

FORTIFYING VIRTUE ETHICS:
RECOGNIZING THE ESSENTIAL ROLES OF
EUDAIMONIA AND PHRONESIS

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ABSTRACT

There is not one, single theory of virtue ethics that commands general agreement in the field. The aim of this dissertation is to help resolve this problem by positing that eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory. I argue for this thesis in two ways: positively and negatively. In a positive way, I give arguments supporting the thesis. Eudaimonia justifies the virtues. We need the virtues to enable us to live a characteristically good human life. Phronesis is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of virtues. It plays four roles: (1) determines the mean of a disposition (2) establishes the means to achieve proposed ends (3) contributes to determining the end (4) helps motivate actions. On the negative side, I critique the work of authors who reject or downplay eudaimonia and phronesis, thereby strengthening support for my thesis.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends – honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism – *these things are old. These things are true.* They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. *What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths.*

...With hope and *virtue*, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come.

Barack H. Obama
44th President of the United States
Inaugural Address
20 January 2009*

* *Financial Times*, 21 January 2009, p. 2 (emphasis added).

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DEDICATION

For Raj, Shera, Mom (Betty), Dad (Tan Choon Seng (1924-1986)), Kiat, and Colin.

I would not have *Eudaimonia* 3.0 without them.

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INTRODUCTION

Something like this lack of regularity is found also in good things...We must be content, then when talking about things of this sort and starting from them, to show what is true about them roughly in outline, and when talking about things that are for the most part, and starting from these, to reach conclusions too of the same sort. *For it is a mark of an educated person to look for precision in each kind of inquiry just to the extent that the nature of the subject allows it.*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b15-25 (emphasis added).

Virtue ethics (VE) is nearly as old as philosophy itself. Yet, contemporary virtue ethics is, by the standards of the academic study of philosophy, at its infancy. As the new kid on the modern ethics block, VE is in the process of defining itself. Critics argue VE is inchoate and is represented by not one, but many strains of thought. Both aspects of Aristotle's insight above are correct: there cannot be precision in the field of ethics, nevertheless philosophy as a discipline should nevertheless aim to be thorough when developing an ethical system. Thus, the objective of this work is to fortify VE thinking by arguing that two pillars, eudaimonia, or (loosely) flourishing, and phronesis, or practical wisdom, are necessary for a comprehensive VE theory.

In truth, like many recent intellectual developments marketed as original, VE is a rediscovery of ancient ideas. The VE approach is part of a long, sophisticated, and fairly continuous tradition. Not only does the approach have origins almost as ancient as philosophy itself, but also its history includes extensive work by such

philosophical luminaries such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Aquinas.¹ There is general agreement that modern VE began in 1958 with a landmark article by Elizabeth Anscombe entitled “*Modern Moral Philosophy*”. Anscombe seriously undermines the foundations of two of the most prominent contemporary ethical theories, deontological and utilitarian theories.² Anscombe finds the notion of a universal moral law, which is not the command of a deity, *i.e.*, a “special moral ‘ought,’” unintelligible. To flourish, she suggests that we “look for norms” that are grounded in the facts about what we need. She calls for a return to virtues to remedy this foundational problem. Alasdair MacIntyre vigorously took up this call in his 1984 book, *After Virtue*.³ A year later, Richard Taylor also provided a clear but a somewhat different version of VE from MacIntyre.⁴

Thus began the cacophony of voices that would discuss, formulate, and design VE theories. As a consequence of the relatively short life span of modern VE and a good number of contributors to this new field, there is now a diverse range of modern VE “theories.” The latter word is in quotes because there is currently a debate (once

¹ Simpson (1997) argues that Aristotle does not have a moral theory in the modern sense and therefore, does not offer a good place for modern virtue ethicists to start if they want to develop such a theory.

² Anscombe, Elizabeth, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, *Philosophy* 33: 1-19, 1958 reprinted in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

³ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1984

⁴ Taylor, Richard, *Ethics, Faith and Reason*. Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985.

again, sparked by Anscombe and later elaborated by Williams and others)⁵ whether VE and ethics in general are amenable to unifying and universal theories. By “moral theory”, anti-theorists mean a systematic organization of our principles and obligations that provides a universally valid answer to every moral question. These skeptics urge no such organization is possible. One possible result of this moral skepticism is the fragmented and inchoate character of VE work.

To be sure, not all proponents of VE share this view of moral theory. Slote explicitly detaches himself from this view, and argues we should take seriously the idea of ethical theory, mainly to overcome the inconsistencies in our intuitive moral thinking.⁶ More VE theories have emerged recently, as VE research and thinking progresses. Yet, the nature of VE means that the majority of them tend not to necessarily provide, and even eschew, universally valid answers to every moral question.

THESIS

The centrality of virtues and the character of the moral agent are two common features of VE thinking. The basic judgments in VE are judgments about character. Trianosky notes the concept of virtue justifies that of right conduct, that is, virtue explains right conduct.⁷ Within this broad description lie a variety of approaches in VE thinking. According to Annas, modern VE theories have not yet achieved the

⁵ Anscombe (1958), Williams, Bernard, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana Press, 1985. Other anti-theory proponents include John McDowell, Martha Nussbaum, and Annette Baier.

⁶ Slote, Michael, *From Morality to Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁷ Trianosky, Gregory, “Supererogation, Wrongdoing and Vice: On the Autonomy of the Ethics of Virtue,” *Journal of Philosophy*: 83 26-40, 1986.

critical mass of argument and theory that classical VE theory developed and refined over hundreds of years.⁸ Unsurprisingly, the modern VE theories fall short of being unifying or universal.

In sum, modern VE theories are partial and fragmentary. The resolution of this problem should be a general agreement among professional philosophers and ethicists about the essential features for a comprehensive VE theory. **Simply put, the thesis of this dissertation is that eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory.**⁹ That is, if VE theory aspires to be complete, to be systematic, then both eudaimonia and phronesis are essential pillars for it. Drop one, the other, or both, and VE regresses to an impressive intellectual curiosity.

DEFINITIONS

Eudaimonia

Eudaimonia is an Ancient Greek word combining *eu* meaning “good” with *daimon* meaning “spirit.” The word often is characterized as “happiness”. This translation is not without loss. Happiness is a thin description for eudaimonia.¹⁰ In ordinary usage, happiness connotes a feeling of pleasure, or of feeling good. However an Ancient Greek, knowing someone is in this state, either in general or about something in particular, would not on that account attribute eudaimonia to that person. In the current use of the term, one can be “happy” about one thing and

⁸ Annas, Julia, “Virtue Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁹ The other elements that should be part of a comprehensive VE theory are a thorough description and justification of the virtues and consideration of the role of emotions. A discussion of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁰ Annas (2006).

“unhappy” about something else. However, one cannot be eudaimon about one thing, and the opposite (duseudaimon) about something else.¹¹ This is because eudaimonia is not about something; it is not a feeling or an attitude that has an object.¹² Eudaimonia is the end or *telos* towards which human good aims. This understanding of eudaimonia, as an ultimate end, means an individual pursues her ends and priorities. Regarding someone as eudaimon is more like ascribing a status. It is to honor the person and imply she is admirable and an exemplar of life at its best. This significant gap in meaning between eudaimonia and happiness is a primary reason the former will not be translated as the latter in this dissertation.

A broader interpretation of the concept of eudaimonia that is faithful to the Ancient Greek understanding is human flourishing. This term is more akin to the original sense of eudaimonia, because it takes the view of life as a whole. Other terms that closely resemble eudaimonia are well-being, a well-lived life, and a worthwhile life. Still, the term eudaimonia will be used in this dissertation rather than the unsatisfactory English translations for the term.

I define eudaimonia as living according to virtues that are guided by reason, in a complete life. This definition is derived from that of Aristotle. But my definition disregards his so-called ‘metaphysics’ of the *psyche*, often translated as soul. I argue later that this metaphysics is not a necessary part of the eudaimonist tradition. Eudaimonia is grounded in human nature, such that human beings need the virtues in

¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, Introduction.

¹² *Ibid.*

order to live a characteristically good human life. This approach derives from ethical naturalism. In addition, since Aristotle, the following features have become common to the eudaimonist tradition:

(1) eudaimonia is the ultimate end of a human being

(2) it justifies the virtues

As virtues are the common element in all VE theories, these features of eudaimonia, I argue, make the concept necessary for a comprehensive VE theory. For there must be a reason why virtues are virtues and why we need virtues in order to be good. Eudaimonia is that reason, because eudaimonia is the basis for virtues.

Phronesis

Phronesis has to do with reason; in particular, the reasoning required for moral decisions. The concept is often translated as “practical wisdom”. I do not take issue with this translation and will use it interchangeably with phronesis. For Aristotle, phronesis is an intellectual virtue. According to his classification, virtues are divided into moral virtues (virtues of character) and intellectual virtues (virtues of the mind). Moral virtues are character dispositions that are habituated in us from childhood. Phronesis is called practical wisdom because it is the part of reason that is involved in decisions in the arena of practical, moral issues. It works closely with moral virtues, so that the latter can function properly and be acted upon.

It is my claim that practical wisdom plays four roles in virtue ethics.

Phronesis:

(1) determines the mean of a disposition

- (2) establishes the means to achieve proposed practical ends
- (3) contributes to determining the end
- (4) helps to motivate actions

These roles are indispensable. Without practical wisdom, virtues cannot work well, be chosen appropriately, or be activated (*i.e.*, applied) correctly in different contexts. Thus, practical wisdom is necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory.

Comprehensive

So what do I mean by a “comprehensive” theory of virtue ethics. Examples of such aspects are reason, emotion, virtues, and the reason or reasons for being virtuous. A comprehensive virtue ethics theory is one that includes all aspects of morality that are relevant to virtue ethics. A comprehensive VE theory is helpful for applying VE to real situations. Put differently, by “comprehensive” I mean a standard VE to which we can call upon, instead of having to refer to idiosyncratic notions, like, “Hursthouse’s VE”, or “Swanton’s VE”, or “Slote’s VE”. These VE theories are not surprisingly, different from each other. If VE remains piecemeal and incomplete, it is unsatisfying as a theory.

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1

The arguments supporting my thesis rely to a good extent on many of the rationales from Aristotle. It is not unreasonable to say that Aristotle’s virtue ethics is the prototype for contemporary virtue ethics. We always can learn from prototypes. This fact is sometimes acknowledged but also largely ignored by contemporary virtue

ethicists. Typically with little discussion of Aristotle, nearly all work on this subject today agrees that a focus on virtues is the core of any VE theory. Yet as Aristotle's virtue ethics is the precursor of modern virtue ethics theories, a review and analysis of his theory is indispensable to inform us of the influence (whether positive or negative) that Aristotle has on today's theories. We can learn from Aristotle's model by the rediscovery of concepts that are useful to, and as I argue, even necessary for, contemporary virtue ethics.

Accordingly in Chapter 1, I lay out the primary concepts of Aristotle's virtue ethics: eudaimonia, moral virtues, and phronesis. I argue his approach is a holistic one where there is no hierarchy of elements such that one component is ascendent whereas others are dependent on it. The primary features of his ethics are interdependent. Together, they form a whole. Thus, I attempt to show how eudaimonia, moral virtues, and phronesis are necessary in Aristotle's virtue ethics.

Chapter 2

A review of the current literature on VE highlights the problem that this dissertation seeks to address. Virtue ethics is diverse in views, generally fragmented in research focus, occasionally lacking in cogency, and deficient in agreement on how a VE theory should look. VE is, therefore, incomprehensive. One reason for these deficiencies is that the movement started from dissatisfaction with current ethical theories, specifically deontological and utilitarian ethical systems. Consequently, philosophers have expended, and continue to spend, a prodigious amount of energy

on distinguishing VE from the latter two systems. To strengthen VE, I argue we must move on from what it is not to what it is.

The sources of virtue ethics are myriad: Aristotle, Stoics, and Aquinas. Among the focus and foundations of VE are virtues, naturalism, and reason. From this cacophony, I suggest a distillation to give VE some agreed principles and a cohesive strain of thought. This distillation means my analysis is on six thinkers: Hursthouse, who is a neo-Aristotelian in the VE field, Slote and Foot, who disregard eudaimonia in their work, Swanton, who takes a pluralistic view of VE, and Driver and Merritt, who underplay the role of practical wisdom in VE.

Chapter 3

I argues that eudaimonia is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory in two ways. In a positive way, arguments developed by Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians Hursthouse and Annas evince that eudaimonia is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory. In a negative way, the work of Slote and Foot are flawed because they disregard eudaimonia. A gulf of two and a half millenia divide us from the Ancients. I will endeavor to bridge this gulf by updating the ethical concept of eudaimonia so that it comports with our contemporary sensibilities. That effort is aided by the work of Rosalind Hursthouse, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, and Julia Annas, who has written extensively on classical eudaimonist theories. An interdisciplinary approach also assists in this effort. I apply results from psychological research on happiness conducted in the past two decades in order to integrate into the concept of eudaimonia modern views of happiness.

Chapter 3 gives the arguments why eudaimonia is necessary. It begins by defining eudaimonia as a complete life, lived according to the virtues, that is guided by reason. Why should we live according to the virtues? Eudaimonia is the purpose of every human. It is a natural purpose for human beings *qua* human beings. Eudaimonia is grounded in human nature, such that human beings need the virtues in order to live a characteristically good human life. This approach derives from ethical naturalism. We flourish when we are good human beings *qua* human beings. Being a eudaimon human being requires we act virtuously, because we need the virtues to live a characteristically good human life. To be a good human being requires we ensure our individual survival and the continuance of the species. Thus, the virtues are grounded in eudaimonia and eudaimonia is grounded in our human nature.

Chapter 4

The dissertation updates the concept of practical wisdom and uses the arguments in Aristotle's ethical works as well as modern academics, Zagzebski, Richardson, Nussbaum, and Chappell to argue that practical wisdom is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory. On the positive side, it explains the four roles practical wisdom plays in ensuring the proper functioning of virtues and the correct use of each virtue in different contexts. On the negative side, Chapter 4 goes on to show that the arguments of Merritt and Driver are flawed because they reject phronesis in their work on VE.

Chapter 5

Objections to my thesis are likely to take three tracks. First, eudaimonia is such a flawed concept that it cannot be necessary for a complete VE. Indeed, including eudaimonia hinders rather than helps VE theory. Supporting this claim, objections may take the form of a list of criticisms of eudaimonism. Second, critics may argue phronesis is not a necessary concept in VE theories. Emotivists may claim that emotion, not reason direct and motivate our actions. Third, the thesis argues that both eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory. Critics may contend this claim is too broad because both are not necessary at the same time. We need only phronesis but not eudaimonia or vice versa. I attempt to answer these objections in Chapter 5. A summary of the dissertation is subsequently given, followed finally by the conclusions.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROTOTYPE: ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUE ETHICS

1.1 Introduction

Why should we study Aristotle and his version of virtue ethics? Two reasons: first, it is the prototype of virtue ethics theories. Second, we can learn from the prototype. Aristotle's ethical theory is the original, comprehensive virtue ethics that we have on record. It is not unreasonable to say that Aristotle's virtue ethics is the prototype for contemporary virtue ethics. This fact is sometimes acknowledged but also largely ignored by contemporary virtue ethicists. Nearly all work on this subject today agrees that a focus on virtues is the core of any virtue ethics theory. However, apart from this agreement, as we shall see in Chapter 2 that there is a cacophony of views on what a virtue ethics theory looks like.

However, as Aristotle's virtue ethics is the precursor of modern virtue ethics theories, some study and analysis of his theory is instructive in informing us of the influence (whether positive or negative) that Aristotle has had on today's theories. In addition, among contemporary virtue ethics theories, there has been widespread conceptual cherry picking from Aristotle's theory. It is also instructive to know the original context in which we find the Aristotelian concepts that various virtue ethicists use, how Aristotle stands on them, and the different interpretations of his views. After a couple of decades of research in this area, virtue ethicists should have some agreement on the necessary features of a virtue ethics theory. An agreement

would give the field greater credibility. We can rediscover some of these features from their prototype.

Second, we can learn from Aristotle's model through the rediscovery of concepts that are useful and as I argue, some are even necessary for contemporary virtue ethics. In this chapter I lay out the primary concepts of Aristotle's virtue ethics: eudaimonia, moral virtues, and phronesis. I argue that his approach is a holistic one where there is no hierarchy of elements such that one component is ascendent while others are dependent on it. The primary features of his ethics are interdependent and together they form a whole. Thus, I attempt to show how eudaimonia, moral virtues, and phronesis are necessary in Aristotle's virtue ethics. Later, in Chapters 3 and 4, I borrow in large measure from Aristotle to argue that eudaimonia and phronesis are also necessary in a contemporary virtue ethics theory.

Admittedly, there are other elements of Aristotle that are outdated. He holds illiberal views on women and slaves. His conception of the soul and the hierarchy of intellectual virtues are difficult to justify today. Aristotle focuses (arguably) on the aristocratic class for ethical training. Today, there is a widespread belief that ethics are not restricted to the elite. Finally, where I also diverge from Aristotle is in his much debated conception of what constitutes the paragon of an eudaimonic life. I agree with Aristotle when he describes eudaimonia as a complete life lived according to the virtues, guided by reason. However, I will not take the second version of Aristotle's description of a eudaimon life *i.e.* the supreme achievement of this kind of life is one that is lived in theoretical contemplation. In this sense, Aristotle's view of

eudaimonia requires some modernization. His version of virtue ethics cannot be taken wholesale the way utilitarians more or less adopt Mill and Kantians adopt Kant. But I argue that the concept of eudaimonia, as a final end towards which we aim, remains foundational for a virtue ethics theory.

In later sections of this chapter I go on to examine Aristotle's view of virtue and phronesis. In doing the latter, I hope to develop from an Aristotelian basis, a theory of the role of phronesis in a virtue ethics theory. Thus, in this chapter I will therefore, do the following:

1. Examine in detail the primary concepts of Aristotle's virtue ethics: eudaimonia, moral virtues, and phronesis.
2. Examine some of the difficulties with these concepts and the scholarly discussions on them.
3. Discuss how Aristotle relates each of these concepts to each other, so that we may use the relationships in a modern version of virtue ethics.

1.2 Features of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

There are five primary features in the ethical process that Aristotle advances. First, Aristotle proposes that we have a chief good. This chief good is our ultimate end. This ultimate end is eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is a well-lived, complete life of virtuous activity and it is the target towards which we aim (1094a23). Second, Aristotle describes a process whereby an individual becomes virtuous under the presupposition that by nature humans are neither virtuous nor not virtuous. Instead, we have the capacity (*dunamis*) for moral virtues and are able to acquire them

through habit (1103a25-26). Aristotle's argument, in the ageless debate of whether humanity is naturally good or bad, is that it is neither but it has the capacity to be either. To ensure that our capacity to be good is fulfilled it is therefore crucial that we acquire virtues through right training. Just as we become harpists by playing the harp, so too, "we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions" (1103b1-2). Conversely, just as we have the capacity to become virtuous through correct training, we also may acquire vices through poor instruction.

The third feature of Aristotle's system is the robust emphasis placed on action (*praxis*). Aristotle is interested in how to become good and not merely examining what is good. In a subtle critique of his teacher, Plato, he states that his "examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us" (1103b29-30). Becoming virtuous requires us to be active. Aristotle is interested in behavior modification through action. Aristotle has been called a "thoroughgoing behaviorist" because he believes that "life or psyche is the behavior of the organism as a whole in its environment"¹³. Since behavior is molded by *praxis*, it is important to understand Aristotle's analysis of motion. What causes us to move and therefore to act? The answer to this question is given in some detail in 1.5.1 (3) but in short, the reason for movement in all organisms is desire (*orexis*) and it is the object of our desires (*to orekton*) that causes us to move.

¹³ Randall, John Herman, *Aristotle*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1960, p. 66.

The fourth notable feature is that Aristotle's ethical system is not absolutist but contextual. In order to judge a deed as virtuous one must take into account the situation, the time, and the individual involved. Aristotle makes it clear that questions of virtue, like questions of health, have no fixed answers. This is true of a general theory of ethical behavior but even more so of moral decisions and behavior in particular cases – they are “inexact” (1104a6). Aristotle points out that we should aim for the mean (*mesotes*) in our action, because excess and deficiency are vices. However, the mean that we should aim at is the one that is relative to us, not to the object (1106b7). In order to determine the mean, we make use of phronesis or practical wisdom. Aristotle sums the argument up thus, “Virtue, then, is a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it” (1107a1-3). Hence, the contextual nature of ethical situations promotes phronesis as a key element in making the correct choices in Aristotle's ethics.

The fifth feature of Aristotle's theory of how one becomes virtuous is his view of the *psyche*, broadly translated as soul. Briefly, the *psyche* possesses both emotion (*pathos*) and reason. Emotions are the well-spring of moral virtues such as courage, justice and magnanimity. Reason is the well-spring of intellectual virtues such as intellectual accomplishment (*sophia*), intelligence (*nous*), scientific knowledge (*episteme*), and practical wisdom (phronesis). Emotions and reason work together to produce virtuous action. Thus, Aristotle does not disregard the emotional side of human beings in his analysis of virtue formation. Indeed, virtue is about emotions in

that it is about pleasure and pain. Aristotle understands that “pleasure causes us to do base actions, and pain causes us to abstain from fine ones” (1104b10-11). He states very clearly that, “virtue of character is about pleasures and pains” (1104b10). Therefore, it follows that people have to be habituated to find enjoyment or pain in the right things. Habituation is achieved through *praxis* and it is *praxis* (if done correctly) that reinforces the correct emotions that are linked to virtues. The emotions play another role in the ethical process because they are tied with desire (*orexis*) – a constituent cause of motion. Desire guided by right reason causes us to act.

The five features discussed above point to five important concepts in the ethical process. (Two of these, moral virtue and desire interact and relate closely with practical wisdom.) The first concept, an ultimate end, eudaimonia, that guides our actions, is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory. The second relates to the development of moral virtues – the focus of VE theories. If humans are morally neutral by nature but possess the capacity to be good or bad, then moral virtue can be taught through a method that Aristotle calls habituation. This method allows us to develop good dispositions or *hexeis*. Third, *praxis* is a vital part of virtue. It thus constitutes a good disposition. Praxis is also relevant to practical wisdom because practical wisdom results in praxis. Fourth, practical wisdom is another important concept in the ethical process. In simplified terms, phronesis guides emotions, determines the mean and decides on the correct *praxis* in particular ethical situations. Finally, emotion is another concept in the ethical process. Desire provides the final motivation for virtuous action. Desire does not do its work in isolation. Practical

wisdom and desire work together. We desire the good and practical wisdom shows us how to achieve it. Together they result in action. By doing virtuous deeds repeatedly, our emotions are shaped to take pleasure in virtuous actions. The pleasure we obtain from virtuous actions in turn determines the desire of future actions so that they align with the good. Therefore, it is not surprising that Aristotle begins his ethical treatise with an examination of eudaimonia, the chief good and ultimate end.

1.3 Eudaimonia

From the fifth century BCE until the modern period, the dominant ethical theory has been some version of what we call virtue ethics.¹⁴ The classical tradition of VE is clearly stated in Aristotle, although it underlies all of ancient ethical theory.¹⁵ Classical VE is concerned with what is the highest or chief good for a human being. The answer to this question is the end or *telos* towards which virtues aim. Aristotle begins and ends the *Nicomachean Ethics* with an investigation into this highest good.¹⁶ There are many goods such as health, wealth, pleasure, honor and respect, beauty, love and friendship. Yet, they are not ends in themselves because we want them as means towards a higher good. The latter becomes that for the sake of which. If one achieves success in any of the other goods at the expense of the highest good, then nothing is gained.

¹⁴ Annas, Julia, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 515.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Aristotle follows Greek convention when he proposes that the highest good is eudaimonia. As pointed out in the definitions section of the Introduction, “happiness” is a thin description for eudaimonia¹⁷. While most of Aristotle’s contemporaries would agree that eudaimonia is a goal of life, there would be disagreement about what eudaimonia actually is. Aristotle argues that the highest good, eudaimonia, is the activity of reason in accordance with excellence, in a complete life (1098a16-19). The highest good is the most complete of human ends. We choose the highest good for its own sake and never for anything else, and it is self-sufficient. Many moral philosophers, virtue ethicists included, have a problem accepting that there is a highest good that is also an ultimate end in our lives. Even if there is, we cannot define it. Even if we can define it, what does it have to do with any moral system? We must answer these questions before we propose eudaimonia as a necessary feature of virtue ethics. Aristotle is a resource for some justification of the proposition. (The next chapter contains responses to specific objections, such as MacIntyre’s, to the claim.)

1.3.1 Aristotle’s Arguments for Eudaimonia

Aristotle’s ethical theory is as much eudaimonistic ethics as it is virtue ethics.¹⁸ His ethics, as indeed ancient ethical theories, are concerned with the agent’s life as a whole, and with her character. Notions of the agent’s final end, of

¹⁷ Annas (2006), Taylor, Richard, *Virtue Ethics*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002, Irwin, T.H., “Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

¹⁸ Annas, Julia, *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 367.

eudaimonia, and of the virtues are what Annas calls primary.¹⁹ We start from these notions (eudaimonia and virtues), which set up the framework of the theory, and we introduce and understand the other notions in terms of them. These notions are thus primary for understanding and they establish the fundamentals of the theory. However, they are not basic in the modern sense. Other concepts are not derived from them, nor reduced to them. However, the notions of final good *i.e.*, eudaimonia, virtue, phronesis, are systematically connected. It would be difficult and undesirable (from a pragmatic and aesthetic sense) to tease out any one of these three primary ones, that we feel are unsatisfactory or outdated, and then try to make sense of a virtue ethics theory as a whole. Just as Aristotle's ethical theory is concerned about the agent's life as whole, the theory itself is a holistic one. Virtue theories, which profess to derive from Aristotelian ethics, largely choose to neglect or reduce the role of eudaimonia, and instead to focus, at times solely, on virtues. Consequently, such theories lack proportion because they lack a foundation.

I am not arguing that we must take all of Aristotle unquestioningly, without changes. Clearly, there are some aspects of his virtue ethics that do not comport with modernity, such as his illiberal views on women, slaves, his hierarchy of intellectual virtues, and the supremacy of a contemplative life. I am simply arguing that eudaimonia, virtues, and practical wisdom are primary notions in his virtue ethics theory and that there is good reason for this primacy. This is not to say that we need to take Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia, virtue, or phronesis wholesale. Of

¹⁹ Annas (1993), p. 9.

course, these concepts in terms of what they are constituted of should be updated. For instance, it would be unrealistic to accept that the supreme form of an eudaimon life is the contemplative one. Yet, the general concept of an ultimate end that is, the good of humans is relevant and necessary if one is to make sense of a virtue ethics theory.

Thus, I argue that eudaimonia and its role in virtue ethics is still relevant today. Eudaimonia is a necessary base for a comprehensive virtue ethics because eudaimonia is the reason to be virtuous. To be virtuous requires the use of phronesis because we must know which virtues are appropriate in different situations. Thus, the three concepts of eudaimonia, virtue, and phronesis are core concepts for a virtue ethics theory. They are interrelated – there cannot be one without the other two. Thus, if virtue ethicists include and focus on virtues (as they all seem to) in their theories, then they must also include eudaimonia and phronesis.

Aristotle's bipartite view on eudaimonia is, of course, infamous. One version is that is elucidated in Book 1 of the NE is a life that is lived in accordance with virtue, guided by reason. This life is an active one in which a person engages fully in the world and the life includes all the external goods as far as possible. Book 10 describes the contemplative life that is the pinnacle of the highest intellectual virtue, *i.e. sophia* or intellectual accomplishment. For reasons of focus, this dissertation will not spend time debating the interpretations or supremacy of the two versions. Some

have argued that the two positions are irreconcilable.²⁰ The life governed by practical wisdom is at odds with the philosophic life because these two lives arise out of the hybrid nature of man – the divine versus the human. I will simply argue that the contemplative or philosophical life is one among many that can be eudaimon.

Writers such as Tuozzo argue that eudaimonia is theoretical contemplation.²¹ Tuozzo takes the position that choosing virtuous action is for the sake of contemplation. Ackrill, Cooper, Irwin and Nussbaum claim that choosing virtuous action is choosing it for the sake of itself and for eudaimonia.²² This inclusivist version is advanced here. Tuozzo argues that eudaimonia as contemplation is an ultimate basis for virtuous actions. Such actions “effect the psychic leisure that is the pre-condition for contemplation.”²³ According to the view that I take, virtuous actions are done for the sake of eudaimonia, the ultimate good for humans. Eudaimonia is an essential part of being a good human being *qua* human being. This

²⁰ Akrill, J.L., "Aristotle on Eudaimonia" and Irwin, T.H., "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," both in *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays*, ed. Nancy Sherman. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. Wilkes, Kathleen V., "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Mind*, Vol. 87, Np. 348, (October, 1978), pp.553-571.

²¹ Tuozzo, Thomas M., "Contemplation, the Noble, and the Mean: The Standard of Moral Virtue in Aristotle's Ethics", in *Aristotle, Virtue and the Mean*, eds. Richard Bosley, Roger A. Shiner, Janet D. Sisson. Edmonton, Alberta: Academic Printing & Publishing, 1996. See also Tuozzo, Thomas, M., "Aristotle's Theory of the Good and Its Causal Basis" *Phronesis* Vol. 40 No. 3 (1995), pp. 293-314.

²² Akrill, J.L., "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980; Cooper, John M., *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986; Irwin, T.H., "Stoic and Aristotelian conceptions of Happiness," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics* eds. M. Schofield and G. Striker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Nussbaum, Martha C., *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 (updated edition).

²³ Tuozzo (1996), p. 150.

naturalistic view is one put forward by Rosalind Hursthouse and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Briefly, there are two measures for validating the virtues. First, virtues benefit the possessors. Secondly, living in accordance with the virtues enables us to live as good human beings qua human beings. These two features spring from the claim that virtues are required for eudaimonia, and are in turn interrelated. As such the basis of virtuous actions is our human nature and not contemplation.

My position on eudaimonia means that I will abandon Aristotle's hierarchy of the intellectual virtues that are described in section 1.5. I do not think that his categorization of the intellect into practical and theoretical reason is unreasonable. However, unlike Aristotle, I will not make any claims as to the superiority of one over the other. As pointed out in the previous section, there are various reasons for the discomfort some virtue ethicists have for eudaimonia. I believe that if we update the concept of eudaimonia by taking an inclusivist, naturalistic view of it and broadening its definition to include contemporary views of happiness (see section 3.4), we can perhaps make the concept more palatable to virtue ethicists.

While Aristotle's high regard of intellectual accomplishment may be outdated and unnecessary for modern virtue ethics, his arguments for an ultimate end, and why this ultimate end is eudaimonia are still relevant. He provides arguments for his use of eudaimonia as a primary concept in his ethics. The arguments are both empirically based and logically argued. By and large, the inquiry proceeds by dialectical argument, beginning with the accepted beliefs (*ta endoxa*). Thus, Aristotle frequently

employs an endoxic procedure for justifying his ethical propositions.²⁴ His investigation usually starts with a survey of the opinions of reputable people (the wise and the notable) and of ordinary people who have some experience of the phenomenon under study. He works through the difficulties and puzzles (*hai aporiai*), and arrives at first principles that are essentially a refined and systematized version of some subset of accepted beliefs. Aristotle's arguments in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* move as follows.

- (1) There is an ultimate end that is the chief good.
- (2) This chief good, our ultimate end, is eudaimonia.
- (3) Eudaimonia is complete and self-sufficient.
- (4) Moral virtues aim towards the ultimate end, which is eudaimonia. Virtuous acts are done for the sake of eudaimonia.
- (5) Moral virtues are realized in action (*praxis*). Therefore, from (4), action is aimed towards eudaimonia.
- (6) *Phronesis* involves choice and initiates action.

Moral virtues are the affective part of the virtues while *phronesis* is one of the two categories of intellectual virtues, the other being intellectual accomplishment (*sophia*). This chapter covers Aristotle's view of moral virtue in section 1.4 and *phronesis* in 1.5. Meanwhile, statements (1) to (3) require elucidation.

²⁴ Kraut argues strongly for the endoxic method of justifying propositions. However, Aristotle uses other methods such as logical arguments and analogy as well. See Richard Kraut, "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method", in *Blackwell's Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

(1) There is an Ultimate End that is the Chief Good

The first part of Book 1 in NE argues that there is a highest good that Aristotle considers the ultimate end of rational, living beings. The celebrated first two sentences of the Nicomachean Ethics state:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason, the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. (1094a1-2)

Commentators accuse Aristotle of committing a fallacy in these opening lines. He moves from 'Each thing aims at a good' to 'there is a good at which each thing aims'. However, this accusation proves false because Aristotle has merely jumped ahead of his arguments, which he proceeds to give in the following two chapters. Broadie ventures that the second sentence is, for Aristotle, a hypothetical at this point.²⁵ First, he must argue for its antecedent.

Empirical evidence bolsters the proposition that there is a good towards which all things aim. Surely, we see (and it seems virtually tautological) that every craft aims at some goal, the achievement of which would constitute an effective performance of the craft. He gives examples of the end of medicine being health, generalship being victory, and economics being wealth. If something like medicine aims at health, and health is a good, then broadly stated, the objective of medicine is good. Therefore, in a sense this objective is the same as the objective of navigation, namely safe passage at sea, because the latter is good also. Thus, the good is the

²⁵ Broadie, Sarah, *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p 8-9.

formal object of aiming. One could object that not all our actions or activities may be aimed at a good. Some deliberated actions have aims that we recognize to be no good or positively evil. Yet, the agent sees something good in the outcome he was trying to bring about. Even the case where an agent aims at something she considers evil, the action is incomprehensible unless there is some aspect somewhere of the aim which gives the agent a good to try to bring it about even if it is the pleasure of revenge.²⁶ The claim that all action is aimed at some good has intuitive plausibility, arising from the thoughts we have when we try to understand the actions of others and ourselves.²⁷ From the proposition that every craft and action has an end that is its good, Aristotle moves on to say that similarly life as a whole should have an end. Aristotle argues that this end is the ultimate end and is also the highest good.

Once again, Aristotle's argument that there is a highest good rests on both empirical evidence and argument. There are many goods, but some goods are higher than others. Health and wealth are limited goods because we wish to have them for their own sakes as well as the sake of a higher good. Indeed, there is a hierarchy of goods such that some goods are aimed for the sake of a higher ranked good. Life is not simply one end after another. Even if we do not realize it consciously, our ends are part of a hierarchy in which they are subordinate to other ends.

Some interpreters have criticized this argument that it is vain and empty to have a progression of higher goods going into infinity as being a simple fallacy, or

²⁶ Annas (1993), p. 31.

²⁷ *Ibid* .

one with extreme but hidden complexity.²⁸ Anscombe finds an illicit transition from all chains must stop somewhere to the claim that there is somewhere where all chains stop.²⁹ Hardie however is inclined to acquit Aristotle of this fallacy in view of the fact that the possibility of a plurality of ends is mentioned in I.7 (1097a22-24) and that he certainly knew that men enjoy and desire many different objects. If the sentence is read in the context of the passage it has a coherent meaning.³⁰ It is best to draw out the intuitive consequences of Aristotle's observations.³¹ Any action is intuitively understood as being aimed at the production of some good. If asked why I pursue this good, the answer will typically be that it is part of a hierarchy of goods. Thus, in modern capitalist societies, individuals do not pursue wealth just for the sake of wealth but for other ends, such as power, recognition, winning a perceived competition with peers. We cannot have this sequence of aiming towards a higher level good extend into infinity because it would make our desire empty and vain (1094a21). If we ask why the limited ends aimed at by crafts and activities are good, in no case will the answer rest simply with a description of the product or activity itself.³² Thus, why pursue wealth that is for the sake of recognition? Recognition is for the sake of assurance that we are successful. This progression of ends leads to the ultimate end that is some (in this case, ill-conceived) notion of eudaimonia. In each

²⁸ See Kenny, Anthony, "Happiness" in Feinberg, J. (Ed.) *Moral Concepts*, p. 43-52, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969; Williams, B. "Aristotle on the Good", *Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 12, 1962, pp. 289-96; Kirwin, C. "Logic and the Good in Aristotle", *Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 17, 1967, pp. 97-114.

²⁹ Anscombe, G.E.M., *Intention*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 34.

³⁰ Hardie, W.F.R., *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p.17.

³¹ Annas (1993), p. 31.

³² Broadie (1991), p. 9.

case, the enjoyment contributes to something that is not, and is not the product of, any one of these limited goods such as health, wealth, or honor. The pleasure contributes to the good life. Therefore, there is a chief and final good towards which all goods aim.

To counter the rejoinder that aiming towards a higher good can continue onto infinity without encountering a final good, Aristotle turns, once more, to our human experience to show that there is an ultimate end. Human societies exist and they are organized. This organization is a result of rational activity of government that aims towards the good of all. The good at which all things aim has been identified as the objective of those who govern. It is the objective of the *politikos* or statesman (1094a25-b10). The good of the polis towards which the statesman aims is the same conceptually as the good that an individual aims towards so that, “the good is the same for a single person and for a city (1094b8)”

Aristotle remarks in later chapters of Book 1 that we may have more than one aim in life, which we want for its own sake, like health and honor. These goods can be aimed at for themselves as well as for the sake of a further or wider aim. However, there will only be a single aim in our life, which we aim at solely for its own sake and not for the sake of any further aim. Aristotle’s argument is not one about what we should do, but an explication of what we do do.³³ We may not realize consciously that we are doing this, or perhaps we do not take the time or have the capacity to understand that we have a final end. McDowell argues that Aristotle’s

³³ Annas (1993), p. 32.

thesis that eudaimonia is the chief good, the end for all that we do is indeed an indicative thesis and not a gerundive one.³⁴ In other words, the thesis is claiming that eudaimonia is that for whose sake all action is undertaken.³⁵ The thesis is not claiming that eudaimonia is that for whose sake all action ought to be undertaken. People do not just aim at health just for its own sake, but also for the sake of an ultimate end. We do pursue the limited goods because we see them as contributing to our *telos*, or ultimate end, which is our highest good. Aristotle recognizes the possibility of living a life in which one has several ends, not subordinated to an ultimate end. He speaks of this possibility at the end of *Eudemian Ethics* I 1, when he writes about people who think that living happily is composed of two or more aims, such as virtue, pleasure and so on (1214b3-5). These people are however, unreflective. Either they have not yet thought through the implications of considering one's life as whole or dissonance between two or more uncoordinated ends will pressure the agent to continue towards recognizing a single ultimate end.

(2) The Ultimate End, that is the Chief Good, is Eudaimonia

This single ultimate end is eudaimonia. Both ordinary people and people of quality agree on this view. They also agree that living well and doing well are the same thing as being happy (1095a17-19). However, the agreement ends here because

³⁴ McDowell, John, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 359.

³⁵ The thesis that we have a final end that is empirically based does not mean that it is the end of ethics. People still need to think about what that final end is, and how one reaches it. We need to investigate what is the final good, how we can achieve it, what are the virtues, how one becomes virtuous, and how we develop into people who allow reason to guide our emotions.

people differ on the finer definitions of eudaimonia. From Aristotle's detailed discussion, we derive the following definition of eudaimonia:

1. It is complete
2. It is self-sufficient
3. It is the chief good of a happy human life
4. It requires the use of our reason
5. Our reason is employed in the practice of virtues
6. It is accomplished in a complete life

We start our inquiry into eudaimonia from what is knowable (1095b5). There are three kinds of lives that one might pursue: the life of consumption, the life of honor, and the life of contemplation. The first two are dismissed as candidates for eudaimon lives because honor and wealth are pursued for the sake of something else. If eudaimonia is the ultimate end, then it is not pursued for anything else. Indeed it is that for which everything else aims. Eudaimonia is therefore complete without qualification because it is desirable for itself and not for something else. We choose health, wealth, honor, intelligence, beauty because of themselves but we also choose them for the sake of happiness. We do not seek happiness for the sake of these other goods, nor in general for anything else (1097a34-b6). Eudaimonia is also self-sufficient because in itself it makes life desirable and lacking in nothing (1097b15). Thus, the completeness and self-sufficient aspects of eudaimonia qualify it as the chief good.

Aristotle feels that the term needs further refinement for to merely say that eudaimonia is the chief good is a little empty in content. At this juncture, he turns to the *ergon* or function argument. We judge whether an activity, such as sculpting, or a thing is doing well by the degree of excellence in the performance of its main function. Aristotle argues that if a carpenter or shoemaker has a function surely, human beings must have one too (1097b25-30). What is the function that is peculiar just to human beings? It is not the nutritive function because we share that with plants and animals. Nor is it the perceptual function because we share that with animals. Humans are the only animals that can reason. Therefore, reasoning is the activity that is peculiar to human beings. This ability distinguishes our species from all others on the planet (as far as we know; there are no signs of whale civilization as yet). If happiness is living well and doing well, then according to the function argument, the achievement of these two goals is through the best use of our reason. In addition, the words “living” and “doing” are active verbs. These words suggest that we must engage in an active life (1099a5). It is no good simply sitting and thinking about virtue, we must be actively engaged in the practice of virtue in order to be eudaimon. Aristotle writes: “Just as at the Olympic Games it is not the finest and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for the winners come from among these), so too in life it is the doers that become achievers of fine and good things – and rightly so” (1099a4-6). Nor can we be eudaimon with just one day’s worth of virtuous activity. “For a single swallow does not make spring, nor does a single day” (1098a20). We must live a complete life of virtue guided by reason.

Finally, according to the function argument, the good of a thing or activity is in the excellent use of its prime function. A good pianist plays the piano well. Similarly, a human being is good who lives a life of virtuous activity according to reason.

Aristotle argues that his account of eudaimonia is in agreement with views held by the Ancients and people of high reputation. Moreover, being virtuous is not painful to the virtuous. Indeed, it would feel good (1099a13-15). There is a naturalness to being virtuous. Aristotle sums up eudaimonia so, “the human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue (and if there are more virtues than one, in accordance with the best and the most complete). But furthermore it will be this in a complete life” (1098a16-19).

1.3.2 Eudaimonia: Inclusivist versus Dominant View

There has been some discussion of whether eudaimonia consists in one good alone, or a composite of all intrinsic goods. J.L. Akrill and Irwin take the latter or inclusivist view.³⁶ Akrill defines an inclusive end as a combination of two or more values, activities, or goods. Kraut, Hardie, and Kenny expound the former or dominant end view of eudaimonia.³⁷ According to this view, eudaimonia consists in just one type of good *i.e.*, virtuous activity according to reason. In I.8, Aristotle identifies the end with activities of the soul rather than with goods of the body or external goods. If he thought eudaimonia was a composite of health, physical

³⁶ See Akrill, J.L., "Aristotle on Eudaimonia" and Irwin, T.H., "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," both in *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays*, ed. Nancy Sherman. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

³⁷ Kraut (1999), Hardie (1984), Kenny (1965)

pleasure, friends, etc. he would have stated that eudaimonia is not only a good of the soul but also an external good and a good of the body.³⁸ Kraut argues that external goods are desirable for the sake of eudaimonia and that they therefore, lack one of the characteristics of the chief good (self-sufficiency).

In a related question as to whether virtuous activity is necessary and sufficient for eudaimonia, Aristotle admits that we require a minimum level of wealth, health, honor, and fortune in order to be ideally eudaimon (1100b20-1101a5). Misfortunes may obstruct virtuous activity. However, "a eudaimon man will never become miserable, though neither will he be blessed if he meets with fortunes like Priam's" (1101a6-8). Even though an individual may require a minimum level of other goods to be fully eudaimon, the cause of their goodness is eudaimonia. For, "[eudaimonia] is a principle; for it is for the sake of eudaimonia that we all do everything else we do, and we lay it down that the principle and cause of goods is something honorable and godlike" (1102a2-4). Thus, Kraut claims on textual grounds that external goods will support virtuous activity, but are not themselves "components of the ultimate end of a happy life."³⁹

On modernity grounds, however, the inclusivist view is more appropriate. Aristotle's *ergon* argument and subsequent definition of eudaimonia seem to support the dominant view. Yet, he does add that eudaimonia is found in a complete life. One that is enjoyable and worthwhile all through. Eudaimonia is a compound of a

³⁸ Kraut (1999), p. 82

³⁹ Kraut (1999), p. 85.

life lived according to virtue that includes pleasure, success, friendship, and other enriching relationships. This version of eudaimonia is more in accord with contemporary society. We can interpret Aristotle in an inclusivist way when he says that eudaimonia is final, self-sufficient, and more desirable than everything else by arguing that eudaimonia includes everything desirable in itself. When Aristotle says that A is for the sake of B, he need not mean that A is a means to B but he may mean that A contributes as a constituent of B.⁴⁰ He could mean that good actions are for the sake of eudaimonia, not that eudaimonia consists in single type of activity. Hence, just because we pursue an activity because it leads to the final end of eudaimonia, does not mean that we do not find the activity to be intrinsically worthwhile. Eudaimonia is the most desirable sort of life, the life that contains all intrinsically worthwhile activities.⁴¹ Chapter 3 expounds on this line of thought when it examines the foundational role of eudaimonia in virtue ethics.

Having established a working definition of eudaimonia in Book 1, Aristotle moves on to describe the virtues and how they are directed towards this highest good. There are two kinds of virtues or human virtues: those of intellect and those of character. The former are intellectual virtues and the latter are moral virtues. In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes two main forms of the former: a theoretical one, which he names ‘sophia’ and a practical one, which he calls

⁴⁰ Akrill (1999), p. 73.

⁴¹ Akrill (1999), p. 63.

‘phronesis’. To aim for virtuous actions would require attaining both moral virtue and phronesis.

1.4 Moral Virtue

To understand Aristotle’s views on moral virtues is to consider his formal definition:

[Moral] Virtues, then, is a disposition issuing in decisions, depending on intermediacy of the kind relative to us, this being determined by rational prescription and in a way in which the wise person would determine it. And it is intermediacy between two bad states, one involving excess, the other involving deficiency.

(II, 6, 1106b36-1107a3)

Dispositions are properties of things which give rise to fixed patterns of behavior. A habitual disposition, which Aristotle calls a *hexis*, also has a basis in nature, in that we are naturally capable of developing such a habit. In II 6, Aristotle develops his account of the way in which the emotions are involved in moral virtue. The habitual disposition to respond emotionally will be a virtue only if the pattern of emotional responses is appropriate.

1.4.1 *Hexis*

Aristotle gives a detailed description of the mechanism that results in *hexis* formation. Although the word ‘mechanism’ may imply that the process is mechanistic, it is certainly not. Rather, the process is organic and fluid because we are after all, studying human behavior. It is generally accepted that the critical faculties do not play a significant role in *hexis* formation. However, Sherman has offered another interpretation in which she argues that critical faculties such as the perceptual, affective and deliberative capacities are a resource and at the same time

developed during *hexis* formation⁴². Her theory is aimed at answering the question of how a person transitions from childhood to moral maturity that is not addressed in the theory of habituation. How does a child with merely habituated virtue ever develop the capacities requisite for practical reason and inseparable from full virtue? Her overall claim is that, “if full virtue is to meet certain conditions, then this must be reflected in the educational process. The child must be seen as being educated towards that end. This will require a developmental conception of cognitive and affective capacities, as well as a conception of habituation as in varying degrees reflective and critical.”⁴³ Hence, for Sherman critical faculties are used in the habituation process. Burnyeat⁴⁴ and Sorabji⁴⁵ have also argued for the significance of critical faculties in the habituation process. Sorabji writes, “The first thing to notice is that it [habituation] is not a mindless process habituation involves assessing the situation and seeing what is called for. So habituation is intimately linked with the kind of intuitive perception (*nous*) Habituation is concerned with desire as well as with reason.”⁴⁶ It is his opinion therefore, that induction, as well as habituation, forms part of moral education.

The purpose of moral education is to develop an individual’s virtuous *hexeis*. *Hexeis* have a central role in Aristotle’s ethical process because virtue is not a feeling

⁴² Sherman, Nancy, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue*. Clarendon Press, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, Chapter 5.

⁴³ Sherman (1989), pp. 159-161.

⁴⁴ Burnyeat, Miles, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good”, in A.O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).

⁴⁵ Sorabji, Richard, “Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue”, in A.O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).

⁴⁶ Sorabji (1980), p.216.

or a capacity but it is a *hexis* (NE II.5). To become virtuous therefore, one has to possess the right *hexeis*. Formation of good *hexeis* must begin early in one's life (NE 1103b23-25). The reason for this is that Aristotle believes that a *hexis* develops from habituation and early childhood training is crucial in instilling the correct *hexis* in an individual. As habituation is best begun at an early age the most influential teachers will be parents and the immediate family unit, perhaps older siblings. Trainers will also include close members of the extended family, teachers and the larger community. The virtues that they teach will be the ones that are valued by their society and especially by the particular socio-economic group to which they belong.

Parents and other teachers instill virtue through practice, encouraging the young to do the right things repeatedly with the right feeling. Aristotle writes:

But these actions are not only the sources and causes both of the emergence and growth of virtues and of their ruin; the activities of the virtues [once we have acquired them] also consist in these same actions. For this is also true of more evident cases; strength, for instance, arises from eating a lot and from withstanding much hard labor, and it is the strong person who is most capable of these very actions. It is the same with the virtues. For abstaining from pleasures makes us become temperate, and once we have become temperate we are most capable of abstaining from pleasures. It is similar with bravery; habituation in disdain for frightening situations and in standing firm against them makes us become brave, and once we have become brave we shall be most capable of standing firm (NE 1104b2-4).

As Aristotle says more simply in the Rhetoric: "Acts are done from habit because individuals have done them many times before" (*Rh* 1369b6). Through repetition an acquired *hexis* becomes almost natural, or second nature, "For as soon as a thing becomes habituated it is virtually natural. For habit is similar to nature. For what

happens often is akin to what happens always, natural events happening always, habitual events being frequent and repeated” (*Rh* 1370a6).

In forming a *hexis* through habituation one therefore works on the *pathe*, and the resulting *praxis*. In shaping the *pathe*, one works on two aspects: pleasure and pain and determining the mean of every pathos. Aristotle is clear that virtue is about pleasure and pain (*NE* 1104b9). The basis for this assertion is based on the argument that virtues are concerned with *praxis* and *pathe*. Every pathos and every *praxis* implies pleasure or pain, hence for this reason virtue is about pleasure and pain (*NE* 1104b114-16). Pleasure causes a person to do base actions, and pain causes a person to abstain from fine ones. Hence, a virtuous individual must be taught to feel pleasure or to bear the pain of right actions. This goal is not easy because even if man is not inherently good or bad, he does tend to naturally pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Countering this natural instinct is difficult but failure to do so will lead to vice.

1.4.2 The Mean

The other aspect of guiding the *pathe* in order to develop a good *hexis* is to practice determining the mean or intermediate of each *pathos*. To be virtuous is to find the mean of every *pathos* and *praxis* in each particular ethical situation. Aristotle believes that vice lies in the excess or deficiency of some virtue. For instance, an excess of bravery is rashness and a deficiency is cowardice; an excess of generosity is wastefulness and the deficiency is ungenerosity. It is important therefore to aim at the mean, a task that is not at all easy, in order to have any virtue. Not only should we aim at the mean of a *pathos* but we should also target the mean in

our actions since virtue is both feelings and deeds. The mean cannot be realized unless reason comes to our aid. Cultivating the *hexeis* to feel fear, anger, compassion or pity appropriately will be bound up with learning how to discern the circumstances that warrant these responses. Hitting the mean in our feelings and action cannot be achieved without critical judgment⁴⁷.

A rather prosaic (for others, though not for me) example of *hexis* formation is how we are teaching our eight year old daughter, Shera, a.k.a. Peanut, to be brave, not in battle but in facing new situations, people and activities. As we wish to cultivate a sense of adventure in her, we want her to try new things. When she is clearly afraid of a new situation, we try to calm her fears by explaining how much fun it will be to try out the new activity, the new friends she will make, and other pleasurable outcomes. Hence, in this way we lessen her fear to a more intermediate (mean) level and show her the pleasurable effect of the action of trying a new thing. All this we do through reason, as far as possible for her age. Although young, she is not closed to all reason because as Sherman states, “to lack deliberative skills at a certain stage does not imply the absence of other cognitive capacities specific to ethical response”⁴⁸. Aristotle has made it clear that critical activity and its enjoyment characterize all stages of development.⁴⁹ Often we persuade by example, *i.e.*, we perform the task or enter the situation that we advocate. In fact, at early stages, discriminatory activity

⁴⁷ Sherman (1989), p.167.

⁴⁸ Sherman (1989), p. 161.

⁴⁹ Sherman (1989), p. 167.

will often take the form of *mimesis*.⁵⁰ Through imitation, Peanut and almost every child learns to size up situations that then adds to her store of experience and trains her cognitive abilities. These abilities then go on to inform her future reactions and emotions.

1.4.3 Desire

In the same vein reason also informs desire, which is another element that goes towards forming a *hexis*. From Aristotle's description of the soul, the non-rational part (*to orektikon*) *i.e.* appetites, emotions and in general *pathe*, does not engage in reasoning but can listen to reason and thus partake of reason in a certain way⁵¹. The role of desire is to provide a *telos* towards which the organism moves. Aristotle believes that reason is not the source of motion but rather it steers desire so that it becomes focused and controlled in specific ways. Hence, while *telos* is supplied by desire, it is also focused and directed by reason. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle outlines that passions are selective responses to articulated features of our environment. This sort of selectivity characterizes, on Aristotle's view, the desires of both humans and animals. The agent moved by thirst or hunger responds cognitively to those features of the environment that can satisfy the need. In the case of ethical situations, the need is focused on the good. In this way, desires are prepared by cognition.⁵² In the formation of *hexis*, desires provide the ethical *telos* that cause us to act. In acting virtuously repeatedly, our emotions are shaped to appreciate virtuous

⁵⁰ Sherman (1989), p.168.

⁵¹ Sherman (1989), p. 162

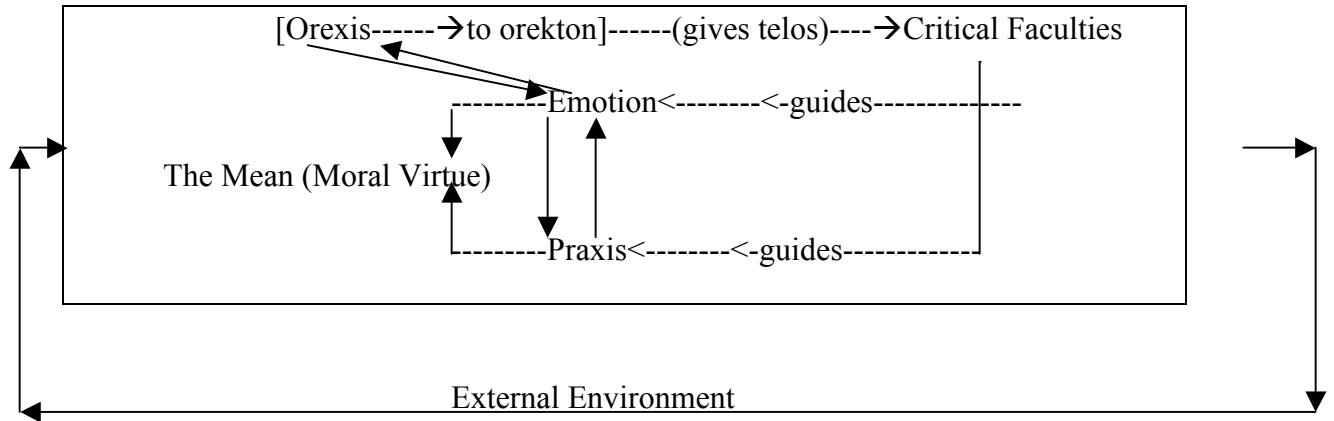
⁵² Sherman (1989), p. 169.

action. In turn, it is the pleasure that we derive from a particular virtuous activity that shapes our future desire so that we desire to perform that activity again.

A more exalted example of *hexis* formation through habituation can be given of the training of a warrior (in modern parlance, military person) to be brave. She is first trained for bravery in boot camp. She learns the skills and then she learns to get the right feelings of bravery in battle. Close comrades whose views of the individual matter a great deal to that individual reinforce these feelings. Therefore, she must be brave so that her comrades think of her as brave. If a *hexis* of bravery is ingrained, eventually the individual will not need other people in order to assess herself. She will associate bravery with the noble and an end in itself.

The discussion can be summed up in the figure below that gives a diagrammatic representation of the elements and their relationships that make up a *hexis*. Two thoughts should be noted. First, it can be seen that emotion is a part of desire. It is not uncommon knowledge that our desires are stirred by our passions. The definition of anger illustrates this: ‘Anger is a desire [*orexis*] accompanied by pain towards the revenge of what one regards as a slight towards oneself or one’s friends that is unwarranted’ (Rh 1378a30-32). Second, the entire system of a *hexis* is self-perpetuating, as Aristotle makes clear, “These actions are not only the sources and causes both of the emergence and growth of virtues and of their ruin; the activities of the virtues [once we have acquired them] also consist in these same actions. Hence, the ontology of a *hexis* is like an actualization (*entelechy*) or essence (*ti en einai*). It is therefore self-maintaining.

The Character of a Hexis



When Aristotle speaks of moral virtues as a mean position between excess and deficiency, he is not saying that the virtuous person is one who is by character disposed to have only moderate emotional responses. The appropriate emotional response depends on the situation: "to be affected when one should, at the things one should, in relation to the people one should, for the reasons one should, and in the way one should, is both intermediate and best, which is what belongs to excellence" (1106b21-24).

Appropriate responses are ones that are in accord with the judgment of a person who has practical wisdom or the *phronimos*. For an emotional response to be virtuous, it must accord with what reason judges to be the true demands of the situation, because reason aims for the truth. Aristotle does not believe that it is possible to be truly virtuous unless one has already acquired the ability to think

correctly about moral decisions.⁵³ For Aristotle, virtue is not simply a habit in accordance with right reason, but a habit, which exists alongside right reason. It is not possible for someone to be fully virtuous without practical wisdom, nor to have practical wisdom without virtue (VI, 13, 1144b26-32).

1.5 Phronesis

First, the caveat. We go through Aristotle's metaphysics of the soul in order to see how reason and emotion interact and connect. We need not and should not accept the metaphysics completely. His hierarchy of the soul is not necessary to support the argument that reason and emotion work together to form a desire for correct action in a situation. Yet, we can agree with Aristotle that humans possess both reason and emotions. We wish to see how Aristotle arrives at his theory of virtuous actions, involving eudaimonia, virtues and practical wisdom. His elaboration of practical wisdom continues to be relevant to our current understanding of the concept. It is not surprising that some modern virtue ethicists dissect practical wisdom in much the same way as Aristotle.⁵⁴ A study of his theory of the soul is instructive for these reasons.

For Aristotle, the soul has two parts: one that is non-rational and the other that possesses reason (1102a28). Part of the non-rational soul participates, in a way, in reason. The self-controlled person is the object of praise because she controls her emotional impulses by following the lead of reason. The moderate and courageous

⁵³ Hughes, Gerard, *Aristotle on Ethics*. London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 108-109.

⁵⁴ For instance, Rosalind Hursthouse in *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

person is even more willing to listen to reason. The appetitive or desiring part participates in reason, in that it listens and obeys reason (1102b25 – 29) at least in the continent person. From Aristotle's discussion of the two parts of the non-rational soul, we infer that the importance of any component of the soul correlates with the measure of its engagement with reason. In the *NE*, the appetitive part of the soul is described as participating in reason but distinct from reason, fighting reason in the incontinent man, obeying reason in the continent man, and harmonizing with reason in the virtuous man. In the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) the appetitive part of the soul also participates in reason, having by nature the power to obey and listen and to follow the rational part (1219b28 – 30; 1220a9 – 11). Aristotle goes on to categorize the virtues pertaining to the appetitive part of the soul as virtues of character. The virtues are dispositions to feel emotions (and do actions) of the appropriate sort. Aristotle makes it very clear that there can be no *phronesis* without moral virtue and no moral virtue without *phronesis* (1144b40 – 43).

Aristotle characterizes the types of intellectual excellences according to the types of data, which they assimilate, and the ends of these excellences. The rational soul has five states which can know the truth: *techne* (technical expertise), *episteme* (systematic knowledge), *phronesis* (wisdom), *sophia* (intellectual accomplishment), and *nous* (intelligence). *Episteme*, *nous*, and *sophia* are intellectual dispositions that are concerned with knowledge of the things that cannot be otherwise. *Techne* and *phronesis* deal with knowledge of the changeable. Aristotle first distinguishes

between the three “theoretical” intellectual dispositions before he classifies *nous* and *episteme* as parts of *sophia*.

It is phronesis that has to do with things human (1141b8). While *sophia* is the proper arête of the *epistemonikon* (scientific part), which is concerned with eternal truths, phronesis is the proper arete of the *logistikon* (calculative part and named from the sense of *logizesthai* in which it is equivalent to *bouleuesthai*, or deliberation)⁵⁵. Phronesis is closely identified with deliberation and is defined as, “that [which] has to do with things human and with things one can deliberate about” (1141b8 – 10). Aristotle emphasizes the importance of deliberation in connection with phronesis, particularly in NE VI.9. Yet, other intellectual excellences are also required for phronesis and he discusses them in later chapters of the book.

According to Bostock, phronesis has six primary aspects. First, phronesis is an intellectual virtue concerned with truth about mutable matters and with particulars. Second, phronesis is ends driven where the end is the whole good of the person. Third, phronesis results in action. Fourth, phronesis is deliberative rather than intuitive. Fifth, as we shall show in section V, phronesis is irretrievably connected with moral virtue, providing the right reasoning for achieving the ends that are determined by moral virtue. Sixth, the union of phronesis and moral virtue is dependent on the pre-existence of natural qualities, intellectual and affective⁵⁶. In

⁵⁵ Bostock D., *Aristotle's Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2000), p.166.

⁵⁶ Bostock (2000), p.163.

chapter 4, we discuss these aspects at greater length, especially as they relate to the essential role of phronesis in a virtue ethics theory.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 of NE VI list the other intellectual virtues, which are required for phronesis. However, these chapters also distinguish phronesis from these intellectual virtues. Deliberation, comprehension, sense, and cleverness are required for and yet, are not the same as phronesis. We mean by deliberation, the virtue of good deliberation (*euboulia*). Comprehension (*sunesis*) is the capacity to sum up a situation and it looks at things over which one puzzles and about which one deliberates (1143a7). It helps phronesis to discriminate in different situations. Comprehension is a capacity that phronesis requires but phronesis encompasses much more than comprehension. Phronesis is prescriptive, it informs an action, whereas comprehension is merely discriminative (1143a10). Like comprehension, sense (*gnome*) has a function that has to do with selection for Aristotle describes it as making correct discrimination of what is reasonable (1143a21 – 22). Sense is an intellectual excellence that engages in sympathy so that we speak of having a “shared sense” (1143a20).

There is a further capacity that Aristotle explicitly says is requisite for practical wisdom (1144a28 – 29). This capacity is cleverness. Aristotle defines cleverness: “...such that, when it comes to the things that conduce to a proposed goal, it is able to carry these out and do so successfully” (1144a25 – 26). Bostock argues

that cleverness is simply a new name for deliberation⁵⁷. The difference is just that cleverness is an ethically neutral term and defines someone who is good at achieving a stated goal, whether the goal is good or bad. Good deliberation applies to those whose goals are good. Urmson disagrees arguing that cleverness is not the same as deliberation because it is an executive skill rather than a planning skill⁵⁸. For deliberation is “not about ends, but about what forwards those ends.” Deliberation is about planning towards a goal while cleverness implements that plan. Cleverness has its place after deliberation has ended and the plan made. Cleverness cannot discern between a good goal and a bad goal. It merely implements a plan towards a goal. To discern between good and bad goals is the job of phronesis. A wicked man may possess executive ability as well as a wise one. Such a man may execute a plan towards a bad goal. Bostock’s and Urmson’s views stand at two extremes; that cleverness and deliberation are basically the same or that they are completely different. I would suggest that they are closely connected. Under the right conditions and if aimed at the right goal cleverness can become phronesis, which is concerned with deliberation. Cleverness is a kind of ability to deliberate that becomes modified when that deliberation has been effectively and habitually directed toward the right end⁵⁹. Thus, phronesis is not identical with cleverness but is conditional upon it (1144a29 – 30). Aristotle stresses that phronesis and moral virtue are not two

⁵⁷ Bostock (2000), p.89

⁵⁸ J.O. Urmson, *Aristotle’s Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p.82.

⁵⁹ T. Tuozzo, discussion notes, 2006.

separate and distinct faculties, but are intimately connected. Phronesis necessarily requires the presence of virtue of character to be itself and not cleverness.

1.5.1 The Roles of Phronesis

(1) Determining the Means

As we have seen in section II, deliberation is important in phronesis. Indeed, it is integral. Aristotle covers deliberation in NE III.3 and IV.9. In these sections, he clearly says as the example in the last section shows, that deliberation is about what forwards the end. Aristotle makes this quite explicit at least in most of the clear texts on the point (1112b11 – 12, 1112b24 – 25, 1113b3 – 5, 1142b32 – 34 and 1144a7 – 10)⁶⁰. The examples of how to produce health (1141b12 – 22) assume that the major premise of a practical argument is simply given; doctors aim at health. What needs deliberation is how to act in such a way that the desired outcome results. Therefore, it is reasonable that many scholars hold the opinion that for Aristotle, phronesis determines the means towards the ultimate end⁶¹. The problems about which we deliberate are problems about means, not about the ends to be achieve.

⁶⁰ D.J. Allan argues that Aristotle treats a restricted and technical notion of deliberation in Book III that is never of ends but always of means. In contrast, Book VI has a much less restricted notion of deliberation and choice. This difference has led to two distinct modes of phronesis, means-end deliberations, and rule-case deliberations. D. Wiggins refutes this interpretation and sees a straightforwardly continuous account in Books III and VI of deliberation, *prohairesis*, and phronesis. See D. Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason”, in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. A.O. Rorty. Berkeley, 1980.

⁶¹ See Broadie (1991), Reeve C.D.C., *Practices of Reason*. Oxford, 2001, Urmson (1988).

In addition, we know that *prohairesis*⁶² proceeds from deliberation. What is *prohairesis*? Aristotle defines it as “deliberative desire for things that depend on us; for it is through having selected on the basis of having deliberated that we desire in accordance with our deliberation” (1113a10 – 13). First, *prohairesis* is an intellectual thing⁶³. It is not “something shared by non-rational creatures, whereas appetite and temper are.” (1111b12 –14) Second, and in support of the first characteristic, *prohairesis* comes after deliberation and the two are therefore, tied to each other (1112a15). To give some weight to this argument, Aristotle remarks that reasoning and thought accompanies *prohairesis* (1112a16 –17). Third, in order to be virtuous one must decide to do what a just man would do. There is an implication that every virtuous act involves exercising *prohairesis* (1112a8 –10). Fourth, *prohairesis* is therefore, a combination of reason and desire (1139a31 – b5). Fifth, just as deliberation seems to consist in working out the means, in particular situations or types of situations, of achieving given, relatively concrete ends, so therefore, *prohairesis* since it follows deliberation, also is about what forwards the end (1111b27 – 28). Aristotle makes the latter point in a number of passages in NE (1111b27 – 30, 1113a10 – 15). *Prohairesis* is not just about what promotes the end to some extent; it is about what best promotes the end, and about what better promotes it

⁶² Broadie and Rowe translate *prohairesis* as ‘decision’, while Ross translates it as ‘choice’.

⁶³ R. Sorabji, “Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, Ed. A.O. Rorty. Berkeley (1980). Sorabji notes that whether scholars believe that the choice is of a means to being virtuous, or an instance of a virtuous act, the choice involved is still a rational thing, p. 201.

than anything else available⁶⁴. When we have judged what best promotes the end our desire to do it expresses our wish. We wish for eudaimonia; we deliberate about what will promote it; we desire to do it, and that desire, which is deliberative desire, is a *prohairesis*.

It is therefore, phronesis that deals with what leads to the end, *i.e.* the means. Some say that phronesis takes the ends as given and devotes itself to investigating the ways of achieving them. Aristotle claims that excellence makes the goal right, which is taken to mean that normally it is moral virtue that makes the virtuous man pursue the right goals⁶⁵.

(2) Contributes to Determining the End

If phronesis determines the means, we should conclude that the mean is a means towards the ultimate end of eudaimonia. The other conclusion that we may draw is that the mean is an end and because it is an end, phronesis does have something to do with determining ends. Even though Aristotle writes moral virtue determines the end, some scholars argue that the calculations of phronesis have moral significance and help determine the end⁶⁶.

There is a lone passage in Aristotle's *Ethics* where we find together two subjects that are usually kept quite separate in Aristotle's thought, *i.e.* the distinction between ends and means and the theory of the mean:

⁶⁴ C.D.C. Reeve (2001), p. 88.

⁶⁵ Reeve (2001), p. 81-84.

⁶⁶ G. J. Hughes (2001), Wiggins (1980), Natali C., *The Wisdom of Aristotle*. New York, 2001.

(1) But the end is the object of the action; for all choice is of something and for the sake of some object. (2) The object, then, is the mean, and excellence is the cause of this by choosing the object. (3) Still choice is not of this but of the things done for the sake of this. (4) To hit on these things – I mean what ought to be done for the sake of the object – belongs to another faculty; but of the rightness of the end of the choice the cause is excellence.

EE 1227b36 – 1228a2

The interpretation of this passage is quite difficult and controversial. The second line may be interpreted as saying the mean is the end (object). It also says that excellence determines the mean because excellence chooses the end. The latter thought is consistent with Aristotle's doctrine of ends, which states that the end is determined by moral virtue. Aristotle addresses the question of ends and means without referring to the problem of whether the end in question is the ultimate end or an intermediate end, and in his discussion of this subject, he never mentions the concept of "ultimate end." Broadie argues that there is no ultimate or "Grand End" towards which practical thinking aims; instead, there are a series of intermediate ends⁶⁷. Since the mean is an end (it is not the ultimate end, because it is not eudaimonia), phronesis through *prohairesis* is not involved in choosing it. Line 3 of the passage states that *prohairesis* is involved with deciding what things need to be done in order to achieve the end. Line 4 assumes that we have been reading Aristotle's thoughts on phronesis because he does not name it but calls it "another faculty." Line 4 reiterates the doctrine that phronesis chooses the means whereas excellence chooses the end. It

⁶⁷ Broadie (1991).

also reaffirms, indirectly, that excellence determines the mean. This passage is apparently contradictory to Aristotle's definition of moral virtue where he states that the mean is determined by correct *logos* or reason.

There are two ways of interpreting this apparent contradiction about the role of phronesis. First, even though the mean is an end in the passage above, it may also be a means to an end. Cooper holds the view that Aristotle thinks that there is an ultimate end, eudaimonia, which is pursued constantly. However, the constant pursuit of this ultimate end does not rule out his having other ends as well, that is, other things desired for their own sake⁶⁸. It entails only that any such end is at the same time pursued as a means to the ultimate end. Other things may be pursued as ends provided that, at the same time they are pursued as means to the ultimate end. These subordinate ends may be deliberated about by considering whether they will contribute to the attainment of the ultimate end. Therefore, the pursuit of these ends can be explained, and hopefully justified, by reference to the ultimate end, to which they serve also as a means. If we treat moral virtue and its mean as a means to eudaimonia, then we may argue that phronesis is involved in determining the mean.

Furthermore, it is true that Aristotle says that we do not deliberate about ends, but it is also true, some may argue, that his illustrations about this point in EN III.3 are examples of ends that one could deliberate about, even if at the time they are being taken for granted. Hence, Aristotle's position may be that deliberation will always

⁶⁸ J.M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishers, 1986, p.15 – 22.

take some end for granted though on another occasion that end itself may be questioned, in the light of some higher end that it is supposed to serve. There is a hierarchy of ends, and it is only the highest end of all, namely eudaimonia that is never subject to deliberation; in this case, we can only deliberate about what conduces to it. It is nowadays almost universally conceded, with Kraut as the exception, that Aristotle's phrase 'what conduces to the end' includes not only what we might naturally call 'means' to that end but also what may be called the 'parts' or 'constituents' or 'ingredients' of that end⁶⁹. However, Aristotle when discussing the issues of ends and means does so without referring to the problem of whether the end in question is the ultimate end or an intermediate end. This leads Natali to conclude that, "In general an end – any end – is not an object of deliberation; therefore recent attempts to maintain that, in the final analysis, all ends except happiness are the object of deliberation (since all ends are means for the ultimate end, *i.e.* happiness) are not convincing."⁷⁰ He goes on to argue that even if this interpretation were accepted, the intermediate ends would be the object of deliberation as means and not as ends. This would therefore, confirm Aristotle's thesis that ends are not the object of deliberation. I find it somewhat unsatisfying to maintain that deliberation is involved in determining intermediate ends and yet (since the evidence is undeniably strong) has nothing to do with determining the ultimate end of eudaimonia.

⁶⁹ Bostock (2000), p. 95.

⁷⁰ Natali (2001), p. 45.

The second avenue for trying to connect phronesis with the determination of the end *i.e.* to show the very intimate link between phronesis and moral virtue is a better way of dealing with the previous problem of the total exclusion of phronesis from setting the ultimate end. Aristotle is quite clear that both phronesis and moral virtue are inextricably intertwined and one depends on the other: “It is clear, then, from what has been said that it is not possible to possess excellence in the primary sense without phronesis, nor to be wise without excellence of character” (1144b31 – 33). Phronesis works through deliberation, which gathers and processes the relevant data *e.g.* the right time, the right way, for the right reasons (1106b 21 – 23). Based on assimilation and analysis of the data, *prohairesis* follows. Phronesis chooses the right action to take according to the circumstances. Phronesis is always targeted towards an end, one that is determined by excellence. Its aim is made true by excellence. Indeed, it is absurd to say that one acts badly on the basis of phronesis, as it, *qua* phronesis, can have only good ends. It is thus impossible to be *phronimos* without being good. As Aristotle describes in NE VI.12 – 13 and discussed in section II.1, phronesis without moral virtue ends up as cleverness, while moral virtue without phronesis is simply natural excellence.

Indeed, just as phronesis is not itself without moral virtue, so too moral virtue is not itself without phronesis. Possession of phronesis makes those who already possess natural virtue able to find the means and ways needed to actualize their good tendencies. Phronesis has the task of finding the ways of achieving the end, which is given by moral virtue. However, moral virtue, which determines the end, cannot be

itself without phronesis. The respective functions of moral virtue and phronesis cannot be performed independently of one another, and at different times. Aristotle forges a close link between phronesis and moral virtue when he writes in NE X:

...and phronesis too is yoked together with virtue of character, and this with phronesis, given that the starting points of phronesis are in accordance with the character-virtues, and the correctness of the character-virtues is in accordance with phronesis.

(1178a 16 – 19)

Aristotle says that moral virtue is not only a “disposition according to the correct *logos*, but the disposition accompanied by the correct *logos*” and in the context of practical knowledge it is phronesis that ‘correctly prescribes’ (1144b27 –29). Thus, when moral virtue chooses the correct end, it does not do so without the presence of phronesis. Both moral virtue and practical knowledge are each compounds of desire and reasoning, although in different forms and mixtures⁷¹. In moral virtue, reason and desire join forces and become one.

We can further clarify the role of phronesis in setting the end by distinguishing a difference in how phronesis acts when it is involved in determining the mean from how it acts when it is determining the means. Phronesis determines means via deliberation. Rational deliberation establishes which means are effective for reaching a given end. Cleverness, which helps find the means, plus moral virtue, which has the right ends, is phronesis. Deliberation connects the end to be reached with the actions that it is up to us to perform. The desire to perform these actions

⁷¹ Natali (2001), p. 45.

causes the body to act. Thus, desire as regards the means, follows reason. Does phronesis determine the end (mean) in the same way? We know from earlier discussions that Aristotle separated natural virtue from moral virtue; the latter is natural virtue plus phronesis. Young children and adolescents have a vague grasp of the end, which they hold as a simple opinion or notion. They derive this notion from personal experience, education, society, or the laws of the city. From these sources, they draw the opinion that certain behaviors are good and acceptable in a community. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of experience because it is through experience of concrete situations, while investigating the best way that conduces to the end, that one comes to see what is a good end. Experienced and older people as well as the *phronimoi* have, “an eye, formed from experience, they see correctly” (1143a14). This is the way in which practical ends first form in an individual. With deliberation, this opinion transforms into a practical principle, is assigned the role of an end, and becomes the object of rational desire. The grasp of the end (mean) that natural virtue has does not count as phronesis until the ability to deliberate is acquired. Deliberation not only enables one to find the means, but also gives a greater clarity to one’s grasp of the end (mean) so that the grasp can now counts as phronesis.

The interdependence of moral virtue and phronesis and the different way phronesis acts in determining the mean and the means ameliorates the circularity problem⁷². This problem emerges as follows: when we ask how we attain moral virtues, the answer is that moral virtue is the mean that is determined by reasoning

⁷² Bostock (2000),

that the practically wise man possesses. How does reasoning know the end towards which it is aiming and therefore, what mean relative to ourselves conduces to eudaimonia? That question in turn must clearly depend upon how the wise man conceives of eudaimonia. Yet, now, when we ask what this conception is, and how we obtain it, we find Aristotle replying that the wise man's conception of eudaimonia is given by moral virtue. The circularity problem goes away when we see that phronesis and moral virtue determine one another, and neither prevails. It is not possible to have one of the two elements in one of the two parts of the soul to which they belong, without having also the other element in the other part of the soul. No one can be *phronimos* unless the soul's emotions are in equilibrium. Similarly, no one's emotions can be in equilibrium unless one has phronesis. Both moral virtue and phronesis involve a relation of harmony and collaboration between reason and desire. This relation of collaboration is different in the two cases of determining the end and determining the means to the end⁷³.

(3) Initiates Action

A vital part of a *hexis* is the *praxis*. The latter necessarily involves motion. Therefore, a study of Aristotle's view of motion is helpful for explaining the mechanism of a *hexis*. What, in Aristotle's opinion, is responsible for a living organism's motion? He rules out the nutritive faculty, perception, and reason. None of these faculties inherently have *telos*, for according to Aristotle, all motion aims towards a *telos*. What moves the living organism to action is twofold. There is

⁷³ Natali (2001), p. 55.

something in the situation, the object of desire or *to orekton*; and there is something in the organism itself, desire. The ultimate mover is the desired, *to orekton*: some practical good which itself is not moved or affected by desire, and is hence an unmoved mover. The immediate mover is desire itself, awakened by the power of desiring (*to orektion*). Desire acts through some organ of the body and the organism responds and seeks the object of its desire. Desire is the initiator of motion because it possesses *telos*. It is by “virtue of having desire that an animal moves itself.”⁷⁴ For Aristotle reason by itself cannot initiate action in the absence of desire, while desire moves even when it is opposed by reason.⁷⁵ Thus, Aristotle writes: “For it is the object of desire (*to orekton*) that moves, and through this reasoning moves, since the object of desire is the starting-point of reasoning. ... Now *nous* does not seem to be a mover without desire. ... Hence it is the object of desire that moves, but this may be either the good or the apparent good.”⁷⁶

In sum, all motion and hence, human action proceeds from desire. This interacts with the object of desire (*to orekton*) to produce the *praxis* that aims towards fulfilling the desire. However, not all objects of desire are necessarily good and reason must act as the guide to our *praxis*. If desire is the source our action, then reason is the guide that directs our action intelligently and in the best way to reach the desired *telos*. We can act from intelligent choice of means *i.e.* from *prohairesis*. The intelligent choice of means if practiced often, becomes a *hexis*.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, transl. Sir David Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press,

⁷⁵ *De Anima*, p. 314.

⁷⁶ Randall (1960), p. 74

Aristotle is careful to say that he is not assuming that the soul has parts that are separable, or separately located, but only that the soul as rational and the soul as non-rational are distinct by definition.⁷⁷ Indeed, in the *De Anima* Aristotle is openly cautious about the practice of dividing the soul into parts, warning that any division will always be relative to a particular inquiry⁷⁸. He argues that desire is considerably more complex than the division of the soul into rational and non-rational parts suggests. Hence, a kind of desire – rational desire or *boulesis* – is distinctive of the rational part but intimately connected with the capacities of reflection and revision.

1.6 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter attempts to show the necessity of eudaimonia and phronesis in Aristotle's ethics. Eudaimonia, as the ultimate end, is a target, which virtuous activity aims toward, like an archer aiming at the bull's-eye. Virtuous acts are done for the sake of eudaimonia. The latter justifies the virtues. Moral virtues are realized in action (*praxis*). In turn, phronesis initiates action through choice. In sum, phronesis is required for four reasons: it is crucial in habituation of a disposition, it determines the means, it helps determine the end, and it leads to action. The concepts of eudaimonia and phronesis may need updating so that they comport with contemporary sensibilities. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will argue that this modernizing is possible. Eudaimonia is equivalent to flourishing, which accords with our modern sensibilities of a well-lived life. We do not need to have an Aristotelian concept of

⁷⁷ Randall (1960), p. 70

⁷⁸ Sherman (1989), p. 163.

the soul in order to understand the importance of reason in our moral lives. Phronesis, updated, is practical or moral reasoning. Indeed, eudaimonia and phronesis are still relevant and necessary in a modern virtue ethics even when we detach them from Aristotle's theory of the soul.

CHAPTER 2

THE CACOPHONY: CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE ETHICS

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give a general overview of the current literature in virtue ethics and so derive an impression of the subject's present condition. I will attempt to show that there is a plethora of work on virtue ethics, most of which focus on specific areas of the theory such as virtue or emotions. These are fragmented, theoretically diverse, and do not offer a complete theory of virtue ethics. There is no one, single theory of virtue ethics that commands general agreement in the field. Worse, the familiarity with virtue ethics is not comparable to that which everyone in the philosophy profession has with deontology and utilitarianism. This familiarity is not easy to acquire from the existing literature. There is a range of articles, but so far, only three full books that explore virtue ethics systematically and at length. Each offers a different version of virtue ethics: Rosalind Hursthouse's, Michael Slote's, and Christine Swanton's. These authors approach the subject in almost opposite directions. For example, Slote wants to tighten the variables in a virtue ethics theory and therefore, distills the evaluation of virtues to one single factor: the motivation for any virtue should be benevolence and that is how we should evaluate whether a virtue is a virtue.

In contrast, Swanton recommends a pluralistic approach to virtue ethics so that considerations of what constitutes a virtue are deeply contextual. We must look at items in the field of virtue, the forms of responsiveness, the traits that make a

virtue, the standards for judging virtues, and the notions of the right. Evaluating a character trait to ascertain whether it is a virtue requires us to draw on these pluralities. Hursthouse, in contrast to Slote and Swanton is a neo-Aristotelian and a eudaimonist. Slote is non-teleological, Swanton is both teleological and non-teleological, and Hursthouse is teleological. Virtue ethics is therefore, diverse in views, generally fragmented in research focus, and deficient in agreement on how a virtue ethics theory should look.

I doubt if virtue ethics can continue in this (lack of) direction. Theorists must arrive at some agreement on what concepts are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory if virtue ethics is to position itself as a serious contender among moral systems. To this end, I posit the thesis of this dissertation: that eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory.

This chapter gives a review of the most prominent and relevant writers in the area to show the diversity of views, conceptual sources, and focus in virtue ethics. Yet to give some order to the subject, this chapter categorizes work on virtue ethics according to the:

(1) Source or the theoretical basis of VE work and their contemporary adherents:

- (a) Aristotle: (i) Hursthouse
(ii) Nussbaum
(iii) Annas
- (b) Stoics: (i) Becker
(ii) Sandler
(iii) Gardiner
- (c) Aquinas: (i) MacIntyre

(2) Focus and/or foundations of VE research and their adherents:

(a) Virtue: (i) Swanton
(ii) Slote

(b) Naturalism: (i) Hursthouse
(ii) Foot

(c) Reason: (i) Richardson
(ii) McDowell
(iii) Sherman

(d) Rejecting Reason: (i) Driver
(ii) Merritt

It is beyond the scope of this work to examine closely every author featured in this chapter. It is however, the intention of this work to use specific and relevant authors to help defend and support the thesis. Thus, Hursthouse and Annas are proponents of eudaimonia in contemporary virtue ethics. Many of their arguments for this position are, naturally, salient to supporting my own position on eudaimonia. Similarly, Richardson and McDowell are useful in backing up my position on the role of phronesis in contemporary virtue ethics. These authors provide scholarly backing on the positive side. On the negative side, I will argue that Slote's disregard for eudaimonia opens his theory up to the criticism that it lacks a more solid foundation for evaluating virtues. Similarly, I also criticize Foot's earlier work on virtues, where she shows open ambivalence to using eudaimonia, for a lack of grounding. Driver and Merritt dispute the importance of reason in virtue ethics. I will argue that their dismissal of reason results in serious flaws in a virtue ethics theory and show how their own work exhibit problems that arise from a lack of attention to practical wisdom. These authors will therefore, be revisited in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.2 A Summary of Virtue Ethics

Only since the late 1980s has there been a consensus about the definition of Virtue Ethics (VE).⁷⁹ It now refers to an approach to ethics that has as its central focus the judgment of character. This focus means that the approach is agent-centered rather than act-centered. The alternate focus on the agent differentiates VE from utilitarian and deontological ethics, which are act-centered. Statman identifies three versions of this agent-centered focus.⁸⁰ First, the moderate version in which most of morality is connected with character, although some actions can be evaluated independently of virtue. Second, the reductionist version in which all judgments of rightness are reducible to judgments of character. Lastly, there is the replacement version, where the aretaic notions gain priority by default, after the deontic concepts have been eliminated. Thus, VE is formulated through the idea of a virtuous character. According to most versions of VE the moral goodness of persons is determined by the virtues they possess. Some people are admirable because of the character traits they possess and not the other way around.

Instead of asking, "what should I do?" as deontological ethics does, VE considers what sort of person the agent should be and what sort of life she should lead. This question is not answered by consulting principles, norms or policies that apply to situations. Rather, it is answered by considering the agent's own character along with other morally salient features of the situation. According to most VE

⁷⁹ Statman, Daniel, "Introduction to Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader* ed. Daniel Statman. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997, p.7.

⁸⁰ Statman (1997), p. 9.

theories, the virtuous do not act virtuously for the sake of being virtuous. An honest person tells the truth because she loves the truth.⁸¹ The virtuous person expresses who they are when they act, and in acting, they develop their characters. Hursthouse has neatly summarized the premises that underlie VE's approach to right action in the following way:⁸²

P.1. An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (*i.e.* acting in character) do in the circumstances.

P.1a. A virtuous agent is one who has, and exercises, certain character traits, namely, the virtues.

P.2. A virtue is a character trait that...

The second premise is completed by giving a list, or a criterion such as the one given by Hume in the Second Enquiry: A virtue is a character trait that is useful or agreeable to its possessor or to others. I argue that P.2. should be completed in an Aristotelian manner: A virtue is a character trait that a human being needs for eudaimonia. However, even in this general form proposed by Hursthouse, there are VE proponents who do not use it (Slote for example), as they do not pursue a teleological line in their VE theories.

Thus, we can also divide VE theories into those that are teleological and those that are non-teleological. Aristotle's ethics is teleological because it conceives of a final end or chief good towards which our actions aim. I argue that VE must have a

⁸¹ Van Hooft, Stan, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*. Chesham: Acumen Publishing, 2006, p. 11.

⁸² Hursthouse, Rosalind, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 28-29.

teleological basis in order to justify the virtues and that *telos* is eudaimonia. Trianosky, however, argues that the teleological framework is not different from a rich notion of utilitarianism.⁸³ For Watson, only non-teleological views of the virtues can be regarded as genuine instances of VE. Slote holds a non-teleological view of the virtues. He argues that we admire certain traits of character not for their results but for their intrinsic character.⁸⁴ However, I agree with Julia Annas who views any VE theory that focuses only on virtues as incomplete because the virtues are not located in a theoretical structure that includes a *telos*.⁸⁵

Deontological and utilitarian theories have the notion of right and wrong acts. By contrast, according to VE, especially in the replacement version, the recommended method in ethics is an Aristotelian one, in the sense that we can expect no precise answer to practical questions. Virtuous people may therefore, arrive at different answers to the same practical problem. Of course, this then raises the question that Schneewind writes about: if two allegedly virtuous agents strongly disagree, one of them (at least) must be morally defective.⁸⁶ If we go through the VE

⁸³ Trianosky, Gregory, "Supererogation, Wrongdoing and Vice: On the Autonomy of the Ethics of Virtue," *Journal of Philosophy*: 83 (1986), pp. 26-40.

⁸⁴ Slote, Michael, "Precis of From Morality to Virtue," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54:681, 1994, p.687.

⁸⁵ Annas, Julia, "Virtue and Eudaimonism" in *Social Philosophy & Policy* 15:1 (1998) 37- 55, p. 41.

⁸⁶ Schneewind, J.B., "The Misfortunes of Virtue," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.200.

literature, various thinkers will have different approaches to this question, depending on the source, focus, and foundation of their theories.⁸⁷

2.3 Sources of Theory

2.3.1. Aristotle

The source of theory for many modern VE theories is Aristotle. The foremost proponents of neo-Aristotelian VE are Rosalind Hursthouse, Martha Nussbaum, and Julia Annas.

2.3.1.1. Rosalind Hursthouse

Hursthouse is one of a handful of VE proponents who has written a comprehensive VE theory. She grounds her VE work on Aristotle's ethics, in particular in four Aristotelian concepts. Her first import is eudaimonia.⁸⁸ Hursthouse explicitly claims that, “a virtue is a character trait a human being needs for eudaimonia, to flourish or live well.”⁸⁹ Hursthouse admits that the translation of eudaimonia as “happiness”, “flourishing” or “well-being”, and each has its drawbacks. Happiness, in its contemporary understanding, connotes something subjective. Flourishing does not have this subjectivity problem but its drawback is that we may have a mistaken idea of what flourishing consists of, pleasure for instance. Well-being does not have a corresponding adjective, and is therefore clumsy to use. She proposes that the notion of eudaimonia is close to the idea of

⁸⁷ Hursthouse, for example, intentionally formulates VE to allow for such a possibility. In her opinion, VE is more favorable to the conclusion reached by many writers on moral dilemmas, who argue, from a different perspective, that it is false to assume that only one uniquely right answer exists to every moral quandary. See Hursthouse (1999).

⁸⁸ Hursthouse (1999).

⁸⁹ Hursthouse (1999), p.10

“true (or real) happiness,” or “the sort of happiness worth having.”⁹⁰ We would want this sort of happiness for our children for their own sakes.

Hursthouse takes the view that eudaimonia is an expression of a form of naturalism. The virtues are those character traits that make a human being a good human being. Human beings need those character traits to live well as human beings, to live a good, characteristically human life. "Ethical evaluations of human beings as good or bad are taken to be analogous to evaluations of other living things as good or bad specimens of their kind. The analogy is instructive, because it reveals that several features of ethical evaluation thought to be peculiar to it, and inimical to its objectivity, are present in the quasi-scientific evaluation even of plants."⁹¹ Thus, Hursthouse thinks that one can (to a certain extent) use an account of human nature to base our understanding of virtue.

Her second import from Aristotle is the concept of virtue. She sticks close to Aristotle's definition of a virtue as (generally) a state (*hexis*) of one's character.⁹² However, she equates this definition with being a "character trait". She goes on to define character traits as Aristotle defines *hexis* -- a settled state that involves reason and emotion. A person is honest and does honest deeds "readily, eagerly, unhesitatingly, scrupulously, as appropriate."⁹³ She agrees that each of the virtues involves getting things right, for each involves phronesis, (she calls it practical

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Hursthouse (1999), p. 21.

⁹² Hursthouse (1999), p.11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

wisdom), which is the ability to reason correctly about practical matters. Unlike Aristotle, Hursthouse is unsure if all virtues are morally good. Someone could be honest and generous "to a fault", or her benevolence may lead to breaking a promise she should have kept in their desire to prevent other's hurt feelings. The only virtue that Hursthouse can claim to make its possessor good is wisdom.

This admission of uncertainty about the moral goodness of virtues is odd, especially when she has already brought in the concept of *phronesis* and *eudaimonia*. Aristotle is clear that the excess or deficiency of a virtue is not the virtue itself. Reason and knowledge of the end guides our virtues. Moreover, her example of a "brave" desperado is diffused by arguing that the desperado is not brave because his means are not guided by deliberation but by cleverness (which lacks the knowledge of the end). She admits as much when she says that perhaps the desperado is daring but does not possess the virtue of courage.

The third import from Aristotle is the distinctions between acting from reason and the actions small children and animals do, and between rational wanting or desire, and the mere passion that drives other animals and small children. She agrees with Aristotle that small children do not have the experience, moral knowledge, or mental capacity to make reasoned moral decisions. They merely have passions.

Thus, Hursthouse's adherence to the above concept of rational desire also makes her an adherent to another Aristotelian concept -- choice (*prohairesis*). Contemporary debate centers on the question of whether intentional action is prompted in part by desire or by belief. The assumption is that beliefs and desires are

entirely different, as is the distinction between rational and non-rational. Hursthouse, however, agrees with Aristotle that choice is either desiderative intellect or intellectual desire. It belongs to both the cognitive and the conative faculties and is not broken down into mutually exclusive belief and desire. Aristotle clearly states that the irrational part of the soul listens to reason. Hursthouse invokes the later Wittgenstein to support the rejection of clear-cut distinctions in philosophical psychology.⁹⁴ She readily admits that a minority of philosophers holds this view.

2.3.1.2. Martha Nussbaum

Nussbaum is an original thinker who is neo-Aristotelian in her approach to practical and ethical problems. She endorses the central concepts of Aristotle's ethical thinking -- eudaimonia, the centrality of practical wisdom, and Aristotelian essentialism. Her view of eudaimonia is an inclusivist one. According to this view, one that is shared by Irwin and Akrill (see chapter 1), the eudaimonistic human life is a life inclusive of a number of different constituents, each being defined apart from each of the others and valued for its own sake.⁹⁵ Part of the account of virtue is the stipulation that fine actions are chosen in each case for their own sake, not simply for the sake of some further reward or consequence (1105a32). Aristotle defines each virtue separately, as something that has its value in itself. Moreover, Aristotle asserts that we choose many things in life for their own sake. To value each of these separate

⁹⁴ Hursthouse (1999), p. 16.

⁹⁵ See Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" (1999), "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category" (1999), and *The Fragility of Good* (2001).

items, for what it is, seems to require recognition of its distinctness and separateness from every other. Hence, Nussbaum views the goods that contribute to eudaimonia as non-commensurable. Unsurprisingly, she is also ardently anti-utilitarian. The latter's project of giving a single value to every good, reducing them down to pleasure or desire, weighing the alternatives using this single measure and then choosing the "best" alternative based on the good consequences it produces is simply mistaken. The question is whether this single-valued world can possibly have the richness and inclusiveness of the current world. Nussbaum supports Aristotle's rejection of this science of measurement and defends a "picture of choice as a quality-based selection among goods that are plural and heterogeneous, each being chosen for its own distinctive value."⁹⁶

The choice between non-commensurable goods is fraught with difficulty. Indeed, tragedy often results from the choice of one good over another. Nussbaum uses Greek tragedies to illustrate ways in which ethical thought comes to terms with disaster. At this point, Nussbaum argues that we cannot make a choice without the aid of reason. She assigns a central role to practical reasoning in the planning and arrangement of a eudaimonistic life. She insists that it is practical reasoning that makes all our activities fully human. She also claims that emotions are forms of intelligent evaluative interpretation, and that the reason/emotion dichotomy ought therefore to be rejected. Clearly, her view is very much informed by Aristotle who has a sophisticated model for ethical action that results from the interplay of desire

⁹⁶ Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception" (1999), p.148.

and emotion (well trained) and practical wisdom. Aristotle describes choice (prohairesis) as an ability that is on the borderline between the intellectual and passionate, partaking of both natures. Choice is either desiderative deliberation or deliberative desire (1113a9, 1113a23, b4-5). Practical wisdom functions in close connection with the correctly disposed passions. It is necessarily interdependent with excellence of character, which is a disposition concerning appropriate passion as well as appropriate action. The experienced person confronting a new situation does not attempt to face it with the intellect. She faces it with desires informed by deliberation and deliberations informed by desire. She responds to the situation appropriately in both passion and act. Frequently the perception of the salient features will be achieved in a way that relies centrally upon the discriminating power of passion. The passions do not follow the lead of reason reluctantly but with pleasure. Proper virtuous choice requires the combination of correct selection with correct emotional response. Without the right emotional response the choice and action are not virtuous. Thus, a virtuous act is done with good feelings. Otherwise, the act is merely a continent act, where feeling is contrary to reason but follows reason nonetheless.

Nussbaum imports Aristotle's model almost wholesale in her work on moral luck.⁹⁷ Nussbaum argues that Aristotelian practical wisdom is, up to a point, both general and, through proper moral education, teachable. We can use our practical wisdom to expand our control over uncontrolled moral luck or *tuche*. Of course, it

⁹⁷ Nussbaum (2001).

cannot entirely ameliorate the effects of *tuche*, because as Aristotle has said, we cannot achieve a scientific precision in matters of ethics. But Nussbaum argues that in a messy moral world, Aristotle's theory of deliberation gives us flexibility and attentiveness to context and contingent particulars. The theory, claims Nussbaum, is better suited to richness, and complexity of the world and to the incommensurability of goods. She disagrees with Williams that we are implacably controlled by the forces of fate. Instead, she sees tragedies as, "a contested place of moral struggle, a place in which virtue might possibly in some cases prevail over the caprices of amoral power, and in which, even if it does not prevail, virtue may still shine through for its own sake."⁹⁸

Nussbaum has also applied Aristotle's thought to develop a political theory and a theory of the ethical bases for international development that is a form of social-democratic liberalism. In collaboration with Amartya Sen, Nussbaum has developed a normative political proposal. She proposes that an account of certain central human capabilities should provide a goal for political planning. This goal is for humans to be guaranteed a minimum level of these capabilities because it is a necessary minimum condition of social justice.

Nussbaum concedes the untenability of extreme metaphysical realism. However, just because we do not have a transcendent metaphysical grounding for our evaluative judgments about human beings does not mean that we have nothing. She criticizes those that fall into extreme relativism or subjectivism. Instead, she argues

⁹⁸ Nussbaum (2001), Preface, xxxvii.

that we can use internalist-essentialism to give an account of the most important functions of the human being, in terms of which human life is defined. This list of important functions in human life lead us to ask what social and political institutions are doing to ensure humans can achieve the functions. Nussbaum's Aristotelian conception that is concerned with ends and with the overall shape and content of the human life form guides the list of human functions. Her list, which includes mortality, the needs of the human body, and capacity for pleasure and pain is composed of two different sorts of items: limits and capabilities. Her claim echoes the Aristotelian essentialist claim that a life that lacks any of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness. In her development theory, Nussbaum continues to stress Aristotelian practical reasoning, its role in making a choice within an inclusivist model of human goods.

Ironically, despite Nussbaum's adherence to Aristotelian ideas in ethics, she argues that the category of "Virtue Ethics" is a mistaken one. There is no need for this category because VE adds nothing new to ethical theories. A major drawback, is that there is not a unitary approach to virtue ethics. Another reason that it is a category mistake of an elementary kind is that people have been writing and thinking about virtue within Kantian and Utilitarian traditions. Virtue ethics cannot be an alternative to those traditions. Even if we focus on the loosely assorted class of thinkers who reject both Kantianism and Utilitarianism and associate ourselves with the insights of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers, there is no unity to that group either. They have different focus and views. The common ground of so-called virtue

ethics thinkers, while significant, can be pursued within Kantianism, Utilitarianism, neo-Aristotelian and neo-Humean projects of many different sorts. VE thinkers should therefore call themselves neo-Aristotelians, neo-Humeans, anti-Kantians or anti-utilitarians. In other words, we should dispense with this new category of ethical thinking because it has little meaning.

While Nussbaum has a valid point about the lack of a unitary approach to VE (a fault this dissertation attempts to correct), she dismisses VE too readily. She makes a sweeping claim about the similarity of VE with other moral systems that is not supported by a close reading of VE and the other moral systems. VE is distinctive from Kantianism and Utilitarianism. The central focus of VE is the character of an agent and how it is expressed in the virtues. The central focus of Kantianism is duty, and that of utilitarianism is the contribution of an action to the overall good. Of course some aspects of these moral systems overlap as Nussbaum chronicles. However, the central foci of these systems are greatly different. There is therefore, good reason to classify VE as a separate moral system requiring its own avenue of research.

2.3.1.3. Julia Annas

Annas writes extensively on the use of eudaimonia (or lack thereof) in modern VE. While VE proponents have embraced virtues, eudaimonia is still problematic for them. The important consequence of this discomfort has been the isolation of virtues from a larger framework in which the overarching concept is eudaimonia. This approach to VE is in stark contrast to ancient VE, which located virtues in a wider

structure in which eudaimonia was the ultimate end and chief good. Annas points out that few if any have thought that virtue can do all the work in a theory.⁹⁹ By studying ancient VE, Annas believes that we can find use in their theories of eudaimonism. One reason why much modern discussion of virtue ethics has remained at a relatively discursive and vague level has been reluctance to explore the ways in which virtue might be located in a systematic ethical theory.¹⁰⁰ If we are to take a systematic interest in ancient theories of virtue, we must pay attention to the way they locate virtue within an overall theory of eudaimonia. Thus, Annas tries to find commonality between the ancient notion of eudaimonia and our current view of happiness in the hopes that there is enough overlap in the two notions so that eudaimonia can also become primary in modern VE theories.

First, do we moderns agree that eudaimonia (let us call it happiness in this section, for the sake of comparison) is the ultimate end? In Chapter 1, we discussed Aristotle's reasoning about the final end. He does not think that any argument is needed to show all agree that our chief good is eudaimonia. To Aristotle and Plato, it seems absurd to deny this. Our modern attitude towards happiness as the final end is more complex. When the question is raised, it is generally easy to find people agreeing to the idea that everything we do is for the sake of happiness. However, we are less likely to agree that happiness is complete in itself. Annas argues if a plausible candidate for happiness lacked something important to human life, the

⁹⁹ Annas (1998), p.36.

¹⁰⁰ Annas (1998), p. 37.

response would be that there is more to life than happiness. If wealth lacks something important, a modern interlocuter might say that a happy life does not just entail wealth alone, but rather that happiness is not the only reasonable aim in life. Annas thinks that this is a crucial difference in the ancient versus modern attitude to happiness as being complete in itself. However, if we take an inclusivist view of Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, as Akrill and Nussbaum do, the modern concept of happiness is closer to the ancient concept.¹⁰¹ Annas does not take this line of thought and pursues the stronger Socratic and Stoic version of virtue and happiness. An Aristotelian interpretation of happiness would be more in tune with our modern conception. He is clear that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for happiness for "some goods are necessary to happiness, while others contribute to it by being useful tools" (1099b28-29). Happiness "requires both complete excellence and a complete life" (1100a5). External goods have independent value, and they therefore count as intrinsic goods in their own right, quite apart from their role in facilitating the exercise of virtue. This reading opens up the possibility of a more inclusive and pluralistic account, in which a number of goods might each make an intrinsic contribution to eudaimonia. If we take this line, we can include a modernized list of external goods that appear to make an intrinsic contribution to the quality of life. We are likely to include items such as fulfilling work, autonomy, and contribution to

¹⁰¹ Akrill, J.L., "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, Nussbaum, Martha C., *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

society. This view of eudaimonia is easier to (though does not completely) reconcile with modern notions of happiness.¹⁰²

Annas points to two other important differences between the modern and ancient intuitions of happiness. First, happiness, in the modern sense, is subjective, while the ancients regard it as objective.¹⁰³ Although a person's life may be going well in many respects, it is prudentially valuable only if it is going well for that person. One's happiness depends on one's own concerns and what one considers important. Annas does not think there is agreement about happiness being subjective. Sumner argues that it is subjective but Kraut maintains that it is not.¹⁰⁴ Happiness based on mistakes turns out not to be happiness at all. The mistaken person would in fact decide that she was not happy, though she thought she was. It would be difficult to get a consensus regarding the subjectivity of happiness.

The final aspect of the ancient view of eudaimonia that is in discord with our modern view is the rigidity of eudaimonia. According to Aristotle, virtue can transform a human life. It can do so because it can transform one's view of eudaimonia. The virtuous person would put less value to the accumulation of money, because virtue enables us to correct ordinary valuations and arrive at a true estimate of value. Eudaimonia is the continuing goal we have, but it can be transformed by

¹⁰² Sumner (1998) regards the weaker version of virtue and eudaimonia to be too optimistic for modern society as it gives virtue a special status on the list of prudential goods. We are inclined to be more cynical about the unvirtuous not faring well. See Sumner, L.W., "Is Virtue Its Own Reward?" in *Social Philosophy & Policy* 15:1 (1998) 18-36.

¹⁰³ Sumner (1998) p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Kraut "Two Conceptions of Happiness," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 88, no.2 (1979), pp. 167-97.

virtue. We continue to seek eudaimonia, but our conception of it and how we can achieve it changes dramatically. Compared to the ancient notion of eudaimonia, our modern conception of happiness is rigid: "it is not tolerant of much shifting of content, certainly not the wholesale redefining demanded by the thesis that virtue is sufficient for happiness."¹⁰⁵ The rigidity is not tied to one particular content. There are many candidates for happiness such as pleasure, welfare, desire satisfaction and so on. However, Annas contends that the rigidity of modern happiness is of form rather than content. Although there are competing accounts of the contents, once we have settled on it we are reluctant to allow that there could be radical change while thinking that we are still talking about happiness.

I am not sure if this obstacle of the rigidity of happiness is unassailable. If the content of happiness is wide ranging, why can we not have as the content of happiness, "virtuous activity in accordance with reason, in a complete life?" Have we become so cynical about the possibility of reviving the idea (was it dead or just quiet) that the criteria for success in a life should take in virtue and other ends? Surely, the resurgence of virtue in the form of virtue ethics says we can conceive that what matters in life is to revise our priorities so that morality has the proper weight in relation to other ends? Perhaps another way to diffuse the rigidity problem that Annas puts up is to use another term rather than happiness to convey the idea of eudaimonia. Virtue ethicists such as Hursthouse prefer the term human flourishing. Sumner prefers well-being, which contains a more clearly objective notion. Annas

¹⁰⁵ Annas (1998) p. 52.

has been resistant to this until recently. In her latest article, she uses the term flourishing.¹⁰⁶

2.3.2 Stoics

This section discusses three VE writers who base their theories on stoic conceptions of VE. The current dissertation does not focus on stoic VE but the following section is intended to illustrate the diversity of sources for contemporary VE theories. Stoic ethics also emphasize eudaimonia as its central, organizing concern. The authors in the discussion emphasize different aspects of stoic VE. Becker wants to expound a new stoically based VE. Sandler is interested in using stoic VE as theoretical support for environmental ethics. Gardiner investigates how VE can accommodate the use of rules through his interpretation of Seneca. This section also illustrates the fragmented nature of VE research that has as its source stoic VE.

2.3.2.1 Lawrence Becker

Becker recognizes and indeed argues for the eudaimonist doctrine. His book endeavors to provide a neo-stoic outlook on human happiness and virtue¹⁰⁷. He develops an ethical theory, which he claims has the structure of ancient Stoicism. We consider our natures as creatures with various wants and consider the means to achieve these rationally. We examine the development of rationality both as instrumental means towards achieving our ends and as rational agency. Thus, we

¹⁰⁶ See, Annas, "Virtue Ethics" in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, (2006).

¹⁰⁷ Becker, Lawrence C., *A New Stoicism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

develop a conception of ourselves as rational agents, and value this conception in a non-instrumental way. This theory is based on accepted studies and results in psychological literature. It does not require us to be particularly deferential to any particular school of psychology because it follows widely accepted and tested results. Becker's VE theory is a modern version of the ancient Stoic notion of familiarization or *oikeiosis*. He also discusses the value of stoic ideas for bioethics.

Becker would like to modernize stoic VE. He does this by using the language and applying the concepts of modern ethics to stoic ethics. His project requires him to acknowledge the primacy of eudaimonia as the goal of a person's life. Thus, this acknowledgement together with his focus on rationality and reason as a means to achieving eudaimonia accords with the thesis of this dissertation.

2.3.2.2 Ronald Sandler

Ronald Sandler offers a virtue-based defense of certain kinds of genetic engineering, consistent with stoicism¹⁰⁸. Although Aristotle and the Stoics disagree about the intrinsic value of external goods, that is whether external goods are constituents of eudaimonia, they both acknowledge an indispensable instrumental role for external goods in eudaimonia. The cultivation of virtue requires physical conditions that sustain the person as a living being. Many of these essential physical conditions such as oxygen, water, and food derive from ecosystems. Therefore, a genuine virtue includes the goal of ensuring ecosystem sustainability. Environmental

¹⁰⁸ Sandler, Ronald, "A Virtue Ethics Perspective on Genetically Modified Crops," in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

considerations assert themselves in both the development and the application of virtue. From the virtue ethics perspective the environmental assessment of a particular agricultural biotechnology involves two dimensions.

First, the environment is relevant to the development of virtue as it provides certain goods that are necessary for the cultivation and maintenance of virtue. Are the technologies produced by the manipulation of the genetic sequence of plants used in agriculture likely to imperil the goods -- food, clothing, water, and so on -- requisite for the development and maintenance of moral agency? Second, the environment is also relevant to virtuous action because there are virtues that pertain to human interaction with the environment. Sandler discusses two distinctly environmental virtues, which he calls non-extensionist virtues. One is conservationist, a disposition to maintain or increase the instrumental value of the environment. The other is non-anthropocentric, a disposition to respect the value of natural entities for themselves. Are we acting virtuously when we allow the use of genetically modified crops (GMC)? Sandler takes an applied stoic VE approach to answering these environmentally based questions. As such, he adds his voice to a new and growing body of research in applied VE.¹⁰⁹

2.3.2.3 Stephen Gardiner

Stephen Gardiner considers the place of moral rules within VE. He takes a markedly different position on the moral rules compared to mainstream thinking in

¹⁰⁹ See for example, Walker, Rebecca L. and Ivanhoe, Philip J (eds), *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

VE. In general, VE thinkers criticize the foundations of moral rules that we find in Kantian ethics. They further argue that there seems no way to generate a completely exceptionless, universal moral principle everyone can apply. Principles are too abstract to guide conduct. The Stoics seem to be paradoxical on this point. On the one hand, they are great proponents of the authority and privileged position of the sage. On the other, they see moral life as structured by an elaborate system of principles and rules. Gardiner argues that Seneca provides an insightful account of how virtue ethics can accommodate the existence of moral rules. He offers a view of Seneca that contrasts markedly with the standard views such as those taken by Gisela Striker, Philip Mitsis, and Brad Inwood.¹¹⁰

Striker and Mitsis claim that rules are absolutely central to the Stoic account of ethics. According to this interpretation, moral judgment is exclusively a matter of understanding and applying moral principles. Sensitivity to particular situations is itself to be understood purely in terms of the grasp and application of rules. For Mitsis, even the sage's judgment is structured by rules. Rules have normative priority and the virtuous person is one who is the embodiment of the rules.

Inwood objects to Striker's and Mitsis's interpretation of Stoic ethics.¹¹¹ He does not think that Stoic rules are universal, substantive, and without exception. Inwood argues that the Stoics, and Seneca in particular, asserts the primacy of the virtuous person while still allowing for a substantial, but subsidiary, role for moral

¹¹⁰ Gardiner, Stephen M., "Seneca's Virtuous Moral Rules," in *Virtue Ethics Old and New*, ed. Stephen M. Gardiner. Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005.

¹¹¹ Gardiner (2005), pp. 36-42.

rules. He bases this middle position on the division of moral reasoning into two levels. At the lower level, ordinary moral agents make decisions in accordance with entrenched moral rules. At the higher level, moral agents are allowed to set aside these rules, treating them as mere rules of thumb. The Stoic will allow the wise man to reason correctly in particular situations and violate moral rules, if necessary.

Gardiner develops his own theory of Stoic ethics that he applies to virtue ethics. He distinguishes between Seneca's precepts and doctrines. Precepts rely on "features which are either quasi-descriptive and non-evaluative (such as natural properties, or easily identified cultural properties), or else involve low-level moral or evaluative concepts or properties."¹¹² These principles are substantive but not in themselves without exception. Their main role is to give guidance to the novice. Doctrines are "firm beliefs deeply implanted, that apply to life as a whole, determine acts and thoughts, and supply the purpose and manner."¹¹³ Thus, precepts are manifest to all, while doctrines are hidden and available only to those with special knowledge *i.e.* the sage. Doctrines pick out high-level structural principles in a general theory of ethics. Thus, ordinary people can use precepts for simple everyday ethical problems. However, one would need to be with a sage to learn about how to deal with complex moral problems because only the sage understands and embodies the doctrines.

¹¹² Gardiner (2005), p. 47.

¹¹³ Gardiner (2005), p.48.

Gardiner claims that his interpretation of Seneca provides the beginnings of an account of how the role of precepts and doctrines might be reconciled with the primacy of the virtuous agent. How do we apply this interpretation to virtue ethics? It is coherent to give priority to the virtuous person and yet think that moral rules are necessary. Precepts are useful at the general level and are accessible practical guidance for the novice. Indeed the existence of moral rules that Gardiner calls precepts will likely reduce some of the criticism of VE that it does not provide guidance. Doctrines are foundational and complex. Understanding and absorbing them requires experience, practical wisdom, and knowledge of the ultimate end. Gardiner believes that Seneca shows a way for VE to accommodate the primacy of the virtuous agent with several kinds of moral rules.

Gardiner gives a good middle way between two positions: VE can accommodate rules for right action and in VE right action depends entirely on the virtuous agent. However, his middle way still leaves some questions. For instance, how do we distinguish precepts from doctrines? It would appear that “do not kill” would easily be a precept but it could also be a doctrine. In the end, distinction between the two concepts requires the use of reason in the form of practical wisdom.

2.3.3 Aquinas

2.3.3.1 Alasdair MacIntyre

MacIntyre is one of the most prominent philosophers in VE who in his later work is influenced by Aquinas. His writings are primarily about the nature of human

reason and in his VE trilogy, he presents an account of tradition-bound rationality¹¹⁴. The term refers to MacIntyre's claim that moral reasoning is necessarily imbedded in social context. Thus, he places a great deal of emphasis on the community as the source of moral practices. MacIntyre argues that the inquiry into virtues is bound to a particular time within a particular context.

MacIntyre's well-known thesis is that the Enlightenment project, particularly in the area of moral philosophy, has failed because it has entirely rejected the previous philosophical traditions on which moral philosophy is based. It was as if moral philosophy was torn from its roots. Following this rejection of tradition, moral language is in a state of grave disorder. Moral language has become disconnected from its conceptual moorings. Indeed, we only have fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which lack the contexts from which their significance derived.¹¹⁵ MacIntyre divides moral philosophy into three distinct stages: the first stage in which philosophy was rooted in tradition and there was continuity in the tradition. The second stage in which moral philosophy suffered catastrophe and the third stage in which moral philosophy was restored but in damaged and disordered form. Thus, "...modern moral utterance and practice can only be understood as a series of fragmented survivals from an older past and that the insoluble problems which they have generated for modern moral theorists will remain insoluble until this is well

¹¹⁴ His trilogy consists of *After Virtue* (1984), *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* (1988), and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990).

¹¹⁵ MacIntyre (1984), p. 2.

understood.”¹¹⁶ MacIntyre goes on to argue that the deontological character of moral judgments is actually derived from conceptions of divine law. However, modern deontological theories reject a divine lawgiver. This argument is familiar because Anscombe made it earlier in her influential article.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the teleological character is an echo of human nature and activity, concepts, which are not currently favorable in the modern world. Modern moral philosophy has attempted to provide foundations to its moral theories that are mere shadows of the traditional foundations from which they are taken. Modern moral philosophy’s groundings are shaky and assailable.

MacIntyre wants to return to the first stage of moral philosophy in which it is tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive. Initially, he looks at Aristotle’s virtue ethics but finds problems with his metaphysical biology. The latter cannot be accepted because it is false. Others argue that Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* barely mentions his metaphysical biology, which in any case, does not have a significant role in the ethical theory.¹¹⁸ MacIntyre develops a definition and an account of virtue that remains teleological but does not require any allegiance to Aristotle’s metaphysical biology. Instead, community and social practices determine teleology. It is a “socially teleological” account that can still support Aristotle’s general account of the virtues. For MacIntyre, “A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession

¹¹⁶ MacIntyre (1984), p. 111.

¹¹⁷ Anscombe, Elizabeth, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹¹⁸ Lutz, Christopher Stephen, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004.

and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”¹¹⁹ The characteristic of internal goods is that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. In contrast, external goods are always some individual’s property and possession. The more someone has of them, the less there is for other people.

In writings that follow *After Virtue*, MacIntyre, notes the shortcomings of two moral traditions: the Augustinian and Aristotelian. Crucially, Aristotelian *telos* depends on the notion of essential nature. MacIntyre argues that if we “take away the corresponding notion of what is good and best for members of a specific kind who share such a nature, and the Aristotelian scheme of the self which is to achieve a good, of good, and of pleasure necessarily collapses. There remains only the individual self with its pleasure and pains.”¹²⁰ MacIntyre’s return to ancient ethical theories, and therefore virtue ethics theories contributed to the start of the virtue ethics movement.

The response to MacIntyre’s criticism that Aristotelian VE is based on Aristotle’s “metaphysical biology” is given in detail in section 5.1.2. One response is that Aristotle makes little use of his biological theory. His account of human nature seems more like empirical psychology than ancient natural philosophy. Another response is we can well discard the so-called metaphysical biology and still arrive at a

¹¹⁹ MacIntyre (1984), p. 191.

¹²⁰ MacIntyre (1990), p. 138.

workable VE theory – Rosalind Hursthouse, for example has developed a systematic neo-Aristotelian VE theory. Eudaimonia as the *telos* of human life can be grounded on human nature. Notably, part of being a good human being is to ensure the good functioning of the social group. This criterion is not so different from MacIntyre’s own basis for the virtues.

In terms of MacIntyre’s criticism of essentialism and its incompatibility with a VE theory, it should be noted that there are thinkers who hold essentialist views of human nature. Some of these thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum and Hursthouse (see above) do not have any dissonance being essentialists and proponents of virtue ethics.

2.4 Focus and Foundations of Theories

2.4.1 Virtues

Modern VE focuses on virtues. However, modern virtue ethicists have some problems with the standard Aristotelian virtues. The virtues Aristotle makes central include some which modern thinkers are inclined either to deemphasize or to reconstruct. For example, Aristotelian courage is that of the citizen soldier on the battlefield in defense of his city from a desire for something noble (1116a28-29). To most moderns the ideal of courage on the battlefield at the very heart of virtue will seem at least strange, and to some repugnant. Most therefore, reconstruct courage into something like moral courage -- a readiness to withstand ridicule or contempt in defense of a belief or person. In addition, there is a range of virtues that moderns uphold but which are absent in Aristotle's treatise. For instance, there is no mention of kindness, compassion, forgiveness, apology, repentance, remorse, humility, or of

the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Thus modern virtue ethicists, especially those who model their views on Aristotle's usually downplay or jettison those features of Aristotle's thought, which they find uncongenial. Some argue that these excisions, inclusions, and reconstructions have limited success.¹²¹

2.4.1.1 Christine Swanton

Two prominent writers in VE take opposing approaches to virtues. Christine Swanton and Michael Slote have developed their own versions of VE theories, but the theories are remarkably dissimilar. Swanton looks at virtue, the bases and modes of responsiveness in their fields, in a pluralistic way. Michael Slote focuses almost solely on the motive of benevolence as the standard on which to judge virtuous acts. Swanton, like her Kiwi counterpart Hursthouse has written an impressive book on VE.¹²² Her version of VE is inspired by Aristotle, Nietzsche, and depth psychology. Yet it differs from neo-Aristotelianism and aims at a theory that is pluralistic. Swanton argues for pluralisms in both the conception of virtue, and the view of rightness of action based on that conception. Her intent is to propose a different kind of virtue ethics. She argues against the Aristotelian claim that virtue is characteristically good for the agent. Instead, there is a much weaker connection between virtue and personal good.

¹²¹ Cordero thinks that down playing and excising certain Aristotelian virtues is at the expense of distorting central themes of Aristotle's ethical thought. See Cordero, Christopher, "Aristotelian Virtue and Its Limitations," in *Philosophy*, Vol. 69, No. 269. (Jul., 1994), pp. 291-316.

¹²² Swanton, Christine, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Swanton defines virtue as, “a disposition to respond to or acknowledge, in an excellent (or good enough) way, items in the field of a virtue whether those items are people, objects, situations, inner states or actions”.¹²³ The basis of her pluralistic virtue ethics lies in this conception of virtue. It is an unusually broad definition of virtue that is applicable to a variety of virtue theories and virtue ethics, from pluralistic to monistic, eudaimonistic to non-eudaimonistic. ‘Items’ cover a broad range of objects that may be “within the agent, for example, the bodily pleasures which are the focus of temperance, or outside the agent for example, human beings, property, money, or honours.”¹²⁴ Her broad definition of virtues is, ironically, limited in usefulness because virtue is defined so generically that it seems unlikely that it can underwrite a powerful and distinct approach in ethics.¹²⁵ The generality of her definition undermines the grounding role of virtue in the VE approach. Her pluralisms range over so many areas (five) that it is hard to pinpoint the foundations of her VE approach.

Swanton’s pluralisms are fivefold. First, the bases of responsiveness to items in the fields of virtues are plural. Second, the modes or forms of responsiveness to items in the fields of virtues are plural. Third, the features that make a trait a virtue can be many. Fourth, the standards for judging whether responses are excellent or

¹²³ Swanton (2003), p.1

¹²⁴ Swanton (2003), p. 20

¹²⁵ Gardiner, Stephen M., “Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View” in *Mind*, Vol. 114, 453, January 2005, p. 211.

good enough are plural. Lastly, her account of what constitutes right action is generated from a pluralistic notion of the right.

Bases of moral acknowledgement are the morally significant features of the items responded to or acknowledged. These features “partially ground or rationalize the form or mode of acknowledgement.”¹²⁶ There are four main bases: value, status, good (or benefit), and bonds. The modes of moral responsiveness include promoting, honoring, appreciating, respecting, being open to, and loving items which have value or status, are good, or to which one is bonded. Swanton provides accounts of three central modes of moral acknowledgement that feature in all virtues. These modes are love, respect and creativity. They constitute what she calls the “profiles of the virtues.”¹²⁷

Her plurality of bases and modes rules out monistic conceptions of what makes a trait of character a virtue. Thus, it rules out monistic forms of relationship ethics of love or care (Slotes’s version). There may be a plurality of features that make a character trait a virtue. Swanton argues that eudaimonia is just one of the features for determining if a disposition is a virtue. There are other ends that we may pursue other than eudaimonia. Under her framework, a trait may even qualify as a virtue when it is detrimental to an agent’s flourishing. She gives the example of a manic-depressive whose creativity derives from this (abnormal) psychological

¹²⁶ Swanton (2003) p. 2.

¹²⁷ Swanton (2003) p.15.

condition. For the sake of her art she leaves her condition untreated. Therefore, she sacrifices her well-being for her art.

For Swanton, virtue is a “threshold concept.” This means that standards for virtues depend on context and the individual’s own capacity. In other words she lowers the demandingness for what it is to be a virtue. She does not have an ideal, utopian and therefore impossible to attain view of virtue in mind but rather one that is suited to a “world characterized by considerable evil, neediness, and frequent catastrophe.” The standards for judging whether an act is right are also varied. A right act is “an excellent realization or attainment of the target or end of a virtue.”¹²⁸ The requirements for virtuous action are complex and pluralistic because the profiles of the virtues are themselves complex.

Swanton’s main purpose in the pluralistic approach is to “accommodate the views of a wide variety of moral theories on what is morally significant,” including Kantian, consequentialist, depth-psychological, and Nietzschean approaches. Unfortunately, in attempting to be as all embracing as possible, Swanton’s attempts to explain and guide moral action are undermined. She offers descriptions of problems that moral theories are trying to solve, rather than any kind of moral theory of her own.¹²⁹ Gardiner has gone as far as to suggest that Swanton gives a framework for the virtue ethics genus but not a distinct species of the approach.

¹²⁸ Swanton (2003) p. 29.

¹²⁹ Gardiner (2005), p.212.

Nevertheless, Swanton's theory is instructive because she introduces the idea of pluralism into virtue ethics. In addition, she attempts to give an account of flourishing that is based on a complex understanding of human psychology. For a trait to count as a virtue, it must be "expressive of fine inner states." An account of these fine inner states relies on psychological theory. For this Swanton turns to Nietzsche and to contemporary psychologists such as Karen Horney. This paper will rely on some of Swanton's psychological investigations in Chapter 3 in its discussion and analysis of eudaimonia and its role in virtue ethics.

2.4.1.2 Michael Slote

In contrast to Swanton's pluralisms, Michael Slote wants to tighten VE theory by reducing the variables. His theory takes a radical agent-based approach to VE. For Slote, "the moral or ethical status of acts [is] entirely derivative from independent and fundamental aretaic (as opposed to deontic) ethical characterizations of motives, character traits or individuals."¹³⁰ Thus, he bases virtue on motivations, in particular benevolence. He takes an even stronger position than Swanton on the connection between virtue and good – he believes that there is no connection. His agent-focused VE argues that the rightness of someone's action depends *entirely* on the motives, dispositions, or inner life of moral individuals. This proposition is a strong one and in Slote's view, represents a radical and purer form of VE. He further argues that this strong sense of agent based VE is not present in Aristotle. However, his point that, for Aristotle the virtuous individual does what is noble because it is the noble and not

¹³⁰ Slote, Michael, *Morals from Motives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 5.

because she is a virtuous individual is at best, contentious. In any case, Slote classifies Aristotle's VE theory as agent-focused, Plato's as agent-prior, and his own as agent-based.¹³¹

Historically, Slote's agent-based VE is in the lineage of James Martineau's. The latter has an agent-based conception of morality that treats compassion as the highest of secular motives. Other philosophers such as Hume and Hutcheson have also placed a special emphasis on compassion. Slote uses what he calls, a more general term, benevolence, as a motive. Indeed, morality as universal benevolence is the foundation of Slote's agent-based theory. An action is right if it is motivated by universal benevolence. Any agent-based VE that evaluates actions in relation to particular or single occurrent good motives is open to the objection that good motives (toward some) are insufficient to insure that one is acting morally (on the whole). To counter this objection Slote's agent based theory judges actions in relation to an agent's total or overall motivation. This holistic approach, Slote believes, is a better way of agent-basing.

Ultimately, Slote defends a morality of caring, or "partial benevolence" according to which caring is a "fundamental form of moral excellence."¹³² Slote emphasizes the virtue of a kind of balanced caring between those with whom we are intimate *i.e.* our family and close friends, and other people in general. A caring person achieves a balanced concern among those for whom she cares in an intimate

¹³¹ Although he argues that Rosalind Hursthouse's treatment of Aristotle makes his VE theory an agent-prior one.

¹³² Slote (2001), p. 29-30.

fashion as well as a balanced concern between those she loves, and all others. It is not clear from Slote's explication how we decide which actions in which circumstances would express balanced concern. Some critics suspect that Slote must rely covertly on intuitions about right and wrong actions in order to figure out which states of character are admirable.¹³³ Another problem is how we should decide which character trait is fundamental and non-derivative. For Slote, caring, or more generally benevolence is the character trait that is fundamentally admirable and lies on the "ground floor". It is used to explain or derive other ethical judgments. Honesty and strength of purpose are only derivatively admirable in his view. They are only admirable to the extent that they are aspects of, or partly constitutive of, the right kind of balanced caring. However, it is reasonable to argue that honesty seems to be admirable in its own right, under certain circumstances. Slote turns aside from grounding virtues in a notion of eudaimonia because the result would not be a theory that takes character evaluations as fundamental. It would not be an agent-based theory of the kind that Slote wants to develop. This is hardly a substantive objection to using eudaimonia to ground the virtues. In Chapter 3, we will develop this argument and further critique Slote's VE theory, using it as an example of one that rejects eudaimonia but at a foundational loss.

¹³³ Copp, David and Sobel, David, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics" in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*. Vol.114, No. 3, pp 514-556, April 2004.

2.4.2 *Naturalism*

Some proponents of VE take the "Naturalism" route as the foundation or at least the rational justification for their VE theories. This account claims that our final end and virtues depend on a particular view of nature, especially human nature that is understood in a broadly scientific way independent of the ethical claims themselves. The most developed and influential classical theories of virtue were naturalistic.¹³⁴ The best known modern virtue ethics theories are Hursthouse's and arguably Foot's. They characterize themselves as neo-Aristotelian, and this is the form of naturalism most commonly associated with classical virtue ethics. Foot has done initial work on naturalism and Hursthouse, using this as a foundation, has built a more comprehensive model.¹³⁵ Hursthouse defines ethical naturalism as "the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on considerations of human nature, on what is involved in being good qua human being."¹³⁶ Ethical naturalism hopes to validate beliefs about which character traits are virtues by appeal to human nature. It takes human beings to be part of the natural, biological order of living things. Its standard first premise is that human beings are a species of rational, social animals and thereby a species of living things -- which, unlike 'persons' or 'rational beings', have a particular biological make-up and a natural life cycle.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Annas (2006).

¹³⁵ Hursthouse (2001) and Foot, Philippa, *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹³⁶ Hursthouse (2001), p. 192.

¹³⁷ Hursthouse (2001), p. 206.

There are four reasons why naturalism seems to be a fitting basis for VE. First, VE locates the ethical within this world, and "requires no invocation of transcendence or other-worldliness".¹³⁸ Second, having the virtues is necessary for living a characteristically human life, that is, for realizing human nature in the best way. Third, VE is naturalistic by virtue of the connection between virtue and human flourishing. Fourth, in regards to moral motivation, the virtuous person does the right thing 'naturally', without having to fight with emotions, inclinations or traits of character. There is no conflict between reason and passion.

Hursthouse admits that Aristotelian naturalism is neither scientific nor foundational. It does not seek to establish its conclusions from a neutral point of view. However, for Hursthouse naturalism serves to provide rational credentials for our beliefs about which character traits are the virtues, not merely re-express them. Hursthouse takes many details and the whole idea of ethical naturalism from Foot. They both agree that 'good' is an attributive adjective. They deny that this grammatical feature of the word 'good' (following Anscombe in 'Modern Moral Philosophy') and its related terms suddenly go through a mysterious change when we start doing ethics. Thus, "what goes for 'good cactus', 'good knife', 'good rider', also goes for 'good human being' even when we use that phrase in ethics."¹³⁹

Hursthouse evaluates social animals on four aspects in relation to four ends. The four aspects are: (i) parts, (ii) operations/reactions, (iii) actions, and (iv)

¹³⁸ Corder (1994), p. 291.

¹³⁹ Foot (2001), p. 195.

emotions/desires. The four ends with respect to which these aspects are evaluated are: (i) individual survival, (ii) the continuance of the species, (iii) characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/characteristic freedom from pain, and (iv) the good functioning of the social group. A good human being is one who is well fitted or endowed with respect to its four aspects. Whether it is well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve the four ends, in the ways characteristic of the species. To be a good human being is to be well endowed with respect to the aspects listed. Thus, to possess the human virtues is to be well endowed. "The human virtues make their possessor good *qua* human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish -- in a characteristically human way."¹⁴⁰

As we are social animals, we will evaluate ourselves on the way in which, and the degree to which, we are fitted to serve the four ends. However, we are rational animals and we therefore flourish in a different way from other social animals. We use our reason to achieve the four ends. Our rationality has a transforming effect on our basic naturalistic structure. Hursthouse freely admits and indeed, takes up the point in her theory, that because we are rational animals we cannot identify what is characteristic of a good human life in the way that we can for other species. There is too much variety. Yet, we do have a characteristic (rational) way of going on, which distinguishes us from all the other species of animals. A rational way is, "any way that we can rightly see as good, as something we have reason to do. Correspondingly,

¹⁴⁰ Foot (1999), p.208.

our characteristic enjoyments are any enjoyments we can rightly see as good, as something we in fact enjoy and that reason can endorse."¹⁴¹ Two points of note about this characteristic way of carrying on: first, most humans do not in fact carry on that way -- and are thus defective. Second, the characteristic way of going on is at an extremely high level of generality. It does not determine specific ways of life for us, in the way that characteristic ways of behaving do for other species. Thus, although virtue must enable us to achieve our four ends, this allows for considerable variation in the lifestyles within which we develop the virtues. Hursthouse gives the example of the celibate monk who may practice the virtues. Whether he does so or not depends not on his lifestyle but on whether he lives his chosen way of life honestly, with charity and so on. For as Hursthouse says, "a life lived in accordance with the virtues can take a great variety of forms, including those in which the exercise of at least one virtue figures much more largely and even at the expense of the exercise of others."¹⁴²

Hursthouse's naturalistic grounding for the virtues is a contemporary take on Aristotle's naturalism. I agree with the direction Hursthouse takes in basing the virtues on the good for human *qua* humans. This move is not based on a metaphysical biology and is a rational basis for grounding the virtues. However, Hursthouse does not consider psychological aspects of happiness, although this feature is part of (iii) – characteristic pleasures and freedom from pain. Chapter 3

¹⁴¹ Foot (1999), p. 222.

¹⁴² Hursthouse (1999), p. 216.

examines further Hursthouse's naturalism and adopts her model together with psychological research on happiness to synthesize an expanded version of eudaimonia.

2.4.3 Reason

Nancy Sherman, John McDowell, Henry Richardson, and David Wiggins belong to the category of VE thinkers who emphasize the role of reason.¹⁴³ As mentioned earlier, Martha Nussbaum also wants to give reason and deliberation a larger role in moral life¹⁴⁴. She turns to Aristotle to give credence to the idea that not only beliefs, but also passions and desires, can be enlightened by the critical work of practical reason. These writers share some common views.¹⁴⁵ First, they tend to be dissatisfied with the utilitarian view that goods human beings pursue represent different quantities of the same thing. They view goods to be plural and qualitatively heterogeneous. Second, reason plays a central role in choosing means to ends, but also in deliberating about the ends themselves of a human life. Third, emotion and desire are not devoid of any intellectual content. They are directed towards goals and have intentionality. Reason plays a role in guiding the emotions towards the good. Finally, existing ideas about the good result in misinformed passions and judgments. A rational critique of these mistaken passions can be undertaken and these critiques are likely to inform the passions themselves. Wiggins and Richardson focus on the

¹⁴³ Sherman, Nancy, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C., "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *Journal of Ethics* 3: 163-201, 1999.

¹⁴⁵ Nussbaum (1999), p. 180.

first and second claims. McDowell and Sherman focus on the third while Nussbaum agrees with all four claims. Nussbaum's work has taken the idea of deliberative emotion in a political direction, in connection with the fourth claim. She believes that we should aim to eliminate bad passions by teach young people the appropriate valuation of ends. For instance, racial hatred is not a blind unreasoning force. It is based on thoughts and evaluations that can be altered by teaching.¹⁴⁶

These writers base their arguments for putting reason at the forefront on Aristotelian grounds. They are inclusivists in that they see that a flourishing life consists of goods that are pursued for their own sake and because they contribute to eudaimonia. To pursue an end for its own sake means that it has its own distinctive kind of value. Its value cannot be measured in terms of a further value such as pleasure or satisfaction. These writers argue against the idea that we can render the goods of human life commensurable by considering them all as means to pleasure or satisfaction. Thus, they are against the principle of utilitarianism that turns the value of all goods into one single value in order to make them commensurable. Indeed, Richardson argues that we require more work on these goods in order to know which of these goods contribute to a flourishing human life. One requires deliberation in order to organize the set of goods that each has its own distinctive value.

2.4.3.1 Henry S. Richardson

Wiggins and Richardson argue that this process of deliberation is fraught with difficulty but they hold this difficulty as one of its virtues, suggesting that narrow

¹⁴⁶ Nussbaum (1999), p. 186.

technical concepts of deliberation are attractive to people who want to evade life's complexities. Some argue that the ultimate ends that are the components of eudaimonia must be grasped by non-rational intuition (see chapter 1). Wiggins and Richardson argue, and I agree with their position, that Aristotle does not hold this. By advancing in a holistic manner, seeking the best overall composite picture of eudaimonia, one may hope to be deliberating in a genuinely rational way about what ultimate parts to put in the picture. Most importantly we deliberate about how to conceive of those parts. A great part of such deliberation consists of producing alternative specifications of highly vague and general ultimate ends, and then choosing among them.

Wiggins argues, against conventional interpretations, that Aristotle's notion of deliberation is the same in Books 3, 6, and 7. It is the analysis of choice and deliberation that is widened, not the sense of the word. He also argues that in Book 6 and 7 Aristotle does not conceive of deliberation from a standpoint of choosing between various rules because Aristotle writes that there are no principles or rules in matters concerning conduct (1104a7). Thus, there is no rule-case approach in Aristotle. Wiggins also contends that we deliberate about the means to the end and about ends themselves. Deliberation about the means takes two forms. First, one deliberates about the efficient cause that will lead to a desired end. Second, one deliberates about the constituents of the end, "something whose existence counts in

itself as the partial or total realization of the end."¹⁴⁷ Practical wisdom in its deliberative manifestations is concerned with the attainment of particular formed objectives and with questions of what specific objectives to form. We start with a vague conception of the eudaimon life but we must have a specification of what this sort of life is. We continually deliberate about a better and more practicable specification of the end.

Richardson is most concerned with showing that deliberation can be of ends. Opponents of this view base their rejection on two claims. The first is a pseudo-Humean position that while reason is concerned with ascertaining the truth of statements or beliefs, desires are not such as to be true or false. Although reason can deal with factual and logical questions, it cannot, settle purely prescriptive ones. Ends are in their view, essentially prescriptive and are not subject to the constraint of fitting with the facts. The second claim is that commensurability is a prerequisite of rational choice. This idea underlies the maximizing formulas of contemporary utilitarianism and rational choice theory. The third claim is that deliberation cannot be of an ultimate end. The latter is the source of rational valuation. It is the ultimately fixed background against which all rational deliberation necessarily proceeds. On this conception, the ultimate end cannot be thrown into question by rational deliberation. Richardson attempts to neutralize these claims, in my opinion successfully. Essentially the core of his account of rational deliberation of ends is

¹⁴⁷ Wiggins, David, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 224.

the holistic standard of rationality that he thinks is appropriate in the revision and specification of ends. His holism refers to an absence of segmentation and mutual relevance of all members of the whole. Richardson has two extended examples of such deliberation concerning the ultimate values of a life. Chapter 4 goes in greater detail about Richardson's arguments, focusing on his proposals of how deliberation works in determining the ends.

2.4.3.2. John McDowell

Reason plays a role in determining our ultimate ends. Desire and taste do not simply chose them for us. At the same time, reason informs the structure of desire and emotion. Virtue is a mean concerning both passion and action, because Aristotle expects that reason shapes the passions, as well as choice. Another proponent of this view is John McDowell who provides a theoretical elaboration of how reason shapes emotion so that the latter come to embody virtue.¹⁴⁸ Like Wiggins, he does not think that rules can unambiguously provide guidance to action for a virtuous person. There will always be exceptions to a set of rules that are set up to guide virtuous behavior. Cases will inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong. In any case, Aristotle consistently says that the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. Thus, McDowell rejects the claims of those who say that the virtuous person's behavior rides on rules and not rationality. Wiggins, McDowell, and Nussbaum's work on

¹⁴⁸ McDowell, John, *Mind, Value and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

vastly reducing the role of universal rules in deliberation and choice are reactions to the non-cognitivists such as R.M. Hare as well as utilitarian conceptions of rules and commensurability of goods.

2.4.3.3 Nancy Sherman

Sherman works on the thesis that habituation of virtue is not a mindless procedure but one that involves reason.¹⁴⁹ She therefore argues against Burnyeat and Sorabji who claim that Aristotle's theory on habituation is a mechanical one.¹⁵⁰ If the habituation process is mechanical it ultimately makes mysterious the transition between childhood and moral maturity. It leaves unexplained how the child goes from habituated virtue to a full moral virtue that involves practical wisdom. Thus, Sherman necessarily focuses on character and how practical reason integrates the different ends of character. Practical reason assesses character and the circumstances and issues judgments of what is best and finest to do. Full virtue is excellence of the non-rational part as well as the combination of the intellectual and character excellences. Aristotle says as much when he defines virtue in NE II.6 as a character disposition concerning choice as determined by the reasoning of the phronimos. He clearly states that one cannot be good without practical wisdom nor wise without virtue (1144b30-3). Sherman uses this uncontroversial definition of virtue to make her overall claim that if full virtue is to meet these conditions, then this goal must be

¹⁴⁹ Sherman (1989).

¹⁵⁰ Burnyeat (1980) and Sorabji, Richard, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

reflected in the educational process. The child must be seen as being educated towards that end. This will require a “developmental conception of cognitive and affective capacities, as well as a conception of habituation as in varying degrees reflective and critical.”¹⁵¹

2.4.4 Rejecting Reason

2.4.4.1 Julia Driver

There are thinkers in contemporary virtue ethics who disagree about the importance of practical wisdom in virtuous acts. Driver holds that practical wisdom does not matter at all; an agent can have a virtue even if that disposition requires her to be ignorant or thoughtless.¹⁵² Driver identifies a class of moral virtues that either does not require the agent know what she does is right or, that actually requires that the agent be ignorant. She calls this class of virtues, “virtues of ignorance.” Modesty is one such virtue. A modest person will underestimate her self-worth to some degree. If she understates the truth, she does so unknowingly. This entails that the modest person is ignorant, to a certain degree, with regard to her self-worth. As modesty is generally considered a virtue, Driver concludes that this virtue rests upon an epistemic defect. Driver’s argument rests on a mistaken view of modesty. The virtue does not entail underestimating but *not overestimating* one’s abilities. In doing the latter, knowledge is essential. Practical wisdom allows us to see our abilities as relative to those of others. For instance, I can competently invest money and achieve

¹⁵¹ Sherman (1989), p. 159-160.

¹⁵² Driver, Julia, *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 16-42.

decent investment returns. Yet, I realize that there are others who are far better at investing than I am, and who achieve higher returns. I also have the knowledge that my investment returns are not necessarily explained solely by my abilities. Luck plays a role too. This knowledge enables me to be modest in my investing abilities.

2.4.4.2 Maria Merritt

In contrast to Driver, Maria Merritt takes a moderate position on the necessity of practical wisdom in virtue ethics. She argues that an agent can have a virtue even if reflection reveals that she has it for instrumental ends such as power, without her own reflective endorsement.¹⁵³ In weakening or rejecting the role of phronesis in developing and exercising the virtues, dispositions become instruments for consequential ends. Thus, like Driver, Merritt takes a consequentialist approach in defining virtues. We can argue that this approach is orthogonal to the very basis of virtue ethics, which is non-consequentialist. This dissertation will fully discuss Driver's and Merritt's arguments for rejecting practical wisdom and refute those arguments. It will argue that phronesis is necessary for a complete virtue ethics theory because of its role in leading a person from deliberation to action.

2.4.5 Emotions

Virtue ethicists who emphasize the role of emotion in their theories are likely reacting to the perceived overreach of reason that was promulgated by Kant and Kantians. Feminist writers on virtue ethics such as Annette Baier tend to focus on

¹⁵³ Merritt, Maria, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personalist Psychology." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3: 365-383, 2000.

emotions. Philippa Foot is one of the first philosophers to develop virtue ethics. Her views are complex and have evolved over time. Her version of VE owes some basis to Aristotle but she is uncomfortable with the concept of eudaimonia. In her early work, she reduces the role of reason in VE theory. Instead, she recognizes the importance of non-rational elements such as emotions and desires.¹⁵⁴ Foot contends that the will is a part of virtue. She is not clear about what she means by will but we gather that it is closely akin to desire or wish. Thus she writes, "...the disposition of the heart is part of virtue."¹⁵⁵ She argues that wisdom, while being an intellectual virtue, also characterizes a person's will because wisdom makes judgments on which attachments are worthwhile and which are not.

In "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," Foot argues that someone who does not have the desires that most others possess, have no reason to choose the things that most people consider good.¹⁵⁶ The term "hypothetical imperatives" strongly suggest that she considers good choices to be means to the satisfaction of some agent's desires.¹⁵⁷ For Foot, morality is rooted in the nature of human beings, and thus, in human desires and passions. She argues that we are naturally predisposed towards virtues such as justice and benevolence.

¹⁵⁴ Her latest work, *Natural Goodness* (2001), gives a higher profile to practical reason. She suggests that it is because moral action is a requirement of practical rationality that it has a special connection with the will. Her book is a sustained argument against non-cognitivist moral philosophy and for making naturalism a foundation of virtue ethics.

¹⁵⁵ Foot, Philippa, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 166.

¹⁵⁶ Foot, Philippa, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 157-174.

¹⁵⁷ Nussbaum (1999), p.191.

“Considerations of justice, charity and the like have a strange and powerful appeal to the human heart, and we do not need bad arguments to show that no one could be indifferent to morality without error.”¹⁵⁸ However, Foot offers little analysis of emotion and desire that would show, more precisely, how desires and passions are the results of man’s choices and values.

2.5 Criticisms of Virtue Ethics Theories

It is instructive to note Rosalind Hursthouse’s attitude to a definition of virtue ethics. She gives the following characterization of virtue ethics: it is (1) an ethics which is ‘agent-centered’ rather than ‘act-centered’ (2) concerned with Being rather than Doing (3) addressing the question ‘What sort of person should I be?’ rather than ‘What sorts of action should I do?’ (4) taking certain areteic concepts as basic rather than deontic ones (5) rejecting the idea that ethics is codifiable in rules or principles that can provide specific action guidance.¹⁵⁹ These characterizations give a broad and general definition of virtue ethics. Hursthouse goes on to say that she gives these characterizations not because they are good ones but because they are commonly encountered. Indeed, she thinks that these characterizations are seriously misleading. Later on, we discover that she thinks the characterizations are misleading because on these basis, virtue ethics cannot be a genuine rival to utilitarianism or deontology because it cannot tell us about right action, i.e. what sort of acts to do. Thus, as with most writers in VE, Hursthouse is still (despite developing a virtue ethics theory)

¹⁵⁸ Foot (1997), p.

¹⁵⁹ Hursthouse (1999), p. 25.

concerned with differentiating VE from its two main rivals. This concern has led VE into describing itself as what it is not instead of giving a clear, consistent, and cogent description of what it is.

In contrast, Nussbaum provides three characterizations for virtue ethics (agent centered, focus on the inner life and character of the agent, and focus on the whole course of the agent's life) but goes on to say that these characterizations are not unique to virtue ethics but can be applied to Kantian ethics. Nor do they really involve a break with the great utilitarian thinkers such as Sidgwick and Mill.¹⁶⁰ She argues that virtue ethics is not any unitary approach. Kantians and utilitarians have always been thinking and writing about virtues. Virtue ethics has different targets and different positive views. While the common ground is significant, it can be pursued within Kantianism, Utilitarianism, neo-Aristotelianism or neo-Humean projects. The inference from Hursthouse's and Nussbaum's insights is that VE lacks a cogent, consistent, and unitary approach. The purpose of this paper is to give some coherence to virtue ethics theories by suggesting that there are a couple of necessary features that should be included in all theories that call themselves virtue ethics theories.

Schneewind makes a similar criticism of VE when he writes, "It is not easy to collect from present exponents of virtue-centred views of morality an agreement

¹⁶⁰ Nussbaum (1999), p. 170.

about what distinguishes their position from others.”¹⁶¹ Another critic of VE, Robert Louden, writes, “One problem confronting anyone who sets out to analyse the new virtue ethics in detail is that we presently lack fully developed examples of it in the contemporary literature. Most of the work done in this genre has a negative rather than a positive thrust.”¹⁶² In addition Louden gives other serious criticisms of virtue ethics. First, VE is weak in applied ethics.¹⁶³ Second, VE does not deal with mistakes made by virtuous persons (and presumably they do make mistakes). Third, VE does not list intolerable offenses and indeed, does not answer the question of whether there are any of these in VE theory. Fourth, how do we deal with character change when using VE? Fifth, VE does not consider the possibility of moral backsliding. Sixth, we live in a heterogenous, crowded, and democratic society. Can we use VE, which is designed for a small polis? Both Louden and Schneewind think that the one of the biggest problems with VE is that we do not know with any degree of certainty who really is virtuous and who vicious.¹⁶⁴

As noted in the introduction, contemporary VE is a relatively new areas of study. Professionals in this area are continuously coming up with ideas that shore up weaknesses in VE theory. For instance, the problem of applied VE that Louden mentions has begun to be addressed by many writers such as Noddings who writes on

¹⁶¹ Schneewind, J.B., “The Misfortunes of Virtue,” in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 179.

¹⁶² Louden Robert B., “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics,” in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 202.

¹⁶³ Louden, (1997), p. 205-210.

¹⁶⁴ Schneewind (1997), p. 199; Louden (1997), p. 210-213.

the virtue of caring in teaching, Radden who writes on VE in psychiatry, and Swanton who writes on VE in business ethics.¹⁶⁵ Certainly, others have responded to some of Louden's criticisms since he articulated them. Louden's sixth criticism is handled by writers such as Slote, Hursthouse, Swanton, and even MacIntyre. Every community, big or small, has its set of moral virtues. Through habituation, parents teach their children these values, regardless of a community's size. The problem of separating the virtuous from the vicious, assumes that the rightness of an act is determined by the particular individual who performs the act. A possible and different way to judge the act is according to what an ideal virtuous agent would do. Hursthouse seems to gesture in that direction.¹⁶⁶ Louden's criticisms are of course a challenge to VE theorists. They are not insurmountable but they are beyond the scope of this dissertation. What this dissertation does attempt to do is to correct the flaw in VE that Schneewind and Louden point to i.e., the lack of agreement about what distinguishes VE from other positions. Agreeing on the necessary elements of a VE theory is an important step towards strengthening the field and addressing one of its weaknesses.

2.6 Conclusion

From the discussion in this chapter, we conclude that there is a broad array of VE theories each with differing emphasis of the many features of VE. Hence, it is

¹⁶⁵ Noddings, Nel, "Caring as Relation and Virtue in Teaching"; Radden, Jennifer, "Virtue Ethics as Profession Ethics: The Case of Psychiatry"; Swanton, Christine, "Virtue Ethics, Roles Ethics, and Business Ethics", in *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Hursthouse (1999), Chapter 1.

difficult for an observer to ascertain the standard features of VE. The theories of the three major VE thinkers who have developed VE theories described in this chapter (Hursthouse, Slote, and Swanton) are startlingly different. To be sure, they have some common ground such as the ones given by Hursthouse and Nussbaum above. Yet, the differences are wide and it is difficult to put them into a single category that we can confidently call VE unless we broaden the term to a mere generality. Even agreement on what constitutes virtues is hard to discern (compare the definition of virtue given by MacIntyre versus Swanton). This conclusion appears to support critics who claim that VE lacks a single, cohesive strain of thinking. In order to give more coherence to VE there must be more agreement on the necessary features for a comprehensive VE theory.

Thus, we argue that eudaimonia and phronesis are two such features. In chapters 3 and 4, this dissertation will focus on the VE theorists who disregard or reduce the significance of eudaimonia (Slote and Foot) and phronesis (Driver and Merritt) and argue that their theories are flawed because of this neglect. VE theories that downplay phronesis are flawed because they lack adequate explanation of how we move from determining virtue to action. VE theories that ignore eudaimonia are flawed because they are unable to give a credible explanation of how virtues are determined and justified. We will use the arguments developed in the theories of Hursthouse and Annas to support the proposition that eudaimonia is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory. To support the proposition that phronesis is necessary for

a comprehensive VE theory, this dissertation will draw on the work of Richardson, and McDowell.

CHAPTER 3

A FOUNDATION: EUDAIMONIA IN VIRTUE ETHICS

3.1 Introduction

Other moral traditions attempt to base morality on the emotions, on intuitions, on conscience, or on a social contract. Virtue ethics must attempt to base morality on eudaimonia. It is no less exciting and intellectually satisfying. Eudaimonia grounds the virtues in the idea of human flourishing, in a teleological manner. Thinking about the virtues leads to thinking of one's life as a whole.¹⁶⁷ This notion is crucial, and as we have seen, is prominent in all forms of classical virtue ethics, because the virtues make sense only within a conception of living that takes the life one lives to be an overall unity, rather than a succession of more or less unconnected states. Cultivating the virtues is worthwhile because living virtuously will constitute living my life as a whole in a way that lives it well.¹⁶⁸ Classical theories of virtue ethics claim that virtue is, more weakly (in the Aristotelian case), necessary for eudaimonia. In the stronger (Stoic) case, virtue is sufficient for eudaimonia.¹⁶⁹

Thus, eudaimonia cannot be defined at the start, without reference to the virtues. A life lived in accordance with the virtues is the best specification of eudaimonia. From the previous chapter, we have seen that contemporary proponents

¹⁶⁷ Annas, Julia, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, chapter 1.

¹⁶⁸ Annas, Julia, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 520

¹⁶⁹ Annas, Julia, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism," in *Virtue Ethics Old and New*, ed. Stephen M. Gardiner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, pp. 26-27.

of virtue ethics, largely, prefer to concentrate on the concept of virtue and to ignore the notion of eudaimonia with which it is historically and conceptually connected. While modern VE theories are analogues of Aristotelian VE, it is interesting to note that these modern theories call themselves virtue ethics and not eudaimonic ethics.

Virtue ethicists are uncomfortable with the concept of eudaimonia for three main reasons. First, they think the concept defies objective definition. One can find many views of eudaimonia and we open the door to relativism if we depend on eudaimonia for the justification of virtues. I think Hursthouse gives as a good an argument for the objectivity of eudaimonia as I have seen in the literature (see 3.1.2). In addition, in 3.3, I incorporate the subjective elements of eudaimonia by using research into modern views of happiness, as defined in the introduction of this dissertation, while still maintaining its essential objective feature, living according to the virtues. Secondly, relying on eudaimonia as a motivation for being virtuous also opens us up to the accusation of moral egoism. This misconception of the connection between eudaimonia and moral egoism is well countered by Annas. A person aims at her own eudaimonia and not others in the sense that she is living her life and not others. There is not implication that she is furthering her own interests at the expense of others. Someone who has dispositions that further only her own interests in a way that could conflict with those of others cannot be considered virtuous.¹⁷⁰ Third, Aristotle's eudaimonia is based on his "metaphysical biology", a term used by MacIntyre. Yet, Aristotle's ethics does not rely on his notions such as substantial

¹⁷⁰ Annas (2006), pp. 522-523.

form, entelechy or on concepts that tie it explicitly to his biological theory. Aristotle's account of human nature in Book 1 is remarkably modern depending more on empirical psychology than on his natural philosophy. I therefore, reject these claims arguing that they are insufficient for discarding eudaimonia (see Chapter 5 for a detailed refutation). If we ignore the concept of eudaimonia virtue ethics is unable to answer certain fundamental questions about the nature and value of virtue. If the concept of virtue is disconnected from eudaimonia, virtue ethics runs the risk of turning into a variant of rival theories.¹⁷¹

This chapter will draw on the definitions and role of eudaimonia given by Aristotle. The paper takes Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia as "rational activity in accordance with the virtues, in a complete life." Thus, there are three strands to eudaimonia: reason (phronesis), a life lived according to the virtues, and a complete life. Chapter 4 gives an account of the first strand, phronesis. In addition, we agree with Aristotle's view that the role of eudaimonia is to justify and validate the virtues. It is the telos of our activities. To update the concept of eudaimonia, this dissertation also uses relevant material from Hursthouse and Annas.

Hursthouse is a neo-Aristotelian who has written an impressive and one of the most comprehensive VE theories in contemporary literature. In it she defends the necessity of eudaimonia to validate the virtues. She takes a naturalistic view of eudaimonia and grounds human flourishing on what is good for human beings *qua*

¹⁷¹ Prior, William J., "Eudaimonism and Virtue" in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 35:325-342, 2001.

human beings. We use her arguments based on a naturalistic account of ethics, to counter that eudaimonia cannot be objectively defined. Annas is an unapologetic eudaimonist and a neo-Aristotelian. Consequently, she holds the view that virtues must be located in a framework in which the overarching concept is eudaimonia. She believes that more theorists will engage with eudaimonia if the perceived differences between the current and ancient views of eudaimonia are reduced. We will attempt to do this in this chapter and build on the arguments of these theorists and psychological research to support its thesis that eudaimonia is necessary for a comprehensive VE theory because it determines which dispositions are virtues. I will apply results from psychological research focusing on happiness that has been carried out in the past two decades in order to include into the concept of eudaimonia, modern views of happiness.

Without eudaimonia, virtues, which everyone agrees are a primary focus of virtue ethics (VE), are left without a determinant of their status. On the negative side, the latter part of this chapter attempts to show that Michael Slote's VE theory is not comprehensive because it rejects eudaimonia and embraces the far weaker motivation of benevolence as a justification for the virtues. I do the same with Foot's attempt to justify the virtue of courage without recourse to eudaimonia. Finally, Christine Swanton's attempt at a pluralistic means of evaluating virtues is also examined. The conclusion is that Swanton's version of virtue recognition and validation is too permissive and can in the end be subsumed under the eudaimonic evaluative scheme.

Her pluralism and desire to accommodate a wide range of views undermines her attempts to explain and guide moral action.

3.2 Eudaimonia 1.0: Aristotle's View

Eudaimonia plays a foundational role in Aristotle's ethics. This role stems from eudaimonia being the *telos* of every human. According to the definition given by Aristotle, eudaimonia is the reason we act virtuously. Thus, it is the justification for the virtues. In Chapter 1 we discussed Aristotle's arguments that there is an ultimate end. This ultimate end is the chief good. The chief good is eudaimonia and all people seek it. As the ultimate end, eudaimonia is the target towards which our actions are aimed: "...it is for the sake of eudaimonia that we all do everything else we do, and we lay it down that the principle and cause of goods is something honorable and godlike (1102a2-4)" Doing well is connected to the notion of proairesis or choice because the word praxis (action) is restricted to man and denied to other animals. Proairesis is a deliberative desire to do something with a view of doing well (eupraxia). McDowell with the support of Aristotle at 1095a19-20 states that "doing well" is a synonym for "having eudaimonia."¹⁷² Continuing this line of argument, if praxeis are actions that issue from proairesis, then "we have it guaranteed, by implicit explanation of the restricted use, that all praxeis are undertaken for the sake of eudaimonia (i.e. eupraxia)."¹⁷³

¹⁷² McDowell, John, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980 (1980), p. 361.

¹⁷³ McDowell (1980), p. 362.

The question then arises as to how everyone can be pursuing the same end. Surely everyone has her own end that differs from other's. I agree with McDowell that both the above characterizations of the end are correct.¹⁷⁴ The appropriate answer depends on the level of specificity with which ends are formulated. If we go down to specific details about what a particular person's end is (*e.g.* having a fulfilling and enjoyable job that adds value to society) divergences are highly likely to appear. (Section 3.2.1. gives a fuller discussion of this aspect of eudaimonia based on results of happiness research.) However, on a broad based level, it is possible for something that we call eudaimonia to be the common end of everyone. Aristotle says as much in 1095a17-28: "Pretty well most people are agreed about what to call it: both ordinary people and people of quality say 'eudaimonia', and suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being eudaimon."

Of course, eudaimonia needs further elaboration and definition. The formal definition of eudaimonia is that it is both self-sufficient and complete. It may be instructive to investigate the definition that emerges from the function or *ergon* argument.

A human being's function we posit as being a kind of life, and this life as being activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, and it belongs to a good man to perform these well and finely, and each thing is completed well when it possesses its proper virtues: if all this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue (1) (and if there are more virtues than one, in accordance with the best and the most complete) (2). But furthermore it will be this in a complete life (3). For a single swallow does not make spring, nor

¹⁷⁴ McDowell (1980), p. 360.

does a single day; in the same way, neither does a single day, or a short time, make a man blessed and happy.

1098a13-21

In (1) Aristotle is saying that eudaimonia is rational activity in accordance with virtues. Therefore, he is telling us that eudaimonia involves reason, actions, and virtues. The reason to which Aristotle refers is one that deals with moral issues. The distinctive sort of reason, “applies to a restricted class of bits of behavior which, because undertaken for that sort of reason, are of special interest in ethics.”¹⁷⁵ Aristotle’s definition describes that kind of life, which is most desirable for a human being. It is a life that aims at virtuousness because it is by being virtuous that one can be eudaimon.

That eudaimonia involves reason that deals with moral categories is perhaps less ambiguous or controversial than the second conjunct, virtue. For there is some debate about which intellectual virtue, *sophia* or *phronesis*, Aristotle was referring in his bracketed statement (2). As noted earlier in section 1.3.1, I do not subscribe to Aristotle’s purported claim that the theoretical and contemplative life is the most superior and therefore, the eudaimonistic. The question which type of life is the archetype of eudaimonia is also linked to the dominant and inclusive interpretations of the ultimate end. Aristotle does not give a definitive answer in Book X. Chapter 7 of this book seems to say that eudaimonia consists in the exercise of our highest and most distinctively human capacity, our capacity for rational thought. It is a life devoted to nothing but the intellectual activity of *theoria*, contemplation. However,

¹⁷⁵ McDowell (1980), p. 364.

X.8 seems to say that eudaimonia consists in the many-faceted activities, which go into the life of a good public-spirited citizen. The first of these interpretations is in line with the dominant interpretation of I.7, while the second, involving a large variety of virtuous activities, is one version of the inclusive interpretation.

The dominant view, which identifies eudaimonia with *theoria*, has to explain how it is that everything else is done for the sake of *theoria*. This has been done but it is unsatisfactory, especially when we apply it to contemporary society.¹⁷⁶ The inclusivist position in most of its versions fails to give the special place given to *theoria*, but it is correct in that it gives due weight to the fact that the *Ethics* is largely devoted to aspects of the practical moral life. Wilkes argues that Aristotle's position is inconsistent and one cannot and should not try to juggle the texts so that the conflict of the two lives is resolved.¹⁷⁷

One intriguing possibility that could reconcile the two versions of the eudaimon life may be found in a Taoist approach. Taoism is naturalistic in some of the same ways as Aristotle. The latter grounds his definition of eudaimonia on human function, and what is most characteristic of human nature. According to Taoism we must live according to our nature and with Nature. The philosophy is also practical – every one of us cannot be philosophers or sages living in simple houses in the forests, contemplating first principles, all our lives. Thus, a good Taoist lives the

¹⁷⁶ Kraut, Richard, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ Wilkes, Kathleen V., "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Mind*, Vol. 87, Np. 348, (October, 1978), pp. 553-571, at p. 566.

first part of her life engaged in the polity, family, and society, while following the precepts of Taoism. In the last part of her life, she disengages from the world, having contributed to it and having learned what she could from it. She enters the contemplative part of her life and does philosophy. Similarly, Aristotle's two versions of the eudaimon life can be pursued in different stages of a person's life. In the first stage of youth and middle age, a person will pursue moral excellence while guided by the intellectual excellence of phronesis. It is the practical, political stage of life where one has friends and the external goods that add to a eudaimon life. In later life, one pulls back, gets rid of the unnecessary external goods, and lives a contemplative life in which *theoria* is the dominant end. If one dies before the latter stage, then one simply does not achieve eudaimonia; not everyone can nor does. This Taoist reconciliation of Aristotle's two versions of the eudaimon life also accords with the latter's last statements in the definition of eudaimonia, where it is clearly stated that eudaimonia is not achieved in a day, but is a result of a lifetime of activity aiming at virtue. This reconciliation is one way of taking into account the contemplative life. Otherwise, it is difficult to reckon how it can be recommended as the only form of eudaimonia in today's cultural milieu.

In (3), Aristotle proposes that eudaimonia is not achieved through a single action or in a short period of time. A eudaimon life becomes one that works over time. To achieve this, a person must analyze the notion of what a good life would and must have a true grasp of the ultimate end. One must develop a life plan that integrates all of the desired pursuits so that it has the best distribution of desired

goods that gives the plan the most completeness and self-sufficiency. On this view, Wilkes views eudaimonia as an ‘emergent’ property.¹⁷⁸ Aristotle shows in the NE that virtuous activity is essential in every plan. A person cannot attain the good life, the good for a human, unless she is a good person.

3.3 Eudaimonia 2.0: Hursthouse’s View:

In Chapter 2 we reviewed some of Hursthouse’s basic views on eudaimonia. In answer to critics who argue that virtue ethics cannot tell us which right action to take, she suggests that virtue ethics can give an account of right action in such a way as to provide action guidance. To reiterate from Chapter 2:

P.1. An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (*i.e.* acting in character) do in the circumstances.

P.1a. A virtuous agent is one who has, and exercises, certain character traits, namely, the virtues.

P.2. A virtue is a character trait a human being needs for eudaimonia, to flourish or live well.

Hursthouse is concerned with validating virtues. P.2. is her way of doing this, although she adds that it is more complicated than is usually supposed. Her definition of a virtue is: “A virtue is a character trait that a human being needs for eudaimonia, to flourish or live well.”¹⁷⁹ (Hursthouse has problems with any translation of eudaimonia but settles for flourishing as the best alternative.) This claim that virtues are required for eudaimonia encapsulates three theses: (1) The virtues benefit their

¹⁷⁸ Wilkes (1978), p. 554.

¹⁷⁹ Hursthouse, Rosalind, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 20.

possessor, as we cannot be eudaimon without having the virtues, (2) The virtues make their possessor good *qua* human being. The virtues are grounded in eudaimonia. Hursthouse further grounds eudaimonia in human nature, such that human beings need the virtues in order to live a characteristically good human life. The third thesis, (3), is the features of virtue in (1) and (2) are interrelated. She argues that (1) and (2) can validate our beliefs about which character traits are the virtues.

That the virtues benefit their possessor because they enable her to live a eudaimon life is the motivation for being virtuous. However, this is not how Hursthouse primarily intends it. She thinks the motivational reason is a red herring. Within ethical naturalism, a person does not look for motivating reasons to be virtuous. Rather she is seeking validation of which character traits are the virtues so that she can live a eudaimon life in accordance with those virtues. Thus, for Hursthouse, the more important role for eudaimonia is that it validates the virtues via thesis (1). She takes the position that being virtuous is not sufficient to bring about eudaimonia in order to undercut arguments such as, if I do something courageous I may be maimed. “The claim is not that possession of virtues will not guarantee that one will flourish. The claim is that they are the only reliable bet.”¹⁸⁰ Then of course there is Thrasymachus’s or the immoralist objection that the wicked may flourish without caring about the virtues. Her answer is twofold: first, by claiming that virtues benefit their possessor, she is not claiming that virtue is necessary for eudaimonia. She is claiming that, “no ‘regimen’ will serve better – no other candidate ‘regimen’ is

¹⁸⁰ Hursthouse (1999), p. 172.

remotely possible.” Second, a few examples of the thriving wicked does not discredit her thesis. There must be a clearly identifiable pattern in human history that shows that the wicked have thrived in a sustained manner.

Notice that Hursthouse, while still holding on to eudaimonia as a means of validation and peripherally of motivation for the virtues, has weakened the Aristotelian position on eudaimonia. It is no longer sufficient and complete. Hursthouse feels compelled to say virtue is not sufficient for eudaimonia to counter the argument that virtue can lead to one’s downfall. She then adds that she does not claim that virtue is even necessary for eudaimonia.¹⁸¹ However, being virtuous is the best possible route to eudaimonia. She brings in other arguments to counter the immoralist claim. First, the majority of us, who have our children’s interests at heart, teach our children to be moral – for the child’s own sake. Her answer to the immoralist’s argument is to look at our own lives and attitudes. How do we feel about the wealthy and powerful who, cheat and are ruthless? Not many of us, she thinks, envy these people. Thus, she appeals to our human nature, which according to her view as a decent and good human being, is by and large, rather good and decent.¹⁸²

And this perspective is in line with her stand that there is “no possibility of justifying morality from the outside by appealing to ‘anything non-moral’, or by

¹⁸¹ Hursthouse (1999), p. 173.

¹⁸² The cheating, ruthless villains are of course, humans, but they are not the majority and according to Hursthouse’s naturalism they are not examples of the good ones in the species.

finding a neutral point of view that the fairly virtuous and the wicked can share.”¹⁸³ Hursthouse takes a middle-of-the-road, sensible, view of eudaimonia. She disagrees with McDowell that even if virtue leads to disaster, it will not be felt as a disaster by the truly virtuous. She does not have the conception of eudaimonia such that no sacrifice necessitated by virtue counts as a loss. Nor does she think like the immoralist that virtue brings with it suffering and helplessness. Both positions are too extreme. People who are by and large virtuous have joy, warmth, and enjoyment in their lives. She calls this the ‘smile factor’.¹⁸⁴ We teach our children, that a life lived in accordance with the virtues is for the most part, enjoyable and satisfying. Hare espouses morality as enlightened self-interest from a neutral point of view. Hursthouse says that virtue ethics is about enlightened self-interest but not from a neutral point of view but from the point of view of most people who share beliefs about human nature and the way human life works. However, these are not “value-laden” viewpoints. They are viewpoints “from within an ethical outlook”. She calls this view the Neurathian view, a view that McDowell and Quine also endorsed.¹⁸⁵

Hursthouse cautions that ethical naturalism is neither “scientific” nor “foundational”. It does not seek to give an account of the virtues from a neutral point of view, but rather from within an ethical outlook. However, ethical naturalism does provide rational reasons for beliefs about which character traits are the virtues. Within ethical naturalism, eudaimonia is grounded in our human nature. We flourish

¹⁸³ Hursthouse (1999), p. 179.

¹⁸⁴ Hursthouse (1999), p. 185.

¹⁸⁵ Hursthouse (1999), p. 165.

when we are good human beings *qua* human beings. What does it mean to flourish as a good human being? Hursthouse evaluates social animals on four aspects in relation to four ends. The four aspects are: (i) parts, (ii) operations/reactions, (iii) actions, and (iv) emotions/desires. The four ends with respect to which these aspects are evaluated are: (i) individual survival, (ii) the continuance of the species, (iii) characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/characteristic freedom from pain, and (iv) the good functioning of the social group – in the ways characteristic of human beings. A good human being is one who is well fitted or endowed with respect to its four aspects. Whether it is well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve the four ends, in the ways characteristic of the species. To be a good human being is to be well endowed with respect to the aspects listed. Thus, to possess the human virtues is to be well endowed. "The human virtues make their possessor good *qua* human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish -- in a characteristically human way."¹⁸⁶ In order to understand human nature and how human life works, we must employ phronesis.

Hursthouse's thesis (2) on the good of human beings is a slightly different take on Aristotle's *ergon* argument. Instead of 'function' she believes that there is 'characteristic way' for a species X to behave in relation to which they are evaluated as good or defective. The evaluation is based on how well a member of the species is endowed with necessary characteristics so that it achieves its ends. In the case of

¹⁸⁶ Foot (1999), p.208.

rational animals – human beings – Hursthouse proposes four aspects and four ends. To possess the virtues is to be well endowed and to therefore, be able to meet the four ends. Thus, Hursthouse like Aristotle, envisages that good humans possess the virtues and live according to them.

In summary, Hursthouse has two measures for validating which character traits are virtues. First, virtues benefit their possessor. Secondly, living in accordance with the virtues enables us to live as good human beings *qua* human beings. These two features that spring from the claim that virtues are required for eudaimonia, are in turn interrelated. Thesis (1) falls under thesis (2). If a virtue makes its possessor well-endowed with respect to achieving its ends, it will also benefit its possessor. Hursthouse's project as explained above has been to modernize the concept of eudaimonia so that it can be a primary concept in virtue ethics theories. Thus, her inclusion of thesis (2), bringing in naturalism as a way to view eudaimonia as a essential part of being a good human being *qua* human being. Annas is also of the view that eudaimonia must be a primary part of virtue ethics but differences in the modern and ancient notions of the concept must first be narrowed.

3.3.1 Annas View: Contrasting Eudaimonia with Happiness

Chapter 2 discusses how Annas thinks the modern concept of eudaimonia or happiness as she translates it, is different from the ancient concept. She believes first, that eudaimonia must be a primary concept in any virtue ethics, ancient or modern. A virtue ethics that is bases solely on virtues does not have the architecture to support a comprehensive and cohesive theory. In order for eudaimonia to be a primary concept

in modern virtue ethics theory, the gulf between the modern and ancient understanding of the term must be bridged as far as possible. Annas tries to find commonality between the ancient notion of eudaimonia and our current view of happiness in the hopes that there is enough overlap in the two notions so that eudaimonia can also become primary in modern VE theories.

She lists three main differences between the two understandings. To recap: first, do moderns think that happiness is the ultimate end towards we should aim? Second, happiness, in the modern sense, is subjective, while the ancients regard it as objective. The final aspect of the ancient view of happiness that is in discord with our modern view is the rigidity of happiness. According to Aristotle, virtue can transform a human life. Compared to the ancient notion of happiness, our modern conception of happiness is rigid and is not tolerant of much shifting of content, certainly not the wholesale redefining demanded by the thesis that virtue is sufficient for happiness. This third difference leads to a subsidiary difference that arises between modern and ancient views of happiness: the definition of happiness.

According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is rational activity in accordance with excellence, in a complete life. In other words, if we gave this definition of eudaimonia or happiness to an average modern, in user friendly language like, “happiness is possessing and practicing the virtues, with the help of reason, in a complete life, that would include external goods, such as health, family, friends, fulfilling work, wealth, status, and leisure activities”, would she balk? The second part of the proposition would not be a problem for a modern. Most people across the

world would not find it strange or disagreeable to aim for those external goods throughout one's life. The first part of the proposition may take a little explanation and discussion. Yet, if we put it in comprehensible terms such as "being a good person" or "doing good and not causing harm", would it cause a modern to reject this definition? I should think it would not. So we are likely to come up with a definition of happiness that would be pretty true to the Aristotelian version, and still be in tune with contemporary sensibilities. Having a definition of happiness that moderns can agree with is one step towards modernizing the concept of eudaimonia. Narrowing the differences that Annas has flagged and with the help of Hursthouse's naturalistic account, we will attempt a modernization of the concept of eudaimonia so that it can be a primary concept in a modern VE theory.

3.4 Modernizing the Concept of Eudaimonia

3.4.1 The Inclusivist Interpretation

Is it true that all people seek eudaimonia? If eudaimonia is thought of as a dominant end, then according to Kenny and Hardie, it is the object of a single prime end, the pursuit of virtue through reason and balanced desire. If it is thought of as an inclusive end, then eudaimonia consists in a number of different ends. Knowing contemporary attitudes, it is more likely that everyone has inclusive ends rather than a single dominant end. This view is therefore, more in line with contemporary attitudes and is defensible from an Aristotelian view as well. For he writes, "Well, it is thought characteristic of a wise person to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous to himself, not in specific contexts, *e.g.* what sorts of

things conduce to health, or to physical strength, but what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general (1140a25-30).” This line of thought assumes that there are a number of choiceworthy and desirable elements that one wants or needs to include in one’s life, and at which one aims. The condition is that these goods are capable of being coherently integrated with one another.

An inclusivist interpretation of eudaimonia is in line with our modern sensibility of happiness. As stated earlier, eudaimonia is not happiness, as we commonly know it in the modern sense of the word. Eudaimonia is virtuous activity plus modern happiness. An inclusivist view has happiness as one of the goods that make up the “complete life” Aristotle writes about. Nor is modern happiness unconnected from virtuousness. Research has shown that happy people are energetic, decisive, flexible, creative and sociable.¹⁸⁷ Compared to unhappy people, they are trusting, more loving, more responsive. Happy people tolerate more frustration. They are less likely to be abusive and are more lenient. Whether temporarily or enduringly happy, they are more loving and forgiving. Indeed, “in experiment after experiment, happy people are more willing to help those in need. It’s the “feel-good, do-good phenomenon”.”¹⁸⁸ Robert Browning wrote, “Oh, make us happy and you make us good!” There seems to be a connection between happiness and altruism. The study above apparently shows that happy people tend to do good things. No doubt happiness and eudaimonia are closely tied, one affecting the other. Another

¹⁸⁷ Myers, David G., *The Pursuit of Happiness*. William Morrow: New York, 1992 (1992), p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ Myers (1992), p. 20-21.

study shows that people who do good things also tend to be happy. The subjects were asked to sort people they knew on two distinct bases: whether they seemed happy and whether they seemed unselfish. The resulting correlations were striking: 70 percent of those considered unselfish were deemed happy, while 95 percent of those considered selfish were reckoned to be unhappy.¹⁸⁹ (Of course, while the data are suggestive, we cannot take the results from one study to be in any way conclusive on the question of whether the good are happy.)

There is however, more data on the goods contemporary societies consider as contributing to happiness. Modern psychological research on happiness has been working on this question since the 1960s. As Aristotle noted two and a half millennia ago, all people want to be happy. This observation has not changed in the twenty-first century. Nor is the desire for happiness a Western phenomenon. The Dalai Lama writes, “[The importance of training the mind] arises from the fundamental fact that each and every one of us innately desires happiness and does not want misery. These are natural human characteristics that don’t have to be created. This desire is not wrong. The question is, how do we achieve these objectives of realizing happiness and relinquishing misery?”¹⁹⁰ Psychological research provides the data to attempt to prove the human desire for happiness.¹⁹¹ As with Aristotle, we find ourselves then asking, what is happiness? Most people seem

¹⁸⁹ Sumner, L.W. “Is Virtue its Own Reward?” in *Social Philosophy & Policy*. Vol 15, No. 1, Winter 1998, pp.18-36.

¹⁹⁰ The Dalai Lama, *Stages of Meditation*, translated by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, and Jeremy Russell. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2001, p. 37.

¹⁹¹ Argyle, Michael, *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Methuen, 2001, p. 1.

to know what it is. Surveys have asked people what they mean by it, and they say either that is often being in a state of joy or other positive emotion, or it is being satisfied with one's life. These two components, positive emotion and satisfaction, are often measured. Argyle thinks that joy is the emotional part of happiness while satisfaction is the cognitive part. It is a reflective appraisal, a judgment, of how well things are going, and have been going. What do most people think are the most important sources of satisfaction in their lives? The most mentioned domains are: family and home life, money and prices, living standards, social values and standards, social relationships, housing, health, and work.¹⁹²

Argyle concludes that happiness is partly caused by objective features of life such as wealth, employment, and marriage, but also by subjective factors such as how we perceive those conditions. Another cause of happiness is having the right kind of personality, but this can be changed by life experiences. As noted earlier, studies indicate that normal, non-patients (who are not depressed) are seeking happiness all the time, although they may not know the true causes and so may not do it very effectively.¹⁹³ Thus, it is not a stretch to conclude that happiness (in the modern sense) for most people is a goal or final end.

3.5 Eudaimonia 3.0: Towards Comprehensive VE Theories

The basic premise of eudaimonia that is given through the ages does not change. It defines the virtues. It answers the question: "Is X a virtue?" The answer

¹⁹² Argyle (2001), p. 41.

¹⁹³ Argyle (2001), p. 229.

is, X is a virtue if it promotes eudaimonia. A human person is virtuous if her dispositions to act from reason, her emotions, and her desires, are likely to promote eudaimonia. Why do we need virtue to be eudaimon? The answer can be found in naturalism. Eudaimonia, as we understand from a naturalistic standpoint, is determined by the standards of flourishing as a member of the human species. Thus, whether a disposition is a virtue depends on whether it promotes:

- (i) her individual survival
- (ii) survival of the human species
- (iii) characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain
- (iv) good functioning of the social group

As we have seen the naturalistic version of eudaimonia espoused by Foot and elaborated by Hursthouse is derived from the function argument. A thing's excellence is conceptually connected to its function and thereby to its eudaimonia. We judge whether a thing is doing well by the degree of excellence in the performance of its main function. What is the function that is peculiar just to human beings? It is not the nutritive function because we share that with plants and animals. Nor is it the perceptual function because we share that with animals. Humans are the only animals that can reason. Therefore, reasoning is the activity that is peculiar to human beings. If eudaimonia is living well and doing well, then according to the function argument, the achievement of these two goals is through the best use of our reason. We must live a complete life of moral excellence or virtue guided by intellectual excellence or virtue, *i.e.*, reason. The good of a thing or activity is in the

excellent use of its prime function. Thus, a human being is good who lives a life of virtuous activity according to reason.

In the earlier section, Annas describes three differences between ancient eudaimonia and modern happiness. One difference is that the former is objective while the latter is subjective. Indeed a frequently cited objection to eudaimonia or happiness when considered in its contemporary understanding is that it connotes something subjective. Whether we are happy depends on my view and that may be different from your view of happiness. It is all too easy for me to be mistaken about whether my life is eudaimon, because self-deception is common and also because of the wrong conception of eudaimonia. Some may believe that it consists largely in pleasure. However, although there is some measure of subjectivity in the word “happiness” or “flourishing” (probably more the former than the latter), according to Hursthouse, we also have a more objective notion much closer to that of eudaimonia which, is “a notion of ‘true (or real) happiness’, or ‘the sort of happiness worth having’.”¹⁹⁴ In our discussion of eudaimonia, we posit that eudaimonia has both subjective and objective elements. Happiness is the subjective element in eudaimonia, but there is an objective element that justifies virtue. However, it is objective to the extent that Hursthouse defines objective, *i.e.*, from within an ethical outlook and not from a neutral point of view. Ethical naturalism provides rational reasons for beliefs about which character traits are the virtues. From the viewpoint of ethical naturalism, eudaimonism is grounded in our human nature.

¹⁹⁴ Hursthouse (1999), p. 10.

A eudaimon life does not have to be just one type of life. Conceivably, one can be eudaimon as a teacher, boxer, investment banker, artist, monastic, and so on. A eudaimonic life is one that is fulfilling, flourishing, meaningful, and well lived over a lifetime. Other adjectives that describe a eudaimonic life include thriving and satisfying. Eudaimonists argue that these features result in large part, from a life of virtuous actions. As shown above, there is a tight connection between the good life and goodness in humans – a connection grounded in our human nature. Yet, virtue can be displayed in a variety of situations and lifestyles. One need not only be a soldier to be courageous. A person can be courageous in different circumstances – fighting a life threatening disease while still striving to keep a family together for instance. An eudaimonic life is primarily morally good (the virtue component) and secondarily personally satisfying (the happiness component). Virtues are necessary for eudaimonia but in some lives they are not sufficient. For while a disposition is deemed to be a virtue if it contributes to the eudaimonia of an agent, yet it is also consistent to claim that the exercise of a virtue does not guarantee eudaimonia.¹⁹⁵ Aristotle emphasizes that the truths of ethics are truths for the most part. A person may act virtuously but still have unfortunate luck in life. Thus, Aristotle refers to Priam's misfortunes (1101a5-10). Aristotle and Hursthouse concede that one may act according to the virtues needed for eudaimonia, but still have such egregious ill fortune that when viewed as a whole, that life cannot be described as eudaimon.

¹⁹⁵ See Swanton, Christine, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, Chapter 4, and Hursthouse (1999), Chapter 8.

Now, Hursthouse is more willing to give up the ghost than Aristotle. She writes, “[T]he claim is not that possession of the virtues guarantees that one will flourish. The claim is that they are the only reliable bet – even though, it is agreed, I might be unlucky and, precisely because of my virtue, wind up dying early or with my life marred or ruined.”¹⁹⁶ Aristotle, in contrast, holds that even if we suffer misfortune, we may still be eudaimon because of our virtuous disposition, “Nevertheless, even in these [unfortunate] circumstances the quality of fineness shines through, when someone bears repeated and great misfortunes calmly, not because he is insensitive to them but because he is a person of nobility and greatness of soul. If one’s activities are what determine the quality of one’s life, as we have said, no one who is blessed will become miserable; for he will never do what is hateful and vile. For we consider that the truly good and sensible person bears what fortune brings him with good grace, and acts on each occasion in the finest way possible given the resources at the time (1100b30 – 1101a5).” What Aristotle is trying to say is that those who are virtuous manage misfortune with greater fortitude, equanimity, and grace. All of the latter traits are unsurprisingly, virtues. By acting virtuously, one becomes more virtuous. Virtue begets virtue and this is especially important during difficult times. Thus, virtue may actually alleviate unhappiness; objective well-being influences and shapes subjective well-being.

When the two components of eudaimonia are at odds with one another, which of the two should we choose? We have already noted that there is a sort of

¹⁹⁶ Hursthouse (1999), p. 172.

connection between moral goodness and personal happiness (see also 3.2.1). On the optimistic view of VE, the components of a eudaimonic life are not only broadly integrated, but the virtues central to the moral worth of a life are also characteristically good for the agent.¹⁹⁷ As Aristotle implies, ethics is an inexact science. Our choice should be guided by our practical wisdom (see chapter 4). A practically wise person would choose virtue over happiness, but not to the extent where she would be reduced to a position where she cannot have the ability to be virtuous. There are the easy cases – should a mortgage banker sell loans to people who do not have a prayer of repaying them, so that he can get the commissions and thereby enrich himself? In other words, should he choose wealth over honesty? A eudaimonist would say no. On the Hursthouse model, choosing to be dishonest in this case would not lead to the smooth functioning of the social group. And as we have seen in the recent global financial crisis, the social group has certainly suffered due to the personal greed of the few. There are the tough cases. Swanton gives an example.¹⁹⁸ Should a dedicated aid worker give up her physical security and well-being in order to work in the jungles of an impoverished country in order to help the underprivileged who live in these jungles? In other words should she choose generosity (of her time and effort) over her own health? First, this aid worker may be happy because she finds her life satisfying and meaningful, despite its physical vicissitudes. Together with her act of selfless giving to the underprivileged, we can

¹⁹⁷ Swanton (2003), p. 59.

¹⁹⁸ Swanton (2003), p. 82.

describe her life, if (as Swanton further hypothesizes) she dies at an early age, in the jungle, as eudaimon. If she finds her life unfulfilling and not meaningful because of the physical difficulties of working in the jungle, then we must consider her overwhelming generosity of heart. From the standpoint of eudaimonia as described, she is still leading a eudaimonic life. Her disposition to help others at the cost of her own well-being promotes the survival of other humans. This disposition is therefore, a virtue.

Eudaimonia is the best route we have for justifying and validating the virtues. It is not an infallible way because there are cogent objections to its use as a primary focus of ethics. Yet, so far, there has been no better replacement for eudaimonia. There is agreement that virtues are a primary focus in virtue ethics. There is however, little agreement over how we justify which dispositions are virtues. Surely the determination is crucial for a virtue ethics theory to be a comprehensive one. Missing the criterion for a virtue, a VE theory will be incomplete because it does not answer a basic question: “Which disposition or character trait is a virtue?” Aristotle, Hursthouse, Annas, and I propose that eudaimonia is this criterion. It is better than others that have been offered so far in the VE literature. Few if any have thought that virtue can do all the work in a VE theory; the question arises at some point as to how we are to locate virtue in a wider structure.¹⁹⁹ Slote attempts to base virtues on our motivation. However, this justification, we argue is weaker than a eudaimonistic one.

¹⁹⁹ Annas, Julia, “Virtue and Eudaimonism” in *Social Philosophy & Policy*. Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 1998, 37-55, at p. 37.

3.6 Problems with Michael Slote's Theory

Slote does not accept the idea that eudaimonia can be the basis for justifying and validating the virtues. In his book, *Morals from Motives*, Slote argues for two positions. First he argues for an agent-based theory of virtue ethics. Second he argues for his version of agent-based virtue ethics. An agent-based version of VE is “one that treats the moral or ethical status of actions as entirely *derivative* from independent and *fundamental* ethical/aretaic facts (or claims) about the motives, dispositions, or inner life of moral individuals.”²⁰⁰ This represents a radical form of virtue ethics. A primary feature of agent-based virtue ethics is that it admits one central or foundational virtue: benevolence or caring. Slote takes his inspiration from the sentimentalist ethics of Hutcheson and Hume. As the theory is motive-centered, attention should be directed inward at the states of character in question rather than outward at the states of the world. As we saw in Chapter 2, agent-based virtue ethics and therefore, Slote's theory are non-teleological. According to his definition, virtues are character traits that are motivated by benevolence. These character traits are then fundamentally admirable. According to Slote, “an act is morally acceptable if and only if it comes from good or virtuous motivation involving benevolence or caring (about the well-being of others) or at least doesn't come from bad or inferior motivation involving malice or indifference to humanity.”²⁰¹ Using Hursthouse's

²⁰⁰ Slote, Michael, *Morals from Motives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 7.

²⁰¹ Slote (2001), p. 38.

formulation, and according to Slote, an agent-based theory of right action would be as follows:

P.1. An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (*i.e.* acting in character) do in the circumstances.

P.1a. A virtuous agent is one who has, and exercises, certain character traits, namely, the virtues.

P.2. A virtue is a character trait that is motivated by benevolence or caring (about the well-being of others).

Slote's account is a sentimentalist view of morality that focuses on concern for human or sentient well-being. Ultimately, Slote's version of agent-based virtue ethics defends a morality of caring, or "partial benevolence". Slote distinguishes between those who are closest to us, whom we love, and others who are part of humanity in general. Slote emphasizes the virtue of a kind of balanced caring between these two groups. He says a caring person achieves a balanced concern among those for whom she cares in an intimate fashion as well as a balanced concern between her intimates considered as a class and all (other) human beings considered as a class.²⁰² He chooses balanced caring over other virtues as the fundamental virtue, giving reasons why for instance honesty and strength of purpose are only derivatively admirable. They are admirable to the extent that they are aspects of or partly constitutive of the balanced caring. However, it is easily argued that intuitively, honesty and strength of purpose are not derivatively admirable. Indeed, it would be desirable if Slote had given a deeper explanation of why balanced caring is the fundamental virtue.

²⁰² Slote (2001), p.70.

In agent-based versions of virtue ethics, the emphasis on motivation is then fundamental. Yet, Slote does not give reasons why we should accept that universal benevolence should be the fundamental ground on which we must base moral judgments of actions. He simply says that, “Every ethical theory must start somewhere, and an agent-based morality will want to say that the moral goodness of (universal) benevolence or of caring about people is intuitively obvious and in need of no further moral grounding.”²⁰³ This quick dismissal of a need to give valid reasons for grounding virtues on universal benevolence contrasts starkly with the well-argued reasons given by Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians like Hursthouse, as detailed earlier, for justifying virtues through eudaimonia. Indeed, Slote appears to rely on intuitions about right and wrong action to direct his explication of balanced concern rather than relying on independent assessments of the virtues to help us decide among various explications of balanced concern. Copp and Sobel are not convinced that Slote’s theory helps us to decide which actions are right or wrong by grounding virtues (or admirable traits) in balanced caring. “We think that Slote must rely covertly on intuitions about right and wrong actions in order to figure out which states of character are admirable.”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Slote (2001), p. 38.

²⁰⁴ Copp, David and Sobel, David, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics” in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*. Vol. 114, No. 3, pp. 514-554, April 2004, p. 518.

The general problem of non-teleological views of VE like Slote's is that they have a serious problem in justifying the virtues.²⁰⁵ If the virtues are not tied to some larger theoretical framework, it is unclear how we can account for wrong judgments and acts. In general, how would we know which traits are desirable while others are not? If the criticism of deontological ethical theories is that principles are not anchored on any foundations, VE theories such as Slote's may also be criticized along the same lines.

Slote would argue that the validation of virtues according to his system is determined by which character traits are motivated by benevolence. Those that are motivated by benevolence are thus justified as virtues. The problem with basing virtues on the internal motivation of benevolence (it is even a problem to which Slote admits) is that our knowledge of the goodness and rightness of particular actions depends ultimately on our knowledge of the motivation behind them. It is notoriously difficult to ascertain people's motives as we are dealing with inner life of moral individuals. Therefore we must assume that it is also frequently difficult to evaluate actions. Slote writes, "However unwanted such a conclusion may be, it may nonetheless be realistic."²⁰⁶ He counters that with most other ethical theories, it is also as difficult to tell right actions from wrong actions. Therefore, he argues if we do not ignore those theories then neither can we discount his theory of virtue ethics.

²⁰⁵ Prior, William J., "Eudaimonism and Virtue" in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 35:325-342, 2001. (2001), p. 325.

²⁰⁶ Slote (2001), p. 19.

However, the primary weakness in Slote's theory must be acknowledged and weighed against the criticisms leveled at eudaimonism.

3.7 Foot's "Courageous" Murderer

An illustration of eudaimonia's role in validating virtues is seen in the case of Foot's "courageous" murderer. We can contrast this to Foot's own argument against classifying the virtue behind the act as courage. In *Virtues and Vices*, Foot acknowledges eudaimonia but does not give a full account of it.²⁰⁷ She accepts that there is a connection between virtue and eudaimonia (which she translates as human flourishing). She writes: "It seems clear that virtues are, in some general way, beneficial. Human beings do not get on well without them."²⁰⁸ However, she does not commit, at least in *Virtues and Vices*, to a full-blown eudaimonist position. She gives two reasons for her doubts about a eudaimonist stand. Both problems involve the virtue of justice, with which Foot has wrangled in her writings for some time.²⁰⁹ First, how can a virtue such as justice contribute to the flourishing of an individual when sometimes, the consequences of choosing the virtue is detrimental to the individual? Virtue, conventionally defined, without regard to its contribution to the good of the agent may seem occasionally to be harmful or at least not beneficial.

²⁰⁷ Foot, Philippa, "Virtues and Vices", in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. Reprinted in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

²⁰⁸ Foot, Philippa, "Virtues and Vices", in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 164.

²⁰⁹ In "Moral Beliefs," Foot argues that a justification of the virtue of justice is beneficial to the just individual and that justice is something everyone needs. In "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," she abandons the attempts to show that justice is something that everyone needs and that it benefits the person who possesses it. There she treats justice as an ideal that many people want to happen.

Second, in some cases justice, that is the pursuit of the rights of an individual, may even clash with the pursuit of the common good. Perhaps because of these problems, Foot will only give a weak endorsement that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and “indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows.”²¹⁰ For Foot, the virtues are generally but not invariably beneficial qualities that depend for their beneficial nature on certain facts about the human condition, including facts about human nature.

Foot gives the example of the murderer who may be said to be courageous.

She hypothesizes the following:

Suppose for instance that a sordid murder were in question, say a murder done for gain or to get an inconvenient person out of the way, but that this murder had to be done in alarming circumstances or in the face of real danger: should we be happy to say that such an action was an act of courage or a courageous act? Did the murderer, who certainly acted boldly, or with intrepidity, if he did the murder, also act courageously?²¹¹

For Foot this hypothetical puts forward a difficult issue. Because Foot maintains only a loose connection between the virtues and human good, it is conceivable to count as virtues, traits that may be displayed in acts that are not good and that do not benefit the agent. This possibility is ruled out in the eudaimonist account. A virtue is defined as a quality that contributes to the eudaimonia of its possessor and as one that chooses acts in accordance with phronesis. As we have seen in Chapter 1, ends are determined by virtue. While phronesis also contributes to the determination of ends,

²¹⁰ Foot (1997), p. 165.

²¹¹ Foot (1997) p. 175.

it also determines the means. Thus, virtuous activity is guided by reason in its selection of ends and in its deliberation about means. Phronesis is the crucial link between virtue and eudaimonia. Both virtue and eudaimonia are essentially characterized by reason. Killing someone for my own benefit, such as to avoid an “inconvenience”, is not an end that virtue guided by reason would choose. Thus, the courage of a murderer is not a virtue because it does not have a good end and thus does not contribute to and indeed takes away from a eudaimonistic life. Courage, like the other virtues, involves the proper use of reason and the pursuit of the good. The more appropriate adjective for Foot to use to describe the murderer would be “daring”. It is not a word that we closely associate with virtue, at least not as much as we would the word “courage”. We must also ask why a courageous man would choose to kill another just because the other is an “inconvenience”. Would he not have shown more courage by facing up to the consequences if the other man had not been murdered?

Foot also does not agree that the act can be termed a courageous one. She argues that ‘courage’ as a naming characteristic of human beings has a certain power, in the same way that we use ‘poison’, ‘solvent’, and ‘corrosive’ to name the properties of physical things. “The power to which virtue-words are so related is the power of producing good action, and good desires.”²¹² But just as poisons, solvents, and corrosives do not always operate characteristically, so it could be with virtues. If P is poison, it may not act as poison wherever it is found. It may be natural to say

²¹² Foot (1997), p. 176.

that ‘P does not act as a poison here.’ “Similarly, courage is not operating as a virtue when the murderer turns his courage, which is a virtue, to bad ends.”²¹³ This argument is one that turns on language, but yet it is fundamentally an eudaimonist position.

However, as Prior points out, this issue is not merely a matter of semantics.²¹⁴ It may seem from a non-eudaimonist standpoint that the murderer’s character trait and Aristotelian courage are psychologically and behaviourally identical. The only difference is that the former is used to perform a bad act and the latter is used for a good act. However, from a eudaimonist and Aristotelian perspective, the traits are different – the daring of a murderer is not connected with phronesis, which explains why it is not connected with the good. Aristotle distinguishes natural virtue from virtue in the full sense (VI.13). Natural virtue is virtue unguided by intelligence while virtue in the full sense is instructed by and united with intelligence. Foot’s example of the courage of the murderer is an example of natural virtue and not virtue in the full sense.

3.8 Problems with Christine Swanton’s VE Theory

Swanton’s pluralistic view of virtue status contains both teleological and non-teleological elements. Swanton does not disagree that eudaimonia is one way of identifying which character dispositions are virtues. However, she disagrees that it is a necessary condition of a disposition’s being a virtue that it is characteristically

²¹³ Foot (1997), p. 176.

²¹⁴ Prior (2001), p. 332.

constitutive of, or contributes to the eudaimonia of the agent.²¹⁵ She argues that it may well be the case that at least some virtues contribute to aspects of a human's goodness other than her eudaimonia. There are some virtues that do not contribute to eudaimonia but do contribute to a person's goodness. She gives the three examples of lives, none of which seem to display features for a eudaimon life, but which display virtues, as they are lives that are characterized by habits of appropriate responses to values, bonds, benefits, and so on. The first example described in section 3.3 is that of the selfless aid worker who dies prematurely in the jungle. The second example is that of the manic depressive artist who refuses to take any medication. Although the medication will alleviate her psychiatric disorder, the cure would also destroy her creativity. Consequently, she goes through mental and emotional hell and commits suicide. She dies unrecognized and does not achieve fame after her death. Swanton argues that this is not a eudaimon life. Yet, her creative drive is a virtue, says Swanton. The third example is that of an environmentalist who keeps warning the world of impending environmental disaster. He has poor interpersonal skills and his message does not get through. He becomes stressed due to this failure and eventually dies of a heart attack. However, the world takes heed of his warnings posthumously. Once again this life is not a eudaimon one but his care for the environment is a virtue. Through these examples, Swanton hopes to show that virtues do not necessarily benefit their possessor, and therefore, eudaimonia is not the only way to validate the virtues.

²¹⁵ Swanton (2003), p. 80.

For Swanton, therefore, what makes a trait a virtue is that it is a “disposition to respond in an excellent (or good enough) way (through the modes of respecting, appreciating, creating, loving, promoting, and so on) to items in the fields of virtue.”²¹⁶ This principle of virtue which, she calls (T) allows the possibility that the ultimate point of various virtues may be eudaimonia, admirability, success (worthwhile achievement), or meaningfulness. What is the ultimate point depends on how the virtue is targeted at the good for, bonds, value, status, with respect to items in their fields. She also thinks that principle (T) has the advantage of allowing for the possibility that some virtues are non-teleological.²¹⁷ For instance, intuitions about the virtuousness of traits grounded in admirability can be accounted for by appeal to the idea of expressiveness.

In the three examples that Swanton gives, the lives are meaningful, worthwhile, and admirable but they are not flourishing (Swanton’s translation of eudaimonia). Authors such as Susan Wolf argue that a meaningful life is a flourishing one.²¹⁸ Lives that are meaningful are also beneficial to the agent. Swanton disagrees. For meaningful lives are not always attractive ones. There are worthwhile traits inimical to personal flourishing.²¹⁹ The aid worker gave up physical health in order to help the impoverished. The crazy artist gave up mental health to create works of art. The environmentalist gave up peace of mind to warn the world of

²¹⁶ Swanton (2003), p. 93.

²¹⁷ Swanton (2003), p. 92.

²¹⁸ Wolf, Susan, “Meaning and Morality”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 97 (1997), 299-315, at 305.

²¹⁹ Swanton (2003), p. 86.

looming disaster. These agents' eudaimonia were diminished or even extinguished as a result of personal goods foregone. Eudaimonists counter that a virtuous agent's conception of eudaimonia enables her to see things virtuously foregone as not being a loss to her. A persuasive proponent of this argument is John McDowell. A virtuous person has a distinctive way of seeing things such that acting as his conception of virtue demands 'silences' competing considerations. These silenced options are not seen as a loss.²²⁰ Swanton's rejoinder is that this claim is false because we are confusing 'silencing' the knowledge of possible losses with seeing possible losses as 'irrelevant'. We still feel a loss but we choose to forego personal goods because they are irrelevant compared to the greater good. I do not disagree with Swanton that an agent feels the loss. Indeed any normal human suffers a personal loss, but she chose to act virtuously despite the loss. How she copes with the loss is a matter of her virtuous disposition. If she is a virtuous person, then other virtues – fortitude, moderation, and wisdom – will start operating. These virtues could very well ensure that her life is still in the end, eudaimon.

The problem with Swanton's pluralism is that it casts the virtue validation net too broadly. She takes issue with the eudaimonist thesis that it is a necessary condition of a trait being a virtue that it characteristically constitutes or contributes to the eudaimonia of the possessor of the virtue. Evaluation of virtues based on this thesis is too limited. Her principle (T) allows for the possibility that some virtues are non-teleological. She claims there are other grounds for a trait's being virtuous, such

²²⁰ McDowell (1980), p. 370.

as its being admirable, or contributing to a successful or meaningful life; “[Many] virtues are so not because they *serve* the ends of human flourishing but because they are *expressive* of human flourishing.”²²¹ However, love, appreciation of beauty, worth, success and meaning contribute to a eudaimon life. Why would you need other criteria to validate virtues? She prefers to replace the eudaimonist thesis with her own Constraint on Virtue: “A correct conception of the virtues must be at least partly shaped by a correct conception of healthy growth and development which in part constitutes our flourishing.”²²² Swanton believes this constraint to be weaker than its eudaimonist counterpart, but nevertheless sufficiently strong to ground a significant connection between prudential and moral worthiness concerns. Swanton’s position is not as far from Aristotle’s as she appears to think. I am not sure why the constraint on virtue is not compatible with the form of eudaimonia that I have already proposed in this chapter.

Swanton’s permissive definition of virtue opens the door to substantial pluralism. Her main purpose is to enable a virtue ethics to “accommodate the views of a wide variety of moral theories on what is morally significant.”²²³ The views include Kantian, consequentialist, depth-psychological, Nietzschean and Asian approaches. The extent of her pluralism opens the door to an ‘anything goes’ approach to the extent that her attempts to explain and guide moral action are undermined. On the reverse side of this concern is that against the background of

²²¹ Swanton (2003), p. 94.

²²² Swanton (2003), p. 60.

²²³ Swanton (2003), p. 24.

permissiveness of her official approach, Swanton's own stands on particular theoretical issues may come to seem arbitrary.²²⁴

Her counterexamples of the three lives that show virtue but that do not lead to eudaimon lives are not convincing for the reasons given above. We could also remark that the agents in the examples exhibited one virtue but apparently lacked others that would have given a greater opportunity for eudaimon lives. The selfless aid worker showed one virtue – generosity. However, she seemed to lack other virtues such as moderation. She did not appear to realize that she needed time off to rest, in a non-jungle environment, so that she could continue helping more people in a long life. The artist lacked friendship, because only a true friend would have helped her through her dilemma. The environmentalist lacked patience and probably empathy, as he was poor at interpersonal relations. All three of course, lacked practical wisdom because they were unable to choose the mean between excess and deficiency of a particular character trait, and did not have a clear vision of their final end. The next chapter drills down into the concept of practical wisdom and its roles.

3.9 Conclusion

Eudaimonia is the final end and therefore, guides our actions that must aim towards this end. Aristotle's definition of this final end is plausibly in keeping with modern sensibilities: it is to live a complete life guided by reason and in accordance with the virtues. As such, eudaimonia justifies and validates the virtues. From a

²²⁴ Gardiner, Stephen M., "Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View" in *Mind*, Vol. 114, 453, January 2005, at p. 212.

naturalistic standpoint, eudaimonia is determined by the standards of flourishing as a member of the human species. The concept of eudaimonia provides overarching support for a theory of virtue ethics. There is agreement that virtues are a primary focus in virtue ethics. There is however, little agreement over how we determine which dispositions are virtues. Surely the determination is crucial for a virtue ethics theory to be a comprehensive one. Missing the criterion for a virtue, a VE theory will be incomplete because it does not answer a basic question: “Which disposition or character trait is a virtue?” Aristotle, Hursthouse, Annas, and I propose that eudaimonia is this criterion. It is better than others that have been offered so far in the VE literature. Few if any have thought that virtue can do all the work in a VE theory; the question arises at some point as to how we are to locate virtue in a wider structure. The acceptance of eudaimonia may be broader if it is modernized as this chapter has attempted to do.

On the negative side, I argue that Slote’s theory of ‘virtue as benevolence’ is even weaker than eudaimonistic virtue theories. I attempt to show through using Foot’s ‘courageous’ murderer hypothetical that eudaimonia is a stronger way of validating the virtues than the one she has proposed. Finally, Swanton’s preference for an evaluation of the virtues using broader measures is flawed in two ways. First, her broader measures are not a departure from Aristotelian virtue ethics. As such, they can be subsumed under a eudaimonist thesis advanced in this chapter. Second, her pluralism and desire to accommodate a wide range of views undermines her attempts to explain and guide moral action.

CHAPTER 4

A GUIDE: PHRONESIS IN VIRTUE ETHICS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 examined Aristotle's conception of moral virtue and intellectual virtue and their connections with each other. To recap, intellectual virtues are virtues of the mind and encompass our critical faculties *e.g.*, practical wisdom and intellect. Moral virtues are dispositions that are engrained as character traits *e.g.* courage, magnanimity, and justice. Unambiguously, Aristotle claims that there are strong connections and interactions between moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues cannot be activated or operate effectively without the presence and guidance of intellectual virtues, in particular, phronesis or practical wisdom. As we have argued with eudaimonia in the previous chapter, virtues are the central element of any virtue ethics (VE) theory. To know which character traits are virtues however, we need eudaimonia because eudaimonia is the way we identify and justify the virtues.

Yet, it is insufficient to simply justify the virtues. For a virtue ethics theory to be comprehensive, it must also explain how and why virtues work and, in particular, how they work well. Thus, phronesis is a necessary component of a comprehensive VE theory because it plays the crucial role of enabling the moral virtues to function properly. This role is played out in four ways that I explain in the present chapter: (1) it determines the mean of a disposition (2) it determines the means to achieve proposed practical ends, (3) it contributes to determining these ends, (4) it helps to motivate actions. On the positive side of the argument, the dissertation proposes and

argues for each of these roles with support from a philosopher in the specialty. Thus, Zagzebski is given as an example of a writer who supports the role of phronesis as determining the means to achieve practical ends. Richardson is a philosopher who argues that reason does play a role in determining the ends. Chappell supports the argument that phronesis motivates action. How do these four roles help moral virtue to function properly? Practical wisdom guides us in the degree of feeling and action that a virtue requires for any specific situation (1). It tells us how to achieve any particular virtuous end (2). It deliberates on what is the ultimate goal of life and if other ends conduce to this final end (3). Even though desire may be the final motivator of action, practical wisdom works with desire so that we act virtuously and it stops us from acting badly (4).

On the negative and refutational aspect of the argument, I disagree with Driver and Merritt who propose that practical wisdom should be given a much smaller role in VE or even can be discarded in some instances of virtue. I attempt to refute their arguments underlining their thesis and thereby, hopefully, strengthen mine.

4.2 Defining Phronesis

As discussed in Chapter 1, Aristotle regards the good of the agent as the goal of ethics. The good of a person is the full development of our natural powers, and our highest power and one that distinguishes us from other animals, is our reason. Phronesis or practical wisdom is, according to Aristotle, an excellent dispositional state of the intellectual and rational part of the soul. His succinct definition is given

in Book VI of the Nicomachean Ethics: “The necessary conclusion is that [practical] wisdom is a disposition accompanied by rational prescription, true, in the sphere of human goods, relating to action (1140b20-21).” Phronesis is reason and rationality as applied to practical moral matters. A person who possesses phronesis is a *phronimos*. This “wise person” is one who is good at deliberation. All this leads to the conclusion that phronesis is an intellectual virtue, which contrasts with a moral virtue that is a dispositional state of the desiderative and appetitive part of the soul. Unlike eudaimonia, there is far less controversy in translating phronesis into English. It is generally accepted that phronesis is fairly captured by the concept of practical wisdom. Thus, we will use the terms rather interchangeably in this chapter. Our analysis of practical wisdom is largely guided and illuminated by Aristotle’s work, which is still relevant today.

From the definition given above, practical wisdom has four characteristic features. First, the machinations of practical wisdom direct and result in action. Practical wisdom is aimed at the truth about practical human goods. The possessor acts well and advises others about appropriate action. For good action to occur, the person acting must choose appropriately. Thus, the second characteristic feature of practical wisdom is that it involves choice.²²⁵ Aristotle writes, “Now the origin of action – in terms of the source of movement, not its end – is choice, while that of choice is desire and rational reference to an end. Hence, intelligence and thought, on the one hand, and character-disposition on the other are necessary for choice; for

²²⁵ Broadie translates *prohairesis* as “decision”.

doing well and its contrary, in the context of action, are conditional on thought and character” (1139a32-35). The efficient cause of action is therefore, choice and choice necessarily requires the third characteristic feature of practical wisdom and that is deliberation. We do not deliberate about matters that we cannot change but about things on which we can act. Aristotle’s line that “we deliberate, not about ends, but about what forwards those ends” (1112b12-13) is often quoted to support the thesis that practical wisdom’s role is to find the means to the end and not to determine the end itself. More will be said about this in the following section. There is little doubt that the means to an end are revealed in deliberation. Thus, the fourth feature of practical wisdom is that it is directed towards an end. The choice that results from deliberation is distinguished by deliberative desire, in that both reason and desire are on board with the decision. This choice that has the agreement of reason and desire is the end point of deliberative thought and the starting point of action.²²⁶ The two features of practical wisdom work as follows: through the process of deliberation or reflection a rational choice is made; from rational choice we then act. The person with practical wisdom is able to deliberate on all the relevant data in a particular situation and then make the right choice.

Richardson’s take on practical reason (his term) is along Aristotelian lines. Practical wisdom requires deliberation, which is the rational process that we

²²⁶ Broadie (1991), p. 185.

undertake in order to answer practical questions about what to do.²²⁷ Deliberation is always a rational process. Moreover, we can deliberate rationally about ends (more about this later). Richardson's lists three standards for rationality: (1) potential discursiveness or public expressibility, (2) orderliness, and (3) the absence of such general defects of thinking as inconsistency, vicious circularity, excessive close-mindedness, and one sidedness.²²⁸ A deliberative process must be assessable and explainable. It can also be justified and criticized publicly. Rational deliberation involves a modicum of order and contrasts with floundering about questions of practice. Rational thinking should also be devoid of the usual cognitive vices. These standards should be kept in mind when using practical wisdom in virtue ethics theory.

Having listed the three standards and four features of practical wisdom, we can now highlight the main components of this intellectual virtue. They are: (1) deliberation (2) comprehension (3) cleverness and (4) sense. Correct sense, good comprehension, and good deliberation are all acquired through experience.²²⁹ We use these capacities whenever we are faced with difficult moral situations and they help us to decide what to do. One needs good sense to "make the correct discrimination on what is reasonable" (1143a21-22). Comprehension is required to take in all the relevant data in a situation, give the correct interpretation of these data, and consequently assign appropriate weightings to their importance. Finding out exactly

²²⁷ Richardson, Henry S., *Practical Reasoning About Final Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp 4-5.

²²⁸ Richardson (1994) p. 31.

²²⁹ Hursthouse, Rosalind, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Vol. 106, Issue 3, Sep 2006, pp 283-307.

about a moral situation involves judging what other people say, particularly about theirs and other people's actions. The young and inexperienced tend to be credulous but the experienced and wise should be able to use good comprehension to judge if the reports of others are likely to be true or false. Comprehension and sense do not prescribe. Rather they make judgments and are discriminative capacities (1143a9-10). Cleverness enables its possessor to find the effective means to proposed goals and is essential to practical wisdom. Of course, the wicked can also possess lashings of cleverness. However, they do not pursue good ends. In choosing good ends, the wise are guided by moral virtue, which the wicked lack.

Much of practical wisdom involves deliberation. Deliberation is difficult because there is so much that it must get right. It is a time-consuming process with a beginning and an end. The beginning is when agents establish an end. They then proceed to think about how and by what means it is to be achieved. This involves choosing the most fine means if there is more than one way to achieve the end. In some cases, deliberation must consider further means to achieve the means. Good deliberation requires experience.²³⁰ From experience we get worldly knowledge that ensures expertise in deliberation. The more experience we have the better our comprehension, sense, and deliberation.

In sum, practical wisdom is the combination of deliberation, cleverness, comprehension, sense, and moral virtue. This can be put into a heuristic formula:

²³⁰ Hursthouse (2006).

Practical wisdom = deliberation + cleverness + comprehension + sense + moral virtue.

4.3 The Role of Phronesis in Virtue Ethics

A virtue is a disposition that guides our choices in accordance with the dictates of reason. Virtuous activity is guided by practical wisdom I argue, in its selection of ends and in its deliberation about means. Annas believes that the most crucial feature of virtue ethics in its classical version is the central role of practical wisdom.²³¹ Similarly, practical wisdom should take on the same necessary role in contemporary virtue ethics. A person is not virtuous unless she has thought through and understands the reasons on which she acts. If we neglect the role of practical wisdom, we are left with virtues that are just dispositions to act. Dispositions are developed and exercised through the agent's practical wisdom. If the role of practical wisdom is reduced or rejected, virtues simply become dispositions to act that may or may not be productive of good.

In contemporary virtue ethics phronesis plays four roles: (1) it determines the mean of a disposition (2) it determines the means to attaining the end; and (3) it contributes to determining the end, and (4) it initiates action.

4.3.1 Determining the Mean

Perhaps this is the more controversial of the four roles. The doctrine of the mean holds that moral virtue is a disposition (with regard to feelings and action) which is a mean. Aristotle writes:

²³¹ Annas (2006).

[Moral] Virtues, then, is a disposition issuing in decisions, depending on intermediacy of the kind relative to us, this being determined by rational prescription and in a way in which the wise person would determine it. And it is intermediacy between two bad states, one involving excess, the other involving deficiency.

(II, 6, 1106b36-1107a3)

Moral virtue is neither excessive nor deficient; it results in neither excessive nor deficient actions and feelings. The location of the mean is “as the man of practical wisdom would determine it” (1107a1-2). Practical wisdom would certainly play an important role in determining the mean. To guide the emotions in order to develop a good disposition is to practice determining the mean or intermediate of each emotion. To be virtuous is to find the mean of every emotion and action in each particular ethical situation. Aristotle believes that vice lies in the excess or deficiency of some virtue. For instance, an excess of bravery is rashness and a deficiency is cowardice; an excess of generosity is wastefulness and the deficiency is stinginess. It is important therefore to aim at the mean, a task that is not at all easy, in order to have virtue. Not only should we aim at the mean of an emotion but we should also target the mean in our actions since virtue is both feelings and deeds.

The mean is different for different people. It is debatable whether the ability to make a judgment of the mean in specific cases can be explained or replaced by following a rule or principle. It takes practical wisdom to decide how courageous one should be in a situation where someone is asked to do something unethical but not illegal at work. Should she refuse and thereby risk losing her job in a bad economy? Or should she acquiesce and perform the unethical act? What would be the mean, in

this case, to exemplify the virtue of courage? Should the agent become livid and email the unethical request around the blogosphere? This action would be an excessive show of rage. Should she then submissively carry out the unethical task, without question? This choice would show a deficiency of righteous anger. Should she calmly confront the person who has made the request, point out its unethical nature and decide her action based on the ensuing discussion? This action would appear to be the mean between excessive anger (rashness) and a deficiency of anger (timidity). How does the agent arrive at the mean? Obviously, practical wisdom must come to her aid.

This view is also the one Urmson takes on the doctrine of the mean.²³² Excellence of character is a disposition to feel and display the right degree of emotion on each occasion and as the occasion demands. In the mean the agent will feel and display each emotion at the right times, with reference to the right matters, towards the right people, for the right reasons and in the right way. While Urmson and Hardie do not think that the doctrine of the mean is conceptually unhelpful, there are those such as Barnes, who argue that this doctrine is of little practical use in morals and conceptually empty.²³³ The discussion and example given above does not seem to bear this criticism out. The doctrine is not one that promotes moderation, as some interpreters would claim. It does not boil down to the empty maxim of “Act as you

²³² Urmson, J.O., *Aristotle's Ethics*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1973, pp. 32- 37.

²³³ Hardie, W.F.R., “Aristotle's Doctrine that Virtue is a ‘Mean’” in *Articles on Aristotle*, Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, Richard Sorabji (eds). New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977. Barnes, Jonathan, *The Ethics of Aristotle*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1978, Introduction.

should act.”²³⁴ It says that there is a mean or intermediate in feelings and action that is correct for each situation, agent, and object. In particular, the doctrine is given more credence when practical wisdom comes into play as the arbiter of the mean.

Another common criticism of the doctrine is that for every virtue there are two corresponding vices.²³⁵ I am not sure why this is wrong, except that it shows virtue as exhibiting, “extraordinary mathematical symmetry”.²³⁶ In any event, the excess or deficiency of a virtue may be termed as a vice but we may instead consider some excesses or deficiencies as bad character traits. Some, such as indifference, are not always morally significant. More importantly, we are considering whether states of character conduce to a eudaimon life. A bad character trait is one that detracts from eudaimonia. Finally, it is clear that the ethical mean is not a mathematical notion. It is the mean determined by and is relative to all the circumstances in which the choice of actions has to be made.

4.3.1 Determining the Means

The second role of practical wisdom is not highly controversial among current practitioners. Aristotle points to this function several times in NE VI. Of the intellectual capacities, it is cleverness that helps determine expeditiously the means to achieve a proposed end. It is the calculative or problem solving capacity. As already mentioned, such capacity may be used for good or bad ends. Literature and history

²³⁴ Barnes (1978), Introduction.

²³⁵ See Ross, W.D., *Aristotle*. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 206, and Hursthouse, Rosalind, “A False Doctrine of the Mean” in *Aristotle’s Ethics*, Nancy Sherman (ed.). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 107.

²³⁶ Hursthouse (1999), p. 108.

are liberally littered with villains with ample cleverness (Iago, Moriarty, and Genghis Khan, to name a few). However, practical wisdom must further involve commitment to a good end. This commitment is secured by the possession of moral virtue. Moral virtue is the development of character such that we tend to choose appropriate things. To have a virtue such as justice or courage is to be committed to acting as the just or brave person should. Moral virtue provides the orientation toward the end and presents the end to cleverness. Cleverness and understanding in turn, decide on the process or means to achieving this end.

4.3.2.1 Support from Zagzebski

Linda Zagzebski takes an unusual position with regard to the status of intellectual virtues. She argues that intellectual virtues should be considered as a subset of moral virtues and rejects the strict division between reason and passion that commonly exists in western philosophical tradition.²³⁷ She therefore, disagrees with the Aristotelian division of the soul into rational and desiring parts. She also disagrees with Aristotle's division of the rational part of the soul into three: intellectual accomplishment (*sophia*), intelligence (*nous*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*). She argues that the division of the rational soul ignores one of the most common uses of the intellect, namely, to find out what the world is like, and that requires certain practical abilities that are neither theoretical nor practical. Intellectual virtues do not differ from certain moral virtues any more than one moral

²³⁷ Zagzebski, Linda, *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

virtue differs from another. The processes related to the two kinds of virtue do not function independently.²³⁸ One problem with dividing the moral from the intellectual virtues on the grounds that the former handle emotions while the latter handle thinking is that there are areas that are blends of thought and feeling. She gives as examples, curiosity, doubt, wonder and awe. “Feelings are involved with intellectual virtues, and intellectual virtues are involved in handling feelings, but their operation shows how blurry the distinction between intellectual and moral virtues really is.”²³⁹ Both intellectual and moral virtues have stages in between virtue and vice consisting of self-control and *akrasia*.

While Zagzebski disagrees with Aristotle on the classification of practical wisdom and its epistemological role in justifying belief, she does not disagree that it plays a crucial role in moral action. Indeed, she gives *phronesis* the same high standing that Aristotle does: “we ought to consider the virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, as a higher-order virtue that governs the entire range of moral and intellectual virtues.”²⁴⁰ For her, *phronesis* is the virtue for which all the features relevant to any virtue are relevant. In addition she agrees with Aristotle that we can acquire practical wisdom ourselves, or until we are able to do that, we can imitate persons who have practical wisdom. These persons use their well-developed virtue of practical wisdom to determine the means to good ends.

²³⁸ Zagzebski (1996), p. 139.

²³⁹ Zagzebski (1996), p. 148.

²⁴⁰ Zagzebski (1996), p. 229.

Determining the means has several aspects. One aspect is to mediate between the different virtues (for Zagzebski, these would include intellectual as well as moral virtues). Every situation requires virtue or virtues that are relevant to it. If a situation calls for both courage and humility, phronesis must choose which is more salient in that particular situation. It may be that in one situation it is more important to show humility while in another, courage is the required virtue. Phronesis sifts through all the salient features of the situation and makes a judgment that is not only the judgment of a courageous person or humble person but is the judgment of a virtuous person. Therefore, the ability to mediate between and among individual moral virtues is part of the function of phronesis as it determines the means to the end.

Phronesis plays a further role of coordinating the various virtues into a single line of action or thought leading up to an act. Human activity in the moral realm is characterized by a lack of known procedures and rules. Aristotle implies as much when he says that ethics is not an exact science. Good judgment is required in all areas of human activity. Persons with practical wisdom learn when to trust certain feelings and they develop through experience the ability to make good judgments. Choice is not always derived from a procedure specifiable in advance of the situation in which action occurs.

4.3.3 Contribution towards Determining the End

The third role is contentious especially if one follows the Humean line in moral theory. The latter's infamous phrase that, "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can pretend to no other office, but to serve and obey them

(2.3.3).” summarises his emotivist view of moral action.²⁴¹ Hume and his followers such as Simon Blackburn argue that reason cannot set ends, only desires do.²⁴² His explicit view is that no action is rational or irrational because reason by itself is impotent to motivate anyone to act. Passions are what move people to act, and the only thing contrary to a passion is another passion.

However, Richardson refutes this view at complex length.²⁴³ In the first place, we should be skeptical about there being any hard and fast ways to divide the psyche into, say, reason on the one hand and passions on the other. Recent philosophical and empirical work on the emotions, for instance, has tended to show that they combine desiderative, evaluative, and cognitive aspects in complex ways.²⁴⁴ It is true that Aristotle tends to the view that the pursuit of human goods requires phronesis to determine the means for achieving appropriate ends. It need not be supposed, however, that all means can be distinguished from the ends themselves. Aristotle observes that “the end of production is something distinct from the productive process, whereas that of action will not be; for, doing well itself serves as end” (1140b6-7). Not only instrumental means are in question.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Cooper holds the view that Aristotle thinks that there is an ultimate end, eudaimonia, which is pursued constantly. However, the constant pursuit of this ultimate end does not rule out his having other ends as well,

²⁴¹ Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

²⁴² Blackburn, Simon, *Ruling Passions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

²⁴³ See Richardson, Henry S., *Practical Reasoning About Final Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

²⁴⁴ Richardson (1994), p. 23.

that is, other things desired for their own sake²⁴⁵. There is therefore, some textual and scholarly support for the view that phronesis contributes to determining the ends. Of course, there is also scholarly rejection of this claim. Based on a close reading of the same texts, Tuozzo's interpretation of Aristotle's position on deliberation is one in which deliberation has a limited role in the specification of ends limited to determining how to act in a particular situation so as to achieve one's intermediate end.²⁴⁶ These counter arguments are well thought out. However, in Chapter 1 (1.5.1 (2)) I argue for a possible way in which phronesis can have a part in contributing to determining the final end. In addition, there also is modern theory, not derivative of Aristotle, for the claim that reason can deliberate about ends. This argument is provided by Richardson's work on deliberation about ends.

4.3.3.1 Support from Richardson

Richardson sets out a case that we can reason about final ends, both as individuals and as members of groups in dialogue with one another. His definition of the 'final end' as an end we pursue for its own sake has an Aristotelian flavor. A common objection to the proposition that we can deliberate about ends is what Richardson calls the scope objection. The scope of practical reasoning can only cover deliberation about means to given ends. Genuine reasoning cannot be about whether to pursue ends except in so far as they are means to still further ends. Richardson

²⁴⁵ Cooper, J.M., *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishers, 1986, p.15 – 22.

²⁴⁶ Tuozzo, Thomas M., "Aristotelian Deliberation in not of the Ends" in *Essays in Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle's Ethics and Politics*. Buffalo: SUNY, 1991, pp. 193-212.

accepts the internalist requirement that “an agent’s reasons for action must derive from motivations that the agent has or had.”²⁴⁷ However, Richardson argues that the rational process of specifying ends is compatible with this restriction. Using reason, the agent can adopt new ends that, if achieved, would satisfy the ends the agent already has. Richardson argues that the attainment of these new ends will guide action in ways the more general ends could not have. The motivations to act on the specified ends can derive from prior motivations that the agent has. Thus, the internalism requirement does not rule out reasoning leading to new ends. He gives the example of Charlene, who has wanted to be the Surgeon General since her childhood. When deciding what courses to take at college she discovers that those who do not cheat at Organic Chemistry all do poorly at it. It further dawns on her that her grades in the sciences are rather mediocre. She does not want to cheat in order to become a doctor. She therefore decides to pursue a degree in law because her grades in history and philosophy, the prototypical pre-law classes have been rather good. Richardson maintains that this is a typical course of deliberation. It is an illustration of a multi-part (in this case three) reasoning process. The first is when she deliberates on how to become the surgeon general based a final end that developed in her childhood. The second is when she deliberates about how to get to law school. The third and pivotal part is the comparison of the two objectives, when she decides which to pursue. She discovers that her overriding end is to be a person of integrity (thus cheating on an exam to become a doctor is unacceptable to her). Thus, her

²⁴⁷ Richardson (1996), p. 67.

satisfaction of her new end (to be a lawyer) will be consistent with her more general end (to be a person of integrity).

A second objection to the proposition that reason determines ends Richardson calls the system argument. This argument says that rational choices can only be made if they are ordered or systematized by some commensurable good, e.g. pleasure, happiness. Such a good has to be an unquestionable final end. Practical reason on this account, depends upon holding some end fixed for each choice so as to commensurate the values that compete in that choice. Thus practical reason resists any thoroughgoing deliberation of ends. Richardson's rejoinder is that the various possible values of commensurable good cannot function as inputs to deliberation. Rather, they are more likely (as in the case of preference orderings used by some decision theorists) to be the outcome of deliberation. In addition, we can rationally choose between competing ends without giving them commensurable values if we reorganize and modify our ends to make them more coherent.

The third objection to the idea that we can deliberate about ends is the "source" argument. It suggests that all practical reasoning must proceed from some ultimate end, so that our most final ends would have to be beyond deliberation. Richardson argues that it is possible for an agent to start her deliberations from existing commitments to some final end. She goes through a process of modifying and specifying those commitments so as to yield a more coherent overall set of ends. In other words, deliberating about ends is like a heuristic process. Richardson agrees with Aristotle that there is no single solution to the ethical issues that arise in our

lives. His strategy in arguing against the objections to the view that deliberation can be of final ends is modest. His arguments are those of ‘relative rationality’ by which he means the primary point of practical reason is to develop methods of reflection that organize our norms and priorities into intelligible patterns that are subject to review and revision.²⁴⁸ Richardson offers a quasi-Aristotelian holism.²⁴⁹ Agents adapt their ends to their situations and through a process of adjustment, reason guides their choice and action.

4.3.3.2 Eudaimonia

Thus, Richardson offers a modern theory of deliberation of final ends and how it is possible. As mentioned in 4.3.3, that practical wisdom contributes to the choice of the final end and/or intermediate ends is consistent also with Aristotelian ethics. Cooper holds the view that there is an ultimate end, eudaimonia, which is pursued constantly. However, the constant pursuit of this ultimate end does not rule out his having other ends as well, that is, other things desired for their own sake²⁵⁰. (This view is consistent with an inclusivist view of ends discussed in chapters 1 and 3.) It entails only that any such end is at the same time pursued as a means to the ultimate end. Other things may be pursued as ends provided that, at the same time they are pursued as means to the ultimate end. These subordinate ends may be deliberated about by considering whether they will contribute to the attainment of the ultimate

²⁴⁸ Richardson (1996), p. 25.

²⁴⁹ Packer, Mark, “Practising Moral Philosophy.” *Res Publica* Vol.III, No. 1, 1997, pp 97-103.

²⁵⁰ J.M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis, 1986, p.15 – 22.

end. Therefore, the pursuit of these ends can be explained, and hopefully justified, by reference to the ultimate end, to which they serve also as a means.

In 1.5.1 (2), I put forward an argument supporting an interpretation of Aristotle where deliberation is involved with determining the ultimate end of eudaimonia. In sum, the argument connects practical wisdom with the determination of the final end, eudaimonia, by showing the very intimate link between practical wisdom and moral virtue. Aristotle is quite clear that both practical wisdom and moral virtue are inextricably intertwined and one depends on the other (1144b31 – 33). Unquestionably, practical wisdom has the task of finding the ways of achieving the end given by moral virtue. However, moral virtue is made complete by practical wisdom. The respective functions of moral virtue and phronesis cannot be performed independently of one another, and at different times. When moral virtue chooses the correct end, it does not do so without the presence of phronesis.

4.3.4 Motivates Action

As we have seen, Aristotelian ethics takes the complex connection between reason and passions in his account of choice (of action). Practical wisdom is intimately connected with the moral virtues. No one can have moral virtues without practical wisdom and anyone with practical wisdom has the moral virtues. “It is clear then, from what has been said that it is not possible to possess virtue in the primary sense without practical wisdom, nor to be wise without virtue in character” (1144b30-33)” There is the need for a cognitive element in moral goodness as no one acts without thought. Practical wisdom is the coordinator and director in moral action. In

directing moral action, practical wisdom combines both reasoning and desire. Aristotle called this combination rational desire (*orexis dianoetike*) or desiderative reason (*orektikos nous*).

Chapter 1 went into some detail on how desire (*orexis*) according to Aristotelian metaphysics is the originator of action. When it comes to moral action, the desire that pushes one to act is rational desire. In this delineated view on the initiation of moral action, Aristotle and Hume are in some agreement. Yet, for Aristotle desire alone cannot originate in good acts. Neither reason nor desire is a sufficient condition of right action. To put it in T.D.J.Chappell's terms, "Belief plus desire does not equal action; but belief in *combination with* desire does."²⁵¹ This aptitude in combining the relevant desires and beliefs to initiate the performance of a consequent action is found in practical wisdom. It is not sufficient that we have desires and reason, we must have the ability to combine the right desires with the right reason to come up with the resultant right action. For Chappell, practical wisdom, at least to some minimal degree, is both a key ingredient of the theory of motivation, and a condition of voluntariness.²⁵² Without practical wisdom it is difficult to imagine how an agent can deal intelligently with hard moral cases. McDowell argues that judgments are not rule-governed, not necessarily because there are no rules about practical matters.²⁵³ Indeed, practical wisdom makes judgments

²⁵¹ Chappell, T.D.J., "Reason, Passion, and Action: The Third Condition of the Voluntary." *Philosophy* Vol. 70. No. 273, (Jul., 1995), pp. 453-459, p. 455.

²⁵² Chappell (1995), p. 456.

²⁵³ McDowell, John, "Virtue and Reason" in *Mind, Value, and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

about when and whether practical rules, such as moral rules, apply or not. It makes judgments on the question of when it is right to make exceptions to rules, which are admitted to apply. McDowell navigates a middle way between the view that there are moral rules which, apply to practical matters and the view that there are none. I believe this is to be a reasonable position not only because it is supported by experience but also because practical wisdom plays a role in deciding between rules in different contexts.

Chappell thinks that practical wisdom is the ability to combine relevant desires and reasons to produce the correct action. His is one interpretation of Aristotelian “rational desire”. Similarly, for Annas and Nussbaum, practical wisdom, deliberation, and choice work together to produce the correct action and feeling. Nussbaum is among VE writers who would like to give reason and deliberation a larger role in moral life.²⁵⁴ She turns to Aristotle to give credence to the idea that not only beliefs, but also passions and desires, can be enlightened by the critical work of practical reason. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to fully discuss the merits of Annas and Nussbaum’s position versus Chappell’s (subtle as the differences are). Suffice to say that I am more in agreement with Nussbaum in separating desire, which is an emotion, from practical wisdom which, is an intellectual capacity. Right action is a consequence of the two working together in harmony. Conversely, I disagree with Chappell that practical wisdom is a combination of desire and reason.

²⁵⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C., “Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?” *Journal of Ethics* 3: 163-201, 1999.

However, it is fair to say that Chappell, Nussbaum, McDowell, and I are particularists. We argue that there can be no rules of right conduct that can cover the gamut of situations. What makes an agent's conduct appropriate is an enormously complex issue, and one that cannot be codified. Instead, how we act and our characters are shaped by judgment and discernment – correct thinking or correct perception (*orthos logos*). It is sufficient to say that Chappell's, Nussbaum's, McDowell's, and my positions view practical wisdom as essential in producing right action. Consequently, practical wisdom is necessary in virtue ethics because it decides what course to take (the means), makes sure the course chosen is with the ultimate end, and together with the right desire, causes a person to take the right action. Without phronesis, how is an agent to choose correctly between a variety of rules and actions in diverse practical situations? One would be left with two options to guide right action – emotions (which are unpredictable and uninformed) or a strict abidance to a list of rules (which results in rigidity). Neither are good enough guides to handle morally complex situations.

Aristotle makes the point that possessing practical wisdom is not only a necessary condition for being good, it is also a sufficient condition. Anyone who has practical wisdom will thereby be good. You may have a variety of natural dispositions or trained habits for doing the virtuous thing, but unless you can see in a situation that acting virtuously is what is called for, your apparently good action will only occur because of that habit or disposition. It will lack the motivation to goodness that perceiving the situation sensitively and seeing what you ought to do in

it brings with it. In that way, phronesis is tune to the ultimate good or eudaimonia. It ensures that actions result from virtues that lead one to achieving eudaimonia. In that way, phronesis and eudaimonia are closely connected as the latter is the goal that guides the former.

4.4 Julia Driver's Objective Consequentialism

There are thinkers in contemporary virtue ethics who disagree about the importance of practical wisdom in virtuous acts. Some prefer to de-emphasize the role of reason. Julia Driver argues that due to the enduring influence of Aristotle, reason has been given too much weight in virtue ethics. Indeed the emphasis on correct perception (her translation of *orthos logos*) is mistaken. For Driver, there is a significant class of virtues, the “virtues of ignorance”, that cannot be accommodated by the view that practical wisdom is necessary for a virtuous agent.²⁵⁵ An agent can, therefore have a virtue even if that disposition requires her to be ignorant or thoughtless. These virtues of ignorance are a class of moral virtues that either does not require the agent know what she does is right or, that actually requires that the agent be ignorant. According to Driver, modesty is one such virtue. “For a person to be modest, she must be ignorant with regard to her self-worth. She must think herself less deserving, or less worthy, than she actually is.”²⁵⁶ If she understates the truth, she does so unknowingly. As modesty is generally considered a virtue, Driver

²⁵⁵ Driver (2001), p. xiv. Driver does not appear to distinguish between the terms ‘correct perception’ and ‘practical wisdom’ as she uses them interchangeably. It may be argued that correct perception is one important aspect of practical wisdom but is not equivalent to practical wisdom.

²⁵⁶ Driver (2001), p.19.

concludes that this virtue rests upon an epistemic defect. Other virtues of ignorance that Driver uses to support her claim that correct perception is not necessary for virtue are blind charity, trust, forgive and forget, and impulsive courage.

Driver disputes the views of Nussbaum and McDowell who argue that correct perception allows us to discern the morally relevant features of our situation. This is a kind of perceptual knowledge, which is necessary for the good life. Accordingly, Driver also takes issue with Aristotle whose view of moral virtue is a “strongly intellectualist view in that it *requires* knowledge and deliberation.”²⁵⁷ She believes that Aristotle wanted the virtues to be reliable. Practical wisdom ensures this reliability by its ability to handle every situation in the right way. However, she counters that if virtue is a disposition, reliability is already built into the concept. “Someone who lacks practical wisdom might be at a loss in an unusual situation. But, on my view, it will turnout that this does not mean that the agent lacks the relevant virtue, any more than the fact that a fishing rod will break when run over by a steamroller means that it lacks the quality of resilience.”²⁵⁸ Driver’s rejection of practical wisdom as necessary for virtue is a precursor for her broader thesis: that other specific psychological states (such as good intentions) that have been deemed necessary for virtue, are in fact, not. Thus, “any account of virtue that defines virtue in terms of some specific sort of psychology will fail because such an account will be

²⁵⁷ Driver (2001), p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Driver (2001), p. 10-11.

too narrow.”²⁵⁹ To accommodate the virtues of ignorance Driver offers a theory that is a supplement to standard objective consequentialism. A virtue is defined as, “a character trait that leads to good consequences systematically.”²⁶⁰ In other words, as virtues of ignorance exist, practical wisdom is not necessary for virtue. We, therefore require another way of defining virtues. Driver recommends the consequentialist method.

According to an Aristotelian account of virtue, modesty will not be a virtue because it does not require practical wisdom, indeed it is a virtue that depends on unknowing ignorance. But if we use Driver’s consequentialist account of virtue, modesty will be a virtue because it leads to good consequences systematically. The good consequences of modesty are largely social ones. Modesty is “valued by those [the modest person] interacts with (e.g. an easing of tensions, lack of jealousies).”²⁶¹ Is this really a good state of affairs in the world? Do people who like to interact with others who underestimate their abilities have a tendency to use the opportunity to overestimate their own merits unchallenged? In addition, do those who are ignorant of their own true abilities and merits not likely to become permanently self-deprecating and perhaps underconfident? A systematically good state of affairs should certainly include one in which the agent also flourishes.

²⁵⁹ Driver (2001), p. 42.

²⁶⁰ Driver (2001), p. xviii. Driver’s definition of virtue contrasts with Thomas Hurka (2001), another virtue ethics theorist who takes a consequentialist position. For Hurka, virtue is loving of the good.

²⁶¹ Driver (2001), p. 26.

To counter Driver's final recommendation for a consequentialist virtue ethics we must first tackle her virtues of ignorance. Are they virtues in the first place and if so, do they lack practical wisdom? Driver's argument rests on a mistaken view of modesty. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'modesty' is defined as "having or expressing a humble or moderate estimate of one's own merit or achievements". Thus, the virtue does not entail underestimating but *not overestimating* one's abilities. In doing the latter, knowledge is essential. Practical wisdom allows us to see our abilities as relative to those of others. For instance, I am can competently invest money and achieve decent investment returns. Yet, I realize that there are others who are far better at investing than I am, and who achieve higher returns. I also have the knowledge that my investment returns are not necessarily explained solely by my abilities. Luck plays a role too. This knowledge enables me to be modest in my investing abilities.

Thus putting the above in theoretical language, while Aristotle requires certain forms of knowledge as necessary for virtue in the full and proper sense, are these forms of knowledge really incompatible with the 'ignorance' that Driver says is characteristic of the modest person? Every virtue in the full and proper sense involves phronesis and a virtuous agent must act knowingly. There is no reason to believe that modesty cannot involve phronesis. What must an agent know when he acts? Perhaps she must know when to be modest, and when one must push oneself forward (see example below). In regard to the virtues of ignorance, it may be argued that not all ignorance involves epistemic defect. Nor does all ignorance constitute a

lack of wisdom. It is questionable whether ignorance is compatible with the absence of phronesis. Take Driver's example of blind charity. This is when an agent can see only the good points in another person but is entirely blind to any weaknesses or vices. Is one blindly charitable because of ignorance or because a virtuous person knows the vices of another but prefers to be not ready to find fault? Would the latter situation not involve phronesis?

The other avenue for refuting Driver's thesis is by denying that the virtues of ignorance described by Driver are indeed virtues. Thus, blind charity is not a virtue. Instead a tendency not to be ready to find fault is a virtue. Modesty is a debatable virtue; looked at in a certain perspective, it may even be a vice. For example, there may arise a situation when someone with the best ability in defusing bombs is called upon when a bomb is discovered. In being modest by not admitting to her unmatched skills in bomb defusing, an agent is not exhibiting modesty as a virtue. However, if she possessed practical wisdom, she would discern the morally significant facts and volunteer to defuse the bomb (modesty be damned.) As Swanton points out, epistemic defect is a normative notion. Moral considerations may determine what counts as such a defect.²⁶²

Clearly, Driver's theory separates eudaimonia and moral virtue. This entire project has argued that the separation does not strengthen virtue ethics. The close relationship between eudaimonia and virtue has an important role of attempting to

²⁶² Swanton, Christine, "Book Review of *Uneasy Virtue*." *Mind* Vol. 112, No. 447, pp 533-536, Jul 2003, p. 535.

guide those wanting to know how to live in the broadest sense, not just from the point of view of promoting the good for others, which is Driver's characterization of moral virtue. Virtue ethics is addressed to those who want to know how to live well. Driver's approach renders virtue irrelevant to the person trying to decide how to live. Virtue can be involuntarily acquired. If this is the case, it is hard to imagine how it can help in guiding character development. Indeed, Driver does not mention character, a primary feature of virtue ethics. Oddly, she commends Jane Bennett's blind charity but muses that we would not recommend it to ourselves, or our children. If part of the point of virtue ethics is to help us shape our lives, it is questionable why blind charity (a character trait that we have no interest in developing) is a virtue.

4.5 Maria Merritt's Solution to the Situationist Challenge

Maria Merritt's suggested approach to virtue ethics is an answer to the challenge posed by situationist personality psychology.²⁶³ It minimizes the role of practical reason in the virtuous person in order to accommodate situationist moral psychology. The latter is inferred from empirical evidence from research on personality psychology. The evidence suggests that character traits exhibited by agents are highly specific to the situations in which they are immersed. For instance, an agent's generosity is dependent on his mood, whether he is in a hurry, or whether there is any one else around. Situationists (as psychologists and philosophers who follow this line of thought are, regrettably, called) conclude from this empirical

²⁶³ Merritt, Maria, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personalist Psychology." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3: 365-383, 2000.

evidence that we are in error to interpret behavioural consistencies in terms of robust traits. According to situationists, individual behavior varies with variations in situations. Indeed, situations are better predictors of consequent behavior than the concepts of robust traits. In contrast, according to some high profile proponents of situationism (another inelegant label), virtue ethics posits that good character traits, or virtues, are dispositions that motivate us to act well. The conclusion is therefore, that virtue ethics, particularly Aristotelian conceptions, have big problems with their descriptive accuracy of moral psychology.

The principle philosophers who have developed the situationist argument against virtue ethics are Gilbert Harman and John Doris.²⁶⁴ The latter has a more developed version of the argument. Harman argues that while people may differ in how they perceive and react to situations, experiments such as those by Isen and Levin, and Milgram²⁶⁵ demonstrate that there is no evidence that they differ in character traits.²⁶⁶ We ignore the influence of situational factors and the lack of empirical evidence to support the existence of character traits. We are making a “fundamental attribution error” when we infer that an agent’s behavior is primarily

²⁶⁴ See Harman, Gilbert, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1998-9, pp. 315-331, and Doris, John, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁶⁵ Milgram’s famous experiment involved asking test subjects to administer increasing levels of electric shocks to other subjects (learners) who gave incorrect answers to selected problems. At 300 volts, the learner would scream and pound on the walls, giving no response thereafter. Of 40 subjects, only 5 stopped at 300 volts, four stopped at the next level, and all others went on to administer the maximum, 450 volts, despite the supposed learner’s silence.

²⁶⁶ Harman (1998), pp. 329-330.

caused by personal dispositions rather than situational factors.²⁶⁷ Thus, Harman takes the strong position that, “there is no empirical evidence for the existence of character traits”.²⁶⁸ Harman’s conclusion is too strong to be warranted by the evidence that he cites. It does not follow that even if situations principally determine behavior, character traits do not exist.²⁶⁹

Doris develops a more sophisticated version of Harman’s strategy. He agrees that there can be consistency of behavior in similar types of situation. While virtue ethics proponents would argue that this consistency is due to personality, Doris argues that this consistency is better explained by the consistency of situational factors. He supports this argument by citing psychological experiments carried out by Isen and Levin.²⁷⁰ The so-called ‘phone booth experiments’ were designed to measure helping behavior and its variation with situational changes. A person coming out of a phone booth is more likely to help a person who has dropped a folder full of papers that scatter in the caller’s path if the caller has found a dime in the slot. According to Isen and Levin, the caller was far more likely to help than if the slot was empty. Doris points other studies that show mood as having a powerful impact on a wide variety of human functioning such as risk taking, memory, cooperative behavior, and problem solving. In the phone booth experiment 13 percent of dime finders failed to help, whereas 96 percent of non-finders were similarly passive.

²⁶⁷ Harman (1998), pp. 323.

²⁶⁸ Harman (1998), pp. 329-330.

²⁶⁹ Fleming, Diana, “The Character of Virtue: Answering the Situationist Challenge to Virtue Ethics.” *Ratio* XIX 1 March 2006, pp. 24-42.

²⁷⁰ Doris (2002), pp. 30-31.

Thus, Doris concludes that the situation, “He found a dime”, is a more plausible explanation of an agent’s helping behavior, than an explanation based on robust character traits.²⁷¹

Doris further argues that there is little evidence of consistent behavior under different circumstances (labeled, alas, as trans-situational consistency). Virtue ethics proposes that a brave person will exhibit bravery in different situations that call for bravery: in the battlefield, in a political contest, or in a boardroom. The little evidence that we have of this type of behavioral consistency is at best piecemeal and unsystematic. Some trans-situational consistency is a product of the relatively limited range of types of situations and situational factors that are at play in most people’s lives.²⁷² While Doris rejects Harman’s claim that there are no character traits, he thinks that we have local traits, including the virtues, limited to a type of situation. It is a mistake of ‘over-attribution’ to think that we have global traits. A person is not compassionate; rather she is compassionate when she has found a dime in the slot of a phone booth.

The empirical evidence given by Harman and Doris cannot be to ignored, but they can be refuted (see below). Maria Merritt prefers however, to outline a virtue ethics theory that she suggests escapes the challenges put forward by situationism. She designs a three-prong test to determine if a virtue ethics theory can accommodate situationist personality psychology. A practically interested, fairly reflective person

²⁷¹ Doris (2002), p. 31.

²⁷² Fleming (2006), p. 35.

must be able to, “(1) undertake to follow in practice the theory’s recommendation to have the virtues, where that includes taking to heart its normative ideal of virtue; (2) accept a descriptive moral psychology that seems, in light of the evidence, to be closest to the truth; and (3) succeed in living as one should live by the lights of the theory.”²⁷³ She uses the awkward term “motivational self-sufficiency of character (MSC for short)” to describe the degree to which the virtues are independent of factors outside of the agent, such as situations and social relationships.²⁷⁴ Aristotelian virtue ethics has a strong ideal of MSC because genuine virtues are firmly secured in one’s character. Merritt’s interpretation of Aristotle is that virtuous actions issue from as stable and firm constitution, with little influence from external contingent factors. I will argue that this interpretation is mistaken (see below). In any case, according to Merritt, if situationist psychology is right, then there will be dissonance between the Aristotelian normative ideal of virtue and the agent’s actual moral psychology. Some of the situational factors that affect behavior are social relationships especially those that are important in an agent’s life. Merritt observes that these relationships are subject to change. Consequently, an agent’s behavior will change accordingly. One can attempt to follow the Aristotelian ideal of virtue by becoming independent of all or most outer ethical resources in all or most spheres of

²⁷³ Merritt (2000), p. 375.

²⁷⁴ Merritt (2000), p. 374.

one's life. However, this would be impractical and "may direct attention away from the real goods and evils to which the virtuous person should be sensitive."²⁷⁵

To be uncommitted to any strong ideal of MSC and be in subsequent conflict with (2) above, Merritt recommends a Humean version of virtue ethics. Her reading of Hume is that an agent may possess virtues, which are socially or personally beneficial qualities of mind. It does not matter in Humean virtue ethics how virtues result in virtuous action. If we behave well because of situational factors, we can still attribute the behavior to Humean virtue. We can do this because a Humean approach does not depend on the "sustained psychological form"²⁷⁶ that is required in an Aristotelian account. Humean virtue is much less demanding than Aristotelian virtue because there is no requirement of a "sage-like perfection of personal character."²⁷⁷ Its aspirations are "philosophically modest" because it carries "no commitment to defend a positive account of what ends are of genuine worth in life, and what priorities we should establish for ourselves among these ends."²⁷⁸ Humean virtues are stable over time but if this is so because of situational factors, the theory still stands because it makes no psychological assumptions. Thus, the theory can support the empirical evidence of situationist personality psychology. "The Humean conception of virtuous character can accommodate reflective awareness of the sustaining social contribution more readily than the Aristotelian conception."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Merritt (2000), p. 376.

²⁷⁶ Merritt (2000), p. 379.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Merritt (2000), p. 380.

Clearly, Merritt's recommendation for a virtue ethics that can accommodate situationism is one that diminishes to a considerable degree, the role of practical wisdom. We need not deliberate about means and ends, nor make a choice of action, if situational factors spur us to act, rather like Pavlov's dog. As moral agents (if we can be considered as moral agents in the situationist account) we are vastly more affected by emotional reactions to external factors and significantly less guided by reason. Yet, the situationist explanation is unable to give an account of how any situational factor results in a particular behavior. The moral agent becomes a black box, which issues actions that may be good or may not be. Situationist theory belongs to the category of behaviorism and is therefore, not a new account of human psychology. Of course behaviorism has been criticized for its deterministic character.

There are two ways to contest Merritt's argument in favor of a substantially reduced role for practical wisdom. The first is to diffuse the situationist argument by assailing the reliability of the empirical evidence in support of situationism and its interpretation. The second is to argue that Aristotelian virtue ethics does not run counter to situationism and does in fact, acknowledge and consider situational factors. Fleming argues that the experimental method that is employed in the situationist studies is poorly suited to detecting the existence or influence of traits.²⁸⁰ The experimental method is designed to detect the variables that cause change in particular situations, not to detect behavioral consistency over extended periods of time.

²⁸⁰ Fleming (2006), p.38.

Trait measures predict trends in behavior over time; they do not claim to predict behavior in every single relevant situation. So, having a trait does not mean your reactions are absolutely consistent or predictable. Because the situationist experiments fail to consider these problems, they bias the evidence in favor of situational factors.²⁸¹

There is another important consideration in reference to experimental reliability. Questions have been raised whether the results of the phone booth experiments, to which Doris devotes some attention, are repeatable and generalizable. Blevins and Murphy employed the same experimental conditions and came up with the results that there is “no relationship between finding a dime and helping.”²⁸² Finally, if situationists claim that behavior is more affected by situational factors than by character traits, then they must assume that agents must have the capacity to respond to situations. In other words, agents must possess the trait of being responsible to situations.

It is a little naïve to think that a character trait can cause behavior without being affected by external factors. It is an uncontroversial assumption that situational factors have an influence on behavior. However, it is an unwarranted inferential leap to conclude that behavior is caused *only* by situational factors. How an agent reacts to various situations and how she interprets these situations depends on her level of practical wisdom and virtuous disposition. Even if the (flawed) experiments provide evidence that behavior is liable to be influenced by situational factors, it does not follow that character traits in the sense that is required by virtue ethics cannot exist.

²⁸¹ Fleming (2006), pp. 38-39.

²⁸² Miller, Christian, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics.” *The Journal of Ethics* 7: 365-392, 2003, p. 390.

Doris and to some extent, Merritt, take the view that character is fixed where the virtues are concerned and developed independently of activity. According to their interpretation of Aristotelian virtue ethics, virtuous actions are simply a matter of habit and good upbringing. Merritt says, “situationist personality psychology requires us to recognize that this good upbringing does not suffice to endow you, forever after, with the full motivational structure you will need, in order to display the specific virtues in every situation that calls for them.”²⁸³ However, as discussed at length in this dissertation, in the virtue ethics tradition, particularly those inspired by Aristotle, a virtue is a disposition to act on reasons. It is exercised in making decisions and is built up not by mindless habit, but by deliberating and making choices. For most thinkers in the tradition virtue is developed in the same way as a skill.²⁸⁴

Thus, initially through imitation of a virtuous person and then through experience guided by practical wisdom we build up our virtuous character. The more virtuous a person, the more she is able to deal with a myriad of situations. Aristotle wrote that to perform a virtuous act one must do it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right reasons, and in the right way (1127-30a). This implies that a virtuous agent must take into consideration the situation in which she is engaged. Annas agrees with this view when she writes that a firm and reliable character in the Aristotelian sense means that “It is reliably virtuous – but that is not

²⁸³ Merritt (2000), p. 376.

²⁸⁴ Annas, Julia, “Comments on John Doris’s Lack of Character”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. LXXI, No. 3, November 2005, pp. 636-642.

just consistent with, but requires, constant openness and sensitivity to situations of exactly the sort Doris ascribes to the situationist. The more you have developed a virtue through reflection and reasoning, the more, not less, aware you become of what is important in different situations.”²⁸⁵ Only if we neglect the role of practical wisdom in virtue can Merritt claim that a situationist is in a better position to appreciate the importance of particular situations than is the proponent of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics does not tell us to ignore situations when we deliberate and choose. The virtuous person is intelligent in practical matters, flexible and innovative when required. Deliberation and sensitivity to situational differences are features of the virtue ethics tradition. Annas astutely notes that, “[Doris’s] book contains no arguments against virtue ethics in the actual Aristotelian tradition; it sets up as opponent only a radically unintellectual version of virtue.”²⁸⁶ When situationists call for a model of deliberation that is sensitive to situations, this is perfectly consistent with the virtue ethics tradition. Thus, just as Merritt recommends that Humean ethics because it can accommodate the empirical evidence that comes out of situationist psychology, we can also recommend Aristotelian virtue ethics because it can do the same. Handling diverse moral situations, each with its own empirical evidence, and determining the right course of action is precisely why I recommend that phronesis is a necessary element in any virtue ethics theory. A virtue ethics theory that

²⁸⁵ Annas (2005), p. 638.

²⁸⁶ Annas (2005), p. 639.

incorporates phronesis enables an agent to use her reason to decide on the right action based on morally relevant data in each situation.

4.6 Conclusion

The description of phronesis or practical wisdom has a distinctly Aristotelian cast to it because much of it is still relevant today. Practical wisdom is reason that is applied to practical and moral matters. It results in choice and choice leads to action. To arrive at choice necessarily requires deliberation. Finally, practical wisdom is directed towards an end. The definition of practical wisdom is that it is a combination of deliberation, cleverness, comprehension, sense, and moral virtue.

I have provided a positive account of practical wisdom and the role it plays in a virtue ethics theory. Practical wisdom has four important roles: it (1) determines the mean (2) determines the means to attaining the end (3) contributes to ascertaining the end and, (4) motivates action. As the virtues are the focus of any contemporary virtue ethics, there must be an explanation of how they function well. A comprehensive VE theory should include an exposition of phronesis because of its necessary roles in promoting the proper working of the virtues. In its first role, practical wisdom ensures that emotions and actions are a mean and therefore, appropriate to the situation, the agent, and recipient of the virtuous deed. For example, we determine how much to give to which deserving charities. The amount should be enough to help the causes and yet not result in our own economic hardship. What we can give up for others is determined by how much we think we really need external goods. This determination is made by practical wisdom. Secondly, through

deliberation, practical wisdom also devices the way to achieve virtuous ends. Going back to the example of generosity, practical wisdom judges how best we can contribute to those in need. Do we, like Swanton's aid worker, leave our family, ignore our health, and throw ourselves into the jungles to help the disadvantaged? Or should we know our own limits and help in other ways, such as cooking dinners for the homeless in our own community? The means to the ends are chosen by practical wisdom.

In turn, the ends are determined with the help of practical wisdom. We deliberate on the intermediate ends and those that contribute to our ultimate end of eudaimonia. I aim for a virtuous life but wish to also help those in need with as much money as I can muster. Finally, virtues cannot stand in theoretical isolation. They must be realized through action. While desire is the ultimate motivation of action, desire that is guided by the right reasoning leads to virtuous action. Thus, I wish to be generous by giving to charity. I do so in the right way, for the right reasons, at the right time, and to the right people, guided by practical wisdom.

In this chapter I also have been concerned with the negative task of refuting virtue ethics theories that disregard or diminish the role of practical wisdom. I have shown that Driver's virtues of ignorance are either not virtues or do require practical wisdom. In addition Merritt's response to the situationist challenge is unnecessary. She recommends a Humean virtue ethics approach that she says accommodates empirical evidence of moral psychology. Her recommendation is unnecessary first, because the challenges of situationism are not as grave as Merritt suggests – the

experiments and interpretation of their results are debatable. Second, Aristotelian virtue ethics can accommodate the empirical evidence of situationism. A virtue ethics that incorporates practical wisdom enables an agent to manage the different situations that situationists posit. Practical wisdom considers the empirical data and morally relevant details in each situation. Cognizant and targeting the ultimate end, practical wisdom, working with desire, gives the guidance that leads to right action in each situation. Thus, through the four roles described in this chapter, practical wisdom helps moral virtues to function properly.

CHAPTER 5

DENOUEMENT: OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES, SUMMARY, CONCLUSION

OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

I have argued that both eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory. Objections to this thesis are likely to take three tracks. First, eudaimonia is such a flawed concept that it cannot be necessary for a complete VE paradigm. Indeed, including eudaimonia hinders rather than helps VE theory. Supporting this claim, objections may take the form of a list of criticisms of eudaimonism. Second, critics may argue phronesis is not a necessary concept in VE theories. Emotivists may claim that emotion, not reason direct and motivate our actions. Third critics may contend the claim of this dissertation is too broad. The contention may be eudaimonia and phronesis are not necessary at the same time. We need only phronesis, but not eudaimonia, or vice versa. Let me respond to the main criticisms contained in these tracks.

5.1 Eudaimonism is a flawed concept and therefore, cannot be necessary for a virtue ethics theory.

5.1.1. "Eudaimonia is outdated"

As noted earlier in this work, eudaimonism was common in ancient ethical thought. Eudaimonism is teleological because it is the end or purpose towards which humans aim. The teleological nature of eudaimonism is one reason that moderns view the concept as outdated. This unease with teleology translates into objections to

eudaimonia and a rejection that it is necessary to complete a virtue ethics theory. Rather, eudaimonia muddies the water. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* gestures to everyday belief about eudaimonia when he notes that most people would agree that the ultimate good of humans is eudaimonia. He does not feel he has to justify this claim because it is accepted belief (1095a16-21). The status of eudaimonia changed with the rise of Christianity. Along with virtues, eudaimonism was eventually eclipsed by tenets of Christian moral theology.²⁸⁷

Schneewind chronicles the decline of virtues in moral theory and the emergence of moral laws that emanate ultimately from divine commandments. Similarly, the purpose of humans no longer rested on naturalistic grounds, but rather on divine purpose. The good of humans was not eudaimonia but to fulfill God's divine plan. Moral theology was itself overshadowed (in the intellectual space, anyway) by deontological and consequentialist views. Finally, eudaimonia was silenced by Darwinism. To speak of an ultimate goal for humans is mistaken. There is no ultimate purpose to human beings because natural selection is random. The very concept of human teleology is therefore, an outdated one. It would be difficult to update the concept because there are too many problems with it. Perhaps the difficulty some philosophers have with a teleological view is for the reason that Foot gives, "Philosophers are sometimes afraid of recognizing teleological language, thinking it must be something left over from a world-view in which all nature was

²⁸⁷ See Schneewind, J.B., "The Misfortunes of Virtue," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

seen as reflecting the will of the deity.”²⁸⁸ However, this is of course, not the only way to look at teleology. In this dissertation, I ground the teleology of eudaimonia, not on divine direction, but on human nature.

The other reason for the unfashionable standing of eudaimonia is the evolution of the concept over the centuries. The meaning of the term has moved from one that was relatively objective to one that is widely considered to be subjective. The modern English translation, of eudaimonia to happiness, is a strong indication of this move. Happiness is often seen as entirely a psychological affair. Indeed, contemporary theories of happiness (also called well-being or welfare) appear to be direct competitors to ancient theories of eudaimonia. There has recently been a plethora of “happiness” research that comes under the heading of “positive psychology”.²⁸⁹ This direction that happiness research has taken is a result of the shift in views about personal authority in matters of well-being. This shift is one factor contributing to the decline of philosophical interest in eudaimonia. The ancients did not view that individuals, in general, were authorities about their own welfare. In contrast modern liberals tend to believe in the sovereignty of the individual in matters of personal welfare. In general people know what is best for them and tend to act rationally in the promotion of their interests. Haybron sums up contemporary attitudes to happiness well when he writes:

²⁸⁸ Foot, Philippa, *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 32.

²⁸⁹ See the following: Haidt, Jonathan, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books, 2006; Eid, Michael and Larsen, Randy (eds), *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*. London: The Guilford Press, 2008; Keyes, Corey L. and Haidt, Jonathan, *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*. Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2003.

This sort of view does not eliminate the need for philosophical work on well-being – but it does diminish its importance. People who are authorities about their own good don't need enlightenment; they need empowerment. They need economics, not philosophy (or, for that matter, psychology). Thus, perhaps, did formal research on well-being pass largely from the philosopher to the economist, who attempts to solve the arcane problems of how to get resources into people's hands most efficiently. Questions about the nature of well-being and its psychology, and the most sensible way to live, have accordingly taken a back seat.²⁹⁰

So it seems that eudaimonia in its original meaning is not so much outdated, as it is merely transmogrified in the past two millennia. When asked (at a lecture at The Catholic University of America) if philosophy ever has new discoveries, Peter Strawson replied there were few new discoveries, just re-discoveries. Eudaimonia in its traditional sense has been rediscovered by contemporary virtue ethicists, in particular by Hursthouse, Annas, and Nussbaum.

Chapter 3 attempts to update the concept borrowing from Hursthouse, who borrows from Aristotle. Indeed, in this work I continue to ground eudaimonia in human nature. There is not much in intrinsic human nature that has changed in two thousand years. Our passions remain the same, as does our intellect. Our ideas have, of course, changed over time and across cultures. Thus, it may be difficult to argue that eudaimonia, a concept that derives from our human nature, is outdated if human nature has remained rather constant in the ensuing period of time. However, deriving eudaimonism from human nature leads to another criticism of this work. The other

²⁹⁰ Haybron, Daniel M., "Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being", in Eid, Michael and Larsen, Randy (eds), *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*. London: The Guilford Press, 2008, p. 21.

shortcoming that is pointed out by its detractors is that eudaimonia as a concept is flawed – one of the biggest obstacles to eudaimonism is its definition. The other is the rationale for its grounding.

5.1.2 “The thesis of this work grounds eudaimonism in naturalistic premises that are questionable.”

A criticism of this updated version of eudaimonia is that it is based on a naturalistic view that is untenable. We begin by giving an account of human nature and we conclude with an account of the good human life. Critics of naturalism argue that naturalists smuggle moral values into a factual discussion. This criticism is leveled at Aristotle and the modern proponents of naturalism. These philosophers claim that eudaimonia is grounded on human function and good. Naturalists such as Aristotle do not illicitly bring in the good in their arguments. In the function argument, Aristotle introduces a premise that if a person has a particular function, a good person or a person who possesses virtue will perform her function well. This premise may or may not be true, but it is an explicitly evaluative premise in the argument. There is no illicit smuggling of moral values. The naturalistic fallacy accuses Aristotle and others who use the naturalistic argument (such as Hursthouse) of moving from what is good for human beings to what it means to be a good human being. This criticism has been defused by the defense of the naturalistic argument by philosophers such as Wilkes.²⁹¹ In particular, the most thorough explication and

²⁹¹ Wilkes, Kathleen V., “The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *Mind*, Vol. 87, Np. 348, (October, 1978), pp.553-571.

defence of Aristotle's function argument may be found in Hutchinson.²⁹² In addition a modern interpretation of naturalism is supported by environmental ethicists who, also take a view of eudaimonia that derives from biological considerations (see following sections).

Another criticism of the function argument attacks the crucial claim that human beings are among the kinds of things that have a characteristic function.²⁹³ It is comprehensible when addressing certain skills such as bricklaying to speak of their characteristic functions. It is however, another matter to say that human beings have this characteristic. Yet, it does not seem unreasonable to claim that reason is the highest order capacity for humans. This capacity differentiates us from other animals. The function of a creature defines the creature.²⁹⁴ I find Wilkes's defense of the function argument and against the naturalistic fallacy compelling:

The exercise of practical reason is rendered possible by his lower-order capacities and by the social circumstances in which he lives; his lower-order capacities function well partly because of practical reason's guidance, and partly because of the social and economic conditions of the state. The state, in turn, is organized by the practical reason of some of its members, and requires the intelligent assent of most of them; and so we have a complete circle, within which every exercise of practical reason is related to man's other capacities by feedback. The need to fit in with society will make it highly likely that the most successful man is one who has developed the moral (other-regarding) virtues, such as justice, generosity, and fairness; indeed, there is a place in this kind of life for nearly all private or social goods – active virtue, honour, pleasure, stamp collecting and so forth... Thus we get a full and active life which we expect the 'good man' to lead

²⁹² Hutchinson, D.S., *The Virtues of Aristotle*. London: Routledge, 1986.

²⁹³ Sumner, L.W., *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p.

71.

²⁹⁴ Wilkes (1978), p. 559.

well; and one that is moreover a life that must be good for man, since his practical reason is explicitly setting out to order all things for his overall advantage.²⁹⁵

The rejection of the function argument is associated particularly with the criticism that eudaimonia makes metaphysical assumptions about the teleology of humans that are not supported by modern science²⁹⁶.

From the metaphysical side, what is required to sustain a virtue ethics is a broadly teleological view of nature. According to this view, explanations in terms of final causes are legitimate and necessary for understanding nature. The *telos* is a justification for moral action and motivation that are supposed to contribute towards this metaphysically fixed end. MacIntyre rejects this “metaphysical teleological biology.”²⁹⁷ In response to this criticism, we refer to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and argue that in Book I, Aristotle makes little use of his biological theory. Instead, Aristotle’s account of human nature seems more like empirical psychology than ancient natural philosophy. Many of his proposals about friendship, wealth, family, and virtue appear to derive support from contemporary psychological accounts of human happiness²⁹⁸.

Moreover, the function argument is not as archaic as its detractors claim. Recent proponents of environmental ethics have adopted this argument. Robin Attfield writes that the flourishing of an organism entails the development in it of the

²⁹⁵ Wilkes (1978), p. 560.

²⁹⁶ Solomon, David, “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics A Critical Reader* ed. Daniel Statman. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

²⁹⁷ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

²⁹⁸ Argyle, Michael, *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Methuen, 1987 and Myers, David G., *The Pursuit of Happiness*. New York: William Morrow, 1992.

essential capacities of the organism.²⁹⁹ The principle does not rely in any obvious way on pre-Darwinian assumptions about natural ends or final causes. For Attfield, the principle simply says that while we may be unable to locate the function of a particular organism, we generally have little difficulty determining when it is functioning well by the standards appropriate to its kind.³⁰⁰ This language is reminiscent of Hursthouse's position on flourishing and its grounding for human beings.

Paul Taylor argues in a similar vein. He espouses a "biocentric outlook on nature".³⁰¹ This outlook includes a "certain way of perceiving and understanding each individual organism. Each is seen to be a teleological (goal-oriented) center of life, pursuing its own good in its own unique way...a living thing is conceived as a unified system of organized activity, the constant tendency of which is to preserve its existence by protecting and promoting its well-being."³⁰² Each individual organism has its own unique way of responding to the environment, interacting with other individual organisms, and undergoing the transformations that are specific to the life-cycle of the species. The organism exemplifies all the functions and activities of its species in its own peculiar manner. Even Sumner, who is a critic of objective

²⁹⁹ Attfield, Robin, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991, p. 142.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Taylor, Paul, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 44 – 47.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

theories of well-being, admits that arguments based on function cannot be defeated by accusing them of biological naivete.³⁰³

5.1.3 “Defining eudaimonia is so fraught that it detracts from rather than completes a virtue ethics theory.”

The second criticism of eudaimonia is that it is difficult to define the term. This criticism is more relevant to subjective theories of well-being. Sumner is a notable adherent to the subjective theory of well-being. Subjective theories of well-being depend, at least in part, on some attitude of the welfare subject.³⁰⁴ The subject determines what is good for her depending on her preferences. According to Sumner, to claim that well-being is subjective is to claim that it is mind-dependent. This subjective relativity accords more with our modern sensibility of well-being. In this sense well-being is often equated with happiness. Well-being or happiness is relative to the individual.

Thus, Martin may be happy living in seclusion in the woods, writing epic poetry. Pauline is happy as a mother of five, raising her children, and living in close proximity to her extended family. It is difficult to define subjective well-being because the definition is subject dependent. For Martin well-being is defined by solitude and creative freedom. For Pauline well-being means close family relationships. This subjective difference leads to the criticism of relativism. The accusations made against eudaimonia are therefore, misguided in two senses. First,

³⁰³ Sumner (1996), p. 74.

³⁰⁴ Sumner (1996), p. 38.

these criticisms should not be directed to eudaimonia but to happiness, well-being, or flourishing as defined in these subjective theories.³⁰⁵ Second, criticisms of relativism in eudaimonia are actually criticisms of subjective theories of well-being and not eudaimonist theories.

Objective theories of well-being, or eudaimonist theories, are not subject dependent. Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia is the activity of reason in accordance with virtue, in a complete life. Aristotle's eudaimonism is generally seen as an objective theory of flourishing or well-being. Eudaimonist theories do not take significant consideration of the attitudes and preferences of welfare subjects. Instead, objective theories claim that what is intrinsically valuable neither consists in nor depend on an individual's psychological state.³⁰⁶ There seems to be little argument in connection to the definition of eudaimonia from the objective point of view. Most eudaimonists such as Hursthouse, Annas, and Nussbaum are neo-Aristotelians who they derive their definition of eudaimonia from Aristotle. Hursthouse says that her theory of eudaimonia is objective within the ethical paradigm that she espouses. Living in accordance with the virtues enables us to live as good human beings *qua*

³⁰⁵ Even within subjective theories of happiness, recent research has found a great deal of commonality amongst factors that subjects say make them happy. Relationships (social and family) rank very high in the happiness table, along with fulfilling work, a belief system, and sufficient leisure time. See Argyle (1987) and Myres (1992). Indeed there are certain external variables that lead to greater happiness such as less noise, more control of the environment, and shorter commutes. See Haidt (2006), p. 91-94.

³⁰⁶ Sumner (1996), p. 41 (footnote 19).

human beings. This good is common to us as human beings.³⁰⁷ This definition of eudaimonia is not at great variance to Aristotle's.

If there is any degree of subjectivity in the concept of eudaimonia, it would arguably be in the last part of Aristotle's definition, "in a complete life". Within the inclusivist view of eudaimonia, the complete life takes into consideration factors such as wealth, family, and friends. Individual preferences determine how much wealth, how many friends, and how deep our relationships ought to be in order to be satisfying. Yet, the predominant emphasis of eudaimonia is that it is an objective goal that does not vary with individuals. That goal is a life lived in accordance with the virtues guided by reason.

5.1.4 "Eudaimonia cannot be necessary for a complete virtue ethics theory because the concept results in moral egoism, which runs counter to any ethical theory."

The last but by no means least, final criticism of eudaimonia is that the concept results in moral egoism. Is not moral philosophy the justification of action that is entirely objective and altruistic? There cannot be a hint of selfish reasons. If self-flourishing is the goal of virtuous action, moral egoism is the consequence and egoism is equated with selfishness. In tackling this objection, we can argue that flourishing, as the aim of the virtues, is not antecedently specified independently of

³⁰⁷ Hursthouse, Rosalind, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

living virtuously³⁰⁸. The person who aims at living a flourishing life by living in a fair, generous, and brave way is not aiming at her good, as opposed to the good of others. Annas argues that it is a mistake to claim that the virtuous person's motivation is egoistic because it is aimed at her flourishing and not someone else's. There is no implication that she is furthering her own interests at the expense of another's. To accuse a person of acting selfishly because she is acting virtuously for the sake of a eudaimonistic life, is to misconstrue the meaning of a virtue. Courage, for example, is to stand up for what is right, whether it benefits the virtuous person or others. The charge that eudaimonia is egoistic seems to depend on the assumption that eudaimonia must be specified independently of the practice of the virtues. Proponents of eudaimonist virtue ethics do not share this assumption. Virtues are a means to an independently agreed end that is eudaimonia.

5.2 “Reason does not motivate action nor select ends, emotions do.”

This work proposes that virtue ethicists should include eudaimonia and phronesis as necessary elements in a complete virtue ethics theory. I draw heavily on an interpretation of Aristotle that gives a primary role to phronesis. The refutation of the proposal that practical wisdom plays an indispensable role in virtue ethics would therefore be based on an interpretation of Aristotle that significantly plays down the this role. Walter and Fortenbaugh take this position. Walter insists that goals are decided by virtue and that virtue is a state of the faculty of desire, which simply

³⁰⁸ Annas, Julia, “Virtue Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

approves certain goals. Thus, Aristotle is assimilated to Hume and the emotivists.³⁰⁹ Fortenbaugh argues that the virtuous man can act virtuously without engaging his practical wisdom.³¹⁰ The latter is used only in calculating the means to achieving a goal. The more extreme view would be that virtue exists in someone who does not have practical wisdom. Fortenbaugh's view has been refuted by Sorabji, Cooper, and more recently Kakoliris.³¹¹ They cite ample textual evidence from Aristotle's *Ethics* to support their refutations. In addition, Sorabji makes the case that practical wisdom is required to keep immediate goals in line with our conception of eudaimonia. Even if there is textual and other scholarly support for the roles of phronesis as given by Aristotle, this work still has to contend with the argument that moral judgments and motivation are given by emotions.

Emotivists argue that our actions are motivated by emotions. This line of thought was given life by Hume and has been taken up by emotivists and prescriptivists like Simon Blackburn and Alan Gibbard, who work in the analytic tradition. Even when we say that practical wisdom sorts out the reasons for doing something, and with deliberation decides which course of action to take, emotivist will say that an agent's reason for doing something is itself dependent on his

³⁰⁹ Sorabji, Richard, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 211-214.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ Sorabji (1980); Cooper, John M., *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986; Kakoliris, Gerasimos, "Refuting Fortenbaugh: The Relationship between Ethike Arete and Phronesis in Aristotle" in *Philosophia: Yearbook of the Research Center for Greek Philosophy at the Academy of Athens*, Vol. 33, 2003, pp. 183-193.

feelings, passions, or desires. They will argue, if a moral judgement about what a person ought to do implies that he has a reason to act in the proper way, then that judgement will be based not only on rational reasons but also ultimately, on feelings and desires. When people think they ought to do something, the ultimate motivating reason is a found in the person's psychological state. In other words, behind every reason (thought) lies a desire (feeling).

For example, I may say that I am buying the shares of Apple because of good fundamental financial reasons. In addition, I have reviewed the corporate responsibility of the company and found that it has so far, been a good corporate citizen. Thus, I buy the shares in the company. However, emotivists would argue that the ultimate reason for my buying the shares of Apple is to be found in my psychological state. I desire owning stock in a "cool" and "hip" company that is innovative and anti-establishment, because I like some rebellion. I am not sure why we must end the causal series at the emotional element of an agent's psychological state. Why not instead, as Foot argues, "take the recognition of a reason for acting as bringing the series to a close?"³¹² Foot's argument would certainly be in line with the contention of this work *i.e.* we have reasons for acting virtuously and those reasons are ultimately aimed at eudaimonia.

In addition, I take Aristotle's view that desire and intellect in a virtuous person act in unison. Indeed we interpret Aristotle in such a way that we turn the Humean view around and claim that behind every desire is a thought. Practical wisdom is

³¹² Foot (2001) p.22.

required to develop the means to an end. When this means is determined, practical wisdom informs our desires so that we desire to do the right thing as guided by reason. Aristotle calls this desire, deliberative desire. It is desire that is informed by our reason. Hence, one of the roles of practical wisdom is to contribute towards motivating an agent to act through stimulating the correct desire.

5.3 “A comprehensive virtue ethics theory does not require both eudaimonia and phronesis.”

5.3.1 Connections Between Eudaimonia and Phronesis

Phronesis and eudaimonia are, to use a new age term, inter-connected. Borrowing from Kant, eudaimonia without phronesis is blind; phronesis without eudaimonia is empty. Phronesis is the crucial link between virtue and eudaimonia in Aristotle’s theory. Both virtue and eudaimonia are essentially characterized by reason, which is what makes the connection between virtue and eudaimonia so close. According to eudaimonism, the good of the agent is the goal of ethics. One primary good of the agent is the full development of the highest power of humans, which is reason. Reason is used in theoretical and practical activity.

A virtue is a disposition that guides our choices in accordance with the dictates of reason. Virtuous activity is guided by reason in its selection of ends and in its deliberation about means. Excellence in rational activity characterizes a good life, every act that makes excellent use of reason, every virtuous act, therefore, contributes to the eudaimonia of an agent.

In sum, phronesis, practical wisdom, is connected to eudaimonia in two ways: first, it plays a role in determining the ultimate goal that is eudaimonia, or a flourishing life. Second, this dissertation argues along Aristotelian lines that virtue is a means to and a part of eudaimonia. Virtue is a disposition or state that runs deep in the person, and is a matter of their character, not a particular style of acting or living. The disposition involves two things, which develop together and are intertwined in practice. One is practical wisdom, which is the ability to reason reflectively in the morally right way. The other element involved with virtue is a developed habit of feeling and acting in the right way that accords with correct reasoning. Ethics involves acting. Practical wisdom is the element in virtue ethics that leads us to right action. Thus, moral virtues work with practical wisdom to achieve a eudaimon life, which is the highest good. All human goods bear a relationship to our ultimate good that is, eudaimonia. Practical wisdom is the intellectual capacity for assessing how we can achieve eudaimonia through proper estimation of the contributions that various goods offer towards eudaimonia.

Eudaimonism is less problematic than often supposed. It does not depend upon accepting formal causes and essences.³¹³ All that is needed is the allowance that humans act for purposes and that what enables them to achieve any of their human purposes of whatever sort is their capacity for thought and reflection. Humans may sense-perceive and do various other things without thought, but to do whatever they

³¹³ Polansky, Ronald, “ ‘Phronesis’ on Tour: Cultural Adaptability of Aristotelian Ethical Notions” in *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. Vol. 10, No. 4, 323-336, p.331.

do in a human way it must be influenced by their capacity for thought and reflection. Eudaimonia is a life of good human activities. Eudaimonia provides the purpose towards which practical wisdom aims. Without a purpose, practical wisdom would be aimless. Indeed it would no longer be practical ‘wisdom’ but practical ‘cleverness’.

SUMMARY

The thesis of this dissertation is that eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory. By “comprehensive,” I mean thorough and complete. Comprehensiveness mandates that a theory include all explanatory elements. These elements should be connected in such a way that the whole theory stands up relatively well to the realities of everyday applications, and to reasonable challenges. I argue that without eudaimonia and phronesis a virtue ethics theory cannot be comprehensive.

Virtues are the central focus of any virtue ethics theory. Few would disagree the virtues are therefore, the common feature to all iterations of the theory. Other elements of a virtue ethics theory should relate to virtues. In the first place we need to know how to justify the virtues. Then we need to know why we should possess and practice the virtues. The upshot is that eudaimonia provides the basis for why we should be virtuous, and helps validate character traits as virtues.

The virtues also must be chosen correctly in different situations and then acted upon. How do we decide among various virtues in a moral context? Phronesis, or

practical wisdom plays four roles in ensuring the proper functioning and realization of the virtues, one of which is determining the means to achieve a good end.

I began in Chapter 1 by discussing one of the first models of virtue ethics, that is Aristotle's *Ethics*. We need to know how eudaimonia, virtues, and practical wisdom interact, influence, and determine each other in one of the primary, original models of virtue ethics. In Chapter 2, with a broad review of the contemporary literature in the field, I laid out the problem that currently exists in virtue ethics. There is a diffuse and disparate array of work in that space. Most are articles, and therefore, deal with only a small, particularized segment of virtue ethics. As such, they are fragmentary like a single chair or bed in the Palace of Versailles. Beautiful as that one piece of furniture may be, it stands alone as an idiosyncratic piece, hardly amounting to a thorough job of interior decoration. So far, just three books are anything close to a thorough job, i.e., to an effort explore virtue ethics systematically and at length: Rosalind Hursthouse's, Michael Slote's, and Christine Swanton's. Yet, each offers a different version of virtue ethics.

These authors approach what purports to be the same subject in almost opposite directions as if one were in Versailles, a second wandering about the Versailles Gardens, and the third venturing out to the nearby chateau of Marie Antoinette. In particular, Slote wants to tighten the variables in a virtue ethics theory and therefore, distills the evaluation of virtues to one single factor: the motivation for any virtue should be benevolence. We should evaluate whether a virtue is a virtue by determining if the motivation behind it is benevolence. In contrast, Swanton

recommends a pluralistic approach to virtue ethics so that considerations of what constitutes a virtue are deeply contextual. We must look at items in the field of virtue, the forms of responsiveness, the traits that make a virtue, the standards for judging virtues, and the notions of the right. Evaluating a character trait to ascertain whether it is a virtue requires us to draw on these pluralities. Hursthouse, in contrast to Slote and Swanton, is a neo-Aristotelian and a eudaimonist. Slote is non-teleological, Swanton is both teleological and non-teleological, and Hursthouse is teleological. Virtue ethics is, therefore, diverse in views, generally fragmented in research focus, and deficient in agreement on how a virtue ethics theory should look. The sources of virtue ethics are myriad: Aristotle, Stoics, and Aquinas. Among the focus and foundations of virtue ethics are virtues, naturalism, and reason. From this cacophony, I suggest a distillation so that virtue ethics can have some common ground and agreed principles.

One common principle I recommend is eudaimonia. Chapter 3 gave the arguments why eudaimonia is necessary. It began by defining eudaimonia as a complete life, lived according to the virtues, that is guided by reason. Why should we live according to the virtues? Eudaimonia is the purpose of every human. We start with the premises that:

1. There is an ultimate end that is the chief good.
2. This chief good is eudaimonia

Aristotle supports (1) with empirical evidence and argument. The second claim rests on Aristotle's use of the endoxic method.³¹⁴ Section 3.1.2 discussed Hursthouse's argument for eudaimonia being the purpose of every human being. Eudaimonia is a natural purpose for human beings *qua* human beings.³¹⁵ Eudaimonia is grounded in human nature, such that human beings need the virtues in order to live a characteristically good human life. This approach derives from ethical naturalism. We flourish when we are good human beings *qua* human beings.

Eudaimonia is the reason we act virtuously. A naturalistic understanding informs the definition of this element that is so critical to a comprehensive VE theory. The necessary part of eudaimonia is a life based on the virtues. The function argument teaches that whether an activity is doing well is judged by the degree of excellence in the performance of its main function. The function that is peculiar to human beings is reason. If eudaimonia is living well and doing well, then its achievement is through the best use of reason. Thus, eudaimonia is acting virtuously according to reason. Flourishing as a human being requires we act virtuously because we need the virtues to live a characteristically good human life. To be a good human being requires that we ensure our individual survival and the continuance of our species. We need to have pleasure and freedom from pain. Finally, good humans work at good functioning of the social group – in the ways characteristic of human beings.

³¹⁴ See Chapter 1 for a full explication of these arguments.

³¹⁵ Hursthouse (1999).

A key interdisciplinary innovation, which modernizes the concept of eudaimonia, is to add psychological and economic research on happiness to it. The definition of eudaimonia has three elements:

- (1) a complete life
- (2) a life lived according to the virtues
- (3) a life guided by reason.

A complete life is the subjective part of the concept, while a life lived according to the virtues is the objective part. Thus, whether we wish to be soldiers, sailors, tinkers or tailors depends on our intrinsic interests. However, to be fully eudaimon, we must be virtuous soldiers, sailors, tinkers and tailors.

In Chapter 3, I proceeded to critique a virtue ethics theory that rejects eudaimonia. Michael Slote relies on the motivation of benevolence as the underpinning of the virtues. I argued this foundation is even weaker than eudaimonia. Indeed, Slote depends on intuitions about right and wrong action to direct his explication of balanced concern rather than relying on independent assessments of the virtues to help decide among various perspectives on balanced concern. In the end, Slote fails to provide a convincing theory that helps decide which actions are right or wrong by grounding virtues (or admirable traits) in

balanced caring. Slote must rely covertly on intuitions about right and wrong actions in order to figure out which states of character are admirable.³¹⁶

Finally, the last part of Chapter 3 critiques the other systematic book length explication of virtue ethics – Christine Swanton’s. Swanton does not disagree that eudaimonia is one way to identify which character dispositions are virtues. However, she disagrees it is a necessary condition of a disposition being a virtue that it is characteristically constitutive of, or contributes to, the eudaimonia of the agent.³¹⁷ She argues it may well be the case that at least some virtues contribute to aspects of a person’s goodness other than her eudaimonia. There are some virtues that do not contribute to eudaimonia but do contribute to a person’s goodness. Swanton prefers to have a pluralistic approach to select what characteristics are virtues. Unfortunately, Swanton’s preference for an evaluation of the virtues using expanded measures is vulnerable in two respects. First, her measures do not depart from Aristotelian virtue ethics. As such, her measures can be subsumed under the eudaimonist thesis advanced in Chapter 3. Second, her pluralism and desire to accommodate a wide range of views undermines her attempts to explain and guide moral action.

In Chapter 4, I posit that phronesis works in four ways to reach eudaimonia as the final end goal.

³¹⁶ Copp, David and Sobel, David, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics” in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*. Vol. 114, No. 3, pp. 514-554, April 2004, p. 518.

³¹⁷ Swanton, Christine, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 80.

1. It determines the mean of a disposition.
2. It determines the means for achieving the end.
3. It contributes to determining the end.
4. It contributes to motivating action to fulfill this end.

That is, without phronesis it would be impossible to see how to reach eudaimonia, or even determine whether eudaimonia is the ultimate goal.

Section 4.3.1 argues that phronesis determines the means to achieving eudaimonia. Zagzebski's view lends considerable support to this argument.³¹⁸ She stresses that practical wisdom mediates between different virtues and chooses the most salient one in a given moral situation. Phronesis also plays a role in coordinating virtues into a single line of action or thought directed towards an end.

In brief, the arguments for phronesis determining the means to achieving the end are as follows.

1. Deliberation is integral to phronesis.
2. Choice proceeds from deliberation. Choice is also an intellectual feature. Choice and deliberation are tied to each other. Reasoning and thought accompany choice.
3. Every virtuous act involves exercising choice.
4. Choice is therefore, a combination of reason and desire.

³¹⁸ Zagzebski, Linda, *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

5. Just as deliberation seems to consist in working out the means, in particular situations, or types of situations, of achieving given, relatively concrete ends, so therefore, choice because it follows deliberation, also is about what forwards the end. Choice is about what best promotes the end. When we have judged what best promotes the end, our desire to do it expresses our wish. We wish for eudaimonia. We deliberate about what will promote it. We desire to do it, and that deliberative desire is a choice.

It is therefore, practical wisdom that deals with what leads to the end, *i.e.*, the means.

Section 4.3.2 gives arguments for the proposition that phronesis contributes to determining the end. This proposition is supported by Richardson, who argues we can deliberate rationally concerning final ends.³¹⁹ Practical wisdom helps to determine the ultimate end. The following argument supports the latter proposition.

1. Practical wisdom and moral virtue are intimately linked and interdependent.
2. Practical wisdom works through deliberation, which gathers and processes the relevant data *e.g.* the right time, the right way, for the right reasons.
3. Practical wisdom without moral virtue ends up as cleverness, while moral virtue without practical wisdom is simply natural virtue.

Therefore, moral virtue and practical wisdom determine the end, because the two are interdependent.

³¹⁹ Richardson, Henry S., *Practical Reasoning about Final Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Section 4.3.3 gives the arguments that practical wisdom helps to initiate action. These arguments are supported by Chappell's views.³²⁰ The following gives the arguments for practical wisdom initiating action.

1. Achieving eudaimonia requires action.
2. The cause of action is an object of desire.
3. The immediate mover is desire itself.
4. However, the object of desire can either be the good or the apparent good.
5. Practical wisdom guides and directs our action intelligently to choose the right end.
6. Practical wisdom and desire combine to form deliberative desire.
7. Deliberative desire initiates moral action.

In the last two sections of Chapter 4, I undertook the negative task of refuting virtue ethics theories that disregard or diminish the role of practical wisdom. Julia Driver and Maria Merritt claim that practical wisdom should be given a diminished role in virtue ethics. For Driver, there is a significant class of virtues, the "virtues of ignorance", that cannot be accommodated by the view that practical wisdom is necessary for a virtuous agent.³²¹ An agent, therefore, can have a virtue even if that disposition requires her to be ignorant or thoughtless. These virtues of ignorance are a class of moral virtues that either does not require the agent know what she does is

³²⁰ Chappell, T.D.J., "Reason, Passion, and Action: The Third Condition of the Voluntary." *Philosophy* Vol. 70. No. 273, (Jul., 1995), pp. 453-459.

³²¹ Driver (2001), p. xiv. Driver does not appear to distinguish between the terms 'correct perception' and 'practical wisdom' as she uses them interchangeably. It may be argued that correct perception is one important aspect of practical wisdom but is not equivalent to practical wisdom.

right or, that actually requires the agent be ignorant. I showed that Driver's virtues of ignorance are either not virtues or do require practical wisdom. I argued Merritt's response to the situationist challenge is unnecessary. She recommends a Humean virtue ethics approach that she says accommodates empirical evidence of moral psychology. Her recommendation is unnecessary first, because Aristotelian virtue ethics can accommodate the empirical evidence of situationism. Second, the challenges of situationism are not as grave as Merritt suggests because the experiments and interpretation of their results are debatable.

CONCLUSION

Aristotle observes that ethics is not a precise subject. When investigating the good, we can only speak of things that are true in general. With that counsel in mind, the present Chapter has responded to the main criticisms that may be made against the thesis of this dissertation. These responses ought to suffice to overcome the objections so that further research in eudaimonia and phronesis as essential features for virtue ethics theories can be continued. I argue that the focus on virtues is the common denominator of virtue ethics theory. However, for a virtue ethics theory to be comprehensive *i.e.*, complete and thorough, it must explain how virtues are justified. Eudaimonia provides the means, because it is the best basis for virtues thus far available. The grounding for eudaimonia as a basis for virtues is our human nature. We need to be virtuous in order to have eudaimon lives. That is because virtues ensure our thriving as individuals and as part of a community. No other basis given for virtues is as strong as eudaimonia.

Another facet of virtues that must be explained in a virtue ethics theory is how virtues function properly. It is simply not enough to say we have virtue x that it is a virtue because it leads to a eudaimon life. Virtue x is used in practice in a moral life. It is crucial to know how virtue x is put into action, how it is chosen over virtue y in a given situation, and how we know that virtue x leads to eudaimonia. Thus, I argue that phronesis, or practical wisdom, is also necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory. Phronesis ensures the proper functioning of virtues.

While I argue, in this dissertation, that eudaimonia and phronesis are necessary for a comprehensive virtue ethics theory, I have not discussed to any great extent, what other elements are necessary. In turn, I have not laid out the package of elements that are both necessary and sufficient. Again, simply put, I have urged nothing more – but nothing less – that both eudaimonia and phronesis are indispensable. In so doing, I have highlighted not only the inchoate state of VE theory, but also its disappointingly variegated and even incoherent condition. Indubitably, a comprehensive virtue ethics theory will need to incorporate a well thought out theory of the virtues that gives a thorough definition of each one. In addition, a virtue ethics theory could well profit from a considered discussion of emotion and its relation to action and reason. Thus, like a grand palace ready for careful furnishing, virtue ethics remains a rich area for future research and discussion as long as it is built on the necessary foundation of eudaimonism and phronesis.

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