

## Introduction

The aim of this book is to show how the thinking and feelings of Aristotle's good person are interdependent. According to Aristotle, the correct type of ethical thinking requires the correct virtue of character, and the correct virtue of character requires the correct type of feelings. The converse also holds: Having the correct type of feelings requires having the correct virtue of character and having the correct virtue of character requires the correct type of ethical thinking. Yet the details of such an account are unclear. I explain how choice (*prohairesis*) is an innovative and pivotal element in Aristotle's account. In the good person, correct thinking, desiring, and feeling all contribute to choice in motivating virtuous action. In other people, choice may fall short.

On my interpretation, the good person achieves this interdependence of thought and feeling by developing the virtues of character, for example, bravery, generosity, and calmness, and the virtues of thought, including practical wisdom or thoughtfulness (*phronēsis*), and the relatively neglected comprehension (*sunesis*) and consideration (*gnōmē*), together. However, it is not the mere *procedure* of becoming good that underwrites the correctness of good people's decisions, but the fact that their aims are objectively good and beautiful. While the psyche of the akratic is intermittently conflicted, and the psyche of bad people is conflicted or out of sync with the world, the good person's psyche is in sync with itself and with the world, analogous to a musical instrument that is in harmony, and tuned to the correct pitch.

### Aristotle's View of Thought and Feeling as *Sui Generis*

In discussions of thought and feeling in Aristotle's ethics, the modern philosophers Kant and Hume have loomed large.<sup>1</sup> Depending on which

<sup>1</sup> On Aristotle, Kant, and Hume, see Dahl (1984). On Aristotle and Kant, see, for example, Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (1996), Nancy Sherman

passages in Aristotle's work are emphasized, Aristotle may seem to be giving a Kantian style view according to which the good person is and ought to be motivated primarily by reason, or a Humean style view according to which desires and feelings are or ought to be in charge. I call these views "Kantian style" and "Humean style" because, while they are influential and appear in everyday conversation, it is controversial as to whether they are in fact the considered views of Kant and Hume themselves. In fact, depending on which passages in *their* works are emphasized, Kant and Hume's own views are subject to different interpretations just as much as Aristotle's views.<sup>2</sup> My goal is not to argue for a particular interpretation of Kant or Hume, but simply to show that Aristotle may be interpreted as thinking that the thought, desires, and feelings of the good person are interdependent in a way that is *sui generis*, and that his work need not be subject to a Kantian or Humean style interpretation. This is the central thesis of my book.

Contrary to my thesis, there are two main passages that suggest that Aristotle is committed to a Kantian or Humean style view of motivation, respectively. When Aristotle divides the human psyche into parts, he posits a part that has reason (*logos*) and a desiring part that listens to reason, which may suggest the Kantian style view that reason should rule (*EN* I 13 1103a30–31). (Here, I use the translation of "*logos*" that is most familiar to Aristotelian readers, "reason," instead of "thought," which I prefer.) On the other hand, Aristotle says that virtue of character, which relates to the feelings, "makes the goal right," while thoughtfulness or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) makes us achieve the things that promote the goal (*EN* VI 13 1145a5–6). This passage suggests a Humean style view.<sup>3</sup> I discuss the second

(1997), Christine Korsgaard (2009), and Allen Wood (2018). On Aristotle and Hume, see Irwin (1975) and Irwin (2007–9, Vol. 1, 158–168) against anti-rationalism. Most recently, see Jessica Moss (2014) in favor of a quasi-Humean view. Irwin (2007–9, Vol. 3, 56–57) concedes that Aristotle and Kant have different views on the feelings, but thinks that Kant can be brought to accept Aristotle's view. Wood (2018, 243) is even more sanguine.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Nancy Sherman (1997) on different works of Kant, and Nick Sturgeon's lectures on Hume's purple passages versus his unofficial views (unpublished).

<sup>3</sup> This passage is the topic of an important article by Jessica Moss (2011) and is also a crux of her book (Moss 2012, 153–198). I show how my understanding of Aristotle on thought and feeling supports a different view of the passage, one compatible with *phronēsis* making the goal right too, at the end of Chapters 3 and 4. In general, we also disagree about the role of sense-perception and pleasure in

passage at the end of Chapters 3 and 4. As for the first passage, I pay particular attention to Aristotle's remark that *prohairesis* (choice) is desiderative thought or thoughtful desire (*orektikos nous ē orexis dianoētikē*) (*EN VI 2 1139b4–5*). This striking phrase emphasizes thought and desire equally, and, as I argue, desire involves the feelings.

### The Doctrine of the Mean

Virtues and vices of character play an important role in Aristotle's ethics, as in any other virtue ethics.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle has a distinctive set of views about such virtues and vices of character, traditionally referred to as “the doctrine of the mean.” Since I shall have occasion to refer to the doctrine of the mean throughout my book, I make some brief remarks on my interpretation of the main points here.

First, according to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, each virtue of character is *relative to us*, that is, what an individual should feel or do on a particular occasion is relative to that individual's own circumstances and particular abilities.<sup>5</sup> Just as there is no universal answer to the question of what diet is suitable for both an accomplished athlete and a beginner, so, for example, there is no universal answer to the question what is the generous thing to do on any occasion. However, that does not mean that there is no objective answer to what a particular person should feel and do now in his particular circumstances and given his particular abilities. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the case of feelings is controversial, but Aristotle does say that on each occasion, the good person should have the feelings he should, when he should, about the things he should, toward the people he should, for the sake of what he should, and in the way he should (*EN II 6*

habituation (e.g., Moss 2012, 202, 216). On my view, it is important that the good person has “level 2 pleasure,” as explained in Chapter 6, section 6.6. But the main issue, from the point of view of the central argument of this book, concerns the passage cited above.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent understanding of virtue ethics does not rule out other factors being important too. See, for example, Lorraine Besser-Jones, and Michael Slote (2015).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account, see Gottlieb (2009, 19–37); cf. Ackrill (1973). For an opposing view of relativity, see Brown (1997) and (2014). I favor a qualitative account of the doctrine of the mean (cf. Hursthouse [1980–1]) as opposed to a quantitative one, for which see Curzer (2012) with comments by Gottlieb (2015).

1106b21–22). These are parameters that also apply to actions. Aristotelian relativity is not relativism; what is correct does not just depend on what some person or some society happens to think.

Second, when one has achieved all the virtues of character and the virtue of thought, thoughtfulness, both of which are necessary for developing any one of the virtues of character fully, one will achieve ethical equilibrium. Just as an old-fashioned scales, when properly balanced, will register the correct weight of what it is weighing, so the good person, being in equilibrium, will register the correct feelings and do the correct actions on the correct occasions.<sup>6</sup> (I argue that internal harmony is not sufficient for being a good person in Chapter 6.)

Third, each virtue also comes between two vices, one of deficiency and one of excess.<sup>7</sup> For example, the virtue of bravery comes between the vices of cowardice and rashness, and the virtue of generosity comes between the vices of stinginess and wastefulness. As it turns out, in general, the excesses reflect the mentality of those who have an excessive estimation of their own abilities and character, and the defects reflect the mentality of those who underestimate their abilities and character. Hence, to take perhaps the clearest example, the vain person who thinks herself worthy of great honors when she is not (exhibiting the excess vice) overestimates her abilities, while the pusillanimous person, thinking herself unworthy of the honors she deserves (exhibiting the vice of deficiency) underestimates hers. The magnanimous person (in the mean), who has self-knowledge, gets it right. Aristotle's triadic system therefore captures truths about human psychology that are obscured in a system that makes every virtue opposed to only one vice. For further nuances in Aristotle's discussion of the mentalities of good and bad people, see Chapter 6.

### **Kant and Hume**

I do not mean to suggest that whether or not one thinks that Aristotle has a Kantian or Humean style view of motivation, Aristotle is

<sup>6</sup> I discuss the relationship between feelings and actions in Chapter 3. The idea of a balance is an old one, mentioned by Alexander Grant (1874).

<sup>7</sup> Young (1996) refers to this as the "location" of the virtue, as opposed to intermediacy, which is aiming at the intermediate on a particular occasion. My account covers both. The good person's virtue is in a mean, located between virtue and vice, and she hits the mean or intermediate on each occasion.

indistinguishable from Kant and Hume on other grounds. For example, Kant does not base his ethics on a happy life and his duties are universal and are not relative to time, place, one's particular abilities, and so forth. Aristotle's term "*dei*" for what one *should* do or what is right to do, as in the parameters of the doctrine of mean, is not the same as the moral ought of Kant's categorical imperative. According to Aristotle, the good person will have the right feelings and do the right actions at the right time in the right way and so forth. It would make no sense for Kant to qualify his universal duties by time, place, and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

On Hume's account, feelings and desires are called "passions." Hume says that they are "original existences," not relating to anything outside the agent, and so cannot conflict with truth and reason. Contra Aristotle, *akrasia*, acting intentionally against one's better judgment, is impossible on Hume's view.<sup>9</sup> For example, Hume writes,

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent. (Selby-Bigge 1896, 217)

Leaving aside the problem of whether being more than five foot high fits Hume's own theory, as we shall see, the passions, according to Aristotle, are much richer than Hume's passions.

On the other hand, there may still be other substantive points of similarity between Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. Sympathy appears to play an important role in both Aristotle and Hume, and Kant's emphasis on treating oneself and others as ends in themselves arguably meshes with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean where one should avoid the excess vice, whereby one may treat others merely as means, and the deficiency vice, whereby one will treat oneself

<sup>8</sup> For other objections to a Kantian interpretation of "*dei*," see Kraut (2006a) and Annas (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Such elements of Hume's view are not all accepted by Moss (2012) and (2014).

merely as a means.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, Aristotle's account is still *sui generis*.

## Philosophical Method

### *Using Aristotle's Texts*

There are three Aristotelian texts about ethics, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Magna Moralia*. The *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* share three books. *Nicomachean Ethics* V, VI, VII are equivalent to *Eudemian Ethics* IV, V, VI. It is generally thought that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the later work and the more philosophically sophisticated.<sup>11</sup> The *Magna Moralia* is a contested work. It may have been written by a student of Aristotle, or it may have been written by a later author.<sup>12</sup> Either way, its account of the virtues of character is more like the *Eudemian* than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There is also the *Protrepticus*, which is gaining renewed interest, a work that Aristotle probably wrote early on when he attended Plato's Academy.<sup>13</sup> Since it does not mention any particular Aristotelian virtues or feelings, and does not distinguish practical and theoretical thought, it does not play a role in these pages.

In this book, I am most interested in working out Aristotle's views of thought and feeling as they occur in his pre-eminent work on ethics, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, although the books common to the *Eudemian Ethics* play a large role.<sup>14</sup> In a tradition going back at least to the nineteenth century, I think that it is reasonable to look at Aristotle's other work when this can throw light on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and especially where these may fill in gaps in Aristotle's account. For example, although feelings play an important role in Aristotle's ethics,

<sup>10</sup> As far as I know, these comparisons have not been made in the secondary literature.

<sup>11</sup> A dissenter is Anthony Kenny (2011), who has abandoned his view that the *Eudemian Ethics* is the later work, but still thinks that it is superior to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a view critiqued by Michael Pakaluk (1995).

<sup>12</sup> See the differing views of Cooper (1999 [1973], 195–211) and Rowe (1975).

<sup>13</sup> See Hutchinson and Johnson (2017).

<sup>14</sup> This book is in no way intended to be a comprehensive account of the whole of Aristotle's ethics. For a summary of the main ideas of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Gottlieb (2013).

there is no analysis of particular feelings in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For that, we need to turn to the *de Anima* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* II 1–11. Again, although *to kalon* (the beautiful) plays an important role in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, to understand it fully we need to turn to other works in the Aristotelian corpus.

It may be objected that one should not use works from different periods of Aristotle's career, let alone works written for different contexts and even containing conflicting ideas, in explaining Aristotle's views. I defend the use of particular works when I use them in particular chapters, but whether the use of other works does shed light on the *Nicomachean Ethics* can only be gauged from a consideration of my book as a whole.

### *Translating Aristotle's Ethics*

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is particularly hard to translate as English words for his technical terms may have acquired connotations that are different from Aristotle's Greek. Aristotle does not help matters by studiously explaining some terms while elsewhere giving them a different usage. For example, while he restricts knowledge (*epistēmē*) to knowledge of necessary truths in one passage, he applies it to disciplines with contingent subject matter elsewhere. In some cases, the traditional translations may be inapt, but changing them can cause confusion for those reading the scholarly literature that uses those translations. Therefore, while the translations are my own, unless otherwise stated, I am much indebted to previous translations. I only occasionally introduce new terms to translate Aristotle's terms, most notably "thoughtfulness" to translate "*phronesis*." I also have a glossary of key terms at the end of the book.

Aristotle's work is probably descended from his own lecture notes, so the style is compressed and some of his comments may be aide-memoires for himself rather than the versions he would have presented to his students. This means that the translator may have to add words or phrases to make some sentences comprehensible.

Even when aiming scrupulously at accuracy, the views of a translator may shine through. Thus Ross's translation of the text reveals his adherence to Kantian rules (Ross 1923). It is also possible for a translation to obscure an important feature of the text. Some commentators are wary of translating "*aretē*" as "virtue" because in Greek

“*aretē*” is broad enough to apply to the excellence of a knife as well as to the excellence of a person.<sup>15</sup> Yet translating “*aretē*” as “excellence” instead of “virtue” makes it impossible to see the connection between Aristotle’s ethics and modern virtue ethics.<sup>16</sup> The modern philosopher Judith Jarvis Thomson has no qualms about using the term “virtue” for a knife and for a person, commenting that “while being a sharp carving knife is not a moral virtue in a carving knife, it is a virtue in a carving knife” (Thomson 2008, 74).

Although Aristotle excludes women, slaves, and artisans from being full members of the polis, his own principles are often at odds with his stated views.<sup>17</sup> I shall therefore use language for the good person that is inclusive, even though Aristotle himself did not clearly do so. I address the problem of how women and others can develop the Aristotelian virtues in adverse circumstances in Chapter 3.<sup>18</sup>

### *Understanding Aristotle*

As we have seen, using works of Aristotle and translating them in particular ways are not mechanical processes, but require judgment. There is no such thing as pure exegesis of an Aristotelian text. No interpretation of Aristotle can be completely neutral. A certain amount of speculation is required in order to understand Aristotle’s claims. I have been quite selective not only in what passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and elsewhere to include in this book, but also in what scholarly debates to engage in, so as to keep the main theme of the book in focus. I have therefore tried to steer between going down every scholarly rabbit hole, and not discussing sufficiently the views of the main proponents in recent scholarly debates. I hope that this will leave the general reader more able to follow the central line of thought.

One way to expand the gaps in Aristotelian psychology would have been to introduce information from modern psychology. My approach

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Ross revised by Urmson (1984), Broadie and Rowe (2002). Even so, while Plato talks of the virtue of a knife, Aristotle never uses this example.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Philippa Foot (1978) and (2001), Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) and Julia Annas (1993) and (2011).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Keyt (2017), Irwin (1988, 358), Ober (2013), and Gottlieb (2009).

<sup>18</sup> For more on translating Aristotle’s ethics, see Gottlieb (2001a).



has been more conservative, only elaborating ideas to be found in Aristotle's own work.

Writing about a work that has been studied for over 2,000 years, it is likely that I have reinvented a few wheels. As Aristotle himself says, "We maintain that the same opinions arise in cycles among human beings not once or twice or occasionally, but infinitely often" (*Met.* I 3 339b27–28, cf. *Cael.* I 3 270b18–21; *Metaph.* XII 8 1074b10–12; *Pol.* II 5 1264a3–4, VII 10 1330a25–27). On the other hand, I have sometimes gone out on a limb to make sense of some of Aristotle's sketchier ideas.

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle perceptively comments that some people only listen to a speaker if he speaks mathematically, others only if he gives examples, and others expect him to cite poetry as evidence. Some want to have everything done precisely, and others are annoyed by precision (*Metaph.* II 2 995a6–9). He continues, "The precision of mathematics is not to be demanded in all cases, but only in the case of the things which have no matter" (*Metaph.* II 2 995a15–16). The precision of mathematics is therefore not applicable to ethics. Aristotle argues that it is the mark of an educated person to seek the precision that is suitable to the subject matter at hand (*EN* I 3 1094b23–1095a1).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while I have aimed to clarify obscure ideas and to provoke further thought, I have eschewed the mathematical exactitude that Aristotle thinks is inapplicable to ethics.

## Synopsis of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I discuss Aristotle's account of the psyche (soul) in book 1 chapter 13 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, his further distinction between theoretical and practical thinking in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 1, and the famous function argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* I 7. I also address Aristotle's unclarity about how to characterize desire, and his skepticism about parts of the psyche in *de Anima* III 9. This leads to a brief discussion of Plato's division of the psyche in *Republic* IV and the *Phaedrus*, and whether both Plato's and Aristotle's divisions lead to problems concerning the unity of motivation. This discussion begins to set the stage for my interpretation of Aristotelian *prohairesis* (often translated as "choice"), the characteristic motivation of the good

<sup>19</sup> On Aristotle and precision, see Dominic Scott (2015, 123–141).

person. As we shall see, the phenomenon of choice straddles different parts of the Aristotelian psyche in a way that Plato never envisaged in his own account of the psyche.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the Aristotelian feelings. Aristotle provides a list of the feelings in *Nicomachean Ethics* II 5, but he fails to give any analysis of their inner workings. For that we need to visit Aristotle's *Rhetoric* II 1–11 and passages from his *de Anima*. While it is a controversial matter to appeal to texts outside the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I argue that it is possible to draw important lessons from these texts for the interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* while keeping sight of the major differences between the scope and often the content of these different works. Two important features of the feelings that emerge from such an examination are (1) that the feelings provide indexical insight – information about the immediate context of choice and action, and (2) that the feelings, while motivational, only get their direction from a person's character and the particular circumstances that that person is in. For example, sympathy (*eleos*) may motivate one to help someone in need if one is a good person, or it may motivate one to turn away, if one is a bad person.

Chapter 3 addresses the question how one develops the correct (or incorrect) thought and feelings. This is a crux of Aristotelian scholarship. While Aristotle is widely believed to give an expansive account of moral education in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, his actual discussion is quite short and cryptic. When Aristotle says that thoughtfulness (*phronēsis*) comes mostly by teaching and that virtue of character comes by habituation, it may sound as if there are two processes taking place separately, one in relation to thinking and one in relation to feeling, with the process in relation to feeling coming first. I follow Burnyeat's insight that "What is exemplary in Aristotle is his grasp of the truth that morality comes in a sequence of stages with both cognitive and emotional dimensions" (Burnyeat 1980, 70–71). There are various ways to fill out Aristotle's account, but I do so by using the conclusions of Chapters 1 and 2 to explain exactly how thought and feeling become interdependent.

I show how the virtues of thought such as comprehension (*sunesis*) and consideration (*gnōmē*) emerge in habituation along with the virtues of character. I also discuss how one may become bad. I consider the conditions of women and slaves who have been habituated to have what would be vices in free men, and I use the case of Neoptolemus in