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Abstract

In this thesis I build on the scholarship on Aristotle's doctrine of the mean that has proposed an interpretation closely connected to ideas of harmony and especially Aristotle's notion of the καλόν. The central question of this paper is whether Aristotle's application of the idea of harmony to ethics presents, as for example Hursthouse has argued, a fruitless spillover of a vacuous principle or rather a substantial ethical position. As a first step, I will argue that Aristotle envisages the doctrine of the mean to be at its core concerned with the intensity of a person's affective response. Having established this central connection of the doctrine with the emotions, I will situate the emotions in the wider terrain of Aristotle's ethics in particular with respect to moral formation and motivation. Having followed the argument for a reading of the mean as tied to ideas of harmony, as epitomised in Aristotle's notion of the καλόν, I contrast two fundamentally different readings of the harmony Aristotle envisages. McDowell seems to suggest that such a harmony stems from a silencing of contrary reasons due to the distinct perception of the virtuous person, while Hartmann, who seems largely overlooked in the anglophone debate, understands the mean as the expression of a fundamental tension at the heart of ethics. In light of the textual material in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I argue against McDowell's silencing account as an interpretation of Aristotle and building on Hartmann argue that the doctrine of the mean may be read as a position of substantial insight in terms of ethics and moral psychology. In particular, I argue, the doctrine of the mean may be read as capturing the remarkable dual demands the virtuous person has to integrate on the level of personality. The contrast between McDowell and Hartmann, furthermore, elucidates what I read as Aristotle's attempt to accommodate for two distinct senses of human excellence – one as essentially responsive, the other informed by and reflecting a correct understanding of values.

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The doctrine of the mean as centrally concerned with the emotions

It seems helpful to start with a few preliminaries about how I understand the doctrine of the mean and in particular to highlight the stance I take with respect to some questions that have been fundamentally debated in the literature. Aristotle introduces the doctrine of the mean in EN II.6 in order to illuminate the content of the virtues where we find his famous definition of virtue. '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. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency.' (EN 1106bff, all translations unless otherwise indicated Irwin, 2019).

The doctrine of the mean is clearly concerned with the quantitative notions of excess and deficiency in the sense that the mean lies between 'too much or too little'. This quantitative language has led some commentators (e.g. Hursthouse 1981 / 2006) to reject the doctrine out of hand as 'silly', containing 'no truth' (Hursthouse, 2006). Hursthouse's total rejection mainly stems from the criticism that as an essentially quantitative perspective the doctrine cannot capture some of the most essential aspects of the ethical life - notably give us the right objects and ends. She argues that it would seem ludicrous to give an account of the ethical life that follows the format 'that our target is to act and feel on neither too many nor too few occasions, about or toward neither too many nor too few things, with respect to neither too many nor too few people, for neither too many nor too few reasons (or "with neither too many nor too few ends")' (Hursthouse, 2006, p98, see also Hursthouse, 1981, p62 for an extensive discussion). This criticism to me seems misguided and thus an important preliminary point of clarification as the literature doesn't always seem very clear on the scope the doctrine of the mean is supposed to cover.

Aristotle states that ‘by virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well.’ (EN 1106b16ff). At its core, I take it, Aristotle envisages the doctrine to apply to affective states of an agent which can be apart from the mean (virtue) one of excess or deficiency. The thought here is quite intuitive, in an affective response a person can either overreact or underreact and thus be mistaken in the intensity of her emotion. This impression seems corroborated by the fact that the examples of virtues Aristotle discusses in EN II.7 seem indeed closely related to affects such as mildness and temperance. In Aristotle’s zeal to tie a particular emotion to a virtue or vice we see him drift even into implausible accounts for example in the analysis of particular injustice which he wants to identify with the single emotion of greed – wanting more than is one’s due (EN 1130324, see Williams, 1980).

Aristotle’s remark that ‘in everything continuous and divisible we can take more, less, and equal’ (EN 1106a26) seems to express that the intensity of the emotion lies on a continuum, a scale of some form, which moves from one state of excess via the mean to the opposed extreme (Bostock, 2000, p38). The doctrine of the mean, however, I take it is not supposed to give a comprehensive account of what righteous action involves. A virtuous person also has to engage in the pertinent deliberations and make the right judgements. This will require an interplay of emotion, perception and cognition which the doctrine of the mean is not supposed to exhaust.

As Aristotle is also eager to distinguish between the mean understood as equidistance and ‘the mean relative to us’, the fundamental insight he is trying to capture by the doctrine is not one

of moderation, a prejudice against the extreme. I think Brown (1997) has provided a very convincing argument that 'the mean relative to us' does not refer to the situation of particular individuals but rather as 'relative to us as human beings, and that Aristotle uses the phrase to convey a normative notion, the notion of something related to human nature, needs or purposes, and which is the object of a certain kind of expertise and judgement.' (ibid, p78). The point on the one hand clarifies that Aristotle doesn't have a simple, universal, arithmetical mean in mind (mean in the object) and on the other hand that the mean is normative for it is determined in terms of what we should do as human beings in light of our nature and sensitive to a particular context – which is determined by reason.

Aristotle thus doesn't seem to claim that the doctrine of the mean is supposed to do all the work but refers to the intensity of agent's affective state. Of course, considerations that involve the mean may again enter our reflections as part of the right deliberative process and judgements – one may think for example that in deciding how much money I should spend on a gift for X it is helpful to know that amount Y would be too much while amount Z would be to spend too little. Yet, not every description or decision procedure that refers to the mean should be considered as part of the doctrine proper. Furthermore, in EN II.9 Aristotle seems to suggest that considerations of the mean as a form of decision procedure apply to earlier stages of development rather than to the virtuous person proper. He uses for example the metaphor of straightening a stick which is done by bending it in the opposite direction (EN 1109b2ff), the point being that if one knows that one is temperamentally more likely to err, say, on the side of caution, it is a good rule of thumb to 'bend the stick in the other direction' and choose what may feel like being slightly too audacious if in doubt. Such advice may be of great practical value but since the virtuous person already possesses a well-balanced character such 'bending' is not required in her case.

It may, however, not have helped that some influential commentators have been all too zealous in applying 'too few' and 'too many' considerations to just about all relevant descriptions even when these formulations are hardly illuminating. Complicating here is that although I think the affective state is primarily with which the doctrine of the mean in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is concerned, it is not to deny that Aristotle sometimes uses the language of the mean in very different contexts.

It should here be kept in mind that the notion of the mean is not an invention of Aristotle's but, as Hursthouse (2006, p96ff) notes, was a prolific model of explanation in antiquity applied to the most varied fields of enquiry such as medicine and astronomy. That Aristotle thus has recourse to the principle in different fields and at times seems to use it almost like a shorthand for 'what is right' consequently can't be surprising. As I will argue later, however, even in this apparently generic sense the language of the mean is not out of place once its essential connection to the perspective of the whole is understood. At its core, thus, *pace* Hursthouse we should not read the doctrine of the mean as a commitment to the 'too few / too many' reasoning that would indeed seem highly distorting.

The centrality of the emotions for Aristotle's account of ethical motivation and formation

Since the emotions are with which the doctrine of the mean is centrally concerned, I shall here initially offer a sketch in very broad brush to attempt to locate their importance and consequently the doctrine of the mean in the wider terrain of Aristotle's project. Correct ethical conduct for Aristotle is not just a matter of performing the right actions but also for these actions to be done in the right way. 'But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done

temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know; secondly, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, thirdly, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state' (EN 1105a28ff).

Aristotle's focus on character, which we might spell out as a stable disposition for correct feelings and actions, is one expression of the importance of the inner constitution of an agent as opposed to just the resultative actions. The reference to 'a firm and unchanging state' shifts the focus to the question what sort of person one is as not every action can be considered equally expressive of one's inner constitution. In this sense Aristotle pays considerable attention to the question of good character and the virtuous person as opposed to the criterion for good action that occupies much of modern moral philosophy.

While the exact relationship between emotion and action Aristotle envisages is not easy to characterise (see Kosman, 1980), emotions seem non-accidentally but defeasibly linked with their characteristic expressions in terms of actions (see Skorupski, 2010, Ch 11 esp. 11.1 for an account of the link between emotions and characteristic expressions and the connection of practical reasons with evaluative reasons). They also have an important role for their cognitive powers expressing assessments carrying motivational force. This motivational force seems to be crucial for what Aristotle has in mind since he understands emotions as mixtures of pleasure and pain (for an account of Aristotle's conception of the emotions see Dow, 2011 / Price, 2010). Pleasure indeed takes an absolutely central role as the following passage makes clear. 'Again, if he stands firm against terrifying situations and enjoys it, or at least does not find it painful, he is brave; but if he finds it painful, he is cowardly. For virtue of character is about pleasures

and pains. For pleasure causes us to do base actions, and pain causes us to abstain from fine ones. That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing — right from early youth, as Plato says - to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is the correct education. Further, virtues are about actions and feelings; but every feeling and every action implies pleasure or pain; hence, for this reason too, virtue is about pleasures and pains.' (EN 1104b6ff).

As the passage makes clear the emotions play a crucial role in moral formation, how someone becomes virtuous (cf. Burnyeat, 1980). Ethical virtues are acquired by habit (NE1103a14ff). For Aristotle one does thus not become virtuous solely by internalising some rules or principles[1], nor is it a matter of intuition or perception of single instances. Indeed, Aristotle repeatedly insists that in the field of ethics no universal rules can be identified. What Aristotle envisages is a gradual development that, as the passage above makes clear, has to be rooted in a good upbringing learning to take pleasure in what is noble and to be pained by what is ignoble. A particular virtue is acquired by performing the pertinent acts – we become just by doing just acts (1103b1) – and in the repeated exercise we become acquainted with the pleasure of the noble and develop a taste for it as it were. Once having matured and developed a reliable taste for the noble the person of good upbringing will seek it in all her actions. This is the sort of person Aristotle envisages as the audience of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, who will be acquainted

[1] Aristotle often insists that there can be no exact rules for the subject matter of ethics in the sense of absolute imperatives that would not admit of exceptions. Rules in the sense of 'rules of thumb' may, however, nevertheless be important. In EN IX.2 Aristotle considers how ties of 'friendship' should be prioritised when they conflict with other requirements – for example should one promote a friend to become a general, if it was in one's power to do so, even if this came at the expense of not promoting someone of superior military aptitude. Aristotle seems to suggest that to know rules of the kind that one has special obligations to one's friends, that the treatment of one's parents should be preferential or that loans should be repaid are indeed important. It would, however, not suffice to rely exclusively on such rules and apply them in an *et pereat mundus* sense. So, while one in general has to pay back a loan one should presumably not do so if the loan-giver was to use the money to finance an attack on the city. The closing comments in EN I.7 may be read in a similar sense where Aristotle attributes great importance to learning the 'first principles' by induction, perception, habituation or some other way, even though these principles will have to remain preliminary or rough up to a point.

and motivated by the noble by familiarity but will probably not yet meet the criterion of knowledge fully.

The mean as a state of harmony

This motivational account is crucial for Aristotle's conception of goodness and as I will argue also indispensable for understanding the core insight the doctrine of the mean expresses. Some of the sharpest criticism of the doctrine is owing to an understanding of it as a mere doctrine of moderation, a *medio tutissimus ibis.* As Urmson notes, a recommendation for moderation as a matter of prudence is compatible with the doctrine, however, neither part of it nor implied (1973, p225). We may for example have reason to avoid strong emotions like extreme anger as Aristotle acknowledges that it could cloud judgement and, in this way, involves a certain risk as it were. 'Anger seems to listen to reason to some extent, but to mishear it, as do hasty servants … so anger by reason of the warmth and hastiness of its nature, though it hears, does not hear an order, and springs to take revenge' (EN 1149a26-31, translation Ross, 2009). This, however, is not to say that strong anger is never legitimate indeed in the face of extreme injustice it may simply be the emotional response required. Someone who would not respond with strong anger to, say, public humiliation would for Aristotle presumably get something profoundly wrong about her sense of self-worth and would have no claim to acting virtuously if she was to put up with it. The mean should thus not be read as a prejudice against the extreme or strong emotions.

The doctrine of mean is thus not a piece of life advice advocating moderation in one's emotions but has, I will argue, an idea of an equilibrium or harmony at its heart. To give it a gloss,

someone who displays medial courage has found an equilibrium adequate to the context of her situation and is thus in a state of harmony between the extremes of the scale – the vices of cowardice and rashness. Again, depending on the situation that equilibrium may lie considerably closer to one or the other extreme such that one can claim to have 'these feelings at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way' (EN 1106b20ff). As Aristotle notes rashness on the battlefield may easily be mistaken for courage (see EN 1116b24ff) since courage in that context lies closer to the overly passionate person than to the coward who runs away. How exactly we are to understand this harmony the doctrine of the mean describes will be a major concern of this paper. However, I first want to develop the importance of harmony as reflected in Aristotle's central notion of the καλόν further and illustrate the continuity to Plato's ethics – which may partly explain why Aristotle, although he clearly considers the doctrine of the mean as crucial and insightful in substance, does not develop this aspect in much breadth when he introduces it.

Plato identifies justice in the Republic book IV as a state of harmony of the soul (for an overview of Plato's Ethics in the Republic see Brown, 2017). Analogously to the justice of the city where the different estates work together according to their place for the proper function of the whole, so in the soul reason, spirit and appetite work together in harmony 'all sing the same song together' (Republic 432a3, all translations Grube & Reeve, 1992). Socrates identifies goodness with unity (cf. Brown, 2017) emphasising that the business of the virtuous person is exactly to create this unity in his soul. In Rep 443d2f we find 'He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale— high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.' A crucial aspect of this unity

is that it looks to the whole which for Plato is the reason why the rational part has to rule for it has the power to create and preserve a harmony of the different parts with the whole in view (cf. 441e).

The harmony of the mean as the καλόν

The good as a harmonious unity seems also what Aristotle has in mind when he formulates the doctrine of the mean. That is to say, Aristotle seems to agree with Plato that harmony is to be found in the perspective of the whole as well as how parts work together again from the perspective of the whole. Further parallels can be found in harmony as an appropriateness or fittingness relative to a particular context. Important here is Aristotle's notion of the καλόν which has somewhat been overlooked in the literature on Aristotle's ethics which pivots on εὐδαιμονία (cf. Crisp, 2014). The καλόν oscillates between a moral and an aesthetic notion. It can be used to express a purely aesthetic judgement of beauty but in the context of actions imports something beyond the mere qualification as good 'the καλόν, in other words, in moral contexts is what is morally praiseworthy or morally admirable' (ibid. p233). Crisp proposes that this may be best captured by a rendering in English as 'nobility', which gives a sense of the admirable while avoiding narrowly aesthetic references. The idea of harmony linked with aesthetic import we find already as one of the first Aristotle presents when he introduces the doctrine of the mean formally in EN II.6. 'This, then, is how each science produces its product well, by concentrating on what is intermediate and making the product conform to that. This, indeed, is why people regularly comment on well-made products that nothing could be added or subtracted; they assume that excess or deficiency ruins a good, but the mean preserves it.' (EN 1106b10ff).

Richardson Lear (2006) presents a very insightful outline of how closely Aristotle's καλόν reflects Plato's priority of the unity of the whole in the noble. Indeed, we find the interdependence of the virtues explicitly affirmed when Aristotle states that one cannot possess one virtue without possessing all the virtues. The intuitive idea here is presumably that someone cannot really exhibit Aristotelian courage, i.e. on the battlefield, if she has not also cultivated for example the virtue of loyalty and knows to distinguish friend and foe. As Pears (1980, p180) notes, courage for Aristotle is also to do with getting the salience of the values involved right (e.g. you should risk your life for the safety of the state but not to retrieve your books from a burning building). It is also helpful to point out that the claim that one cannot possess a single virtue unless one has all the virtues refers to virtue proper while it is of course possible to have one 'natural virtue', i.e. a temperamental suitability, without the other (Gottlieb, 2009, p108).

In Metaphysics XIII.3 we find an account of the καλόν as order (taxis), symmetry (summetria), and definiteness or boundedness (to hōrismenon) (1078a36–b1; cf. EE I.8.1218a21– 3). Richardson Lear interprets these with reference to Aristotle's biological and political writings as essentially teleological notions ordered towards the whole. 'Beauty *qua* order is not a mere formal property, then, a relation of parts *to each other*. It is (or inheres in) an effective teleological arrangement (that is, it aims at its good and succeeds in so aiming)' (Richardson Lear, 2006, p118f, italics as quoted in text). Order she reads as an arrangement towards the good of the whole, proportionality as the concern that the parts are so dimensioned that they work correctly together as a whole. The idea of boundedness finally has the same core, that is to say, that the function poses limits on size akin to the idea that a city state should not exceed a certain size or fall below it in order not to impair its proper working.

Although the point is not very explicit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Richardson Lear also notes that there is a sense of showiness about the noble, that things are not only to be well arranged but also to be visibly so. 'If something is too large, its unity and wholeness will be lost on the people contemplating it; if it is minuscule, they will not be able to see it at all (Poet. 7.1450b38–1451a3). But even when the eye is literally capable of seeing an object, it may still be too small to be beautiful (NE IV.3.1123b7). For it may be difficult to distinguish its different parts, and thus to discern their relationship to each other and to their common good (Lucas 1968, not. ad Poet. 7.1450b38–9). It seems, then, that in order to be beautiful or fine, a thing must not only be ordered with reference to its good, but this arrangement must also be manifest or apparent.' (ibid. p122). I think it is worth mentioning the point in order to be alert to the possibility that the noble for Aristotle may not coincide with Christian ideals of humility and discrete moral decorum. However, it also reinforces the point about the essential connection between nobility, the mean or harmony, and the perspective of the whole.

The idea of visibility or even showiness also links the καλόν with its crucial motivational force which, as noticed above, is presupposed in Aristotle's account of moral development and formation. If we connect the aesthetic import of the καλόν, in a suitably wide sense that is, with Aristotle's claim of the centrality of pleasure for the virtuous life, we can see important implications for Aristotle's account of motivation (cf. Crisp, 2014, see also Richardson Lear, 2006). In the discussion of particular virtues in EN III-V we learn that the virtuous person acts for the sake of the noble. As we read in EN 1104b6ff printed above, the virtuous person enjoys his actions and derives pleasure from them.

There is good reason to think that this is the case since the virtuous person takes pleasure from the awareness of her own nobility, her own admirability, and this indeed for Aristotle seems to be the supreme pleasure in the virtuous life (see also Moss, 2012 Chapter VIII). Illuminating here are Aristotle's virtues of magnificence (IV.2) and magnanimity (IV.3) which seem to be a matter of scale and visibility concerned with grandeur. Aristotle sketches a virtue that seems concerned with the capacity for stateliness or representation, which clearly requires a privileged economic position – although Aristotle is keen to distinguish magnificence, for which good taste is the hallmark, from vulgar showiness. The magnificent person will be very recognisable to his fellow citizens as he is a patron of the arts, lives in a stately house and knows to celebrate important feasts of a representational character like weddings as it befits his status.

In the following chapter IV.3 on magnanimity we find the impression confirmed. The life of the virtuous person is the opposite of that which Dostoyevsky has Father Zosima recommend, that the way to virtue is always to think of oneself as the worst sinner. In fact Aristotle seems to suggest that the virtuous person is thoroughly pleased with himself - 'The magnanimous person, then, seems to be the one who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them' (EN 1123b4f), a passage followed by the unambiguous affirmation that 'Since the magnanimous person is worthy of the greatest things, he is the best person.' (EN1123b26). Magnanimity Aristotle finally describes as a sort of adornment that presupposes the possession of virtue but enlarges them in scale making them even more admirable (EN 1124a1f), which can again be read as a matter of aesthetic import. As Crisp notes, an interesting corollary of this position seems to be that the question 'why be good?' for Aristotle doesn't arise as self-interest properly conceived resulting in the supreme pleasure of the καλόν and the virtuous course of action can't come apart (2014, p242).

What is the substantive insight the doctrine of the mean captures?

Above I have situated the doctrine of the mean as an idea of equilibrium or harmony within Aristotle's ethics outlining its connection to the motivational account rooted in pleasure that is crucial for Aristotle. I have also pointed to the kinship of the concept of harmony at the heart of the doctrine and Aristotle's central notion of the καλόν with its quasi-aesthetic dimension that bridges the judgment of goodness with a more radiant notion of admirability and nobility with clear motivational force. However, as has already been noted, ideas of the mean and harmony were prolific in antiquity and there is a substantial question whether in its application to ethics Aristotle captures substantial ethical insights or rather imports an otherwise vacuous principle.

The doctrine of the mean certainly presents a fundamental tenet for those who find the integration of the emotions into moral philosophy central and lament an overly cognitive account à la Kant. Aristotle unambiguously endorses the centrality of pleasure rejecting ethical projects that would later come to be expressed in stoicism. The doctrine that virtue lies in a mean implies that the correctness of an emotional response is a matter of degree and intensity but that no emotion per se, or neutrally described, is to be categorically rejected.

The centrality of this is again reflected in the position that the virtuous person is distinguished from the enkratic, who for Aristotle clearly falls short of virtue, since she has to fight against the grain, resist her emotions and dominate them to act correctly. In the virtuous person the emotions are so aligned that they do not require a tamer of reason; her whole constitution is wired for the noble. For Aristotle virtue builds on and perfects human nature, desire and

emotion can be perfectly integrated in a human life that has reached the state of perfection. Aristotle thus positions himself firmly against at least one impulse in Plato who finds a 'dangerous, wild, and lawless form of desire in everyone, even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate or measured' (Republic 572b3f) that haunts us in our dreams even if we master it by daylight. In contrast to this intuition, the passage goes on to describe how the person descends into a tyrannical constitution under the influence of erotic love - a true feast for the reader of Freudian sensibilities no doubt - Aristotle envisages, at least as far as human excellence is concerned, a perfect cooperation of nature and virtue.

While in light of this Aristotle sees a great scope for harmony, in the following I wish to argue that tension may nevertheless not be absent from the harmony Aristotle describes in the doctrine of the mean. I shall contrast here McDowell's and Hartmann's respective interpretations of whom the latter seems to have been largely ignored in the anglophone literature. As a final preface, the caveat should be noted that while both McDowell and Hartmann explicitly interpret Aristotle, they both pursue projects that stretch beyond Aristotelian exegesis. My discussion of them, however, will remain limited to the plausibility of their view as an interpretation of the doctrine of the mean as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

McDowell: Harmony as silence

McDowell (1978, 1979, 1980), it seems appropriate to suggest, would argue that the harmony Aristotle describes in the doctrine of the mean should be read as a 'silencing' of contrary reasons. In the case of courage on the battlefield crucially the virtuous person is not balancing

the pleasure of the noble, i.e. putting your life at risk to win the battle for the city, against the pleasure of saving your life – such that the noble wins on balance. Indeed, the balancing of pleasures is characteristic of the enkratic person. The enkratic person feels the force of the pleasure of saving one's life but recognises that one has to stand one's ground in battle and manages to keep her emotions in check.

By contrast, the virtuous person does not feel the pull of the pleasure of saving one's life when facing the risk of death on the battlefield since saving one's life in that particular situation ceases to be a reason for the virtuous person. The virtuous person thus has no distracting emotional forces to master but as a person is wholly oriented towards the noble. This analysis has a very strong interpretative advantage on its side, McDowell suggests, as it renders the difference between the virtuous and the enkratic person, on which Aristotle insists, intelligible in the first place (1979, p334).

So much for McDowell's account. McDowell can argue that the virtuous person does not feel the pull of the pleasure of a prolonged life in bodily integrity for he locates the difference between the virtuous and the enkratic already on the level of perception, that is the sensibility, the way in which the particular choice situation appears to a person. This point for McDowell is fundamental and carries a number of highly significant corollaries. McDowell relies on a reading of Aristotle's famous function argument that is 'neutral' in the sense that it does not attempt to provide a substantive list of values a person should strive to instantiate and maximise from the external standpoint (cf. 1980, p366f). On his reading, the argument works on a more abstract level indicating that once we have a view of what it is 'the business of a human being to do' we also have a sense of what an excellence, or virtue, for such a person would be.

In contrast to the canonical interpretation, on McDowell's reading, Aristotle is not trying to establish human excellence on the grounds of an externally accessible perspective like certain postulates about human nature. The substantive account of virtue, McDowell argues, can only be understood internally, that is once a substantive account of 'what it is a human being's business to do' is assumed. This account of the good life, however, cannot be codified in the language of principles or rules as Aristotle repeatedly insists. Crucially, one thus has to come to share in the perspective of the virtuous person, the person who leads a good life, come to see life as she does, that is, share her perception. This of course gives the *phronesis* of the virtuous person a pivotal role in Aristotle's account. The question why a person should be motivated to act for the noble is not answered by reference to values that can be grasped from an external standpoint. Rather the question of how the person is motivated finds its answer in having a share in a specific perception since 'one cannot share a virtuous person's view of a situation in which it seems to him that virtue requires some action, but see no reason to act in that way.' (1978, p26).

Since virtue is thus yoked with a particular perception, McDowell can interpret Aristotle on the harmony captured by the doctrine of the mean such that 'the thesis is not that the missed chance of pleasure is an admitted loss, compensated for, however, by a counterbalancing again; but, rather, that in the circumstances (viz., circumstances in which the missed pleasure would involve flouting a requirement of excellence) missing the pleasure is no loss at all. (…) To embrace a specific conception of eudaimonia is to see the relevant reasons for acting, on occasions when they coexist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but silencing those other considerations – as bringing it about that, in these circumstances, they are not reasons at all.' (1980, p369f).

On McDowell's account the voice of the pleasures associated with the vices is not aroused at all in the case of the virtuous person as it becomes clear from his analysis of temperance. There is no attraction in the virtuous person to illicit bodily pleasure (self-indulgence) nor presumably, I would add, to the pleasure of insensitivity which could for example be read as the promise of invulnerability: 'The temperate person need be no less prone to enjoy physical pleasure than the next man. In suitable circumstances it will be true that he would enjoy some intemperate action which is available to him. In the absence of a requirement, the prospective enjoyment would constitute a reason for going ahead. But his clear perception of the requirement insulates the prospective enjoyment - of which, for a satisfying conception of the virtue, we should want him to have a vivid appreciation- from engaging his inclinations at all. Here and now, it does not count for him as any reason for acting in that way.' (1978, p27).

This lack of struggle described is achieved by the virtuous person keeping her gaze fixed on the noble, the supreme motivational force of which for Aristotle's account I have already described. Furthermore, McDowell then identifies the state of the mean as a form of serenity (ibid. p27f): 'Genuinely courageous behaviour, on this view, combines a lively awareness of risk, and a normal valuation of life and health (see Nicomachean Ethics III. 9), with a sort of serenity; taking harm to be, by definition, what one has reason to avoid, we can see the serenity as based on the belief, paradoxical in juxtaposition with the valuing of life and health, that no harm can come to one by acting thus.' He then finally notices that 'this view of virtue obviously involves a high degree of idealization; the best we usually encounter is to some degree tainted with continence' (ibid. p28).

Hartmann: Harmony as tension

Hartmann's interpretation of the harmony of the mean (see 2015; Kapitel 48. Aristotelische Tugenden / Kapitel 61. Gegensatzverhältnis und Wertesynthese), at least on the face of it, takes the opposite approach and understands harmony as essentially tension rather than serene silence. This difference, I will argue, is more than a question of phenomenology for on Hartmann's reading of the doctrine of the mean, tension is in fact the core characteristic of what it means to be virtuous. Hartmann's fundamental insight is that the choice situation described by the doctrine of the mean, where virtue lies between two vices, in fact can easily be reformulated. To take again the example of courage - rashness and cowardice, while undeniably vices, also carry a positive side. The voice of cowardice, we could say, registers the value of one's life while the voice of rashness expresses a concern for one's 'virility' for example. Or we might say that the coward, while it is true that she gets it wrong in fact also gets something right in so far as she displays '*kaltblütige Vorsicht'* (cold-blooded caution) and we could credit the rash person with getting something about courage right in her 'wagemutige Kühnheit' (loosely, audaciously embracing risks). This insight leads Hartmann to add a second dimension to Aristotle's account. Virtue, he argues, lies both between two vices, as Aristotle correctly recognised, but importantly also between two values. While Aristotle clearly doesn't express the doctrine of the mean in these terms, Hartmann takes his account to be perfectly consistent with Aristotle, indeed, clarifying and illuminating elements present in his account but not yet fully developed.

In this context the doctrine of the mean captures a very specific and fundamental moral insight. For McDowell the doctrine of the mean seems to provide a cartography of virtue and vice which helps to explain the difference between the virtuous person and the enkratic, which lies

in whether one feels the pull of the voice of the vices at all. Hartmann wants to say that feeling the pull of the 'vices' is in fact essential. The crucial insight for Hartmann expressed in the doctrine of the mean is that virtues always make a double demand on us. Hartmann speaks here of a 'Wertesynthese' (synthesis of value), i.e. the virtue of courage in a certain sense brings together cautious *sang froid* and hot-headed audaciousness. It is important here not to be confused by the nomenclature for the synthesis concerns the value formulation and not the idea that virtue is a mixture of two vices, a matter of right proportion in the blending of two vices, for which Hardie criticises Burnet (see Hardie, 1980, p144ff).

The insight of the mean for Hartmann is indeed substantive and anything but trivial. Every virtue in fact lies in answering two opposite demands of value at the same time. The courageous person answers to both the value of life and the value of virility / chivalry and manages to hold both, judged by the demands of the choice situation, in balance. It seems to me that this reading of the doctrine of the mean as reflecting a dual demand could have profound implications I can but sketch here. On a dualistic account of virtue and vice, where it falls to virtue to correct vice, virtue may easily be understood as a mere rejection of vice. The trinitarian model expressed in the mean, however, demands engagement with both voices as it were – rather than being deaf to one. It is not an idea of purity, a mere abjuring, but a constant holding of paradoxes (if we want to label Hartmann's 'Gegensatzverhältnis', a position of opposition but not contradiction, as such) like *sang froid* and hot-headedness in the case of courage or as Hartmann explains in the case of μεγαλοψυχία between 'Selbstschätzung und Selbstkritik' (both esteem and criticism of the self; On the implication of the difference between a dualistic and trinitarian model see also Gottlieb, 2009, Chapter III).

While Joseph (1934) finds Hartmann's account insightful, he objects that Hartmann's picture is nevertheless dubious. Hartmann portrays the values as *'seinsollend'*[2] in their own right. If Aristotle is interpreted like this, we seem to get a sort of list of values that all make demands on us and want to be instantiated. Plato, however, Joseph argues, having the unity of virtue, that is the perspective of an entire life, as his focus gets the direction of dependence right. Something is valuable because it contributes to a good life; a value only gains force from the perspective of the whole and is not a freestanding claim. The virtuous person has just one overarching demand she is facing, that is to lead a good life, and does not face a plurality of values to which there is tribute to be paid. Consequently, once properly understood Joseph argues, there is no existential tension, dual demand at the heart of ethics but the one demand to lead a life of excellence.

While Joseph credits Plato with this insight and judges that Aristotle obscures rather than clarifies it, I agree with McDowell that Aristotle in fact understood the point very well and is in perfect continuity with Plato regarding the unity of virtue. I will, however, argue that in a way Aristotle tries to hold both directions of dependence such that Hartmann captures the other side as it were rather than being off the mark. But before I turn to this point, I want to draw attention to a further interpretative problem that the comparison between Hartmann and McDowell brings to light.

When Aristotle talks about the virtues, he gives them a surprisingly narrow scope making them far more particularised than ordinary usage suggests. Courage for Aristotle, which has been the illustrating example to guide us, has only death and wounds as the object of fear, is a thoroughly

[2]The adjective is archaic in German, meaning literally translated 'ought to be', i.e. should come into existence

martial virtue. Indeed, Aristotle seems to want to differentiate the virtues as clearly as possible which may speak of his overarching practical ambition in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and a recognition of the context-sensitivity of the virtues. McDowell reflects this impulse well in yoking virtue and perception in such a way that the particular choice situation is clearly the focus.

Aristotle's zeal in differentiating, however, comes at the expense of a sense about how the virtues relate to each other. Plato's courage as a steadfast belief in adversity captures this overarching connection better – a sense in which courage on the battlefield is akin to the courage it takes to speak one's mind, for example, when what one risks is awkwardness and exclusion rather than death and wounds. In some cases, like Aristotle's account of particular injustice, which he ties to the motive of greed in an attempt to clearly individuate it, the differentiation looks exceedingly implausible (see Williams, 1980). Hartmann who has a far more abstract, ontological agenda in trying to map the values and their relations (*Wertreich*) in this respect seems closer to Plato. Yet, it would seem that this division is only superficially neat for the same question reappears with regard to how we are to understand Aristotle's notion of character in the *Nicomachean Ethics.*

There is one sense in which character could be plausibly understood as something like a general emotional repertoire, the potential for affective responses a person finds in herself. If this is how Aristotle uses the notion of character, we indeed seem to face dual demands on the level of personality which are not trivial as, in tune with our martial example, C.S. Lewis' essay on the medieval ideal of chivalry might illuminate. As Lewis throws the medieval ideal into relief, the virtuous person looks in fact profoundly irritating and modern sensibilities might easily be

tempted to rejected it immediately as flagrantly incoherent or ludicrously hypocritical. The knight has to be the meekest and most refined of men, capable of delicate sensibility while the very same person also has to find it in himself to create a bloodbath on the battlefield and go through the lines of the enemy like a berserker. So, in the context of personality, Hartmann's essential tension seems perfectly intelligible.

But if we think of character as a more particularised disposition for action, indexed to a particular choice situation, the dual demand disappears clearly as the knight's brutality is uncalled for in courtly love as are his poetic sensibilities on the battlefield. Now, unfortunately it is not always very clear when Aristotle talks about the mean whether he has a particular response or rather a more general disposition or temperament in mind that is supposed to be well balanced (see Broadie, 1991, p95-102 see also Williams, 1980[3]). This certainly does not make the task of spelling out Aristotle's usage of character easier but in fact the complexity seems much deeper still and well beyond what I can hope to address in this paper.

While in some sense the basic constituents of ethical life like choice, perception, cognition, feeling, habits and life-plans are distinct, Aristotle seems to suggest they are all connected and interacting in important ways. *Prohairesis*, for example, for Aristotle is not just any choice but he holds 'no prohairesis without intelligence and thought, nor without moral character' (EN

[3] Williams notes the problem in the context of Aristotle's proposed analysis of particular injustice as essentially tied to greed. This position is plausible when particular injustice, taking more than is one's due, is discussed on the level of character and tied to the motivation of greed. It is not implausible to say that the sort of person who takes more than her due is typically motivated by greed. As Williams notes, however, it would seem wrong to make the connection with greed an essential criterion for particular acts of injustice as Aristotle proposes. This leads him to the improbable analysis of the kind found in 1137a1f (as quoted in Williams, 1980, p192) 'If [the distributor] judged unjustly with knowledge, he himself gets an unfair share of gratitude or revenge. As much, then, as if he had shared in the plunder, one who judges unjustly for these reasons gets too much'. Clearly, someone may on a particular occasion take more than is her due for a variety of motives, not just greed. The person may for example be lazy and simply can't be bothered to work out what her correct share would be or in the extreme case of a thoroughly wicked person might even find the unfairness itself pleasurable.

1139a33, as quoted in Kosman,1980, see ibid. for an excellent exposition). Similarly, Aristotle seems to suggest that *akrasia* is not a simple reason being overpowered by emotion but rather that emotion alters rationality substantively (see Kraut, 2018). The idea rather seems to be that emotion clouds reason, that thus the faculties interact chemically as it were and do not just run in parallel but with different strengths. The same point we find in EN 1178a16–20 (as cited in Gottlieb, 2009, p105f, see ibid. for an exposition of Aristotle on the unity of the soul) 'Practical wisdom is yoked to virtue of character, and it to practical wisdom, since the starting points of practical wisdom are in accordance with ethical virtues and the correctness of ethics is in accordance with practical wisdom. Being fitted together with the emotions too, the ethical virtues must belong to our composite nature'. The definitive answer what character for Aristotle then is can presumably thus only be given if all these interactions were to be understood.

An existential unity of virtue: the virtuous life as the point of reference

Let us now return to Joseph's criticism that Aristotle fails to capture the unity of the virtues as the perspective of the whole, as the virtuous life *tout court,* and thus is getting the sense of dependence and force of the values wrong. For if this criticism proved substantial, the insight in the doctrine of the mean Hartmann wants to credit Aristotle with that the virtuous life is essentially in tension would itself seem dubious. I have already followed Richardson Lear's argument that in fact Aristotle in his notion of the καλόν stands in continuity with Plato with his concern for the unity of virtue and the insistence on the perspective of the whole. It furthermore seems perfectly justified to read Aristotle not just in continuity with Plato with respect to a conception of unity as teleologically ordered but also, as McDowell does, in

agreement with Plato on the substantive point that the unity or whole is nothing other than the integrality of a life of excellence, the life of the virtuous person.

Evidence for this can be found in the strikingly prominent position in which the virtuous person features in the definition of virtue and is adduced to identify the reason required - 'the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it'. As Martha Nussbaum (1993) argues Aristotle approaches the virtues very much with this holistic and existential perspective in mind, defined by the demands a person will likely encounter in her life, when he discusses individual virtues. 'What he does, in each case, is to isolate a sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and in which more or less any human being will have to make some choices rather than others, and act in some way rather than some other. The introductory chapter enumerating the virtues and vices begins with an enumeration of these spheres (EN II. 7); and each chapter on a virtue in the more detailed account that follows begins with 'Concerning X ... ', or words to this effect, where X names a sphere of life with which all human beings regularly and more or less necessarily have dealings' (p245).

Given the interconnectedness of the virtues, to which I alluded already as a complicating factor, it also does not seem very promising to try to provide a comprehensive theoretical account even of a single choice situation – as the courageous person is not just right about fear and confidence but also has to get everything else right. This point is furthermore reflected in those who have been eager to point out that it is in a way wrong to speak of just two vices associated with a virtue since there are indeed potentially countless ways is which one might fall into vice – as Aristotle affirms 'Moreover, there are many ways to be in error— for badness is proper to the

indeterminate, as the Pythagoreans pictured it, and good to the determinate. But there is only one way to be correct' (NE 1106b30f).

Indeed, the fact that Aristotle addresses even the slightly eccentric questions of whether we should ever call a man happy during his life time and whether we should take into consideration what happens after a person's death in order to determine whether we should call him happy or not (EN I.10-11) could be read as further evidence for the centrality of the whole life and the ability to identify who this virtuous person is that should serve as our point of reference. Finally, in so far as Aristotle thinks that the noble should be visible to others, leaving aside the question how far the virtuous person herself is concerned with her image, the visibility of the noble may express the same concern as it would seem an important characteristic that those who seek to become virtuous can identify the point of reference – and this is of course easier to behold in those who performed historic acts rather than those who rest in unvisited tombs.

The virtuous life – a synthesis of Hartmann and McDowell

The point Joseph brings out thus seems perfectly reconcilable with Aristotle but seems to support McDowell's reading which speaks against Hartmann's interpretation of the doctrine of the mean. I want to argue, however, that McDowell's reading seems to capture only part of what Aristotle has to say about a life of excellence and the role of the emotions. The example of courage is again instructive since Aristotle discusses it at length and because, if Hartmann was right about his account of the mean as tension, one would surely expect the tension to be most pronounced when the very life of the virtuous person is at risk.

As Pears (1980) notes, Aristotle's characterisation of courage is not entirely straightforward. When Aristotle discusses courage in III.7 he first suggests that 'some things are too frightening for a human being to resist; these, then, are frightening for everyone, at least for everyone with any sense.' (1115b8f). He thus adds that 'the brave person is unperturbed, as far as a human being can be' so at least in these instances perfect fearlessness is not what seems required even if what is asked for is indeed courage. We then find the interaction and integration with the affections affirmed - 'Now brave people act because of the fine, and their spirit co-operates with them.' (1117a32). The same point is again made when Aristotle notes that courage is particularly visible in how someone acts when he doesn't have time to deliberate and check his emotions revealing most clearly his state of character (1117a18ff). Finally, having insisted throughout the chapter that the courageous person acts for the noble, Aristotle makes clear that the end of courage is pleasurable but not necessarily the way to achieve it – comparing it with a boxer who takes pleasure from winning the fight but is of course pained by the blows he receives on the way there. So far, the text seems compatible with the serenity (or at least qualified serenity) McDowell associates with courageous action. However, the following passage sits uncomfortably with McDowell's interpretation that 'his clear perception of the requirement insulates the prospective enjoyment-of which, for a satisfying conception of the virtue, we should want him to have a vivid appreciation- from engaging his inclinations at all'.

'The brave person will find death and wounds painful, and suffer them unwillingly, but he will endure them because that is fine or because failure is shameful. Indeed, the truer it is that he has every virtue and the happier he is, the more pain he will feel at the prospect of death. For this sort of person, more than anyone, finds it worthwhile to be alive, and knows he is being deprived of the greatest goods, and this is painful. But he is no less brave for all that; presumably, indeed, he is all the braver, because he chooses what is fine in war at the cost of

all these goods. It is not true, then, in the case of every virtue that its active exercise is pleasant; it is pleasant only insofar as we attain the end.' (EN 1117b8ff)

The recognition that the virtuous person is pained by the prospect of losing his life is in fact highly significant and, I suggest, not a mere slip in Aristotle's purportedly highly idealistic account (cf. McDowell, 1978, p28). Rather what Aristotle seems to envisage is a broader, and I think highly plausible conception, which gives the emotions a wider scope than McDowell suggests. The idea seems to be that an important part of registering, understanding a value is that its weight is felt. The virtuous person feels even more pain, we learn, which registers that his life is extremely valuable. The point comes out by contrast to the vulgar person, who seems to attach less weight to the value of life and thus Aristotle suggests in a way the vulgar mercenary is the more useful soldier as he is prepared to sell his life for a small price (EN 1117b18f).

Thus, the emotion performs a crucial role in what it is to understand a value. What Aristotle describes is what we might call a counterfactual quality of the emotions. The virtuous person of philosophical disposition is pained by the fact that she will not be able to pursue fine contemplation in the company of her refined friends as she might well have done to old age if it wasn't that fate had put the city in peril such that she might perish on the battlefield. The pain expresses *inter alia* that the person has a correct grasp of what is valuable, notably the life of contemplation which he perhaps has to forsake in the circumstances.

McDowell seems to subsume the emotions under perception, which is plausible in so far as our affective response to a situation often can be accounted for in this way. My feeling anger or

grief when seeing an innocent person being attacked in the street is an important part of perceiving the situation correctly, in making sense of it as I should. Yet, Aristotle seems to attribute to the emotions a role beyond this in understanding value. It is of course possible that Aristotle envisaged the counterfactual as a phantasma[4], the virtuous person as it were 'imagines' in some form what her life could have been in grasping the value and perception would thus still be essential.

Yet, McDowell's reading that the emotion is 'insulated' and no inclination aroused doesn't seem to fit in so far as the virtuous person is clearly pained by the loss of some value – which makes him perceive it as a cost he has to pay. It is clearly not the case that Aristotle thinks that the pleasure of a continuation of life is silent since the virtuous person suffers even more and unwillingly (ἄκοντι) from the prospect of losing it. The most natural reading of Aristotle's comment that the virtuous person 'chooses what is fine in war at the cost of all these goods' seems to be that he perceives the goods he is about to lose, or risks to lose, as a cost, indeed very high cost, to pay for the noble sitting uncomfortably with McDowell's reading that they are silent and cease to be reasons in the circumstances.

Furthermore, one may read Aristotle's comment in IX.8 1169a29ff where he suggests that the virtuous person may sometimes not perform the noble act himself but take an 'after you approach' so that his friend may shine even more as problematic for McDowell's reading. The idea seems to be that while it is for example noble to capture the enemy's standard, the virtuous person may also choose to cover his friend's back instead and let him have it even though this

[4] I won't pursue the question how far phantasia is involved in this sort of choice situation; for an account that attributes a very broad role of phantasia and perception to Aristotle's ethics see Moss, 2012.

is certainly less glamourous then carrying the standard away for oneself. Behind the idea of course is Aristotle's proposal in IX.4 to understand the friend as an *alter ego* so that consequently what is good for one's friend is also good for oneself. It seems plausible that Aristotle envisages the course of action in which the virtuous person herself performs the act as indeed something noble and not just silenced even if it may be nobler in some cases to leave the act to be performed by a friend.

It seems to me that McDowell is in some sense correct in stating with respect to reasons that 'on occasions when they coexist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but silencing those other considerations – as bringing it about that, in these circumstances, they are not reasons at all.' (1980, p369f). This, however, seems to capture only one strain in Aristotle. The strain McDowell reflects is the sense in which the virtuous life is responsive and has to answer to the demands of fate. It is this sense we find affirmed in EN 1101a1ff: 'For a truly good and prudent person, we suppose, will bear strokes of fortune suitably, and from his resources at any time will do the finest actions, just as a good general will make the best use of the forces available to him in war, and a good shoemaker will make the finest shoe from the hides given to him, and similarly for all other craftsmen.' The sense is which life to some degree is a matter of coping, achieving the best possible having to accept the circumstances as a given. It is the life in which 'what is fine shines through' (1100b31) yet there is no denying that this life is less than blessed (1100b30) and happiness compromised.

To say, however, that the virtuous person thus takes a view entirely indexed to the circumstances as if she were wearing blinders that spared her from the sense in which her life

is less than perfect, without regret, however, fails to capture, it seems, a second strain, which Hartmann picks up. Aristotle indeed seems to suggest that the virtuous person has a clear sense of values which carry weight regardless of circumstances most clearly when he identifies contemplation as the highest pleasure in book X. The virtuous life comes with a certain program which doesn't dissipate when fortune tampers with it or even renders its fulfilment impossible. Since Aristotle also has this substantive account of the life of excellence, we find Hartmann's reading reflected that certain values make demands on us, which leads to conflict and an ethics of tension. It suffices to mention that for all that is said it may of course be possible that this 'list' of values can only be understood from an internal perspective and not derived on external grounds.

These two strains have led some commentators like Ackrill (1980) to reject Aristotle's account as inconsistent for there seems to be one sense in which the good life is aggregative and another in which a life of contemplation extremely valuable. Yet, this may speak not so much of incoherence than the sense in which the excellent live is striving towards the ideal but in another way responsive and hostage to fate – which opens the possibility of regret. If regret is consequently conceivable, the virtuous person is not just content and fulfilled as long as she does the best possible and avoids shameful action. The question, however, arises how this fits with the supreme pleasure of the noble, on which Aristotle's account of both motivation and formation seems to be built. For given that Aristotle's virtuous person thinks above all that her life should be one of contemplation and being the most divine activity to which we can aspire presents the highest pleasure, one may suspect that the virtuous person should feel compelled to drop arms and rush to her study.

Clearly this isn't what Aristotle claims and there is evidence that he has a rather pronounced and possibly unforgiving idea of 'tainting' in mind. Aristotle explicitly argues that dying in battle is an expression of self-love in EN IX.8 and makes no reference on the level of motivation to altruism - 'This is presumably true of one who dies for others; he does indeed choose something great and fine for himself' (1169a25). One idea may be that since death is unavoidable, a noble death in battle is in fact a privilege since it makes death in itself something fine which would otherwise remain mere organic, carnal extinction. But this on its own wouldn't seem to suffice given the hierarchical superiority of contemplation or the line of thought according to which the person, if she fled and would spend many years of noble achievement, could somehow tip the balance in her favour notwithstanding that fleeing is indeed ignoble.

The idea rather must be that every achievement would be tainted irredeemably by the failure to put one's life on the line once fate has confronted one with the necessity to do so: as the Japanese put it, the scar in the tree widens over time rather than heals. Indeed, we find Aristotle taking the same stance when he discusses the virtue of liberality and insists that only the person who has acquired his means in the right way can ever exhibit the virtue of liberality – that it consists not only in the giving of goods but also in having received them properly (EN 1120a31–1120b4 see Gottlieb, 2009, p107). Presumably thus, the person who acquired wealth in a questionable way but spends decades afterwards in philanthropy could not wash the stain of having received it the wrong way - at least not to the point where she could be said to possess the virtue. If the virtuous person finds himself on the battlefield, death can indeed be said to be the highest pleasure obtainable – partly because death in battle is enormously distinguished and honourable but also because all the alternatives are tainted, their pleasure irredeemably reduced – he chooses to stand his ground 'because that is fine or because failure is shameful'.

The strong distinction McDowell wants to draw between the virtuous person and the enkratic seems to make this form of regret[5] unintelligible if all the contrary reasons are simply silenced already by the very way the virtuous person perceives a situation. Aristotle seems to suggest that contrary reasons are not so much silenced then understood as the price the virtuous person pays in her pursuit of the noble – a point again reinforced by the comparison with boxing where the victorious athlete clearly is no less pained by the blows. It is something distinctly perceived as valuable that is forsaken at a cost of which the virtuous person is aware – most acutely of course if that cost happens to be her very life which is supremely admirable and valuable.

In so far as her life falls short of the ideal by strokes of misfortune, it is not that she just puts up with whatever life throws at her indifferently but rather that she understands that every other course of action but the noble would be tainted and thus unattractive to her. Notwithstanding this, she would be capable of feeling regret as Priam would have felt it being deprived of his kingly grandeur such that after the sack of Troy his decorum lay but in the dignity with which he carried himself, avoiding all that is base, in spite of his misfortune. Similarly, the pull which the enkratic person has to keep in check in order not to run away and know life and limb in safety is not unintelligible to the virtuous person. As Aristotle stresses, of all people the virtuous person is most acutely aware of the value of life. It is rather that it has no force on her since the effects of tainting are so salient to her that she does not have to check her desires by the controlling force of reason - 'At any rate, in the continent person it obeys reason; and in the temperate and the brave person it presumably listens still better to reason, since there it agrees with reason in everything.' (EN 1102b27f). Every fibre of her existence knows that she would

[5] That is of course the sense of regret of having to forsake something valuable and not regretting having done something shameful – which by definition is never the case for the virtuous person.

not get anything out of saving her life – even as her pain testifies to the value of what she gathers in this supremely noble sacrifice.

Conclusions

Hartmann's reading, it seems to me, merits our attention as an interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean and indeed is stimulating beyond the exegesis of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Hartmann's reading of the doctrine of the mean as a juxtaposition of value and vice, which admittedly finds no full formulation in these terms in Aristotle, may have profound implications to which I have already alluded. To recognise the 'positive voice' in the vice seems not only theoretically insightful and more nuanced but to harmonise very well with Aristotle's general outlook in which virtue perfects nature rather than works against it. One may for example think of a child that is outraged when she notices that someone has been cheating in a game. While she would of course be reprimanded for the excess of temper (flying cutlery and so forth), it would seem important that she is told that there is also something valuable in her strong response to injustice that mobilises so much of her energy. The Aristotelean parent would want to recognise this element of value and cultivate this force anxious not to lose it were the correction to fail to reflect this important nuance. Recognising this element of value in vice of course doesn't straightforwardly translate into pardon and excuse; if anything, the rather pronounced account of tainting, I have argued Aristotle holds, in fact may seem quite unforgiving at least once very substantive values are at stake.

McDowell introduces the interesting question of how someone could learn to be virtuous and thus from a necessarily limited experience find the right answers to the countless and

unpredictable choice situations she may face in her life, which is one motivation for him to attribute such a central role to perception – coming to see the world like the virtuous person (cf. McDowell, 1978, p21). I have tried to illustrate with reference to C.S. Lewis' thoughts on chivalry that such a person would also have to be remarkably capable on the level of psychology in a constant holding of paradoxes. The case of courage, facing very consciously the risk of death on the battlefield, has been the illustrating example throughout the text since such a tension may be most pronounced if it involves losing the very substance of life. Yet, as Hartmann's example of the great 'paradoxes' the virtuous person has to unite in herself illustrates – self-esteem and self-criticism, sang-froid and hot-headedness etc. - the virtuous person has to manage a psychological achievement that seems indeed remarkable.

Hartmann puts great emphasis on the risk of a *Tyrannei der Werte* (*tyranny of value),* a one-sidedness, the risk of an absolutism of one value that lacks its balancing opposite. 'In life there is a rigorism of single values. This rigorism can escalate to the point where it reaches fanaticism. Every value - once it holds sway over a person - has the tendency to pose as the tyrant of the entire human ethos at the expense of other values – even those to which it is not materially opposed. This tendency is not due to the nature of the values themselves in their ideal sphere but rather is owing to their domineering force in the human sensibility of value (*Wertgefühl*): a tendency to oust other values from this sensibility' (Hartmann, 2015, p524, my translation). How such a personality capable of bearing such tension could be forged, I submit, adds yet a further intriguing question to moral formation - be it though rather on the level of psychology. It is telling here that Hartmann's interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean has been widely popularised by the German psychologist Friedemann Schulz von Thun as a model of communication and development.

One reason why Hartmann appears somewhat overlooked may be that his ontological programme can sound extremely abstract and, as Joseph notes, even misleading when it appears as if there was an independent realm of values the topography of which Hartmann is set to map. Here the insistence on the one demand of living a life of excellence in concrete circumstances rather than a chorus of values that demand tribute to be paid is helpful. Sometimes Hartmann can seem to be overlooking this point but one may wonder whether the disagreement is indeed substantial or rather due to the abstract, ontological outlook of Hartmann's programme.

As I have argued, the comparison between Hartmann and McDowell is also fruitful in so far as it throws Aristotle's account of human excellence into relief. As I have interpreted Aristotle, he seems to want to capture both positions - excellence in a sense of coping where nobility in adversity shines through and the sense in which excellence presupposes a substantive account of what is valuable and should find a place in life – which opens the possibility of regret as a sentiment of one's life falling short of the ideal. This willingness to hold both senses of excellence might also have made Aristotle hesitant to put his account quite like Hartmann did, which risks underplaying the element of coping and the single demand of living a good life in concrete circumstances. Nagel (1980) has read this as an indeed profound aspect of Aristotle's anthropology, an original tension between animal and the transcendental. Van der Eijk (2005) has argued that Aristotle shows a similar tension in his treatment of the intellect over the corpus – on the one hand as entirely continuous with other animals' cognition and in other places as essentially different, relating to the divine.

It goes without saying that I have not been able to reflect McDowell's in many ways very insightful account. It has to suffice here to underline again how fruitful his insistence on the

integrality of a life of excellence, the virtuous person, has proved for understanding Aristotle's position. I have focused almost exclusively on his account of the silencing of contrary reasons in the virtuous person and its implications for the doctrine of the mean arguing against attributing to Aristotle such a claim in light of the textual material. Indeed, I have argued that the text appears to point at a wider, and it seems to me very plausible, role Aristotle attributes to the emotions in recognising value. The idea that what is noble can come at times at a very high cost is clearly present in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a cost that is not silenced or disqualified but rather deliberately accepted in the pursuit of the noble.

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, which he presents with a great sense of importance and yet leaves much undeveloped, has left many of the ablest commentators on his work over the centuries split between ridicule and admiration. Owing to the body of recent literature that has worked to establish the connection of the doctrine of the mean with ideas of harmony and nobility and so proposed a defence against the unfortunate implications of a reading as a timid doctrine of moderation, I have asked what we are to make of this harmony and what ethical insight it may hold. Building on Hartmann, I have tried to develop a reading of harmony as dynamic and in tension rather than static and silent translating into insights in ethics and moral psychology that hopes to contribute to dispelling the air of triviality or even suspicions of smoke and mirrors that may easily render the notion suspect.

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