

Vice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

Karen Margrethe Nielsen
Somerville College, University of Oxford,
Oxford OX2 6HD. UK
karen.nielsen@some.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper aims to articulate Aristotle's general account of vice, an account that applies to all special vices, regardless of their spheres of action and emotion, and whether they are states of excess or deficiency. Vice is ignorance in the decision (ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια): the paper explains what this means.

Keywords

Aristotle; vice; ignorance; decision; principle; virtue

It is often noted that Aristotle's remarks about vice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* seem unsystematic and unlikely to add up to a unified picture. Scholars have seen incongruities between (1) the analysis of vice as in accordance with decision (κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν) in *EN* 7 (1150a19-23; b29; 1151a5-7) and the consequent claim that vicious men do not suffer regrets (1150a22; b30-1), and (2) Aristotle's portrayal of the vicious as psychologically conflicted and plagued by regrets in *EN* 9.4 (1166b26). Are the vicious conflicted, as 9.4 suggests, or does the rational part of their souls decide to satisfy the desires of their non-rational part? Aristotle's claims seem contradictory.¹ In both Book 7 and 9.4, Aristotle appears to treat intemperance (ἀκολασία) as a vice *par excellence*.² But it is not clear whether the analyses of vice in 7 and 9.4 generalize to cover all vices of excess and, even more, whether Aristotle's observations about intemperance carry over to vices of *deficiency*. So even supposing that we can construct a unified picture of *EN* 7 and *EN* 9.4, we are still left to puzzle over how Aristotle's seemingly disparate remarks about vice in 7 and 9.4 relate to his remarks about specific vices of character in *EN* 3.6-12, 4, and 5. Do all of Aristotle's remarks apply to flawed characters such as the wasteful, ostentatious, or vain man? And how can we square the psychological profile of the vicious man in 9.4 with Aristotle's description of the quarrelsome or ill-tempered person, the pusillanimous man, or the boor?³

Even if we allow that each of these vices has its distinctive sphere of action and passion, a ‘*peri ho*’, as it has been called,⁴ we may balk at describing all vicious men as ‘distressed at being *restrained*’ (9.4, 1166b22, my emphasis)⁵, as if the emotions involved in each vice mirror the intensity of appetite that needs to be kept in check. That obviously cannot be true of insensitivity (ἀναισθησία), the deficient appreciation of food, drink and sex, however rare Aristotle thinks that condition is (EN 3.11, 1119a7-8; 7.9, 1151b24-33). And, in general, it seems a poor fit for other deficient states, or even for some excesses that are due to what Hume would call the ‘calm passions’. Not every vicious person is inflamed in the manner of a Dominique Strauss-Kahn – clawing at chamber maids, and getting themselves into all kinds of trouble on account of the strength and vehemence of their non-rational desires. Insensitive, cantankerous, or pusillanimous men seem rather to have *too little* of the relevant emotions and concerns and would, if anything, need *less* restraint to hit the mean. Not every vice is due to lack of restraint (literally, ἀκολασία).

Indeed it would be peculiar if Aristotle abandoned his central insight about vice in Books 2 and 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – as a departure from the mean in *either* direction – when he returned to the vicious person in later books, exchanging it for a view on which vice is caused, at root, by πλεονεξία. Any account of Aristotle’s theory of vice that fails to fit all of the special vices will be obviously flawed. It is therefore striking that the literature on Aristotelian vice has been almost exclusively concerned with bringing EN 7 and 9.4 into line, at the expense of considering how these passages relate to Aristotle’s discussion of virtue and vice in Books 2-5. This approach fails to do justice to what is new in Aristotle’s analysis of virtue and vice, namely his account of virtue as a *mean*, and of vice as a state of excess or deficiency.⁶

By failing to relate Aristotle’s remarks in later books to his analysis of virtue and vice in general, readers have missed the larger picture. Features that are specific to *pleonectic* vices are ascribed to vice as such. This confusion is understandable, given Aristotle’s penchant for using the same term to refer both to the genus and the species. As Thomas Brickhouse notes, Aristotle refers to intemperance by using generic labels like μοχθηρία, φαυλότης, κακία and πονηρία in several places (EN 6.5, 1140b19; 7.6, 1150a5; 7.8, 1150b29-35; 7.8, 1151a19-28; 7.14, 1154b28-31; and 9.4, 1166b13-14).⁷ Perhaps understandably, then, readers have taken this as a reason to treat what is in fact an analysis of intemperance in 9.4 as an account of vice in general. This is not to deny that Aristotle treats intemperance as a particularly important vice. In this respect, he is Plato’s student. Even so, the fact that Aristotle uses terms like μοχθηρία, φαυλότης, κακία and πονηρία in a specific sense, as equivalent to intemperance, does not mean that the specific features he ascribes to ἀκολασία carry over to vice in general. What exactly vice in general is on Aristotle’s account is not immediately obvious, however, as his account

emerges mainly as a long shadow cast by his analysis of virtue of character in the first books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And so we need to systematize his remarks to extract an account. After considering the relationship between Books 7 and 9.4, I will turn to this task, and defend an account of vice in general that explains why Aristotle would call vice ‘ignorance in the decision’ (ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια, *EN* 3.1, 1110b31).

Aristotle’s Aims in *EN* 7 and 9

Critics have discerned a Platonizing tendency in Aristotle’s discussion in 9.4,⁸ and it is no doubt true that the analysis fits Plato’s diagnosis of vice as due to unrestrained appetite better than Aristotle’s own analysis in Books 2 and 3. Indeed, Aristotle’s image of the intemperate man being torn to pieces by his conflicting desires invokes Plato’s description of the tyrant’s soul in *Republic* 9, whereas Plato’s image of the democratic man, carried now this way and now that in the pursuit of pleasure, has echoes in Aristotle’s description of ‘the many’ as living base lives, like cattle.⁹ And so we may conclude that Aristotle accepts Plato’s analysis of vice.

There are, however, internal reasons why Aristotle would focus on pleonectic vices when he discusses the vicious man in later books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Whereas Books 2 and 3 develop his own account of virtue and vice, the arguments in 7 and 9 are mainly dialectical, targeting widespread conceptions of friendship and self-love. In 9.4, Aristotle examines friendship as the mirror-image of rational self-love, a project that culminates in the famous discussion of rational self-love as self-love properly speaking in 9.8. Aristotle here observes that those who blame self-love do so because they think of the self-lover as someone who ‘gratifies his appetites’ and ‘overreaches for the sake of money, honor and bodily pleasures’ (1168b18-20). In responding to these people, Aristotle adopts their conception of self-love and hence of vice for the sake of argument, but denies that the self properly speaking (μάλιστα) is to be identified with the non-rational part that has appetites.

In the same way, Aristotle’s discussion of ἀκρασία in Book 7 is shaped as a dialectical examination of Socrates’ denial of the possibility of ἀκρασία in the *Protagoras*. Aristotle quotes the *Protagoras* verbatim, and positions his own, more nuanced, view relative to it. Since Aristotle can only explain how ἀκρασία differs from vice by contrasting it with its associated vice, and since he thinks ἀκρασία is about the same emotions and actions as temperance and intemperance, he needs to determine how ἀκρασία differs from intemperance. ‘Vice’ subsequently becomes shorthand for intemperance. Aristotle defines ἀκρασία ‘simply speaking’ (ἀπλῶς) (7.4, 1148b10-11) as the condition that makes people abandon their correct decision (προαίρεσις) on account of excessive or base appetites (in contrast with ἀκρασία with a qualification, e.g. about anger or other emotions), and so for the purposes of this argument, vice

‘simply speaking’ will be the same as intemperance. Aristotle explains that the intemperate man ‘pursues excesses of pleasant things because they are excesses and because he decides on it, for themselves and not for some further result’ (ἢ καθ’ ὑπερβολὰς καὶ διὰ προαίρεσιν, δι’ αὐτὰς καὶ μηδὲν δι’ ἕτερον ἀποβαῖνον, ἀκόλαστος).¹⁰ And so it seems that intemperance as Aristotle conceives of it is a vice that makes us pursue excessive pleasures *on principle*, because we take this to be good, and not for any other reason. This is a striking description in its own right, given what it suggests about the motives of the intemperate man. I will return to it.¹¹ At this point, however, I simply wish to note that Aristotle’s penchant for equating intemperance and vice can be seen as a direct consequence of his efforts in Book 7 to position ἀκρασία relative to virtue, continence and vice, and his conviction that ἀκρασία simply speaking concerns the pleasures of touch and taste. It is therefore unsurprising that vice as it is described in this and subsequent books of the *EN* fits intemperance better than any other virtue. The ‘Platonizing’ tendency of 9.4 and, perhaps to a lesser extent, of 7, is thus born of Aristotle’s dialectical aims, as well as his Platonic understanding of intemperance in particular.

Psychological Unity and Disunity

The image of the vicious man as principled remains constant throughout the *Ethics* (3.11, 1119a1-6; 7.7, 1150a19-22; 9.4, 1166b7-10). Indeed, it is needed for Aristotle’s taxonomy.¹² As is well known, Aristotle in Book 7 classifies the virtuous, enkratic, akratic and vicious agents according to the quality of their decision (προαίρεσις) and the degree to which their non-rational desires reject the actions that reason enjoins them to do. The virtuous agent makes the right decision and stands by it, and does not have excessive or base desires for sensuous pleasure. Thus, he does not have any element in him ‘clashing and struggling with reason’ (ὃ μάχεται καὶ ἀντιτείνει τῷ λόγῳ, 1.13, 1102b17-18). The enkratic makes the right decision and abides by it, despite having excessive or base appetites, and so he suffers from a conflict of desire before he acts, but reason holds sway. The akratic makes the right decision, but abandons it due to appetite. When he realizes what he has done, he regrets the act. Like the virtuous agent, the vicious agent in 7 is said to act in accordance with his decision and not to regret his act after the fact (see also *EN* 1.13, 1102b ff. and 3.2. 1111b14-19), and so one might infer that he is his own friend.

It is this taxonomy that comes under pressure in 9.4, and that has led some critics, like Grant, Gauthier and Jolif, and Annas to accuse Aristotle of contradicting himself. In 9.4 Aristotle describes the vicious agent as at the mercy of his appetites, though here, unlike in 7, Aristotle he claims that he experiences internal conflict. For base people (φαύλοι) (*EN* 9.4 1166b7-23):

are at odds with themselves (διαφέρονται ἑαυτοῖς) and have an appetite for one thing (ἐτέρων μὲν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν) and a wish for another (ἄλλα δὲ βούλονται), as incontinent people do. For they do not choose things that seem to be good for them, but instead choose pleasant things that are actually harmful (αἰροῦνται γὰρ ἀντὶ τῶν δοκούντων ἑαυτοῖς ἀγαθῶν εἶναι τὰ ἡδέα βλαβερὰ ὄντα); and cowardice and laziness causes others to shrink from doing what they think is best for themselves (ἃ οἶονται ἑαυτοῖς βέλτιστα εἶναι). And those who have done many terrible actions hate and shun life because of their vice, and destroy themselves . . . Hence such a person does not share his own enjoyments and distresses. For his soul is in conflict (στασιάζει γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡ ψυχὴ), and because he is vicious one part is distressed at being restrained, and another is pleased [by the intended action]; and so each part pulls (ἔλκει) in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart.

One reason to treat 9.4 as incompatible with 7 is its emphasis on the psychological conflict suffered by the vicious.¹³ Aristotle's depiction of the vicious as internally divided and 'not sharing his own enjoyments and distresses', and as 'having a desire for one thing and a wish for another, as incontinent people do' initially seems to directly contradict the psychologically unified ἀκόλαστος from Book 7. However, if this is a contradiction, it is a contradiction in Aristotle's account of ἀκολασία rather than vice in general. Irwin, Brickhouse, Broadie and Rowe, and Müller all propose ways of aligning the claims in 10.4 with Aristotle's claims about vice and ἀκρασία in Book 7. If the vicious experience regret and conflicts of motivation, should we treat the description in 7 as provisional and conclude that, in the final analysis, Aristotle thinks the vicious suffer particularly bad versions of the regrets and pains that plague the ἀκρατής? And if so, is the difference between the ἀκρατής and the vicious a matter of degree rather than kind? I will argue that 7 does not in fact commit Aristotle to the view that the intemperate do not experience pain or regrets of any sort; all that is required for Aristotle's taxonomy is that, if they regret acting as they do, this is not because they recognize a conflict between the acts that they actually do and the acts recommended by their rational principles. Nothing Aristotle says precludes other types of pain and regret, for instance pain or regret stemming from their pursuit of bad ends. Aristotle can therefore allow that the ἀκόλαστος acts on principle, and in accordance with his προαίρεσις, and that, unlike the akratic, he does not perceive a conflict between what he thinks he ought to do and what he actually does, while still leaving room for plenty of bad emotions and conflicted feelings in his soul. Nothing Aristotle says in 7 indicates that the vicious experience the happy, *global* harmony between reason and

passion that Aristotle takes to be a hallmark of virtue. Consequently, Aristotle can uphold the distinction between vice and temperance that he drew up in Book 7 while still maintaining that the lives of vicious agents are rife with pain and regret, only not the kind of regret that akratics feel when they regain their knowledge.

How, then, should we interpret Aristotle remarks about unrestrained vice in 9.4? I believe the best way of interpreting Aristotle's remarks is to read them in the context of Aristotle's discussion of intemperance in Book 3. Aristotle here suggests that the unrestrained man will end up disappointed even if he gets what he desires. For as Aristotle emphasizes, if the appetitive part is not obedient and subordinate to reason by observing due measure in its pursuits, the agent's desire for the pleasant will be 'insatiable' and will seek 'indiscriminate satisfaction' (4.12, 1119b4-5). Furthermore, the 'active exercise of appetite increases appetite he already had from birth', and so his desire will be insatiable (b7-8). By giving license to his non-rational part, so that his appetites grow large and intense, the ἀκόλαστος may end up 'dethroning' his rational part altogether, so that it ends up literally enslaved to the passions. Rational calculation is 'expelled' (καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν ἐκκρούουσιν, b10).¹⁴ The libertine who initially adopts Callicles' maxim 'I will allow my appetites to grow as large as possible and not restrain them (ὥς μεγίστας εἶναι καὶ μὴ κολάζειν)' (*Gorgias* 491e) will eventually find himself frustrated: his appetites keep growing, and so what seemed sufficient yesterday will no longer sate him tomorrow. If he is not careful, he may end up with a bestial state. Even if he deliberates to ensure that he maximizes the amount of pleasure he enjoys in his life as a whole, correcting for distortions of perspective and making what seem like the right trade-offs between pleasures and pains, the sense of control is illusory for, since he simultaneously allows his appetites to grow large and strong, demand will always outstrip supply. By indulging, he will experience diminishing returns. His enjoyment adapts as his desires grow. Varying the sources of pleasure only keeps inevitable disappointment at bay. What starts as a principled attempt to enlarge one's appetites as much as possible thus ends up with appetites that can never be sated by any provision, however large or refined. The intemperate agent's principled pursuit of unlimited pleasure is thereby bound to disappoint. What seems good to the intemperate man is the maximal satisfaction of maximal desires. But following this 'maxi-max' plan yields minimal returns. The more he reaches the first-order objects of pursuit, the less he achieves the object of his wish (βούλησις). Thus, what he wants he cannot get, and the increasingly desperate pursuit of satisfaction will lead him to do acts that make him feel ashamed – presumably because there are limits even to the intemperate man's shamelessness – witness Thrasymachus' blushing in *Republic* 350d.¹⁵

When he realizes that restraining appetite is the only way to get what he wants, it is too late. Therefore, neither average base people, like the many, who at some level or at some point approve of themselves and think they are decent, nor those whom Aristotle calls ‘utterly base people’ (κομιδῇ φαῦλοι, 1166b5), who have a harder time maintaining the illusion, are psychologically unified, for what they want is not what they get when they pursue pleasant things that are actually harmful. Whether this realization only occurs at some time after action – as Aristotle goes on to suggest when he notes that even if they ‘cannot be distressed and pleased at the same time, still he is soon distressed because he was pleased, and wishes these things had not become pleasant to him’ – or whether the conflict is rather apparent right under the surface all the way through action, Aristotle here insists that vice leads to regret, for ‘base people are full of regret’ (1166b25-6).

This is not the kind of regret that the ἀκρατής experiences, however, for the ἀκρατής regrets the action that he has done since he has the right principle. The content of his προαίρεσις, if not its strength, is right. Therefore, the akratic has what we may call ‘a moral hangover’ when he recovers from his temporary inattention to his own principles. The intemperate vicious man is not unaware of his own principles as he acts; initially, his regret is not moral regret, but rather a kind of frustration or ennui. It is only when he is driven to pursue more and more extreme sources of pleasure to experience the same ‘kick’ or intensity of pleasure that he starts enjoying actions that even the intemperate think are beyond the pale morally speaking.¹⁶ And this may lead him to curse the appetites that drive him on and on, however much he has cultivated them deliberately, and however much he thinks they ought to be satisfied. The nature of the principle adopted by the intemperate man, coupled with the boundless nature of sensuous desire, means that his appetite will never be sated. In this regard, Aristotle’s image of appetite is Platonic – it’s simply the nature of appetite to want more and more and to never be fully sated. The intemperate person, who lacks restraint, will therefore want one thing (the maximal satisfaction of his desires) and get frustration, since his desires will grow, and will lead him to pursue pleasure in ways that strike him as shameful and base. When he realizes what he has become, it is too late, and reason will fight an uphill battle to try to keep appetites in check.

This analysis, we may think, still does not fully explain how the intemperate person’s appetite conflicts with his wish. Even if the intemperate agent fails to get what he wants, this does not by itself show that his appetite and wish are for different objects. Why should he be torn apart by a conflict between a part that is pained at being restrained and a part that is pleased at the intended action? We can understand Aristotle’s claims if we recall that wish, as Aristotle describes it, necessarily involves a view of the fine. The intemperate person views the

maximization of pleasure as a fine end for, as Aristotle says: ‘each state of character has its own distinctive [view of] what is fine and pleasant’ (*EN* 3.4, 1113b1). The intemperate man’s distinctive view recommends the principled pursuit of pleasure to him *as fine*, and not simply as pleasant. But as he soon realizes, there is nothing fine about the *actual* sources of pleasure that he in the end pursues. And so a painful gap appears between the ideal to which he aspires and the life that he actually leads. Wanting Calliclean freedom, he instead ends up as the despicable stone curlew (χαπαδριός, *Gorgias* 494b).¹⁷ When he tries to restrain his shameful desires, he simply cannot, for he has cultivated unrestraint in his rational and non-rational parts. The rational part is pained by being restrained, because it has adopted a Calliclean maxim, while the appetitive part drives him toward an act that is very far from the fine, even by his own admission.

Irwin and Brickhouse’s Harmonizing Interpretations

Readers who try to ease the apparent tension between 7 and 9.4 have proposed different ways of making sense of Aristotle’s remarks in 9.4. Irwin suggests that the vicious experience conflict because they do not value their actions as fine; their only value consists in securing pleasure and benefit. When that objective is not met, they regret their actions and wish they had not done them. By contrast, the virtuous think their acts have value even when they fail to secure the external aim.¹⁸

Irwin’s explanation of the psychological conflict has a desirable level of generality: on his interpretation, Aristotle’s point applies to more vices than temperance. It is not obvious that it fits every vice equally well, however. The ostentatious man may seem *excessively* concerned with fine action, to the point where he overspends on public goods, though his notion of the fine is warped. The same could be said for a rash soldier, who may think of glory as fine, and that it is worth taking great risks in the pursuit of victory, even when a brave man would call him foolhardy. I have already noted that Aristotle thinks that ‘each state of character has its own distinctive [view of] what is fine and pleasant’. The excellent person is far superior ‘because he sees what is true in each case, being himself a sort of standard and measure’ (*EN* 3.4, 1113a32-b3), not because he, unlike others, cares about the fine. It is furthermore not obvious how the vicious would be ‘torn to pieces’ on Irwin’s reconstruction of Aristotle’s argument in 9.4. As we have seen, Aristotle thinks that ‘his soul is in conflict (στασιάζει γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡ ψυχή), and because he is vicious one part is distressed at being restrained, and another is pleased [by the intended action]; and so each part pulls (ἔλκει) in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart’ (1166b19-22). But retrospective regret at acts that did not turn out the way you wanted will not explain why your soul is torn apart before or during the action. I therefore

think it is wrong to seek the answer to the question about the source of vicious regret in a point about vice and success – the difference between the virtuous and the vicious is not that the former, but not the latter, can value their own acts even when they fail to secure their external objective, for vicious agents, no less than virtuous ones, can be concerned (albeit confusedly) with the fine.

Brickhouse's account seems better suited to make sense of these claims, for he maintains that the mental conflict Aristotle has in mind is due to the fact that the libertine or glutton who pursues sensuous gratification on principle will sometimes have reason to postpone gratification or to forgo pleasures now for the sake of greater enjoyment later. His pursuit of pleasure is governed by reason, and is not willy-nilly, insofar as he thinks he ought to maximize pleasure in his life as a whole, and engages in deliberation to secure the maximal satisfaction of his desires. In this respect, the completely vicious man differs from the one who merely lapses into indulgence. However, argues Brickhouse, once the intemperate man's appetites have grown large and strong (μεγάλοι καὶ σφοδραί, 3.12, 1119b10), they drive out reason by overpowering his rational plan for the orderly satisfaction of his desires. Writes Brickhouse (000 pp. 19 and 21):

Anyone who makes a practice of choosing activities that make his appetites great and strong is bound to experience discord as his appetites rise up and, ignoring reason's wish that all pleasures be good pleasures, demand satisfaction regardless of the consequences. .

. .

The vicious regret what they have done only when they have been overpowered by appetite and act contrary to what they think is in their interest. We would see this, for example, when the libertine, driven by his appetite for illicit sexual pleasure, takes what he himself sees as unacceptably dangerous risks, or when the glutton knowingly ruins his appetite for a sumptuous feast about to be served because he cannot help indulging in too many hors d'oeuvres.

My interpretation of 9.4 agrees with Brickhouse's in seeing the source of the problem in the principle that the intemperate adopt. However, I hold that since it is part of the inherent nature of appetites to be boundless and to be strengthened by repeated indulgence, as Brickhouse correctly underlines, the elusive object of desire, namely satisfaction, will inevitably escape the intemperate. By indulging, he necessarily ensures that he will be on the hedonic treadmill, which will ultimately lead him to seek out pleasures that even he deems unacceptable. It is in this light, rather than in light of the intemperate man's tendency to abandon his orderly

plan for the satisfaction of his desires, that we should read Aristotle's claim that vicious men 'shun themselves' and 'seek others to pass their days with'. When they are by themselves, they 'remember many disagreeable actions', says Aristotle, and 'anticipate others in the future', but they 'manage to forget these when they are in other people's company' (*EN* 9.4, 1166b15-19). It would be strange if the vicious fled from themselves and 'destroyed themselves' simply because they were unable to stick with an orderly plan for the satisfaction of their desires. Here, the appropriate reactive attitude would be frustration with oneself for lacking the cleverness required to get the most enjoyment out of life. When the libertine regrets having taken excessive risks to enjoy an illicit encounter, or when the glutton laments having indulged in one hors d'oeuvre too many before dinner, he does not think that there is anything intrinsically wrong about these acts – taking risk or eating hors d'oeuvres – but rather that it was the wrong thing to do under the circumstances, given his overall goal. It seems more plausible to suppose that utterly base people are in fact horrified by the lengths to which they will go to satisfy their own desires, whether these pursuits are inimical to an orderly overall plan or not. They are horrified, for instance, and shun themselves, when they realize that their pursuit of sex has led them to sleep with underage prostitutes, or when they find themselves shooting up in a crack house in New York, despite their aristocratic bearings, like Patrick Melrose, the protagonist of Edward St Aubyn's *Bad News*. Or they recoil in horror when they see their own reflection in a mirror after eating and purging or drinking and getting sick. All the while, they still cling to the view that the happy life consists in letting their desires have their fill.

Vice in General: *EN* 2 and 3

On the interpretation of 9.4 that I have proposed, the inner conflicts experienced by the vicious agent as he is here described are specific to intemperance, insofar as appetitive desires by nature gain vehemence and strength when they are indulged. Though Aristotle thinks of all desires and emotions as malleable and amenable to habituation in some way, he does not attribute the same features to all kinds of desires and emotions, and so we should not expect vices that are not caused by excessive or base appetites to yield a similar psychological profile. This means that we must look elsewhere for an account of vice that fits all the vices and deficiencies that Aristotle introduces in his chart at the end of Book 2 and in the subsequent treatments in Books 3, 4 and 5.

I believe we can get a closer to an understanding of Aristotle's general account of vice if we start from Aristotle's claim in Book 2 that virtues are 'decisions of some kind, or rather require decision' (αἱ δ' ἀρεταὶ προαιρέσεις τινὲς ἢ οὐκ ἄνευ προαιρέσεως, *EN* 2.5, 1106a4-5). Aristotle here distinguishes states that are merely emotional and behavioral dispositions –

tendencies to experience feelings and to act in certain ways – from states that reveal the agent’s conception of the good, expressed in his προαίρεσις. That is why he demands that feelings reflect the agent’s decision to express his state of character. As he puts it in *EN* 2.5, ‘neither virtues nor vices are feelings’. We are praised or blamed, not for *having* feelings, but rather if we are well or badly off with regard to feelings: ‘for we do not praise the angry or frightened person, and do not blame the person who is simply angry, but only the person who is angry in a particular way. We are praised or blamed, however, insofar as we have virtues or vices. Further, we are angry or afraid without decision; but the virtues are decisions of some kind or rather require decision’ (*EN* 2.5, 1105b33-6a5).

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle makes explicit what we can infer from his analysis of virtue in the *EN*, namely that the vices, too, are states that decide, for there are some ways of hitting the mean with respect to emotions that fall short of being virtuous, and similarly some ways of failing to hit the mean that fall short of vice: ‘Though all these mean points are praiseworthy, they are not virtues, nor are their opposites vices, since they do not involve decision (προαίρεσις)’ (*EE* 3.7, 1234a24-5).

This means that any account of Aristotle’s theory of vice that makes the vicious agent a mere ‘mass of conflicts’ (Annas, 1977 p. 554), or ‘unprincipled’ in the sense that he lacks an overarching προαίρεσις, articulating his notion of the good and his deliberative belief about how to promote it (Müller, ‘Aristotle on Vice’ [n. 1 above]), will fail to meet criteria that Aristotle explicitly endorses. The agent’s προαίρεσις, I have argued elsewhere, encapsulates his choice of end (articulated in his practical wish) as well as the actions that he thinks should be done for the sake of this end (the προ- in προαίρεσις is thus equivalent to πρὸς, and teleological rather than temporal or preferential in meaning).¹⁹ Insofar as the ἀρχή of the vicious agent in ‘corrupted’ (*EN* 7.8, 1151a15; 6.5, 1140b19-20: ἔστι γὰρ ἡ κακία φθαρτικὴ ἀρχή), he does not pursue the good, which is what is the object of βούλησις simply speaking (ἀπλῶς, 3.4, 1113a23-7). Instead, he pursues things that strike him as good but that are not. The vicious person’s principle is corrupted, then, not insofar as he lacks a principle altogether, and is entirely unprincipled (as Müller has urged), but instead insofar as habituation has perverted his natural end. For Aristotle, as for the Stoics, a false conception of the good is the result of deficient or wrong habituation – if we are not corrupted, then we will pursue our own good by nature.²⁰

This also explains why Aristotle speaks of ignorance of the good in Book 3 as ‘ignorance in the decision’ (ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια, 3.1, 1110b31), for the agent’s decision encapsulates his conception of the end, insofar as what is chosen is chosen for its sake, so that if the conception of the end (i.e. what is beneficial) is false, the decision will also in some sense be ‘ignorant’ of the end that is the natural and proper object of wish – namely the good itself. Vice

makes us miss the target, not because we are mistaken about matters of fact (who is acting, what he is doing, about what or to what he is doing it, what he is doing it with, what the result will be, and how he is doing it, *EN* 3.1, 1111a3-7), which Aristotle calls the ‘particulars’ of the act, but rather because the target is itself wrong: we are mistaken about what *end* we should pursue (*EN* 3.5, 1110b28-1111a3). This condition can be described interchangeably as ‘ignorance about the universal’ and ‘ignorance in the decision’ (ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια). In contrast to Socrates, Aristotle thinks it is blameworthy, since the agent has replaced good ends with bad, and so has allowed himself to be corrupted. As he says, ‘Every vicious person is ignorant of the actions he must do and avoid, and this sort of error makes people unjust, and in general bad’ (1110b29-30).²¹

Aristotle’s definition of vice in *EN* 3.1 appears in the context of his discussion of the voluntary, and his refutation of Socrates’ asymmetry thesis about responsibility: the view that while virtue is voluntary, vice is involuntary. One might initially wonder whether the omission of an extended discussion of vice in Book 2 is by design rather than by accident. Perhaps Aristotle omits to give a general account of vice in the course of elaborating the doctrine of the mean because he thinks that vice is not some one disposition, but rather a grab-bag of variegated flaws. Seeking a unified account of vice would run counter to Aristotle’s warning that, while there is only one way to hit the mean, there are many ways to go wrong, and so many ways of failing to be virtuous.²² However, Aristotle’s relative neglect of vice is understandable: his aim in Book 2 is to fill in his definition of the best life as a life of virtuous activity.

We can furthermore articulate a fuller conception of vice on Aristotle’s behalf by considering his remarks in *EN* 3.1-5 in the context of the discussion of virtue of character in *EN* 2.4. Aristotle here clarifies his account of virtue and habituation in response to an objection, and highlights what it takes to be a virtuous agent. The objection he considers is this: if doing just actions is what it is to be a just person, then I will already possess justice in virtue of behaving in a certain way, and similarly for vicious acts and the trait of vice. In that case, Aristotle’s theory of habituation has no explanatory power, for explanandum and explanans would coincide. Aristotle responds by distinguishing between the character of the act and the state of the agent when he does it (*EN* 2.4, 1105a29-35):

For acts 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 [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them and decide on them for themselves; and third, he must do them from a firm and unchanging state.

This yields three criteria for acting virtuously:

1. The *knowledge* criterion (the agent must know that his acts are virtuous).
2. The *decision* criterion (he must (i) decide on virtuous acts and (ii) decide on them for themselves).
3. The *state* criterion (he must do so from a firm and unchanging state).

We are now in position to see that these conditions have counterparts for vicious agents. The vicious agent is vicious since he has a false conception of the end he should be aiming at (3.1, 1110b34). There can be no such a thing as ‘clear-eyed’ vice on Aristotle’s score – knowing that one’s ends are bad and nevertheless pursuing them. Vicious agents have a false supposition about the end, and this means that even if they hit the target that they have set up for themselves, they miss the mean, since the target is off mark. But if they do not know what end they should be aiming at, then they will not even know that they are vicious, since this presupposes knowing that their supposition about the end is false. As Aristotle notes, ‘the vicious person does not recognize that he is vicious, whereas the incontinent person recognizes that he is incontinent’ (7.8, 1150b36-7). Ignorance of the universal therefore entails a failure of self-knowledge.

It follows that Aristotle’s distance from Socrates is not great as far as their *diagnosis* of vice is concerned: where they part ways is in their assessment of its blameworthiness. Whereas Socrates holds that ignorance of good and bad excuses, Aristotle thinks we act voluntarily, and so are proper subjects of praise and blame, as long as we know the relevant particulars. Not knowing the quality of one’s own ends and adopting the wrong means as a result is not an excuse, for there are certain truths that we are required to know.²³ Aristotle further maintains that vice requires rational endorsement of a bad end as good. It is not enough habitually to do acts of intemperance or acts of boastfulness to be intemperate or boastful, for I can habitually do such acts without judging them to be right. In the case of the boaster, Aristotle says ‘it is not a person’s capacity, but his decision, that makes him a boaster; for his state of character makes a person a boaster, just as it makes a person a liar’ (6.7, 1127b15-17). He makes a similar point about injustice in Book 5, distinguishing the person who does unjust acts from the unjust person. When someone inflicts a harm in knowledge of the particulars, but without previous deliberation, as when he acts on appetites and spirited desires that are necessary and natural for a human being, he does an act of injustice, ‘but he is not thereby unjust or wicked, since it is not vice that causes him to inflict the harm. But whenever decision is the cause, he is unjust and

vicious' (*EN* 5.8, 1135b20-6). When someone inflicts harm in knowledge of the particulars, and on decision, he is vicious and unjust, whereas when he acts in knowledge of the particulars, but his act is caused by natural appetitive or spirited desires, he does an unjust *act*, but is not thereby unjust or wicked. This indicates that Aristotle sees a parallel between the criteria for acting virtuously laid out in *EN* 2.4, and criteria for acting viciously, and hence for being vicious, for the vicious agent must decide on vicious acts, and does not simply do them from appetite or spirit.

Do vicious agents also choose vicious acts for their own sakes? Obviously not, if by this we mean that they choose them because they *know* that they are vicious, and think this makes them attractive, Sir Edmund Blackadder style. Aristotle's vicious man is not malicious; he typically thinks he is in the mean, and he accuses the virtuous of missing the target.²⁴ Instead, Aristotle's vicious agent decides on vicious acts for the sake of the very properties that make the virtuous shun them. As he says in Book 7, the intemperate man 'pursues excesses of pleasant things because they are excesses and because he decides on it, for themselves and not for some further result' (ἢ καθ' ὑπερβολὰς καὶ διὰ προαίρεσιν, δι' αὐτὰς καὶ μηδὲν δι' ἕτερον ἀποβαῖνον, ἀκόλαστος).²⁵ Aristotle does not mean that he aims at excess as his intentional object, but rather that the very properties that would make a prudent man say the acts are excessive make them attractive to the vicious man. While the virtuous person chooses virtuous acts for the sake of the very properties that make them virtuous, the vicious choose vicious acts for the sake of the very properties that make them vicious.

Finally, Aristotle treats vice, just like virtue, as a 'firm and unchanging state'. In this context, what matters is not whether vice is an unchange-*able* state – or literally irreversible – but whether Aristotle ascribes a degree of stability to the vicious man parallel to the stability he attributes to the virtuous. In his discussion of the dissolution of friendship in 9.3, Aristotle allows the virtuous man to backslide – so, for instance, he asks what we should do when our friend, who was good, has become bad, and answers that we should go to every length to try to restore his character, and only give up the friendship if he becomes incurably base. And in 3.5, Aristotle remarks that the unjust or intemperate agent will not become just or temperate simply by wishing to be so – and by revising their conception of the good informing their wish. Like those who acquire curable bodily vices, a resolution without a change of habits will not alter his character, and making the resolution is not what is hard. This means that vicious agents can have stable and unchanging characters without being incurably wicked.

It would seem, then, that Aristotle attributes counterparts of the agent-criteria for virtuous activity to vicious activity. The vicious agent does vicious acts in ignorance of their badness; he decides on them, and decides on them for their own sakes (for the reasons because

of which they are in fact vicious); and does so from a firm and unchanging state. To be vicious is to have adopted a certain false view of what is fine and worthy of pursuit, and to act on the basis of this conception.

Principled Virtue and Unprincipled Vice: Müller's Asymmetry Reading

I have emphasized the principled aspect of vice as a reflection of Aristotle's emphasis on the principled nature of virtue. Virtue and vice are both *states*, namely states that decide, although only virtue is a state that grasps the truth.

Jozef Müller has recently challenged this line of thought, and attributed what we may call an 'asymmetry thesis' about virtue and vice to Aristotle: while the virtuous' pursuit of the good is principled, the vicious' pursuit of what is bad is unprincipled. Instead of seeing the vicious agent as someone who follows a mistaken conception of the good in his actions and feelings, Müller thinks Aristotle's vicious agent 'is characterized by the fact that her reason fails to guide her life on the basis of a reasoned conception of what a good life is'. Writes Müller: 'her conception of the good changes according to her feelings and non-rational desires. She thus follows a mere appearance of pleasure which, as Aristotle repeatedly stresses, can be deceiving' ('Aristotle on Vice' [n. 1 above], 464). Müller infers that the vicious person's decisions 'also reflect her current interests and pleasures rather than any *principles* she would have adopted, on the basis of reflection, as her own long-term policies of conduct' (ib.). Müller thinks Aristotle remains committed to this view throughout the *Ethics*, and so he defends a harmonizing account of Aristotelian vice that departs from the accounts of Brickhouse and Irwin by denying that e.g. the intemperate person's decision in individual cases reflects a general policy she has adopted or a conception of the good life.²⁶

This reading aims to do justice to 9.4 by bringing seemingly contradictory remarks in Book 7 into line with it. But it cannot be sustained. A major stumbling block is Müller's use of a bifurcated notion of *προαίρεσις*, according to which Aristotle's references to the vicious agent's *προαίρεσις* refer to particular decisions that do not reflect any overarching conception of the good, whereas references to the virtuous agent's *προαίρεσις* refer to decisions that *do* reflect her overarching conception of the good. This is gratuitous at best. While Müller sensibly does not attempt to sweep under the rug the many places where Aristotle states that the vicious act on decision (that would be an uphill battle in light of the textual evidence, see e.g. 1151a6-7: 'vice accords with decision'), he instead claims that this means something other than what it appears to mean. Müller seeks textual support for his proposal in the lines that follow 1151a6-7. Aristotle here claims that 'virtue preserves the principle, whereas vice corrupts it' (ἡ γὰρ ἀρετὴ καὶ μοχθηρία τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ μὲν φθείρει ἢ δὲ σφάζει, 7.8, 1151a15-17). On Müller's preferred

reading, this means that vice literally does away with any principle at all, rather than that it corrupts a good principle. Thus, the contrast is between preserving a principle that is good and destroying any principle whatsoever, rather than between preserving the *good* principle (that we all have by nature: see e.g. 3.4) and corrupting this principle so that we wish for what is actually bad, as Aristotle's argument demands. For virtue does not preserve just any principle, but rather the good one, and that is the very principle which vice destroys. In the end, then, the issue is not whether we translate φθείρει 'destroys' or 'corrupts', since what is being destroyed or corrupted is the *good* principle. The question is rather what we are left with when a good principle is destroyed – a bad principle or no principle at all.

Müller maintains that while the intemperate agent's principle (ἀρχή) is 'destroyed' in the sense that he lacks a principle, the intemperate man continues to act on decisions that fail to conform to any rational plan in life. On the asymmetry reading, the vicious 'is like the fool who although capable of reasoning and decisions does not organize her life around some aim or purpose (*EE* I 2, 1214b6-10), but wanders from one random pleasure to another, indulging in any that is at hand' ('Aristotle on Vice' [n. 1 above], 465). Müller's appeal to *EE* 1.2, 1214b6-10 is peculiar. Aristotle must here use 'προαίρεσις' in the expression 'capable of living in accordance with their προαίρεσις' in the robust sense that he, according to Müller, elsewhere reserves for the virtuous person's decision; he cannot use it in the low-level sense of 'decision' that Müller reads into Aristotle's reference to the vicious man's προαίρεσις in *EN* 7. For, by Müller's own admission, the vicious are capable of making decisions, only not ones that reflect a conception of the good.

What Aristotle in fact argues in *EE* 1.2 is that some people are incapable of leading a life in accordance with their own προαίρεσις, and that these people need not bother articulating a conception of happiness with reference to which they choose all their acts. Thus, they either have a προαίρεσις which reflects their conception of the good, but fail to adhere to it in practice, or they lack it altogether. Müller claims that this applies to the many, who change their conception of happiness relative to their present state (in illness, they think happiness is health, in poverty, wealth: *EN* 1.4, 1095a22-6).²⁷ This may be so, but Aristotle's description of the vicious man in 7 and 9.4 appears to refer rather to someone who both can and does articulate a conception of the good and who pursues it in his actions. That is why Aristotle insists that the vicious man thinks that his acts are *right*, and that he ought to act in this way. The contrast between lacking a principle (a unifying aim or purpose), and being capable of making a decision that Müller introduces, is not Aristotle's own, but rather born of Müller's need to carve out space for his 'unprincipled vicious person' in a textual landscape where Aristotle emphatically argues that vice is a ἔξως προαιρετική, and so a principled state (if by 'principled' we mean a

state that reflects the agent's conception of the good and his deliberation about how to promote that good in particular circumstances).

It is only by treating Aristotle's use of 'decision' in the context of vice as a non-technical term that Müller can invoke 1146b22-3 in support of his own view. Müller contrasts two translations of the passage, defending the first:

(1) For the ἀκόλαστος acts having decided to do so, always thinking that one should pursue the pleasant thing at hand (νομίζων ἀεὶ δεῖν τὸ παρὸν ἡδὺ διώκειν), but the ἀκρατής does not think that, but pursues it nevertheless.

(2) For the ἀκόλαστος acts having decided to do so, thinking that one should always pursue the pleasant thing at hand, but the ἀκρατής does not think that, but pursues it nevertheless.

Müller thinks that the real obstacle to his proposal in the passage is the phrase that appears in Greek in (1). By exploiting the syntactical ambiguity in the placement of the adverb ἀεὶ – ever a source of mischief, and so of opportunity, in Aristotle scholarship – he maintains that Aristotle here commits himself to the view that the vicious agent lacks principles altogether, rather than the opposite view, which is what the passage tries to convey, given that the disputed phrase is a gloss on what it means for the intemperate agent to act '*having decided to do so*'. Müller's remarks about 1.5, 1095b14-20 are equally strained. It is only when we restore Aristotle's technical sense of προαίρεσις and argue that it always reflects the agent's conception of the good that we understand how Aristotle can draw the principled distinction that he draws between people who *do vicious acts* and those who *act from vice*, because they have vicious characters. For Aristotle, a decision necessarily reflects the agent's ἀρχή, since the ἀρχή is the end that he has adopted, for the sake of which he deliberates and decides. This end is the object of his wish. Thus, a coward is not simply someone who throws away his shield and runs, but someone who thinks that this kind of behavior is justified (namely, that when the going gets rough, the rough get going), and that one is justified in saving one's own life at the expense of the common good. Throwing away the shield is a cowardly act, but cowardly acts can be done by non-cowards, for instance weak agents, who run away out of fear, arms swinging, rather than on principle.

It is an unfortunate consequence of Müller's reading that it prevents us from seeing what cases of vice have in common, regardless of the type of action or emotion the vice is about, and regardless of its status as a vice of excess or deficiency. Indeed, the failure of the model to fit vices like pusillanimity, insensitivity or ill temper should have been a warning that

the analysis is badly off track. For Aristotle, vice is ignorance in the decision, precisely because the decision articulates the agent's conception of the good. Like Socrates, Aristotle thinks that a certain kind of ignorance explains vice but, unlike Socrates, he takes us to be responsible for having false beliefs about the end and making particular decisions based on it. The emotions of the vicious fail to hit the mean because they are not guided by right reason (ὁρθὸς λόγος), in the sense of reason that *reaches a good*, but rather by what we may call 'wrong reason', which makes them attain a great evil (κακὸν μέγα, 6.8, 1142b20). The vicious cultivate inappropriate affective attitudes in themselves because they think these attitudes are right. And they think they are right, in part, because they have lived their lives in pursuit of such ends. The vicious man is therefore governed by a rational part that lacks right reason, and that fails in its role as a shepherd for non-rational emotions by consistently leading them astray.

Vice and Imprudence

I have argued that vice, just like virtue, essentially involves a rational principle. In *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.12 and 13, Aristotle defends the reciprocity of virtue of character and virtue of thought: we cannot have virtue of character without prudence, or prudence without virtue of character. We can now see why Aristotle thinks that all character states involve both the rational and the non-rational parts of soul. While having excessive, deficient or base desires and emotions is enough to make us do vicious acts, we only count as vicious agents if we do these acts from a vicious state. And acting from a vicious state means acting on a decision that encapsulates one's ignorance of the good. It is therefore a mistake to treat vice as a flaw only of the non-rational part of the soul. The agent is vicious, not simply because he has excessive or deficient appetites and emotions, but also because his rational part is wrong about the kinds of things that promote living well in general. And so, just as Aristotle's definition of virtue of character already entails that it presupposes prudence, character vice cannot exist without what we might call 'imprudence', a state of the rational part whereby we are ignorant about human goods.²⁸ Aristotle importantly does not adopt this label in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But his argument needs it.

In Book 6.9, Aristotle returns to the need for a 'true supposition' – the right conception of the end. The same point is made at 6.5, 1140b31, where Aristotle identifies having the right supposition with having the right principle (ἀρχή) and acting for the sake of the right end. Prudence, he argues in 6.9, involves good deliberation (εὐβουλία), insofar as good deliberation 'is the type of correctness that accords with what is expedient for promoting the end about which prudence is true supposition (ὕποληψις, 6.9, 1142b33-6). Imprudence (the state by which we adopt false beliefs about ends) would consequently not be a lack of cleverness in planning

one's life as a whole, but rather a failure to know and be guided by the right supposition about the end in one's deliberation.²⁹ Though the vicious person may be eminently skilled in finding means to ends, whether instrumental or constitutive, that merely makes matters worse.³⁰

Strikingly, Aristotle never develops an account of vices of thought in *Nicomachean Ethics* 6. Nor does he refer to such vices as anything other than absence of virtue in the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³¹ Perhaps the only indication that he had the outline of a positive concept is the stray references to ἀφροσύνη ('folly') in 7.2, 1146a27 and 1149a5. The fool, Aristotle argues, has the wrong ends, as can be seen by Aristotle's response to a sophistical puzzle: 'A certain argument, then, concludes that foolishness combined with incontinence makes someone act contrary to what he supposes [is right], but since he supposes that good things are bad and that it is wrong to do them, he will do the good actions, not the bad' (1146a27; note ὑπολαμβάνειν, the verb from which ὑπόληψις is derived). Here, ἀφροσύνη is a state that makes us aim at bad ends. Had Aristotle developed a positive account of vices of thought in Book 6, he would likely not have positioned virtues of thought in a mean between two vices, but would have explained how vices of thought, as the converse of their correlative virtues, are 'false states', i.e. states that make us believe falsehoods about the human good. As such, vices of thought would not simply be failures of practical reasoning, but would crucially involve the adoption of false supposition about the human good and the unqualified end of human action.

To be virtuous, we need good deliberation, practical perception of particulars, and the right conception of the end. Practical perception is of no use if it is not informed by the right supposition about the end. That is why Aristotle associates ignorance in the decision with ignorance about a universal, and why a failure to perceive the right particulars at the right time and in the right way leads to ἀκρασία rather than vice. Had Aristotle included a more elaborate definition of vice as a state of character, it might have included a reference to imprudence, just as his definition of virtue of character includes a reference to prudence (since the mean, as Aristotle states, is defined 'by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it' 2.7, 1107a2-3). Perhaps, then, we may infer that vice, as Aristotle conceives of it, is a 'state that decides, consisting in a deficient or excessive extreme, extremes relative to us', where the *actual* extremes are defined 'by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the *prudent* person would define them', but where the *perceived* mean pursued by the *imprudent* person is in fact identical to one of the extremes. The *imprudent* person thus suffers from ignorance in the decision, and if he gets what he wants, he will have gotten himself a great evil. As Socrates might have remarked, 'what else is being miserable than to desire bad things and secure them?' (*Meno* 78a6).³²

¹ Harmonizing views are defended in T. Irwin, 'Vice and Reason', *The Journal of Ethics* 5 (2001), 73-97; T. Brickhouse, 'Does Aristotle Have a Consistent Account of Vice', *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2003), 3-23; and S. Broadie and C. J. Rowe, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2002), commentary at 419-20. By contrast, R.-A. Gauthier and J.-Y. Jolif, *L'Ethique à Nicomaque: Introduction, Traduction et Commentaire* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1970) in their note *ad* 9.4, 1166b6-7 agree with A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1884), p. 290 that Aristotle is guilty of a contradiction: he sets out to portray the vicious, but instead describes the incontinent. The reason, they claim, is that he is carried away by 'un excès de zèle: dans son désir de refuser au vicieux la bénéfice de la bonne conscience, il lui a appliqué illégitimement des conclusions établies pour d'autres que pour lui'. Julia Annas likewise concludes that Aristotle's account is inconsistent, although she explains it as an accident rather than the result of theoretical pressures, by hypothesizing that Aristotle did not get around to revising his account. See her 'Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism', *Mind* 86 (1977), 532-54. Broadie replies to Annas in *Ethics with Aristotle* (Oxford, 1991), 177 n. 44. Jozef Müller has recently argued that Aristotle's account of vice is consistent, but not in any of the ways traditionally supposed. For on Müller's account, Aristotle thinks of the vicious man as entirely unprincipled. See Müller, 'Aristotle on Vice', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* vol. 23, no 3 (2015), 459-77. Müller's analysis of vice is unpersuasive. As I argue in the final section of this paper, his account of the vicious agent's decision and wish do not square with Aristotle's general claims about their relationship.

² If you'll excuse the oxymoron.

³ The cantankerous and quarrelsome man (δύσκολος καὶ δύσερις, 4.6) is unpleasant in social relations, and opposes us on every point without concern for the pain he causes. He is deficient in the emotions that cause a friendly disposition. The pusillanimous man (μικρόψυχος, 4.3) is worthy of great honors on account of his 'greatness in each virtue', but since he does not know his own worth, he fails to claim the honor that is his. The boor (ἄγροικος, 4.8) never says anything himself to raise a laugh, and disapproves even of the jokes of witty people.

⁴ The label adopted by Howard Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford, 2015).

⁵ Translations of the EN are from T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).

⁶ 'Virtue 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 2.7, 1107a1-3).

⁷ Brickhouse, 'Does Aristotle Have a Consistent Account' (n. 1 above), 3.

⁸ So Franz Dirlmeier, *Aristoteles Nikomachische Ethik* (Berlin, 1960), 546 n. 5, who claims that the discussion in 9.4 shows 'a wholly uncommon purely Platonic tone'. Also Broadie and Rowe (n. 1 above), who comment that 'the connection between badness and self-conflict is reminiscent of Plato' (419, note *ad* 1166b5-7).

⁹ Neither Plato nor Aristotle treat these vagaries as unprincipled, however, for when Plato depicts the democratic man, who 'yields day by day to the desire at hand', he is said to 'declare that all pleasures are

equal and must be valued equally' (561c). Although 'there is neither order nor necessity in his life, 'he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it as long as he lives' (561b-d). Thus, when the democratic man 'feeds, fattens, and fornicates' (tr. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve, in J. Cooper, *Plato's Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), adding alliteration to Plato's Greek), he does not simply follow his appetite as if he were bovine, but satisfies his appetites because he thinks he *should*, and because he believes there are no qualitative distinctions between pleasures. Likewise, Aristotle remarks that the many set up sensuous gratification as their goal in life, and that they decide on this kind of life: 'The many, the most vulgar, would seem to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure, and hence they also like the life of gratification, In this they appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life for grazing animals' (1.4, 1095b18-23). We can tell that this is not a fitting life for us, since grazing animals cannot decide on it, whereas it is part of our essence that we can.

¹⁰ *EN* 7.7, 1150a19-22. I. Bywater (*Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, Oxford 1894) prints †ἢ καθ' ὑπερβολὰς† ἢ διὰ . . . which (ignoring the obelisks) would yield: 'the person who pursues excesses of pleasant things either in accordance with excess or because he decides on them' – which makes little sense. Bywater himself suggests ἦ for the first ἢ, and one ms. (Marcianus 213, Bywater's M^b) omits the second, adding καὶ, to provide a reading which allows us to see that the intemperate man decides on excesses because he thinks he should maximize the amount of pleasure in his life, and not restrain himself (as for instance Callicles in the *Gorgias* thinks one should allow one's appetites to grow as large as possible and ensure that one has the power to satisfy them).

¹¹ Aristotle here claims that the intemperate man is incurable (ἀνίατος, 1150a22), since he is without regrets (ἀμεταμέλητος), whereas he in 9.4 says that he has regrets, although he does not explicitly suggest that he is curable.

¹² In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes virtues and vices properly speaking from mere emotional dispositions by stating that the former, but not the latter, are states that decide: 'Though all these mean points are praiseworthy, they are not virtues, nor are their opposites vices, since they do not involve decision' (*EE* 3.7, 1234a24-5). Aristotle's refusal to call a state a vice unless it is a ἔξις προαιρετική is retained in his treatment of particular virtues and vices in the *EN*.

¹³ Annas, who thinks Aristotle's account is inconsistent, conjectures that 9.4 belongs to an earlier phase of Aristotle's thought where he aimed to respond to puzzles about friendship from Plato's *Lysis*, and that it was poorly integrated into the 'official' line he defends in Book 7. The (alleged) incoherence between 7 and 9.4 thus reflects Aristotle's 'preference for local rather than global systematization' (Annas, *Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism* [n. 1 above], 554). Even if this were true, it would not help to alleviate the tension between the analysis of vice as lack of restraint (ἀκολασία) in 7 and 9.4 and the analysis of vice in earlier books.

¹⁴ The end point of this process is bestiality – Phalaris roasting his enemies in a bronze bull the better to enjoy their screams. In such cases, the rational principle is missing from the soul altogether, and the sufferer has literally turned into a beast. Plato in the *Republic* likens the tyrannical soul, completely dominated by appetites, to a werewolf, since he has acquired a taste for human blood.

¹⁵ For instance, he may not wish to be arrested and handcuffed on an airplane about to depart JFK on charges of rape. Another example of a person with only residual shame is the addicted protagonist of Edward St Aubyn's *Bad News*.

¹⁶ I here agree with T. Brickhouse (2003) that Aristotle may intend a developmental account of (akolastic) vice as involving subsequent stages of depravity, depending on the lengths to which the vicious person will go to satisfy his appetites.

¹⁷ 'A bird of messy habits and uncertain identity', E. R. Dodds remarks in Plato *Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 306; LSJ suggest the Norfolk plover or thick-knee. Its name 'χαραδριός' contains the noun χαρά, joy – although Socrates surely intends this as a pun: it is in fact derived from χαράδρα, a ravine, torrent or mountain stream. Aristotle in *History of Animals* describes the χαραδριός as a wild bird that builds its nest in ravines, clefts and on cliffs. It is, he says 'in no way noteworthy for plumage or voice. It makes an appearance at night, but in the daytime keeps out of sight' (*HA* 615a1).

¹⁸ Irwin, 'Vice and Reason' (n. 1 above). Irwin's account in *Aristotle's First Principles* (1988) differs in important respects, and is the one Brickhouse rejects in 'Does Aristotle Have a Consistent Account of Vice' (n. 1 above).

¹⁹ 'Deliberation and Decision in the *Eudemian Ethics*' (forthcoming).

²⁰ This is also the sense in which the principle is 'preserved' in akratic agents (*EN* 7.8, 1151a24-5), who have the right conception of the good, even if they do not always act on it. By speaking of the principle being preserved or destroyed, then, Aristotle does not mean whether they have a principle or not, or whether they remain committed to it or not, but rather whether they have the right supposition about their ends. As Aristotle says in 3.4: 'Without qualification, and in reality, what is wished is the good, but for each person what is wished is the apparent good . . . For the excellent person, then, what is wished will be what is wished in reality, while for the base person what is wished is whatever it turns out to be [that appears good to him]' (1113a23-7). Thus, what is destroyed is the good principle, and it is replaced by a bad one.

²¹ I here leave out the well-known problem of fitting justice into the model, which Aristotle himself acknowledges.

²² The following remark may suggest such a view: 'badness is proper to the indeterminate, as the Pythagoreans pictured it, and good to the determinate . . . And so for this reason also excess and deficiency are proper to vice, the mean to virtue; 'for we are noble in only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways' (*EN* 2.6, 1106b30-6).

²³ Aristotle cannot hold that all vicious agents could 'easily' have known that their ends are base, for the corruption that causes ignorance may have started early. Instead, they are culpable because it is something that they are *required* to know, maybe because the laws explain what kinds of acts are praiseworthy and what kind blameworthy (see Aristotle's remarks at the head of 3.1 and his remarks about good laws at the end of Book 10).

²⁴ Aristotle observes that the intermediate states are excessive in comparison to the deficiencies and deficient in comparison to the excesses – both in feelings and in actions. 'For the brave person, for

instance, appears rash in comparison to the coward, and the cowardly in comparison to the rash person, and the temperate person appears intemperate in comparison to the insensitive person, and insensitive in comparison with the intemperate person; and the generous person appears wasteful in comparison to the ungenerous, and the ungenerous in comparison to the wasteful person. That is why each of the extreme people tries to push the intermediate person to the other extreme, so that the coward, for instance, calls the brave person rash, and the rash person calls him a coward, and similarly with the other cases' (*EN* 2.9, 1108b17-27). So, Scrooge accuses the generous of being wasteful, and Don Giovanni accuses the temperate of insensitivity.

²⁵ *EN* 7.7, 1150a19-22. For the text, see n. 9 above.

²⁶ On Müller's reading, the vicious person has failed to make a choice of lives, and instead lives his life willy-nilly, at the mercy of his non-rational desires.

²⁷ Compare this with Plato's portrait of the democratic man, its source of inspiration: 'And so he lives on, yielding day by day to the desire at hand. Sometimes he drinks heavily while listening to the flute; at other times he drinks only water and is on a diet; sometimes he goes in for physical training; at other times he is idle and neglects everything' (*Republic* 561c-d). However, as I argue in n. 9 above, even Plato's democratic man thinks *he ought* to act on his whims.

²⁸ Aristotle defines prudence as a 'state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being (ὥστ' ἀνάγκη τὴν φρόνησιν ἔξιν εἶναι μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀγαθὰ πρακτικῇν)' and says that its end is acting well itself (εὐπραξία, 6.5, 1140b5-8). And he says that the prudent person deliberates finely about things that promote living well in general (τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως, 6.5, 1140a28).

²⁹ I here take 'about which' to refer back to 'the end' rather than the less plausible 'what is expedient for promoting the end'. For a defense of the latter reading, see Jessica Moss, 'Virtue Makes the Goal Right: Virtue and Phronesis in Aristotle's Ethics', *Phronesis* 56 (2011), 204-61 at 230-1.

³⁰ Aristotle says in *EN* 6.12 that cleverness, as the capacity to do the actions that tend to promote whatever goal is assumed and to attain them, is praiseworthy if the goal is fine, but if the goal is base, it is unscrupulousness (1144a26-9). The opposite of εὐβουλία (which Aristotle could have called δυσβουλία) is the state whereby deliberation makes us reach an evil, even when we are deliberating about constituents of the (bad) end that we have assumed.

³¹ In 1149a10, Aristotle claims that some foolish people lack reason altogether, and live only by sense-perception, for instance 'some races of distant foreigners' (sic). These are not the foolish people who have bad principles, however, but a different kind of fools.

³² I wish to thank Christelle Veillard, Dimitri El Murr, Pierre-Marie Morel, and Olivier Renaut for inviting me to the conference *Le vice et ses vertus. Théories des vices dans la philosophie antique*, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre / Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 4th-5th December, 2015, for which this paper was originally written. The participants deserve special thanks for their perceptive questions and comments. David Konstan generously shared his muscle-power and good spirits, transporting my son both physically and mentally through Paris. I presented a revised version of the paper

at the Philosophical Society in Oxford on 5th February, 2016, and wish to thank Lizzie Fricker and Bill Child for inviting me, as well as the participants for their helpful suggestions, although I am afraid I was unable to do justice to them all (here's looking at you, Lesley!). Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the editors of *Phronesis* for their stewardship and patience, and to an external referee for reading my draft with such exquisite care.