desire wishes." (p.85)

⁵⁷ One can of course deny the strong form of the guise of the good doctrine that we have been supposing (and implicitly attributing to Aristotle) throughout this paper. That is, one might claim

On our proposed view, what is special about incontinence as opposed to standard cases of conflict is that the incontinent agent's dispositions concerning psychic pleasures match those of the virtuous. Aristotle's own conception of incontinence contains no additional action-theoretic puzzle once its ethical dimension is abstracted from. Incontinence falls short only in relation to ethical excellence. Davidson writes in "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?" that when we say the incontinent is somebody who acts against his better judgment, the phrase "better judgment" might mean either a judgment the agent took to be the better thing to do at the time of acting or simply that the judgment is better in that it leads to the ethically correct action.⁵⁸ Our proposed account understands the phrase only in the second way because what distinguishes the incontinent is not her occurrent practical judgment but the relation her standing dispositions bear to those of the virtuous. The action performed by the incontinent is motivationally ordinary *qua* action; what makes it akratic is the ethical profile of the standing dispositions behind it.

Understood thus, incontinence fails to stand as a challenge to the "guise of the good" doctrine even in its strongest form, namely that insofar as an agent acts intentionally, she acts in light of what she takes to be the better or best thing to do. For, on the proposed interpretation, at the time of acting incontinently, she takes the inappropriate bodily pleasure to be the better or best thing to pursue, even if she will later likely regret it. More generally, the existence of incontinence does not promote any particular theory of the motivation of action over another, at least no more than the existence of any standard case of conflict between mutually exclusive

that incontinent action is a counterexample to the strong form of the doctrine. In doing so, one makes room for a possibility that is neither a standard case of conflict nor our characterization of incontinence. We will not address this possibility in this paper.

⁵⁸ Davidson (1970).

pleasures. If it did threaten the “guise of the good” doctrine, a thesis to which Aristotle is clearly committed, one would expect some indication that he regarded incontinence as threatening the doctrine. This omission is unsurprising because, on our proposed account, Aristotle has no reason to mention the “guise of the good” doctrine; the existence of incontinence does not constitute evidence for or against it.⁵⁹

XIV. Ways of “Having Knowledge”

If the preceding account is correct, it becomes possible to make straightforward sense of much of what Aristotle says about the ways of “knowing” or “having knowledge” in VII.3.⁶⁰ We are told “there are two ways in which we say someone knows—for both the person who has but is not using it and the one using it are said to know” (1146b32-33). Here, the distinction is between the active exercise of knowledge and its mere possession in unexercised form. One can be said to know either of these ways. Aristotle then goes on to say the situation of the incontinent would be “astonishing” only if we meant having knowledge in the first way, namely the incontinent exercises her knowledge but nevertheless acts inappropriately (1146b35-36). On the present interpretation, Aristotle's remarks are best understood as implying that when the

⁵⁹ We believe the failure to appreciate these points regarding the essentially ethical nature of incontinence is what has made it so difficult for attempts to get clear on Aristotle's actual account.

⁶⁰ This essay will not address the things Aristotle says about incontinence while relating it to the practical syllogism, not because our account is unable to make sense of them but because the Aristotelian practical syllogism is a difficult thing to properly understand, even more so than incontinence. Using the more difficult thing to shed light on the lesser is unlikely to be particularly illuminating.

More importantly, we do not think the practical syllogism is necessary in order for Aristotle to cope with the ‘problem’ of incontinence. As Zingano (2007) maintains, “Aristotle's strategy when he refers to the practical syllogism does not aim at the presentation of his own solution (which, indeed, works with the strength of an appetite that defeats what the agent thinks); on the contrary, it aims at the preservation of the Socratic position...” (p.183)

incontinent is said to have knowledge at the time of acting incontinently, it is in the second way. She only possesses knowledge in its unexercised form. For present purposes, only Aristotle's distinction between possessing and exercising knowledge is relevant.

Aristotle continues with a further distinction between ways of possessing unexercised knowledge. An agent is sometimes said to possess such knowledge even though she is at the time being prevented from and therefore incapable of exercising it.⁶¹ Of such an agent, one can say that she "both has knowledge in a way and does not have it, as with someone asleep, raving, or drunk" (1147a13-15).⁶² She has knowledge in that her capacity has not been destroyed but she also lacks it in that she is currently unable to exercise it. The consumption of alcohol or the onset of sleep may prevent an agent from exercising her ability to walk in a straight line but will not destroy it. Once no longer so affected, she will once again be able to exercise her ability without having to relearn it. Aristotle suggests that this is the condition of the incontinent agent's knowledge. As a result of the presence of "various affective states: occurrences of temper,

⁶¹ According to Lear (1988), Aristotle "distinguishes various senses in which one can have knowledge or understanding: there is the sense in which one possesses the knowledge though one is not at present exercising it, and the sense in which one is actively contemplating. Aristotle accepts that a man actively exercising his knowledge could not act incontinently with respect to it, so he concentrates on those cases in which a man may possess the knowledge but somehow be prevented from exercising it. (p.181)

For Destree (2007), "knowledge in potentia is a completely inactive knowledge, and even incapable of being activated, depending on the state in which the agent finds himself (sleep, madness or drunkenness), preventing the agent from activating the knowledge he nonetheless possesses." (p.147)

⁶² Pickave and Whiting (2008) maintain that the akratic "is in a temporary condition that resembles sleep in that it prevents her from moving at will from first to second actuality knowledge. So, in so far as having knowledge involves the ability to actualize it at will, there is an important sense in which, when she is in this condition, she does not have the knowledge: that is why Aristotle says she both 'has it in a way and does not have it'." (p.343) It is this kind of 'ignorance' that we take the akratic to be afflicted with when she acts incontinently.

appetite for sex, and some things like this” (1147a15-16), the exercise of her knowledge is prevented.⁶³

Given the account of incontinence defended in the previous section, Aristotle's explanation can be understood as involving bodily pleasure temporarily preventing the knowledge of the right thing to do from being exercised but not destroying it.⁶⁴ The agent can be said to have knowledge in a way because she possesses it without exercising it. But she can also be said not to have it in the sense that she is presently unable to exercise it.⁶⁵ Thus, the apparent paradox surrounding the incontinent's knowledge disappears once possession is distinguished from exercise.

XV. Conclusion

The preceding interpretation has argued that Aristotle's account of incontinence is best understood by distinguishing between two kinds of pleasure, bodily and psychic, and the corresponding rational dispositions directed toward them. The incontinent agent's rational dispositions concerning psychic pleasures match those of the virtuous agent. What distinguishes the incontinent from the virtuous is not her orientation toward psychic goods but her lack of the

⁶³ According to Destree (2007), “ignorance is only a description of the non-use of a practical knowledge. The cause of that non-use or that ignorance is of course *epithumia*, and the cause of that *epithumia*, which manages to reverse sensible knowledge is in turn the akratic's bad habits.” (p.194) We are in full agreement with Destree on this point.

⁶⁴ Destree (2007) maintains that “that which is the cause of the movement of the akratic is without doubt the presence of the *epithumia* which ‘leads’ the agent to eat the cake, which Aristotle is explaining when he adds that it is the *epithumia* in fact which is ‘capable of setting in movement any of the parts of our bodies’. We are in agreement the appetite is the cause of the movement of the incontinent towards the bad end.

⁶⁵ According to Broadie (1991), “Aristotle never questions Socrates' claim that the incontinent acts in ignorance but seeks only to rebut the Socratic implication that knowledge is wholly lacking.” (p.289) This agrees with our position.

acquired rational disposition partly constitutive of moderation, namely the disposition to resist inappropriate bodily pleasures. Incontinence is therefore not explained by ignorance concerning the good, nor by a defect in the agent's orientation toward ethical goods, but by the temporary prevention of the exercise of the rational dispositions through which practical knowledge is realized.

This interpretation explains why Aristotle denies that ethical virtue and incontinence can coexist while nevertheless allowing the incontinent to retain the same rational orientation toward psychic pleasures as the virtuous. More generally, the proposed interpretation shows that incontinence introduces no additional action-theoretic puzzle beyond those already present in ordinary practical conflict between competing pleasures. Once its ethical dimension is abstracted away, it reduces to the familiar psychological pattern of one disposition temporarily preventing another from being exercised. What makes incontinence distinctive is therefore not the structure of the action itself but the ethical standing of the agent whose action it is. Aristotle's interest lies not in identifying a novel form of agency but in explaining why an agent whose rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures are otherwise aligned with those of the virtuous nevertheless fails to act well.

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Chapter II. The Asymmetry of the Aristotelian Vices and Virtues

Introduction

Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean holds that each ethical virtue lies between two opposed vices, one of excess and one of deficiency.⁶⁶ Less frequently noticed is Aristotle's further claim that these opposing vices are often asymmetrical.⁶⁷ Cowardice is more opposed to courage than rashness, self-indulgence more opposed to temperance than insensibility, meanness more opposed to liberality than prodigality, and so on. Aristotle explains this asymmetry in two ways. One appeals to our own psychological tendencies: the vice toward which we are naturally more inclined is taken to be more opposed to virtue. The other is drawn from the thing itself: one vice is objectively nearer to and more like the virtue than its opposite. While Aristotle states both explanations, he says remarkably little about why one vice should resemble the virtue more closely than the other.

This chapter investigates that neglected objective explanation. We argue that the most straightforward interpretation of Aristotle's claim of asymmetry proves inadequate once the full range of the virtuous person's characteristic activities is taken into account. If the virtues are analyzed in terms of the full range of actions characteristic of the virtuous person, each vice resembles one aspect of the virtue and differs from another. The apparent asymmetry generated by this interpretation collapses. Aristotle's claim that one vice is objectively more like the virtue than the other cannot be sustained on this straightforward reading.

⁶⁶ Throughout this chapter, we use the Barnes translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Rhetoric*.

⁶⁷ The asymmetry between many of the Aristotelian vices has been largely understudied. Most historical and modern commentators have little to say on the topic. This chapter hopes to, in some small way, rectify the neglect of this topic.

We then propose an alternative account that preserves Aristotle's insight. We argue that not every action performed by the virtuous person is equally constitutive of the virtue. Some actions are genuine but merely constitutive instantiations of the virtue, whereas others are manifestations of the virtue and are therefore essentially constitutive of its identity. We later suggest that these manifestations are characteristically accompanied by the rational ethical pleasures proper to the virtue. We also argue that one vice resembles what is essentially constitutive of the virtue whereas the opposing vice resembles only what is merely constitutive of it. This account not only vindicates Aristotle's objective explanation but also explains why his objective and subjective explanations systematically coincide.

The discussion proceeds as follows. We first introduce the distinctions needed for the argument and survey Aristotle's claims concerning the asymmetry of the vices. We then examine and reject the most straightforward interpretation of Aristotle's objective explanation. Finally, we develop a revised account grounded in the distinction between manifestations and mere instantiations of virtue and suggest that the rational pleasures proper to the virtues explain both the internal asymmetry within virtue and the asymmetry between the opposing vices.

I. Preliminary Distinctions and Qualifications

We begin with some preliminary distinctions and qualifications. These will facilitate our main discussion by allowing us to focus on the relevant issues.

Affections or passions (*pathe*) are crucial to a full understanding of an Aristotelian ethical virtue given we are told ethical virtue is a disposition lying in a mean with respect to both affections and actions. It is crucial to courage that it has to do with fear and boldness and it is crucial to liberality that it involves the proper pleasures of giving money. But we will initially limit our discussion to actions only and ignore affections for the sake of simplicity. Although

affections are essential to a complete account, the present structural point can initially be developed solely in terms of actions.⁶⁸ Only in the final sections of the chapter will we engage in a discussion of the pleasures of virtuous and vicious activities as they bear on our topic.

Moving on, Aristotle allows for mixed cases of vice. One can be both rash and cowardly or both mean and profligate. He tells us that “the mean is more opposed to the extremes than these to one another, because the mean is found with neither, but the extremes often with one another, and sometimes the same people are at once cowardly and foolhardy, or lavish in some ways, illiberal in others...” (*EE* 1234a34-b3). We are even told some mixed cases of vice are more common than pure cases. For instance, most rash people “are a mixture of rashness and cowardice” (*EN* 1115b32).⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Aristotle's discussion presupposes idealized cases in

⁶⁸ Broadie (1991) tells us that “Aristotle, of course, treats the virtues as dispositions to act and behave, but he is equally interested in them as dispositions to feel appropriately. Partly this is because feeling often directly issues in action, which is then the focus of judgments of appropriateness. But Aristotle is also concerned with appropriate and inappropriate feeling on its own account. In this he would surely be right, since feeling and lack of feeling manifest character no less than action and failure to act. It would be absurd to draw the boundaries of the concept of morally significant response so narrowly that our reactions to the conduct of agents beyond our control, or our feelings about some course of action which we had to decide not to take, say nothing about us morally. This carries an important implication concerning the ethical value of action. Let us roughly characterise the difference between an action and a “mere” feeling by stating that action essentially makes changes in the external world, some of them intended by the agent. Now if feelings have ethical significance, it would seem that actions are of ethical significance not because of their external effects, but because of the difference it makes regarding the agent that he so acts. The action, like the feeling, matters as expressing him in response to his situation, and to be someone who responds appropriately is per se desirable, whether the response be in action, feeling or thought.” (p.76)

Since we are only temporarily abstracting from passions for a limited purpose, namely to get clear on the asymmetry that exists within virtues and between vices, we are confident we are not deforming Aristotle's notions of virtue and vice.

⁶⁹ Curzer (2012) tells us that “Aristotle maintains that it is possible to have both of the vices associated with a virtue at once by being disposed to go to excess with respect to some parameters while being deficient with respect to others.” (p.44)

which one vice predominates. This chapter puts aside the mixed cases and focuses only on the pure cases to better discern the differences between two fully opposed vices.

Now, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, we are told the less opposed of two vices to virtue and the corresponding virtue are “concerned with the same things, and up to a certain point contiguous; thus the brave man and the foolhardy man are alike ready to face danger” (1232a26-27). The same things with which both agents are concerned can be illustrated by the sphere of courage. To make Aristotle's comparison precise, we require a more abstract description of the actions common to virtue and vice. Both of the aforementioned agents are alike up to a certain point in that they are ready to face danger. We take ‘facing danger’ to be what we shall term a *neutral action-type*, in that it is not normatively loaded like adultery.⁷⁰⁷¹ It can be used to describe both virtuous and vicious activity.⁷² The negation of the neutral-action type, ‘not facing danger’, can also describe both virtuous and vicious activity and is thus itself a neutral-action type.⁷³ A neutral action-type abstracts from whether the action is performed rightly or wrongly and therefore can

⁷⁰ For the purpose of simplicity, we are assuming that every Aristotelian ethical virtue is organized around a single action-type (and its negation). We introduce neutral action-types merely as heuristic abstractions for describing the activities common to virtue and vice. Nothing substantive about Aristotle's psychology depends upon this terminology.

⁷¹ According to Crisp (2006), “some virtues do not involve any special feeling: for example, the central virtue of generosity (NE IV.1), the sphere of which is the giving and taking of money. What is essential is that there is some neutrally describable feeling and/or action, which can be felt or performed at the right time, toward the right person, and so on. It is the fact that these feelings and actions are neutrally describable that makes the doctrine of the mean possible, since each can then feature in a description of either the virtue or a vice” (p.159-160). We are in agreement with Crisp on this point.

⁷² Davidson (1980), in “The Individuation of Events”, takes particular actions to fall under many descriptions. A particular action can instantiate several action descriptions simultaneously. Similarly, we allow a particular bodily movement to be describable either as a neutral-action type (e.g. “facing danger”) or normatively (e.g. “acting courageously”, “acting rashly”).

⁷³ Again, for the purpose of simplicity, we are assuming that omissions are included in neutral action-types.

be instantiated both virtuously and viciously. It is a heuristic framework adequate for the virtues discussed rather than an exhaustive analysis of every Aristotelian virtue.

We propose that a neutral action-type and its negation bring an Aristotelian virtue and its two corresponding vices into the same sphere.⁷⁴ The neutral action-type is instantiated by the virtuous person in some situations and its negation is instantiated by her in other situations. Moreover, the neutral action-type is instantiated by one of the vicious persons in certain situations whereas its negation is instantiated by the other vicious person in certain situations. For instance, facing danger is instantiated by the courageous person in some situations and not facing danger is instantiated by her in other situations. Facing danger in certain situations is instantiated by the rash person and not facing danger in certain situations is instantiated by the coward.

These neutral-action types serve as the characteristic activities of the virtues and vices once we specify the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their instantiations within the relevant situations.⁷⁵ A virtuous agent instantiates the neutral-action type in all situations where instantiation is appropriate and instantiates its negation in all situations where not instantiating is appropriate. For the purposes of this chapter, we will treat an Aristotelian virtue as having two characteristic activities, namely some neutral-action type performed in the appropriate situations and its negation performed in the appropriate situations. Both are naturally included within an Aristotelian account of the virtue. For instance, the neutral-action types of facing danger when

⁷⁴ By “sphere”, we have in mind the domain of action or passion of a virtue and its vices.

⁷⁵ Broadie (1991) says of the virtuous person that “his virtuous acts...express his moral nature, which is metaphysically anxious (so to speak) to be expressed in action” (p.91).

appropriate and not facing danger when appropriate constitute the characteristic activities of courage.⁷⁶

One vicious agent, meanwhile, will instantiate the neutral-action type in certain situations where doing so is inappropriate. This constitutes the defining characteristic activity of the vice. The other vicious agent will instantiate the negation of the neutral-action type in certain situations where doing so is inappropriate. This constitutes the defining characteristic activity of the other vice. For instance, the rash person will face danger in certain situations where doing so is inappropriate and this constitutes the defining characteristic activity of the vice. The coward will not face danger in certain situations where not facing is inappropriate and this constitutes the defining characteristic activity of the vice. Thus, we see that the situations that constitute the sphere of a virtue will be of two kinds, depending on which characteristic activity is called for. For instance, the situations that constitute the sphere of courage will either call for facing danger or not facing danger.

II. The Asymmetry of the Vices

Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean maintains that each ethical virtue is opposed by two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency. For instance, courage is opposed by cowardice (deficiency) and rashness (excess) and temperance is opposed by insensateness (deficiency) and self-indulgence (excess).

⁷⁶ According to Curzer (2012), for a virtue to be compatible with the Doctrine of the Mean, "it must include dispositions to perform characteristic actions and feel characteristic passions medially in certain situations." (p.131) This observation is consistent with our understanding of virtues as involving characteristic activities.

Taken by itself, the Doctrine of the Mean is silent with respect to whether one vice is more opposed to its corresponding virtue than the other vice or whether the two vices are equally opposed. On this interpretation, we will assume that one vice being more opposed to virtue than another vice is equivalent to it being a worse vice and also equivalent to it being further from the mean than the other vice. The assumption is based on the thought that if a vice is more opposed to virtue, the most natural explanation is that it is morally worse. Similarly, if a vice is further from the mean, the most natural explanation is that it is morally worse.

Shortly after introducing the Doctrine of the Mean, Aristotle informs us that “to the mean in some cases the deficiency, in some the excess is opposed; e.g. it is not rashness, which is an excess, but cowardice, which is a deficiency, that is more opposed to courage, and not insensibility, which is a deficiency, but self-indulgence, which is an excess, that is more opposed to temperance” (*EN* 1109a1-5). With some of the virtues, the excess vice is more opposed than the deficient vice while with others, things are the other way around. The deficient vice of cowardice is more opposed to courage than the excessive vice of rashness. And the excessive vice of self-indulgence is more opposed to temperance than the deficient vice of insensibility.

Is it true for all the virtues that one corresponding vice is more opposed than the other? Already, courage and temperance have been said to have this feature. With respect to liberality, Aristotle tells us “the man who is prodigal in this way is thought much better than the mean man both for the aforesaid reasons and because he benefits many while the other benefits no one, not even himself.” (*EN* 1121a19-29) This suggests the vice of deficiency, meanness, is worse than and so more opposed to liberality than prodigality. We are also told “it is natural that meanness is described as the contrary of liberality; for not only is it a greater evil than prodigality, but men err more often in this direction than in the way of prodigality as we have described it.” (*EN*

1122a14-16) Meanness is more contrary to liberality than prodigality because it is a greater evil and more common.

With respect to magnificence, we are not told one vice is worse. But if, putting differences aside, magnificence is structurally analogous to liberality since both concern the virtuous use of wealth, it seems that the person who does not spend enough is worse than the person who spends too much (tastelessly).

Turning to pride/magnanimity, Aristotle tells us “undue humility is more opposed to pride than vanity is; for it is both commoner and worse” (*EN* 1125b9-11). With respect to the nameless virtue concerned with modest honors, Aristotle says nothing with regards to one vice being worse. But again, if this virtue is structurally parallel to pride, differing from it only in the scale of honor, it seems the person who does not accept moderate honors when she ought to is worse than the person who accepts them when she should not.

With respect to anger, we are told that “to good temper we oppose the excess rather than the defect; for not only is it commoner (since revenge is the more human), but bad-tempered people are worse to live with” (*EN* 1126a29-31). That is, excessive anger is more opposed to virtue than deficient anger.

With respect to the virtue of friendliness, no claims are made as to whether obsequiousness or churlishness is the worse vice. With respect to truthfulness, we are told “both forms of untruthful man are culpable, and particularly the boastful man” (*EN* 1127a31-32). More directly, we are told “it is the boaster that seems to be opposed to the truthful man; for he is the worse character.” (*EN* 1127b31-32). While both vices are bad, the boaster is worse and so more

opposed to the virtue of truthfulness. As for the minor virtue of wit, we are not told one vice is worse. The same is true of justice.⁷⁷

Aristotle explicitly takes one vice to be worse in the cases of the vices of courage, temperance, liberality, pride, anger, and truthfulness. And he says nothing about the vices of magnificence, the nameless virtue concerning moderate honors, friendliness, wit, and justice. Thus, across most of the virtues he explicitly discusses, he maintains that one opposing vice is worse. How does Aristotle explain this asymmetry? He gives two kinds of explanation.

III. Aristotle's Reasons for Asymmetries in Vices

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains why one vice is more opposed to virtue than its opposing vice through two kinds of causes, one subjective and the other objective. He tells us one cause is:

“...drawn from the thing itself; for because one extreme is nearer and liker to the intermediate, we oppose not this but rather its contrary to the intermediate. E.g., since rashness is thought liker and nearer to courage, and cowardice more unlike, we oppose rather the latter to courage; for things that are further from the intermediate are thought more contrary to it. This, then, is one cause, drawn from the thing itself; another is drawn from ourselves; for the things to which we ourselves more naturally tend seem more contrary to the intermediate. For instance, we ourselves tend more naturally to pleasures, and hence are more easily carried away towards self-indulgence than towards insensibility. We describe as contrary to the mean, then, the states into which we are more inclined to lapse; and therefore self-indulgence, which is an excess is the more contrary to temperance” (*EN* 1109a1-19).

We are offered two explanations for why one vice is more opposed to virtue than the opposing vice. On the present interpretation, the first explanation treats one vice as more contrary because it is objectively less similar to virtue. The second explanation is that one vice seems more contrary because we are more naturally inclined toward it. The two explanations initially appear

⁷⁷ Of course, justice is somewhat peculiar with respect to the way in which it falls (or fails to fall) under a mean. And this fact may leave no room to make the point that one of the vices flanking it is worse than the opposed vice.

independent, but we later argue that they are closely connected. The remainder of this chapter concentrates on the objective explanation and returns to the subjective explanation only briefly.

IV. Objective Explanation: Similarity and Dissimilarity to Virtue

Aristotle's objective explanation appears to rest on the thought that the less opposed vice is, in some relevant respect, more like the corresponding virtue. Given the interpretation defended above, greater similarity explains why one vice is less contrary to virtue and less morally bad than its opposing vice. But greater similarity along what dimensions? Aristotle's thought seems to be that, for instance, the characteristic activity of the rash person is more similar to that of the courageous person than is the coward's. Since dispositions are individuated in part by their characteristic activities, similarity of characteristic activity provides *prima facie* evidence of similarity of disposition. The neutral action-types introduced above provide a way of specifying these characteristic activities without already assuming their moral status.

Suppose for the moment that the only characteristic activity of courage is facing danger when appropriate. The characteristic activity of the rash person is to face danger when inappropriate. The characteristic activity of the coward is to not face danger when not facing is inappropriate. Because both the rash and the courageous person share the same neutral action-type, namely facing danger, whereas the coward does not, rashness and courage more closely resemble one another than courage resembles cowardice. It is due to this lesser resemblance that cowardice is worse than rashness and more opposed to courage. On this straightforward reading, similarity consists in sharing the same neutral action-type with respect to their characteristic activities. The same reasoning that applies to courage also applies to temperance, liberality, pride, and so on.

For any given virtue, one vice shares the neutral action-type while the opposing vice instantiates its negation. And on the basis of this difference in similarity from virtue, one vice will be more opposed to virtue and one less opposed. The rash are less bad than cowards because they face danger just as the virtuous do (though they do not do this as they should). We contend that this is the *prima facie* similarity Aristotle has in mind when discussing the likeness and unlikeness of the vices and virtues with one another. Moreover, it is plausible that a vice that resembles virtue more closely would be less bad. After all, the virtues are superlatively good and those things that resemble virtue more are likely better than those that resemble it less. The straightforward interpretation presupposes that every characteristic activity contributes equally to determining resemblance to the virtue. But if that assumption is correct, the argument developed below will show that symmetry follows.

We want to claim that given what was said in our preliminary discussion of the characteristic activities of the virtues and vices, the vices are not asymmetrical with respect to their resemblance to virtue. The difficulty is that, as argued in Section I, Aristotelian virtues have two characteristic activities. Each vice resembles one characteristic activity of the virtue while failing to resemble the other. And so, the vices are symmetrical in their resemblance to virtue. And if so, resemblance provides no grounds for thinking one vice is worse.

To draw out the symmetry, we must notice that though the Aristotelian virtues involve engaging in their neutral action-type in all appropriate situations, they also involve not doing so in all inappropriate situations. For instance, it is part of courage to face danger in all appropriate situations. But it is also part of courage *not* to face danger when doing so would be inappropriate. A courageous person faces danger when she should but also avoids it when this is appropriate.

The rash will resemble the courageous in situations where facing danger is to be instantiated and will not resemble the courageous in situations where instantiation is possible but where facing danger is not to be instantiated. The coward, meanwhile, will not resemble the courageous in situations where facing danger is to be instantiated and will instead resemble the courageous in situations where instantiation is possible but where facing danger is not to be instantiated. It is true both the rash and courageous person face danger in certain situations and in this they resemble one another. But it is also true the cowardly and the courageous person will both not face danger in certain situations and in this they resemble one another.

The apparent asymmetry generated by the straightforward interpretation proves illusory. By focusing only on situations where engaging in the neutral action type is appropriate, we were able to see greater resemblance between one vice and the virtue than between the opposed vice and the virtue. But, as maintained in Section I, Aristotelian virtues crucially involve not engaging in the neutral action-type of the virtue in situations where doing so is inappropriate. And in this respect, the opposed vice resembles virtue more than the first vice.

In other words, we cannot accept this straightforward interpretation of Aristotle's words that one vice is more similar to virtue than its opposed vice, at least as things stand. Nevertheless, Aristotle can still be right that one vice is more similar to virtue than its opposite. The next section develops an account on which this asymmetry can be recovered.

V. Instantiations and Manifestations of Virtue

Symmetry arises only if every characteristic activity contributes equally to the identity of the virtue.⁷⁸ We now argue that this assumption is false. We first introduce a twofold distinction with respect to virtue. Firstly, there are what we are calling *mere instantiations* of virtue. These activities are entailed by virtue and we can also say of them that they are virtuous acts. But instantiations of virtue are *merely constitutive* in that their removal would not make the virtue in question stop being a virtue or being the virtue it is. Denying a mere instantiation the status of being a part of virtue would not be to fundamentally alter the account. For instance, denying that not facing danger when that is appropriate the status of being a part of courage would not be to fundamentally alter the account of courage.

Secondly, there are what we are calling *manifestations* of virtue. These acts are also entailed by virtue and are virtuous acts. In addition, manifestations are *essentially constitutive* of virtue in that they are parts whose removal would no longer make the virtue the virtue it is. Denying a manifestation the status of being a part of a virtue would be to fundamentally alter the account of the virtue. For instance, denying facing danger when doing so is appropriate the status of being a part of courage would be to fundamentally alter the account of courage. More generally, manifestations express the activity toward which the virtue is primarily ordered whereas mere instantiations are derivative constraints on that activity.

Every Aristotelian virtue has an essence that makes it the particular virtue it is. If courage, temperance, liberality, and the other virtues are genuine stable dispositions (*hexeis*), each must possess features that determine its essence. The activities of a virtue do not all

⁷⁸ Cooper (1986) maintains that, “it should be noted that Aristotle here refers to the state of character itself as a mean between two vices, on the ground that the actions and feelings that are *characteristic* of it are typically intermediate...” (p.102).

contribute equally to specifying that essence.⁷⁹ An activity is a manifestation of a virtue iff it directly expresses the essence that individuates the virtue.⁸⁰ If standing firm were not essential to courage, the resulting disposition would no longer be courage. An activity is a mere instantiation iff it follows from possessing the virtue but does not itself determine the virtue's essence. Such activities are genuine exercises of the virtue but are derivative exercises of an already specified disposition. The activity that directly expresses a virtue's essence contributes more to its identity than an activity that merely follows from possessing that disposition.

We gain defeasible evidence of the legitimacy of our distinction by the observation that we ordinarily identify virtues by their paradigmatic exercises. A soldier who repeatedly faces danger in battle for the right reasons is naturally recognized as exercising courage paradigmatically. But a soldier who repeatedly retreats from battle for the right reasons does not thereby naturally appear as instantiating courage paradigmatically. Facing danger is a manifestation of courage whereas retreat is a mere instantiation. We suggest that paradigmatic exercises are naturally taken to reveal a virtue because they typically express the essence of the virtue.

⁷⁹ According to Aquinas (1981), every virtue has a principal act, the act that best reveals the virtue. Other acts also proceed from the same habit, but they are secondary or consequent acts. They flow from the virtue without defining its nature. Thus, not every act issuing from a virtue is equally explanatory of what the virtue is.

⁸⁰ Hirji (2021) makes “a distinction between the “mere” exercise of virtue, and the full or complete exercise of virtue and that “only this full exercise that is constitutive of eudaimonia” and that “an action that fully expresses virtue aims at an end that is unqualifiedly good, while an action that merely exercises virtue does not” (p.1). Though she puts the distinction to different use than we do, Hirji provides an example of a view where one part of the exercise of virtue is metaphysically privileged over the other.

Giving money when one should is a manifestation of liberality since denying that it is a part of liberality would no longer make liberality a virtue. Not giving money when one should not is a mere instantiation of liberality since denying that it is a part of liberality would not make it that liberality is no longer a virtue. The same pattern applies across the virtues.

Now, we claimed Aristotelian virtue involves engaging in the characteristic activity of the virtue in all appropriate situations and not engaging in the characteristic activity of the virtue in all inappropriate situations. At the time, these two parts appeared symmetrical with respect to their resemblances to their corresponding vices. But now, we have identified a possible asymmetry in the parts of virtues themselves and this asymmetry can account for why one vice is more opposed to virtue than the other vice.

Each of the vices resemble one of the two parts of virtue to the same extent. In this respect, they are symmetrical. But what one of the vices resembles is essentially constitutive of virtue while what the other resembles is merely constitutive of virtue. Consequently, in resembling what is essentially constitutive of virtue, one vice resembles virtue more than the vice that resembles what is not essentially constitutive of virtue. This asymmetry helps explain why one vice is more opposed to virtue than the other. Being more like virtue by resembling what is a manifestation of virtue, the resembling vice is understood to be better than the opposed vice. As argued previously, Aristotle treats closer resemblance to virtue as evidence of lesser badness. We now propose this is the kind of resemblance between the vices and virtues Aristotle took to hold.

Aristotle, for his part, never maintains one part of a virtue is more constitutive of virtue than the other. He sometimes seems to put the two parts of virtue on an equal footing as when he tells us:

“the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly

the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible” (*EN* 1104a19-25).

But he also often speaks as though he considers one part of virtue quite important while taking the other part as not worth mentioning. In discussing the ways human beings acquire the virtues, Aristotle tells us that “by abstaining from pleasures we become temperate” (*EN* 1104a34) and “by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave” (*EN* 1104b1-2). A little later, he tells us:

“the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent and he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward” (*EN* 1104b5-9).

It is true we become temperate by refraining from (inappropriate) bodily pleasures. But temperance also involves not refraining from the appropriate bodily pleasures. Without this, we would tend towards insensateness. But Aristotle gives comparatively little emphasis to this aspect of temperance. While these passages admit psychological explanations, they are also exactly what one would expect if Aristotle regarded the activities he does mention as expressing the essence of the virtue.

That Aristotle brings up the importance of one part of virtue but neglects to mention the other suggests that he at least implicitly takes the part he mentions to be more important to the virtue than the part he neglects. Our account suggests that one part of virtue is more central to the identity of the virtue than the other because it is essentially constitutive of virtue in a way the other part is not. Since a thing is primarily the kind of thing it is by virtue of its essence, resemblance in essential features contributes more to overall resemblance than does resemblance

in derivative features.⁸¹ We suggest that resemblance should be understood as tracking explanatory priority. The features that explain what a thing is contribute more to similarity than features that merely follow from what it is. As such, the vice that resembles the essential features of the virtue is more similar to the virtue *qua* the kind of state it is. As argued in the previous section, greater resemblance to virtue makes a vice morally better. Therefore, that vice is less opposed to virtue and less bad than the opposed vice.

VI. Virtue and Hardness

Courage involves facing danger in certain situations and not facing danger in others. Temperance involves refraining from bodily pleasures in certain situations and not refraining in others. Liberality involves giving money in certain situations and not giving money in others. What all of these have in common is that the first is typically a harder thing to do than the second for most people. Facing danger when one should is typically harder than not facing it when one should not. Refraining from a bodily pleasure when one should is typically harder than not refraining when one should not refrain. And giving money when one should is typically harder than not giving when one should not.

Significantly, the harder action belongs to the essentially constitutive part of the virtue in question and the easier belongs to the merely constitutive part. That is, performing the essentially constitutive activity of virtue is typically harder than performing the merely constitutive activity. This pattern appears across the central ethical virtues and plausibly extends to others. Since

⁸¹ According to Irwin (1988), “some capacities are essential to human beings, and some realizations of these capacities are essential activities of human beings.” (p.375) Our position is that the realization of one part of virtue is an essential activity of human beings whereas the realization of the other part is not.

Aristotle thinks “the hard thing is better than the easy” (*RH* 1364a29), performing the essentially constitutive activity of virtue is more expressive of excellence than performing the merely constitutive activity. And since rashness, for instance, resembles the essentially constitutive part of courage while cowardice resembles the merely constitutive part, rashness is itself better than cowardice and less opposed to courage given that, as was defended in the last section, resemblance to the better part of virtue makes the vice itself better.

Moreover, the worse vice involves failing to do the essentially constitutive part of virtue and the less bad vice involves failing to do the merely constitutive part. Since the majority fail to do the essentially constitutive part of virtue partly because it is typically hard but are able to do the merely constitutive part because it is typically easier, they tend towards the worse vice (because the difficulty largely consists in resisting pleasure or enduring pain). Thus, the vice that is more opposed to virtue is also typically the vice toward which the majority tend. On this interpretation, this helps explain why Aristotle's objective and subjective considerations generally converge.

VII. Asymmetry and Pleasure

We now inquire into the grounds for the distinction between the manifestation and the mere instantiation of virtue. Our tentative answer is that activities that manifest a virtue typically give rise to some rational ethical pleasure proper to the virtue whereas those that merely instantiate a virtue fail to do so.⁸² By a rational pleasure, we mean a pleasure that must be acquired by habituation. Appetites (and temper) for Aristotle are 'rational in a sense' in that they

⁸² Broadie (1991) takes Aristotle to maintain that “every kind of activity has its own pleasure” (p.328). Thus, she would likely not argue as we do that some virtuous actions characteristically produce ethical pleasure while others do not.

can be molded according to reason but they are non-rational in nature. Being non-rational in nature, they are possessed innately rather than acquired. As Aristotle maintains, acting in accordance with the ethical virtues is pleasant. But we maintain the pleasures of a virtue are not distributed equally among all its instantiations.

For instance, the liberal person gives money when she should and does not when she should not. Since the profligate has the lesser vice and goes wrong in giving too much, the manifestation of liberality involves appropriately giving money. Not giving money when giving is inappropriate, meanwhile, is a mere instantiation.

In discussing liberality, Aristotle tells us the liberal person “will give...with pleasure or without pain; for that which is excellent is pleasant or free from pain—least of all will it be painful” (*EN* 1120a23-28). Thus, it seems plausible a liberal person will characteristically take pleasure in giving money when giving is appropriate. For example, a liberal person will sometimes take pleasure in helping a friend in financial need when doing so is appropriate. Thus, the manifestation of liberality is sometimes pleasant.

Aristotle also tells us the liberal person “will refrain from giving to anybody and everybody, that he may have something to give to the right people, at the right time, and where it is noble to do so” (*EN* 1120b3-5). A little later, he adds that the liberal person “will not give to the wrong people at the wrong time, and so on; for he would no longer be acting in accordance with liberality, and if he spent on these objects he would *have* nothing to spend on the right objects” (*EN* 1120b20-2). The liberal person refrains from giving in situations where giving is inappropriate not because not giving is worthwhile for its own sake but because her resources are finite and must be preserved for occasions where it is appropriate to give. That is, not giving when not giving is appropriate is only instrumentally valuable. Thus, a liberal person will not

take distinctive pleasure in not giving as such when not giving is appropriate. For instance, it does not seem plausible to think a liberal person will take pleasure in refusing a stranger's request for financial assistance even if refusing is appropriate. And if the liberal person had the nearly limitless wealth of a tyrant, she would likely give even in most of the situations where giving is not appropriate for one with moderate wealth. But if refusing a request for financial assistance was a source of pleasure for the liberal person, she would have some reason to refuse even with limitless wealth. Thus, it is plausible that the manifestation of liberality is accompanied by an ethical pleasure whereas no such pleasure accompanies its mere instantiation.

The courageous person, meanwhile, faces danger when doing so is appropriate and does not face danger when facing is inappropriate. Since the rash person has the lesser vice and goes wrong in facing the enemy to excess, the manifestation of courage involves facing the enemy when appropriate. Not facing the enemy when facing is inappropriate, meanwhile, is a mere instantiation.

Now, Aristotle tells us "he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward" (*EN* 1104b6-8). We are also told "the end which courage sets before it would seem to be pleasant, but to be concealed by the attending circumstances, as happens also in athletic contests" (*EN* 1117a35-b2). The courageous person is not somebody moved to face danger by pain or fear. Rather, she characteristically takes pleasure in facing danger when facing is called for.

But Aristotle does not tell us the person who does not face danger when not facing is appropriate feels pleasure in this very fact. Moreover, it does not seem independently plausible to think the courageous person takes pleasure in not facing danger when not facing is appropriate. For instance, she will likely not rejoice at having to retreat from danger even if retreat is called

for. To be pleased at having to retreat seems rather the province of the coward. The courageous person will instead likely wish that the circumstances that required retreat were different so as to make it appropriate to face danger. It therefore seems that the manifestation of courage is characteristically accompanied by an ethical pleasure whereas no such pleasure accompanies its mere instantiation.

As for the temperate person, she enjoys bodily pleasures when doing so is appropriate and refrains from enjoying them when enjoying them is inappropriate. Since the insensate person has the lesser vice and is deficient in enjoying bodily pleasures, the manifestation of temperance must involve refraining from bodily pleasures when refraining is appropriate. Not refraining from bodily pleasures when not refraining is appropriate, meanwhile, is a mere instantiation.

Aristotle tells us “the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent” (*EN* 1104b5-6). The temperate person takes pleasure in refraining from an inappropriate bodily pleasure in situations where most people would at least be tempted by it.⁸³ This pleasure of refraining, unlike appetitive bodily pleasures, is a rational ethical pleasure acquired through habituation. The manifestation of temperance is characteristically accompanied by this rational ethical pleasure. The mere instantiation of temperance, such as eating a healthy meal when doing so is appropriate, is also accompanied by pleasure, but the pleasure is an appetitive bodily pleasure. And such pleasures are innately possessed/not acquired and thus non-rational. They are therefore unsuited to be identified with the rational ethical pleasure proper to temperance. Thus, we see the

⁸³ To say that the temperate person refrains from bodily pleasures is not to imply that she is tempted by them but resists them. It is to say that she is not even tempted by them.

manifestation of temperance is accompanied by a rational ethical pleasure whereas no such pleasure is enjoyed by its mere instantiation.

Turning to pride, we find the proud person accepts honors when doing so is appropriate and refuses them when accepting is inappropriate. Since the vain person has the lesser vice and accepts honors when accepting is inappropriate, the manifestation of pride must involve accepting honors when appropriate. Refusing honors when accepting is inappropriate, meanwhile, is a mere instantiation.

Honor, as something good for its own sake, is such that the proper response to receiving it in the appropriate situations is to feel pleasure. It is therefore plausible to think the proud person takes (some) pleasure in receiving appropriate honors. It is equally plausible to think she receives no such pleasure when it is appropriate for her to refuse some honor. If anything, having to refuse inappropriate honors might be an annoyance to her given the honors she refuses will be beneath her. And so, the manifestation of pride is characteristically accompanied by the ethical pleasure of receiving honors whereas no such pleasure accompanies its mere instantiation.

The person who hits the mean with respect to anger gets angry when doing so is appropriate and refrains when refraining is appropriate. Since the person who is deficiently angry has the lesser vice, the manifestation of anger will be not getting angry when getting angry is inappropriate and its mere instantiation will be getting angry when doing so is appropriate.

Now, when a person gets angry, she typically unleashes her temper (*thumos*). A person typically feels pleasure when she unleashes her temper, namely the pleasure of returning pain for pain. But since such a pleasure belongs to temper and is therefore non-rational, it is not appropriate to identify it with the ethical pleasure proper to being appropriately angry. Instead, the pleasure proper to the virtue with respect to anger is the pleasure of refraining from getting

angry in situations where getting angry is inappropriate (but where most people are prone to anger). Thus, the manifestation of the virtue with respect to anger is accompanied by a rational pleasure whereas its mere instantiation is not.

In any case, we see there is (at least) a strong correlation between some action being the manifestation of a virtue and the presence of a rational ethical pleasure. But we want to suggest this is more than mere correlation. Though we will not argue for it in the present chapter, we want to raise the possibility that the presence of a rational ethical pleasure is what at least in large part makes the manifestation of a virtue a manifestation. And its absence is what makes the mere instantiation of virtue a mere instantiation. Our thought is that the rational ethical pleasure that belongs to a virtue is to be identified with that virtue most of all. And if this proposal is correct, the activity that brings about such pleasure derives its own nature largely from the pleasure it brings about.

The presence or absence of rational pleasure also helps us see why one of the vices flanking some virtue is a lesser vice than the other vice. This is because the lesser vice makes one act for the sake of the pleasures proper to the virtue except that one does so in inappropriate situations. The greater vice, meanwhile, does not make one act for the sake of such pleasures. For instance, the prodigal person is moved to give money when she should not by the pleasure of giving money. This is the same species of pleasure a liberal person acts on when she gives as she should. The mean person, on the other hand, does not give when she should and her action in no way involves the rational pleasures of giving money proper to liberality. She is instead often moved by the pleasures and pains of greed.

And so, we see the rational pleasures proper to the particular ethical virtues are unevenly distributed and this makes some virtuous instantiations into manifestations and others into mere

instantiations. At the same time, the uneven distribution of pleasure within the sphere of some particular virtue has the effect of making one of the vices flanking the virtue more closely resemble the virtue than its opposing vice because it involves the same species of pleasure as the pleasure proper to the virtue.

VIII. Conclusion

We have argued that Aristotle's asymmetrical treatment of the vices is best understood by distinguishing between the manifestation and the mere instantiation of virtue. The manifestation of a virtue characteristically consists in the exercise of what we have argued is the central excellence of the virtue, whereas its mere instantiation consists in actions that satisfy the virtue's demands without expressing its central excellence.

We further suggested this asymmetry is illuminated by the unequal distribution of rational ethical pleasure within the sphere of each virtue. Manifestations of virtue characteristically give rise to the rational ethical pleasures proper to the virtue, whereas mere instantiations do not. This not only helps explain why one virtuous activity is more expressive of excellence than another, but also why the lesser vice resembles virtue more closely than its opposite: on our proposal, it is motivated by the same species of rational ethical pleasure as the virtue itself, albeit in inappropriate circumstances.

If this account is correct, Aristotle's claims concerning the greater and lesser opposition of the vices are neither isolated observations nor merely psychological generalizations. Rather, they reflect a deeper structure within the virtues themselves, one in which manifestations occupy a privileged place because they express the central excellence of the virtue and characteristically realize the rational pleasures distinctive of each virtue.

If, as we have suggested, manifestations alone characteristically produce rational ethical pleasure, then the uneven distribution of pleasure gives rise to the possibility of a virtuous person who lives a life filled with virtuous actions (and not just virtuous dispositions) but who never experiences any rational ethical pleasures. Suppose circumstances never presented occasions for those activities that characteristically manifest the virtues. That is, we are stipulating a world where only the easier side of every virtue is ever called for. Though fully virtuous, such a person would plausibly never experience the rational ethical pleasures that accompany manifestations of virtue.

If happiness consists in a complete active life in accordance with the virtues, then such a life would qualify as happy. But one might have thought a happy life also includes the enjoyment of rational ethical pleasures distinctive of manifestations and yet such pleasures are absent from the agent's life. This raises the possibility that a life wholly lacking in rational ethical pleasures would not qualify as happiness because the enjoyment of certain rational ethical pleasures may itself be an essential constituent of flourishing. We leave this question open for future investigation.

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Chapter III: Magnanimity, Honor, and the Two-Tier Structure of Aristotelian Virtue

Introduction

This chapter examines Aristotle's account of magnanimity (*megalopsychia*) as discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) and the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*), its relation to honor, and its significance for the structure of Aristotelian virtue.⁸⁴⁸⁵ It begins with an analysis of honor, the proper domain of magnanimity (or “greatness of soul” or “pride”).⁸⁶ It then addresses certain interpretive issues concerning magnanimity’s relation to honor, self-knowledge, and Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. It goes on to argue that Aristotle’s recognition of magnanimity and the nameless virtue concerning small honors likely commits him to a two-tier structure of virtue, a feature that has not been sufficiently appreciated. Finally, it considers the implications of this two-tier structure for broader Aristotelian ethics, especially the relation between the best practical and the best theoretical life.

I. Analysis of Honor

Since Aristotle tells us “honors and dishonors... are the objects with respect to which the great-souled man is as he should be” (*EN* 1123b21-2), an investigation into the nature of honor is the appropriate starting point. In the *Rhetoric*, we are told that an “honor is the token of a man’s being famous for doing good” (1361a28). Such tokens include commemorations, privileges, grants of land, state burial, obeisances, and presents (*Rh.* 1361a35-9). Aristotle elaborates that “a

⁸⁴ For this chapter, we have relied on the Barnes translation of the *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia*, and the *Rhetoric* and on the Broadie and Rowe translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁸⁵ The terms “excellence” and “virtue” are used interchangeably in this chapter.

⁸⁶ This chapter is concerned with elucidating the formal characteristics of magnanimity (e.g. its objects, its relation to the other virtues) rather than the more concrete characterization of the magnanimous man (e.g. “his slow movement”, “steady speech”, and “deep voice” (*EN* 1125a13-4).

present is not only the bestowal of a piece of property, but also a token of honor” (*Rh.* 1361a39-40). Some tokens have monetary value but this is not what marks them out as tokens of honor.⁸⁷ Rather, honor “seems to be located in those doing the honoring” (*EN* 1095b25-7). An object counts as a token of honor because it is given by one person to another. Attention should instead be directed towards the person offering the honor and the one receiving it because honor resides in the activity of honoring rather than in the objects serving as its tokens.

Not every case of offering something to another is a case of honoring. Whether some instance of giving counts as honoring will depend on the reason for the gift. Honor is “chiefly and most properly paid to those who have already done good” and to those who “can do good in the future” (*Rh.* 1361a29-30). Honor enjoys a special conceptual connection to excellence. To honor is to offer something to another in order to mark and recognize excellence in the recipient.⁸⁸ A non-defective case of honoring entails the recipient has the excellence for which the honor is offered. It is therefore most fitting for honor to be given to persons who instantiate ethical virtue.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Crisp (2006) tells us that “by honors Aristotle does not necessarily have in mind material goods, such as wealth. The honor received by the virtuous from other virtuous people is analogous to the honor paid to the gods, in the form of respect and its symbols.” (p.163)

⁸⁸ Aristotle is referring to this conceptual connection when he tells us that “honor is a prize of excellence” (*EN* 1124a1) and that “excellence is the cause of honor” (*MM* 1200a22).

⁸⁹ Aristotle thinks it is also fitting for honor to be given to the possessor of other external goods (*EN* 1124a18-19: “power and wealth are desirable because of the honor they bring), though only on the condition that such a person has ethical virtue as well (*EN* 1124a26-7: “only the good person is to be honored, even though someone who has the other things as well is thought more worthy of honor”). Mantzouranis (2026) makes a similar when he tells us that while “Aristotle unequivocally prioritises virtue (arete) as the normative ground for honour and respect, he is nonetheless prepared to acknowledge that, on the level of ordinary beliefs at least, positional goods and a high sense of self-worth typically go hand in hand” (p.26) and that for Aristotle “it is only excellence of character that legitimises one to lay claims to honour and consider oneself worthy of great things.” (p.32)

Honor is also the kind of thing which “admits of more and less” and this depends in part on the greatness of the excellence being recognized.⁹⁰ Greater deeds and dispositions tend to bring greater honors than lesser ones. All else being equal, recognition for saving the city from invaders is a greater honor than recognition for helping a blind person cross the street.

But the magnitude of an honor depends not only on the qualities of the one honored but also on the quantity and quality of the recognition offered. We are told honor “is made great not merely by the number of those who give the honor” (*EE* 1232b19-20).⁹¹ More important than numbers is the ethical character of the giver and “the magnanimous man would consider rather what one good man thinks than many ordinary men” (*EE* 1232b6-7). Because honor derives part of its significance from the judgment it expresses, the authority of the judge affects the magnitude of the honor. Thus, offering honor as one should presupposes the ability to recognize excellence and this cannot reliably be done if one does not oneself have some share in it (*MM* 1192a24-5: “For the good will bestow honor with knowledge and good judgment”).⁹² The person who gets things right in matters of receiving honor will discount honors bestowed by the non-virtuous because such people are less reliable judges of excellence.⁹³

II. The Contribution of Honor to Happiness

⁹⁰ The fact that honor admits of degrees (“more and less”) should not make one assume that Aristotle does not think a difference in kind also exists between greater and lesser honors. For we are told “things different in kind too can be compared as more or less” (*EN* 1155b15-6).

⁹¹ Hanley (2002) maintains that the magnanimous man “better than any other knows that honour depends on those who confer it rather than the one on whom it is conferred” (p.13)

⁹² According to Mantzouranis (2026), the magnanimous person “does accept, however, the honour that comes from good or worthy men like him.” (p.34)

⁹³ Getting things right in matters of receiving honors must therefore require making correct judgments about the ethical characters of those who offer honor.

Although the proper possession of honor presupposes ethical excellence, an internal good, honor is an external good because it also requires the presence of persons with the ability to recognize excellence, something outside one's full control.⁹⁴ We are told happiness (*eudaimonia*) "clearly also requires external goods in addition [to virtue]" (*EN* 1099a31-2). External goods contribute to happiness but are not on the same footing as virtue.⁹⁵ They only add to the happiness of a virtuous agent. Although the ensuing discussion does not explicitly mention honor, it is natural to infer its inclusion, since wealth and beauty are both listed as contributors and honor is "the greatest of the external goods" (*EN* 1123b21).^{96,97}

Aristotle's discussion suggests at least two distinct ways in which external goods contribute to happiness.⁹⁸ A good can serve as a necessary instrument for the performance of certain kinds of virtuous actions (*EN* 1099b1). Wealth is a paradigmatic good of this sort since we need it to perform liberal acts. Aristotle also speaks of external goods "the lack of which is like a stain on happiness" (*EN* 1099b3) and mentions good children and beauty as examples. Though the expression "stain on happiness" is somewhat cryptic, its meaning need not be settled

⁹⁴ Broadie (1991) argues that Aristotle maintains that honor "cannot really be happiness, because it is a surface phenomenon: it is how the agent is reflected by others, whereas happiness, the supreme good, must be something that belongs to us in ourselves." (p.24)

⁹⁵ Broadie (1991) argues that Aristotle thinks "the possession of a measure of external and physical goods is not a part of *human virtue* but a necessary condition of the successful exercise which is happiness." (p.54)

⁹⁶ Aristotle seems to be setting aside the external good of friendship when he calls honor the greatest external good. Otherwise, his remarks about honor would stand in tension with things said about friendship (*EN* 1159a26-7: "it would seem that being loved is something superior to being honored"). This essay follows Aristotle in that friendship is set aside when claims are made regarding the greatness of honor.

⁹⁷ According to Palaluk (2004), "honour is the greatest good, because it is what people turn to when they want to reciprocate with 'as much as possible'." (p.255)

⁹⁸ These two ways in which external goods can contribute to happiness are discussed by Cooper (1985).

for our present purpose. It is only important to note that Aristotle thinks it possible for an external good to contribute to happiness without being an instrument of virtue.⁹⁹ This distinction becomes important because it suggests honor contributes to happiness in a way unlike merely instrumental goods such as wealth.¹⁰⁰

This interpretation is reinforced by two considerations. In considering candidates for happiness, Aristotle tells us “wealth is clearly not the good we are looking for, since it is useful, and for the sake of something else” (*EN* 1096a6-7) whereas such things as pleasure and honor “are valued for themselves” (*EN* 1096a8). He also describes the magnanimous person as being concerned with getting things right with respect to matters of honor and “as not being concerned with things useful” (*EE* 1233a6-7). Aristotle does not treat honor as valuable merely because it can be useful.¹⁰¹¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Tolland (2013) tells us that “while Aristotle treats the external good wealth as merely instrumentally valuable, this will not work for honours; it must have some kind of final value.” (p.3)

¹⁰⁰ For Mantzouranis (2026), “honour, as has been stressed, is an intrinsic good and a good that human beings naturally desire to have, so he [the magnanimous person] is not, and should not be, entirely indifferent to it. (p.34)

¹⁰¹ At *EN*1095b27-8, Aristotle does say that “people seem to pursue honor in order to be convinced that they themselves are good”, clearly implying an instrumental role for honor. But the “people” Aristotle has in mind cannot be virtuous. For as we shall see in Section III, the virtuous person must possess self-knowledge regarding his level of virtue in order to act rightly in situations involving the acceptance of honors. Such a person would not pursue honor in order to be convinced of his goodness because he already knows he is good. Pursuing honor in order to be convinced of one’s goodness is just one way honor can be misused.

Aristotle also tells us “if therefore the good man on there coming to him high honor or high office shall not make right *use* of these, it shows that he is not a good man” (*MM* 1200a26). One might take this to mean that a good man *must* put honors to good use. But Aristotle’s point here is simply that the good person will not *misuse* honor. Given the context, making “right use” of honor need not be understood instrumentally. Aristotle is simply telling us that the virtuous agent will relate to honors as he should rather than allow their possession to cause him to descend into vice.

¹⁰² Kraut (1989) maintains that Aristotle thinks “pleasure, honor, and virtue are more plausible candidates for happiness, since they are loved for themselves.” (p.226)

Of course, honor can be used or misused in particular situations. We may pursue some high honor to gain political office. Aristotle suggests that most people pursue honor for reasons other than its intrinsic worth. Of the majority, he says that “it seems not to be for its own sake, but only incidentally, that they choose honor. For most people delight in the honor they receive as an indication of good things to come” (*EN* 1095b22–26). Even the fully virtuous person may come to pursue honor as an instrument (e.g. a tyrant holds his children hostage and will only spare them if he wins the next chariot race). But insofar as an agent instantiates either magnanimity or an opposing vice (i.e. little-souledness or conceit), he will relate to honors non-instrumentally and accept or reject honors for their own sakes. Instrumental pursuit subordinates honor to another end, whereas magnanimity and its opposing vices treat honor itself as expressive of one's worth. Thus, only the non-instrumental pursuit of honor manifests an agent's (correct or mistaken) estimation of his worth.¹⁰³

III. Honor, Virtue, and Self-Knowledge

Having elucidated the nature of honor and its contribution to happiness, it becomes possible to illustrate the way the special connection between honor and excellence is reflected in the honor-relating virtues.

Let us imagine a situation in which a person in need asks a wealthier friend for financial help. Being virtuous, the friend takes all relevant aspects of the situation into account and performs the ethically correct action of giving one thousand dollars. In doing so, he manifests the virtue of liberality.

¹⁰³ Although honor is intrinsically valuable, Aristotle also insists that even the highest honors fall short of the worth of complete virtue, which explains the magnanimous person's measured response to them.

Let us now imagine an identical situation except that the friend tends towards avarice and not liberality. Instead of providing assistance, he refuses the request. He fails to act as he should. *But how should he have acted?* We can say the non-virtuous friend should have acted *as the virtuous friend acted* in the previous situation given that their circumstances are identical in every respect but for the difference in ethical excellence. The avaricious agent should have given his friend in need one thousand dollars.

Let us now turn to a different scenario where the acceptance of some high honor is at issue. In one situation, the person offered the honor has virtue. Recognizing the honor offered is commensurate with his excellence, he acts in the ethically correct way and accepts it. The second situation is only different in that the person being offered the honor lacks virtue. Because of this, he accepts an undeserved honor and fails to act as he should. *But how should he have acted?*

To say he should have acted *as the virtuous person acted* will only be correct provided we mean he should have acted in the ethically correct way. But it would be wrong to say the non-virtuous agent should have also accepted the high honor. For his excellence is outstripped by the magnitude of the honor offered. Acting rightly for him is declining the honor. Given who he is, to do otherwise would imply he suffers from the vice of conceit in that he accepts more honor than he is worth. To generalize, when it comes to accepting honors, a non-virtuous agent cannot accept the same honors a virtuous agent would in identical circumstances and must act differently to act rightly.

A difference in the ethically correct action from one situation to another is usually explained by some salient difference in external circumstances. In the situations involving

wealth, identical external circumstances warranted identical actions.¹⁰⁴ But it was not only external circumstances that determined the correct action in the situations involving honor. Accepting honor is special in that the agent's own ethical character becomes one of the morally relevant facts determining the correct action.¹⁰⁵ An agent must reflect on the condition of his own ethical character when determining right action.¹⁰⁶

This difference between the honor-relating virtues and those relating to wealth is explained by the special conceptual connection holding between honor and excellence.¹⁰⁷ There is no such conceptual connection between excellence and wealth. A non-defective case of honoring entails the recipient has the excellence being recognized. A recipient must therefore know the condition of his own ethical character so as to correctly judge whether the honor presented to him is fitting, beneath him, or more than he deserves. A virtuous agent's possession

¹⁰⁴ What is true of wealth is also true of the objects of the other particular virtues. For instance, the coward and the rash agent must behave in battle as the courageous agent would in order to act rightly and the self-indulgent and the insensate ought to follow the example of the moderate agent when facing the prospect of enjoying appetitive pleasures.

¹⁰⁵ Of course, when it comes to situations where giving money is at issue, other facts about an agent are relevant (e.g. his level of wealth, his relationship to the person in need). What is important is that these are not facts about the condition of the agent's own ethical dispositions.

¹⁰⁶ Hardie (1978) interprets Aristotle as defining magnanimity through the agent's correct estimation of his own deserts. On this interpretation, magnanimity consists in avoiding both excessive and deficient self-estimation. This naturally suggests that magnanimity presupposes a distinctive kind of self-knowledge.

¹⁰⁷ Besides honor, friendship seems to be the only other external good that has a conceptual connection to excellence. For Aristotle thinks that only the ethically virtuous have the possibility of partaking in the highest and most genuine form of friendship.

of the capacity to relate to honor in the appropriate ways necessarily entails he has a certain kind of self-knowledge, namely he knows he is in fact virtuous.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹

IV. Magnanimity, Honor, and Worth

In “‘Magnanimity’ in Aristotle’s Ethics”, Hardie writes:

Aristotle does at least go through the motions of assigning a particular province to greatness [magnanimity]: it is concerned with honors (*timai*) and dishonors (*atimiai*) (1123b21-2). Now honor, as Aristotle says is something which “may be desired more than is right, or less, or from the right sources and in the right way” (1125b6-8). This remark, however, is made not in reference to magnanimity but in the following chapter where the range of desire for honor is assigned to the lesser nameless virtue concerned with lesser honors, standing to magnanimity as liberality to magnificence (1125b1-4). It is true that the great-souled man is said to take moderate pleasure (*metrios*) in great honors from good men (1124a5-7). But Aristotle does not connect this remark with the doctrine of the mean. His account of the way in which greatness is a mean is in terms of deserts, which must be great, of the great man and of his avoidance alike of excessive and of defective self-esteem. Thus, Aristotle does not relate magnanimity, as he has related courage (III 6-9) and temperance (III 10-12), to a range of feeling; nor does he relate it, as he has related liberality (IV 1) and magnificence (IV 2) to a range of actions involving quantities of money or other measurable goods. By hiving off the lesser of the two virtues concerned with honor and honors Aristotle has eliminated the obvious account of the way in which magnanimity is a mean. (p.64)

Hardie is right that Aristotle does not explicitly define magnanimity as lying in a mean with respect to great honors but instead defines it in terms of an agent’s “self-esteem” or worth. The magnanimous man thinks he has great worth and is not mistaken (*EN* 1123b2-3). The conceited agent also thinks himself of great worth but is mistaken (*EN* 1123b8-9). The little-souled agent does not think he has great worth but has more than he thinks (*EN* 1123b9-11).

But Hardie’s characterization understates the explanatory role that honor continues to play in explaining magnanimity. Given the magnanimous person thinks himself and is worthy of

¹⁰⁸ Curzer (1990) also thinks that magnanimity involves self-knowledge about one’s level of virtue. But he believes the other virtues also require self-knowledge. But this seems wrong. There is no apparent reason to think a courageous person needs to know he is courageous in order to be brave in battle or that a liberal person needs to know himself as such to give and take the right monetary amounts.

¹⁰⁹ Crisp (2006) says of the magnanimous person that “his self-knowledge is merely knowledge of his own worth.” (p.175)

the greatest things (*EN* 1123b15-6), and since “worth is stated in terms of external goods” (*EN* 1123b17), the magnanimous person will think himself and be worthy of the greatest external good, namely honor. Therefore, greatness of worth is expressed paradigmatically through the acceptance and rejection of honors. Honor itself varies in magnitude because honors correspond to different degrees of worth. And the way in which an agent typically relates to honor will manifest his sense of self-worth.¹¹⁰

Hardie underestimates the explanatory work Aristotle still gives to honor in assigning the province of honors and dishonors to magnanimity and Aristotle does relate magnanimity “as he has related liberality and magnificence, to a range of actions involving quantities of money or other measurable goods”. For honors admit of greater and lesser magnitude, and agents may therefore accept honors that exceed, fall short of, or are proportionate to their worth. That is, although honor is not quantitatively measurable in the way money is, Aristotle nevertheless treats honors as admitting of degrees corresponding to differing degrees of worth. Therefore, honor itself supplies the structural analogue of the measurable range. This directly challenges Hardie’s claim that Aristotle lacks an account of magnanimity as a mean in a structurally familiar way. Whereas liberality regulates the appropriate use of money, magnanimity regulates the appropriate acceptance of honor. Thus, the agent’s reception of honor occupies the same structural role that spending money occupies in liberality.

¹¹⁰ We say “typically” because the acceptance of honor for instrumental reasons does not manifest an agent’s self-worth. A tyrant threatens to kill a magnanimous person’s family unless he comes to acquire some honor typically unworthy of him. Acceptance of such an honor will not be a manifestation of self-worth and we cannot conclude from it that the magnanimous person is in fact little-souled. Similarly, a worthless agent who only accepts some high honor because of the monetary gain that promises to follow in its wake is not conceited. He values honor only insofar as it serves his avarice.

Aristotle's account of worth is not an alternative to the doctrine of the mean. Although he defines magnanimity through worth rather than directly through honor, worth functions as the principle determining which honors are appropriate for the agent. Thus, on our interpretation, Aristotle does not abandon the doctrine of the mean but it is mediated through an antecedent judgment about the agent's own excellence.¹¹¹ Hardie's criticism has force only if worth displaces honor as the primary explanatory category. On our reading, it does not. Worth specifies the honors appropriate to the agent and thereby explains, rather than replaces, the virtue's relation to honor.

V. Magnanimity and the Unity of the Virtues

At *EN* IV.3, Aristotle connects the possession of magnanimity to that of the other ethical virtues with the remark that magnanimity “does not occur without them [the virtues]” (1124a3). There is a temptation to understand him as simply applying the unity of the virtues doctrine, namely that possession of one virtue implies the possession of the rest, to the specific virtue of magnanimity.¹¹² Though Aristotle likely takes the unity doctrine to apply to magnanimity, it is

¹¹¹ The significance of Aristotle's separation of the two honor-relating virtues will become clearer below.

¹¹² For Aristotle, magnanimity and another nameless virtue pertaining to small honors are mutually exclusive. It therefore cannot be the case that the possession of magnanimity entails possession of the nameless virtue or that the possession of courage entails the possession of both magnanimity and the nameless virtue.

In addition, the possession of munificence, the virtue pertaining to large-scale expenditures, is not entailed by the possession of the other virtues because a virtuous agent needs great resources to be able to engage in large-scale expenditures, and this is not guaranteed by the possession of virtue. The unity of the virtues doctrine must therefore be understood as claiming that an agent's possession of one virtue entails possession of all the other virtues *that are possible for him to possess*.

Russell (2012) suggests a similar move when he tells us that “Aristotle's premisses warrant at most the conclusion that the magnanimous person must have every virtue that it would be incongruous for him not to have.” (p.143)

strange that he would single out and emphasize this fact given that the doctrine is stated in more general form elsewhere and we have no reason to suspect that things stand differently with magnanimity. And he does not reiterate the unity doctrine when he discusses the other particular virtues.

A plausible explanation of this emphasis is that since having magnanimity involves having a certain kind of self-knowledge, namely the knowledge that one is virtuous, and given that knowledge entails truth, having magnanimity entails also having the other virtues.¹¹³ Aristotle is not merely reiterating the unity doctrine.¹¹⁴ Rather, his remark is meant to highlight *this* relation between magnanimity and the rest of the virtues. This relation differs from the unity doctrine. The relation between the virtues posited by the unity doctrine is one of logical and symmetrical dependence. Each virtue depends on the rest for being the kind of disposition it is and all must be present if any one of them is to be. But the special relation holding between magnanimity and the other virtues is one of developmental and asymmetrical dependence. The other virtues must already be developed before it is possible to possess magnanimity. A person disposed to act as the magnanimous person would but who has yet to develop the other virtues will tend towards the vice of conceit because he will be overestimating his self-worth.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Hanley (2002) argues that magnanimity is not merely one virtue among others but the virtue that presupposes and displays complete ethical excellence. He takes seriously Aristotle's claim that magnanimity does not arise without the virtues and interprets it as the culmination or completion of ethical virtue. Hanley tells us: "where others are distinguished in only one of the virtues, he [the great-souled man] excels in all of the virtues that distinguish men" (p. 9)

¹¹⁴ Mantzouranis (2026) think that "megalopsychia, then, is the virtue that guarantees that the rest of the virtues will remain intact both in good and in bad times." (p.40)

¹¹⁵ Crisp (2006) offers a similar developmental story: "First, I begin to acquire the (other) virtues. Then I reach a level of modest virtue, at which I am worthy of some modest honor – and if I am aware of that then I have the virtue of proper ambition, though not of course that of greatness of soul. My moral development continues, however, and I develop virtue to a degree worthy of the greatest

VI. Magnanimity and the Nameless Virtue Concerning Small Honors

Following the discussion of magnanimity, Aristotle tells us that “in relation to honor there appears to be a kind of excellence...making one disposed as one should be in relation to moderate and small things” (*EN* 1125b1-5). Whereas magnanimity has to do with the greatest honors, the proper domain of this nameless virtue is honor on a small scale. Because the magnanimous person “despises” small honors and views them as trifles beneath his superlative worth (*EN* 1124a10-3) whereas the nameless agent is disposed to accept small honors when they are commensurate to his worth, the nameless virtue will not be a disposition that belongs to the magnanimous person. For the characteristic response constituting the nameless virtue includes accepting small honors in a way incompatible with the magnanimous person's characteristic attitude toward them. Thus, these two honor-relating virtues are not to be found alongside one another in the same agent.¹¹⁶

Though the possessor of either virtue will necessarily have a correct estimation of his own worth (*EN* 1123b3-4), the magnanimous agent is worthy of greater honors than the nameless agent. But this is to say that the magnanimous agent is more excellent since “it is always the better person who is worthy of greater, and the best of what is greatest” (*EN* 1123b28-9). Were the levels of excellence of the two agents identical, either the magnanimous agent

honor. At that point, if I am aware of my worth, then greatness of soul has emerged out of my possession of these other virtues, and adds further luster to my moral character and worthiness of honor.” (p.167)

¹¹⁶ Russell (2012) argues that “Aristotle should maintain that persons with the virtue of magnanimity must also possess the virtue of proper pride.” (p.141) We disagree on the grounds that a person worthy of only the greatest honors would have no use for a virtue concerned solely with moderate and small-scale honors. Moreover, unlike with magnificence and liberality, Aristotle nowhere says that the honor-relating virtues go together.

would be conceited (if we assume the nameless agent's estimation of his own worth is correct) or else the nameless agent would be little-souled (if we assume the magnanimous agent's estimation of his own worth is right). Since honor reflects overall ethical excellence, and magnanimity and the nameless virtue essentially involve accurate judgment about one's total worth, differences in honor imply differences in overall virtue.¹¹⁷

This difference must be accounted for. Do both agents possess virtue, or does the nameless agent fall short?¹¹⁸ If we say both are virtuous, we must attribute to Aristotle a distinction between two levels of virtue.¹¹⁹ Otherwise, one must claim that the possessor of this nameless excellence does not yet possess genuine ethical virtue. On this interpretation, the nameless disposition would consist in knowing one's own modest worth and accepting only those honors appropriate to one, however modest they may be. Such a disposition might help one *become* magnanimous once one acquires the other virtues. But it is good only hypothetically, namely, if one is not yet virtuous, this is how one ought to be disposed.

Aristotle already recognizes dispositions that are appropriate only for those not yet fully virtuous, namely shame and self-control. On such a view, the nameless virtue would be similar to these. Aristotle thinks shame is "hypothetically something decent—if one did such and such, one would be ashamed" (*EN* 1128b30). But one should not do wrong in the first place. Similarly,

¹¹⁷ Howland (2002) notes that "the virtues themselves are furthermore magnified by their connection with greatness of soul." (p.17)

¹¹⁸ The magnanimous agent's possession of virtue is not in question because Aristotle explicitly attributes all the particular virtues to him: "Greatness in respect of each of the excellences would seem to belong to the great-souled person" (*EN* 1123b30-3).

¹¹⁹ Pakaluk (2004), against our interpretation, is committed to Aristotle maintaining "that no virtue can be lacking if great-heartedness is rightly ascribed, not that the extreme or pronounced expressions of each virtue must be present." (p.259)

self-control is a disposition causing an agent to refrain from acting on inappropriate appetites and is to that extent praiseworthy. But one should not have inappropriate appetites in the first place. Shame and self-control are fitting only for those on their way to *becoming* virtuous; the virtuous have no need of them. One might try to understand the nameless virtue as a disposition of this kind.

But this way is closed. Aristotle explicitly excludes shame and self-control as virtues. We are told “a sense of shame is not appropriately talked about as a kind of excellence” (*EN* 1128b10) and that “self-control is not an excellence either” (*EN* 1128b33-4). Since Aristotle excludes dispositions characteristic only of the morally immature from the class of virtues, a disposition absent from the fully virtuous cannot itself be a complete ethical virtue. He is, however, explicit about calling the disposition relating to small honors a virtue. This suggests that Aristotle is committed to recognizing two levels of ethical excellence corresponding to the two kinds of honor-relating virtues.¹²⁰

It is striking that Aristotle gives little to no explicit attention to this two-tier structure of virtue in his ethical works. Nor does he tell us how an agent proceeds from the lower level to the higher. The task of the next section will be to speculate on what his answers might have been.

VII. Higher and Lower Forms of the Virtues

If the foregoing interpretation is correct, the picture that emerges is of a two-tier structure of virtue with the magnanimous agent occupying the higher tier and the nameless agent the lower. It is not only with respect to honors that there exists a greater and a lesser virtue. The

¹²⁰ Whereas Hardie (1978) regards the nameless virtue as creating an explanatory problem, the present interpretation argues that it reveals a previously unnoticed two-tier structure within Aristotelian virtue.

present interpretation suggests Aristotle is committed to virtue as a whole admitting of a greater and a lesser. This is because honor tracks overall ethical excellence. Moreover, since magnanimity requires accurate self-assessment of one's total virtue, the distinction manifested in honor reflects differences in the whole ethical character. On the present interpretation, rather than introducing higher and lower versions of each virtue individually (e.g. a greater and a lesser courage), Aristotle instead distinguishes the honor-relating virtues and relies on the distinctive self-knowledge accompanying them to indicate a division within virtue as a whole.

Given that the magnanimous agent claims for himself the greatest honors and is justified in doing so, he must be superlatively good and must possess what this interpretation understands as the higher forms of each excellence.¹²¹ The nameless agent, meanwhile, rightfully claims for himself only moderate and small honors because his form of virtue is of a lesser kind. Since having magnanimity entails having the higher forms of the virtues, this would explain why Aristotle can employ the term 'magnanimous man' either in a strict way to refer to the possessor of the disposition of magnanimity (i.e. the disposition relating to great honors) or in a looser way to refer to the possessor of the higher form of the virtues (*EE* 1232b25-6: "still there is a single excellence, magnanimity, alongside of the other excellences, and he who has this must be called in a special sense magnanimous").¹²² Since magnanimity presupposes the highest excellence

¹²¹ According to Russell (2012), "if the fact that magnificence is outstanding makes it distinct from its less outstanding counterpart, and if magnificence makes the other virtues outstanding as well, then presumably we must divide all of the other virtues into their more and less outstanding varieties as well. And this seems implausible." (p.136) In this chapter, we do in fact divide all the other virtues into greater and lesser forms and do not think it implausible to do so.

¹²² According to Russell (2012), "if magnificence makes the other virtues greater by being what is outstanding in them to a high degree, then magnificence would not be one of the virtues, as Aristotle supposes, but instead would be an aspect or quality of the other virtues—their outstandingness, so to speak." (p.136) We sidestep this complaint by Russell by recognizing two senses of magnanimity, one

generally, Aristotle can sometimes use "magnanimous" almost as shorthand for the fully excellent person.

Aristotle gives no explicit developmental account.¹²³ If the present interpretation is correct, however, the most natural reconstruction would be as follows. An agent first acquires virtue in its lesser form, including the nameless virtue concerning lesser honors. He then comes to cultivate the higher forms of the virtues and this cultivation is accompanied by a transformation of the nameless virtue into magnanimity since the two honor-relating dispositions cannot simultaneously characterize the same agent.¹²⁴ As an agent's excellence increases, the honors proportionate to his worth also increase, making the replacement of the nameless virtue by magnanimity necessary.¹²⁵

VIII. Grounds for the Distinction between Greater and Lesser Honors

At the very least, the difference between the objects of magnanimity and of the nameless virtues is one of degree. The magnanimous person is worth greater honors than the nameless agent. But it is not clear whether there is in addition a difference in kind. We are told the nameless virtue is "related to greatness of soul in the same sort of way as liberality to munificence" (*EN* 1125b2-3). An analysis of the relation between the two wealth-relating virtues

of them being a virtue specifically concerned with the acceptance of high honors, the other concerned with specifying the higher forms of the other character virtues.

¹²³ Curzer (2012) interprets Aristotle's moral psychology as a gradual developmental process culminating in the properly virtuous agent governed by practical wisdom (Ch. 15, 16). The present interpretation accepts this developmental framework but proposes that Aristotle's discussion of the nameless virtue concerning small honors reveals an additional developmental transition: the replacement of the nameless virtue by magnanimity as an agent's overall excellence increases.

¹²⁴ Aristotle tells us that an agent possessing the nameless virtue "is neither wholly blameable nor yet magnanimous" (*EE* 1233a16-7) and also that "he might become magnanimous" (*EE* 1233a24).

¹²⁵ Without such a transformation, the agent in question will cease to be virtuous and will instead suffer from smallness of soul.

might therefore shed light on the difference between the honor-relating virtues. Although Aristotle does not indicate that every structural feature transfers, the analogy nevertheless provides a basis for cautious speculation.

Munificence “is the excellence productive of greatness in matters involving the spending of money” (*Rh.* 1366b19) and the munificent person “is able to observe what is suitable and spend large amounts with good taste” (*EN* 1122a34-6). Munificence and liberality both involve spending money but differ in that the expenditures of the munificent agent “are on a large scale” (*EN* 1122b3) whereas those of the liberal agent are in “small and moderate things” (*EN* 1122a28). That is, a munificent action (e.g. outfitting a trireme) will typically require greater spending than a liberal one (e.g. helping a friend in need).

There also appears to be a qualitative difference in the kinds of expenditures to which the money-relating virtues are directed. Munificence “belongs to the types of private expenditure that arise *only once*” (*EN* 1123a1). Spending in an extraordinary situation (e.g. a daughter’s wedding) counts as munificence while spending occurring in ordinary everyday situations (e.g. giving alms) counts as liberality. Since magnanimity and the nameless virtue are said to be related to one another as munificence and liberality are, we can speculate that the honors belonging to the nameless agent will be ordinary, whereas those proper to the magnanimous agent will be extraordinary. If the analogy extends this far, then the distinction would appear to be one of kind as well as degree.

If the analogy is apt, then the distinction among honors may likewise correspond to the kinds of actions for which they are bestowed. Extraordinary honors attach themselves to those

who perform ethically extraordinary deeds.¹²⁶ The magnanimous person, as one worthy of such honors, will be a doer of such deeds. His dispositions for such actions might reasonably be equated with his possession of the higher forms of the virtues. Aristotle perhaps has such superior ethical excellence in view when he tells us that the magnanimous person “does not risk himself for small things...but for great ones he does” (*EN* 1124b7-9).

IX. Levels of Virtue and the Best Human Life

Having argued for the distinction between the higher and lower forms of the virtues, it remains for us to address Aristotle’s motivation for positing a two-tier structure in the first place. In Book X of *EN*, Aristotle tells us the life of theoretical reflection or contemplation is happiest (1177a19) and the practical life of ethical excellence is second happiest (1178a9-10).

He goes on to remark that reflection requires for its activity much less in the way of external goods than practical action (*EN* 1178b4-5). But because even a lover of reflection remains a material and social being, “he chooses to do the deeds that accord with [ethical] excellence” (*EN* 1178b7). It is possible to lead a life of ethical excellence without contemplation but a life of contemplation still requires coping with practical demands imposed by embodied life.¹²⁷ Unlike the gods, human beings cannot contemplate continuously because their materiality serves as an obstacle. One who contemplates will “need external prosperity, in so far as he is

¹²⁶ According to Howland (2002), “great-souled men are most worthy of honor because, next to the gods, they are considered to be the community’s greatest benefactors.” (p.14)

¹²⁷ According to Lear (1988), “the life of contemplation is only a choice for members of a leisured master class. Although a contemplator will shed his obligations to society, he will nevertheless depend on society to confer upon him the material benefits which make an anti-social contemplative life possible. To be blunt: the contemplative life is socially parasitic.” (p.314) We disagree with Lear that the life of the contemplator is parasitic on the society she lives in and think that she will secure for herself all the goods that are requisite for living the contemplative life.

human; for human nature is not self-sufficient for the purposes of reflection, but needs bodily health too, and the availability of nourishment and other kinds of servicing” (EN 1178b33-5).¹²⁸

But Aristotle is also quick to point out that though “it is not possible to be blessedly happy without external things, still it should not be thought that the happy person will need many of them, and on a large scale” (EN 1179a1-3) and “even someone who does not rule over land and sea is capable of doing fine things; for it will be possible to act in accordance with excellence even on the basis of moderate resources” (EN 1179a4-5). Additional practical demands and external goods “are even impediments to him, at least in relation to reflecting” (EN 1178b4-5).¹²⁹ Aristotle expects an agent who chooses the reflective life to be concerned with possessing a moderate level of practical virtue rather than practical virtue in its highest form. Such a person does not need external goods on a “large scale” and this is true even in the case of honor. Since magnanimity and munificence concern great honors and great expenditures respectively, the contemplative person’s commitment to moderate practical engagement seems to exclude these excellences. And more generally, he only has the lower forms of the virtues. The additional practical demands accompanying the higher forms would only squander time that could have been devoted to reflection.

¹²⁸ According to Kraut (1989), Aristotle maintains that “to live well, [the philosopher and the politician] must stay alive, and so they both need food, shelter, health, and so on. Nonetheless, he insists that the politician needs more external goods to engage in his characteristic activity than does the philosopher to engage in his.” (p.185)

¹²⁹ For Broadie (1991), “since human *theoria* needs material conditions but cannot lift a finger towards obtaining them, human *theoria* in itself is the least self-sufficient activity. But granted the material substructure, lovers of *theoria* are more independent than would-be politicians, as they need not look out for special occasions and resources.” (p.425)

It turns out then that the happiest life will consist in reflection and the instantiation of the lower forms of the ethical virtues.¹³⁰ On the present interpretation, the second happiest life is that of the magnanimous person who manifests all the ethical virtues in their highest forms. The person who leads the best life lives the second best practical life and the person who leads the best practical life lives the second best life.

The present interpretation suggests that Aristotle is motivated to posit two levels of ethical excellence because he thinks the happiest life, the life of contemplation, still requires attaining and exercising ethical excellence. But he does not want to deny that persons whose primary end is practical (i.e. the politically-minded) have the possibility of greatly surpassing the modest ethical excellence of the lover of contemplation by becoming and being magnanimous. Within the Aristotelian ethical framework, the highest theoretical excellence and the highest practical excellence stand in tension and are not to be found alongside one another in the same individual.¹³¹ Whereas the Platonic philosopher-king is one who jointly possesses practical and theoretical excellence in their highest forms, on the present interpretation, Aristotle separates the philosopher from the magnanimous man of action.¹³² The contrast illustrates what is distinctive about Aristotle's conception.

¹³⁰ This is not to say that only a lover of reflection can have the lower forms of the virtues. A person who does not contemplate might also have them. Such a person would presumably live the third-best life (after the lover of reflection and the magnanimous person).

¹³¹ According to Mantzouranis (2026), one group of commentators relates "Aristotelian *megalopsychia* to theoretical wisdom and contemplation. Drawing attention to the 'Socratic' characteristics in the description of the *megalopsychos*, this influential interpretation suggests that in the discussion of *megalopsychia* Aristotle was, in fact, drawing the portrait of a philosopher." (p.4) The interpretation we are advancing is opposed to this interpretation of the magnanimous person as a contemplator in that it holds that magnanimity has no place in the life of the philosopher.

¹³² Kraut (1989) tells us that "Aristotle presents, in other words, two models of how one should lead one's life: one should be either a philosopher (that is, someone who devotes himself above all to

The two types importantly differ in the way they relate to ethical activity. The magnanimous person values ethical action for its own sake. The manifestation of the highest ethical excellence is his ultimate end. The lover of reflection, meanwhile, values ethical action both for its own sake and for the sake of his ultimate end of reflection. His ethical activity is partly subordinated to contemplation. His ethical aims are moderate because this puts him in the best position to contemplate well and continuously. The higher forms of the virtues are less conducive to sustained contemplation because the practical demands required for their exercise would leave less opportunity for reflection.

exercising the virtues of theoretical reason) or a statesman (that is, someone who devotes himself above all to the fullest exercise of moral virtue)." (p.5) We agree that Aristotle has these two models and further maintain that he takes them to be mutually exclusive.

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Chapter IV: Type-Identical Theories of Aristotelian Contemplation

Introduction

Aristotle's account of contemplation (*theoria*) raises a fundamental question concerning the relationship between the highest human cognition and divine cognition.¹³³ On the one hand, Aristotle presents contemplation as the highest human activity and the source of complete happiness. On the other, he characterizes the divine life as one of eternal contemplation and identifies divine nous (intellect) with self-thinking thought. One central interpretive problem is therefore whether human and divine contemplation are the same type of activity (type-identical) or differ in type (type-distinct).

Historical and contemporary interpreters typically maintain that Aristotle draws a sharp distinction between human and divine contemplation. They interpret him in a way that emphasizes divine transcendence and human finitude, which naturally pushes them toward analogy or some weaker relation rather than type-identity. On such views, human contemplation is often understood as finite and dependent upon capacities associated with theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), whereas divine contemplation is eternal, self-contained, and purely reflexive. Consequently, human and divine contemplation are taken to be type-distinct.

In contrast, this chapter explores the possibility that Aristotle's texts permit a type-identical understanding of contemplation.¹³⁴ A principal motivation for exploring such a view is

¹³³ We have relied on the Shields translation of *De Anima* and on the Barnes translations for the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *On the Generation of Animals*, and the *Metaphysics*.

¹³⁴ Type-identical views of Aristotelian contemplation have been by and large understudied. As far as we are aware, few if any historical or modern commentators seem to explicitly hold a type-identical view of contemplation. At least part of the reason for such neglect is that type-identical views tend to stand in tension with the relationship between human beings and the divine as understood by the Abrahamic religions. The gulf between the highest activity of human beings and the activity of the

that it provides a more straightforward explanation of Aristotle's claim that we should “make ourselves immortal” (*EN* 1177b33–34) by making human fulfillment consist in partaking in the very same type of activity that constitutes divine life.¹³⁵ If human contemplation entails doing the same type of thing as the divine, it becomes easier to explain how such activity could immortalize us. Moreover, if human intellect in act becomes identical with the intelligible in act, and if, as will later be argued, the intelligible in question is divine intellect in the case of human contemplation, then the metaphysical gap between human and divine contemplation may be considerably narrower than many type-distinct views would allow.

The strategy of this chapter is first to identify the principal metaphysical ways in which human and divine contemplation can be type-identical and only then determine which of those possibilities works best within a broadly Aristotelian metaphysical framework. Before developing these possibilities, we must address what is perhaps the strongest recent argument against a type-identical understanding. So, we begin by examining Bryan Reece's argument that human and divine contemplation are not type-identical. If we do not have to accept this argument, an important obstacle to a type-identical interpretation is removed.

To clarify the logical space of possible type-identical theories, we distinguish three increasingly weak forms of unity between human and divine contemplation. As less is shared between the human and divine acts, progressively less metaphysical unity is posited. According to the *Strict Identity View*, human and divine contemplation are numerically identical acts.

divine is too vast for there to be genuine type-identity. We hope this chapter will in some small way address the neglect of this topic.

¹³⁵ Type-identical interpretations represent one way of taking Aristotle's immortalization language literally rather than the only possible interpretation.

According to the *Participation View*, they are numerically distinct acts that are actualized by the very same contemplative actuality (*energeia*), essentially by divine nous and derivatively by human nous. According to the *Formal Identity View*, they are numerically distinct acts that instantiate formally identical forms.

Our taxonomy is based on answering the question: In virtue of what are human and divine contemplation metaphysically the same type of activity? Within the Aristotelian framework developed here, every type-identical account metaphysically appears ultimately to reduce to one of these three: 1) Same act of contemplation, exemplified by the Strict Identity View 2) Distinct acts sharing in the same contemplative actuality, exemplified by the Participation View 3) Formally identical forms but distinct acts, exemplified by the Formal Identity View. The three views therefore form a spectrum of progressively weaker metaphysical unity: first sameness of contemplative act, then sameness of contemplative actuality, and finally formal identity of form. The taxonomy does not distinguish three different notions of type-identity but rather three metaphysical explanations of one and the same claim that human and divine contemplation are type-identical. Given the adopted Aristotelian metaphysical framework, the three views appear to us to exhaust the possible candidates. Type-identical views, as we understand them, locate the relevant sameness in one of these three things: act, actuality, or form.

If a theory appeals merely to similarity, imitation, function, and so on, it is no longer genuinely type-identical because human and divine contemplation are not the same type of activity. They are merely related in some weaker way and thus type-distinct. Moreover, it seems to us that most purported type-identical alternatives can be shown to reduce to one or more of the three views we are considering. That is, by asking whether sameness is grounded in one act, one

actuality, or one form, we think most alternatives can be shown to reduce either to Strict Identity, Participation or Formal Identity.

One might think human and divine contemplation are the same type because they have the same object, namely both contemplate self-thinking thought. But this is insufficient. Two activities can have the same object while being different types. For example, my seeing a rock and my touching a rock have the same object but are different activities. So, object identity does not ground type-identity. Within Aristotle's hylomorphism, if sameness of object were enough, it would have to be because the object specifies the form of the act, thus reducing to identity of form.

One might instead think human and divine contemplation have the same end, e.g. contemplation of truth. But this is also insufficient. One may have the same end of eating dinner in buying dinner and making dinner. But these are still two different activities. So, sameness of end does not ground type-identity. If sameness of end were enough, it would have to be because the end specifies the form of the activity. Again, this reduces to identity of form.

Another possibility is that human and divine contemplation have the same causal source, e.g. both come from divine nous. But things with the same cause need not be the same type. The same cause, namely the sun, may cause plants to grow and animals to see. Thus, we have sameness of cause but different activities. Further, if divine nous causes human contemplation by giving it the same actuality, that is just Participation. And if it causes human contemplation by giving it formally identical forms, that is just Formal Identity.

Yet another possibility is that human and divine contemplation perform the same function. But, at least within Aristotle's metaphysics, functions are determined by forms. Different things, i.e. a heart and an artificial pump, can perform the same function of circulating

blood, but that does not make them the same type of thing. Since, for Aristotle, a thing performs its characteristic function in virtue of its form, sameness of function presupposes less than sameness of form. And so, sameness of function is weaker than Formal Identity.

Moreover, two things can resemble each other without being the same type. A photo of a flower resembles the flower but is not the same type of thing. And so, mere resemblance does not yield type-identity.

Finally, one might maintain human and divine contemplation share the same essence. But appeals to shared essence require further specification. If the shared essence is understood structurally, the view reduces to Formal Identity. If understood as one shared actuality, it reduces to Participation. And if understood as one numerically identical act, it reduces to Strict Identity.

While no taxonomy can rule out every conceivable account, the criteria developed here suggest any genuinely type-identical proposal will reduce to one of these three views. Proving this, however, goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

The Formal Identity View serves as the boundary for type-identical theories. For Aristotle, substantial kinds are primarily determined by form. Accordingly, within his hylomorphic framework, sameness of form appears to be the minimum requirement for type-identity. Once the relation of sameness is weakened further, one typically loses type-identity altogether. Sameness of function, sameness of end, analogical sameness, or resemblance do not require sameness of form. But once sameness of form is abandoned, it is plausible to maintain along with Aristotle that the activities are no longer genuinely the same type.

The chapter proceeds dialectically. Rather than immediately defending one interpretation, it first maps the logical space of type-identical theories, examines their respective strengths and weaknesses, and eventually concludes the Participation View provides the strongest overall

account. The expositions of the views of contemplation that follow should not be taken as claims that Aristotle explicitly held them. Rather, they are metaphysical reconstructions that attempt to preserve central Aristotelian commitments while exploring different ways those commitments might coherently be developed.

I. Critique of Reece

According to Bryan Reece in “Aristotle on Divine and Human Contemplation” (2020), in *EN* 10.7-8, Aristotle tells us human happiness is contemplative because a contemplative life is most proper (*idion/oikeion*) to a human being.¹³⁶ He also holds that it is not only human beings

¹³⁶ Reece seems to understand “proper to” as entailing “exclusive to” partly on the basis of Aristotle’s function argument in I.7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle excludes activities shared with plants and non-rational animals as the human function. This suggests to Reece that if species Y shares activity X with any other species, X cannot constitute the function of Y. It is true that in the function argument, Aristotle excludes nutrition, growth, and perception as candidates for the human function because these activities are shared with plants and non-rational animals. But he is not comparing humans with all beings that exist when he rejects these activities as candidates. He is instead comparing the different levels of soul (nutritive, perceptive, rational) to find the activity that expresses the distinctive and highest capacity of the human soul. Nutrition and perception are rejected because they belong to lower levels of soul. Rational activity, as the highest capacity belonging to human beings, remains because it expresses what is distinctive about human beings within the hierarchy of embodied living beings. Every explicit elimination Aristotle makes is downward-looking. He excludes capacities shared with lower forms of life because they fail to express the highest principle in humans. If an activity belongs equally to lower forms of life, then it cannot constitute the highest function of a higher form of life. The argument nowhere turns on whether rational activity is shared with higher beings. Therefore, the argument itself provides some evidence that “proper to humans” means “characteristic of humans as humans,” not “exclusive to humans among all beings”. And so, the function argument establishes the human function must distinguish humans from beings lacking reason. It does not establish the human function must distinguish humans from every being whatsoever. Moreover, Aristotle gives no indication that exclusivity extends upward. Every example he actually uses concerns capacities belonging to less complete forms of life. Reece therefore owes an additional argument for extending Aristotle’s principle beyond the cases Aristotle himself discusses.

that are capable of contemplation. The divine also contemplate. This is supposed to give rise to the following worry:

The Argument from Divine Contemplation

1. If contemplation is *proper* to human beings, then only human beings are capable of contemplation.
2. If divine beings are capable of contemplation, then it is false that only human beings are capable of contemplation.
3. Divine beings are capable of contemplation.
4. So, it is false that only human beings are capable of contemplation.
5. Therefore, contemplation is not proper to human beings.

But premise 1 is false. Contemplation may be *proper* to human beings in the sense of being *characteristic* rather than *exclusive*. In fact, we can maintain contemplation is proper to a wider class of beings, i.e. divine beings, and that humans belong to that class, i.e. they possess a divine element whose actualization constitutes their highest fulfillment. Contemplation would then be proper to humans *qua* divine without it being true that only humans are capable of contemplation, since there are non-human divine beings who also contemplate.

Reece's own way of dissolving the Argument from Divine Contemplation is to claim Aristotle equivocates with respect to contemplation. Human contemplation is not type-identical to divine contemplation. We will lay out his arguments and then proceed to show why they do not establish the thesis that human and divine contemplation are not type-identical.

Reece argues human contemplation is the instantiation of *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) which includes a particular kind of nous, the ability to grasp first principles, and *episteme*, the ability to derive truths from first principles. Lacking either means a being lacks *sophia*. And if a

divine being lacks *sophia*, its contemplation is not type-identical to human contemplation. Reece supposes the Unmoved Mover/God and the celestial spheres are divine beings who contemplate and attempts to show they lack *sophia*.

He asserts the Unmoved Mover cannot have *episteme* because the activity of *episteme* is directed towards something other than itself whereas the activity of the Unmoved Mover is only directed towards itself. And so, they cannot be the same type of activity. Further, the Unmoved Mover cannot have *episteme* because *episteme* involves thinking many different (though related) things whereas the Unmoved Mover can only think itself. In addition, Reece supposes the Unmoved Mover's nous could not be the same as a human nous because human nous grasps multiple first principles whereas the Unmoved Mover's nous cannot grasp multiple first principles.

A little later, Reece supposes the celestial spheres, who are divinities, also contemplate. But he argues they lack theoretical thought and so their contemplation must be different from human contemplation. And he thinks that even if they had theoretical thought, their thinking would not be an instance of *sophia* (which involves *episteme*) since the celestial spheres do not go from thinking one thing to thinking another.

We now examine Reece's argument that human and divine contemplation are distinct types of activities. His main argument seems to presuppose the following assumptions:

1. Human contemplation is an exercise of *sophia*.
2. The exercise of *sophia* involves both nous and *episteme*.
3. Divine thought lacks *episteme*.
4. Therefore, divine contemplation differs in type from human contemplation.

In what follows, we reject premise 2. The fact that Aristotle understands *sophia* as *nous* + *episteme* does not entail every act of *sophia* simultaneously exercises both. *Sophia* is a *hexis* (disposition). A *hexis* need not exercise every constituent simultaneously, even in its fullest exercise. Even if *sophia* consists dispositionally of *nous* and *episteme*, a particular activity may instantiate *sophia* primarily through just one constituent. Reece's interpretation appears to require that because *sophia* consists of both dispositions, every activity expressing it must exercise both constituents simultaneously. But Aristotle nowhere explicitly argues for this stronger claim.

Would the grasp of a first principle from which nothing else followed discursively not count as the manifestation of *sophia*, the highest intellectual virtue, simply because *episteme* cannot operate on such content? To say it would not does not seem obviously correct. For that first principle may be the most important theoretical first principle arrived at by *nous*. Aristotle gives no reason to think why grasping such a first principle would fail to count as an exercise of *sophia*.

Further, one can maintain *sophia* involves *nous* and *episteme* in ordinary cognition, including when we think about scientific first principles and what follows from them, but that *episteme* plays no role in contemplation as such. When we ascribe contemplation to *sophia*, we are not at the same time saying this involves derivation of truths from first principles. We may simply be saying *nous* alone is operative and so, the highest form of manifesting *sophia* is without *episteme*. If, as argued below, human contemplation only requires interaction between active and passive *nous* and involves self-thinking, we would be hard pressed to claim it was not an instance of the highest kind of intellectual activity. This suggests it would fall under *sophia* even if *episteme* did not contribute to it. Even if Reece is correct that human *sophia* ordinarily includes *episteme*, this does not establish contemplation itself essentially consists in *episteme*.

Reece's own interpretation seems to suppose human contemplation at least partly consists in pondering what follows from scientific first principles, i.e. it involves the instantiation of *episteme*. Scientific demonstration is undoubtedly a genuine intellectual activity, but it need not constitute contemplation. On the interpretation defended below, human contemplation is best understood as culminating in the same activity-type that characterizes divine thinking, i.e. self-thinking. This interpretation gains plausibility from Aristotle's repeated description of contemplation as the activity most akin to divine life (*EN* X) and his account of divine thought as self-thinking (*Metaphysics* XII).

On the interpretation defended below, human contemplation also does not involve a different kind of nous than divine nous since it involves passive nous, which can become any intelligible (in act), becoming identical (in act) with divine nous. If contemplation consists solely in the interaction of passive and active nous rather than involving *episteme*, one of Reece's principal grounds for distinguishing human and divine contemplation is weakened.

Turning to the celestial spheres, Aristotle nowhere unequivocally states they contemplate. We want to suggest the possibility that they do not in fact contemplate. On the interpretation defended here, the reason they do not contemplate is they lack intellective souls. Although many commentators infer some form of intellectual cognition from Aristotle's cosmology, the texts nowhere explicitly attribute contemplative nous to the celestial spheres whereas they do explain their motion through desire (*orexis*). Since desire, considered simply as desire, does not require intellective cognition, the textual evidence does not by itself require us to infer contemplative intellect.

The celestial spheres are divine because they are alive, eternal, ungenerated, indestructible, and so on. On the present reconstruction, they are best understood as just divine

animals in that they engage in eternal circular self-motion on the basis of the desire to imitate the Unmoved Mover. That is, they have desiderative souls. We need not decide whether they also have perceptual souls. But just as terrestrial animals do not have rational souls with which to contemplate but can engage in self-motion, the same is true of the celestial spheres.

If this is the proper understanding of the celestial spheres, the fact they cannot contemplate makes their natures irrelevant to the question of whether human and divine contemplation are type-identical. That they lack *sophia* or even theoretical souls altogether in no way implies there is a way of contemplating wholly different from human contemplation.

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8, does speak of the “gods” (in the plural) being supremely happy and since happiness equals contemplation, he seems committed to many gods who contemplate. And so, he might be thought to be maintaining that, besides the Unmoved Mover, the celestial spheres, the only other beings he takes to be divine, also contemplate.

But this understanding of the passage is problematic. For in it, Aristotle maintains there must be some activity the gods engage in as their characteristic activity that is identical to happiness and, in the absence of any other candidate characteristic activities, he concludes this must be the immaterial activity of contemplation. But the celestial spheres, unlike the Unmoved Mover, already have a matter-involving characteristic activity they engage in, namely circular motion. And so, Aristotle’s argument at most establishes the Unmoved Mover must contemplate to possess a characteristic activity, not that the celestial spheres also must. The passage does not in itself establish Aristotle has the celestial spheres specifically in mind. A possible reading is that “god” and even “gods” in this passage ultimately refer only to the Unmoved Mover, though it is admittedly not the standard interpretation. On this reading, Aristotle may simply be using the plural because he has not established in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that there is only one God. He

may be speaking loosely or trying to conform as much as possible to ordinary Greek religious discourse.

Once premise 2 is called into question, namely that every instance of *sophia* exercises both nous and *episteme*, we are no longer forced to conclude human and divine contemplation are type-distinct. Reece's argument is meant to establish that if contemplation essentially consists in the joint exercise of nous and *episteme*, then human and divine contemplation differ in type. We have argued, however, that Aristotle nowhere commits himself to such a claim. Once this assumption is abandoned, Reece's argument no longer excludes type-identical interpretations, thereby reopening the interpretive space explored in the remainder of this chapter.

II. Understanding of Active and Passive Nous Common to All Views

Active nous is immortal (*De Anima* III.5, 430a22–23) while passive nous is perishable (*De Anima* III.5, 430a23–25). Passive nous belongs to the human soul and is ordinarily dependent upon embodiment for its characteristic operations (although its highest actualization through contemplation may not require bodily conditions). And so, when the human being perishes, passive nous perishes along with it insofar as it belongs to the embodied soul (unless otherwise specified in the contemplative theories discussed below). On the present reconstruction, active nous is not tied to the human body in any way and cannot be properly regarded as part of the human soul.¹³⁷ When the human body perishes, active nous remains what it is.

¹³⁷ This is, of course, not uncontroversial. Some might think active nous is part of the human soul but is separable. But if the soul is the form of the body and if active nous is not the form of any bodily organ or the body as a whole, then it is plausible to think it is not in fact a part of the human soul.

Nevertheless, both active and passive nous are called nous because both are capable of thought. On the interpretation defended here, active nous thinks without the assistance of anything outside itself, though it eternally thinks only itself. This follows from Aristotle's characterization of divine thought as self-thinking and from the identification defended below between active and divine nous. Meanwhile, on the present interpretation, passive nous thinks always with the assistance of active nous and sometimes with the help of other parts of the human soul. Its thought is illimitable and it is in principle capable of receiving any intelligible.

Active nous is immaterial and essentially actual (*De Anima* iii.5 430a17–18). Now, if two beings are numerically distinct immaterial essentially actual beings, then given Aristotle's hylomorphic account of individuation, numerical distinction requires a differentiating principle, paradigmatically matter or form. Aristotle provides no obvious such principle. He gives no indication active nous differs essentially from one human being to another. And since active nous is immaterial, matter cannot differentiate it. Thus, if active nous has the same essence wherever present and is immaterial and essentially actual, it is reasonable to conclude the active nous of all human beings is one. Passive nous, meanwhile, being part of the human soul, is individuated by the individual human being. And so, there are as many passive nous as there are human beings, assuming humans are the only rational animals in existence.

The only self-subsistent immaterial intellects in Aristotle's cosmology are active and divine nous, and on the present reconstruction, there is at most one of each.¹³⁸ The remaining question is whether the one active intellect is distinct from or identical with divine intellect.

¹³⁸ Though controversial, in this chapter, we reject the thesis that Aristotle is committed to the existence of multiple unmoved movers. We will not, however, argue against this thesis.

Although Aristotle nowhere explicitly develops a theory of the individuation of immaterial essentially actual beings, the present reconstruction argues the principles governing individuation elsewhere in his metaphysics naturally extend to this case, yielding the most unified reading of his metaphysics.

In *Metaphysics* Lambda, we are told divine nous is thought thinking itself and its essence is actuality. In the case of divine nous, the thinker and the object thought are not independently given items but identical with the activity of self-thinking. We have some reason to think active nous is the same kind of immaterial essentially actual intellect since Aristotle nowhere positively distinguishes two kinds of such intellects. Further, Aristotle positively characterizes active and divine nous using the same cluster of metaphysical predicates. If Aristotle intended active and divine nous to be distinct kinds of immaterial essentially actual intellects, we would reasonably expect some positive textual differentiation. Although this by itself does not establish their identity, it removes any positive textual basis for distinguishing them. And since Aristotle never distinguishes their mode of activity, the simplest reading is that active nous likewise self-thinks.

Aristotle maintains both active and divine nous have actuality as their essence, though in different texts and formulations. Within his hylomorphic framework, no evident principle remains by which numerically distinct essentially actual beings could be individuated. Extending Aristotle's hylomorphic principles, since numerical plurality among beings sharing one essence requires some principle of differentiation, and no such principle appears available for immaterial essentially actual beings, multiplication lacks metaphysical ground.

To insist divine nous thinks itself while active nous thinks itself, yet that the selves are distinct, presupposes what needs explaining. As was said, divine and active nous are both immaterial essentially actual intellects. Given the assumptions defended in this chapter,

distinctness among such beings must be grounded in matter or degree of actuality or some other relevant difference. Among essentially actual beings, there is no unrealized potentiality by which one could be more actual than another. Also, immateriality excludes material individuation. Further, active and divine nous cannot be individuated by accidents since both are simple and impassible. In short, no obvious remaining principle of individuation appears available. In fact, since immaterial essential actuality appears to exclude every differentiating principle Aristotle explicitly recognizes, plurality seems to lack metaphysical support. Moreover, Aristotle never appeals to primitive numerical diversity in explaining separate substances.

And so, since no evident principle remains, it appears there is one immaterial self-subsistent intellect, namely divine nous (considered in itself) or active nous (considered in relation to human thinking). Nothing in Aristotle's psychology appears to require more than one self-subsistent immaterial intellect because the immaterial nature of active/divine nous makes it suitable to perform all that is demanded of it within the Aristotelian explanatory framework. Since active nous performs no essentially individualized explanatory role, multiplying active intellects introduces explanatory multiplication without explanatory gain. Every explanatory function attributed to active nous in *De Anima* iii.5, i.e. actualizing intelligibles, making thought possible, remaining separate and impassible, and so on, can equally be performed by one intellect standing in relation to many passive intellects. The present interpretation rejects the thesis that active nous is a separate divine substance distinct from the Unmoved Mover/God. Instead, it is the same immaterial essentially actual intellect considered under a different explanatory relation.

In *On the Generation of Animals*, on one plausible reading, Aristotle tells us active nous enters a person from outside and is divine. In *De Anima* iii.5, we are told it is unchanging. These

have important implications for the nature of active nous since they naturally suggest though do not strictly entail that it is the same before and after it enters a person. Nothing in Aristotle suggests active nous acquires new intrinsic powers or activities upon entering the human being. On the present interpretation, it need perform no additional intrinsic activity beyond those Aristotle attributes to divine nous. That is, it does not acquire a new intrinsic activity when related to passive nous; rather, it enters into an extrinsic relation. On the present reconstruction, active nous enters from outside not by becoming a constituent part of the human soul, but by entering into a relation with passive nous whereby the latter becomes capable of intellectual actuality. And numerical identity with divine nous does not preclude active nous from standing in explanatory relations to many passive intellects.

Having established the common metaphysical framework, we now turn to elucidating ordinary finite cognition.

III. Finite Cognition

There are two kinds of human cognition, finite and infinite.¹³⁹ Finite cognition involves active nous, passive nous, and some other psychic capacity from the rest of the human soul (the identity of this further psychic power need not concern us here). These three things come together to produce a finite thought, say “I think triangularity”. On the present interpretation, passive nous is the immediate subject of finite thinking, while the further psychic power provides the thought content and active nous provides its form. In what follows, we use “form”, “reflexive

¹³⁹ Infinite cognition is our term for contemplation by passive nous. Finite cognition is our term for all other kinds of cognition by passive nous.

actuality”, “self-thinking”, and the “I self-think” to describe aspects of the same underlying reality contributed by active nous.

Passive nous is “that by which the soul becomes all things” (*De Anima* iii.5, 430a14). It is the receptive intellectual power that can in some sense become all intelligible things. That means it is capable of receiving any intelligible without its matter. Passive nous is intellect in potency. Before thinking, it is not actually any intelligible thing. In fact, “before thinking it is actually none of the things that exist” (*De Anima* III.4, 429a21–24). And so, passive nous is indeterminate.

Upon receiving thought content from the further psychic power and form from active nous, passive nous is actualized and in some sense “becomes” what it thinks, or more accurately, it in some sense becomes the intelligible without its matter. This allows human beings to cognize intelligible truths, rather than merely perceive particulars. Passive nous only takes up the thinkable contents of what is presented to it by the other parts of the soul. No separation or discrimination of the thinkable part from the non-thinkable part of what is presented is made by passive nous because it is only receptive to the thinkable part.

Now, we are told in *De Anima* iii 5: “And one sort of mind exists by coming to be all things and one sort of mind exists by producing all things, as a kind of positive state, like light. For in a certain way, light makes colors existing in potentiality colors in actuality.” Active nous is “like light” because just as light makes potentially visible things actually visible, active nous makes potentially intelligible things, namely potential thought contents taken up by passive nous, actually intelligible. It is like light not because it modifies thought contents, but because it is the condition under which thought contents appear as intelligible at all. Just as light makes seeing possible, active nous makes thinking possible. Light is not identical to visible objects and active

nous is not identical to thought contents. Light does not receive images just as active nous does not receive thought contents.

Thought contents come from other powers of the soul. But this in itself does not yet constitute thinking. Active nous is that in virtue of which these contents become actual as intelligible. On the present reconstruction, this consists in passive nous being actualized by active nous. Since passive nous is pure potentiality, the “I self-think” cannot arise from it; it must come from active nous. Active nous does not add further content to what is given; rather, it provides the “I self-think”, namely that in virtue of which what is given becomes intelligible as such.

Aristotle does tell us active nous is productive (*poietikon*), which might suggest it produces thought contents. But we interpret this as meaning that active nous is productive in the sense of actualizing thought contents by providing their form, i.e. the “I self-think”. Indeed, this actualizing role of active nous is suggested by “light makes colors existing in potentiality colors in actuality”.

We can now explain finite cognition. On the present reconstruction, passive nous is capable of in a sense becoming any intelligible. Finite cognition involves passive nous thinking some finite thought content (e.g. triangularity) by way of being actualized by active nous. If the identification of active and divine nous defended in the previous section is correct, then active nous shares the activity Aristotle attributes to divine nous in *Metaphysics* Λ, namely self-thinking thought. Since we want to claim active nous contributes no thought content of its own to passive nous in finite cognition, whatever it contributes must belong to the form of thought. On this reconstruction, if active nous is self-thinking actuality, then what it contributes can only be the reflexive structure of thinking itself. Since it is metaphysically simple, it will not contain a

plurality of finite concepts. Thus, whatever it contributes to finite cognition must be invariant across all acts of thinking. The best candidate for the invariant feature of every intellectual act is its reflexive actuality. Since active nous is itself self-thinking actuality, the actuality it imparts cannot be merely generic actuality but must bear the same reflexive character that constitutes it.

As we said, on the present reconstruction, active nous is thought thinking itself or to put it first-personally, “I self-think”, where ‘self’ refers to the object of the self-thinking which is of course the self-thinking itself. In finite cognition, e.g. “I think triangularity”, passive nous receives “triangularity” from another part of the soul while simultaneously being actualized by the self-thinking actuality of active nous, i.e the “I self-think”. Throughout this process, active nous is wholly unaffected. Since the actuality of active nous is simple, passive nous cannot receive less than the whole of its actuality because the actuality cannot be divided into parts or aspects and so cannot be divided into what is communicable and what is non-communicable. Rather, passive nous is actualized by the whole actuality of self-thinking.

The “I think” is an expression of the more fundamental form “I self-think” rather than the other way around. “I self-think” entails that the thinker is present to itself, thought is reflexively present to itself, and the act includes awareness of itself as an act. When the content triangularity is introduced to passive nous, the act of thought becomes “I self-think my thinking triangularity”. “I self-think” is the form of the thought. “My thinking triangularity” is the immediate content of self-thinking. And “triangularity” is the ultimate object of the thought. This can be abbreviated as “I think triangularity” so long as we keep in mind the latter is a specification of a deeper reflexive structure. Since active nous is the principle through which cognition is actualized, every intellectual act has a derivative reflexivity insofar as passive nous is actualized by a principle whose actuality consists in self-thinking. But then why isn’t finite thought always

explicitly self-reflexive? Most of our thoughts seem directed towards objects rather than the self. On this interpretation, the self-thinking form is always present but is usually implicit. Attention is directed primarily towards the content/object in finite cognition.

And so, we want to claim the form of all finite cognition can be traced to the activity of active nous, i.e. to the “I self-think”. Passive nous cannot itself generate the reflexive form of thought because, prior to actualization, it is wholly potential. Reflexivity must therefore originate from the actuality of active nous. This helps us see that “without this [active nous], nothing thinks” (*De Anima*, iii.5 430a25) because, on the present interpretation, every intellectual act possesses an intrinsic reflexive structure and active nous is the only source of such reflexivity. Every intellectual act has such a structure because intellect is always present to itself although this need not constitute a second-order act of reflection. And so, every act of thought is reflexive in its mode of actuality, even when it is not reflexive in its intentional content. On this reconstruction, active nous is necessary for all finite cognition in that it imparts reflexivity to all finite thoughts without contributing content. Because active nous contributes form rather than content, its role is less immediately apparent than the contribution of the other psychic powers.

In what follows, we discuss several different views where human and divine contemplation are type-identical partly to determine how amenable they are to the immortalization of passive nous. We begin with views within which it is easiest to secure the immortality of passive nous and end with those within which it is hardest. We also put aside views where passive nous is taken to be immortal by its very nature because this goes against Aristotle’s claim that passive nous is perishable. We assume if passive nous is to be immortal, it must be immortalized through contemplation. Having laid out what is common to all views, we now proceed to spell out what is exclusive to the first.

IV. Strict Identity View of Contemplation

As we have said, passive nous is capable of becoming in a sense anything that can be thought. This includes active nous since it is a thinkable being. We thus turn to the pure cognition of active nous by passive nous which happens when passive nous is only affected by active nous. That is, active nous provides both the form of the thought, i.e. the “I self-think”, as well as the content “my thinking self-thinking”. This can be abbreviated by the expression “I self-think”.

Active nous is identical with its intelligible. Whenever an intelligible is identical with the substance that possesses it, becoming that intelligible entails becoming that substance. Since the intelligible is numerically identical with its substance, there is nothing distinct from the substance for passive nous to become. Further, passive nous has no independent intellectual actuality that could remain distinct from the actuality received. Moreover, on this view, the identity conditions of an intellect are exhausted by its actuality. And so, when passive nous thinks active nous, it becomes numerically identical to active nous.¹⁴⁰ Strict numerical identity is here understood as the termination of passive nous through its complete actualization rather than the coming into existence of a second instance of active nous. Since passive nous has no independent intellectual actuality apart from what it receives, once it receives pure actuality without remainder nothing distinctively passive remains. There cannot remain a numerically distinct subject once the entirety of its actuality is numerically identical with the actuality received. On the present interpretation, the identification of passive nous with active nous

¹⁴⁰ This claim is, of course, extremely controversial. It is the defining commitment of the Strict Identity View. But it is almost certainly not the view that Aristotle himself holds.

constitutes contemplation. In contemplation, passive nous is no longer perishable. It has achieved immortality by having become pure actuality. That is, it has achieved its highest actuality or fully realized itself.

The decisive difference between passive nous engaging in finite and infinite cognition is that the former only brings passive nous to partial actuality whereas the latter brings it to full actuality without remainder. Finite cognition involves one intelligible object rather than another. Thus, passive nous retains unrealized potentiality. Having thought one thing, it can think otherwise, cease thinking altogether, and so on. Since finite cognition does not eliminate potency, passive nous cannot be pure actuality. But if it cognizes active nous alone, with no finite admixture, it receives pure actuality itself. In cognizing active nous, passive nous must arrive at pure actuality because if potency remained, it would not become what it cognized.

But doesn't passive nous becoming identical to active nous mean it can no longer be receptive? Does this mean contemplation is irreversible and will go on indefinitely? And will the human being whose passive nous it was never again be able to engage in finite cognition? We may reason as follows: when passive nous becomes active nous, it becomes pure actuality. Actuality is prior to potency and pure actuality contains no unrealized potential. So, when passive nous genuinely reaches pure actuality, it cannot then become otherwise. That is, whatever is pure actuality cannot reacquire potency. And so, passive nous becoming active nous is irreversible.

But Aristotle seems to think contemplation is intermittent rather than a one-time irreversible achievement. How is this possible on this view? Perhaps some potentiality in passive nous always remains. But if any passive potency remained, passive nous would differ metaphysically from pure actuality. Therefore it would not literally be active nous. It is more

plausible that contemplation is irreversible. Taking this route then requires an explanation of how human beings return from contemplation, continue practical life, and remain embodied beings. Aristotle nowhere gives such an account. And so, what follows will be wholly speculative. But it is at least one way to account for irreversibility, continued finite cognition, and intermittent contemplation at the same time on this interpretation. The full price of this interpretive move will become apparent in the next section.

An admittedly speculative reconciliation would be that contemplation is irreversible but that a new passive nous regenerates in place of the old because embodied life would appear to require an intellectual receptive principle for ordinary finite cognition. So long as the new passive nous is not yet activated, the manifestation of contemplative self-thinking will remain. But the demands of embodied human life will inevitably activate the new passive nous for the purpose of finite cognition. At such a time, the manifestation of contemplation will cease as new finite cognition takes its place.

This speculative view maintains a newly generated passive nous succeeds the previous one while inheriting the same embodied organism. In saying this, a distinction is being made between the living organism who is biologically and mostly psychologically continuous and the current passive nous. This view preserves irreversibility while allowing finite cognition to continue while also preserving bodily continuity together with some psychological continuity. But biological continuity is not identical to intellectual identity. The view therefore raises enormous personal identity questions. Coping with them would take us too far afield. To be clear, the Strict Identity View only entails irreversibility. The regeneration hypothesis is merely one (weak) speculative attempt to reconcile that consequence with Aristotle's repeated claim that contemplation is intermittent.

It might be noticed finite cognition possesses a certain practical priority within embodied life. For instance, when it comes to finite thoughts by passive nous, one usually attends to the ultimate content rather than to the self-reflexive activity of self-thinking. Likewise, the manifestation of contemplation persists only so long as regenerated passive nous remains unengaged in finite cognition. But the latter inevitably resumes. At that point, finite cognition obscures or eclipses the manifestation of the already achieved contemplative identity, and finite reflexivity returns. This can be best explained by the fact that passive nous belongs to the embodied human soul. And so, embodied existence structurally orients passive nous toward finite cognition and finite contents over infinite cognition and the self-reflexive aspects of finite cognition.

Whether a human being has contemplated once or more, so long as she has contemplated at least once, the obstructions imposed by finite cognition permanently cease upon death and the manifestation of contemplation becomes permanently unimpeded. What interrupts contemplation during embodied life is finite cognition. At bodily death, finite cognition is no longer possible because it essentially depends upon passive nous. Contemplation no longer depends upon passive nous once numerical identity has been achieved since passive nous has ceased to exist. Therefore, if one has genuinely achieved contemplation, nothing remains to obstruct its eternal manifestation. And so, death removes the conditions of interruption rather than the condition of contemplation. A single stretch of contemplation is sufficient to secure eternal contemplation after bodily death. This follows from irreversibility. But the best life will still maximize contemplation because it is the most pleasant activity in the Aristotelian universe.

The view sketched thus far allows for impersonal rather than personal immortality since all individuality rooted in matter disappears in contemplation as we have understood it. For if

what survives death is numerically identical with divine nous and the latter is not individuated by matter, memory, or finite personality, what survives cannot be a distinct personal self in the ordinary sense. Rather, it is the manifestation of eternal thinking and not the continued existence of an empirical subject.

V. Problems with the Strict Identity View of Contemplation

The Strict Identity View has some strengths. It explains why human contemplation is divine by understanding contemplation as an act performed when the human being becomes identical with divine nous. It also offers a straightforward explanation of why contemplation is the highest good, namely because it grants the contemplator immortality. It further explains why contemplation differs from finite cognition. And it achieves maximal metaphysical unity with divine nous.

We now turn to the principal difficulties facing this view. Given that passive nous becomes literally identical to divine nous and since the latter is unique, the individuality of the contemplating subject disappears. And yet, the view wants to maintain contemplation is something that happens to the human being. But this is problematic because once identity has been achieved, the human being no longer performs or undergoes contemplation as a distinct subject. The distinct contemplating human subject disappears, leaving only divine nous as the subject of contemplation.

A related problem is how multiple humans can engage in contemplation while their contemplative acts remain distinct from one another. If contemplation literally involves numerical identity with divine nous, there is no remaining principle of individuation by which Plato's contemplation could differ from Aristotle's. Numerical identity collapses the

contemplative acts of all distinct subjects into a single act because it is transitive. The Strict Identity View seems to have no straightforward solution to this problem.

Another difficulty is if passive and active nous become numerically identical, how can divine contemplation be continuous while human contemplation is intermittent? One can maintain a new passive nous regenerates after the original passive nous becomes identical with active nous. But it is not clear passive nous is metaphysically the kind of thing that can regenerate. And in any case, positing a series of passive intellects in the same human being implies one can have multiple intellectual selves over time, a position that should be avoided because Aristotle nowhere suggests one human life involves a succession of passive intellects. Further, the regeneration hypothesis appears *ad hoc* since it is introduced independently of textual evidence solely to preserve the Strict Identity View from an otherwise devastating objection. Thus, the view has no satisfactory way of accounting for the intermittency of human contemplation.

A more fundamental objection is that Aristotle's claim that intellect in act is identical with the intelligible in act concerns the identity of knower and known in cognition rather than explicitly establishing the numerical identity of substances. Even if passive nous becomes identical with divine nous *qua* intelligible actuality, it does not obviously follow that it becomes numerically identical with divine nous as a substance. The central inference of the Strict Identity View therefore requires an additional argument that Aristotle himself never provides. Moreover, the Strict Identity View assumes, without textual support, that the identity conditions of intellect are exhausted by actuality alone. Without this additional premise, the move from identity in cognition to identity of substances does not follow.

Finally, this view makes human fulfillment depend on the destruction rather than the perfection of human nature. That is, if contemplation literally annihilates passive nous, then contemplation perfects human beings only by eliminating the human intellect. This sits awkwardly with Aristotle's general teleology, where the perfection of a being normally completes rather than abolishes its nature. On this view, the subject perfected is precisely the subject eliminated.

These objections are sufficient to show why the Strict Identity View is difficult to maintain. We now turn to weaker metaphysical conceptions of the union between passive and active nous that do not saddle us with these serious and perhaps insurmountable difficulties (but may of course saddle us with others). This will require not taking passive nous to literally become active nous and engage in the very same act of contemplation. The new interpretations will, however, attempt to retain as many of the strengths of the Strict Identity View as possible so long as they do not inherit these difficulties.

VI. Participation View of Contemplation

Taken literally, Aristotle's claim of passive nous becoming all things tempts one toward a Strict Identity View on which passive and divine nous become numerically identical and their act of contemplation becomes literally the same. But such a view faces serious difficulties. A more coherent interpretation understands contemplation as the fullest possible actualization of passive nous through *participation* in the divine actuality (*energeia*).

By divine actuality, we mean the realized mode of being in virtue of which contemplative acts occur. An act is the concrete exercise of that actuality. Active nous is not something over and above this divine actuality. Rather, it is a substance whose very being consists in that

actuality. The present interpretation maintains one actuality can be participated in by different subjects, while each subject can have its own act of exercising that actuality.

Participation here is reconstructed as the dependent actualization of a potency by an independent actuality that remains numerically one. Human contemplation is an asymmetrical sharing in the divine actuality. That is, it participates in the very same divine actuality that constitutes the being of active nous. And so, there is one eternal divine actuality but there can be more than one participant and more than one act participating in that actuality. Being immaterial, divine pure actuality need not be individuated in the same way as material actualities. Therefore, it need not be multiplied by many participating subjects and acts.

But if contemplation is participation in divine actuality, and active nous is unique precisely because pure actuality cannot be multiplied as we have claimed, why does the same reasoning not prohibit multiple subjects from participating in that actuality? The answer is that actuality need not be multiplied to be participated in. Multiple subjects can participate in it but the actuality itself remains one. Participation is a kind of asymmetrical dependence, not co-possession. Dependence relations terminate in one actuality without multiplying it. The reasoning is as follows: the multiplication of divine pure actuality would require individuating features. But according to the Aristotelian framework defended above, numerical individuation among beings with the same essence requires either matter, accidental differentiation, or unrealized potentiality. Pure actuality lacks every principle of numerical differentiation. Therefore, any multiplicity must belong to the participants rather than to the actuality itself.

Now, an act is not merely the exercise of an actuality considered in abstraction. It is the exercise of an actuality by a determinate subject. Consequently, even if many subjects participate in one actuality, each subject's exercise is numerically distinct because each exercise remains

indexed to its own subject. The reasoning is as follows: active nous is a single divine actuality. Multiple passive intellects are distinct potencies. Each passive nous is actualized by the same divine actuality. But an act is individuated by its exercising subject. That is, acts are tokened through subjects. And so, the resulting contemplative acts are distinct because they are acts of distinct passive intellects.

On the present reconstruction, active nous supplies both form to passive nous, i.e. the “I self-think”, and content “my thinking self-thinking”, while passive nous receives this form and content. This yields the thought “I self-think my thinking self-thinking”, i.e. “I self-think”. Yet active and passive nous remain distinct because active nous does not become receptive (it does not acquire potentiality) and passive nous does not become self-subsisting pure actuality. That is, passive nous is actualized by active nous to the highest degree possible while avoiding the irreversible transformation into pure actuality. Unlike with the Strict Identity View, the individuality of passive nous and its acts is preserved because passive nous remains essentially receptive despite being fully actualized *qua* contemplator. The Participation View distinguishes three things usually conflated: the contemplating subject, the contemplative act, and the actuality which the act exercises. Subjects and acts are many whereas the divine actuality is numerically one.

On the present interpretation, when contemplation ceases, the participation of passive nous stops being unimpeded. Active nous goes on uninterrupted. And passive nous remains the receptive principle of the human intellect. What stops is the non-obstructed participation of passive nous in divine actuality due to the presence of finite cognitive material. Passive nous is no longer receiving active nous in a pure, undistorted manner. On the view, cessation of contemplation is not loss of divine contact. It is rather a shift from transparent participation in

intelligible actuality to finite articulation of that same intelligibility.¹⁴¹ Finite cognition and contemplation cannot simultaneously dominate the same receptive operation because the same receptive principle cannot simultaneously receive intelligibility both transparently and through finite mediation in the same respect. To use the light analogy, in contemplation, the eye sees light as light. In finite cognition, the eye still sees by light but now sees colored objects instead of light itself. When contemplation ceases, light does not disappear, but attention is no longer directed to light as such. On this view, there is no need for the regeneration of passive nous or irreversible metaphysical transformation or loss of subjectivity. Instead, the same human thinker oscillates between mediated and unmediated participation in divine actuality. And so, we can have a coherent account of intermittent contemplation without maintaining a new passive nous is regenerated.

As for immortality, successful contemplation permanently establishes passive nous in a stable relation to active nous. On this interpretation, immortality becomes the continued participation of passive nous in active nous after bodily death. Bodily death removes the conditions that obstructed transparent participation. Since finite cognition depended on other perishable parts of the soul, while contemplation did not, death destroys finite cognition while leaving contemplation intact. Thus, for non-contemplators, death destroys the embodied structures necessary for finite cognition, but nothing remains capable of contemplative participation. And so, non-contemplators perish experientially while contemplators persist contemplatively. This preserves Aristotle's insistence that contemplation is the highest fulfillment of human nature and not an automatic possession. Immortality depends on actualizing

¹⁴¹ By 'transparent', we are referring to the absence of finite objects in cognition.

one's highest capacity. Passive nous is typically perishable but can be immortalized as a result of having participated in divine actuality.

But why should contemplation become eternal after death if the contemplator remains essentially receptive rather than self-subsistent actuality? On this view, because passive nous is passive, it cannot and does not sustain contemplation by itself. Active nous eternally sustains it. Immortality is just eternally sustained participation. Passive nous survives because its activity remains continuously or stably grounded in and dependent on eternal active nous. This requires rejecting that only self-subsistent actuality can persist eternally. Thus, passive nous remains essentially receptive rather than self-subsistent, but its continued existence is eternally sustained by active nous.

But why does passive nous not perish completely if Aristotle calls it perishable? According to this reconstruction, passive nous is perishable only in its embodied mode of operation rather than absolutely. It is not merely a faculty like sight. It is an intellectual principle capable of subsisting apart from bodily operations. This proposal requires rejecting interpretations identifying passive nous exclusively with a perishable psychological faculty. Aristotle himself may be suggesting such a picture when he urges human beings to "so far as we can, make ourselves immortal" and tells us contemplation is divine and the intellect is the most divine thing in us. Though passive nous remains essentially a perishable potency, its existence is continuously sustained through participation. For whatever is continuously grounded in an eternal actuality continues so long as that actuality continues.

On this view, what survives in immortality is not the empirical self. Immortality neither becomes personal nor fully impersonal since it is passive nous that becomes immortal, which is sufficient for minimal subjectivity, but without any memories or perceptions and so on. But the

contemplator remains distinct from divine nous given the asymmetrical relation between passive and active nous.

Passive nous becomes as fully actualized as receptive intellect can be while remaining essentially receptive when contemplating. Even in contemplation, it continues to be actualized by active nous and receptivity thus reaches its highest perfection. Just as a knower is capable of knowing X even as they actually know X, passive nous remains receptive even while being as fully actualized as possible in contemplation. Contemplation remains stable not because passive nous becomes self-sufficient but because active nous continuously actualizes it.

VII. Problems with the Participation View of Contemplation

One might worry about how the many acts of multiple human subjects can be actualized by the same divine actuality at the same time. This objection assumes acts are individuated solely by the actuality exercised. But we maintain one actuality may actualize many acts without those acts collapsing into one because the numerical identity of acts is not determined solely by the actuality it is actualized by. Rather, an act is the exercise of a determinate potency actualized by the divine actuality. Thus, while the same actuality may be common to many acts as their principle of actualization, each act remains numerically distinct because it is the exercise of a numerically distinct potency. The one divine actuality explains what is common to every contemplative act, whereas distinct potencies explain their numerical diversity. Therefore, sharing one actuality does not entail numerical identity of the acts.

One might also worry that the Participation View is just the Strict Identity View in disguise. Why do passive and active nous not become identical if the actuality itself is numerically one? It is because passive nous is as actual as possible without being pure actuality whereas active nous is pure actuality. Numerical identity of actuality need not imply numerical

identity of intellects. The same actuality can exist essentially in one thing and participatively in another. Active nous possesses divine actuality essentially and self-subsistently; passive nous participates in it dependently and receptively. Participation is not possession because the participant depends upon an actuality whose being is complete independently of the participant. Active and passive nous remain two distinct intellects even though there is one divine actuality.

A further worry is that if, on the Participation View, passive nous always remains partly potential, why doesn't human contemplation remain imperfect? The answer depends on distinguishing the actuality participated in by the contemplator from the metaphysical status of the contemplator as a substance. Passive nous remains partly potential as a subject, but human contemplation need not therefore be imperfect as an act. The perfection of an act does not require the substance performing it to be itself pure actuality.

A further objection is whether dependence can be eternal as this view maintains. If passive nous depends forever on active nous for its existence, is this genuine immortality? We maintain that dependence can in fact be eternal and this need not undermine immortality. The Participation View rejects the assumption that eternal existence requires ontological independence. Something may exist eternally while depending at every moment for its existence on something else that is self-subsistent. Passive nous need not be pure actuality to exist forever so long as the pure actuality that is active nous sustains it eternally.

VIII. Formal Identity View of Contemplation

The Formal Identity View is an intermediate position between the Participation View and type-distinct views. It seeks to preserve continuity between human and divine contemplation while avoiding the difficulties of stronger type-identity theories. It attempts to preserve three Aristotelian commitments simultaneously: (1) the individuality of human contemplators, (2) the

dependence of passive nous upon active nous, and (3) the suggestion that human contemplation is genuinely the same activity-type as divine contemplation. The central claim is that human and divine contemplative acts are numerically distinct but formally identical. The view distinguishes carefully between numerical and formal identity. It denies human contemplation literally is God's contemplation and also denies that many human contemplators participate in one numerically identical contemplative actuality. Instead, it claims every contemplative act possesses its own actuality while instantiating the same formal specification. Thus, God's contemplation is one act, Aristotle's contemplation is another, Plato's contemplation is another, yet each possesses the same formal specification.

This specification includes only those features required for the act to be contemplation as such, not those having to do with the subject or the act's ontological mode of existence. The acts differ numerically but not formally. By "same formal specification", we mean not merely exact resemblance but one identical intelligible determination capable of multiple numerical instantiations. This identical intelligible determination is not a separately existing universal but the explanatory specification instantiated in each contemplative act. The explanatory specification has no existence apart from the activities instantiating it and the activity of active nous from which those instantiations derive. Active nous is not merely an efficient cause that initiates contemplation but the source whose own intelligible activity is communicated in the actualization of passive nous. And unlike ordinary universal predication, where subjects are grouped under a common concept abstracted from them, formal identity concerns the identity of the formal specification actively communicated in each contemplative actualization.

Central to the view is the metaphysical notion of formal identity. The claim is not merely that the acts resemble one another or belong to the same genus or are analogous. Rather, they

instantiate one and the same formal specification. Two acts are formally identical iff every essential feature constitutive of what makes them the kind of act they are is identical though they remain numerically distinct actualizations. Constitutive features are those essential to the explanatory identity of contemplation as contemplation rather than contingent features belonging to its subject or mode of existence. Formal identity is introduced because it provides the strongest metaphysical relation that constitutes type-identity between human and divine contemplation without collapsing them into one numerical act or a shared actuality.

The principal motivation for the view comes from Aristotle's general explanatory strategy. The following proposal is reconstructive rather than exegetically explicit. For Aristotle, form determines kind. For substances, bronze does not determine what something is. Its form does. The explanatory role of form can be extended analogically rather than univocally. Thus, we are not claiming that acts possess substantial forms but only that they possess formally explanatory structures. What determines the kind of an act is not whose act it is, but the act's formal specification. Thus, two acts belong to one type only insofar as they share one formal specification. By the form of an act, we mean the intelligible specification that determines what activity-type the act is, not a substantial form inhering in matter. Since contemplative acts share the same formal specification while remaining numerically distinct, human and divine contemplation are the same activity-type without being the same individual act.

What exactly constitutes the form of a contemplative act? The view identifies the form with self-thinking. Passive nous instantiates self-thinking derivatively rather than independently, since the self-thinking it exercises depends continuously upon the actualization supplied by active nous. The reason for why self-thinking is the form is that divine contemplation is self-thinking and Aristotle presents divine contemplation as the paradigm of contemplative activity.

Human contemplation is presented as the highest finite analogue to divine contemplation while remaining numerically distinct. The analogue relation concerns precisely what is essential to contemplation as contemplation rather than accidental conditions under which contemplation occurs. Since divine contemplation differs from ordinary cognition precisely in being self-thinking, self-thinking is the feature that explains contemplation as contemplation rather than merely cognition. If human contemplation is genuinely the same activity-type as divine contemplation, whatever is essential to contemplation as such must belong to both. Thus, self-thinking is constitutive of contemplation, whereas eternity, independence, and perfection are modes of existence rather than formal features.

These latter properties concern how contemplation exists rather than what contemplation is. Activities differing only in temporal mode of existence or dependence remain activities of the same explanatory type. These differences presuppose an already determined activity rather than constituting that activity. Although eternity follows necessarily from divine contemplation's mode of being as pure actuality, it is not what makes contemplation the activity-type it is. Other features of divine contemplation either presuppose self-thinking or characterize its object. Self-thinking alone identifies contemplation *qua* contemplation. More generally, differences in ontological mode explain the perfection of an activity rather than its explanatory identity. In other words, the formal specification of an activity consists only in those features necessary for classifying the activity as this activity-type, not those belonging to the ontological condition under which the activity exists.

The view explains numerical distinction of contemplative acts through subjects. Immanent acts become distinct primarily because they actualize different passive intellects. Thus, Aristotle's contemplation actualizes Aristotle's passive nous and Plato's contemplation

actualizes Plato's passive nous. The acts differ numerically primarily through their subjects. The view rejects one numerically identical actuality shared by many participants. For an immanent actuality is the fulfillment of one potency. Since actuality is always the actuality of a determinate potency, one actuality cannot literally be the actuality of numerically distinct passive powers. And since an immanent actuality is individuated by the potency whose fulfillment it is, numerically distinct potencies require numerically distinct actualizations. Unlike an external object participated in by many subjects, an immanent actuality exists only as the exercise of the subject's own power. Therefore, it cannot be numerically one across distinct subjects. Participation concerns metaphysical sharing of one actuality, whereas Formal Identity concerns sameness of explanatory determination across distinct actualities.

Active nous serves as the concurrent efficient cause of every contemplative act. Rather than merely initiating contemplation, it continually actualizes passive nous. Because contemplation is an act rather than an enduring disposition, it ceases when actualization ceases. Because passive nous remains essentially receptive rather than self-actualizing, contemplation never becomes a self-sustaining actuality. Thus, human contemplation exists only while active nous continually actualizes passive nous. The intermittence of human contemplation does not arise from fluctuation in active nous but from the varying receptivity of passive nous, whose exercise depends upon conditions of embodied cognition.

Active nous does not merely produce similar acts because its causal activity consists precisely in actualizing passive nous according to the same formal specification that characterizes its own activity rather than merely producing an external effect. It produces actuality within intellect itself rather than generating an external product because its activity is intelligible rather than physical and its causal action consists precisely in rendering another

intellect actually intelligible. And so, passive nous is actualized into an intelligible activity possessing the same formal specification as the activity that active nous eternally exercises.

Because active nous is pure actuality, its activity can actualize passive intellect without itself undergoing change. Since pure actuality lacks unrealized potentiality, active nous is eternally active. Its eternal activity is intellectual rather than merely self-contained and is essentially intellectual actualization rather than merely self-contained contemplation. Its activity therefore can serve as the continual source by which passive nous is rendered actually intelligible. The resulting picture is therefore one in which every contemplative act is numerically its own actuality while sharing one explanatory specification continuously communicated through the activity of active nous.

The advantages of the Formal Identity View include its preservation of individuality. Every contemplator remains a genuine subject with individual contemplative acts. The shared formal specification does not eliminate numerical distinction because the specification determines the activity-type exercised, whereas the passive intellect determines whose activity it is. It also preserves the dependence of passive nous on active nous. Passive nous does not become self-actualizing. Finally, on this view, human and divine contemplation qualify as the same activity-type because both instantiate one formal specification. In the next section, we examine the difficulties faced by this view.

IX. Problems with the Formal Identity View of Contemplation

Despite its merits, the Formal Identity View faces significant philosophical difficulties, especially if one wishes to preserve Aristotle's apparent commitment to immortalization through contemplation. Its distinctive thesis is that human and divine contemplation instantiate formally identical contemplative forms. But it does not automatically follow from this that human and

divine nous have the same mode of existence, namely immortality. For instance, two triangles may share one form but one is made of titanium and the other of sand. A strong gust of wind will destroy the latter but not the former. So merely sharing the form of divine contemplation does not obviously make a human contemplator immortal.

One might maintain the form instantiated in contemplation is an eternally existing actuality. When contemplation occurs, passive nous is actualized by this actuality. Immortality follows because the contemplator participates in an eternal actuality and therefore shares its mode of existence. But this pushes us significantly toward the Participation View.

Another possibility is that passive nous instantiates a form capable of existing independently of the body. Ordinary cognitive acts depend on the body, but contemplative acts do not. Therefore, the contemplative intellect can survive bodily death. But there is no obvious reason why an incorruptible form cannot be instantiated in a corruptible subject. Aristotle generally distinguishes the formal character of an act from the persistence of the substance exercising it.

The view's difficulty with respect to immortality is that formal identity explains sameness of form, whereas immortality requires an account of why the contemplator persists. For Aristotle, numerical persistence belongs primarily to substances, whereas acts ordinarily persist only insofar as substances continue exercising them. The view naturally yields that human contemplation is divine in kind. But it does not naturally yield that its subject is eternal in its mode of existence. The Strict Identity View offers a more straightforward route to immortality (where the contemplator literally becomes the eternal actuality) as does the Participation View (where the contemplator is eternally sustained by the eternal actuality). The Formal Identity

View needs an extra argument showing why possession of the divine form also confers immortality. Absent this, immortality remains a vulnerability.

Immortality aside, one can wonder: what differentiates Plato's contemplative "I" from Aristotle's? If contemplative acts share one form, what grounds distinct first-person awarenesses? One might answer that distinct passive intellects serve as the ground. The attraction of the Formal Identity View is that it secures personal distinction. Yet preserving robust individuality comes at the cost of weakening the metaphysical union originally motivating the view. Once individuation is entirely performed by passive intellect, formal identity explains only sameness in type and not communion with the divine.

Moreover, if active nous eternally instantiates the contemplative form, why must human contemplation derive it from active nous each time? Why is the form not simply possessed by passive nous itself once acquired? That is, what makes the dependence continual rather than merely initial? Our answer is that passive nous cannot retain the instantiated form independently of active nous. Its very essence is to be potency. Thus, every contemplative act requires fresh actualization by active nous. The instantiation of the form exists in passive nous only while actualized, not as an enduring possession. It is not like a disposition (e.g. being courageous) that, once acquired, stably belongs to the subject. When the act ceases, so does the instantiation. Just as light must continually illuminate colors for seeing to occur, active nous must continually actualize passive nous for contemplation to occur. The dependence is concurrent. If passive nous permanently possessed the form independently, it would no longer be merely potential with respect to contemplation. It would become self-actualizing, which would erase Aristotle's distinction between passive and active nous.

Finally and most fundamentally, if human and divine contemplation instantiate formally identical forms, is this relation anything more than the ordinary Aristotelian instantiation of a single immanent universal by many subjects? Unless it can explain why the form differs from ordinary immanent universals, the Formal Identity View risks collapsing into a standard theory of shared universals. If so, it becomes unclear why instantiating this form should constitute communion with divine nous rather than merely exemplifying the same species of contemplative act, or why divine contemplation should possess any unique metaphysical or immortalizing significance.

A defender might reply the form is not merely an immanent universal but the activity of active nous itself whose instantiation requires its continual efficient causation. Yet this raises a further difficulty. Continuous efficient causation, by itself, does not ordinarily constitute metaphysical union in Aristotle. Accordingly, unless a principled account of formal identity is given, either the form is merely an immanent universal instantiated in many subjects, in which case no distinctive communion with divine nous follows, or its dependence upon active nous is itself sufficient to constitute communion, in which case the view converges on the Participation View. This dilemma appears to be the deepest difficulty facing the Formal Identity View, since it threatens collapse either into ordinary universal instantiation or into the Participation View.

These objections do not show the Formal Identity View is incoherent. They do, however, show it struggles to explain the very features that originally motivated type-identical theories of contemplation, namely immortality and genuine metaphysical union with divine nous. In attempting to preserve individuality, the view appears to weaken union to the point where its advantages over type-distinct views require substantially more argument than either the Participation or Strict Identity Views. Nevertheless, the view retains one important advantage

over type-distinct theories: it secures genuine type-identity by positing one formally identical form. Whether this outweighs the explanatory costs concerning immortality and metaphysical union remains the central question for this view.

X. Final Analysis

In this chapter, we first argued the principal considerations advanced by Reece for a type-distinct interpretation do not show that human and divine contemplation must differ in type. One reason for investigating type-identical views is that doing so opens up the possibility of taking literally Aristotle's injunction in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we "must, so far as we can, *make ourselves immortal*" (1177b33-34). If human and divine contemplation are type-distinct, it becomes less straightforward to explain in non-accidental terms why contemplation rather than the other excellent activities Aristotle discusses (e.g. virtuous practical activity) appears uniquely connected with immortalization. But if contemplation is type-identical, it is at least possible to envisage a view where engaging in contemplation provides the possibility of immortalization.

With the partial aim of ascertaining the possibility of immortality through contemplation, we considered three possible type-identical conceptions of human contemplation, namely the Strict Identity View, the Participation View, and the Formal Identity View, pointing out both their merits and shortcomings. Our investigation suggested the Formal Identity View best preserved human individuality but made it difficult to see how a human being can be immortalized through contemplation. It also risked reducing contemplation to the ordinary instantiation of a universal, thereby weakening the metaphysical relation between human and divine contemplation. The Strict Identity View, meanwhile, had the easiest time showing how immortality might be possible but at the cost of eliminating the human being altogether as a distinct subject of contemplation. The Participation View functioned as a middle position in

positing a metaphysically strong union with divine nous while avoiding the collapse of human subjects. Its principal metaphysical cost was the claim that one numerically identical contemplative actuality can be participated in by many distinct subjects whose contemplative acts remain distinct. Of course, such a claim is not on the face of it contradictory. But more needs to be said in its defense than we have been able to provide in this chapter.

While the Participation View requires a richer account of shared intelligible actuality than has been developed here, it best reconciles three desiderata that no rival view considered in this chapter simultaneously satisfies: the divinity of contemplation, the persistence of the human contemplator, and the possibility of immortality. These desiderata correspond to Aristotle's claims that contemplation is divine, is our activity, and is connected with immortalization. The Participation View therefore emerges as the strongest of the type-identical interpretations considered here, even if its metaphysics of shared intelligible actuality requires further development.

More generally, our discussion suggests the interpretation of Aristotelian contemplation cannot be settled merely by exegetical questions concerning *De Anima* or the *Nicomachean Ethics* but depends equally upon deeper metaphysical assumptions concerning actuality, participation, and the individuation of intellectual activity.

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Conclusion

In this dissertation, we sought to elucidate aspects of two forms of badness, namely incontinence and vice as well as to investigate the two highest forms of human excellence, namely magnanimity and contemplation.¹⁴²

Our investigation of incontinence argued that ‘unqualified’ incontinence was importantly different from the qualified forms of the phenomenon, e.g. being incontinent with respect to honor or profit, in the sense that ‘unqualified’ incontinence does not entail that an agent’s rational dispositions towards psychic pleasures are not as they should be. Rather, it is their non-rational dispositions for food, drink, and sex that are excessive. But an agent who is incontinent in a qualified sense, by having excessive desires for such things as honor or profit, betrays herself as having rational dispositions towards these goods that tend towards excess rather than towards the mean.

The reason this distinction matters is that both Socrates and Aristotle are (partly) interested in the phenomenon of incontinence because of the thought that the incontinent person is somebody who knows what the virtuous thing to do amounts to and yet ends up acting badly. That is, the practical rational part of the incontinent agent’s soul matches that of the virtuous person yet she is nevertheless led astray. The rational dispositions of an agent who possesses a qualified form of incontinence make it such that her rational part of the soul does not match the rational part of the soul of the virtuous agent. And so, qualified incontinence does not present a

¹⁴² For this conclusion, we have relied entirely on the Barnes translation of the relevant works.

threat to the thesis that an agent whose rational dispositions match those of the virtuous cannot act badly.

But in the case of the ‘unqualifiedly’ incontinent agent, it is appetite and not reason that is not as it should be. Thus, it is possible to imagine an incontinent agent whose rational dispositions match those of the virtuous agent, but who nevertheless acts badly due to the presence of appetite. It is this kind of agent who poses the greatest threat to the Socratic thesis that a virtuous person cannot act badly.

Aristotle agrees with Socrates that a virtuous person can never act badly, but unlike Socrates, he does not want to deny the very phenomenon of incontinence. And so, he goes to great lengths to explain how it is that in the case of ‘unqualified’ incontinence, an agent’s appetites temporarily incapacitate her knowledge of the ethical correct action and thereby cause her to act badly. In other words, Aristotle agrees with Socrates that only ignorance could make an agent act badly but Aristotle thinks that the kind of ignorance involved is not ignorance in the sense of an agent’s reason recommending the ethically bad thing.

We then turned to the topic of the asymmetry of the vices. Throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tells us that some of the vices are worse than their opposing vices. One of the explanations he gives for this phenomenon is that some of the vices are less similar to virtue than their opposing vice. For example, cowardice is worse than rashness because it is less similar to courage than rashness is.

One way to understand this claim is to maintain that a vicious and a virtuous agent whose characteristic activity is of the same kind are more similar and so the other vice is worse. For instance, both rashness and courage involve facing danger whereas cowardice involves retreating from danger. And so, rashness and courage are more similar and thus, cowardice is the worse

vice. But to think this is to ignore the fact that it is also part of courage to retreat from danger when doing so is appropriate. And in this, the courageous and the coward are similar. Therefore, there does not seem to be the kind of asymmetry Aristotle was hinting at. A different account is needed.

To provide such an account, a distinction is made between the instantiation of some virtue and its manifestation. A manifestation is an act that is essentially constitutive of a virtue in the sense that if such an act were no longer considered a part of that virtue, the virtue would no longer be the virtue that it is or it would no longer be a virtue at all. For instance, if facing danger was no longer considered a part of courage, then courage would no longer be the virtue that it is or would no longer be a virtue at all. An instantiation, meanwhile, is an act that is not essentially constitutive of a virtue in the sense that if such an act were no longer considered a part of that virtue, the virtue would still be the virtue that it is and would remain a virtue. For example, if retreating from danger was no longer considered a part of courage, then courage would still be the virtue that it is and would still be a virtue. Once we make the distinction between the manifestation and the instantiation of a virtue, we can then maintain that the corresponding vice that resembles the manifestation of a virtue is less bad than the vice that resembles the instantiation of a virtue.

Following this account, we then went on to maintain that the rational pleasures belonging to a particular virtue are not spread evenly. Rational pleasures only arise from the manifestations of a virtue whereas the instantiations of a virtue either do not give rise to pleasure or give rise to non-rational pleasures. We then argued that, for instance, the pleasures of rashness and of courage are more similar to one another than the pleasures of cowardice and of courage. On the basis of this similarity, rashness is less bad than cowardice.

After having discussed both the bad states of incontinence and vice, we shifted gears and sought to develop an account of the highest ethical virtue, namely magnanimity. Following an analysis of honor, where we showed that honor has a special conceptual connection to ethical excellence, we went on to argue that the magnanimous person must possess a special kind of self-knowledge, namely the knowledge that he is virtuous, if he is to be able to perform his characteristic activity well, namely accepting and rejecting honors as he should.

We also sought to argue that the magnanimous person is worthy of the greatest honors whereas there is another nameless virtue that has to do with moderate and small honors, and that these virtues are incompatible. But then, if the honors each kind of agent deserves differ in magnitude, then it must be the case that the virtues of the magnanimous person must be greater than the virtues of the nameless agent. In fact, we maintained, the virtues of the two kinds of agents are different in kind. Such a move commits Aristotle to a framework where there are two distinct levels of virtue. We then speculated that the magnanimous person's virtues are the virtues of a great statesman, superlative as they are. Meanwhile, the virtues belonging to the nameless agent are primarily meant to be the virtues of a contemplator, a person who is devoted to the highest theoretical excellence and who therefore only needs a moderate amount of goods (including honors) in order to be able to live the kind of life that she lives.

At this point, we moved from practical philosophy to theoretical philosophy and sought to spell out ways in which we might understand the activity of contemplation. Aristotle is committed to the divine contemplating eternally and continuously whereas human contemplation is intermittent. But we sought to identify way in which human contemplation might be thought to be type-identical to divine contemplation.

On the first view we canvassed, human intellect becomes numerically identical to divine intellect so that human and divine contemplation become one act. This view posited the strongest possible form of union between the human and the divine and it also gave a straightforward account of what human immortality might consist in. But it did so by way of collapsing the human subject into the divine.

The second view we considered maintained that distinct human subjects engaged in distinct acts of contemplation while participating in the very same divine actuality. Subjecthood is preserved on this view because human intellects remain potentialities even as they participate in the divine actuality. Immortality involves human intellects being eternally sustained by the divine as a result of their participation in the divine actuality. But a drawback of this view is that it is committed to multiple subjects sharing in one and the same actuality.

The third view we sketched holds that both human and divine intellects instantiate the same formal structure, namely self-thinking, but that each intellect has its own distinct act of contemplation. This view has the advantage of preserving subjecthood without at the same time committing one to there being multiple subjects sharing in a single actuality. But it falls short in the sense that the metaphysical union it posits between the human and the divine is so weak that there is really no easy way in which human intellects can be immortalized on this view.

Contemplation is a subject about which Aristotle has surprisingly little to say given its supreme importance in the good life. In fact, Aristotle provides greater clarity about divine contemplation than he does about its human counterpart. The last chapter of this dissertation was an attempt to reconstruct possible views of contemplation that do not simply refuse to countenance the possibility that human contemplation is the same kind of thing as divine contemplation. It is true that we have only set down some possibilities on the table, some of them

implausible, but it seems to us that if we are to make progress on this most important of notions, it is necessary for us to have some concrete views in mind so as to guide our enquiries.