



Questions of Character

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Morality and Aristotelian Character Excellence

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Always be first and best and superior to the others.

(PELEUS TO ACHILLES, *HOMER, ILIAD* 11.784)

The object of the general revolution envisaged by Diderot and d'Holbach was precisely to end this state of affairs by making equality the supreme principle of human morality and organization; by 1789 their efforts had begun to have startling results.

(ISRAEL 2010, 105)

1 Introduction

The phrase *aretê êthikê* expresses one of the central concepts in Aristotle's ethics. It is often rendered as "moral virtue."¹ A more literal and arguably much better rendition is "character excellence" or "excellence of character."

Aristotle understands *aretê êthikê* to be the optimal or excellent condition or disposition (*hexis*) of that part of the irrational (*alogon*) part of the human soul, which is capable of heeding reason, whose excellence is achieved through habituation, and which he calls "*êthos*." I assume that this disposition of this part of the soul is character. Consequently, two questions remain: To what extent is Aristotelian character excellence moral? And is Aristotelian character excellence a virtue? My aim in this chapter is to advance an answer to the first question. I will call it the *character question*.

Pursuit of the character question requires the clarification of two things: the nature of Aristotelian character excellence and the nature of morality. Regarding morality, consider Julia Annas's remarks:

Is ancient ethics then modern morality? ... Perhaps ... our intuitive notion of morality might be thought to be unsatisfactorily vague. ... Thus a satisfactory answer to the question about ancient ethics and modern morality must await the same kind of reflection at this end, [that is,] about the

concept of modern morality and the various kinds of moral theory available. (Annas 1993, 452-453)

Defining morality is an enormous task. Articulating a satisfactory account of Aristotelian character excellence is also a tall order. It would be foolhardy in a single brief chapter to attempt both, and to do so as preliminaries to assessing to what extent Aristotelian character excellence is moral. How then should we proceed?

I will proceed in a circumscribed and imperfect way. To my knowledge, the character question per se has not previously been considered. Yet it has been included within the broader question: To what extent is Aristotle's ethical theory a moral theory? In pursuing the character question, I will engage some important contributions to the broader question and use them to cast light on the character question and shape it into a manageable form. Precisely, I will draw out of the work of Bernard Williams, Terence Irwin, and Julia Annas seven conditions of morality, six positive, one negative (Irwin 1985; Williams 1985; Annas 1993, 1996). I will then assess these conditions with respect to Aristotelian character excellence.

2 Seven Conditions of Morality

Bernard Williams is an influential advocate of the view that morality is a distinctive, indeed perverse form of ethical theorizing. He is also known for maintaining that ancient ethical theories are not moral theories:

[The Greeks] had certainly not arrived at the distinctive preoccupations of the *morality* system, with its emphasis on a very special notion of obligation. (Cited in Irwin 1985, 32)

One salient property of moral obligation that Williams criticizes is this: Moral obligations are inescapable in the sense that

the fact that a given agent would prefer not to be in this system or bound by its rules will not excuse him. (Williams 1985, 177)

From this, I draw a first condition of morality:

PREFERENCE Moral obligation binds the agent independently of his preferences.

PREFERENCE is to be distinguished from another condition of moral obligation Williams recognizes:

SUPREMACY The normative force of a moral obligation is supreme (cf. Loudon 2007, 107).

That is, moral obligations trump any other (conflicting) requirements or recommendations.

The distinction between PREFERENCE and SUPREMACY can be appreciated by considering the following. A practical theory might claim normative supremacy, but not (wholly) independently of an agent's preferences. Indeed, Williams endorses a form of reasons internalism. Hence, he should think that if morality conjoins PREFERENCE and SUPREMACY, moral obligation is incoherent.

Terence Irwin's paper "Aristotle's Conception of Morality" defends the view that Aristotelian ethics is a moral theory and in doing so criticizes Williams. But Irwin focuses on a different condition of morality:

We tend to identify moral principles . . . with those that refer to the welfare of those affected by them. If someone is moved only by concern for his own welfare, or by a purely aesthetic concern, e.g. to preserve all the works of art in the world, we will doubt if he is moved by moral considerations. If I think of other people without regard to their welfare, I probably do not think of them as objects of moral concern. (1985, 116)

It is difficult to state precisely what Irwin here views as a condition of morality. Minimally, I presume the following loosely construed condition:

OTHERS Concern for the welfare of others must somehow be at least a part of what motivates action that is moral action.²

In *The Morality of Happiness* (1993) and her paper "Aristotle and Kant on Morality and Practical Reasoning," Julia Annas maintains that "ancient ethical theories are . . . theories of morality" (1996, 238). However, in the case of Aristotle's ethics she acknowledges two difficulties. First, the "large-scale" excellences discussed in *Nicomachean Ethics* IV do not seem moral. For instance, magnificence (*megaloprepeia*) is "limited to the rich." Moreover, this excellence seems to concern matters of taste:

Magnificence, in short, is not a moral virtue, and the magnificent person who aims at [nobility] in exercising his disposition displays appropriate taste and judgment, but hardly moral motivation. A similar case can be developed for others among Aristotle's virtues, but magnificence makes the point vividly. (Annas 1996, 243)

The basic worry here seems to be that Aristotle's conception of character excellence is broader than or merely overlaps with moral virtue. But it is hard to clarify the positive conditions from which Annas takes Aristotle to depart. Since she charges that some excellences are limited to the rich, presumably some egalitarian conception of the agents constituting the moral community is assumed. I will refer to the following condition as:

EQUALITY The community of moral agents consists of individuals who are, in some respect that morality entails, equal.

I am unable to articulate the second point in positive terms. So, I will put the condition negatively:

TASTE Matters of mere taste do not qualify as moral.

Recall that Irwin negatively distinguishes moral from "purely aesthetic concern." TASTE may not be equivalent to Irwin's point, but I will conveniently treat the two as one.

Annas's second problem with morality and Aristotelian ethics is this:

The second problem that we find with Aristotle's account of [nobility] concerns the importance of actual success in action for the virtuous agent. (1996, 245)

Here she is contrasting Aristotle with both Kant and the Stoics. Again, the point is a negative one. But I think I can construe the positive condition:

LOCUS The locus of moral value lies in the agent's motivation. It does not, for instance, lie in the consequences of the motivational state.

Insofar as consequentialism is a moral theory, this condition might seem problematic. However, it need not be. For a consequentialist, the locus of primary value lies outside of motivation. Moreover, the kind of value at that site is not moral, but concerns welfare. However, the motivation to maximize welfare may be regarded as valuable insofar as it derives from and supports the value of maximization of welfare. This motivation may also be moral on certain grounds constitutive of morality. So, a consequentialist may hold that the locus of moral value resides in motivation. It is just that the consequentialist also holds that moral value depends upon or is constrained by certain nonmoral value.

Note further—my point, not Annas's—what is special about motivation as the locus of moral value is that the value at this site is complete. By this I mean that all the moral value there is rests in the moral value at the motivational site. For instance, actions as well as motivations can be moral. Moral actions are those whose motivation is moral. But the moral value of moral action is not greater than that of its motivation. Consequently, I will supplement the moral condition of LOCUS with this condition:

COMPLETION All the moral value there is lies at the motivational site.

In sum, in addition to the negative condition of TASTE, we have the following six positive conditions of morality: PREFERENCE, SUPREMACY, OTHERS, EQUALITY, LOCUS, and COMPLETION.

As Annas notes, the nature of morality is vague. Indeed, it is contested. Moreover, the conditions are introduced by various authors. In advance of an exhaustive examination of the traditions of modern morality, one should not assume that the conditions are jointly necessary and sufficient. Rather, they serve

as provisional lenses and heuristic probes, offering perspective on the shape of Aristotle's ethical thought.

3 Aristotelian Character Excellence and the Moral Conditions

I introduced the moral conditions in the chronological order of Williams's, Irwin's, and Annas's contributions. I will assess them in what I take to be a fruitful expository order. Before doing so, it will be helpful, especially for nonspecialists, to bear in mind the following ideas regarding Aristotle's conception of practical excellence.

Character excellence and practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) are conditions of different parts of the soul. Practical wisdom, like theoretical excellence, belongs to the rational part of the soul, the part that possesses reason (*logos*). In contrast, character excellence is a condition of the non-rational part of the soul. Hence, character lacks reason. However, character is able to heed reason. This reason-heeding capacity is crucial both for the acquisition and the exercise of character excellence.

In the optimal course of the practical development of the free male Greek citizen who is a member of an aristocracy, the best political system, character excellence, and practical wisdom develop to some extent in tandem. Character is habituated, that is, dispositionally trained, into a condition of excellence through heeding the injunctions of practical reason. These practically rational injunctions, Aristotle describes as "right reason" (*orthos logos*). More precisely, right reason enjoins in particular circumstances what one should do and in what way. Acting in the right way entails acting at the right time, with respect to the right people or objects, to the right extent, and so on; and thus constitutes acting according to the mean. Hence, right reason specifies the mean. Character excellence, therefore, involves conformity to right reason and to the mean. In short, character excellence requires practical wisdom both for its acquisition and exercise, since practical wisdom supplies right reason.

In the early stages of practical development, external sources such as parents and pedagogues impart right reason. So, while practical reason is required for the acquisition of character excellence, it is not required, initially, that the agent possess right reason himself. Indeed, that would be impossible, since practical wisdom requires considerable practical experience. Rather, through maturation the agent comes to acquire practical wisdom and hence to possess the capacity to determine for himself in various circumstances what he should do. With the ultimate acquisition of the conjunction of character excellence and practical wisdom—which I call "practical excellence" and which Aristotle calls "governing excellence" (*kuria aretê*)—the agent becomes a practically rationally self-governing human being.³

EQUALITY The community of moral agents consists of individuals who are, in some respect that morality entails, equal.

The question is: In what respect? Consider Jerome Schneewind's remarks:

At the heart of Kant's ethical theory is the proposition that normal adults are capable of being fully self-governing in moral matters. . . . Other eighteenth century philosophers besides Kant argued for the equal ability of normal adults to be fully self-governing in moral matters. . . . Richard Price and Thomas Reid would have agreed with Kant about the supremacy of morality and about our ability to know what morality calls for and to be moved by that knowledge. . . . [This idea] is also central . . . to modern morality itself. If we do not believe that everyone alike is "essentially" or by nature a fully competent moral agent, we believe that we ought to educate everyone to be so. (Schneewind 2010, 86-87)

Here, equality is a capacity to be fully self-governing in moral matters. The inclusion of "moral matters" would make this construal of EQUALITY circular. Hence, we might simply say that the community of moral agents consists of individuals who are equal insofar as they are all capable of becoming fully self-governing in practical matters. This remains inadequate, for it cannot mean fully self-governing in all practical matters—and the problem is precisely to properly delineate the scope of action. Granted this shortcoming, let me emphasize that Schneewind views this practical capability as enabling the moral agent to achieve certain practical knowledge and to be moved by that knowledge. Moreover—and this is the key point—Schneewind states that the individuals in question are "normal [human] adults."

Aristotle does not endorse EQUALITY because he believes that a small portion of humanity has the capacity for character excellence and practical excellence more broadly. In other words, Aristotle denies that "normal" human adults all possess the capacity for practical excellence. Adult male non-Greeks (*barbaroi*), women of any ethnicity or political affiliation, and those humans whom Aristotle regards as "natural slaves" all naturally lack the psychological capacities needed for practical excellence. These Aristotelian views are notorious and, in a sense, tedious to rehearse. But since they inform various aspects of his conception of character excellence and since EQUALITY is, arguably, the pillar of modern morality, we need to acknowledge them.

Aristotle says that the natural slave "shares in reason insofar as he perceives it, but does not have it" (*Pol.* 1254b22-23, 1260a12). William Fortenbaugh remarks on this: "Even though a slave cannot deliberate for himself, he can follow reasoned deliberations and instructions and therefore can be said to perceive or appreciate *logos*" (Fortenbaugh 2002, 54).

This latter capacity is precisely the function of character. So the natural slave possesses the non-rational, but reason-heeding capacity of character, while

lacking the rational capacity of which practical wisdom is the excellent condition. Consequently, natural slaves cannot become practically self-governing human beings. This is precisely why they are natural slaves rather than free men.

Exactly how large a portion of humanity Aristotle believes to be natural slaves is debatable. It may be significantly smaller than the large portion of slaves relative to free men in fourth-century Athens. Even so, the condition of being a natural slave is gradable, and Aristotle believes that various non-Greeks are to varying extents naturally slavish (cf. Kraut 2002, 286-300).

In contrast to natural slaves, Aristotle admits that women have some capacity to deliberate; and this capacity is distinctive of practical rationality. However, in contrast to that of men, women's deliberative capacity is, as he says, "non-governing" (*akuron*) (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1260a6-14). Precisely how to construe the Greek term is contested. I believe Aristotle means that women have some capacity for practical self-government, but not enough to enable them to be fully autonomous human beings. In particular, women can govern themselves within a part of the private, domestic setting, but not within the public and political sphere.

In short, most of those we would call "normal" human beings fall outside of the domain of those Aristotle regards as capable of achieving practical wisdom. Given that character excellence and practical wisdom are interdependent, most of humanity, in Aristotle's view, is incapable of character excellence. In short, Aristotle is not a moral egalitarian.⁴

OTHERS

Irwin's discussion of OTHERS focuses on two texts, *Rhetoric* 1.9 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8. Scholars have criticized Irwin's use of *Rhetoric* 1.9 on the grounds that Aristotle's ethical claims there are not theses he himself maintains, but popular views useful for an orator. Since I agree, I will focus on the discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.

The topic of *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8 is self-love (*philautia*). Aristotle's argument is basically this. There are two uses of the term "self-lover" (*philautos*), one of which is popular and disparaging. According to this use, the self-lover's motivations, which are for what Aristotle elsewhere calls "natural goods" (bodily pleasures, wealth, power), are exercised at the expense of others' welfare. But Aristotle maintains that this popular use of "*philautos*" is confused. It rests on a misconception of the object of love (*philia*), namely, oneself (*heautos*). Aristotle argues that what a human being is is most strictly to be identified with the ruling or governing part of himself, and this is the reason-possessing part, the mind. In the second and proper sense of "*philautos*," then, the self-lover seeks to gratify his mind. Gratification of the mind is achieved through the achievement of nobility (*to kalon*). Hence, the true self-lover acts for the sake of nobility.

Pursuit of nobility conduces to the welfare of others and in certain circumstances requires that the agent choose to forego certain goods for himself so that others obtain them. For instance, the agent may choose to sacrifice his life in battle on behalf of his city-state. However, Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes that in pursuing nobility and, when necessary to achieving that goal, relinquishing goods for himself, the excellent man acquires the greatest good for himself, namely, nobility:

[The excellent man] will give up both money and honors, and generally all the goods people fight over, while acquiring for himself [*heautôî*] nobility. For he will choose [*hairoumenos*] . . . a year of life lived in a noble way rather than many years lived indifferently, and one noble action on a grand scale in preference to many small ones. And this, presumably, is what happens with those who die for others; they are then choosing [*hairountai*] a noble thing on a grand scale for themselves [*heautois*]. Good people will also give up money when this means that their friend will get more. For while the friend gains money, the good person acquires what is noble, and so he allots [*aponemei*] a greater good to himself [*heautôî*]. He will forego these in favor of his friend, for this is a noble thing for himself [*autôî*] and praiseworthy. . . . With every praiseworthy thing, then, the man of excellence allots [*nemôn*] to himself [*heautôî*] more of what is noble. (EN 1169a20-b1)

Note that when the excellent man sacrifices or foregoes goods for others, he does not merely come to have nobility. Aristotle says that he “allots” and “chooses” nobility to and for himself. The verbs “*hairousthai*” and “(*apo*)*nemein*” express the intentions of the agent. Hence, the excellent man does not merely act for the sake of the welfare of others.

Granted this, does the excellent man act for the sake of nobility simpliciter? Or does he act for the sake of nobility for himself? To say that the excellent man chooses or allots certain goods for or to himself does not entail that his motivation is self-interested. For instance, why does the excellent man allot nobility to himself? Among possible answers, it seems clear that the right one must appeal to the following two points: the excellent man values nobility in a certain way, and he values himself in a certain way. What, then, are these ways of valuation?

The excellent man takes nobility to have greater value than non-noble goods. Similarly, in case he chooses a certain nobility by the very foregoing of some other noble action, he takes the nobility he chooses to be greater than that which he foregoes. Regarding valuation of himself as beneficiary of nobility, consider the following distinction. The excellent man might value himself in a partial or impartial way. In the former case, he might misconstrue his self-worth through some distorting psychological influence. But, as Aristotle often says, the excellent man is a standard of true value. Hence, the excellent man is immune to such error. Consequently, the excellent man must value himself correctly. Therefore, if he allots something to himself, he does so on the basis of a correct conception

of his worthiness as beneficiary (cf. EE 1249a5-10). And so, the excellent man’s allotment of nobility to himself is just. Indeed, qua excellent he is just. Hence, his allotment is impartial.

Since Aristotle is not a moral egalitarian, his conception of justice is accordingly nonmoral. For instance, the excellent man will use a natural slave according to what he is, a tool. Likewise, it would be repugnant to the excellent man to promote the welfare of a woman disproportionately to her imperfect nature. Aristotle even says that those who give to their friends more than is proper are themselves “worthless” (*oudenos aksioi*) (EE 1244a18-19; cf. EN 1120b3-4). Generally, then, different human beings have different values, and the excellent man conducts himself in relation to various human beings according to their distinct values:

Excellent actions are noble and are undertaken for the sake of nobility. Therefore, the generous person will give for the sake of nobility and give correctly. For he will give to the right people, in the right amount, at the right time, and all of the other things implied by correct giving. (EN 1120a23-26; cf. 1121b1-10)

It appears, then, that the excellent man acts for the sake of nobility simpliciter, but that the nobility, including justice, for the sake of which he acts in turn requires that he allot special goods to himself. Consequently, insofar as the motivation of self-interest entails some sort of unjustified self-preference, it is wrong to claim that the excellent man acts out of self-interest. Likewise, insofar as acting for the sake of nobility entails benefiting others, the excellent man’s acts benefit others; but it is mistaken to claim that the excellent man acts for the sake of the welfare of others.⁵ Moreover, it must be underscored that the way that nobility or right reason requires other-regarding concern is non-egalitarian and hence nonmoral.

LOCUS AND COMPLETION

LOCUS specifies the site, more precisely the psychological site of the locus of moral value. The condition states moral value lies in the psyche, more precisely, in a psychological state of motivation. Consequently, in assessing this moral condition in relation to Aristotle, the question to be considered is whether Aristotle assigns a special kind of value to the motivation of the excellent man.

The answer to this question is complex. Character excellence qua excellence has a certain value. This value is analogous to the value of other excellent conditions, be they bodily or psychological. The value in question is final or intrinsic, although, as I will discuss later, not exclusively so. For instance, compare what Aristotle says about the excellences of the rational part of the soul:

First then let us assert that theoretical wisdom [*sophia*] and practical wisdom, being as they are the excellences of each part [of the rational soul],

are necessarily choiceworthy for their own sake [hence, intrinsically good], even if neither produces [*poiouisi*] anything. (EN 1144a5)

Furthermore, given Aristotle's hierarchizing of various entities, including psychological faculties, the value of excellence of character is greater than that of, say, bodily excellence, but lesser than that of, say, theoretical excellence. Aristotle seems to understand the operative scale of value here according to the perfection (*teleiôsis*) of living beings. For instance, he regards humans as more perfect living beings than dogs, since the former have certain "higher" psychological faculties that the latter lack. Likewise, as we have seen, Aristotle regards naturally free men as more perfect living beings than natural slaves insofar as the latter lack certain psychological capacities that the former possess.

Beyond its excellence, character excellence has a special sort of value. Rather, a certain exercise of character excellence does. Here it is necessary to distinguish the disposition of character excellence and the exercise of character excellence in instances of motivation. I emphasize that this distinction is not equivalent to that between character excellence and excellent action, even though excellent action entails exercise of such motivation. The property in question is praiseworthiness (*to epaineton*). Exercise of character excellence, in conjunction with practical wisdom, in the psychological act of choice (*prohairesis*) is praiseworthy. The praiseworthiness of choice is a function of several other properties. Something that is praiseworthy is voluntary or within our power. But it is also rare, difficult, and, of course, good. For instance, courageously choosing to sacrifice one's life in battle on behalf of one's city-state is praiseworthy. It is noteworthy that the praiseworthiness of excellent motivation shares certain properties with the moral value of moral motivation. Both are properties of motivation and also voluntary.

COMPLETION holds that all the moral value there is resides in motivation. Hence, we have now to consider whether the value of excellent motivation qua motivation is complete. In contrast to the moral value of moral motivation, the value of character excellence is incomplete. This is because Aristotle views character excellence as a functional kind. Character is for the sake of action. (By "action" here I mean not merely the mental activation of the disposition, but alteration of the body and of the environment.) Character excellence is the realization of the disposition of character in what Aristotle calls the primary way, so-called primary actualization. But because it is a functional kind, the disposition is realizable in a further way, namely, in its exercise, that is, in acting. Such realization—so-called secondary actualization—is indeed full realization of the disposition. Hence, if a man possessed practical excellence, but were, say, shipwrecked by himself on a remote island and thus largely rendered incapable of exercising this practical excellence, the remainder of his life would, with respect to the value of its practical dimension, be considerably less than if he had remained an engaged citizen of his city-state. In short, Aristotle holds that the value of excellent action is greater than that of excellent character.

In contrast, Aristotle maintains that the value of the praiseworthiness of the choice that depends on character excellence is greater than the value of the praiseworthiness of excellent action:

Moreover, when we praise or blame, we all look at the choice rather than the deeds, even though the exercise [in action] of an excellence is more valuable than the excellence itself. This is because people may perform bad actions under coercion, but choice cannot be coerced. Again, it is because it is not easy to discern the character of a choice that we are forced to make judgments of character based on people's deeds. The exercise of excellence is more choiceworthy, but the choice is more praiseworthy. (EE 1228a11-17)

Finally, recall that Annas states the problem relating to LOCUS as follows:

The second problem that we find with Aristotle's account of [nobility] concerns the importance of actual success in action for the virtuous agent.

Observe the word "importance" here. Aristotle regards "actual success" in action as important. But "important" entails having a significant degree of value. We can say now that the exercise of character excellence in excellent action is more important than the mere possession of character excellence because the former is the full realization of the latter.

PREFERENCE AND SUPREMACY

According to PREFERENCE, morality requires adherence to its injunctions regardless of one's inclinations or desires. In contrast, for Aristotle the achievement of character excellence requires the disposition to take pleasure in or at least not in any way be disinclined from engaging in excellent action. In other words, one's motivation to perform excellent action must be unified. Contrast the character of the merely self-controlled (*enkratês*), as opposed to sound-minded (*sôphrôn*), agent. The self-controlled man manages to perform the right action for the right reason. However, he lacks excellent character because he harbors a disinclination to perform the right action and hence is motivationally conflicted:

We should treat the pleasure or pain that is added on to one's actions as an indicator of one's [characterological] dispositions. For one who holds back from bodily pleasure and enjoys doing so is a sound-minded person, while one who is upset at doing so is self-indulgent. (EN 1104b3-7)

In short, the motivation that character excellence requires is not preference-independent.

According to SUPREMACY, morality's obligations or directives cannot be overridden. It is important here to distinguish normative from evaluative supremacy. SUPREMACY is a normative matter, a matter of what we have most reason or greatest obligation to do. It is not per se a matter of what is most

valuable. The two can come apart in cases where what is most valuable is not (wholly) within our power. For example, Kant holds that moral value has greater value than nonmoral value, but he holds that the best life is not merely a life of moral value. A life of morally deserved happiness is better.

Regarding normative supremacy, Aristotle's position is complicated and somewhat obscure. Within the domain of practical life, what practical wisdom enjoins, namely, right reason, is normatively supreme. But Aristotle regards the theoretical life as having greater value than the practical, political life. Note: I do not say that the theoretical life *per se* is evaluatively supreme. Aristotle recognizes aspects of *eudaimonia* that are not within our control. Hence, a given theoretical life exercised with theoretical excellence is subject to misfortunes that would mar its value. Granting this, relative to the political life, the evaluative superiority of the theoretical life at least recommends its pursuit. But it is unclear whether Aristotle holds more strongly that, to those capable of its achievement, the evaluative superiority of the theoretical life requires its pursuit. In other words, it is unclear what for Aristotle would justify a man's decision's to forego or compromise a theoretical life in favor of governing his city-state. Granted this irresolution, assume that right reason enjoins that, insofar as it is within one's power, one engage in theorizing and thus live a philosophical life. Insofar as character serves practical life, then, the norms that govern character are not supreme. Likewise, insofar as practical wisdom concerns practical, in contrast to theoretical, life, neither are those norms that govern practical wisdom supreme.

TASTE

TASTE was introduced as a negative condition. The idea is that Aristotelian character excellence seems to include dispositions that are nonmoral in terms of the range and kinds of affects and activities they govern. Annas cites magnificence, which concerns big-spending. Richard Kraut emphasizes a similar point in discussing the character excellence of good humor (*eutrapelia*):

Consider, for example, Aristotle's discussion of the [excellence] that has to do with social amusements, laughter, games, and play. . . . We are told immediately . . . that there are sorts of things one should . . . say, and a way in which one should say them (and similarly for what one should listen to). . . . Is Aristotle saying of certain jokes: it is morally wrong not to laugh at them? Or that we have a duty to laugh at them? It should be apparent that were we to use these words to convey what he is saying, we would be misunderstanding one of the points he is trying to make. (2006, 187–188)

Morally relevant concerns may enter into the spheres of big-spending and social amusements. For instance, making large financial contributions to corrupt political organizations and taking pleasure in racist jokes are morally wrong. But that is beside the point. Aristotelian practical excellence requires big-spending.

Morality does not because its commitment to EQUALITY includes the poor among those capable of moral action. Again, Aristotelian practical excellence requires a good sense of humor. But this does not mean a morally good sense of humor. Within the sphere of morally acceptable humor and sociability generally, there are more and less good-humored people and more and less sociable people. Morality's commitment to OTHERS minimally requires respect for persons as equals. It does not require a good sense of humor—which may not in fact be within our power—or that we cultivate a charming social life.

4 Conclusion

TASTE invites reflection on how we should conceive the property that demarcates Aristotelian character, governing its distinctive range of types of affection and action. Sarah Broadie provides some help, remarking on the fact that Aristotle recognizes forms of practical excellence other than practical wisdom. In particular, Aristotle recognizes craft knowledge and its specific forms such as medicine and architecture. How, Broadie asks, is the scope of practical wisdom, including character excellence, to be distinguished from the scope of craftsmanship and particular *technai*? Her answer is that practical wisdom concerns human action qua human. Not all humans should become doctors or architects, but all should become practically excellent (Broadie 1993).

On this view, Aristotelian character excellence is equivalent to human excellence. But to identify character excellence or practical excellence with human excellence is faulty and unclear. It is faulty because human excellence requires theoretical as well as practical excellence. It is unclear because it is inadequately precise. For instance, is Aristotelian character excellence a biological category? To say so would be misleading; likewise, to say that it is a sociobiological category. Aristotle thinks that other animals are "*politikoi*." Indeed, some animals, including social animals, have what he calls "natural excellences of character," of which the habituated character excellences of courage, gentleness, and the like are analogues. More precisely, then, character excellence seems to be a sort of civic category. That is, character excellence is required for flourishing within a city-state, more precisely, within the best kind of city-state, an aristocracy. Given Aristotle's non-egalitarian views about the characterological capacities of various kinds of human being and accordingly about the correct socio-political structure of the city-state, Aristotelian character excellence qua civic excellence is, more precisely, the excellence of the free male Greek aristocratic citizen.

In conclusion, according to the conditions of morality derived from the Williams's, Irwin's, and Annas's contributions, I suggest that Aristotelian character excellence differs from morality. It both includes features that morality lacks and lacks certain signal features that morality possesses. Whether the seven

conditions are indeed conditions of morality is open to question. Whether there are other conditions is also questionable.

Notes

1. Thanks to Richard Kraut for generous and valuable comments on a prior draft. Thanks to Iskra for the invitation and encouragement.
2. Kant notoriously criticizes OTHERS (cf. *Groundwork* 398). His point, that moral motivation must involve the agent's endorsement of a principle of practical reason, is an important topic. But Kant's view cannot be regarded as representative of modern morality.
3. I note, but will not discuss, the point that Aristotle's ideas regarding the distinct ways that character excellence and practical wisdom contribute to excellent action—particularly, Aristotle's claims that character excellence determines the practical goal (*telos*), while practical wisdom determines what conduces to or promotes that goal (*ta pros to telos*)—are much contested.
4. Cf. the brief, but fascinating discussion of the critical reception of Aristotle's egalitarianism among the scholastics in Bejczy (2011, 262–75).
5. I note that a more adequate treatment of this topic requires discussion of Aristotle's view that friends seek the good of the other for the other's own sake.

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Aristotle on the Person-Situation Debate

FROM NATURAL CHARACTER TO MORAL VIRTUE

Mariska Leunissen

1 Introduction

With the renewed interest in character among moral philosophers, Aristotle's concept of character—and specifically, the way it is developed in his ethical treatises—has come under fire as being psychologically implausible and empirically inadequate as an explanation for human action.¹ This chapter sets out to counterbalance this tendency by focusing on Aristotle's biological views about character and on the importance of what he calls "natural character traits" for the development of moral virtue. My goal is not to defend (an Aristotelian version of) virtue ethics, but rather more modestly to show that Aristotle's ethical theories do not exhaust his views about character as has traditionally been assumed, and that his treatment of natural character is more sensitive to situationists' critiques than one might have expected: for, since natural character traits have an entirely physiological basis, Aristotle's view naturally leaves room for situational factors like diet and climate to influence those traits and the corresponding behavior of people.²

In the ethical treatises, Aristotle discusses character almost exclusively in its role as the bearer of morality:³ it is a virtuous state of character that disposes one to perform actions that hit the mean and that are therefore praiseworthy, and Aristotle emphasizes that this virtuous state—and not just our actions—are "up to us and voluntary."⁴ Provided that we receive the appropriate moral education from childhood and are raised in a properly organized city, we can shape our character by performing right and just actions. The moral character and the unified psychological state that result from this kind of habituation—for Aristotle, one cannot have one virtue without having them all as one single condition of the soul and without being practically wise at the same time—is stable across time and robust across situations, and therefore reliably predicts and guides virtuous

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