

ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS:
THE MOTIVATION FOR THE MORAL LEARNER TO BECOME VIRTUOUS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Aristotle's ethical writings are focused on defining virtue and how a man who desires to become virtuous can do so. However, what is not readily apparent in Aristotle's writings is the impetus that moves a person to become virtuous and the reason(s) that virtue is ultimately worthwhile, even for those who are not yet virtuous. Accordingly, this thesis investigates Aristotle's account of human nature and human action (across both his metaphysical and ethical writings), develops a synthesized account of the virtuous person's moral psychology, and then connects Aristotle's comments on moral education with his accounts of human nature, action, and virtue. This thesis then concludes that the motivating reason for a person to become virtuous parallels the motivating reasons for the virtuous person to be virtuous: the desire for pleasure which is exhibited within the overarching desire to live a complete, flourishing human life. Although a part of human nature, this desire requires nurturing and education to manifest as an individual's conceptualization of his life's good.

INTRODUCTION

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that “[T]he virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this to completion and fulfillment.”¹ Numerous commentators agree that, for Aristotle, becoming virtuous is a process consisting of cognitive and emotional stages in which one develops, through practice, virtuous habits under the guidance of some sort of educational structure. One is not born virtuous, but, rather, must become so, and this development takes effort and time.

Aristotle focuses extensively on two main areas in his ethical writings: 1) defining virtue and 2) investigating the means by which a man who desires to be virtuous can become so. However, what is not clear is *why* a person would be motivated to become virtuous. Moreover, as Aristotle is restricting his discussion of moral development to those who already desire to be virtuous, perhaps more significant is the question of *how* and *why* people come to desire virtue in the first place; particularly as virtuous actions (dying for a loved one, giving up one’s possession, etc.) appear often to be more painful than not.

I will not attempt to provide an answer to the questions of how and why people should be good in this paper. Rather, I will be focusing on what Aristotle has to say about

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 1103a23-25.

human nature, virtue, and motivation and, drawing from that analysis, develop some conclusions that may begin to address the gaps in his theory. My thesis is that the motivating reason for a person to become virtuous is the same as the motivating reason for a virtuous person to be virtuous—namely, the desire for pleasure which is exhibited within the overarching desire to live a complete, flourishing human life that best promotes *eudaimonia*. This desire is a part of human nature; however, it requires nurturing and education to manifest as an individual's conceptualization of his life's good. As ethics and virtue are social in nature for Aristotle, so their development has a predominately social component as well.

Accordingly, in the first part of this paper, I provide an overview of Aristotle's basic account of human beings and human action. Not only do I show that Aristotle considers reason (*logos*) to be the defining capacity of human beings, but also that all action, regardless of virtue, is the result of sense, cognition, and desire (*orexis*), with emotions, desires, and cognition informing one's perception. Although the conative component of action, *orexis*, is not rational, it can be informed or guided by *logos*. I will show that, for Aristotle, to be human *is* to act; the nature of all living things is to strive for the fulfillment of all of their potentialities, and such completion or perfection is the "good" at which one's life aims. Then, in Part II, I show how ethics and virtue fit within the broader context of human nature and human action for Aristotle. Building upon the basic account outlined in Part I, I argue that the moral psychology of the virtuous man is ultimately grounded in a reasoned understanding of his life and function as a human being, and this is grounded in an understanding of human nature. To be virtuous is to be

in such as state that one's *orexeis* are consistently directed by *logos* and result in correct action. The virtuous man is motivated to act virtuously because to do so is, in a very real sense, to be fully human for Aristotle—this makes virtue more pleasant than painful. Next, in Part III, I provide an overview of Aristotle's comments on moral education. Drawing on the conclusions from Part I and Part II, I argue that not only is the virtuous man continuously learning, but, given Aristotle's account of habituation, the development of a student of ethics into a virtuous man is parallel to the account of the virtuous man's moral psychology—the motivations of both ultimately reside in a reasoned understanding of human life. Finally, in Part IV, I outline several gaps in Aristotle's account of moral education, and I argue that these gaps are filled by a person's community. According to Aristotle, human beings are naturally social, and I conclude in Part IV that moral education is largely a social endeavor; thus, the virtuosity of the majority of the population, given Aristotle's account of human nature and moral education, will ultimately rest upon the overall health of the community. In all aspects of moral education, from the child to the virtuous man, Aristotle's basic account of human beings and human action explains not only what it means to be virtuous, but also the reasons that a person would be motivated to become and remain so.

PART I

Importance of the Metaphysical Writings

Aristotle offers an account of human beings and human action in his metaphysical writings that not only is consistent with his ethical writings, but provides the necessary foundation for understanding his ethics. In order to understand Aristotle's ethics, we must first understand the place of human beings and human action within Aristotle's philosophy. The following is a mere overview of Aristotle's account: it glosses over many of the finer points in Aristotle's thinking, but it addresses his general theory that the substance of living things, to include humans, is the combination of the body and soul, with the soul being the essence, the purpose, and the mover of the body. Human souls are unique amongst living things in that they have rational capacities, which the souls of animals and plants do not. Consequently, reason is not only the highest of the soul's powers, but also the defining capacity of human beings. Within this context, Aristotle understands humans to have bipartite souls consisting of rational and nonrational parts. Furthermore, human action involves sensation, perception, cognition, appetite, and locomotion—these powers of the soul work in concert to reach the completion, or perfection, of their potentialities, which is the function of all living things. The unmoved mover of action is desire, which is the product of both cognitive and conative elements within the soul. Desire is ultimately characterized by its ends, or goals: in order to desire

an end, and consequently act, the subject must identify that end with pleasure, for desire is the appetite for pleasure. Pleasure does not simply encompass bodily pleasures, but also goods. Thus, action for human beings necessarily involves both conative and cognitive elements, with the cognitive elements characterizing, or triggering, the conative elements.

Nature of Living Things

Prior to investigating Aristotle's account of human action and virtue, we must first understand his account of human beings; for, if we accept that Aristotle remains consistent across his metaphysical and ethical writings (and I will show in this paper how he is), then his basic account of human beings and human nature is the foundation for all of his theories regarding human life. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that, "All men by nature desire to know,"² and he explains that in order to have knowledge about something, one must be able to explain the "why" of that thing; thus, in order to understand what a human being is, we must be able to explain the "why" of human beings.³ Aristotle states that there are four causes that sufficiently explain the "why" of things: the material cause (that from which a thing comes into being), the formal cause (the essence or formula of the thing), the efficient cause (that from which the change, or freedom from change, first begins—the source of motion), and the final cause (that for the sake of which a thing is, the thing's function).⁴ He further argues that, for all living

² *Metaphysics*, transl. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 980b22-23.

³ For Aristotle, to have knowledge about something is to be able to explain the "why" of that thing; and to be able to explain the "why" of a thing is to grasp the truth of that thing. Truth, for Aristotle, is a matter of what a thing is: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what that it is not, is true" (*Metaphysics*, 1011b25-30).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1013a24-37.

things, the body is the material cause, and the soul is the formal cause of that respective living thing. The soul is the formal cause because it is “an actuality [that is temporally prior] of a natural organized body.”⁵ The body, the material cause, only has the potential to be a living thing, and the soul actualizes life within the body; for, when a living thing dies, its soul is no longer with its body. Thus, the soul and the body, together, form the substance (*hypokeimenon*) of a living thing.⁶

Aristotle then names five powers, or capabilities (*dunameis*), that are displays of life—nutritive, appetitive, sensory, locomotive, and thinking. Because the soul is the actuality of a living thing, it must be the source of these five *dunameis* and, in turn, characterized by them.⁷ Hence, the five *dunameis* are the forms of the soul, which is the ultimate form of a living thing; moreover, these forms of the soul, in turn, characterize the ways in which the soul is the efficient and formal causes of a living thing.⁸ For example, although the parents of a living thing (specifically, the father’s semen and the mother’s egg) are *an* efficient cause of that living thing, the soul is the primary, efficient cause for, through nutrition and reproduction, it sustains the life of the living thing. Accordingly, the soul is also the final cause, “for any living thing that has reached its normal development and which is unmutilated, and whose mode of generation is not spontaneous, the most natural act is the production of another like itself [...] in order that, as far as nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards

⁵ *On the Soul*, transl. J.A. Smith, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vol. 1, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 412b3-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 414a14a5-29.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 660.

which all things strive.”⁹ Thus, the soul’s nutritive and reproductive *dunameis* are efficient and final causes of a living thing.¹⁰

However, although all living things (plants, animals, and humans) have nutritive and reproductive *dunameis*, plants do not have the sensory, appetitive, thinking, and locomotive *dunameis* of animals and humans.¹¹ The sensory *dunamis* entails the appetitive *dunamis*; the sensory *dunamis* is the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and appetite is the corresponding desire (*orexis*) for pleasure and aversion to pain.¹² The desire for pleasure is natural and occurs as a part of sensation: to sense *is* to feel pain or pleasure, and to feel pain or pleasure *is* to desire that pleasure or be averse to that pain. Additionally, animals and humans possess locomotive *dunamis*, the ability for movement. Any living thing that has locomotive *dunamis* must have sensory, appetitive, and at least some thinking *dunameis*: movement is a response to perceived stimuli (the function of the sensory and thinking *dunameis*) that is either towards pleasure or away from pain (the function of the appetitive *dunamis*). Thus, although the soul’s *dunameis* are named separately, they occur concomitantly by nature. Moreover, as with nutrition and reproduction, the sensory, appetitive, thinking, and locomotive *dunameis* will also be efficient and final causes for animals and humans; however, a more thorough investigation of these *dunameis* is required to determine in precisely what way for human beings.

⁹ Ibid., 415a25-415b2.

¹⁰ Ibid, 415b9-11.

¹¹ It is unclear if Aristotle was unaware of certain plants, like the Venus flytrap or the moonflower, that have a sensory and locomotive responses to stimuli within their environments. However, Aristotle’s overall point, that these *dunameis* vary between different species, with humans having the fullest capacity of these *dunameis*, remains accurate.

¹² “[W]hatever has a sense has the capacity for pleasure and pain and therefore has pleasant and painful objects present to it, and wherever these are present, there is desire, for desire is appetition of what is pleasant” (Ibid., 414b4-5).

Human Beings and Logos

The key difference between humans and animals lies in the thinking *dunamis*. Aristotle differentiates the thinking *dunamis* into perception, thinking (imagination and judgment), and understanding: whereas both animals and humans have perception (a result of sensory *dunamis*) and imagination, only human beings have judgment and understanding—only humans have reason (*logos*).¹³ Thus, humans possess the most complete *dunamis* of the soul: “Lastly, certain living beings [i.e., man, and possibly an order superior to him]—a small minority—possess calculation and thought, for (among mortal beings) those which possess calculation have all the other [*dunamis*] mentioned, while the converse does not hold—indeed some live by imagination alone, while others have not even imagination.”¹⁴ *Logos* is the distinguishing capability of human beings, for animals have only perception and imagination, and plants have neither.

W. W. Fortenbaugh makes a connection between Aristotle’s metaphysical and ethical writings that Aristotle does not make explicit himself: in the ethical works, Aristotle elaborates on the biological faculty of “logos as the distinguishing mark of intelligence in human beings” by stating that humans have a bipartite soul, consisting of rational and nonrational halves.¹⁵ The rational and nonrational halves of the soul are not the same as sensory and thinking *dunamis*: whereas the *De Anima* is comparing the biological faculties of plants, animals, and humans, the ethical treatises are focusing

¹³ “The fundamental meaning [of logos] is speech, statement, in the sense that any speech or statement consists of a coherent or rational arrangement of words. From this derives the wider application of the term to a rational principle or reason underlying a great variety of things [...] Logos is also used in the normative sense, describing the human faculty of reason which comprehends and formulates rational principles and thus guides the conduct of the good and reasonable man” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 310.) For the purposes of this essay, I will be using logos in the general sense of the type of reason (thinking powers) that are unique to humans.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 415a9-13.

¹⁵ Fortenbaugh, W.W., *Aristotle on Emotion* (Great Britain: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1975), 28.

exclusively on the psychological and practical faculties of human beings. Because *logos* plays such a predominant role in being human, Aristotle understands the human soul, and consequently human action, within the context of *logos*—thus his partition of the rational and nonrational parts of the soul. The rational part of the soul includes all types of thinking and knowledge, and the nonrational part of the soul contains vegetative parts (sleep and sensation) and non-vegetative parts (emotion, appetites, and desires). An overview of the different types of thinking and knowledge will help clarify Aristotle’s basic account of human action and the interplay between the rational and nonrational parts of the human soul. As I will later show in Part II, the interplay between the rational and nonrational parts of the soul is of absolute paramount importance for Aristotle’s ethics.

In the *De Anima*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle outlines three types of *logos* activity—*theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis*— and three corresponding types of knowledge—*epistêmê*, *phronesis*, and *technê*.¹⁶ *Theoria* is the use of *logos* to discover or create universals, which are objects of thought—these are concepts. The ability of the soul to grasp universals from a particular, or a series of particulars, is intellect (*nous*). The starting point of *theoria* is the nature of things, and its goal (*telos*) is truth. The knowledge of universals (or what we would call scientific knowledge) is *epistêmê*. Although the initial starting point of *theoria* is external (the perceived nature of things), the activity and *telos* are internal to the soul. The theoretical

¹⁶ Meilaender, Peter C, Review of *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre* by Kelvin Knight (University of Notre Dame, February 2, 2009), Accessed 25 July 2017, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/aristotelian-philosophy-ethics-and-politics-from-aristotle-to-macintyre/>.

sciences include mathematics, physics, and metaphysics; and excellence in theoretical reasoning is theoretical wisdom (*sophia*).

Praxis refers to what is generally meant by human action: *praxis* is concerned with the social, external dimension of human activity. Unlike *theoria*, *praxis* involves reasoning in terms of the contingent; *praxis* is concerned with what an individual can affect or change, both external and internal to his soul, through action that is external to the soul. The *telos* of *praxis* is the human good (*to agathon*)—that is, the best that can be obtained through human action. Whereas *theoria* is concerned with universals, *praxis* is concerned with particulars because it deals with practical matters; specifically, *praxis* deals with how to act in a particular circumstance in order to obtain a certain result. Accordingly, the practical sciences, which include ethics and politics, are imprecise and inexact in a way that *theoria* is not. Thus, practical knowledge is excellence in practical reasoning; Aristotle’s term for practical wisdom is *phronesis*.¹⁷

Finally, *poiesis* is the purposeful “bringing-into-being”, or production, of something external to the producer. Although the starting point of *poiesis* is internal to the soul (a conception of something that does not yet exist), the activity and *telos* (which is the product to be made) are external to the soul. Unlike *praxis*, *poiesis* requires exact, specific knowledge of the process required to produce a particular object—this knowledge is *technê* (skill, art, or craft).¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Human Action: Sensation, Cognition, and Desire

In the *De Anima*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle is specifically discussing *praxis*: he is focusing on human action dealing with contingent externals. In the ethical works, Aristotle focuses on correct action; however, in the *De Anima*, Aristotle investigates all action, prior to any question of correctness. Aristotle's account of action in the *De Anima* is critical to understanding his account of action in his ethical works because his focus in the *De Anima* is the mechanics of all action, which then determines the how and why of action being correct or incorrect. By investigating and analyzing the interplay of the sensory, appetitive, and thinking *dunameis* in the *De Anima*, Aristotle argues that the appetitive and thinking *dunameis* (specifically, practical thought) are together the source of locomotion. When human beings utilize *logos*, specifically practical thought, then the combination of sensation, cognition, and desire results in action.^{19, 20} Accordingly, the soul is also the efficient cause of human beings in that the exercise of its *dunameis* results in human action—the appetitive and thinking *dunameis* literally move the body.

First, because *praxis* is concerned with contingent externals, sensation is the starting point for *praxis*. Sensation depends “on a process or movement or affection from without”²¹—sensation is the *dunamis* by which the soul, the internal, meets the world, the external. The sensible object, as apprehended by the subject via the sensory *dunamis*, is

¹⁹ “It follows that there is justification for regarding these two as the sources as movement, i.e., appetite and practical thought” (*On the Soul*, 433a17-20).

²⁰ Importantly, in the *De Anima*, Aristotle is discussing *praxis* for human beings while acknowledging a parallel account of basic locomotion, or movement, for animals. Because animals do not have full reasoning capacities, animals use imagination only, vs. the practical thought of humans, in forming their appetitive impulses, which are the unmoved movers of locomotion. Thus, humans can act (when their movement is stimulated by practical thought) whereas animals can only move.

²¹ *On the Soul*, 416b33-35.

perception. Importantly, unlike knowledge of universals, perception of sensed, external objects is free from error; “This is why a man can think when he wants to but his sensation does not depend upon himself.”²² If I feel cold, then I feel cold; the fact that I am wearing a sweater in 100 degree weather does not have any bearing on the rightness or wrongness of what I feel.

However, because thinking incorporates imagination and judgment, thinking is subject to rightness and wrongness. Imagination (*phantasia*) is that in virtue of which an image arises for us: it is the movement of calling up an image in our minds that results from an actual exercise of sensory *dunamis*.²³ Both imagination and judgment (which includes knowledge, opinion, understanding, and their opposites) can be wrong; thus, when a perception includes thinking, the perception can be wrong:²⁴

Perception of the special objects of sense is never in error or admits of the least possible amount of falsehood. Next comes perception that what is incidental to objects of perception *is* incidental to them: in this case certainly we may be deceived; for while the perception that there is white before us cannot be false, the perception that what is white is this or that may be false. Third comes the perception of the common attributes which accompany the incidental objects to which the special sensibles attach (I mean e.g. of movement and magnitude); it is in respect to these that the greatest amount of sense illusion is possible.²⁵

Although we cannot be wrong in what we directly sense or feel, we can be wrong in the attribution of images (imagination), concepts (knowledge or understanding), and opinion (judgment) to a particular sensation. I am free from error in feeling cold, in recognizing that I feel cold, but I could be wrong to think that it is winter, that it is unseasonably cold,

²² Ibid., 417b24-25.

²³ Ibid., 427b7-428a20.

²⁴ Whereas imagination does not necessarily involve judgment, judgment necessarily involves imagination.

²⁵ Ibid., 428a18-26.

etc., based on what I feel. Thus, perceptions that include imaginations or judgments, unlike direct perceptions of objects of sense, can be wrong. And, if the perception is wrong, then the action could be wrong—this account of perception that Aristotle gives in the *De Anima* already sheds light on at least one way in which action could be correct or incorrect in the ethical writings.

Moreover, perceptions that include a judgment (i.e., this is wrong, this is bad, etc.) are a mixture of sensation and *logos*; if the perceived object is accompanied by pleasure (a sensation) and/or the soul makes the judgment that the object, or the accompanying object of thought, is “good”, then the soul will undergo an impulse (*hormai*) towards that object. This impulse is the exercise of the soul’s appetitive *dunamis* through which the soul pursues the object, which the soul has identified with pleasure through the thinking *dunamis*—this is desire. “To perceive then is like bare asserting or thinking; but when the object is pleasant or painful, the soul makes a sort of affirmation or negation, and pursues or avoids the object. To feel pleasure or pain is to act with a sensitive mean towards what is good or bad as such.”²⁶ When sensation includes pleasure (as affirmed through the thinking *dunamis*), then desire is a part of that sensation and perception due to the exercise of the appetitive *dunamis*. To desire is to undergo a *hormai* towards the object of sensation: the resulting pursuit can be absolute (which is action) or relative (occurring only internal to the subject).²⁷ Thus, pleasure, as that towards which the soul moves, motivates action.

²⁶ Ibid., 431a7-14.

²⁷ Ibid., 431b24-30.

Critically, although Aristotle does not state so in a comprehensive fashion, he recognizes types of pleasure beyond bodily pleasure. The following can be derived from what he does have to say about pleasure and the good in his metaphysical and ethical writings. Bodily pleasure (*hêdonê*) is shared with the animals; however, humans have the capability to conceive of bodily pleasure as an instance of, or contributing to, the overall good for one's life, such as health, and plan accordingly. In this way, humans correctly judge *hêdonê* to be "good". There is also an aesthetic sort of pleasure derived from *kalon*—the fine, beautiful, or noble. Although *kalon* is unique to humans, the difficulty lies in determining whether something truly is *kalon* (and therefore is pleasant) or only appears to be so: when an agent uses *logos* to determine whether something is *kalon*, then the *kalon* is affirmed as "good". Finally, there is a sort of pleasure from obtaining the advantageous, or the good, for one's life—*to agathon*. Unlike *hêdonê* and *kalon*, *to agathon*, as the "good", cannot be sensed—it can only be conceived.^{28,29} Consequently, human souls undergo *hormai* towards both sensed and cognized pleasures for Aristotle. As I will show in Part II, along with the validity of the perception, the type of pleasure that motivates an action will also determine the correctness of that action.

Interworkings of the Rational and Nonrational Soul

Importantly, every action has an end or goal (*telos*). *Telos* is "the good" that is to be obtained through a particular course of action: it is the object that the soul desires and

²⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b30-1105a1.

²⁹ Cooper, John, "Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value," in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 264-266).

pursues. *Telos* must be feasible; for, practical action concerns the contingent, and to attempt to achieve the impossible is contradictory. Furthermore, *telos* ultimately characterizes and prompts appetite: “that which moves without itself being moved is the realizable good [*telos*], that which at once moves and is moved is the faculty for appetite (for that which is moved moves insofar as it desires, and appetite in the sense of actual appetite is a kind of movement), that that which is in motion is the animal.”³⁰ Although action begins with the unmoved mover, *telos*, the immediate, proximate cause of action is appetite, which Aristotle defines as *orexis* for either a real good (*to agathon*) or an apparent good.³¹ *Orexis* occurs concomitantly with perception of the good, whether real or apparent, cognized or sensed. To perceive a good is to desire it, and that good, as the *telos*, characterizes the *orexis*; thus, the *telos* will also have a bearing on an action’s correctness because it characterizes the *orexis* and, thus, the motivating pleasure.

Aristotle’s description of the role of *orexis* in action in the *De Anima* directly supports the distinction between the three types of desire that he ultimately names across his other works: *epithumia*, *thumos*, and *boulêsis*.³² *Epithumia* is *orexis* in which the good is identified with bodily pleasure (*hêdonê*); typically, *epithumia* is synonymous with appetite, in the sense of appetite for bodily pleasures. *Thumos* is a competitive impulse or “spirited” *orexis*; spurred by the emotions, *thumos* “will ‘leap out’ at anticipation to a conclusion which reason might have led.”³³ Contrastingly, *boulêsis* is a reasoned *orexis*:

³⁰ Ibid., 433b15-19.

³¹ Richardson, Henry S, “Desire and Good in the *De Anima*” in *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, eds. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 393.

³² Tuozzo, Thomas M., “Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire in Aristotle” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 32, no. 4 (1994): 525-549, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1994.0089>.

³³ Cooper, John, “Some Remarks on Aristotle’s Moral Psychology” in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 241-242.

it is *orexis* for that which one has practically determined, via *logos*, to be good (*to agathon*) for one's life.³⁴

As Thomas Tuozzo argues in “Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desires in Aristotle”, the distinction that Aristotle makes between sense-perception and thought (beyond the imaginative *dunamis*) in the *De Anima* parallels a clear distinction in the three types of *orexis*: conceptualized vs. unconceptualized *orexis*. Tuozzo re-emphasizes that *orexeis* are essentially mental predications that are conative (have motivating force)—they are that which at once move and are moved within the soul, and they have both conative and cognitive components. Moreover, the conative mental predicate can be conceptualized, or unconceptualized, based on whether it contains a judgment or opinion.³⁵ For example, my *feeling* cold is a sense perception that involves no judgment—it involves sense, but I am not putting any rational thought into whether I am cold... I simply *am cold*. If, then, I desire to be warm, and don my sweater accordingly, without any thought on the overall state of whether the pleasant warmth is, in fact, *good* for me, or conceiving of the warmth in any way outside of my perception, then my *orexis* to be warm is an unconceptualized *orexis*. As with both *epithumia* and *thumos*, the mental predication of “the pleasant” (*hêdonê*) is conative and stems directly from perception with no intervening deliberation—“the pleasant” in these cases is the apparent, vs. the conceived, good.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tuozzo, “Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire”, 535-545.

³⁶ Tuozzo highlights a passage from *On the Movement of Animals* that reinforces both Aristotle's argument that the *telos* is the originator of movement and his distinction between the good and the apparent good in terms of the pleasant: “The first cause of movement is the object of desire and the object of thought. Not, however, every object of thought, but only the end of things done. Accordingly, it is goods of this sort that initiate movement, not everything fine. For it initiates movement only so far as something is

Contrastingly, *boulêsis* is *orexis* for something that someone has conceived as a good: “a conceptualized mental predicate is asserted of an unconceptualized mental subject.”³⁷ I synthesize a concept, which is a general view or idea produced by *nous*, with a perceptual experience that I have pictured to myself via the imagination. Specifically, the conceptualized mental predicate of *boulêsis* is an antecedent end of “the good” or “the good” itself—*to agathon*. *To agathon* is the conceptualization of an end state of the best state of affairs for my life that I can obtain through particular actions. In contrast to *hêdonê*, *to agathon* cannot be directly perceived: it can only be thought.³⁸ Nonetheless, *to agathon* has motivating force because either we directly receive, or anticipate receiving, pleasure from *to agathon*.

Critically, as the different types of *orexis* demonstrate, even though *orexis* is part of the nonrational soul, *orexis* can partake in reason. Specifically, the *telos* determines which part of the soul characterizes the *orexis*: “The object of desire and wish is either the good or the apparent good. Now this is why the pleasant is an object of desire; for it is something that appears good. For while some people have the opinion of it, to others it appears good, even if they do not have this opinion of it. For appearance and opinion do not reside in the same part of the soul.”³⁹ If the *telos* is *to agathon*, which is a product of *logos*, then the *orexis* (which is *boulêsis*) is characterized by *logos*. However, if the *telos*

for its sake, or so far as it is the end of that which is for the sake of something else. And we must suppose that the apparent good takes the position of the good, as does the pleasant, which is itself an apparent good” (*De Motu Animalium*, 700b23-29).

³⁷ Tuozzo, “Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire”, 529-530.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 528-532, 541-545.

³⁹ *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. J. Solomon, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1235b25-29.

is *hêdonê*, which is also part of the nonrational soul, then the *orexis* is not characterized by *logos*.

Thus Aristotle's division of the nonrational soul into vegetative and non-vegetative parts in the ethical writings: the vegetative part of the nonrational soul (sleep, sensation, etc.) cannot partake in *logos* whereas the non-vegetative part of the nonrational soul can (but does not necessarily) partake of reason: "Thus we see that the irrational element of the soul has two parts: the one is vegetative and has no share in reason at all, the other is the seat of appetites and of desire in general and partakes of reason insofar as it complies with reason and accepts its leadership [...] the irrational element can be persuaded by the rational."⁴⁰ When the soul pursues *to agathon*, or antecedent ends of *to agathon*, its conative elements within the nonrational part are complying with, and accepting, the determination of the rational part.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle re-emphasizes the point he argues in the *De Anima*: the appetite for pleasure is a naturally occurring *hormai* that underpins all human action. Every desire upon which an agent acts is for an object that the agent has either conceived as pleasant or appears to be pleasant:

"For pleasure is not only common to man and the animals, but also accompanies all objects of choice: in fact, the noble and beneficial seem pleasant to us. Moreover, a love of pleasure has grown up with all of us since infancy. Therefore, this emotion has become ingrained in our lives and is difficult to erase. Even in our actions we use, to a greater or smaller extent, pleasure and pain as a criterion."⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b28-33.

⁴¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b35-1105a5.

The *hormai* towards pleasure, whether that of *hêdonê*, *kalon*, or *to agathon*, is the unmoved mover of all human action. We may infer from both this and Aristotle's previous comments on *logos* that the role of *logos* is to determine whether that pleasure is true (i.e., it contributes to *to agathon* and is therefore a rational object of pursuit) or merely appears to be pleasant. The nonrational part of the soul contains the capacity for feeling pleasure or pain—sleep, the senses, emotion, and *orexeis*. Of these, only the *orexeis* and emotion are non-vegetative and, therefore, can partake in *logos*. Thus, just as with the *orexeis*, the emotions require *logos* in order to determine real pleasure from apparent pleasure.

Interestingly, the only systematic analysis on emotions that Aristotle provides is in the *Rhetoric*, which he intended to teach orators how to persuade their audiences.⁴² Nonetheless, his discussion on emotions sheds some light on their role in action and their interplay with *logos*. Like *orexeis*, emotions are complex psychic phenomena that include both cognitive and sensitive components. Unlike *orexeis*, emotions do not necessarily contain a conative element.

Although the ancient Greeks did not have a word that equates to our modern day term “emotion,” the term *pathos* is the closest approximation. *Pathos* literally means “to suffer” in the sense of to undergo something: emotions happen to, or befall, us. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines *pathê* by their causal effect, “Let the *pathê* be all of those things on account of which people change and differ in regard to their decisions, and

⁴² Sherman, Nancy, “The Emotional Structure of Aristotelian Virtue”, in *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55-56.

upon which attend pain and pleasure, for example anger, pity, fear, and all other such things and their opposites.”⁴³ *Pathê*, then, are not synonymous with pleasure and pain but, rather, are accompanied by them. Moreover, not only do *pathê* have an effect on the subject’s judgments, but they can also be manipulated. Unlike his predecessors, Aristotle argued that the efficient cause of *pathê* are cognitive states: by altering the cognitive state, one can consequently alter the *pathê* that one undergoes.⁴⁴

For example, anger is not simply *pain*: it is the reaction one has to the thought of outrage. Specifically, anger is the feeling that one has towards a specific person whom one perceives to have offended oneself. Anger is accompanied by pain as well as an *orexis* for revenge (anger is a *pathos* that contains a conative component). In this way, anger differs from hate, as hate is not necessarily directed at a specific person, nor does it necessarily arise from an act of injustice against us: we hate people because of certain traits, and we do not necessarily feel pain, nor desire revenge, when we hate. In fact, anger and hate are distinct, for hate can arise from anger.^{45,46}

Similarly, fear is, “a pain or disturbance due to imagining some destructive or painful evil in the future”: fear is caused by whatever we feel has the capability of destroying us or causing us great pain.⁴⁷ On the other hand, shame is “a pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit.”⁴⁸ Both fear and shame involve a pain or disturbance, but they are

⁴³ Konstan, David, “Emotions and Morality: The View from Classical Antiquity”, (Netherlands: Springer Science Business Media Dordrecht, 28 November 2013): 402, doi: 10.1007/s11245-013-9229-0. Translation of Rhetoric, 1378a20-23.

⁴⁴ Fortenbaugh, W.W., *Aristotle on Emotion*, 14-15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁴⁶ *Rhetoric*, transl. W. Rhys Roberts, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1382a1-15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1382a22-30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1383b15-18.

distinguishable by their cognitive content: fear arises from the belief of future destruction or pain whereas shame arises from the memory, experience, or belief of past, present, or future discredit.

Aristotle also discusses material causes (such as the boiling of blood for anger), but the cognitive component of *pathê* is the efficient cause of those *pathê*.⁴⁹ Although not all *pathê* contain an *orexis*, all *pathê* are accompanied by pleasure or pain; thus, *pathê* can sway a person's judgment and a person's action. Returning to the purpose of the *Rhetoric*, if an orator can convince the audience that a neighboring state is a threat, then the orator can evoke fear in the audience. This fear is accompanied by pain, and per Aristotle's discussion in the *De Anima*, all animals undergo *hormai* from pain: this is aversion, which is the corollary to desire. Because of their cognitive components, *pathê* can be swayed, or informed, by *logos*, just like *orexeis*. However, because of the accompanying pleasures or pains, *pathê* can also influence, or cause, *orexeis*; consequently, *pathê* affect human action as well. Thus, for Aristotle, both parts of the human soul are irrevocably interconnected: the rational part of the soul can inform and guide the nonrational part of the soul, and the nonrational soul can inform or overrule the rational part of the soul—this dynamic will have the ultimate bearing on the correctness or incorrectness of action in the ethical writings.

⁴⁹ Fortenbaugh, W.W., *Aristotle on Emotion*, 15.

Action and the Human Good

Critically, *logos* is the defining *dunamis* of the human soul. For every living thing, the body is the material cause, and the soul is the formal, efficient, and final causes. For human beings specifically, the soul is the efficient and final cause in that to be human *is* to strive for the actuality of all the *dunameis* within the soul, which are only potentialities without action—and action requires the functioning of the sensory, appetitive, thinking, and locomotive *dunameis*. Thus, unlike plants and animals which do not have *logos*, the human soul has far greater potentiality and, consequently, for action.

Michael Weinman makes explicit the ultimate connection between the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima*, “The soul is the never-ceasing setting-to-work (*energeia*) of the body, as *dunamis*.”⁵⁰ The body and the soul are not two, separate substances or materials, but, rather, two causes that together form the substance (*hypokeimenon*) of the living thing. The soul is the *energeia* of the body—the soul is the setting-to-work of the body, and the *dunameis* are the being-at-work of the soul. At the heart of this *energeia* of being human is pleasure and desire, the unmoved mover. To be human is to not simply to have potential nutritive (and reproductive), sensory, appetitive, thinking, and locomotive *dunameis*, but to eat and drink, to procreate, to sense, to desire, to think, and to act, with the goal of the highest actualization of all the capacities of one’s soul—this is *to agathon*. To live a human life is to pursue the fullest perfection of each of the *dunameis*, of which the thinking is the highest and most complex. This pursuit stems from desire for pleasure: there is an inherent pleasure in completing or fulfilling a desire, and humans, by nature,

⁵⁰ Weinman, Michael, *Pleasure in Aristotle’s Ethics* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 39.

desire to complete their potential—that is the being-at-work of the human soul. “Pleasure, and the desire that we have for it, is not a deviation from our being, but an innermost aspect of its natural expression.”⁵¹ Through the *hormai* that are a part of desire, the human soul lives in the sense that living is the *energeia* of the body. The task of *logos* is to correctly identify pleasure, whether it be *hêdonê*, *kalon*, or *to agathon*, and thereby inform and persuade the nonrational soul’s pursuit—the resulting action will be correct action. “The desire for the pleasure received from food and drink, for the pleasure of physical exercise, for sexual intimacy, and for physical contact generally, no less so than the desire to think through the incommensurability of the diagonal of the square, are all at the very heart of the ‘what it keeps on being to be’ of a human being.”⁵² To be human is to be motivated by pleasure; to think, to desire, and to act.

⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

⁵² Ibid., 31.

PART II

Role of Ethics and Politics

As stated, the human action described in the *De Anima* and Aristotle's ethical works is *praxis*: the social, external dimension of *logos* activity in which how one acts contingently effects whether or not he will achieve the outcome at which he aims. Accordingly, the practical sciences are focused on characterizing and defining correct action, which is action that obtains the best possible outcome. Ethics is the science that deals with correct action on an individual level, and politics deals with correct action on a social, or organizational, level. Politics has a vested interest in ethics, for social organizations are composed of individuals: any change at the political level must at some point occur at an individual level in order to take effect. Likewise, politics shapes the environment in which the individual operates and, thus, affects ethics. Ultimately, through *praxis*, humanity sets the political conditions that either allow or disallow for the development of the other sciences *epistêmê* and *technê*: if the political conditions are such that the people are consistently faced with a threat to their basic life needs, then things like food and shelter will trump theory and craft expertise. Moreover, because ethics deals with *praxis* at the individual level, it is the foundation of all the sciences—but what, precisely, is correct action at the individual level?

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle argues that correct action stems from a complete accord between the rational and nonrational parts of an individual's soul and aims at the human good. According to the account of human action in Part I, the *telos* at which all *praxis* aims is the best that can be obtained through human action, the ultimate human good—to *agathon*. What distinguishes correct *praxis* from incorrect *praxis* is the individual's conception of the ultimate *telos* as true happiness, consisting of a full, flourishing existence that is both complete and self-sufficient in that the individual is living to the fullest of his or her capacities, particularly the soul's rational capacities that are unique to human beings. However, this conception of happiness is not sufficient, for it only addresses the cognitive component of *praxis*. Correct *praxis* also requires that the individual have a rational *orexis*⁵³ for this conception of the human good. When an individual has achieved a character such that the nonrational part of his soul is in conformity with the rational part of his soul, then he has achieved moral excellence (moral virtue). As a result, the individual correctly interprets particular circumstances in light of his overall conception of *to agathon* and rational wish for that end and acts correctly, which is to act morally. Despite virtue often appearing to be more painful than pleasant, the virtuous individual is motivated to act correctly by both the anticipated pleasure of true happiness and the pleasure inherent to virtue, which is *kalon*.

⁵³ As noted in Part I, this type of *orexis*, *orexis* that is informed by reason and aims at that which reason has posited as the good, is *boulēsis*.

Defining Ethical Action: Eudaimonia and the Human Good

Aristotle begins both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics* with a discussion of ends. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that the ultimate end is the good at which all things aim.⁵⁴ Because politics, and thereby ethics (which focuses on correct *praxis* and thus encompasses the way that human beings should act towards one another), supports the ends of all the sciences, its end is the ultimate good for man (*to agathon*).⁵⁵ After a discussion of the many views on *to agathon*, Aristotle concludes that the ultimate good is happiness (*eudaimonia*), for it “is always chosen as an end in itself” and “by itself makes life something desirable and deficient in nothing.”⁵⁶ Similarly, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle states that happiness is “at once the most beautiful and the best of things and also the pleasantest.”⁵⁷ The difference between *eudaimonia* and *makarios* (which also means blessed or happy) is that *eudaimonia* is attained by an individual through his own efforts whereas *makarios* is a matter of chance or fortune.⁵⁸ Human beings want to be happy, and, as *praxis* concerns only that which we can contingently bring about, the *telos* of *praxis* is *eudaimonia*—the happiness that we can bring about within our own lives.

However, “happiness” is a rather vague term; undefined, *eudaimonia* is insufficient for *to agathon*, the ultimate *telos*, because there is disagreement about the highest good. According to Aristotle, there are three general conceptions of the good life:

⁵⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1-2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1094b1-7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1097a33-35, 1097b14-16.

⁵⁷ *Eudemian Ethics*, 1214a8-9.

⁵⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 18.

the life of bodily pleasure (*hêdonê*), the political life, and the contemplative life.^{59,60} In order to determine which, if any of these may be correct, Aristotle investigates the proper function (*ergon*) of man, for “just as the goodness and performance of a flute player [...] or generally of anyone who fulfills some function or performs some action, are thought to reside in his proper function, so the goodness and performance of man would seem to reside in whatever is his proper function.”⁶¹ Thus, although Aristotle does not say so himself, he is drawing from his metaphysics, particularly the efficient cause, or function, of man.⁶² As I highlighted in Part I from the *Metaphysics*, the *De Anima*, and the ethical writings, man’s formal, efficient, and final cause is his soul; the soul is the setting-to-work of the body, and the soul’s *dunamis* are the being-at-work of the soul. Moreover, that what distinguishes man from other living things is the rational part of his soul—*logos*. Thus, man’s defining function, the heart of what it means to be human, is, “activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle.”⁶³ Not only is Aristotle connecting his ethics to his metaphysics, and maintaining consistency between the two, but he is also building his ethical theory from the foundation of his metaphysical theory.

Furthermore, the goodness and performance of man reside not in the mere activity of the soul in conformity with reason, but in the *proper* function of the soul in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1095b15-19.

⁶⁰ *Eudemian Ethics*, 1215a31-1215b5.

⁶¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b24-27.

⁶² For additional commentary on the role of the ergon argument and its connection between the metaphysical writings and the ethical writings, please see: Achtenberg, Deborah, “The Ergon Inference”, in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle’s Ethics*, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 59-72; Achtenberg, Deborah, “Human Being, Beast, and God: The Place of Human Happiness According to Aristotle and some Twentieth-Century Philosophers” in *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature*, ed. May Sim (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 29-50; Gomez-Lobo, Alfonso, “The Ergon Inference”, in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle’s Ethics*, eds. by John P. Anton and Anthony Preus, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 43-58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1098a6-7.

conformity with reason. The proper function of something is the attainment of excellence (*arête*) in that function. For instance, when we train somebody in a craft, we use examples of *arête* in that craft to instruct him on the correct function of that craft. Thus, Aristotle concludes that *to agathon* is a life of man's proper function, which is activity of the soul in excellent accordance with the rational parts of the soul:

“On these assumptions, if we take the proper function of man to be a certain kind of life, and if this kind of life is an activity of the soul and consists in actions performed in conjunction with the rational element, and if a man of high standards is he who performs these actions well and properly, and if a function is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the excellence appropriate to it; we reach the conclusion that the good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete.”⁶⁴

Not only does the rational part of the soul exercise reason (*logos*), but, per Aristotle's remarks on human action, the non-vegetative parts of the nonrational soul can also partake in *logos* by aligning with the determinations of *logos*. Thus, there are two types of *arête*: intellectual and moral.⁶⁵ Intellectual *arête* is *arête* of the rational part of the soul, and moral *arête* is *arête* of the nonrational soul. The mark of intellectual *arête* is *arête* in reasoning (*logos*), and the mark of moral *arête* is the *arête* of the nonrational part of the soul to follow the rational part of the soul; thus, moral *arête* involves intellectual *arête*. Because *orexis* contains the impulse (*hormai*) that is the unmoved mover of action, and because *orexeis* reside in the nonrational part of the soul, moral *arête* is the province of *praxis*: the *ergon* of human action is the activity of the soul in which the *orexeis* excellently conform to *logos*. Moreover, as noted previously, ethics and politics set the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1098a12-17.

⁶⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a10-15.

foundation for the other sciences; thus, *arête* in *praxis* (moral *arête*) creates the conditions for *arête* in *theoria* (which is a type of intellectual *arête*).

Thus, based on the human *ergon*, *to agathon* cannot be the life of *hêdonê*. Animals are also capable of *hêdonê*, and so a life of *hêdonê* does not involve the full use of the capacities that make us human. Because *eudaimonia* is self-sufficient and final, it completes us as human beings, for we desire nothing further. Therefore, unless we are exercising all of our capacities— nutritive, reproductive, appetitive, locomotive, and thinking—to the fullest of their capacities, we will not achieve *eudaimonia* because our life will be lacking and incomplete. Consequently, *to agathon* must be either the political or the contemplative life.

Unfortunately, as Anthony Kenny observes, Aristotle does not give a consistent account on the relation of the political and contemplative lives to *eudaimonia* across his ethical works: the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives a hierarchical account of *eudaimonia*, as opposed to the comprehensive account offered in the *Eudemian Ethics*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* argues that *eudaimonia* is constituted by the activity of *nous* (intellect) in contemplation, which is preferable, or better than, the types of “second-rate” happiness attained through the exercise of the other capacities of the soul. Conversely, the *Eudemian Ethics* argues that *eudaimonia* consists in the ideal functioning of *every* part of the soul, with contemplative activity being the highest among a family of activities that, together, constitute a life of *eudaimonia*.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Kenny, Anthony, “Happiness in the Aristotelian Ethics” in *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 190.

Nonetheless, many commentators favor an overall comprehensive view of *eudaimonia* and observe that the distinction between the hierarchical and comprehensive views of *eudaimonia* may be arbitrary.⁶⁷ Kenny argues that when it comes to *eudaimonia*, “what [Aristotle] treats with respect, as philosophical data, are the everyday choices and decisions (actual and hypothetical) of the ordinary man.”⁶⁸ Contemplation may be the highest, or best, activity, but to live a purely contemplative life is impossible—would we call a man of wisdom happy who has no family, no friends, and does not participate in society? Per Aristotle, “It is perhaps also strange to make a supremely happy man live his life in isolation. No one would choose to have all good things all by himself, for man is a social and political being and his natural condition is to live with others. Consequently, even a happy man needs society.”⁶⁹ We can infer from Aristotle’s comments that although a man may chose contemplation over politics as the direction for his life as a whole, when it comes to the organization of his personal life, *praxis* is just as relevant as *theoria* to that man’s happiness. Moreover, just as a contemplative life requires that others engage in the political life (for one cannot engage in *theoria* unless the political conditions are such that his survival is secure), so the political life benefits from the thoughts or conclusions of those who engage in the contemplative life. On the individual

⁶⁷ There is extensive discussion amongst commentators on the hierarchical view vs. the comprehensive view of *eudaimonia*. For a range of arguments for degrees of the comprehensive view, please see the following: Kenny, “Happiness in the *Aristotelian Ethics*,” 190-214; Kraut, Richard, “Aristotle on the Human Good: An Overview,” in *Aristotle’s Ethics: Critical Essays*, ed. Nancy Sherman (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littleman Publishers, Inc., 1999), 79-104; Kraut, Richard, “Reply to Professor Roche,” in *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature*, ed. May Sim, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 139-150; Nagel, Thomas, “Aristotle on Eudaimonia,” in *Phronesis* 17, no.3 (1972), 252-259, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4181892>; Modrak, D.K.W., “Aristotle on Reason, Practical Reason, and Living Well,” in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle’s Ethics*, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 179-192. For a clear argument against the comprehensive view, please see: Roche, Timothy, “The Ultimate End of Action: A Critique of Richard Kraut’s Aristotle on the Human Good,” in *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature*, ed. May Sim (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 15-138.

⁶⁸ Kenny, “Happiness in the *Aristotelian Ethics*”, 193.

⁶⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b17-20.

level, *praxis* enables *theoria* (i.e., an individual chooses to organize his life to allow for study and contemplation), and *theoria* informs *praxis* (i.e., *theoria* assists in the conceptualization of *to agathon*, or *telos*, for individual action).

Thus, *to agathon* is a life lived in accordance with the rational principles dictated by man's *logos*, and it involves both *praxis* and *theoria*. *Eudaimonia* is not mere happiness, but a full and complete happiness that results from living to one's fullest human capacities—*eudaimonia* is an individual state of human flourishing and *arête*. Importantly, Aristotle does not argue that things that may be outside of one's control, such as external goods or goods of the body do not effect one's overall happiness: "And there are some external goods the absence of which spoils supreme happiness, e.g., good birth, good children, and good beauty: for a man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or who lives all by himself cannot be classified as altogether happy."⁷⁰ Certainly, as noted before, if one is starving or suffering a bodily disease, one will not be able to fully flourish. Nonetheless, Aristotle is making the point that *eudaimonia* is the happiness that is within our control whereas *makarios* is the happiness that refers to fortune, blessedness, or luck. As such, *eudaimonia* has more to do with *how* a man lives his life vs. the totality of which a man's life consists—*eudaimonia* is possible only if a man chooses to act in accordance with his rational principles and to be a certain sort of person,⁷¹ despite external circumstances. Thus, *eudaimonia* has a permanent quality that can only be undone by extreme misfortunes, for the man who has attained such a complete sort of excellence will bear challenges nobly: "[I]f, as we said, activities

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1103a10-15.

⁷¹ Sherman, Nancy, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 27.

determine a man's life, no supremely happy man can ever become miserable, for he will never do what is hateful and base. [...] He will not be fickle and changeable; he will not be dislodged from his happiness easily by any misfortune that comes along, but only by great and numerous disasters."⁷²

Accordingly, *orexis* for the *telos* of *to agathon*, for a life lived in accordance with the rational principles of one's soul, makes *praxis* correct. As mentioned previously, this sort of rational *orexis* is *boulêsis*. However, *praxis* deals with particulars, the individual circumstances and actions that occur throughout the course of daily life. How does *boulêsis*, a rational wish for the good *life*, translate to all of the particulars that compose that life? Or, more pointedly, what does moral *arête* look like in daily life and action?

Character and the Moral Virtues

As the permanence of *eudaimonia* rests on the fact that it stems from a man being a certain sort of person, Aristotle notes that moral *arête* is not a capacity or a *pathos*, but rather a characteristic (*hexis*). Moral *arête* cannot be *pathê*, for emotions are not necessarily in conformity with reason. Similarly, moral *arête* cannot be a capacity, because we are not praised and blamed based on what we are capable of, but by that which we do—and as *praxis* deals with the contingent, moral *arête*, or excellence in human action, must deal with that over which we have control (and thereby earn praise or blame).⁷³ Thus, moral *arête* is a *hexis*: specifically, moral *arête* depends upon a “quality in accordance with governing reason belonging to the irrational part of the soul which is

⁷² Ibid., 1100b30-1101a15.

⁷³ Ibid., 1105b18-1106a12.

yet able to obey the reason.”⁷⁴ Moral *arête* is the sum of the qualities, or characteristics, of the individual elements of the nonrational soul to excellently conform to *logos*: our characters are determined by the faculties of our individual *pathê* and *orexeis* to follow *logos*. Importantly, the faculties of our *pathê* and *orexeis* do not refer to their potentiality or capacity to follow *logos*, but, rather, their inherent power or function of following *logos*—faculties are active characteristics that are, in themselves, individual moral virtues that together compose moral *arête*.

Moreover, moral virtues are expressions of the mean (between excess and deficiency) in particular circumstances. As Aristotle observes, action is a type of motion, and because all motion is continuous and divisible, all action has the potentiality for excess, deficiency, and a mean.⁷⁵ In any craft, the expert avoids excess and deficiency because they detract from the pursuit of the overall good. Likewise with the *pathê* (which are formed through perception and a corresponding pleasure or pain) and action: too much or too little of a pleasure or a pain (as experienced through a sensation or *pathos*) can undermine *boulêsis* and result in action that is not in accordance with one’s rational principles. Thus, the virtues, as excellent states of the *pathê*, safeguard *boulêsis* by aiming towards the mean: “[W]e can experience fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and generally any kind of pleasure and pain either too much or too little, and in either case not properly. But to experience all of this at the right time, toward the right object, toward the

⁷⁴ *Eudemian Ethics*, 1220b1-7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1220b21-30.

right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner—that is the median and the best course, the course that is the mark of virtue.”⁷⁶

Aristotle provides a list of some of the moral virtues: gentleness, bravery, modesty, temperance, righteous indignation, the just, liberality, sincerity, friendliness, dignity, endurance, greatness of spirit, magnificence, and wisdom. He also lists each virtue’s excess and deficiency. For example, the excess of bravery is foolhardiness, and the deficiency of bravery is cowardice. To have bravery is to understand the situations that call for a certain lack of fear (such as battle or defense of one’s family), to have the appropriate amount of fear towards the threat in order to make good tactical decisions (too little or too much fear will result in foolish or cowardly decisions), and to have the *pathê* to be in line with the dictates of one’s *logos*—fear, in the appropriate amounts, is instructive for survival. Thus, a virtue is “a unified condition of both feeling and reasoned judgment”⁷⁷ in which the *pathê* express the mean between deficiency and excess in action.

Accordingly, one cannot unknowingly perform actions that express virtue: because the virtues are a part of one’s character, and because *praxis* concerns the realm of contingent human action (that over which we have some control), one must *choose* to act virtuously. True choice involves understanding the situation, understanding what one is doing, choosing to act a certain way from amongst numerous options, and then acting from one’s character (in which the *pathê* and *orexeis* are already in line with *logos*). Being virtuous requires both the right action and the right affectation: “But in the case of

⁷⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b17-23.

⁷⁷ Cooper, John, “Some Remarks on Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 237.

the virtues, the act [must be] of a certain kind [and] the agent [must have] certain characteristics as he performs it: first of all, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose to act that way that he does, and he must choose it for its own sake; and in the third place, the act must spring from a firm and unchangeable character.”⁷⁸ Choosing to act virtuously is an affirmation of the value that one places on the things that one determines to contribute to the overall human good, “it [virtue] is a characteristic involving choice [and] it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principle, such as a man of practical wisdom would use to determine it.”⁷⁹ Thus, moral *arête* is achieved through developing the virtues, and it is expressed in daily action as the mean between deficiency and excess, as guided by the rational principle aiming towards the *telos* of *to agathon*. The virtuous man has achieved moral *arête* through action that is an expression of his values and character; being virtuous requires the correct intention (*telos*), the correct affectation (*orexis*), and correct action (which requires correct perception of the circumstances)—being virtuous requires all of the elements of action that Aristotle provides in his metaphysical writings to be in line with a clear conceptualization of *to agathon*.

Motivation: Virtue “for the Sake of” and Practical Reason

Nonetheless, acting virtuously often seems to result in pain; this is problematic, because according to Aristotle’s ethical and metaphysical writings, human beings are motivated by pleasure. Although for Aristotle the virtuous constitute the standard for the

⁷⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a29-37.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1106b36-1107a2.

pleasant, and vice versa, there are many instances in which Aristotle indicates that even the virtuous do not find virtuous action completely pleasant. For example, expressing justified anger is painful,⁸⁰ the magnanimous feel pain at paying their debts,⁸¹ friendship results in friends feeling the pain of each other's suffering,⁸² etc.^{83,84} The view that acting virtuously typically involves some amount of pain is consistent with human experience and with Aristotle's practical and realistic approach to his investigation of morality. As Aristotle himself notes, "<That actions of this kind [virtuous actions] are considered as voluntary is also shown by the fact that> sometimes people are even praised for doing them, for example, if they endure shameful or painful treatment in return for great and noble objectives."⁸⁵ Because, "it is [...] pain that prevents us from doing noble actions,"⁸⁶ what motivates the virtuous man beyond the pain of acting virtuously?

Simply put, due to our rational capacities, human beings have the unique capacity for planning and organizing our lives around a single, ultimate end—*eudaimonia*, which is synonymous with *to agathon*. If one's ultimate goal is *eudaimonia*, then one's understanding of pleasure goes beyond bodily pleasures or material gain: one understands pleasure to also include human flourishing and *arête*. Pleasure is not mere *hêdonê*, but a higher sort of well-being and happiness that is equated with *to agathon*. Accordingly, in acting, we are motivated by anticipated pleasures as well as existing pleasures; and,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 149b20-21.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1124b12-15.

⁸² Ibid., 1171b4-6.

⁸³ Curzer, Howard J., "Aristotle's Painful Path to Virtue" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2002), doi:10.1353/hph.2002.0026, 151.

⁸⁴ Curzer argues that "[M]en who love what is noble derive pleasure from what is naturally pleasant. Actions which conform to virtue are naturally pleasant, and, as a result, such actions are not only pleasant for those who love the noble but also pleasant in themselves" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a13-15) is a syllogism that Aristotle develops in order to show that pleasure is the standard of virtue and vice versa, not to argue that virtue is overall pleasant for the virtuous man (150-151).

⁸⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a19-22.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1104b9-10.

oftentimes, the anticipated pleasure or pain can outweigh the existing pleasure or pain.⁸⁷ For example, most sick people will undergo an operation, despite the physical pain and material expense, because they anticipate the future pleasure of better health: they are motivated to undergo additional pain in order to obtain the good of health. Similarly, an athlete, or any expert practitioner of a craft, will undergo hours of painstaking, patient practice in order to achieve an end state of *arête*. Likewise, the virtuous person is willing to undergo pain in order to achieve *eudaimonia*.

Correctly planning and organizing one's life around an ultimate end requires excellence in practical reasoning, which is practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Although *boulêsis* sets the ultimate *telos* as *to agathon*, practical reason determines how to reach that *telos* through *praxis*: thus, *phronesis* is necessary for moral *arête*, and moral *arête* is necessary for *phronesis*. Correct action, as with any action, requires an interdependence of conative and cognitive elements. Together, moral *arête* and *phronesis* produce correct *praxis*, and it is through the anticipated and realized pleasures of moral *arête* and *phronesis* cause that man is motivated to act virtuously.

A point that is often overlooked in the commentary on Aristotle's ethics is that the process begins with perception: the first step in *praxis* is not deliberation on how to act, but determining whether a particular situation requires action in the first place. Both the virtues and *phronesis* inform perception, "Preliminary to deciding how to act, one must acknowledge that the situation requires action. The decision must arise from a

⁸⁷ As is hopefully evident here, one may be motivated by an anticipated pleasure that does not fall under a conception or understanding of *eudaimonia*—this would be an anticipated apparent pleasure. Or, one may be motivated by an anticipated pleasure that is a real good, but may not have the right affectation, in which case the resulting action would not be virtuous.

reading of the circumstances. This reading, or reaction, is informed by ethical considerations expressive of an agent's virtue. Perception is thus informed by the virtues."⁸⁸ In a particular circumstance, an agent will experience pleasure and/or pain—whether emotional or bodily, existing or anticipated—through perception. Because the virtuous man's *pathê* are in line with the rational part of his soul, and because the *pathê* have a cognitive foundation (they are formed from evaluative beliefs about a given situation that, are themselves, a part of perception), the perceived and experienced pleasure and pain will be instructive as to the correct course of action. For the virtuous man, the *pathê* are critical to correctly perceiving the ethical saliences of a given situation because, along with reason, they interpret the situation in light of one's values, of which the ultimate value is *to agathon*. "Perception is contextual awareness that seizes upon the salient features of situations precisely because the agent is first committed to a larger conceptual framework generated by an understanding of *eudaimonia*."⁸⁹ Thus the earlier example of fear, in the appropriate doses, being instructive to the goal of the brave man who is defending his home in battle.

After perceiving the ethically salient features of a particular situation, the virtuous agent then uses practical reason to determine the course of action that meets the contingent ends set by *boulêsis*: "[A] man fulfills his proper function only by way of practical wisdom and moral excellence or virtue: virtue makes us aim at the right target [*skopos*], and practical wisdom makes us use the right means."⁹⁰ *Boulêsis* sets the

⁸⁸ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 29.

⁸⁹ Loudon, Robert B, "Aristotle's Practical Particularism" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle's Ethics*, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 170.

⁹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a7-9.

ultimate *telos*—*eudaimonia*. The virtuous agent then uses practical reason to determine what will contribute to that end in a particular situation, as informed by the ethically salient features of that situation: “We deliberate not about ends but about means to obtain ends [...] We take the end for granted, and then consider in what manner and by what means it can be realized.”⁹¹ Part of organizing one’s life around a single *telos* involves determining, through practical reason, what contributes to that *telos*. The virtuous man has a plan, with antecedent goals and corresponding activities, to reach *eudaimonia*. For example, a full, flourishing human life generally requires health, good relationships with family and friends, employment, and pursuit of individual interests. Although these ends are not the ultimate end, they are sub-ends in the sense that they are the goal of a particular action, both for the pleasure they bring in themselves and as contributing to the ultimate goal of *eudaimonia*. As Nancy Sherman notes, “If one, as a rational agent, is to be more than a bundle of disparate streams and interests, then part of planning will involve coherence of end side by side and the promotion of actions in light of that pattern of ends.”⁹² Through perception, the virtuous agent will recognize, via practical *nous*,⁹³ when the particulars of a situation are an occasion for pursuing the ends that contribute to the ultimate end of *eudaimonia*,⁹⁴ then, through the deliberative process, both the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1112b11-15.

⁹² Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 69.

⁹³ Nancy Sherman does extensive work in clarifying the often seemingly conflicting comments that Aristotle makes on the role of *nous* in *praxis*, of particular relevance here is her following insight, “*Nous* enables us to appreciate the relevance of particular circumstances to more general ends. *Nous* is practical (perceptual) insight which issues in both more and less conditioned judgments about action.” (Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 44). I will be discussing practical *nous* more in depth in Part III of this thesis, borrowing further from Nancy Sherman’s observations.

⁹⁴ “As for intelligence [*nous*], it deals with both ends of the scale. It is intelligence, not reasoning, that has as its primary objects primary terms and definitions as well as ultimate particulars. Intelligence grasps, on the one hand, the unchangeable primary terms and concepts for demonstrations; on the other hand, in questions of action, it grasps the ultimate, contingent fact and the minor premise [which will be the immediate fact of experience as perceived by intelligence]. For it is particular facts that form the starting points or principles [for our knowledge of] the goal of action: universals arise out of particulars. Hence, one must have perception of particular facts, and this perception is intelligence.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a35-b5).

anticipated pleasure of the sub-end itself and of *eudaimonia* will overrule any immediate or anticipated pain from acting virtuously.

Choice (*prohairesis*) is the culmination of the virtuous man's deliberative process and the efficient cause of action. Perception and deliberation shape the sub-ends of action by noticing occasions for action and refining the ends of action through the *pathê* (which are in a state of *arête* because they are in accordance with reason) and practical reason. *Prohairesis* then promotes the ends that fall under the general conception of *to agathon* above ends that do not fall under that conception. *Prohairesis* is not simply a voluntary decision or intention; it literally means "choosing over" or "choosing before."⁹⁵ All action requires both a conative and a cognitive component, and *prohairesis* is the meeting of these two requirements to functionally produce ethical action: "It is clear that choice is not simply wish or simply opinion, but opinion [practical belief] and desire [*boulêsis*] together when following as a conclusion from deliberation."⁹⁶ Thus, *prohairesis* is a voluntary, rational, and practical affirmation of one's commitment to *to agathon* in response to particular circumstances; it is a "deliberate desire for things within our power."⁹⁷ The chief distinction between the virtuous man and the non-virtuous man is the virtuous man's "ability to see the truth in each particular moral question."⁹⁸ Although Aristotle does not directly mention the mechanism by which the virtuous man is motivated to act virtuously, we can infer from his comments that by determining the truth of how the salient aspects of a particular situation apply to *to agathon*, the virtuous man

⁹⁵ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 79-82, 89.

⁹⁶ *Eudemian Ethics*, 1227a1-5.

⁹⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a10-14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1113a32-36.

is motivated by the anticipated pleasure of *eudaimonia* to choose the end that best promotes his conceptualization of *to agathon*.

Motivation: Virtue's Internal Ends

Moreover, not only does the virtuous man act for virtuously the sake of *eudaimonia*, but he chooses to act virtuously for its own sake as well. Per Aristotle's criteria for acting virtuously, the agent must not only have a certain characteristics while he performs the action, but he must also choose to act virtuously knowingly and *for its own sake* (and this choice must stem from a firm and unchangeable character).⁹⁹ Aristotle's comments on acting virtuously for its own sake have caused extensive confusion, for how can one act virtuously for its own sake when the *telos* of *to agathon* is necessary for an action to be virtuous in the first place? Nonetheless, commentators such as Richard Sorabji and Eugene Garver have argued that acting virtuously for its own sake does not necessarily exclude acting virtuously as a means to the ultimate end, *eudaimonia*. As Sorabji notes, there is a relationship between instance, manner, and means: "Whether the virtuous man is choosing a *means* of being courageous, or an *instance* of courageous conduct, or a *way* of bestowing his wealth, the choice involved is still a rational thing."¹⁰⁰ Garver additionally notes that the object of virtuous action is both an external and internal end. The external end is the sub-end that fits into the overall scheme of *to agathon* and is distinct from the acts that produced it: examples of external ends are the defense of one's home, good relationships with family and friends, good

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1105a31-35.

¹⁰⁰ Sorabji, R, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series 74 (1973-74): 110, accessed 24 March 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4544852>.

bodily health, etc. The internal end is “an act that is constitutive of its own end.”¹⁰¹ For Aristotle, “the end of every activity corresponds to the character that produced it,”¹⁰² and because virtuous actions are functions of virtuous character, virtuous action is constitutive of its own end. Put another way, “virtuous action is its own end because it is the source and measure of its own value, and therein lies its nobility.”¹⁰³ Virtuous action is not simply a means to *eudaimonia*, but also an instance of *eudaimonia*: a virtuous action is an individual way of expressing and living *to agathon*.

Moreover, Garver argues that the internalized end of virtuous action *incorporates* the external end of virtuous action: the internal end of virtuous action determines the way in which one accomplishes, or puts forth one’s best effort, to accomplish the external end. For example, “Courage is not achieving an internal end, e.g., conquering one’s fears, so that one can thereby also accomplish an external end, defending one’s city; courage is ignoring or despising fears of dying for the sake of the city—the original external end has become part of the internalized end.”¹⁰⁴ *Eudaimonia* is a life of human flourishing or well-being that is within our control in the sense that we can achieve it through our actions. Virtuous actions are instances of *eudaimonia* precisely because virtuous actions are the function of an excellent *hexis*. Thus, the external ends of virtuous action (which are the ends that contribute towards the agent’s conception of *to agathon*) are part of the internal ends because *to agathon* requires that the agent have a certain state or

¹⁰¹ Garver, Eugene, “Aristotle’s Genealogy of Morals,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 44, no. 4 (June 1984): 482, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2107614>.

¹⁰² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b22-22.

¹⁰³ Garver, Eugene, “Aristotle’s Genealogy of Morals”, 482.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 481.

character—to *agathon* requires that the agent be a specific sort of person. “An action which is its own end [virtuous action] is not an additional end we aim at besides the given external end; it is the external end made determinate, perfected, made into action.”¹⁰⁵ Whereas *eudaimonia* is an end only, virtuous action is both a means and an end: “We always choose happiness as an end in itself and never for the sake of something else. Honor, pleasure, intelligence, and all virtue we choose partly for themselves—we would choose each of them even if no further advantage would accrue from them—but we also choose them partly for the sake of happiness, because it is through them that we assume we will be happy.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously by not only the anticipated pleasure from *eudaimonia*, but also the existing and real pleasure from being virtuous, which also is noble (*kalon*).

Pleasure Completes Virtue

Thus, because the virtuous man values *to agathon* and the moral and intellectual excellence that are both ends in themselves and contribute to his conception of *to agathon*, acting virtuously brings its own pleasure:

“For the sensation of pleasure belongs to the soul, and each man derives pleasure from what he is said to love: a lover of horses from horses, a lover of the theater from plays, and in the same way a lover of justice from just acts, and a lover of virtue in general from virtuous acts. In most men, pleasant acts conflict with one another because they are not pleasant by nature, but men who love what is noble derive pleasure from what is naturally pleasant. Actions which conform to virtue are not naturally pleasant, and, as a result, such actions are not only pleasant for those who love the noble but also pleasant in themselves.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 488.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 490; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b1-6.

¹⁰⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a6-15.

As noted above, Aristotle is not arguing that virtuous actions are perfectly pleasant, for he acknowledges that external goods and forces, which may or may not be within one's control, can affect the overall outcome of a virtuous action. However, Aristotle is arguing that virtuous actions, in addition to being both their own end and being a means to *eudaimonia*, have a certain pleasantness in themselves precisely because they are activities and their own ends. "For pleasures are not processes, nor do all pleasures involve processes: they are activities and an end, and they result not from the process of development we undergo, but from the use we make of the powers that we have."¹⁰⁸ As excellent functions of the soul's *dunamis*, virtuous actions are loved and valued for themselves, regardless of whether they lead to any greater or fuller value—accordingly, virtuous actions are naturally pleasant.

Importantly, Aristotle does argue that this pleasure is a mark of virtue itself—“Nobody would call a man just who does not enjoy acting justly, nor generous who does not enjoy generous actions, and so on.”¹⁰⁹ If an agent feels no pleasure in acting virtuously, then he is not virtuous. The reason is due to the nature of moral virtue: moral virtue is excellence of the nonrational part of the soul to follow, or partake in, reason. By definition, the virtuous man's *pathê* are in line with his rational conception of the good life, and, so, he has a rational wish (*boulêsis*) for *to agathon*—being virtuous fulfills the virtuous man's desires. As noted in Part I, to have desires and to experience pleasure in fulfilling one's desires is part of human nature. Accordingly, “[P]leasure and pain are an index of an individual's virtue because a virtuous man will derive pleasure from acting

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1153a9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1099a19-20.

virtuously and will enjoy virtue for its own sake, whereas a self-indulgent or base man will find virtuous action painful.”¹¹⁰ Pleasure in acting virtuously is indicative of *boulêsis for to agathon*.

Moreover, the virtuous man’s pleasure in virtuous action is unimpeded in the sense that both parts of his soul are in agreement; he does not experience the pain of the non-virtuous man during the deliberative process. If pleasures result from the use that we make of the powers that we have, and virtuous action is the function (of powers) of an excellent *hexis* of the soul, then the pleasure of virtuous action is unimpeded or complete in the sense that the function of the soul is unimpeded by conflicting desires. In this sense, virtuous action is pleasant in that it is unobstructed: “No activity is complete and perfect as long as it is obstructed, and happiness is a complete and perfect thing.”¹¹¹ Thus, pleasure, as a mark of virtue, completes virtue: “Pleasure completes the activity not as a characteristic completes the activity by already being inherent in it, but as a completeness that superimposes itself upon it, like the bloom of youth in those who are in their prime.”¹¹² For the virtuous man, being virtuous is pleasant because virtuous activity is an activity and an end, and both unobstructed and loved. This pleasure completes virtuous activity for the virtuous man in the sense that the virtuous activity is “increased by the pleasure proper to it”¹¹³: the pleasure of virtuous activity motivates the virtuous man to be better in his perception and in his deliberation of the particulars regarding practical action.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1104b3-7.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1153a.

¹¹² Ibid., 1174b30-35.

¹¹³ Ibid., 1175a30.

PART III

Virtue Requires Time and Effort

In Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that, “[T]he virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this to completion and fulfillment.”¹¹⁴

Although a human being may be born with some natural virtues, no one is born a virtuous man: he must strive to achieve the perfection that is the excellent functioning of his soul. As observed in Part I, this striving for the completion of the soul’s powers (*dunamis*), along with having a body and soul, is what it means to be a living thing.¹¹⁵ Although the nonrational part of the soul (specifically the senses) may undergo alterations through the experience of pleasure and pain,¹¹⁶ the virtues themselves are not alterations, but, rather, states (*hexeis*) of completion:

“Again, states, whether of the body or of the soul are not alterations. For some are excellences, and others defects, and neither excellence nor defect is an alteration: excellence is a perfection (for when anything acquires its proper excellence, we call it perfect, since it is then really in its natural state: e.g., a circle is perfect when it really becomes a circle and when it is best), while defect is a perishing or departure from this condition.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1103a23-25.

¹¹⁵ Weinman, 21.

¹¹⁶ *Metaphysics*, transl. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 247a5-10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 246a10-246b3.

This perfection of the human soul is the human good—to *agathon*, which is *eudaimonia*. As Aristotle observes, *eudaimonia* is not god-sent, but attained through *aretê* and training: “[I]t [*eudaimonia*] will be shared by many people; for study and effort will make it accessible to anyone whose capacity for virtue is unimpaired.”¹¹⁸ Although we are not by nature complete or perfect, we do, by nature, have the potential to be so.

As Deborah Achtenberg notes, this striving towards perfection is precisely that which separates human beings from gods. Due to *logos*, human beings are the only living things that can act (per Aristotle, animals only move, and plants can do neither). However, unlike the gods, the success of human action is not guaranteed: the gods’ action has an unlimited *telos* whereas human action has a limited *telos* because its success depends upon *aretê*, which we must achieve.¹¹⁹ Human beings are unique in that we have the potential for the perfection of all of our *dunamis*, but we have to work for it: “Successful activity—*energeia*—is not by nature. It is a piece of work, an accomplishment, an *ergon*. Or, at least the acquisition of the developed capacity and necessary conditions for its exercise is a piece of work. Once those have been acquired, the actual exercise of virtue is not work—it is being-at-work, or *energeia*.”¹²⁰ As noted in Part I, the never-ceasing being-at-work of the soul to fulfill its potentialities is what it means to be a living thing, and at the heart of this *energeia* are pleasure and *orexis*. In a very real sense, effort, failure, and success are part of what it means to be human and to

¹¹⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b15-20.

¹¹⁹ Achtenberg, "Human Being, Beast, and God", 29.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

live a human life. The closer that we come to achieving intellectual and moral *aretê*, the closer we come to perfection and success—the closer we come to *eudaimonia*.

Continuous Learning of the Virtuous

Moreover, achieving moral *aretê* is exceptionally difficult because the practical sciences, ethics and politics, are imprecise and inexact in a way that the other sciences are not: there are no universal rules that hold for all of the particulars involved in human action. Even Aristotle acknowledges that, “[I]n the discussion of such [imprecise] subjects, we must be satisfied to indicate the truth with a rough and general sketch: when the subject and the basis for the basis of a discussion consist of matters that hold good only as a general rule, but not always, the conclusions reached must be of the same order.”¹²¹ The only absolute in ethics is that there are no absolutes.

Nancy Sherman argues that Aristotle’s comments on the law and equity clarify his points on the imprecise nature of ethics and politics.¹²² Aristotle observes that laws are, by nature, universal and, as such, limited: “[A]ll law is universal, but there are some things about which it is not possible to speak correctly in universal terms. Now, in situations where it is necessary to speak correctly in universal terms, but impossible to do so correctly, the law takes the majority of cases, fully realizing in what respect it misses the mark.”¹²³ In the Ancient Greek system, the jurors’ role was to provide equity and compensate for the limitations of law by interpreting the original intent of the legislators

¹²¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b18-23.

¹²² Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 13.

¹²³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 113713-16.

and applying it to the particulars of an individual case. Our modern day conceptions of justice make this clear: although stealing is prohibited by law, we believe that there is a large difference in the degree of transgression between an individual who steals to survive (such as a starving man) and an individual who steals for profit (such as a professional thief). Without an interpretation of the law, both offenders would be punished equally, regardless of their individual intent and circumstances. “[Equity] thus reveals the spirit of the law, rather than its letter, and as such is an antidote to legal rigorism.”¹²⁴ As a rectification of the law’s deficiencies, equity is only possible through careful consideration of both the law and the particulars of the situation.¹²⁵

Likewise, in *praxis*, we use laws and rules, both imposed from without and self-created, to guide our actions. Theoretical *nous* enables us to generate universals from particulars—it is the intellectual capacity by which we create rules and laws regarding human action. We believe external laws and rules (those instituted from within society or imposed by figured in positions of authority) to generally hold as they represent the experience and knowledge of many people who have come before us. We also create our own rules from personal experience—they act as shortcuts for our deliberative processes and can assist us in identifying both when particular circumstances require action and what sort of action is required.¹²⁶ However, these rules and laws, by nature, are limited in that they will not sufficiently apply to all scenarios.

¹²⁴ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 16.

¹²⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1137b20-27.

¹²⁶ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 180-181.

Accordingly, as virtue requires that the agent act knowingly with a full understanding of the particular circumstances, applying a rule or law to a situation without consideration of its relevance or application is insufficient for virtuous action. Like jurors and equity, the virtuous agent must carefully consider the particulars of a situation in light of his conception of *to agathon* and act accordingly. The ability of the virtuous man to grasp that which *to agathon* requires in specific circumstances is not theoretical *nous*, but practical *nous*: whereas theoretical *nous* is the capacity by which we grasp universals from particulars, practical *nous* is the capacity by which we grasp particular applications of universals.^{127,128}

By exercising practical *nous* in a particular circumstance, “[We] can go on to inductively appreciate [a virtue’s] requirements in other relevantly similar cases. It is not that [we] formulate some sort of rule, but as a result of this and past experience, [we] can go on to make sensitive discriminations.”¹²⁹ Through theoretical *nous*, an agent will create or learn rules and principles that will assist the discriminatory process; however, these rules are ultimately insufficient for virtuous action. It is through practical *nous* that an agent is able to understand both the applicability of a specific circumstance to *to agathon* and the particular requirements of *to agathon* in that specific circumstance. Unlike theoretical *nous*, practical *nous* is cultivated through experience: practical *nous*

¹²⁷ Ibid., 43-44.

¹²⁸“As for intelligence, it deals with ultimates on both ends of the scale. It is intelligence [*nous*], not reasoning, that has as its objects primary terms and definitions as well as ultimate particulars. Intelligence grasps, on the one hand, the unchangeable, primary terms and concepts for demonstrations; on the other hand, in questions of action, it grasps the ultimate contingent fact and the minor premise. For it is particular facts that form the starting points or principles for <our knowledge of> the goal of action: universals arise out of particulars. Hence, one must have perception of particular facts, and this perception is intelligence.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a35-b5).

¹²⁹ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 44.

does not formulate rules but, rather, hones the agent's discriminatory functioning in regards to virtue's requirements.

Thus, we can infer from Aristotle's comments and Sherman's insights that even the virtuous agent is continuously learning. Per Aristotle, the virtuous man is not only able to identify which acts are virtuous in particular situations, but also to understand why; he desires and chooses to act virtuously for its own sake; and he reliably acts and feel "right".¹³⁰ However, despite the fact that the virtuous man's nonrational soul is in an excellent state (*hexis*), that his *pathê* and *orexeis* are harmonious with the rational part of his soul, and that he reliably acts correctly, he still has much to learn because the particulars of each circumstance are unique. To be virtuous is to have a certain character, to approach each new scenario in a certain way—part of the virtuous approach to each new circumstance is to continuously re-inform and reconceive *to agathon* in light of one's own life through practical *nous*. Each deliberative conclusion that a virtuous agent reaches in a particular situation informs his overall conception of *to agathon* and of the immediate and antecedent ends that contribute to *to agathon*. "To pursue an apparent good is just to construe certain moments as occasions for acting for that end."¹³¹ In applying the requirements of *to agathon* to a particular circumstance in action, the virtuous agent acquires a new insight and a new understanding of what *to agathon* means for his life, which in turn informs his future deliberations.¹³²

¹³⁰ Curzer, "Aristotle's Painful Path to Virtue", 141.

¹³¹ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 33.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Although being virtuous requires continuous effort on the part of the virtuous man, this effort is pleasant for him. First, as noted in Part II, overarching all of the virtuous man's actions is the *orexis* for the highest good, *to agathon—eudaimonia*. The virtuous man understands all of his activities to be in pursuit of the completion of his soul's potentialities, *to agathon*. Moreover, not only does the anticipated pleasure of *eudaimonia* motivate the virtuous man to act virtuously, even at the expense of lesser pleasures, but acting virtuously brings its own pleasure in that virtue is valuable and pleasurable in itself. Finally, as part of the perfection of our rational capacities, learning is intrinsically pleasant: humans have a natural *orexis* to understand that which we come to wonder through our senses.¹³³ As Aristotle notes in the *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves [...] not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything."¹³⁴ Aristotle uses the words "desire", "love", and "delight" to describe learning, and such pleasure characterizes all critical activity. And, ultimately, happiness is an activity¹³⁵—if the virtuous man were to reach a stage at which no further effort, no further action, were required, then he would in a very real sense no longer be human, but a god. Continuous learning is part of being virtuous, and the effort and activity required for being virtuous is pleasant, and thus motivational, for the virtuous man.

¹³³ Weinman, *Pleasure in Aristotle's Ethics*, 17-18.

¹³⁴ *Metaphysics*, 980a20-27.

¹³⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a5-27.

The Puzzle in Aristotle's Account of Virtue Development

Nonetheless, the virtuous man is not born virtuous, but must become so: and, if being virtuous requires continuous learning and effort, then becoming virtuous requires that much more so. As Aristotle notes, one does not align ones *pathê* and *orexeis* with *logos* by simply learning a rule or a principle: one can only do so through habit (*ethos*). Characteristics (including the virtues) develop from corresponding activities.¹³⁶ A person becomes just by acting justly, by taking no more than his share, by giving honor to those who deserve it, etc. Thus, acquiring virtue can be likened to learning a craft: “The virtues [...] we acquire by first putting them into practice, and the same is also true of the arts. For the things which we have to learn before we can do them we learn by doing: men become builders by building houses, and harpists by playing the harp.”¹³⁷ The process of learning to act correctly requires action itself; we develop the individual excellences (or moral virtues) of the nonrational soul through activities in which our *pathê* and *orexeis* are in conformity to reason—we must train our *pathê* and *orexeis* by practicing virtue.

However, the non-virtuous man does not have the same understanding of *to agathon* as the virtuous man and, thus, is deficient in the functioning of his practical *nous* and in his *orexis* for *to agathon*. Furthermore, if virtuous action is only pleasant for the virtuous, then, presumably, it will not be pleasant for those learning how to become virtuous. Unlike the crafts, which require only a skill, virtue requires both a *hexis* and a skill. A man becomes a builder by building houses, by incrementally acquiring the skill set; however, for Aristotle, a man becomes virtuous by not only acquiring the skill set,

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1103a30-35.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1103b21-22.

but also by being in a certain *hexis* when he performs it. Moreover, the man must be in the correct *hexis* when he performs virtuous action in order to derive pleasure from it. Thus, the problem is, what is the non-virtuous man's motivation to learn to identify virtuous acts, to choose to act virtuously for its own sake, to act virtuously, and then to repeat such choices and actions in an effort to make them habits if only the virtuous derive pleasure from such action? This problem is parallel to the question of how a person can become just by acting justly, for must he not already be just in order to act so?

Eligibility for Virtue

Aristotle's comments on moral education shed some light on how a man could become virtuous through habituation and why he would want to do so. Critically, Aristotle holds that the group of individuals who can be virtuous is limited to free men who are at least fifty years of age. The age requirement is due to the maturation process of the soul (both the nonrational and rational parts) and the experience required for virtue. Aristotle argues that, "[A]s the body is prior in generation to the soul, so the irrational is prior to the rational. The proof is that anger and wishing and desire are implanted in children from their very birth, but reason and understanding are developed as they grow older."¹³⁸ According to Aristotle, a man reaches physical maturity at thirty-seven years of age and intellectual maturity at fifty years of age—neither of these can be rushed.¹³⁹ The deliberative capacities of children are imperfect; because the nonrational

¹³⁸ *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett, in Vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of Aristotle: Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1334b21-28.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 1335a29, 1335b31-35.

part of the child's soul reaches maturation before the rational part, a child cannot be virtuous—the child's *orexeis* and *pathê* cannot fully conform to *logos* because the capacity for *logos*, the functioning of that part of the thinking *dunamis*, is not fully developed. Moreover, even if the capacity for the thinking *dunamis* were fully developed, the functioning of practical *nous* would still be underdeveloped, for it can only be honed over time through experience.

Likewise, Aristotle held that neither women nor slaves can be fully virtuous, regardless of their age. Although Aristotle's views on this matter are certainly contentious and incorrect, they explain why Aristotle restricted virtue to adult men and provide additional background for Aristotle's account of moral education. Aristotle's reasoning for slaves' and women's limitation is the biology of their souls. In the case of slaves, Aristotle held that slaves' souls lack deliberative capacities: Aristotle theorized that although slaves possess a nonrational soul with *pathê* and *orexeis*, they do not have the capacity to deliberate, to reflect and plan accordingly. Nonetheless, "[Slaves] can follow reasoned deliberations and instructions and therefore can be said to perceive or appreciate *logos*."¹⁴⁰ Thus, according to Aristotle's account, slaves are most certainly human and have a nonrational soul that can be guided by a master who can deliberate, despite lacking their own deliberative capacities.¹⁴¹ In this way, Aristotle's account of slaves is similar to that of very young children—both lack deliberation of their own and require guidance and oversight from those who do. The difference is that slaves do not

¹⁴⁰ Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 54.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54-57.

have any deliberative capacity whereas the deliberative capacities of free, male children are present, just incomplete.

Contrastingly, Aristotle holds that women do have deliberative faculties; however, their deliberative faculties lack authority over their *pathê* and *orexeis*. Simply put, a women's deliberative conclusions are often overruled by the nonrational part of her soul; accordingly, although women are superior to slaves and children, they are subordinate to men whose *pathê* and *orexeis* are guided by *logos*.¹⁴² Thus, slaves, women, and children cannot be fully virtuous, "For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature. So it must necessarily be supposed to be with the excellences of character also; all should partake of them, but only in such a manner and degree as required by each for the fulfillment of his function." The lack of the deliberative capacities in slaves, women, and children explain, for Aristotle, their respective hierarchical roles within society.

Thus, the brunt of Aristotle's work in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemean Ethics* is specifically addressing the prospective student—the adult, free man who already has a *orexis* to lead a virtuous life.¹⁴³ That the student already desire virtue is key, for if the student does not value the fine and noble (*kalon*), then he will not desire to understand and pursue *to agathon*: "Argument and teaching [...] are not effective in all cases: the soul of the listener must first have been conditioned by habits to the right kind of likes and dislikes, just as land (must be cultivated before it is able) to foster the seed [...] there must first be a character that somehow has an affinity for excellence of virtue,

¹⁴² Ibid., 57-61.

¹⁴³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b20-1180a6.

a character that loves what is noble and feels disgust at what is base.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, we can derive two stages of moral habituation and teaching from Aristotle’s comments on moral education, with the first stage being necessary for the second stage, the members of which comprise the audience for Aristotle’s ethical writings.

Habit and the Stages of Moral Education

The first stage of habituation is accomplished in a person’s childhood: because children lack complete deliberative faculties, they need to be taught to love *kalon* through the instruction and example of their parents and elders and through a state’s laws. Specifically, the child’s *pathê* and *orexeis* need to be directed towards the *kalon* through nurture and care.¹⁴⁵ As Aristotle notes, “To live a life of self-control and tenacity is not pleasant for most people, especially the young. Therefore, their upbringing and pursuits must be regulated by laws; for once they have become familiar, they will no longer be painful.”¹⁴⁶ Children form their characters through activities directed by their elders and, if trained properly, will learn to find pleasure, rather than pain, in the *kalon*. Moreover, if children are taught to correctly identify *kalon*, and to love it, then their *orexis* for *kalon* in their lives will translate into an overarching *orexis* for *to agathon*.¹⁴⁷

Importantly, this first stage of moral development must occur in childhood: although a child cannot be virtuous, the child forms *hexeis* that, according to Aristotle, will likely remain with him for life because characters, as settled states, are difficult to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 1179b23-31.

¹⁴⁵ Meyer, Susan Suave, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 123-124.

¹⁴⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b33-35.

¹⁴⁷ For example, children may come to identify and love the virtue of bravery through war stories from elders, fairy tales, and Bible stories—these stories provide examples of what bravery looks like, and the way in which the stories are framed (both the telling of it by the child’s elders and the stories’ endings or morals) can reinforce that bravery is *kalon*.

change drastically once formed, “Hence, it is no small matter whether one habit or another is inculcated in us from early childhood; on the contrary, it makes a considerable difference, or, rather, all the difference.”^{148, 149} Although slaves, women, and children cannot be virtuous, that does not mean that their *pathê* and *orexeis* cannot admit of degrees of conformity to their own limited deliberative faculties or to the deliberations of others. This suggests that Aristotle would accept that his comments on the moral education of children could apply to both young slaves and young women, as well as young free men, with the important distinction that not only will the young free men be the only children with the capacity for full virtue, but also, consequently, the only children who could someday qualify for political office and, thus, require the robust sort of education outlined in the *Politics*.¹⁵⁰

The second stage of habituation is the focus of Aristotle’s ethical writings: this stage concerns adult, free men who already desire *to agathon* and can choose to develop their capacity for full, moral *arête* through habituation and training.¹⁵¹ The first stage of moral education will have taught Aristotle’s prospective student “a general evaluative attitude which is not reducible to rules or precepts” concerning *kalon* and *to agathon* and given him practice in applying this attitude in *praxis*;¹⁵² however, “[the first stage] cannot

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 1103b22-25.

¹⁴⁹ As W. W. Fortenbaugh notes, “I do not think that there is any difficulty in saying that a man’s alogical side may be perfected even at a time when his logical side remains imperfect. Of course, such a man does not possess in himself the perfect reason or practical wisdom in which his alogical or emotional side should listen. But ideally he has been educated under law which is an expression of practical wisdom (*Rhet.* 1389a29, *EN* 1180a14-24, b23-8) and in any case has acquired a disposition which is obedient to the reasoned guidance of a father, tutor, or ruler” (*Aristotle on Emotion*, 52).

¹⁵⁰ The initial acquisition of any type of virtue in children is *paideia* (W. W., Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 49). The education outlined in the *Politics* for free, male children incorporated not just moral *paideia*, but also that of physical exercise, music, and the arts and sciences.

¹⁵¹ Meyer, Susan Suave, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility*, 124-125.

¹⁵² Burnyeat, M. F., “Aristotle on Learning to be Good” in *Aristotle’s Ethics: Critical Essays*, ed. Nancy Sherman (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littleman Publishers, Inc., 1999), 208.

have taught him to reason well and in particular to explain and defend his moral principles. Such teaching must await the development of the deliberative capacity.”¹⁵³ In the first stage of moral development, habituation makes the *orexis* for *to agathon* second nature: even though the child does not understand how *to agathon* applies to the specific circumstances of his life and why *to agathon* and *kalon* are good, he learns for himself both how to correctly identify the *kalon* (virtue) and that virtue and *to agathon* are in fact good. Through habituation, the child comes to judge *virtue* and *to agathon* as the good for himself and, thus, not only desires *to agathon*, but has developed a capacity for enjoying virtue—for men derive pleasure from the things they love.

Then, in the second stage of moral development, the prospective student’s *orexis* for *to agathon* motivates him to understand why virtue is desirable for its own sake, to use the fullest of his deliberative capacities to understand the good in particular circumstances and, thereby, to inform his conception of *to agathon*. Numerous commentators have debated on how habituation precisely works in the second stage; however, a review of the totality of Aristotle’s comments on habituation across his ethical works, coupled with his comments on the soul in the metaphysical writings and the *Rhetoric* (covered in Part I), as well as Nancy Sherman’s extensive work on habituation as a non-mechanical process and the role of *pathê* in ethics leads to the following conclusions.

As with being virtuous, the process of becoming virtuous is more cyclical than linear: development of the conative components informs or spurs the development of the

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52.

cognitive components, and vice versa. Through habituation, the prospective student aligns his *pathê* and *orexeis* with *logos*; because the *pathê* and *orexeis* have cognitive underpinnings (both are evaluative responses to beliefs), the student purposefully aligns his nonrational soul with his rational soul through deliberation and reflection on those beliefs. As noted in Part I, although we cannot be incorrect in what we directly sense or feel, we can be wrong in our perception when it involves an attribution of images (imagination), concepts (knowledge or understanding), and opinion (judgment) to a particular sensation. By investigating both the causes of his *pathê* and *orexeis* and by thinking through the application of *to agathon* in particular situations, the student will come to identify areas in which his existing *pathê* and *orexeis* are not in accordance with the ends that contribute to *to agathon*. Once the student fully “sees” this discrepancy, his *pathê* and *orexeis* will align with *logos*, for his conception of *to agathon*, as the ultimate good, is inherently motivational. Through habituation and practice, this new cognitive underpinning of the *pathê* and *orexeis*, this new harmony between the nonrational and rational parts of the soul, will become second nature. As Sherman observes, moral education is more about learning to “see correctly” than understanding rules or principles: “Ethical action, of course, will not be procedural [...] Even so, explicit teaching must take place [...] but what is passed on will be ways of reacting, seeing, and understanding which aim at establishing enduring patterns of action.”¹⁵⁴ Through instruction and guidance, the student can come to perceive correctly the application of *to agathon* and the

¹⁵⁴ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 181.

requirements of virtue in particular circumstances and to mold his *pathê* and *orexeis* accordingly.

Furthermore, the more aligned the student's nonrational and rational parts of the soul, the more likely he is to perceive the ethically salient features of a situation and act accordingly—emotion, as well as cognition, informs perception.¹⁵⁵ Over time, the prospective student not only develops a more comprehensive understanding of *to agathon* from the conclusions he has reached in the individual scenarios in which he was habituating his nonrational soul, but he also hones the functioning of his practical *nous*. The fuller the student's understanding of *to agathon* and the better functioning of his practical *nous*, the more likely he will be to understand the requirements of virtue within a particular situation: he then must habituate his nonrational soul to conform to these more informed requirements and act accordingly. Thus, through habituation, the student not only develops the evaluation of *to agathon* as “good,” but an understanding of why it is good; an understanding that is only possible from one who has lived virtue in his daily life, connected the requirements of a conceptualized good to the particulars of each circumstance, and perceived throughout an embodiment of human flourishing, of pursuing the fulfillment of all his *dunameis* as a human being. In this way, the student practices virtue, and thereby becomes virtuous, through habituation.

Aristotle's comments on incontinence (*akrasia*) provide more insight on how the second stage of moral development works. The akratic are, essentially, Aristotle's prospective students: they desire to lead a virtuous life but fail to do so for, although they

¹⁵⁵ Sherman, “The Emotional Structure of Aristotelian Virtue”, 24-98.

can identify virtuous acts, they are swayed by contrary *orexeis*. Importantly, Aristotle does not believe that an individual can hold conflicting beliefs: “*akrasia* involves a perceptual failure: the morally weak person fails to apply a general principle s/he accepts to the particular circumstances that provide the context for the incontinent action [...] this conflict [between judgments is] between the *akratēs* hypothetical judgment about what one should do in such circumstances and his/her actual judgment under those circumstances.”¹⁵⁶ Essentially, although the akratic desire *to agathon*, or its antecedent ends such as health and love, they fail to grasp through perceptual *nous* scenarios in which these evaluative attitudes apply. For example, the majority of people value health as a good; however, the akratic person may overindulge on sweets. According to Aristotle, this occurs because, although the akratic person values health and understands that too many sweets can be to the detriment of health, the akratic believes that in this specific instance, and following specific instances, “this one time” or “this one little bit” will not harm his health. Because the akratic is not making the connection between his health, an antecedent end of *to agathon*, and this specific instance, his *orexis* for sweets, for bodily pleasure (*hêdonê*) as a good, prevails.

Motivation: Pleasure in Moral Education

In a very real sense, although the akratic believes that health is a good, he has not made that belief a part of himself; there is a difference between knowledge and understanding:

¹⁵⁶ Modrak, D.K.W., “Aristotle on Reason, Practical Reason, and Living Well” in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle's Ethics*, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 179, 182.

“When we see that a person has knowledge, but does not use it, we see that ‘having’ a characteristic has different meanings [...] There is a sense in which a person both has and does not have knowledge, for example, when he is asleep, mad, or drunk. But this is precisely the condition of people who are in the grip of the emotions [...] People can repeat geometrical demonstrations and verses of Empedocles when affected by sleep, madness, and drink; and beginning students can reel of the words they have heard, but they do not yet know the subject. The subject must grow to be a part of them, and that takes time.”¹⁵⁷

Returning to a point made in Part I, there are three objects of pleasure (and therefore of pursuit): bodily pleasure (*hêdonê*), *kalon*, and the good. The *orexis* for *hêdonê* is a part of our animal natures, and we then acquire an appreciation for *kalon* in the first stage of moral education. A full conceptualization, and consequent *orexis* for, the good—*to agathon*—is the object of the second stage of moral education. Once the akratic man makes *to agathon* a part of himself through habit and experience, not only will he be able to apply *to agathon* to specific circumstances within his life, but he will find that *hêdonê* and *kalon* are more pleasant than painful only in the context of *to agathon*. “It is second nature to the virtuous man to love and find his greatest enjoyment in the things that he knows to be good. In him, the three categories of value are in harmony. They have become commensurable in terms of pleasure and pain.”¹⁵⁸ By reevaluating the cognitive underpinnings of *pathê* and *orexeis* in light of *to agathon*, and habituating the nonrational soul accordingly, the akratic man becomes virtuous—he no longer experiences the pain of conflicting *orexeis* because, for him, all objects of *orexeis* are in harmony.

Likewise, M.F. Burnyeat argues that there is both a distinction between believing that virtue is desirable in itself and understanding why virtue is desirable in itself and

¹⁵⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a10-23.

¹⁵⁸ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good”, 226.

between having the capacity to enjoy virtue and learning to enjoy virtue properly. Aristotle's student believes or knows that virtue is desirable in itself, and, because he loves what is noble, he has a "taste" or a capacity for deriving pleasure from it that will lead him to experience some pleasure from virtuous action. However, the virtuous man understands why virtue is desirable in itself and, therefore, enjoys virtuous actions fully and properly. The key is that "the growth of enjoyment goes hand in hand with the internalization of knowledge",¹⁵⁹ as the student internalizes why virtue is desirable in itself through habituation, the pleasure that he takes in such action increases. To the extent that the student is virtuous, he will experience pleasure; moreover, once he becomes fully virtuous, he experiences a pleasure that is both complete and proper. "Aristotle holds that to learn to do what is virtuous, to make it habit or second nature to one, is among other things to learn to enjoy doing it, to come to take pleasure—the appropriate pleasure—in doing it," and, thereby, pleasure and pain come to be measures of a person's virtue.¹⁶⁰ Thus, pleasure is the mechanism by which habituation results in virtue, and, therefore, motivates us to pursue virtue:

"I may be told, and may believe, that such and such actions are just and noble, but I have not really learned for myself (taken to heart, made second nature to me) that they have this intrinsic value until I have learned to value (love) them for it, with the consequence that I take pleasure in doing them. To understand and appreciate the value that makes them enjoyable in themselves, I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice—in short, habituation."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 213.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 215.

The student is motivated by pleasure (both experienced and anticipated) in virtuous or partially-virtuous action, his very *orexis* for *to agathon* in the first place, and the moral education (and the critical activity involved) to which this *orexis* makes him amenable. Importantly, shame (*aidōs*), which Burnyeat coins “the semi-virtue of the learner,” also plays a role in moral development.¹⁶² Aristotle’s student loves what is noble and feels disgust at what is base; thus, when he realizes that his actions are not virtuous, he will feel disgust and, consequently, *aidōs* for acting so. This *aidōs* will cause the learner internal pain, which then motivates him to learn how to live virtuously, to understand why virtue is desirable in itself. Without *aidōs*, those who desire the virtuous life, but are not virtuous, would not be motivated to undergo moral education. Thus, for Burnyeat, pain motivates the student to learn the reason that virtuous actions are desirable in themselves and then, as he “practices” virtue, the pleasure that he receives from his action, insofar as it is virtuous, further propels him towards becoming fully virtuous through habituation.¹⁶³ Although pleasure and pain both spur moral development, pleasure is key in that its motivation is affirmative of one’s desire for *to agathon* and the value that one finds in the *kalon*.¹⁶⁴

Moral development does not happen in vacuums: the akratic man is not “akratic” one moment and then suddenly “virtuous” the next. The development of the conative and

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 215-217.

¹⁶⁴ For a direct argument against Burnyeat’s conclusion that the student of virtue makes moral progress through pleasure, please see Curzer, “Aristotle’s Painful Path to Virtue”, in which Curzer argues that pain is not a side-effect of moral development, but the primary, driving force behind the process. Nonetheless, I find Burnyeat’s argument to be more persuasive because not only does Curzer seem to miss that Burnyeat is restricting his discussion to Aristotle’s students (those who already desire to be virtuous), but Curzer also seems to overlook that virtuous action is affirmative—that pleasure, *kalon*, and the good, together in concert, move a man to choose to act in accordance with his conception of *to agathon*. Thus, Curzer fails to acknowledge that even if the virtuous action is overall painful for the learner, the learner’s belief in the prospect of future pleasure, coupled with the pleasure that he receives in proportion to the virtuousness of his actions, plays a critical role in both motivating him and helping him to become virtuous.

cognitive components of virtue is cyclical and interdependent: aligning one's *pathê* and *orexeis* to *logos* informs one's conception of *to agathon*, and one's understanding of *to agathon* assists in aligning one's *pathê* and *orexeis* to *logos* by linking *to agathon* to the particular circumstance. This is possible due to the cognitive components of the *pathê* and *orexeis*. Accordingly, as a man becomes more virtuous, not only will the nonrational and rational parts of his soul become increasingly harmonious, but he will also deepen his understanding of *to agathon*. To fully understand *to agathon* is to understand its application within one's own life: each human life is unique, and therefore the antecedent ends, or combination and timing of antecedent ends, of *to agathon* will be unique to the context of an individual's life. Even the virtuous man is continuously learning and refining his conception of *to agathon*. Furthermore, as moral development is a process of indistinct cognitive and emotional stages that blend into one another, to the extent that the student is virtuous, he will experience pleasure; and, both the pleasure of *kalon* and the good, as well as the pain of *aidōs*, motivate the student to become virtuous. However, only complete virtue results in the fullest of pleasures—*eudaimonia*.

PART IV

The Problem for Children and the Hoi Polloi

Although the theory of moral education that can be gleaned from Aristotle's ethical writings can answer how a student of ethics could become virtuous (and why he would be motivated to do so), it rests on one critical factor—that the student desire *to agathon* in the first place. Aristotle is purposefully restricting his discussion to the minority of the population. Both the virtuous man and the student of virtue will receive pleasure from their actions that is commensurate with the virtue of their actions, the pleasure that comes from fulfilled desires, the pleasure that results from critical activity and, in the virtuous man's case, the pleasure of unimpeded action in the sense that the nonrational and rational parts of his soul are in complete harmony. Moreover, overarching the actions of both the student and the virtuous man is the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, the planning and organizing of their lives in anticipation of the fullest, most complete pleasure. The man of virtue and the student of virtue have a conceptualization of *eudaimonia—to agathon*—that they deepen and broaden through virtuous action. Together, these pleasures outweigh the pains involved in acting virtuously.

But, what about those who do not desire *to agathon*, the *hoi polloi* (literally, “the many”)? Aristotle states that children should be habituated to love the *kalon* from a young age, but what is the child's motivation to desire *to agathon*? And what about those

who do not receive the sort of moral education that Aristotle recommends at a young age? Punishment, whether by parents or the state, is often the corrective to ethical discretions. However, if the overall process is negatively conditioned by pain, versus the positive *orexis* for pleasure, then how can Aristotle say that we are by nature equipped to receive the virtues? Moreover, the first stage of moral education is essentially a social endeavor: one is instilled with a conception of *kalon* and *to agathon* from parents, educators, and/or mentors. This conceptualization will be colored with the social and political specifics of one's community. Accordingly, what is the connection between individual and community ethics for Aristotle, and should we be concerned about moral relativism?

Family and the Moral Education of Children

Although children and the *hoi polloi* do not have a conceptualization of *to agathon*, they do have an unconceptualized *orexis* for happiness; according to Aristotle, all men desire to be happy¹⁶⁵—it is part of human nature to desire pleasure and happiness, and we will pursue these goods regardless of whether they are conceptualized or unconceptualized. From Aristotle's comments, we can infer that the key difference between the child and the *hoi polloi* is that the child has not yet had the opportunity to form a conceptualization of happiness, or what constitutes a good life, whereas the *hoi polloi* have had the time to develop either an inaccurate conceptualization of these goods or some general and inaccurate beliefs in place of a clear conceptualization of these

¹⁶⁵ *On the Soul*, 414b4-5.

goods. Consequently, the child is far more likely to be amenable to receiving guidance on identifying the *kalon*, valuing the *kalon* for itself, and forming a conceptualization of *to agathon* that is in harmony with his beliefs about the *kalon*: the child's education will be one of habit whereas the education of the *hoi polloi* would require changing that which they have already made a part of their nature through habit. As Aristotle notes, "[I]t is easier to change habit than to change nature [and] even habit is hard to change, precisely because it resembles nature."¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, both the child and the *hoi polloi* desire a good life—they just do not know what the good life is.

Because the child's case is simpler, I will address the moral education of the child first. In addition to an *orexis* for pleasure and an *orexis* for happiness, as a human being, a child also finds pleasure in critical activity, in understanding the world that he perceives around him. Young children particularly delight in asking "why" repeatedly until they obtain an answer that satisfies their need to understand. These natural capacities for pleasure make children very amenable to education, and they look to their parents (or caretakers) for the answers that they seek because it is also natural to love one's parents. Moreover, because parents love their children, to desire to protect them is also natural: "So we see that parents love their children as themselves: offspring is, as it were, another self, "other" because it exists separately. Children love their parents because they were born of them."¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, children are dependent upon their parents physically, morally, and intellectually, and this dependence instills within them a predilection for guidance and instruction. Aristotle describes the relationship between parent and child as

¹⁶⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152a29-31.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1161b27-30.

one between the inferior to the superior: “The friendship [relationship] of children to their parents and of man to the gods is friendship to what is good and superior. For <parents> are the greatest benefactors <children have>: they are responsible for their being and their nurture, and for their education once they have been born.”¹⁶⁸ Love, coupled with the needs of a dependent, motivates children to desire to please their parents, to trust the counsel of their parents, and to emulate their parents. Likewise, love motivates parents to nurture and care for their children.¹⁶⁹

Thus, although children do not have a conception of *to agathon*, they do have an *orexis* for happiness, and their natural affection for their parents motivates them to accept an early education. Just as a student of virtue feels disgust at what is base due to his understanding of *to agathon*, and thus feels shame (*aidōs*) when he acts basely, so a young child feels *aidōs* when he disappoints his parents.¹⁷⁰ A child’s love for his parents, his desire to please his parents, his desire for pleasure and happiness, and his desire to understand the world around him all motivate him to undergo the first stage of moral education. Nonetheless, as Nancy Sherman notes, “[I]t would be a mistake to think of the child’s love and trust of his parents as primarily establishing the child’s compliance to rules and precepts. Rather [...] parents [inform] certain ideals of character, through reason and example (*logoi kai ethē*), that influence (*enischuei*) the child’s own sense of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 1162a4-7.

¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, there are many cases in which parents do not nurture and care for their children. Although Aristotle does not specifically address this problem, it is consistent with his other comments on human nature and moral weakness to say that, in these cases, the parents either are sick (in the sense that something inside of them is wrong because they do not love their children) or that they are being swayed by baser pleasures. The point Aristotle is making is not that all parents nurture and care for their children but, rather, that all parents naturally love their children, and this love can motivate parents to nurture and care for their children absent the pursuit of competing *orexeis*.

¹⁷⁰ Admittedly, children often test their parents and purposefully disobey them. The point I am making here about *aidōs*, outside of testing one’s parents, a very young child does feel shame when they know that they have done something wrong (oftentimes, they find that they have been wrong only after being punished and counseled by their parents for disobedience).

virtue.”¹⁷¹ Accordingly, I argue that the child learning to love *kalon* and forming a conceptualization of *to agathon* through habituation is parallel to the student learning to be virtuous through habituation: like the student, the child practices not only acting correctly, but, more importantly, seeing the world in light of the values that his parents teach him. As the child practices these modes of perceiving and acting, they become a part of his nature over time until he believes and values the *kalon* and *to agathon* within the context of his own life—the parents’ values have become the values of the child.¹⁷² The child does not yet possess the deliberative capacities to be fully virtuous, to accurately identify how to act virtuously and to do so from a firm and unchanging character, but he has come to love his, albeit limited, conceptualization of *kalon* and *to agathon* for himself.

Importantly, although Aristotle does not mention the role of pain in the first stage of moral education, it is consistent with his comments on the second stage of moral education to say that pain does have a role in motivating the child to become more virtuous. Not only does the pain of *aidōs* have a prominent role, but, particularly in the first stage of moral education, punishment has a role as well. Parents often use spankings, time-outs, withholding treats, etc. as punishments for when their children misbehave. Particularly because a child has incomplete deliberative capacities, the pain of

¹⁷¹ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 153.

¹⁷² Nancy Sherman, in my opinion, best captures what habituation in the first stage of moral education could look like, given Aristotle’s comments on the second stage of moral education: “Aristotle might accept something like this picture: there might be an early period in which affective capacities are cultivated, followed by the more active development of rational (and deliberative capacities), and then eventually the emergence of full rationality. This recognizes the general fact that there are conditions of internal readiness as well as environmental factors that affect the rate of progress. Growth will be marked by spurts and impasses. Thus, the extremely young child, on his view, may not engage in the reasoning process in a very extensive way [...] As the child becomes older, the cultivation of these cognitive capacities will become an essential element in the development of the affections. But he will not yet, in a substantive way, cultivate the more deliberative skills that enter into complex choice-making. That comes later.” (*The Fabric of Character*, 159).

punishment can be used by parents to reinforce the types of pain that a child cannot yet feel. For example, a parent may place a child in timeout until the child eats his vegetables: because the child does not have the deliberative capacities to make an organized plan for his life, or to have an appreciation for the antecedent end of health, all he can “see” here and now is the terror of eating broccoli. However, the parent can reinforce the message that health, to which eating vegetables contributes, is important by using the punishment of a timeout to demonstrate to the child some negative consequences of not doing so. The child cannot understand the negative consequences of poor health twenty years in his future; he cannot connect a lack of nutrition to poor health and understand poor health as a pain, as contrary to his ultimate *orexis* for pleasure. However, the child can understand the immediate negative consequences of being placed in timeout. The key is that the parent use the punishment only as a reinforcement to argument and teaching, to engaging the child’s limited reason and establishing value.¹⁷³ Pain is not the sole motivator in a child’s moral education: if it were, then rather valuing *kalon* and *to agathon* for themselves, he would simply be avoiding that which he has come to identify with pain—the child’s valuing of *kalon* and *to agathon* would be one of avoidance, of the lesser of two evils, than one of affirmation. Just as with the student of virtue, the child must come to affirm, on his own, the value of *kalon* and *to agathon*.

However, this account of the first stage of moral education relies heavily on the parents and caretakers of children, and even Aristotle acknowledges that the majority of people (the *hoi polloi*) either do not receive the proper moral education at a young age or

¹⁷³ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 164.

do not respond to it, for the *hoi polloi* do not have a conceptualization of the human good: “[T]he common run of people [say happiness] is some clear and obvious good, such as pleasure, wealth, or honor; some say it is one thing and others another, and often the very same person identifies it with different things at different times [...] and when people are conscious of their own ignorance, they admire those who talk above their heads in accents of greatness.”¹⁷⁴ Consequently, the *hoi polloi* will not be amenable to argument and teaching: “For most people are swayed rather by compulsion than argument, and by punishments rather than by <a sense of> what is noble [...] A good man, they think, who orients his life by what is noble will accept the guidance of reason, while a bad man, whose *orexis* is for pleasure [*hêdonê*], is corrected by pain like a beast of burden.”¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Aristotle notes that this is due largely to the fact that most states and communities neglect a man’s upbringing and virtue.¹⁷⁶ Although parents and caregivers are the biggest factor in a child’s moral development, they should not be a single point of failure—children and the *hoi polloi* are strongly influenced, and in a sense raised, by their societies, of which the family is the smallest unit. Accordingly, in order to fully appreciate the first stage of moral education that children and the *hoi polloi* undergo, it is necessary to first investigate the role of society in ethics for Aristotle.

Role of Society in Moral Education: Philia

Although ethics focuses on the individual, and politics on groups of individuals, the two disciplines are irrevocably intertwined for Aristotle: ethics is a matter of

¹⁷⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a16-27.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1180a4-13.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1180a25-30.

individual action within a society, and politics is a matter of organizing society in such a way that the individual can flourish to the fullest extent possible. Aristotle's focus on the social dimension of ethics is made evident by the fact that three of the ten books in the *Nicomachean Ethics* deal exclusively with justice and friendship—the two virtues that focus on one's relationship to others. Importantly, friendship (*philia*), for Aristotle, encompasses a broader array of relationships than our modern day use of the term: it is “the mutually acknowledged and reciprocal exchange of goodwill and affection that exists among individuals who share an interest in each other on the basis of virtue, pleasure, or utility.”¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, *philia* includes the relationships that one has with not only friends whom one chooses, but also family and fellow countrymen.¹⁷⁸ Within the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*, three primary intersections between *philia* and virtue emerge.

First, as noted earlier, happiness is an activity that requires some external goods: in order to pursue the fullest capacities of one's thinking and locomotive *dunamis*, one must at least be able to sustain one's own existence. The starving and impoverished will not have the time, nor the energy, to focus on moral education—all of their energies will be in the pursuit of survival. Furthermore, virtuous action oftentimes requires external goods such as political power, friends, and/or wealth.¹⁷⁹ Thus, “Men combine with an eye to some advantage or to provide some of the necessities of life, and we think of the political community as having initially come together and as enduring to secure the

¹⁷⁷ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 124 (referencing *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.2).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a31-1099b5.

advantage of its members.”¹⁸⁰ By banding together in communities, human beings ensure the protection and survival of one another through mutual cooperation and thereby enable the pursuit of higher goods, such as moral and intellectual development.

Second, the society of other human beings is itself an external good. Aristotle notes that man is a social and political being; “[W]e define something as self-sufficient not by reference to the ‘self’ alone. We do not mean a man who lives his life in isolation, but a man who also lives with parents, children, a wife, and friends and fellow citizens generally, since man is by nature a social and political being.”¹⁸¹ Aristotle comments that *philia* is generally regarded as “the greatest of external goods”,¹⁸² and his argument that humans are social by nature is the empirical observation that everyone’s conception of human life and human happiness incorporates *philia*. For Aristotle, “[T]he sociality of all human beings is [a fundamental belief] which cannot be compromised in the specification of happiness.”¹⁸³ To be human is to have *logos*¹⁸⁴ and to be social.

Third, not only are friends and family themselves a requirement of a happy life, but they also assist in a man’s moral and intellectual development: “Even a happy man needs society [...If he lived] in isolation, his life would be hard. For it is not easy to be continuously active all by oneself; it is easier in the company of and relation to others.”¹⁸⁵ Society promotes an active life and gives man the opportunities to both practice virtue and become virtuous; even the virtuous man requires the society of others in which to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1160a9-13.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1097b8-12.

¹⁸² Ibid., 1169b9-11.

¹⁸³ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 130.

¹⁸⁴ Or, in the case of slaves, at least the capacity to follow *logos*.

¹⁸⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b19, 1170a4-6.

pursue all of the activities that make him virtuous. Moreover, part of being virtuous is to continuously evaluate the application of *to agathon* within the context of one's own life and to re-inform one's conception of *to agathon* based on the particulars of one's experience. As Nancy Sherman observes, "[V]irtue and practical wisdom require a reflective grasp (*hupolēpsis*) of the right ends, and a confidence that actions have in fact been guided by them. Being aware of what sort of person one is [...] and the degree to which one exhibits avowed ends is part of critically reflective choice. Aristotle often assigns the exploration of internal motives to the sphere of intimate friendships."¹⁸⁶ For Aristotle, to be alive is to perceive and to think:¹⁸⁷ the sensory and thinking *dunamis* form the foundation of all human activity. Accordingly, the thinking and perceiving required for self-reflection, for examining one's own life as objectively as possible, is greatly enhanced through *philia*. A dear friend is not only intimately acquainted with the specifics of one's values and activities, but can further provide an external perspective on the sort of person one is being. This insight and dialogue can only result from a shared life over time, from friends living together and exchanging perspectives and thoughts through dialogue.¹⁸⁸

Thus, *philia* is an integral part to a robust moral education and moral life. Ideally, a man should not grow alone, nor within too limited a sphere. Virtue, specifically the practical wisdom required for deciding how to act, demands experience; not just any experience, but varied and diverse circumstances that force a student of virtue to re-

¹⁸⁶ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 27.

¹⁸⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a30-1170b2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1156b25-26, 1170b10-12.

evaluate his beliefs and his habits from new perspectives—*philia* is essential to both creating the conditions for this experience and learning from it. Nonetheless, as Sherman argues, “To demand that virtue include wide and even specialized experience is of course not to demand that the practically wise person be prepared for *all* logically possible contingencies.”¹⁸⁹ In some cases, whether due to scientific, political, or other advances, a situation may be brand new in the sense that it is beyond the expertise of everyone, or at least beyond the experience of an agent and his associates. Such situations demand careful consideration and collaboration.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, “If good living is collaborative, then the experience and expertise required for virtuous action need not reside separately in each individual, but can be borrowed from others; clearly this division of labor is part of household and political wisdom, and a part of practical wisdom in so far it extends to include the former two.”¹⁹¹ The moral education of both the virtuous man and a student of virtue greatly benefits from the feedback of close friends as well as from role models or mentors, wise men (*phronimos*) with greater and/or different experiences who can assist them in reasoning through new sets of unfamiliar circumstances. Through collaboration, men can learn “the right way of seeing and doing things” from each other rather than through error alone and can thus practice the sorts of actions that lead to virtue more readily.

In an entirely parallel manner, *philia* allows a child to benefit from the practical wisdom, experiences, and insights of not only his parents, but also other authority figures

¹⁸⁹ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 52.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-54.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

whom he encounters. Furthermore, *philia* enables the child to practice and to test the lessons that he has learned from his parents and, perhaps more importantly, exposes the child to modes of seeing and understanding outside of his family circle. Thus Aristotle's argument that a child's education should ideally be part of a larger, civic education: "But, with a few exceptions, Sparta is the only state in which the lawgiver seems to have paid attention to the upbringing and pursuits. In most states, such matters are utterly neglected, and each man lives as he pleases, 'dealing out law to his children and his wife' [...] Now, the best thing would be to make the correct care of these matters a common concern."¹⁹² A civic education not only acts as a remedy to the ill fortune of being born to bad parents, within poverty, etc., but it provides the opportunities and experiences required for moral growth that even the child born under the best circumstances requires.¹⁹³ As noted in Part III, this is the type of education that Aristotle has in mind when he states that the young's pursuit and upbringing should be regulated by laws, advocating for a robust education for young men in the *Politics* that includes not only instruction on moral virtue and civic duty, but physical exercise, music, and the arts and sciences as well.

Role of Society in Moral Education: Dikaion

Nonetheless, I argue that justice has even more profound effects upon moral development. The just, "*dikaion*", literally means, "a division into two equal parts (*dicha*)."¹⁹⁴ Aristotle notes that there are two uses of the *dikaion*. The first is in the sense

¹⁹² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1180a25-30

¹⁹³ "If virtue is to be acquired, then it requires favorable circumstances for acquisition—a good family, good birth, reasonable opportunities, and means for emotion and action [...] Aristotle is well aware of this problem and thus insists that the private educational process must be part of a broader civic education" (Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 56).

¹⁹⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1132a30-32.

of *dikaion* as one virtue amongst the other virtues: whereas courage regards how we handle fear and generosity in how we share our goods with others, *dikaion* regards our dealings with others in contracts, property, etc. The second sense of *dikaion* approaches closer to our modern day conception of integrity: it encompasses all of moral virtue, demonstrated in a man's actions with other human beings in society.¹⁹⁵ As Aristotle notes:

“[T]his kind of justice is complete virtue or excellence, not in an unqualified sense, but in relation to our fellow men. And for that reason, justice is regarded as the highest of all virtues [...] It is complete virtue and excellence in the fullest sense, because it is the practice of complete virtue. It is complete because he who possesses it can make use of his virtue not only by himself but also in his relations with his fellow men [thus] justice alone of all of the virtues is thought to be the good of another, because it is a relation to our fellow men in that it does what is of advantage to others, either to a ruler or to a fellow member of society.”¹⁹⁶

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that, “The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction: yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine. In short, these are the aims of our investigation, which is in a sense an investigation of social and political matters.”¹⁹⁷

Although often missed in discussions of Aristotle's ethics, the goal of ethics is not simply to ensure that one individual alone flourishes, but, rather, to promote the flourishing of both oneself and others through one's actions. Aristotle both begins and ends the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a discussion on the relationship between ethics and politics, neatly bookending ethics within its larger context of politics. To act is to act within a

¹⁹⁵ Bambrough, Renford, “Aristotle on Justice: A Paradigm of Philosophy” in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Renford Bambrough (New York: Routledge, 1965), 159.

¹⁹⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b26-1130a6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1094b9-13.

society with other human beings, and *dikaion* is the lynch pin that connects the whole of individual virtue to the pursuit of good for all the members of a community. By acting justly, one promotes one's own good, one achieves *kalon*, through the promotion of the good for all in the community.

The primary mechanism by which a political community aims for the good is through law.¹⁹⁸ Although laws will be imperfect, as identified in Part III, they perform the important function of codifying a community's values and instilling practices to support the continuation and development of those values:

“The laws make pronouncements on every sphere of life, and their aim is either to secure the common good of all or of the best, or the good of those who hold power either because of their excellence or on some other basis of this sort. Accordingly, in one sense we call those things ‘just’ which preserve happiness for the social and political community. The law enjoins us to fulfill our function as brave men (e.g., not to abandon our post, not to flee, and not to throw away our arms), as self-controlled men (e.g., not to commit adultery or outrage), as gentle men (e.g., not to strike or defame anyone), and similarly with the other kinds of virtue and wickedness. It commands some things and forbids others, and it does so correctly when it is framed correctly, and not so well if it was drawn up in haste.”¹⁹⁹

According to Aristotle, as a man should not enter politics until he has reached full intellectual maturity, the laws are ideally created by the *phronimos* with an eye towards the good of the community; the laws, if done correctly, represent the experience and wisdom of virtuous men and assist the members of the community in pursuing the good. Moreover, as “law is intelligence without desire”;²⁰⁰ law is meant to be a means of achieving impartial justice through an impersonal reason.²⁰¹ Thus, in Aristotle's examples

¹⁹⁸ In an ideal political community, this ultimate good is a clearly conceptualized *to agathon*.

¹⁹⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b13-26.

²⁰⁰ *Politics*, 1287a31-32.

²⁰¹ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 14.

above, laws reinforce the virtues of bravery, continence, and gentleness. Now, certainly this is not the case in all political systems, such as brutal totalitarian regimes that oppress and subjugate the large majority of the people to the benefit of a select few. My intent here is not to expound on ideal political systems or the flaws of current political systems in pursuing the common good, but, rather, to simply show the role that laws play within society in propagating a certain set of values, whatever those values may be.

Even Aristotle acknowledges that the political system will affect the distribution of justice: “Everyone agrees that in the distributions the just share must be given on the basis of what one deserves, though not everyone would name the same criterion of deserving; democrats say it is free birth, oligarchs that it is wealth or noble birth, and aristocrats that it is excellence.”²⁰² However, this points to the fact that not only the laws, but also the very political structure is a statement on the values of a community. Although not every single member of a democracy will necessarily believe that free birth is the criterion of deserving (and likewise with oligarchies and aristocracies), a significant portion of the population will, and the laws that regard the distribution of justice will reinforce these beliefs and values within the community.

Accordingly, we can infer from Aristotle’s comments that both children and the *hoi polloi* are exposed to a whole set of values and beliefs in their everyday lives within a society. Regardless of whether they have good parents, good mentors, or the type of formal education envisaged by Aristotle, the laws and customs of a community will teach children and the *hoi polloi* certain modes of seeing and understanding. The laws reinforce

²⁰² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1131a25-29.

a set of values and beliefs through punishment, but they also codify those values and beliefs as a baseline for the community. For example, people may disagree on the specifics of what precisely constitutes murder or thievery; however, within the natural limitations of law itself, the laws prohibiting murder and thievery both specify that which constitutes such transgressions and outline the punishment for these transgressions. In an important sense, these laws codify the community values of human life and personal property. Moreover, the members of the community will have varied reactions to these laws: whether they be of enthusiastic adherence, outrage, dismissal, etc. A child will grow up learning not only the content of the laws that affect his life, but also the general understanding and endorsement (or lack thereof) of the beliefs and values that the law codifies from the other members of his community.

Custom, Culture, and the Moral Education of the Hoi Polloi

Even so, I argue that a society's customs are even more instructive than laws in this manner, and Aristotle's comments on currency are instructive on this point. In discussing the first type of *dikaion*, as one virtue amongst others that regards our dealings with others in contracts, property, etc., Aristotle notes that, "[A] community is formed [...] by people who are unequal and different. But they must be equalized; and hence everything that enters into an exchange must somehow be comparable."²⁰³ In order to do business, to interact, to function as a community, the community must have a single standard; Aristotle observes that this single standard is that which brings communities

²⁰³ Ibid., 1133a17-19.

together—need, as measured by currency.²⁰⁴ “[M]oney acts like a measure: it makes goods commensurable and equalizes them. For just as there is no community without exchange, there is no exchange without equality and no equality without commensurability.”²⁰⁵ Thus, as a common standard of value, currency makes reciprocal exchange possible within a community.

However, Aristotle notes that the first type of *dikaion* “deals with honor, material goods, security, or whatever single term we can find to express all of these collectively, and its motive is the pleasure that comes from profit.”²⁰⁶ This type of *dikaion* deals with tangible and intangible goods, and currency certainly is a standard of profit. Nonetheless, there is another standard that measures goods between members of a community—custom. Particularly with the intangible goods, communities have established modes of communicating a wide array of communicable values and *pathê* between individuals—honor, generosity, love, bravery, anger, fear, etc. For example, in some Occidental societies, respect is shown with a firm handshake, looking someone in the eye, replying to what the other person has to say, etc. These modes of communication indicate the conferral of respect or honor. However, in some Eastern societies, the same values are communicated with a slight bow, avoiding looking the other person in the eye, and remaining silent. What is a conferral of respect in one society can be a conferral of disrespect in another. Likewise, there is often a fine line between being generous and impugning an individual’s honor, between expressing love and respecting an individual’s

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 1133a25-27.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 1133b16-18.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 1130b3-5.

independence; these fine lines are often defined in a community's customs and common understanding of communication. As learning to be virtuous is learning modes of perceiving and understanding specific circumstances in light of an overarching set of values (that culminates in *to agathon*), a community's customs will be constitute a huge portion of moral education. Not only will the child and the student of virtue need to understand what is being communicated by other individuals in order to understand the particulars or, at a minimum, to identify the *kalon*, but they will also need to know how to act justly, in the broader sense of overall moral virtue, with other members of the community in order to test and to practice virtuous acts. Moreover, children and the *hoi polloi* will be immersed in these modes of perceiving and understanding in their everyday lives and, consequently, be inundated with beliefs and values, regardless of any other type of formal and informal moral education they may be receiving.

Thus, even if children do not have good parents and a formal civic education, even if children become the *hoi polloi*, they will have received some sort of moral education simply through being a part of their community. As it is human nature to be social, it is human nature to want to be a part of a community—the need for communication and interaction within a community, coupled with the natural *orexis* to be a part of a community in the first place, will motivate both children and the *hoi polloi* to learn the community's values and beliefs and to practice them. Moreover, if the community is healthy (i.e., if the community's laws and the customs promote the common good), then I argue that the *hoi polloi* can achieve partial virtue. The *hoi polloi* may not be able to reliably identify the *kalon* in each circumstance, and they may not

have a clear conceptualization of *to agathon*, but, as noted previously, even the student of virtue's conception of *to agathon* is deficient compared to that of the virtuous man, and even the virtuous man is continuously refining his capacity to identify the *kalon*. Perhaps more pointedly, the nonrational soul of a member of the *hoi polloi* (his *pathê* and *orexeis*) will not be in accordance with his rational soul—but this is the case for the student as well. In a healthy society, the *hoi polloi* will have absorbed central beliefs and values about good living from the laws and customs—these beliefs and values will be *kalon*. Thus, perhaps the biggest difference between the *hoi polloi* and the student of virtue is the level of endorsement of and commitment to *kalon* within the context of their own lives. Virtue is a spectrum, and the healthier the society, the closer the majority of its members to full virtue.

Virtue is Worthwhile for Everyone

Heretofore, I have primarily focused the discussion on the efficient cause (impetus) for a person to cultivate virtue: the natural *orexis* for pleasure that, through education, manifests as an *orexis* to fulfill our soul's potentialities and obtain a complete and flourishing life. Secondary moving causes are the love of learning, community and family that drive us to undergo the requisite educational processes to become virtuous. As noted in Parts II and III, the virtuous person identifies the pleasurable with the *kalon*, and the *kalon* with "the good". Thus, pleasure, *kalon*, and "the good" motivate the virtuous person: the *hormai* (impulse) within *orexis* moves the person (body and soul) towards these *telê* (ends). Also noted in Part II is that these *telê* are worthwhile in themselves, primarily because they both contribute to, and are instances of, the life's work of the

soul—the fulfillment of its potentialities, which is *to agathon*. Thus, *to agathon* literally is “the good of man”; it is that for the sake of which it is worthwhile to be (and continually strive to be) virtuous—it is the goal of our soul’s *energeia*.²⁰⁷

As evident from Aristotle’s comments on the soul, and Michael Weinman’s further explication of those comments, the four causes of human being are essentially four aspects or ways of understanding what it is to be a human being—no cause is wholly distinct from the others. The material cause is the body, the formal cause is the soul (as characterized by the five *dunameis*), the efficient cause is the setting-to-work of the body by the soul (accomplished through the desire for pleasure), and the final cause is *to agathon*—the completion, or perfection, of the capacities of the soul’s *dunameis* (which are the being-at-work of the soul). Particularly in regards to the efficient and final causes, they are essentially two sides of the same coin: the final cause prompts the efficient cause (it sets the direction of the movement generated from the efficient cause), and the efficient cause is the mechanism by which the living thing is connected to the final cause (it sets the path to the ultimate *telos*). Accordingly, investigating the final cause of virtue, the sense in which virtue is worthwhile, will shed additional light on the motivation to become, and remain, virtuous.

As Nancy Sherman argue, virtue is to the benefit of everyone in a healthy society:

“[A] life engaged in moral action [...] is contingent upon bringing about further ends, such as welfare or peace. Without these ends, there would be no point to munificence or justice. Hence, even if moral action comes to be valued for its own sake, as it must on the Aristotelian view, its value is derivative upon certain external ends, which are themselves worthwhile [...] given the standing conditions of human society. The effort of virtue is

²⁰⁷ I am indebted to Professor Rose Cherubin for noting this distinction and for assisting me in drawing out its implications virtue.

thus to safeguard these ends, and to restore them when they come undone. It is the precariousness of these ends, and not virtue itself, that ultimately gives a point to virtue [...] In this sense, virtuous work is un leisuredly; it is work that struggles to safeguard and restore certain ends; it is needed to ameliorate the conditions that human beings find themselves in.”²⁰⁸

Returning to the comments made by Deborah Achtenberg earlier, human life and human virtue is difficult—to be human is to strive towards ends without the guarantee of success and, at its core, to be human is to strive to fulfill the capacities of the soul’s *dunameis*. The same holds true for human communities: moral virtue, expressed in the community as justice, aims at the antecedent ends of *to agathon* for the whole of the community and safeguards these ends. Individual virtue, at the community level, translates to justice, peace, welfare, etc.²⁰⁹ These ends, in turn, promote individual flourishing. A man who is virtuous promotes an environment that will both promote his own growth and flourishing and that of others.

Finally, given this role of justice (as encompassing the whole of moral virtue within society), there is a further sense in unjust are not whole, beyond the fact that they are not striving to reach the fullest capacities of their *dunameis*, *to agathon*. The intrinsic and material external goods that the unjust acquire unjustly are not truly their own. Not only have the unjust damaged the integrity of their own lives, but they have profited at the expense of the flourishing of others. Aristotle observes that to act unjustly is not in the self-interest of the wicked; although the term “self-love” is often taken in the pejorative sense, true self-love is to love and gratify that which is most sovereign in

²⁰⁸ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 98.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

oneself—*logos* and *nous*, and, thus, intellectual and moral *arête*.²¹⁰ “Therefore, a good man should be a self-lover, for he will himself profit by performing noble actions and will benefit his fellow men. But a wicked man should not love himself, since he will harm both himself and his neighbors in following base emotions.”²¹¹ The virtuous man understands that the *kalon* is fullest expression of the meaning of his life, as complete excellence of his *dunamis* in the pursuit of *to agathon*. Accordingly, to act unjustly, under this understanding of *to agathon*, is irrational and, as such, damaging to one’s soul. Thus, the virtuous man, “[W]ill freely give his money, honors, in short, all good things that men compete for, while he gains nobility for himself [...] he would rather live nobly for one full year than lead an indifferent existence for many [...] People who die for a cause achieve this perhaps, and they clearly choose great nobility for themselves.”²¹² To choose nobility at the cost of everything else is a tall order indeed; but, as noted before, virtue is a spectrum of indistinct conative and cognitive stages. A man of sufficient experience, practical wisdom, and moral *arête* is virtuous, despite the fact that even he is continuously learning and working. Thus, to the extent that a man is virtuous, he is exhibiting rational self-love.

The understanding that virtuous acts are acts of self-love and unjust acts are acts of self-harm is only possible through an understanding of the value of *kalon* and of the application of *to agathon* within one’s own life. Thus, again, the importance of a moral education. Per Aristotle, this education is necessary because although human beings are

²¹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1168b

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1169a11-15.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 1169a20-26.

by nature equipped to receive the virtues, they are not born with them—virtues must be acquired, and this is difficult because, for human beings, the nonrational soul matures before the rational soul. Accordingly, human beings have to learn to see and understand the pleasures beyond *hêdonê*—*kalon* and *to agathon*—in order to be motivated to become virtuous, and this process often involves some pain.

Despite the fact that some human beings may have a natural proclivity towards certain virtues and the fact that only free men (according to Aristotle) have the deliberative capacities to become fully virtuous, the general account of human nature and action holds for all—children, the *hoi polloi*, the student of ethics, and the virtuous man. To be human is to have a body and soul. Human beings, unlike plants and animals, have a capacity for *logos*, and this aspect of the thinking *dunamis* enables us to deliberate, to choose, and to act. To live is to pursue the fullest capacities of the soul's nutritive, sensitive, appetitive, thinking, and locomotive *dunamis*—for human beings, this is the human good, *to agathon*. The striving for the completion, or fulfilment, of the soul's potentialities is natural to all living things; however, due to *logos*, human beings can organize and plan their lives accordingly. Moreover, due to the cognitive underpinnings of the *pathê* and *orexeis* (which contain the impulses, *hormai*, that are the unmoved movers of action), human beings can train the nonrational part of their souls, and thus their actions, to be guided by *logos*. Finally, human beings, unlike plants or animals, have a capacity for deriving pleasure not only from *hêdonê*, but the *kalon* and *to agathon* as well. These higher pleasures motivate the virtuous man to act virtuously, for doing so becomes rational acts of self-love.

Thus, virtuous men are motivated to act virtuously by their *orexis* for a clearly conceptualized *to agathon*, which is synonymous with final and self-sufficient, flourishing happiness—*eudaimonia*. Moreover, as virtuous actions are excellent functionings of the soul, the virtuous experience pleasure directly from virtue, not only because they value it for its own sake, but also because it is itself a completion of the soul's potentialities. If a child is born into a good family, or at least a healthy society, then the *orexis* that he shares with the virtuous man for happiness, his appetite for pleasure, his *orexis* to fulfill the potentialities of his *dunamis* (thus the pleasure he receives from critical thinking), coupled with his love for his parents and/or *orexis* to be a part of community, will motivate him to learn to love the *kalon* and *to agathon* for itself, to develop a capacity to feel higher pleasures. Even if the child does not learn to love the *kalon*, if he is in a healthy society, then he will likely learn to love numerous antecedent ends of the *kalon*, and in such a way approach virtue. To the extent that the child, the *hoi polloi*, or the student is virtuous, they will experience the pleasure that is intrinsic to virtue.

The quality of the child's education, in large part, does not depend upon the child, but on the society and/or family in which he lives. Certainly, there are many families and communities that are harmful, that do not promote the common, human good. In such circumstances, according to Aristotle's theory, children are far less likely to learn to love the *kalon*, and the *hoi polloi* are far more likely to be vicious. Moreover, being virtuous will be harder for both the virtuous and the student of virtue. Although we would perhaps like to believe that the individual can always triumph over the community,

the fact is that, as human beings, we are social and political creatures. Our communities, their laws, customs, values, and beliefs, have a huge effect upon our morality, whether for better or worse. Although a virtuous man, because he is virtuous, fully appreciates and understands the pleasure in being so, his vantage point is not available to the children, the *hoi polloi*, and the student. Thus the importance of political and social systems that reinforce and facilitate moral education and, ultimately, a conceptualization of *to agathon* that is pursuable by all members of the community.

CONCLUSION

Finally, given the role of the community in moral education, I would like to address the concern of moral relativism, the concern that the “common good” will completely depend upon the culture and society in which one happens to find oneself. In fact, Aristotle briefly acknowledges this. In Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle remarks that there is a difference between something being just by nature and just by convention: “What is by nature just has the same force everywhere and does not depend on what we regard or do not regard as just. In what is just by convention, on the other hand, it makes originally no difference whether it is fixed one way or another, but it does make a difference once it is fixed.”²¹³ Aristotle concedes that most human things are just by convention, but adamantly maintains that certain things are just by nature and, thus, universal in the sense that they hold for all human beings. Unfortunately, Aristotle never details what the just by nature might be; he concludes the section within Book V stating that such an examination will be postponed until later, but he never fulfills this promise in any of his writings.^{214, 215}

Nonetheless, Martha Nussbaum argues that, based on Aristotle’s account of human nature, we can identify a group of functions that are the most important to being a

²¹³ Ibid., 1134b19-24.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 1134b19-1135a15.

²¹⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 133.

human being and, thus, define human life. Not only will this group of essential functions enable us to more clearly define a full and flourishing human life, but they also enable us to evaluate political and social institutions to the extent that they protect and promote these functions (and thus the flourishing of their members).²¹⁶ Based on Aristotle's description of human beings, Nussbaum derives two categories of essential human functions: limits and capabilities. Human beings are limited in that we are mortal and have bodies; thus, all human beings have the following needs—food and drink, shelter, sexual desire, mobility, and the desire for pleasure (and aversion to pain). Second, based on the soul's *dunamis*, human beings have the following capacities: maturation (early infant development and onwards); the cognitive capacities of perceiving, imagining, and thinking; practical reason; affiliation with other human beings (human sociality); humor and play; relatedness to other species and to nature (the recognition that we are not the only living things in this world and the fact that we live in ecosystems); and separateness (the fact that we are individuals, which is both a limit and a capacity).²¹⁷

Although this list is necessarily general and open to much debate, the point is that Aristotle's account of human nature is a starting point for evaluating political institutions and determining a "the common good" that truly is *to agathon*. Just as the virtuous man must continuously reflect on his actions and *to agathon* within the unique context of his own life, so societies must constantly evaluate *to agathon* within the unique context of their laws and customs and refine their conceptualizations of the common good.

²¹⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C., "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism" in *Political Theory*, 20, no. 2 (May 1992), accessed 12 February 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/192002>, 214.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 216-221.

Aristotle's account of human nature and virtue allow us to make a philosophically consistent and rational argument against rape, child abuse, spousal abuse, slavery, genocide, etc. in today's world—these social phenomena clearly do not promote the flourishing of the community members in the Aristotelian sense. Thus, when a society's laws and customs do not promote the flourishing of its members, it is a tragedy: not only will the *hoi polloi* be more vicious, but those who desire virtue will be pitted against the very frameworks of their community.²¹⁸ Ultimately, the truth of the human good is neither relative, nor is it a Platonic truth—it reflects the uniqueness of each person's individual life and society (we are a living part of that truth), while also adhering to basic facts of human goodness and flourishing.

²¹⁸ I am indebted to Professor Rose Cherubin for this insight.

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