

THE HARMONY THESIS AND THE PROBLEM OF CONTINENCE  
IN CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE ETHICS

By

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## Abstract

Contemporary virtue ethicists have largely followed Aristotle in accepting what Karen Stohr calls the *harmony thesis*. This thesis claims that a virtuous agent will not experience inner conflict or pain when acting. His reasons, desires, and actions will correspond and be in harmony with one another. A merely continent agent, on the other hand, is one who is said to perform the same action as the virtuous agent, but experiences inner conflict or pain in doing so. While the harmony thesis provides a useful criterion for demarcating virtue from continence, we can imagine cases where acting with conflict or pain is not only appropriate but necessary in the situation. In these cases the virtue/continence distinction cannot be easily drawn. This difficulty for the harmony thesis is better known as the problem of continence. In writing this dissertation I have three goals: show that the problem of continence poses a threat to the harmony thesis, offer a solution to the problem, and make that solution fit the needs of contemporary virtue ethics.

In bringing about the first goal, I begin by introducing the harmony thesis and show that, in the contemporary context, the virtue/continence distinction takes on a much more expanded scope than espoused by Aristotle. For example, McDowell applies it to courage; Foot to honesty, charity, and justice; and Hursthouse to nearly all the moral virtues. While useful for contemporary virtue ethicists, this more robust conception makes the harmony thesis susceptible to problematic cases that Aristotle did not have to face. Chapter 2 explores a problematic case offered by Stohr involving a company owner who needs to fire several of her employees in order to save the company from ruin. Because acting rightly in the case requires an agent experience inner conflict or pain, only the continent agent can deliver. This puts the status of the virtuous agent in a compromising position: either be deemed morally lacking (in some way) compared to the continent agent or deny that the standard of virtue is sharply distinct from continence. In

looking for a way out of the dilemma, Chapter 3 explores some attempts at a solution offered by Sarah Broadie, Susan Stark, David Carr, Geoffrey Scarre, and Howard Curzer, concluding that none of the mentioned solutions adequately solve the problem of continence.

The second goal of the dissertation is reached in three steps. I first return to the traditional account of continence defended by Aristotle. In a neo-Aristotelian spin drawing on Terence Irwin and Ursula Coope, I argue in Chapter 4 that continence should be interpreted as a failure of rationality rather than one of feeling. By redefining continence in this way, the real problem in Stohr's counterexample can be homed in on: the company owner who fires her employees with ease feels less pain than she should. The second step sets out to make sense of what it means to feel an inappropriate amount of pain. In Chapter 5, I propose that we turn to Aristotle's virtue of endurance to make sense of the defect. The third step uses the virtue of endurance to show that the defect in the company owner that acts with ease is that he is subject to the vice of hardness—feeling less pain than he should—not that virtue is inferior to continence in the case.

Having accounted for Stohr's problem case, I address the other horn of the dilemma in Chapters 6 by offering an improved method for drawing the virtue/continence distinction. I do this by expanding and refining the concept of endurance. This culminates into a sophisticated account making use of temperance, continence, endurance, softness, and hardness. This meets my third goal by allowing the contemporary virtue ethicist to utilize continence and/or endurance in accommodating the wide variety of cases characteristically treated in the field.

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## Chapter 1: The Harmony Thesis

### 1. Introduction

The harmony thesis holds that a virtuous agent's reasons, actions, and desires will correspond and be in harmony with one another. The virtuous agent, accordingly, is taken to not experience inner conflict or pain when acting virtuously.<sup>1</sup> The idea has ancient origins, extending at least as far back as Plato, and appearing in its most comprehensive form in Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> In developing the thesis, Aristotle contrasts the preferable, harmonious state to two types of non-harmonious states: incontinence and continence.<sup>3</sup> The incontinent agent, according to Aristotle, has the right reasons, but *both* his actions and desires fail to conform to right reason. The continent agent on the other hand, has the right reasons, and performs the right action, but has desires that conflict with right reason. The conflicting desires in question are then indicated by inner conflict or pain when acting. Under the harmony thesis, pointing to the expressed difficulty that a continent agent experiences when acting rightly allows us to claim that, while superior to the incontinent agent, he is still morally defective or lacking compared to the virtuous agent who does not have to struggle. Thus, the continent agent, while praiseworthy for his self-control, is judged to be morally inferior to the virtuous agent. By these standards, the harmony thesis gives rise to a

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<sup>1</sup> Virtue ethicists commonly subscribe to the additional claim that a virtuous agent should also take pleasure in acting virtuously. But I believe this to be a separate issue, and see no reason why the harmony thesis needs to be committed to this requirement. In this dissertation, I will take the force of the harmony thesis to stand independent of the stronger pleasure requirement.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, see Plato's *Republic*. The Stoics also make use of the harmony thesis. See Annas (1993), esp. pp. 159–179, for a good treatment of this subject.

<sup>3</sup> It might be argued that viciousness is a harmonious state. See Irwin (2001). I will return to this point in Chapter 4. For now, we can say that only a vicious agent's actions and desires correspond, not his reasons. This would be enough to discredit viciousness as a superior state according to the harmony thesis.



sharp division between virtue and continence based on the ease or difficulty with which virtuous actions are performed.

It must be acknowledged that Aristotle confined the harmony thesis exclusively to cases involving bodily pleasures, or the domain of temperance.<sup>4</sup> This restricted scope provided the harmony thesis a relatively clear criterion for distinguishing a virtuous agent from a continent agent. If an agent performed the right action with ease and without pain in resisting some bodily pleasure judged contrary to reason, he was deemed temperate. If an agent performed the right action with difficulty and pain in resisting some bodily pleasure judged contrary to reason, he was deemed continent. In the modern context, however, the harmony thesis takes on a much more expanded scope. Prominent virtue ethicists like Philippa Foot, John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Julia Annas have all extended the usage of the harmony thesis beyond the domain of temperance. I will call this expanded usage of the harmony thesis outside of the domain of temperance the *robust conception of the harmony thesis*.

The purpose of this chapter is to defend the crucial role that the robust conception of the harmony thesis plays in contemporary virtue ethics. In Section 2, I offer evidence that the acceptance of the harmony thesis is widespread, and give a number of examples of the harmony thesis being applied outside of the domain of temperance by contemporary virtue ethicists (being representative of the robust conception). From here, having established that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is utilized by contemporary virtue ethicists, I go on to make the stronger argument in Section 3 that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is a vital component of the contemporary debate and entrenched in the field of virtue ethics. Section 4 gives support for the claim that the harmony thesis is useful for contemporary virtue ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter NE), Book 7.

Finally, Section 5, drawing on what was previously claimed, argues that the robust conception of the harmony thesis made use of by contemporary virtue ethicists is worth maintaining, before concluding in Section 6.

## **2. The Robust Conception of the Harmony Thesis**

The harmony thesis—more specifically the robust conception of the harmony thesis—has gained widespread acceptance in contemporary virtue ethics. In order to support this claim, I will do two things. First, I offer textual evidence from a number of notable virtue ethicists showing their endorsement of the harmony thesis. This endorsement, it should be noted, implies more than that the virtue/continence distinction can be drawn (or that virtue ethicists accept the virtue/continence distinction). The harmony thesis entails a specific way to draw the virtue/continence distinction. To be clear, the harmony thesis will both claim that there is a virtue/continence distinction, and that it is determined by the ease or difficulty with which virtuous actions are performed.<sup>5</sup> My argument holds that the harmony thesis is widely accepted, not simply that the virtue/continence distinction is widely accepted. The second thing I do is provide evidence that the harmony thesis is applied outside of the domain of temperance. In doing so, I aim to establish that the contemporary virtue ethicists discussed endorse the robust conception of the harmony thesis.

One of the first virtue ethicists in the contemporary tradition to give the virtue/continence distinction a serious treatment was Philippa Foot. In the second section of her seminal paper, "Virtues and Vices," Foot sets out to make sense of the continent agent. There seems to be, as

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<sup>5</sup> The harmony thesis will also want to claim that the virtuous agent is superior to the continent agent. But this assumption could be questioned. For example, Karen Stohr (2003) denies that acting with ease is necessarily superior to acting with difficulty in every circumstance. I address this important criticism in Chapter 2. At this stage, I hold that the harmony thesis can consistently be held without making reference to superiority.

Foot claims, something incredibly admirable about the person who, through sheer force of will, is able to resist temptation (1978: p. 6). She has in mind, not small temptations like avoiding a tasty treat, but rather those temptations that really test us. The continent agent succeeds where most people fail. The continent agent, then, is morally better than a regular person. He demonstrates a level of self-control that exceeds that of a normal person. And the more difficult the circumstances; the more the continent agent has to struggle to overcome conflicting desires; the stronger we take him to be, or the more self-control we attribute to him.

On the other hand, the fact that the continent agent has to struggle to do the right thing points to some defect in his character. It seems to indicate that he lacks virtue, or fails to appreciate what is important. The conflict that the continent agent experiences shows that he still possesses desires that he should not have, or has conflicting desires that are stronger than they should be. In this sense, we want to say that it would be better if the continent agent did not have these conflicting desires. It would be better if the continent agent did not have to struggle. Thus, while the continent agent's self-control is admirable, it falls short of virtue. Here we see the application of the harmony thesis. The continent agent is deemed morally inferior to the virtuous agent because he has to struggle to act virtuously. Textual evidence for this from Foot can be found in the following passage:

For on the one hand great virtue is needed where it is particularly hard to act virtuously; yet on the other hand it could be argued that difficulty in acting virtuously shows that the agent is imperfect in virtue: according to Aristotle to take pleasure in virtuous action is a mark of true virtue, with the self-mastery of the one who finds virtue difficult only a second best. (1978: p. 6)

What is important, and a point that Foot stresses, is that there is something special or unique about the virtue/continence distinction. It is not simply the case that continence is *simpliciter*

inferior to virtue. Continenence is admirable in its own right, something to be praised above all other states, other than virtue.<sup>6</sup> It really is, as Foot claims above, "second best."

So far, we have evidence that Foot endorsed the harmony thesis. But it can also be shown that she accepts the robust conception of the harmony thesis. Two examples of the harmony thesis being applied outside of the domain of temperance from the text are as follows:

[1] We may suppose for instance that a man has the opportunity to steal, in circumstances where stealing is not morally permissible, but he refrains. And now let us ask our old question. For one man it is hard to refrain from stealing and for another it is not: which shows the greater virtue in acting as he should? (Foot 1978: p. 7)<sup>7</sup>

[2] Some circumstances, as that great sacrifice is needed, or that the one to be helped is a rival, give an occasion on which a man's charity is severely tested. Yet in given circumstances of this kind it is the man who acts easily rather than the one who finds it hard who shows the most charity. Charity is a virtue of attachment, and the sympathy for others which makes it easier to help them is part of the virtue itself. (Foot 1978: p. 7)

The first case given involves honesty<sup>8</sup> and the second case involves charity. These cases clearly do not involve bodily pleasures. And it follows, in both cases, that the harmony thesis is being

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<sup>6</sup> We might ask whether continence is superior to mere natural virtue. This is difficult question. I believe Aristotle, at least, would deny this. Mere natural virtue, unlike virtue proper or continence, does not involve reason. The naturally virtuous person, in a sense, is just lucky. His desires and actions happen to correspond to right reason, but it might be more appropriate to say, more in line with the harmony thesis, that the mere naturally virtuous person has no reason at all; lacking harmony in the more sophisticated sense. The clearest argument for why acting rightly by accident is an inferior state can be found in Aristotle's dismissal of the paradoxical vicious, incontinent agent who always performs the right action through an unintentional failure of the will (see NE 1146a20–30). While both the vicious, incontinent agent and continent agent perform the right action, only the continent agent is praised. Here, I believe it is appropriate to say continence is the superior state.

<sup>7</sup> Foot's comparison of the two agents (the poor man whose circumstances provide much temptation to steal and the rich man who has little temptation to steal) in this example has led to much confusion. At first blush, it seems that Foot sides with the poor man, attributing greater virtue to him, or leaves the question unanswered. But we should avoid interpreting the example this way. It would, as Foot would need to concede, follow that the rich man if he is truly virtuous, would still not be tempted to steal if circumstances changed, for instance he lost all his money. If this were not the case, virtue might be judged as fickle or variable, depending on the circumstances—a position we want to avoid. Some philosophers will want to deny this move. For example, see Doris (1998) and Harman (1999). In any case, the example that follows shortly after, involving charity, clearly expresses Foot's preferred view on the matter (where the honesty case, I believe, is intentionally set up as a foil to bring to light the intuitive appeal of continence).

<sup>8</sup> Justice is probably a more appropriate description here. But Foot takes the term honesty, in the expanded sense, to encompass the case in question.

applied to determine the virtue/continence distinction. I take this as reason to believe that Foot endorses the robust conception of the harmony thesis.

Another important figure in contemporary virtue ethics is John McDowell. In a series of papers McDowell argues that the virtuous agent possesses a special type of moral sensitivity.<sup>9</sup> This sensitivity has two aspects. The first aspect allows the virtuous agent to see the salient or morally important features of a situation (McDowell 1979: p. 332). It is a sort of perceptual capacity that reliably picks out what is morally required, or how to act in a particular situation. The second aspect silences, or blocks, non-moral or opposing considerations from being reasons for action in the situation. McDowell takes the continent agent to lack the virtuous agent's moral sensitivity (1979: p. 335). Because the continent agent has contrary desires or inclinations, it shows that he does not have the same perception of the situation as the virtuous person. He is morally defective in this sense. The agent who has to struggle to do the right thing "shows not virtue but (mere) continence" (McDowell 1979: p. 334). Hence, McDowell can be said to adhere to the harmony thesis in drawing the virtue/continence distinction.

McDowell also extends the virtue/continence distinction to courage:

Virtues like temperance and courage involve steadfastness in face of characteristic sorts of temptation, and it can seem impossible to register that fact without regarding them as cases of continence. Insisting nevertheless on the distinction between virtue and continence yields a view of these virtues which has a certain sublimity. Their proper manifestation is a renunciation, without struggle, of something which in the abstract one would value highly (physical pleasure, security of life and limb). (1978: p. 27)

This is an interesting passage. Looking at the case of courage, the courageous person, when facing death or harm, is taken by McDowell to possess a sort of tranquility that the continent agent lacks (1978: pp. 27–28). While both will toe the line, so to speak, the latter is taken to have

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<sup>9</sup> See McDowell (1978), (1979), and (1980).

to resist the temptation to run away, escape, dodge responsibility, etc. This is not to say the virtuous agent is oblivious to danger, or does not value his own life. Rather, the concerns in question are silenced for the virtuous agent. Therefore, we can say, in the case of courage, the virtuous agent performs the courageous action without inner conflict or pain, and the continent agent experiences inner conflict and pain when performing the courageous action. I take this as evidence that McDowell accepts the robust conception of the harmony thesis.

Rosalind Hursthouse, in her influential book, *On Virtue Ethics*, takes herself to be presenting a comprehensive collection of the central ideas of contemporary virtue ethics.<sup>10</sup> She takes the characteristic behavior of the virtuous agent to be the appropriate standard for right action. Part of this characteristic behavior is to perform the right action easily or without inner conflict. Hursthouse's endorsement of the harmony thesis can be seen in the following passage:

Simply, the continent character is the one who, typically, knowing what she should do, does it, *contrary* to her desires, and the fully virtuous character is the one who, typically, knowing what she should do, does it, desiring to do it. Her desires are in complete harmony with her reason; hence, when she does what she should, she does what she desires to do, and reaps the reward of satisfied desire. (1999: p. 92)

It is also apparent that Hursthouse takes the above standard to be expansive, and not simply limited to the virtue of temperance. The clearest indication that Hursthouse intends the above standard to apply to all, or nearly all, the moral virtues, is expressed in her fourth requirement for acting virtuously:

(4) The agent has the appropriate feeling(s) or attitude(s) when she acts. (1999: p. 125)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hursthouse claims her book to capture the central ideas of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, in particular. I take her claims to apply more broadly, but if pressed will concede that my meaning here is neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics when I say contemporary virtue ethics.

<sup>11</sup> The other three requirements are: (1) [The agent performs a certain sort of action that is virtuous or good] (p. 123); (2) The agent must know what she is doing... (p. 124); and (3) The agent acts for a reason, moreover, for the 'right reason(s)' (p. 124).

Because the continent agent experiences inner conflict or pain when acting virtuously, he fails to meet the fourth requirement, falling short of virtue. Hence, the virtue/continence distinction in this case is determined by the ease or difficulty with which virtuous actions are performed (in general).<sup>12</sup> It would then be appropriate to say that Hursthouse is committed to the robust conception of the harmony thesis.

Julia Annas makes large use of the harmony thesis in her recent book, *Intelligent Virtue*. In her book, Annas defends a skill model of virtue. She takes virtue to be a type of moral expertise, and capable of being captured in developmental stages. One of the final steps in the process toward full virtue is performing virtuous actions effortlessly or with ease. Just as the expert pianist no longer needs to think about how to play the next chord or attempt the next scale, the virtuous agent does not need to mull the details, or struggle to perform a virtuous action (Annas 2011: p. 29). The continent agent, according to Annas, has not yet reached this stage of development:

Putting the difference in this way clearly expresses the idea that the encratic [continent person] is someone who has not yet matured or grown up; there is something still missing in his development... The encratic's actions are not in tune with her feelings, so although she may do the virtuous act, she does not do it as the virtuous person would do it; she can do the right thing, but is virtuous only in the way that the learner is, and so cannot yet properly be called virtuous. (2011: p. 67)

Just like a novice in other skills, we can say the continent agent has certain deficiencies in his performance. While he can replicate the actions of the virtuous agent, he fails to do them as a virtuous agent would do them.

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<sup>12</sup> Because the fourth requirement is a major standard for Hursthouse's definition of virtuous action it would be highly unusual if she implicitly meant for it to apply to only temperance, or a limited number of virtues. Additional evidence for my interpretation can be found in a footnote, where Hursthouse acknowledges that she is using continence in the general sense, rather than the limited sense made use of by Aristotle (see 1999: p. 92).

Annas goes on to apply the virtue/continence distinction in the following example:

The encratic [continent person], then, does what is tactful, brave, or beneficent, but does not have the right feelings about it, whereas the virtuous person does. (2011: p. 67)

Again, we see the harmony thesis being applied outside of the domain of temperance. In terms of beneficence, for instance, the continent agent is said to be less morally developed than the virtuous agent because he still, for instance, hesitates, or weighs time and cost; or is pained when not receiving praise or reward when helping others. He is on the right track, as Annas would claim, but still lacks the effortless action or moral maturity expected of the virtuous agent. And because the continent agent must struggle to act rightly, this is ground to hold that he is less developed or morally inferior to the virtuous agent, giving support to the robust conception of the harmony thesis.

In the examples given, we see that the virtue/continence distinction is drawn from the ease or difficulty with which virtuous actions are performed. If an agent struggles in performing the right action, he is deemed continent, and if he performs the right action with ease, he is deemed virtuous. I take this to be evidence that the harmony thesis is accepted by the philosophers cited. There is also clear evidence that each of the philosophers discussed extend the harmony thesis outside of the domain of temperance. Thus, Foot, McDowell, Hursthouse, and Annas can be said to subscribe to the robust conception of the harmony thesis. To be fair, while I take the philosophers mentioned to be the best representatives of the field of contemporary virtue ethics, this list is not exhaustive.<sup>13</sup> But, as I will show in the next section, the harmony thesis has become (whether explicitly or implicitly) inseparable from and ingrained in contemporary virtue ethics, as we know it. While exceptions are possible, the vast majority of

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<sup>13</sup> Some figures not mentioned might include Gregory Trianosky, Michael Slote, Thomas Hurka, Christine Swanton, and Daniel Russell.



contemporary virtue ethicists will *need* to accept to some version of the harmony thesis to maintain the characteristic features distinguishing virtue ethics from other ethical theories.

### **3. The Harmony Thesis is Ingrained in Contemporary Theory**

The endorsement of the harmony thesis by contemporary virtue ethicists is not surprising. The idea that the virtuous agent must not only perform the right action, but also do so in a certain way, or have the appropriate emotions and desires when doing so, is ingrained in the contemporary debate. This giving of significance to the emotions is usually claimed to be a strength of virtue ethics over its rival theories of consequentialism and deontology. As Michael Stocker claims:

To embody in one's motives the values of current ethical theories [e.g., consequentialism, deontology] is to treat people externally and to preclude love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community—both with others and with oneself. To get these great goods while holding those current ethical theories requires a schizophrenia between reason and motive. (1976: p. 461)

The schizophrenia that Stocker is referring to involves a disconnect between an agent's reasons and desires. An agent who struggles to perform the right action, or has contrary inclinations, but does the right thing nonetheless, out of a sense of duty, or to maximize the best consequences, for example, might be said to act in a way that is detached or fragmented from his inner self. There seems to be something unnerving about an agent who fails to desire, value, have positive feelings towards, etc., the (good) actions that he performs. The idea that the right action can trump all other considerations without making reference to, or independent of the agent's feelings, in some sense, comes off as very peculiar and alien.

The above point is illuminated by Stocker's often-cited example involving a visit from a friend during a hospital stay (see 1976: p. 462). In the case, we would normally say that being visited by a friend while recovering in the hospital, or after some traumatic event (especially

when bored or lonely, or in pain), is a good thing. We might even say that by visiting you the friend performs the right action. But imagine, as Stocker asks us to do, that after being bombarded with your praise, the friend in all seriousness assures you that the reason he is visiting you is not because you are his friend, but rather because it is his duty to visit you, or visiting you produces good consequences, etc. (1976: p. 462). This seemingly would cause alarm for anyone in the situation; and largely would cause us to question whether that person was in fact a true friend. Surely, we want to be visited by a friend in the hospital because he cares about us, or wants to be there, or simply because he is our friend. While visiting or cheering up the friend is taking to be the right action in both cases, intuitively we want to say that the second case is better, or more representative of genuine friendship.

Of the mentioned ethical theories, virtue ethics is particularly well-equipped to make sense of Stocker's case, and the emotions in general. Virtue ethics can confidently claim, in concord with our commonsense intuitions, that the person who visits his friend in the hospital but goes reluctantly, or would prefer to do something else, or is pained at doing so, is morally defective. There is something lacking in him as a friend. This is where the harmony thesis comes into play. The agent who must struggle, or overcome conflicting desires, to visit a friend in the hospital in need of cheering up is merely continent rather than virtuous. Performing the right action *because it is right* is not enough. The harmony thesis gives us the resources to make sense of the case being discussed. While visiting your friend in the hospital is a good thing (or even the right action), and better than not visiting, only the person who also has the appropriate desires and emotions is virtuous.

The harmony thesis is also needed by virtue ethics to prevent virtue from breaking down into merely performing the right action (even if the action is determined by some standard

involving the virtuous agent). Without the harmony thesis, virtue ethics find itself in much the same predicament as act-based moral theories. If it is not the case that the emotions, desires, motive, of the agent is important, the emphasis on the agent becomes impoverished. We need not become virtuous agents, or strive toward becoming one; instead all we need to do is perform the action that a virtuous agent would (characteristically) perform.<sup>14</sup> This might be one route, but I would hardly call it consistent with what we take a virtue ethical theory to be. Instead, performing the right action in a harmonious way, in which an agent's reasons and desires correspond, is taken by virtue ethicists to be the standard of virtue, and the ideal to strive toward. It is the focus on the agent that separates virtue ethics from other ethical theories. As Annas points out, "A distinction between the enkratic and the virtuous is made by most theories that make virtue central... Indeed, it is hard to think of a theory of virtue making virtue a matter of disposition and character which could fail to note the distinction in some form" (2011: p. 67). We need some way to account for the fact that the agent (and his inner state) matters. The harmony thesis does just this by demarcating agents who perform the right action according to their desires. The virtuous agent acts rightly from corresponding desires and easily; whereas non-virtuous agents, or continent agents, must struggle to act rightly, or act from contrary desires. In fact, without acknowledging the necessity of this harmony, virtue ethics finds itself liable to the much greater problem involving agents who happen to perform the same action as the virtuous agent, but do so from non-virtuous or base motives.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A loose reading of Hursthouse (1999) might take performing the same action that the virtuous agent would characteristically perform in the circumstances to be sufficient for acting virtuously, but this is incorrect. This is only a necessary condition for Hursthouse. An agent, in order to act virtuously, must also have knowledge of what he is doing, act for the right reason, and have the appropriate feelings or attitudes when he acts (see pp. 223–225).

<sup>15</sup> An example might be, an agent who jumps in the water to save a drowning child, but does so only to get a monetary reward, or praise. Without making reference to the motivation of this agent it would seem to follow that his action was virtuous. But clearly, we don't want to concede to this; and are even pressed to say the agent is continent. One way out would be to point out that the agent in question fails Hursthouse's third requirement for virtue: that the agent act for the right reason. This problematic case, I admit, might not be so easily dismissed.

While any virtue ethical theory *must* take the agent's desires, emotions, and feelings, into consideration, there is a broader focus in the contemporary tradition on action-guidance than is found in Aristotle. Contemporary virtue ethics normally takes itself to be capable of also offering advice on what to do, in addition to what type of person to become. It is capable of being a normative theory. One example of this aspect in contemporary virtue ethics can be found in Hursthouse's v-rules. Hursthouse's v-rules are general moral prescriptions derived from virtue and vice terms capable of providing action-guidance (1999: p. 37). For example, the virtue of charity carries the prescription 'help others in need'. The virtue of honesty carries prescriptions like 'don't lie', 'keep your word' and so on. According to Hursthouse, these v-rules help us escape the criticism that virtue ethics can only tell us the type of person to be, rather than what to do. It is meant to apply more broadly to non-virtuous agents. Excluding certain problem cases (where *actually* being virtuous is required), Hursthouse is correct in this regard. The virtue of generosity tells me 'not to skimp on my turn to pay the bill'; the virtue of courage tells me 'not to run away'. I may still avoid picking up the bill or run away, but this is a problem in my motivation, not in the prescriptions the v-rules have to offer.

The acceptance of this more normative aspect is standard for many virtue ethicists, and an important contributing factor in virtue ethics status as one of the major ethical theories. This could be seen as an advancement over Aristotle, who is largely content with only telling us who to be, or more charitably, how we might imitate or strive to become a virtuous agent. Contemporary virtue ethics seems capable of giving us much more specific moral instruction. While this is the case, the prescriptions from the v-rules, for instance, find themselves thin. There is more to the virtue of charity than the prescription 'help others in need'. The harmony thesis is

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However, in this dissertation, I am concerned with a different problem, roughly, the agent who performs the right action, knows what he is doing, acts for the right reason, but fails Hursthouse's fourth requirement: having the appropriate feelings or attitudes when he acts.

needed to make sense of these prescriptions. We want to also say that we should help others because we care about their well-being, or value human life, or can empathize with their suffering. We need these additional criteria to make sense of what it really means to be charitable. The person who blindly followed the prescription 'help others in need' but failed to have compassion or be concerned is missing something important. But if he follows the rule, and is properly motivated by that rule, it is hard to say why the agent in question does not actually act charitably. The harmony thesis allows us to go further (past compliance with right action) and show that not having the corresponding desires shows that the agent is defective. He is continent, rather than virtuous.

Above I argued that the harmony thesis gives substance to specific prescriptions offered by virtue ethics. We can also now say that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is *needed* to cover the broad scope of contemporary virtue ethics' normative project. It might be possible to limit the scope of your prescriptions to temperance, offering specific action-guidance like 'don't sleep with the neighbor's wife' or 'don't drink so much you impair your ability to drive' but this is not the scope of the normative project in contemporary virtue ethics. Contemporary virtue ethics wants to offer action-guidance to cover the entirety of our moral lives. The prescriptions offered are taken to cover courage, charity, honesty, friendliness, generosity, and so on; not just temperance. Virtue ethics would be at a serious disadvantage to consequentialism or deontology if it could only guide us a fraction of the time (e.g. only in cases involving temperance). A respectable normative theory, in other words, must be capable of informing our actions in at least *most* cases. I take this to be the goal of the contemporary tradition.<sup>16</sup> This normative project

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<sup>16</sup> Deontological or consequentialist theories usually carry the stronger normative ambition to inform our actions in *all* cases.

might be abandoned of course, but one of the defining features of the contemporary tradition would go with it.

#### **4. The Harmony Thesis is Useful**

The appeal of the harmony thesis for contemporary virtue ethics extends further than broad consensus or theoretical necessity. It is also useful. The harmony thesis could play an important, if not essential role, in a number of theories on the horizon. One area in particular, offering much promise, involves the concept of the *flow experience*. The flow experience, originally put forward by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, entails a singular focus and commitment to a particular action or task.<sup>17</sup> When an agent experiences 'flow' in his actions he is taken to perform the action effortlessly, lose sense of time, suspend all concerns, and get a deep sense of enjoyment from performing the action.<sup>18</sup> A good example of an agent who might be said to experience flow in certain actions would be an elite athlete. The best soccer players when, for instance, attempting the winning kick in an important game, do not think about their problems at home, or the day before or after; they are immersed in the *now*.<sup>19</sup> Nor do they hesitate, or struggle, or need to think through the steps; they just know and act. The virtuous agent, at least in his ideal or most developed form is taken to perform virtuous actions in a similar way.

Whether or not it is explicitly defended, intuitively we expect a virtuous agent to act with flow. The man who jumps in the water effortlessly and without hesitation to save a drowning child is what we imagine the virtuous agent to be. If that same man asked about the current, checked the depth of the water, and planned out what angle and stroke he would use in the rescue

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<sup>17</sup> See Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

<sup>18</sup> A very clear and succinct description of the flow experience, and the conditions stated, can be found in Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, and Nakamura (2005), pp. 598–608.

<sup>19</sup> A more colloquial description of the athlete might be that he is "in the zone."

he falls short of the ideal. But, we must acknowledge, it is quite possible the second man's reasons, desires, and actions could be in harmony. He just might be inexperienced in performing courageous actions. The man in question, we might say, will still, without a doubt jump in the water and save the child, and do so without inner conflict or struggle; but it takes him a little longer than the first man; his execution is sloppy; and he must meticulously plan the action out to guarantee he is successful. In this sense, flow is a stronger requirement than harmony.

The concept of flow has gained a lot of attention from philosophers as of late.<sup>20</sup> The most notable defender of the flow experience in contemporary virtue ethics is Annas. In defending the concept she claims:

This [the flow experience] aligns perfectly with the distinction, already seen, between virtue and continence or *enkrateia*. The merely continent person does the right thing, and is even guided to doing the right thing by developing virtue, but has other commitments and values that conflict with the exercise of virtue. Because of this, virtuous activity in her case has to be effortful and self-conscious. The mature honest person is aware of occasions for dishonesty, say, but it simply does not occur to her to take advantage of them... Honest actions will be experienced by the mature honest person in the 'flow' way; however complex and hard to navigate the circumstances are, there is no felt resistance to acting honestly, no interference with the direct having of honest responses. (2011: p. 75)

What Annas has in mind involves the idea that disharmony impedes or interferes with the performance of virtuous action. An agent might still perform the virtuous action, but he will never, according to Annas, have flow in his actions as long as he has contrary values or desires (2011: p. 75). These contrary desires act as obstacles, requiring conscious effort to overcome, preventing the agent from performing the action in the flow way.

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<sup>20</sup> For some very recent examples, see Stichter (2011), DeSouza (2013), and Peters (2015).

Again, it must be pointed out that flow is stronger than harmony. The flow experience also has to do with performance. Virtuous performance entails hitting the mark: getting it right. This in many ways connects to the success component of virtue, which any virtue ethical theory should take seriously. There seems to be more to being virtuous than having the appropriate motivation, and feelings, and *actually* doing the right thing. We also take the delivery to matter.

Annas claims:

What of the point that activity is experienced satisfyingly as 'flow' when all the person's relevant goals are in harmony? In the case of skill, this is obviously a local matter; someone might be a skillful skater while having all kind of unresolved issues in other areas of her life. In the case of virtue, the person's global state is what is relevant to the performance of the action. An action won't be performed easily and enjoyably if there is interference from attachment to goals that are in tension with what the person is doing in the action. (2011: p. 74)

Getting it right in the flow sense, for virtue, requires *both* practical expertise and internal harmony. An athlete, for instance, that makes a perfect kick will be praised regardless of what he was thinking at the time, or his motivation. But the same is not true of virtue. The performance of the action is only skilled in the sense that it comes from a virtuous character. An observer who witnesses an agent deliver kind remarks to his friends, but knows the agent has ulterior motives, will justifiably judge the action as morally lacking—according to the harmony aspect of the flow requirement. But at the same time, if that agent fails to impress, we will also be hesitant to hold him as virtuous in the other sense of the flow requirement—the practical sense. We might say the agent is not there yet: he needs to develop more skill in that virtue. The same would be the case with a charitable person that attempts to cheer up another person down on his luck but stumbles on his words, or hesitates, or pauses awkwardly while searching for the right joke or compliment. In fact, it could even have the opposite effect, upsetting the person even more. Flow helps us



explain why the otherwise harmonious person who performs the right action from the right motivation, emotions, and desires, could still manage to go wrong. Whether flow will be incorporated into the contemporary debate remains to be seen. Theoretically, virtue ethics can consistently be maintained without this stronger requirement. In any case, the point to be stressed is that harmony is required for flow, and the latter cannot be maintained without also endorsing the former. Thus, abandoning the harmony thesis closes an otherwise fruitful area of investigation.

### **5. Reasons to Maintain the Robust Conception of the Harmony Thesis**

So far, I have argued that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is widespread, ingrained, and useful for contemporary virtue ethics. In this section, I look at the implications of these claims. To start, the first claim is rather straightforward. It is very clear, as I have shown, that many virtue ethicists accept the robust conception of the harmony thesis that I have described. What would it mean to contemporary virtue ethics in this regard if the harmony thesis were abandoned? Many theories would need to be drastically reworked. While burdensome, this is not an impossible feat. The fact that the harmony thesis is widespread, in itself, does not constitute grounds to maintain it at all cost. But it does count as a reason in favor of keeping the theory as long as doing so does not pose a contradiction or weakness to greater virtue ethics. This is especially true, considering the fact that it is unclear (in the current environment) how the gap might be filled by contemporary virtue ethicists.

The second claim is stronger. It holds that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is a defining feature of what we take a contemporary virtue ethical theory to be. I argued that the harmony thesis was entrenched in the contemporary debate in three major ways by: allowing

virtue ethics to give significance to and offer a better account of the emotions than deontology or consequentialism, demarcating and establishing virtue ethics as agent-focused rather than act-focused in a consistent way, and bolstering the broad normative project contributing to virtue ethics' status as a major ethical theory. Abandoning the robust conception of the harmony thesis would have a significant impact on each of these three features. There is some overlap with the first two features. If it were not the case that the virtuous agent's emotional state mattered, in the sense that he could—in a consistent way—experience inner conflict and pain when acting virtuously, the focus on the agent is in many ways diminished. We want to understand why we take the agent who must struggle to perform the right action to be morally lacking. What is wrong with his inner state? It is not directly evident what other alternatives are available in the absence of the harmony thesis, and thus, we are forced to either leave the question open or say that the emotional state of the agent is not directly relevant to an act's moral status.<sup>21</sup> The first option leaves a serious theoretical gap in our virtue ethical theories. The second option allows for the possibility that an agent can act with a great deal of inner conflict, or even from contrary motives, and still act virtuously as long as he performs the right action. In this sense, virtue ethics largely is reduced to the mere performance of the right action, a position we want to avoid holding.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> There, it should be noted, could be other alternatives here. Chapter 2 explores one such alternative offered by Stohr (2003).

<sup>22</sup> One way out might be to say, that virtue ethics can still remain agent-focused rather than act-focused because the moral wisdom of the virtuous agent is needed to pick out or determine what the right action is. In this way, we could in theory consistently hold that as long as at least one virtuous agent existed, we could potentially ask for his advice or imitate his actions (independent of our own inner conflict or pain). Crudely, the virtuous agent's moral wisdom could be interpreted as a type of unique internal state (in the same way emotions are a type of internal state). So, because the virtuous agent's internal state determines the moral status of the action, virtue ethics remains agent-focused. This view, though, is subject to its own difficulties. If we follow Aristotle, it proves to be difficult, if not impossible, to separate the moral wisdom of the virtuous agent from his emotional state (see NE 1144a8–10). We in a sense just pass the buck. If the harmony thesis fails, the implication is that the possibility of moral wisdom goes with it.

The third feature definitive of the contemporary debate, virtue ethics' broad normative project, would also be impacted if we rejected the harmony thesis. The point of interest here involves the robustness component of the harmony thesis endorsed in this chapter. In the modern context, we take an agent that is conflicted, or has to struggle to return a wallet to be equally problematic as the agent who struggles to perform the temperate action. Contemporary virtue ethics' normative project aims to offer action-guidance in this more expanded sense. Because of this commitment, we also need the harmony thesis to apply in the broader sense as well. For each prescription we need the harmony thesis to give substance to it. Without the harmony thesis many or all of these prescriptions prove thin and liable to break down to mere compliance with specific rules. Whether we reject the harmony thesis in itself or the robust component, virtue ethics' normative project, and status as a major ethical theory, is compromised, or at the very least severely weakened.

I also argued that the robust conception of the harmony thesis is useful. I used the concept of the flow experience as an example to provide support for my claim. This claim, of course, and its implications does not cause a rift in or call the theoretical status of virtue ethics into question in the same way as the claims above. Only a small amount of virtue ethicists (mostly coming from the skill model camp of virtue ethics) endorse the flow requirement for virtue. I believe the concept of flow will play an important role in our future virtue ethical theories. But there is, of course, no guarantee. What is important though is the fact that the concept of the flow experience in virtue ethics is dependent on the harmony thesis to be viable. Thus, we have reason to maintain the harmony thesis, in this regard, if only to leave the possibility open.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the harmony thesis is widespread, entrenched in the contemporary debate, and useful for contemporary virtue ethics, and that there are important reasons counting in favor of maintaining the harmony thesis. To be clear in my terminology, when I say there are important reasons counting in favor of maintaining the harmony thesis, I mean there are important reasons counting in favor of maintaining the robust conception of the harmony thesis. As should be clear from this chapter, the two are taken together in the contemporary context. But as we will see in the next chapter, this more expansive version of the harmony thesis is more vulnerable to attack than the one offered by Aristotle.

## Chapter 2: Stohr and the Problem of Continence

### 1. Introduction

In the extended moral landscape of contemporary virtue ethics there are hard cases where acting rightly with ease or without pain would offend our commonsense intuitions. We intuitively feel that in special cases involving a necessary harm or lesser evil we should be disturbed and pained by doing what needs to be done. This intuition, of course, comes into conflict with the harmony thesis, inverting the standards. Because the situation demands that an agent be pained in acting, only the continent agent can deliver. The status of the virtuous agent seems to be left in a compromising position: either be deemed as morally lacking in some way compared to the continent agent or deny that the standard of virtue is sharply distinct from continence. In order to resolve the dilemma, either our commonsense intuitions regarding problem cases or the harmony thesis as it is currently upheld must be discarded. This might be referred to as the *problem of continence*.

In this chapter, I start by looking at a problem case offered by Karen Stohr.<sup>23</sup> Because contemporary virtue ethics takes its normative project to be expansive—that is it accepts the robust conception of the harmony thesis—it is subject to the *problem of continence*, and must be able to respond to Stohr's case to be consistent. Stohr, as I will show, takes the second route above to escape the dilemma, but does so at the expense of having to abandon the harmony thesis. Section 3 explores the ramifications of rejecting the harmony thesis for a number of notable virtue ethical theories. In particular, virtue ethicists find themselves unable to draw the virtue/continence distinction in the absence of the harmony thesis. Section 4 looks at an

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<sup>23</sup> See Karen Stohr, "Moral Cacophony: When Continence is a Virtue" (2003).

alternative way to draw the virtue/continence distinction offered by Stohr based on the choiceworthiness of particular goods. She claims that a virtuous agent will respond with an intensity of feeling corresponding to her correct judgment of value, whereas a continent agent will miss the mark: he will feel *too much* or *too little* pain in response to his correct judgment of value. This solution, I argue in Section 5, is too strict because it entails something like a *mean* resembling a moral virtue or vice regarding pain, being inconsistent with our ordinary understanding of continence. Finally, I defend the need to find a solution to the *problem of continence* in Section 6.

## 2. A Problem Case

The *problem of continence*, roughly speaking, rests on the possibility of a counterexample. In order to appreciate the force of this claim it will prove useful to look closely at an illuminating case offered by Stohr:

Imagine an agent who owns a small company. She has a number of employees, all of whom have worked for her for years and all of whom are capable and dependable. Since the company is small, she has gotten to know her employees relatively well and she has developed genuine affection and concern for them. Due to a recent downturn in the economy, demand for the company's products has declined and the company is in financial trouble. After agonizing over the books, the owner of the company has decided that there is no alternative but to lay off several of her employees. She has already taken every other cost-cutting step possible and this is the last remaining option. If she does not perform any layoffs, the company will certainly go under and *all* her employees will lose their jobs. She knows that firing the employees is the right thing to do in these circumstances, and so she decides to go ahead with it. (2003: p. 342)

The company owner in this case does what is right, and performs the action characteristically expected of someone who is virtuous. But we also intuitively believe that a virtuous agent should

have sympathy for the fired employees and be pained at causing them harm. If the company owner came in the day of the firing without any indication of inner conflict and handed out pink slips with ease, we would want to say that something was seriously wrong with her. We would think that she lacked the emotional depth and concern demanded by the situation.

This concern extends beyond the actual act itself, taking a toll on the virtuous agent both in the days leading up to the firing once the decision had been made as well as after the fact:

We can imagine that she wakes up that morning with an anxious feeling in her stomach, perhaps unable to eat breakfast. She drives to work with a sense of dread and with the fanciful wish that the targeted employees will come in with the news that they have found other employment. She delivers the news as best she can, but she finds it extremely difficult. She is grieved at the sight of her employees' stress, sadness, and anxiety in response to the news. After the fact, she worries about whether they will be able to find new jobs, pay their mortgages, and take care of their children. (Stohr 2003: p. 343)

This type of behavior is expected of someone that is compassionate rather than callous. In Stohr's example, the aspects of the company owner's character like kindness, sympathy and responsiveness to the harm she is causing, the very traits that make it difficult to carry out the task, are the same traits that we would expect of someone with a virtuous character. An agent who slept soundly the night before and acted without pain or remorse in the situation is someone who we, by our commonsense intuitions, would find morally repulsive or lacking.

In order to meet the demands of the intuition, we must expect that the agent, if she is virtuous, be conflicted and pained when acting in the situation. For Stohr, the difficulty and pain that the agent experiences is not only necessary, but a mark of virtue. She elaborates:

There are many actions that, though required, seem to be of a sort that good people should find difficult. People should find it difficult to deliver bad news to their friends. Parents should find it hard to punish their children. Teachers should find it hard to give low grades to students who are genuinely trying to do well. Lovers

should find it hard to break off relationships when doing so is likely to cause the other person to suffer. In each case, if an agent finds the action easy or painless, then she lacks virtue. (Stohr 2003: p. 344)

Agents who performed the above actions without difficulty or pain, for Stohr, are in some sense lacking in some aspect of their characters. They are morally deficient. The problem, hence, involves the fact that in order for the harmony thesis to be true, a virtuous agent must possess this moral defect. In order to act appropriately, the virtuous agent must act as the continent agent would act in the situation. He must find it difficult and painful to act as he should.

The virtue/continence distinction finds itself flipped on account of accepting Stohr's counterexample. The immunity from inner conflict and pain that the virtuous agent was claimed to possess now is a mark against his virtue, and the susceptibility to inner conflict and pain that deemed the continent agent inferior acts as his strength. For Stohr, the inner conflict in the company owner is representative of some virtue(s).<sup>24</sup> If this is the case, it seems that an agent who acted without difficulty or pain in the company owner's situation could not properly be called virtuous by Stohr's standards. Conflicting desires or disharmony are in some sense necessary. Stohr claims:

The point is not simply that it would be understandable for the company owner to find such an action difficult and painful. Rather, the point is that it seems to be a requirement of virtue that she finds it hard. If she does not, that is *prima facie* evidence that she lacks virtue. The person who can fire a deserving person without experiencing any difficulty or pain shows himself to be callous to the misfortune of others. (2003: p. 343)

The problem at hand is more than the inversion of virtue and continence by the standards of the harmony thesis, but rather concerns the viability of the harmony thesis itself. If both the harmony

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<sup>24</sup> See Stohr (2003: p. 344). Stohr describes the inner conflict of the company owner as entailing both the presence of familiar virtues like compassion, kindness and sympathy as well as some deeper virtue or virtues distinct to continence.



thesis and Stohr's intuition about the company owner are true, the resultant conclusion is that it is possible for an agent to demonstrate a lack of virtue by acting as a virtuous agent should (without inner conflict or pain) in particular cases.

There are two ways that the preceding claim might be interpreted: (a) in some circumstances the virtuous agent shows himself to be subject to a moral defect, or, (b) acting with difficulty or pain in some situations is a mark of virtue. Regarding the first interpretation, it might be contended that, even if it is true that the virtuous agent is not inferior to the continent agent generally, he is still shown to be subject to a moral defect nonetheless, and should have his *exemplary* moral status questioned. We commonly take the virtuous agent to be morally perfect, or at least in possession of all the virtues. In the case of the company owner, the expressed inner conflict and concern for the fired employees points to morally desirable features of her character. It is clear that Stohr takes this expressed difficulty in acting to be reducible to some real virtue or virtues.<sup>25</sup> The company owner "would be less virtuous if she lacked them" (Stohr 2003: p. 347). An agent in the company owner's situation who did not express the same difficulty demonstrates a mark in his character. The problem, then, with the agent who acts without difficulty in the situation is more than the fact that he fails to be appropriately disturbed; his failure indicates that he is not in possession of all the virtues. His character is morally incomplete or imperfect.

Although Stohr's counterexample points to some taint in the character of the agent who acts with ease or without pain in the situation, she is not posing a direct attack on the exemplary status of the virtuous agent. Stohr instead wants to claim that the virtuous agent will act with or without difficulty according to the demands of the situation: "It is true that sometimes harmony is preferable, but sometimes it is not" (2003: p. 342). The difficulty and pain that the company

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<sup>25</sup> See Stohr (2003: p. 347).

owner experiences in firing the employees is directly responsive to the harm she is causing to them, and is traceable to her kindness and compassion. There is no reason to believe that if the company's product was in greater demand and times where better (promotions or raises needed to be handed out) the company owner would experience the same inner struggle. In fact, we should expect that she act with ease in distributing rewards if she is virtuous. Now, it need not be the case that the two examples be split into competing sets of virtues corresponding to the difficulty or ease of acting in the situation (i.e., kindness, compassion in the one case and generosity, fairness in the other). For Stohr, it does not directly follow that an agent fails to be virtuous because she experiences difficulty and pain in acting. Nor does it directly follow that an agent fails to be virtuous because he acts with ease. Rather, a virtuous agent, because he is completely virtuous, must be capable of demonstrating kindness, compassion, generosity, fairness, etc., in either situation. A virtuous agent could and *should* act with difficulty and pain in one situation and with ease in another because he possesses *all* the virtues.

While detractors of the counterexample will want to claim that a virtuous agent does not experience inner conflict or pain in acting, Stohr defends that in order for an agent to be virtuous to begin with he must be capable of experiencing inner conflict or pain in acting. This points to the second interpretation (b): acting with difficulty or pain in some situations is a mark of virtue. Again, acting with difficulty or pain is not preferable to acting with ease generally. Nor, is disharmony necessary or sufficient for virtue in itself. The claim is simply that in some cases the presence of inner conflict or pain is indicative of virtue (Stohr 2003: p. 346). Though less imposing than the previous interpretation, there is still enough force in it to call the harmony thesis into question. The very possibility of cases, or even a single case, posing a contradiction will "give us reason to doubt the general claim that virtuous agents always want to do what they

should do, or find it easy or pleasant, or feel no conflict” (Stohr 2003: p. 344). If we accept this interpretation, the harmony thesis as it is currently upheld is liable to produce inconsistent results.

Where does the viability of the harmony thesis stand? Stohr’s argument, if cogent, gives us serious grounds for doubt. The rejection of the harmony thesis, of course, also has ramifications for the virtue/continence distinction. In the absence of the inner conflict and pain characteristic of disharmony, continence finds itself unable to be adequately demarcated from virtue. In order to generate a distinction we might stipulate that the continent agent differs from the virtuous agent in the fact that he lacks the full set of virtues. But this proves to be an inadequate explanation because it fails to distinguish the continent agent from the incontinent or vicious agent. There are also arbitrary criteria we could force on the continent agent to negatively delimit him, but this would offend the praiseworthiness commonly attributed to the status. It is not entirely clear what criterion we should use, or how our current definition of continence can be maintained. Without the harmony thesis the virtue/continence distinction seems to fall apart.

### **3. Ramifications for Contemporary Virtue Ethics**

The force of Stohr's argument impacts all of the major virtue ethical theories discussed. Because Foot, McDowell, Hursthouse, and Annas, as I have shown, are committed to the robust conception of the harmony thesis, the *problem of continence* needs to be responded to. This section addresses the problem from the vantage point of each of the philosophers mentioned.

To start, remember that Foot holds the continent agent to be praiseworthy, and superior to the vicious agent on account of desiring to do the right thing, and superior to the incontinent agent on account of actually doing the right thing. But the continent agent falls short of the virtuous agent in the fact that he has conflicting desires. Foot's theory seems most able, of the

theories mentioned, to capture Stohr's problem case. The fact, as Foot suggests, that the poor man has to overcome much pain or struggle to act rightly—in not stealing—seems to count in his favor (1978: p. 7). But if we look closely we will see that the cases are very different from one another. Because the poor man in Foot's case is tempted to steal, it is appropriate to attribute continence rather than virtue to him under the ordinary view. What makes the action admirable is dependent on the features of the situation: the poor man needs the money and so on, but resists anyway. We must be careful to note that what makes it hard for the poor man in the example is ultimately dependent on a lack of virtue or a mark in his character. The fact that he has the temptation to steal coupled with exceptional circumstances, such as hard times, and an abandoned purse in arm's reach, makes resisting that much more difficult. But, it still follows from Foot, that the fact that he even has the temptation to steal shows that the agent in question is morally defective, and not truly virtuous—independent of the circumstances.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of the company owner something else is at issue. What makes the company owner pained or conflicted comes from the fact that she is virtuous or possesses certain virtuous character traits. The source of the conflict comes from within the agent herself rather than the circumstances. Whereas the poor man might become less pained or conflicted in acting honestly if his external situation were improved, i.e. he were made wealthier, the company owner can only become less conflicted by being less compassionate, caring, sympathetic, etc. The cases go in the opposite direction. It is the fact that the company owner is virtuous that makes it hard for her to act. Thus, Foot cannot account for Stohr's counterexample. This is further complicated by the fact that Foot must also hold that a rich man, if he were made poor, would still *not* have the temptation to steal in the circumstances if he is virtuous. Her explication of the virtue of charity

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<sup>26</sup> This of course excludes cases where the agent needs to steal to survive, or feed his family, etc.

captures this point: "It is the man who acts easily rather than the one who finds it hard that shows the most charity" (Foot 1978: p. 7). We might press the issue and say that certain virtues are best exemplified by having to overcome difficult circumstance or a struggle, and certain other virtues are exemplified by a lack of struggle or acting easily in the situation. But there is no indication that Foot takes this position.<sup>27</sup> Her held view is that virtue entails not having the inclination to act otherwise and performing the right action easily (Foot 1978: p. 8).

McDowell holds the virtuous agent to possess a special type of moral sensitivity that allows him to see the morally salient features of a situation and silence competing considerations. His theory is very reliant on the harmony thesis. Part of what it means to be virtuous for McDowell is to not have conflicting desires, experience conflict, etc. The whole point of silencing points to this dependence on harmony (McDowell 1979: pp. 334–335). Thus, for McDowell, the company owner should not experience pain and inner conflict in firing the employees if she is virtuous. Of course, this runs counter to our commonsense intuitions about the case. We want to say that the concern that the agent has for the employees should not be silenced. That is the point at issue. It is worth reiterating that McDowell's theory has two components. Remember, besides silencing competing considerations the virtuous agent also has a special moral sensitivity capable of picking out the morally salient features of particular circumstances. While silencing is not an option in responding to Stohr's counterexample it is conceivable that McDowell's theory could hold one component without the other; it could hold

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<sup>27</sup> Considering that Foot (1978) is in a large way responding to Kant, it would not make sense for her to fracture virtue in this way (i.e., in cases of honesty the man who overcomes much struggle is superior, but in cases of charity the man who acts easily is superior). Besides not being very helpful in responding to Stohr's counterexample, adopting a fractured view of virtue would undermine an important goal of Foot's theory.

onto the virtuous agent's unique perceptual capacity while allowing competing considerations to surface—that is we could keep moral sensitivity while rejecting silencing.<sup>28</sup>

Although the above move could allow McDowell to respond to Stohr's counterexample (the same moral sensitivity that picks out saving the company also picks out the needs of the employees to be fired) it opens him up to a different problem. McDowell, without silencing, finds himself unable to draw the virtue/continence distinction. If all that matters is picking out the right action, or locating the morally salient features of circumstances, there is nothing (deriving simply from this capacity) to distinguish continence from virtue. Both the continent agent and virtuous agent simply respond to the moral demands of particular circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Of course we could go on to claim that agents who lacked the perceptual capacity in question would fail to act in the right way, or miss the mark. But there is nothing in McDowell, or implied by Stohr's case, that would suggest that the continent agent would be lacking in this capacity.<sup>30</sup>

Hursthouse holds having the appropriate feelings and attitude when acting to be a necessary component of virtue. When taken with an understanding and commitment to acting rightly, this according to Hursthouse, can be represented by moral prescriptions she calls v-rules.<sup>31</sup> Hursthouse might respond to Stohr's problem case as a conflict between v-rules. We might say that in the case there are competing concerns capable of pulling the virtuous agent in more than one direction. For instance, charity might demand that the employees to be fired not

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<sup>28</sup> It might be argued that for McDowell the two components mentioned are one and the same or are unable to be split from one another. If this is the case, then without much argument, it will need to be conceded that McDowell's theory cannot adequately account for Stohr's counterexample. My aim here is not to take a position on whether the move is possible or not in McDowell's theory, but rather simply to speculate whether the move, if allowed, could solve the problem.

<sup>29</sup> We might point out that saving the company and the employees' welfare both seem to be morally salient. Should competing considerations counting in favor of saving the employees' jobs—the non-right action in the case—be silenced under McDowell's view? This is an interesting question that I will return to in Chapter 6.

<sup>30</sup> The continent agent for McDowell, of course, *would not* silence competing considerations giving us a way to demarcate him from the virtuous agent. But in the case discussed we are dismissing the silencing aspect of McDowell's theory.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.

suffer or be harmed, and justice or general benevolence might demand that the company be saved. While this is an interesting move, it does not get us out of the problem. Part of the issue with this move is that Hursthouse's conception of the virtuous agent entails that the virtuous agent is able to resolve conflicts between v-rules (1999: pp. 80–81). So, for Hursthouse, it would likely still follow that firing the employees is the right thing to do. The virtuous agent could be said to simply weigh the competing concerns, deciding that the needs of justice or general benevolence is more salient. It also should be acknowledged that in the way Stohr sets up the case, both the company owner who fires the employees easily and the company owner who must struggle both know that saving the company is the right thing to do, and that they will cause harm by firing the employees (see 2003: p. 343). Thus, there presumably would not be a conflict concerning which v-rule had greater precedence.

Annas holds the virtuous agent to be a type of moral expert. Annas' theory without much argument needs to make a serious concession to even to attempt to respond to Stohr's problem case. The concept of the flow experience must be abandoned in the general sense. For the company owner to act with flow when firing the employees seems to be even more intuitively repulsive than the original example. But it is conceivable that Annas' theory can be sustained without the stronger flow requirement. While this is the case, the skill model of virtue proves not to be very helpful. For Annas, an agent becomes better at acting virtuously through practice (2011: p. 79). As he performs more and more virtuous actions he becomes more proficient at performing such actions. At each developmental stage performing the right action becomes easier. Hence, for Annas, the continent agent who must struggle is taken to be at the level of learner and the virtuous agent who acts easily is taken to be more akin to a moral expert. The problem with this view, for our purposes, concerns the fact that it is unclear where to place

Stohr's company owner on the paradigm. If she struggles to perform the right action the company owner will fall on the learner side of Annas' model. But, the intuition that we are defending is that the company owner should be pained and conflicted when acting; and that this is a mark of virtue.

I am not sure how Annas can respond, or draw the virtue/continence distinction in a consistent way in light of the case. She would have to allow that an agent on the skill model in some cases becomes more and more pained and conflicted as he becomes more proficient at acting rightly. At each developmental stage it becomes harder for the agent to act rightly, and this is a mark of virtue. But clearly this is absurd. Even if we used Stohr's case as a constant in the model, the move is implausible. For instance, imagine that the company owner is instead a consultant in charge of advising numerous companies on how to maintain solvency. In the given case, the agent in question must decide which employees to fire on a regular basis. Take the variable to be roughly the same as in Stohr's case: if no one is fired each company will go under and so on. For Annas' theory to effectively respond to Stohr's counterexample it would have to follow that the consultant in question as a learner starts by firing the employees very easily, and later through practice finds it harder and harder to do so with each new company; ultimately culminating in the level of pain and inner conflict expected in the original case. While not impossible, this is a very strange conclusion to accept. For we intuitively believe that the development of skill or expertise works the other way: we become less and less pained and frustrated as we become more proficient.

It is clear that a number of notable virtue ethical theories are unable to respond to the *problem of continence*. In each case, either the problem case of the company owner cannot be accounted for in an adequate way or the virtue/continence distinction cannot be drawn. This, in



many ways, can be traced to a reliance on the harmony thesis as traditionally upheld. But, as was previously claimed, the harmony thesis only entails a particular way to draw the virtue/continence distinction not necessarily the distinction itself.<sup>32</sup> So, while contemporary virtue ethical theories can be said to be reliant on the virtue/continence distinction, it is at least possible that it can consistently do without the harmony thesis if some other method is available to draw the distinction. Thus, such a move is worth exploring if we want to escape the *problem of continence*. The next section will show one way we might try drawing the virtue/continence distinction without appealing to the harmony thesis.

#### **4. Stohr's Solution**

Although Stohr ultimately rejects the harmony thesis, she wants to hold onto the virtue/continence distinction in some form. In order to salvage the distinction she appeals to the choiceworthiness of particular goods (Stohr 2003: p. 348). The status of a particular good as choiceworthy is largely determined by the extent to which it is responsive to reason. For example, goods like knowledge, honor, and aesthetic appreciation could be categorized as choiceworthy, whereas goods concerning bodily pleasures would fall in the category of the non-choiceworthy or base.<sup>33</sup> Following Aristotle, a choiceworthy good is an object to be valued, and elicits a response in the agent who pursues or desires it.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the company owner, the appropriateness of being conflicted or pained is derived from the loss of something valuable. The

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>33</sup> Stohr uses the terms noble and shameful interchangeably with choiceworthiness and baseness. But there are notable difficulties regarding *the noble* and *the base* in Aristotle. For example, murder, adultery, and theft are base in a different way than bodily pleasures. The latter might be better categorized as ignoble. I restrict myself to the terms choiceworthy and non-choiceworthy to avoid some of these interpretive difficulties.

<sup>34</sup> See NE 1099a10–25.

well-being and livelihood of the fired employees is a choiceworthy good worth preserving and *should* cause a negative response in its loss.

For the virtuous, objects of value will elicit a positive response like pleasure in those who promote it and a negative response like pain or disturbance at the loss of the choiceworthy object.<sup>35</sup> The inner conflict that the company owner experiences in firing the employees is representative of virtue, essentially, because it is expressive of how choiceworthy goods are to be responded to. This gives Stohr what she needs to capture the intuition underlying her counterexample. The fault of the agent who acts with ease in the situation lies in the fact that he fails to appreciate the loss of something valuable (Stohr 2003: p. 356). While the current move provides Stohr with an independent criterion (to replace the harmony thesis) for establishing the conditions for virtue, it is only one side of the solution. More still needs to be said on how we are to distinguish continence from virtue under the new criterion.

In order to flesh out the distinction Stohr turns to the practical wisdom of the virtuous agent:

The *phronimos* [practically wise person] has a correct understanding of the goods of human life and hence knows what is worth giving up and at what price. She also knows what is to be held dear and how much to grieve its loss. She values things in correspondence to their actual value in human flourishing, and her feelings reflect those correct judgments of value. (2003: p. 362)

There are at least two implications to be drawn from this path of argumentation. The first is that a virtuous agent (because he possesses practical wisdom) will recognize choiceworthy goods as valuable, and non-choiceworthy goods as lacking value or being less valuable. Though an important (perhaps necessary) feature, the mere recognition of objects as choiceworthy or non-choiceworthy is not enough to generate a distinctive moral defect in the continent agent. For it

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<sup>35</sup> See NE 1104b1–15.

does not directly follow that a continent agent will misapprehend choiceworthy objects. Instead, the problem lies in the intensity in which his feelings correspond to his correct judgment (Stohr 2003: p. 362).

To illustrate this point Stohr gives an example:

She [the continent agent] *knows* that when her friend calls for help with a broken-down car, she ought to go help her, despite the fact that one of her favorite television programs is on. She does in fact go to help her friend, but she does not really *want* to go. She wants to stay at home and watch television, and she is annoyed that she has to go out. Because she knows that her friend's needs are more important than her television program, she berates herself for being annoyed. But she is annoyed all the same, and her annoyance, while perhaps understandable, is a moral failing in her. (2003: p. 362)

The agent above, for Stohr, is morally defective because her frustration shows that she values watching the television program more than she should. If she were fully virtuous her feelings would proportionally correspond to her correct judgment concerning the worth of the good. The force behind the claim has to do with the requisite pull of the competing objects. A friend's welfare is more choiceworthy than the enjoyment of a television program. The agent is morally defective who is disturbed at having to miss a television program in order to help her friend because it (the television program) elicits a response that does not correspond to the value of the object. She is pained or annoyed when she should not be. This is different from the case of the company owner. The company owner, like the agent who wants to watch her favorite television program, also has a desire to value the less choiceworthy good. She *really* does not want to fire the employees (Stohr 2003: p. 361). The difference, though, concerns the fact that the pain, agony, annoyance, etc., the company owner experiences in the loss of the lesser good corresponds to its worth, whereas, the same level of disturbance in missing a television program does not.

The revised virtue/continence distinction, then, seems to avoid a direct confrontation with our commonsense intuitions. We can now understand why an agent in the company owner's situation *should* experience inner conflict. This is not a mark against her, but an appropriate response to an object of value. We can also see that acting with ease is not generally representative of a moral defect in an agent. When a non-choiceworthy good is passed over in pursuit of an object of greater worth, an agent is completely justified in assigning the lesser good little or no weight. For Stohr, the moral defect in the continent agent, then, does not involve the *mere* presence or lack of pain in a particular situation. If it is a response correctly corresponding to the value of the object it is appropriate. Rather, the fault in the continent agent lies in the fact that his feelings fail to track his correct judgment of what is valuable; he feels *more* or *less* pain than he should.

## **5. Problems with Stohr's Solution**

While promising, Stohr's solution does not prove to be particularly helpful. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that the worth in pursuing choiceworthy objects seems *not* to be strictly reliant on a set level of intensity. For instance, take Stohr's example of the reluctant television enthusiast again (see Stohr 2003: p. 362). Accounting for intensity, the example seems to imply that the worth of helping the friend is something like 5, and the value of watching the television program is something like 1; But, the friend feels an intensity of pain as if the worth of watching the television program is 4, and this is continence: in the sense of Stohr's feeling more pain than is appropriate. Following this line of thought, we could *contrarily* go on to claim in response that saving the company has a worth of, say 10, and not firing the employees has a worth of 9; And the company owner correspondingly experiences an intensity of pain of 9, and this is continence

for the most part, as traditionally understood—but Stohr calls this virtue. What if there were two competing goods where one had a worth of 10 and the other 9.9? For example, the agent performed the right action (bringing about 10) and felt an intensity of pain corresponding to say 9.8—keep in mind that Stohr would claim the agent experienced too little pain here: and also characterize it as continence. But it seems not to matter whether the agent experiences an intensity of pain of 9.8, 9.7, 5, 4, 1; the agent is simply continent by Stohr's standards—and the traditional standard as well. In order to see this, it might prove useful to look at an unloaded case, where the consequences in performing one action over the other are not necessarily unsavory or repulsive. In a case involving two choiceworthy actions A and B, where A is the rationally prescribed, or right action to perform according to the agent's knowledge:<sup>36</sup>

- (1) Virtue – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, and performs A.
- (2) Continence – Agent knows A is right, prefers B, and performs A.

Imagine A to represent writing a novel and B to represent joining the Peace Corps (for the sake of argument, having a worth of 10 for writing a novel and 9.9 for joining the Peace Corps, respectively). An agent who desired A excessively, or more than he should (say 11, or even 20), would not normally be referred to as continent. Nor will an agent who desires B less than he should (say he values writing the novel at 10 and now values joining the Peace Corps at 9.8 instead of 9.9—technically he is now less conflicted) be referred to as less continent. Unless he should not be pained at all at the lost opportunity of not joining the Peace Corps.<sup>37</sup> He may simply defend that, B, while choiceworthy, is not what he values (or prefers) in the situation. To demand that he have some corresponding anguish to match the lost worth of volunteering is

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<sup>36</sup> In the situation presented, it is stipulated that the agent cannot perform both A and B, but is required to perform one or the other, where the performance of one excludes the performance of the other. It is also the case that the situation is not dilemmatic; A is clearly the better choice over B (continue to increase the value of A and decrease the value of B if needed to arrive at this conclusion).

<sup>37</sup> The traditional harmony thesis *does* imply this. But it seems a little strange. Chapter 5 offers an explanation to the puzzle, and shows that the virtuous agent, if he is fully virtuous, will be pained at this prospect.

unnecessarily rigid. Unlike the case of the company owner, the agent who wrote his novel with ease is not intuitively repulsive.<sup>38</sup>

Only in cases where an agent has a stronger desire for B can we confidently attribute inner conflict. If an agent prefers B, but performs A, for example, (i.e., B has a value of 10.1 and A now has a value of 9.9) he will by necessity be ascribed as being disturbed in some way. An agent who prefers to join the Peace Corps but writes a novel instead is by definition conflicted. According to the harmony thesis, pain or difficulty in acting provides evidence for the presence of this disturbance. Stohr at the basic level accepts (1). Even though the company owner does not want to fire the employees and values their well-being, she values saving her company even more (i.e., she prefers saving the company). Her preference corresponds to the rationally prescribed action. Where Stohr diverges from the harmony thesis is in directly deriving continence from (1) instead of (2). She takes the virtue/continence distinction to be dependent on the correct appraisal of B as well as A.

To see the contrast we can formulate the distinctions as follows:

- (1a) Virtue 1 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* acknowledges B as a competing *good* but is not pained by not performing B (harmony thesis).
- (1b) Virtue 2 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* both acknowledges B as a competing *good* and is pained by not performing B (Stohr).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The argument here is that, the real issue that Stohr is bringing to the surface by the company owner example is our intuitive repulsion to the agent not being pained in firing the employees. She is tapping and affirming our commonsense intuitions about the case. A charitable interpretation of Stohr might hold her to mean there is some threshold capable of being capture by "more" or "less" pain than is appropriate at the loss of B. But I take the strict intensity requirement not to follow intuitively from the affirmation of that same commonsense intuition.

<sup>39</sup> Using this formulation, the other side of the demarcation would be: (2a) Continence 1 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* both acknowledges B as a competing *good* and is pained by not performing B. Stohr's demarcation is more complicated: (2b) Continence 2 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* acknowledges B as a competing *good* but is not pained by not performing B; (3b) Continence 3 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* both acknowledges B as a competing *good* and is pained *too little* by not performing B; (4b) Continence 4 – Agent knows A is right, prefers A, performs A, *and* both acknowledges B as a competing *good* and is pained *too much* by not performing B.

Notice that (1a) would fall under what Stohr takes to be continence rather than virtue (because presumably, the amount of pain in response to the loss of B is seemingly 0 according to the harmony thesis). The agent who is not disturbed by the loss of B demonstrates a failure to appreciate its worth as a choiceworthy object by feeling less pain than he should—where 0 here is *less*. But, of course, this is not the only example that Stohr uses to represent continence. In the case of the reluctant television enthusiast the agent is *more* pained than she should be. But I should point out that, for Stohr's theory, it would not matter whether this agent was pained by an intensity of 2 or 4. In fact, if it were the case that the friend was in serious danger, and helping had a worth of 100, the agent would be continent, or lacking, by Stohr's standard if she valued the television program, or even helping the friend, anywhere between 1.1–99.9; or 101. That is, anything other than feeling exactly a 1 or 100 intensity of pain falls short of virtue. I take this standard to be far too strict. Even if we, out of charity, assume Stohr to be entailing not falling short of virtue to occur within some general threshold of neither too much nor too little pain (plus or minus 10, for instance), it still follows that Stohr is trying to get something like a moral *mean*, similar to the other moral virtues, for how much pain an agent should feel. But continence, we take it, is *not* a moral virtue, and in nearly every meaning of the word is taking to be, even if praiseworthy, second to or less praiseworthy than moral virtue. We could treat it as a moral virtue concerning pain; but it should be clear that it is too high a standard for continence, as normally understood.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, when we talk about continence as such, there are, we must admit, certain conceptual distinctions that are difficult if not impossible to dismiss or ignore. For example, Stohr's positive claim is that in some cases (where the agent performs the right action) what we

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<sup>40</sup> An important clarification is in order. I am not claiming that a *mean* or moral virtue regarding pain is impossible or incoherent, but rather that a discussion of continence is unable to do the work or properly capture this mean or moral virtue.

take as continence is indicative of virtue (2003: pp. 345–346). But according to our traditional understanding, continence is never indicative of virtue. That is the whole point of continence. It falls short of virtue. There is also, we normally take it, an important relation between continence, temperance, and pleasure. But Stohr is positing that same relation toward pain; something very different. And it is not entirely clear what worth or value Stohr would attribute to bodily pleasures, except to say it is 0. But if that is the case then we really need not talk about an intensity requirement; for even the slightest overvaluing (0.1?) of pleasure would result in a defect. Stohr could stipulate that it is only inner conflict if pain is felt in the presence of some countervailing good having value; but this is simply temperance as treated by the harmony thesis. She also, I take it from her theory, will have no need for, or a distorted view of the associated moral vices of intemperance and insensibility. The insensible person, who cares very little for pleasure, does not adequately capture what we mean by continence. But Stohr will need to claim, if her theory is to hold—e.g., virtue as feelings correctly tracking judgment of value, and continence as not—that the insensible person is continent. Or even worse, if the value of bodily pleasure is 0, and the insensible person really cares nothing for bodily pleasures, that he is virtuous. Stohr could counter by claiming that continence, as she is using it, only applies to choiceworthy goods; but then we have, it seems, no way to account for temperance.<sup>41</sup> It is my suspicion that Stohr is in fact after some undelineated moral virtue, other than temperance, concerning pain, and using the word "continence" to replace it. But continence has important connotations that do not cross over, and close relations to a number of other virtue ethical concepts. Its traditional connections to temperance, moral virtue, and moral vice run deep. Thus,

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<sup>41</sup> Charitably, Stohr could be claiming that temperance is caring about pleasure more than one should, or feeling excessive feeling toward non-choiceworthy goods. But this would seem, by her standards, to imply that temperance is a type of continence; which I take to be even stranger than the above claim; unless to simply beg the question that what Stohr means by virtue is really a special type of temperance.



it would be a disservice to contemporary virtue ethics to dismiss the temperance/continence (moral virtue/continence) distinction readily.

That being said, I will admit that Stohr would be justified in pointing out that her usage of the word continence is non-traditional, or detached from any of its ancient connotations.<sup>42</sup> This makes much of my criticism moot. And it is true that her problem remains; verbal disputes aside. But the point I want to stress is that something much more important is at stake. I take the harmony thesis to be connected to virtue ethics in an intimate way. Part of what makes the virtuous agent appealing lies in the fact that he does the right thing so easily. Being able to draw a virtue/continence distinction, in itself, is not enough. We want to be able to draw it in a way that respects its traditional connotations. Thus, we should not reject the harmony thesis so willingly. And even if it is true that Stohr can escape the *problem of continence* by rejecting the harmony thesis there is something important lost.

## **6. An Impasse?**

Remember, the problem brought to light by Stohr's counterexample involved the failure of the robust conception of the virtue/continence distinction to account for hard cases involving competing choiceworthy goods. Stohr takes this as reason to reject the harmony thesis outright and replace it with an intensity requirement (corresponding to an agent's correct judgment). I have argued that Stohr's attempt to derive the virtue/continence distinction fails—in demarcating continence—because it is *only* able to show that the continent agent falls short of or lacks the full set of virtues. To call this continence would be in name only. It should now be clear that the latter implication is more important than initially thought. The underlying problem cannot be

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<sup>42</sup> This seems to be Stohr's ultimate position. Though her heavy usage of Aristotle makes it less clear than it otherwise should be.

addressed by appealing to continence. Instead, the real difficulty rests on the fact that Stohr's counterexample points to a missing virtue that we cannot delineate. Stohr in a way recognizes this problem, but attempts to bridge the gap by treating continence as a virtue.<sup>43</sup> Unless we accept a radical reinterpretation of continence as a moral virtue concerning pain, this proves unsatisfactory.

While Stohr's solution fails her problem still remains. We do intuitively feel that an agent in the company owner's situation *should* be pained and experience inner conflict when firing the employees. How are we to account for the *problem of continence* in a consistent way? In order to find an adequate solution three things need to be accomplished. First, our ordinary understanding of continence needs to remain fixed.<sup>44</sup> We cannot simply call whatever defect the company owner has continence.<sup>45</sup> This leaves an unacceptable theoretical gap in virtue ethical theories, and distorts what we mean by continence in non-problem cases. Because we also want *robustness*, Stohr's counterexample (as well as any other problem case) needs to be accounted for. To fail to offer an explanation for such cases would put contemporary virtue ethics at a serious disadvantage to deontology and consequentialism. We must also be able to draw the virtue/continence distinction. This, as was argued, is an indispensable feature of the contemporary debate. Stohr's argument showed that our understanding of the harmony thesis is incompatible with robustness, hence we cannot draw the virtue/continence distinction in the ordinary way. But this does not mean that the harmony thesis cannot be revised, or that there are

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<sup>43</sup> I should acknowledge that my disagreement with Stohr, to her credit, could be viewed as a disagreement over which terminology to use. Stohr argues that continence best captures the problem case. I argue that some unidentified moral virtue or vice concerning pain is at issue. But we both arrive at very similar conclusions: mainly that an agent who fails to feel the appropriate amount of pain in the case is morally defective.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, it should be noted, does consider the possibility that continence could be a mean, looking at excessive and deficient forms (see NE 1151b24–32). But ultimately, as Aristotle is clear to point out, this is a distortion of what continence is supposed to be or represent. Continence is different than moral virtue or vice (NE 1145a35–1145b3). This is part of what makes the concept special or interesting.

<sup>45</sup> That is the company owner who fires his employees easily or without inner conflict or pain in the case.

not other ways to draw the virtue/continence distinction that are compatible with robustness. The next chapter looks at some other attempts at a solution to the *problem of continence*.

## Chapter 3: Some Alternative Solutions to the Problem of Continence

### 1. Introduction

With the failure of Stohr's solution in the previous chapter, the *problem of continence* remains as a threat to contemporary virtue ethics—the threat, if you will remember, being that if we accept Stohr's intuition about the problem case (that on some occasions virtue requires that we feel pain in doing the right thing) then it seems that we must reject the harmony thesis or hold the virtuous agent to be morally lacking in some way compared to the continent agent. This chapter looks to several other philosophers in hopes of finding a solution to the problem. It should be pointed out that the authors in question are not explicitly responding to the *problem of continence* as such. This is to be expected considering the novelty of the topic treated in the dissertation. But, as I will show, it is not too difficult to adapt certain aspects of these philosophers' theories in service of our goal. The bulk of this chapter pursues this strategy, before concluding with a summary of the major features of the arguments discussed in Chapters 1-3 and a sketch of the solution that I will pursue in the chapters to follow.

### 2. Broadie and Attitudinal Pleasure

A promising first solution to the *problem of continence* comes from Sarah Broadie. In her book, *Ethics with Aristotle*, Broadie holds the view that a virtuous agent will take a special type of satisfaction in performing virtuous actions, independent of the sensory pleasures or pains involved. She claims:

[T]he pleasure with which the virtuous agent acts must be distinguished from his enjoying or finding enjoyable what he does. Doing it with pleasure must be doing it freely, unreluctantly, ungrudgingly, hence in this sense gladly. It may also be taking

satisfaction in doing it. All this is consistent with its being an unpleasant or painful thing to do. (Broadie 1991: p. 91)

The type of pleasure that Broadie is referring to is in many ways representative of what is now referred to as propositional or attitudinal pleasure.<sup>46</sup> There are indications that Aristotle took such a view (at least in some cases).<sup>47</sup> For example, in certain circumstances, it does seem completely appropriate to allow, or expect, that an agent experience pain. As Broadie contends, "How can it realistically be held that fighting until one is cut to pieces is pleasant or ... not painful?" (1991: p. 91). To say that getting cut to pieces would not be painful would be very bizarre. But, this is not to say that an agent who sacrifices himself for something worthwhile cannot be glad that he did it, or take satisfaction in the act.

Broadie goes on to claim,

So, when Aristotle says that the temperate person delights or takes pleasure in temperate actions, meaning that they are engaged in gladly and with satisfaction, he is referring to an attitude *consequential* upon seeing the action as good or proper and as it would be noble to do or shameful not to do; whereas pleasures that can clash with the noble are felt to be pleasures independently of the rightness of pursuing them. (1991: p. 93)

What Broadie is saying is that a virtuous agent, when acting virtuously, will take attitudinal pleasure in the action itself, or a particular state of affairs. A courageous agent, for instance, may be wounded or suffer severe pain during a battle, but this does not count against him having satisfaction regarding his action when evaluating the situation. Even though he experiences sensory pain (which includes emotional or psychological distress) while performing the right action, he nonetheless takes attitudinal pleasure in its performance. The point is, that

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<sup>46</sup> See Feldman (1988) and (2004), in particular.

<sup>47</sup> The clearest example can be found in Aristotle's discussion of the courageous agent. See NE 1117b8–18.

experiencing sensory pain is not necessarily incompatible with taking attitudinal pleasure in bringing about a certain state of affairs.

The focus of the attitudinal pleasure that the virtuous agent is said to take in acting virtuously can be directly attributed to the fact that it is noble or right. The sensory aspects of the action, or means to achieving the end, are according to Broadie, irrelevant in an important sense: "[A]cting for pleasure that is excluded by acting for the sake of the noble has to do with logically *antecedent* pleasure. Someone who does A simply because he feels like it or feels he would enjoy it (these are not the same, but Aristotle tends to merge them) is not doing A for the sake of the noble" (1991: p. 93). For Broadie, something like the presence of sensory pleasure or pain, while an unavoidable feature of certain actions, are to be seen as merely derivative. While it might indeed be the case that acting virtuously could produce something like sensory pleasure indirectly, it is only accidental; and the virtuous agent is taken to be one who would gladly perform the virtuous action in the absence of any resultant sensory aspects. This type of gladness or satisfaction is to be found in the performance of the action itself; for itself. And in the same way that the presence or promise of sensory pleasure is non-decisive as to whether or not an agent will take attitudinal pleasure in an action's performance, sensory pain is also an irrelevant factor for deciding against performing a virtuous action; or whether a virtuous agent will take attitudinal pleasure in its performance.

In applying this interpretation to Stohr's problem case, we might claim that the virtuous agent merely experiences sensory pain when firing the employees. Thus, the company owner can be ascribed as taking pleasure, as attitudinal pleasure, in performing the right action while still being pained in its performance. This could allow us to keep our commonsense intuitions about Stohr's case while holding the harmony thesis at the same time. The company owner who fires

the employees, thus, can now be said to experience and be physically pained, conflicted, hurt, sad, anxious, depressed, nervous, distraught, etc., during the firing. She acts in the way we expect any caring or kind person to act. But, while the company owner is not deemed insensitive or callous (e.g., she does not offend out commonsense intuitions) it can still be said that she takes satisfaction in doing what is right in the fact that the company has been saved.

While an interesting move, Broadie's solution is problematic. One reason the move is problematic involves the fact that a continent agent presumably also takes attitudinal pleasure in performing the right action. Even if he has to struggle, or is pained, he can be said to be satisfied with what he has done. There is nothing in Stohr or Aristotle to suggest that the continent agent is not pleased in bringing about the state of affairs deemed to be right by his action. In fact, this in many ways is needed to account for why the continent agent performs the right action at all. Stohr in her discussion of the problem even goes on to suggest that a continent agent, when performing the right action, might take even *more* attitudinal pleasure than the virtuous agent on account of how hard it is for him to perform the action (2003: p. 353). Therefore, Broadie's solution fails to solve the problem because we are still unable to draw the virtue/continence distinction from her account.

### **3. Stark and Motivational Unity**

Susan Stark, in her paper "Virtue and Emotion," is concerned with the virtuous agent's motivating reasons for action. For Stark, a virtuous agent is motivationally unified whereas a continent agent is not. She claims:

As we have seen, this view holds that for the virtuous person, there simply are no countervailing considerations. Though I do not argue for this in depth, I believe that this idea of unity is a crucial one for virtue theorists. First, it allows the virtue theorist to maintain

Aristotle's clear distinction between virtue and continence. The virtuous person is motivationally unified, while the continent person is not. Second, and more important, without this notion of unity, it is difficult to explain why virtue represents a higher level of moral goodness than mere continence. (Stark 2001: p. 446)

What Stark is claiming is that a virtuous agent will not be motivated to perform a non-virtuous action, even in the presence of other *reasons* (like loss, emotions, pain, etc.). She takes it that reasons to feel a certain way are (or can be) separated from motivating reasons for action (Stark 2001: p. 452). For example, during a battle, the suffering that the courageous agent experiences can (or will), according to Stark, generate motivating reasons to *have* negative emotions or feel pain, but it will never generate a motivating reason to act non-virtuously. The continent agent, on the other hand, will not only possess motivating reasons to have negative emotions or feel pain, but also will have a motivating reason to act otherwise. He will have a motivating reason to run away. Essentially, Stark is claiming that the virtuous agent and continent agent can be demarcated by the fact that the virtuous agent, when performing the right action, will never be tempted to act otherwise, whereas the continent agent will.

We might also look at the above in the following way. Stark can be said to commit to two central claims. The first is that the virtuous agent's motivating reasons and normative reasons—counting in favor of performing the action, as the right thing to do—line up. What the virtuous agent evaluates to be right corresponds with his desire to perform the action. Whereas in the case of the continent agent, while his normative reasons pick out the right action his motivating reasons push in the other direction. Stark claims:

For the virtuous person, the normative reasons and the motivating reasons coincide. And this is one way of expressing the virtuous person's very important unity. But this unity is lacking in the continent person. For the continent person, although he may perceive the moral situation accurately, he has an anti-virtue desire. So although he does the right action, he has a desire and thus a



motivating anti-virtue reason. For him, the normative pro-virtue reason is not the only motivating reason there is. His motivations are in this sense, then, not unified. (2001: p. 444)

The first claim expressed above is not very controversial. Essentially it is saying that the virtuous agent's reasons and desire are in harmony with one another, whereas the continent agent's are not. But the second claim held by Stark proves to be much more interesting.

Stark holds that an agent can recognize or appreciate some consideration as a reason without it generating a motivating reason for action; and that it can take the form of an emotion instead.<sup>48</sup> Thus the desire in such cases does not act as a reason for action but rather as a motivating reason to have some emotion. As Stark claims, "A consideration can be evaluative without having any say whatsoever in action: its evaluative-ness can be fully expressed in the emotional state of the agent" (2001: p. 452). This allows a virtuous agent to express a certain level of mixed feelings or reluctance without attributing a real case of conflict, or allows us to "admit conflicting values into virtue without the worry of indecision in action" (Stark 2001: p. 453). As far as our purposes in finding a solution to the *problem of continence*, Stark's move could allow us to separate the negative emotions or pain that an agent experiences from the inner conflict itself.

In applying this interpretation to the problem case, we might claim that the company owner's pain, grief, etc., is appropriate according to motivating reasons concerning her emotions, but she does not have a motivating reason for action to do otherwise; she will not be tempted to *not* fire the employees, whereas the continent agent will. This allows us to say that the virtuous agent can appropriately experience pain in firing the employees while at the same time remain unified in his actions, reasons, and desires. Thus we might try to save the harmony thesis by

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<sup>48</sup> I am taking Stark to be rejecting reasons internalism here.

claiming something like: both the virtuous agent and continent agent are indeed (appropriately) pained when acting in Stohr's problem case, but such pain is largely inconsequential to whether or not an agent's actions line up with his desires or are representative of inner conflict; thus the virtuous agent acts in a unified way and the continent agent acts in a non-unified way. Such a move, I take it, allows for a demarcation of harmony and disharmony while also accommodating the commonsense intuition that the company owner should experience pain in the case.

The above solution is problematic in a number of ways. The first concerns the fact that we intuitively believe that the virtuous agent *should* be tempted *not* to fire the employees. If saving the employees' jobs was never an option for the company owner, the soul searching and grief that we expect her to go through before making the decision seems insincere. The company owner in this case *simply* goes through the motions. So, it seems there is more at issue in acting virtuously than just the presence of some negative emotion or mere pain. Our commonsense intuitions point to or expect something more serious and troubling in the virtuous agent: a real case of inner conflict; not simply a fleeting sense of loss or regret. So while it is indeed possible that reasons to feel a certain way can be separated from the agent's motivating reasons for action, it seems limited to cases where the countervailing pull is toward something non-virtuous. But in the case of the company owner both saving the company and not firing the employees are, I take it, to be deemed pro-virtue reasons by Stark's standards. Or more simply, in the case of the company owner the pain that the company owner is expected to experience cannot be neatly separated from the underlying inner conflict generating that pain.

A second, related, problem concerns an assumption on Stark's part that the continent agent will have a motivating reason for action that corresponds to acting non-virtuously. This may or may not be true. The continent agent can presumably be ascribed as strong enough to

*always* perform the right action in the presence of other countervailing motivating reasons. Stark is taking it that the continent agent will occasionally slip up and perform the wrong action (2001: p. 446). But again, this is unwarranted, and can only, at least by necessity, be ascribed to the incontinent agent. Furthermore, by Stark's own standards, there is nothing to prevent the continent agent from being motivationally unified. She is allowing that a virtuous agent can act virtuously even while pained or distressed as long as there is no motivating reason to act otherwise. In this view, the virtuous agent sounds a lot like the continent agent previously put under evaluation.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Stark's solution fails to solve the problem because we are unable to draw the virtue/continence distinction in an adequate way from her account.

#### **4. Carr and Moral Ambivalence**

David Carr, in his paper "Virtue, Mixed Emotions, and Moral Ambivalence," argues that the continent agent and virtuous agent differ in the fact that the former will experience moral ambivalence whereas the latter will not. He claims:

On the other hand, though there may be squalid or dishonorable courses of human action to which they are no longer drawn, the virtuous are no less prey than the rest of us to the emotional conflicts and moral dilemmas to which human flesh is heir, so that the absence of emotional or moral uncertainty or conflict would not in and of itself distinguish the virtuous from the continent. But, more strongly, the standard Aristotelian story might lead us to expect that the virtuous are those who have the wisdom, imagination, and ability to address such conflicts in ways that are not available to the merely continent. (Carr 2009: p. 44)

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<sup>49</sup> Not only does the virtuous agent appear similar to the continent agent under Stark's view, it exacerbates the difficulties found in Stohr's problem case: intuitively, we might now claim that, not only do we expect the virtuous agent to be pained in the case, we also expect him to have a motivating reason not to fire the employees—making him exhibit an even stronger type of continence (where mere pain was all that was originally required). Thus, Stark's move not only fails to solve the *problem of continence*; it makes it worse.

In the above passage, Carr is following Stark in allowing that both the virtuous and continent agent are capable of experiencing pain, distress, negative emotions, etc., when performing the right action. But instead of drawing the virtue/continence from motivational unity, Carr relies on the agent's particular understanding or appreciation of acting rightly. The continent agent, for Carr, regrets or resents having done the right thing; he wishes he could have done otherwise (2009: p. 43). The virtuous agent, while reflecting on his action, by contrast, has no such desire. The continent agent, unlike the virtuous agent, is also taken to not understand his inner conflict or emotions. He is unable to analyze or adjust his evaluation of himself to encompass the conflict. Nor is he able to adjust his actions or moral evaluations in response to new evidence. The continent agent, for Carr, is only able to act in a rigid or single-minded way (2009: p. 45).

The fact that the continent agent fails to properly understand or appreciate the relation that his desires bare to the moral actions he performs is grounds for attributing him a moral defect. Carr gives an example:

To be sure, continent agents—or at least some of them—may actually view heroically resisted opportunities for adultery with some regret: they may even wish (albeit unconsciously) that they were not cursed with the strong moral conscience (the product, perhaps, of a strict puritan upbringing) that has denied them the opportunities for pleasure available to the less scrupulous. The virtuous, on the other hand, are said to be incapable of such ambivalence. (2009: p. 40)

The continent agent for Carr, fails to recognize that the reason he should not commit adultery has to do with the fact that people could get hurt, trusts will be broken, and so on. The continent agent instead simply sees the moral action as something that he should not do. This points to a very narrow and limited understanding of what is at issue: like a young child who stares at a cookie jar wishing he was not forbidden to reach in; rather than appreciating that his health is the thing at stake. The continent agent acts, unquestionably, according to what he believes to be right,

but has no understanding of why the action is right. Thusly, as a result, he is inflexible and ill-equipped to respond to diverse or changing circumstances.

Not only does the continent agent act in a rigid and uncompromising way, his ambivalent emotions are in a way alien to him. Carr, for instance, claims that "merely self-controlled agents are incapable of coming to mature terms with the prospect of such inevitably ungratified desire" (2009: p. 45). The continent agent in a sense both wants and does not want to do the right thing. When reflecting on what was lost, he wishes he was less upright, and when reflecting on his contrary to right inclinations he wishes the base desire would disappear. Rather than coming to terms with the fact that certain things are more valuable or important than those things that he resents himself for wanting, the continent agent sees his contrary inclinations as a threat needed to be fought, vanquished, or locked away in the subconscious. This is different from the virtuous agent, who, in Carr's view, experiences the same pull toward base desires, but sees these desires as being of lesser importance; appropriately delegating them to their proper place (2009: p. 45).

In applying Carr's interpretation to the company owner, we might say that both the virtuous agent and continent agent in this case act appropriately by being pained or conflicted, but the continent agent regrets his decision after the fact, whereas the virtuous agent does not. Furthermore, it presumably would follow from Carr's argument, that if the fired employees gained (or could gain) employment shortly after being fired, the virtuous agent would adjust her evaluation of herself to be pleased at the outcome (or she will no longer have pain, negative emotions, etc.), whereas the continent agent will continue to have regret or be conflicted by his decision. Thus, the virtuous agent can be distinguished from the continent agent by the fact that her emotional conflict is temporary, whereas the continent agent's is longer lasting or permanent. Besides the fact that the above, intuitively, makes the continent agent out to be more concerned

or affected by the employees' plight—which Carr would hold to be a failure to appreciate the situation rather than a merit—the demarcation poses some serious difficulties. First, Carr is imposing a very strict or uncompromising attitude on the continent agent. The continent agent seems to be caught in a type of inescapable momentum after making up his mind. Why would the continent company owner not be able to re-evaluate his decision; especially if everything worked out for the best? The continent agent must remain stuck with the mixed emotions present at the time of making the decision in the case. This does not necessarily follow, and is unwarranted. I think Carr is relying on a very specific type of continence here, which Aristotle refers to as strong-headedness (see NE 1151b1–15).<sup>50</sup> This is not the notion of continence we have been working with.

Second, Carr's interpretation of the continent agent as not understanding or appreciating right action seems questionable. Why would the continent agent not be able to understand his own mind, actions, or emotions? Could he not hold that he is completely aware or appreciate, for example, that his strong desire to smoke is in conflict with staying healthy, and correctly see it as problematic for that reason? It would be strange to hold that the smoker above *only* resists smoking because it is the wrong action under the description 'smoking is wrong'. And even if the agent in question did hold the narrow view that he should not smoke because it is wrong, this would not be incompatible with him also holding the view that smoking is unhealthy. Nor does it necessarily follow that he will resent himself for smoking *or* not smoking.

Furthermore, why would a continent agent not be able to adjust his evaluation of himself or change his behavior in light of new evidence? For example, if recent studies were able to show that something the continent agent desired like red meat, for example, was healthy rather

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<sup>50</sup> Aristotle does not hold strong-headedness to be the same as continence. It only seems like continence (NE 1151b1–10).

than unhealthy, it seems perfectly reasonable that the continent agent can (or will) start eating red meat without regret. To demand that he resent himself for having the desire or continue to avoid red meat in spite of the evidence is severe. But Carr would require that the continent agent continue to be subject to self-loathing:

For while Aristotle's concept of continence might be considered a morally required developmental stage on the way to virtue—through which perfectly decent human beings may have to pass to genuine love of the good for its own sake—it may also be the psychological source and cause of some of the worst human excesses and vices of self-delusion, hypocrisy, and fanaticism... Indeed, the idea that much excessive moral zeal is often fuelled by projected self-hatred was clearly recognized long before psychoanalysis. (Carr 2009: p. 44)

The preceding passage suggests that the continent agent in the scenario given above will after living with the repressed desire for so long, *now* need, in at least some sense, to resent himself for previously having the (non-right) desire not to eat red meat—that is if he is continent. He regrets not acting well in the past. Otherwise it would simply be the case that the red-meat-desiring continent agent is virtuous, or non-continent, in light of the new evidence. But Carr would deny this of the continent agent. In this sense, the continent agent is taken to suffer permanent psychologically damage from the experience—where the moral ambivalence remains as residue. I am not sure that Carr's distinction can work without assigning the continent agent some type of neurosis.<sup>51</sup> This, of course, would pose serious problems regarding the *praiseworthiness* commonly attributed to continence. Thus, Carr's solution proves to be unsatisfactory.

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<sup>51</sup> Carr (2009) seems to suggest that the continent agent is neurotic on p. 46: "Thus seen, the trouble with neurotic agents—or the more seriously repressed continent—is that they lack the wisdom or self-knowledge needed for both honest recognition of what they cannot change and the courage to bear the ungratified desire that is the inevitable consequence of such recognition."

## 5. Scarre on Blurring the Virtue/Continenence Distinction

A fourth solution to the *problem of continence* might involve denying that a clear distinction between continence and virtue can be drawn. In his paper, "The Continence of Virtue," Geoffrey Scarre argues that the distinction between virtue and continence should be seen as one of degree rather than kind, where virtue is seen as continence matured and perfected by practice. For Scarre, the path to becoming virtuous is not direct or unbroken, but must make reference to an agent's struggle in getting there:

Virtuous people accomplish with ease what is taxing to the "merely continent" subject. This answer may still fail to satisfy if it makes virtuous behavior seem simply effortless to the virtuous. But it begins to look more promising if it places emphasis on the *development* of virtuous dispositions by the subject... The virtuous agent has arrived at where he or she now is on the basis of a sustained and laborious programme of character development. (2013: p. 6)

What Scarre is saying is that the division commonly drawn between the virtuous agent and continent agent is largely artificial. He claims, "On this account, the virtuous agent acts swiftly and unhesitatingly while his continent counterpart succeeds only after a struggle and some mental pain. But this account is *too neat*..." (Scarre 2013: p. 17). Not only is a neat division not possible, Scarre goes on to say that maintaining one's character, and overcoming temptation is an ongoing process, even for agents that are morally mature: "Hence, even people whose moral development is well advanced will never be wholly beyond the reach of temptation" (2013: p. 15). Acting rightly will never be *completely* effortless, "continence will always be required in the practice of virtue" (2013: p. 15). Thus, according to Scarre, an agent can never completely transcend from continence to virtue: continence will always remain a live option, and a necessary moral feature of the agent's character.



While the above is the case, Scarre holds that an agent that is engaged and committed to moral improvement will struggle less and less over time until he performs the right action more and more easily. Scarre claims:

It is unrealistic to suppose there to be a determinate threshold at which agents pass from being merely continent to being genuinely virtuous. While those who exhibit a high state of self-development are more fittingly labeled 'virtuous', the difference between them and less-advanced agents is a matter of degree rather than kind. The further on that a person is in her character development, the easier she should find it to act rightly in situations that provide temptations to deviate from right reason. But the relative ease with which she now copes with temptation should not be allowed to mask the hardness of the task she has performed to arrive at that point. (2013: p. 12)

For Scarre, there are a large number of developmental stages in between *mere* continence and *matured* continence that he refers to as proto-virtue (2013: p. 8). In becoming proto-virtuous, an agent through practice, and effort, starts to appreciate the value of performing the right action. This appreciation, in some ways, stems from the struggle that must be undertaken to get there. Scarre claims, "The former [matured continence] is aspirational in a way that the other [mere continence] is not. While the latter is prepared to put in what might be termed the 'occasional labor' to combat specific bad temptations, the former, more far-sighted, is engaged in an enterprise that requires effort of a different kind" (2013: p. 8). This different kind of effort involves a more refined understanding of what is at stake, and the difficulties involved. In becoming proto-virtuous, the agent performs the right action in a more systematic and effortless way; though, again, the nature of the proto-virtuous agent's proficiency is traceable to a gradual series of steps building to this point. So, while an agent can become more morally proficient with practice, and moral gradations are distinguishable, there is never a clear or full transition to what might be called *virtue*, in the strict sense. Ultimately, Scarre is able to get around the need to

draw the virtue/continence distinction by holding that such a move is neither possible nor necessary.<sup>52</sup>

Scarre's solution is interesting. I take it that the merely continent agent always has to struggle to perform the right action and the matured continent agent or "proto-virtuous" agent as Scarre calls him, struggles say half the time or only some of the time when performing the right action. I also presume Scarre holds (or would allow) that certain agents will come very close to virtue, and be able to act well most of the time, but not all of the time. The problem though involves the fact that it is still the case that the virtuous agent will act well in *all* cases, and the matured continent agent, or proto-virtuous agent, will not. This has a very similar structure to the harmony thesis. We could of course deny that virtuous agents exist. But this would prove to be very problematic for virtue ethics. Furthermore, it would still follow in evaluating particular cases regarding the proto-virtuous agent that he can act virtuously in one case (he experiences no inner conflict) or that he can act continently in another case (he experiences inner conflict). I don't see how this is a significant departure from our ordinary understanding of the harmony thesis.

Another problem with Scarre's solution concerns the fact that it does not necessarily follow that continence needs to be a developmental stage in becoming virtuous. For example, Gregory Trianosky, in his paper "Rightly Ordered Appetites: How to Live Morally and Live Well" points out that there is more than one way to reach virtue. He gives the example of an agent trying to achieve temperance in overcoming alcohol:

There are two distinct possible strategies for coping with alcoholism. On the one hand, one might rely on aversion therapy, together with efforts to develop alternative interests and pleasures.

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<sup>52</sup> While this move mimics Annas (2011) in some ways it differs in the fact that it denies that there can be a virtue/continence distinction at all. Annas on the other hand holds there to be some clear demarcation that takes place at a certain stage of moral development that can be linked to the flow experience. See Chapter 1, Section 4.

If such therapy is successful, then ultimately one's desire for alcohol will extinguish entirely. On the other hand, one might rely on the supportiveness and morally uplifting effects of membership in a group like Alcoholics Anonymous, to develop the self-control or strength of will necessary to combat unruly passions. (Trianosky 1988: p. 3)

Scarre is going to require that an agent have to go through a series of stages requiring struggle and inner conflict before he can reach proto-virtue or virtue. This seems to be unnecessary or avoidable in certain cases. For example, take the case of an agent that is naturally generous. It does follow that he will need to refine his character in order to move the natural virtue in question to full virtue. But this need not involve some type of internal struggle in the process. This fine-tuning will involve learning to give to the right people, at the right time, in the right amount, etc., not exercising the will. Contrary to Scarre, an agent that takes this alternative path will be praised just as much as an agent who had to struggle in order to get there. Thus, Scarre, in addition to this concern, and the previous argument, cannot adequately make sense of Stohr's problem case.<sup>53</sup>

## **6. Curzer and Idealization**

Finally, the notion that the virtuous agent is morally perfect might be attacked to escape the *problem of continence*. This move is made by Howard Curzer in his paper "How Good People Do Bad Things: Aristotle on the Misdeeds of the Virtuous." Curzer argues that it is unwarranted to hold that the virtuous agent need *always* acts virtuously. For instance, as Curzer points out, if a generous agent happens to give more or less money than he should due to epistemic limitations, misinformation, or even accidentally, he will not cease to be generous afterward (2005: p. 237). Virtue, at least if we follow Aristotle, is taken to be a very durable thing. Because the virtuous

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<sup>53</sup> That is, even if he outright rejected the harmony thesis.

agent is not omniscient, we must accept that out of character acts like the one above are at least possible and not necessarily character-destroying. As Curzer claims:

Indeed, it would be uncharitable to attribute to Aristotle the view that merely performing a few vicious acts disqualifies a person from being virtuous. Surely a person who performs thousands and thousands of just acts plus a tiny number of peccadilloes over the course of a lifetime is a just person. Similarly for the other virtues. Even the virtuous occasionally act out of character, i.e., wrongly. Even the virtuous occasionally have bad days. (2005: p. 240)

The above passage makes a good point. It would seem very counterintuitive to withdraw the status of being virtuous from an agent who slipped up on occasion, especially if the slip up was independent of his character. To be clear, the virtuous agent is not perfect with a capital *P*; he is not superhuman. Rather the virtuous agent is morally perfect. And sometimes being morally perfect will entail making the best of a bad situation.

There are two more things that can be said about the above passage. If we accept Curzer's intuition, and agree with the view he is putting forward, it will follow that a virtuous agent is an agent who *usually* acts rightly. But we should be mindful that as a normative standard we should not follow or imitate the virtuous agent in the sense that he slips up; but rather only allow or make exceptions for occasional, out of character acts. And if this is the case, as Curzer agrees, the standard is not the virtuous agent but rather the virtuous agent in so far as he acts rightly (2005: p. 235). This is an important point that I will come back to.

There is also another sense in which Curzer takes a virtuous agent to be capable of being imperfect yet virtuous. Sometimes on account of the very virtues he possesses an agent will be expected to act wrongly in a reliable way. Curzer refers to this defect as being virtuous-to-a-fault (2005: p. 242). Curzer gives the following example:

Greg recognizes that when it comes to helping others, he can do more good by giving to charities than by giving to needy people

directly... Greg frequently makes large donations to charities, but sometimes encounters beggars face to face. He knows that giving money directly to beggars is a mistake ... but because Greg is liberal, the plight of the beggar affects him deeply and he ends up giving them cash. (2005: p. 245)

This is an interesting case. Greg knows the right thing to do is not to give money to the beggars when he encounters them; but he does so anyway. But, we would not say that Greg is less virtuous or generous because of this. In fact, we are tempted to say the opposite. Furthermore, assuming we knew Greg, such actions would not be surprising or unexpected. But he acts wrongly nonetheless, and his "vicious acts arise from his virtues rather than despite them" (Curzer 2005: p. 245).

Intuitively we think Greg acts generously, or at least does not cease to be a generous person on account of committing what he takes to be a wrong act: giving money to the beggars rather than charity. In order to be generous it seems he must act other than he ought. The case of Greg, it should be pointed out, is very similar to the case of the company owner. But it is in reverse. It would be as if the company owner decided not to fire the employees after all and let the company go under. And surprisingly, following the same line of intuition we might say that this company owner acts virtuously. But we must be careful. When we start to separate virtue from right action like this it can get us into a lot of theoretical trouble. So I suggest in applying Curzer's theory to Stohr's counterexample we take a step back and simply consider whether or not holding the virtuous agent to be less than perfect is able to escape the problem case in a way that is consistent with the harmony thesis.

To get at a solution, we might first draw the virtue/continence distinction in the usual way and hold that the virtuous agent performs the right action easily and without inner conflict and the continent agent performs the right action painfully or with inner conflict. And to get

robustness we can say that this demarcation extends to every case. Applying Curzer's theory we might go on to now say that the virtuous agent *always* acts easily and without inner conflict but occasionally on account of this *fails* to act as he should; and the continent agent *always* acts painfully and with inner conflict but occasionally on account of this *succeeds* in acting as he should. Thus, the virtuous agent *usually acts as he should* but occasionally slips up and the continent agent *usually acts other than he should* but occasionally gets it right. And I take it that it would not be unreasonable to say the virtuous agent is morally better than the continent agent on account of getting it right most of the time.

Notice the tension between 'acting rightly' and 'acting as one should'. The tension, I think, comes from the original underlying intuition regarding the problem case. Our commonsense intuitions tell us that the company owner *should* be conflicted and that Greg *should* give the money to the beggar. But we also have to be aware that doing as one should comes into conflict with our standard of virtuous action in the first case and acting rightly in the second. Putting this tension aside, we could claim that acting easily and without inner conflict is the best means to being virtuous and works in most cases; while still allowing that in certain problem cases the virtuous agent will come up short, or fail. This solution, I take it, could allow us to hold onto the robust conception of the harmony these without forcing us to hold that the virtuous agent is inferior to the continent agent.

While I take Curzer's solution to be very promising, it is subject to some difficulties. The first, and most problematic, is that Curzer's solution seems to pass the buck on Stohr's counterexample. Roughly, if we follow Curzer: the *problem of continence* is not really a problem at all, or one we should be concerned with. It is simply a case where the virtuous agent cannot act as he should. This proves unsatisfying. We do, I take it, want to understand why the virtuous

agent cannot act as he should in Stohr's problem case. The counterexample, for instance, does not involve acting in a way that is self-defeating or the agent being in what Hursthouse refers to as a tragic dilemma: where performing the act strips the virtuous agent of his virtue.<sup>54</sup> By Curzer's own standards the virtuous agent can occasionally act viciously and still retain his status as a virtuous agent. Thus, Stohr's counterexample still needs explaining. Simply holding it as a problem case best avoided is not satisfactory.

The second difficulty with Curzer's solution is that it weakens the virtuous agent's normative status. If the virtuous agent is taken to occasionally not act as he should, in what sense can he function as the standard of right action in a reliable way? We might again claim that the virtuous agent is our normative standard only in so far as he acts virtuously, but how are we to know when the virtuous agent is acting virtuously? Stohr's counterexample is almost certainly not the only problem case there is, and it will be a huge disadvantage to virtue ethics if in certain cases it tells us something like, "you're on your own." This might have some justification behind it if the case is a genuine moral dilemma or epistemically there is no clear best solution. But in the case of the company owner saving the company is clearly the right action and the company owner's life or virtue—drawing on another set of intuitions—will not be destroyed. So, virtue ethics, to be a robust normative theory, needs to be able to account for the case. And Curzer's solution comes up short at offering an explanation, and thus, is unable to adequately account for Stohr's problem case.

## **7. Conclusion**

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<sup>54</sup> See Hursthouse (1999), Chapter 3.

None of the philosophers treated are able to provide an adequate solution to the *problem of continence*. Where do we go from here? At this point, a quick recap is in order. It was argued that because contemporary virtue ethics is taken to be expansive it cannot simply escape the *problem of continence* by ignoring or dismissing Stohr's problem case. And, because we accept the intuition that the company owner should be conflicted or pained in the situation, there is reason to reject the harmony thesis.<sup>55</sup> But without the harmony thesis the virtue/continence distinction cannot be drawn. With some implicit premises added the argument might be formulated in the following way:

1. If we accept our commonsense intuitions about Stohr's problem case, then we must reject the harmony thesis or hold the virtuous agent to be morally lacking in some way compared to the continent agent.<sup>56</sup>
2. We accept our commonsense intuitions about Stohr's problem case.
3. Therefore, we must reject the harmony thesis or hold the virtuous agent to be morally lacking in some way compared to the continent agent.
4. If we reject the harmony thesis, then the virtue/continence distinction cannot be drawn.
5. If we hold the virtuous agent to be morally lacking in some way compared to the continent agent, then contemporary virtue ethics is not a robust normative theory.
6. Therefore, the virtue/continence distinction cannot be drawn or contemporary virtue ethics is not a robust normative theory.

The authors discussed thus far, I argued, have largely been unsuccessful at defeating the above argument. In each case they have either failed to account for Stohr's counterexample or were unable to adequately draw the virtue/continence distinction. In the upcoming chapters, I

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<sup>55</sup> One unexamined solution to the *problem of continence*, of course, might simply be to reject our commonsense intuitions regarding Stohr's problem case, however strange such a move might seem. While this could work, it seems to be an undesirable move for contemporary virtue ethicists to make, especially in light of the widespread emphasis and attention paid to terms like compassion and callousness in recent years. While it is hard to track down the source of this particular enthusiasm, Foot (1977) and Hursthouse (1991) are likely contributors to the current popularity of such and like virtue ethical terms.

<sup>56</sup> We might also think of the *problem of continence* as stemming from three plausible claims that are conjointly inconsistent: (a) our commonsense intuitions about Stohr's problem case are correct, (b) the harmony thesis is true, and (c) the virtuous agent is not morally defective.



will solve the *problem of continence* by addressing both sides. In the process, I hope to show that the harmony thesis should be limited in scope, as well as propose an independent explanation capable of accounting for Stohr's problem case—while doing so in a way that is consistent with the commitments of contemporary virtue ethics.<sup>57</sup> Getting here will take some time. So, while tedious, it is best to start at the beginning. The next chapter will examine Aristotle's motivation for limiting the scope of the harmony thesis to temperance, and argue that he was justified in doing so.

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<sup>57</sup> If helpful to the reader, a rough sketch and foreshadow of my intended path of argumentation goes as follows: The virtue/continence distinction can be drawn but must be limited in scope to be viable, and contemporary virtue ethics is a robust normative theory but must rely on Aristotle's virtue of endurance in order to be so.

## Chapter 4: Continnence and Reason

### 1. Introduction

The problem brought to light by Stohr's counterexample and explored in Chapters 2 and 3, had to do with the failure of the virtuous agent—under the harmony thesis—to be appropriately disturbed at having to fire the employees. This in an important way had to do with the fact that we take the employees' well-being to matter in the case: saving their jobs is choiceworthy. But what do we mean by choiceworthiness? Section 2 looks to Aristotle in order to find an answer to this question and its relation to continence. We might also ask why the traditional view of continence must limit itself to bodily pleasures? Section 3 makes the case that this limitation is a necessary feature of what continence entails. What does continence entail? What is wrong with the continent agent? Sections 4 and 5 argue that it is not simply that the continent agent feels pain when he should not; but rather that he is subject to a *genuine* rational defect. Finally, Section 6 defends that continence cannot make sense of cases involving competing choiceworthy goods and must instead relegate itself to cases involving at least one non-choiceworthy good, before concluding in Section 7 that for the *problem of continence*, the virtue/continence distinction is not at issue, but something else.

### 2. Choiceworthiness and Continnence

What does it mean for a good to be choiceworthy? We might at first be tempted to simply equate choiceworthiness with the noble (the fine, *to kalon*). But I think this move is unjustified within the context of how we have been using the term choiceworthy. For, while even if it is true that all noble goods, actions, etc., are choiceworthy, the reverse does not necessarily follow. For instance,

while Aristotle would agree that paying respect to one's parents is choiceworthy, it seems very unlikely that performing basic familial duties is noble in itself, or at least not representative of 'the noble'. Furthermore, in order to be able to represent degrees of choiceworthiness—that is, certain goods are more or less choiceworthy than others—we must be able to point to some evaluative standard. If something is barely choiceworthy, for instance, we are hard-pressed to say that thing is noble. This of course might be a consequence of nobleness normally being ascribed to goods, actions, etc., that are ends in themselves or done for their own sake. But this gets us into a lot of trouble. How do you compare two things, each of which is to be pursued in and for its own sake? What do we say about the employees' mortgages in Stohr's case, which seem to have moral value but not intrinsic value?<sup>58</sup>

To avoid the above difficulties, I propose adopting an alternative standard for choiceworthiness. To determine if a good is choiceworthy, and its degree of choiceworthiness, we should look to its relation and responsiveness to reason. By responsiveness to reason, I am referring to the Aristotelian understanding of rationality, or Reason, as having the ability to command or exhort the nonrational part of the soul toward certain actions or objects. To be responsive to reason is to listen to what the rational part of the soul prescribes. Aristotle provides some evidence for this interpretation when he claims:

Or perhaps pleasures differ in species. For those from fine [noble] sources are different from those from shameful sources; and we cannot have the just person's pleasure without being just, any more than we can have the musician's without being musicians, and similarly in the other cases. (NE 1173b29–32)

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<sup>58</sup> We might follow Jennifer Whiting (2002) and hold choiceworthiness to correspond with instrumentally bringing about *eudaimonia*, or flourishing. But in the case of the company owner this would mean that her *eudaimonia* is realized outside of herself: in the employees. This possibility is controversial, and best steered clear of in this dissertation.

Aristotle here is pointing to the fact that certain pleasures and the source of those pleasures differ in kind from others. Not only this, Aristotle claims that these types of pleasures are responsive to the objects of a thing's proper activity, and that objects in the best relation to this proper activity are best (NE 1174b15–21). For our purposes, I think it is best to focus on what objects (and pleasures) specifically engage us as human beings. I will hold that an object to be pursued, a good, becomes more or less valuable to the extent that it engages the source of a human being's proper activity: reason.

Aristotle, more generally, is referring to the capacity of human beings to take a certain kind of pleasure that animals do not: "Each kind of animal seems to have its own proper pleasure, just as it has its own proper function; for the proper pleasure will be the one that corresponds to its activity" (NE 1176a3–5). If we take the proper function of a human being to be the exercise of his rational faculty, it seems that our evaluation of goods as valuable will need to make reference to reason in some way.<sup>59</sup> We could of course value things that are detached from or opposed to reason, but Aristotle would point out that we are simply in error: those things we value in fact are not valuable (NE 1176a20–24). And this extends beyond virtue in the strict sense. It is completely appropriate to respect one's parents, or seek honor from others; and hold doing so to be choiceworthy (see NE 1148a30–1148b17). At the same time, we could claim that the mentioned goods are in fact more choiceworthy than bodily pleasures, though less choiceworthy than moral virtue, and so on. We can say this is the case because moral virtue is more connected and responsive to the rational faculty than honor, and honor is more connected and responsive to the rational faculty than bodily pleasures; that is, moral virtue listens better to reason than honor,

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<sup>59</sup> The same would be the case with evaluations of character. For instance, Aristotle claims: "However, this [part] as well [as the rational part] appears, as we said, to share in reason. At any rate, in the continent person it obeys reason; and in the temperate and the brave person it presumably listens still better to reason, since there it agrees with reason in everything" (NE 1102b27–30).

which listens better to reason than bodily pleasures—mainly, we now have an evaluative standard to point to. While this interpretation is far from perfect, it does help make sense of intermediate goods like honor, power, wealth, social status, and physical beauty: those goods that are not necessary (nor virtue) but praiseworthy<sup>60</sup>; as well as the worth of contemplation at the other extreme.<sup>61</sup>

If we accept the proposed interpretation it also becomes relatively clear why Aristotle would hold things like food and sex as non-choiceworthy—that is having absolutely no worth in itself. Eating and reproducing are something we do in so far as we are animals. What makes something have worth has to do with it being distinctly human: that is, being representative of our rational nature in one way or another. And this includes respecting our parents, paying a mortgage, and presumably keeping a steady job. With this in mind, let us turn our attention back to continence.

Aristotle places excessive pursuit of choiceworthy objects like wealth, profit, victory, and honor in a *qualified* category of continence/incontinence because their objects are inherently rational:

There is no vice here [i.e., concerning wealth, profit, victory, and honor], for the reason we have given, since each of these things is naturally choiceworthy for itself, though excess about them is bad and to be avoided. Similarly, there is no incontinence here either, since incontinence is not merely to be avoided, but also blameworthy [and these conditions are not]. But because this way of being affected is similar to incontinence, people call it incontinence, adding the qualification that it is incontinence about this or that. Just so they call someone a bad doctor or a bad actor, though they would never call him simply bad, since each of these

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<sup>60</sup> Some examples of intermediate goods given by Aristotle would include: wealth, profit, victory, and honor. See NE 1147b25–31; 1148a23–28.

<sup>61</sup> In this dissertation, I think it is best to avoid getting caught up in the inclusivist/exclusivist debate concerning final ends. But I will point out that the interpretation offered, at the very least, is not directly inconsistent with either side.

conditions is not vice, but only similar to it by analogy. (NE 1148b3–11)

In the cases mentioned, the objects themselves are not criticized for being pursued. Nor are agents blamed "for feeling an appetite and love for them" (NE 1148a27). Instead, the problem lies in the particular way choiceworthy objects are pursued by the agent (in this case excessively). For example, the agent who overvalues or undervalues honor is normally characterized to be vicious: an *honor-lover* in the first case and *indifferent to honor* in the second case.<sup>62</sup> But this is not the criterion for continence/incontinence that Aristotle is after. For Aristotle, continence/incontinence is taken to be different from moral virtue and vice (NE 1145a35–1145b3). Though a mismatch in feelings may resemble excessive/deficient forms of a particular moral virtue, continence/incontinence is regarded as failing in a different way. The demarcation of continence as an intensity of feeling involving *too much* or *too little* pleasure or pain corresponding to the value of an object is unable to account for cases involving choiceworthiness. It is not that a good is more or less choiceworthy, but rather that it is choiceworthy at all. The connection of choiceworthy objects to the rational faculty prevents it from generating continence in the *unqualified* sense that Aristotle is looking for.

The same is the case with the emotions. While objects of emotion are far more removed from rational prescription than choiceworthy objects like honor or victory, they are still connected to reason. For example, Aristotle describes *incontinence in respect to anger* to be like an overly eager servant that mishears his instructions before setting about his task (NE 1149a25–31). Even though it (anger) fails in its purpose, it is still said to listen to reason to an extent (NE 1149a26–27). While an agent in this case may get too angry or angry at the wrong person, he acts according to reason and rightly in the sense that he has appropriate grounds to be angry in

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<sup>62</sup> See NE 1125b7–13.

the situation. Again, Stohr would be justified in pointing out that an agent who felt too much anger at a small insult is defective in his excessive reaction. But this is simply to say that the agent in question is subject to the moral vice of irascibility.<sup>63</sup> This is not what Aristotle is after in trying to establish the conditions of continence/incontinence. The intensity of the emotion is less relevant than the source: "For if someone is incontinent about spirit, [specifically referring to anger in the context] he is overcome by reason in a way" (NE 1149b2–3). Even if an agent grows excessively angry at the smallest slight, there seems for Aristotle some rational prescription, however small, justifying the reaction. Aristotle therefore seems committed to cases that are *completely* detached from reason in order to ascribe *unqualified* continence/incontinence.<sup>64</sup>

In order to get a purely irrational defect Aristotle must turn to the appetitive desires. The appetitive desires are concerned with necessary bodily needs, and are not held by Aristotle to be choiceworthy in themselves (NE 1147b25–31). This is not to say that all bodily desires are bad, but rather that it is possible for bodily desires to issue commands that conflict with reason. These desires are normally taken to involve objects of sense like sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, though Aristotle is careful to restrict continence/incontinence exclusively to taste and touch. The move, while seemingly required, is unilluminating. If it is indeed the case, as I have claimed, that Aristotle wants unqualified continence/incontinence to be completely disconnected from reason, it does follow that it must involve non-choiceworthy objects, of which the bodily pleasures are an example. But this does not explain why continence/incontinence should be limited to such

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<sup>63</sup> See NE 1125b25–31.

<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that Aristotle holds all spirited desire to be cases of qualified rather than unqualified continence/incontinence. For example, right after referencing the pursuit of intermediate goods like honor and gain as qualified cases of continence/incontinence Aristotle claims: "We speak of incontinence about spirit because of the similarity [to simple incontinence], and hence add the qualification that someone is incontinent about spirit, as we do in cases of honor or gain" (NE 1148b14–17).

cases. It only informs us that it is possible and consistent with Aristotle's commitments that continence/incontinence can be derived from the bodily pleasures.

It is important to try to understand why Aristotle decides to limit unqualified continence/incontinence to bodily pleasures, particularly taste and touch, rather than something else. What is his motivation? The answer to this question is not readily apparent. Besides a discussion concerning the necessity of bodily pleasures and their status as non-choiceworthy, much of the support is commonly just taken to be stipulated. The primary quote in question reads:

It is clear, then, that incontinence and continence apply only within the range of intemperance and temperance, and that for other things there is another form of incontinence, so called by transference of the name, and not simply. (NE 1149a20–25)

The above passage is clear evidence that Aristotle intended the virtue/continence distinction to be limited in scope. But simply accepting the stipulation and using it to block derivations of the virtue/continence distinction outside of cases of temperance proves to be unsatisfying. I believe Aristotle must have had some reason for doing what he did. In order to try to provide an explanation for Aristotle's tactic I suggest we move outside the confines of NE Book 7.

### **3. The Uniqueness of Taste and Touch**

What is unique about taste and touch? It cannot simply lie in the fact that the two are necessary, non-choiceworthy, or appetitive.<sup>65</sup> The other bodily pleasures of sight, hearing, and smell share in these features. It is also not the case that taste and touch are unique in being excessively

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<sup>65</sup> Aristotle ultimately reduces the pleasures of taste to touch, making it one sense rather than two. See NE 1118a25–1118b2. For convenience, I am treating taste and touch as two distinct senses, with their objects being food, drink, and sex, respectively.



pursued, or admitting of degrees. Aristotle readily acknowledges that objects of sight, hearing, and smell admit of excessive, deficient, or appropriate degrees. He claims,

For those who find enjoyment in objects of sight, such as colors, shapes, a painting, are called neither temperate nor intemperate, even though it would also seem possible to enjoy these things rightly or excessively and deficiently. The same is true for hearing; no one is ever called intemperate for excessive enjoyment of songs or playacting, or temperate for the right enjoyment of them. Nor is this said about someone enjoying smells, except coincidentally. (NE 1118a4–11)

This seems right. In terms of continence or temperance, we do not praise someone for his effort in resisting some smell. In fact, there is no need for self-control at all in such cases. The same would be the case with someone who decided to listen to music excessively. There is no defect here. So, the fact that taste and touch can be excessively pursued is not enough to demarcate it from sight, hearing, and smell.

Perhaps taste and touch are unique in being the most bestial of the bodily pleasures. For example, Aristotle claims, "The pleasures that concern temperance and intemperance are those that are shared with the other animals, and so appear slavish and bestial. These pleasures are touch and taste" (NE 1118a25–27). He goes on to claim, "And so the sense that concerns intemperance is the most widely shared, and seems justifiably open to reproach, since we have it insofar as we are animals, not insofar as we are human beings" (1118b2–5). The argument here is that taste and touch are senses that belong to a larger class of animals than sight, hearing, and smell; and that this is ground to hold these senses as more primitive than the others. This, I take it, will necessarily follow from Aristotle's commitments in *De Anima*,<sup>66</sup> but the distinction is somewhat trivial, or at least not very helpful for our purposes. Many animals, like lions and

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<sup>66</sup> See *De Anima* 413b5–7, where Aristotle claims: "The primary form of sense is touch, which belongs to all animals. Just as the power of self-nutrition can be separated from touch and sensation generally, so touch can be separated from all other forms of sense."

wolves, for example, share in the sense of sight, hearing, and smell in similar if not more sophisticated ways than humans.<sup>67</sup> The fact that they also possess the more basic necessary senses does little to show why continence/incontinence needs to be limited to temperance. Rather, it seems to amount to the claim that the most primitive senses are simply inferior to the less primitive.

We might expand the above argument to claim that touch—and taste: to be consistent—cannot share in thought in the same way as sight, hearing, and smell. But this claim seems to come into conflict with Aristotle's acknowledgment in NE Book 3 that the connoisseur is capable of differentiating complicated flavors in tasting wine and fine food (1118a28–31) and that the rubbing and warming of massage allows for fine discrimination of touch (1118b5–8). It is hard to deny that appreciating fine wine, for instance, has some intellectual component to it. Enjoying a massage is less convincing, but when we think about advanced feats of dexterity it seems to counter the claim that touch is incapable of sharing in thought, in the strict sense.<sup>68</sup> We might then say that taste and touch share in thought less than seeing, hearing, and smell. This is probably true, but Aristotle is not pointing to taste and touch in itself to make his claim, but more of a bestial version of these senses. For example, he excludes the example of the connoisseur above from intemperance. The same is the case with more sophisticated aspects of touch: "For indeed the most civilized of the pleasures coming through touch, such as those produced by rubbing and warming in gymnasia, are excluded from intemperance..." (NE 1118b5–7). So, in

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<sup>67</sup> I should note that Aristotle would likely deny this. Though his claim in *De Anima* 421a20–22 might call my intuition into question: "While in respect of all the other senses we fall below many species of animals, in respect of touch we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination."

<sup>68</sup> For example, see *Parts of Animals* 687a16–21 where Aristotle praises the hands: "Seeing then that such is the better course, and seeing also that of what is possible nature invariably brings about the best, we must conclude that man does not owe his superior intelligence to his hands, but his hands to his superior intelligence. For the most intelligent of animals is the one who would put the most organs to good use; and the hand is not to be looked on as one organ but as many; for it is, as it were, and instrument for further instruments." Also see *De Anima* 421a20–22.

order to get intemperance we must appeal to a less sophisticated form of taste and touch that does not share in thought, or is completely disconnected from the rational faculty.

The problem with the above move is the fact that each of the five senses admits of basic and more sophisticated forms. Seeing and hearing, for instance, can be elevated to appreciating art or listening to music. The horse for example can hear the same music as humans, but we want to say that for the horse it is not music but just a series of sounds. It is not clear why this is not the same scenario, or similar to that of the connoisseur of taste and touch above. The issue at hand is that the given argument does not tell us how taste and touch are different from seeing, hearing, and smell in itself. Rather, it seems to be the case that we are now drawing a new distinction between intellectually attuned perception and the five senses.<sup>69</sup> That is, instead of trying to differentiate taste and touch from the other senses we are now, it seems, trying to differentiate a special quality of human perception from animal perception. But this does not tell us why taste and touch are unique in themselves; only that intemperance will need to apply to a less sophisticated or non-intellectual version of it. But without simply begging the question, there is no reason why the same demarcation should not apply to seeing, hearing, and smell as well.

That being said, there are some odd claims that Aristotle makes that would allow us to get more out of the above argument. First, Aristotle privileges sight in humans above the other senses. For example, he claims in *Metaphysics* 980a24–26 that humans prefer sight above all the other senses: "For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer sight to almost everything else." Notice, that the claim is not simply stating that sight is better, less bestial, etc., but rather that we prefer seeing above the other senses.<sup>70</sup> Aristotle also

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<sup>69</sup> A discussion of Aristotle's account of *phantasia* or an analysis of his notion of "appearances" would prove helpful here. But *phantasia* is a notoriously difficult concept and beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>70</sup> This is made more clear when Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* 980a22–27: "All men desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above

makes the strange claim that animals, unlike humans, are pained by seeing and hearing (NE 1154b7–10). In fact, Aristotle claims that animals are constantly in pain: "For an animal is always suffering, as the natural scientists also testify, since they maintain that seeing and hearing are painful" (NE 1154b7–8). But from the phenomena, it seems pretty clear that humans *at least* are not constantly pained. As Aristotle contests, "However, we [humans] are used [to seeing and hearing] by now, so they say, [and so feel no intense pain]" (NE 1154b8–10). So from this, we might distinguish at least one distinct feature of human perception, in the basic sense, from animal perception: In humans, seeing and hearing are generally not painful activities. As far as the project in this section goes, we might go on to claim that seeing and hearing—and taking some philosophical liberties, smell—are *not* capable of causing humans pain, in itself. And by elimination, we might then say it is left open (or at least not excluded) that taste and touch are capable of causing humans pain, in itself.

While interesting, the above discussions have yet to provide an answer to the question of why taste and touch, in itself, is distinct from the other senses? In finding an answer to our question, I suggest that the distinctive mark of taste and touch is the fact that it is possible for these pleasures to cause pain in their absence or in the desiring of them. An excessive desire for pleasure is less to be faulted than the pain that results: "Pain disturbs and ruins the nature of the sufferer, while pleasure does nothing of the sort" (NE 1119a23–24). It is the potential destructive power of the pain generated by the pursuit of objects of taste and touch that separate these desires from sight, hearing, and smell. A desire for images, sounds, or smells does not produce pain in the same way. For instance, walking past blooming flowers without smelling them, we take it, will not require any serious struggle. This is not to say that pursuing objects of sight,

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all others the sense of sight... The reason is that this, [sight] most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things."

hearing, or smell cannot result in bad consequences; like failing to fulfill one's social responsibilities on account of staring too long at a mountain range. But the point is that the pain resulting from taste and touch are internal to the desire itself, not the consequences. Unlike sight, hearing, or smell, the desire for objects of taste and touch are capable of generating pain simply in the fact that they are desired.

The continent agent and intemperate agent are similar in the fact that they are both pained by not receiving objects of taste and touch: "Rather, someone is intemperate because he feels more pain than is right at failing to get pleasant things; and even this pain is produced by the pleasure [he takes in them]" (NE 1118b31–33). In searching for the defect of the continent agent, the above considerations become important. The mere presence of a desire (however strong) for a bodily pleasure is not enough to show that the continent agent is subject to a distinctive defect. In fact, Aristotle holds desires of this sort to be necessary and appropriate to an extent (NE 1154a10–20). What is not necessary is the presence of pain. In the case of bodily pleasures, Aristotle does not simply hold that some pain or a certain amount of pain is unnecessary, but rather *no pain is necessary*.<sup>71</sup> He further claims that, "It would seem absurd, however, to suffer pain because of pleasure" (NE 1119a5–6). By "absurd," I take Aristotle to mean contradictory or self-defeating. To be pained by the loss or absence of a hypothetical bodily pleasure is of course irrational in this sense. In this condition, the more an agent desired a pleasure of this sort, the more pained he would become. The continent agent's situation is most dire, in the sense that he, unlike the intemperate or incontinent agent, will never satisfy the conflicting desire in action. It

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<sup>71</sup> Aristotle provides support for this claim when he says, "Now the bodily goods allow excess. The base person is base because he pursues the excess, but not because he pursues the necessary pleasures; for all enjoy delicacies and wine and sexual relations in some way, though not all in the right way. The contrary is true with pain. For the base person avoids pain in general, not [only] an excess of it. For not [all] pain is contrary to excess [of pleasure], except to someone who pursues the excess [of pleasure]" (NE 1154a16–22).

will perpetually remain hypothetical, creating all the more reason that he should not desire the pleasure or be pained by its absence.

But, while it is true that not receiving objects of taste and touch can cause the continent agent to be pained in acting rightly, when by his own standards he should not be, this does not tell us very much about his distinctive defect. More is required to demarcate continence. Why is the continent agent pained at the loss of bodily pleasures like the intemperate agent when the virtuous agent is not? What is the source of the continent agent's irrational pain? The next two sections try to answer these questions.

#### **4. The Vicious Agent's Defect and Continence**

Before answering the question about the continent agent's defect, it will be useful to first look at the vicious agent's defect in the general sense. By seeing what's wrong with the vicious agent, I believe we can better understand the source of the continent agent's inner conflict. In making sense of the vicious agent's defect Terence Irwin's paper "Vice and Reason" proves incredibly helpful. Irwin argues that the standard view of the vicious agent as one who brings about the wrong ends in a harmonious way, or without inner conflict—neatly separating him from the incontinent agent—needs to be reevaluated. He instead claims that the vicious agent, in the extended view, is subject to inner conflict and regret. In making his argument, Irwin starts by pointing to the vicious agent's unstable source of evaluation:

The virtuous person attaches value to acting on a non-strategic conviction about what is best, apart from its usefulness in fulfilling his inclinations; and so he will not regret having acted on that conviction. On the contrary, he will be satisfied with himself, since he has done what he rationally cares most about doing. The vicious person lacks this reason for self-satisfaction; for he does not care about acting on any non-strategic conviction. The fact that he has acted on such a conviction is not a source of satisfaction; hence he

has no retrospective satisfaction opposing his dissatisfaction at how things turned out. The frustration of his inclinations is an undefeated reason for regret about his past actions. (Irwin 2001: p. 91)

Unlike the virtuous agent, the vicious agent acts according to his inclinations rather than an objective standard. This standard of personal inclination, while potentially unproblematic at the moment of acting, is subject to change over time. The fleeting nature of appetites makes the vicious agent liable to no longer value the past action or develop new inclinations that conflict with his original inclinations. Under such a view, the vicious agent's harmony is always threatened by his own sporadic desires.

The preceding claim might also be represented as a conflict between the vicious agent's current and future self:

The vicious person conceives himself as nothing more than a sequence of appetites and satisfactions; he takes his good to depend on what he happens to want at a particular time. While he exercises practical reason to the extent of taking measures to secure his future satisfaction, his reason for this is not the virtuous person's reason. His concern for his future depends on the persistence of the same desires and appetites; and since he does not adopt these for a reason, but just treats them as desires that he happens to have, he has no particular reason to be concerned about a future self that (for all he knows) may have changed quite significantly. (Irwin 2001: p. 91)

The source of inner conflict in the passage is the volatile nature of appetites. Because the vicious agent bases his conception of the good on his current inclinations, he can act against his own self-interest—even by his own standard of what is good. This is the source of his inner conflict. When his inclinations change he will then regret having done what he did. This is not to say that the vicious agent necessarily lacks a self, but rather that he has no reason to be concerned with his future self. Thus, there is no reason counting in favor of not act against his future inclinations and interests.

The above is further complicated by the fact that the vicious agent need not necessarily bring about the wrong ends. Because he is taken to act with decision and is capable of forming a rational plan to bring about what he holds to be valuable, the possibility of pursuing fine<sup>72</sup> action is not excluded to him. As Irwin claims,

This difference between virtuous and vicious people still allows the vicious person to have a conception of virtues and fine action. He can see, for instance, that it is good for him, given his inclinations, to cultivate some aspects of bravery and temperance (as Aristotle understands them) so that he can execute his longer-term aims. He can also regard some actions and traits of personality as fine, because they are admirable in their own right apart from any belief about their effects; perhaps, for instance, he takes this view of someone who displays his power and wealth in magnificent actions (as the vicious person conceives them). (2001: p. 86)

This is an interesting passage. It seems to be the case (without simply begging the question) that there is nothing to prevent the vicious person from performing fine actions, or even desiring to perform these types of actions. As was stated, the vicious agent simply values whatever inclination he has at the time. And when we think about intermediate choiceworthy goods like honor or power it becomes even more apparent that vicious agents will often desire and pursue these goods, sometimes at the expense of other gratifications. Furthermore, by the given view of viciousness, it is at least possible that a vicious agent could form a desire to develop some virtue in himself like honesty, for instance. Perhaps the agent in question is attracted to all the attention and praises honest people receive, and sees actually becoming honest to be the best strategy in securing this end.

If we accept the above possibility, there are problematic results. The first is that the agent discussed, who now has the desire to be honest, will according to the view given resent his past

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<sup>72</sup> Irwin (2001) primarily uses fine to mean 'choiceworthy' in the sense of 'the noble' as I have defined it in Section 2, but he also uses fine to mean 'choiceworthy' in the more general sense to mean 'something that is valuable'. In this section, I simply stick to the term fine instead of choiceworthy to avoid ambiguity or misinterpreting Irwin.



self for telling so many lies: it makes it harder to accomplish his current ends, and so on. He regrets being so bad. But if this is the case, he sounds a lot like the virtuous agent. That is, the agent's present desires support, or are in harmony, with bringing about the right action. The reverse would also be the case if honesty no longer appealed to him in the future. He would regret being so good, and so on. This issue at hand is that *merely* performing the wrong action or having the wrong desires is not enough to demarcate the vicious agent. It is at least possible that all that could change the next day, and he could perform the right action and have the right desires, if his inclinations steered him in that direction. But, I take it, we want to say that in the second case the agent is still vicious: there is something wrong with him; even if he happens to imitate the virtuous agent.

To make sense of the vicious agent we need to look beyond the fact that he performs the wrong action.<sup>73</sup> We need to look to the source of his inner conflict. The problem, according to Irwin, is that vicious agents, even when they pursue the fine, do not pursue it for itself, but rather for some other reason. They fail to appreciate the value of the action in itself:

These features of vicious people result from their refusing to form their rational decisions by consideration of what is fine; hence, Aristotle is entitled to treat them as essential to vice. He need not rely on the assumption (true or false) that vicious people always have some residual respect for morality that is the source of their disapproval of themselves. On the contrary, the less their respect for the outlook guided by considerations of the fine, the more liable they are to self-hatred. (Irwin 2001: p. 94)

The vicious agent's defect is that he is unable to see the fine as valuable in itself (even when he desires it). Rather, the vicious agent would pursue something like honesty because it is advantageous, gives him pleasure, etc. He holds his inclinations as the standard for what is right rather than a rational principle. Because of this, the vicious agent is unable to form a coherent

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<sup>73</sup> In the case, the vicious agent is taken to perform the wrong action easily or without inner conflict at a specific point in time to separate him from the incontinent agent.

life plan or basis for self-evaluation (Irwin 2001: p. 91). For Irwin, this points to a malfunction of his reasoning and the source of his inner conflict.<sup>74</sup>

I hold that something similar is going on with the continent agent. The continent agent lacks the resources to be able to appreciate fine action in itself. While he knows that health is more valuable than bodily pleasure, he cannot rationally determine how valuable health actually is. He only knows that bodily pleasure, as a non-choiceworthy good, has no value whatsoever and health has more value than that. And that is his sole basis for preferring the latter. Thus, while he can distinguish that temperance is preferable to intemperance, he cannot gauge the actual value of a temperate act over another. He lacks the capacity to determine the worth of an object outside of a right/wrong dichotomy.

Because the continent agent is unable to gauge the value of fine actions or choiceworthy goods it fails to move him in the same way that it would a virtuous agent. His inclinations continue to play a decisive role in a similar way that they do in the vicious agent pushing him in more than one direction. Thus, he fails to take the appropriate pleasure in acting rightly while at the same time experiencing pain in having to forego something that he wanted. And because he holds his decision as right—even though he cannot gauge the worth of either good—he will regret experiencing pain for something he actively avoided. In this way, the continent agent remains conflicted on account of his failure to be appropriately moved by the rational principle he set for himself. The next section looks at why a failure to be moved by the fine represents a defect in the rational faculty.

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<sup>74</sup> To be clear, the important feature of argument is that it is at least possible for the vicious agent to act as the virtuous agent would act in a harmonious way; and thus we cannot use harmoniously performing vicious actions as the sole standard for demarcating the vicious agent. Irwin suggests instead we look to the vicious agent's inner conflict over time to demarcate him. This works. But I will acknowledge that it is conceivable for some vicious agent to be truly committed to evil, and consistently form his life plan in a way to bring it about. This new *problem of viciousness*, or whether or not genuine viciousness can or needs to be demarcated from incontinent viciousness or continent viciousness is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

## 5. The Continent Agent's Defect and Pleasure

The continent agent is subject to the conflicted state of being both pained at the loss of a bodily pleasure while at the same time anticipates the future prospect of some good: for instance, health. So, in this way, we could hold him to care about his future self unlike the vicious agent.<sup>75</sup> But the continent agent is pained when he should not be unlike the virtuous agent. Why does acting rightly cause the continent agent to be pained? Ursula Coope makes headway in answering this question in her paper "Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?" Coope agrees that the continent agent is unable to grasp the fine but takes the argument further in claiming that a failure to take the appropriate pleasure in fine action is representative of a rational defect. In regard to the pleasure the continent agent takes in health, for example, she claims, "The pleasure [in acting continently] comes from the anticipation of some benefit that the action is expected to produce: the benefit of good health. It is *not* said to come from the awareness that, in acting that way, one is acting finely (or at least, as finely as possible, given the presence of bad appetites)" (Coope 2012: p. 153). The pleasure in question is pursued by the continent agent for a reason other than that it is fine; it is advantageous, preventative of pain later on, etc. And because future benefit like this is remote it fails to be properly felt in the presence of the countervailing pain of foregoing the appetite at hand.

The point at issue is that the continent agent, on account of his appetites, remains drawn to objects contrary to what is right. For instance, if gluttony were not detrimental to health the continent agent would pursue it. Coope makes this point when she claims:

This brings out the strength of the self-controlled [continent] person's bad appetites. The point, I take it, is not simply that the

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<sup>75</sup> Or at least we would hold him to care about maintaining some constant principle over time, like acting in a way to preserve health.

self-controlled person has an appetite for some pleasure that reason forbids him to pursue. The point is, rather, that the self-controlled person's appetitive desire is so strong that he would enjoy acting on it, even though he was aware that this was not the right thing to do. (2012: p. 154)

The fact that the continent agent would take pleasure in actions contrary to what reason prescribes is an indication that he does not appreciate fine action for itself. To take pleasure from shameful or base objects is something the virtuous agent would not do. Not only is this the case, we take it that the virtuous agent would be pained by such actions (Coope: 2012: p. 154; NE 1119a12–15). Thus, both *not* taking appropriate pleasure in the fine and taking pleasure in what is shameful would represent some failure in the continent agent. Coope reinforces this point:

Taken together, these remarks suggest that the self-controlled person is not sufficiently pained by the shameful of bad action: he would enjoy it, in spite of its shamefulness... Nor is he sufficiently pleased by the fineness of good action: he finds good action painful, in spite of his awareness that it is the right action ... and any pleasure he gets from good action only comes from the anticipation of a good product such as health. (2012: p. 154)

According to Coope, the above features characteristic to the continent agent point to a rational failing on his part. The reason that it is a rational failing, for Coope, concerns that fact that the appreciation and discernment of the fine needed to take pleasure in it is attributed to reason or the rational faculty. When pleasure is not experienced, or worse, the agent is pained, it is an indication that the rational part is not working properly, or tracking the wrong objects. Coope makes this point:

Why suppose that the pleasure taken in the fineness of an action must be a pleasure of the rational part? The answer, I shall argue, is that Aristotle takes the capacity to discern the fineness of an action to be a rational capacity, and he assumes that if the capacity to discern Fness is rational, the pleasure taken in Fness must be a pleasure of the rational part... (2012: p. 155)

Discernment of the fine, for Coope, is taken to be a feature of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*. It is intellectual as well as perceptual. In seeing fine action as proper or fitting, the virtuous agent is capable of appreciating it in itself as the right thing to do, in accordance with reason, and for that reason alone.

According to Coope, in order to appreciate the fineness of an action fully an agent must take the appropriate pleasure in that action. The appropriate pleasure in a way completes the activity:

From this, I think, it follows that the pleasure taken in this kind of fineness is a rational pleasure. Though Aristotle does not explicitly endorse this view, it is strongly suggested by his remarks about the relation between pleasure and perceptual or intellectual activity. Aristotle describes the pleasure taken in Fness as a kind of completion of the activity of perceiving or grasping Fness. (Coope 2012: p. 156)

What Coope is getting at is the idea that appreciating the fine is more than a belief about the rightness of the action. It is meant to incorporate a full understanding of the value of that action as fine. And for Coope full understanding "would require a kind of pleasurable engagement" (2012: p. 158).

Because the continent agent does not take the appropriate pleasure in performing the right action, it shows that he is unable to understand or grasp its fineness fully. That is not to say that the continent agent cannot see the right action as appropriate in the circumstances. Rather, the continent agent, because he is unable to take the proper pleasure in engaging the right action, shows himself to be subject to a rational flaw. Coope explains:

Since it is, in the virtuous person, the rational part that takes pleasure in fine action, the failure to take this kind of pleasure is a failure of the rational part. The self-controlled person is able to discern what is appropriate to do in particular situations, and in this he has an ability that is similar to that of the practically wise person. But unlike the practically wise person, he does not take

pleasure in the fineness of appropriate action. It is because of this rational failing that he falls short of practical wisdom. (2012: p. 157)

From what was discussed, we should be able to demarcate the continent agent from the virtuous agent. The continent agent possesses a rational flaw contributing to his inability to fully discern or appreciate the fineness of an action. That is, his rational flaw prevents him from properly apprehending the value of fineness in itself, or recognizing the full worth of its objects. To be clear, the continent agent does pick out and is capable of seeing fine actions or objects as fine, in that they are to be taken as having value, *simpliciter*. So he is not irrational or arational in the same sense as the vicious agent. But the failure of the continent agent to take rational pleasure in fine action prevents him from *fully* engaging the fine for its own sake. So, while the continent agent is capable of setting and following a rational principle, he is less than fully rational, and thus does not possess practical wisdom in the sense that the virtuous agent possesses practical wisdom.

In support of the above claim, we might also think of the continent agent's defect as representative of a disconnect between the rational and nonrational (appetitive) part of the soul. Aristotle takes the function of the rational part of the soul to at least partly consist in persuading the nonrational part to follow its prescriptions (NE 1102b29–35). Because the rational part is unable to persuade the nonrational part to (fully) agree with its prescriptions in the continent agent, it points to some malfunction or deficiency of that faculty in performing its function.

Coope explains:

Though the nonrational part cannot itself discern fineness, it is responsive to pleasure. The (rational) enjoyment of fine action (or of the prospect of fine action) is just what would be needed to 'persuade' the nonrational part, and to rid the soul of strong and bad appetites. Thus, because the self-controlled person does not take proper (rational) pleasure in the fineness of right action, her

rational part cannot perform one of its essential functions: it cannot 'persuade' her nonrational part to agree with it. This, then, is a further respect in which the self-controlled person's rational part is at fault, and it provides a further reason for denying that the self-controlled person is practically wise. (2012: p. 160)

Under Coope's view, rational pleasure is a tool utilized by reason to persuade the nonrational part of the soul to agree with its decision. While the nonrational part of the soul cannot discern the worth of the fine, or appreciate it in itself, it does respond to the pleasure that is produced (indirectly) by the intellectual activity of discernment and appreciation. While it is unclear whether Coope—in regard to this specific argument—takes this rational pleasure to be of greater quantity or intensity than the countervailing pleasure to do otherwise, or simply takes it to contribute or add to the already existing pleasure or reasons counting in favor of performing the right action, it is apparent that an agent who lacked this capacity would be less successful, or incapable of fully persuading the nonrational part of the soul to accept the rational part's prescriptions. The continued presence of conflicting desires in the continent agent is indicative that his rational part is unable to fully persuade the nonrational part, and thus this failure is to be attributed to a rational defect.<sup>76</sup> To sum up, on account of a prior rational defect, the continent agent cannot discern or appreciate the fine fully, which in turn prevents him from taking the rational pleasure in acting rightly that would be needed to quell countervailing strong or bad appetites, or persuade the nonrational part. Thus, as a result, the agent is pained in acting rightly; and this is what continence is.

## 6. Reintroducing Choiceworthiness

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<sup>76</sup> Coope (2012) is unclear on whether or not persuasive failure between the two parts of the soul is a minor rational defect or a major rational defect. For our purposes, I think the more important issue is that the continent agent is rationally defective, not the extent to which he is defective.

I have argued in the previous two sections that the continent agent fails to appreciate the fine (contributing to his pain when acting rightly) and that this is representative of a rational defect on his part. This section goes further to argue that the continent agent is unable to differentiate the worth of choiceworthy goods in the more general sense. (Remember, 'fine' in the sense that it has been being used is representative of something like 'the noble', or goods that are ends in themselves.) In the more general sense, I believe we can talk about the employees' jobs or mortgages in a coherent way; even though they are pursued for some further end. The argument in this section is that the continent agent cannot make sense of cases involving competing choiceworthy goods.

To start, it should be clear that the continent agent by definition experiences inner conflict or pain when performing the right action. If this is not the case, then we really have no idea what continence is.<sup>77</sup> So, I think it is necessary to rule out cases where no pain is present.<sup>78</sup> But there are a large number of cases where pain might be felt. Section 3 argued that not receiving objects of taste and touch are capable of causing pain in the continent agent. Because taste and touch are bodily pleasures, and bodily pleasures are taken by Aristotle to be non-choiceworthy, the pain in the case would be in response to a non-choiceworthy good. Alternatively, we take it that the pain the continent agent experiences cannot be in response to performing the right action in isolation—where the temptation of bodily pleasures is absent.<sup>79</sup> Thus, if we accept the analysis, it follows that the desire for non-choiceworthy goods alone is (at least) capable of causing the continent agent to be pained.

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<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 2 for a defense of this claim.

<sup>78</sup> It should be pointed out that there is some space allowed for holding the continent agent to be pained without inner conflict (in particular, see my discussion of Broadie's solution; and to a lesser degree Stark, in Chapter 3). But this fails to adequately account for the problem case.

<sup>79</sup> To be thorough, it is at least conceivable for an agent to always be pained at doing the right thing in the absence of competing considerations. But this condition would be far worse than continence.



Sections 4 and 5 argued that the continent agent is unable to appreciate or discern fineness, and that this can be attributed to a defect in his rational faculty. Connecting this to my claims in Section 2, we might say that because choiceworthiness (in the general sense) must make reference to the rational faculty, and objects are more or less choiceworthy to the extent of their relation and responsiveness to reason, the continent agent's faulty rational faculty would also fail, or be defective at discerning or appreciating choiceworthy goods in some way.<sup>80</sup> And if this is the case, because the fine is a category of the choiceworthy, we could hold that if the continent agent is unable to properly discern or appreciate choiceworthy goods it will follow that he would be unable to appreciate fine goods. Thus, we might simply claim that the continent agent is unable to discern or appreciate choiceworthy goods.

It was also argued in Section 5 that part of the continent agent's failure to appreciate the fine had to do with his inability to take the proper pleasure in it. So even though the continent agent is able to pick out the fine, and see it as valuable, or as the right thing to do, he is unable to fully understand or appreciate it for its own sake on account of his inability to properly engage it: by taking a rational pleasure in it.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, as Coope was keen to point out, the nonrational part will not be properly persuaded by the rational part to abandon "its strong and bad appetites."<sup>82</sup> If strong and bad appetites remain, it will follow that these appetites are capable of causing the continent agent pain.<sup>83</sup> Thus, if the continent agent is unable to take the proper

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<sup>80</sup> I will admit that I can only assume this to be true. But unless 'the fine' requires some unique or limited category of reasoning, the rational faculty in the general sense should be able to pick out both choiceworthy and fine goods (where remember, the fine is a category of the choiceworthy) if it is functioning properly.

<sup>81</sup> I should note that I am assuming the continent agent will need to pick out the right action (or object) as such. If this were not the case then the continent agent could presumably act arbitrarily or viciously; diminishing the praiseworthiness of the status. See Chapter 1 for some support of this claim; in particular the discussion of Hursthouse's third condition: mainly, acting for the right reason.

<sup>82</sup> See Section 5 for a reminder of Coope's argument.

<sup>83</sup> If by strong and bad we mean objects of taste and touch, this should follow from my argument in Section 3, though Coope is unclear on what she means by "strong and bad."

pleasure in the fine that is needed to rid him of bad appetites, and these bad appetites are taken as non-choiceworthy, then the continent agent is able to be pained by not pursuing a non-choiceworthy good in cases involving a competing non-choiceworthy good and choiceworthy good—where the fine is taken to be choiceworthy.

Finally, because it was stipulated that the continent agent will not be pained when performing the right action in itself, if he is pained the pain must come from somewhere else. Presumably, this pain will have to come from not receiving a choiceworthy good or not receiving a non-choiceworthy good. But it would seem to follow that because the continent agent's rational defect results in him being unable to properly discern the fine, and take pleasure in the fine, it would prove unfit for him to be pained by these objects on account of the fact that he cannot take the appropriate rational pleasure in them. If the continent agent should not be pained by something he cannot appreciate or take pleasure in, then he should not be pained at the loss of choiceworthy goods. If this is the case, the only way to consistently account for the continent agent's pain is to attribute it to a non-choiceworthy good that he can appreciate independently of his rational faculty, in virtue of his necessary animal nature.<sup>84</sup> Thus, there is good reason to limit continence to cases that involve at least one non-choiceworthy good, of which temperance is a clear instance.

### **7. Conclusion: Is the *Problem of Continence* a Problem for Continence?**

From what was argued, we can now understand why the scope of the harmony thesis needs to be limited to temperance. Contrary to Stohr, the defect in the continent agent does not concern the fact that he possesses *too much* or *too little* pain, but rather that he possesses *any* pain at all. Any

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<sup>84</sup> See Section 3 for a reminder of this argument.

disturbance or pain, however small, is necessarily indicative of irrationality. But while I reject Stohr's proposed solution and demarcation of continence, her problem still remains. We do intuitively feel that an agent in the company owner's situation *should* be pained at the loss of something choiceworthy. Where I disagree with Stohr is in labeling the case of the company owner as a problem for continence. Something other than continence is at issue. This, according to my argument, follows because continence can *only* apply to cases where pain is felt at the loss of a non-choiceworthy good. The case of the company owner, on the other hand, involves competing choiceworthy goods. Thus, a discussion of continence is out of place in finding a solution to the *problem of continence* because it cannot respond to cases like Stohr's. In addressing problem cases involving competing choiceworthy goods, I suggest we instead look outside of continence toward a related, yet distinct concept in Aristotle: the virtue of endurance.

## Chapter 5: Using Aristotle's Virtue of Endurance to Solve the Problem of Continence

### 1. Introduction

Endurance was not an uncommon concept in the ancient world, operating as a theme in Greek tragedy<sup>85</sup> and receiving serious treatment in Plato's *Laches*. But in most cases, endurance is treated *as* or *as part of* the virtue of courage. This chapter argues that Aristotle uses endurance in a special way, and that he takes it to be a virtue in its own right. I start, in Section 2, by trying to provide an account of Aristotle's concept of endurance from what is available in the texts. Sections 3 and 4 use this account of endurance to help make sense of mixed action, and establish its importance regarding competing choiceworthy goods. In Section 5, I go on to establish endurance as a moral virtue and mean, with opposing vices that I refer to as *moral apathy* and *moral squeamishness*; as well as placing *hardness* and *softness* (regarding pain) as analogues to continence and incontinence. Section 6 uses the given demarcation to solve the *problem of continence*, before suggesting a revised formulation of the harmony thesis in Section 7, and concluding in Section 8.

### 2. Endurance: A Rudimentary Account

Aristotle's concept of endurance is largely neglected by contemporary scholars. The reason for its neglect is not entirely clear, though the scarce treatment of the concept in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is likely a contributing factor. Still, there is evidence that Aristotle took endurance seriously, stating its delineation from continence as the third major task of NE Book 7:

We must consider first, then, [1] whether incontinent people act knowingly or not, and in what sense knowingly; then [2] with what

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<sup>85</sup> For example, see the works of Euripides and Sophocles.

sorts of object the incontinent and continent man may be said to be concerned (i.e. whether with any and every pleasure and pain, or with certain determinate kinds), and [3] whether the continent man and the man of endurance are the same or different; and similarly with regard to other matters germane to this inquiry. (1146b5–15)<sup>86</sup>

Of the three major tasks stated in the passage, the first is widely covered by scholars, the second less so (though I hope to have given it some treatment in the previous chapter), and the third remains undeveloped by Aristotle. While Aristotle never delivers on his promise to complete the third task of delineating endurance in the extant works, I believe there is enough mention of the concept to reconstruct a rudimentary account capable of meeting the needs of the current problem.

To start, endurance is claimed to be primarily concerned with pain (NE 1150a10–15), though it seems capable of assisting temperance in some cases: “The temperate man all men call continent and disposed to endurance” (NE 1145b14–15). It is also associated with courage, helping agents both face and resist the pains involved in fearful situations (NE 1117a30–35). Endurance admits of a defective state referred to as *softness* by Aristotle. There are at least two different types of softness that are demonstrated. The first type involves not being able to overcome the same pain that most men could tolerate in the situation (NE 1150b13–16). An agent, in this case, is taken to be unable to resist the same amount of pain that most men are able to resist, or experiences more pain than most men would in the situation. The second type of softness involves choosing to avoid pain, rather than being prone to be defeated by pain. Aristotle uses the example of someone who drags his cloak rather than carry it to represent the latter type of softness (NE 1150b1–6). The lover of amusement is also claimed to be soft in a similar way: “The lover of amusement, too, is thought to be self-indulgent [intemperate], but is

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<sup>86</sup> All references to Aristotle in the chapter are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. (Previous chapters used Terence Irwin's 1999 translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.)

really soft. For amusement is relaxation, since it is rest; and the lover of amusement is one of the people who go to excess in this” (NE 1150b16–18). Amusement in this case is taken to be less about enjoyment and more about avoiding the pains required of labor. What Aristotle is trying to get at here is the fact that an agent who excessively avoids work to seek relaxation does not necessarily do so on account of an inability to tolerate the pain involved. Rather, he chooses to avoid pain *simpliciter*. In the same way, the man who drags his cloak could lift and successfully carry it if he wanted to, but avoids doing so. He is simply opposed to experiencing pain, however small.

The second type of softness might also be framed as allowing oneself to suffer something shameful or act shamefully on account of pain. Aristotle seems to suggest this when he points out in the above case that the agent who drags his cloak is content with being perceived as an "invalid" (NE 1150b1–6). Some support for this view can be found in *Rhetoric* 2.6:

[W]e feel shame at such bad things as we think are disgraceful to ourselves or to those we care for... [including] refusing to endure hardships that are endured by people who are older, more delicately brought up, of higher rank, or generally less capable of endurance than ourselves; for all this shows effeminacy [softness]. (1383b15–1384a5)<sup>87</sup>

If we read the above passage as concerning itself with endurance in the same sense as the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it should follow that an agent with endurance, unlike the soft agent, would be willing to face pain to avoid something shameful. This is an important point that I will return to in Section 3.

There is also a deficient state of endurance in which an agent is less pained than he should be or faces pain unnecessarily. To get a description of this type we must turn to the *Eudemian Ethics*:

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<sup>87</sup> I am treating effeminacy here as a type of softness. My justification for this move comes from NE 1150b3–4, where Aristotle claims: "for effeminacy too is a kind of softness."

Further, one who can endure no pain, even if it is good for him, is soft; one who can endure all pain alike has no name literally applicable to him, but by metaphor is called hard, patient, or ready of submission. (1221a28–31)

We can see that Aristotle has a discrimination of intensity and which pains to face in mind here. The enduring agent can tolerate the same pain as most men, feels the appropriate amount of pain toward the loss of something valuable, and will not purposely face just any pain, but only those pains that are worth facing. I take it that Aristotle holds choiceworthy goods to be worth facing pain over. This is both in the pursuit of choiceworthy goods and at their loss. What we might call a *hard agent* can seemingly go wrong in at least two ways: by feeling less pain than most men in the situation, specifically, at the loss of choiceworthy goods, and his willingness to indiscriminately face (any) pain for something non-choiceworthy.

Though there is only a single paragraph referencing endurance in the *Magna Moralia*, it provides a clear answer to the basic question of whether the continent man and man of endurance are the same or different:

Are self-control [continence] and endurance the same thing? Surely not! For self-control has to do with pleasures and the man of self-control is he who masters pleasures, but endurance has to do with pains. For the man of endurance is he who endures and undergoes pains. (1202b29–32)<sup>88</sup>

The delineation of endurance proves to be more complicated. While continence and endurance are not the same, Aristotle seems to draw parallels between the two concepts. Both are claimed to be good and praiseworthy (NE 1145b8–10). The opposing concepts are also taken to be similar. For example, he claims that incontinence is opposed to continence in the same way that

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<sup>88</sup> I am taking self-control to be equivalent to continence in this passage. But other interpretations are possible. The passage continues: “Again, lack of self-control and softness are not the same thing. For softness and the soft person is he who does not undergo pains—not all of them, but such as any one else would undergo, if he had to; whereas the incontinent man is he who is not able to endure pleasures, but succumbs to them and lets himself be led by them” (1202b32–36).

softness is opposed to endurance (NE 1150a32–34). This analogy is not completely developed by Aristotle but would seem to point to the first type of softness, where an agent is overcome by an overwhelming amount of pain in the situation. The comparison would then be an agent that is overwhelmed by pleasure. The continent and enduring agent then would be capable of overcoming the corresponding pleasure or pain, respectively.

While it is a convenient analogy, there are admittedly some differences between the two types of agents. In the case of continence an agent is said to conquer pleasure, while in the case of endurance an agent resists pain. These for Aristotle are different things: “For endurance consists in resisting, while continence consists in conquering, and resisting and conquering are different, as not being beaten is different from winning” (NE 1150a34–36). Resisting is taken to entail an agent passively accepting the presence of a pain, while conquering involves an agent actively trying to drive a pleasure out or nullifying it. This is why Aristotle claims that continence is “more worthy of choice than endurance” (NE 1150a35–36). We must be careful here concerning what Aristotle means by “more worthy of choice.” He is not saying that acting continently is superior or more difficult than acting from endurance. This is supported by Aristotle’s claim that “it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant” (NE 1117a33–35). Instead, choiceworthiness here has to do with voluntariness. Endurance contains an involuntary aspect that continence lacks. The enduring agent would prefer not to experience the pain, but does so anyway in order to gain some choiceworthy good at a later time. The continent agent on the other hand chooses to conquer the conflicting pleasure.

### **3. Endurance and Mixed Action**



The given delineation provides us with some insight regarding Aristotle's discussion of mixed action: "For such actions [mixed actions] men are sometimes even praised, when they endure something base or painful for great and noble objects gained" (NE 1110a20–21). Though there is a sense of involuntariness involved in facing pain, it is also voluntary in the sense that the agent resists or faces the pain in order to possess some choiceworthy good. The example Aristotle gives is of a ship captain that has to throw his cargo overboard during a storm to save his ship (NE 1110a8–13). The pain the captain endures is appropriate and praiseworthy in the sense that its object is something choiceworthy: saving the ship. If the pain were experienced for its own sake or for something non-choiceworthy, it would not be appropriate or praiseworthy in the same way. This helps explain how agents can be pained while acting virtuously at the same time. The clearest example of this can be found in Aristotle's discussion of courage: "Death and wounds will be painful to the brave man and *against his will* [italics mine], but he will face them because it is noble to do so or because it is base not to do so" (NE 1117b5–10). The agent in this case does not choose to experience the pain, nor conquers the pain, but simply endures it.

Stohr's company owner should come to mind here. Like the ship captain, the company owner must act in response to external circumstances she has no control over. Just as the ship captain would never throw his cargo overboard under normal circumstances, the company owner would never fire the employees under normal circumstances. Both act only to bring about something more choiceworthy (saving the ship or saving the company) at a later time. I am willing to go as far as to claim that the case of the company owner is an example of mixed action. This is not to say that Stohr's argument needs to be limited to mixed action. The force of her argument allows for a broader scope. I will return to this point.

There is also another sense of mixed action that is worth discussing. For Aristotle, an agent should also be willing to endure pain in order to avoid doing something shameful. That is, avoiding a shameful act is in some aspect choiceworthy or good in itself, even if a choiceworthy object is lost by avoiding that action. This aspect of mixed action is brought to light in Robert Heinaman's deft paper "Rationality, Eudaimonia, and Kakodaimonia in Aristotle." Heinaman's paper starts by calling into question whether Aristotle is a strict eudaimonist about value. He claims:

On the eudaimonist view, the impossibility of eudaimonia means that nothing in my life can have any value. In that case it cannot be worth living. So on the eudaimonist view Aristotle should say that the impossibility of eudaimonia makes life not worth living. But, on the other hand, Aristotle says that the good man will endure with nobility the misfortunes that destroy eudaimonia, and he does not suggest that this does not hold in those cases where the misfortune is severe enough to render future eudaimonia impossible. (Heinaman 1993: p. 36)

The passage is pointing to Aristotle's view that the virtuous agent will never be miserable, even if the possibility of happiness is taken from him due to external circumstances he has no control over (see NE 1101a34–1101b8; *Politics* 1332a8–27). Heinaman goes on to ask why this is the case. Why shouldn't the virtuous person be miserable in such hard cases? With eudaimonia out of reach, why even care?

The answer to the above questions, according to Heinaman, concerns the idea that it is possible to act rightly under the circumstances. What would make the virtuous person miserable, and make him truly unhappy, would be to act shamefully; as the vicious person would act. To act in this type of way would subject the agent in question to what Heinaman calls *kakodaimonia*, or wretchedness. He claims, "Virtue of character is not justified only if it promotes eudaimonia. Even when virtue fails to promote eudaimonia in specific cases it is justified by its prevention of

wretchedness (kakodaimonia). The truly virtuous man who has lost eudaimonia due to great misfortune will never suffer the worst and become wretched 'for he will never do what is hateful and base'" (Heinaman 1993: p. 55). What Heinaman is getting at is the idea that avoiding kakodaimonia is choiceworthy in itself. Becoming wretched is a worse condition than having everything (external) taken away or losing the possibility of happiness. Even when virtuous action is diminished it "need not be reduced to zero" (Heinaman 1993: p. 45). This helps explain the Aristotelian position that the courageous person would be willing to die rather than act cowardly (see NE 1117b10–15). While dying surely reduces that agent's positive potential for virtue, it might be said that performing a vicious action is negative to a greater degree. In fact, Heinaman says kakodaimonia is "the worst affliction that a human being can suffer" (1993: p. 56). So, in terms of acting rightly, avoiding the condition of wretchedness could be said to be preferable and more valuable than any potential opportunity for virtue.

Referencing courage Heinaman claims, "Even if he [the virtuous agent] cannot achieve the greatest human good he may still act rationally to avert the greatest evil" (1993: p. 55). The idea being brought to the surface, I believe, has to do with the non-ideal nature of mixed actions. The greatest good would be achieved if nothing of value had to be sacrificed. But in the case of mixed action this is not possible, and something will need to be lost. Although, in these types of situations there is, as was said, the option to avoid doing something shameful or wretched, which if we take the argument seriously, will supersede the worth of either of the competing goods. That is, the virtuous agent's action "must *not* be an example of an intrinsic evil" (Heinaman 1993: pp. 46–47). This might be called the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement. To see this, think of Aristotle's ship captain again. There is nothing inherently shameful or wretched about throwing the cargo overboard. The same would follow with firing the employees. So both examples, while

mixed actions, pass the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement. But what about the case of Agamemnon?

In Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter to ensure the safety and glory of the Greek fleet. This I take to be an example of mixed action. Assuming Agamemnon cares about his daughter, something choiceworthy is being sacrificed for the greater good or something more choiceworthy: the fleet. But we *do* take the case of Agamemnon to be different from Aristotle's ship captain and the company owner. Why? This, I hold, has to do with the fact that Agamemnon has to murder his daughter to bring it about. He has to do something shameful. As such, it violates the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement and should not be done. The thing to be made clear is that there is a second type of mixed action that needs to be responded to, albeit briefly.<sup>89</sup> An agent, like Agamemnon, can presumably act to bring about a lesser evil as well as a greater good. But this, for Aristotle, will not be the right action in the case. I return to this example in the next section.

The point is that, while it is indeed possible that agents can find themselves needing to react in unsavory cases (i.e., Agamemnon), where they must do something base to prevent a greater evil, the virtuous agent is not subject to these types of mixed actions. There is no lesser evil for the virtuous agent. In terms of acting rightly, a virtuous agent will never intentionally perform an evil or shameful act; however small. And this is what the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement is pointing to. But, again, there is also a class of mixed actions that do not require an agent to act shamefully, where a lesser good needs to be sacrificed for a greater good, and pain is necessary and appropriately felt in bringing it about (i.e., Aristotle's ship captain, Stohr's

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<sup>89</sup> That is, if we want virtue ethics to be a robust normative theory capable of responding to hard cases other than Stohr's company owner.

company owner). These are the cases of mixed action that the virtue of endurance concerns itself with.

#### **4. Endurance, Mixed Action, and Choiceworthiness**

If we accept the claims in the previous sections, it will follow that a virtuous agent be willing to face pain in bringing about choiceworthy goods and in avoiding something shameful. But this does not simply entail a willingness to endure some raw physical pain.<sup>90</sup> It goes much further than this. This is why endurance, as I am using it, is different from courage. Again, there is nothing special, or necessarily appropriate about the discomfort, pain, fear, agony, etc., of performing a courageous act. Rather, it is something the courageous agent must simply deal with in order to act rightly. The bleeding wound, ghastly scar, and aches do nothing to make the soldier more courageous; it would be better if the pain weren't there. But for the virtue of endurance, the pain is appropriate, praiseworthy, needed: it comes from within. And pain of this sort can only, or should only, be attributed to something that is choiceworthy. This also says something about the puzzle of praiseworthy *akrasia*.<sup>91</sup> When Neoptolemus foils Odysseus' plan on account of the difficulty he faces in telling a lie, we admire him for it.<sup>92</sup> What we admire about Neoptolemus does not concern his overcoming any physical obstacle or the fact that he fails to carry through with an action that he believes to be right—even though it all works out in the end—but rather the pain he experiences at the prospect of doing something he deems dishonorable.

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<sup>90</sup> It should be acknowledged that endurance is given a unique set of associated pains like cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; distinguishing it from the pains characteristic of courage: i.e., wounds, death, fear, etc. See NE 1148a5–18 and *Eudemian Ethics* 1229b1–21. But I am using endurance in a special sense. For example, Aristotle's ship captain, when throwing the cargo overboard, is not necessarily taken to have to overcome cold, hunger, thirst, exertion; or physical pain for that matter. The pain of losing the cargo is of a different kind.

<sup>91</sup> See NE 1151b17–22.

<sup>92</sup> See Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

I would go on to say that Neoptolemus is subject to a type of softness in the case—even though Aristotle attributes the failure to a noble pleasure.<sup>93</sup> To see this, imagine that the story was less benign than Sophocles makes it out to be. For instance, after learning the plot against him, Philoctetes upon retrieving his bow kills Neoptolemus and Odysseus instead of sparing them.<sup>94</sup> I take it, Neoptolemus by his own standards, would say that he should have kept his word to Odysseus and not have foiled the plan.<sup>95</sup> But imagine Neoptolemus does keep his word and carries through. We expect that he would still be strongly pained in having to forgo the honest act, and this pain is what we admire about him; not that he acted one way or another. I take this type of pain, in this sense, to capture what endurance is supposed to represent. It is appropriate because it is in response to the loss of a choiceworthy good. If Neoptolemus, when performing the right action (keeping his word), failed to experience this type of pain we would not admire him in the same way. So, admirable pain, which endurance concerns itself with, is taken to be appropriate only in the sense that it is in response to something choiceworthy.

If we accept the above along with the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement we can also respond to cases of mixed action like that of Agamemnon, and presumably the standard mill of moral dilemmas.<sup>96</sup> For instance, even if Agamemnon were pained to a significant degree by his daughter's death (where the daughter's life is choiceworthy) it will not represent endurance or virtue, mainly because he murdered his daughter, which for Aristotle, and most of us, is taken to be shameful. And I take it that it would be the same with the company owner if she were required to murder the same employees to save the company. The right action would always be

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<sup>93</sup> See NE 1151b17–22.

<sup>94</sup> See *Philoctetes*, lines 1290–1310.

<sup>95</sup> Neoptolemus, like Odysseus, believes that Philoctetes' coming to Troy is crucial to winning the war. Revealing the plot puts this goal in jeopardy; and it is only a matter of luck that Heracles appears and convinces Philoctetes to join the Greek cause rather than remain on the island. See *Philoctetes*, lines 1390–1471.

<sup>96</sup> The question might be raised whether or not there can be genuine moral dilemmas in virtue ethics? But such a topic exceeds the scope of this dissertation, and is best avoided.

*not* to murder the employees, no matter how many jobs were on the line—and I take it, it would be inappropriate for the company owner to look back with regret or pain at not killing the employees. These are not cases in which endurance, as we are using it, would apply. Aristotle, in terms of acting well, enforces this position when he says:

But some acts, perhaps, we cannot be forced to do, but ought to face death after the most fearful sufferings; for the things that forced Euripides' Alcmaeon to slay his mother seem absurd. (NE 1110a25–28)

In the example that Aristotle is referencing, Alcmaeon kills his mother for betraying his father.<sup>97</sup> In the case, even if it is taken into account that Alcmaeon committed the act to avenge his father, or as part of familial honor or duty, these conditions fail to justify or warrant the murder, and such actions are taken by Aristotle to be shameful and avoided in the case.

To be fair, I should acknowledge that the circumstances in which actions are taken to be shameful, or wretched, are not always made readily apparent by Aristotle. For example, Aristotle in NE 3.1 leaves it open whether a virtuous agent would do something base to save his children or parents from being held hostage by a tyrant (1110a4–8). While unclear, I do take it that murdering someone else's family to appease the tyrant, for instance, would likely be representative of a shameful act and impermissible in Aristotle's view.<sup>98</sup> In any case, I am holding that, if an act is *in fact* shameful a virtuous agent would not perform it or be pained by not performing it.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The reference is to Euripides' lost play *Alcmaeon*. For a reconstruction of the play see Teevan (2004).

<sup>98</sup> See NE 1107a9–12 where Aristotle gives a list of absolute prohibitions including: adultery, theft, and murder. He goes on to say, "It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them [adultery, theft, murder]; one must always be wrong" (1107a12–13).

<sup>99</sup> This gets some further support from Aristotle's claim that "the sense of disgrace is not even characteristic of a good man, since it is consequent on bad actions, for such actions should not be done..." (NE 1128b22–25) and "the excellences are not subject to such a qualification [regarding shame]" (NE 1128b29–31).

Therefore, I am taking endurance, as a virtue, to not concern itself with cases that require an agent to do something shameful (whether for the greater good, saving one's own life, the welfare of others; whatever). I also claimed that an agent with the virtue of endurance will be appropriately pained by the loss of a choiceworthy good. Thus, the virtuous agent will not perform a shameful action and will only be pained by the loss of something choiceworthy. I am also holding that Aristotle takes all right actions—or at the very least, all virtuous actions—to be choiceworthy to some degree, and vice versa with wrong actions. Without making this move there would be no reason to value the right action (or virtue) as such, or as good in itself.<sup>100</sup> If this is the case, I believe it follows that, *if* a virtuous agent with endurance performs an action that is in fact the right action it will need to be choiceworthy to some degree, and *if* that agent is pained then (for it to be appropriate pain) it will need to be in response to a choiceworthy good.

If the above claims are correct, the virtue of endurance will only concern itself with cases of mixed action that involve competing choiceworthy goods.

To move forward, while endurance was claimed to be limited to a specific type of mixed action, it is least conceivable for there to be cases where continence also plays a role. Imagine a situation where an agent has to both tolerate some pain for a future choiceworthy good and overcome some present competing bodily pleasure. An example might involve the roles of diet and exercise in obtaining fitness or health. Here we need both continence to conquer the desire for the competing pleasure (i.e., unhealthy food, alcohol, etc.) and endurance to tolerate the pain (i.e., jogging, lifting weights, etc.) needed to bring about the choiceworthy good. It could be contended that a temperate agent would not have the strong desire for the pleasurable object to begin with. This is a fair assessment, but what do we say about the agent resisting the pain? We

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<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 5. Though I take it to be intuitive from a virtue ethical standpoint that the right action be choiceworthy. At the very least, we must accept the above if we want to maintain the traditional harmony thesis, or if we want to be able to make sense of temperance.



have some difficulty with the moral vocabulary. Part of this concerns an ambiguity in how endurance is described. It is both used to mean the capacity to tolerate strong pains, as well as the quality of not being overly pained or under pained in response to pursuing something choiceworthy. We lack the appropriate virtue terms. I suggest we make a similar move to Aristotle's treatment of temperance and continence. In a similar vein, we might stipulate that the capacity to tolerate strong pains is contained within the virtue of endurance proper. Just as all temperate agents are also continent in regard to their capacity to conquer pleasure,<sup>101</sup> all *endurant agents* are also *endurant*—in the sense of being tolerant—in regard to their capacity to resist strong pains.

I am not sure exactly how far Aristotle would want to extend the usage of endurance, but it should be able to cover many cases of mixed action where a choiceworthy good is lost. Or at least, it will operate to some extent whenever pain is necessary or appropriate in the situation. In following my rudimentary account, I will not speculate further on how Aristotle intended endurance to be used here. Instead, I will briefly offer a positive account (derived from the texts) of what endurance would entail if treated as a virtue. As a virtue, endurance will require an appropriate amount of pain corresponding to the value of a lost choiceworthy good. If an agent is overly pained he is deemed soft. If he is less pained than he should be he is deemed hard. Softness and hardness also have further distinctions. An agent who has the capacity to resist pain for something choiceworthy, but chooses to avoid pain altogether, is subject to a type of softness. An agent who chooses to suffer pain in the pursuit of non-choiceworthy objects is subject to a type of hardness. Of the derivations, the second type of softness has some parallels to intemperance. Like the intemperate agent who pursues objects contrary to reason on account of

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<sup>101</sup> See NE 1151b32–1152a5.

pleasure, the soft agent avoids objects he should not on account of pain. In addition, there are restrictions on which objects are to be responded to. Just as an agent should not take pleasure in certain objects (NE 1118b22–27), an agent should also not be pained by certain objects. All other cases would have to fall under some qualified class of continence/incontinence.

## **5. Endurance: Addressing Difficulties in Terminology**

The above demarcation, while promising, is subject to certain difficulties. Because of the scarce treatment of endurance in the texts we find ourselves working with a limited and inadequate terminology. Roughly, the available terms either confuse or overlap one another. This section goes beyond Aristotle to introduce some new virtue terms and distinctions to help alleviate this concern.

To start, because endurance is a moral virtue it is appropriate to establish it as a mean between two extremes in a similar fashion as the other moral virtues. The extremes and vice terms related to endurance I will call *moral apathy* and *moral squeamishness*. Moral apathy is the deficient state where *some* pain is felt at the loss of a choiceworthy good, but in an amount that is less than appropriate. For example, if the company owner were pained in firing the employees, but only to the degree that he might feel toward getting a bad haircut or dropping his wallet, he would fail to act virtuously in the situation. Moral squeamishness is the excessive state where an agent is pained in performing the right action (at the loss of a choiceworthy good) but in a degree exceeding what is appropriate. For example, if the company owner after firing the employees suffered severe depression and couldn't go on, or her life was ruined and so on, we would think this was far too extreme. Firing the employees is indeed a pity, but such a reaction is probably inappropriate and uncalled for; and intuitively we can even imagine the fired

employees themselves telling the company owner things like: "Cheer up!," "We'll be fine," "Life goes on," and the like in this case.

What about hardness? In the previous sections we treated hardness as a general category for not feeling enough pain. While useful, this is not strictly correct. To differentiate hardness from moral apathy further clarifications are in order. Because the company owner, under dispute, feels no pain or even pleasure when firing the employees we need a way to account for it—and moral apathy doesn't quite cover it. So hardness, in the proposed view, is not simply a general category of not feeling enough pain, but rather a special case of feeling *no pain at all* in the loss of a choiceworthy object. If we accept this distinction we can see the parallels to my account of continence in Chapter 4. Hardness is to endurance as continence is to temperance. The hard agent, like the continent agent, fails to appreciate the worth of choiceworthy goods. But where the defect of the continent agent lies in his failure to take a type of rational pleasure in these objects the hard agent fails to take a type of rational pain at their loss. What is rational pain in this sense? This is difficult to capture, but we can, I hope, get some understanding of it by imagining our reaction to a landmark or precious work of art being defaced or destroyed. It hurts in a special way; deep down. But of course, we can imagine people who could care less. And this in a sense captures what hardness is, whether it be attributed to jadedness, being desensitized, or the natural make-up of a person.

Softness in the previous sections was also being used in a very general way to refer to feeling too much pain. But to be clear, softness is not the same as moral squeamishness. Softness, in the proposed view, requires an agent to act wrongly on account of pain. Moral squeamishness on the other hand entails that an agent still perform the right action, but in the presence of excessive pain, or more pain than is appropriate at the loss of a choiceworthy good. So, softness

is to be treated as an analogue to incontinence rather than as a moral vice. But the soft agent fails to act rightly on account of pain, whereas the incontinent agent fails to act rightly on account of pleasure. To wrap up, while there are likely additional distinctions that might be made, I believe the suggested terms are enough to move forward with my argument. For clarification, the given moral terms and distinctions are: endurance, moral apathy, moral squeamishness, hardness, and softness.

## 6. Endurance and the Problem of Continence

The *problem of continence* involved the failure of the robust conception of the harmony thesis to account for hard cases involving competing choiceworthy goods. I have argued that the *problem of continence* is not an issue for continence per se, but rather involves a lack or failure of an undelineated moral virtue.<sup>102</sup> From what was discussed, I think it is possible to fill in that moral virtue by appealing to endurance. This move, I take it, allows us to make sense of cases involving competing choiceworthy goods in a way that captures many of Stohr's intuitions about the problem case, while at the same time allowing us to hold onto our common understanding of continence under the harmony thesis.

Let's return to the case of the company owner. It was argued that there is something intuitively wrong with an agent in the company owner's situation that fails to experience inner conflict or pain in firing the employees. We can now see that the problem with the agent in question is that he is subject to the defect of *hardness*. Because he feels no pain, or acts with ease in the case, he shows himself not to value the employees' well-being as much as he should. An enduring agent will be appropriately pained at the loss of choiceworthy objects. At the same time,

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<sup>102</sup> See Chapter 2 for a reminder of this argument.

he will not be pained at the loss of non-choiceworthy goods, making endurance compatible with possessing the virtue of temperance. We also saw in Section 5 that an agent who *is pained* at the loss of a choiceworthy good can go wrong in feeling too much or too little pain. For example, if the company owner were so overwhelmed by conflict or pain that it prevented or made it almost impossible to do what needed to be done (saving the company) then we might say that agent is subject to the vice of *moral squeamishness*. At the same time, if the agent *was pained* but experienced less pain than is appropriate we might say that he is subject to the vice of *moral apathy*. These are our extremes, and vice terms, in contrast to endurance, which is the mean. The point then, is that the problem with Stohr's counterexample concerns the fact that the agent in the case is less than virtuous, not that "continence is indicative of virtue." We can now show that an agent who acted without pain in the situation is indeed lacking in one of the moral virtues: endurance. Only by expressing the appropriate amount of pain can she be deemed fully virtuous.

We should now be able to see that the agent who is pained or conflicted in firing the employees is not morally lacking. She does not fail to act virtuously on account of experiencing inner conflict or pain in the case. In fact, if she were not pained, it would show that she is morally lacking on account of not possessing the virtue of endurance. So, the right and virtuous action in the case will entail the presence of the appropriate amount of pain. By the same standard, other hard cases—involving competing choiceworthy goods—would also require pain and inner conflict to act virtuously. Thus, virtue ethics is able to respond to problem cases and capable of being a robust normative theory.

The question might be raised concerning how endurance is to respond to cases involving non-choiceworthy goods like bodily pleasures? The easy answer is that it does not have to. The virtue of temperance is capable of capturing the appropriate response to bodily pleasures. In

these cases, desiring the pleasures too much or less than is necessary would represent moral vice. On the other hand, if there is *any* pain resulting from the desire for pleasurable objects, it can be captured by our ordinary understanding of continence. Further, in the modern context, we do have an understanding of non-choiceworthy goods that in many cases are not normally considered to be bodily. Watching a television program would be one case. This points to a need to expand our understanding of temperance. This is a tricky move. As I argued in Chapter 4, Aristotle has reasons for limiting temperance and continence to the senses of taste and touch. While this is a serious obstacle, it could be argued that any non-choiceworthy object taking on the same unique character of the bodily pleasures of taste and touch are open for inclusion. For instance, an excessive desire for watching television programs or playing video games seems capable of developing similar destructive tendencies as objects of food, drink, and sex. Whether the mere absence or desire for these objects are capable of causing pain in the same way as the traditional non-choiceworthy goods is debatable, though we have good evidence from people familiar with the phenomena to attest to the possibility. While I do not take up the challenge directly, the next section, in a weaker sense, pushes beyond strict temperance and proposes a formulation for demarcating competing goods in virtue of its general status as choiceworthy or non-choiceworthy.<sup>103</sup>

## **7. A Revised Harmony Thesis**

From what has been discussed, we should now be able to draw two primary demarcations of right action. In my schema, cases involving at least one non-choiceworthy good will utilize the traditional virtue/continence distinction. And cases involving competing choiceworthy goods

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<sup>103</sup> I also try to expand the scope of temperance in Chapter 6.

will utilize the virtue/hardness distinction (where endurance is the virtue term to be filled in). Combined, these paradigms might be represented in the following formulation, which might be called the *harmony thesis*+

Harmony Thesis+ – A virtuous agent, when performing the right action, *will not* experience inner conflict or pain at the loss of non-choiceworthy goods, but *will* experience inner conflict or pain at the loss of choiceworthy goods.

In demarcating the virtuous agent we make the following distinctions:

Continence – A continent agent, when performing the right action, *will* experience inner conflict or pain at the loss of non-choiceworthy goods.

Hardness – A hard agent, when performing the right action, *will not* experience inner conflict or pain at the loss of choiceworthy goods.

By using the formulation above I believe we can respond to all, or most cases, as well as preserve continence in its traditional place alongside temperance. Hence, if we accept my proposal, the virtue/continence distinction can be drawn and virtue ethics can remain a robust normative theory.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I used Aristotle's virtue of endurance to solve the *problem of continence*. I think I have offered a solution that is viable and capable of addressing the case put forward by Stohr, as well as problem cases more generally. I did this in a way that avoided the need to sacrifice any of a number of plausible virtue ethical intuitions discussed, namely that our commonsense intuitions about Stohr's problem case are correct, that the harmony thesis is true, and that the

virtuous agent is not morally defective.<sup>104</sup> Although certain revisions were inevitable, I believe each of these plausible intuitions remain largely intact after the argument. Finally, while my goal in writing this dissertation has been to solve the *problem of continence*, I hope to have also accomplished something more in showing that the virtuous agent is more morally complex than initially thought. The next chapter picks up this extended task, and goes a little further to try to use some of the endorsed ideas to enrich contemporary virtue ethics.

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<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 7.



## Chapter 6: The Virtue of Endurance and Contemporary Virtue Ethics

### 1. Introduction

The previous chapter used Aristotle's virtue of endurance to solve to the *problem of continence* and developed a revised harmony thesis. This chapter takes the solution further and attempts to incorporate some of the proposed ideas into contemporary virtue ethics. Sections 2-5 return to the virtue ethical theories of Foot, McDowell, Hursthouse, and Annas; and use the foregoing discussions to better make sense of the harmony thesis within these theories, as well as offer some potential improvements. In Section 6, acknowledging that the traditional harmony thesis needs to be limited in scope to be viable, I suggest that Aristotle might have limited the harmony thesis more than he needed to. I go on to look for some slack in the harmony thesis' theoretical structure to accommodate the intuition in the contemporary debate that part of the virtuous agent's appeal is the fact that he does the right thing so easily (generally). Finally, Section 7 looks at some difficulties that endurance will have to face to gain acceptance in contemporary virtue ethics, before concluding in Section 8.

### 2. Foot Revisited

In Chapter 2, I looked at how a number of major virtue ethical theories were effected by the *problem of continence*, the first of which came from Foot. I argued that Foot's theory could not make sense of Stohr's problem case because the fault of the agent came from virtue itself rather than some non-virtuous temptation: such as the desire of the poor man to steal a purse in Foot's discussion. With all that has been discussed, I think it is now possible to go deeper and get more from Foot's theory. The details matter. Assuming the agent in question is not a criminal or thug,

we might ask what is his motivation for stealing the purse? There is a huge difference, for instance, between the desire for fashionable jewelry and clothes and feeding oneself. If the poor man is starving, or has hungry children at home, or even needs to pay his rent, there is a certain sense in which these things have a legitimate moral pull. The man in the situation, who does not give a second thought to providing shoes for his daughter, while praiseworthy in some lofty sense, seems to be missing something. I am willing to say that the poor man's health, his children's happiness, keeping the lights on, are all choiceworthy goods. So while this agent, to be certain, will not steal the purse or desire to steal as such, we might say it is completely appropriate (especially if he is poor) that he be pained or conflicted in the situation on account of what is to be lost: for instance, his child not eating that night. Or, we might even go as far as to say that the man who fails to appreciate that providing his daughter with shoes is choiceworthy is subject to hardness or moral apathy—even though this person, if he is to be virtuous, will still not steal in spite of the pain. Our moral lives are not black and white, and it is worth recognizing that it is sometimes hard to do what's right. I believe the force of Foot's example could be viewed in this way and representative of a more mature view of virtue. What about Foot's example of charity?

Foot holds that the man who helps another easily, say a rival, is more praiseworthy than one who struggles to do so.<sup>105</sup> Again, the details matter. For example, what is it that would make it difficult to help a rival in need? If the answer is spite, or resentment, or even some satisfaction the agent might take in seeing the antagonist down on his luck, it fails to qualify as an appropriate consideration. These things are not choiceworthy. If these things need to be overcome or generate pain, this shows that the agent has some flaw in his character. For the

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<sup>105</sup> See Foot (1978: p. 11).

virtuous agent such things are not important,<sup>106</sup> and he would, I take it, help easily and without inner conflict or pain in the case.

So, we might then claim, that in certain cases (where something choiceworthy must be sacrificed) acting virtuously is difficult, and the more difficult the case the more praise and virtue the agent shows in acting well; while also holding that in other cases, the agent shows the most virtue by performing the right action easily. The *harmony thesis*+ put forward in the previous chapter, at least in part, could be said to capture this intuition.

### **3. McDowell Revisited**

McDowell's theory could not make sense of Stohr's problem case due to the fact that competing considerations (opposed to performing the right action) need to be silenced—remember, without making this move there is no way to demarcate the virtuous agent from the continent agent. But of course we want to say that any concern for the employees' well-being should not be silenced in the case. Because we already established and defended that the company owner's concern for the employees should be heard and that she should be pained in the case, in order to get more from McDowell's theory we will need to weaken (or modify) his view in some way. Though, in light of the foregoing discussions, I believe that incorporating the virtue of endurance and its derivations could act to reinforce McDowell's view and give more than it takes.

Before moving forward, it is worth exploring McDowell's primary choice of application of the harmony thesis: to temperance and courage. While the former is largely consistent with the traditional usage of the harmony thesis, the latter leads to some strange implications. McDowell applies the traditional harmony thesis to courage in the same way that he does to temperance.

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<sup>106</sup> I am simply taking it for granted that the virtuous agent would not concern himself with the mentioned considerations. But, if needed, there is some support for this view from Aristotle's discussion of the magnanimous person in NE 4.3.

The result is his famous exemplar of the stoic at the gate who faces death and injury with a "certain sublimity" and "sort of serenity."<sup>107</sup> This is a puzzling example. In one sense, the agent seems to be lofty, or heroic, or non-human. And in another sense, it seems that such an attitude is praiseworthy or something to strive for. My answer to the puzzle is, that McDowell's stoic at the gate is representative of the *hard agent*. Remember, hardness *is* praiseworthy in the same way that continence is praiseworthy; but it falls short of virtue. So, we might recognize that in strictly applying the traditional harmony thesis outside of temperance (or at least to courage in this case) we will end up with the hard agent. This captures the strangeness of the example while also explaining why that action (as the right action) is praiseworthy. More generally, I think, we might look at McDowell's dichotomy as an attempt to accommodate considerations other than bodily pleasures.

I argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that, in order to consistently account for cases outside of bodily pleasure (or non-choiceworthy goods) we will need to rely on the virtue of endurance. Because courage, I take it, is not a case of bodily pleasure, a similar move could help McDowell. We might ask why the courageous agent needs to silence competing considerations? In the case of temperance, the answer was pretty straightforward: these things don't matter; are opposed to reason; are non-choiceworthy, etc. But the same line of argument fails to account for things like losing an arm or your life. The same would apply to the fired employees. McDowell wants to hold and goes onto claim that such types of considerations, if contrary to the right action, "count for nothing."<sup>108</sup> Of course we don't want to accept this, and believe that an arm, a life, the well-being of the fired employees, counts for a lot. But I believe it is possible to give some ground. While hard to swallow, we must admit that even typically noble or choiceworthy considerations

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<sup>107</sup> See McDowell (1978: p. 27).

<sup>108</sup> See McDowell (1978: p. 27).

are capable of being an impediment to acting virtuously if they compete with something that is more choiceworthy—the right action. This is the whole point and problem of moral squeamishness. But in forming a compromise, this is not to say that such considerations should not be heard. Of course they should. And the virtuous agent will hear and take such considerations seriously because he is virtuous. But if such considerations are justifiably very strong—say, the desire not to suffer a torturous death—they will need to be controlled and brought down. And this is why we need endurance in these types of cases to quell the pain.

#### **4. Hursthouse Revisited**

Holding Stohr's problem case to depend on a conflict between Hursthouse's v-rules (e.g. concerning charity and benevolence) proved unsatisfactory due to the fact that Hursthouse's conception of the virtuous agent allows for him to resolve conflicts between v-rules using moral wisdom.<sup>109</sup> Again, we might claim that the continent agent is unable to resolve conflicts in the same way and at a loss as to what he should do. But Stohr is very clear that this is not the case in her example: both the company owner who acts easily and the company owner who must struggle know that saving the company is the right thing to do and that the fired employees will be hurt in the process.<sup>110</sup> In looking for a resolution, we might now go on to claim that endurance as a moral virtue will issue its own v-rules like 'Be pained at the loss of something valuable.' If we accept a v-rule like this then it will follow that an agent in the company owner's position will fail to act well if she is not pained in the case (because the employees' well-being is valuable). Thus, if we incorporate endurance it becomes less a case of a conflict of v-rules and more a case

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<sup>109</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3; Hursthouse (1999: pp. 80–81) for a reminder.

<sup>110</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3; Stohr (2003: p. 343).

of an agent failing to abide by v-rules that are issued. And there seems to be no apparent conflict between saving the company and being pained in doing so.

It might be argued that the above v-rule issued by endurance comes into direct conflict with the harmony thesis. But, I must remind the reader that the harmony thesis is not a moral virtue—so it will not issue v-rules directly by Hursthouse's conception. The harmony thesis can only be represented as a particular aspect of temperance, which in turn would issue a prescription like 'Don't be pained over something invaluable.' I hope to have shown in the dissertation that a case like the one above does not involve temperance. Because temperance is not salient in the circumstances there is no reason why considerations or prescriptions concerning that moral virtue should factor into the decision-making process. Instead, the company owner who fires the employees easily and the company owner that must struggle to do so could be said to be represented as not abiding by the issued prescription in the first case and abiding by the issued prescription in the second case. As I have argued throughout, the company owner who fires the employees easily is morally lacking in some way—lacking in endurance if we accept my arguments. So the case is not necessarily representative of a conflict of v-rules but rather involves one agent who acts morally well and the other who does not. Using Hursthouse's concept of v-rules (and adding endurance's prescriptions) allows us to specifically point out where the morally defective agent fails in regard to right action in the case.

I also believe the virtue of endurance has something to offer Hursthouse's theory in terms of action-guidance. While contemporary virtue ethics' normative project, following my argument, has the tools to deal with Stohr's counterexample, Hursthouse's theory is subject to certain deficiencies regarding the virtuous agent's ability to act well in *all* cases. One of the biggest gaps concerning right action in Hursthouse's theory involves the virtuous agent's capacity to act well

in what Hursthouse refers to as Tragic Dilemmas. Some of my discussions in the dissertation, I believe, can help to fix or lessen this deficiency.

Regarding tragic dilemmas Hursthouse claims:

However, if a genuinely tragic dilemma is what a virtuous agent emerges from, it will be the case that she emerges having done a terrible thing, the very sort of thing that the callous, dishonest, unjust, or in general vicious agent would characteristically do—killed someone, or let them die, betrayed a trust, violated someone's serious rights. And hence it will not be possible to say that she has acted *well*... The actions a virtuous agent is forced to in tragic dilemmas fail to be good actions because the doing of them, no matter how unwillingly or involuntarily, mars or ruins a good life. (1999: p. 74)

The difficulty with tragic dilemmas for Hursthouse involves the fact that by performing the heinous act, the virtuous agent is forced to lose his moral status or have it called into question. He in a sense ceases to be virtuous, and can no longer act as the standard of right action.<sup>111</sup> And importantly, this will be the case no matter what action the virtuous agent chooses in a tragic dilemma. Hursthouse gives Bernard Williams' example of the 'Jim and Pedro case' to help make her point.<sup>112</sup> Whether Jim kills the one or lets the twenty die he will not be able to live with himself afterward. His life will be "forever marred."<sup>113</sup> This of course is a serious normative problem. In such cases, we are unable to rely on the virtuous agent to tell us what to do. There is no right answer. As Hursthouse aptly puts it: "Yes, there are tragic dilemmas, namely situations from which a virtuous agent cannot emerge having acted well" (1999: p. 77).

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<sup>111</sup> It might be argued that a virtuous agent can *only* not act virtuously in a tragic dilemma, but Hursthouse is clear that she is making the stronger claim that he cannot act rightly when she says: "An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would, characteristically, do in the circumstances, except for tragic dilemmas, in which a decision is right iff it is what such an agent would decide, but the action decided upon may be too terrible to be called 'right' or 'good'. (And a tragic dilemma is one from which a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred.) (1999: p. 79).

<sup>112</sup> See Smart and Williams (1973: pp. 93–100) for a reminder of the case.

<sup>113</sup> See Hursthouse (1999: p. 75). I should note that Hursthouse uses "her" life instead of "his" life in the case, but I use 'his' to refer back to Jim.

In closing this normative gap, I propose a two-pronged attack. First, we might make use of the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement that I defended in Chapter 5. Murdering the one, even if for a good reason (i.e., they're all going to die anyway if he doesn't), is still a shameful and horrible thing to do. And we might say, in alignment with the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement that the virtuous agent would never do such a thing. To see this more clearly, think of the familiar crying baby case, where a parent must suffocate her child to prevent enemy soldiers from discovering her and a group of people hiding in a basement. We, I take it, simply cannot imagine the virtuous agent smothering her baby to death, as hard as we try. The virtuous agent would choose to die rather than do such a thing—it just happens to be a shame that the other people in the group will have to die along with her. So if we accept the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement there is clear, right action in the cases, mainly, not to suffocate the baby or murder the Indian.

The second prong of the attack involves the fact that, for instance, even if Jim chooses not to kill the one, he will be plagued by guilt, remorse, regret, and so on, at letting the twenty die. As Hursthouse claims, "Here again, we arrive at a situation that deserves to be called 'tragic'—not because the dilemma was irresolvable, but because, resolving it correctly, a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred" (1999: p. 77). The point Hursthouse is getting at here, I think, is that even if the action is evaluated as right, the virtuous agent in a tragic dilemma someone still fails or the action is morally subpar or less than virtuous: and all the guilt, remorse, regret, etc. is indicative that this is the case. But by using the virtue of endurance, we might flip this and claim that: the fact that the agent has so much guilt, remorse, regret, etc., in the case shows *not* that the action is unvirtuous but rather that it *is* virtuous, or that agent shows himself to have virtue because of it. Thus, an agent does not lose his virtue, but preserves it in the case.



The agent who would fail to act virtuously—though rightly—in the case would be the one who was not so conflicted.<sup>114</sup> Roughly put, we know what the virtuous agent would do in tragic cases like the one given: He would not kill the one Indian and feel awful about letting the twenty die. While maybe not the most appealing of solutions, this move does offer action-guidance and tells us how we should act in tragic cases, while also fixing a hole in Hursthouse's normative theory regarding tragic dilemmas.<sup>115</sup>

## 5. Annas Revisited

The problem with Annas' theory was that it needed to work in reverse to respond to Stohr's problem case. The company owner, as a learner, would have to start by firing the employees easily and then find it harder and harder to do so as she moved from learner to moral expert (the virtuous agent).<sup>116</sup> While complicated, I believe there is a way to reconcile this move with Annas' theory. To get a solution, we might think in terms of the agent's attitude toward pain. An agent can through experience become more accustomed to and familiar with different types of pain. For example, a boxer will need to learn to keep hits from affecting his focus and performance. There is no denying that a boxer (even an expert) feels and is hurt from getting punched in the jaw. But we might say that he gets better at coming to terms with the pain over time: at first as a rookie he is dazed and can barely react afterward; and later as a professional he takes blows

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<sup>114</sup> I should note that Hursthouse's theory is eudaimonistic. So it might be better, according to her theory, if the agent's life were not marred in the case. The 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement will need to reject at least strict eudaimonism. See Chapter 5, Section 3.

<sup>115</sup> There, it should be acknowledged, are certain cases that prove more difficult than the ones mentioned (or treated by Hursthouse). For example, take Ruth Marcus' (1980) symmetrical dilemma involving a doctor who can only save one of two identical twins. My intuition is that he should save either twin, and feel an appropriate amount of pain at the death of the other twin. But of course this would point to more than one right action in the case. Something like the trolley case also seems to push in opposing directions. In such cases my arguments are not of much help, and I admit it as a weakness in my theory, though I am content with the capability of the 'avoid kakodaimonia' requirement and the virtue of endurance to provide action-guidance in at least *most* cases.

<sup>116</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.

without flinching. The pain itself remains fixed, but the reaction changes. But there is another way to think of improving one's attitude toward pain. An agent might be said to expand his perception and appreciation of pain as he becomes more morally mature.

Take the case of the consultant again who is in charge of advising numerous companies on maintaining solvency<sup>117</sup>—and for the case, take this person to also be directly in charge of firing the specific employees at these companies. For argument, we could imagine that this consultant at first, in agreement with our intuitions, is (appropriately) pained at seeing the employees lose their jobs.<sup>118</sup> But we might also imagine that this agent, after numerous consultations, starts to *also* pick up on the fact that many of the non-fired employees are negatively affected by the firings: they lose a friend, they fear for their own jobs, are caused stress, etc. We might say his perception and appreciation of pain has expanded here. In response, he might act to institute a better transition policy or provide counseling to those affected by the ordeal and so on. In this way, the consultant could be said to become *more* pained (in that he is more responsive) as he becomes better at his job, while also gaining a better grasp and understanding of that pain over time. As he comes to see the bigger picture, the anguish of firing the employees, while still there, will be put in its proper place and come to terms with. So, in this view, we might recognize a complex interplay, and acknowledge that as the learner moves toward becoming a moral expert, acting well becomes easier in some ways and harder in others. Whether this move is satisfying is debatable. But it does offer a way to reconcile Annas' view of moral expertise with the problem case.

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<sup>117</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3 for a reminder.

<sup>118</sup> And we might also hold, that at the early learner stage the consultant only sees saving each company as valuable and is only pained at that prospect, and so on. This move, to be consistent, would need to involve a transition from hardness to virtue—e.g. endurance—rather than continence to virtue.

Outside of the problem case, the virtue of endurance might enhance Annas' general theory. Take the boxer again. As he moves from learner to expert he is better able to control his reaction to pain, or at least prevent it from effecting his performance. Endurance is needed here. But we might also utilize the more sophisticated sense of endurance. Any boxer should have some concern for his opponent, in at least the sense of not killing him or causing him serious bodily harm. But if the boxer is more affected or pained then he should be at the prospect of hurting his opponent—i.e., he pulls his punches—it will prevent him from carrying out his intended goal: winning the match.<sup>119</sup> In terms of performance, moral squeamishness seems to be a bigger hindrance than apathy. So, beyond physical pain, an agent will also need to control competing considerations to the extent that they do not affect his performance—even if they are choiceworthy. The same could be said of a doctor or nurse, for instance. While he should be responsive to his patients, his compassion must not interfere with helping them. He must not hesitate to make an incision or perform a tracheostomy or give a shot. Being overly sensitive would only make it harder to do what is required or right in the case. So we might say endurance is needed here too.

If we accept the above, endurance will be needed for the flow experience to be expansive.<sup>120</sup> While many examples of flow can be said not to warrant any pain, the argument in this dissertation has shown that in at least some cases pain is appropriate. Endurance offers a way to account for this pain while also providing a means to control, or keep this pain to an acceptable level. We might now claim that an 'acceptable level' of pain is one where it does not effect the smooth performance of the right action.<sup>121</sup> When it does effect the performance, or

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<sup>119</sup> The same would be the case if the boxer were overly concerned with not getting injured himself.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 4 for a discussion of the flow experience.

<sup>121</sup> In non-moral cases of flow, an 'acceptable level' of pain would entail the threshold in which the agent can still smoothly perform the intended action.

worse prevents the performance of the right action, it could be said to represent moral squeamishness in the first case and softness in the second. Finally, more simply, the flow experience will have to account for the nitty-gritty of many actions. The boxer will feel the punches. The soccer player will ache when sprinting to make the winning kick. Even the piano maestro's fingers will hurt from time to time. To say that the boxer when acting with flow—following the harmony thesis—somehow doesn't feel the punch in the case, or is not pained by it, seems counterintuitive. But if we accept the virtue of endurance, the flow experience becomes more plausible and workable as a concept. In this way, along with the harmony thesis, endurance could be held to be necessary for flow—in the expanded sense.<sup>122</sup>

## 6. Expanding the Traditional Harmony Thesis

I have argued throughout that the harmony thesis needs to be limited in scope to be viable, in particular, that it must be limited to temperance. I would now like to qualify this view slightly. While it is true that the harmony thesis needs to be limited, there is no reason why it *necessarily* needs to be limited to *only* temperance, much less to taste and touch.<sup>123</sup> While this view, undoubtedly, comes into tension with the standard Aristotelian interpretation, I believe it is workable if given a little wiggle room. I make two moves in this section. I first take the traditional harmony thesis, without alteration, and try to consistently apply it to some of the other

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<sup>122</sup> I am intentionally avoiding pursuing the new problem of how to reconcile the flow thesis with what might be called the robust flow thesis. The point I hope to get across is, that in at least some cases endurance will be necessary for the flow experience.

<sup>123</sup> This move could seem to conflict with the arguments made in Chapter 4. But I will point out that Chapter 4 held that Aristotle's motivation for limiting the harmony thesis to temperance rested on the fact that temperance, as necessarily involving at least one non-choiceworthy good, provided a consistent means to draw the virtue/continence distinction. While, I admit, it will follow that *if* bodily pleasures are the only non-choiceworthy goods *then* the harmony thesis will need to be limited exclusively to temperance; but this section proposes that bodily pleasures are not the only non-choiceworthy goods, allowing for some extension.

moral virtues—outside of temperance. I then try to expand the scope of temperance itself, to accommodate a larger range of cases.

Before attempting to expand the harmony thesis it is worth reiterating that there are good reasons for it being ascribed to temperance. In fact, the harmony thesis will come into play in all cases of temperance, as traditionally understood (where the agent performs the right action). But just because the harmony thesis can be consistently applied to such cases does not mean that it is specific to it. The harmony thesis and temperance can be separated from one another. In this section, I will hold that the only thing that Aristotle is necessarily committed to, regarding the harmony thesis, is that it must apply to cases that involve at least one non-choiceworthy good. The further claims that it be derived from temperance, or taste and touch, while consistent with this commitment, are not necessary. Finally, I will use the category of non-choiceworthy in a more flexible sense than Aristotle might endorse. But, if we allow these concessions, I think we can do some real work in making the theory more compatible with some contemporary intuitions about the virtuous agent.

I start with a familiar example in virtue ethics. When we talk up the virtuous agent, we might give examples of his readiness to give to charity, or pick up the bill, or loan a friend money and so on; in the sense of him being generous. We might then go on to give examples of how non-virtuous people fall short. If a friend, for instance, begrudgingly treated you to a nice restaurant on your birthday, you would likely hold him to be lacking in the virtue of generosity. Even if he put on a show and hid his reluctance, if you found out afterward that it was difficult for him, again, that friend shows himself to be morally lacking. What if it was only a little difficult for that friend to treat you? While surely a nice guy, your friend still falls short: the virtuous agent would do better. The issue I think we are having, intuitively, is that anything short

of performing the generous act easily (or without inner conflict or pain) is unbecoming of the *virtuous agent*. The robust harmony thesis seems to have resurfaced.

In order to make sense of this intuition, and make it consistent with previous arguments, we might look at what is involved in the above case concerning generosity. Why would it be difficult for your friend to buy you dinner? Assuming the answer is not something like, 'you're not really friends after all', we might point to the fact that he cares too much about spending the requisite money. I am willing to hold that a small amount of money is non-choiceworthy in the case.<sup>124</sup> So, the fact that the friend is pained by something non-choiceworthy points to the fact that he is not truly generous—even if it was never a question of whether or not he would treat you to the dinner: the right action. Following this line of thinking, the case can then be made out to be one involving a non-choiceworthy good (a small amount of money) and a choiceworthy good (doing something nice for a friend). If this is the case, the harmony thesis can be applied to generosity in the same way that we would apply it to temperance. Because the virtuous agent will not be pained or conflicted at the loss of a non-choiceworthy good, he will perform the generous action easily in the case.<sup>125</sup> And this is what we typically expect in contemporary virtue ethics.

Take another case. We expect the virtuous agent to be honest, or keep his word, or tell the truth and so on. And we expect him to do this very easily. To understand this intuition, we might point to the many things that would make someone act otherwise. An agent might exaggerate his accomplishments for undue praise, or break a promise to gain some immediate benefit, or lie to get out of some obligation. But for the virtuous agent, I take it, these things are not important. They are we might say non-choiceworthy for him. The person who recounts how much strength

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<sup>124</sup> Although, if the friend is very poor the money might be choiceworthy in the case.

<sup>125</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 7.

it took to overcome some obstacle and stay true to his word fails to appreciate an important point. There should not have been a struggle at all. The same would be the case with the *just person* or the *friendly person*. The things that might commonly steer him amiss like greed, or selfishness, or jealousy, or vanity, are not considerations for him. They are non-choiceworthy. So, like honesty, or generosity, or temperance; the harmony thesis comes into play for these moral virtues.

The above examples capture contemporary intuitions about the virtuous agent, in the sense of him performing the right action easily (or without inner conflict or pain) generally. But the fact that the harmony thesis can be applied to multiple moral virtues does not necessarily mean that the robust harmony thesis has resurfaced (in the strict sense). For example, let's go back to the virtue of honesty. Most contemporary virtue ethicists will want to claim that the virtuous agent would lie to prevent significant harm to another. In a case like this, it would not be appropriate to perform the right action easily, as the harmony thesis would typically advise. Instead, an agent should be pained or conflicted in telling the lie—the right action. Following my theory, this would be the case because there are two competing choiceworthy goods in play. So we will have to appeal to endurance rather than the harmony thesis to respond to the case. To sum up, the harmony thesis does work in many cases, and is capable of accounting for the contemporary intuition that the virtuous agent performs the right action easily, generally, but it still needs to be limited in scope and cannot be robust in the strict sense. (But where it does fail, endurance is capable of picking up the slack.)

I claimed that the harmony thesis will apply to all cases of temperance. In the Aristotelian view, temperance will involve the senses of taste and touch, with food, drink, and sex being its objects. But we also might talk about temperance regarding something like alcohol. For example, Aristotle claims that all humans "enjoy delicacies and *wines* [*italics mine*] and sexual relations in

some way, though not all in the right way" (NE 1154a15–20). By not in the right way, I take it, Aristotle means intemperately. In the spirit of gaining ground, there is an important discrepancy that we might point to. While it is true that objects like food and sex are necessary and natural, as Aristotle understands the terms, this clearly cannot be the case with wine, or alcohol more generally. As far as we know, no non-human animals drink wine or have it as a necessary requisite for survival. So an argument to the effect that wine can be an object of temperance (like food or sex) on account of its association with our necessary animal nature (and hence non-choiceworthy) loses support.<sup>126</sup>

The above being said, it would not be unreasonable—in both the modern and traditional views—to hold alcohol to fall in the domain of temperance, and allow that it is non-choiceworthy.<sup>127</sup> The same could be said about alcohol having similar destructive tendencies as food or sex, in that it is possible for its object to cause pain in its absence or in the desiring of it.<sup>128</sup> And here's the move. Looking at the phenomena, it is clear that many people enjoy the pleasures of alcohol beyond the fact that it tastes good, or quenches thirst, and may seek it for the sole purpose of becoming intoxicated, relaxed, etc. But the pleasurable sensation of being intoxicated, for instance, cannot solely be attributed to the senses of taste or touch. If this is the case, we have an example of temperance being applied outside of the senses of taste and touch. With a little flexibility, I hold, it is not too difficult to capture many forms of drug use, or even

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<sup>126</sup> While this move may seem to conflict with some of my arguments it need not to. The claim in Chapter 4 was that the pleasures of taste and touch are non-choiceworthy on account of their association with our necessary animal nature. The above move, on the other hand, is simply claiming that something like wine cannot be held to be non-choiceworthy by the same criteria. But this does not mean it is not non-choiceworthy. A rock, for instance, is non-choiceworthy. And so is poison. Furthermore, in order to fall under the domain of temperance (or so I argued) an object needs to take on the unique, destructive characteristics of taste and touch; which something like wine might possess, and objects of sight, hearing, and smell will lack (see Chapter 4, Section 3; also see Chapter 5, Section 6).

<sup>127</sup> To see the intuition, think of our resistance to the claim that it is appropriate to be pained at not having another drink. We want to hold that the temperate person would not be pained by this prospect—compared to his health—on account of the drink being non-choiceworthy. But I admit, I am simply stipulating that this is the case.

<sup>128</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 3.



certain thrill seeking forms of behavior like gambling, and the like, under the same description. The point to be made, without simply deriving an extended list, is that there is some room for temperance to operate outside of taste and touch. Whether it be a certain class of pleasurable sensation, or pleasure more generally understood, the virtue of temperance could be expanded to a larger range of cases than allowed by the traditional view.<sup>129</sup> I take an extension of the virtue of temperance—small or large—to be desirable and conducive to accommodating contemporary virtue ethics, both in its held intuitions and in its normative project.

### **7. Some Difficulties for Endurance in Contemporary Virtue Ethics**

The virtue of endurance, I argued, would prove a valuable addition to contemporary virtue ethics. But there are a number of obstacles that could deter or work against its acceptance. The first is that contemporary virtue ethicists simply might not want it. The case for endurance, in a large way, depends on the acknowledgement that the *problem of continence* is a real problem. But the significance of the *problem of continence* could be discounted by virtue ethicists. I see at least two camps that would prove problematic in this regard. The first would involve philosophers who are happy with the robust harmony thesis as is, and see no need to modify it in face of the *problem of continence*. The second camp would be philosophers that do not make use of the harmony thesis in their theories. In order to appeal to both camps of philosophers, one of two things needs to be done. The first thing entails convincing philosophers that the *problem of continence* is a serious problem. More can be done, and further arguments made in this regard. But it is worth pointing out that it is quite possible that many virtue ethicists who accept the

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<sup>129</sup> The project itself is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

harmony thesis might be unaware that it leads to problematic implications. This dissertation, in part, could be seen as a way to raise awareness of the *problem of continence*.

As far as convincing the second camp of philosophers above, another issue and difficulty involves the fact that endurance seems to come as a package deal with the acceptance of the *problem of continence*. I acknowledge that I have argued in a way that forwards this view. But, of course, theories that do not accept or make use of the harmony thesis have no reason to see a solution to the *problem of continence* as very important or relevant. So, in order to reach out to these philosophers regarding the value of endurance, we will have to find a way to separate it from the *problem of continence* and deliver it by itself. I believe this can be done, and that the virtue of endurance has a lot to offer, other than its ability to solve a particular problem.

The second obstacle involves the fact that contemporary virtue ethics might not need the virtue of endurance. I have drawn a series of moral demarcations and distinctions to account for problem and non-problem cases. But it seems possible that the same work could be done with less technical or non-philosophical terminology—or with terminology other than my own. In the extended sphere there are a large array of concepts to draw from like empathy, callousness, kindness, coldness, ego-depletion, willpower, insincerity, integrity, and so on. While messy, it is likely possible to do many of the same things I have done throughout the dissertation with less technical or varied concepts. But I will say this. In my view, endurance is not just one of, or the same as, many of the recent virtue concepts now in use.<sup>130</sup> I believe it is just as important and has the same stature as the moral virtue of temperance. And just as temperance fails to be adequately captured by like terms the same is the case with endurance. That being said, while the temperance/endurance division proves to be a valuable means for accounting for problem and

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<sup>130</sup> That is, just because endurance lacks the authority of more recognizable traditional moral virtues like courage, generosity, mildness, wit, etc., this is not reason to associate it with the larger share of novel virtues currently in use (like: industriousness, curiosity, patience, love, respect, tolerance, compassion, care, and so on).

non-problem cases, there is still much room and need for additional terms, both philosophical and non-philosophical.

The third obstacle for the virtue of endurance is that, even if accepted, it might not be compatible with a number of contemporary virtue ethical theories. For instance, the attempt to incorporate endurance into the four theories treated in this chapter could be seen as less than successful. A defender of McDowell, for instance, might retract and claim that, "No, the concern for the employees should be silenced." Or, outside the problem case, it might claim that, "No, the stoic at the gate is not subject to hardness. He is virtuous."<sup>131</sup> There is not much the supporter of endurance can do here. We could argue that the benefits outweigh the costs. But in each of the examples treated, the incorporation of endurance was not a perfect integration, and required revisions on the part of the theories taken up. There are two ways this difficulty might be overcome. We could search for specific theories where endurance is a better fit, or we could build a theory from the ground up. Both tasks are a project for another time.

A fourth obstacle for the virtue of endurance comes from two directions: it could rely on Aristotle too much, or be too Aristotelian; or it fails to adequately represent, or overstretches the Aristotelian position. Regarding the first hurdle, endurance does seem to be strongly dependent on the Aristotelian model. It takes concepts like continence, the doctrine of the mean, and choiceworthiness, as basic. So in this way it could be said to be specifically geared toward neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics rather than virtue ethics more generally understood. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, there is no reason why endurance, taken by itself, needs to be neo-Aristotelian or bound to a neo-Aristotelian framework. For example, we can sufficiently make sense of failing to be moved by something important without bringing in the doctrine of the

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<sup>131</sup> See Section 3 for a reminder.

mean, or choiceworthiness, or even holding it under the description of being pained. I take the concepts to be helpful, but they are not necessary for endurance to do its work. So, an independent non-Aristotelian framework, or at least an adaptable framework, will have to be built if endurance is to be utilized outside of the neo-Aristotelian mold. I think this restructuring is both possible and desirable.

The second hurdle is equally problematic, in regard to philosophers who *do* want to remain and identify themselves as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists. Much of what I say about the virtue of endurance is speculative. For example, while Aristotle does list endurance as a virtue and mean on his chart in the *Eudemian Ethics*, there is no clear indication that he intended it to be used in the way that I put forward. Much of what I go on to claim is put together indirectly by examining Aristotle's scattered comments concerning endurance's relation to other concepts like continence, softness, mixed action, and so on. But while making this type of move was necessary (considering Aristotle's scarce treatment of endurance in the extant works), I take it, there is still something there that is worth maintaining; whether it is consistent with what Aristotle would want to hold or not. As Hursthouse keenly puts it: "But, one might say, what reasons have we for believing this, beyond the fact that Aristotle says so?"<sup>132</sup> In the dissertation, I have given many reasons to accept endurance beyond the fact that it comes from Aristotle. Thus, while one can attack my scholarship, the end result stands on its own. And even if the implications are my own, I believe there is enough of an Aristotelian flavor to keep most virtue ethicists in the neo-Aristotelian camp satisfied.

## 8. Conclusion

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<sup>132</sup> See Hursthouse (1999: pp. 54–55).

This chapter made the case for adopting the virtue of endurance in contemporary virtue ethics, beyond its ability to solve the *problem of continence*. I believe the case for incorporation is a good one. But why stop here? Endurance has great promise above its ability to solve a particular problem and incorporate into a particular theory. For instance, with a little work, I see no reason that would prevent endurance from working within a deontological or utilitarian framework. There are many avenues for further investigation that this very old, but exciting concept could take. Thus, in a big way, it is my hope that this dissertation will bring attention to or renew interest in endurance's potential.

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