

Margaret Hampson

## The Learner's Motivation and the Structure of Habituation in Aristotle

**Abstract:** Moral virtue is, for Aristotle, a state to which an agent's motivation is central. For anyone interested in Aristotle's account of moral development this invites reflection on two questions: how is it that virtuous motivational dispositions are established? And what contribution do the moral learner's existing motivational states make to the success of her habituation? I argue that views which demand that the learner act with virtuous motives if she is to acquire virtuous dispositions misconstrue the nature and structure of the habituation process, but also obscure Aristotle's crucial insight that the very practice of virtuous actions affords a certain discovery and can be transformative of an agent's motivational states. Drawing attention, in Aristotle's account, to an asymmetry between the agential perspective and the observation of others, I consider what the agential perspective affords the learner, and offer a novel interpretation of the role a learner's existing motives play in her habituation.

**Corresponding author: Margaret Hampson**, Department of Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin, College Green, Dublin 2, Ireland; [hampsonm@tcd.ie](mailto:hampsonm@tcd.ie)

### I Introduction

Moral virtue (*ēthikē aretē*)<sup>1</sup> is, for Aristotle, a state to which an agent's motivation is central. The virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for their own sake (*NE* 1105a32) or, as Aristotle also puts it, for the sake of the fine (*to kalon*, 1120a23–27, 1122b6–10).<sup>2</sup> For anyone interested in Aristotle's picture of moral development, this invites reflection on at least two questions: first, how is it that such virtuous motivational dispositions come to be established? We become virtuous, of course, through the practice of virtuous actions (1103b1–2), but how does our practice of certain sorts of actions lead to our being motivated just as the virtuous agent is? Second, what contribution do the moral learner's existing motivational states make to the success of her habituation? To what extent do the motives with which the moral learner acts

---

<sup>1</sup> By 'moral', 'ethical' or 'character' virtues Aristotle means virtues such as justice, bravery, temperance, and so on. It follows that this discussion is not immediately about *phronēsis*, which is classified as an intellectual virtue, though I wish to leave open how the issues discussed in this paper relate to the question of how *phronēsis* is acquired.

<sup>2</sup> See also 1115b13–13, 21–4. There is some debate as to whether these two expressions should be taken as equivalent, as noted in Section 3 (n. 14). For a defence of the idea that both expressions refer to the *motivation* of the virtuous agent – and, indeed, of the view that to choose virtuous actions 'because of themselves' or 'for their own sake' is to choose them because they are *kalon* – see Sauvé-Meyer 2016, 48–53.

during the course of her habituation determine the eventual state that is established? In particular, does an ill-motivated learner stand any chance of success, compared with a ‘better’ motivated counterpart?

Aristotle does not make any explicit claims about the motive with which a learner should act if her habituation is to be successful, or the way in which her existing motives might contribute to the success of this process. Many scholars have (implicitly) endorsed a so-called ‘motivationally neutral’ conception of the learner’s action, according to which the successful learner performs the right actions and engages her perceptual and deliberative faculties when she practises these, but allowing that she might perform these from a variety of motives. In this way the learner differs from the virtuous agent who performs virtuous actions always for the sake of the fine.<sup>3</sup> The motives of the learner, on this view, would seem to play no significant role in the development of virtuous dispositions. Against this view, however, it has recently been argued that “if the actions of the learners of virtue differ in motive from those of virtuous agents, it is hard to see how repeatedly performing such actions should lead to the acquisition of a state to which proper motivation is crucial” (Jimenez 2016, 24). We are urged, instead, to endorse what I will call the ‘Virtuous Motives’ view, according to which a learner’s actions must be performed with virtuous motives – performed, that is, for the sake of the fine – if they are to contribute to the formation of virtuous dispositions. On this view the learner’s motives contribute directly to the success of her habituation, and determine whether or not virtuous motivational dispositions will be established.

The Virtuous Motives view is defended chiefly by Marta Jimenez, though the assumptions that underpin the view have each found expression in the wider literature. Moreover, we can locate the Virtuous Motives view in a tradition of scholarship that attempts to account for the learner’s successful development by insisting on a certain *continuity* between the actions of the learner and the activity of the virtuous agent.<sup>4</sup> The attempt to show continuity in the habituation process is driven, in part, by the thought that “if full virtue is to meet certain conditions, this must be reflected in the educational process” (Sherman 1989, 159). To this end, scholarship of the last forty years has focused, in particular, on the need for cognitive

---

<sup>3</sup> On this view, the moral learner might act for the sake of pleasure, say, or a desire to be obedient. For examples of this view, see Ross 1949, 194; Vasiliou 2007, 52 n22; Irwin 1999, 195. The term ‘motivationally neutral conception’ is due to Jimenez; for her criticism of this view, see Jimenez 2016, 18–21.

<sup>4</sup> See also e.g. Broadie 1991, 104.

continuity between the learner and the virtuous agent, emphasising the ways in which a learner must engage and cultivate her discriminatory and deliberative capacities, if she is to acquire the knowledge of virtuous action and attain the excellence at deliberation characteristic of the virtuous agent.<sup>5</sup> The Virtuous Motives view meanwhile emerges as part of an effort to extend this same continuity to the motivations of the moral learner. For, Jimenez argues, without such continuity between the motives of the learner and the virtuous agent, we find ourselves facing a ‘moral upbringing gap’, leaving it hard to see how, through her repeated practice of virtuous actions, the learner comes to choose such actions for their own sake. Only if a learner’s actions are performed for the sake of the fine can we understand how her practice yields dispositions to choose right actions for their own sake.

This account of the successful learner’s habituation stands in stark contrast to so-called mechanical views of habituation which see the moral learner as engaged merely in the mindless repetition of certain action types. Such views have long been abandoned owing to their inability to account for the learner’s successful development,<sup>6</sup> and insofar as it proposes a psychologically rich picture of what is required of the successful learner, the Virtuous Motives view might be thought to make important progress. I contend, nevertheless, that the Virtuous Motives view too fails to offer a satisfactory account of how virtuous motivational dispositions come to be established, and misrepresents the role that a learner’s motives play in the habituation process.<sup>7</sup> The Virtuous Motives view, I argue, is grounded in two mistaken assumptions about what it is that the learner must practice in the course of her habituation and what it is that her practice effects. In summary, the view assumes, first, that virtuous actions themselves are constituted by virtuous motives and that a learner must therefore act with virtuous motives if she is to perform the actions required for successful habituation. Second, it assumes that the habituation process is ultimately a process of making stable or reliable an antecedent but

---

<sup>5</sup> At the end of this paper I return to the issue of continuity, and suggest that there is, in fact, an important asymmetry between the cognitive continuity required for successful habituation and the kind of motivational continuity which I will argue is not so required.

<sup>6</sup> See Sorabji 1973/74, 107, 126; Cooper 1986, 8; Hursthouse 1988, 211; Broadie 1991, 109; McDowell 1996, 28; Vasilioiu 2007, 42; Jimenez 2016, 5.

<sup>7</sup> I should make clear that this issue is not, as some have seen it, that only a fully virtuous agent, and not a learner, can act for the sake of the fine. Jimenez has shown that this motive is available to less than fully virtuous agents (see 1116a27–9; b15–22, and for discussion see Jimenez 2016, 24–29f), and I grant that a learner may indeed act with such a motive at a later stage in her development. Nor is it the case that the learner, as such, could not have access to the fine in action; insofar as the learner performs virtuous actions (see Section 2), which have the quality of being fine (1099a7–15; 1099a21–24; 1109a30, 1116a10–12; 1120a11–15), she at least in principle has access to the fine in action.

unstable way of acting (where that includes a way of being motivated), and takes the importance of *practice* to consist primarily in its repetitive aspect.<sup>8</sup> These assumptions, I will argue, not only conflict with various of Aristotle's own remarks and serve to distort his picture of moral habituation, but they also cut us off from the very resources that would allow us to explain how the practice of virtuous actions yields virtuous motivational dispositions.

The very practice of virtuous actions, I will argue, affords a certain form of discovery, namely of their fineness. In the second part of this paper, I argue that it is in discovering the fineness specifically of her *own* virtuous action that the learner comes to be motivated just as the mature virtuous agent is. With this picture in place, I return to the question of what role, if any, the learner's existing motives play in the habituation process so conceived.

## 2 Virtuous Action and Acting Virtuously

Moral virtue is acquired, Aristotle tells us, through the practice of virtuous actions:

Men become builders, for instance, by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. Similarly, then, we become just by doing just things, temperate by doing temperate things, brave by doing brave things (1103a33–b2).<sup>9</sup>

Aristotle acknowledges in *NE* 2.4 that this thesis might give rise to a certain puzzlement about the status of the learner, for one might reasonably suppose that insofar as she performs virtuous actions, she already counts as virtuous (1105a17–21). He thus takes pains to show how this objection to his thesis can be avoided, by distinguishing between the activity of the mature agent and the actions of the learner. To do this, he invokes a distinction between the performance of a 'virtuous action' on the one hand, and 'acting virtuously', on the other. That is, between the thing done and the way it is done. Virtuous actions can be performed by a variety of agents (including the learner), but only the virtuous agent acts virtuously.<sup>10</sup> Acting

---

<sup>8</sup> The first assumption, concerning the nature of virtuous actions, is defended notably by Korsgaard 1996. The second assumption is not often made explicit in the literature but is nevertheless implicit in many accounts of Aristotelian habituation (see note 22 for examples).

<sup>9</sup> Quotations from *NE* follow Irwin 1999, with modifications.

<sup>10</sup> This distinction is introduced by way of an analogous distinction in the case of skill: many agents can do 'something grammatical' (*grammatikon ti*), under instruction say, or even by chance. One only

virtuously requires that an agent acts knowingly, that she choose virtuous actions for their own sake, and that she does so from a stable state of character (1105a31–33). Hence the learner, when she practises virtuous actions does not thereby count as virtuous. But by doing these things many times, Aristotle tells us, the conditions on virtuously performed action come to be met (1105b4–5). Indeed, he stresses that without doing these things, we stand no chance of becoming good (1105b9–12).

Aristotle's discussion in *NE* 2.4 has received much attention, and has given rise to a number of interpretive debates.<sup>11</sup> For our purposes, however, the discussion is revealing in the following ways. First, not only does it show that we can distinguish virtuous actions from their performance by a virtuous agent, but the contrast that Aristotle draws also reveals something about the nature of virtuous actions. A once common misconception is that the agential conditions, concerning knowledge, motivation and stability are conditions on an action counting as *virtuous*,<sup>12</sup> but these conditions are presented only as conditions on an action counting as *virtuously* performed. Indeed, that Aristotle stipulates only that there are psychological conditions to be met if an action is to count as *virtuously* performed indicates that, by contrast, he takes virtuous actions to be, as it were, psychologically determinable. That is, it seems possible on his account to perform a virtuous action from a variety of motivations and holding a variety of beliefs.

Second, the discussion makes clear the *telos* of the habituation process, and what it is the learner's practice is directed towards. The aim of the habituation process is to become such as to act knowingly, to choose virtuous actions for their own sake, and to do so from a stable state of character. Aristotle, unfortunately, does

---

counts as a grammarian, however, if one does grammatical things grammatically (*grammatikōs*), which requires knowledge (1105a24–26).

<sup>11</sup> Much discussion has focused, in particular, on how we should understand the conditions on virtuously performed action. For a comprehensive overview of all three conditions, see especially Broadie 1991, 82–90. For discussion of the second condition in particular, see Williams 1995, Hursthouse 1995, and Whiting 2002.

<sup>12</sup> See Grant 1885, 492 f.; Stewart 1892, 183; Ross 1949, 149; Joachim 1951, 79; Hardie 1968, 104 f.; Korsgaard 1996, 214; Taylor 2006, 84–86; Vasiliou 2007, 51; cf. Vasiliou 2011, 174, where some uncertainty is registered. It is ambiguous whether Williams, by “V Acts” – which he takes to be constituted by the agential conditions – means ‘virtuous actions’ or ‘actions virtuously performed’ (1995, 13 f.). Broadie correctly identifies Aristotle's task in *NE* 2.4 as “to explain the difference between doing what the virtuous person would do and acting *virtuously*” (82, my emphasis), but perhaps misleadingly entitles this section “Conditions of *Virtuous Action*” (my emphasis again). For a corrective to this view, see Jimenez 2016, Hirji 2018, Hampson forthcoming.

The question in what terms we should properly describe ‘virtuous actions’ is not for this paper. There may be some agential conditions that need to be satisfied for these to count as actions on Aristotle's view; the point, however, is that these conditions cannot be the same knowledge, choice and stability conditions to which Aristotle refers in *NE* 2.4, since otherwise the distinction between virtuous action and acting virtuously would collapse.

not expand on what is involved in choosing virtuous actions for their own sake; indeed, he doesn't use this locution again. Instead he later speaks of the virtuous agent choosing or acting 'for the sake of the fine' (III5b12–13, 21–4, II20a23–27; II22b6–10). It is generally thought, however, that fineness is the quality that makes virtuous actions worth choosing for their own sake, and the quality that is grasped by the virtuous agent when she acts in this way.<sup>13</sup> At any rate, one outcome of successful habituation is that the agent will act for the sake of the fine.

Finally, the discussion helps to focus our interpretive task. Since Aristotle makes clear that it is by performing virtuous actions many times that the conditions on virtuously performed action come to be met, the interpretive challenge is thus to explain how, through the repeated performance of virtuous actions, an agent comes to be in the highly demanding state that is moral virtue, and to act as the virtuous agent does. What is it that happens when a learner performs virtuous actions and how does this contribute to the establishment of virtuous dispositions, in particular virtuous motivational dispositions?

That the Virtuous Motives view, as it stands, does not provide an adequate account of how these conditions come to be met might already be evident. The view purports to explain how virtuous motivational dispositions are established, and claims that these are produced by repeatedly acting with virtuous motives. But this only invites a question concerning the origin of these motives themselves. How does the learner come to act with a virtuous motive – even 'on occasion'? Aristotle is clear that we do not begin by choosing virtuous actions for the sake of the fine (II79b4–II80a5, cf. II05a1–5), and how we come to be so motivated remains to be explained. In seeking to show above all a continuity between the learner and the virtuous agent, the Virtuous Motives view risks obscuring the fact that there is also a significant change that takes place in the course of the learner's development; how

---

<sup>13</sup> As Moss explains, this is "in part because it is the only way to save Aristotle from contradiction, and in part because Aristotle defines the fine as one of the things chosen for itself (*EN* II.3 II04b30–31; *Rhet* 1362b8–9)" (Moss 2012, 207). See also Sauv -Meyer: "Aristotle's view is thus that the virtuous person performs acts that are *kalon* and decides to perform them because they are *kalon* rather than for some other reason. It makes sense to suppose that this is what he means in *NE* 2.4 when he speaks of "deciding on [the actions] because of themselves" (II05a32). After all, what makes a particular instance of repayment a just action – or a particular case of standing one's ground a brave action, or a particular case refraining from sensual indulgence a temperate action – is that this particular action (repayment, or withstanding, or refraining) is *kalon*. So deciding on these actions because they are *kalon* (or for the sake of the *kalon*) will count as deciding on them 'because of themselves'" (Sauv -Meyer 2016, 52). See also Cooper 1996, 113; Richardson-Lear 2006, 117; Charles 2017, 116 f. For a challenge to the assumed equivalence, see Tuozzo 1995, 130. Note, however, that Tuozzo is motivated by a concern about the relation between moral virtue and contemplation. For criticism of Tuozzo's view, see Richardson-Lear 2004, 124 n3.

such a change is effected is, in large part, what an account of moral habituation needs to explain.

More problematically, however, the Virtuous Motives view is grounded in two assumptions which cut us off from the resources which could otherwise be used to explain the development of virtuous dispositions. We can turn to these now.

### 3 Virtuous Actions and Virtuous Motives

The Virtuous Motives view maintains that if we are to account for the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, we must grant that a moral learner can, at least on occasion, act with virtuous motives – that is, act for the sake of the fine. Only the learner who practices acting for the sake of the fine will be successful in her moral habituation. Why must a learner act with virtuous motives if her habituation is to be successful? A starting point for a proponent of this view is Aristotle’s remark on what is required for successful habituation in *NE* 2. Aristotle makes clear that a learner must act ‘well’ if her habituation is to be successful, arguing that just as we become good builders by building well, and bad builders by building badly (1103b8–13), so too in the case of the virtues we become virtuous by acting well, and vicious by acting badly:

[...] by acting as we do in our dealings with men, some of us become just, some unjust; by acting as we do in terrifying situations, and accustoming ourselves to fear or to be confident, some become brave, some cowardly. [...] In one phrase: like states come about through like activities (1103b14–22).

It has been suggested that from these very remarks it follows that “the quality of [learners’] actions will be determined not only by the external results, but also by the agents’ emotional and motivational states” (Jimenez 2016, 11). That is, only if a learner acts for the sake of the fine will she count as ‘acting well’.

Yet this is not what Aristotle claims here – nor does he tell us what ‘acting well’, for the *learner*, amounts to. Acting well for a mature virtuous agent, as we have seen, requires that she not only perform virtuous actions, but that she performs these virtuously. But we don’t know what requirements a *learner* must meet in order

for her to be regarded as acting well *in the course of her habituation*. We do know that a learner must perform virtuous actions and that she has no hope of becoming good without doing these things (1103b1–2; 1105b9–12). But there is nothing in the analogy with skills to suggest that a learner’s acting well depends on her performing virtuous actions with a virtuous motive. Indeed, that the analogy here is with skill, where the motives of the agent are not important suggests that his focus here is on the need to get the actions themselves right.<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny that the agent’s emotional states will contribute to the success of her habituation; by ‘accustoming ourselves to fear and confidence’ we become either brave or cowardly, and *mutatis mutandis* with anger and appetites.<sup>15</sup> Nor is it to say that the learner’s existing motivational states will play no role in her habituation (I return to this thought in Section 6). The point is that nothing *in the skills analogy* entails that the quality of a learner’s actions will be determined by her motivational states.

It has been suggested, however, that there is in fact decisive evidence that a learner must act with a virtuous motive if her habituation is to prove successful. This putative evidence is to be found in Aristotle’s very characterisation of virtuous action, gleaned from his discussion of the ‘mean’ at *NE* 2.9. We are given to understand that a virtuous action is one that hits the mean, and here Aristotle summarises the requirements that must be met if an action is to do so. Hitting the mean requires doing a given action – such as giving or spending money – “to the [right] person, in the [right] amount, at the [right] time, for the [right] end (*hou heneka*), and in the [right] way” (1109a24–30).<sup>16</sup> ‘The end’ or ‘that for the sake of which’ is included among the things an agent must get right,<sup>17</sup> and noting Aristotle’s repeated claims that the virtuous agent acts ‘for the sake of the fine’ (e.g. 1120a23–27, 1122b6–10), Jimenez concludes this must be the end at which an agent aims if her

---

<sup>14</sup> Later, at 1105a26–28 he points to the ways in which the two cases are disanalogous, but here his emphasis is on the analogy between the two.

<sup>15</sup> Consider also the contribution of the ‘natural virtues’ (*NE* 6.13).

<sup>16</sup> The reviewer notes that there is no use of the term ‘correct’ or ‘right’ here (‘τὸ δ’ ὀρθὸν καὶ ὅσον καὶ ὄρεον καὶ οὐκ ἕνεκα καὶ ὡς’); the notion of correctness, however, is implied by the context. Summing up his discussion of the mean, Aristotle asserts that hitting the mean is hard work, much like finding the centre of a circle. Whilst getting angry or giving and spending money is easy and can be achieved by anyone, to do so to the right person, and in the right way, and so on, is neither easy, nor can it be achieved by everyone. It is thus rare, praiseworthy and fine. Broadie-Rowe and Kenny prefer ‘[as one] should’ over Irwin’s ‘right’.

<sup>17</sup> Though as Susan Sauvé-Meyer notes (Sauvé-Meyer 2016, 45), not all formulations of the mean mention *hou heneka*: 1109b14–16, 1118b25–7, 1119b16–18; 1120b29–31; 1125b8–21, 30–32; 1126a13–15, 32–35, b5–6. She too asserts that virtuous actions “are actions whose status as just, temperate, or brave is independent of the agent’s motivation in performing them” (Sauvé-Meyer 2016, 45).

action is to hit the mean and count as a virtuous action.<sup>18</sup> Since Aristotle's habituation thesis demands that the learner performs virtuous actions, she must therefore act for the sake of the fine – only in this way will her habituation be successful.

This passage might seem surprising to a reader of *NE* 2.4, where Aristotle told us only that there is a motivational condition that must be met if actions are to count as *virtuously* performed, not if they are to count as *virtuous*. That Aristotle pointed to the motivational, epistemic and stability conditions as *distinguishing* virtuously performed actions from the mere performance of virtuous actions seemed to indicate that, by contrast, he takes there to be no such conditions on the virtuous action itself counting as virtuous. Indeed, if he held that virtuous actions also involve a motivational condition, we might wonder why he pointed to this condition as apparently distinctive of virtuously performed action. The natural reading of this earlier passage gives us to understand that virtuous actions are not constituted by the agent's motives; that he would include this as a condition of virtuous action in *NE* 2.9 should come as a surprise.

Yet it is far from clear that we should read the *NE* 2.9 passage in this way – taking 'the end' (*hou heneka*) to mean 'for the sake of the fine' (*tou kalou heneka*) – and virtuous actions to thus be constituted by virtuous motives. Whilst Aristotle tells us that virtuous actions involve getting the 'end' right, and we know that the virtuous agent characteristically acts 'for the sake of the fine', he also uses the 'for the sake of' locution in more prosaic ways elsewhere. In his discussion of voluntary action in *NE* 3.1, for example, Aristotle specifies the particulars an agent must know if her action is to count as voluntarily done (IIIIa2–6), and includes '*heneka tinos*' among these, giving 'safety' as an example.<sup>19</sup> Here, the end for which the agent acts has more to do with the purpose or intended outcome of her action, rather than her motive understood in a thicker sense.<sup>20</sup> When claiming that an agent must get the

---

<sup>18</sup> This conception of virtuous action is also explicitly defended by Korsgaard, who claims that "virtuous actions are done for the sake of the noble" (1996, 216).

<sup>19</sup> See also II35b11–16: "Among the three ways of inflicting harms in a community, actions done with ignorance are errors if someone does neither the action he supposed, nor to the person, nor with the instrument, nor for the result (*hou heneka*) he supposed. For he thought, for instance, that he was not hitting, or not hitting this person, or not for this result (*ou toutou heneka oiēthē*); but coincidentally the result was not what he thought (*sunebē ouch hou heneka oiēthē*) (for instance, [he hit him]) *to graze, not to wound*". For a detailed discussion of Aristotle's use of *heneka tinos* and *hou heneka* in these contexts, see Flannery 2013, Chs 4 and 5.

<sup>20</sup> Williams too notes that "matters of intention are importantly different from matters of motive", pointing to the difference between someone who sends a cheque to a hospital to advance his reputation, and someone who puts the cheque in the wrong envelope (Williams 1995, 14).

‘end’ right if her action is to hit the mean, Aristotle might simply be claiming that the agent must intend a certain outcome (to repay her debt, say, or to save the drowning child). So an agent can get the goal right and perform a mean or virtuous action, quite independently of whether she is motivated by the fineness of so acting.

Jimenez herself acknowledges that Aristotle speaks of both the ends of actions and that-for-the-sake-of-which we act in a variety of ways. She considers whether a young learner, practising a generous action such as sharing her sandwich, might get the goal right, in aiming at sharing her sandwich, but do so not because she thinks it fine, but because she finds it pleasant. She claims however that “the ultimate goal is not the action itself but ‘pleasure or gain” (Jimenez 2016, 23), and these cannot be the kinds of goals Aristotle has in mind. Yet we can also imagine the case of a child sharing her sandwich because she wishes to be obedient, or because she wants to please her brother. It is not clear that these motives should ultimately reduce to ‘pleasure or gain’, or that Aristotle would rule these out as contributing to the success of the learner’s habituation. Indeed, there seems to be a great difference between a child who acts to be obedient or to please others, and a child who acts merely for the sake of some personal gain, and many would say that the former stands a greater chance of success in her moral development than the latter. On the Virtuous Motives view, however, insofar as neither learner acts for the sake of the fine, both would be equally unsuccessful.

The texts, then, do not demand that we conceive of virtuous actions as constituted by virtuous motives, and that a learner must act with such motives if she is to perform the actions required for successful habituation. In fact, there are good reasons to reject this view of what constitutes virtuous action, which can be brought into view if we turn to the second assumption of the Virtuous Motives view, and the tension between this and Aristotle’s own remarks on the learner’s development.

#### **4 The Structure of Habituation and What Practice Effects**

The Virtuous Motives view is grounded not only in a view of what constitutes a virtuous action, but also in a particular view of the structure of habituation and what the practice of virtuous actions effects. It assumes, implicitly, a certain picture of the

---

For further discussion of Aristotle’s conception(s) of the ‘end’ of action, see Whiting 2002, 278 f., Vasiliou 2011, 182 f.

very nature of moral habituation; a picture that has found (at least implicit) endorsement in the wider literature. What is this picture?

It is uncontroversial that, for Aristotle, we must practise virtuous actions if we are to acquire virtuous dispositions. Since, on the Virtuous Motives view, virtuous actions are constituted by virtuous motives (acting ‘for the sake of the fine’), if the learner is to practise virtuous actions, she must be able to apprehend the fineness of virtuous action, and be motivated by this quality *antecedent to her practice*. She must be able to recognise, and be motivated by, “the fact that it is the [fine] thing to do in the circumstances” (Jimenez 2016, 26), and then act accordingly. The structure of the process, then, is as follows: an agent possesses an antecedent virtuous motive, and it’s acting with this motive that she practises. Acting with such a motive, of course, isn’t yet a stable disposition of the learner, and thus what the learner’s practice would appear to effect is the making more stable, more reliable, this way of acting. On the Virtuous Motives view, what is important about the learner’s practice is that, through repetition, this way of acting – which includes a way of being motivated – gets established as a disposition.<sup>21</sup>

This assumption about the structure of the habituation process and what the learner’s practice effects might seem to follow simply from the conception of virtuous action assumed by the Virtuous Motives view. But I take this picture of what practice effects to serve also as an independent assumption of the view. This we can see if we reflect on Jimenez’ argument that on a ‘motivationally neutral’

---

<sup>21</sup> As noted previously, the assumption that the aim of practice is to make more stable or reliable whatever is practised, and that the efficacy of practice is to be explained in terms of the mechanism of repetition is not often made explicit. Lawrence, however, in attempting to spell out what he takes to be the central principles of Aristotelian habituation attributes to Aristotle the principle ‘Like State from Like Activity’ (LSLA), and identifies as a key feature of this principle: “(R) *the natural effect of activity repetition*: it is a natural, and supposedly obvious, bedrock fact about human nature (and some other organic natures) that, for a certain range of human activities, *repeatedly doing the activity as qualified in a certain way results in the disposition so qualifiable* (itself a disposition to do acts so qualified), i.e. LSLA; and further that such repetition is the only way in which dispositions in these areas are formed. *These facts underwrite a notion of practice – of the possibility of attaining competence by practice, and of the necessity of practice in its attainment* (see 3.5, 1114a9–10)” (Lawrence 2011, 246, my emphasis).

This notion of practice is implicit, however, in many accounts of Aristotelian habituation. It is an assumption, certainly, that underpinned the now unpopular ‘mechanical’ accounts of Aristotelian habituation (see, for example, Grant 1885, 480 f., 484; Stewart 1892, 170 f.), but emerges even in criticisms of mechanical views. For example, whilst stressing that habituation cannot be a ‘mindless’ process, Curzer concedes that: “*It is easy enough to see how performing virtuous acts can provide dispositions of virtuous action*. [...] But the acquisition of the two remaining components of virtue seems mysterious. How do we acquire the ability to identify virtuous acts? How do we come to desire virtuous acts for their own sake? (2012, 318 f., my emphasis). That Curzer takes the emerging disposition to act to be easily explained by the practice of virtuous actions suggests a picture of habituation in which the practice of actions simply results in a tendency to so act. For strong emphasis on the importance of repetition, see also Lear 1988, 169.

conception of the learner's action, it is mysterious how an agent who acts with motives that differ from those of the virtuous agent could ever acquire virtuous motivational dispositions as a result of her practice. For the mystery, it seems, arises if we assume that all the learner's practice achieves is the making stable of whatever way she acts when she practises. If, on the other hand, we thought that her practice – that is, her *very doing of these actions* – afforded something more than the making stable of some way of acting, this might make less mysterious how practice of virtuous actions could yield virtuous dispositions, whether or not the learner acts from virtuous motives.

Now, it might seem as though there is obvious textual support for the thought that what happens when we practise virtuous actions is that a particular way of acting is made stable. Aristotle tells us that the moral virtues arise from habit (1103a17) and emphasises the importance of doing virtuous things 'many times' (1105b4); in this way a 'firm and unchanging state' (1105a33) is established. Aristotle, indeed, is all but explicit in claiming that practice establishes a 'second nature', where the analogy with nature is intended to pick out the idea that what gets established is something law-like and deep-rooted.<sup>22</sup> We cannot deny, then, that at least part of what comes about as a result of the learner's practice is that a particular way of acting and being motivated becomes, as it were, second nature. Yet a closer look at Aristotle's remarks reveal it is a mistake to think that this is *all* that the practice of virtuous actions effects, and to conceive of the structure of habituation as the Virtuous Motives view does.

Whilst Aristotle tells us in *NE* 2.4 that by practising just and temperate actions many times, a firm and unchanging state is established, this is not all he says that such practice effects. Having stated the three conditions of virtuously performed action – that the agent acts (1) knowingly, (2) that she chooses virtuous actions for their own sakes, and (3) that she acts from a stable state of character (1105a31–33) – he tells us that in the case of skills these conditions do not count for much except for knowledge, whilst in the case of virtue, "knowing is of no or of little worth, but the other conditions (*ta d'alla*) are not of little significance, but of all significance" (1105b1–4). And importantly, "these [two conditions] (*hapet*) come about through doing just and temperate things many times" (1105b4–5). By performing virtuous

---

<sup>22</sup> See, for example 1152a30–33: "Indeed, the reason habit is also difficult to change is that it is like nature; as Euenus says, 'Habit, I say, is longtime training, my friend, and in the end training is nature for human beings'".

actions many times, not only is a stable state established, but the agent also comes to choose virtuous actions for their own sake.

A proponent of the Virtuous Motives view might take this to indicate merely that, through practice, an antecedent but unstable virtuous motive comes to be established as a stable disposition. But the fact that the motivation and stability conditions are listed here as *separate* conditions on virtuously performed action, and are *both* said to arise from the practice of virtuous actions, suggests less that Aristotle takes the practice of virtuous actions to render stable an antecedent virtuous motive, than that it is *through* the practice of virtuous actions that this very motive is acquired.

That virtuous motives are not had antecedent to practice, but rather *result* from practice, is confirmed by two further passages in Books I and 10 of the *Ethics* respectively.<sup>23</sup> The first appears in a discussion of the suitable student of political science, the subject matter of which is the fine and the just (1094b14–15). A youth, Aristotle tells us, is not a suitable student of political science, since he lacks experience of actions in general, which are the subject of Aristotle’s argument; indeed, lacking such experience he “tends to follow his feelings” (1095a4). The immature agent is contrasted with those who “accord with reason in forming their desires and in their actions (*kata logon tas orexeis poioumenois kai prattousi*)” (1095a10), for whom knowledge of political science will be beneficial. After a brief interlude, Aristotle goes on to explain that since we ought to begin from things known to us, not only do we need experience of action in general, but specifically:

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 that; if this is apparent enough to us, we can begin without also the why. Someone who is well brought up has the beginnings or can easily acquire them (1095b4–8, my emphasis).

However we should understand the distinction between the ‘that’ (*hoti*) and the ‘why’ (*dioti*) here, and irrespective of whether there are further reasons that people who are badly brought up cannot be students of political science, what is important

---

<sup>23</sup> The claims made in the wider contexts of these passages have each been subject to interpretive dispute, and in appealing to these passages I do not seek to offer a particular interpretation of the passages, nor to engage with these more global issues. I cite these passages merely as evidence that for Aristotle virtuous motives cannot be antecedent to practice.

for our purposes is that Aristotle indicates here that our knowledge of fine and just things – whatever this amounts to – and our ability to form correct desires in accordance with reason (as opposed to merely living *kata pathos*) is dependent on our having been well brought up. And this, we soon discover, consists in our having practised just and temperate things.<sup>24</sup>

The second passage appears in the final chapter of the *Ethics*, where Aristotle returns to the topic of moral upbringing. Here he asks whether arguments (*logoi*) are sufficient to make people decent, and argues that whilst they may have the power to stimulate and encourage ‘civilised’ young people, they will be unable to turn the many towards the fine and good (1179b7–10). These many:

naturally obey fear not shame; they avoid what is base because of penalties, not because it is disgraceful. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the sources of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it (1179b11–16).

The many, unlike the well brought up, are not motivated by the fineness of virtuous action (or the shamefulness of base action), and instead act out of fear of punishment, living in accordance with their feelings. The passage reveals that the failure of the many to be motivated by the fine is due, at least in part, to their ‘having not even a notion’ (*oud’ ennoian echousin*) of this, which in turn comes down to their never having had a taste of it (*ageustoi ontes*).

This passage raises important questions about the possibility of moral reform, as well as the role of argument in both moral upbringing and reform.<sup>25</sup> Irrespective of

---

<sup>24</sup> This is further confirmed by Aristotle’s remark in *NE* 1.7, that “‘the that’ is the first thing and the principle (*to d’hoti proton kai archē*)” (1098b2–3) and his implied claim that this is grasped not by induction or perception, but by habituation (1098b3–4; see Burnyeat 1980, 71–73). Once again, it seems that our knowledge of fine and just things is, in an important sense, dependent on our having practised virtuous actions.

<sup>25</sup> For a careful reading of this passage, see Kontos 2014, 236–238. As Kontos argues, when Aristotle contrasts the well brought-up and the base, and asks what arguments could reform the latter, he should not be taken to be claiming that these are entirely incorrigible, for he goes on to introduce a tripartite contrast between (i) those who have been well brought-up, who can be encouraged and exhorted towards virtue, (ii) those who disobey and are not naturally well-disposed, who are to be steered through punishment and sanctions, and (iii) those who are incurable. The base who are not incurable cannot be reformed by argument (at least to begin with) but this, Kontos argues, does not rule out the possibility of reform through a change in their habits (followed by what he calls ‘rational reorientation’). In any case, Kontos’ insistence that a change in habits (effected, presumably, through practice of the right sorts of actions) is a necessary first step in the process of reform is consistent with my claim that for Aristotle possession of virtuous motives is dependent on having engaged in the

what further conclusions about such matters we draw from this passage, Aristotle's claim that the many have had no *taste* of the fine and truly pleasant strongly indicates that it is their failure to have engaged in fine action that explains their failure to be well motivated, the taste metaphor here pointing to the need for first-hand experience.<sup>26</sup> Those who truly love what is fine, by contrast, have been decently guided in the formation of habits (1179b9, 1180a5-8). Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of proper habituation and (continued) engagement in decent practices (1179b35ish, 1180a14-16) implies that such lovers of the fine are those who have practised virtuous actions. The implication, once more, is that our being motivated by the fineness of virtuous action is in some way dependent on our having engaged in such action.

Aristotle's remarks in *NE* I and 10 thus suggest that our appreciation of the fineness of virtuous action – where 'appreciation' is something both recognitional and motivational – is importantly dependent on our having practised such actions, and to this extent tell against the assumptions that underpin the Virtuous Motives view. First, since our appreciation of the fineness of virtuous action seems to *result* from practice, this undermines the second assumption of the Virtuous Motives view, that this appreciation is something the learner has *antecedent* to her practice.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, this now gives us reason to decisively reject the first assumption of the Virtuous Motives view, that virtuous actions themselves are in part constituted by virtuous motives. For if the performance of a virtuous action requires that an agent act with a virtuous motive, then the agent's possession of such a motive must be antecedent to her practice, and cannot result from her practice. Since, however, Aristotle's remarks indicate that the practice of virtuous actions *gives rise* to virtuous motives, we should reject the assumption that virtuous actions are constituted by virtuous motives.

---

right sort of practices. For further discussion of the possibility of and conditions for moral reform, see also Di Muzio 2000.

<sup>26</sup> If, by contrast, Aristotle had employed a sight metaphor, this would have still indicated the need for some form of *exposure* to fine action, but allowed that this could come through the observation of others. The taste metaphor, however, implies something stronger, namely that we need to have done these things ourselves.

<sup>27</sup> It's possible that having engaged in a certain amount of practice and having thus come to appreciate the fineness of virtuous action, the learner could at some later stage in her habituation begin to perform virtuous actions for the sake of this quality, and from then on practise acting in this way. But Aristotle's remarks strongly suggest that a virtuous motive is not had antecedent to the practice of virtuous actions *simpliciter*; the learner must have engaged sufficiently in virtuous action in order to appreciate the fineness of so acting and be motivated by this quality on future occasions.

But these passages also offer a certain insight into how virtuous motivational dispositions come to be established. For they suggest that the very practice of virtuous actions affords the learner a certain form of *discovery*. Such practice does not simply make stable an antecedent virtuous motive, but is rather the mode by which the learner discovers something of the fineness of such action and this, it seems, can be transformative. Indeed, as I remarked earlier, it is precisely this change that the learner undergoes when she engages in moral habituation that we should be seeking to account for: Aristotle makes clear that the typical source of motivation for the young is not the fine, but rather pleasure or the fear of pain, whilst the upshot of successful habituation is that she will be motivated to perform virtuous actions for the sake of the fine. We want our account of the learner's habituation to explain just how she comes to be motivated in this way. Aristotle's remarks now offer us a clue: there is something, it seems, about engaging in virtuous action which can be revealing to the agent of its value and bring about a change in her motives. What, then, is it that happens when a learner engages in virtuous action and how does this bring about this transformation?

## **5 The Agential Perspective and the Fineness of One's Own Virtuous Action**

The preceding discussion has yielded an important insight into Aristotle's account of moral habituation, namely that there is, for Aristotle, an important asymmetry between the first person, or specifically agential, perspective and the third person perspective, with regard to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions. It clearly matters, for the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, that we ourselves are the agents of virtuous actions, and not just observers of the virtuous actions of others. That is not to say, of course, that there is nothing to be gained from the observation of others, but rather that there is something afforded by the agential perspective that seemingly cannot be gained from a third person perspective.<sup>28</sup> What is it, then, with respect to the development of virtuous motivations, that the agential perspective affords?

---

<sup>28</sup> This is a claim about the *development* of virtuous motivational dispositions, and thus about the moral learner, not the mature virtuous agent. Whether and in what respect there remains an asymmetry between these perspectives for the mature virtuous agent, or whether and in what respect this asymmetry disappears, is not our present concern.

## 5.1 Discerning the fine?

Before we take up this question, I want to raise an issue in order to set it aside. This is the issue of how a learner comes to possess the ability to discern or recognise the fineness of virtuous actions, for it is clear that not all agents do possess this ability.<sup>29</sup> This is an important question, no doubt, for an extended study of Aristotelian moral development; since, however, our immediate concern lies in understanding the asymmetry that our survey of Aristotle's remarks in Books 1, 2 and 10 has brought to our attention, and since it is not immediately clear that the question of how precisely a learner comes to recognise the fine in action itself develops this idea, I reserve treatment of this question for another occasion. Indeed, a satisfactory answer to this question concerning recognition of the fine would take us beyond the topic of the moral learner and moral habituation which are the focus of this paper. For in order to explain satisfactorily how the moral learner *acquires* the ability to recognise the fineness of virtuous actions, we need some account both of what the fineness of virtuous action consists in, and how it is that an (ethically mature) agent grasps this quality, whether in general, or specifically in the case of virtuous action.<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I wish only to make the following point about the ability to recognise the fineness of virtuous actions and the cultivation of this ability.

---

<sup>29</sup> For Aristotle fineness is a property of virtuous actions (1099a7–15; 1099a21–24; 1109a30, 1116a10–12; 1120a11–15). In identifying virtuous actions as fine, then, the virtuous agent has not merely come to attach a certain concept – ‘being fine’ – to certain actions (whether as a result of being told that those actions are fine, or having been praised for performing such actions, and so on), but is able to discern what for Aristotle is a real quality of such actions. In this way, Aristotle's realism makes the task of explaining how the learner acquires this ability all the more demanding, for what needs to be explained is how such a discerning ability is acquired.

<sup>30</sup> See Charles 2017, 121, who likewise acknowledges the need for further investigation.

On what the fine consists in, Aristotle does tell us, in the *Metaphysics*, that the fine is associated with qualities such as order (*taxis*), symmetry (*summetria*), definiteness or boundedness (*to hōrismenon*) (*Met.* 1078a36–b1). In ethical contexts, the fine is also connected with worth (*axia*) and fittingness (*to prepon*) (EE 1249a8–10; *Topics* V 5 135a13). Noting this, various scholars attempted to show how these qualities are also manifested in virtuous actions, which have the quality of being fine; see especially Richardson-Lear 2006, and also Cooper ([1996] 1999); Coope 2012, 155 f.; Moss 2012, ch 8; Cagnoli Fieconi 2016, 416 f. For further discussion of the fine in virtuous action, see also Irwin 1986, 2010, 2011; cf. Rogers 1993.

With respect to the issue of how an ethically mature agent grasps the fineness of virtuous action, at least two issues need to be addressed. First, there is the question whether a grasp of what we might call the fine-making features of an action is sufficient for a grasp of the fine, or whether this grasp must be mediated in some way by a grasp of these features *as* appropriate, or proportional, and so on. Second, there is the question whether an agent's grasp of the fine, especially with respect to virtuous action, is perceptual or intellectual; the texts seemingly provide evidence for both (compare *NE* 1170a7–11, *Pol.* 1341a14 and *NE* 1168b33–34). This in turn raises the question of what the distinction between a perceptual grasp and an intellectual grasp of the fine would amount to; a satisfactory answer to this question would require, amongst other things, an examination of the fraught issue of Aristotle's conception of the intellect and its role in grasping ethical principles.

(1) Since for Aristotle what counts as a virtuous action varies according to the situation, what counts as a fine action will likewise depend on the particulars of the action and situation. It is reasonable to suppose that the agent's ability to recognise the fineness of a given action will be importantly dependent on her awareness of the particulars of the action, in virtue of which it is fine, and the relations such features bear towards one another. We might call these the 'fine-making' features of the action. Aristotle, of course, does not offer concrete examples, but drawing on his remarks on magnificence, we might suppose that in order to see a particular magnificent action as fine, the agent must be aware, say, that a foreign visitor is arriving (1123a2-3), that it is customary to receive visitors with a feast, that she has the resources to host the feast (1122b23-25) and so on; that the cost of the feast will reduce the amount she has to spend on herself will, by contrast, appear irrelevant to her (1122b9-10). In another situation, she must be aware that a beautiful ball will bring as much – or even more – pleasure to a child than an object of great monetary worth (1123a14-16). Without some form of awareness, at least, of these various features of the action and situation, it is hard to see how an agent could correctly discern the fineness of the action in question. As noted above (n.31), whether in simply seeing (together, perhaps, and not merely in isolation) the fine-making features of the action in question the agent thereby sees the action as fine, or whether she needs to see these features *as* appropriate, or proportional, and so on, is a question for another occasion.

(2) If an agent's ability to recognise the fineness of virtuous actions is dependent on her awareness of the morally relevant or 'fine-making' features of such actions in given situations, we might reasonably wonder how the learner's ability to recognise such features is cultivated. I have argued elsewhere for an account of Aristotelian habituation as involving the emulative imitation of a virtuous agent, according to which such imitation involves not only close attention to the action of a (virtuous) role model, but also the adoption of the (virtuous) agent's perspective.<sup>31</sup> In adopting the virtuous agent's perspective and attempting to see things as the virtuous agent does, the features of an action in which its fineness is manifested are brought into view. In response to the question of how a learner could come to see those

---

<sup>31</sup> I acknowledge there is a further question as to how a learner recognises a model as appropriate, when she herself is not virtuous, and suggest that this problem (and thus, perhaps, its solution) is parallel to the problem of how we might identify experts when we are not expert ourselves. In any case, Aristotle himself does not appear to be concerned by this issue, for in the *Rhetoric* he simply asserts that the virtuous are objects of emulation, particularly for the young (1388b10-11).

things that are salient to the virtuous agent, it is important to recognise that the learner is not alone in this process. For the virtuous agent should not be seen as a passive model, but rather – like a teacher of skill – active in guiding the learner and drawing her attention to those things that are important about a given situation (see 1103b8–14; Hampson 2019). Hence, indeed, Aristotle’s emphasis on the importance of friends in Books 8–9 and the larger community in Book 10.<sup>32</sup> This, then, provides the outline of an account of how a learner comes to be in a position to see the fine in action.

## 5.2 What does the agential perspective afford?

Our present concern, however, is the question of what the agential perspective affords with regards to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, and why, with regard to the development of such dispositions, it matters that we ourselves are agents of virtuous actions. There are two main interpretive options, one stronger, one weaker.

*Option 1. Recognition of the fine in action as such.* One explanation of why it matters, with respect to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, that we ourselves are agents of fine actions would be to claim that there is an asymmetry between the agential perspective and the third person perspective in how we come to recognise the fine in action as such.<sup>33</sup> This would in turn account for the asymmetry between the two perspectives with regard to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, on the grounds that proper motivation depends on our recognition of the fine in action. On this view, someone who has not engaged in at least some fine action would be unable to recognise the fine in action at all, let alone be motivated by it. Our ability to recognise the fineness of others’ actions would be dependent on our first having recognised it in, or through, our own action. This is a strong claim, then, though not thereby implausible. It appears to be consistent, at least, with the intimation in Book 1 that our knowledge of fine and just things is in some way dependent on good upbringing and the practice of virtuous actions, and

---

<sup>32</sup> For an alternative, though not incompatible, account of how the ability to discern fine actions is developed, see Cagnoli Fieconi 2016 who constructs an account of how musical education enables learners to perceptually discern fine actions and characters.

<sup>33</sup> Whatever more detailed account one might offer of this process, as acknowledged in Section 5.1. Note that this is a claim only about the fine in action; it is implausible to suppose that one must have engaged in virtuous action in order to recognise the fine in any domain, such as painting or poetry.

the claim in Book 10 that the many have ‘not even a *notion*’ of the truly fine and pleasant. Yet since it is the claims in these passages that we are, in part, trying to understand, we cannot simply cite these passages as support for a particular interpretation of them.

In order positively to recommend this stronger interpretive option, we might hope both for further textual support,<sup>34</sup> and some account of why our very recognition of the fine in action can come only through the observation of our own actions, and not the observation of others. Indeed, this suggestion is in some apparent tension with other features of Aristotle’s ethical theory. For he claims in *NE* 9.9 that “we are able to observe our neighbours more than ourselves, and to observe their actions more than our own” (1170a33–35); why, given this, would he maintain that recognition of the fine cannot (first) come through observation of others actions? Moreover, Aristotle elsewhere appears to suggest that our ability to recognise the fine in action can be cultivated through other modes. For in *Politics* 8 he claims that musical education helps us to recognise (or discern, *krinein*) the fine *not only in*

---

<sup>34</sup> There might appear to be tangential support from a remark on musical education in *Politics* 8. Here Aristotle takes up the question of whether, and to what end, musical training should be included in the education of the young. In *Pol.* 8.5 Aristotle raises a challenge for any view of the purpose of music: whether it is for the sake of amusement, the cultivation of character, or intellectual enjoyment, why should the young be taught to play music themselves? Having explained the particular benefits of music for the cultivation of character, Aristotle concludes that children should indeed be taught to sing and play themselves, on the grounds that “it is difficult if not impossible for people to become excellent judges of performance if they do not take part in it (*hen gar to tōn adunatōn ē chalepōn esti mē koinōnēsantas tōn ergōn kritas genesthai spoudaious*)” (*Pol.* 1340b24–25). One might suppose that an analogous claim could be made in the case of virtuous action: it is difficult, if not impossible, to become excellent judges [of the fineness] of virtuous action, if we have not taken part in it. Yet it is unclear whether we are licensed to assume this analogous claim (and to suppose, moreover, that it is *fineness* and not some other aspect of virtuous action that practice would make us excellent judges of). Indeed, there are textual reasons for doubting whether Aristotle meant this claim to extend beyond the case of music. For Aristotle earlier claims that we do *not* always need to be trained in a given craft in order to be excellent judges, citing building as an example: he who uses a house is a better judge than the maker (*Pol.* 1282a18–23; see Kraut 1997, 199). Indeed, on Kraut’s interpretation of *Pol.* 8.6 Aristotle’s point is not that a performer has access to some feature of musical performances that are inaccessible to a listener; Aristotle’s point is rather that “it will be difficult or impossible to [become an excellent judge of music] unless one takes pleasure in the right sorts of music when one is a child – a goal that is most easily achieved if one learns an instrument” (1997, 200). Interestingly, Aristotle claims in *NE* 10.5 that we “discern each thing better (*mallon gar hekasta krinousi*) and more exactly (*exakribousin*) when our activity involves pleasure” (1075a31–32), supporting the thought that the pleasure taken by the agent of fine actions contributes to her discernment of the fine in action. Yet this claim requires an important qualification; a qualification, moreover, which prevents us from citing this passage in support of our first suggestion as such. The pleasure that increases our discernment is specifically pleasure proper to the activity; the pleasure that would improve our discernment of virtuous activity must be pleasure proper to virtuous activity, namely pleasure taken in the fineness of virtuous activity (*NE* 1099a13–15, 1105a1, 1179b25). This being so, it cannot be that such pleasures are what *first* enables an agent to discern the fineness of virtuous activity, for she must have discerned this quality in order to take (proper) pleasure in it. Pleasure taken in the fineness of virtuous activity could only contribute to the *increased* discernment of the fine; it could not be that which allows for recognition of the fine as such.

*music*, but in actions and character too (1340a15–17). To resolve the tension between this latter claim and the first interpretive option, one would have to maintain that any contribution to our recognition of the fine made by musical education is necessarily posterior to, and dependent upon, our prior recognition of the fine in or through our own action. These challenges are not insurmountable, but further work would be required to fully defend this interpretive option.<sup>35</sup>

*Option 2. Recognition of the fine in action* insofar as it is motivating. The weaker interpretive strategy is not to posit an asymmetry in our recognition of the fine in action as such, but to begin with the core thesis established in the passages we surveyed, that there is an asymmetry with respect to our being motivated by the fine, between what is afforded by our own performance of virtuous actions, and what is afforded by the observation of others. If we are to act for the sake of the fine, it clearly matters that we have been the agents of fine actions ourselves, and have not merely observed the fine actions of others.

A once popular approach to explaining Aristotelian habituation – inspired in large part by Aristotle’s remarks on pleasure and habituation in *NE* 2.3 – took the habituation process to consist in training a learner to take pleasure in fine actions, whether through the mechanism of association or whether because the habitual, according to Aristotle, is pleasant (*Rhet.* 1369b16–18).<sup>36</sup> The importance of practising virtuous actions is thus explained in terms of the pleasure the learner comes to take in performing virtuous actions, this providing the motivation to so act in the future. Such accounts have rightly been criticised for a number of reasons: they fail to account for the distinctive pleasure the virtuous agent takes in virtuous actions, namely pleasure taken in virtuous actions *qua* fine (see 1099a13; 1179b25–31), and fail moreover to explain how the learner comes to choose virtuous actions *for their own sake* or *for the sake of the fine*.<sup>37</sup> But – and most pertinent for this discussion – they

---

<sup>35</sup> A possible approach might be to claim that there are certain fine-making features of virtuous actions that we can only learn to discern from the agential perspective, and moreover that we need to have first discerned these features through or in our own actions before we can recognise such features in the actions of others. Such a grasp would be necessary for us to benefit from musical education, or indeed the observation of role models. This invites the question, however, what such features might be. There are, certainly, features of virtuous actions which may be more perspicuous to the agent of the action: in the case of courageous action, say, the fearsomeness of the on-coming army may be more perspicuous to the agent than an observer, and the perspicuity of this danger may, for the sake of argument, make the fineness of standing firm more immediately apparent. Yet it is unclear whether or not one could *only* learn to discern a feature such as this from the agential perspective. And what, we might ask, would such features be in other cases, such as the just allocation of honour or money?

<sup>36</sup> See for example MacIntyre 1981, 188; Engberg-Pedersen 1983, 182 f.; Lear 1988, 169.

<sup>37</sup> For recent and comprehensive criticism see Jimenez 2015. See also Hursthouse 1986.

also assume a gap between our recognition of the fine and our being motivated by it – a gap that is to be filled by appeal to training in pleasure – and this assumption conflicts with Aristotle’s remarks which strongly suggest that to see something as fine is sufficient to find it attractive.<sup>38</sup> Where the object under consideration is a fine action that another has performed, this attractiveness manifests itself in attitudes of praise. Where prospective action is concerned, it is thought that to see a course of action as fine is sufficient to be motivated to perform it; there is no gap between recognition and motivation that needs bridging through training in habitual or associated pleasure.

Those scholars who have advocated for the inherent attractiveness of the fine have not, to my knowledge, raised the question that I am raising, viz. why there is an asymmetry, with respect to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, between the agential perspective and the third person perspective, and why it is important for the development of such dispositions that we have performed virtuous actions ourselves. For if we accept, as Aristotle’s remarks indicate we should, that to see a prospective course of action as fine is to be motivated to perform it, we might reasonably wonder why it is so important that we have performed fine actions ourselves, and not merely observed the fine action of others, if we are to be motivated by this quality. By raising this question we arrive, I submit, at an interesting answer: in order to recognise the fineness of virtuous action *in a motivating way*, we need to have seen the fineness *of our own action*, and not merely recognised the fineness of others’ action. There is something, it seems, about recognising the fineness of *our own* virtuous actions that is motivating, in a way that recognising the fineness of another’s action – at least in the first instance – is not.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> See especially Charles 2015, 76 f. Charles draws on his 2006 account of seeing something as pleasant to develop an analogous account of seeing something as fine, that is as ‘an attraction-involving form of thought’ or ‘a thought-involving form of desire’ (Charles 2015, 77).

I have argued in Hampson 2019 that the motivational force of the fine is indicated by Aristotle’s remarks on the objects of choice at *NE* 1104b30–32. Here Aristotle lists the fine as one of three objects of choice, alongside pleasure and the beneficial, implying that just as for something to appear pleasant is for it to appear as an object of choice or pursuit, so too for the fine. See also the discussion in *NE* 3.1 of the fine’s apparent power to compel us to act (1110a4–5, b9–10).

For other discussions of the inherent attractiveness of the fine, see Richardson-Lear 2006; Taylor 2006, 89 n10; Coope 2012, 157–60; Moss 2012, 210; Charles 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Moss 2012 emphasises the importance of an agent’s self-awareness in the habituation process, but does not make the point that the recognition of the fineness of one’s own actions is motivating in a way that the recognition of another’s is not. Moss argues that the “crucial effect of habituation is making one take pleasure in the fine” (208), and this pleasure, she claims, is taken specifically in the “awareness of *oneself* as acting and feeling finely” (208); it is not immediately clear from her discussion whether Moss would agree with my conclusion or not. Certainly Moss does not directly raise the issue of an asymmetry between the first person or agential perspective and the third person

There is a further question, of course, as to why Aristotle should think there is such an asymmetry between what is afforded by our recognition of a quality in *our own* actions, and our recognition of a quality in those of another, but this, once again, is a question for Aristotle’s psychology more generally. Possible strategies for addressing this question might include, but need not be limited to, the following. (i) Aristotle might suppose that the mode of awareness is (qualitatively) different in the case of the first person or agential perspective and the third person perspective – that the awareness of ourselves takes the form of proprioception, say, and is unlike third person observation – and that this qualitative difference accounts, in some way, for the motivating quality of the former.<sup>40</sup> (ii) Alternatively, Aristotle might appeal to the notion of ‘experience’, and argue that only in performing virtuous actions (and in being aware of, or reflecting upon, one’s own performance) does one gain the relevant experience of acting finely, where such experience accounts for the motivational force of the first person or agential perspective.<sup>41</sup> (iii) Or again, Aristotle might appeal to the content of what is first perceived, and later envisaged, as fine. He might claim, for example, that when an agent is motivated to act for the sake of the fine, what she envisages is not the fineness of an action as such, but the fineness of herself so acting, and for this reason she needs to have previously recognised the fineness of her own performance of virtuous actions.<sup>42</sup> For the present study, however, that there appears to be such an asymmetry is already a significant

---

perspective with respect to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions. Moreover, when emphasising that the virtuous agent delights in the actions of a virtuous friend as, in a sense, her own, Moss does not consider, as I do below, why it is nevertheless so important that we do these actions ourselves. Moss’ account may be compatible with the picture I present, but it is not clearly intended to answer the same questions.

<sup>40</sup> See Moss 2012, 217 f., for critical discussion of proprioception as the relevant model for first person awareness here. Yet, as noted above, Moss does not make reference to the asymmetry between perspectives that I have identified, and the presence of this asymmetry may – contra Moss – give us reason for preferring the proprioception model to the third person observational model.

<sup>41</sup> This suggestion is consistent with remarks in Charles 2015, though, as noted, since Charles does not raise the question I am raising, his allusions to experience of the fineness of acting are not necessarily intended as answers to this.

<sup>42</sup> In support of the thought that a virtuous agent apprehends not simply the fineness of virtuous actions, but also the fineness of her own performance of these, one might appeal to Aristotle’s discussion of friendship and benefaction in Book 9. For there Aristotle repeatedly makes reference to the agent and not just the action itself, stating for example that “the benefactor’s action is fine *for him*” (*tōi men euergetēi kalon to kata tēn praxin*, 1168a9), or that the decent person sacrifices honours and offices for his friends, “since this is fine and praiseworthy *for himself*” (*kalon gar autōi touto kai epaineton*, 1169a30–1). Aristotle also points out that it is possible for the decent person “to sacrifice actions to his friend, since it may be finer to be responsible for his friend’s doing the action than to do it himself” (1069a32–34); the action he sacrifices to his friend is presumably a fine action, but the decent person recognises that it will be finer *for himself* to perform another action, namely to sacrifice the performance of that action to his friend.

finding in terms of advancing our understanding of Aristotle's account of moral habituation, and indeed his moral psychology more widely.

Before I conclude this discussion, I wish to address one final issue. For the claim that the recognition of the fineness of one's own action is motivating in a way that the (initial) recognition of the fineness of another's action is not, raises an interesting question about our *friends'* actions. For Aristotle famously claims that a friend is 'another self' (*heteros gar autos ho philos estin*) 1170b6–7, and says that the actions of the virtuous who are friends are pleasant to the good person since they are decent, and 'his own' (*oikeias*, 1169b35–70a4). Could the recognition of the fineness of our friends' actions be motivating in the way that recognition of the fineness of others' actions is not? That is, could we come to be motivated by the fineness of virtuous actions if we simply observed our friends' fine actions, but did not perform such actions ourselves? The answer, I believe, is no. Aristotle is emphatic that without having *done* virtuous things ourselves, we have *no chance* of becoming good (*ek de tou mē prattein tauta oudeis an oude mellēseie ginesthai agathos*, 1105b11–12), and this strongly indicates that we could not be successful in our habituation merely observing our friends' actions without engaging in virtuous action ourselves – even if those friends are, in an important sense, other selves. The observation of virtuous friends may be more effective, in other respects, than the observation of mere acquaintances or strangers – whether that is in contributing to our knowledge in general of the fine in action, or in helping us to see things about ourselves – and it may even be the case that as an agent matures, and after she has engaged in sufficient fine action herself, the sense of the boundaries or differences, as it were, between herself and her friend, and her own action and her friend's action, becomes less distinct.<sup>43</sup> But Aristotle's insistence that we must engage in virtuous actions ourselves indicates that, for the learner, observation of a friend could not replace what is afforded by her own performance of virtuous actions.

## 6 The Learner's Motives Revisited

---

<sup>43</sup> Note, too, that Aristotle's claims about the pleasure taken by friends in each other's actions is in the context of a discussion of virtuous – that is, mature – friends, and not the moral learner. Cooper writes that "it is the sense of kinship as it grows up, deepens, and sustains itself within close and prolonged association that the argument relies on" (Cooper 1977, 300).

See Kosman 2004 for extended discussion of the sense in which a friend is another self and, in particular, the thought that kinship can enable "the enlargement of my being"; for, as Kosman explains, as friends we can "constitute a community of shared activity that goes beyond and amplifies the experience of each of us separately" (Kosman 2004, 148).

I have argued for a picture of the learner's habituation according to which the transformation of the learner's motives is dependent on her coming to recognise the fineness of virtuous actions, and specifically the actions she herself performs. This discovery, and the corresponding transformation of the learner's motives, is dependent on the learner's own engagement in virtuous action. This provides the basis of an answer to the first of our original questions, namely how virtuous motivational dispositions are acquired through the practice of virtuous actions. But what of the second question with which we began, concerning the contribution a learner's existing motivational states make to the success of her habituation? If what is important is that through her practice an agent comes to see the fineness of her own virtuous action, and as a result becomes well-motivated, does it even matter what motive she originally acts with? Will an ill-motivated learner then be just as likely to succeed in her habituation as anyone else? Will the child who acts for the sake of obedience or pleasing others stand no greater chance of success than one who acts for personal gain?

Whilst the account I have presented emphasises the importance of the learner's own engagement in virtuous action, and her recognition of the fineness of her own virtuous actions, it does not follow that the learner's existing motivational states will make no contribution to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions. It is worth noting, to begin with, that in performing a fine action, the learner is not thereby guaranteed to recognise the fineness of her action. And whilst – as noted in Section 5.1 – it is not my aim in this paper to present a positive account of how precisely an agent comes to recognise the fine in action, Aristotle's psychological works point to a way in which a learner's motives might *negatively* influence her ability to recognise the fineness of her virtuous actions. For it is a familiar fact that for Aristotle the states which motivate our action – our desires, *pathē*, and so on – are intentional states:<sup>44</sup> they are of, or about, some object, and in this way occupy an agent's attention, or influence what she attends to, in particular ways.<sup>45</sup> In *De Sensu*,

---

<sup>44</sup> For an extensive discussion of desire in Aristotle, see Pearson 2012. The intentionality of *pathē* is especially prominent in *Rhetoric* 2, in which Aristotle recognises the capacity for *pathē* to influence an audience's judgments and details the kinds of appearances a rhetorician might conjure to give rise to certain emotional states.

<sup>45</sup> I use the notions of 'attention' and 'what an agent attends to' in a non-technical way, to pick out what she is aware of (in the relevant sense) or 'has at the forefront of her mind' when she acts. Moreover, in speaking of a learner's attending or not to the features of an action in which its fineness is manifested, I do not mean to imply that to recognise the fine is simply to pay attention to it. Nor is

for example, Aristotle refers to people who “do not perceive what is presented to their eyes if they happen to be engrossed in thought, or *in a state of fear* or listening to a loud noise” (447a14–21). Fear, as Aristotle tells us in the *Rhetoric*, is a “painful or troubled feeling caused by the appearance of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain” (1382a21–22), and we can imagine in the case that Aristotle describes, that the appearance of the imminent slight – and/or the desire to flee that accompanies fear – will occupy the subject’s attention, as it were, and prevent her from perceiving what is in front of her eyes as Aristotle claims.

In this way, then, we can see how a learner’s existing motivational states might potentially eclipse – for her – the fineness of her own actions. If the recognition of the fineness of virtuous action is dependent, in some way, on the relevant awareness of the features of an action and situation in which its fineness is manifested, then in so far as certain motivational states may (though need not always) cause the agent to focus on the wrong features of the situation, on such occasions they will prevent her from recognising the fineness of the action she performs. When an agent performs a virtuous action, but does so only for the sake of some personal gain or through the threat of punishment, say, she will typically (though not always) attend to the wrong features of the situation when she acts, and not those features in which the fineness of the action is manifested. A young child who is unwilling to share her beautiful ball with her brother, but does so when threatened with its confiscation may well be focused only on the thought that she cannot keep it to herself, or that her sharing is simply a means to avoid its confiscation, rather than the fact that her brother is pleased to join in the play.<sup>46</sup> It is not that her non-virtuous motives prevent her from

---

it to claim that an agent’s recognition of the fine is dependent on some special form of attention to its fine-making features; for the purposes of this paper I wish to remain neutral on this latter issue.

<sup>46</sup> The situations that a young learner faces will presumably be of this sort; more complex or demanding cases, concerning just transactions or courage on the battlefield, she will face as she grows up. From Aristotle’s remarks on courage, however, we can construct an example in which an agent’s fear might prevent her from recognising the fineness of an action she performs. Let us suppose, as Aristotle on occasion does, that the courageous – and thus fine – action in a given situation is to stand firm against what is painful (e.g. 1117a32–33). The brave person stands firm because it is fine (1115b23–24), and recognises the conditions (*‘en tisin oun?’* NE 1115a29) that make standing firm so. In Aristotle’s discussion of courage, he tells us of other agents who resemble the brave – many of whom perform the same actions as the brave – but are not in fact brave, whether because they are excessively hopeful, or are merely mercenary soldiers (1116b15ff) who turn out to be excessively fearful. On some occasions fear leads the non-brave to perform shameful actions, such as running away (1116b16–24). But Aristotle recognises too that in other cases the non-brave might stand firm – and in doing so, potentially perform a fine action (albeit not courageously) – on account of fearing a state such as poverty (1116a12). It is clear that such a person does not stand firm because the action is fine (1116a16), and it is plausible to suppose that the imminent harm of poverty holds the agent’s attention, as it were, and prevents her from seeing what it is about standing firm that is in fact fine in the situation.

performing a fine action, but that the fineness of her action is, as it were, obscured from her view.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Aristotle himself acknowledges that the fineness of an action can sometimes be obscured – using the very same language of obscuring (*aphanizein*) used in his psychological works – when he claims that “the end of bravery [namely, the fine] seems to be pleasant, though obscured (*aphanizesthai*) by its surroundings” (III7b1–2).<sup>48</sup>

So a learner’s existing motives can influence what she attends to when she acts, and thus potentially obscure the fineness of her own virtuous actions. They can, moreover, influence her ability to see opportunities to engage in fine action in the future. It’s worth noting, however, that this account does not require either that a learner must act with the *same* motive as the virtuous agent if she is to recognise the fineness of virtuous action (this would entail similar problems of circularity to those pressed against the Virtuous Motives view), nor that any virtuous action performed with an ulterior motive will obscure this quality from view. Indeed, it is not to single out a set of motives as always playing a negative role. The influence of the learner’s motives will depend, I suggest, on the extent to which these divert the learner’s attention from the relevant features of the situation or action. Perhaps those motives that are strongly focused on an (external) object like some promised reward or threatened punishment will occupy and divert an agent’s attention more than motives such as the desire to be obedient or to emulate another, which are more open ended, as it were, and leave room for the learner to notice certain morally relevant features of her action.<sup>49</sup>

This account, then, allows us to accommodate and account for certain intuitions about differently motivated learners, and allows, too, for some attractive possibilities. For I suspect that, underpinning the concern, voiced by Jimenez, that if

---

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, an ill motivated person will often have reason to *ignore* certain features of situations. A politician who is aware of the perception of her party as ‘nasty’, and so volunteers at a foodbank as a publicity stunt, will not only be focused on making her actions visible to the press, but since it is her policies that have caused their hardship, she will be motivated *not* to attend to the needs of those around her and other such morally important features of the situation.

<sup>48</sup> The language of obscuring is used in both *De Sensu* and *De Insomn.* to describe the way in which perceptual movements obscure one another (e.g. *Sens.* 447a20; *Insomn.* 461a1), as in the case above where an agent’s fear prevents them from seeing what is in front of their eyes. For detailed discussion of these passages and, in particular, the evidence these provide for an account of perceptual attention in Aristotle, see Cagnoli Fieconi (forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> I thank Elena Cagnoli for this suggestion about the ‘open-endedness’ of certain desires. Whether there are certain motives which can *positively* influence the learner’s ability to recognise the fineness of her virtuous actions is an option I will leave open, but do not seek to defend here. For an account of how the desire to emulate might positively contribute to the learner’s habituation, when the object of emulation is a virtuous agent, see Hampson 2019.

a learner acts “*not virtuously*” (2016, 4, original emphasis) it is hard to see how she will develop virtuous dispositions, is an intuition (based perhaps on empirical observation) that an ill-motivated learner – one who acts only for the sake of personal gain (2016, 23) or only under the threat of punishment – would surely be unlikely to succeed in her habituation.<sup>50</sup> On the Virtuous Motives view, this intuition is accounted for by claiming that an agent so motivated fails to perform virtuous actions, and as such cannot develop virtuous dispositions. On the account I have presented, the *likelihood* (but not necessity) of such a learner’s failure is explained by the fact that a learner who acts only for the sake of some personal gain or under the threat of punishment will be more likely to attend to the wrong features of the situation and her action, and not those features in which its fineness is manifested. For Aristotle’s character sketches strongly indicate that in many, if not most, cases of fine action, the fineness of the action will not be constituted by what the agent may gain (and certainly not by some threatened punishment, being external to the action).<sup>51</sup> Such a learner will thus be unlikely to discover the fineness of so acting, and thus come to choose virtuous actions for the sake of this quality.

Nevertheless, even for the initially ill-motivated learner there remains, on this account, some possibility of hope. For it remains possible that she could come, at a later time, to recognise the fineness of an action she once performed, but she did not recognise as fine at the time, and in this way make progress.<sup>52</sup> Moreover – and whilst this claim is admittedly speculative – it seems possible that Aristotle would grant that the fine-making features of some actions (of saving a life, say) might be so salient that even an ill-motivated learner could not fail to recognise their fineness if she were to perform such an action, and could thus – at least in principle – come to act for the sake of this quality in the future.

## 7 Conclusion

---

<sup>50</sup> See for example Jimenez, 2016, 23.

<sup>51</sup> The extreme case being that in which an agent faces the loss of their life (1117b7–15). This is not to be confused with the claim advanced in Irwin 1986, that the fine in action is to be identified with what produces benefit for others.

<sup>52</sup> For discussion of such possibilities and, in particular, their textual basis in *Rhet.* 1.11 and Aristotle’s reference there to Eumaeus of Homer *Od.* 15.400 f., see Warren 2014, 168–174. This suggestion is compatible, too, with thoughts concerning moral reform as discussed in note 26.

The account of the learner's development presented in this paper sees the learner as developing an increased appreciation of the fineness of virtuous action, and more specifically, the fineness of her own virtuous action, through attention to, and subsequent recognition of, the fine-making features of such actions and corresponding situations. The influence of the learner's existing motives on the success of her habituation is explained in terms of the influence these have on what she attends to when she acts. I want to end by making two comments about the habituation process as I have presented it.

The first concerns the issue of the continuity that is demanded between the learner and the virtuous agent. For I acknowledged at the outset that contemporary accounts of Aristotelian habituation rightly stipulate a certain *cognitive* continuity between the learner and the virtuous agent, specifying that a learner must engage her perceptual and discriminatory capacities if her habituation is to be successful, whilst arguing that we do not need to stipulate a strong continuity in *motive* in order to account for the development of virtuous motivational dispositions. This apparent asymmetry<sup>53</sup> in terms of the continuity demanded can be explained in terms of the role that the learner's discriminatory capacities play in her successful habituation, and the contribution these make to *both* her epistemic and motivational achievements. On the view presented, the importance of engaging these capacities in the course of habituation lies not merely in the fact that a learner must *practise* using these capacities, or acting in a way that engages them, but in the fact that, *by engaging* these capacities, the learner is enabled to make certain discoveries about the actions she performs and the situations in which she finds herself. Such discoveries, on the view proposed, not only contribute to her epistemic achievements, but to her motivational achievements too. The sensitivity to the fineness of virtuous action that is afforded by the engagement of one's perceptual and discriminatory faculties affords not only a certain knowledge of virtuous actions, but also makes possible a transformation of motives.

Second, but relatedly, this account presents a quite different view of the habituation process to that assumed by the Virtuous Motives view and indeed many

---

<sup>53</sup> To be clear, this is not the asymmetry discussed in Section 5, which concerned a difference, with respect to the development of virtuous motivational dispositions, between the first and the third person perspectives. The asymmetry under consideration here concerns a difference between the kind of continuity between the learner and virtuous agent that must be stipulated with regard to their cognitive capacities versus the kind of continuity which must be stipulated with respect to their motivational states.

traditional accounts of the habituation process. Where many accounts emphasise the repetition involved in practice, and see the learner's practice of virtuous actions as a process of making more regular or more stable a certain way of acting, this account emphasises instead the practical mode of engagement in virtuous action that practice necessarily demands, and sees the learner's engagement in virtuous action as a mode of discovery. This is not to deny, of course, that stability is something that emerges as a result of the habituation process – Aristotle clearly lists this condition as one that is met by practising virtuous actions many times (1105b4–5). On the account presented, however, stability does not emerge as a mere 'habituated' response, achieved primarily through repetition, but as a result of the agent coming to see the world, and her own possibilities as an agent, in a certain way. By practising virtuous actions over a long period of time, in a variety of contexts, the learner gains an increased sensitivity to the fineness of virtuous action, the situations that call for such action, and the variety of forms that this can take. She is able to see opportunities for herself to engage in fine action wherever these present themselves. In seeing such opportunities for fine action the agent is motivated to act on account of this quality. It is in this way that, over time, performing virtuous actions knowingly and for their own sake becomes a stable disposition.

Aristotle's deep insight, I submit, is that there is something in particular about doing something oneself that is revealing to an agent, and in the case of moral education, that can be transformative. "And so" he writes, "it is well said that the just person becomes so by doing just things [...] and no one would ever stand a chance of becoming good without doing these things" (1105b9–12).<sup>54</sup>

Broady, S. 1991. *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford.

Burnyeat, M. F. 1980. "Aristotle on Learning to be Good". In *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*.

Ed. A. O. Rorty. Berkeley, 69–92.

Bywater, I. 1894. *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*. Oxford.

---

<sup>54</sup> I have presented versions of this paper at the BSHP Annual Conference in Durham, Lyceum Society WIP, UCL Philosophy Department Symposium, Oxford Ancient Philosophy Workshop, TCD Philosophy Department Colloquium, Trinity Plato Centre, B Club University of Cambridge; I thank the audiences at these events for their many helpful questions and comments. I thank Ursula Coope and Joachim Aufderheide for discussion of this material, and Will Hornett, Raphael Woolf, Sophia Connell, Elena Cagnoli and Vasilis Politis for their insightful written feedback. I am especially grateful to Fiona Leigh for her insight and support since the earliest stages of this paper. I offer my sincere thanks the two reviewers and the editor for their help in improving this paper.

- Cagnoli Fieconi, E. 2016. “*Harmonia, Melos and Rhythmos*. Aristotle on Musical Education”. *Ancient Philosophy* 36 (2), 409–24.
- Cagnoli Fieconi, E. (forthcoming). “Aristotle on Attention”. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*.
- Charles, D. 2006. “Aristotle’s Desire”. In *Mind and Modality, Studies in the History of Philosophy in Honour of Simo Knuuttila*. Eds. V. Hirvonen/T. Holopainen/M. Tuominen. Leiden, 19–40.
- . 2015. “Aristotle on Practical and Theoretical Knowledge”. In *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle’s Science and Ethics*. Ed. D. Henry/K.M. Nielsen. Cambridge, 71–93.
- . 2017. “Aristotle on Virtue and Happiness”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*. Ed. C. Bobonich. Cambridge, 105–123.
- Coope, U. 2012. “Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?”. *Phronesis* 57, 142–163.
- Cooper, J. 1977. “Friendship and the Good in Aristotle”. *Philosophical Review* 86 (3), 290–315.
- . 1988. “Some Remarks on Aristotle’s Moral Psychology”. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27, Supplement, 25–42.
- . 1996. “Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value.” In *Rationality in Greek Thought*. Ed. M. Frede/G. Striker. Oxford, 81–114.
- Di Muzio, G. 2000. “Aristotle on Improving One’s Character”. *Phronesis* 45, 205–219.
- Engberg-Pedersen, T. 1983. *Aristotle’s Theory of Moral Insight*. Oxford.
- Flannery, K. 2013. *Action and Character According to Aristotle*. Washington DC.
- Grant, A. 1885. *The Ethics of Aristotle*. London.
- Hampson, M. 2019. “Imitating Virtue”. *Phronesis* 64, 292–320.
- Hardie, W. F. R. 1968. *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*. Oxford.
- Hirji, S. 2018. “Acting Virtuously as an End in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26, 1006–26.
- Hursthouse, R. 1988. “Moral Habituation”. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6, 201–19.
- . 1995. “The Virtuous Agent’s Reasons: a Reply to Bernard Williams”. In *Aristotle and Moral Realism*. Ed. R. Heinaman. London, 24–33.
- Irwin, T. 1986. “Aristotle’s Conception of Morality”. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1, 112–43.
- . 1999. *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*. 2nd Edition. Indianapolis.

- . 2010. “The Sense and Reference of *Kalon* in Aristotle”. *Classical Philology* 105, 381–396.
- . 2011. “Beauty and Morality in Aristotle”. In *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*. Ed. J. Miller. Cambridge, 239–253.
- Jimenez, M. 2015. “Aristotle on “Steering the Young by Pleasure and Pain””. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29, 137–64.
- . 2016. “Aristotle on Becoming Virtuous by Doing Virtuous Actions”. *Phronesis* 61, 3–32.
- Joachim, H. 1951. *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford.
- Kontos, P. 2014. “Non-Virtuous Intellectual States in Aristotle’s Ethics”. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 47, 205–43.
- Korsgaard, C. 1996. “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble”. In *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics. Rethinking Happiness and Duty*. Ed. S. Engstrom/J. Whiting. New York, 203–36.
- Kosman, A. 2004. “Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends”. *Ancient Philosophy* 24, 135–54.
- Kraut, R. 1997. *Aristotle, Politics, Books VII and VIII*. Oxford.
- Lawrence, G. 2011. “Acquiring Character: Becoming Grown-Up 1”. In *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*. Eds. M Pakaluk/G. Pearson. Oxford, 233–84.
- Lear, J. 1988. *Aristotle: the Desire to Understand*. Cambridge.
- MacIntyre, A. 1981. *After Virtue*. London.
- McDowell, J. 1996. “Deliberation and Moral Development”. In *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics. Rethinking Happiness and Duty*. Ed. S. Engstrom/J. Whiting. New York, 19–35.
- Moss, J. 2012. *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*. Oxford.
- Richardson-Lear, G. 2004. *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Princeton, NJ.
- . 2006. “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine”. In *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Ed. R. Kraut. Oxford, 116–136.
- Rogers, K. 1993. ‘The Fine’. *Ancient Philosophy* 13, 355–71.
- Ross, W. D. 1923/1949. *Aristotle*. London.
- Sauvé Meyer, S. 2016. “Aristotle on Moral Motivation”. In *Moral Motivation: A History*. Ed. I. Vasilou. Oxford, 44–64.
- Sherman, N. 1989. *The Fabric of Character*. Cambridge MA.

- Sorabji, R. 1973/74. "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 107–29.
- Stewart, J. A. 1892. *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics Vols I & II*. Oxford.
- Taylor, C. C. W. 2006. *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Books II-IV*. Oxford.
- Tuozzo, T. 1995. "Contemplation, the Noble, and the Mean: The Standard of Moral Virtue in Aristotle's Ethics". In *Aristotle, Virtue and the Mean*. Ed. R. Bosley/R. Shiner/J. Sisson. Edmonton, 129–54.
- Vasilou, I. 1996. "The Role of Good Upbringing in Aristotle's Ethics". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56 (4), 771–97.
- . 2007. "Virtue and Argument in Aristotle's Ethics". In *New Trends in Philosophy: Moral Psychology*. Ed. S. Tenenbaum. Amsterdam/New York, 37–76.
- . 2011. 'Aristotle, Agents, and Actions'. In *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*. Ed. J. Miller. Cambridge, 170–190.
- . 2016. *Moral Motivation: A History*. Oxford.
- Warren, J. 2014. *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle and the Hellenistic Hedonists*. Cambridge.
- Williams, B. 1995. "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts". In *Aristotle and Moral Realism*. Ed. R. Heinaman. London, 13–23.
- Whiting, J. 2002. "Eudaimonia, External Results, and Choosing Virtuous Actions for Themselves". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2), 270–90.