

ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE SELF-ABSORPTION
OBJECTION

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Lay Abstract: In this dissertation, I advance a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from what I call the “self-absorption objection.” Roughly, proponents of this objection state that the main problem with neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation is that they wrongly prescribe that our ultimate reason for acting virtuously is the fact that doing so is good *for us*. In an attempt to sidestep this objection, I offer what I call the altruistic account of motivation. On this account, the virtuous agent’s main reason for acting virtuously is based on her desire to act in accordance with a particular conception of the good life, where what makes such a conception good is not that it is good *for her*, but rather good, *qua human goodness*.

Abstract: Aristotelian eudaimonism – as Daniel Russell puts it – is understood as two things at once: it is the final end for practical reasoning, and it is a good human life for the one living it. This understanding of Aristotelian eudaimonism, on which one’s ultimate reason for doing all that one does *is* one’s *own eudaimonia*, has given rise to what I call the “self-absorption objection.” Roughly, proponents of this objection state that the main problem with neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation is that they prescribe that our ultimate reason for acting virtuously is the fact that doing so is good *for us*. In an attempt to adequately address this objection, I break with those contemporary neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation that insist that the virtuous agent ought to be understood as performing virtuous actions ultimately for the sake of her *own eudaimonia* (enlarged, no doubt, to include the *eudaimonia* of others). On the alternative neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation I go on to defend – what I call the altruistic account of motivation – the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for acting virtuously is based on a desire to act in accordance with her particular conception of the good life, where what makes such a conception good is not that it is good *for her*, but rather good, *qua human goodness*. More specifically, on the altruistic account of motivation I advance, the virtuous agent may be understood as being motivated by human goodness, valuing objects and persons only insofar as they participate in human goodness, and where all of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, and justifications are cashed out in terms of human goodness – as they say – “all the way down.”

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Introduction

“Suppose, when wondering whether we really ought to act in the ways usually called moral, we are told as a means of resolving our doubt that those acts are right which produce happiness. We at once ask: ‘Whose happiness?’ If we are told ‘Our own happiness’, then though we shall lose our hesitation to act in these ways, we shall not recover our sense that we ought to do so.” (Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” 1912)

What matters, morally speaking, is not just what we do, but *why* we do it. Following Immanuel Kant, we may think that actions performed in accordance with duty, though not from the motive of duty, may be said to have absolutely *no moral worth*.¹ If this seems too strong, we may want to follow Aristotle, who holds that voluntary actions performed in accordance with the moral virtues are in some sense praiseworthy, but who nonetheless insists that a *truly* virtuous action, must, *mutatis mutandis*, be performed for the right reason.² Regardless, however, of where we stand on the question of whether a motive can affect the moral quality of an action, I take it that most will agree that when it comes to “character-based” normative ethical theories – that is, those on which the assessment of one’s character is taken to be primary – the evaluation of motives ought to play a central role.³ This is because, as Bernard Mayo has correctly emphasized, virtue ethics has to do with “being” – as opposed to “doing” – and, in order to get an accurate sense as to what type of person someone is, we must pay special attention to the inner qualities of the agent, including, and most importantly, one’s motivations.⁴

No doubt, some moral philosophers may wish to push back here, and insist that we can get an accurate sense of what type of person someone is without paying attention to the individual’s motivations. One might argue that we can get a fairly good idea regarding the content of an individual’s character simply by

¹ Take, for instance, Kant’s “sympathetic philanthropist” who acts beneficently toward others, but only because he finds “an inner pleasure in spreading happiness” to others. For Kant, “an action of this kind, however right and however amiable it may be has ... no ... moral worth.” Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. H.J. Paton (1964) P. 66.

² Aristotle writes “but for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.” *EN* 1105a 29-35.

³ A notable exception here is Julia Driver. Driver argues that good motives are not necessary for an adequate theory of virtue. She writes, “as is the case with good intentions, good motives – where good motives are understood to be one’s having good objects – will not be necessary either.” Driver, Julia. *Uneasy Virtue*. (2001) P. 57.

⁴ By “being” Mayo has in mind one’s character. Mayo writes, “when we speak of a moral quality such as courage, and say that a certain action was courageous, we are not merely saying something about the action. We are referring, not so much to what is done, as to the kind of person by whom we take it to have been done. We connect, by means of imputed motives and intentions, with the character of the agent as courageous.” Mayo, Bernard. *Ethics and the Moral Life*. (1958) P. 211.

paying attention to her dispositions, habits, and actions. And, based on this – it might be argued – we may be able to draw fairly reliable inferences regarding the type of character an individual possesses without referring to motives. Now, while such a view might sound plausible at first glance, and seems to avoid a wide array of challenges – e.g., the problem of accessing what someone’s motivation *actually is* – it is, I argue, unsatisfactory. It is unsatisfactory because while paying attention to someone’s habits, dispositions, and actions may provide *some* insight into an individual’s character, it does not provide us with sufficient insight to make the everyday moral judgements and evaluations that we wish to make.⁵ In other words, without having access to *why* an individual does what she does, we cannot call someone “benevolent” or “generous” or “kind” with any degree of certainty. For, as we know all too well, people may appear caring, generous, and kind, when viewed based on their actions alone, but upon discovering what their true motives are, we may find out that they are not the wonderful people that we thought they were.⁶ While I take it that we’ve all experienced situations such as this, perhaps a more concrete example may help to illuminate what I have in mind.

Imagine a world-renowned scholar, with a great gift for synthesizing and analyzing complex global issues, such as poverty. Further imagine that while this individual would prefer spending almost all of his time doing his own research and working on his own publications, he spends a great deal of time performing service work for his department and helping others with their research. Let’s say that he takes seriously recruiting the best and brightest students to his university, supervises and lends his expertise to others, is relentless in terms of securing financial aid for all of the students under his tutelage, and so on. Based on these actions alone, it appears that this individual may be said to be benevolent, generous, and kind. Now, suppose, that we find out that this particular individual performed all of the actions above, not because he wanted to, say, help promising graduate students, but rather because he desired to put himself in a position where he might be able to obtain sexual relations with female graduate students. That is, suppose we find out that he recruited the best and the brightest, lent his expertise, and helped to secure financial aid for the students under his tutelage *primarily* for the sake of cultivating relationships with female graduate students, with the hope that such relationships might go on to include a sexual component down the road. Here, I take it that even if our world renowned scholar never goes on to have any sexual relations with any of the students under his tutelage, the mere fact that he performed all of these actions for the sake of his own sexual desires is enough, I think, to rule out calling him benevolent, generous, or kind. Further, to attribute such character traits to him, it seems, would be deeply misleading. What follows

⁵ What is missing, I contend, is access to the inner thoughts and motivations of the individual.

⁶ To be sure, my point here is not that if one pays attention to one’s motives, it necessary follows that one will make reliable moral judgments regarding an individual’s character. Rather, my point is only that by ignoring why one does what one does, we are unable to make character-based judgments and evaluations with any degree of certainty.

from this, I take it, is that the discovery of an individual’s motivations may be said to make all the difference when it comes to our moral evaluations of an individual’s character. Simply assessing what one does – i.e., one’s actions – is just not enough.

Given the central role that motivation plays in character-based normative ethical theories – such as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics – it is of utmost importance that what the normative ethical theory in question takes to be a virtuous motive is in fact virtuous, and what it takes to be a vicious motive is in fact vicious.⁷ For if it gets this wrong, all else crumbles with it. Recall, as previously stated, that, according to character-based normative ethical theories, our assessment of an agent’s motives for acting makes a great difference to our evaluation of that agent’s character.⁸ And, if we take a particular motive to be good when it is not, or vice versa, this will lead to us making incorrect moral judgments and evaluations. Returning to the example above, if an ethical theory (incorrectly) held that “acting for the sake of fulfilling one’s own sexual desires, come what may for others” is virtuous, then, our world-renowned scholar may be said to have acted virtuously, on that theory.⁹ In such a case, incorrectly identifying a vicious motive as a virtuous one yields an incorrect moral judgment. More generally, the same goes for every other case in which a virtuous motive is incorrectly taken to be vicious, and in which a vicious motive is incorrectly identified as virtuous.

Now, as will see, one of the central objections levied against neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is that it incorrectly takes a particular motivation – viz., acting for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia* – to be virtuous, when it is in fact – so the argument goes – better characterized as base. If this objection holds, we can easily see just how damning it is. For, just as in the example above, it will lead to us to making incorrect moral judgements and evaluations.¹⁰ That is, if this objection holds, it follows that every time an individual acts in accordance with virtue, but for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics would, *mutatis mutandis*, characterize such an action as virtuous, when it is in fact, *ex hypothesi*, not virtuous. This would lead to virtue ethics consistently getting things wrong.¹¹ And a normative ethical theory that consistently erred in its judgments, evaluations, and prescriptions would not be able to fulfill one of the

⁷ I.e., both in terms of being able to reveal important aspects about an individual’s character and in terms of something that we must consider if we are to use the virtue and vice terms with any degree of certainty.

⁸ And, no doubt, affects the moral quality of an individual’s action(s).

⁹ For his actions would be in accordance with virtue and would have been performed from a virtuous motive, and, *mutatis mutandis*, he may very well be said to be virtuous.

¹⁰ Further, such an account may also be said to prescribe that individuals act for the wrong reasons. For presumably if neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics holds that acting for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia* is a virtuous motive, then it would prescribe that actions be performed (at least in some scenarios) from such a motive. At the very least, it would not discourage that actions be performed from such a motive.

¹¹ I.e., both in terms of our assessments of individual actions as well as one’s character.

central desiderata of a normative ethical theory: providing proper guidance with respect to how we ought to live our lives.¹²

In this dissertation, I break with those contemporary neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation that insist that the virtuous agent ought to be understood as performing virtuous actions ultimately for the sake of her *own eudaimonia* (enlarged, no doubt, to include the *eudaimonia* of others).¹³ Broadly, on the alternative neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation I go on to defend, the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for acting virtuously is based on a desire to act in accordance with her particular conception of the good life, where what makes such a conception good is not that it is good *for her*, but rather that it is simply good, *qua human goodness*.¹⁴ More specifically, on what I call the “altruistic” account of moral motivation, the virtuous agent may be said to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition *ultimately* because she appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues.¹⁵ This account differs from more standard contemporary neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation in that it does not take the ultimate end of all of one’s actions to be one’s *own eudaimonia*, and, as we will see, there will be occasions where one ought to act contrary to one’s own *eudaimonia*.¹⁶ As a result, the altruistic account of moral motivation is able to fend off the all too familiar charges that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is committed to an account of moral motivation that is objectionably “self-absorbed,” “egoistic,” and “self-centred.”

Overview

In chapter one, I begin by laying out what I call the “self-absorption objection.” Roughly, proponents of this objection state that the main problem with all Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation is that according to them our ultimate reason for acting morally is that doing so is in our

¹² For other damning features of such an objection, see chapter one, sections one and two.

¹³ No neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist has *explicitly* adopted this route – i.e., rejecting the view that the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for acting virtuously ought to be her *own eudaimonia* – in order to address what I go on to call the “self-absorption objection.” However, this line of thought *has* been explored in trying to grasp Aristotle’s own account of moral motivation. For examples of such accounts, see Richard Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good* (1989), and Dennis McKerlie’s “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998).

¹⁴ On my account, none of the virtuous agent’s actions are performed for the sake of her *own eudaimonia*. Further, there will be times when the virtuous agent performs a particular virtuous action, while aware that doing so will actually *negatively* affect her *own eudaimonia*. For more on this view, see chapter four, section two.

¹⁵ This view marks a departure from the way in which neo-Aristotelians have, generally speaking, understood how the virtuous agent conceives of her ultimate end.

¹⁶ In doing so, I argue that we have good reason to reject what Anne Baril refers to as eudaimonism’s central recommendation (ECR): viz., that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia.” Baril, “Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics.” (2014) P. 23.

own objective self-interest; i.e., because doing so is good *for* us. However, they argue, being a morally good person requires taking as one’s ultimate goal something other than one’s own good: the good of others, or moral duty, for example. In the first section, I show that such an objection is not new: we find traces of it in the works of Henry Sidgwick, R.A. Prichard, and W.D. Ross. In the second section, I lay out the objection as it is put forth in recent work, especially by Thomas Hurka (2013) and Christine Swanton (2015). I conclude the chapter by laying out three tests that a neo-Aristotelian account of motivation must pass if it is to adequately address the self-absorption objection *in toto*. First, it must provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous individual. Second, it must lay out a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous individual. And third, it must be consistent with – or at the very least inspired by – the central core tenets of Aristotle’s Ethics. This chapter has two central aims: (1) to show that there are good grounds for taking the self-absorption objection seriously, and (2) to establish some criteria that a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation must meet if it is to adequately address this objection *in toto*.

In chapter two, I examine the three main strategies neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have employed for responding to the self-absorption objection. I call these the developmental approach, the two-standpoint approach, and the reconceptualization approach. I argue that none of these strategies is able to provide a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection at both (1) the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, and (2) the underlying level of motivation of the virtuous agent. The central aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the self-absorption objection still stands, despite various attempts by contemporary neo-Aristotelian to address it.

In chapter three, I begin charting a new way to address the self-absorption objection, starting with the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. Roughly, the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent is the reason why the virtuous agent acts the way that she does at the time that she acts.¹⁷ I argue in favour of what I call “The Recognition View.” This view states that the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, simply because she recognizes the intrinsic, non-relational goodness of the act itself. On this view, the mere recognition that a particular action is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Thus, the question of whether performing an action is “good for me” or “good for another” does not arise. As a result, the self-absorption objection cannot find any footing at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent. The central goal

¹⁷ The content of this motivation can generally be determined by asking (hypothetically or actually) the following question to a virtuous agent: “what motivated you to act virtuously when you acted?” The occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent is understood in contrast to the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent. See chapter one, section three for more on this distinction.

of this chapter is to provide an account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent that does not fall prey to the self-absorption objection.

In chapter four, I challenge a widely held assumption in the literature on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics: viz., that to be a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, one must endorse what Gregory Vlastos calls the “eudaemonist axiom.”¹⁸ This axiom states that the ultimate end of all of our actions ought to be our own *eudaimonia*. Here, I argue that it is unclear whether Aristotle actually held the eudaemonist axiom, and further lay out three arguments that suggest that he did *not* hold such a view: the argument from omission, the argument from self-concern, and the anti-maximization argument. I contend that if Aristotle himself did not subscribe – or at the very least may well not have subscribed – to the eudaemonist axiom, then neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists should not feel bound to do so either. Once neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics has been liberated from having to adhere to this axiom, the neo-Aristotelian is then able to reject the view that the ultimate end of one’s actions ought to be one’s own *eudaimonia*. This enables her to provide a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent.¹⁹

In chapter five, I lay out my own neo-Aristotelian account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent, which I call the “altruistic” account of motivation. This account states that the underlying reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is *ultimately because one appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues*. After laying out this account, I combine it with my account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, and with my account of early moral education, in order to provide a *unified* account of why the virtuous agent may be said to choose a life of virtue, and act/emote virtuously. I conclude by demonstrating that my unified account of moral motivation is immune from the self-absorption objection *in toto*, and is also free from what Michael Stocker refers to as “moral schizophrenia.”²⁰ On my account, the virtuous agent may be understood as being motivated by human goodness, and valuing objects only insofar as they participate in human goodness. All of the agent’s justifications for her actions are given in terms of human goodness. Such an account of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, and justification is *human goodness* – as they say – “all the way down.”²¹

¹⁸ Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. P. 203.

¹⁹ By “underlying motivation,” I mean the deeper-seated motivation that explains both why an individual begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and also why an individual may be said to maintain said disposition. For more on the underlying motivation, see chapter one, section three.

²⁰ By “moral schizophrenia” Stocker has in mind a potent phenomenological discomfort experienced as a result of not having one’s motives, reasons, values, and justifications coexist in a harmonious way. Put simply, moral schizophrenia is problematic because it precludes an individual from living well. For more on “moral schizophrenia”, see Stocker’s “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67.

²¹ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (2001) P. 134.

The overall aim of this dissertation is to lay out a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that does not fall prey to the most serious and longest standing objection levied against virtue ethics: namely, that it offers an unacceptably egoistic account of moral motivation.²² It is my hope that in doing so, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics will broaden its appeal, from newcomers being introduced to normative ethical theories for the first time, to those who have turned away from neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as a result of feeling dissatisfaction with the way in which “one’s own *eudaimonia*” features in neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation.²³ The re-emergence of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics in contemporary moral theory is still relatively new. By showing how it is possible to respond to one of the most persistent, recurring objections against neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, I hope to contribute to the growing popularity of this approach to normative ethical theory.

Two Preliminary Notes on the Self-Absorption Objection

Before turning to the first chapter, two preliminary notes are in order. First, in noting above that the thrust of the self-absorption objection is that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics incorrectly takes one’s own *eudaimonia* to be the ultimate end of all of one’s actions, one might have wondered just what was meant by “one’s own *eudaimonia*.” As we will see, Aristotelians, neo-Aristotelians and proponents of the self-absorption objection differ in their understanding of what Aristotelian *eudaimonism* is, and how we ought to understand the claim that the virtuous agent acts virtuously for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*. At the very least, however, I take it that when proponents of the self-absorption objection discuss the virtuous agent’s “own *eudaimonia*” – and, likewise, when virtue ethicists claim that the virtuous agent acts virtuously for the sake of her own *eudaimonia* – the emphasis on one’s own *eudaimonia* is not to be understood trivially. This is important to note because for some – for example, John McDowell – the virtuous agent’s own *eudaimonia* (i.e., what is objectively good *for* the virtuous agent) ought to be understood essentially as what is good *for* humans.²⁴ On McDowell’s view, what is good for, say, the virtuous individual and what is good *qua* human goodness are so deeply intertwined, that, for example, one could very well substitute the claim that the virtuous agent

²² As we shall see, a variant of this objection is first raised by David Solomon in “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” (1988). More recently, Christine Swanton writes that “one would think that by now the self-centredness objection has been well and truly dealt with by virtue ethicists. But the objection never seems to go away. This suggests that it is more serious than virtue ethicists have taken it to be.” Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics,” P. 112 (2015).

²³ See for example Christine Swanton’s *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (2003).

²⁴ McDowell writes, “with the equation understood this way round, it is because a certain life is a life of exercises of human excellence, or, equivalently, because it is a life of doing what it is the business of a human being to do, that the life is in the relevant sense the most satisfying life possible for its subject, circumstanced at each point as he is.” McDowell, John. “The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s Ethics” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (1980) P. 370.

ultimately acts virtuously for the sake of her *own* good, or her *own eudaimonia*, with the claim that the virtuous agent ultimately acts virtuously because doing so is good *qua* human goodness. On this reading, talk of one’s *own eudaimonia* is misleading, because there is nothing particularly one’s own on this view. The two – i.e., human goodness and what is good *for* an agent – are so deeply intertwined that they cannot come apart. Now, whatever proponents of the self-absorption objection and neo-Aristotelians mean by “one’s own *eudaimonia*,” to be sure, it is clearly not this.²⁵

Aristotelian eudaimonism, as it is generally understood today – and how I take it to be understood by most of the interlocutors in this dissertation, unless specified otherwise – is viewed as playing two central roles. As Daniel Russell puts it, “[*eudaimonia* is] two things at once: it is the final end for practical reasoning, and it is a good human life for the one living it.”²⁶ On this view – what I take to be Daniel Russell’s view, but what we might also call the orthodox view – *eudaimonia* is understood as a final and comprehensive end in the sense that it is for the sake of *eudaimonia* that we do all that we do, and we do not desire *eudaimonia* for the sake of anything else. And, as a result of *eudaimonia* serving as our final and comprehensive end, there are certain alleged formal constraints that any adequate account of *eudaimonia* in the Aristotelian tradition must adhere to. Most importantly, for our purposes here, one’s *eudaimonia* must be objectively good for the one living it.²⁷ Put slightly differently, *my eudaimonia* must be good *for me*.²⁸ By “good for me”, I do not simply mean that it aligns with my conception of what it means to live well, but also that it promotes *my* flourishing or *my* objective well-being.²⁹

The second preliminary point I would like to make concerns the nature of the self-absorption objection. Unfortunately, philosophers have used – and

²⁵Daniel Russell writes, “lastly, how far is this emphasis on human fulfillment to go? If we keep pushing this thought, we might end up characterizing happiness as “being a good specimen of humanity,” for instance; but that sounds more like our goodness than like our good. The life of a good human specimen is obviously some sort of “good life,” but recall that happiness is a good life for the one living it, and being a good specimen is not that sort of good.” Russell, Daniel, “Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. P. 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, P.14.

²⁷ As Daniel Russell has – I think correctly – recently pointed out, while Aristotelian eudaimonism involves both “human fulfillment and individual fulfillment”, part of what it means to pursue our own *eudaimonia* or our own happiness on the orthodox view involves the end of giving ourselves a good life, where this is best understood not in terms of pursuing the good *qua* human goodness. *Ibid.*, P. 21.

²⁸ Daniel Russell writes, “the final end is an “objective” good, we might say, in the sense that pursuing that good is important for one’s happiness whether one thinks so or not; and in that case, a person is not the final authority on what his or her happiness requires.” *Ibid.*, P. 19.

²⁹ These two points form what Anne Baril refers to as Eudaimonism’s central recommendation (ECR): viz. that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia.” Baril, Anne. “Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics.” (2014) P. 23. In Chapter 4, I go on to argue that Aristotelian eudaimonism need not be committed to this second condition.

continue to use – terms such as “egoism”, “formal egoism”, “benign egoism,” “self-centredness,” “self-absorption,” etc., in different ways.³⁰ And this, no doubt, has led to some philosophers simply speaking past one another, as opposed to engaging in a meaningful philosophical debate. In an attempt to mitigate confusion, and to provide some clarity on what the self-absorption objection is, I will now say a few words regarding the nature of this objection, focusing on what those who advance it take to be problematic and what they do not take to be problematic. Beginning with the latter, the self absorption objection has absolutely nothing to do with the particular actions that the virtuous individual characteristically performs.³¹ As neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have correctly pointed out, the virtuous individual – who acts in accordance with the moral virtues – does not act in selfish or self-regarding ways, but may be described as characteristically acting in ways that are good for others. Put slightly differently, the self-absorption is *not concerned with whether neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is substantively egoistic*.³² Sophisticated proponents of the self-absorption objection are happy to grant that Aristotle’s virtuous individual may be said to act generously, kindly, justly, benevolently, charitably, and so on.

At a general level, the self-absorption objection is concerned with *why* the virtuous individual acts the way that she does; i.e., why she acts virtuously. More specifically, the self-absorption objection is focused on the extent to which the virtuous individual acts virtuously for the sake of her *own eudaimonia*.³³ The basic idea here is that the extent to which our own *eudaimonia* features or plays a role in explaining why we act the way that we do can vary. Presumably, there is some proper amount or range that one’s own *eudaimonia* ought to feature in motivating one to act virtuously. To hit such a target would be admirable or fine, while to miss it would be shameful or base.³⁴ On one end of the spectrum we may

³⁰ For a discussion of the various ways that philosophers have used such terms, see for example Christopher Toner’s “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism” (2010).

³¹ Put slightly differently, the self-absorption objection does not seek to address the metaphysical issue regarding what makes a moral virtue a moral virtue. While some eudaimonists, no doubt, understand the moral virtues solely in terms of what enables a particular agent to flourish, some neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists are able to side-step such an objection by insisting that what makes a moral virtue is *not* to be understood in terms of an agent’s flourishing, but rather in terms of what it means to live well *qua human*. For example, a neo-Aristotelian may follow Gary Watson’s lead. He writes “an Aristotelian ethics of virtue will look something like this... virtues are (a subset of the) human excellences, that is, those traits that enable one to live a characteristically human life, or to live in accordance with one’s nature as a human being.” Watson, “On the Primacy of Character.” P. 235.

³² A substantive egoist is an agent whose concerns are focused narrowly on herself, who does not see her good as including the good of others, and who typically acts in ways that promote only her own good.

³³ This focus can arise at either the underlying level of motivation or the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent. For more on this distinction, see chapter one, section three.

³⁴ The self-absorption objection takes for granted that the extent to which one acts virtuously for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia* is something that is in one’s own control; i.e., it is subject to the will.

be said to act virtuously *entirely* for the sake of our own *eudaimonia*, while on the other end of the spectrum we may be said to act virtuously without *any* regard for our own *eudaimonia*. Presumably, somewhere on the spectrum is the correct amount of concern to have for one’s own *eudaimonia* when acting virtuously. Now, the self-absorption objection takes to be problematic all of those accounts of motivation on which one’s own *eudaimonia* plays too large of a role in explaining why the virtuous agent acts virtuously. What this means is that the self-absorption objection has as its target not only those accounts of moral motivation on which one acts virtuously *solely* for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia*, but also all of those accounts of moral motivation on which concern for one’s own *eudaimonia* plays too large a role in the virtuous agent’s motivation.

Hoping to have shed some light on (1) Aristotelian eudaimonism as it is generally understood today, and (2) the aim and scope of the self-absorption objection, I now go on to show how this objection has featured in recent moral theory. By doing so, I aim to clarify the scope and structure of the objection, and to show what a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical theory needs to do to avoid it.

Chapter 1: The Self-Absorption Objection

“It will be best to face at once and consider a natural and common criticism of Aristotle; the criticism that his virtuous man is not moral at all but a calculating egoist whose guiding principle is not duty but prudence, Bishop Butler’s ‘cool self-love.’” (Hardie, “The Final Good in Aristotle’s Ethics”, 1965)

Introduction

Opposition toward Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is not new.³⁵ Upon a quick glance at the “fall and rise” of Aristotle’s ethics,³⁶ we find no shortage of critics blasting his account of moral motivation as being *unacceptably* self-regarding/egoistic.³⁷ This is because – on the orthodox reading – Aristotle is said to claim that the virtuous agent’s ultimate or underlying reason for acting morally stems primarily from his/her own self-regard, as opposed to his/her regard for others for their own sake.³⁸ This reading has led to what I shall refer to going forward as the “self-absorption objection.”³⁹ Roughly, proponents of this objection state that the main problem with Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is that it prescribes that our ultimate reason for acting morally is the fact that doing so is in our *own* objective self-interest.⁴⁰

³⁵ By “account of moral motivation”, I mean (i) the occurrent motivation from which the virtuous person acts and (ii) the underlying or ultimate motivation from which the virtuous person decides to cultivate the virtues of character.

³⁶ I adopt this term from Jennifer Welchman’s “The Fall and Rise of Aristotelian Ethics in Anglo-American Moral Philosophy Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (2012). In this work, Welchman tracks the fall and rise of Aristotle’s ethics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and sees a pattern of Aristotle’s ethics being met with fierce resistance, and then followed by broad approval.

³⁷ W.F.R. Hardie writes, “it will be best to face at once and consider a natural and common criticism of Aristotle; the criticism that his virtuous man is not moral at all but a calculating egoist whose guiding principle is not duty but prudence, Bishop Butler’s ‘cool self-love’” Hardie, “The Final Good in Aristotle’s Ethics. (1965) P. 287.

³⁸ This interpretation is held by Henry Sidgwick, W.D. Ross, D.J. Allan, Thomas Hurka, Charles Kahn, *et alia*. Some virtue ethicists – following Anne Baril – insist that such a view is one of the central tenets of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. She claims that part of what makes a virtue ethical theory eudaimonistic is its endorsement of what she calls Eudaimonism’s central recommendation (ECR): viz. that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia.” “Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics.” (2014) P. 23. I see no reason why one cannot be a eudaimonist virtue ethicist while rejecting ECR. As shown in chapter four, section two, there is reason to think that Aristotle himself – one of the greatest eudaimonists – did not hold what Baril refers to as “ECR.”

³⁹ It is important to note, however, that the precise form and emphasis of what is in fact objectionable about Aristotle’s account of moral motivation *does* differ based on the proponent of the objection. How the various objections differ will become apparent in what follows.

⁴⁰ This is not to say that all moral actions are performed *purely* for the sake of one’s own end, but rather that the *ultimate* reason for acting morally is that doing so is good for one’s self. Acting morally may not be purely for the sake of oneself insofar as others are *constituents* – and not merely means – of one’s own *eudaimonia*.

In this chapter, my main aim is to lay out the contemporary objection made against the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation. To help situate this criticism, I begin by providing a brief historical overview of the objection. In doing so, my aim is to demonstrate that the underlying objection made against the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation today is already present – *albeit*, conceptualized slightly differently – in the works of Henry Sidgwick, R.A. Prichard, W.D. Ross, *et. alia*.⁴¹ It is my contention that by placing the self-absorption objection in its historical context, we will be in a better position to appreciate and understand the thrust behind a common objection to Aristotelian virtue ethics still being made today.⁴² In the second section of this chapter, I turn to the objection made against the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation as it is put forth in recent work by Thomas Hurka (2013) and Christine Swanton (2015). In this section, my aim is to succinctly lay out their arguments, and to show that the objection raised is a serious one, and one that needs to be addressed if virtue ethics is going to be said to have an adequate account of moral motivation.⁴³ Finally, I conclude this chapter by laying out the criteria that a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation must meet if it is to address the self-absorption objection. Here, my aim is to provide a standard that accounts of moral motivation must meet if they are going to be deemed adequate, and, further, provide us with a tool to assess various and competing accounts of moral motivation.

⁴¹ We see traces of the contemporary objection as early as the Stoics. As Julia Annas notes, “the Stoics are the first ethical theorists clearly to commit themselves to the thesis that morality requires impartiality to all others from the moral point of view.” Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993 P. 265. On my reading, implicit in this thesis is the idea that to act virtuously towards others with an eye on one’s own *eudaimonia* violates the stoic thesis that morality requires impartiality from the moral point of view. The objection may also be seen in the writings of John Duns Scotus, Joseph Butler, John Hare, D.J. Allan, *et alia*.

⁴² It is my contention that many neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have too quickly dismissed the significance of the self-absorption objection made against the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation. Hopefully, by showing that one of the best historians of western philosophical thought, Sidgwick, and one of the pre-eminent translators of Aristotle’s ethics, W.D. Ross, both criticize Aristotle’s account of moral motivation on these grounds, perhaps others will re-consider the significance of the objection laid out below.

⁴³ I follow Christine Swanton in understanding neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as a genus “analogous to consequentialism, as opposed to, say, hedonistic utilitarianism.” Swanton, Christine. *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003. P. 1. Here, my claim is that the objection raised by Swanton and Hurka is problematic for most – though perhaps not all – species of virtue ethics. As emphasized in the Introduction, those virtue ethicists who understand “my *eudaimonia*” in terms of “living well *qua human goodness*” – as perhaps John McDowell does – might be able to sidestep this objection. That said, it is incumbent on all species of eudaimonistic virtue ethics to show that its version is not committed to egoism. As Julia Annas correctly emphasizes, “any eudaimonist account of virtue has to meet the challenge of showing that eudaimonism is not committed to egoism... Egoistic forms of eudaimonism are of course possible (Epicurus, for example).” Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, P. 152.

1.1. The Self-Absorption Objection: A Historical Overview

Sidgwick on Aristotle’s Account of Moral Motivation

Within his systematic comparative study of the major ethical theories in *The Methods of Ethics*, Henry Sidgwick provides us with an insightful evaluation of various metaethical issues, including the nature and importance of motives.⁴⁴ In his discussion of motives, he begins by drawing an important distinction between “intention” and “motive.” Briefly, he understands the former as desiring to bring something about,⁴⁵ and the latter as the reason *why* a particular agent chooses to bring something about.⁴⁶ He argues that while our common judgements of right and wrong relate primarily to intentions – i.e., we judge individuals’ actions mainly based on *what* they desire, and not *why* they desire it – motives *do* play an important role in our moral assessments.⁴⁷ Further, he goes on to argue that insofar as we may be said to be in control of our motives – and perhaps, our dispositions as well⁴⁸ – we may be said to have a corresponding moral duty to cultivate them. Hence he writes, “it is doubtless true that it is our duty to get rid of bad motives if we can; so that a man’s intention cannot be *wholly* right, unless it includes the repression, so far as possible, of a motive known to be bad.”⁴⁹

Given the role that motive plays in our moral assessments – along with the fact that we may be said to have a duty to repress “bad motives” insofar as doing so is possible – some may wonder what motive is appropriate or best. On this point, Sidgwick first acknowledges that many “moralists of influence” maintain that the best motive is “doing what is right as such [or] realising duty or virtue for duty or virtue’s sake.”⁵⁰ However, Sidgwick goes on to distance himself from such views. He writes, “I think it impossible to assign a definite and constant ethical value to each different kind of motive, without reference to the particular

⁴⁴ The central aim of my thesis is to address the objection laid against the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation.

⁴⁵ He writes, “when we speak of the intention of an act we usually, no doubt, have desired consequences in view.” Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981. P. 202.

⁴⁶ He writes, “I shall use the term Motive to denote the desires of particular results, believed to be attainable as consequences of our voluntary acts, by which desires we are stimulated to will those acts.” Ibid., P. 363.

⁴⁷ He writes “in the first chapter of this third Book I was careful to point out that motives, as well as intentions, form part of the subject-matter of our common moral judgments: and indeed in our notion of ‘conscientiousness’ the habit of reflecting on motives, and judging them to be good or bad, is a prominent element.” Ibid., P. 362.

⁴⁸ He writes, “it should, however, be observed that even when it is beyond our power to realise virtue immediately at will, we recognise a duty of cultivating it and seeking to develop it: and this duty of cultivation extends to all virtuous habits or dispositions in which we are found to be deficient, so far as we can thus increase our tendency to do the corresponding acts in the future.” Ibid., P. 227.

⁴⁹ Ibid., P. 202.

⁵⁰ Ibid., P. 204.

circumstances under which it has arisen, the extent of indulgence that it demands, and the consequences to which this indulgence would lead in any particular case.”⁵¹ Now, though Sidgwick does not think that we can rank every motive from best to worst, he does think that some motives are higher – i.e., morally more meritorious and praiseworthy – than others. He writes,

“On one or two points, indeed, we seem to be generally agreed; *e.g.* that the bodily appetites are inferior to the benevolent affections and the intellectual desires; and perhaps that impulses tending primarily to the well-being of the individual are lower in rank than those which we class as extra-regarding or disinterested. But beyond a few vague statements of this kind, it is very difficult to proceed.”⁵²

The important thing to note here is that Sidgwick holds self-regarding motives to be morally *inferior* to other-regarding motives. In fact, on his view, insofar as it is possible to replace self-regarding motives with higher ones, it is our duty to do so.⁵³ He continues,

“There are two distinct aims in moral regulation and cultures, so far as they relate to motives: (1) to keep the “lower” motive within the limits within which its operation is considered to be legitimate and good on the whole, so long as we cannot substitute for it the equally effective operation of a higher motive; and at the same time (2) to effect this substitution of “higher” for “lower” gradually, as far as can be done without danger, – up to a limit which we cannot definitely fix, but which we certainly conceive, for the most part, as falling short of complete exclusion of the lower motive.”⁵⁴

In light of these two aims of moral regulation – along with the view that self-regarding motives are inferior to other-regarding motives⁵⁵ – it is clear what

⁵¹ Ibid., P. 369.

⁵² Ibid., P. 367.

⁵³ Unlike moral theorists who extend to virtuous agents a sense of extended self-interest, Sidgwick insists on the sharp distinction between the self and others. He writes, “it would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently “I” am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals: and this being so, I do not see how it can be proved that this distinction is not to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual.” Ibid., P. 498.

⁵⁴ Ibid., P. 370.

⁵⁵ He writes, “on the whole, then, I conclude...that while intentions affecting the agent’s own feelings and character are morally prescribed no less than intentions to produce certain external effects, still, the latter form the primary – though not the sole – content of the main prescriptions of duty, as commonly affirmed and understood.” P. 204. Here, Sidgwick asserts that we ought to

Sidgwick would think of Aristotle’s account of motivation. That is, he would argue that given that Aristotle’s account insists that one’s underlying motivation – or ultimate aim – be one’s *own eudaimonia*, and insofar as it is possible to have as one’s underlying motivation a less self-regarding one, Aristotle ought to abandon his underlying self-regarding motive for a higher one.⁵⁶ Now, if it was impossible – as some psychological egoists maintain⁵⁷ – to act for reasons that were not primarily self-regarding *or* if acting primarily with concern for oneself simply turned out to be the same as acting for the sake of others, then Sidgwick’s objection to Aristotle’s account of motivation would amount to very little. However, given that we *are* capable of setting as our ultimate ends the happiness/*eudaimonia* of others,⁵⁸ and insofar as acting for the sake of one’s own happiness is distinct from acting for the sake of another’s happiness, the objection raised by Sidgwick stands, at least on the assumption that other-regarding motives are in some sense preferable to self-regarding ones.⁵⁹

perform our duty primarily for the sake of the external effects that our actions will bring about, and not primarily because of how the actions may affect us. It is also important to note that self-regarding motives are not only inferior to other-regarding motives for assessing particular actions, but also in terms of assessing our life plans. Sidgwick writes, “and certainly one’s individual happiness is, in many respects, an unsatisfactory mark for one’s supreme aim, apart from any direct collision into which the exclusive pursuit of it may bring us with rational or sympathetic benevolence.” Ibid., P. 403.

⁵⁶ Here, I claim that Sidgwick *would* argue, – as opposed to does argue – because in the particular passage in which he attacks egoistic accounts of moral motivation, he does not address Aristotle directly, but rather Ancient Greek philosophers as a group. That said, Aristotle not only falls within the group of Ancient Greek philosophers that Sidgwick refers to, but is – on my reading – the chief one Sidgwick has in mind. He writes, “indeed it may be said that egoism in this sense was assumed in the whole ethical controversy of ancient Greece; that is, it was assumed on all sides that a rational individual would make the pursuit of his own good his supreme aim: the controverted question was whether this good was rightly conceived as pleasure or virtue or any *tertium quid*.” Ibid, P 91-92.

⁵⁷ T.H. Irwin claims that Sidgwick does not think that we find the dualism of practical reason in the history of western philosophy before Joseph Butler. Irwin seems to suggest that Sidgwick maintains that Aristotle is a psychological egoist. Irwin., T.H. “Scotus and the Possibility of Moral Motivation” in *Morality and Self-Interest*. Ed. P. Bloomfield. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008 P. 159.

⁵⁸ Sidgwick clearly believes this is possible. He writes, “if the duty of aiming at the general happiness is thus taken to include all other duties, as subordinate applications of it, we seem to be again led to the notion of happiness as an ultimate end categorically prescribed – only it is now the general happiness and not the private happiness of any individual. And this is the view that I myself take of the utilitarian principle” Sidgwick, Op Cit., P. 8.

⁵⁹ It is important to note that the type of egoism that Sidgwick attacks here is now often referred to as formal – as opposed to substantive – egoism. He writes, “we see, in short, that the term Egoism, so far as it merely implies that reference is made to the self in laying down first principles of conduct, does not really indicate in any way the substance of such principles. For all our impulses, high and low, sensual and moral alike, are so far similarly related to self that We tend to identify ourselves with each as it arises” Ibid., P. 90-91. Precisely *why* Sidgwick holds that self-regarding motives are inferior to other-regarding motives is not important for the purposes of my project here. That said, Sidgwick *seems* to suggest throughout *The Methods of Ethics* that to insist

H.A. Prichard on Aristotle’s Account of Moral Motivation

In his seminal paper “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” H.A. Prichard begins his investigation into the nature of moral motivation by asking the following question: “is there really a reason why I should act in the ways in which hitherto I have thought I ought to act?”⁶⁰ He goes on to argue that answers to this question have generally fallen into one of two camps. He writes,

“*Either* they [i.e., previous moral philosophers] state that we ought to do so and so, because, as we see when we fully apprehend the facts, doing so will be our good, i.e. really, as I would rather say, for our own advantage, or, better still, for our happiness; *or* they state that we ought to do so and so, because something realized either in or by the action is good. In other words, the reason “why” is stated in terms either of the agent’s happiness or of the goodness of something involved in the action.”⁶¹

In the first camp, Prichard places Plato, Mill and Aristotle – *et alia* – as philosophers who set out to “convince the individual that he ought to act in so-called moral ways by showing that to do so will really be for his happiness.”⁶² In the second camp, Prichard places various consequentialists and deontologists who claim that the “goodness [of an act] is the reason why it ought to be done.”⁶³ Now, while Prichard ultimately goes on to reject both reasons for *why* one ought to act morally,⁶⁴ he does recognize two intrinsically good motivations. He writes, “a

that our ultimate aim is our *own* happiness is in some way or another necessarily self-defeating. He writes, “reason shows me that if *my* happiness is desirable and a good, the equal happiness of any other person must be equally desirable.” Ibid., P. 403. And, further, he writes that to suggest that “each individual is to seek his own happiness at the expense (if necessary) or, at any rate, to the neglect of others... [is to offend] both our sympathetic and our rational regard for others’ happiness.” Ibid., P. 403.

⁶⁰ Prichard, H.A. “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake” in *Obligation: Essays and Lectures*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1949. P 1.

⁶¹ Ibid., P. 2.

⁶² Ibid., P. 2. Though Prichard does *not* explicitly place Aristotle in the first camp here, he does do so in his essay “Moral Obligation.” He writes, “the idea that we always seek, i.e. act for the sake of, our own good is one which has not infrequently been held. Aristotle shared this idea with Plato, and it was in effect held by Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, and T.H. Green.” Prichard R.A., “Moral Obligation” in *Moral Writings*. Ed. MacAdam, Jim. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002. P. 183.

⁶³ While Prichard thinks both approaches to answering *why* one ought to be moral ultimately fail to provide an adequate response, he does admit that the latter response is more fruitful. Precisely *why* the second camp fails to provide a reason why one ought to be moral need not concern us here. What is important for us here is the account of motivation that Prichard attributes to Aristotle, and the reasons why he considers it problematic.

⁶⁴ Prichard writes, “this demand is, as I have argued, illegitimate.” Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake.” P. 16. While Prichard does not think that we can provide a convincing reason for why we ought to act morally, this is not to say that he does not think that we

motive which we recognize as good seems to belong to one of two species. It may be either the sense that the act ought to be done *or* a desire arising out of some intrinsically good emotion such as sympathy, family affection, shame at being overcome by fear, or some good interest, such as interest in one’s family or the public welfare.”⁶⁵

It is important to note that Prichard follows Sidgwick in adopting a strong distinction between moral reasons and prudential reasons, and – also like Sidgwick – insists that there is something problematic in acting morally for the sake of prudential reasons.⁶⁶ Prichard, however, goes further than Sidgwick, and – like G.E. Moore – claims that morality and moral obligations are *sui generis* in nature, and that neither can be reduced or accounted for in either moral or non-moral terms.⁶⁷ This leads Prichard to reject the view that our reasons for acting morally can be ultimately grounded in concern for our own interest. Now, throughout Prichard’s moral writings, he provides a number of arguments for why it is objectionable to act morally for the sake of one’s own objective well-being. However, given the limited space here, I restrict my focus to only one such argument.⁶⁸

cannot act morally for the right reason. His point is simply that we cannot give an account of *why* the right reason *is* the right reason.

⁶⁵ Prichard, R. A. “What is the Basis of Moral Obligation” in *Moral Writings*. Ed. MacAdam, Jim. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002. P. 3. Here, Prichard does *not* recognize acting for the sake of one’s own happiness as having any moral worth. This is not to say, however, that such an action is not right. For Prichard, the ‘rightness’ of an act and whether an act is moral can come apart. He writes, “it is also, I think, quite certain that the rightness or wrongness of an action is independent of the motive. [For example] A man who pays his debts from fear of the consequences does what he ought just as much as the man who does so because he feels that he ought to. No doubt his [the former individual’s] act is *not* moral, but it *is* right.” Prichard, *Op. Cit.*, P. 3.

⁶⁶ Prichard writes, “suppose, when wondering whether we really ought to act in the ways usually called moral, we are told as a means of resolving our doubt that those acts are right which produce happiness. We at once ask: ‘Whose happiness?’ If we are told ‘Our own happiness’, then though we shall lose our hesitation to act in these ways, we shall not recover our sense that we ought to do so.” Prichard “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake” P.3.

⁶⁷ He writes, “moral principles are not deducible from one moral principle, or from anything which is not a moral principle, but each stands on its own footing.” Prichard, “What is the Basis of Moral Obligation?” P. 5.

⁶⁸ Throughout Prichard’s moral writings – in particular his essays “Moral Obligation” and “The Meaning of Agathon in the Ethics of Aristotle” – he provides a number of arguments rejecting any connection between moral obligation and the agent’s own happiness. Given the limited space here, I do not examine these arguments in full. Prichard also provides a number of – what he takes to be – direct criticisms of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. But – as has been pointed out by W.D. Ross and T.H. Irwin – given that he misreads a great deal of Aristotle’s ethics, his critique of what he takes to be Aristotle’s account of moral motivation, simply put, misses its target. In “Mistakes about Good: Prichard Carritt, and Aristotle”, Irwin writes “in his essay on Aristotle Prichard ... misinterprets Aristotle so grossly that one may well suppose it is a waste of time to discuss it. One may be confirmed in this view by the fact that Austin has carefully and convincingly exposed and refuted Prichard’s basic errors.” Irwin, Terence. “Mistakes about the Good: Prichard, Carritt, and Aristotle” in *Underivative Duty: British Moral Philosophers from*

In “Moral Obligation,” Prichard provides us with a *reductio ad absurdum* to refute the claim that the virtuous person’s underlying motivation for acting morally is his/her *own* self-interest. He argues that *if* the ultimate end of all of our actions is our own good – as the orthodox reading of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation suggests – and not the good of humans generally speaking, we are forced to accept two “very awkward consequences.”⁶⁹ In particular, he claims that we will be “forced to allow (1) that there is really no such thing as ... a benevolent or a malevolent action, and also (2) that there is really no difference of motive between the acts of a so-called good man and those of a so-called bad man.”⁷⁰ This is because, according to Prichard, what gives a particular action/disposition its moral worth is the motive from which the act is performed, or the motive from which the disposition is cultivated. He writes, “for we ordinarily regard a good act as distinguished from a bad one by its motive [and] ... when we pronounce an act already done intrinsically good or bad, we do in respect of the motive, i.e., that which led the agent to act as he did.”⁷¹ Thus, it follows that if both virtuous and vicious actions are performed from the same motive – i.e., self-interest – then both actions, according to Prichard, have equal, viz., no moral worth. And so, on Prichard’s account, if we wish to reject both of these “awkward consequences”, it follows that we must reject the claim that both virtuous and vicious individuals act for the sake of their own *eudaimonia*.⁷² Hence, in keeping with what Prichard takes to be our strong moral convictions, the virtuous individual may *not* act virtuously ultimately for the sake of his/her own well-being.

Thus, in Prichard’s moral writings we find yet another critique of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. *If* the virtuous person is said to act morally primarily for her own sake – as the majority reading of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation suggests – then her actions, Prichard contends, have no moral worth.⁷³ Such an account of moral motivation reduces the moral “ought” to the non-moral “ought”, and, for him, commits one of the gravest sins possible against moral philosophy.⁷⁴ For – as Prichard emphasizes – our strongest moral

Sidgwick to Ewing. Ed. Thomas Hurka. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011. P. 4. That said, the objection raised below does not depend on Prichard’s misreading of Aristotle, but is one that follows from his more general critique of particular accounts of moral motivation.

⁶⁹Prichard “Moral Obligation” in *Moral Writings* P. 183.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 183.

⁷¹ Prichard, “What is the Basis of Moral Obligation?” P. 3.

⁷² While what gives an action/disposition its moral worth for Prichard differs from what gives an action/disposition its moral worth for Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians, the point here is that there is something problematic in attributing a certain level of self-indulgence to the virtuous individual.

⁷³ He writes, “the fact, if it be a fact, that virtue is no basis for morality will explain what otherwise it is difficult to account for, viz. the extreme sense of dissatisfaction produced by a close reading of Aristotle’s *Ethics*.” Prichard. “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake” P. 13.

⁷⁴ He writes, “it does not, however, take much consideration to discover that a teleological theory, whichever form it takes, is open to a fatal objection of principle... For we have only to ask ourselves whether some act’s being that which would do most to make us happy would render it what we are bound to do, to know that it would not. The fatal objection of principle is that it

convictions suggest that what makes an action moral or non-moral is a function of the motive attached to it.⁷⁵

W.D. Ross on Aristotle’s Account of Moral Motivation

W.D. Ross was one of the leading translators and scholars of Aristotle in the twentieth century.⁷⁶ His translation of Aristotle’s *Ethics* is widely read today, and his commentaries on Aristotle have had a lasting impact.⁷⁷ Unlike the two commentators briefly discussed above, Ross acknowledges that we find two conflicting accounts of moral motivation in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. He claims that in certain sections of the *Ethics*, we find the virtuous individual acting morally for virtue’s sake / for the sake of the noble.⁷⁸ Ross writes, “when Aristotle is engaged in studying the moral activities he treats them as good in themselves, and the moral agent as finding his motive in *nothing beyond the act, but in its own nobility*.”⁷⁹ However, Ross also notes – and does so emphatically – that we also find in Aristotle’s ethics an egoistic account of moral motivation. He writes, “morality for him [Aristotle] consists in doing certain actions not because we see them to be right in themselves but because we see them to be such as will bring us nearer to the ‘good for man’.”⁸⁰

Given these two conflicting accounts, Ross goes on to examine Aristotle’s *Ethics* to get a sense as to which account more accurately reflects Aristotle’s view on moral motivation. Ross concludes that “for the most part Aristotle’s moral system is *decidedly* self-centred. It is at *his* [or her] own eudaimonia, we are told, that man [or woman] *aims and should aim*.”⁸¹ He continues, Aristotle’s account “assigns a higher value to the moral life than his formal theory warrants.”⁸² Now, while Ross assesses a number of passages before drawing the conclusion that he

resolves the moral ‘ought’ into the non-moral ‘ought’, representing our being morally bound to do some action as if it were the same thing as the action’s being one which we must do if our purpose is to become realized. And in consequence, strictly speaking the theory is not a theory of obligation, or duty, at all, but, if anything, is a theory that what are called our obligations or duties are really something else.” Prichard “Moral Obligation” in *Moral Writings* P. 188.

⁷⁵ He writes, “when we praise some action and consider it good, we do so on account of its motive.” Ibid., P. 216.

⁷⁶ Irwin, Terence. Op. Cit. P. 106.

⁷⁷ Many of the contemporary critics of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation site Ross consistently throughout their work.

⁷⁸ The difference between acting virtuously for its own sake and acting virtuously for the sake of the noble is not important here. This issue will be addressed in chapter three.

⁷⁹ Ross, David. *Aristotle*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1964. P. 234. My italics.

⁸⁰ Ibid., P. 188.

⁸¹ Ibid., P. 230. It may also be of interest to the reader that Ross argues that one of Aristotle’s central aims in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to “breakdown the antithesis between egoism and altruism by showing that the egoism of a good man has just the same characteristics as altruism.” Ibid., P. 231. That is, it is in the good man’s own self- interest to act altruistically.

⁸² Ibid., P. 234.

does here, given the limited space, I restrict my focus to Ross’s discussion of friendship in Aristotle’s *Ethics*.⁸³

Ross claims that in the “whole of the *Ethics* outside the books on friendship very little is said to suggest that men can and should take a warm personal interest in other people; altruism is almost completely absent.”⁸⁴ And so, presumably, if we are going to find strong textual evidence in support of attributing an altruistic view of moral motivation to Aristotle, it is in Aristotle’s discussion of friendship where such evidence is likely to be found. However, in Ross’s examination of Aristotle’s discussion of friendship, he finds textual support not only for attributing an altruistic account of moral motivation to Aristotle, but also in favour of attributing an egoistic account of moral motivation to Aristotle. Regarding the former, Ross notes that Aristotle does claim that “loving is said to be more essential to friendship than being loved [and that] a man wishes well to his friend for his friend’s sake, not as a means to his happiness.”⁸⁵ Despite recognizing such remarks, however, Ross emphasizes that we find *greater* textual support in Aristotle’s discussion of friendship that suggests that he holds an egoistic view of moral motivation. Here, Ross cites a number of examples in the *Ethics*, such as Aristotle’s claims “that friendship is based on the love of the good man for himself”,⁸⁶ and that friendship “is most necessary to [a good] life.”⁸⁷ Ross concludes that it is no surprise that we find Aristotle endorsing an egoistic view of moral motivation in his discussion of friendship because for Aristotle “friendship is not mere benevolence but demands a return.”⁸⁸

At this point, one may wonder, given the two interpretations of moral motivation present in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, why the virtuous agent cannot be said to act virtuously *both* for virtue’s sake, *and* for the sake of his/her own *eudaimonia*. That is, why is it that Ross feels compelled to choose between attributing to Aristotle the view that the virtuous agent acts virtuously for virtue’s sake, *and* for his/her own *eudaimonia*? Here, Ross seems to suggest that given the teleological nature of Aristotle’s ethical theory, virtuous action cannot be both intrinsically good and good because of what virtuous action aims to bring about. He writes, “All action aims at something other than itself, and from its tendency to produce this it derives its value. Aristotle’s ethics is definitely teleological.”⁸⁹

⁸³ In addition to the argument mentioned below, Ross also provides a further argument that the virtuous individual holds an egoistic account of moral motivation that stems from Aristotle’s discussion of the teleological nature of action. For this argument, see page 188 in Ross’s *Aristotle*, (1964).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 230.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 230.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 230.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 230.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 230.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, P. 188.

However, as many have pointed out, on this point Ross gets Aristotle wrong.⁹⁰ In *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*, Gregory Vlastos writes, “can Aristotle hold without inconsistency that something can be desired for its own sake and also for the sake of something else? He certainly can, and if so fine an Aristotelian as Ross had failed to see this, it was only because, bullied by prevailing philosophical dogmas, he had not paid due attention to the fact that for Aristotle happiness *consists* of goods.”⁹¹ That said, even if we were to amend the view that Ross attributes to Aristotle from the virtuous agent acting “solely for the sake of his/her own *eudaimonia*” to “*primarily* for the sake of his/her own *eudaimonia*, but also for the sake of the noble”, the virtuous agent’s motivation would still be *primarily* egoistic. And, if a “completely good action”⁹² requires being performed from an *entirely* good motivation – and assuming that an egoistic motivation is *not* a good one – then the objection still stands. Further, to reconcile and intelligibly distinguish between the two different motives in the virtuous agent is no small task.⁹³

Thus, in the writings of W.D. Ross, we find yet another critique of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. Given that on Ross’s reading Aristotle ultimately endorses an egoistic account of moral motivation – and holds that to the extent that it is egoistic, it is a bad account⁹⁴ – it is no surprise that he ultimately rejects Aristotle’s account and “does not turn to Aristotle as a [major] source for insights in moral philosophy.”⁹⁵ Unlike Sidgwick and Prichard, W.D. Ross – who was a leading scholar of Aristotle – goes on to develop his own pluralistic theory of obligation, and turns away from Aristotle as a positive source in moral theory.⁹⁶

To conclude, then, I hope to have shown that several of the greatest moral philosophers writing in the early twentieth century raised significant concerns regarding the extent to which Aristotle’s account of moral motivation – as understood on the orthodox reading – is egoistic. For Sidgwick, Aristotle should

⁹⁰ Aristotle writes, “honor, pleasure, understanding, and every virtue we certainly choose because of themselves, since we choose each of them even if it had no further result; but we also choose them for the sake of happiness.” *EN* 1097b (1-3).

⁹¹ Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*. P. 206. In “Mistakes about Good: Prichard, Carrith, and Aristotle”, Irwin notes the same mistakes that Vlastos points out. Irwin writes, “Ross criticizes Aristotle for his teleological and instrumental treatment of rational action as being valuable only as a means... [Such] remarks indicate some failure to appreciate Aristotle.” Irwin, “Mistakes about Good” P. 107

⁹² Ross, *Op. Cit.*, P. 194.

⁹³ Richard Kraut asks the following: “but how can benefitting another person for your own sake provide a reason for benefiting him for his sake? Your own good can of course provide a reason for benefiting another person – but it cannot provide a reason for benefiting that person *for his sake*.” Kraut, Richard. *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989. P. 137.

⁹⁴ Ross writes that Aristotle’s *Ethics* “simply betrays somewhat nakedly the self-absorption which is the bad side of Aristotle’s ethics.” Ross, *Op. Cit.*, P. 208.

⁹⁵ Irwin, *Op. Cit.* P. 106.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 106.

have abandoned his underlying self-regarding motive for a higher – i.e., less self-regarding – one. According to Prichard, insofar as Aristotle maintains that we ought to act morally primarily for the sake of our own well-being, he reduces “the moral” to the “non-moral” and commits one of the gravest sins against philosophy.⁹⁷ And for Ross, insofar as Aristotle’s account of moral motivation may be said to be “nakedly self-absorbed”, such a label warrants turning our attention away from Aristotle’s ethical theory, and toward other theories – such as his own – that do not possess an egoistic account of moral motivation.

1.2. Contemporary Critiques

Arguably, there is no bigger contemporary critic of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation than the consequentialist, Thomas Hurka. Since the publication of *Perfectionism* in 1993, Hurka has published two books and a handful of papers that, as we shall see, aim to show that Aristotle’s account of moral motivation falls prey to what I have referred to above as the self-absorption objection. In addition, one of the leading “card-carrying” virtue ethicists, Christine Swanton, has also argued for the past 20 years that Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is objectionably egoistic, or in her words “narcissistic.”⁹⁸ Both of these individuals, due in part with their dissatisfaction with Aristotle’s account of moral motivation, have gone on to develop their own normative virtue ethical theories.⁹⁹ In this section, I begin by laying out Hurka’s objection against Aristotle’s account of moral motivation, and then turn to Swanton’s. Here, my aim is to simply give the reader a sense for how the self-absorption objection is generally articulated today.

⁹⁷ Prichard, Op. Cit. P. 188.

⁹⁸ This is the most recent way that she describes Aristotle’s account of moral motivation in “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics” (2015). It is important to note that Hurka and Swanton are not the only two present-day philosophers who find Aristotle’s account of moral motivation objectionable. For additional accounts, see Charles Kahn’s “Aristotle and Altruism” (1981), David Solomon’s “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” (1988), and Jennifer Whiting’s “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2006).

⁹⁹ To be more precise – and in keeping with Hursthouse’s distinction between ‘virtue theory’ and ‘virtue ethics’ – Hurka’s ethical theory is best understood as a normative virtue theory. This is because for him virtue is incapable of providing action-guiding principles, and, therefore, must be supplemented by an ethics with action-guiding principles. On the other hand, the ethical theory that Swanton goes on to develop is best understood as a virtue ethical theory in that she holds that the virtues are *irreducible*, and that virtues *can* provide action-guiding principles. For more on this distinction, see Hursthouse’s “Are Virtue Ethics the Proper Starting Point for Morality” (2005).

Thomas Hurka on Aristotle’s Account of Moral Motivation

In “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong and Wrong,” Thomas Hurka argues that the “central flaw in Aristotle’s account of virtue [is] its underlying explanatory egoism.”¹⁰⁰ He writes,

“The general structure of Aristotle’s ethics is set out in *NE I*. In every act we aim at some good, and therefore, he argues, at a single chief good. This chief good is *eudaimonia*, and though he does not say so explicitly, *it seems* clear that for each person the relevant good is just her own *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* turns out to involve the active exercise of virtue, which consists in part in acts expressing moral virtues such as courage and liberality. Our ultimate reason to perform these acts is therefore that doing so is part of exercising virtue, which is what we must do to achieve the *eudaimon* or good life that’s our ultimate goal.”¹⁰¹

For the sake of simplicity, the basic structure of Aristotle’s argument – as Hurka understands it – is as follows:

- P1: The ultimate end for everyone is their own *eudaimonia*.¹⁰²
- P2: Moral action contributes to one’s own *eudaimonia*.
- C: It seems to follow (from premises 1 & 2) that everyone’s ultimate reason for acting morally is that doing so contributes to their own *eudaimonia*.¹⁰³

Here, it is important to note that *nowhere* in any of Hurka’s writings does he lay out what he takes to be the basic structure of Aristotle’s underlying account of

¹⁰⁰ Hurka, Thomas. “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong and Wrong” in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*. Ed. Julia Peters. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013. P. 15.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., P. 14. My italics. He continues, “my *eudaimonia* is necessarily a state of me and located in my life; it’s my *eudaimonia* rather than someone else’s. And that means his [Aristotle’s] view grounds all my oughts or reasons in considerations about *my* good.” Ibid., P. 15.

¹⁰² The term “*eudaimonia*” in Hurka’s argument is to be understood as the virtuous person’s objective account of what makes a life go well. This life includes the active exercise of moral virtue, among other things, and should not be confused with a subjective account of well-being.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that this particular formulation of Hurka’s argument (for there is more than one) is the most apt to apply to Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. While he does at times state that “a flourishing-based theory ... says a person has reason to act rightly *only* or *ultimately* because doing so will contribute to her own flourishing” (My italics) he does acknowledge that for Aristotle the *eudaimonia* of others is constitutive of the virtuous person’s own *eudaimonia*. And so, *ex hypothesi*, the virtuous person cannot pursue her own *eudaimonia* without pursuing the *eudaimonia* of others as well. He writes, “it [Aristotle’s account of virtue] just says the virtues are ... intrinsic constituents of an overall good or *eudaimon* life for him.” Ibid., P. 24. As will be shown below, it is the degree to which the virtuous individual is focused on her own *eudaimonia* – and not on the *eudaimonia* of others – that is highly problematic for Hurka.

moral motivation in standard form, where truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. Instead, he provides an inductive argument where the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises, but is probable based on what he refers to as “the most common reading of his [Aristotle’s] ethics.”¹⁰⁴ Now, my rationale for laying out Hurka’s understanding of Aristotle’s argument in standard – though *inductive* – form is twofold. First, and most importantly, it is worth emphasizing the limited – viz., inductive scope – of Hurka’s argument. This is because many of Hurka’s critics uncharitably and needlessly attribute a stronger view to him than his argument necessarily suggests. And second, laying out his argument as such will help narrow the focus of the various responses to the self-absorption objection discussed in the following chapter.

Now, Hurka offers a number of arguments to show why Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is objectionable, but before we turn to these it is worth highlighting the criteria that Hurka adopts in assessing various accounts of morality.¹⁰⁵ According to Hurka, the adequacy of an account of moral motivation may be assessed on three levels.¹⁰⁶ First, the account may be assessed on whether it coheres with our “intuitive moral judgements at all levels of generality.”¹⁰⁷ Here, Hurka claims that while our intuitive moral judgments can sometimes be reformed as a result of philosophical argument, other things being equal, it is a merit in a moral theory if it can “affirm common-sense beliefs.”¹⁰⁸ Second, an account can be assessed on whether or not it has “attractive consequences... where it makes particular claims about which activities are best and right.”¹⁰⁹ Lastly, an adequate account of moral motivation may be evaluated on whether it provides a “systematic whole, with its general ideas explaining its particular claims. Then the theory not only matches our intuitions but also gives them a satisfying rationale.”¹¹⁰ With these criteria in mind, I now go on to provide a sketch of Hurka’s main objections to Aristotle’s view as they arise at each level.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., P. 14. Further, he writes, “the underlying egoism of Aristotle’s account *seems to imply* a similarly egoistic picture of the virtuous person’s motivation.” Ibid., P. 16. (My italics).

¹⁰⁵ For if we find the criteria which he uses lacking in important respects, this will diminish the overall strength of his argument(s). On the other hand, if we find his criteria satisfactory, this warrants taking his objections against Aristotle’s account of moral motivation seriously.

¹⁰⁶ This method is laid out in full in chapter three of *Perfectionism*, entitled “Accretions and Methods.” I should note that the criteria adopted here was originally put forth to assess the adequacy of moral theories generally speaking. In this section, I take said criteria and apply it specifically – in the spirit of Hurka – to accounts of moral motivation.

¹⁰⁷ Hurka, *Perfectionism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993. P. 31.

¹⁰⁸ Hurka, “Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue” in *Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation*. Vol. 14.1 (1997): P. 286.

¹⁰⁹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, P. 31.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., P. 31.

¹¹¹ Given the great number of arguments and examples that Hurka raises against Aristotle’s account of moral motivation, I simply do not have the space to rehearse them all here. In what follows, I simply sketch in broad strokes the thrust behind Hurka’s concerns regarding Aristotle’s account of moral motivation.

According to Hurka, the major problem with Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is the extent to which the virtuous agent is concerned with her own *eudaimonia* while acting and cultivating a virtuous disposition. For if – as the argument goes – the *primary* motivation for acting/being moral is an individual’s own well-being, then it follows that one cannot act morally primarily for the well-being of others.¹¹² Now, to see why this follows for Hurka we need to turn to his discussion of value theory, and in particular what he calls the “problem of division.” Briefly, the problem of division states that “we humans cannot love all good things with infinite intensity. We have just finite capacities for desiring, pursuing, and taking pleasure in what is good, and we therefore face the question of how it is best to divide our love between good objects.”¹¹³ And so, it is because we have a finite amount of concern to divide between our own good and the good of others that it follows that *if* we act morally *primarily* for our own sake, our moral actions cannot be said to be performed primarily for the sake of others.

As a result of our finite capacity for loving and desiring, we as moral agents necessarily face decisions regarding how to divide our concern, and here it seems that we can divide our concern in better and worse ways. Regarding how best to divide our concern, Hurka argues for two principles that, for him, have overwhelmingly intuitive appeal. The first is a sort of “ground-floor” principle that he refers to as the “minimal claim of division.” This principle states that “given two goods, one greater than the other, it is best to love [pursue, desire, take pleasure in] the greater more intensely, than the lesser... This minimal claim is somewhat vague... but partly for this reason, it seems intuitively undeniable.”¹¹⁴ The second principle and the one that he ultimately endorses is what he refers to as the “proportionality principle.”¹¹⁵ It is as follows:

“The best division of love between two goods is proportioned to their degrees of goodness, with the ideal relative intensity of love for each good determined by its relative degree of goodness. If two goods are equal in value, this view holds, it is best to love them equally intensely. If one good is greater than the other,

¹¹² Being “primarily” or “ultimately” motivated by reason *x* to perform action *y*, ought to be understood as reason *x*, more than any other reason, leads us to perform action *y*. On the formulation of Hurka’s argument advanced here, he is *not* suggesting that reason *x* is our sole reason for performing action *y* or that reason *x* when weighed against all other reasons, say, *a* through *f*, outweighs all other reasons for performing action *y*.

¹¹³ Hurka, “Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue.” (1997) P. 291.

¹¹⁴ Hurka, Thomas. *Virtue, Vice and Value*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.P. 60.

¹¹⁵ Many Aristotelians also assert that Aristotle holds something akin to the “proportionality principle.” E.g., in “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics”, Christopher Toner writes, “I believe that for Aristotle *eudaimonia* consists in standing in the right relation to the good (take this as shorthand for the right relations to objects according to their degrees and kinds of goodness).” Toner, Christopher. “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” in *The Royal Institute of Philosophy*. Vol. 81 (2006) P. 609.

however, one should love it with as much more intensity as its goodness exceeds that of the other.”¹¹⁶

Now, according to Hurka, “both self-interested and altruistic attitudes, since they involve a positive orientation toward a good in oneself or another person, are intrinsically good.”¹¹⁷ However, “though intrinsically good, both self-interested and altruistic attitudes can be instrumentally evil if by being disproportionately intense, they prevent a person from having another, intrinsically better attitude.”¹¹⁸ Thus, in the event that one’s attitude toward one’s own good or the good of others becomes disproportionately intense, one’s attitude may be said to vicious.

In keeping with fellow consequentialists such as Jeremy Bentham and J.S. Mill, Hurka holds that at the base level of any adequate moral theory, every individual’s good or happiness ought to count *equally*. In contemporary terms, Hurka favours what is often referred to as an “agent-neutral view.”¹¹⁹ He does so because, for him, goods, such as pleasure, health, knowledge, and achievement are good for others in the same way that they are good for oneself. He writes, “since the goods of different people are all good in the same way, one’s division of love should take no account of their location in different people.”¹²⁰ And so, given that each individual’s well-being is to count equally, and insofar as we weigh our own good too much or too little in relation to the good of others, we may be said to err, morally speaking. The former – the vice called “selfishness”¹²¹ – “consists in loving one’s own good with disproportionate intensity, that is, in loving goods in one’s own life more than equal in the lives of other people.”¹²² And, the latter – the vice called “self-abnegation” – consists in “loving one’s own good less than the good of others.”¹²³

¹¹⁶ Hurka, “Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue” P. 291. It is important to note that Hurka’s talk of “proportionality” in attitudes should not be taken to imply that issues about the division of love can be pursued in anything like a mathematically precise way. [He continues] On the contrary ... our judgments about values and intensities of attitudes, and also about the values of their objects, can at best be rough and imprecise. But we can still talk meaningfully, about proportionality and departures from it.” Ibid., P. 292.

¹¹⁷ Hurka, “Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue” P. 298.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., P. 298.

¹¹⁹ For Hurka, this is not to say, however, that morality forbids us from favouring our own-well-being or the well-being of those near and dear to us over others. However, such a moral permission requires a philosophical justification. In chapter 5 of *Perfectionism*, Hurka provides a justification in which he discusses an asymmetry between an individual’s ability to realize goodness in his/her life compared to realizing goodness in the lives of others. It is also important to note that Hurka endorses a threshold account of ‘right-action’, according to which we are not morally required to bring about the greatest good. For more on his theory of right action, see page 301 of his “Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue” (1997).

¹²⁰ Ibid., P. 292. As a result, Aristotle’s account of moral motivation treats like cases differently. This consequence is unacceptable for Hurka.

¹²¹ He also refers to this vice as self-indulgence, priggishness and narcissism.

¹²² Ibid., P. 294.

¹²³ Ibid., P. 294.

Given Aristotle’s insistence that our ultimate motivation and final end is our own *eudaimonia*, and insofar as Hurka holds that everyone’s *eudaimonia* ought to be weighed equally, it should be apparent precisely where Hurka thinks the problem with Aristotle’s account of motivation lies. For Hurka, Aristotle’s account of moral motivation has the virtuous agent disproportionately weighing his own well-being over the well-being of others. Where Aristotle insists that it is one’s own well-being that should be the primary motivation in the virtuous person’s life, Hurka contends that “our ultimate moral goal ... is the greatest development of human nature by all humans everywhere.”¹²⁴

Now, one of the consequences that follow from Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is that when the virtuous agent acts virtuously, she may be said to be *more* concerned with her own well-being than the well-being of the person she acts virtuously toward.¹²⁵ And this – for Hurka – is especially problematic. For it is one thing to weigh one’s own well-being disproportionately, relative to another’s well-being, generally speaking; but when it comes to occurrent *moral* actions, it seems that we ought to help others primarily for their own sake. For example, let’s say you and I are going for dinner, and you suddenly slip on some black ice, cut your leg deeply, and are in a great deal of pain. Shouldn’t I, morally speaking, comfort you, help you up, and bring you to a hospital – say, to get the necessary stitches to stop the bleeding – *primarily* for your own sake and not for the sake of my own *eudaimonia*? On Aristotle’s account, however, Hurka claims each agent’s ultimate goal is his or her own *eudaimonia*; and “if my ultimate goal is my own *eudaimonia*, shouldn’t I, while relieving your pain, have the desire for my *eudaimonia* as my ultimate motive? But isn’t helping you from concern for my good precisely not virtuous?”¹²⁶ Here, Hurka insists that “this [Aristotle’s] egoistic motivation is inconsistent with genuine virtue, which is not focused primarily on the self.”¹²⁷ For virtuous agents to “choose their acts above all for themselves... makes virtue excessively self-concerned.”¹²⁸

Finally, Aristotle’s account of moral motivation – according to Hurka – does *not* provide a systematic rationale for a number of its claims. Most significantly, it is unable – so the argument goes – to account for *why* precisely it is that one’s own *eudaimonia* counts more – i.e., should be weighed more heavily – than the *eudaimonia* of others. In doing so, it may be said to treat like cases, differently. Recall that for Hurka, flourishing – be it merely formal or substantive

¹²⁴ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, P. 55.

¹²⁵ Irwin puts this point as follows. “[The] Greeks moralists [including Aristotle] agree that the relevant goal is the agent’s happiness (*eudaimonia*). They believe this because they accept a version of eudaimonism – that is if S is a rational agent, the ultimate end that S has reason to pursue in all of S’s actions is S’s own happiness.” Irwin, Terence. “The Virtues Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy” in *How Should One Live? New Essays on Virtue*. Ed. R. Crisp. Clarendon Press, 1996. P. 41.

¹²⁶ Hurka, “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong.” P. 16.

¹²⁷ Hurka, *Virtue, Vice and Value*, P. 246.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 18.

– supervenes upon human nature.¹²⁹ And so, it is puzzling why *my* flourishing as a human being counts more than the flourishing of others, who are also human beings. To clarify, Hurka is not suggesting that the conditions for human flourishing are exactly the same for every individual. That is, he does draw a distinction between that which is “good for” an individual and that which is “good period.” He writes, “to call something “good from a person’s point of view” is to call it “good from the point of view at all times in his life.”¹³⁰ Whereas, to call something “good period” is to call it “good from the point of view of all persons always.”¹³¹ Now, regarding flourishing, it is clear what type of good this is. For it is *not* the case that flourishing is good for some people and not others, or that it is better for some individuals to flourish more than others. For Hurka, human flourishing is good *equally* for all human beings and thus, “each person has as fundamental a reason to pursue the good of others as he has to pursue his own.”¹³² And so, insofar as Aristotle’s account of moral motivation may be said to treat “like cases, differently”, its rationale for favouring our *eudaimonia* over the *eudaimonia* of others appears to conflict.

In summation, Hurka is highly critical of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation for the following three reasons: first, its central claims seem to conflict with our moral intuitions; second, the account suggests unattractive consequences; and third, it lacks coherence amongst its various claims. It is in part because of his dissatisfaction with Aristotle’s account that Hurka then goes on to develop what he first referred to as “the recursive account” and which he now calls the “higher-level account” of virtue. Briefly, the crux of this account – what he calls “Loving for itself what is Good” – states that “if *x* is intrinsically good, loving *x* (desiring, pursuing, or taking pleasure in *x*) for itself is also intrinsically good.” According to Hurka, this “higher-level account” is more adequate – insofar as it scores higher on the criteria given above – and as a result, he encourages us to drop Aristotle’s account of the motivations of a truly virtuous agent in favour of his own.¹³³

Christine Swanton on Aristotle’s Account of Moral Motivation

In “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, Christine Swanton raises two major objections internal to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics that “threaten to undermine virtue ethics as a moral theory.”¹³⁴ The main problem that she considers here is

¹²⁹ He writes, “that the human good rests somehow in human nature is, although elusive, also deeply attractive.” Hurka, *Perfectionism*, P. 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 60.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, P. 60.

¹³² Hurka, Thomas. “The Three Faces of Flourishing” in *Social Philosophy and Policy*. Vol. 16. (1999). P. 46.

¹³³ Hurka, *Virtue, Value, Vice*, P. 13.

¹³⁴ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics” (2015) P. 111.

“the much discussed self-centredness objection.”¹³⁵ For Swanton, this objection arises as a result of two particular difficulties that stem from two different structural features of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as it is generally understood today.¹³⁶ The first difficulty – referred to originally as the “problem of indirection” – arises as a result of two seemingly conflicting claims: first, that the moral virtues are grounded in one’s *own eudaimonia*, and second, that the virtuous agent’s primary motivation for acting morally *cannot* be because doing so is good for her.¹³⁷ The second difficulty arises as a result of the “logic of (eudaimonist) virtue ethics.”¹³⁸ Here, Swanton claims that insofar as virtue ethics is committed to the view that “having virtue is the most important aspect of [an] agent’s final end,”¹³⁹ everything – including the well-being of others – must be subordinated to this end. And, this subordination – so the argument goes – is *intolerably* narcissistic.

In an earlier article, “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection: A Pluralistic Value-Centred Approach”, Swanton begins by defining the “problem of indirection” with respect to virtue ethics as follows. She writes that the problem arises when “the criterion for the status of a trait as a virtue is not the same as the criterion for the status of an act as [virtuous or] right.”¹⁴⁰ For Swanton, on standard forms of virtue ethics – such as Hursthouse’s – virtue ethics is committed to what she refers to as the “eudaimonist thesis of virtue status”, or, for short, “Thesis (E).” Thesis (E) states that “it is a necessary condition of a trait being a virtue that it characteristically (partially) constitute (or contribute to) the flourishing of the possessor. Thesis (E) is intended as an answer to a question of justification: ‘What makes *this* trait (humility, temperance...) a *virtue*?’ Or ‘Why is *this* trait, humility temperance ... claimed to be a *virtue*?’”¹⁴¹ The problem of indirection arises here because on standard forms of virtue ethics there is an explicit denial that “a virtuous or right *act* is always or even standardly to be

¹³⁵ Ibid., P. 111. The second objection is called the “Right But Not Virtuous” Objection. In a nutshell, this objection states that “virtue ethics cannot account for right acts of the non-virtuous.” Ibid., P. 120. For more on this, see Swanton’s “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics” (2015).

¹³⁶ She writes, “in what follows, I argue that the problems are indeed serious for a certain form of virtue ethics, but that virtue ethics need not possess the structure that generates these problems.” Ibid., P. 111. By “certain forms of virtue ethics”, Swanton has in mind the accounts of virtue ethics espoused by Rosalind Hursthouse and Julia Annas.

¹³⁷ Swanton writes, “what is problematic is the maintenance of the Aristotelian picture of the motivations of the virtuous agent, together with the idea that the rationale of the virtues is agent-benefit, whether that latter notion is given a moralized or a non-moralized reading.” Swanton, Christine. “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection: A Pluralist Value Centred Approach” in *Utilitas*. Vol. 9.2. (1997): P. 172. In Swanton’s most recent work, she refers to the problem of indirection as it applies to virtue ethics as the “Disconnect Objection.” See, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics” (2015).

¹³⁸ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, P. 114.

¹³⁹ Ibid., P. 114.

¹⁴⁰ Swanton, “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection” P. 167.

¹⁴¹ Swanton, Christine. *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003. P. 77.

understood in terms of action needed for the flourishing of the actor.”¹⁴² In regard to standard virtue ethical accounts of right action, Swanton writes:

“The good-making or right making features of *actions* are not characteristically features which promote or constitute the flourishing of the agent, but are the sorts of things that Bernard Williams calls the “X reasons.” These are reasons, associated with a virtue, which a virtuous person is characteristically motivated by, and of course they are many and varied, and circumstance dependent. For Williams (and for Hursthouse, who follows him in this respect) a person who wants to do what the virtuous person would do should characteristically be motivated not by a motive under the description “promoting my own virtue or happiness” but under the description “repaying a debt”, for example.”¹⁴³

And so, according to Swanton, standard accounts of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics fall prey to the problem of indirection insofar as the justification of the moral virtues differs from what makes an action virtuous or right.¹⁴⁴

Now, one may wonder precisely *why* the problem of indirection is said to be problematic. That is, why is it that an adequate account of virtue ethics cannot simply have one account for why a virtue is a virtue, and a different account for why one ought to be virtuous? Here, Swanton claims that the problem of indirection *is* problematic for standard accounts of virtue ethics because they are unable to give an account for *why* the virtuous agent may be said to act for “X reasons.”¹⁴⁵ She writes, “there is an apparently strange dissonance between the point or rationale of the virtues, which is agent benefit, and the motivations of the virtuous agent. One cannot just *say* that the motivations of the virtuous are suitably other-regarding, unless an adequate explanation can be given for this from the point of eudaimonism.”¹⁴⁶ And on this point, Swanton concludes that

¹⁴² Swanton, “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection” P. 167.

¹⁴³ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, P. 113.

¹⁴⁴ Swanton, “Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Indirection” P. 169.

¹⁴⁵ On this point, I think that Swanton does not make explicit just how problematic the problem of indirection actually is for moral theories. Here, it is worth recalling the highly influential words from Michael Stocker’s seminal paper entitled “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories.” He writes, “one mark of a good life is a harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications. Not to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on – bespeaks of a malady of spirit... At the very least, we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek... Any theory that ignores such harmony does so at great peril.” Stocker, Michael “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67.

¹⁴⁶ Here, she seems to have something in mind like Hurka’s third criterion for an adequate account of moral motivation. Recall that for Hurka an account of moral motivation may be evaluated on whether it provides a “systematic whole, with its general ideas explaining its particular claims.

various virtue ethicists – including Julia Annas and Rosalind Hursthouse – fail in this regard, and that such an explanation is unlikely to be given.¹⁴⁷

The second difficulty that gives rise to the self-centredness objection for Swanton has nothing to do with the relationship between the justification of the moral virtues and the virtuous agent’s motivation when acting virtuously. Rather, it has to do *solely* with the emphasis that one’s moral character is given on standard (eudaimonistic) accounts of virtue ethics. Swanton writes,

“The reason for the alleged self-centredness of the agent’s moral attention and motivation lies in the logic of (eudaimonist) virtue ethics’ conception of the final end of the agent. Since on this view having virtue is the most important aspect of an agent’s final end, I as a moral agent must hold that “having ... virtue is the most important thing for me; practically I must subordinate everything else to this.”¹⁴⁸

On this eudaimonistic structure – where one’s own moral virtue is the most important thing in one’s life – one’s ultimate reason for acting virtuously may be put as follows: “it is a virtuous action, and being virtuous is the most important thing for *me*.”¹⁴⁹ Further, such a structure suggests that the virtuous agent’s fundamental commitments would be to “acquiring, cultivating and maintaining her own virtue.”¹⁵⁰ Here, Swanton asks the following: “is there not something deplorably narcissistic in possessing a value structure where your own virtue has greater importance to you than others being helped?”¹⁵¹ She responds, “a good mother would surely not consider her own virtue ... to be more important to her than the ... good of the welfare of her own children. As long as virtue ethics is held to be committed to the value structures as outlined by the “deeper level” objection ... I see no way out.”¹⁵²

Then the theory not only matches our intuitions but also gives them a satisfying rationale.” Hurka, *Perfectionism* P. 31.

¹⁴⁷ She writes, “one would think that by now the self-centredness objection has been well and truly dealt with by virtue ethicists. But the objection never seems to go away. This suggests that it is more serious than virtue ethicists have taken it to be.” Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, P. 112. Precisely *why* these responses fail is the subject of the next chapter. Stay tuned.

¹⁴⁸ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, P. 114. Here, Swanton draws heavily on David Solomon’s “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” (1988). Similar objections have been made by John Hare in “Scotus on Morality and Nature” (2001) and Jennifer Whiting in “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2006).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., P. 115. Or as Bernard Williams puts it, “he [the virtuous person] is motivated by the thought ‘they need help, not by the thought ‘they need help and I have an altruistic disposition.’” Williams, “Egoism and Altruism” P. 265.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., P. 120.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., P. 116.

¹⁵² Ibid., P. 117. In addition to these two difficulties, there is also present in Swanton’s earlier work a separate argument against standard accounts of virtue ethics. This argument claims that the virtuous agent on the standard account of virtue ethics possesses the vice of hypersubjectivity

In part because of the egoistic structure of standard accounts of virtue ethics – which gives rise to the self-centredness objection – Swanton goes on to develop her own pluralistic account of virtue ethics.¹⁵³ This pluralistic account – unlike standard accounts – *is* able to meet both difficulties laid out above. In particular, it meets the problem of indirection by adopting what she refers to as a “target-centred” approach, on which the criterion for status of a trait as a virtue is *the same* as the criterion for the status of an act as virtuous or right. She writes, “on my view, the features which make traits virtues are exactly the same features that determine the virtuousness of response to items in the field of a virtue.”¹⁵⁴ Second, Swanton’s approach does *not* make one’s own virtue or character the most important thing in the life of the virtuous agent, but instead holds that “one’s primary responsibility is to live one’s life according to virtue.”¹⁵⁵ On Swanton’s account, the virtuous agent “is committed to *leading a life of virtue*, which as we have seen is a commitment to acting, feeling, and being motivated as virtue demands or commends ... Far from all moral obligations deriving from the agent’s own happiness or flourishing, they derive from the targets of the virtues themselves.”¹⁵⁶ Swanton concludes:

“The complex of problems dubbed the “self-centredness objection” can be overcome in a virtue ethics [such as mine] having the following tenets. (a) The features which *make* traits of character virtues are determined by their targets, aims, or point, as opposed to the flourishing of the possessor of the virtues (though of course that may be the target of some virtues...) (b) Hitting the targets of (relevant) virtues is what makes actions right. (c) What fundamentally motivates a virtuous agent, and should motivate an agent aspiring to virtue, is attaining the targets of the virtues: the cultivation and maintenance of virtue is secondary to this aim.”¹⁵⁷

wherein “there is deficient self-transcendence: the perceived demands of the self are excessive in relation to the demands of the world.” Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, P. 183.

¹⁵³ Personal communication on November 9th, 2014. For Swanton’s account see, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. (2001). Swanton’s account of virtue ethics may be understood as pluralistic for five reasons. First, the fundamental *bases* of responsiveness to items in the fields of the virtues are plural. Second, the fundamental *modes* or forms of responsiveness to items in the fields of the virtues are plural. Third, what *makes* traits of character virtues is based on several features. Fourth, the standard of what makes responsiveness to items in the field(s) of a virtue excellent or good enough is not single, such as the responsiveness of an excellent human being. And, lastly, her conception of right action involves a pluralistic account of the right. *Ibid.*, P. 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, P. 93. She goes on to refer to this feature as “trait” or (T) for short. (T) is stated as follows: “what makes a trait a virtue is that it is a disposition to respond in an excellent (or good enough) way (through the modes of respecting, appreciating, creating, loving, promoting, and so on) to items in the fields of the virtue.” *Ibid.*, P. 93.

¹⁵⁵ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, P. 119.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 119. In various sections, Swanton also describes leading a life of virtue as “meeting appropriately ‘the demands of the world’.” Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, P. 14.

¹⁵⁷ Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics.” P. 119.

And so, if Swanton’s argument here is correct, her pluralistic account of virtue ethics – insofar as it avoids the “self-centredness” objection – provides us with a *prima facie* reason for favouring it over other accounts of virtue ethics, such as the one developed by Rosalind Hursthouse.¹⁵⁸ If, however having a non-egoistic account of moral motivation is a necessary requirement for any adequate moral theory, then the fact that the standard account of virtue ethics falls prey to the “self-centredness” objection in and of itself leads to the demise of the standard account of virtue ethics as we know it.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I hope to have provided the reader with a sense for how the self-absorption objection was laid out in the early twentieth century, and to have given the reader a gist as to how the objection is generally articulated today. At this point, it may be helpful to summarize the key commitments held by all of the critics who have advanced various formulations of the self-absorption objection. It is important to emphasize that I am not proposing anything new here, but rather highlighting the common and salient tenets held by all of the objectors considered above. My hope is that by laying out these key tenets, we may have a clearer idea of what the self-absorption objection specifically entails. I believe there are four key theses held in common by all of the critics considered above.

First, desire is *not* futile. Contra Hobbes,¹⁵⁹ these critics accept Aristotle’s claim that “we do not choose everything because of something else,”¹⁶⁰ and that the objects of rational choice can be organized into a hierarchy of ends – where some ends are more valuable than others – though all of our ends can come together within a relatively unified conception of a life well lived. Second, these objectors are committed to the view that the good of the individual or the good of others or “human goodness” are distinct, and that the two can come apart.¹⁶¹ For if the good of the individual, *ex hypothesis*, turns out to be the good of others or the

¹⁵⁸ *On Virtue Ethics* (1999).

¹⁵⁹ Hobbes writes, “for there is no such thing *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall philosophers.... I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power that ceaseth onely in Death” Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd. 1985. Bk 1.1; P. 160 – 161.

¹⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. T. Irwin. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999. 1094a (20-21). He continues, “for if we do, it will go on without limit, so that desire will prove to be empty and futile.” *Ibid.*, *EN* 1094a (21-22).

¹⁶¹ While it is not precisely clear as to how we are to understand *in toto* the virtuous person’s relation to her friend in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Aristotle does seem to accept the fact that the virtuous individual and her friend are two distinct individuals, and that each individual’s own *eudaimonia* is distinct of the other’s. In Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in the *EN*, he writes, “in everything praiseworthy, then, the excellent person awards more of the fine to himself” *Ibid.*, 1169a (35-1b). Further, as Dennis McKerlie notes, “we cannot simply claim that Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia* transcends the distinction between the agent’s good and the good of others without explaining how this can be true. Aristotle treats *eudaimonia* as a property of a life, and he distinguishes between different lives. For another person’s achievements to contribute to my good, we need to understand what makes them relevant.” McKerlie, “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998). P. 555.

human good, then the thrust of the self-absorption objection seems to dissipate. This is because if “my good” simply is “your good” or the “human good”, then by pursuing “my good” I also pursue “your good” or the “human good,” and thus, we appear to be drawing a distinction without a difference. Third, these critics acknowledge that humans are capable of acting for reasons that are *not* ultimately in their own objective self-interest.¹⁶² That is, humans are capable of aiming at ends – e.g., the promotion of others’ interests – that they regard as likely to result in *real* costs to their own objective well-being. And, finally, these objectors insist that there is an appropriate level of concern for one’s self when acting morally, and that beyond or below that level, one is morally blameworthy.¹⁶³

With the self-absorption objection now laid out in full, the question that lies before us is the following: can such an objection be met? Before turning to this question, however, it will be helpful to have in mind a standard or rationale for assessing various accounts of moral motivation. This will not only provide us with a way to evaluate various attempts aiming to address the self-absorption objection, but will also guide the nature of our investigation going forward.

1.3. The Test

3 Conditions for A Successful Neo-Aristotelian Account of Moral Motivation

Determining precisely what it is that makes an account of moral motivation adequate or successful is no small task. For centuries, philosophers have debated the grounds on which we should evaluate moral motivations. That rich and complex debate is not one that I plan to settle, or can settle, here.¹⁶⁴ That said, there do appear to be three necessary conditions that any adequate *neo-Aristotelian* account of moral motivation must meet. They are as follows. First, it must be able to provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. Second, it must be able to lay out a non-egoistic account of the underlying or dispositional motivation of the virtuous agent. Finally, such an

¹⁶²On the majority reading of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Aristotle is said to hold that humans are capable of acting for reasons that do *not* stem ultimately from one’s *own* objective well-being, and that the virtuous person does not act for his own sake, but ‘*tou kalou heneka*’. For the view that Aristotle is a psychological egoist, see D.J.Allan’s. *The Philosophy of Aristotle*. (1952) P. 187.

¹⁶³ Sidgwick seems to suggest that less focus on the self when acting morally is always better, whereas others – e.g., Thomas Hurka – suggests that there is an appropriate amount of concern for the self that one ought to maintain when acting virtuously.

¹⁶⁴ Consider Dr. Martineau’s rankings of moral motivations from worst to best as laid out by Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics*. P. 369. Here, one may wonder whether it is really the case that acting morally out of the primary sentiment of reverence is better than acting morally out of a sense of compassion or parental/social responsibility. It seems that if we cannot settle questions such as that one here, we are unlikely to be able to provide an exhaustive account as to how best to evaluate moral motivations.

account needs to be, at the very least, “Aristotelian in spirit”; i.e., inspired by or based on Aristotle’s ethics. Allow me to elaborate on each in turn.¹⁶⁵

The occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent is to be understood as the reason *why* the virtuous agent acts the way that she does at the time that she acts. The content of this motivation can generally be determined by asking (hypothetically or actually) the following question to a virtuous agent: “what motivated you to act virtuously when you acted?” Now, while there has been a recent trend to move away from analyzing the occurrent motivation, and a move toward analyzing the dispositional state of virtuous agents,¹⁶⁶ it is important for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be able to provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous individual for the following reason: namely, because Aristotle makes it explicit that the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent is, as he puts it, “*tou kalou heneka*.”¹⁶⁷ And, while such a motivation has been translated into English, and interpreted in various different ways – e.g., “for the sake of the fine”, “for the sake of the beautiful”, “for the sake of the noble”, etc., – such a motivation, no doubt, is incompatible with an egoistic reading.¹⁶⁸ Thus, even though it is contentious how best to understand “*tou kalou heneka*”, it is clear that Aristotle’s virtuous agent is not occurrently motivated to act virtuously primarily for her *own* sake, and an adequate neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation must adhere to this fact.

The underlying or dispositional motivation of the virtuous agent is to be understood as a deeper-seated motivation that explains both why an individual begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and also why an individual may be said to maintain said disposition. Determining the content of such a motivation requires examining the “inner life of individuals”¹⁶⁹ and any rationale given must be seen against the agent’s background beliefs regarding how to live.¹⁷⁰ Now, it is necessary for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be able to provide a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent because – as all neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists will agree – “a virtue ethical theory like Aristotle’s

¹⁶⁵ The way that I divide the occurrent motivation from the underlying motivation here is in keeping with the way in which neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation have generally been assessed – this will become apparent in the next chapter. In order for an account of moral motivation to meet the self-absorption objection, it must meet the first two conditions. Meeting the third condition is what enables us to call such an account “neo-Aristotelian”.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., Swanton writes, “but what counts as bias, self-indulgence, selfishness and self centeredness or narrowness of concern is not something on my view that can be determined without looking deeply into the agent.” Swanton, P. 178.

¹⁶⁷ *EN* 1120 a 24. Also, see, *EN* 1115 b 12 and *EN* 1122 b 6.

¹⁶⁸ Kraut emphasises this approach. He writes, “first, however unclear we are about what kind of motivation is involved in choosing virtuous actions for themselves, we nonetheless have a good idea of what motives Aristotle means to *exclude*.” Kraut, Richard, “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself” (1976) P. 235

¹⁶⁹ Slote, Michael. “Agent-Based Virtue Ethics” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. Vol. 20 (1995) P. 84.

¹⁷⁰ McDowell, John. “Virtue and Reason.” *Monist*. 62. (1979). P. 344.

focuses more on virtuous individuals and individual traits than on actions.”¹⁷¹ Thus, given the emphasis that neo-Aristotelians place on one’s enduring character – which includes one’s deeply embedded motivations, such as, say, to live a certain kind of life – though occurrent motivations may be a good starting place for evaluating one’s moral character, evaluating one’s underlying motivational structure is more important.¹⁷² For virtue ethicists, evaluating just the occurrent motivations of individuals is, simply put, not enough.¹⁷³

Finally – and at the risk of stating the obvious – an adequate “neo-Aristotelian” account of moral motivation must be consistent – or at the very least inspired by – the central core tenets of Aristotle’s ethics. Here, the challenge is to show that a neo-Aristotelian theory can respond to the self-absorption objection. For to “solve” the self-absorption objection as it applies to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics by appealing to non-Aristotelian principles is, simply put, already to abandon the goal of providing a viable neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical theory.¹⁷⁴

In addition to these three conditions, it is important to reiterate the first preliminary point made in the previous chapter: namely, that the principle of charity requires that we take proponents of the self-absorption objection on their own terms (unless, of course, one has good reason not to). One thing that should be clear by now is that all of the proponents of the self-absorption objection mentioned above understand Aristotelian eudaimonism in terms of what I have called the “orthodox view.” Recall, this is the view that takes *eudaimonia* to be two things at once: it is the final end for practical reasoning, and it is a good human life for the one living it.”¹⁷⁵ Further, all of the proponents of the self-absorption objection insist, that, for Aristotle, the virtuous agent’s “own *eudaimonia*” is *not* the same thing as what it means to live well *qua* human.¹⁷⁶ That is, the virtuous agent’s *own eudaimonia* consists, in part, in her *own*

¹⁷¹ Slote, “Agent-Based Virtue Ethics”. P. 84.

¹⁷² As noted above there is an intimate relationship between the occurrent and underlying motivations in the virtuous agent.

¹⁷³ As Christopher Toner reminds us, “the Fact that the virtuous agent ... is not motivated by concern for her own good from moment to moment, does not also mean that this knowledge and motivation are present ‘all along in the background’.” Toner, Christopher. “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” in *The Royal Institute of Philosophy*. Vol. 81 (2006) P. 604.

¹⁷⁴ E.g., Christine Swanton’s account of moral motivation is immune from the self-absorption objection, but her account is pluralistic and not based on Aristotle’s ethics. See Swanton’s *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (2003).

¹⁷⁵ Russell, Daniel, “Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. P.14.

¹⁷⁶ Imagine a case where the virtuous agent understands her “own *eudaimonia*” in terms of, say, maximizing utility and minimizing disutility from an impersonal point of view in the world. Now, if this particular virtuous agent performed all of her actions for the sake of “maximizing utility and minimizing disutility from an impersonal point of view in the world,” then there would be nothing self-absorbed about this account of moral motivation. For such an agent, to be sure, has taken the ultimate aim of morality (for consequentialists, at least) and made it her utmost aim. On views such as this, where one’s own *eudaimonia* and one’s conception of the human good (or morality writ large) coincide, the self-absorption objection cannot get off the ground.

flourishing or her *own* objective well-being, where this is distinct from what it means to live well *qua* human.¹⁷⁷

To conclude, an adequate neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation must pass three tests: first, it must provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous individual; second, it must lay out a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent; and third, it must be said to be inspired by the central core tenets of Aristotle’s *Ethics*. With these three conditions now laid out in full, the time has come to see whether the self-absorption objection can be met, and further whether neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics can provide an adequate account of moral motivation. It is to this challenge that I now turn.

¹⁷⁷ In Chapter 4, I spell out in some detail what this account of *eudaimonia* might look like by drawing on Richard Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good*. (1989).

Chapter 2: The Self-Absorption Objection: Responses and Rejoinders

“One would think that by now the self-centredness objection has been well and truly dealt with by virtue ethicists. But the objection never seems to go away. This suggests that it is more serious than virtue ethicists have taken it to be.”
(Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics”, 2015)

Introduction

The first clear articulation of the self-absorption objection (at least since the revival of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics in the late 1950s) is laid out in a seminal paper by David Solomon entitled, “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” (1988).¹⁷⁸ Since then, a number of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, *et alia*, have gone on to defend neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from what Solomon refers to as the “self-centredness objection” – a variant of what I refer to here as the “self-absorption objection.”¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, I argue, none of these attempts are able to provide a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection at both (1) the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, and (2) the underlying level of motivation of the virtuous agent.¹⁸⁰ As we shall see, there are neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation that can meet (1) but not (2). These accounts reflect how we may be said to acquire natural virtue, illuminate how we may come to appreciate the proper moral standing of others, highlight what a proper concern for others for their own sake may look like, and so on. However, not one is immune from the self-absorption objection, as they say, “all the way down.”

Given the many attempts to defend neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection over the past 25 years, I do not have space to rehearse them all here and point out precisely how each of them fails to provide a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption

¹⁷⁸ Solomon writes, “the first objection, which I will call the “self-centredness objection,” alleges that an EV [Ethics of Virtue] tends to focus too much attention on the agent.” Solomon, “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics” (1988) P. 431.

¹⁷⁹ He continues, “at this deeper level, the objection points to an asymmetry that arises between an agent’s regard for his own character and his regard for the character of others. The question raised here has this form: Since an EV [ethics of virtue] requires me to pay primary attention to the state of my own character, doesn’t this suggest that I must regard my own character as the ethically most important feature of myself? But, if so, and if I am suitably concerned about others, shouldn’t my concern for them extend beyond a mere concern that their wants needs and desires be satisfied, and encompass a concern for their character? Shouldn’t I indeed have the same concern for the character of my neighbor as I have for my own?” Solomon, *Ibid.*, P. 435.

¹⁸⁰ Christine Swanton writes, “one would think that by now the self-centredness objection has been well and truly dealt with by virtue ethicists. But the objection never seems to go away.” Swanton, “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics” (2015) P. 112. Christopher Toner writes, “for this reason his [Hare’s] formulation of the Self- Centredness objection cannot be turned aside by the standard response in the literature, and indeed I am aware of no adequate response to this formulation at all.” Toner, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics (2006). P. 605.

objection “all the way down.”¹⁸¹ Rather, in what follows, I examine three general strategies which I take to exhaust the ones employed by virtue ethicists to address the self-absorption objection.¹⁸² I then go on to show how they all, for one reason or another, fail to adequately address the self-absorption objection *in toto*.¹⁸³

In the first section of this chapter, I examine Julia Annas’ developmental approach. Annas states that the person “on the road to virtue,” while once perhaps self-absorbed, eventually transcends her self-absorption to the point that, by the time she is fully virtuous, she is free from any objectionable self-referential thoughts or motivations. The problem with this account of motivation, however, is that even if the virtuous agent is no longer occurrently motivated by such egoistic thoughts or motivations, such thoughts and motivations nonetheless persist deep down in her.¹⁸⁴ And, so long as such self-referential thoughts and motivations persist deep down in the virtuous agent, such an account cannot meet the self-absorption objection as the objection may be said to arise at the underlying level of motivation. The basic thought behind my argument here is that, if egoistic motivations are objectionable during the first stage of moral development, they also ought to be objectionable at the second and final stage of moral development. If they are not, some explanation must be given to explain why the two stages are treated differently. And, disappointingly, Annas provides no such explanation. As a result, her account falls short of addressing the self-absorption objection *in toto*.

In the second section, I examine what I call “two-standpoint-approaches.” Proponents of these approaches attempt to address the self-absorption objection by invoking a distinction between (1) the prudential justification of the virtuous

¹⁸¹ Julia Annas first addresses this objection in “The Good Life and the Good Lives of Others” (1992).

¹⁸² This is not to say, that particular attempts to address the self-absorption objection do not adopt more than one of these strategies. Rather my claim is that all attempts made by virtue ethicists to address the self-absorption objection – at least those of which I am aware – adopt one of these three strategies or a combination of these strategies. A fourth strategy for responding to the self-absorption objection will be proposed in chapter five, section three.

¹⁸³ Given that the task before us is to defend *neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics* from the self-absorption objection – as opposed to defending Aristotle’s ethics from various charges of egoism – in this chapter, I only examine attempts made by neo-Aristotelians who address the self-absorption objection as it applies to contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. This is not to say, of course, that there are not a number of Aristotelian scholars who have made great progress on defending Aristotle’s own ethics from various charges of formal egoism. Indeed, I do draw on a number of these scholars’ works at various points throughout this dissertation. However, given that their aim is to defend Aristotle’s ethics – as opposed to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics – from charges of egoism, I will not examine their attempts and how they fall short in defending Aristotle’s virtuous agent from the self-absorption objection. See, for example Paula Gottlieb’s “Aristotle’s Ethical Egoism” (1996), Dennis McKerlie’s “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998), Jennifer Whiting’s “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2006), and Richard Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good* (1989).

¹⁸⁴ This is because, as we shall see, one’s own *eudaimonia* or “happiness” always puts a stop to why we do what we do. Annas writes, “I may want to be healthy to have a career, to have a family, as part of being happy, but I don’t want to be happy as part of a means to something further. It’s just what I want; a terminus to my other goals.” Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, P. 124.

agent’s actions, and (2) the moral motivation behind the virtuous agent’s actions. In particular, I focus on Mark Lebar’s attempt to address the self-absorption objection by insisting that we view the virtuous agent as acting from two distinct standpoints: the first-person standpoint, and the second-person standpoint. Lebar argues that the self-absorption objection can be adequately addressed by understanding the virtuous agent as acting from the second-person standpoint. On such a standpoint, the virtuous agent may be described as acting virtuously *primarily* for reasons that respect the well-being, autonomy, and moral agency of others, and not for self-regarding reasons. The main problem with this approach, I argue, is that, while it can adequately address the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, it cannot adequately address it at the underlying level of motivation of the virtuous agent. This is because the virtuous agent is characterized as adopting the second-person standpoint for first-person reasons; i.e. reasons that stem from concern for her *own* happiness.

In the final section, I examine what I call “reconceptualization approaches.” Proponents of these approaches seek to address the self-absorption objection by making clear precisely what the virtuous agent takes *eudaimonia* to be, and then arguing that such an understanding is incompatible with the virtuous agent being motivated to act virtuously for egoistic reasons. In particular, I focus on Christopher Toner’s attempt to provide a “non-egoistic eudaimonism” by pushing for an understanding of *eudaimonia* on which the agent’s own welfare is peripheral, while what is central is the agent’s “stand[ing] in the right relation to the good.”¹⁸⁵ Here, I insist that such accounts simply miss the mark. That is, I argue that no matter how “*eudaimonia*” is to be understood – be it in terms of “welfare prior,” “excellence prior,” or what we might call “divine prior,” – so long as the ultimate reason *why* the virtuous agent acts virtuously is for the sake of *her* achieving *eudaimonia*, such an account is nonetheless too self-absorbed. While this type of response is capable of addressing the charge that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is *substantively* egoistic, it cannot address the charge that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is *formally* egoistic.¹⁸⁶ And this, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the crux of the self-absorption objection.

2.1. Julia Annas’ Developmental Approach

One of the fiercest critics of the self-absorption objection is Julia Annas. For the past 25 years, she has argued that there is nothing objectionable about the way in which Aristotle’s virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously. Now, while Annas has dedicated a great deal of time and energy toward defending neo-

¹⁸⁵ Toner, Christopher, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” (2006) P. 611.

¹⁸⁶ For more on substantive egoism, see the introduction. For more on formal egoism, see chapter one, sections one and two.

Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection, in what follows, I examine only her most recent attempt to address this objection.¹⁸⁷

In Chapter 9 of *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas states that the self-absorption objection may be understood as arising as a result of two seemingly conflicting claims that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists appear to hold: namely, that virtuous actions ought to be performed for their good making features (understood not in terms of one’s own happiness), and that virtuous actions ought to be performed for the sake of one’s own happiness.¹⁸⁸ She writes,

“The alleged objection, as articulated by contemporary critics, goes thus. If the account is eudaimonist, then happiness must be one’s overall aim in living. And if the account is a virtue-centred account, then one is also aiming to be living virtuously. But one has to give some account of how these two aims fit together. In acting virtuously and aiming to become a virtuous person, my reasons for doing this are either aimed at achieving happiness or not. But either option is troublesome. However worthy may be my aim of acting virtuously and becoming a virtuous person (worthy as opposed to an aim of having a good time, or getting rich), I am still aiming *at my happiness*. And this, it is claimed, is inconsistent with a proper account of virtue; virtue implies a commitment to the good, and whatever account we give of what the good is, if I am virtuous my good surely can’t be my own happiness.”¹⁸⁹

Here, Annas contends that the challenge put before the virtue ethicist is not to only demonstrate how the virtuous agent may be understood as acting from virtuous reasons and eudaimonistic ones, but to do so while fending off charges of egoism.

¹⁸⁷ In particular, I focus on subsection 2 of chapter 9 of *Intelligent Virtue*, entitled “Happiness and Egoism” P. 152-163. Annas’ most in-depth treatment of the self-absorption objection is found in “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism” (2007). However, the view that she articulates in this earlier work, is, I think, less strong. Her stronger and more mature/insightful response is found below. For discussions of Annas’ previous treatments of the self-absorption objection, see McKerlie’s “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998) and Christopher Toner’s “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” (1996).

¹⁸⁸ These two seemingly conflicting claims are the same ones that we saw Ross grapple with in the previous chapter, and making sense of how to understand the relation between these two claims will be one of the central goals of this thesis. For my understanding of the relation between these two claims, see chapter five, section three.

¹⁸⁹ Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*. P. 153-155. All italics are my own. The basic idea here is that if I aim at my happiness the account is egoistic, but if I do not then the account cannot be said to be eudaimonistic. In chapter 4 and 5, I go on to argue that an account can be eudaimonistic even though one does not aim at one’s own *eudaimonia*.

Annas’ solution to this problem exemplifies more broadly what we might call a “developmental approach.” On such an approach, one, generally speaking, appeals to the way in which moral virtue and one’s conception of *eudaimonia* develop over the course of one’s life, in order to demonstrate that one’s focus on one’s own happiness is not egoistic, and also that such a focus *is* compatible with acting virtuously for its good-making features (understood in terms other than one’s own happiness).¹⁹⁰ In *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas adopts such a strategy. She offers two arguments aimed at mitigating and eliminating the negative effects that the self-absorption objection might be said to have on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.¹⁹¹ Let us look at each of these arguments in turn.¹⁹²

First, Annas claims that a number of critics object to the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation because it seems to suggest that virtuous activity is essentially to be understood in terms of its *instrumental* value.¹⁹³ On one variation of this view, it may be said that the person on the road to virtue begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition *knowingly*, because she recognizes that doing so will further her own happiness. Here, however, Annas argues that it is simply false that the person on the road to virtue cultivates a virtuous disposition and aims to act virtuously *knowing* that by doing so she will further her own happiness. According to Annas, such an objection holds only against people who hold that being virtuous is a good (or possibly the best) way of achieving happiness where happiness is *already* defined in a determinate and circumstantial way independently of whether you are virtuous or not.”¹⁹⁴ She continues,

“happiness is the unspecific overall aim that we find that we have in some form in doing what we are doing. What we take it determinately to consist in is not given in advance of our becoming virtuous. (If it is, then becoming virtuous is likely to change it, as someone might be brought up to think happiness

¹⁹⁰ E.g., for its own sake, for the sake of the *kalon*, etc. In the next chapter, I examine precisely how I think we ought to understand the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.

¹⁹¹ Annas also adopts what I call a “reconceptualization approach” to address the self-absorption objection. She writes, “we can by now see that this charge loses any force it appeared to have as soon as we clarify what happiness is here. Critics often assume that the only viable conceptions of happiness must be of the pleasure or desire or life satisfaction kinds, and clearly any of these would create a problem for the virtuous person. On this view, the objection fails as soon as we point out the difference between such conceptions and happiness in eudaimonist thinking” Ibid., P. 155. I will deal with reconceptualization approaches in section three below.

¹⁹² In *On Virtue Ethics*, Rosalind Hursthouse addresses the self-absorption objection in part by laying out a developmental account of moral motivation. However, ultimately, she is better understood as adopting what I call a “two-standpoint” view. For she claims that the virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously for a set of reasons, while the acquisition of the moral virtues are justified for a different set of reasons.

¹⁹³ She writes, “even if happiness can be thought of as flourishing, for example, it’s still an end that virtue appears to be a means to attaining, and virtue still seems threatened with merely instrumental status.” Op cit., Annas (2011) P. 155

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., P.155. Annas’ italics.

simply consists in being rich, but alters this view as he becomes a better person.) Our final end *becomes* more determinate as we live and develop our characters... virtue cannot be assessed as a means to an already agreed-upon and determinately formed end.”¹⁹⁵

Here, Annas argues that it is misleading to describe the person on the road to virtue as an individual who has a clear and correct conception of *eudaimonia* that she then simply puts into action in order to live well.¹⁹⁶ Rather, the idea is that the person on the road to virtue is constantly refining her conception of what it means to live well and constantly grappling with what it means to act virtuously. On such a developmental approach, one cannot be said to act virtuously for the sake of achieving one’s own happiness, because (1) the content of one’s own happiness is imprecise and indeterminate, and (2) precisely what acting well or what virtue requires is not fully known. For how can such an individual be said to act for the sake of her own *eudaimonia* when she does not even know what her *eudaimonia* is? And so, those who argue that the person on the road to virtue simply takes a correct conception of *eudaimonia* and puts it in practice in order to live well, wrongly presuppose that the beginner in virtue already has a correct and highly refined conception of what it means to be *eudaimon*.

In Annas’ second argument, she attempts to demonstrate how (1) acting virtuously for the act’s good making features, and (2) acting virtuously for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia*, may be said to co-exist, while keeping at bay the self-absorption objection.¹⁹⁷ She claims that in order to see this, we must first situate the virtuous agent within a developmental framework and acknowledge two important stages in the virtuous agent’s development. In the first stage – what she calls the “beginner stage” – an individual (usually a young person) has to make an effort and think through what virtue requires in everyday situations. For example, she may think to herself “that *this* is what a virtuous (brave, etc.) person would do, or that *that* would be a virtuous (brave, etc.) action.”¹⁹⁸ In the early part of this stage, virtue and happiness may or may not seem related.¹⁹⁹ However, as we develop in the first stage – and learn, for example, “which aims are *worth*

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., P. 156.

¹⁹⁶ We may contrast this with a classical utilitarian who, say, from reading a bit of Bentham, may know well before reaching adulthood what happiness consists in and what it means to act well.

¹⁹⁷ The second argument is surely needed because many of those who hold the self-absorption objection do not simply assert that the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation is too self-absorbed because virtue is understood just in terms of its instrumental value. Rather, many who also advance the objection – e.g. Thomas Hurka – insist that the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation is objectionable so long as the virtuous agent is said to act virtuously where one’s primary motivation for acting virtuously is one’s own *eudaimonia*. On this view, an account may be said to be self-absorbed even if virtue is not taken to have only instrumental value.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., P. 159.

¹⁹⁹ Annas writes, “when we learn to be brave and to be fair, there seems little or no reason to connect the two; the areas of life in which they are displayed, and the feelings and attitudes which they deal, have little in common.” Ibid., P. 160.

enduring hardship for, [or] what the differences between circumstances that do require you to stand up for an unpopular opinion and those in which it would be merely tactless or showing-off” – we come to see a particular relation between virtue and one’s own happiness: namely, that acting virtuously and cultivating a virtuous disposition is good *for me*.²⁰⁰

However, in the second stage – where one is truly virtuous – the virtuous agent may be described as acting without any thoughts pertaining to his own happiness.²⁰¹ This is because “by the time he has developed to being a truly virtuous person, he will not have to, and won’t, think explicitly about being brave or doing a brave action. Rather he will, as a result of experience, reflection, and habituation simply respond to the situation ‘from a disposition’, because [say] he thinks that people are in danger and need help.”²⁰² Thus, while the beginner in virtue may need some type of “egoistic” or self-referential motivation for acting virtuously, the fully virtuous agent – on Annas’ developmental account of virtue – is not motivated at all by any egoistic thoughts. Hence, if Annas’ account here is tenable, it appears that we have before us a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection as the objection may be said to arise in the fully virtuous agent.

However, in response to Annas’ first argument, it seems that regardless of precisely how definite, thorough, articulate, and correct the person on the road to virtue’s conception of happiness may be, so long as she pursues cultivating a virtuous disposition *primarily* for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*, the self-absorption objection still stands.²⁰³ An example may help to illuminate this point.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., P. 160. Annas writes, “he is learning about the value of acting bravely and being a brave person. How is this compatible with his having *no* views about his overall happiness? How could he have learnt these points and about value, acting, responding, and feeling, and have had no thoughts at all about their implications for how he lives his life?” Ibid., P. 160. She continues, “as we develop the virtues, we may begin to do so for reasons that come from happiness.” Ibid., P. 162.

²⁰¹ Cf. Hursthouse writes, “of *course* people can be virtuous, really virtuous, without having spent clockable hours thinking about *eudaimonia*, coming to the conclusion that it is a life lived in accordance with the virtues and working out an account of acting well, just as they can possess a really good will without having spent clockable hours working out whether various maxims can be willed as universal laws.” Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, P. 137.

²⁰² Op cit., Annas (2011) P. 159. For Annas, just as an expert, say, pianist, will not have to think about pressing a particular key in a particular way, a virtuous individual will not have to think about acting virtuously. She writes, “we have just seen that it is the fact that virtue is ‘self-effacing’ in the way that practical skills are (that is, that explicit reasons in terms of virtue cease to be explicitly present in the person’s deliberations) that enables us to see how virtue in a eudaimonist account is not egoistic in any way. It also enables us to see how natural it is for us to come think of living virtuously (at least partly) constituting living happily.” Ibid., P. 163.

²⁰³ For Annas, the virtuous agent’s conception of her own *eudaimonia* is not something defined independently of moral virtue. Rather, moral virtue plays an important role in her conception of what she takes to be her own objective good or what constitutes in large part her own flourishing. She writes, “what is a eudaimonist account? An account of how to live, one in which happiness, *eudaimonia*, is central... Here happiness is a central concept (not, and this is important, the basic

Suppose an agent says to herself “I must organize my life with respect to some end, and, while I do not know which end I ought to pursue, a life of excellent moral activity seems to be the best life for me, though I am not entirely sure. So, I will take up such an end, even though I do not know how to cultivate the moral virtues, who to seek out for moral guidance, how to train my emotions, and so on, because doing so seems to be my best chance at achieving happiness.” While it is true that such a person’s end is indeterminate and still taking shape, this does not negate the fact that her ultimate motivation for cultivating a virtuous disposition is a desire for her *own eudaimonia*.²⁰⁴ Since the buck stops with *her own eudaimonia* – as opposed to, say, the *eudaimonia* of others, the general good, etc. – however indeterminate such an end might be, such an account still seems to be too self-absorbed.²⁰⁵

To be fair to Annas, however, it seems that the central aim of her argument here is not to address the self-absorption objection *in toto*, but rather to soften the appearance of the way in which the person on the road to virtue’s focus on her own *eudaimonia* shapes her future actions. For Annas, the person on the road to virtue is not a manipulative and calculative individual who possesses a highly refined plan of what it means to live well, and then simply puts her plan into action in order to achieve her own *eudaimonia*.²⁰⁶ Rather, the person on the road to virtue is presented as grappling with the question of what it means to live well, and how to achieve such an end in her own life, and as someone simply doing the best that she can. So, although Annas’ first argument may not vindicate neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection, it does present the virtuous individual as less shrewd, and, for some – especially those who do not find formal egoism especially problematic – this may be enough to fend off some variations of the worry that her account is “too egoistic.”

With respect to Annas’ second argument, it seems that while it can fend off the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, it cannot fend off the objection as it may be said to arise at the underlying level of motivation of the virtuous agent. To see why Annas’ account can fend off the self-absorption objection at the occurrent level of

or foundational concept), but it is not the first concept that we encounter.” Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue* (2011) P. 120.

²⁰⁴ Annas writes, “I may want to be healthy to have a career, to have a family, as part of being happy, but I don’t want to be happy as part of a means to something further. It’s just what I want; a terminus to my other goals.” Ibid., P. 124.

²⁰⁵ Now, one could push back here and insist that because Annas’ account of *eudaimonia* includes to some extent the well-being of others for their own sake, it might be the case that talk of her virtuous agent pursuing her *own eudaimonia* is a bit misleading. Be that as it may, it seems clear that Annas understands the virtuous agent’s conception of her *own eudaimonia* more in terms of contributing to her *own* flourishing than the flourishing of others. And, so long as this is the case, the self-absorption objection stands.

²⁰⁶ Her view, does not, for example, suggest that the virtuous person ought to encourage another individual to perform a virtuous action that she may have performed so that she may perform the even nobler action.

motivation, we may simply turn to the passage mentioned above, in which Annas describes the fully virtuous agent acting virtuously from a virtuous disposition. What motivates this agent, occurrently speaking, is something like “people are in danger and need help.”²⁰⁷ Such a description of the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation does not exhibit any appeals to one’s own *eudaimonia*, and thus cannot be said to be self-absorbed. However, to see why Annas’ account cannot fend off the objection as it may be said to arise at the *underlying* level of motivation, we require a more in-depth analysis of Annas’ developmental account of virtue.

Recall, the task before Annas is to demonstrate that virtue and happiness can both serve as goals of the virtuous agent, while not falling prey to the self-absorption objection. However, when we look at Annas’ developmental account closely, and examine its ability to meet such a challenge, the result is disappointing.²⁰⁸ Annas claims that the beginner in virtue (during the latter part of the first stage) “may begin to do so [i.e., cultivate the virtues] for reasons that come from happiness.”²⁰⁹ Now, while she does not explicitly state that the beginner in virtue in fact cultivates the moral virtues for reasons that come from *her* happiness or her *eudaimonia*, this is clearly what she has in mind. For Annas, if such thoughts could not connect to her own *eudaimonia*, then such an account could not be said to be eudaimonistic.²¹⁰ Recall, that, Aristotelian eudaimonism – as Annas understands it, and as it is understood on the orthodox view – is committed to the following two theses: (1) that one’s own *eudaimonia* serves as the last reason one can give for all that one does, and (2) that one’s own *eudaimonia* must be good for the one living it. Regarding the former, Annas writes, “I may want to be healthy to have a career, to have a family, as part of being happy, but I don’t want to be happy as part of a means to something further.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., P. 159. Here, Annas seems to take a leaf from Hursthouse who claims that the virtuous person is motivated to act virtuously for “v-reasons”; i.e., reasons typical of performing virtuous actions. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, P. 128.

²⁰⁸ Robert Adams articulates this sentiment of disappointment nicely in his commentary on *Intelligent Virtue*. He writes, “it is at this point that I have my deepest misgivings about Annas’ account of virtue. I agree that virtue is a great good, and intrinsically excellent, and that we ought to want very much to be virtuous ourselves. But I do not believe that that is the whole of the good to which the virtuous person should be committed—or, as I might rather say, devoted. I think the ideal of virtuous motivation should be understood as devotion to a good that includes one’s own developing virtue but is much larger than any virtue of one’s own. In devotion to such a good there is room for strong and central motives that are altruistic in a way that I think commitment to one’s own virtue, as such, is not. And some such motives will aim at outcomes that are distinct from one’s own character and actions—will aim, for example, at the flourishing of other persons, and perhaps the flourishing of philosophy.” Adams, “Comments on *Intelligent Virtue: Moral Education, Aspiration, and Altruism*.” (2015) P. 292-293.

²⁰⁹ Op cit., Annas (2011) P. 162.

²¹⁰ As we shall see in chapters four and five, such a restrictive understanding of eudaimonia is unnecessary here. For textual support for the claim that Annas has the agent’s own happiness in mind, see chapter 9 of *Intelligent Virtue*. Here, it is clear that she has the agent’s own *eudaimonia* in mind.

It’s just what I want; a terminus to my other goals.”²¹¹ And, regarding the latter, Annas writes “virtue constitutes (at least in part) *the person’s* flourishing or happiness”.²¹² Thus, I take it to be clear that on Annas’ account of virtue, the beginner in virtue (during the second part of the first stage) cultivates the moral virtues for the sake of her *own eudaimonia*.²¹³

What is more, when we turn to the underlying motivation of Annas’ virtuous agent, and ask her *why* she chooses to maintain a virtuous disposition – and why she ultimately acts in accordance with the virtues for reasons stemming from virtue – given her endorsement of both of the two theses mentioned above, her answer here must be given in terms of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*.²¹⁴ This follows so long as the virtuous agent’s ultimate aim – i.e., the last reason one could give for all that one does – is her *own eudaimonia*. Thus, while Annas’ virtuous agent might be able to act virtuously, occurrently speaking, for non-egoistic reasons, if further pressed as to why she acts virtuously for non-egoistic reasons, eventually her answer must be because doing so either furthers or is constitutive of her *own eudaimonia*.²¹⁵ What follows from this – as we have seen in Chapter 1 – is that such a motivation for cultivating the moral virtues – viz. for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia* – is unable to adequately address the thrust of the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at the underlying level of the virtuous agent.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Ibid., P. 124.

²¹² Ibid., P. 118. My italics.

²¹³ While I contend that Annas’ account cannot meet the self-absorption objection, her account does seem to reflect the way in which some tend to think about how we, empirically speaking, acquire the virtues. For example, Whiting writes “this seems reasonable since this is more or less the way it happens with everyone. We *all* start off performing virtuous actions only coincidentally, for sake of rewards (for example) or to avoid punishment. But this ceases to matter once we have acquired the disposition to choose virtuous actions for themselves.” Whiting, “External Results, and Choosing Virtuous Actions for Themselves.” (2002) P. 286.

²¹⁴ This just follows if the last reason for all that one does is one’s *own eudaimonia*. Here, Annas might want to emphasize that such an explanation would be given in a “cool hour” and while the agent steps back and reflects on her life as a whole.

²¹⁵ Annas insists that the virtuous agent ought to be able to stand back and give an account for why she acts virtuously in terms of her *own eudaimonia*. This is necessary for her account to meet what she refers to as the “articulacy requirement.” For more on this, see Chapter 3 of Annas’ *Intelligent Virtue* (2011).

²¹⁶ According to Aristotelian eudaimonism, the buck does not stop simply with why the virtuous agent acts virtuously occurrently speaking. Why she does this, will be for the sake of some other reason, ultimately ending – according to Aristotelian eudaimonism – in terms of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*. As John McDowell stresses, any rationale given for why an agent cultivates a virtuous disposition must be seen against the agent’s background beliefs regarding how to live. McDowell, John. “Virtue and Reason” (1979). P. 344. Cf. Macintyre’s parable of the chess playing child. He writes, “notice however, that, so long as it is the candy alone which provides the child with a good reason for playing chess, the child has no reason not to cheat and every reason to cheat, provided he or she can do successfully. But, so we may hope, there will come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess, in the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination, and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons, reasons now not just for winning on a particular occasion, but for trying to excel in

At this point, Annas might object that the egoistic thoughts that persist deep down in the fully virtuous agent are perfectly harmless so long as they are not what motivate her to act virtuously on particular occasions.²¹⁷ Such a response, however, is inadequate for three reasons.²¹⁸ First, *prima facie*, it seems that if a motivation is objectionably egoistic during the first stage in our moral development, then, for the sake of consistency and the integrity of the theory, it must also be said to be objectionably egoistic in later stages of moral development. If it is objectionable to serve as our occurrent motivation, then it seems that it ought to be objectionable to serve as our underlying motivation. For such treatment of the same principle of motivation though understood and valued differently based on whether it is occurrent or underlying calls for an explanation.²¹⁹ And, until such an explanation is provided, Annas’ account of moral motivation must be deemed inadequate insofar as it cannot provide a satisfying rationale for why self-referential thoughts at the occurrent level of motivation are objectionable, while self-referential thoughts at the underlying level are not.²²⁰ This is particularly important given the important role that the last reason one can give for all that one does plays on eudaimonistic accounts of moral motivation in the Aristotelian tradition.

Second, downplaying the importance of the underlying motivation and solely focusing on evaluating the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent is at odds with a widely shared view adopted by most virtue ethicists, including, it seems, Annas. This shared view is that evaluating moral motivation *necessarily* entails examining the inner life of individuals, and not just the occurrent

whatever way the game of chess demands.” Macintyre, *After Virtue* P. 176. On Macintyre’s account, the boy need not always be motivated in terms of his own *eudaimonia*.

²¹⁷ Annas writes, “but my happiness is my living happily, and what life can I live other than mine? It would be absurd as well as objectionable for me to try to live your life.” Op cit., Annas (2011), P. 156. Annas here seems to miss the point. While she is correct in suggesting that only I can live my own life, the ultimate end that I adopt – unless one is a psychological egoist – need not be my own *eudaimonia*. I can make the ultimate aim of my life promoting the *eudaimonia* of others, even at the expense of my own. For more on the relation between one’s own good and the good of others, see chapter 4, section two.

²¹⁸ Robert Audi provides a third objection. He writes, “one cannot count as *simply* doing the thing for an admirable reason where there is such an admixture [of good and bad reasons], any more than one can count as simply believing a proposition for a good reason when another reason for which one believes it is not good” Audi, “Moral Virtue and Reasons for Action” (2009) P. 12-13.

²¹⁹ By “a satisfying rationale” I refer here to Hurka’s argument, which I laid out Chapter 1, that a moral theory along with accounts of motivation ought to give a satisfying rationale for its general claims, its particular claims, and how they fit together to form a systematic whole. Hurka, *Perfectionism*, P. 31.

²²⁰ Here, I agree with Hurka when he argues that accounts such as Annas’, which understand the virtuous person’s ultimate aim in terms of her own *eudaimonia* (however enlarged to include the well-being of others it may be), cannot adequately explain why it is that the virtuous agent’s ultimate end ought to be her own *eudaimonia* as opposed to another’s *eudaimonia* or the *eudaimonia* of all. See Hurka’s “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong and Wrong” (2013).

motivation of individuals from time to time.²²¹ As Annas has argued, grasping *why* the virtuous agent acts the way that she does requires that we view her life as an integrated whole.²²² This, it seems, requires not only paying attention to, and limiting our moral evaluations to, the reasons why the virtuous agent acts the way she does at the particular time that she acts, but also evaluating why she adopts and maintains a general disposition to act in those very same ways.²²³

Third, by evaluating only the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, one unfairly ignores the way in which *both* levels of motivation work together to motivate the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Here, the idea is that while Annas’ virtuous agent may be said to act virtuously, occurrently speaking, for non self-regarding reasons, those reasons do not exist in a vacuum, and are not the sole determinant of why the virtuous agent acts the way that she does. Rather, there is a story to be told about why the virtuous agent (prior to becoming virtuous) initially decides to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and a story to be told about why the virtuous agent continues to maintain such a disposition. Both stories play an important role in explaining why the virtuous agent acts the way she does. And, given the important role both of these stories play, it would be a serious mistake to ignore either of them, or to limit our evaluation to just the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.

I conclude that while Annas’ developmental approach can fend off the self-absorption objection as it be said to arise at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, it cannot fend off this objection as it may be said to arise at the underlying level. For so long as Annas maintains that the virtuous person first cultivates and then maintains a virtuous disposition for reasons that stem from her concern for her *own eudaimonia*, such an account rightfully deserves the label “self-absorbed.”

2.2. Mark Lebar’s Two Standpoint Approach

The most popular approach adopted by virtue ethicists to defend neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection is the “two standpoint

²²¹ Hursthouse puts this point nicely. She writes, “‘because she thought it was right’ is an ascription that goes far beyond the moment of action. It is not merely, as grammatically it may appear to be, a claim about how things are with the agent and her reasons at that moment. It is also a substantial claim about the future (with respect to reliability) and, most importantly, a claim about what sort of person the agent is – a claim that goes ‘all the way down.’” Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*. P. 134. Also, see Slote’s “Agent-Based Virtue Ethics” (1995)

²²² She writes, “the notion of ‘my life as a whole’ is crucial here; the virtues make sense within a conception of living which takes the life I live to be a unity.” Annas, “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism” in *Morality and Self-Interest* (2007) P. 206.

²²³ Cf. Kelly Rogers. She writes “but presumably the Aristotelian agent does not overlook or repress his awareness of the larger motivational context [viz. his own *eudaimonia*] in which his pursuit of the noble takes place.” Rogers, “Aristotle on Loving Another for his Own Sake” (1994) P. 300.

approach.”²²⁴ This approach may be broken down into two steps. First, it draws a distinction between (1) what *justifies* the virtuous agent’s actions from a prudential point of view, and (2) what *motivates* the virtuous agent’s actions from a moral point of view.²²⁵ And, second, it seeks to demonstrate not only that (1) and (2) can come apart, but also that the content of (1) does not undermine the content of (2), leaving the motivation of the virtuous agent intact. While a number of variations of this approach exist within the virtue ethics literature, the clearest formulation of such an approach is provided by Mark Lebar in “Virtue Ethics and Deontic Constraints.”

In “Virtue Ethics and Deontic Constraints,” Lebar sets out to defend neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from a variation of the self-absorption objection. This objection – which he calls simply “The Objection” – applies to “any view which makes morality and self-interest coincide (as it is the point of eudaimonist virtue ethical theories to do) [and] gives the wrong explanation of other-regarding norms.”²²⁶ It goes as follows.

“The objection ... is then that eudaimonist virtue-ethical theories fail to accommodate ‘The Intuition’ insofar as they hold the reason for treating others with respect is *our own* eudaimonia, or happiness. The effects of our actions on others might be part

²²⁴ This approach was first popularized by Terence Irwin in *Aristotle’s First Principles*. Irwin attempted to keep charges of egoism at bay by insisting that we interpret Aristotle’s ethical theory in terms of “eudaimonic virtues” – those that promote the agent’s self-realization – and “moral virtues” – those that promote the good of others. Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* P. 439. Irwin claims that “Aristotle believes that these are not two separate lists of virtues [but rather] that the moral virtues are eudaimonic virtues also.” Ibid., P. 439. Three of the leading neo-Aristotelian philosophers today – Rosalind Hursthouse, Daniel Russell, and Mark Lebar – all adopt variations of what I call the two standpoint approach. In *On Virtue Ethics* (1999), while Hursthouse spends a great deal of time taking up a variation of the self-absorption objection, as many have pointed out – e.g., Jennifer Frey, Christine Swanton, and Christopher Toner – her response is unsatisfactory. In her more recent work – e.g., “Applying Virtue Ethics to our Treatment of Non-human Animals” (2006) – Hursthouse seems to rely on Julia Annas to vindicate neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection. She writes, “but, as Julia Annas has recently pointed out... it [i.e., my flourishing] is not egoistic in virtue of its directing me to think about *my* flourishing, *my* good life. I am to think about how I should live *my* life, how to give it shape, simply because it is only *my* life that I can live, not because I am to take it to be necessarily more worth preserving than yours.” Hursthouse, (2006). P. 153. In *Happiness for Humans* (2012) while Daniel Russell does put forth his own two-standpoint approach, he relies on Lebar’s argument (that we shall examine below) to keep the self-absorption objection at bay. He writes, “I am persuaded by Lebar’s argument, but obviously it would go far beyond my present scope, and be foolishly heroic, for me to try to offer a full-blown discussion of this very thorny theoretical issue here.” Russell, (2012) P. 34.

²²⁵ This is put in slightly different ways by different philosophers. Some talk in terms of a “justification within a practice” in contrast with a “justification outside a practice” and others adopt a distinction between “moral reasoning” or “reasons from virtue” and “prudential reasoning” or “eudaimonistic reasoning.”

²²⁶ Lebar, Mark. “Virtue Ethics and Deontic Constraints” (2009) P. 645.

of the content of such reasons, but they are at best a sideshow to the main focus on living well.”²²⁷

Now, to clarify, by “the intuition,” Lebar has in mind the generally accepted idea that the moral reason we have for not acting in harmful ways toward others must be based on the well-being of others, and not our own. So, for example, my moral reason for not stealing something from someone ought to be cashed out in terms of, say, respecting a fellow moral agent’s property or the harm I would cause the victim, and not, say, that by partaking in such an act, my own character would be negatively affected.²²⁸ He goes on to claim that in order “to meet The Objection, we must be able to explain how, on a eudaimonist virtue-ethical theory, an agent has reason to respect deontic constraints, in a way which focuses on the effects of violations of those constraints on their victims.”²²⁹ And, in his paper, he goes on to explore one possible way that a neo-Aristotelian might meet such an objection: viz., by adopting a two-standpoint approach.

Lebar argues that in order to meet “The Objection” we need to recognize an important distinction in our moral reasoning between the second-person standpoint and the first-person standpoint.²³⁰ The second-person standpoint is “the [moral] perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another’s conduct and will.”²³¹ He writes, “it is a standpoint that makes salient our relations with particular individual others and does so in a way which registers our mutual and reciprocal recognition of those others.”²³² From this standpoint, we have second-person reasons – what he also calls “reasons for deontic constraints” – to respect others, and these reasons ought to be understood

²²⁷ Ibid., P. 646. My italics. This objection, Lebar notes, is most forcefully laid out in chapter seven of Samuel Scheffler’s *Human Morality* (1992).

²²⁸ Recall that in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the just person ought to act justly – and not unjustly – because doing so promotes the health of his own soul/character. Plato, *Republic* 444c-e.

²²⁹ For Lebar, one respects “deontic constraints” toward others when one treats others as the source of moral claims. He writes, “let us see how this works. If I am considering harming you, it will become apparent to me from the second-person standpoint that I have reason not to do so; that reason is that the effect of my action would violate *your* moral standing as an agent – *your* dignity – in a way *you* have a claim against my doing so.” P. 649. My italics.

²³⁰ In *Happiness for Humans*, Russell draws a similar distinction between (1) “reasons for acting in the virtue of the ends one has,” and (2) “reasons to have those ends in the first place.” He writes “what I have just argued is that if the question is whether identifying the final end with eudaimonia means that reasons of the first sort must be self-interested, then the answer is clearly no. But perhaps the question will turn to the second sort of reasons, reasons for adopting the ends one has – for *those* reasons clearly *are* all for the one’s own sake, if the final end is eudaimonia.” P.26.

²³¹ Op. Cit., Lebar, P. 647.

²³² Ibid., P. 647. Following Stephen Darwall, Lebar insists that such a standpoint is required in order to properly acknowledge and respect the moral status of others. Lebar does not himself argue for this position, but rather directs the reader to Darwall’s work. Lebar writes, “I find both of these arguments compelling and, in any event, will not rehearse them here.” Ibid., P. 649.

as having the “real and non-derivative authority that all reasons do.”²³³ He contrasts this with the first-person standpoint, or what we may call “the eudaimonistic standpoint.” The eudaimonistic standpoint is the one we take up when trying to make sense of our lives as a whole. Such a standpoint seeks to bring unity to the various standpoints that we adopt, and is directed toward our *own* happiness.

After carefully laying out the distinction between the two standpoints, Lebar goes on to argue that neo-Aristotelians have good reason to adopt the second-person standpoint. His argument may be broken down as follows. He begins by noting – and all virtue ethicists will gladly agree – that acting in accordance with the moral virtues is at the very least necessary for living well. From this, it follows that if one wants to live well, one ought to cultivate and maintain the moral virtues.²³⁴ And, *if* cultivating and maintaining the moral virtues necessarily entails adopting the second-person standpoint – as Lebar insists it does – then, so the argument goes, one has good reason for adopting the second-person standpoint as well. He writes, “we have the same reason for occupying the second-person standpoint that we do for being virtuous generally: doing so is crucially important for living well.”²³⁵ Lebar concludes – and this is the most important part for our purposes here – that *if* we take the virtuous agent to have adopted the second-person standpoint, and *if* part of adopting such a standpoint entails being motivated to act virtuously for other-regarding reasons – and not self-regarding ones – then, we have, in fact, adequately addressed “The Objection.”²³⁶ That is, we have successfully shown how, on a eudaimonist virtue ethical theory, a virtuous agent may be said to act virtuously toward others for reasons that do not stem primarily from thoughts about her own happiness. All

²³³ Ibid., P. 666. When we act virtuously from such a standpoint, we may be said to act for the sake of others, and not for the sake of our own *eudaimonia*.

²³⁴ For doing so enables us to act virtuously. Recall that for Aristotelians a truly virtuous action must stem from a virtuous disposition, which must be acquired.

²³⁵ Ibid., P. 650. It is unclear precisely how Lebar understands the “second-person standpoint” and “living well.” He writes, “if I am right, then it makes as much sense to think that occupying the second-person standpoint is part of the virtuous person’s dispositions as to think that any other disposition is. Perhaps it is (or is like) a virtue, or perhaps it is part of an enhanced understanding of one or more of the virtues already recognized, such as justice.” Ibid. P. 652.

²³⁶ For Lebar, the fact that one adopts the second-person standpoint for the sake of one’s own happiness plays absolutely no role in the content of the virtuous agent’s moral motivation. Those who object to his account on such grounds make a mistake. He writes that such an objection “conflates into a single picture of reasons for respecting others what are, on the view I advocate, two distinct moments or elements in the psychological and rational economy of a virtuous agent. It supposes that eudaimonism requires that some, anyway, of the second-personal reason-responsive attitudes of a fully virtuous agent – an agent who has inculcated the disposition to see others second-personally (call him “Socrates”) – include his well-being as part of their content. This is not so. The fact that acting on such reasons is part of the best life is no element in Socrates’ reasons for acting on them. Instead, eudaimonism and its focus on the agent’s interest in living well enter into his rational economy in a different way.” Ibid., P. 663

this requires – on Lebar’s view – is that the virtuous agent adopts, and acts virtuously from, the second-person standpoint.²³⁷

Now, reflecting on his own response to “The Objection,” Lebar considers whether his solution provides the wrong kind of reason why the virtuous agent adopts the second-person standpoint.²³⁸ For, as we just saw, the virtuous agent may be described as adopting the second-person standpoint for reasons that stem from concern for her own happiness, and this may appear problematic to some. Here, Lebar insists that his account is not problematic, and that seeing this simply requires taking some time to get clear on the various senses of the “why be moral” question. Once we acknowledge, he argues, that this question has two distinct senses – one moral and the other prudential – and are careful about the sense in which the question is being asked (and the type of answer that is appropriate), the “objection” can be explained away. He writes,

“Justifications are responses to questions or challenges; they are what we provide when we crave or demand reasons. There are two distinct questions or challenges relevant to the full story of why the virtuous person respects deontic constraints, and (correspondingly) there are two distinct justificatory responses... The first is whether and why some particular form of respect for others is appropriate; the justificatory response to this is that such respect is the only appropriate response to the dignity of those with whom we are in moral community, as persons with whom we stand in second-personal relations. Eudaimonism enters as a response to a second and distinct question or challenge, which might be something like this: “why should we care about the dignity of others?” Like the first challenge, it is a normative challenge requiring an answer to a practical question. But this challenge can be read in either of two ways. The first is a further question about dignity: what about it gives us reasons? This is just a variant of the first question, and the only appropriate response is to advert again to the account of second-personal reasons that articulates and explicates The Intuition reflected in The Objection in the first place. But here is another reading. If we mean something more in pressing the challenge, we must be asking something about us: what about us is such that it makes

²³⁷ Here, one might worry that even if Lebar’s virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, from the second person standpoint, perhaps it could still be the case that such an agent adopts the second-person standpoint for prudential reasons. As we shall see below, Lebar has a response to this.

²³⁸ He writes, “the strategy I have advocated might seem like a perfect exemplar of the “mistake” in moral philosophy H.A. Prichard warned against a century ago.... As a theory of why we should be moral, the answer that we will be happy or live well if we do so is a paradigmatic wrong kind of reason (WKR)” *Ibid.*, P. 662.

sense for us to care about dignity? And to this question, it is not only acceptable but appropriate that we advert to broader claims about ourselves as moral and rational agents in responding. The Intuition that drives The Objection does not extend to this issue. The response that eudaimonist virtue-ethical theory gives at this point is one that makes essential reference to the interests or good life of the agent as a practically rational member of the moral community. Eudaimonism fixes on the aim of living well to give unity, focus, and point to the wide array of things which we find reason-giving; conversely, the shape of the well-lived life is determined by the fact that we can respond to reasons – the very feature of us that grounds our dignity.”²³⁹

In this passage, Lebar demonstrates how his account is immune from the “Wrong-Kind-of-Reason” Objection. Here, there are two points worth illuminating. First, paying careful attention to the sense in which the “why be moral” question is asked – and the type of response that is required – puts us in a position to sidestep this objection, and avoid the monumental mistake that Prichard (over a century ago) rightly warns us about. This mistake, in a nutshell, consists in trying to give a prudential answer to the “why be moral” question when one is really after a moral answer, or in giving a moral answer to the “why be moral” question when what one seeks is a prudential answer.²⁴⁰ Lebar insists that both senses of the ‘why be moral’ question can be adequately addressed on his account, so long as we come to terms with the type of question being asked, and the type of response that it requires. The second point he makes – which is related to the first – is that the “Wrong-Kind-of-Reason” objection does *not* apply to the “why be moral” question when it is posed in a prudential or eudaimonistic sense. In such a case, one mistakenly seeks a moral answer to a prudential question, when the only appropriate way to respond to a prudential question is with a prudential answer.²⁴¹

Now, while it is clear that Lebar’s account does provide a non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation, unfortunately, it cannot meet the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at the underlying level of

²³⁹ Ibid., P. 669-670.

²⁴⁰ This may very well be, in part, why it is so hard to convince a skeptic to be moral. For such an individual is seeking a prudential answer to a moral question.

²⁴¹ For as Lebar notes, “the Intuition that drives The Objection does not extend to this issue.” Ibid., P. 670. On Lebar’s account if one asks why the virtuous agent cultivates the virtuous disposition in a moral sense, and would like a moral answer, Lebar’s account of moral motivation will provide a response from the second person standpoint. So, for example, he might suggest that the virtuous agent cultivates the virtuous disposition because, say, “others have the properties of dignity, and autonomy, and by cultivating and exercising the moral virtues, we put ourselves in the best position to respect those agents within our moral community.” If one asks the same question in a prudential sense, it is would be misguided to object to it on moral grounds.

motivation of the virtuous agent.²⁴² This is not to say, however, that Lebar’s account cannot provide a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent on *his own* terms. As we shall see, given Lebar’s insistence on separating what *justifies* the virtuous agent’s actions from a prudential point of view, and what *motivates* the virtuous agent’s actions from a moral point of view, his account *can* provide a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent on his *own* terms. That said, Lebar’s account, nonetheless, faces three of its own challenges, given his aim of providing a *neo-Aristotelian* response to what he refers to as “the Objection.”²⁴³ But, before turning to these three challenges, let us now turn to Lebar’s account, and why it is unable to adequately address the self-absorption objection.

Recall, according to the self-absorption objection, the main problem with neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation is that they prescribe that our ultimate reason – i.e., the last reason one could give for all that one does – for acting virtuously, is the fact that doing so furthers, or is constitutive of, our *own eudaimonia*. This objection – to adopt Lebar’s approach and terminology – ought to be understood as a moral one, and one that requires a moral answer.²⁴⁴ However, when we turn to Lebar’s account, and inquire why his virtuous agent ultimately chooses to live a life of moral virtue – i.e., why she adopts and maintains a virtuous disposition – where we would like for Lebar to respond from the second-person standpoint, he in fact responds from the first-person standpoint.²⁴⁵ In other words, for Lebar, the ultimate reason – i.e., the last reason one could give – for adopting the second-person standpoint is because doing so is good *for* the virtuous individual; i.e., the virtuous agent adopts the second person-standpoint because it is good *for* the “life of the agent.”²⁴⁶ And, so long as the last reason Lebar’s virtuous agent gives for cultivating the virtuous disposition is provided in terms of the virtuous agent’s own happiness, the self-absorption objection stands.

²⁴² If Lebar’s virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, for, and is motivated by second-person reasons, I take it to be clear that such an agent does not act for reasons that stem from her own self-interest or from her own *eudaimonia*.

²⁴³ First, it is unclear the extent to which Lebar’s account of moral motivation rightly deserves the label “Aristotelian.” Second, his account seems to give rise to the problematic schizophrenia that Michael Stocker, Peter Railton, *et alia*, implore us to avoid. And third, Lebar’s account appears to reject a central pillar in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, namely, its insistence that the virtuous agent ought to view her life as a unified and integrated whole.

²⁴⁴ Whether Lebar would in fact agree that such a question is best understood as a moral one requiring a moral answer is another issue altogether. That we have good reason to think that such a question is a moral one requiring a moral answer, see chapter one.

²⁴⁵ Lebar holds what Timothy Chappell calls “the prudentialistic presumption”: viz., that the moral requires explanatory grounding in the prudential. If Lebar instead held what Chappell calls “the moralistic presumption” – i.e., that the prudential requires explanatory grounding in the moral – then his two standpoint approach would be able to adequately address the self-absorption objection. For more on the prudentialistic and moralistic presumptions, see Chappell’s “*Kalou Heneka*” (2013).

²⁴⁶ Op. Cit., Lebar, P. 664.

At this point, it is important to note that Lebar claims that the second-person standpoint must be adopted for the sake of the good life of the agent because otherwise it would be arbitrary as to why the virtuous agent would adopt the second-person standpoint in the first place.²⁴⁷ For Lebar, there must be some connection between why the virtuous agent acts virtuously and the virtuous agent’s own happiness. He writes,

“One might be tempted to abandon the “formal” egoism here... [However] this way of proceeding offers no explanation of why it is that the wise agent would find this course of action (as opposed to alternatives) to be warranted – indeed, it claims that a demand for such an explanation is misguided. The line I take is necessary as against the concern that the standards of the virtuous agent are arbitrary. The ancients thought the choices of the wise agent were not arbitrary but justifiable and defensible, in light of the ultimate end of living well.”²⁴⁸

Here, while I agree with Lebar that the virtuous agent’s explanation for why she ought to cultivate a virtuous disposition must be defensible, I reject the idea that it must be defensible in terms of the virtuous agent’s *own eudaimonia* or the good life of the virtuous agent. Surely, there are other ways avoid the “arbitrariness” that Lebar eludes to here, and, in chapter five I explore one possible route one might take.

Now, if my argument above holds, it is clear that so long as Lebar insists that the virtuous agent adopts the second-person standpoint for the sake of first-person reasons, the last reason the virtuous agent gives for acting virtuously must be understood in terms of the virtuous agent’s *own eudaimonia*. This account cannot be said to adequately address the self-absorption objection because for proponents of the self-absorption objection, one’s motivations are understood in terms of one’s reasons for acting. And, if one’s ultimate reason for acting morally is for the sake of one’s *own eudaimonia*, one’s ultimate motivation for acting morally must be understood in terms of one’s *own eudaimonia* as well.

However, on Lebar’s view – where one’s justifications and one’s motivations can come apart – it does *not* follow that just because the virtuous agent ultimately acts virtuously for the sake of her *own eudaimonia* that the virtuous agent is also ultimately motivated to act virtuously for the sake of her *own eudaimonia*. Here, Lebar – I think – would insist that the virtuous agent’s motivation for acting virtuously at both the occurrent and underlying levels of motivation ought to be understood solely in terms of second-person reasons. That is, he would insist that first-person reasons ought to be understood essentially as

²⁴⁷ In other words, Lebar holds the orthodox view of Aristotelian eudaimonism which states (1) that one’s *own eudaimonia* is the final end for practical reasoning, and (2) it is a good human life for the one living it.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., P. 664.

justificatory and motivationally inefficacious, and that the virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously from second-person – i.e., non-egoistic – reasons. Lebar writes,

“the “for the sake of” locution is a favourite of Aristotle’s; the virtuous person acts “for the sake of” the fine and noble, for example. I take the primary notion at work in for-the-sake-of relations to be rationalizing or justifying. That for the sake of which we do what we do renders rational or justified our doing so, and this in a normative way, not merely as a matter of descriptive explanatory psychology. That for the sake of which we do what we do gives us reason (or at least purports to give us reason) to do it. If A is done for the sake of B, B is providing a reason for A; it is justifying A.”²⁴⁹

And so, if Lebar’s virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously – at both the occurrent and underlying levels of motivation – just for second-person reasons, while the justification for adopting the second-person standpoint is given in terms of first-person reasons, then, it appears that Lebar can provide a non-egoistic account of both levels of motivation of the virtuous agent. However, as alluded to above, this approach faces a series of its own challenges in terms of providing a *neo-Aristotelian* account of motivation of the virtuous agent.

First, Lebar’s insistence on the virtuous agent keeping separate (1) the justificatory reasons for acquiring and maintaining a virtuous disposition and (2) the motivational state of the virtuous agent appears to be un-Aristotelian.²⁵⁰ That is, as Dennis McKerlie – I think correctly notes – “it is hard to find this degree of complexity in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.”²⁵¹ That is, “attributing two different theories to Aristotle... a theory of individual rationality, distinct from what he says about morality itself, which has the authority to determine the appropriateness of a person’s commitments to the moral virtues” seems to conflict with the way in which Aristotle – and the majority of ancient Greek philosophers – approached ethical inquiries.”²⁵² As Julia Annas emphasizes – I think correctly – Aristotle is “committed to the unity of practical reasoning – not just in the weak sense demanded by any eudaimonist theory that takes practical reasoning to be aimed at a single overall goal, happiness, but in a stronger sense that brings together all kinds of factors in a single kind of unified deliberation.”²⁵³ If Annas is

²⁴⁹ Lebar, *The Value of Living Well*. P. 15.

²⁵⁰ Lebar notes that “Darwall himself is skeptical that this [a two standpoint approach] could be of any help to a virtue ethical theory: he takes the forms of “evaluation of conduct and character” in virtue-ethical theory and the second-person standpoint to be so radically different that they cannot be reconciled or united.” Op. Cit., Lebar, P. 649.

²⁵¹ McKerlie, “Aristotle and Egoism.” P. 540.

²⁵² Ibid., P. 540.

²⁵³ Annas, “Morality and Practical Reasoning.” (1996) P. 247. She continues, “Aristotle takes morality to be a part of the world that is not essentially problematic in its relation to the rest of the

correct that Aristotle’s virtuous agent adopts a unified deliberative approach when thinking about her life as a whole – as I think she is – then Lebar mistakenly attributes to Aristotle’s virtuous agent “one standpoint too many.”²⁵⁴

Second, not only does Lebar’s approach insist that the virtuous agent view her prospective actions from two standpoints, but these standpoints also seem to be in tension, and it is unclear whether they can both coexist harmoniously.²⁵⁵ That is, the very content of these two standpoints seems to imply that the virtuous agent value, appreciate, understand, conceptualize, etc., in different and potentially conflicting ways.²⁵⁶ An example might be helpful here. As we saw, on the eudaimonistic standpoint, one’s ultimate aim is one’s own *eudaimonia*. Yet, however enlarged to include the well-being of others one’s conception of one’s own *eudaimonia* may be, such a standpoint, *ex hypothesi*, takes one’s own *eudaimonia* to be in some sense *more important* or special than others.²⁵⁷ For, after all, for Lebar, it is the virtuous person’s own *eudaimonia*, that justifies all of the virtuous person’s actions. And yet, on the second-person standpoint, one

world. He holds a view of the world in which there are no deep problems of principle as to how morality fits into the world and is explained as part of the world.” Ibid., P. 247. In *The Morality of Happiness*, Annas writes, “phronesis has commonly been translated as “prudence” and this retains the idea that it is a developed and successful state, but introduces the modern idea, utterly foreign to ancient theories, of a distinct realm of prudence or self-interest, which may be different from that of morality.” Ibid., P. 73. She continues, “eudaimonistic theories do not permit this kind of split to develop. Reasoning about my own interest differs neither in kind nor in its sphere from reasoning about the interests of others.” Ibid., P. 323.

²⁵⁴ I.e., Lebar’s account attributes to Aristotle’s virtuous agent two modes of practical reason, when Aristotle seems to have just posited one. Now, while Lebar does not explicitly state that his account is “Aristotelian”, it is clear that he takes Aristotle to be the major source of inspiration for developing his account. That is, he draws heavily on his interpretation of Aristotle’s ethics. For example, he writes, “Aristotle claims that inferences to what is to be done always begin from some starting point, and apprehension of the right starting point for these inferences is impossible without virtue. So acquiring a virtue crucially involves a change in the way we apprehend our conditions and the reasons they give us.” Op. Cit., Lebar, (2009). P. 651.

²⁵⁵ In “How to Be an Ethical Naturalist,” Jennifer Frey puts her finger on this same issue in her examination of Hursthouse’s work. For Hursthouse, the virtuous agent may be described as being motivated to act from reasons of virtue, but the justification for why such an agent cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition is given in terms of her own *eudaimonia*. In response to such a view, Frey writes, “the trouble is that it’s completely unclear how the two accounts are supposed to hang together because it is unclear why when we are concerned with the truth of these activities (i.e., that they are really good human activities) we should give an account that looks *radically incompatible* with what we should say from a practical point of view, where we attend to something that is not supposed to and in need of *any such account*.” Frey, P. 9-10 (Forthcoming). Christopher Toner assess Hursthouse’s response here as “very unsatisfactory.” Toner, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics (2006) P. 600.

²⁵⁶ As Michael Slote has emphasized, it is unclear how, say, a general concern for all humankind may be said to promote one’s own flourishing or *eudaimonia*. It may very well be that one can get along quite well without any such concern. For more of his view, See Chapter 1 in Slote’s *Morals from Motives* (2001).

²⁵⁷ Recall, for Lebar, all actions adopted from the eudaimonistic standpoint must be justified in terms of what is good *for* the agent.

understands one’s own well-being or *eudaimonia* as possessing *equal moral worth* to the well-being and *eudaimonia* of others. On this standpoint, one’s actions are not cashed out in terms of what is good for oneself. Rather, we focus on our “relations with particular individual others ... in a way which registers our mutual and reciprocal recognition of those others.”²⁵⁸ Now, surely, either my own *eudaimonia* matters or is more special than another’s, or it is not. To suggest that it does from one standpoint, but does not from the other – as Lebar’s account appears to do – gives rise to the kind of “schizophrenia” that Michael Stocker urges us to avoid.²⁵⁹ He writes,

“One mark of a good life is a harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications. Not to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on – bespeaks of a malady of spirit... At the very least, we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek... Any theory that ignores such harmony does so at great peril.”²⁶⁰

And so, on Lebar’s two standpoint approach, so long as one standpoint requires the virtuous agent to see an action in a particular light, and the other standpoint precludes doing so, the virtuous agent’s psyche may accurately be described as possessing the kind of “schizophrenia” that Stocker and others implore us to avoid.²⁶¹ If Stocker and others are correct here, then this is one more hurdle that two-standpoint approaches – such as Lebar’s – must clear.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Op cit. Lebar. P. 647.

²⁵⁹ To be fair to Lebar, this tension is unlike the tension found in the continent individual’s psyche where she simultaneously experiences a force “which fights against and resists that principle” which she acts on, and is required of him, morally speaking.” EN 1102b (22-24) Rather, it arises as a result of having various conflicting goals, desires, values, and aims.

²⁶⁰ Stocker, Michael “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67.

²⁶¹ Roger Crisp writes, “one upshot of Aristotle’s combining an egoist theory of justification with an apparently non-egoist account of motivation, which allows concern for others ‘for their own sake’, is that he appears open to a charge that has been especially made against modern consequentialist and Kantian views: that of moral schizophrenia. All that Aristotle can do at this point, I suggest, is to bite the bullet, as many modern theorists have done, and allow that the virtuous person’s motivations can come apart from what justifies their actions, and that the presence of this gap is indeed required by a proper understanding of what justifies our actions.” Crisp, “Nobility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.” P. 241. To be clear, I follow Annas in rejecting such an interpretation of Aristotle, but think that Crisp is correct in asserting that so long as the rational justification and moral motivation of the virtuous agent come apart, such an account gives rise to the problematic schizophrenia Stocker urges us to avoid. As we shall see in the following chapters, there is a way to provide a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that does not give rise to such schizophrenia.

²⁶² Given the importance of a harmonious psyche to living well, flourishing, etc., – both for ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle as well as for contemporary philosophers today, such as Michael Stocker, Peter Railton, Rosalind Hursthouse, et alia, – Lebar’s account has the

Third, Lebar’s two standpoint approach is inimical to a widely endorsed and highly attractive aspect of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.²⁶³ This is its insistence that the virtuous agent ought to view her life as a unified and integrated whole. Here, I take it that even if Aristotle’s virtuous agent – on various interpretations – may be understood as making sense of her life from two distinct standpoints, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, generally speaking, insist that the virtuous agent ought to be able to come to terms with her commitments, values, projects, etc., from one unified standpoint.²⁶⁴ Indeed, such a unified perspective seems to be one of the features that distinguish neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from other normative ethical theories – such as deontology – which, generally speaking, insists that we view ourselves from multiple standpoints.²⁶⁵

To conclude, I have argued that while Lebar’s account is able to address the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, it, much like Annas’ account, is unable to adequately address it at the underlying level. So long as Lebar’s virtuous agent insists that she ought to adopt the second-person standpoint for the sake of first-person reasons – i.e., reasons that stem from the agent’s concern for her own *eudaimonia* – such an account, according to the proponents of the self-absorption objection, is going to be *too* self-absorbed. Further, I have claimed that while Lebar’s account can provide a non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent’s motivation – at both the occurrent and underlying levels – his account faces three challenges if it is going to be said to provide a *neo-Aristotelian* account of moral motivation. First, Lebar must be able to provide some support for the view that Aristotle held that the virtuous agent’s reasons or justifications for acting morally can come apart from what motivates the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Second, Lebar must demonstrate that the various standpoints that we adopt or consult do not produce an objectionable schizophrenia in the virtuous agent.²⁶⁶ And, lastly, he must be able to provide some reason why neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists

unfortunate consequence of characterizing the virtuous agent as possessing (in some sense) a disharmonious soul. Railton writes, “we must somehow give an account of practical reasoning that does not merely multiply points of view and divide the self – a more unified account is needed.” Peter Railton “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality.” (1984) P. 139.

²⁶³ The central difference between this challenge – in contrast with the first challenge noted above – is that even if Aristotle might be said to have held a “two-standpoint” approach as Irwin and Lebar suggest, extant neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, generally speaking, seem to reject such a view.

²⁶⁴ Recall, on Lebar’s account one cannot fully explain why one ought to treat others well for their own sake from the first-person standpoint. Thus, adopting the second-person standpoint is necessary.

²⁶⁵ And, on some consequentialist accounts, we ought to understand our moral commitments by abstracting ourselves from our particular situation and seeing ourselves as acting from an impartial point of view. E.g., Mill famously wrote that the “first of judicial virtues, impartiality is an obligation of justice... this is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice; towards which all institutions, and the efforts of all virtuous citizens, should be made in the utmost possible degree to converge.” Mill, *Utilitarianism*. P. 1026.

²⁶⁶ This is often, though not necessarily, understood in terms of objectionable self-effacement.

ought to reject what I take to be a central pillar of their normative ethical theory – viz., its insistence that the virtuous agent ought to view her life as a unified and integrated whole – in favour of viewing oneself from multiple standpoints. Here, it seems to me, that, until these three challenges have been met, Lebar’s account cannot be said to provide a *neo-Aristotelian* account of moral motivation that is free from what he himself refers to as “the Objection”.

2.3. Christopher Toner’s Reconceptualization Approach

The final type of response that neo-Aristotelians have invoked to address the self-absorption objection is what I call the “reconceptualization approach.” In a nutshell, the reconceptualization approach attempts to eliminate the sense in which the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation may be said to be “too self-absorbed” by appealing to the virtuous agent’s conception of *eudaimonia* itself.²⁶⁷ Basically, the general strategy here is to show how the virtuous agent’s understanding of *eudaimonia* – at its core – is incompatible with the view that the virtuous agent is ultimately motivated to act virtuously because doing so in her own objective self-interest. And, given a choice between the two competing views, proponents of such an approach argue that the more plausible way to view Aristotle’s virtuous agent is not in terms of being self-absorbed, but rather as being appropriately concerned with others.

The strongest formulation of this general approach is presented by Christopher Toner in “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism.” (2010)²⁶⁸ Discontent with the current state of the debate regarding whether the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation is or is not egoistic, Toner begins by offering what he takes to be “a clear, non-arbitrary definition of egoism often lacking in these exchanges.”²⁶⁹ He defines egoism as “the doctrine that an agent does or should take as his primary goal the attainment of what is good *for him*,

²⁶⁷ The most common strategy here is to give an account of *eudaimonia* in terms of excellence as opposed to one’s own welfare. This is often discussed in terms of “excellence prior” and “welfare prior.” For more on this distinction, see Anne Baril’s “The Role of Welfare in Eudaimonism.” (2013). For a similar line of reply to Toner’s, see chapter 5 in Foot’s *Natural Goodness*. She writes, “in terms of contemporary discussions of happiness and its relation to virtue, I should describe my own view in the following terms. I agree with John McDowell that we have an understanding of the word ‘happiness’ that is close to Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* in that operation in conformity with the virtues belongs to its meaning” Foot, *Natural Goodness*. P. 97. Also, see McDowell’s “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics”(1995) .

²⁶⁸ Julia Annas has also adopted such an approach, at least in her earlier attempt to address the self-absorption objection. She writes, “similarly the good of others is introduced in ways which make it formally part of the agent’s own good; but we fail to grasp its place in ancient theories if we think of it as derived from or justified in terms of the agent’s own good – for if that were the case, we would be misconceiving what the good of others is.” Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, P. 9. In this passage, Annas appeals to the virtuous agent’s conception of *eudaimonia* itself to show how such a conception is incompatible with the virtuous agent being described as “self-absorbed.”

²⁶⁹ Toner, Christopher, “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism” (2010) P. 275.

because it is good for him,” and goes on to distinguish four different types of egoism.²⁷⁰ The type of egoism that is most salient to our discussion here is what he calls “formal foundational egoism.” Formal foundational egoism shares with other kinds of egoism the doctrine that an agent ought to take as his primary goal the attainment of what is good *for him*, *because it is good for him*, but differs in that on it the agent’s own good – both at the “foundational level” and “factoral level” – is understood widely, so as to include the well-being of others. This type of egoism, Toner claims, is the most plausible one to attribute to Aristotle – though, as we shall see, he does not attribute it to Aristotle – and he takes a number of prominent neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists to hold accounts of moral motivation that fall under its purview.²⁷¹ Now, according to Toner, the main problem with formal foundational egoism – and with egoism in general – is that it “misrepresents the true standing of the agent in the world.”²⁷² Toner writes, “what is wrong with egoism is not that it necessarily gets the wrong results. Even substantive factoral egoism might prescribe the “right” actions, given suitable circumstances... Egoism in its essence is wrong ... because in telling the agent how he should live, it pays no attention to who he really is.”²⁷³ Here, the problem with such a view is that it incorrectly ascribes too much value to the virtuous agent’s own well-being and status in the world. As a result, the virtuous agent’s attitude, disposition, assessments of situations, etc., will be misguided. And, an agent in possession of a misguided view of the world cannot be said to – in Toner’s terms – “stand in the right relation to the good.”²⁷⁴

Having shown that the objections against neo-Aristotelian accounts of motivation that are formally and foundationally egoistic are “damning,” Toner goes on to argue that we need not understand Aristotle’s virtuous agent as acting in such a light.²⁷⁵ That is, we need not understand such an agent as primarily motivated to act virtuously by thoughts pertaining to her own *eudaimonia*, understood in terms of *her own welfare*. Instead, he argues, we would do better – both in terms of getting at Aristotle’s own view, and in terms of sidestepping charges of egoism – by understanding Aristotle’s ultimate end in a perfectionist sense.²⁷⁶ He writes,

²⁷⁰ Ibid., P. 279. All italics belong to Toner. He continues, “another way of putting this is to say that egoism teaches that the agent does or should take the achievement of his own welfare as his primary goal.” Ibid., P. 279.

²⁷¹ E.g., Toner also reads Hursthouse’s neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation as falling into this category. He writes, “Rosalind Hursthouse argues that virtues are justified in part by the fact that they are beneficial to their possessor, but insists that their beneficial nature can often be seen only from within an ethical outlook.” P. 285.

²⁷² Ibid., P. 288.

²⁷³ Ibid., P. 288-289.

²⁷⁴ Toner, Christopher, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” (2006) P. 611.

²⁷⁵ Op. Cit., Toner (2010) P. 277.

²⁷⁶ Toner writes, “this, then, is the template for a non-self-centred eudaimonistic virtue ethics: the agent seeks to live a life of virtue, where virtues are simply those traits the possession and exercise of which constitute flourishing for a rational agent of that sort, where to flourish is to stand in the

“I believe that what Aristotle means by this [i.e., the ultimate end for man] *is* that each agent should pursue the life that is “*best* for him,” not “*best for him*.” The primary goal is not welfare, but perfection (being good, the second sense of “Well-being”). This goal of perfection is more consonant than that of welfare with Aristotle’s final definition of *eudaimonia* as a lifetime of virtuous activity, activity in accordance with excellence.”²⁷⁷

According to Toner’s definition of egoism, it is clear that so long as the virtuous agent acts virtuously because doing so is conducive to her own ultimate end – understood in a perfectionist sense – such an account cannot be said to be egoistic. This is because, for Toner, the egoism charge only applies to those accounts which take one’s ultimate end to be one’s own welfare. If, by contrast, the virtuous agent’s ultimate end is her own perfection, the charge of egoism can find no footing. Toner’s argument may be summarized as follows.

- (1) A doctrine is egoistic if and only if it holds that agents are to pursue their own *welfare* as their ultimate end.²⁷⁸
- (2) Aristotle’s doctrine does not hold that agents are to pursue their own welfare as their ultimate end. Rather, Aristotle’s doctrine holds that agents are to pursue their own perfection, which is distinct in kind from pursuing one’s own welfare.
- (3) Therefore, Aristotle’s doctrine is not egoistic.²⁷⁹

Now, the problematic premise, I take it, for sympathizers of the self-absorption objection – e.g., Prichard, Hurka, Lebar, *et. alia.* – is premise (1). That is, it seems that proponents of the self-absorption objection would insist that so long as the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is that doing so contributes to the agent’s *own eudaimonia* – even if that is cashed out in terms of the agent’s own perfection – such an account

right relation to objects according to their degrees and kinds of goodness, and where the right relation is that which acknowledges the nature or status of each relatum in such a way that it is held in regard at least in part for its own sake. It is not self-centred to seek one’s own flourishing because such flourishing is essentially relational.” Op. Cit., (2006). P. 613.

²⁷⁷ Op Cit., Toner (2010) P. 295.

²⁷⁸ This first premise is laid out in Christopher Toner’s “Was Aquinas an Egoist?” (2007) P. 592.

²⁷⁹ Now, to be sure, Toner does not take himself to have vindicated neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection *in toto*, or to have provided a convincing argument that the most plausible interpretation of the conclusion of Aristotle’s function argument is understood in a perfectionist sense. He does, however, claim to have offered us a “recipe” for adequately addressing the self-absorption objection. He writes, “but it is not my goal here to show that this or that philosopher is not an egoist, but to provide a recipe for non-egoistic virtue ethics. And the recipe is just this: make *eudaimonia* the primary goal, and define *eudaimonia*, not as the life *best for the agent* to live, but as the life *best for the agent* to live (being good in the way most appropriate to her situation in life), such that the primary goal is not welfare but perfection.” Ibid., P. 295.

is nonetheless too self-absorbed. The idea here – as Lebar, succinctly puts it above, in formulating what he calls “the intuition” – is that when we act virtuously toward others – e.g., volunteer in our communities, give to charity, perform small acts of kindness, etc. – we think that we ought, morally speaking, to do so *primarily* for the sake of others, or at the very least, not primarily because doing so is good for us, even if our good is understood in terms of perfecting our own nature or achieving excellence in our own lives.²⁸⁰ If this is the case, then it seems that regardless of how Toner claims we ought to understand Aristotle’s conception of “*eudaimonia*” his account of moral motivation falls short of defending neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics against the self-absorption objection.

Now, Toner anticipates this rejoinder, and has a response ready. However, his response, unfortunately, is unsatisfactory. He argues that those who insist that his account – on which the ultimate end of one’s actions is one’s own perfection – is “egoistic” overextend the use of the term. Here, he adopts a surprising ally in Henry Sidgwick, who, according to Toner, also holds the view that we ought not call those accounts of motivation on which an agent makes the ultimate end of all her actions her own perfection “egoistic.” He quotes Sidgwick saying “we must discard a common account of Egoism which describes its ultimate end as the ‘good’ of the individual; for the term ‘good’ may cover all possible views of the ultimate end for rational conduct.”²⁸¹ Now, even if Sidgwick held that we ought not to count those normative ethical theories that take one’s ultimate end to be one’s own perfection “egoistic” – though I see no clear evidence that Sidgwick held such a view – the central problem here is that one cannot arbitrarily curtail the extent to which various accounts of moral motivation may be said to be egoistic simply because more accounts than one would like qualify as egoistic.²⁸² Recall, for Toner, egoistic accounts of moral motivation are problematic because they misrepresent the true standing of the agent in the world.²⁸³ On his view, agents with a misguided understanding of their place in the world cannot be said to “stand in the right relation to the good” and so cannot be said to be virtuous.²⁸⁴ Now, if we take this explanation of why egoistic accounts of moral motivation are problematic and apply it to Toner’s own account, we find that his account *too* is egoistic. That is, there is nothing about the virtuous agent that justifies making the ultimate end of all her actions the perfection of her own character, when the perfection of another’s character is equally valuable when compared to her own.

²⁸⁰ The basic problem with such an approach is that it cannot give an adequate explanation for why the virtuous agent ought to focus on the perfection of her own character as opposed to helping perfect the character of others.

²⁸¹ Ibid., P.300.

²⁸² On my reading of Sidgwick’s passage above, he is only suggesting that we should not call those accounts in which an individual makes his ultimate aim his own good to be *substantively egoistic*. For, it might turn out that what one takes to be one’s own good is a life of service toward others. Surely such an account cannot be said to be substantively egoistic. That said, it can still be formally egoistic.

²⁸³ Ibid., P. 288.

²⁸⁴ Toner, Christopher, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” (2006) P. 611.

In other words, if to count one’s own welfare as more important than another’s is to misrepresent one’s standing in the world, then so too, I argue, is taking one’s own perfection to be more important than another’s: it misrepresents one’s place in the world in the very same way. And so, if I am correct here, it seems that Toner’s own account is subject to the very same objection he levels against other egoistic accounts, and for the very same reason ought to be rejected. This is so even if he stipulates that the label “egoistic” does not apply to his account.

While Toner’s “reconceptualization approach” cannot be said to adequately address the self-absorption objection, one may wonder how well reconceptualization approaches in general fare in terms of defending neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics against formal charges of egoism. Here, it seems to me that all approaches that attempt to address the self-absorption objection by reconceptualising our ultimate end in terms of something admirable or noble – such as the pursuit of one’s perfection – are incapable of making any progress.²⁸⁵ For, as I emphasized in the introductory chapter, the crux of the self-absorption objection has to do with the formal structure of the virtuous agent’s reasoning, and is not based on how the virtuous agent construes her ultimate end. The fact that an agent takes as her ultimate goal “her own *eudaimonia*” – as opposed to, say, the *eudaimonia* of all, or, say, the general good – is what makes the self-absorption objection stick. Hence, so long as reconceptualization approaches insist on taking the ultimate end of the virtuous agent’s actions to be the agent’s *own eudaimonia*, the objection stands.²⁸⁶

Here, one may wonder how it is that so many philosophers have adopted approaches that fail to adequately address the self-absorption objection. Part of the reason, I take it, has to do with the fact that the terms we use when we engage in dialogue – terms such as, “*eudaimonia*,” “egoism,” “happiness” etc., – are used imprecisely, and are understood and adopted by different interlocutors in different ways. For example, for many, as soon as we make it clear that the virtuous agent’s conception of *eudaimonia* includes the well-being of others for their own sake and

²⁸⁵ Baril’s echoes the same point in defending a welfare conception of *eudaimonia*. She writes, “when it comes to determining whether *eudaimonism* (or some version of *eudaimonism*) is egoistic, it is not what the *eudaimonist* counts as part of the concept, and what part of the conception that matters ... but a commitment to a certain dependence thesis.” Baril, “Role of Welfare in *Eudaimonism*.” (2013) P. 527.

²⁸⁶ Now, one may wonder whether it is possible to make one’s ultimate end the perfection of another’s character or the perfection of a group of individuals’ characters. While some have a hard time with this idea because it is often thought that perfecting one’s own character is something that one must do for one’s self, I see no reason why one cannot make one’s ultimate aim promoting the perfection of others. Sure, one might not be able to fully bring about the perfection in another’s character all on one’s own. However, this does not preclude one’s ability to promote the perfection of others in a number of ways. It seems that just as I can help a student perfect her piano skills, I can help someone else perfect her moral character. And, if I dedicate my life to helping others perfect their own piano skills, then it seems that I have dedicated my life to helping bring about the perfection of others in a particular domain. Obviously my students must want to play the piano, or want to become virtuous, etc., but the fact that they must participate in the task by themselves does not mean I cannot make it my ultimate aim to help bring about their perfection.

right from the very start, or the perfection of human nature, it is unclear how such a pursuit can be labelled “egoistic” or “self-absorbed.” For, it might be said, one is not simply pursuing one’s own good narrowly defined, and what could be a nobler goal than striving for excellence? If my hunch is correct, part of the confusion here has to do with equivocation. For, if we take “egoistic” to mean *substantively* egoistic – where one performs primarily self-regarding actions or actions that are primarily good for one’s self – then accounts such as Toner’s cannot be said to be egoistic or self-absorbed. However, if “egoistic” is taken to appeal to the way in which one’s first principles are organized, it is easier to see how the term might be deemed appropriate.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined three approaches that seek to defend neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection: the developmental approach, the two-standpoint approach, and the reconceptualization approach. In the first section, I argued that while Annas’ account is able to provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, it is unable to fend off the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise deep down in the virtuous agent. In the second section, I demonstrated that while Lebar’s two-standpoint approach is able to provide a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, given that the second-person standpoint is adopted for first-person reasons, his account is also unable to fend off the self-absorption objection at the underlying level of motivation of the virtuous agent. In the third section, I argued that even if we adopt Toner’s interpretation of our ultimate end – understood in terms of our own perfection – his account remains formally egoistic, which is the crux of the self-absorption objection. In addition to illuminating the shortcomings in the specific arguments above, which all aimed at keeping the self-absorption objection at bay, I have also raised a number of difficulties for the general approaches they exemplify. Since I am pessimistic about the likelihood of such difficulties being met, I go on to present a new approach aimed at addressing the self-absorption objection *in toto*. This involves rejecting what Gregory Vlastos calls the “eudaemonist axiom”, and the formal egoism generally attributed to the neo-Aristotelian agent.²⁸⁸ But before presenting

²⁸⁷ Cf. Toner’s account. He writes, “as stated in the introduction, I will be contending that both sides in the antagonistic-complacent debate are mistaken. The definition of egoism settled on below, together with the taxonomy of egoisms developed in section II, will have the added benefit of allowing us to understand how intelligent people, who are working with the same shared (but imprecise) sense of the term as the one I start with, could make the mistakes they have made (to glance ahead, there is a form of egoism that can look a lot like Aristotle’s theory, and can also look open enough to the good of others to seem unobjectionable—although in fact it is objectionable, and does not apply to Aristotle’s theory).” *Op. Cit.*, Toner (2010) P. 278.

²⁸⁸ Put slightly differently, it involves rejecting the second condition of Aristotelian eudaimonism mentioned above: namely that the virtuous agent must organize her life in a way that is good *for* her.

my non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent, it is necessary to say something about the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent; this will be my focus in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Occurrent Motivation of the Virtuous Agent

“We choose every virtue for itself, for if nothing resulted from them we would still choose each one; but we also choose them for the sake of happiness. (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b)”

Introduction

In this chapter, I take the first step toward advancing a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that can meet the self-absorption objection. In keeping with the distinction previously drawn, I begin at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent.²⁸⁹ Drawing on Julia Annas’ interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, I argue in favour of – what I go on to call – “The Recognition View.” This view states that the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, because she recognizes the intrinsic, non-relational goodness of the act itself. Given my general dissatisfaction with the current neo-Aristotelian debate surrounding the motivation of the virtuous agent (as shown in the previous chapter), I return to the source: that is, I return to Aristotle’s discussion of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the first section, I begin by briefly laying out Aristotle’s criteria for virtuous action, and then turn to an analysis of the various ways that he depicts the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent: namely, choosing virtuous actions for themselves, choosing virtuous actions for the sake of the *kalon*, and choosing virtuous actions for the sake of others. I contend that among the various depictions that he provides, we ought to adopt the orthodox view that such depictions are compatible with one another, and that the virtuous agent, characteristically speaking, may be said to act for the sake of the *kalon*. Next, I examine three possible ways of cashing out what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*, and note that among these various possibilities, one notable feature is common to all: viz., that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she *recognizes* the goodness of the act itself. Now, while a number of scholars maintain that the recognition view does not go far enough in illuminating what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*, I insist that such a view *does* provide a sufficient amount of insight into why the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking. Further, I argue that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists ought to adopt the recognition view because it is *genuinely* Aristotelian, and

²⁸⁹ As emphasized in chapter 1, the content of this motivation can generally be determined by asking (hypothetically or actually) the following question to a virtuous agent: “what motivated you to act virtuously when you acted?” The occurrent motivation is often contrasted with the underlying or dispositional motivation of the virtuous agent, where the latter is understood as a deeper-seated motivation that explains both *why* an individual begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and also *why* an individual may be said to maintain said disposition. It is important to note that this chapter deals *solely* with the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. My discussion of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent will be discussed at length chapter five.

successfully meets the self-absorption objection as it arises at the occurrent level of motivation.²⁹⁰ In addition, and central to the aim of this thesis, the recognition view, when taken along with the underlying account of motivation developed in chapter five, provides a unified and non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent’s motivation *in toto*.

In the second section of this chapter, I lay out two objections to the recognition view – the first by Timothy Chappell and the second by Bernard Williams. Chappell claims that the recognition view provides minimal insight – if any – into *why* the virtuous agent acts virtuously, and Williams insists that it is for the most part false that Aristotle’s virtuous agent acts virtuously because he recognizes the goodness of the act itself. I argue that upon close examination, both of these objections fail to hit their mark. I go on to show that the recognition view is neither uninformative nor misleading, but rather is intelligible, psychologically defensible, and, on my reading, accurately depicts Aristotle’s characterization of the virtuous agent.

Before turning to the first section, it is important to note that I hope to show *only* that the account of occurrent motivation developed below is consistent with Aristotle’s writings, and that there is a sufficient amount of textual evidence to suggest that he *may* have held such a view. Nowhere in this chapter do I argue for the superiority of the recognition view over competing interpretations of what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*. To do so (it seems to me) would require an exhaustive and systematic comparative analysis of the many accounts of what Aristotle means when he says that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*. While such a project is no doubt worthwhile, it is not one that I take on here. My main goal is not to defend a particular interpretation of his texts; rather, the ultimate aim of this chapter is to advance a philosophically viable account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent that is not vulnerable to the self-absorption objection, while staying true to the spirit of Aristotle’s ethics.

3.1. The Recognition View

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle draws an important distinction between actions performed in accordance with virtue and *truly* virtuous actions. The former are those actions which “accord with correct reason”²⁹¹ and are typically performed by those who are not yet virtuous, including those who have just begun, or are in the midst of, their moral training, as well as those who are

²⁹⁰ Here, by “genuinely Aristotelian”, I simply mean that we have good reason to think Aristotle himself may have held the recognition view. The fact that the recognition view is able to meet the self-absorption objection at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, I take it, is necessary for any adequate neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation. The fact that we have good reason to believe that Aristotle may have held the recognition view, *ceteris paribus*, provides an independent reason in favour of its adoption by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists.

²⁹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN). Trans. T. Irwin. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999. 1103b 33. All references to the EN in this chapter are from Irwin’s translation.

simply continent.²⁹² Truly virtuous actions, however, in addition to being in accord with correct reason, must necessarily meet the following criteria.²⁹³ Aristotle writes:

“But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves [the actions] 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 also do them from a firm and unchanging state.”²⁹⁴

Now, while the first and the third condition – i.e., that the virtuous agent knows that her action is virtuous and that the virtuous agent’s action springs from a firm disposition – are less contentious, it is somewhat ambiguous how we ought to understand the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. This ambiguity may be said to arise for two reasons. First, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides three different and *possibly* conflicting accounts of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.²⁹⁵ In his general description of moral virtue – laid out above – Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for themselves.²⁹⁶ However, in his discussion of particular moral virtues – e.g., courage (*andreia*) – Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*.²⁹⁷ For example, he writes, “the brave person... though he will fear even the

²⁹² It is also possible that an individual acts in accord with virtue by mere chance, though such an occurrence is rare.

²⁹³ In Book II Chapter 4 of the *EN*, Aristotle contrasts truly virtuous actions with a craftsman’s creation of a product. He argues that while the value of the craftsman’s action is determined solely by its efficiency in producing a product, the value of virtuous action cannot be determined simply by appealing to just the feature(s) of the action itself. *EN* 1105a 26 – 29. For more on this distinction, see Michael Slote’s “Agent Based Virtue Ethics” (1995).

²⁹⁴ *EN* 1105a 29-35. In addition, the virtuous agent is generally said to experience pleasure in performing virtuous actions. Aristotle writes, “similarly, what is just pleases the lover of justice, and in general what accords with virtue pleases the lover of virtue... For besides the reasons already given, someone who does not enjoy fine actions is not good; for no one would call a person just, for instance, if he did not enjoy doing just actions, or generous if he did not enjoy generous actions, and similarly for the other virtues.” *EN* 1099a 10-20. Experiencing pleasure while performing virtuous actions, it seems to me, is characteristic of the virtuous agent, though not necessary for virtuous action. For presumably, the performance of certain types of virtuous actions, such as, say, grieving the loss of one’s beloved, should not be accompanied by feelings of pleasure.

²⁹⁵ Korsgaard writes, “if we oversimplify Aristotle’s moral psychology these will look like three competing accounts of the purpose or aim of virtuous action.” Korsgaard, Christine. “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action” in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness* (1996) P. 216.

²⁹⁶ Aristotle writes, “he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves.” *EN* 1105a 33-34.

²⁹⁷ This point is emphasized by Gabriel Lear in “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005).

sorts of things that are not irresistible, he will stand firm against them, in the right way, as reason prescribes, for the sake of the fine, since this is the end aimed at by virtue.”²⁹⁸ Lastly, at times, Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent acts virtuously for rather specific purposes, such as to benefit a friend. For instance, he writes, “It is quite true that, as they say, the excellent person labors for his friends and for his native country, and will die *for them* if he must.”²⁹⁹ Thus, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find three different portrayals of the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation. Such seemingly conflicting portrayals have given rise to some confusion regarding the characteristic occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.

Here, it is important to note that while Aristotle provides three possibly conflicting accounts of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, there is a general consensus among Aristotelian scholars that the virtuous agent, occurrently speaking, acts for the sake of the *kalon*, where this is understood to be compatible with acting virtuously for its own sake, and may be further specified, such as when Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of his friends or countrymen. In “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself”, Richard Kraut puts this point as follows: “it seems likely that choosing an act for the sake of the noble is equivalent to choosing it because it is a virtuous act. In that case, to choose a virtuous act for the sake of the noble is to choose it for itself. The same point is made by Burnet.... And I know of no interpreter of Aristotle who would deny it.”³⁰⁰ Going forward, I adopt this view, namely, that the virtuous agent, occurrently speaking, acts for the sake of the *kalon*. As Aristotle writes, “actions in accord with virtue are fine, and aim at the fine.”³⁰¹

The second difficulty in grasping the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation arises because, as Julia Annas puts it, “Aristotle says so little, in the *Ethics*, about the fine.”³⁰² In fact, nowhere in Aristotle’s ethical writings does he tell us which property of an action nobility names.³⁰³ As Terence Irwin notes, such a gap in Aristotle’s ethics is puzzling.³⁰⁴ He writes, “according to Aristotle, the

²⁹⁸ EN 1115b 12-13. Also see, EN 1115b 12; EN 1116b 3; EN 1117b 9; EN 1117b 17; and EN 1120a 23.

²⁹⁹ EN 1169a 19-20. My italics.

³⁰⁰ Kraut, Richard. “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself” (1995). P. 235.

³⁰¹ EN 1120 a 24. Also, see, EN 1115 b 12 and EN 1122 b 6.

³⁰² Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness*. P. 371. Such a thought is echoed by many others, including Roger Crisp in “Nobility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*” (2014).

³⁰³ Korsgaard, Christine. “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action” (1996) P. 218. Aristotle’s main discussion of the *kalon* is found in the *Rhetoric* 1366a 33 to 1366b 22. His discussion here, however, is somewhat contentious in that it is unclear if he is merely rehearsing common views about the *kalon* or laying out his own view.

³⁰⁴ Irwin raises the possibility that Aristotle might believe that virtuous actions might be *kalon* only insofar as they are brave, or just, or temperate, etc., and that they share no further property that makes them *kalon*. However, he rightly rules out such a possibility by pointing out that if “the *kalon* were simply whatever we want for its own sake, it would be trivial to claim that we wish for what is *kalon*; for wish (*boulêsis*) is essentially wanting something for its own sake... [And] Aristotle’s claim that we wish for *kalon* things for their own sake is not meant to be trivial.” Irwin, Terence, “Beauty and Morality in Aristotle.” P. 250.

Nicomachean Ethics is a work of political science, and political science considers ‘just and *kalon* things’ [and while] he devotes a whole book to a discussion of justice, he offers no explicit discussion of the *kalon*.’³⁰⁵ Given this missing piece of the puzzle, many commentators have come to Aristotle’s aid to offer a possible explanation of what it means for the virtuous agent to act for the sake of the *kalon*.³⁰⁶ Unfortunately, there are irreconcilable disagreements among scholars on what property nobility names, and these disagreements have given birth to a further difficulty in grasping the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent: namely, that of determining which of the various competing amendments – *if any* – is able to fill in the “gap” and capture what Aristotle had in mind in claiming that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*.

Now, the ongoing debate regarding what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon* is rich, complex, and impossible to summarize or resolve here.³⁰⁷ The three accounts that I briefly lay out below are meant to provide the reader with a general sense of the various ways scholars have attempted to cash out what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*.³⁰⁸ First, Terence Irwin has famously been arguing – for over 25 years – that Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* ought to be understood, characteristically speaking, as the claim that the virtuous agent acts for the good of others.³⁰⁹ Christine Korsgaard,

³⁰⁵ Ibid., P. 239.

³⁰⁶ See for example Richard Kraut’s “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself” (1995); Jennifer Whiting’s “Eudaimonia, External Results, and Choosing Virtuous Actions for Themselves” (2002); Kelly Rogers’ “Aristotle’s Conception of τὸ Καλόν” (1993); Gabriel Lear’s “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005); and Book II of John Cooper’s *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (1975).

³⁰⁷ For significant contributions to the debate, see Terence Irwin’s *Aristotle’s First Principles*, (1988), Bernard Williams’ “Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts” (1995), Christine Korsgaard’s “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action” (1996), Gabriel Lear’s “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005), and Roger Crisp’s “Nobility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*” (2014).

³⁰⁸ To further complicate matters, it is unclear whether the occurrent motivation of Aristotle’s virtuous agent – i.e., to act for the sake of the *kalon* – ought to be understood in one characteristic sense or in different senses based on the particular context. Irwin writes, “on the one hand, we may doubt whether he [Aristotle] recognizes different senses [of the *kalon*]... On the other hand, we may have good reason to claim that, in Aristotle’s view, and not only in our view, “*kalon*” refers to different properties.” Irwin, “Beauty and Morality in Aristotle” P. 241.

³⁰⁹ He first lays this view out in Chapter 18 of *Aristotle’s First Principles*, and defends it more recently in “Beauty and Morality in Aristotle” (2011). He writes, “the Aristotelian virtues of character are moral virtues, in so far as they are all concerned with the fine, and therefore with the good of others. Some virtues, especially friendship and justice, make this concern clear and explicit.” Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, P. 389. Irwin argues for this view by turning to Aristotle’s discussion of the *kalon* in the *Rhetoric*, examining Aristotle’s three objects of desire, and by noting all of those sections within the *Ethics* where there is a strong connection between the virtuous agent acting virtuously and the good of others. He also reiterates the connection between the *kalon* and the good of others in his commentary in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He writes, “probably Aristotle accepts the extra condition ... that the fine is the intrinsic good that is praiseworthy ... [and] actions are normally praised for being virtuous in ways that benefit others.” Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, P. 329.

on the other hand, argues that we ought to understand Aristotle’s claim – that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* – as the virtuous agent acting because of “the specific kind of *intrinsic* value that moral actions ... possess.”³¹⁰ For Korsgaard, the type of intrinsic value characteristic of virtuous actions stems from such actions being “in accordance with the *orthos logos*, the right reason.”³¹¹ Finally, Gabriel Lear argues that in order to understand Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, we must first grasp the particular role that each of the “three central elements of the fine ... [viz.,] effective teleological order, visibility, and pleasantness,” play in the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.³¹² For Lear, once we grasp the role of these three elements, we will see that when Aristotle claims that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, he ought to be understood as claiming that the virtuous agent *delightfully* acts because she perceives the “formal properties of end-directed order, symmetry and boundedness” which makes the action good.³¹³

At this point, perhaps an example may help to illuminate the differences among these three competing accounts. Suppose a virtuous agent is at home preparing dinner, and receives a call notifying him that his beloved, on her way home from work, was in a severe (though not fatal) car accident. The virtuous agent stops what he is doing, and leaves at once for the hospital to be with his beloved. On Irwin’s account, the virtuous agent visits his beloved in the hospital because it is the fine thing to do, where the action is fine because his doing so is good *for her*. Perhaps he thinks to himself that his simply being there will help her get through a difficult and painful experience, and so he acts for *her* sake/well-being. On Korsgaard’s account too, the virtuous agent visits his beloved in the hospital because it is the fine thing to do; however, on her interpretation the virtuous agent performs such an action because, say, “being sympathetic toward one’s beloved”, is, *mutatis mutandis*, a good action in that it is in accordance with correct reason. If prompted, the virtuous agent might think to himself – according to Korsgaard – that “being with my beloved to comfort her is the good/right thing to do, and I should perform the action because of the goodness of the act itself;

³¹⁰ Korsgaard, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action” P. 216.

³¹¹ Ibid., P. 218

³¹² Lear, Gabriel, “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005). P. 117. She writes that we need to “appreciate the pleasantness and visibility of the fine in Aristotle’s account.” Ibid. Lear, P. 117.

³¹³ She writes, “we do not exhaust Aristotle’s meaning when we interpret his phrases *tou kalou heneka* ... as ‘for the sake of whatever makes an action worth choosing for its own sake.’” Lear, Ibid., P. 117. It is important to note that most commentators understand Aristotle’s criteria for virtuous action – i.e., choosing virtuous acts for themselves, acting from a firm disposition, and acting from knowledge – as somewhat independent of one another, whereas Lear understands these criteria as somewhat intertwined. She also gives a much more prominent role to pleasure in Aristotle’s account of virtuous activity, and seems to treat it as a necessary criterion for virtuous action, while most commentators take it to be characteristic of virtuous action. Susan Meyer also takes pleasure to be a necessary condition in acting for the sake of the *kalon*. She writes, “in order to be acting for the sake of the *kalon*, we have to love and take pleasure in the *kalon*.” See, “Aristotle on Moral Motivation” (2016) P. 64.

viz., because it is accordance with correct reason.” Finally, on Lear’s account, as on the others, the virtuous agent visits his beloved in the hospital because it is the fine thing to do; however, according to Lear, the virtuous agent may be said to be motivated because, say, “visiting his beloved is well-ordered by the human good.”³¹⁴ If pressed, the virtuous agent – according to Lear – might think to himself “visiting my beloved in the hospital during this difficult time is what human goodness requires.”

Now, although there are interpretive disagreements regarding how to cash out Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent, characteristically speaking, acts for the sake of the *kalon*, there is one common thread that runs through all of the various interpretations given above, and also many of those not mentioned here.³¹⁵ According to all of the views considered thus far, the virtuous agent may be said to act virtuously because she *recognizes* the goodness of the act itself.³¹⁶ Such a view is endorsed to various degrees by all three of the authours considered above. For example, while Irwin argues that the virtuous agent essentially acts for the sake of others, he does not think that the virtuous agent acts *solely* for the sake of others. That is, in addition to the virtuous agent acting for the sake of others, he also acts, in part, because of the non-instrumental goodness of the act itself.³¹⁷ Similarly for Korsgaard, while the virtuous agent may be said to act virtuously,

³¹⁴ Ibid., Lear, (2005) P. 127. To be sure, the type of pleasure that the virtuous agent might partake in here is *not* pleasure that one’s beloved is in the hospital, but seems to be a minimal type of pleasure that one is able to do the virtuous thing. Lear writes “since he [Aristotle] conceives of virtuous action as the excellent realization of our nature as rational animals, we should expect pleasure in the fine to be in some way proper to rational activity.” Ibid., Lear, P. 117.

³¹⁵ One possible exception here *seems* to be Bernard Williams. Williams claims that the virtuous agent rarely acts virtuously – except in the case of justice – because an action is good in and of itself. He writes, “courageous people rarely choose acts as courageous and modest people never choose modest behaviour as modest.” Ibid. P. 16 He – and Rosalind Hursthouse, who follows him in this respect – argues that we ought to understand Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* as the claim that the virtuous agent acts for “X reasons, where “for X reasons” is part of his thought, and the type X is tied (both positively and negatively) to the V in question.” Williams, Bernard. “Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts.” P. 18. It is important to note, however, that it is unclear whether Williams thinks that the virtuous agent acts occurrently for “X reasons” is Aristotle’s own view or whether he is claiming that it *should* be Aristotle’s view. He writes, “this paper starts from a question that Aristotle raises about virtuous action, and gives what I think should have been Aristotle’s answer to it, an answer which I think was also, broadly speaking, Aristotle’s own answer.” Ibid., P. 13.

³¹⁶ For Lear, to act for the sake of the *kalon* is more than simply recognizing that a virtuous act is good; she also thinks that acting for the sake of the *kalon* necessarily involves acting with pleasure. She claims that we need to “appreciate the pleasantness... of Aristotle’s account.” Lear, Gabriel, “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005). P. 117.

³¹⁷ Irwin writes, “*kalon* things are a proper subset of non-instrumental goods,” and thus, to act for the sake of the *kalon*, is, in part, to act because of the goodness of the act itself, and not only because *kalon* actions are concerned with the good of others.” Irwin, “Beauty and Morality in Aristotle”, P. 244. For Irwin, all *kalon* things are good things, but not all good things are *kalon* things. For him, *kalon* things are a subset of good things that while intrinsically good, also aim at the good of others, and are thus praiseworthy. Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, P. 630.

occurently speaking, because doing so “embodies a principle of reason”,³¹⁸ this principle of reason is what makes the action good in and of itself. Thus, when the virtuous agent – according to Korsgaard – acts virtuously, she acts at a more general level because of the goodness of the act itself. Korsgaard writes, “it is a judgment about its goodness considered as an *action*” that motivates the virtuous agent to act virtuously.³¹⁹ Finally, according to Lear, while the virtuous agent may be said to act virtuously, occurently speaking, because the virtuous act exhibits the correct teleological order, such an action is not chosen *only* because it exhibits the correct teleological order. For Lear “what makes action fine is also (in part) what makes them worth choosing for their own sakes.”³²⁰ Here, the important thing to note is that the majority of Aristotle’s interpreters agree that the virtuous agent acts, in part, because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself. Precisely what *makes* the action good – be it benefiting others, that it is in accordance with correct reason, or the fact that it demonstrates the “correct teleological order”, etc.³²¹ – is where the differences between the interpretations lie. And so, it seems that we have what appears to be a necessary condition, according to Aristotle. That is, to say that the virtuous agent acts virtuously for the sake of the *kalon* is to say that the virtuous agent is motivated, in part, because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself.³²²

Now, Irwin, Korsgaard, Lear, *et alia*, might well contend that laying out this necessary condition – viz., that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself – does not go far enough in illuminating Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*. However, I argue that it *does* provide sufficient insight into why the virtuous agent acts virtuously *at the occurrent level of motivation*.³²³ To fully see this, however, we

³¹⁸ Korsgaard, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action” P. 218

³¹⁹ Ibid., Korsgaard, P. 217.

³²⁰ Lear, (2005) P. 117.

³²¹ For a discussion of the role of “symmetry” and “the correct order” in the *kalon*, see Kelly Rogers’ “Aristotle’s Conception of τὸ Καλόν” (1993)

³²² Hursthouse writes, “there are some fairly standard lines on what Aristotle means – or should have meant – by the virtuous choosing virtuous actions ‘for their own sake’. The virtuous agent chooses the virtuous act as or *qua* just or courageous, or more generally, *qua* virtuous, or as an instance of doing well (*eupraxia*) or for the sake of the noble (*to kalon*). But all of these interpretations, unless further developed, run up against the same difficulty. What are we insisting *must be the case* if the agent chooses her action for this reason (whichever it is claimed to be)?” Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* P. 126. (my italics). Here, my response to Hursthouse would be that “we” are claiming that the virtuous agent is acting because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself.

³²³ Following Roger Sullivan, I do think that we as interpreters need to be cautious about importing a *desiderata* to provide a “fully complete” account or a list of necessary and sufficient conditions of what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon* when such an aim seems to be alien to the way in which Aristotle discusses the nature of the *kalon* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Sullivan writes, “since the *kalon* is the moral absolute, it is as impossible for Aristotle to derive it from something else as it is for Kant to provide a deduction of morality in the third chapter of the *Groundwork*. What is possible is to explicate the *kalon* in terms of kinships, if not ancestry.”

cannot, as many tend to do, examine the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent in isolation from the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent.³²⁴ Rather, what we need to do – and what I will do in the remainder of this chapter and in chapter five – is show how the acquisition of a virtuous disposition, along with the occurrent and underlying motivation of the virtuous agent, work together to provide a plausible account of moral motivation that *can* illuminate why the virtuous agent acts virtuously.³²⁵ Thus, what follows in this chapter is a *partial* defense of the recognition view, that, when taken on its own, provides some support in favour of this account, but will be further supported in chapter five.³²⁶

Moving on, then, let us call the view that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the intrinsic goodness of the act itself “The Recognition View.” This view is defended by Julia Annas in *The Morality of Happiness*, as the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, and it is the one that I adopt and defend here. Annas writes, “but what marks the virtuous disposition is that the virtuous person now does the virtuous action just for its own sake; discerning that this is what virtue requires is enough to motivate her, and no counter-motivation is produced in her. This is what it is for her to act ‘for the sake of the fine’.”³²⁷ Now, it is important to note that on this view the type of goodness that the virtuous agent recognizes in the virtuous act is not qualified as “good for me” or “good for others” but is recognized as good *simpliciter*.³²⁸ Here, the recognition – or as Annas puts it,

Sullivan, Roger. “The Kantian Critique of Aristotle’s Moral Philosophy: An Appraisal.” (1974) P. 46.

³²⁴ This is because the account of motivation I offer is holistic in structure – the different parts are mutually supportive.

³²⁵ As I understand it, by examining how the virtuous disposition is obtained, we gain insight into the settled disposition of the virtuous agent, and by examining the settled disposition of the virtuous agent we gain insight into the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. All three of these levels interact in such a way that by examining one level, we gain insight into the other two. In *Intelligent Virtue*, Julia Annas makes a similar point. She claims that we need to take seriously “the developmental nature of virtue.” She insists that we need to examine the process of acquiring virtue and learning to act on virtue as part of the theory proper, and not just begin our investigation with the fully mature virtuous agent. See chapter 3 of Annas’ *Intelligent Virtue*.

³²⁶ A crucial difference between the account that I defend and the accounts laid out by Irwin, Korsgaard, and Lear is that, on my account, the virtuous individual does not have in mind what it is about the action in particular that makes the action good. The recognition that such and such an act is good is what motivates the virtuous agent to act virtuously. The further thought as to what makes the act good, is something that, on my account, the virtuous agent discovers during the acquisition of the virtuous disposition and is not something that the agent recognizes or thinks about when she acts virtuously, occurrently speaking.

³²⁷ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (1993). P. 371.

³²⁸ Such a view is consistent with the one Aristotle outlines in the *Rhetoric*. There, he writes that older people “live with a view to the expedient, not the *kalon*, more than is right, because they are self-lovers; for the expedient is good for oneself, but the *kalon* is good without qualification.” Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. 1389b 26 – 1390a 1. By “good *simpliciter*” I do *not* mean that the type of goodness involved is something akin to G.E. Moore’s understanding of goodness as something *sui generis* in nature. What makes the action good on the recognition view will be discussed in chapter

“discernment” – that such and such an act is good moves the virtuous agent to act virtuously.³²⁹ Thoughts as to whether the act is “good for me” or “good for others” do not arise in the virtuous agent, and, as a result, the self-absorption objection cannot find any footing at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent. As Annas emphasizes, “for what characterizes virtue is a commitment to doing the virtuous action, regardless of whether it brings personal loss or gain to the agent – doing it for its own sake. Aristotle takes this to be the most basic and important fact about the *kalon*.”³³⁰

Now, as virtue ethicists are well aware, Julia Annas currently argues in favour of understanding the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent “by way of immediate response to situations, but in a way that exhibits the practical intelligence of the skilled craftsperson or athlete.”³³¹ In doing so, she departs from the account of occurrent motivation that she attributes to Aristotle in the *Morality of Happiness*, and offers contemporary virtue ethics an account of *neo-Aristotelian* motivation that is “like the kind of reasoning we find in the development and exercise of practical expertise.”³³² As others have pointed out, likening the virtuous agent’s motivation to the motivation of an expert is problematic, and the idea that practicing moral virtue is analogous to exercising certain sorts of practical skills raises serious doubts for many.³³³ Now, while I am

five, section three. The important thing to note here is that, at the occurrent level, the virtuous agent recognizes the act as simply good.

³²⁹I take it as a virtue that the type of goodness that the virtuous agent recognizes on the recognition view is fairly general, for as many have recently emphasized dividing the goodness of action in terms of “good for me” or “good for others” seems contrived. As Susan Wolf nicely illustrates, “when I visit my brother in the hospital, or help my friend move, or stay up all night sewing my daughter a Halloween costume, I act neither for egoistic reasons nor for moral ones. I do not believe that it is better *for me* that I spend a depressing hour in a drab, cramped room, seeing my brother irritable and in pain, that I risk back injury trying to get my friend’s sofa safely down two flights of stairs, or that I forego hours of much-wanted sleep to make sure that the wings will stand out at a good angle from the butterfly costume my daughter wants to wear in the next day’s parade. But neither do I believe myself duty-bound to perform these acts, or fool myself into thinking that by doing them I do what will be best for the world. Wolf, Susan *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, (2010) P. 4.

³³⁰ Ibid., P. 371.

³³¹ Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue*. P. 169.

³³² Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue*. P. 169. She writes, “while the account clearly draws inspiration from the tradition of eudaimonistic virtue ethics, it aims to develop an account of virtue for today which does not rely on historical antecedents” Annas, Julia. “Précis of *Intelligent Virtue*” in the *Journal of Value Inquiry* (2015). P. 281

³³³Hacker-Wright argues that the claimed identity between developing a skill and developing wisdom does not exist and is liable to lead us to overlook what is important about the *phronimos*, and *phronesis* in general. He argues that the acquisition of moral virtue – unlike the acquisition of a skill – involves reflection and insight into human nature, and reflection and action in accordance with worthwhile ends. Further, the skilled craftsperson need not appreciate his reasons for action, and need not be motivated to act for virtue’s sake, whereas with the *phronimos*, appreciating the value of virtuous activity and acting virtuously for its own sake is characteristic of virtuous activity. See Hacker-Wright’s “Skill, Practical Wisdom, and Ethical Naturalism” (forthcoming).

somewhat sympathetic to Annas’ contemporary account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, I nevertheless argue that it would be fruitful for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists to adopt Annas’ interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* – what I call the recognition view – as the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. Doing so, I hope to have shown, would provide neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics with a plausible account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent that is based on Aristotle’s discussion of acting for the sake of the *kalon*, one that does not rely on the problematic use of “X reasons” or the *seemingly* equally troubling account of motivation exhibited by certain sorts of experts.

To recall, I hope to have shown that amidst Aristotle’s various characterizations of the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and among the conflicting interpretations of what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*, it is plausible to think that Aristotle *may* have held the recognition view. Such a view, I argue, when taken along with the account of underlying motivation developed in chapter five, provides a unified account of why the virtuous agent acts virtuously *in toto*, one that is immune to one of virtue ethics’ greatest theoretical challenges: the self-absorption objection. But, before I turn to developing my account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent, it is important to see whether the recognition view can withstand a few of the more familiar objections. It is to this task that I now turn.

3.2. In Defense of the Recognition View

While the majority of Aristotelian scholars, generally speaking, accept the recognition view as a plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* – *albeit* perhaps not under this label – the view does have its critics. Given the limited space here, I restrict my focus to two objections.³³⁴ In his article “Kalou Heneka”, Timothy Chappell claims that simply saying that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself provides minimal insight – if any – into *why* the virtuous agent acts virtuously. He argues that if one can say no more about the virtuous agent’s motivation than that she acts virtuously because she recognizes that the action is good/virtuous, then the “position looks obscurantist; [i.e.,] it seems to run us very quickly in a philosophical and explanatory dead end.”³³⁵ Here, so the argument

Also, see John Adams’ “Comments on *Intelligent Virtue*: Moral Education, Aspiration, and Altruism” (2015).

³³⁴ The first has recently been laid out by Timothy Chappell and the second was originally put forth by Bernard Williams. A possible third objection laid out by Lear is that insofar as the recognition view does not account for the pleasantness experienced by the virtuous agent in acting for the sake of the *kalon*, something important is missing in the account. See Lear’s “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine” (2005). However, this objection only holds if one takes pleasantness to be a necessary feature of virtuous action.

³³⁵ Chappell, Timothy. “Kalou Heneka” (2013). P. 169. Annas also insists that the virtuous agent’s occurrent motivation ought not to be understood as mystical. She writes, “because he leaves it

goes, to claim that the virtuous agent performs good acts because she regards them as good – or acts virtuously for its own sake – seems mystical and incomplete. The first conjunct is said to be problematic because a mystical or obscurantist explanation is uninformative, and raises doubts about whether such an inquiry is the proper object of further investigation. The second conjunct is also said to be problematic because claiming that the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions because she recognizes them as virtuous/good does not explain why the virtuous agent chooses them in the first place. That is, it does not explain what it is about virtuous actions that makes them good, and thus does not provide us with an explanation as to why the virtuous agent goes for them as opposed to any other sort of action.

Here, I contend – contra Chappell – that the claim that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself is neither mystical nor incomplete. Rather, I argue that the recognition view, once contextualized in terms of a particular philosophy of action, and understood as characterizing only the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, is intelligible, and defensible. Now, to get a handle on the particular philosophy of action that may be said to “demystify” the recognition view, I turn to Gavin Lawrence’s “The Rationality of Morality.” In this article, Lawrence provides us with a detailed explication of the particular model of practical reason he claims was adopted by both Plato and Aristotle, which he calls, “The Traditional Conception of Practical Reason.”³³⁶ According to the traditional conception, “the ordinary connection that makes something into a reason for an agent is not a connection with his desires or interests, but with the practicable good – [i.e.,] with what the agent must do to be acting well – and this is generally independent of an individual’s actual desires.”³³⁷ Now, while the incontinent individual may be said to act contrary to what he takes to be good as a result of a conflicting desire – i.e., *thumos* or *epithumia* – the same cannot be said of the virtuous agent.³³⁸ This is because the

[the *kalon*] unanalyzed some have concluded that Aristotle thinks that the virtuous person has something like perception of what he ought to do. This would be something unarguable, not open to rational discussion. However, given Aristotle’s stress on the development of the intellectual side of virtue, this can scarcely be the right account.” Ibid., P. 371. And so, if the recognition view is considered mystical, then, according to Annas, it cannot be the right account.

³³⁶ Some may question whether Plato and Aristotle in fact adopted this particular structure of rationality. However, at the very least, such a structure – as Gavin Lawrence successfully shows – is one that we have good reason to think that Plato and Aristotle endorsed. See, “The Rationality of Morality” in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory* (1995).

³³⁷ Lawrence, Gavin, “The Rationality of Morality.” P. 98. He continues, “the central, or defining, question of practical reason is: ‘what should I do?’ Its formal answer I take to be: ‘Do what is best’ or ‘Act well.’” P. 130.

³³⁸ Though my focus in this chapter is on the virtuous agent, the structure of practical reason and motivation laid out here by Lawrence does not apply solely to the virtuous individual. E.g., for the vicious individual, the mere belief that an action is good is also sufficient to motivate her/him to perform said action. However, for the incontinent individual, while the belief that an action is good may provide some motivation to perform said act, the desire that gets generated from such a

virtuous agent possesses a harmonious psyche – guided by correct reason – and has a deeply embedded desire to achieve the practicable good in action.³³⁹ Given this deeply held desire, and in light of the absence of a conflicting desire, the mere recognition that an action is good is sufficient to motivate the virtuous agent to act virtuously.³⁴⁰ On such an account of the psychological make-up of the virtuous agent, there is nothing mystical about why the virtuous agent acts virtuously: the virtuous agent simply has a strong habitual desire (*boulêsis*) to pursue the practicable good in action, and the recognition that an action is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to act virtuously.³⁴¹

Now, one might wonder whether the account laid out above is intelligible only on Aristotle’s understanding of the psychological make-up of the virtuous agent. If so, one may worry that in light of modern psychology, and the current ways we tend to think of the phenomenological experiences of agents, the claim that the virtuous agent acts virtuously simply because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself, while intelligible in Aristotle’s time, is no longer intelligible or defensible anymore. However, if we take a quick look at the on-going work in psychology today, we find that the traditional conception of practical reason can be defended and grounded in contemporary empirical science. One example here should suffice.

In “The Automated Will: Nonconscious Activation and Pursuit of Behavioural Goals”, John Bargh and his colleagues argue for a “comprehensive approach to goal pursuit that allows for the nonconscious activation and operation of goals as well as the traditional conscious, controlled mode of goal pursuit.”³⁴²

belief is not, generally speaking, sufficient to bring the individual to perform said act. This is because the incontinent individual tends to act from a non-rational desire, e.g., *epithumia*.

³³⁹ It is important to emphasize that on the recognition view, it is not recognition of the goodness of the act alone that motivates the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Rather, on this view, what motivates the virtuous person to act virtuously is a deeply embedded desire to pursue the practicable good, *plus* the recognition that such and such an act is good.

³⁴⁰ It seems to me that any residual “mystical” or “obscurantist” aura surrounding the view of occurrent motivation above – i.e., that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself – stems from what Chappell calls the “Prudential Presumption of Morality.” He writes, “typically, when people ask “Why be moral?” they are asking for an explanatory reduction of The Moral to The Prudential... Moral reasons require grounding, their force for us is somehow not obvious; whereas it is obvious how prudential reasons are reasons for us... So far as I can see, we could just as well assume the inverse: that it is moral reasons that are unproblematic, and prudential reasons that require the explanatory reduction.” Chappell, “Kalou Heneka” (2013) P. 158-159.

³⁴¹ While I cash out the “habitual desire” of the virtuous agent here as *boulêsis*, it is important to note that the habitual desire has come about as a result of a decision (*prohairesis*). This decision, though, is made at the underlying level of motivation, and will be explained in full in chapter five. No doubt, if one adopts a particular philosophy of action where reason alone is inert, then it may seem mystical as to how the mere recognition that an action is good may be said to motivate an individual.

³⁴² Bargh, John A., Peter M. Gollwitzer, A. Lee-Chai and Kimberly Barndollar, and R. Trotschel. “The Automated Will: Nonconscious Activation and Pursuit of Behavioral Goals” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81 (2001.) P. 1014.

Bargh and his colleagues claim that after pursuing a particular goal consciously a number of times, “a pattern of goal-directed cognitive activity” is established, and the pursuit of a particular goal may become activated nonconsciously.³⁴³ They insist that “behaviour guided by nonconscious goals is not “habit” as conceptualized in behaviorist stimulus-response models ... but instead is behavior that is flexibly responding to environmental events.”³⁴⁴ Further, nonconsciously activated goals demonstrate “the same attention to and processing of goal-relevant environmental information and show the same qualities of persistence over time toward the desired end state, and of overcoming obstacles in the same way as ... consciously set goals.”³⁴⁵ And, important for our purposes here, nonconsciously activated goals are generally understood to be “in line with the individual’s valued, aspired-to life goals and purposes.”³⁴⁶

To be clear, I turn here to the work of Bargh and his colleagues only to demonstrate that the recognition view advanced above *can* be grounded in contemporary psychology.³⁴⁷ I do not suggest that the model expressed by Bargh and his colleagues is the only plausible psychological model for understanding our underlying motivational structure. That said, on this model of goal pursuit, it seems that the recognition view advanced above can be grounded. That is, insofar as the virtuous agent has a deeply held desire (or goal) to partake in practicable good actions, upon recognizing – whether consciously or nonconsciously – that such and such an act is good, the virtuous agent may be said to be moved to act virtuously. For Bargh and his colleagues, this is because “a pattern of goal-directed cognitive activity”³⁴⁸ has been established in the virtuous agent, and thus the recognition that an act is virtuous/good moves the virtuous agent to act virtuously.³⁴⁹

³⁴³ Ibid., P. 1016.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., P. 1025.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., P. 1015.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., P. 1015.

³⁴⁷ N.B. Some virtue ethicists are skeptical about the prospects of empirical psychology being able to ground or measure moral virtue because there is currently no empirical way to assess whether the alleged moral virtues connect with what is often referred to as Aristotelian naturalism. Such psychological experiments – so the skeptic insists – cannot connect its empirical data with the human good. Regarding the experiments carried out by Bargh and his colleagues, the skeptic may insist that being motivated from virtue is so different in kind that it cannot be compared with the mundane conscious/non-conscious activation and operation of non-virtuous goals. Whether empirical psychology can or cannot play a meaningful role in virtue ethics, at the present moment, it seems to me, is unclear. Nothing I say in this chapter depends on empirical psychology playing a meaningful role. My turn to Bargh and his colleagues’ experiments is primarily intended to address those situationists who may think that Aristotle’s understanding of the psychological make-up of humans is outdated.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., P. 1016.

³⁴⁹ N.B. One advantage of the recognition view is that it seems immune to what is often referred to as “The Worry of Psychology.” This is the view that rational processing is too slow and costly to determine what we should do most of the time and our actions are mostly the result of automatic processes, the inputs of which operate below the level of conscious awareness.

The second issue raised by Chappell – viz., that to say that the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act itself is incomplete insofar as it does not address why the virtuous agent ultimately chooses virtuous actions – is, no doubt, an important objection. Such an objection would stick if this were all that was to be said regarding why the virtuous agent acts virtuously. However, this is not the case. The recognition view advanced here *only* aims to capture the motivation of the virtuous agent as it arises at the *occurrent* level of motivation. As we will see in chapter five, the ultimate or underlying reason why the virtuous agent acts virtuously has to do with the type of life the virtuous agent wishes to live, and the particular role that the cultivation and exercise of moral virtue plays in such a life. Thus, in light of the limited aim of the recognition view – viz., to capture only the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent – it would be unfair to require that it provide a complete account of why the virtuous agent acts virtuously, especially when we have good reason to think that moral agents possess different levels of motivation, with each level playing a particular function or characteristic role. Thus, Chappell’s concern as it applies here seems to be not whether the recognition view captures why the virtuous agent acts virtuously *in toto*, but whether it is able to capture the *occurrent level* of motivation of the virtuous agent. And, after a quick peek into the psyche of Aristotle’s virtuous agent – as understood by Gavin Lawrence – we see that it can.

The final criticism of the recognition view I will examine, originally advanced by Bernard Williams, is that it is simply false, in the majority of cases, that the virtuous agent, characteristically speaking, chooses virtuous acts because she recognizes them as virtuous or good. He writes that such a view “is in general false, in a *de dicto* sense: courageous people rarely choose acts as courageous, and modest people never choose modest behaviours as modest.”³⁵⁰ Rather, as he goes on to argue, the virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously for a wide array of “X reasons.” According to Williams, although such reasons are intimately related to the good, it would be uninformative and misleading to suggest that Aristotle’s virtuous agent acts virtuously simply because she recognizes that such acts are good.³⁵¹ However, when we turn to Aristotle’s text, contrary to finding that the recognition view does not fit Aristotle’s depiction of the occurrent motivation of

³⁵⁰ Williams, Bernard. “Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts.” P. 16. Williams, however, *does* think that the claim, “a virtuous person chooses virtuous acts because they are virtuous acts” makes sense if it is read in a *de re* sense. He writes, “we say that the agent did the generous (e.g.) thing because it was the generous thing to do, and we understand what this means because we understand what it is about the situation and the action that makes this action in this situation something that would seem to a generous person the appropriate thing to do.” Ibid., P. 17.

³⁵¹ His exception to this rule is when the virtuous agent performs just acts. Williams writes, “justice is about the only case in which it clearly holds.” Williams, “Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts”, P. 16.

the virtuous agent, we find that it fits all too well.³⁵² One example here should suffice.

According to Aristotle, an incontinent (i.e. *akratic*) agent can possess knowledge of the good in a way, yet still act contrary to that knowledge. Aristotle contrasts the role of knowledge of the good in an instance of incontinence with the role of such knowledge in the virtuous agent. In Book VII.3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes:

“Further, we may also look at the cause [of action] in the following way, referring to human nature. For one belief is universal; the other is about particulars, and because they are particulars, perception controls them. And in the cases where these two beliefs result in one belief, it is necessary, in one case, for the soul to affirm what has been concluded, but in the case of beliefs about production, *to act at once on what has been concluded*. If, for instance, everything sweet must be tasted, and this, some one particular thing is sweet, it is necessary for someone who is able and unhindered also to act on this at the same time.”³⁵³

Here, Aristotle claims that insofar as an individual holds a particular universal premise – such as that one ought to pursue the practicable good in action – and perceives a minor premise that falls under the universal premise – e.g., that such and such an act is good – the result, when unhindered, is action.³⁵⁴ It therefore seems that – contra Williams – we *can* ground the recognition view advanced above in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, and capture why the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking. For example, insofar as the virtuous agent holds the universal premise that one ought to partake in courageous and modest actions, the virtuous person may be said to act courageously or modestly *simply* because she recognizes the minor premise, namely that a particular act is courageous or

³⁵² N.B. The motivation behind Williams’ account is to provide a non-vacuous account of two central claims, what he calls “A” and “B.” “A” states that “a fully V act is what a V person would do, but only if it is done as the V person does such a thing” and “B” states that “a V person chooses V acts qua V acts.” Ibid., P. 16.

³⁵³ EN 1144a 25– 33. Similarly, Aristotle writes, “but how is it that thought is sometimes followed by action, sometimes not; sometimes by movement, sometimes not? What happens seems parallel to the case of thinking and inferring about the immovable objects. There the end is the truth seen (for, when one thinks the two propositions, one thinks and puts together the conclusion) but here the two propositions result in a conclusion which is an action – for example, whenever one thinks that every man ought to walk, and that one is a man oneself, straightaway one walks.” Aristotle, *MA* 701a 6 – 12.

³⁵⁴ Irwin puts this point as follows. “action requires a so-called “practical syllogism” – a universal belief about the kind of thing that is good or pleasant, a particular belief that this particular thing is that kind of thing, and the resulting belief that this particular thing is good or pleasant. On the assumption that we desire what is good or pleasant, this concluding belief results in action.” Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, P. 597.

modest.³⁵⁵ On this model, no further explanation is needed to explain why the virtuous individual acts virtuously.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have defended a particular interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*.³⁵⁶ This interpretation – what I have called the recognition view – states that the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, because she recognizes the non-relational goodness of the act itself. I hope to have shown that such a view is compatible with the prevailing interpretations of what it means to act for the sake of the *kalon*, and that we have good reason to think that Aristotle *may* have held such a few. To repeat, the type of goodness that the virtuous agent recognizes on the recognition view is the intrinsic goodness of the act itself, or – put slightly differently – goodness *simpliciter*. On this account, the recognition that such and such an act is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Thus, the question of whether performing said action is “good for me” or “good for another” does not arise. As a result, the self-absorption objection cannot find any footing at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent. It is this view, the recognition view, that I argue that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists ought to adopt. One reason in favour of it is that such a view, seems – at least on my reading – to have possibly been Aristotle’s own. And, I take it that, *mutatis mutandis*, for a contemporary ethicist who identifies as “neo-Aristotelian,” the more Aristotelian a view is, the better. Further, and more importantly, the recognition view, when taken along with the underlying account of motivation developed in chapter five, is able to provide a unified, non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent’s motivation *in toto*, one that is immune to the self-absorption objection.

In the second section of this chapter, I sought to defend the recognition view against two key criticisms. I hope to have shown both that – contra Chappell – the recognition view is neither mystical nor objectionably incomplete, and – contra Williams – that it is neither misleading nor false. On the contrary, I have shown that the recognition view, once it is properly contextualized and its scope is made clear, is intelligible, and defensible. As emphasized in the previous chapter, however, providing a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation is only the first, and much easier, step in defending neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics against the self-absorption objection. The more challenging step is providing a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent. But, before I turn to this, I must create some conceptual space.

³⁵⁵ Here, it follows that insofar as the moral virtues – e.g., courage, modesty, benevolence, etc – are good, in recognizing such virtues, one may be said to recognize the good. Precisely what it is that the virtuous person recognizes in the moral virtues will be discussed in chapter five, section three.

³⁵⁶ As noted above, this view is famously defended by Julia Annas in *The Morality of Happiness*.

Chapter 4: Why A Neo-Aristotelian Need Not Adopt the Eudaemonist Axiom

“Should you do a service for your friend rather than for an excellent person, and return a favour to a benefactor rather than do a favour for a companion, if you cannot do both?” ... Surely it is not easy to define all of these matters exactly. For they include many differences of all sorts – in importance and unimportance, and in the fine and in the necessary.” (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1164b)

Introduction

In this chapter, I take an important preliminary step towards providing a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that can meet the self-absorption objection: namely, showing that a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation need not be committed to what Gregory Vlastos has called the “eudaemonist axiom.”³⁵⁷ For if, as I will argue, Aristotle himself did not subscribe (or at least may well not have subscribed) to the eudaemonist axiom, then neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists should not feel bound to do so either.³⁵⁸ In the first section, I begin by laying out Vlastos’ eudaemonist axiom – viz. that the ultimate end of all of our actions is our *own* happiness – and then turn to various passages in Aristotle’s ethics that suggest that he may have held such a view. Here, I argue that while there is some evidence to suggest that Aristotle *may* have held the eudaemonist axiom, it is ultimately unclear whether he in fact held such a position. In the second section, I lay out three arguments that suggest that Aristotle did *not* hold the eudaemonist axiom: the argument from omission, the argument from self-concern, and the anti-maximization argument. In doing so, I hope to show not only that it is far from clear that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom – as some supporters of the orthodox reading would have us believe – but also that there is a strong case to be made that Aristotle did *not* hold such an axiom. I conclude that *if* Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom – or even if it is unclear whether he did – then we need not insist that neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation adopt the formal features of such a structure. Establishing such a position gives me license to present an alternative neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation

³⁵⁷ As shown in chapter two, so long as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists are committed to the view that the virtuous agent’s ultimately acts morally primarily from a concern for her own *eudaimonia*, the self-absorption objection stands. What makes this challenge a conceptual one is that so long as the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist takes the virtuous agent to adopt a structure of motivation akin to Gregory Vlastos’ eudaemonist axiom, where the ultimate reason for acting morally stems from a concern for one’s own self-interest, the self-absorption objection cannot be adequately addressed. For the view that most if not all eudaemonist virtue ethicists hold some version of the eudaemonist axiom, see Anne Baril’s “The Role of Welfare in Eudaimonism (2013).

³⁵⁸ Put slightly differently, neo-Aristotelians need not subscribe to what Anne Baril calls eudaimonism’s central recommendation (ECR): viz. that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia”. “Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics” (2014) P. 23.

that lacks any of the formal features of the eudaemonist axiom, which is exactly what I go on to do in the next chapter.

4.1. The Eudaemonist Axiom and Aristotle’s Ethics

As we have seen in chapters one and two, the majority of Aristotelian scholars and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists hold some version of the formal reading of Aristotle’s account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent.³⁵⁹ On such a view, all rational actions are primarily undertaken for the sake of an individual’s *own eudaimonia*, as opposed to “*eudaimonia*, generally speaking” or the “*eudaimonia* of all.”³⁶⁰ On this account, while the well-being of other individuals matters in its own right, the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for treating others with respect, dignity, fairness, and so on, is that doing so is for the sake of the agent’s *own* good. Gregory Vlastos famously described this underlying rationale as “the Eudaemonist Axiom.”³⁶¹ He writes, “I may now introduce the principle I shall call ‘the Eudaemonist Axiom,’ which once staked out by Socrates becomes foundational for virtually all subsequent moralists of classical antiquity.”³⁶² This is [the thesis] that happiness is desired by all human beings as the ultimate end (*telos*) of all their rational acts.”³⁶³ And, the type of “happiness [in this case] is strictly self-referential: it is the agent’s desire for his [or her] *own* happiness and that of no one else.”³⁶⁴

³⁵⁹ As noted in chapter one, the formal reading of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation states that one’s ultimate motivation for acting morally stems from concern for one’s own *eudaimonia*. Recall, while such a view is self-referential, “*eudaimonia*” is to be understood as a thin concept devoid of any content. The term “formal reading” gets introduced into this discussion by Henry Sidwick, and is picked up by Bernard Williams, Julia Annas, and others.

³⁶⁰ By “rational action” I mean those actions that come about as a result of a decision (*prohairesis*) by the agent and that stem from a rational desire (*boulêsis*) to act in accordance with what one takes to be good. On such an understanding, the virtuous individual, the continent individual, and the vicious individual all may be said to act rationally. The incontinent individual, however, does not act rationally insofar as she does act in accordance with what she takes to be the good, but acts from either anger (*thumos*) or from an appetitive desire (*epithumia*).

³⁶¹ Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. P. 203.

³⁶² He writes, “this [the Eudaemonist Axiom] is so deep-seated an assumption that it is simply taken for granted.” Vlastos, Op. Cit., P. 203.

³⁶³ Ibid., P. 203. The emphasis on “rational action” and not just “action” is important because while at times – see, for example *EN* 1102a 2-3 – Aristotle suggests that we aim at *eudaimonia* in all of our actions, we know that this is not the case. As McDowell rightly points out, “taken at face value, this may seem to make *eudaimonia* embrace all reason for action, of whatever kind. But we know anyway that Aristotle does not think all human behaviour is aimed at *eudaimonia*; for instance, incontinent behaviour is precisely not aimed at *eudaimonia*.” McDowell, John. “Eudaemonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics” (1995) P. 211. Here, Vlastos is simply claiming that all of our decisions (*prohairesis*) aim at our own happiness.

³⁶⁴ Vlastos, Op. Cit., P. 203. He goes on to clarify, “to say that happiness is the *telos* of all our actions” is not to say that this is what we are always, or often, thinking of when choosing what to do in our daily life, but only that this is the last of the reasons we could give if pressed to give our

Now, to be fair, there are certain sections in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, when taken on their own, do seem to suggest that Aristotle holds something akin to the eudaemonist axiom.³⁶⁵ Three brief examples here should suffice.³⁶⁶ First, in Aristotle’s discussion of how the virtuous agent will deal with honors and offices that are open to both him and his friends, Aristotle writes that the virtuous agent will sacrifice them all for his friends “in achieving the fine for *himself*.”³⁶⁷ In this passage, Aristotle appears to be suggesting that what ultimately justifies or motivates the virtuous person’s action is not acting virtuously for its own sake, but acting virtuously because doing so furthers his *own* good. Second, Aristotle claims that it may be wise for the virtuous person to sacrifice the performance of various virtuous actions to his friend because “it may be finer to be responsible for his friend’s doing the action than to do it himself.”³⁶⁸ Here, once again, Aristotle seems to be suggesting that the main reason for allowing his friend to perform the virtuous action is that by doing so, he performs an even nobler action himself. Lastly, Aristotle concludes Book IX.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by emphasizing that in *all* of the virtuous person’s actions, the virtuous person awards more of the fine to himself than to others.³⁶⁹ He writes, “in everything praiseworthy, then, the excellent person awards more of the fine to himself. In this way, then, we must be self-lovers, as we have said.”³⁷⁰ If we focus only on passages such as these, it can seem as if Aristotle’s virtuous agent is best understood as acting morally *primarily* because doing so in her own objective self-interest.³⁷¹ However, as we are well aware, Aristotle has a lot more to say regarding the motivation of the virtuous agent than just what has been laid out here.

reason for choosing to do anything at all – the only one which, if given, would make it senseless to be asked for any further reason.” Ibid., P. 203.

³⁶⁵ No doubt, these passages need not be read as evidence that Aristotle holds the eudaemonist axiom. My point here is that scholars who do think that Aristotle holds such an axiom may very well point to such examples as evidence to support their interpretation.

³⁶⁶ Here, I draw on Aristotle’s discussion of friendship because, as Kraut puts it, “paradoxically, the passages that seem to provide the strongest evidence in favour of the egoistic reading is contained in Aristotle’s discussion of friendship.” Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. P. 115.

³⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*). Trans. T. Irwin. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999. *EN* 1169a 20 - 23. (My italics). All passages from the *EN* in this chapter follow Irwin’s translation, unless specified otherwise.

³⁶⁸ *EN* 1169a 33- 35.

³⁶⁹ Christopher Toner writes, “Hare is far from alone in thinking Aristotle’s ethics to be... self-centred. Indeed, Aristotle himself in a number of passages gives good *prima facie* reasons for thinking so; and ranking very high among such passages must be *Ethics* IX. 8, in which Aristotle discusses what has become known as ‘moral competition’.” Toner, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” P. 607.

³⁷⁰ *EN* 1169a35 - 1169b 2 (My italics).

³⁷¹ In addition to the passages laid out here, some scholars find evidence in favour of the formal reading in Aristotle’s discussion of courage, and magnanimity. See, for example Hurka’s “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong,” (2013).

The important thing to note at this point is that *nowhere* in the Aristotelian corpus does Aristotle ever claim that the virtuous person cultivates a virtuous disposition or acts virtuously primarily because doing so is in her own objective self-interest.³⁷² Proponents of the formal reading either appeal to particular readings of Aristotle’s text – including those passages mentioned above – or argue in favour of the account by appealing to its general acceptance at the time when Aristotle wrote in order to make their case.³⁷³ Now, if we accept Vlastos’ claim that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, two things immediately come to mind. First, we will notice that Aristotle may be said to offer us two rather distinct aims. For, as we saw in the last chapter, the virtuous individual is motivated to act virtuously at the occurrent level for the sake of the *kalon*, where, on the recognition view, this is to be understood as acting because the virtuous agent recognizes the goodness of the act itself. However, if Vlastos’ claim is correct, then, at the underlying level, Aristotle is offering us an account of moral motivation wherein the virtuous agent’s ultimate motivation for acting morally – i.e. the underlying reason for all of the virtuous person’s actions – stems from a desire for her own happiness. And, these two motivations for acting morally seem to be rather far apart.³⁷⁴ One might even think that if the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, she cannot also and at the same time act for the sake of her own happiness – that is, that these two kinds of motivation directly conflict.³⁷⁵

Second, such a tension – even if there is no direct conflict – gives rise to the sort of “schizophrenia” Michael Stocker cautiously urges us to avoid.³⁷⁶ This

³⁷² I.e., nowhere in Aristotle’s writings does he explicitly state that the virtuous agent ought to make his ultimate aim his own *eudaimonia*. Jennifer Whiting writes, “the *NE* does not actually specify the agent’s own *eudaimonia* as the ultimate end of all of her actions: it is compatible with what Aristotle says that an agent at least sometimes, perhaps often, takes the *eudaimonia* of others as the ultimate end for the sake of which she acts in the sense that she aims at their *eudaimonia* *simply as such* (and *not* as parts of her own).” Whiting, Jennifer, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2008) P. 277.

³⁷³ McKerlie writes, “many writers take it for granted that what Aristotle says about ethics (and/or rationality) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* has the formal structure of egoistic eudaemonism. The dominance of this reading is puzzling. There is no explicit discussion by Aristotle of the issues at stake between it and other possible interpretations that settles the question. Defenders of the interpretation often feel that Aristotle himself takes it for granted. It is not something that he sees as a controversial thesis that calls for emphasis or justification.” McKerlie, Dennis. “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998) P. 541. Also see, Ross’ *Aristotle* (1923). P. 230.

³⁷⁴ If we return to Dr. Martineau’s rankings of moral motivations from worst to best as laid out by Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics*, we will notice that these two motivations are rather far apart in his rankings. On his rankings, to act out of concern for oneself – what Dr. Martineau would call “Love of gain” – is the 5th lowest motivation to act morally where to act for the sake of the *kalon* – or what Dr. Martineau would probably call “primary sentiment of reverence” – is the *best* motivation to act morally. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* P. 369.

³⁷⁵ E.g., McKerlie claims that Aristotle’s insistence that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon* rules out such a “self-referential motivation.” McKerlie, Op Cit., P. 534.

³⁷⁶ For a full defense of the view that “moral schizophrenia” is an undesirable feature in any moral theory, see Stocker’s “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” (1976). For a defense of

is because the virtuous agent’s reason for acting virtuously at the occurrent level of motivation differs greatly from her reason for acting morally at the underlying level. Recall that on Stocker’s view such incongruity gives rise to a malady of spirit. Stocker writes,

One mark of a good life is a harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications. Not to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on – bespeaks of a malady of spirit... At the very least, we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek... Any theory that ignores such harmony does so at great peril.³⁷⁷

Now, given that Aristotle nowhere endorses the eudaemonist axiom, and given that when we try to attribute such a view to him, we generate a number of tensions – both within the psyche of the virtuous agent as well as with our own deeply embedded moral convictions – I ask the following question: is it plausible to think that he did *not* hold such a view? That is, is it plausible to read Aristotle as *not* subscribing to the eudaemonist axiom that many interpreters – such as Gregory Vlastos, W.D. Ross, T.H. Irwin, and others – attribute to him? Here, it seems to me, the answer is a resounding yes.

Since the latter half of the 20th century, a number of Aristotelian scholars – notably Richard Kraut, Dennis McKerlie, and Jennifer Whiting – have argued for a different interpretation of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation than the orthodox view expressed above.³⁷⁸ These authors make a rather convincing case for interpreting Aristotle’s underlying account of moral motivation in a non-egoistic way. Proponents of such a reading – what we may call the “non-egoistic reading” – just like proponents of the formal reading, have turned to various

the claim that Aristotle’s occurrent and underlying motivation need not be in direct conflict, see Kraut’s “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself” (1995).

³⁷⁷ Stocker, Michael “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67. Further – and as Thomas Hurka would rightly emphasize – if we attribute the eudaemonist axiom to Aristotle, we appear to be unable to provide a systematic rationale for *why* one’s own *eudaimonia* counts more – i.e., should be weighed more heavily – than the *eudaimonia* of others. In doing so, Hurka would insist, we may be said to treat like cases differently. Recall, for Hurka, an adequate account of moral motivation may be evaluated on whether it provides a “systematic whole, with its general ideas explaining its particular claims. Then the theory not only matches our intuitions but also gives them a satisfying rationale.” Hurka, *Perfectionism*, P. 31. For a defense of the claim that Aristotle thinks that other-concern and love for another ought to be justified on similar grounds to that of self-concern and self-love, see Jennifer Whiting’s “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2008).

³⁷⁸ Kelly Rogers writes, “prior to about 1970, it was said by many commentators that Aristotle’s ethics was egoistic.” Rogers, Kelly, “Aristotle on Loving Another for his own Sake” (1994) P. 291.

sections of Aristotle’s text to make their case.³⁷⁹ Further, many of the proponents of the non-egoistic reading have shown that various passages that proponents of the formal reading take to be decisive evidence in favour of their view are more ambiguous than initially thought, open to alternative interpretations, and in some cases are better explained away.³⁸⁰ In what follows, rather than summarizing this entire debate and examining closely every contested passage, I will proceed by laying out what I take to be three of the strongest arguments – the argument from omission, the argument from self-concern, and the anti-maximization argument – in favour of understanding Aristotle’s account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent in a non-egoistic way. In doing so, I hope to show that there is at least a strong case to be made *against* attributing Vlastos’ eudaemonist axiom to Aristotle.

4.2. The Eudaemonist Axiom: Unsettling the Foundation

The Argument from Omission

As noted above, many proponents of the formal reading simply assume that the underlying motivation of Aristotle’s virtuous agent possesses the formal structure of Vlastos’ eudaemonist axiom.³⁸¹ On this interpretation, the virtuous agent’s ultimate reason for being virtuous is that doing so promotes her *own eudaimonia*. As Dennis McKerlie puts it, such proponents do not see it as “a controversial thesis that calls for emphasis or justification, [but rather they simply] take for granted that what Aristotle says about ethics (and/or rationality) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* has the formal structure of egoistic eudaimonism.”³⁸² Now, if Aristotle assumed the eudaemonist axiom, then insisting that he provides us with an explicit argument for a view that he may have taken for granted may be too demanding.³⁸³ That said, *if* Aristotle did assume something akin to the

³⁷⁹ Although, and unlike many of the proponents of the formal reading, they do not give much weight to the following claim: namely, the fact that the eudaemonist axiom may have been prevalent at the time when Aristotle wrote provides some *prima facie* reason for accepting that such a view was in fact his own.

³⁸⁰ For example, see Christopher Toner’s claims that the alleged egoism in IX. 8 of the *EN* can be explained away. He argues that in the case of moral competition, the Aristotelian agent is not motivated by reserving the finer act for himself, but rather by “standing in the right relation to the good.” Toner, “The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics” (2006) P. 611. See also McKerlie’s “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998) for how Aristotle’s discussion in Book I of the *EN* may be said to introduce the “human good”, and not the “good *for* the individual.”

³⁸¹ This includes neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists such as Anne Baril who takes neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be committed to (ECR): viz. that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia”. “Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics” (2014) P. 23.

³⁸² Op. Cit., McKerlie, P. 541. McKerlie’s understanding of “egoistic eudaimonism” may be understood in terms of what Vlastos calls the “eudaemonist axiom.” Cp. Ross’ *Aristotle* (1923). P. 230.

³⁸³ Especially, if Gregory Vlastos is correct in asserting that such a position was adopted by all moralists of classical antiquity. See, Vlastos’ *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher* (1991).

eudaimonist axiom, then it is reasonable, I contend, to expect to see traces of such an axiom sprinkled throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The important thing to note here, however, is that when we turn to Aristotle’s ethics – and in particular to his discussion of the moral virtues in Books III to V of the *EN* – where we could reasonably expect to find clear traces or semblance of such a position, we find no semblance at all.³⁸⁴ Instead what we find in Aristotle’s discussion of the moral virtues is his repeated insistence that the virtuous person acts virtuously for the sake of the *kalon*. For the sake of simplicity, we may summarize what I call the “argument from omission” as follows.

P1: If Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, then there would be clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom in his discussion of the moral virtues.

P2: There are no clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom in Aristotle’s discussion of the moral virtues; i.e., Aristotle does *not* claim that the virtuous agent ought to perform virtuous actions because doing so will promote her *own eudaimonia*.

C: So, Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom.³⁸⁵

In this argument, I take premise two to be uncontentious, given Aristotle’s repeated insistence throughout his discussion of the moral virtues that the virtuous individual acts for the sake of the *kalon*.³⁸⁶ And, I take premise one to be a reasonable expectation to place on Aristotle’s ethics *if* he assumed something akin to the eudaemonist axiom as the proper way to think about how to organize our lives. Now, I imagine that proponents of the formal reading – who, *ex hypothesi*, insist that Aristotle holds the eudaemonist axiom – will look for various ways to refute the argument above. Here, there seem to be two main possibilities, both of which involve rejecting premise one. First, proponents of the formal reading may argue that it is *too* demanding to require that Aristotle leave clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom in his discussion of the moral virtues, because there are clear traces elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Second, they may try to “explain away” the lack of clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom by invoking a particular reading of the *EN* on which it contains two distinct types of reasoning: prudential reasoning and moral reasoning.

Now, those who adopt the first of these two strategies – i.e., those who deny premise one on the grounds that there *are* clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom elsewhere in the *EN* and that this is sufficient to show that he did assume such an

³⁸⁴ E.g., McKerlie writes, “in the case of justice, if Aristotle is an egoistic eudaimonist we would expect him to say that a just action is noble and should be performed because of the contribution that the action would make to eudaimonia in the agent’s life.” McKerlie, (1991) P. 88.

³⁸⁵ A similar case is made by Dennis McKerlie in “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s Ethics” (1991). While McKerlie’s ultimate aim is to argue in favour of reading Aristotle as a type of self-referential altruist, my sole aim here is cast doubt on the wide acceptance that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom.

³⁸⁶ This claim was defended in the previous chapter.

axiom – tend to turn to Book I of the *EN* in order to make their case.³⁸⁷ As McKerlie notes,

“Readers may think that egoistic eudaimonism is the natural way of understanding Book I of the *Ethics*. Book I picks out eudaimonia as the uniquely fundamental goal. Other important goals, including the virtues, are envisaged as falling under it, either being treated as means to eudaimonia or included inside it as constituents. And it seems to many that when Aristotle discusses eudaimonia in Book I, he is thinking of an agent deciding how to realize eudaimonia in his own life. What should I aim at (my) pleasure, or (my) honor, or (my) contemplation?”³⁸⁸

Such a reading insists that Book I of the *EN* be read, as McKerlie puts it, as “a discussion of the ultimate grounds of individual choice.”³⁸⁹ However, there is an alternative – and in my view far more plausible – reading of the central aim of Book I of the *EN*, which is simply to lay out a preliminary account of the human good.³⁹⁰

Those who take the second strategy, such as Terence Irwin, claim that we can explain the absence of the eudaemonist axiom in Aristotle’s discussion of the moral virtues because Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, properly understood, contains two distinct types of practical reasoning: moral reasoning and prudential

³⁸⁷ Others turn to Book IX of the *EN*, but that book is equally contentious.

³⁸⁸ McKerlie, Dennis. “Aristotle and Egoism” P. 541. In response to such an argument, McKerlie writes. “in many places in book I Aristotle clearly is thinking about an agent who is aiming at *eudaimonia* in his own life. This emphasis is understandable even if Aristotle is not an egoistic eudaimonist. In book I, Aristotle is trying to characterize human good or well-being in general, and it is simplest for him to consider the case of agents choosing between rival candidates like pleasure, honour, and virtue in their own lives. But book I does not explicitly say that the final goal of all my practical thinking should be my own *eudaimonia*.” McKerlie, Dennis. “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s *Ethics*.” P. 87.

³⁸⁹ McKerlie goes on to state that “eudaimonia is introduced as the goal of political understanding... and political understanding aims at the eudaimonia of the citizens of a state.” McKerlie, Dennis. “Aristotle and Egoism.” P. 542.

³⁹⁰ In Kraut’s discussion of Book I of the *EN*, he writes “but I shall argue that when we look carefully, what we find him [Aristotle] saying is this: happiness is the ultimate end for the sake of which one should always act. This is quite different from the claim that one’s own happiness is the ultimate end of one’s actions. Aristotle’s idea, as I want to construe it, is that whether we act for our own sake or for the sake of others, or both, happiness (our own or another’s) is the good, we are ultimately trying to attain.” Kraut, Richard, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. P. 145. McKerlie claims that if it is not just one’s own *eudaimonia* that Aristotle has in mind in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, then “perhaps Aristotle believes that I should consider my own *eudaimonia* when my own life is in question, and that I am also obligated to make the good of others – their *eudaimonia* a fundamental aim.” McKerlie, Dennis “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s *Ethics*.” P. 87. W.F.R. Hardie claims that in “the *E.N.* the emphasis is on political science [and] statesmanship.” Hardie, “The Final Good in Aristotle’s *Ethics*” (1965). P.277.

reasoning.³⁹¹ On Irwin’s view, Aristotle switches throughout the *EN* between a prudential mode of reasoning and a moral mode of reasoning. And, in Books II to V of the *EN* – Irwin insists – there are no clear traces of the eudaemonist axiom because in those Books Aristotle has adopted the moral mode of reasoning. However, as promising as this defence may initially appear, such a position ultimately depends on being able to point to sections where there *are* clear traces of the prudential mode of reasoning in the *EN*. And this is what appears to be lacking.³⁹²

If the argument from omission holds, we have good reason to doubt that Aristotle in fact held the eudaemonist axiom. That is, even if we were to assume that Aristotle took the eudaemonist axiom for granted, and accept that it might be too burdensome to require that he provide an explicit argument in order to attribute such a view to him, still, where we should reasonably expect to find clear traces or semblance of such a position, we find no traces or semblance at all. This, I take it, suggests that Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom.

The Argument from Self-Concern

When proponents of the formal reading are pressed to provide evidence that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, many turn to Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to make their case. More specifically, special attention tends to be given to the middle chapters – chapters 4 to 8 – of Book IX, where Aristotle explicitly discusses the relationship between self-concern and concern for others. Here, Aristotle famously claims that the love and concern that the virtuous person has toward another is akin to the love and concern that the virtuous person has toward herself. He writes,

“The defining features of friendship that are found in friendships to one’s neighbors would seem to be derived from features of friendship toward oneself. For a friend is taken to be someone who wishes and does goods or apparent goods to his friend for the friend’s sake; or one who wishes the friend to be and to live for the friend’s own sake ... Each of these features is found in the decent person’s relation to himself, and it is found in other people, insofar as they suppose they are decent. As we have said, virtue

³⁹¹ See chapters 15, 16 and 17 in Terence Irwin’s *Aristotle’s First Principles* (1988).

³⁹² Further – and as emphasized in chapter two – this second strategy is dubious for there is no textual evidence that Aristotle held *three* distinct types of reasoning: theoretical reasoning, moral reasoning, and prudential reasoning. – and in addition, by invoking two distinct modes of practical reason, while this may – so proponents of such a view insist – help explain why there are no traces of the eudaemonist axiom in Aristotle’s discussion of the moral virtues, it generates a number of other tensions and concerns. As argued for in chapter two, section two, such a cure, seems to be worse than the disease. As McKerlie correctly emphasizes “it is hard to find this degree of complexity [i.e., these three modes of reasoning] in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.” McKerlie, Dennis. “Aristotle and Egoism.” P. 540.

and the excellent person would seem to be the standard in each case.”³⁹³

Based on passages such as this, a number of scholars have concluded that Aristotle justifies concern and love for another based on the concern and love that the virtuous person has toward herself.³⁹⁴ For example, David Brink writes, “Aristotle, as I understand him, wants to *justify* concern for one’s (best or complete) friends and concern for one’s family members (e.g., children and siblings) as cases of, or on the model of, self-love.”³⁹⁵ Now, no doubt Aristotle does appeal to the ways in which the virtuous person cares about herself to explain the ways in which the virtuous person should care about others. However, it would be a mistake to infer from this fact that the virtuous person cares about others *because* she cares about herself.³⁹⁶

The important thing to note here is that Aristotle carefully considers the ways in which self-concern and self-love may be said to be justified or deemed appropriate.³⁹⁷ That is, he does not simply take self-concern or self-love for granted. We see this most clearly in Aristotle’s discussion in Book IX.8 of the *EN*, where he claims that certain types of self-concern and self-love are justifiably reproached. Aristotle writes,

“Those who make self-love a matter for reproach ascribe it to those who award the biggest share in money, honors, and bodily pleasures to themselves. For these are goods desired and eagerly pursued by the many on the assumption that they are best. That is why they are also contested. Those who overreach for these goods gratify their appetites and in general their feelings and the nonrational part of the soul; and this is the character of the many. That is why the application of the term [‘self-love’] is

³⁹³ *EN* 1166a 1 – 14.

³⁹⁴ Also, see Book IX. 8 of the *EN*. Here, Aristotle writes, “for it is said that we must love most the friend who is most a friend; and one person is a friend to another most of all if he wishes goods to the other for the other’s sake, even if no one will know about it. But these are features most of all of one’s relation to oneself; and so too are all the other defining features of a friend, since we have said that all the features of friendship extend from oneself to others. All the proverbs agree with this too... For all these are true most of all in someone’s relations with himself, since one is a friend to himself most of all. Hence he should also love himself most of all.” *EN* 1168b 2-10.

³⁹⁵ Brink, David. “Rational Egoism, Self, and Others” (1993). P. 350. My italics.

³⁹⁶ On this point, Whiting writes, “in sum we need not read the eudaemonist axiom as requiring that all actions be performed ultimately for the sake of the agent’s own eudaimonia: for Aristotle’s account of *philia* shows how, given human nature, it is possible to act directly for the sake of another’s eudaimonia.” Whiting, Jennifer. “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” P. 302.

³⁹⁷ This is in contrast to the ways in which many philosophers have thought about the nature of self-concern. Jennifer Whiting writes, “the rationality of concern for oneself has been taken for granted by the authors of western moral and political thought in a way in which the rationality of concern for others has not.” Whiting, “Impersonal Friends”, P.3.

derived from the most frequent [kind of self-love], which is base. This type of self-lover, then, is justifiably reproached.”³⁹⁸

Now, given that Aristotle does not embrace all types of self-concern and self-love, this raises the question of what type of self-concern and self-love may be said to be appropriate for the virtuous person to have toward herself. Here, it seems to me – following Jennifer Whiting, *et alia* – that the proper grounds of self-love and self-concern, for Aristotle, are based on the content of one’s character.³⁹⁹ On such a view, one is justified in caring and loving oneself in relation to one’s goodness. If we take this view, then, from Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous person ought to love and care for others in the same manner in which she loves and cares for herself, it follows that she ought to love and care for others in relation to *their* goodness, and not because doing so in one’s own objective self-interest.⁴⁰⁰

There is evidence in Aristotle’s ethics that the virtuous person cares for and loves herself in relation to her goodness, and also that she cares for and loves others in relation to their goodness. One example of each case should suffice. In the *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle explicitly states that “the good man is a lover of good, not a lover of self; for he loves himself only, if at all, because he is good.”⁴⁰¹ This passage, no doubt, suggests that the virtuous person does not love herself simply because it is herself, but rather that she loves herself in relation to

³⁹⁸ EN 1168 b 17- 23. Whiting writes, “instead of taking the legitimacy of brute self-love for granted and seeking – as on rational egoist readings – to extend it to others, Aristotle argues in IX.8 that brute self-love is not justified.” Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” P. 291.

³⁹⁹ This point is argued for in Jennifer Whiting’s “Impersonal Friends” and to a lesser extent in her “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*.” Dennis McKerlie also shares the view that the virtuous person cares about herself and others in relation to their goodness. He writes, “the good man’s concern for himself depends on his awareness of the goodness of his thoughts and perceptions... His concern for the friend is bound up with his awareness of the goodness of his friend’s thoughts and perceptions. So there is a sense in which his self-concern and his friendship have the same basis. That is why it is appropriate to call the friend another self and to say that the good man cares about his friend’s existence in almost the same way that he cares about his own existence.” McKerlie, Dennis, “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s Ethics” P. 95-96. Cp. Kraut. He writes, “when Aristotle says that the ethically virtuous person loves himself, he thinks he can justify this statement by picking out that same part of the soul – practical understanding – as the one the good person loves. To love your *self* is to love your practical reason or to love it more than any other part.” Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, P. 128

⁴⁰⁰ While the source of love and concern for one’s self and for others is the same, there will no doubt be epistemological constraints on one’s ability to perceive the goodness of another’s character. For further discussion, see Whiting’s “Impersonal Friends” (1991). John Cooper writes that virtuous friends love one another “because of their good human qualities.” “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship”, P.320.

⁴⁰¹ *Magna Moralia* 1212 b 18-20. The authenticity of the *Magna Moralia* is defended by John Cooper in “The *Magna Moralia* and Aristotle’s Moral Philosophy (1973), in Anthony Kenny’s *The Aristotelian Ethics: A study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (1978), and in Christopher Rowe’s “A Reply to John Cooper on the *Magna Moralia*” (1975).

her goodness.⁴⁰² In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that “complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other *insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own right...* they have this attitude because of the friend himself, not coincidentally.”⁴⁰³ Here, Aristotle appears to be suggesting that we should wish-well and care for others, not simply because they happen to be our friends, but rather because of the goodness of their character. In this passage, I take it, it is the goodness of the friend’s character that justifies the virtuous person wishing the friend well, and not some other sort of reason such as that wishing the friend well might be good for the virtuous person’s own *eudaimonia*.

If we take Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous person cares about others in much the same way that she cares about herself, along with his claim that the virtuous person cares about herself in relation to her goodness, we get what I call the “argument from self-concern.” This argument may be simplified as follows:

P1: Other-concern is justified because it is sufficiently and saliently like self-concern.⁴⁰⁴

P2: Self-concern is justified based on the goodness of one’s own character.

C: Thus, other-concern is justified based on the goodness of the other’s character.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² McKerlie defends this view – viz., that the proper ground of self-concern is based on the goodness of one’s character – by examining 1170a 13 – 1170 b19 in the *EN*. He argues that Aristotle’s claim that “as his own being is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of the friend” suggests that “Aristotle seems to be saying that I value the friend’s existence almost as much as I value my own existence and that I value the friend’s existence in much the same way that I value my own existence. The earlier stages of the argument support this strong conclusion by claiming that self-love and friendship or love for another person has the same basis, recognition of the goodness of the thoughts and perceptions that constitute my own and the friend’s life.” McKerlie, “Aristotle and Egoism” P. 546.

⁴⁰³ *EN* 1056b 7-11. My italics. Aristotle writes that base people “who have done many terrible actions [and thus, possess a base character] hate and shun life because of their vice, and destroy themselves.” *EN* 1166b 11-13

⁴⁰⁴ It is important to note that the mere fact that Aristotle held premise one – i.e., that other-concern is justified because it is like self-concern – already suggests that Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom. For all rational egoists (with the exception of psychological egoists) take concern for others to be justified in a way in which self-concern is not. And, here, we find Aristotle explicitly saying that other-concern is justified because it is like self-concern. McKerlie writes, “we should care about the friend in virtually the same way, and *for the same reasons that we should care about ourselves*. This view conflicts with the claim that at the most fundamental level we only have reason to care about ourselves.” McKerlie, “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s Ethics” P. 100. (My italics).

⁴⁰⁵ Whiting writes, “once we accept his distinction between self love properly construed and self love as it is usually (but mistakenly understood), we are supposed to see an important sense in which self-love properly construed is *impartial*: insofar as self-love properly construed involves the virtuous person’s love for herself *qua* virtuous, and insofar as a genuinely virtuous agent will

In this argument, Aristotle clearly subscribed to premise one, as all parties to the debate accept.⁴⁰⁶ I hope to have shown that we have good reason to think that Aristotle held premise two: namely, that self-concern is justified based on the goodness of one’s character. Now, if this is true, the conclusion follows: viz., that other-concern is justified based on the goodness of the other’s character. Thus, in Book IX of the *EN* we have a reason for why we ought to care for others that is independent of the eudaimonist axiom. Indeed, it even appears to be in tension with it.⁴⁰⁷ For, according to the argument from self-concern, the virtuous person cares about others *not* because the virtuous person cares about herself, but rather because she cares about their *goodness*.⁴⁰⁸ On such an account, it is goodness – whether in one’s own character or in that of another’s – that explains why the virtuous person loves and cares for *both* others *and* herself in the manner that she does.⁴⁰⁹

The Anti-Maximization Argument

According to Vlastos, the eudaemonist axiom states that one’s own *eudaimonia* is the ultimate end of all of one’s actions in the sense that it is never chosen for the sake of any further end, and it is that for the sake of which all actions are primarily performed.⁴¹⁰ Thus, if Aristotle endorsed the eudaemonist

value virtue as such, the virtuous agent should love other virtuous agents in much the same way that she loves herself (*qua* virtuous).”Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” P. 293.

⁴⁰⁶ To be sure, I do not claim that the argument from self-concern proves that Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom. Rather, I present the argument from self-concern to show that we have good reason to think that he did not hold such an axiom.

⁴⁰⁷ For a defense of the view that these two justifications cannot both be primary motivations for the virtuous agent, see Jennifer Whiting’s “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*.” Here, she writes, “the idea that I should wish-well-to-another-for-her sake *qua* my own self-realization – or *because* doing so is a component of *my eudaimonia* – is not only morally, but also conceptually problematic. For to the extent that I do what I do *qua* self-realization, it seems that I fail to do it for *itself*. And I take Aristotle’s requirement that we choose virtuous actions for themselves, along with his requirement that we wish our friends well for *their* sakes, to be incompatible with the view that our primary reason for engaging in such activities is that doing so is a form of self-realization.” P. 297.

⁴⁰⁸ Whiting puts this point as follows. “as the virtuous agent’s attitude toward his friends derives from his attitudes toward himself, he will not love his friends because they are his “other selves” in the sense that they are simply like him: he will love them, as he loves himself, because they are *good*. Any likeness they bear to him is a mere sign of what really matters – namely their respective goodness.” Ibid., P. 291.

⁴⁰⁹ At this point, one might wonder *why* Aristotle appeals to self-concern to justify other-concern *if* it is the goodness of one’s character that justifies both self-concern and other-concern. In “Impersonal Friends”, Jennifer Whiting provides what I take to be a satisfactory response to such a question. She writes, “Aristotle no doubt begins with the virtuous person’s attitude toward herself partly for dialectical reasons: he thinks it uncontroversial that a person loves and wishes *herself* well for her own sake *if* she loves and wishes anyone well for her own sake at all.” Whiting, “Impersonal Friends” P. 14.

⁴¹⁰ Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. P. 203.

axiom as the proper way to organize our lives, then it follows that he thinks that one should always pursue one’s own good, come what may for others.⁴¹¹ Now, given that such an axiom has such a strong focus on the self, it seems that *if* Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, then, in all cases of conflict, we should expect to find Aristotle claiming that in such cases the virtuous person ought to pursue her own *eudaimonia*. However, I argue, this is not what we find in Aristotle’s ethics. That is, Aristotle does *not* always insist that in cases of conflict between one’s own *eudaimonia* and the *eudaimonia* of others one should always act in accordance with one’s *own eudaimonia*. For the sake of clarity, we may summarize this argument – what I refer to as the “anti-maximization argument” – as follows:

- (P1) If Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, then he would have insisted that one should always pursue one’s own good over the good of others in cases where they conflict.
- (P2) Aristotle does not insist that one should always pursue one’s own good over the good of others in cases where they conflict.
- (C) Therefore, Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom.

The plausibility of this argument, I take it, is dependent on two things: first, that the good of an individual and the good of another is capable of conflicting, and second, that in some such cases Aristotle does *not* insist that the virtuous individual ought to prefer her own well-being to that of another’s.⁴¹² For if Aristotle does not always insist that the virtuous person should prefer her own *eudaimonia* to the *eudaimonia* of others, then we will have strong grounds to doubt that Aristotle in fact held the eudaemonist axiom.

It is important to note that, thus far, I have simply taken it for granted that Aristotle thinks that the virtuous person’s *eudaimonia* and the *eudaimonia* of others are two distinct things that are capable of conflicting. However, given that the plausibility of the anti-maximization argument depends on the possibility of such a conflict, it is worth considering whether such a conflict *can* arise for Aristotle.⁴¹³ Now, demonstrating that it can – as we shall see – is no small task.

⁴¹¹ For if my *eudaimonia* and the *eudaimonia* of others may be said to conflict – according to the eudaemonist axiom – I should always pursue my own good over the good of others. To reiterate, this is because it is *my eudaimonia* that matters most, and it is my *own eudaimonia* that should be the ultimate end of all of my actions.

⁴¹² Recall, according to proponents of the self-absorption objection, the virtuous agent’s own *eudaimonia* or her own flourishing is distinct from acting well/virtuously and her conception of the human good. For if – as pointed out in the introduction – the virtuous agent understands her own *eudaimonia* essentially in terms of living in accordance the human good, then the self-absorption objection cannot really get off the ground. This is because one could easily go from “the virtuous agent acts virtuously ultimately for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*” to “the virtuous agent acts virtuously ultimately for the sake of the human good.” And, the latter, is not self-absorbed.

⁴¹³ Further, the plausibility of the self-absorption objection also rests on this possibility.

For it is not clear to what extent acting primarily for one’s own good may be said to conflict with the good of others.⁴¹⁴ This is because Aristotle thinks that what is ultimately good for an individual is very much intertwined with the good of others.⁴¹⁵ We see this most explicitly in Aristotle’s discussion of friendship, in which he states that it is good for the excellent person to labour “for his friends and for his native country, and ... die for them if he must.”⁴¹⁶ Here, I imagine that most contemporary ethicists would take it that dying prematurely in, say, a just war, would be a costly form of self-sacrifice, and hence contrary to what is in one’s own objective self-interest: one is *dying* after all. However, Aristotle holds that it is good for one to perform “a single fine and great action over many small actions.”⁴¹⁷ And, he notes that “this is presumably true of one who dies for others; he does indeed choose something great and fine for himself.”⁴¹⁸ Given these remarks, it is unclear whether Aristotle takes the courageous soldier, for example, to be sacrificing her own well-being for the well-being of others. That is to say it is unclear whether Aristotle thinks the soldier understands the pursuit of her own good and the good of others to be in conflict in such a scenario, and opts for the latter – *or* whether he takes the soldier to be simply pursuing her *own* good, and thinking that this requires that she fights valiantly, risking her life, come what may for others.

Now, it seems to me that there is no way to determine whether the virtuous person’s *eudaimonia* and the *eudaimonia* of others may be said to conflict, unless we begin to fill in in some detail what Aristotle takes to be good for an individual.⁴¹⁹ Now, precisely what Aristotle takes the individual good to consist in is a rich and complex issue, and one that has been thoroughly debated throughout the history of western philosophy. I in no way intend to resolve such a matter here. Instead, in what follows, I simply assume what I take to be a plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s basic account of the human good, as recently put forth by Richard Kraut.⁴²⁰ In doing so, I hope to show that we have

⁴¹⁴ By conflict, I mean A’s pursuit of her own maximal good has consequences that prevent B from pursuing as much good as she can.

⁴¹⁵ Recall Terence Irwin takes one of Aristotle’s main tasks in the *Ethics* to show how acting for the sake of others does not conflict with acting with one’s own good, and vice versa. He writes, “he [Aristotle] intends each virtue of character to aim at the fine, and therefore at the common good that the wise agent recognizes as part of her own good” Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*. P. 441.

⁴¹⁶ *EN* 1169a 19-20. He also claims that it is good for the virtuous individual to prefer “a year of living finely over many years of undistinguished [or a humdrum] life” *EN* 1169 a 24-26. Also see, Aristotle’s discussion of bravery where he states that the virtuous person will be “intrepid in facing a fine (premature) death.” *EN* 1115a 33-34.

⁴¹⁷ *EN* 1169a 25.

⁴¹⁸ *EN* 1169a 26-27.

⁴¹⁹ In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Kraut writes that there is “no way to determine whether the good of individuals can conflict, according to Aristotle, unless we attribute to him some view about what the good is.” Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. P. 82

⁴²⁰ One of the main reasons why I adopt Kraut’s interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of the human good here is because it is quite similar (I think) to the understanding of the human good

good reason to think that the good of the virtuous individual and the good of others *are* capable of conflicting. Once this is established, I then turn to such cases of conflict, and show that when they occur Aristotle does *not* insist that the virtuous individual ought to prefer her own good to the good of others, as those who endorse the eudaimonist axiom would have us believe. Rather, such cases are complex, and for Aristotle it is *prima facie* unclear in what sorts of situations the virtuous individual ought to prefer her own well-being to the well-being of others.⁴²¹ I conclude by suggesting that it is the virtue of justice – and not the eudaimonist axiom – that Aristotle seems to endorse in addressing such complex moral cases where one must choose whether to act with respect to one’s own *eudaimonia* or with respect to the *eudaimonia* of others.

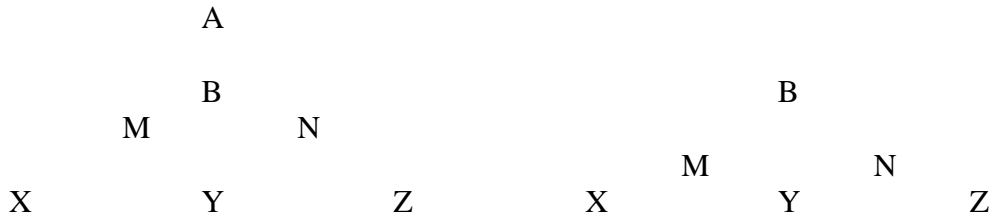
In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Richard Kraut argues that two accounts of the human good are present in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The first is a life that consists primarily of excellent contemplative activity, and the second is a life that consists primarily of excellent moral activity. He writes, “for the ultimate aim of human life, and the proper function of human beings, is to use reason well, and this goal can be reached in either one of two ways: ideally, by leading a philosophical life and making contemplation one’s highest aim; but if that option cannot be taken, then we do best by fully developing the practical virtues and exercising them on a grand scale, in the political arena.”⁴²² For Kraut, these two lives are to be structured hierarchically, and one’s *own eudaimonia* is to be understood in terms of activity in accordance with that which is at the top of the hierarchy. In the diagram below to the left, “A” is at the top of the hierarchy and represents excellent activity in accordance with contemplation and in the diagram below to the right, “B” is at the top of the hierarchy, and represents excellent activity in accordance with moral virtue.⁴²³ The middle rows (e.g., “B”, “M”, “N” in the first diagram, and “M” and “N” in second diagram) are those goods that are both intrinsically and instrumentally good, while the bottom row consists solely of conditional goods.

that proponents of the self-absorption attribute to Aristotle. And, it is important, I think, to try to address the proponents of the self-absorption objection (insofar as it is possible) on their own terms.

⁴²¹ Cf. Anne Baril’s view in “Virtue and Well-Being” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being* (2016). For Baril, the verdicts of virtue cannot ever, *ex hypothesi*, be said to negatively affect one’s own personal well-being. For Baril, “a trait is a virtue only if its verdictive judgments do not conflict with what the agent has sufficient reason to do, all things considered” and the standard for what one has sufficient reason to do, all things considered, is based on what promotes one’s own flourishing. Baril “Virtue and Well-Being” (2016). P. 243.

⁴²² Kraut, *Op. Cit.*, P. 7.

⁴²³ These models are taken from page 6 in Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good* (1989).



The important thing to note is that on *this* interpretation of Aristotle’s account of the human good, Aristotle takes a life of excellent contemplative activity to be better than a life of excellent moral activity.⁴²⁴ Recall Aristotle’s claim, in *EN* I.7, that the “human good proves to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one.”⁴²⁵ And, in *EN* X.7, he further refines his initial view and states that the best and most complete virtue is “the activity of study [or contemplation].”⁴²⁶

Having briefly laid out Aristotle’s account of the human good – as understood by Kraut – we can now turn to see whether it is possible for the good of an individual to conflict with the good of others. Here, Kraut writes,

“Consider another example: An old man is ill, and his son, a philosopher, is trying to decide what to do about it. If the son devotes himself to restoring his father’s health, he knows that he will have to give up a certain amount of philosophical activity, and this loss cannot be recovered; he does not think that if he gives up some time for theorizing now, he will as a result eventually have more time for this activity. Furthermore, his father is not a philosopher, and never will be; contemplation is not one of his activities.”⁴²⁷

In this example, if the son seeks to maximize his own *eudaimonia*, then he must pursue a life of contemplation and not help to restore his father’s health.⁴²⁸ This

⁴²⁴ N.B. Kraut goes further and claims that Aristotle’s treatment of happiness in Books I and X of the *EN* form an integrated whole, neither of which can be understood in terms of the other.

⁴²⁵ *EN* 1098a 17-19.

⁴²⁶ *EN* 1176a 16-17. According to Kraut, evidence for the view that Aristotle takes the superiority of a life of active contemplation over the life of active moral virtue is found in what he calls the “argument from divinity.” He takes Aristotle to hold the view that “nondivine lives are increasingly happy as they more closely approximate the life of the Gods.” [He continues] he [Aristotle] cannot accept this and at the same time hold that we should, for the sake of our happiness, contemplate less, in order to leave more room for ethical activity.” Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. P. 186. He takes such a view to be explicit in Book X.8 of the *EN*. Cp. Whiting. She writes, “Aristotle seems to model human on divine *eudaimonia*: he seems to think that human subjects – even those living primarily political lives – are more *eudaimon* the more their activities resemble those of the gods.” Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*.” (2008) P. 278.

⁴²⁷ Op cit. Kraut, P. 10.

⁴²⁸ *Ex hypothesi*, the son cannot do both.

follows from Aristotle’s account of the human good, which states that a life of contemplative activity is better than a life of moral activity.⁴²⁹ However, if the son partakes in such activity, the father’s own *eudaimonia* is negatively affected as a result of his son’s decision to pursue philosophy.⁴³⁰ This is because the father’s life is cut unnecessarily short, and thus he is unable to partake in excellent moral activity to the extent that he could have, had his son decided to help restore his father’s health.⁴³¹ In this example, it should be clear that what best promotes the son’s *eudaimonia* is in conflict with what best promotes the father’s *eudaimonia*, and we have a case in which one’s own *eudaimonia* and the *eudaimonia* of another directly conflict: either the son chooses to philosophize and promote his own *eudaimonia*, or he chooses to promote the *eudaimonia* of his father by helping to restore his father’s health. In either case, the pursuit of one goal precludes the pursuit of the other. Thus, we may conclude that, for Aristotle, the pursuit of one’s own good may be said to conflict with the good of others in *some* cases, and the first criterion for the plausibility of the anti-maximization argument above has been met.⁴³²

Now, if Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, then it is clear how the virtuous agent should respond in situations where there is a conflict between promoting one’s own *eudaimonia* and promoting the *eudaimonia* of others.⁴³³ In such cases, the eudaemonist axiom provides clear action guidance: the virtuous agent should simply pursue her own *eudaimonia*, and not act in accordance with the *eudaimonia* of others. However, when we turn to Aristotle’s text, I argue, this

⁴²⁹ Kraut claims that Aristotle holds the “value of contemplation thesis.” He writes, “this is not the weak claim that it would always be desirable to increase theoretical activity provided that this brings no loss in other goods. Rather Aristotle’s thesis is that it would always be desirable to change the mixture of goods in one’s life so that contemplation increases, even if the level of other goods decreases. The best way to improve a life is to add a greater amount of philosophical activity to it. In this sense, there is no limit to the value of theoretical activity; more is always better than less.” *Ibid.*, P. 11.

⁴³⁰ For Kraut, “interpersonal conflicts occur when the act that maximizes A’s good has consequences that prevent B from achieving as much good as he can” Kraut. *Ibid.*, P. 80.

⁴³¹ Here, one may object that moral virtue requires that the father gracefully refuse his son’s help, and insist that his son spend his time philosophizing. If this is the case, then the conflict would be apparent, but not real. However, for such an objection to hold, the good that comes about as a result of the father’s insistence that his son continues to philosophize, must be greater than the good that could have come about from the father’s otherwise ongoing excellent moral activity. And, we can imagine a case in which the father may be able to do *more* good, say, by promoting the contemplation of two others if his health is fully restored by his son.

⁴³² Cf. Philippa Foot writes, “happiness is not the universal aim of action. Brave people choose great and immediate evils, such as certain death, in order to rescue or defend others. And even in their choice of lives some reject happiness for the sake of some other goal.” Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness* (2001) P. 82.

⁴³³ Jonathan Lear writes “[This] is not a tragic choice. If we are genuinely in a position to choose, there is no question but that we should choose the contemplative life. There will be no basis for regret or remorse at having left the ethical life behind”. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* P. 313.

is *not* what we find.⁴³⁴ That is, Aristotle does not endorse such a simplistic method for dealing with such cases. Instead, Aristotle suggests that such matters are inherently difficult to address and by their very nature complex. Here, I introduce what I call the “argument from complexity.” It may be summarized as follows:

- (P1) Aristotle’s view on the extent to which one should be concerned with and promote one’s own *eudaimonia* is complex.
- (P2) The eudaemonist axiom is *not* complex.
- (C) Therefore, the eudaemonist axiom is not Aristotle’s view on the extent to which one should be concerned and promote one’s own *eudaimonia*.

In this argument, the second premise – which states that the eudaemonist axiom is not complex – is not meant to suggest that it is easy to determine what is in one’s own objective self-interest. Rather, “complex” is to be understood as being multi-faceted. Insofar as the eudaemonist axiom is primarily concerned just with one’s own *eudaimonia*, other considerations only enter into the deliberation of the virtuous agent in a secondary way.⁴³⁵

That Aristotle held premise one is clear from his discussion in Book IX.2. of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where he considers whether one ought to benefit a friend or an excellent person. Here, Aristotle rhetorically raises the following questions: “should you do a service for your friend rather than for an excellent person, and return a favour to a benefactor rather than do a favour for a companion, if you cannot do both?”⁴³⁶ Aristotle responds as follows: “surely it is not easy to define all of these matters exactly. For they include many differences of all sorts – in importance and unimportance, and in the fine and in the

⁴³⁴ In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Kraut argues that Aristotle’s discussion of ostracism (in Section 2.3) slavery (in Section 2.6) political power (in Section 2.4), and friendship (in Sections 2.8 to 2.16), all suggest that Aristotle’s virtuous agent does not aim to maximize her own *eudaimonia* come what may for others. Cp. Julia Annas. She writes, “it is also not surprising that ancient ethics ... never develops anything like the related consequentialist idea of a maximizing model of rationality... Rather, what I aim at is my living in a certain way, my making the best use of goods, and acting in some ways rather than others. None of these can sensibly be maximized by the agent. Why would I want to maximize my acting courageously, for example? I aim at acting courageously when it is required. I have no need, normally, to produce as many dangerous situations as possible, in order to act bravely in them.” Annas. *The Morality of Happiness*, P. 38.

⁴³⁵ Kraut writes, “the egoist ... has a simple formula: one should always treat others in ways that maximize one’s own good, never allowing their well-being to outweigh one’s own. All human relationships, no matter how diverse are to be regulated by this severe stricture. It is wrongheaded to impose this formula upon Aristotle’s writings, for his approach is to recognize and endorse the variety of ways in which we adjust our behaviour so that it is appropriate to the various relationships in which we find ourselves, or into which we voluntarily enter.” Op cit., Kraut, P. 112.

⁴³⁶ EN 1164b 25-27.

necessary.”⁴³⁷ Now, if Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, I contend, it would be reasonable to expect him to resolve such an issue by determining which one of the two actions would most promote the virtuous agent’s own *eudaimonia*, and then endorse said action. However, this is not what we find. In the example above, it seems that according to Aristotle, such conflicts are not capable of resolution by mere appeals to what best promotes one’s own *eudaimonia*. That is, the passage above suggests that the extent to which one should be concerned with and promote one’s own well-being, the well-being of friends, or the well-being of excellent individuals is a complex issue and one that is not easily resolved.⁴³⁸

If the conclusion above holds, that is, if Aristotle does not appeal to the eudaemonist axiom to address such cases of conflict, this raises the following question: does Aristotle provide us with any action guidance in cases where promoting one’s own well-being precludes us from promoting the well-being of others? On my reading, while Aristotle does not envisage any sort of clear decision procedure for addressing such cases, he *does* suggest– and here I follow Richard Kraut, Dennis McKerlie, *et alia* – that such cases of conflict are to be governed primarily by the virtue of justice.⁴³⁹ This view is most fervently defended by Richard Kraut. He writes,

“This brings me to the second feature of my interpretation: Aristotle rejects the view that when conflicts arise, neither person should give way to the other. That is he does not endorse the position that each should try to maximize his own good, come what may for others. For that will not be a just resolution of the conflict. Justice sometimes requires giving up a certain amount of a certain good, in order that others may also have their fair share of it. That does not provide us with a decision procedure for resolving conflicts, because there is no such formula, applicable to all situations, for deciding what a just solution to a conflict is. Sometimes one person should give way to another, and sometimes both should give way to some extent. But Aristotle would have no sympathy for the view that whenever such conflicts occur, each should maximize his own good, come what may for others. Nor does he endorse other simplistic ways of resolving conflicts: for example, choosing

⁴³⁷ EN 1164b 27-29.

⁴³⁸ In *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Kraut writes that the extent to which the virtuous individual should care and promote her own *eudaimonia* as well as the *eudaimonia* of others is a complicated matter and requires being attentive to a “great variety of considerations.” P. 111.

⁴³⁹ No doubt, in extremely complicated situations a good deal of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) will be required in order to act virtuously. McKerlie writes, “in the case of justice, if Aristotle is an egoistic eudaemonist we would expect him to say that a just action is noble and should be performed because of the contribution that the action would make to eudaimonia in the agent’s life.” McKerlie, “Friendship, Self-Love, and Concern for Others in Aristotle’s Ethics”, P. 88.

whichever act maximizes the total amount of contemplative activity in the world (or in one’s political community).”⁴⁴⁰

If Kraut is correct here, then we have two strong reasons for taking premise two in the anti-maximization argument above to be correct.⁴⁴¹ First, Aristotle’s view on the extent to which one should be concerned with and promote one’s own *eudaimonia* is complex, and is based on a number of considerations, whereas the eudaemonist axiom is based ultimately on one consideration. Second, in cases of conflict, where one must choose whether to act with respect to one’s own *eudaimonia* or with respect to the *eudaimonia* of others, Aristotle’s appeal to justice suggests that it is the virtue of justice – and not the eudaemonist axiom – that guides the virtuous agent’s deliberation in such matters. These two reasons, I take it, should lead us to seriously doubt whether Aristotle thought that the virtuous person ought to pursue her own *eudaimonia* in all of her actions, come what may for others.⁴⁴²

Conclusion

My main goal in this chapter has been to weaken the grip that the eudaemonist axiom has had on our understanding of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. More specifically, I hope to have shown not only that it is far from clear that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom, but also that there is a strong case to be made that he did not hold such a view.⁴⁴³ Now – and this is the crucial part – *if* Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom – or even if it is unclear whether he did – then we need not insist that neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation adopt the formal features of such a structure.⁴⁴⁴ To do otherwise would

⁴⁴⁰ Op cit., Kraut, P. 80. Kraut goes on to defend his view that Aristotle addresses such cases of conflict by the virtue of justice by turning to Aristotle’s discussion of ostracism (in Section 2.3) slavery (in Section 2.6) and political power (in Section 2.4).

⁴⁴¹ Viz., that Aristotle does not insist that one ought to always pursue one’s own good over the good of others.

⁴⁴² To be sure, there are no clear examples in Aristotle’s ethics in which he portrays the virtuous agent sacrificing her *eudaimonia* for the *eudaimonia* of others. I only hope to have shown that we have reasons to doubt that Aristotle thought that the virtuous agent always ought to pursue her own good, over the good of others.

⁴⁴³ Dennis McKerlie describes Aristotle’s account of moral motivation as a kind of “altruistic eudaimonism.” McKerlie, “Aristotle and Egoism.” P. 532. Jennifer Whiting describes Aristotle’s virtuous agent as sometimes taking “the *eudaimonia* of others as the ultimate end for the sake of which she acts in the sense that she aims at their *eudaimonia simply as such* (and *not* part of her own”). “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*.” P. 277. Richard Kraut describes the actions of Aristotle’s virtuous agent as “taking the good of that person as something that by itself provides a reason for action.” Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*. P. 79. All three of these philosophers reject attributing the eudaemonist axiom to Aristotle’s virtuous agent.

⁴⁴⁴ In other words, one can be a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist while rejecting the view that one’s ultimate motivation for acting morally is that doing so furthers one’s own objective self-interest. Put slightly differently, one can reject the second condition of the orthodox view of neo-

be to impose a limited and fixed view on what can count as a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation, one that cannot be justified by what we find in Aristotle’s texts. In the absence of such a constraint, the neo-Aristotelian may now reject the eudaemonist axiom altogether, and go on to develop an account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent without having to worry about how such an account might fit with the eudaemonist axiom.⁴⁴⁵ In other words, I have created the necessary conceptual space for a neo-Aristotelian account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent that is not grounded in the eudaemonist axiom. In the next chapter, I go on to provide just such an account.

Aristotelianism, namely, that the virtuous agent ought to organize her life in a way that is good *for* her.

⁴⁴⁵ Though we will have to examine how the underlying level of motivation fits with the occurrent level of motivation.

Chapter 5: An Altruistic Account of Motivation

“The good man is a lover of good, not a lover of self; for he loves himself only, if at all, because he is good.” (Aristotle, Magna Moralia 1212b)

Introduction

In chapter two, I argued that adequately addressing the self-absorption objection *in toto* requires more than simply providing a non-egoistic account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent.⁴⁴⁶ In addition, it requires – and this will be the central focus of this chapter – providing a non-egoistic account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent. To reiterate, the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent is a deeper-seated motivation that explains both (1) why an individual begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and (2) why an individual may be said to maintain such a disposition throughout his/her life. Having established in the previous chapter that a neo-Aristotelian need not adopt the formal features of Gregory Vlastos’ “eudaemonist axiom” – and thus need not adopt the orthodox view of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent – I now offer my own account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent: the altruistic account of motivation. The altruistic account of motivation states that the underlying reason for cultivating a virtuous disposition – and maintaining said disposition – is *ultimately because one appreciates and understands that the*

⁴⁴⁶ As emphasized in chapter 1, the “occurrent motivation” is what motivates the agent to act just before she or he acts; i.e., it captures her motive, as they say, “in the present.” E.g., if I see an empty glass bottle on the ground, and think to myself that picking up this bottle and putting it into a recycling bin is a good/appropriate thing to do, and this thought leads to my picking up the bottle and recycling it, then my finding it good/appropriate to recycle the bottle in this particular situation is my occurrent motivation. The occurrent motivation is often contrasted with the underlying or dispositional motivation of the virtuous agent, where the latter is understood as a deeper-seated motivation that explains both why an individual begins to cultivate such a disposition in the first place, and also why such an individual maintains that disposition to act in various ways. In the example above, it seems that in addition to the occurrent motivation, there must be some reason why I think that it is good or appropriate to recycle when I can do so, say, with general ease. Perhaps this is because I think that it is good to do my part for the environment or perhaps I think that to not recycle would be to act on a maxim that could not be universalizable, or perhaps I recycle simply because I see others whom I look up to and admire generally recycling. At any rate, the reason why I take recycling to be good/ appropriate may be said to form part of the underlying reason why I recycle, while the occurrent motivation is just what motivates me to act in the present. Now, no doubt, an individual can incorrectly identify her/his occurrent motivation as a result of, say, uncertainty, confusion or self-deceit. E.g., an individual in a physically abusive relationship may describe her occurrent motivation for staying with her partner because she loves him, but the actual occurrent motivation may very well be because she is in a co-dependent relationship or is afraid for her physical safety were she to leave, etc. In such a case, the occurrent motivation would be what actually (and not what she incorrectly thinks) motivates her at the time that she acts. For more on this distinction, see Chapter 1. The occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent that I have argued for and have adopted is “The Recognition View.” For more on the recognition view, see chapter three.

*human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues.*⁴⁴⁷

This chapter contains five sections. In the first section, I briefly explore the relationship between altruism and eudaimonism. I demonstrate that there is a sense in which eudaimonistic accounts of moral motivation may be said to be altruistic, and I explain the way in which the altruistic account of motivation I defend *is* altruistic. In the second section, I begin fleshing out my developmental account of how one acquires virtue in “the strict sense.”⁴⁴⁸ Here, I highlight the fact that nobody is simply born virtuous, and emphasize the important role that early moral education plays in the virtuous person’s upbringing. I argue that the “person on the road to virtue” – i.e., the one who goes on to acquire and maintain a virtuous disposition – prior to becoming virtuous, begins to reflect on the Socratic question not as someone uninterested in moral virtue, but as someone already in possession of natural virtue, and well on his way in acquiring virtue in the strict sense.⁴⁴⁹ In the third section, I lay out what I call the altruistic account of motivation. On this view, the person on the road to virtue cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition ultimately because she appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. On this account, such a motivation arises as a result of a self-reflective and epistemic inquiry in which the person on the road to virtue grapples with “the Socratic Question”: namely, how should one live?⁴⁵⁰ Here, it is important to note that the altruistic account of moral motivation is immune from the self-absorption objection because thoughts about one’s own *eudaimonia* are not what motivate one to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition.⁴⁵¹ As we shall see, while the motivation to become *truly*

⁴⁴⁷ One might wonder whether being virtuous on this account *necessarily* entails that one appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity. The short answer I give here is *yes*. On the account developed in this chapter, correctly situating moral virtue in one’s life and having a correct understanding of the human good is necessary for acquiring virtue in the strict sense. This is not to say, however, that such a robust understanding is required for the possession of natural virtue or that one cannot, say, act virtuously in wide number of situations without great insight into living well. I take such an insight to be no more difficult to acquire than is practical wisdom. For more on this point, see sections two and three below. For a defense of “Hard Virtue Theory”, see Part IV of Daniel Russell’s *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (2009). Further, one may also wonder whether one may be said to acquire the virtuous disposition and maintain said disposition from some motivation other than the one given here. This, no doubt, is a possibility. My aim in this chapter is simply to provide one such account that fits with the occurrent motivation developed in chapter three in order to provide a complete account of moral motivation that can address the self-absorption objection *in toto*.

⁴⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. David Ross. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998. EN 1144 b 16.

⁴⁴⁹ Throughout this chapter, I use the phrase “person on the road to virtue” to refer to the ideal individual who goes on to acquire virtue in the strict sense.

⁴⁵⁰ The “Socratic Question” is introduced by Bernard Williams. See, Williams’ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. P 1-2.

⁴⁵¹ On the altruistic account developed below, the fact that cultivating a virtuous disposition – in typical circumstances – may be said to promote one’s own *eudaimonia*, does not provide any

virtuous does arise from a reflection regarding what type of life one should lead, one does not cultivate or maintain a virtuous disposition because one thinks that doing so is good for oneself, but *ultimately* because one appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity. As we saw in chapter two, while some argue that the virtuous agent is ultimately motivated to act virtuously in part because such a disposition is good *qua* human goodness, nobody suggests that such an individual first cultivates and then maintains a virtuous disposition *simply* because doing so is good *qua* human goodness. This is one important way that my account differs from accounts that cash out the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent *both* in terms of human goodness *and* agent benefit.⁴⁵²

In the fourth section, I go on to show that we find the seeds for the altruistic account of motivation in Book I.7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. That is, the altruistic account of motivation may be understood as arising naturally from a particular reading of Aristotle’s function argument, and in this sense may be understood as “Aristotelian.” To be clear, my goal in this section is not to argue that Aristotle actually held the altruistic account of motivation. My point is rather that such an account, is, we might say, “Aristotelian in spirit”; i.e., broadly based on a particular – and I think plausible – reading of Aristotle’s function argument. In the final section, I conclude by bringing my account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent developed in chapter three – the Recognition View – together with the altruistic account of motivation developed in this chapter. Here, my aim is to show how the two accounts may be said to fit together in order to provide a unified account of moral motivation that is capable of addressing the self-absorption objection in *toto*.

5.1. Altruism and Eudaimonism

Describing a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation as “altruistic” may strike some Aristotelians and neo-Aristotelians as questionable or wrong-headed. A number of them reject the idea of describing Aristotle’s ethical theory, and, in particular, his account of motivation, using such a term. For many, this is

independent justification or rationale for cultivating such a disposition. Put slightly differently, that cultivating such a character may be said to promote one’s own personal well-being is generally a consequence, and not something that either justifies or motivates such cultivation of character. Some Aristotelians may think, and on good textual grounds, that this is too strong. As will be made clear below, in adopting the “Traditional Conception of Practical Reason” here, simply understanding and recognizing that such a disposition is good *qua* human good, is sufficient to motivate one to cultivate the virtuous disposition. No further thoughts are necessary.

⁴⁵² See, for example chapters 8 and 9 in Hursthouse’s *On Virtue Ethics*, (1999). So long as the ultimate reason for cultivating and maintaining the moral virtues is explained in terms of agent benefit *and* human goodness – and nothing is said regarding the extent to which each plays in one’s motivations – such an account cannot adequately address the self-absorption objection. Put slightly differently, so long as one’s own *eudaimonia* is understood, in part, as what is good for the agent, and the virtuous agent ultimately acts for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*, the self-absorption objection stands.

not so much because his theory is better described as “egoistic,” but rather because the terms “egoism” and “altruism” are inappropriate given the alleged conceptual framework held by the majority of ancient Greeks.⁴⁵³ More specifically, there appear to be two main objections to describing Aristotle’s ethics and his account of motivation as “altruistic.”⁴⁵⁴ First, there is the objection that Aristotle – along with the majority of ancient Greeks – did not understand one’s own good *in opposition to* the good of others. And, second, there is the objection that the two “main ways” in which the term “altruism” is used today do not apply to the complex nature typical of eudaimonistic frameworks. With respect to the first, Kelly Rogers writes:

“We encounter a different problem with the altruistic construal, stemming from the fact that altruism, like egoism, is grounded in a conflict model of ethics, which would have been quite alien to most Greeks. On this model, the self-interest of different people is in conflict, which morality must resolve. The altruist places greater moral value on others’ good, so that in cases of conflict, he feels morally obligated to forgo his own. The egoist takes self-good as the standard, and rather gives himself preference. Both theories as traditionally conceived agree that ethics is a zero sum game.”⁴⁵⁵

For Rogers, any description of a neo-Aristotelian account of motivation as “altruistic” – or even “egoistic” – relies on a “conflict-model of ethics” that she claims the ancient Greeks, including Aristotle, simply did not hold. As a result, Rogers insists that we are better off jettisoning such terms to describe ancient ethical theories because they tend to obscure Aristotle’s account of moral motivation, instead of revealing or illuminating it.

Though I do not have space to defend the claim here, I think that Rogers underestimates the extent to which conflict between one’s own good and the good of others arose for the ancient Greeks, and, further, does not fully appreciate the way in which morality, for the ancient Greeks, had as one of its central aims to shed light on the extent to which an individual ought to be concerned with promoting the good of others or the city-state, sometimes at the expense of one’s

⁴⁵³ As Julia Annas reminds us, “the Cyrenaics alone among ancient schools rejected the importance of one’s life as a whole for one’s ethical perspective.” Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, P. 230.

⁴⁵⁴ Aside, of course, from those who think that Aristotle’s account of moral motivation is best described as “egoistic.”

⁴⁵⁵ Rogers, Kelly. “Aristotle on Loving Another for his Own Sake” (1994) P. 294. Cf. Nicholas White, who goes even further than Rogers, and describes Aristotle as a fusionist. White argues that the ancients did not tend to distinguish their own individual good from the social or collective good, and thus that the various goods are “fused” together. For more on this view, see White’s *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics* (2002).

own good.⁴⁵⁶ The view that the ancient Greeks thought that one’s own good and the good of others could and sometimes did conflict is defended most fervently by Julia Annas. She writes, “the idea that individuals will tend to be in a state of conflict, particularly over things like money, and power, and that when I think of my good I am likely to oppose it to yours and think of us as being in competition (rather than to sink our apparent competition in the joint achievement of some larger good), was obviously as prominent in the ancient world as it is nowadays.”⁴⁵⁷ Here, it seems to me that Annas maintains the more plausible of the two positions.⁴⁵⁸ That said, regardless of what particular view Greek popular morality held, or the majority of ancient Greek philosophers maintained, it seems to me that Aristotle *did* think that one’s own good and the good of others do in fact conflict, and sometimes that the virtuous person must choose whether to promote one’s own *eudaimonia* or the *eudaimonia* of others, but cannot choose both.⁴⁵⁹

Second, in *The Morality of Happiness*, Julia Annas argues that the term “altruism” has “been defined in terms of modern debates which do not apply in ancient ethics.”⁴⁶⁰ More specifically, she claims that there are two common uses of the term “altruism,” neither of which fit the eudaimonistic framework.⁴⁶¹ She writes that “in one use, it implies merely that one gives the interests of others some weight for their own sake and not instrumentally... [and] in another use, “altruism” is used for the disposition to put the interests of others *before* one’s own, to be self-sacrificing.”⁴⁶² Further, for Annas, the eudaimonistic framework does not lend itself to such sharp and crass distinctions. Recall, as we saw in chapter two, that for Annas, “virtue and flourishing are both central in it [a virtuous person’s account of *eudaimonia*], but neither is a basis or foundation from which other parts of the theory can be derived, nor do they jointly form such a foundation. Rather, the theory is holistic in structure; the different parts are mutually supportive.”⁴⁶³ Thus, to say that the virtuous person’s actions are altruistic – understood either in terms of attributing a bit of “non-instrumental status” to others or in the self-sacrificing sense – would be to miss the way in

⁴⁵⁶ Such a defense is provided by Julia Annas in “Prudence and Morality in Ancient and Modern Ethics (1995). Also, see chapter two of Richard Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good*. (1989).

⁴⁵⁷ Annas, “Prudence and Morality in Ancient and Modern Ethics” (1995) P. 246.

⁴⁵⁸ The examples to draw from are many. One should suffice. In Plato’s *Republic*, one of the central questions that Socrates directly takes up is whether acting justly is both good for oneself as well as good for others. Recall, the story of the Ring of Gyges laid out by Glaucon is meant to illuminate the majority view that what is truly good for oneself is not acting justly, but being able to act unjustly with impunity.

⁴⁵⁹ For a defense of such a view, see the “Anti-maximization Argument” laid out in the previous chapter.

⁴⁶⁰ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, P. 225.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, P. 225.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, P. 225.

⁴⁶³ Annas, Julia, *Intelligent Virtue*, (2011) P. 2-3.

which the well-being of at least some others makes up part of virtuous person’s account of what it means to live well.

In response to Annas, two points might be made. First, it seems that somewhere in between Annas’ two usages of the term “altruism” – the first in which the other individual is given just a bit of non-instrumental weight for his/her own sake, and the second in which the other individual is given *all* the weight on a particular matter, and which requires some sort of “selflessness” – lies a third common usage.⁴⁶⁴ The third usage, as I understand it, denotes cases in which one acts virtuously *primarily* because of the goodness of the act itself, where one understands what makes the act good *not* in terms of the well-being of the agent performing the action.⁴⁶⁵ Perhaps an example may help to illuminate the differences between Annas’ two usages, and my own. In Annas’ first usage, an individual may be said to be altruistically motivated insofar as she is not exclusively motivated by her own well-being – though the majority of her concern does rest with herself – and gives some minimal weight to others for their own sake. So, for example, such an individual may give to, say, Oxfam, almost entirely because, say, doing so makes her feel good, but also a bit because she realizes that her generosity will help others. In Annas’ second usage, an individual may be said to be altruistically motivated so long as she acts exclusively for the sake of others, with absolutely no concern for how her actions may be said to affect her own well-being. Here, for example, such an individual may, say, give money to Oxfam thinking entirely of the destitute, and perhaps be inclined to write a check so large that she can no longer meet her own needs of subsistence. In such a case, such an individual may be said to put the needs of others *entirely* before her own. Finally, on the third usage, an individual may be said to be altruistically motivated so long as she is *primarily* concerned about the goodness of the act itself, where one understands what makes the act good not in terms of the well-being of the agent performing the action. In such a case, while an individual may exhibit some degree of self-referential thoughts when acting virtuously, such thoughts cannot be the major determinant of her actions. Returning to the Oxfam example, such an individual may be said to give to Oxfam primarily because of the goodness of the

⁴⁶⁴ To be fair to Annas, much has changed in contemporary moral philosophy since 1993 when Annas stated that there were only two “common usages” of the term altruism. I take this third usage to be an amenable addendum to the two distinctions she notes above.

⁴⁶⁵ No doubt, it is true that both egoistic accounts of moral motivation and altruistic accounts of moral motivation may be said to describe the reason why their respective agents act as “acting simply for the sake of the good”, or “because of the goodness of the act itself.” However, as emphasized in chapter three, this cannot be the whole story. At this point, the following question immediately comes to mind: what does it mean to act because of the goodness of the act itself? How *this* question is answered determines whether the motivation is altruistic or egoistic. An altruistic account must deny that what ultimately makes such an act good is the flourishing of the agent performing the act. That is, for an account to be altruistic, the type of goodness involved, *ex hypothesi*, cannot be self-regarding. This is what makes it altruistic. We may contrast this with the egoist, who may also take herself to be acting simply because the act is good, but, to be sure, she understands “good” as something akin to “good or beneficial *for me*” in a narrow sense.

act itself – understood in non self-referential terms, such as the recipients of her generous actions – but also, though to a lesser extent, because doing so is in one’s own self-interest.⁴⁶⁶

Now, even though the virtuous person’s substantive account of *eudaimonia* includes the well-being of various others, the question still remains whether the virtuous person ultimately acts in accordance with her conception of *eudaimonia* for the sake of her own living well or for some other sort of reason.⁴⁶⁷ That is, even if the virtuous person understands her happiness in terms of promoting the well-being of others for their own sake, we may ask whether she promotes the good of others ultimately because it is good for her, or because it is good simpliciter, or good for others, or for some other reason. On Annas’ account – and according to others who also adopt what I have called the orthodox reading of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation – the underlying reason why the virtuous person acts virtuously is that doing so is constitutive of her own *eudaimonia*. However, on the account I develop below, the ultimate reason why the virtuous person acts in accordance with her conception of *eudaimonia* is *not* because she regards doing so as good *for her*. Rather, it is because of the goodness that she perceives in living in such a way, where what makes living in such a way good is understood not in terms of her own well-being, but *solely* based on what it means to live well *qua* human: i.e., human nature.⁴⁶⁸ And so, if we take what I have called the third common usage of the term “altruism”, and apply it to the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent, we may ask the following: is the

⁴⁶⁶ Here, one may wonder whether I take Annas’ two usages of the term “altruism” and my own usage to be different in terms of kind or degree. In short, the answer is degree. That is, the third understanding of being altruistically motivated I introduce above is meant to convey *greater* concern for others than merely “some” – say a drop in a large bucket – concern for others, though *less* concern than being entirely motivated by the well-being of others alone. Now, while “acting with *some* regard for others for their own sake”, no doubt, includes “acting *primarily* for others for their own sake, on my reading, I take Annas to understand the former as a minimal amount of concern for others for their own sake. Here, I think it is imperative to be more precise just how much concern for others for their own sake we have in mind when describing their motivations as altruistic. This type of clarity, I take it, is what is required to adequately address the self-absorption objection. Recall Hurka writes that “it would be going much too far to say that a virtuous person cannot be motivated at all by thoughts of his own virtue. He can have as one motive in acting for others’ benefit that he will thereby act virtuously, so long as this is a secondary motive. His primary motive, if he is truly virtuous, must be a desire for the others’ good for its own sake.” Hurka, Thomas. “The Three faces of Flourishing.” (1999) P. 67.

⁴⁶⁷ Though the virtuous person’s substantive conception of *eudaimonia* will include the well-being of others for their own sake, we may still ask whether the virtuous person adopts such a conception of the good life because she thinks that doing so is in her best interest – i.e., because it is her best chance of living well – or because she thinks that such a life is worth living independent of how it may be said to affect her own personal well-being. While the virtuous person’s actions in such a case, *ex hypothesi*, cannot be substantively egoistic, it may still be formally egoistic if the virtuous person adopts such a conception of *eudaimonia* because doing so is ultimately good for her. For more on the distinction between “substantive egoism” and “formal egoism”, see the introduction and chapter one.

⁴⁶⁸ There will be more on this to follow in sections two and three below.

virtuous person’s underlying motivation altruistic? Does such an individual cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition primarily because of the goodness of the disposition itself, where what makes the disposition good is understood not in terms of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*? If the answer here is “yes”, then it seems to me that we have an account of moral motivation that rightly deserves the label “altruistic.”⁴⁶⁹

Going forward, in arguing that the virtuous individual cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition for altruistic reasons, I do not mean that such an individual is characteristically or generally self-sacrificing (as Rogers and the second usage of the term distinguished by Annas might suggest) or that such an agent gives the well being of others just a bit of non-instrumental weight (such as understood in Annas’ first usage).⁴⁷⁰ Rather, what I have in mind is that such an individual cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition *simply* because it is good, where such goodness is understood in a way that makes no direct reference to the agent’s own flourishing.⁴⁷¹ This is in sharp contrast with the views outlined in chapter two. For Annas, Lebar, and Toner the last reason that one can give for acting virtuously is understood in terms of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*. And, they – following the orthodox understanding of neo-Aristotelianism – embrace a conception of *eudaimonia* where it is “two things at once: it is the final end for practical reasoning, and it is a good human life for the one living it.”⁴⁷² The account I develop below rejects this second condition – namely that Aristotelian eudaimonism must be understood in terms of being a good human life for the one living it – on what I take to be good textual grounds.⁴⁷³ Hoping to have said just enough to address what I take to be the relationship between eudaimonism and altruism, I now turn to the second section.

5.2. Early Moral Education and Natural Virtue

Before I present my account of why the person on the road to virtue cultivates a virtuous disposition, it is important to note that much happens in an

⁴⁶⁹ Given the prevalence of the term in today’s parlance – along with the fact that dialogue between various normative ethical theories and other fields, such as psychology, is generally encouraged – it would be unfortunate to have to jettison the term “altruism” unless doing so really did obscure matters instead of illuminating them. I insist that we are better off preserving such a term.

⁴⁷⁰ See section three below for precisely how the virtuous agent understands the well-being of others in relation to her own good.

⁴⁷¹ Once again, precisely the way in which the self features in the altruistic account of moral motivation advanced here will be made clear in sections 2 and 3 below.

⁴⁷² Russell, Daniel, “Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. P. 14.

⁴⁷³ For more on these grounds, see chapter four. It is also important to note that my account differs from accounts like McDowell’s insofar as on my account, the virtuous agent’s conception of living well is *not* the same thing as what is good *for* the virtuous agent. On my view – and the account of the human good I hold (as laid out by Kraut in the previous chapter – the virtuous agent’s conception of living well and what is good for the virtuous agent can come apart.

individual’s life before she/he begins to consider the “Socratic Question”: viz., what type of life should I live? That is, we all enter into this world as infants who grow up in a particular society, get raised by a specific family/guardian(s), experience a certain type of upbringing, develop particular habits, and come to hold various views before we are in a position to meaningfully consider what type of life we wish to lead. While this point, may, *prima facie*, seem trivial, it seems to me that situating the virtuous individual as someone who has had a particular type of upbringing can help to illuminate why the person on the road to virtue goes on to cultivate a virtuous disposition.⁴⁷⁴ With this end in mind, I ask the following: what type of upbringing is characteristic of the virtuous individual, such that she finds herself in a position to acquire – and *does* go on to acquire – virtue in the strict sense?⁴⁷⁵

It seems that a central part of the virtuous person’s upbringing – as Aristotle notes – includes what we might call “early moral education.”⁴⁷⁶ He writes that the good candidate for virtue experiences a good moral upbringing, one which makes her character “suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful.”⁴⁷⁷ Now, while Aristotle does not spell out exactly what type of early moral education is involved here, whatever it is, it is clear that it enables one to acquire natural virtue. This, I take it, is no trivial point. For it provides us with a specific starting point from which we may then situate the person on the road to virtue as entering into the Socratic question not as

⁴⁷⁴ Here, I follow the lead of Hursthouse, Baier, and more recently Annas, *et alia*, who all encourage us to examine the ways in which virtue is acquired throughout one’s life as opposed to just how it appears in mature moral agents. Annas writes, “understanding the process of ethical education is a part of virtue ethics... we cannot understand what virtue is without coming to understand how we acquire it.” Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, P. 21.

⁴⁷⁵ To be clear, the upbringing described below is *not* necessary for acquiring virtue in the strict sense. It is intended to situate the virtuous individual (prior to becoming virtuous) as an individual with a typical sort of upbringing, one which makes her character suitable for acquiring virtue in the strict sense. No doubt, someone who takes acting morally as only instrumentally good – as Glaucon tells us Gyges did – will enter into the Socratic question from a very different vantage point than the naturally virtuous person who acts morally and takes pleasure in doing so. The state of one’s character prior to entering the Socratic question will influence how one chooses to live.

⁴⁷⁶ By “early moral education”, I have in mind the type of education that one typically experiences as a child or adolescent before one is capable of deliberating meaningfully about what type of life one wishes to lead. “Early moral education” is distinct from actually learning to cultivate the virtues in the strict sense. In the former case, Aristotle does not have much to say, but with respect to the latter he does have a specific view regarding how we become virtuous. He writes, “so too is it with the virtues; by abstaining from pleasures we become temperate, and it is when we have become so that we are most able to abstain from them; and similarly too in the case of courage; for by being habituated to despise things that are fearful and to stand our ground against them we become brave, and it is when we have become so that we shall most be able to stand our ground against them.” Aristotle, *EN*, 1104a (35-41).

⁴⁷⁷ *EN* 1179b 30-32. Without such an early childhood upbringing, the likelihood of an individual becoming virtuous is greatly diminished.

disinterested in virtue, but as already naturally virtuous; i.e., in possession of “natural virtue.”⁴⁷⁸

To possess “natural virtue”, I take it, is to generally speaking act and emote in accordance with the moral virtues. For example, a child with natural virtue may be said to, say, share her toys with her classmates, be pained if she witnesses a bully bothering her younger brother on the playground, be respectful to her parents and teachers, and emote correctly while doing all of the above (e.g., she may experience pleasure in sharing her toys, believing, in some sense, that she is acting well). Further, if someone tries to test her character by encouraging her to do something that she takes to be wrong, she will, generally speaking, refuse or be reluctant.⁴⁷⁹ To be sure, while such an individual characteristically acts and emotes in accordance with moral virtue, she does not possess virtue in the strict sense, in part because she does not possess practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Now, precisely what practical wisdom is for Aristotle is a deeply interesting philosophical question, but one that we need not consider here.⁴⁸⁰ However practical wisdom is to be understood, I take it to be clear that the naturally virtuous person does not possess two important and necessary aspects of it. First, such an individual is going to lack sufficient life experience for applying the moral virtues correctly to more delicate and complex situations.⁴⁸¹ And, second, such an individual does not fully understand *why* a particular moral virtue *is* a moral virtue.⁴⁸² That is, a naturally virtuous individual does not fully see why a particular virtue is necessary for living well – understood either in relation to her

⁴⁷⁸ Julia Annas puts this point as follows “it is crucial to bear in mind that by the time we reflect about virtues, we already have some.” Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, P. 10.

⁴⁷⁹ Aristotle writes, “as we have said, then, someone who is to be good must be finely brought up and habituated, and then must live in decent practices, doing base actions neither willingly nor unwillingly.” *EN* 1180a 15-17.

⁴⁸⁰ That practical wisdom is required for the possession of virtue in the strict sense I take for granted. For one recent defense of such a view, see Rachana Kamtekar’s “Ancient Virtue Ethics: An Overview with An Emphasis on Practical Wisdom” (2013). This is not to say that there is not a primitive form of practical wisdom in the naturally virtuous agent. As Christine Korsgaard writes “as I understand it, there is already a primitive form of practical wisdom built into the passions of the naturally virtuous person; the result of habituation is to refine it, and the result of intellectual training is to render it articulate.” Korsgaard, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble.” P. 235 in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics* (1996). For an alternative account, see McDowell’s “Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle’s Ethics” (1996).

⁴⁸¹ Aristotle writes, “what has been said is confirmed by the fact that while young men become geometers ... and wise in matters like these, it is thought a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found.” *EN*, 1142a13-15.

⁴⁸² Aristotle writes, “presumably, then, we ought to begin from things known to us. That is why we need to have been brought up in fine habits if we are to be adequate students of fine and just things, and of political questions generally. For we begin from the belief that something is true; if this is apparent enough to us, we can begin without us knowing why it is true. Someone who is well brought up has the beginnings or can easily acquire them. Someone who neither has them nor can acquire them should listen to Hesiod. ‘He who grasps everything himself is best of all; he is noble also who listens to one who has spoken well; but he who neither grasps it himself nor takes to heart to what he hears from another is a useless man.’” *EN* 1095b 4-13.

own eudaimonia or in terms of what it means to live well *qua* human – and thus will not be able to fully appreciate and understand why the action she performs is central to living well.⁴⁸³

To say that the naturally virtuous person does not fully know or understand the connection between the moral virtues and living well, is, I take it, to leave open precisely what motivates the naturally virtuous agent to act virtuously. While Aristotle certainly does tell us that the virtuous agent acts for the sake of the *kalon*, he does not specify why the naturally virtuous agent acts virtuously. Here, regardless of what specifically motivates the naturally virtuous to act, given that such an individual’s character may be described as “naturally virtuous”, it is safe to suppose that such an individual may be said to act from “habit.”⁴⁸⁴ Now, one may wonder in more precise terms – i.e., more than broad appeals to the virtuous person’s upbringing – how the naturally virtuous agent comes to act virtuously from habit. At this point, it seems that cultivating natural virtue in younger children may require a wide array of different strategies, and there may very well be no one central way to inculcate natural virtue in children or adolescents. For some, a particular type of rewards/punishment system may be appropriate, for others, self-referential appeals may do the trick – e.g., “how would you feel if your younger brother said hurtful things *to you*?” – And, perhaps for others, simply surrounding them with good moral exemplars may go a long way in inculcating natural virtue in them.⁴⁸⁵ Regardless of the precise strategy adopted in inculcating natural virtue in the person on the road to virtue, the central point that I wish to emphasize is that when such an individual begins to reflect on the “Socratic Question” she is already on the road to virtue in the strict sense. Hoping to have said just enough to help situate the person on the road to

⁴⁸³ No doubt, there is much more that could be said here to distinguish natural virtue from virtue in the strict sense. My point in this section is simply to emphasize the fact that prior to deciding what type of life the person on the road to virtue chooses to live, she already possesses natural virtue. To be clear, I do not intend to collapse important aspects of virtue in the strict sense into virtue in the natural sense. There is an important difference here. Aristotle writes, “but if someone acquires understanding, he improves his actions; and the state he now has, though still similar [to the natural one], will be fully virtue.” *EN* 1144b5 14-17. And just before that he remarks, “just as a heavy body moving around unable to see suffers a heavy fall because it has no sight, so it is with virtue. [A naturally well-endowed person without understanding will harm himself].” *EN* 1144b 12-13. For a general overview of the importance of practical wisdom to moral virtue, see Rachana Kamtekar’s “Ancient Virtue Ethics: An Overview with An Emphasis on Practical Wisdom” (2013). She writes, “wisdom cannot be optional for virtue if it is supposed to be the way we ourselves can bring it about that we live well rather than badly; the real question is, what is the content of practical wisdom?” P. 48.

⁴⁸⁴ Though precisely what led to the establishment of such a habit is unclear. Here, by “habit” I mean “a pattern of goal-directed cognitive activity.” Bargh, John A., Peter M. Gollwitzer, A. Lee-Chair and Kimberly Barndollar, and R. Trotschel. “The Automated Will: Nonconscious Activation and Pursuit of Behavioral Goals.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81 (2001.) P. 1016. For more on this understanding of habit, see chapter three.

⁴⁸⁵ I take it that anyone who has some experience working with and raising children or young adolescents will know all too well that there is no “one size fits all” or one particular method for getting children and adolescents to act and emote well.

virtue who is reaching the “entry point of ethical reflection”, I now turn to the question of why the person on the road to virtue goes on to cultivate a virtuous disposition.⁴⁸⁶

5.3. An Altruistic Account of Moral Motivation

For many of us, there comes a point in our life where we begin to seriously reflect on the type of life that we are currently living, and begin to critically evaluate our plans, projects, goals, and values, in light of possible alternatives. This is what Julia Annas refers to as the “entry point of ethical reflection”, and it is here that I begin laying out my account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent.⁴⁸⁷ Now, what is characteristic of ancient ethical theories – and what I take to be a particularly attractive feature of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical theories – is that they all adopt a eudaimonistic framework, which requires individuals to view and aim to make sense of their life as an *integrated* whole.⁴⁸⁸ Such a framework (or a good one anyway) must be internally consistent and needs to be structured in such a way that our various ends may be said to fit together, and, in the event that conflict arises, it can be addressed or resolved in a

⁴⁸⁶ It may be worth pointing out that situating the virtuous agent (prior to becoming virtuous) as already “on the road to virtue” differs from the ways in which other virtue ethicists – such as Rosalind Hursthouse and Julia Annas – describe the motivations and character of the virtuous individual prior to her deciding to cultivate the moral virtues. For Hursthouse and Annas, certain sorts of justifications and motivations are lacking in the individual who is deciding whether to cultivate the virtuous disposition, and, in some cases, various sorts of justifications in terms of one’s own self-interest may be necessary in order to get such an individual to begin to cultivate a virtuous disposition. Recall that in Annas’ earlier work, a self-interested motivation is present in the individual when she first decides to cultivate the moral virtues, whereas for Hursthouse a self-interested justification is needed to get the virtuous individual (prior to becoming virtuous) to initially cultivate a virtuous disposition, but then plays no role in the mature agent’s motivation to act virtuously. For more on these views, see chapter two. On the account of early moral education I lay out above, the person on the road to virtue, prior to deciding whether to cultivate the moral virtues, already takes pleasure in, and is motivated toward, being virtuous and doing the right thing.

⁴⁸⁷ Annas describes the entry point of ethical reflection as follows. She writes, “it is the agent’s reflection on her life as a whole, and the relative importance of her various ends.” Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*. P. 11.

⁴⁸⁸ As Julia Annas reminds us, “the Cyrenaics [are] alone among ancient schools [who] rejected the importance of one’s life as a whole for one’s ethical perspective” Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, P. 230. It is important to distinguish “eudaimonistic frameworks” which are conceptual models that enable individuals to think and structure their lives as a whole, and substantive conceptions of *eudaimonia*, which attempt to provide a particular formulation of living well or happiness. This characteristic feature of eudaimonistic ethical theories may be understood in contrast to various other ethical theories – some of the Kantian variety – that insist that we must view the world from various different viewpoints in order to make sense of our lives and the world. See, for example Kant’s “Two Standpoints” in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

principled way.⁴⁸⁹ As Aristotle writes, “all things considered, everyone who has the power to live according to his own choice should set up for himself some object for a noble life – whether honour, or reputation, or wealth or culture – Since not to have one’s life organized with reference to some end is a mark of great folly.”⁴⁹⁰ What follows from this eudaimonistic approach, I take it, is that the central question of this chapter – viz., “why does the person on the road to virtue cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition?” – must be situated against the backdrop of the type of life the virtuous agent decides to live because her answer to the former will be deeply intertwined with her answer to the latter.⁴⁹¹

So, what type of life does the person on the road to virtue choose to live? Here, it should come as no surprise that the person on the road to “virtue” does not choose to live a life of simple pleasures, honour, wealth, or contemplation, but rather chooses to live a life in accordance with moral virtue. Now, one important feature of my account here – in keeping with neo-Aristotelian tradition – is just how closely related (1) choosing to live a life in accordance with moral virtue is with (2) cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition. Here, part of what it means to live a life in accordance with moral virtue, entails a commitment to cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition, and in order to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition, one must choose to live a life in accordance with moral virtue. Thus, (1) and (2) are deeply intertwined.⁴⁹²

Having situated the central question of this chapter against the backdrop of the type of life the person on the road to virtue chooses to live, I now turn to the main question of this chapter: why does the person on the road to virtue cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition? To this, I respond by presenting what I call the “altruistic account of motivation.” On this account, the person on the road to virtue cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition *ultimately because she*

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. Hobbes. He writes, “for there is no such thing *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall philosophers.... I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power that ceaseth onely in Death.” Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd. 1985. Bk 1.1; P. 160 – 161.

⁴⁹⁰ EE 1214b 7-11. Neera Badhwar writes, “And someone who refuses to rationally choose her own ends at all ... chooses a way of life that invites misfortune and deprives her of the pleasures of agency. Badhwar, Neera. “Self-Interest and Virtue” (1997) P. 238.

⁴⁹¹ Cf., Hursthouse writes “Of course people can be virtuous, really virtuous, without having spent clockable hours thinking about *eudaimonia*, coming to the conclusion that it is a life lived in accordance with the virtues and working out an account of acting well, just as they can possess a really good will without having spent clockable hours working out whether various maxims can be willed as universal laws” Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (1999) P. 137.

⁴⁹² In choosing (1), the virtuous person must act on (2), for there is no other way to live a life in accordance with moral virtue than to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition. And, virtue in the strict sense, *ex hypothesi*, requires deciding to live a life of moral virtue. Without such a decision, while one might be said to possess natural virtue, one cannot be said to possess virtue in the strict sense. The precise relationship between the two is not what is important here. What matters is situating the “why be moral” question against the backdrop of the type of life the virtuous agent chooses to live.

*comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues.*⁴⁹³ Here, the idea is that if we take our naturally virtuous agent from the previous section, and situate her entering into the “Socratic question” and deliberating about the type of life to lead, she will decide to live a life of virtuous activity – which entails a commitment to cultivating and maintaining the moral virtues – *ultimately* because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity.⁴⁹⁴ Now, I imagine that simply saying that the virtuous person cultivates the moral virtues and exercises them ultimately because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity will appear *too* vague and *too* opaque to some readers.⁴⁹⁵ And so, with this in mind, I go on to elaborate below.⁴⁹⁶ But, before I do, one preliminary note is in order.

Now, I take it that there is more than one way to come to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity, and so it is important to be mindful of the fact that different individuals with somewhat different backgrounds – though all in possession of natural virtue – will come to acquire such an insight in various ways. In other words, I do not think that recognition of such an insight can simply be implanted or come about by following a particular set of steps *or* that such an insight comes about in a characteristic way. For example, take an individual who goes on to cultivate virtue in the strict sense from a state of natural virtue, but comes from a family

⁴⁹³ We may compare this with the formally egoistic individual who may come to see that *x* is good *qua* human goodness, and, generally speaking, that it is good *for him* to perform *x*. However, such an individual, *ex hypothesi*, performs *x* primarily because it is good *for him*. Such a thought, the virtuous person would say is “one thought too many”, and many – such as Ross, Hurka, and Swanton – would describe such a motivation as being too self-absorbed.

⁴⁹⁴ More precisely, the idea here is that the person on the road to virtue emerges out of the entry point of ethical reflection with a strong rational desire (*boulêsis*) to pursue the practicable good in action, and recognition that cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to cultivate and maintain said disposition. For how understanding and appreciating that something is good, can lead to acting in accordance with it, see the account of action theory laid out in chapter 3 and adopted here: what Gavin Lawrence calls the “Traditional Conception of Practical Reason”.

⁴⁹⁵ For such a criticism, see chapter three, section two.

⁴⁹⁶ My discussion below is not intended to provide an exhaustive account, but is solely meant to provide some content to the rationale given above. Following Philippa Foot, I do think we can shed some light on the issue, and that such a light is instructive, even though we may not be able to explain in full “how much particular ends are worth.” Foot writes, “the second part of wisdom, which has to do with values, is much harder to describe, because here we meet ideas which are curiously elusive, such as the thought that some pursuits are more worthwhile than others, and some matters trivial and some important in human life.... What we can see is that one of the things a wise man knows and a foolish man does not is that such things as social position, and wealth and the good opinion of the world, are too dearly bought at the cost of health or friendship or family ties. So we may say that the man who lacks wisdom has false values, and that such vices as vanity and worldliness and avarice are contrary to wisdom in a special way.” Foot, “Virtues and Vices.” P. 168.

where honour is highly regarded. Such an individual may have to think long and hard about why a life of pursuing great honours is not a life worthy of being her ultimate aim. Compare this with another individual who also goes on to cultivate virtue in the strict sense from a state of natural virtue, but experiences an upbringing where honour is regarded suspiciously. Such an individual, it seems, need not spend much time in order to conclude that the human good does not consist in a life characterized by the pursuit of high honours. Here, my point is simply that there seems to be no “one size fits all” picture for precisely how individuals may come to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity. What must take place, I insist, is that at some point the person on the road to virtue will decide to cultivate a virtuous disposition by coming to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity.

With this proviso in place, and having laid out the ultimate reason (i.e., the last reason one could give) why the person on the road to virtue goes on to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition, we may now begin to fill in the account in more detail.⁴⁹⁷ Prior to the virtuous agent deciding to cultivate and maintain the moral virtues ultimately because she realizes that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity, there are three other theses that, I take it, the person on the road to virtue will discover while contemplating the Socratic question, and ultimately adopt.⁴⁹⁸ The first is the “priority of moral virtue thesis,” the second is the “situated agency thesis,” and the third is the “supremacy of virtuous pleasures thesis.” Allow me to elaborate on each in turn.⁴⁹⁹

The “priority of moral virtue thesis” states that virtuous activity is the best type of activity that humans can engage in, and is to be ranked above all other activities. What follows from this, I take it, is that in a situation where the virtuous agent finds herself in a position where she can either act so as to promote, say, her own honour, or her own wealth, or her own success, and so on, *or* act virtuously – but cannot act in accordance with both – the virtuous agent will always choose to act in accordance with moral virtue. This is because, for the virtuous agent, acting

⁴⁹⁷ What follows below is not meant to be an exhaustive account of all of the beliefs that virtuous agent adopts before deciding to make her ultimate aim acting in accordance with the moral virtues. Rather, it is intended to describe in broad strokes why the virtuous agent takes virtuous activity to be her ultimate end, and how such an understanding goes on to inform her way of living.

⁴⁹⁸ These theses are meant to illuminate the type of knowledge and understanding the person on the road to virtue possesses, and leads her to cultivate and maintain the virtuous disposition for the ultimate reason that she does.

⁴⁹⁹ All three of these theses are derived from my reflections on human nature. Here, I follow most naturalists who claim that the good of a human – or even non human animal – will be broadly based on what a human is. As Irwin notes, “for it is plausible to assume that answers to the questions ‘What is the good for F?’ and ‘What is a good F?’ both depend on the answer ‘What is F?’ Both the good for a dog and goodness of a dog seem to depend on the sort of thing a dog is.” Irwin, Aristotle’s *First Principles* (1988) P. 352.

in accordance with virtue is more valuable, and is given a certain priority over all other goods.

The “situated agency thesis” states that there is nothing particularly special, noteworthy, or valuable about one’s own agency, *simply* because it is one’s own agency. According to this thesis, when we situate one’s own *eudaimonia* in relation to the *eudaimonia* of others, we find that what makes one’s own *eudaimonia* valuable and worthy taking seriously is the same thing that makes another’s *eudaimonia* valuable and worth taking seriously. Thus, prioritizing one’s own *eudaimonia* simply because it is one’s own cannot be justified, morally speaking. As a result of the virtuous agent adopting this thesis, the virtuous agent may be described as taking the well-being of others seriously, and does not give a priority to her own well-being simply because it is her own. This thesis marks a separation between my account and other neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation. On other accounts of moral motivation, all of the virtuous agent’s actions are chosen for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*, where her own *eudaimonia* is understood, in part, in terms of “the good life of the agent.” On my account, all of the virtuous agent’s actions are chosen for the sake of human goodness, where human goodness is not understood in terms of “the good life of the agent.” Thus, there is no self-referential aspect on my account.

Finally, the “supremacy of virtuous pleasures thesis” states that pleasures that arise from actively exercising the moral virtues are taken to be supreme and ranked above all other types of pleasures.⁵⁰⁰ So, for example, according to this thesis, life’s greatest and distinctly human pleasures come not from short-term gains on, say, the stock-market, winning the lottery, or driving the fastest car, but from, for example, knowing that one has acted virtuously in a difficult situation. On this view, not all pleasures are taken to be equally valuable, and noble pleasures are ranked above and beyond those pleasures that arise from non-virtuous activities.⁵⁰¹

Hoping to have said just enough to illuminate why the person on the road to virtue ultimately cultivates the virtuous disposition, and the type of knowledge that such an agent possesses, we may now turn to see whether such an account rightly deserves the label “altruistic.” Recall, that for an individual action to be altruistically motivated – in the “third usage” defended above – it must be performed because of the goodness of the act itself, where what makes the act good is understood not in terms of the well-being of the agent performing the action. To help clarify the matter, it may be worth fleshing out more precisely the way in which the motivation advanced here *is* and *is not* self-referential. To help illuminate what I have in mind, I invoke what I take to be an important

⁵⁰⁰ Aristotle writes, “for always, or more than anything else, he [the virtuous person] will do and study the actions in accord with virtue, and will bear fortunes most finely, in every way and in all conditions appropriately, since he is truly good, foursquare, and blameless.” *EN* 1100 b 20-22.

⁵⁰¹ This is my attempt to cash out, as Aristotle puts it, the truth “concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being.” *EN* 1140b 6-7. I take it that all three of these theses are central to understanding correctly the human good.

distinction: the distinction between acting “from” and acting “because” or “for the sake of.” Now, it is true that the person on the road to virtue decides to cultivate the moral virtues *from* a self-referential concern: i.e., she decides to cultivate a virtuous disposition from reflecting on the “Socratic question”: viz., what type of life should “I” live? If this was not the case, then such an account could not be considered eudaimonistic because eudaimonistic approaches, *ex hypothesi*, require that one view one’s life as a whole from a first-person perspective.⁵⁰² This is not to be confused or conflated, however, with the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent. As noted above, such an agent, prior to becoming virtuous, decides to cultivate the moral virtues *ultimately* because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity. On such an account, it should be clear that the person on the road to virtue cultivates a virtuous disposition ultimately because it is good, where what makes the disposition good is not understood in terms of the agent’s own *eudaimonia*, but human goodness.⁵⁰³ And, insofar as altruistic motivations are understood in terms of being motivated by the good, where the type of goodness involved is understood not primarily in terms of the agent’s own well-being, the altruistic account of moral motivation rightly deserves the label “altruistic.”

Having laid out the altruistic account of motivation above, I imagine a number of questions remain with respect to its plausibility and feasibility. In an attempt to help illuminate various important features of the account, as well vindicate it from possible misunderstandings, in what follows, I address three questions one might have regarding the account of motivation laid out above. First, how is it possible that simply coming to “understand and appreciate the human good” leads the person on the road to virtue to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition? Second, does not the person on the road to virtue demonstrate too little concern for her own well-being by cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition without any regard for her own well-being? Does that not make her self-abnegating? And, third, when the virtuous agent acts in accordance with *her* conception of the good, is this not really just the same thing as her simply pursuing her *own* good? ⁵⁰⁴ Allow me to address each in turn.

First, I have argued that in coming to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity, the person on the road to

⁵⁰² And, a central feature of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is that it adopts such a structure. We may contrast such a view of the individual with various utilitarian accounts of the individual that reduce the importance of the individual to a utility maximizing agent, and require that one adopt a universal or impartial point of view when deciding how to live.

⁵⁰³ Such a view seems to be in line with the way in which Hacker-Wright describes an Anscombian view of the virtuous agent. He writes, “a virtuous agent is someone who allows such considerations [i.e. considerations of human goodness] to have definitive say over her conduct.” Hacker-Wright, “Virtue Ethics without Right Action,” (2010) P. 215.

⁵⁰⁴ This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of possible concerns regarding the altruistic account of moral motivation above. I have chosen these questions because they do, I think, reflect the main questions regarding the account of motivation offered above.

virtue will go on to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition.⁵⁰⁵ (To be sure, this is not meant to be an exhaustive account of all that the person on the road to virtue goes on to do after emerging out of reflecting on the Socratic question, but is something that is of primary importance given the task before us here).⁵⁰⁶ Now, it is true that if we were to adopt, say, a Humean account of motivation where reason is inert, then, simply coming to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity would be unable to move the person on the road to virtue to cultivate a virtuous disposition.⁵⁰⁷ On such an account, one would have to possess a desire to act in accordance with the human good as well. However, recall the particular philosophy of action adopted in this dissertation and defended in chapter three: the traditional conception of practical reason. On such an account, “the ordinary connection that makes something into a reason for an agent is not a connection with *his* desires or [*his*] interests, but with the practicable good – [i.e.,] with what the agent must do to be acting well – and this is generally independent of an individual’s actual desires.”⁵⁰⁸ And, as shown in chapter three, the mere recognition or acknowledgement that such an act is good in a particular situation, along with an accompanying desire to pursue the practicable good, is sufficient to move the person on the road to virtue to act accordingly.⁵⁰⁹ And so, the reason why we can describe the person on the road to virtue as being motivated essentially by coming to appreciate and understand what is good, *qua* human goodness, is because the recognition that such an act is good is sufficient to bring such an individual to act accordingly. Here, one’s personal desires, self-referential thoughts – e.g., “what is in *it* for me?” – are simply superfluous: they do not matter to an agent that characteristically acts in accordance with what she takes to be good, *qua* human goodness.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ For the sake of clarity, simply appreciating and understanding that the human good is to be understood in terms of virtuous activity, provides only very general action guidance (e.g., that it would be good for one to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition). Precisely how one ought to act in a particular situation has to do with applying the moral virtues correctly. This, as Aristotle tells us, takes time, experience, and practical wisdom.

⁵⁰⁶ It is important to note that my discussion of the “human good” is *not* to be understood as a type of goodness that pertains mainly to the well-being of *just* humans, but is to be understood as an excellent way of responding *qua human* to the world. This involves acting/emoting appropriately toward non-human animals, the environment, future generations, and so on.

⁵⁰⁷ For in addition to appreciating and understanding such a fact she would need a separate desire as well.

⁵⁰⁸ Lawrence, Gavin, “The Rationality of Morality.” My italics. P. 98. He continues, “the central, or defining, question of practical reason is: ‘what should I do?’ Its formal answer I take to be: ‘Do what is best’ or ‘Act well.’” P. 130.

⁵⁰⁹ For unlike the incontinent individual who may recognize that such an act is good, but act otherwise, the virtuous agent – and *ex hypothesi* the person on the road to virtue – acts in accordance with what she takes to be good. This is because the person on the road to virtue possesses a strong rational desire (*boulêsis*) to pursue the practicable good in action, and recognition that cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is good, is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to cultivate and maintain said disposition.

⁵¹⁰ Here, one may wonder whether the virtuous agent is primarily concerned with *her* acting well or moral character over, say, the acting well of others or another’s character. It is important to note

Second, given that the person on the road to virtue is said to cultivate a virtuous disposition without regard for how doing so affects her own *eudaimonia*, some may think that such an account demonstrates *too* little concern for her own well-being or requires that she be *too* selfless.⁵¹¹ Here, however – and following Aristotle’s lead – it is important to not take self-concern and self-love for granted, but rather to stop and reflect on why we ought to care about ourselves in the first place. Now, drawing on what I have called the “Argument from Self-Concern” (outlined in chapter 4), if we take the virtuous person to care, love and be concerned about herself not simply because it is her own well-being, but based primarily on the goodness of her character, then it seems that the alleged worry can be dealt with both quickly and easily.⁵¹² The idea here is straightforward. If the virtuous person ought to care, love and be concerned about herself primarily in relation to her goodness, and goodness requires cultivating virtue for its good-making features and not for self-regarding reasons, then by cultivating a good character for its good-making features – and not for self-regarding reasons – it

that nothing said here implies that the virtuous agent is ultimately concerned with her *own* acting well or character, over the acting well of others or others’ character. It seems that the extent to which the virtuous agent will promote and facilitate another’s acting well or character will depend on a correct application of the moral virtues (e.g., justice, generosity, kindness, and so on). No doubt, a virtuous mother or father will spend a lot of time promoting and being concerned about instilling the virtues in her/his children, just as a teacher will spend a lot of time cultivating virtue in her/his students, and a virtuous older brother or sister in his/her younger siblings, and so on. To avoid confusion, there is an important difference in asserting that my ultimate end is *acting well* or *virtuous activity* and that my ultimate end is *my* acting well or *my* virtuous activity. I endorse the former, and emphatically reject the latter.

⁵¹¹ A related concern here is that it is simply phenomenologically false that when we tend to think about how we ought to live our lives we do so based on a conception of the human good and not our own individual good. While this might be true as a descriptive thesis, this need not impact the aspirational account given here. I thank Dan Russell for bringing this to my attention. Whereas Russell prioritizes an account of motivation that captures the way we currently tend to be motivated to act in accordance with the good, I prioritize the way I think we ought to be motivated to act in accordance with the good.

⁵¹² As Aristotle puts it, “the good man is a lover of good, not a lover of self; for he loves himself only, if at all, because he is good.” *Magna Moralia* 1212 b 18-20. Here, one may wonder whether the virtuous person is of special concern to herself compared to others who are equal in virtue. For it might seem that if the virtuous person should love, care and be concerned with others in relation to their goodness – and that she should also love, care and be concerned about herself in relation to her goodness – then it seems to follow that if another is equal in goodness, the virtuous agent should be concerned, love, and care about that particular other just as much as she does toward herself. Now, while I do endorse such a view in theory, in practice, however, there are epistemic barriers for coming to know that another is just as virtuous as, say, I am. And, as a result of such certainty with respect to my own goodness – and less certainty with respect to another’s goodness – it may empirically turn out that the virtuous person, generally speaking, loves, cares, and is more concerned for her own well-being even if, *ex hypothesi*, another is equal in virtue to her. For more on this point, see Whiting’s “Nicomachean Account of *Philia*” (2006). She writes, “other factors, especially epistemological ones, may limit the *extent* to which virtuous agents can appreciate (and so enjoy) the actions of others in the same way that they can appreciate (and so enjoy) their own”. P. 293. In “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship” (1977), John Cooper claims that virtuous friends love each other primarily based on their good human qualities.

follows that one is more deserving of love, care, and concern than one would otherwise be had one had self-referential concerns when trying to cultivate a virtuous disposition.⁵¹³ And so, while the account of moral motivation above may, *prima facie*, appear to show too little concern for one’s self, in fact, cultivating virtue in such a way makes one worthy of *more* care, *more* concern, and *more* love than would otherwise be the case.⁵¹⁴ On such a view, a great way to demonstrate concern, love, and care for one’s self is to become good.⁵¹⁵

Finally, one may worry that when the person on the road to virtue acts in accordance with her conception of the good, she is really, for all intents and purposes, just pursuing her own good. For if one takes (1) the virtuous person’s conception of what it means to live well as very much intertwined with (2) what she takes to be her own *eudaimonia* – i.e., her own well-being or flourishing – then it follows that in pursuing (1) she may also be said to be pursuing (2).⁵¹⁶ This view, as we saw in the introduction, is John McDowell’s view.⁵¹⁷ And so, if this is the case with my account here as well, some may be inclined to think that when the virtuous agent acts in accordance with what she takes to be her conception of living well, she is really just pursuing her own *eudaimonia*. Now, while I do think – following many in the eudaimonistic tradition, such as Rosalind Hursthouse, Julia Annas, Anne Baril, *et alia* – that acting in accordance with moral virtue, does, generally speaking, promote the virtuous person’s own *eudaimonia*, it is

⁵¹³ For the view that Aristotle holds that we should care about ourselves and others not only in relation to our goodness but to the extent to which such goodness is directly related to us, see Mika Perälä’s “A Friend Being Good and One’s Own” (2016).

⁵¹⁴ Such an account meets Philippa Foot’s thought that a virtuous individual will demonstrate “a readiness to accept good things for oneself.” Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness*. (2001) P. 79.

⁵¹⁵ In “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?”, Hursthouse writes that “the Aristotelian view of human nature is that, *qua* rational, it can be perfected by getting our inclinations into harmony with our reason. If my inclinations are not in harmony with my reason, and if getting them into harmony is something that human rationality can achieve, then the people whose inclinations are in harmony are, *ceteris paribus*, better human beings, closer to excellence (virtue), than I am.” Hursthouse, P. 104. Taking off from this point, my idea here is that as we become better human beings and closer to excellence, we become more deserving of care, love, and concern. This, to be clear, is simply a consequence of cultivating virtue. One does not on my account cultivate virtue so that one becomes a more worthy recipient of concern, love and care.

⁵¹⁶ Now, part of this confusion, I think, stems from the fact that – as Timothy Chappell argues – “*eudaimonia*” is used by Aristotle in two distinct senses: the verdictive sense and the descriptive sense. In the verdictive sense, *eudaimonia* is to be understood as a maximally indefinite description. Here, one may be called *eudaimôn* when one’s life has gone reasonably well, and when reflecting on one’s life, prompts the words “O happy (say, for example) Ariston!” In the descriptive sense, “*eudaimonia*” is to be understood as a concrete instantiation of what it means to live well: viz., “activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one.” *EN* 1098 a 16-18. For more on this distinction, see Chappell’s, “Eudaimonia, Happiness, and the Redemption of Unhappiness” (2013).

⁵¹⁷ McDowell writes, “with the equation understood this way round, it is because a certain life is a life of exercises of human excellence, or, equivalently, because it is a life of doing what it is the business of a human being to do, that the life is in the relevant sense the most satisfying life possible for its subject, circumstanced at each point as he is.” McDowell, John. “The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle’s Ethics” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (1980) P. 370.

important to note that (1) and (2) do not always go together. And, on the altruistic account of moral motivation developed here, in cases of conflict where pursuing (1) negatively affects (2), one nonetheless ought to pursue (1). This is because the virtuous person is ultimately motivated to act based not on her own *eudaimonia*, but on her conception of what it means to live well *qua* human goodness. And as we saw in chapter 4, the two can come apart.⁵¹⁸

Now, I take it that one of the virtues of the altruistic account of motivation defended here is that it enables us to make sense of those situations in which we ought to act virtuously, even though doing so may bring about great misfortune to ourselves. Take Aristotle’s famous discussion of courage where he insists that the virtuous individual ought to fight valiantly (risking and laying her life on the battlefield) when doing so is appropriate.⁵¹⁹ In such a case, it is puzzling why the virtuous person would act in such a manner if the underlying aim of all of her actions is just her *own eudaimonia*: in such a case, one does or is likely to lose one’s life after all.⁵²⁰ On the altruistic account of motivation, however, while it is true that the virtuous person’s conception of what it means to live well might be intertwined with what she takes to be her own *eudaimonia*, all of her actions are performed for the sake of the former as opposed to the latter. And so, when the virtuous agent acts in accordance with her conception of what it means to live well, and this action negatively affects her *own eudaimonia* – say, resulting in death – it is clear why the virtuous agent acts the way that she does. This is because the virtuous agent acts based on her conception of what it means to live well, where this is understood as distinct from her *own eudaimonia*. Returning to

⁵¹⁸ It may be worth point out that some – e.g., Anne Baril – would find the account I present here as only “weakly eudaimonistic” insofar as I reject what she calls eudaimonism’s central recommendation (ECR): viz., that “a human being ought to organize his or her life so that it realizes eudaimonia.” Baril, Anne. *Eudaimonia in Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (2014) P. 23. I see no reason why one cannot be a eudaimonist virtue ethicist while rejecting ECR. As shown in the previous chapter, there is reason to think that Aristotle himself – one of the greatest eudaimonists – did not hold what Baril refers to as “ECR.”

⁵¹⁹ Aristotle writes “and so, if the same is true for bravery, the brave person will find death and wounds painful, and suffer them unwillingly, but he will endure them because that is fine or because failure is shameful... For this sort of person more than anyone, finds it worthwhile to be alive, and knows he is being deprived of the greatest goods, and this is painful. But he is no less brave for all that ... because he chooses what is fine in war at the cost of all these goods.” *EN* 1117b 7 – 17.

⁵²⁰ This is not to say that some have not tried to make sense of how dying in battle may be said to further the virtuous agent’s *own eudaimonia*. For example, Terence Irwin argues that dying in battle for the sake of the *kalon* promotes the virtuous agent’s *own eudaimonia* more than shirking one’s military responsibility. And, to be sure, there is some evidence that Aristotle held such a view. He does after all write that “a single fine and great action [is better] over many small actions. This is presumably true of one who dies for others.” *EN* 1169 a 24 -27. Here, to be clear, I disagree with Irwin. I think that it is unintelligible to conceive of the virtuous agent risking her life in battle – especially where death is highly likely – for the sake of her *own eudaimonia*. Rather, I take the virtuous agent who risks her life in battle to be acting because doing so is in accordance with her conception of living well, even though it will almost certainly bring about her own demise.

our example of the soldier who fights valiantly on the battlefield risking her life for the sake of the *kalon*, such an action may be understood as being performed because the virtuous agent holds that living well – i.e., acting in accordance with moral virtue – is *more* important than her *own eudaimonia*. While she, no doubt, recognizes that losing her own life will negatively affect her own *eudaimonia* and that that would be a great loss, she is also alive to the fact that there is more to living well than simply aiming to further her own *eudaimonia*. And, risking one’s life to fight valiantly for a just cause – at least according to Aristotle – is one such example.⁵²¹

Before I conclude this section, it is important to reiterate that the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent plays two important roles: first, it explains why an individual begins to cultivate a virtuous disposition, and second, it also provides the basis for why such an individual maintains such a disposition throughout his/her life. Thus far, I have been primarily concerned with the former role, but a few words about the latter are now in order. To be clear, on the altruistic account of motivation defended here, one begins to cultivate and maintain the virtuous disposition for the same reason: because one appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. As emphasised in chapter three, the virtuous person’s underlying reason for maintaining her virtuous disposition is not the reason why she acts virtuously at the time that she acts – which would be her occurrent motivation – but such a motivation is nonetheless entrenched in her character. So, for example, if the virtuous person finds herself in dialogue with someone who inquires into why she chooses to live a life of virtue, or why she acts the way that she does on a particular occasion, or what the relationship is between the moral virtues and human goodness, and so on, she will be able tap into her understanding of the relationship between her conception of living well and human goodness and will answer her interlocutor’s question(s) appropriately.⁵²² As emphasized above, the virtuous person is in a position to do this because, *ex hypothesi*, she grasps the truth “concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being.”⁵²³ Now, how such an explanation will be received will, no doubt, vary based on the particular interlocutor(s). Someone who has lived an impoverished life may be left unconvinced by the virtuous person’s explanation for why she acts the way that she does. However,

⁵²¹ It seems to me that Aristotle’s remarks on the courageous person’s willingness to risk death in battle are best understood if we take the virtuous agent acting for the sake of the good, irrespective of how such actions may be said to affect her *own eudaimonia* or well-being.

⁵²² Thus, the account provided here meets what some refer to as the “articulacy requirement.” As Julia Annas correctly points out, this is critical for being able to learn how to become virtuous and teach moral virtue to others. For more on the articulacy requirement, see chapter 3 of Annas’ *Intelligent Virtue*.

⁵²³ Someone, for example, who grows up as an orphan without strong relationships or attachments may, no doubt, have a difficult time appreciating just how important relationships are to living well. Another who grows up extremely poor, and who desires money above all else may have a difficult time coming to see that money is just an instrumental good.

those who seek the truth and have had a decent upbringing may very well leave the conversation convinced.⁵²⁴

To conclude, in this section, I have laid out and defended what I take to be a plausible account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent: the altruistic account of motivation. The altruistic account of motivation states that the truly virtuous person’s underlying reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is because she appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. On this account, the virtuous agent does not simply wake up one day and all of a sudden choose to cultivate a virtuous disposition “out of the blue.” Rather, such an individual decides to cultivate a virtuous disposition from a state of natural virtue, and comes to such a decision as a result of engaging and reflecting on the “Socratic Question”: viz., what type of life she should lead. Further, such a decision is not made in isolation, but rather is situated against the backdrop of the type of life the virtuous agent wishes to live, i.e., a life characterized by moral activity. Now, the altruistic account of motivation may be said to be “eudaimonistic” in the following sense. On my account, all of the virtuous agent’s actions are undertaken for the sake of “*eudaimonia*” – i.e., “*eudaimonia*” is understood as the final end for practical reasoning – but “*eudaimonia*” here is *not* understood as “*my eudaimonia*” or as a “good human life for the one living it.” Rather “*eudaimonia*” is understood in terms of what it means to live well *qua* human, where what it means to live well *qua* human can come apart from what is good *for* the agent. As a result, I deviate here from contemporary virtue ethicists who insist that the virtuous agent’s conception of *eudaimonia* must also be a “good human life for the one living it.”⁵²⁵ To be sure, the altruistic account of motivation is immune from the self-absorption objection because – as should now be clear – the virtuous agent does *not* ultimately cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition because doing so is good *for her*, but rather simply because it is good, *qua* human goodness. It is human goodness that is the virtuous agent’s underlying motivation, as they say, “all the way down.” Such an account cannot be said to be “self-absorbed”, “self-centred” or “egoistic.” Such an account can however be described as altruistic.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Presumably, Aristotle’s own students at the Lyceum would be capable of benefiting from such dialogue.

⁵²⁵ Russell, Daniel, “Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good life” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. P.14.

⁵²⁶ While I do refer to this account as altruistic, there is also a sense in which we may describe it as “transcendental,” in that the reason why the virtuous person acts the way that she does goes beyond her *own* well-being, and she ultimately performs her actions ultimately because doing so is what it means to live well *qua* human.

5.4. The Altruistic Account of Motivation and Aristotle’s Ethics

The central goal of this thesis is to vindicate neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from the self-absorption objection. As I have shown in chapter one, an adequate defense cannot appeal to resources outside of Aristotle’s ethics because to do so would be to abandon the very aim of providing a viable *neo-Aristotelian* virtue ethical theory.⁵²⁷ In this chapter, thus far, I have argued that the altruistic account of motivation *can* adequately address the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at the underlying level. However, the question still remains whether such an account is “neo-Aristotelian.” With this in mind, I ask the following: is the altruistic account of motivation offered above “neo-Aristotelian”? More specifically, might such an account be understood as largely based on or inspired by Aristotle’s ethics? Now, while nowhere in Aristotle’s writings does he explicitly state why someone might cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition, he does indirectly lay out his particular view in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book I, Aristotle clearly states that all of our actions – which include those required for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition – are ultimately performed for the sake of “*eudaimonia*.”⁵²⁸ Thus, it is in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* which I turn to to determine whether the altruistic account of motivation offered above may be said to be “neo-Aristotelian.”

Recall, the altruistic account of motivation states that the person on the road to virtue cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition *ultimately* because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues.⁵²⁹ As emphasized above, precisely how one reaches this insight may be said to vary from individual to individual, but this insight, to be sure, does arise as a result of the person on the road to virtue reflecting on the type of life she wishes to lead. Now, when we turn to Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is clear that Aristotle is guiding us through a similar reflection and investigation to the one

⁵²⁷ For when one begins to incorporate different resources from various influences, such accounts seem to be pluralistic and not “neo-Aristotelian.” For example, while Christine Swanton does address the self-absorption objection, she does so not by appealing to Aristotle’s ethics, but rather by abandoning it. See *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. (2001)

⁵²⁸ Aristotle writes, “suppose, then, that the things achievable by action have some end that we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for other things, and that we do not choose everything because of something else – for if we do, it will go on without limit, so that desire will prove to be empty and futile. Clearly, this end will be the good, that is to say, the best good.” *EN* 1094a 17-21. He then goes on to note that we call this “best good” “*eudaimonia*.”

⁵²⁹ We may contrast the altruistic account of motivation with the orthodox reading of Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. The latter may be represented as follows. (1) I ought to make the ultimate end of all of my actions *my own* happiness. (2) While virtuous activity may be in part performed because it is good, the ultimate reason why I perform such an action is because doing so furthers my own happiness. (3) Thus, the ultimate end in acting virtuously is my own happiness. Here, it is important to stress that on the altruistic account of moral motivation, premise 1, premise 2, and the conclusion are all rejected.

described in the section above.⁵³⁰ In Book I, after noting that “*eudaimonia*” is our ultimate end, Aristotle goes on to investigate how we ought to understand such an end and what such an end consists in.⁵³¹ He walks us through a preliminary discussion of possible candidates – i.e., a healthy life, the life of pleasure, and the life of honour – before ruling them all out as being unfit to serve as our ultimate end.⁵³² After some reflection, he realizes that in order to determine what our ultimate end is, we need to examine the type of thing we are, and so he turns to investigate our nature *qua* human beings. From such an investigation, Aristotle discovers and concludes that humans have a characteristic function, and that our ultimate aim is the “activity of the soul in accord with virtue.”⁵³³

Now, before delving into how we ought to understand such an aim, it is worth pausing to highlight four striking similarities between the altruistic account of motivation laid out above and Aristotle’s discussion of our ultimate end. First, in both cases, the ultimate reason for why we act is determined by reflecting on *human* goodness. Second, in both cases, human goodness is understood to be supervenient on human nature. Third, in both cases, part of discovering our ultimate aim requires that we acknowledge that various types of lives are simply unfit for serving as the ultimate end for all of our actions. And, finally – and most importantly – in both cases, acting in accordance with virtue is recognized as the ultimate end for all of our actions.

These similarities aside, it seems that if the altruistic account of motivation is to be understood as inspired by Aristotle’s own account, it would be good to have a clear idea what Aristotle means when he says that our ultimate aim is “activity of the soul in accord with virtue.”⁵³⁴ With such an understanding within reach, we could then go on to assess just how closely Aristotle’s account fits with the altruistic account of motivation laid out above. However, as Aristotelian scholars know all too well, Aristotle’s discussion of our ultimate end is disappointingly brief, and, at times, he appears to suggest that we ought to live in

⁵³⁰ Timothy Chappell writes, “Aristotle makes it quite clear that his initial question “what is *eudaimonia*?” is very close in sense to the question “what is the human good?” (See e.g. 1098a17)... At this point in his argument, *eudaimonia* is his name for the good human life, whatever that turns out to be. It is as if he starts with a sentence- frame that runs “*eudaimonia* is....” and is looking for something to fill in the dots. In this sense, he can equally well start with a sentence -frame that runs “the human good is... or the best (sc. For humans is... and look to fill that in.” Chappell, Timothy “*Eudaimonia* Happiness, and the Redemption of Unhappiness” (2013) P. 36.

⁵³¹ He writes, “as far as its name goes, most people virtually agree; for both the many and the cultivated call it happiness, and they suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy. But they disagree about what happiness is, and the many do not give the same answer as the wise.” 1095a18-22 *EN*.

⁵³² Such accounts are unfit because they are incomplete and not self-sufficient. See 1097b1 -1097b 20 of the *EN*.

⁵³³ *EN* 1098 a 16-18.

⁵³⁴ *EN* 1098 a 16-18.

seemingly conflicting ways.⁵³⁵ Further, leading Aristotelian scholars have long debated – and continue to debate – just how Aristotle understands our ultimate end.⁵³⁶ Given that there is no widely accepted interpretation of just how Aristotle understands our ultimate end, in what follows, I go on to show how the altruistic account of motivation may be understood as inspired by and based on a plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s understanding of *eudaimonia*/our ultimate end.⁵³⁷

In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle insists that all of our actions ultimately ought to be performed for the sake of “*eudaimonia*”, and that “*eudaimonia*” ought to be understood based on our characteristic human function.⁵³⁸ Thus, the ultimate end of all of our actions ought to be understood based on our characteristic human function.⁵³⁹ As mentioned previously, Aristotle describes our function as follows. He writes, “the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one.”⁵⁴⁰ Now, it seems to me, that, here, Aristotle is suggesting that our characteristic human function – or, put slightly differently, *the* human good – lies essentially in virtuous activity.⁵⁴¹ And, if *eudaimonia* ought to be understood essentially as virtuous activity, it follows that the ultimate end of all of our actions may be understood essentially as

⁵³⁵ E.g., Thomas Nagel writes, “the *Nicomachean Ethics* exhibits indecision between two accounts of *eudaimonia* – a comprehensive and intellectualist account.” Nagel, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*” (1980) P. 7.

⁵³⁶ Two of the more popular interpretations on Aristotle’s account of “*eudaimonia*” are written by J.L. Ackrill and Thomas Nagel in *Essays on Aristotle* edited by Amélie Rorty (1980). For a more recent interpretation, see Timothy Chappell’s “*Eudaimonia*, Happiness, and the Redemption of Unhappiness” (2013).

⁵³⁷ In light of widespread disagreement among Aristotelian scholars regarding precisely how Aristotle understood our ultimate end – i.e., “*eudaimonia*” – the best that I can do here is to show how the altruistic account of motivation advanced above may be said to be inspired by a particular – and what I take to be plausible reading – of Aristotle’s account of our final end.

⁵³⁸ As mentioned in chapter 4, nowhere does Aristotle suggest that all of one’s actions ought to be performed for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia*.

⁵³⁹ This is no small point. The emphasis given here is clearly on human goodness, and not my own personal happiness. See Dennis McKerlie’s “Aristotle and Egoism” (1998) for how Aristotle’s discussion in Book I of the *EN* may be said to introduce the “human good”, and not the “good for the individual.”

⁵⁴⁰ *EN* 1098 a 16-18. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle writes, “and since the activity is better than the state, and the best activity than the best state, and excellence is the best state, that the activity of the excellence of the soul is the best thing. But happiness, we saw, was the best of things; *therefore happiness is the activity of a good soul*. But since happiness was something complete, and living is either complete or incomplete and so also excellence—one excellence being a whole, the other a part—and the activity of what is incomplete is itself incomplete, therefore happiness would be the activity of a complete life in accordance with complete excellence.” *EE* 1219a 29 - 39 (from *The Complete Works of Aristotle Vol. 2* (my italics). I take Aristotle to be suggesting here that it is virtuous activity that is the ultimate end of all of our actions and not our *own eudaimonia*.

⁵⁴¹ Here, to be clear by “virtuous activity” I do not mean *my* virtuous activity, but rather virtuous activity simpliciter. To be sure, this is not to say that virtuous activity is the only good. As Aristotle emphasizes, external goods (e.g., money, family, friends, health, luck, and so on) are also required.

virtuous activity; i.e., acting virtuously.⁵⁴² On such a view, it is not for the sake of *my* acting well, cultivating the moral virtues in *me*, or *my eudaimonia* that explains why I do all that I do, rather I do all that I do – including cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition – for sake of acting well; i.e., acting virtuously.⁵⁴³ On such an interpretation, “living well” or “flourishing” is generally characterized by a life filled with excellent virtuous activity.⁵⁴⁴ Now, if this interpretation of Book I is correct, then it seems that if the virtuous person was asked why she first cultivated and continues to maintain a virtuous disposition – on the interpretation of Book I of the *EN* offered here – she may respond as follows: “ultimately because cultivating a virtuous disposition is good *qua* human goodness”, or, put slightly differently, she may say “because by cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition, I will then be able to act virtuously, and acting virtuously is essentially what it means to live well *qua* human.”⁵⁴⁵ And, if asked to elaborate, she may very well provide a response similar to the altruistic account of motivation laid out above. That is, she may say “I have chosen to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition ultimately because I have come to appreciate and understand that the human good consists chiefly in a life of excellent virtuous activity; i.e., a life of actively exercising the moral virtues.”⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² For a full defense of the view that the ultimate end of all of our actions is simply virtuous activity, see Richard Kraut’s *Aristotle on the Human Good*. He writes, “Aristotle is not saying here that virtuous activity is just one good among many; after all, the same could be said about pleasure, honor, friendship, and so on... Clearly he needs a special argument – the ‘function argument’ – because he is singling out virtuous activity and giving it a special status: it is not just a good but also the human good. And as I have said, the function argument of 1.7 is Aristotle’s attempt to answer the question that has been raised in 1.1-2: what is the intrinsically desirable end for the sake of which all others are pursued, but which in turn is not desirable for the sake of any other? When we connect 1.1-2 with the function argument in this way, we must conclude that he takes the ultimate end to be just one type of good – virtuous activity.” Kraut, P. 199. Also, see the diagram laid out in Chapter four, section two.

⁵⁴³ And so, to say that we cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition for the sake of “*eudaimonia*” is to say that we cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition for the sake of acting virtuously. It is important to emphasize that upon recognizing that a life of virtuous activity is our ultimate end – i.e., that for which all of our actions are ultimately taken – any other thoughts are simply superfluous.

⁵⁴⁴ Aristotle writes, “for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed and happy.” *EN* 1098a 19-20. For a contemporary defense of the idea that happiness is a life of virtuous activity, see Daniel Russell’s *Happiness for Humans* (2012). He writes, “in a word, and in the terms I have briefly introduced here, I shall say that happiness is a life of embodied virtuous activity.” Russell, P. 7.

⁵⁴⁵ Here, both responses are equally acceptable because “human goodness” is understood in terms of “virtuous activity”.

⁵⁴⁶ If further pressed, it is possible that she may go on into some of the details mentioned above in section three. We may contrast this view with the formally egoistic view, which states that the virtuous person cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition not only because doing is good *qua* human goodness, but also with the further thought –and this will be her/his central motivation – that doing so is good for her/him. On my reading, Aristotle’s main aim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to take his students on a guided reflection through the various plausible candidates for what they might have taken to be their ultimate aim in life, and to help them to arrive on their own that the

At this point, it is important to note that if the ultimate reason for all of the virtuous person’s actions is acting virtuously, then it seems to follow that the virtuous person’s ultimate reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition *cannot* be for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*.⁵⁴⁷ For, insofar as acting virtuously and one’s own *eudaimonia* are conceptually distinct – and, as I argued in chapter 4 can conflict – either all of one’s actions are performed for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia*, or all of one’s actions are ultimately performed for the sake of acting virtuously. However, it is simply untenable to maintain that all of one’s actions are ultimately performed for the sake of both.⁵⁴⁸ As a result, one must choose whether to adopt the orthodox reading of Aristotle’s account of motivation – on which the ultimate end of the virtuous agent’s actions is understood as her “own *eudaimonia*” – or the reading laid out above – where all of one’s actions are ultimately performed for the sake of acting well – when attributing a particular account of the underlying motivation to Aristotle’s virtuous agent. It simply cannot be that one can choose both.⁵⁴⁹ In the previous chapter, I laid out three arguments that raise great doubt that Aristotle’s virtuous agent is best understood as it is on the orthodox reading, and here I hope to have shown the altruistic account of motivation may be understood as largely based on a plausible reading of Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In this section, I have argued that we find the seeds for the altruistic account of motivation in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. More specifically, I hope to have shown that such an account may be understood as arising naturally from a plausible reading of Aristotle’s function argument (at *EN* 1098a 16-18), and in this sense may be understood as “Aristotelian in spirit.” To reiterate, insofar as Aristotle held that the ultimate end of all of our actions – including the actions involved with cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition – is

correct ultimate aim for all humans, including them, is a life of virtuous activity. For direct textual support that Aristotle held that “*eudaimonia*” is “acting well”, see *Pol.* VII.3 1325a22-3, *EN*, 1.8 1098b20-22, and *EN* VI.2 1139b3-4. For a defense of the view that acting well is our ultimate end and the target of rational desire, see A.W. Price’s “Eudaimonism and Egocentricity in Aristotle” in *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴⁷ This holds regardless of whether “*eudaimonia*” is understood in a “welfare prior” or “excellence prior” sense. For more on this distinction, see chapter two, section three

⁵⁴⁸ No doubt, we could conceive of our ultimate end as a conjunction or an inclusive end that comprises of both acting virtuously and one’s own *eudaimonia* if one’s own *eudaimonia* and acting well never conflicted. But, insofar as they can (as shown in Chapter 4), it seems that one’s ultimate end cannot consist of both ends. For the Stoics, however, who hold that one’s own *eudaimonia* consists entirely in one’s own virtuous activity, one’s ultimate end could be one’s own *eudaimonia* and virtuous activity. This is because the Stoics held that one’s own *eudaimonia* ought to be understood entirely in terms of virtuous activity, and a life characterized entirely by virtuous activity is sufficient for being able to call one happy. To be sure, the point made in the main text is not to deny that there is much overlap between acting virtuously and promoting one’s own *eudaimonia*.

⁵⁴⁹ Or, of course, some other account. See the argument from omission, the argument from self-concern, and the anti-maximization argument in the previous chapter for why we should push back on attributing the orthodox reading to Aristotle’s virtuous agent.

eudaimonia, and *eudaimonia* is understood as acting in accordance with virtue, then, the two accounts may be said to closely resemble one another. For on the altruistic account of motivation, the person on the road to virtue cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition ultimately because she recognizes that the human good consists in a life of virtuous activity, and, likewise for Aristotle – on the interpretation defended above – the person on the road to virtue may also be said to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition for the sake of *eudaimonia*, understood here as acting virtuously. In both cases, it is virtuous activity that serves as the ultimate end for all of the virtuous persons’ actions.

5.5. The Virtuous Agent’s Account of Motivation: A Harmonious Account

Having laid out the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent in chapter three – what I have called the recognition view – and the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent in this chapter – what I have called the altruistic account of motivation – the time has come to bring the two together to see how they may be said to provide an account of the virtuous agent’s motivation *in toto*.⁵⁵⁰ The account in full may be summarized as follows. The person on the road to virtue, as a result of a good early moral education – one in which makes her character “suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful” – enters into the “Socratic Question” as already inclined toward acting well, and in possession of virtue in the natural sense.⁵⁵¹ She emerges out of such a reflection with a strong rational desire (*boulêsis*) to pursue the practicable good in action, and decides to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition *simply* because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. Having cultivated the moral virtues – and thus a virtuous disposition – the virtuous agent then acts virtuously from habit and solely because she recognizes the intrinsic goodness of the act itself.⁵⁵² If pressed by an interlocutor regarding why she acts the way that she does, she will be able to tap into her understanding of the relationship between living well and human goodness and respond because,

⁵⁵⁰ For as we saw in chapter two, a number of the more prominent neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation are immune to the self-absorption objection as it may be said to arise at either the occurrent level, but when it comes to providing a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation *in toto*, various problems emerge.

⁵⁵¹ *EN* 1179b 30-32

⁵⁵² It should be clear that the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent while perhaps “mystical” and “incomplete” when taken on its own – as we saw Timothy Chappell correctly emphasized in Chapter 3.2. – is both insightful and complete once situated. For although the virtuous agent, at the occurrent level, may be said to act virtuously simply because she recognizes the intrinsic goodness of the act, the ultimate reasons why she finds those acts good stem from facts concerning what is good for human beings. And, once we situate the occurrent motivation with an account of early moral education and the type of cultivation involved with cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition, such an account seems to be quite thorough.

ex hypothesi, she grasps the truth “concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being.”⁵⁵³

It is important to note that the altruistic account of motivation defended here deviates from standard neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation in two important ways. First, the altruistic account of motivation rejects the view that the ultimate end of all of the virtuous agent’s actions is her *own eudaimonia* (however understood). More specifically, it rejects what I have referred to as the orthodox reading of Aristotelian eudaimonism, on which the virtuous agent must organize her life in way that is good *for her*. As a result, the sense in which my account is eudaimonistic compared to standard-neo-Aristotelian accounts is different. On my account, the virtuous agent does view and aim to make sense of her life as an integrated whole, and *eudaimonia* does serve as her ultimate end. However, her conception of *eudaimonia* is not understood in terms of being good *for her*, but rather what is good *qua* human goodness. The second, point to make – and related to the first – is that on the account advanced here, the virtuous agent’s *own* good, and acting virtuously can come apart. For standard neo-Aristotelian accounts, it is unclear the extent to which when, say, the virtuous agent loses her life acting courageously in battle, she may be said to sacrifice her own objective good, for the sake of acting well. On my account, in such a case, the virtuous agent clearly may be said to put acting well – i.e., living in accordance with the moral virtues – ahead of her own good. The two, in various cases can come apart, and the virtuous agent is more concerned with acting well than her own *eudaimonia*.

Now, the central merit, I take it, of the account of motivation offered here in comparison with other neo-Aristotelian accounts of motivation is that it is immune from the self-absorption objection. Recall, roughly, proponents of this objection state that the main problem with neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation is that they prescribe that our ultimate reason for acting morally is the fact that doing so is in our own objective self-interest.⁵⁵⁴ And – as emphasized in Chapter 1 – this objection has been made forcefully by many throughout the history of Western philosophical thought, and has led to some rejecting neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics altogether.⁵⁵⁵ In this dissertation, I have provided a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune to such an objection. More specifically, I have argued that the self-absorption objection cannot find any footing at the occurrent level of motivation because on the recognition view, the virtuous agent acts virtuously because she recognizes the goodness of the act

⁵⁵³ EN 1140b 6-7.

⁵⁵⁴ This is not to say that all moral actions are performed *purely* for the sake of one’s own end, but rather that the *ultimate* reason for acting morally is that doing so is good for one’s self. Acting morally may not be purely for the sake of oneself insofar as others are *constituents* – and not merely means – of one’s own *eudaimonia*.

⁵⁵⁵ See, for example Hurka’s “Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong and Wrong” in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*. Ed. Julia Peters. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

itself, where the type of goodness that the virtuous agent recognizes is the intrinsic goodness of the act itself, or – put slightly differently – goodness *simpliciter*. On such a view, the recognition that a particular act is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to act virtuously, and thus the question of whether performing said action is “good for me” or “good for another” does not arise. At the underlying level, the virtuous agent cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition *ultimately* because she appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. Such a view is also immune from the self-absorption objection because the virtuous agent cultivates and maintains a virtuous disposition *simply* because it is good, *qua* human goodness, without any self-referential thoughts entering into her head. Such an account cannot be said to be “self-absorbed”, “self-centred” or “egoistic”, but can be described as altruistic.⁵⁵⁶

A further important merit that cannot be understated is that the depiction of the virtuous agent’s motivations offered here is free from the type of “schizophrenia” that plagues so many accounts of moral motivation.⁵⁵⁷ Recall, the important insight made by Michael Stocker, in “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” and emphasized in chapter one. Stocker writes:

“One mark of a good life is a harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications. Not to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on – bespeaks of a malady of spirit... At the very least, we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek... Any theory that ignores such harmony does so at great peril.”⁵⁵⁸

Having laid out both the occurrent and underlying motivations of the virtuous agent, it should by now be apparent that the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, justifications, and actions have all been cashed out in terms of *human goodness*. For example, in chapter four, I argued that we ought to understand the virtuous agent as being concerned with and caring for herself in relation to her goodness *qua* human goodness. In chapter three, while I argued that the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, simply because she recognizes that such an act is good, what makes such an act good is *human goodness*. And, in this chapter, I have argued that the person on the road to virtue cultivates and then goes on to maintain the virtuous disposition ultimately because she appreciates and understands that the *human good* consists in a life of excellent moral activity.

⁵⁵⁶ I.e., as understood in the third usage mentioned above.

⁵⁵⁷ See Chapter 2, for particular neo-Aristotelian accounts that may be said to give rise to such malady of spirit.

⁵⁵⁸ Stocker, Michael “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67.

In short, all of the virtuous agent’s actions are performed for the sake of the good *qua* human goodness. As a result, she may be understood as being motivated by human goodness, valuing objects only insofar as they participate in human goodness, and the justifications for all of her actions are given in terms of *human goodness*. Such an account of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, and justification is *human goodness*, as they say, “all the way down.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by making the case that there is a sense in which we may describe eudaimonistic approaches toward ethics – including the Aristotelian variety – as “altruistic.” Such frameworks, I argued, may be said to be “altruistic” insofar as the ultimate reason for endorsing a particular way of life is not cashed out in terms of one’s own well-being. In the second section, I emphasized the importance of situating the individual, who is on the way to virtue, when entering into the Socratic question, as someone who has had a great deal of early moral education, and is already in possession of virtue in the natural sense. By situating the person on the road to virtue in this way, we gain insight into why she chooses to live a life in accordance with the moral virtues while others do not. In the third section, I laid out my account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent: the altruistic account of moral motivation. Once again, the altruistic account of moral motivation states that the underlying reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is *ultimately* because one appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. While precisely how one comes to appreciate and understand that human goodness consists in a life of virtuous activity will vary from individual to individual, I hope to have articulated a few of the simple truths that the person on the road to virtue will be aware of in order to help illuminate the kind of knowledge that such an individual possesses. In the fourth section, I hope to have shown that the altruistic account of motivation may be understood as arising naturally from a plausible reading of Aristotle’s function argument (at *EN* 1098a 16-18), and in this sense may be understood as “Aristotelian in spirit.” Finally, and most importantly, I hope to have demonstrated how the virtuous person’s moral upbringing and her occurrent level of motivation may be said to fit with her underlying level of motivation to provide not only a unified neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection, but also one in which all of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations and justifications are in harmony “all the way down.”

Conclusion

“All things considered, everyone who has the power to live according to his own choice should set up for himself some object for a noble life – whether honour, or reputation, or wealth or culture ... Since not to have one’s life organized with reference to some end is a mark of great folly.” (Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics 1214b)

The central goal of this dissertation was to adequately address one of the longest standing objections levied against neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics: namely, that it offers an unacceptably egoistic account of why the virtuous agent acts virtuously. While various contemporary neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation *are* able to address such a charge as it may be said to arise at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, none, so I have argued, are able to adequately address it on its own terms “all the way down.” By contrast, the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation offered here – which I call the altruistic account of motivation – can adequately address what I call the “self-absorption objection” *in toto*. This is no small feat. For, if the arguments offered in this thesis are accepted, then the all too familiar charge that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is necessarily committed to an account of moral motivation that is objectionably “self-absorbed,” “egoistic,” “self-centred,” etc., can be laid to rest once and for all.

I began this dissertation by arguing that there are good grounds for taking the self-absorption objection seriously. In chapter one, I showed that the recent objections made by contemporary ethicists – such as Thomas Hurka, and Christine Swanton – are not new, but rather are best understood as part of a long history of discontentment with Aristotle’s account of moral motivation. In chapter two, I examined the three main strategies that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have employed to address the self-absorption objection – i.e., the developmental approach, the two-standpoint approach, and the reconceptualization approach – and showed that none of these strategies is able to provide a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection “all the way down.”

Discontent with the various strategies neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists have employed to address the self-absorption objection, in chapter three I begin charting a new way forward, starting with the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent. Here, I laid out and defended what I have called the “recognition view.” On this view, the virtuous agent acts virtuously, occurrently speaking, simply because she recognizes the intrinsic, non-relational goodness of the act itself. The mere recognition that a particular action is good is sufficient to move the virtuous agent to act virtuously. Thus, the question of whether performing an action is “good for me” or “good for another” does not arise. As a result, the self-absorption objection cannot find any footing at the occurrent level of motivation of the virtuous agent, as it is understood on the recognition view.

In chapter four, I challenged a widely held assumption in the literature on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics: viz., that to be a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, one must endorse what Gregory Vlastos calls the “eudaemonist axiom.” This axiom states that the ultimate end of all of our actions ought to be our own *eudaimonia*. Here, I argued that if it is unclear whether Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom – and thus, a formally egoistic account of moral motivation – or if we have good reason to think he did hold it, then neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists should not feel bound to adopt such an axiom either. I then went on to lay out three arguments in support of the view that Aristotle did not hold the eudaemonist axiom: the argument from omission, the argument from self-concern, and the anti-maximization argument. Now, if the arguments advanced in this section are plausible, then I may be said to have shown that we have good reason to doubt that Aristotle held the eudaemonist axiom. If it is plausible to think that Aristotle himself did not hold the eudaemonist axiom, this liberates neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from having to adhere to the formal structure of the eudaemonist axiom when developing responses to the self-absorption objection.

Having liberated neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from having to adhere to the formal structure of the eudaemonist axiom, in chapter five I laid out an account of the underlying motivation of the virtuous agent that does not possess such a structure: the altruistic account of moral motivation. This account states that the ultimate reason for cultivating and maintaining a virtuous disposition is because one appreciates and understands that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity; i.e., a life in which one actively exercises the moral virtues. To be sure, the virtuous agent does not adopt this ultimate end just out of the blue. Rather, she arrives at such a conclusion and adopts such an ultimate motivation from holding, among other things, three theses: the priority of virtue thesis, the situated agency thesis, and supremacy of virtuous pleasures thesis. All three of these theses play an important role in helping the virtuous agent to realize that virtuous activity is the greatest good, and is worthy of serving as her ultimate aim. After laying out this account, I then combined it with my account of the occurrent motivation of the virtuous agent, and with my account of early moral education, in order to provide a *unified* account of why the virtuous agent may be said to choose a life of virtue, and act/emote virtuously. Finally, I concluded by demonstrating how my unified account of moral motivation is immune from the self-absorption objection “all the way down.”

Now, to be clear, while I do claim to have provided a non-egoistic account of why the virtuous agent is motivated to act virtuously, I have not sought out to provide an account of why a *non-virtuous* agent – or, say, a vicious agent or moral skeptic – ought, or has good reason to, act virtuously. Providing such an account is no doubt important, especially given that many of us may question the value of moral virtue, and may grapple with the extent to which we ought to cultivate moral virtue in our own lives. However, given the central task in this dissertation, viz., to provide a non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent’s motivation *in toto*, I

have set out to accomplish this, and have elected not to take on these related, but separate issues here.

It is also important to note that while I do hold that the virtuous agent acts in what we might recognize as “other-regarding” ways – as opposed to selfish or self-interested ways – nowhere in this dissertation have I argued that the virtuous agent in fact does so. That is, while I do think that the virtuous agent generally *does* act in ways that are good for others – i.e., that she tends to act generously, kindly, justly, benevolently, charitably, and so on – I have not said anything here to support such a view. This is because I think this matter has been adequately addressed by neo-Aristotelians elsewhere.⁵⁵⁹

Hoping to have already sufficiently explained how important it is for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be able to provide a non-egoistic account of moral motivation “all the way down,” I would like to conclude by briefly touching upon three benefits of the neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation defended here that I have yet to meaningfully explore.⁵⁶⁰ First, one central challenge for standard neo-Aristotelian accounts of virtue – such as Annas’ or Hursthouse’s – is to show how acting in accordance with the moral virtues is good *for* the agent; i.e., that acting virtuously provides some type of agent-benefit.⁵⁶¹ Standard neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral virtue must show this because they hold that acting in accordance with the moral virtues ought to contribute to one’s *own eudaimonia*. Now, for some, most notably Michael Slote, this proposition is puzzling.⁵⁶² That is, it is puzzling how certain types of virtues and virtuous actions – for instance, the virtue of charity and charitable actions – may be said to provide some type of agent benefit. On the altruistic account of moral motivation defended here, however, we need *not* show how acting in typically “other-regarding” ways – such as, say, giving money to Oxfam – is actually good for the agent who performs such actions. Rather, on the altruistic account of moral motivation, we simply need to be able to connect acting in other-regarding ways with the virtuous agent’s conception of what it means to live well, where this is understood not in terms of the agent’s *own* good, but in terms of what is good, *qua human goodness*. This link, I contend, is much easier to make.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ For an adequate defense, see Julia Annas’ “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism,” (2007).

⁵⁶⁰ All three of these alleged benefits, I take it, are improvements on already existing neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation. Further benefits exist when compared to various other consequentialist accounts of moral motivation – such as Thomas Hurka’s – and deontological accounts of moral motivation, such as Immanuel Kant’s.

⁵⁶¹ To be sure, for Hursthouse and Annas, such agent benefit need not hold in each and every case that the virtuous agent performs a virtuous action. However, they must show that acting in accordance with the virtues, is, generally speaking, good for the virtuous agent. While Hursthouse and Annas have made attempts to address this issue, their attempts, on my view, are unsatisfactory. For Hursthouse’s account, see chapter 9 in *On Virtue Ethics* (1999), and for Annas’ account see, chapter 7 in *Intelligent Virtue* (2011).

⁵⁶² Slote, Michael. *Morals from Motives*, P. 21.

⁵⁶³ Recall, in chapter five, I showed how the altruistic account of moral motivation can help us to understand *why* Aristotle’s courageous soldier has good reason to risk his life on the battlefield. In

A second benefit of the altruistic account of moral motivation is that it correctly captures the idea that acting well – i.e., acting in accordance with the moral virtues – is more important, and thus more fitting to serve as our ultimate end, than acting in accordance with our *own eudaimonia*. Recall, on the altruistic account of moral motivation defended here, all of the virtuous agent’s actions are performed for the sake of realizing a particular conception of what it means to live well, *qua human*. And, what informs this particular conception of what it means to live well is *not* what is good for oneself, but what is good, *qua human goodness*.⁵⁶⁴ And so, whereas on formally egoistic accounts of moral motivation, the virtuous agent may be described as acting virtuously ultimately because doing so furthers or is of constitutive of her *own eudaimonia*, on the altruistic account of moral motivation, the virtuous agent may be described as acting virtuously because acting virtuously is *more important* than anything else. Put slightly differently, on my account, virtuous activity is the *summum bonum*; that is, our highest good, and our utmost aim.⁵⁶⁵

A third benefit of the altruistic account of moral motivation is that – unlike standard neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation – it provides an account of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, and justifications that are in harmony “all the way down.”⁵⁶⁶ As a result, the altruistic account of moral motivation adheres to a central ancient insight – and, I take it, a desideratum for contemporary moral theories – namely, that living well requires a certain harmony among one’s reasons, values, motivations, and justifications. As Stocker puts it, “we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek... any theory that ignores such harmony does so at great peril.”⁵⁶⁷ As should be clear by now, the account of moral motivation advanced here takes seriously the connection between (1) having one’s reasons, values, motivations and justifications in harmony, and (2) living well.

In this dissertation, I hope to have provided a neo-Aristotelian account of moral motivation that is immune from the self-absorption objection *in toto*. On my account, the person who is on the road to virtue, as a result of a good early moral education – one which makes her character “suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful” – enters into the “Socratic Question” already inclined toward acting well, and in possession of virtue in the

short, he does not do this for the sake of his *own eudaimonia*, but rather because doing so is what virtue requires, and acting in accordance with virtue is the virtuous agent’s ultimate aim.

⁵⁶⁴ As emphasized in the introductory chapter, I take acting in accordance with the moral virtues to follow from acting in accordance with a correct account of the human good.

⁵⁶⁵ Recall, in chapter five section four, I argued in favour of understanding *eudaimonia* as essentially virtuous activity.

⁵⁶⁶ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (2001) P. 134. Recall, on the altruistic account of motivation, the virtuous agent justifies her actions in terms of human goodness, is motivated by human goodness, and values objects and persons (including herself) only insofar as they participate in human goodness.

⁵⁶⁷ Stocker, Michael “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in *Virtue Ethics*. Ed. By R. Crisp & M. Slote. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997 P. 67.

natural sense.⁵⁶⁸ She emerges out of “the entry point of ethical reflection” with a strong rational desire (*boulêsis*) to pursue the practicable good in action, and decides to cultivate and maintain a virtuous disposition *simply* because she comes to appreciate and understand that the human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity. Having cultivated a virtuous disposition, the virtuous agent goes on to act *solely* because she recognizes the intrinsic non-relational goodness of the act itself. On this account, the virtuous agent may be understood as being motivated by human goodness, valuing objects and persons only insofar as they participate in human goodness, and where all of the virtuous agent’s reasons, values, motivations, and justifications are cashed in terms of human goodness “all the way down.”

Now, if the altruistic account of moral motivation advanced in this dissertation adequately addresses the self-absorption objection *in toto* – as I take it to have done – then, the most serious and longest standing objection that “never seems to go away”, can be said to have been “truly dealt with by virtue ethicists.”⁵⁶⁹ By showing how virtue ethicists may successfully respond to the self-absorption objection, I hope to have contributed to the growing popularity of the neo-Aristotelian approach as a normative ethical theory, by both broadening its appeal to newcomers who are being introduced to normative ethical theories for the first time, and by welcoming back those who have turned away from neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as a result of feeling dissatisfaction with the way in which “one’s own *eudaimonia*” features in neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation. Finally, I hope to have shown that one can both be a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, and adopt an altruistic account of moral motivation. The two can go together, and need not come apart.

⁵⁶⁸ EN 1179b 30-32.

⁵⁶⁹ Swanton, Christine. “Two Problems for Virtue Ethics,” (2015). P. 112.

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