Imitating Virtue

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Abstract

Moral virtue is, for Aristotle, famously acquired through the practice of virtuous actions. But how should we understand the activity of Aristotle's moral learner, and how does her activity result in the acquisition of virtue? I argue that by understanding Aristotle's learner as engaged in the emulative imitation of a virtuous agent, we can best account for her development. Such activity crucially involves the adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective, from which I argue the learner is positioned so as to appreciate the value of virtuous action – its fineness – and what it would be to act finely herself.

1. Introduction

At the heart of Aristotle's account of moral development is the thought that we become virtuous through practice of virtuous actions (*NE* 1103a31-b2). What Aristotle does not make entirely clear, however, is precisely what such practice involves, and just how it contributes to the development of virtuous dispositions. The challenge for commentators interested in Aristotle's account of moral development is thus to explain what it is that happens when a learner practises virtuous actions, and how it is that through such practice she comes to acquire virtue and eventually to act just as the virtuous agent does.[1]

In *NE* 2.4 – asking how it is that a moral learner does not already count as virtuous if she performs virtuous actions (1105a17-21) – Aristotle takes the opportunity to point out that what is distinctive of a virtuous agent is not that she performs virtuous actions, but that she performs these *virtuously*. To act virtuously involves meeting three conditions: the agent must act knowingly, she must choose the virtuous actions she performs and choose them for their

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[1] The last forty years of scholarship have seen a number of attempts to offer accounts of this process which make intelligible how such practice could result in the achievement of virtue. See Burnyeat 1980, Sorabji 1980, Engberg-Pedersen 1983, Hursthouse 1988, Sherman 1989, Broadie 1991, McDowell 1996, Vasiliou 1996, Curzer 2002, Fossheim 2007, Moss 2012, Jimenez 2016.

own sake, and she must act from a firm and unchanging state (1105a31-3). The learner, however, does not yet act in this way; she performs virtuous actions, but she does not yet perform these virtuously.[2] We are told, however, that by performing such actions many times the learner will come eventually to achieve the conditions of virtuously performed action, and in meeting these conditions will have achieved moral virtue (1105b4-5).

Recent attempts to explain the learner's development have focused on the kind of continuity that is needed between a learner's actions and those of a virtuous agent; it being supposed that a radical discontinuity between the two would make mysterious how the learner's practice of virtuous actions could ever lead to the acquisition of virtue. Yet whilst there must be some continuity in the way the respective agents act – it is almost universally accepted, for example, that the learner's practice will involve the exercise of her perceptual and deliberative capacities, just as mature virtuous activity does – an appeal for continuity must not come at the expense of the distinction between the two.[3] Prior to the acquisition of virtue, a learner does not act virtuously, and what needs to be explained is how, through practice of some form, she comes to act in this way; there is a certain knowledge that is acquired and a transformation of motivational states – as well as a certain stability that emerges – and what we need to explain is precisely this change that takes place over the course of the learner's habituation.[4]

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[2] This must be the case if Aristotle is to maintain that a moral learner, when practising virtuous actions, does not count as virtuous already and if, moreover, there is to be something for her *practice* to be directed towards. The aim of Aristotle's argument at *NE* 2.4 is to block the claim that if one does just and temperate things, one is thereby (*ēdē eisi*) just and temperate. He responds to this challenge in the case of grammar first, showing that many agents whom we would not count as grammarians can do grammatical things, and thus that it does not follow from one's doing 'something grammatical' (*grammatikon ti*) that one is thereby proficient in grammar. A person will be proficient in grammar, however, 'if he does something grammatical and does it grammatically' (*grammatikōs*, 1105a23-6). Likewise, in the case of virtues. Aristotle can avoid the charge that a learner is already just and temperate when she practises virtuous actions, by showing that nothing about her character follows from her simply doing these things: 'the person who does [just and temperate things] is not just or temperate, but only if he acts as just and temperate people act' (1105b7-9). If he were to claim that a learner also acts 'virtuously', Aristotle would be without the resources to show the very thing he set out to show: that a learner, when she practises, does *not* count as virtuous.

[3] Scholars have long rejected a so-called 'mindless' or 'mechanical' picture of the learner's practice in favour of a picture which emphasises the involvement of perceptual or other cognitive capacities. Most recently, the issue of continuity has been taken up by Jimenez 2016, who argues for continuity in motive as well as cognition, and stipulates that a learner can and must act for the sake of the fine (*to kalon*). Jimenez argues that a learner is thus 'able to fulfil at least occasionally and at least to some degree the requirements for virtuously performed virtuous action' (2016, 17), though her account risks simply shifting the explanatory problem, since it remains to be explained how the virtuous motives she attributes to a learner come to be acquired. How does a learner come to recognise the value of virtuous action and to choose such actions for their own sakes and not for some other reason?

[4] The virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for their own sake or for the sake of the fine, but Aristotle is clear that we do not begin by choosing them in this way: *NE* 1179b4-1180a5; cf. 1105a1-5.

In this paper I offer a model for understanding the learner's activity that can help to explain her development. Aristotle's characterisations of the learner and the virtuous agent in *NE* 2.4, and his claim in this passage that 'things are called just and temperate when they are *such as the just and temperate person would do*' (1105b5-7), have led many commentators to emphasise the paradigmatic status of the virtuous agent and her actions. Various commentators have suggested, moreover, that the learner can be seen as standing in a relation of imitation to the virtuous agent and her activity – be this conscious or otherwise. Broadie, for example, writes that 'truly virtuous activity arises from what is a sort of imitation of itself' (though adds that 'the person engaged cannot be said to know what she is imitating') (1991, 82); Kosman meanwhile characterises the learner's activity as impersonatory, writing that 'virtue . . . is itself shaped by the impersonation of the virtuous' (1992, 61).[5] Others appeal directly to our imitative nature as part of their account of the learner's development, often to explain how a learner ever comes to practise doing what the virtuous agent does.[6] Yet few have developed this picture or explained just how the imitation of a virtuous agent might contribute to the development of virtue.[7] I believe, however, that by understanding the learner as engaged in a specifically emulative and reflective kind of imitation of a virtuous agent, we can make important explanatory progress. For in thinking about the psychology of imitation and emulation, we are provided with the resources to explain how through such activity the learner comes to meet the conditions of virtuously performed action, and so to act as the virtuous agent does.

Talk of 'imitation' typically evokes the Greek concept of *mimēsis*,[8] and it is worth acknowledging at the outset that language of *mimēsis* as such is absent from Aristotle's discussion of habituation in the early chapters of *NE* 2. Indeed, and as will soon become clear, that '*mimēsis*' – like the English 'imitation' – can sometimes suggest '*mere* imitation', merely

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[5] See also Price 2000, 77; Lovibond 1996, 81; cf. Irwin 2000, 101.

[6] See Broadie 1991, 116-17; Kraut 2012, 537; Lawrence 2011, 252-3; and especially Fossheim 2007. Cf. Sherman 1989, 168 *ff.*, who appeals to our tendency to imitate in connection with the development of *phronēsis.*

[7] The exception is Fossheim, who attempts to show how such a reading can explain how a learner comes to be motivated to perform virtuous actions. Fossheim is primarily concerned with explaining how a learner can be motivated to engage in habituation *in the first place* (2007, 106), and appeals to our natural desire to imitate to explain how a learner will naturally imitate virtuous role models. To this extent, it remains to be explained how a learner comes to acquire the motivation to perform virtuous actions for their own sake. Fossheim attempts to show this by asserting that the strong focus that is involved in getting *x* action right in imitative activity will entail 'somehow "doing *x* for its own sake"' (2007, 113). Yet Fossheim does not elaborate on this and, in emphasising the pleasure that humans take specifically in imitative activity, he faces the difficulty of explaining how a learner can move beyond taking pleasure in virtuous action only incidentally, to choosing it for its own sake.

[8] The term '*mimēsis*' is perhaps broader than the English 'imitation' (although the scope of 'imitation' itself remains broad); translations include 'emulation', 'impersonation', 'representation', 'image-making', 'reproduction', etc. For a comprehensive discussion of the various senses of *mimēsis*, see Halliwell 1986.

'appearing like', or can suggest a somewhat unreflective activity, is perhaps one reason why we do not find talk of *mimēsis* as such in his discussion of virtue acquisition. Yet it remains the case that there is a phenomenon, consisting in the emulation and modelling of oneself and one's behaviour on another, that we can refer to in English using the language of imitation; I will call this particular phenomenon 'emulative imitation'. The relevance of this phenomenon, I believe, is signalled through Aristotle's analogy with skills, and it is in terms of this phenomenon that we can fruitfully understand the learner's activity. Central to my account is the thought that the emulative imitation of an agent involves the adoption of that agent's perspective: in imitating the virtuous agent, the moral learner not only attempts to act as the virtuous agent does, but to see the world as if through her eyes. I will argue that, in adopting the perspective of the virtuous agent, the moral learner is enabled to read situations better, and in particular is positioned so as to properly appreciate the value of virtuous action – its fineness. Moreover, she is enabled to envisage what it would be for *herself* to engage in fine action. Through the imitation of the virtuous agent and adoption of her perspective, the moral learner thus comes both to know the actions required of her in a situation, and at the same time, to see clearly the value that makes them worth choosing for their own sake.

2. Appearing like and becoming like

I have suggested that we can shed light on Aristotle's account of moral habituation if we understand the student of virtue to be engaged in the imitation of a virtuous agent, and that by reflecting on what happens when we imitate others we can make progress in accounting for the transformation that the moral learner undergoes. Yet imitation can take a variety of forms,[9] and it is worth tracing some of the modalities of this concept, and its appearance in the writings of both Aristotle and his predecessors, if we are to identify the activity in which we can see Aristotle's learner as engaged, and to distinguish this from other forms of imitative activity.

Aristotle is very much aware that as human beings we have the capacity to be (for periods of time, at least) like other people. We can make ourselves like others through action, our mannerisms, voice and so on. Human beings have, he tells us in *Poetics* 4, 'a natural tendency, from childhood onwards, to imitate, and this distinguishes man from other creatures, that he is thoroughly imitative' (1448b5-7). Throughout the rest of the *Poetics*, Aristotle is

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[9] For example, behavioural, linguistic, pictorial, and so on. As an indication of the scope of *mimēsis*, in Plato alone Halliwell finds ten different forms (1986, 121). In what follows we will concern ourselves only with the behavioural or emulative senses of imitation (those senses concerned with the imitation of persons), rather than imitation as it figures in visual representation, say, or as the relation in which *technē* famously stands to nature (*Phys.* 194a21, 199a16). Yet, even restricting our focus in this way, it becomes quickly apparent that the modalities of behavioural *mimēsis* remain complex, and these complexities are perhaps one reason why Aristotle avoids couching his discussion of habituation in terms of *mimēsis*.

concerned with imitation in a narrower form than the more general ability to make ourselves like others, for he is focused on the representation to an audience of characters in tragic poetry. But Aristotle's claim in *Poetics* 4 that imitation is something we engage in 'right from childhood', and indeed in which we take our 'first steps' (*tas prōtas*) in understanding (1448b7-8), strongly indicates that this remark refers to a more general tendency to imitate the behaviour and mannerisms of others, than to engage specifically in dramatic representation,[10] since our capacity for such activity would seem to emerge later in our development.

As the case of dramatic representation in tragic poetry makes clear, this quite general capacity to imitate the behaviour of others can be harnessed to make ourselves *appear to others* to be other than we are. It is precisely what takes place in the fictional representation of characters on stage to an audience, but can also take place outside the dramatic sphere and with more malign intentions. In *NE* 3.7, for example, Aristotle writes of the rash man, who (1115b28-32):

> Seems to be a boaster, and a pretender (*prospoiētikos*) to bravery. At any rate, the attitude towards frightening things that the virtuous person really has is the attitude that the rash person wants to appear (*bouletai phainesthai*) to have and hence he imitates (*mimeitai*) the brave person where he can.

Aristotle's talk here of the rash man's wishing *to appear* a certain way indicates, more precisely, that he desires to appear a certain way *to others*, and his imitative activity here constitutes a form of deception, for he wishes to deceive others into believing that he shares the attitudes of the truly brave person.[11] In both the case of the rash man and the dramatic case, however, insofar as the imitator is concerned with the presentation of appearances to others, the imitator

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[10] Or indeed the pictorial representation he also goes on to discuss; see Halliwell (1986, 129). That he goes on to discuss imitation as a form of pictorial representation (*Poetics* 1148b9-19) may lead readers to suppose that it is this sense too that is the focus of his remarks about our natural mimetic tendencies. This, however, is offered as an example or indication (*sēmeion de toutou*) of the pleasure humans take in mimetic objects (*ta mimēmata*), which is cited as a principle cause of tragic poetry (1448b8-9) (in addition, that is, to our natural mimetic tendency); it is clearly not our particular capacity to make pictorial representations to which Aristotle is referring when he writes of our natural capacity to engage in mimetic activity. Moreover, Aristotle's discussion of the pleasure we take in contemplating images is offered as an illustration of his more general claim about the pleasure humans take in mimetic objects, so we are also licensed to take the explanations he goes on to give of why we take such pleasure as explanations of the pleasure taken in mimetic objects more generally, not merely as explanations of why we take pleasure in pictorial representations. Thus we learn that our pleasure in mimetic objects is importantly connected with the operation of understanding and application of reasoning (*sullogisthai*) in figuring out, for example, that 'this' is 'that' (*hoion hoti houtos ekeinos*, 1448b17).

[11] On whether dramatic *mimēsis* also constitutes a form of deception for Aristotle, see Woodruff 1992, 83-9.

will be required to focus quite strongly on the psychology of their respective 'audience', and how they will appear in the eyes of others. What these cases also have in common, of course, is that in neither of these is the imitator *really* like the agent whom they imitate.[12] And this feature of behavioural imitation – that an imitator may merely be imitating another but fail to be really like the object of imitation – might lead one to suppose that imitation is a particularly *unsuitable* candidate for explaining the development of moral virtue. Indeed, I believe Aristotle elects not to invoke the general and widely used concept of *mimēsis* in *NE* 2.1 in part because '*mimēsis*' can connote this kind of phoney activity.[13]

Yet both Aristotle and his predecessors also recognised that imitation can be transformative, for through imitation we can also *become* like the agents we imitate. And thus, depending on what – or whom – we imitate, mimetic activity can serve either as a means of improvement or of corruption. Perhaps the most famous acknowledgment of our tendency to become like those we imitate – and its double-edged nature – is to be found in Plato's discussion of *paideia* in *Republic* 3, where he has Socrates argue that (395c3-d3):

> If [the young guardians] imitate anything, they must imitate right from childhood what is appropriate for them – that is to say, people who are courageous, temperate, pious, free, and everything of that sort. On the other hand, they must not be clever at doing or imitating illiberal or shameful actions, so that they won't enjoy the real thing from imitating it. Or haven't you noticed that imitations, if they are practised much past youth, get established in the habits and nature of body, speech and mind?

Whilst we ought to be cautious about the conclusions we draw from this passage if taken out of context,[14] the passage nevertheless attests to our susceptibility through imitation to taking on the

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[12] See also Aristotle's discussion of those who imitate, but still fail to be like, the *megalopsuchos*. These people, he explains, possess many goods, but not virtue, and thus, in so far as they are prosperous, think themselves 'superior to everyone else, [and] look down on them, even though they act in no better way than anyone else'. This is because, as Aristotle explains, 'they imitate (*mimountai*) the great-souled man without really being like him (*oukh homoioi ontes*), and do this in what they can: they don't act in accordance with virtue, but they do look down on others' (*NE* 1124a31-b5). Unlike the rash man or dramatic actors, these people are not presented by Aristotle as seeking to appear a certain way to others, but seem rather to unreflectively imitate the *megalopsuchos* by looking down on others and in general adopting his attitude towards those whom they take to be inferior.

[13] As should become clear in this and the following section, the thought is not that Aristotle regarded the notions of imitation and emulation as problematic in themselves, but that the concept of *mimēsis* has such a variety of senses that an appeal to this concept could be misleading if it is taken in the wrong sense.

[14] The topic of discussion at this point in *Republic* 3 is *lexis*, that is, the activity of speaking. Having completed their discussion of the kind of content that will be permitted in stories within the ideal city, the interlocutors then move on to discuss the way in which stories are presented, or, perhaps more accurately, the way in which the speaker presents himself in telling such stories. He may, on the one hand, narrate the

persona of another, and indeed reveals just how thoroughgoing this can be. For imitations practised long past youth, Socrates warns us, become established in both the 'habits' and 'nature' of not only body and speech, but also mind. Our susceptibility to becoming like those whom we imitate is clearly recognised by Aristotle too, not least in the *Politics,* where in his own treatment of *paideia* in *Politics* 7.17, he instructs that 'most children's games should be imitations of the serious occupations of later life' (τὰς παιδιὰς εἶναι δεῖ τὰς πολλὰς μιμήσεις τῶν ὕστερον σπουδαζομένων, 1336a33-4). As with the *Republic* discussion, the implication of the *Politics* passages is that, since we can become like those things which we imitate, it is of the utmost importance that young children imitate serious and not base occupations (1336a28-30), if the outcome of their moral education is to be positive.

Whilst both the *Republic* and *Politics* passages deal with imitation that begins in the context of fiction (the *Republic* 3 passage concerns the forms of the storytelling permitted in the ideal state, whilst the *Politics* passage is concerned with the kinds of games free children should play), it is also clear that we can become, through imitation, like those with whom we associate. The connection between the influence of our associates and the power of imitation is made clear by the author of the *Problems,* who asks explicitly why it is that by associating with certain sorts of people our characters can become altered (*Problems* 29, 951a5-11):

> Why does the one associating with a person who is healthy not become healthier, nor (does associating) with a strong or beautiful person add anything to one's characteristics, but (associating) with the just, the moderate, and the good does? Is it because the former cannot be imitated by the soul, whereas the latter can be imitated (τὰ μὲν ἀμίμητα τὰ δὲ μιμητὰ τῇ ψυχῇ)? For good is in the soul, but health is in the body; therefore, one can become accustomed (ἐθίζεται) to enjoy and to feel pain correctly. But the one associating with the healthy cannot: for health is not found in enjoying or not enjoying certain things; for neither of these produces health.

That we have a tendency to imitate those with whom we associate is offered as the explanation of the influence that our associates can have on our characters (in contrast to the lack of influence that our associates have on our health), and we see here an explicit connection

story, presenting himself as himself whilst telling the story of another, but he may also tell the story in an imitative mode, speaking as a character in the story, by adjusting his voice, and so on (see esp. 397a). This impersonatory sense of *mimēsis* appears to consist in imitation through voice, and is in this respect different to what we might think of as the more behavioural or enactive sense that is implied in the other passages to which I draw attention.

between the broad phenomenon of imitation and that of habituation or accustoming (*ethismos*). That we tend to imitate those with whom we associate, moreover, serves as the most plausible explanation of the influence that Aristotle claims a father's 'habits' (*ta ethē*), as well as his words (*hoi patrikoi logoi*) have on those in his household (1180b4-5) – a claim that appears in Aristotle's return to the topic of moral education and the training of the young at the close of the *Ethics* – for it is natural to assume that the children of a household will, perhaps unreflectively, imitate their father in his behaviour, and so develop accordingly.

Certainly, our tendency to imitate those with whom we associate was well recognised in the tradition that immediately preceded Aristotle, and the role that this can play in an agent's moral development well attested. Xenophon, for example, in discussing the charges brought against Socrates asks (*Memorabilia* 1.2.2-3):

> How could he, being such as he is, have made others either impious or lawless or gluttonous or sexually intemperate or work-shy? Rather, he kept them from these things, making them all desire virtue (ἀρετῆς ποιήσας ἐπιθυμεῖν) and allowing them to expect that if they took care of themselves, they would become fine and good people (καλοὺς κἀγαθοὺς ἔσεσθαι). Indeed, he never professed to be a teacher of this, but by being manifestly of this sort, he made his followers hope that by imitating him, they will become like him (ἑαυτῷ μιμουμένους ἐκεῖνον τοιούτους γενήσεσθαι).

Rather than teaching virtue – in the sense that Protagoras or Gorgias claimed to do – Socrates serves as a model that his followers can imitate, and in so doing can hope to become like. Indeed, not only does Socrates, through his example, prevent his imitators from engaging in immoral behaviour, but by imitating him his followers can in fact be brought to desire virtue, much like the young guardians of *Republic* 3 who come to enjoy (*apolausōsin*) the things that they imitate. By imitating others, it would seem that even our desires can be transformed.

Since our imitation of others can thus importantly determine the development of our characters, Aristotle's predecessors strongly recommended that we actively seek to imitate the virtuous, in the hope that we can thereby become good. Democritus writes that it is 'necessary either to be good or to imitate the good' (## B39 DK), whilst Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is recorded as explaining that, if civilisations wish to regain their lost virtue, then (*Memorabilia*, 3.5.14):

> If they discover the customs of their ancestors and practise them in no lesser way than they did, they will become as good as they were; or if not, they [should] imitate

(*mimoumenoi*) those who are now pre-eminent and practise their customs, and if they observe them likewise, they will be as good as they, and, if they are more careful [in observing them] even better'

In the *Agesilaus* too, Xenophon recommends that we actively take Agesilaus as a model to imitate, explaining that (*Agesilaus* 10.2):

If line and rule are a fine discovery of men for good work, I think that the virtue of Agesilaus may become a fine example for those to follow who wish to practise bravery. For which man that imitates (*mimoumenos*) a pious man would become impious, a just man unjust, a temperate man wanton, a self-controlled man akratic? Indeed, Agesilaus prided himself less on reigning over others than on ruling himself, less on leading the people against their enemies than on guiding them to the whole of virtue.

Before we proceed to Aristotle's discussion of moral habituation in *NE* 2, it is worth pausing to reflect on what these various passages might suggest about the concept of *mimēsis* and its role in our moral lives. We have seen passages which treat *mimēsis* as a matter of mere appearance and even a form of deception, and noted that so understood the concept of *mimēsis* would seem an unsuitable candidate for explaining the development of virtue. We have also seen, however, the suggestion that we are naturally imitative creatures, and that *mimēsis* can have the power to transform, suggesting that imitation (of virtuous models) could play a positive role in our moral development. Yet these passages tell us very little about how we should understand the nature of such positive imitative activity or what the successful imitation of a virtuous model would involve. Democritus tells us simply to 'imitate the good'. *Problems* 29, meanwhile, does not depict *mimēsis* as a particularly reflective activity, for it is not clear that the agents intend to imitate, and become like, their associates – no mention is made of their intentions, and we are told only that the virtuous can be imitated 'by the soul'. If imitation is understood as an unreflective activity, this again does not seem adequate for explaining how moral virtue is acquired, at least as virtue is characterised by Aristotle. The passages from Xenophon on the other hand are suggestive of a form of *mimēsis* that is more deliberate and emulative: Socrates' followers can 'hope that by imitating him, they will become like him;' Agesilaus is presented as an example (*paradeigma*) for those who wish to practise bravery (τοῖς ἀνδραγαθίαν ἀσκεῖν βουλομένοις). Yet no further detail is given to suggest what this activity

might involve, and the potential for reflection in imitative activity is not being emphasised as such.[15]

So, whilst the concepts of imitation and emulation hold some promise for an account of moral development, the indeterminacy of mimetic language and depiction of mimetic activity in the preceding tradition means that a mere appeal to 'mimēsis' in explaining the learner's habituation could not be guaranteed to convey the kind of activity in which Aristotle must take the moral learner to be engaged. Not only can mimetic language be suggestive of either 'merely appearing like' or a means of transformation, but even in its transformative sense, it does not reliably signal a reflective activity.[16] Instead of using the language of *mimēsis* then, I suggest that Aristotle points us to the analogy between skill acquisition and virtue acquisition, which – as I will argue below – can nonetheless be captured in terms of imitation and emulation, and understood as highly reflective. We can turn to this discussion now.

3. The skills analogy and emulative imitation

Unlike the intellectual virtues, which are acquired through teaching (*NE* 1103a15), the moral virtues come about through habit (*ex ethous periginetai*, 1103a17-18), and more specifically through the doing of just and temperate things (1103a35-b2). In this way, they are much like skills, which are likewise acquired through practice of the things that the skilled agent does. The strong analogy between the virtues and skills – in particular with regard to their acquisition – is something that Aristotle stresses repeatedly throughout *NE* 2, and things that are more apparent in the case of skills are used to shed light on certain more puzzling features of the virtues and their acquisition. In *NE* 2.1, Aristotle informs his readers that, not only are both the virtues and skills acquired through the actions in which they find their expression, but the same actions can be both the source of the virtues, and their ruin (1104a8-29). He goes on to explain what he means by way of reference to the acquisition of skill, explaining that (1103b8-14):

> Playing the harp makes both good and bad harpists, and it is analogous in the case of builders and all the rest; for building well makes good builders, and building badly makes bad ones. Otherwise no teacher (*tou didaxontos*) would be needed, but everyone would be born a good or a bad craftsman. It is the same, then, with the virtues.

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[15] There is a hint that the more 'care' one takes the better (*epimelesteron kai beltious*), though it is unclear whether this care is in imitating or practising the customs of the ancestors.

[16] It is not, then, that it *necessarily* suggests an unreflective activity. But since *mimēsis* appears as *both* unreflective and (possibly) reflective in the preceding tradition – and at any rate since the potential reflectiveness of *mimēsis* isn't emphasised particularly – use of mimetic language could not be guaranteed to convey a reflective activity.

Here, not only Aristotle's remark on the ways in which the case of skill acquisition and virtue acquisition are analogous, but specifically his reference to the need for teachers in this, is of great importance. For his emphasis on the way in which these two cases are analogous strongly indicates that by thinking about the way a skill is acquired, and the way in which this can be taught, we should gain insight too into the way in which virtue is likewise acquired.

Aristotle has, of course, told us only a few lines previously that the intellectual virtues are acquired through teaching, and contrasted this mode of acquisition with that of the virtues and skills; for this reason, we ought to assume that the form of teaching he has in mind when discussing the acquisition of skill is importantly distinct from the kind of teaching through which the intellectual virtues are acquired. Indeed, reflection on the ways in which skills are acquired bears this out. By contrast, with a more theoretical form of teaching which takes the form of lectures (*NE* 1095b4-6; 1179b4 *ff.*) or proceeds by means of argumentation, the teaching of skills is highly practical. A master craftsperson teaches her apprentice by acting as an example that she might follow, and the apprentice learns by imitating and modelling herself and her actions on the master craftsperson. When a person learns to become a tailor, for example, she does not learn from a pattern-book, but is apprenticed to a master tailor, and learns by attending to the master as she works, to the way the master holds her shears, the way she sews a seam, and so on. As with any skill, the apprentice will, like the master, be engaged in producing the product she will produce when she possesses the skill (*NE* 1103a32-3), and as she does this she imitates the master tailor, attempting to hold her own shears in the way the master does, to sew her own seams in a like manner, and so on.

The active and reflexive nature of such imitative activity will be important in what follows and we will return to this in Section 4 below. For the present, what must be stressed is just how cognitive, and indeed, reflective this form of imitation is. Unlike certain cases of imitation discussed in Section 2 above, here the learner's imitation of her model is not unreflective; rather, she consciously emulates the skilled master, attempting to become like her by modelling herself and her behaviour on the master. We might indeed suppose that the learner who 'best' imitates their model, who manages to act in as like a way as possible, thus practises 'well', and so is enabled to acquire the skill in question, unlike the learner who fails to do as she does, and so acts 'badly'. Moreover, as the learner attends to the master and attempts to model herself on the master, we see an example of the identification of 'this-as-that' (*Poetics* 1148b17)

– my action as like your action – and indeed of how 'through imitation [man] takes his first steps in understanding' (*Poetics* 1448b7-8).[17]

Interestingly, in Aristotle's discussion of *paideia* in the *Politics,* we see another example of cognitively rich imitative activity – albeit in a different form – and a direct statement of the positive contribution this makes to a moral learner's development. Where *NE* 2 offers an account in broad outline of how the moral virtues are acquired, the *Politics* offers much more detail on what the learner's habituation involves, with Aristotle describing not only the physical training that children will have to undertake as part of their habituation (133612 *ff*.), but also the role of musical education in moral upbringing (*Pol.* 8.5 *ff*.). Musical performances, identified as imitations (*mimēseis*, 1340a12), contain representations (*mimēmata*, 1340a39) of character-types, and for this reason, musical education can both encourage the young to take pleasure in fine actions and characters and, most importantly, to become excellent judges of such things. Musical education is thus to be encouraged from the early moments of children's education (1340b10-19), and in particular Aristotle stresses the importance of the young engaging in musical performances themselves – that is, to learn to produce such representations themselves – 'since it is difficult if not impossible for people to become excellent judges of performances if they do not take part in it' (1340b23-5).

The term *mousikē* in Greek is broader than the English 'music', and can encompass acting and storytelling, as well as singing and instrumental music, and one might therefore suppose that the *Politics* 8 discussion lends textual support to the thought that the moral learner will imitate behaviourally the virtuous agent and through such activity will be aided in the development of virtue. Aristotle's focus on rhythm (*rhythmos*) and melody (*melos*), however, strongly indicates that his main concern in these particular passages is the power of music in the strict sense of vocal and instrumental music, rather than the more 'dramatic' performances.[18] The evidence for our interpretation that this discussion provides is thus not direct. But what this discussion does show is not only that Aristotle clearly envisaged a positive role for some form of imitative activity in the moral development of the young – and did so despite not using mimetic language in the *Ethics* – but that the imitative activity he takes to contribute to the

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[17] The example Aristotle offers in *Poetics* 4 involves, of course, an observer of a mimetic object, rather than the producer, but it is clear that the production of an imitation will likewise require the imitator to attend to, to abstract from the relevant features of her model, and to reproduce these in her given medium. See Sherman 1989, 168 *ff*.

[18] See Cagnoli Fiecconi 2016, 410. Cagnoli Fiecconi offers a compelling account of the role of strict musical education in the moral education of the young, and explains in particular how, through *harmonia*, *melos* and *rhythmos*, musical performances contain likenesses of character, most notably in the sense that they share the quality of being fine. Musical education thus trains the young to recognise fine actions and characters perceptually, and to pursue these for their own sake. This account, and my proposal of Section 5 below, can be viewed as complementary processes in a learner's moral education.

development of virtue is cognitively rich, both appealing to and developing our recognitional capacities. This is a thought to which we will return.

Returning now to *NE* 2.1, whilst there are certain disanalogies between skills and virtues, Aristotle is clear that at this point in his discussion he is treating the two as strictly analogous. In the case of skills, we need teachers in order to act well and so to become skilled agents, and we have seen that he writes immediately thereafter: 'it is the same, then, with the virtues' (οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἔχει, 1103b13-14). If we take seriously the role of models and reflective imitation in the acquisition of skills,[19] we see here a quite clear allusion to the thought that the acquisition of virtue, like skills, requires the presence of models who can guide through their example, and that a learner is enabled to act well by deliberately emulating and modelling herself on a virtuous model.

We might expand on this thought by appeal to Aristotle's discussion of 'emulation' (*zēlos*) in *Rhetoric* 2.11, in which he characterises the state of mind of those who emulate, what are the objects of emulation, and who it is that are emulated. Aristotle defines emulation – a *pathos* – as (*Rhet.* 1388a32-5, trans. Kennedy):

> a kind of distress at the apparent presence among others like him by nature (περὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους τῇ φύσει) of things honoured and possible for a person to acquire, [with the distress arising] not from the fact that another has them, but that the emulator does not.

Thus, unlike the emotion of envy, where the envious person wishes to deprive the other of her goods, 'emulation is a good thing and characteristic of good people' (ἐπιεικές ἐστιν ὁ ζῆλος καὶ ἐπιεικῶν, 1388a33). Aristotle stresses that the young in particular are amongst the emulous, and moreover that the virtues, as honoured goods, are necessarily objects of emulation (1388b10-11). The people who are emulated are those who have acquired these things and whom many want to be like (καὶ οἷς πολλοὶ ὅμοιοι βούλονται εἶναι, 1388b15-19).[20] This makes clear that virtuous agents are objects of emulation, particularly for the young, and in recognising the possession by virtuous agents of such goods as the virtues the young will seek to acquire these for themselves, by attempting to become like these agents.

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[19] And this the context of *NE* 2.1 in particular demands, since we need to maintain the distinction between the teaching of skills and teaching of intellectual virtues.

[20] The people who are emulated are those who are like the emulator in nature. One might suppose that the differences between a moral learner and a mature virtuous agent are such that the likeness between these will be strained; but the qualification that the two agents are alike 'in nature' can alleviate this worry. For further discussion of the differences between the two agents, see Section 6 below.

We can put this thought together with the analogy with skills to come up with the following picture. A learner of a skill wishes to acquire that skill and to become like the skilled master, and does so by modelling herself and her actions on that agent. Likewise a learner of virtue wishes to emulate and to become like the virtuous agent, and – like the learner of skill – will do this by modelling herself and her behaviour on the virtuous agent. This is not a phenomenon that Aristotle picks out with technical language – he certainly does not use the language of *mimēsis* – but I will refer to this as 'emulative imitation', in order to distinguish it on the one hand from the passion of emulation (*zēlos*) alone, and on the other from those forms of imitation or *mimēsis* that are either deceptive or unreflective. So, what is it that the deliberate and reflective imitation – the emulative imitation – of a virtuous model affords a learner, and how might this help to account for our successful development as virtuous agents?

4. Two features of emulative imitation

Those who have gestured towards some role for imitation in the learner's habituation, and in particular to the importance of our natural imitative tendency, have tended to emphasise the way in which, thanks to her imitative tendency, a learner will be encouraged to perform the actions that a virtuous agent performs (see n. 6 above). Yet such an account of the contribution of imitation to the learner's development would be unsatisfactory given our explanatory task as I presented it at the outset. Our task is to shed light on what the learner's practice involves, and to explain how a moral learner, from not acting virtuously, comes to acquire virtue and to act as the virtuous agent does. So far, this suggestion merely posits that, through imitation, a learner will be able to practise performing virtuous actions; it sheds little light on this process nor does it explain how, through her practice, the learner comes to meet the conditions of virtuously performed action.[21]

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[21] Some also appeal to the example of a virtuous agent to explain how a learner might come to acquire knowledge of virtuous action (see, for example, Taylor 2006; cf. Vasiliou 2011). Given Aristotle's remarks on the nature of virtuous action and its non-codifiability, it is after all difficult to see how a learner could arrive at knowledge of virtuous action but through the example of an agent who is aware in any given situation of what the appropriate action is. Now, it is surely correct that knowledge of virtuous action will require a learner to have had some exposure to such action, to have seen the variety of situations that call for it, and the variety of forms that such action can take. And it is surely correct, too, that this is best afforded through the example and guidance of a virtuous agent. This is no doubt one of things that a virtuous model provides for a moral learner. Yet this in itself does not explain why imitation should be thought to play a crucial role in the development of virtue, since the kind of knowledge described thus far could surely be gained simply through the *observation* of a virtuous model. Moreover, even if we were to grant that the knowledge of virtuous action of the sort described above could not be gained through mere observation, but requires – for some reason to be explained – the learner to be actively imitating her model, this proposal tells us nothing of how the motivational condition on virtuously performed action comes to be met.

That emulative imitation requires the learner to *do* something, however, does point to a way in which the learner's imitation of a virtuous agent might importantly contribute to the development of virtue. For, insofar as emulative imitation requires the imitator to be active and to produce an imitation *herself*, it is also importantly reflexive.[22] We already saw a hint of this in the description of the learner of a skill, but to bring out this feature further, we might also contrast emulative imitation with the mere observation of an agent. Where in cases of observation the observer's attention will be focused on whatever is being observed, an imitator must attend not only to her model, but also to herself and her own circumstances, as she attempts to produce her imitation. In particular, emulative imitation requires an agent to reflect on what it would be for *herself* to act as, or to otherwise *be like*, the model she has adopted. Since a mere observer is not required to do or produce anything in the way that an imitator is, the question of what would be required for oneself to be or to act in a certain way does not necessarily get raised when simply observing the actions of another.[23] That this question does get raised when one engages in emulative imitation already points to the richness of the kind of understanding that can be gained through the imitation (as opposed to mere observation) of an agent.

There is, however, a second feature of emulative imitation that will be important in explaining its contribution to the learner's development (a feature, again, that marks it out from the mere observation of another), which we can arrive at by reflecting on the object of the learner's imitation. For it is the virtuous *agent* whom the learner seeks to emulate and so imitate – she is not merely imitating her actions[24] – and the emulative imitation of a virtuous (or other) *agent* cannot consist merely in copying that agent's actions. Actions are, after all, simply the medium in which a character state is manifested, but they are neither wholly indicative nor exhaustive of a character state. Not only can actions be performed either by chance or simply

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[22] Interestingly, we see a similar account in Plutarch's account of how we make progress in virtue. It is the translating of our judgements into deeds, 'and not allowing our words to remain mere words, but to make them into actions' that is a specific mark of progress. We must not merely commend and admire others, but like Themistocles emulate and imitate as well (84b-c). The person making true progress in the development of virtue: '*[compares] himself with the deeds and conduct of a good and perfect man*, and being pricked by the consciousness of his own shortcomings, yet at the same time rejoicing because of his hope and yearning, and being filled with an urging that is never still . . . so great is his craving all but *to merge his own identity in that of the good man*. And this is the proper feeling of true progress: to love and cherish the disposition of those whose deeds we emulate, and always to make ourselves like them with good will that pays them good honour' (Plutarch, *How a Man May Become Aware of His True Progress in Virtue* 84D-E, trans. Babbitt 1923 with modifications).

[23] I thank Ursula Coope for drawing this important feature of imitation to my attention.

[24] I am grateful to M. M. McCabe who encouraged me to see the important difference between the imitation of actions and of agents. McCabe argues for this as the correct interpretation of Plato's views on imitation in moral development also.

under instruction (*NE* 1105a17 *ff.*), and thus alone serve as no true indication of character, but the case of the enkratic agent makes especially clear that if the imitator were merely to perform certain actions, she would be no more imitating the virtuous than the enkratic agent. A character state comprises, amongst other things, the agent's epistemic states and motivational tendencies (see e.g. *NE* 1105a32, 1120a23-7) and, in general, the way in which she perceives the world, what she sees as valuable, and so on (see e.g. *NE* 1099a22-4, 1144a32-4). Thus, to imitate an agent in the emulative sense, I submit that the imitator must attempt to adopt her perspective. She must try to see situations as her model does, and inhabiting this perspective, to then act as her model would in a given situation. Rather than merely copying the temperate agent in refusing a second piece of cake, the imitator – on the model I am proposing – will adopt the temperate agent's perspective, and attempt to see, as if through her eyes, that the second piece of cake is one too many and for this reason is something to be refused. Where the mere observation of an agent and the actions she performs takes place from the outside, as it were, the emulative imitation of an agent requires an imitator to 'get inside' that agent.

5. Imitating the virtuous agent

With these features of emulative imitation in view, we can ask how imitation, thus conceived, might contribute to the development of virtue. Let us begin with the second feature – the adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective – and ask what it is about inhabiting this perspective that might help to explain how a learner comes to act virtuously.

Setting aside for one moment that it is the *virtuous* agent's perspective which the moral learner adopts, one thing that imitation, so conceived, achieves is that it obliges the learner to stand outside her own initial perspective and step away – even if just momentarily – from her own particular concerns. From this, it does not follow that the learner will be on her way to acquiring *virtue*, but even doing this shows some form of development on the part the learner, in terms of both her view of the world and the way in which she acts. In adopting the perspective of another, a learner's view of the world becomes enlarged, since the world is then viewed from at least two perspectives. But it is also already importantly altered, for, in stepping outside her own initial perspective and inhabiting the perspective of another, she is required to see the world as structured not simply so as to serve her own immediate inclinations. When faced with a particular situation, she will be required to look at the world and consider not what in the world might bring her pleasure, say, or serve her immediate desires, but to consider instead what features of the situation would be salient to the agent whose perspective she is inhabiting.

Not only does a learner's view of the world already begin to alter, but the imitation of another and adoption of another's perspective also begins to effect a change in the way she acts.

For where a learner may previously have acted on her own immediate inclinations, in being obliged to consider a situation from another's perspective the learner will already be required not to act in whatever way she is immediately inclined to; she will be required to pause before acting, at least, and to assess the situation from a different perspective. Thus, she will already be engaged in a more mature form of action, involving a more panoramic view, as it were, of the situation and the recognition of factors other than those which relate to one's own immediate pleasures and inclinations.

But what is it that the adoption of the *virtuous* agent's perspective in particular affords? At least one answer is that this perspective affords the learner a certain insight into the actions that a virtuous agent performs, a certain insight that is perhaps less readily available when simply observing that agent. Observed from the outside, the learner may see the virtuous agent performing a certain action-type – sharing her belongings, standing at her post – but, in adopting that agent's perspective, she is invited to see what the virtuous agent saw when she acted. What features of the *situation* were salient to the virtuous agent: to what features was she responding when she acted? What, to the virtuous agent, are the salient features of her *action*: what makes this a fitting response to the situation, and so on? Those features of the situation and action that are salient to the virtuous agent may not have been apparent to the learner prior to her adopting the virtuous agent's perspective.[25] She learns, then, not as a mere observer would, that the virtuous agent performs certain action-types, but rather she learns to see these actions as proper responses to the situations in which the virtuous agent finds herself. She learns to recognise the features of a situation that call for virtuous action, and those features of the action that make it a fitting response. But, more than that, I suggest that in coming to see what is salient to the virtuous agent, the learner is also enabled to better appreciate the value of virtuous action that is grasped by the virtuous agent.

Aristotle makes clear throughout the *Ethics* that virtuous actions have the quality of being fine (e.g. *NE* 1099a7-15, 21-4; 1116a10-12; 1120a11-15), and it is for the sake of this quality that the virtuous agent performs such actions (*NE* 1120a23). It is generally understood that this is the quality that makes virtuous actions worth choosing for their own sakes, and the quality that is grasped by the virtuous agent when she acts in this way.[26] Aristotle does not

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[25] By analogy, we can imagine a non-wheelchair user who is not fully aware of the obstacles faced by a wheelchair user in navigating a university campus; when she adopts the perspective of the wheelchair user, however, suddenly the number of staircases, narrow doorways and lack of ramps become salient to her.

[26] Aristotle does not say in *NE* 2.4 what it is to choose an action for its own sake, but the locution appears to be replaced in subsequent books by the talk of 'acting for the sake of the fine' or 'choosing for the sake of the fine' (e.g. 1120a23-7; 1122b6-10). Virtuous actions have the quality of being fine, and many commentators have thus reasonably supposed that to choose an action on account of its fineness is to

elaborate on what the fineness of virtuous action consists in, though some indication is offered in his summary of the mean in action at *NE* 2.9, where he reminds us that mean actions involve acting towards the right person, at the right time, for the right end, in the right way, and so on, and concludes that 'doing these things well is thus rare, praiseworthy and fine' (1109a28-30). Actions in the mean, Richardson Lear (2006, 118-22) has insightfully shown, display features associated with the fine in other works, namely a certain order (*taxis*), symmetry (*summetria*), and definiteness or boundedness (*to hōrismenon*) (*Metaph.* 1078a36-b1).[27] They likewise accord with worth (*kat' axian*) and are above all fitting or appropriate (*prepon*) (*EE* 1249a8-10; see also *Topics* 135a13).

Aristotle says little about how we apprehend the fineness of virtuous actions, but we can usefully distinguish between an ability to identify an action as fine on the one hand, and a fuller appreciation of its fineness on the other, where the latter is afforded by a certain recognition of and attention to its fine-making features. We might suppose that a subject could identify certain actions as fine – at least in quite obvious or paradigmatic cases – without fully appreciating or attending particularly to the features in virtue of which they are fine.[28] A subject who is sensitive to the fine-making features of these actions, by contrast, will have a fuller appreciation of their fineness; something richer than a mere capacity to identify actions as fine.[29] That subjects might have a more superficial grasp of the fineness of an object on the one hand, and a fuller appreciation of its fineness on the other, can be brought out by reflection on the case of music, which Aristotle frequently takes as analogous to the virtues (see esp. *NE* 1170a7-11). Many untrained listeners are able to identify certain familiar compositions as fine, without being particularly sensitive to the features in virtue of which they are fine. A trained listener, by contrast, is sensitive to the fine-making features of compositions – she can pick these out, she attends to them, and so on – and thus can not only identify such compositions as fine, but will have a fuller appreciation of their fineness.[30] Moreover, this sensitivity to the fine-making

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choose it for its own sake. See especially Cooper 1996, 113; Richardson Lear 2006, 117; Moss 2012, 207; cf. Tuozzo 1995, 130.

[27] On the equivalence of fine actions and mean actions, see also Coope 2012, 155-6; Cagnoli Fiecconi 2016, 416-17.

[28] This is something of which various agents may be capable, and without adopting the perspective of the virtuous agent.

[29] This 'appreciation' need not be cast in intellectual terms, nor yet amount to a full and articulate understanding, though such sensitivity to the fine-making features of virtuous actions and fuller appreciation of their fineness may represent the seeds of full understanding and grasp of 'the why' (*dioti*).

[30] Their 'training' need not be intellectual – the claim is not that one needs training in harmonics, say, to appreciate the fineness of a composition, though of course such training may help to bring out certain features of the composition. The trained listener may instead be one who has listened for a long time and

features of compositions will enable her to grasp the fineness of movements that an untrained listener may not be able to identify as such, their fineness being less manifest than in more obvious cases.

Likewise, in the case of the virtues, I suggest that when an agent is sensitive to the fine-making features of an action – when she is able to pick these out, and / or is attentive to these in other ways – she will have a fuller appreciation of the fineness of that action. Moreover, like the trained listener, she will be a more reliable identifier of fine actions, particularly in less paradigmatic or more difficult cases, being able to recognise the fine-making features of such actions and the situations in which they are performed. And this, I submit, is afforded by the adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective. In attempting to see what the virtuous agent sees when she performs virtuous actions, the learner brings into view the features of the situation and action in which its fineness is manifested, and in this way is enabled to more fully appreciate the fineness of virtuous actions. This is not to say, of course, that for all fine-making features of all virtuous actions, such features will come into view only if the virtuous agent's perspective is adopted; there may be particular features of particular actions that come into view in some other way.[31] The adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective, however, allows the learner to bring into view more than the occasional fine-making feature of certain actions. It allows her to see the fine-making features of virtuous actions over a broad range of cases and to develop an overall sensitivity to such features. In this way, the adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective affords a full appreciation of the fineness of virtuous action and enables the learner to reliably identify fine actions.

The adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective does not, however, merely enable the learner to appreciate the fineness of the virtuous agent's actions – to appreciate a certain quality in the actions of *another*, that is – but also enables her to envisage opportunities for fine action herself. Recall that when an agent engages in emulative imitation, she is required to ask what it would be for herself to act or to be like the agent whom she is imitating. In imitating the virtuous agent, the moral learner will be required to view her own situation from the perspective of the virtuous agent, and to consider what features of her own situation would be salient to that

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learned to attend to certain features of compositions – to recognise certain chords or arrangements, say – namely those things in virtue of which a composition is fine.

[31] Some may simply be salient. Or perhaps other concerns of the agent might help to bring certain features into view incidentally; someone seeking to please might be more alert to the joy brought to the recipient of a generous action, which may be one of its fine-making features. Though note that such a person (on the lookout for things that please) might be liable to overlook certain fine-making features of a given just action, say, where that action is not one that brings pleasure to both sides. The person adopting the virtuous agent's perspective, however, would recognise the fine-making features of the just action. There might moreover be complementary strategies for bringing certain fine-making features of virtuous action into view, such as musical education (see n. 17 above).

agent; with this in view, she can see what it would be to do as the virtuous agent does in that situation. The features of situations and the actions that they call for that are salient to the virtuous agent will, of course, be those features that make the action fine, and so, in adopting the perspective of the virtuous agent and attempting to see her own situation in light of this, the learner will learn to see opportunities for herself to engage in fine action.

So understood, this suggests a way in which, through the imitation of a virtuous agent, the learner may come to meet the knowledge condition of virtuously performed action, insofar as she is aware of what fine actions consist in and how to go on finely herself in the future.[32] But not only does this ability to appreciate the fineness of virtuous actions and to recognise opportunities for such actions enable the learner to come to meet the knowledge condition, it enables her to come to meet the choice condition also. For the very thing that reveals to an agent how she should go on in a particular situation is also the very thing that makes that action worth choosing for its own sake.

We have noted already that Aristotle tells us little about the fine as such – his remarks on the fine are scattered and often made in passing – but he does tell us in *NE* 2.3, 1104b30-2 that:

> there are three objects of choice (τῶν εἰς τὰς αἱρέσεις) and three objects of avoidance (τῶν εἰς τὰς φυγάς): [the] fine, beneficial and pleasant, and their contraries, [the] shameful, harmful and painful. About all these, then, the good person is correct and the bad person is in error, especially about pleasure.

The first sentence is most naturally read as a psychological claim: 'there are three kinds of things that we, as human beings, choose: the (real or apparent) fine, the beneficial and the pleasant';[33] whilst the second sentence explains that the virtuous agent gets things right insofar

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[32] This is quite different to the supposition that the knowledge condition could come to be fulfilled by merely observing the types of actions that the virtuous agent performs. Indeed, it is not clear that the knowledge condition *could* come to be fulfilled in that way, since a particular action type might count as virtuous in one circumstance, but not be so in another.

[33] One might attempt to read the first sentence as strictly normative, to the effect that 'there are three things we ought to choose: the fine, the beneficial and the pleasant . . . and the virtuous agent gets things right in choosing these things'. If this were what Aristotle meant, however, we might expect him to use *haireton* (choiceworthy; to be chosen) as he does elsewhere (*NE* 1097a32), rather than *tōn eis tas haireseis*, which is more suggestive of there being three kinds of things that we in fact choose. We might also expect a more explicit explanation about the way the bad person is in error, as compared with the virtuous person, especially the way they are in error about pleasure. For it cannot be that they fail to choose pleasant things. On the psychological reading, the claim about correctness is clear: since the first sentence essentially asserts that we all choose what we take to be fine / pleasant / beneficial, the following claim about correctness is naturally read as asserting that the virtuous agent is correct insofar as she

as she chooses what is truly fine, beneficial and pleasant.[34] So understood, Aristotle is making a point he makes elsewhere about pleasure and pain, namely that to find something pleasant is for it to appear as an object or choice or pursuit, whereas to find something painful is for it to appear as an object of avoidance (see e.g. *DA* 431a8-16). So too then for the fine and the shameful (and the beneficial and harmful too). For something to appear fine, so it would seem, is for it to appear as an object of choice, whilst for something to appear shameful is for it to appear as an object of avoidance. Other passages also support this thought, pointing to the positively valanced and motivating character of the fine. In his discussion of the voluntary in *NE* 3.1, for example, Aristotle twice refers to the apparent power of the fine to compel us to act (1110a4-5, b9-10), situating it alongside two other inherently motivating phenomena: fear and pleasure. Aristotle does not, of course, claim that actions performed for the sake of the fine are compelled (in the sense that we are compelled by a tyrant, say) and thus involuntary. Yet his acknowledgement that we might take there to be something compelling about the fine, like fear and pleasure, lends support to the thought that there is something inherently motivating about the fine, just as in the case of pleasure and fear.

Indeed, throughout the corpus Aristotle makes various remarks which reveal the fine to be positively valanced. Aristotle tells us that things that are fine are pleasant by nature (*NE* 1099a13).[35] He also makes numerous references to the connection between the fine and what we praise or honour (*NE* 1113b25; *EE* 1248b19-20; *Rhet.* 1366a33-4). When we see another's action as fine, we see it as admirable and praiseworthy, just as when we see an agent's action as shameful, we see this as condemnable. Putting these various thoughts together, then, this suggests that in the case of our own prospective actions, when we see a course of action as fine, we see this as worth choosing on account of this quality.[36] And this ability to recognise

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chooses what is truly fine/pleasant/beneficial, and the bad person is in error about these things – especially about what is pleasant.

[34] Cooper (1996, 109-14) argues that the fine is the object of spirited desire (*thumos*) (just as pleasure is the object of *epithumia*), though he does not claim that it is the immediate object of *thumos* in general (i.e. in children and animals) but only for the virtuous person (110). Grönroos meanwhile, seems to take the fine as the immediate object of *thumos* in general, for he writes that *thumos* is a 'basic, inborn desire that requires only stimulation by means of exposure to the fine in order to be activated' (2007, 265 n. 33). I do not make any claims about what kind of desire has the fine as its object; my concern is rather with the inherent motivating quality of the fine, as suggested by the *NE* 2.3 passage and those passages noted below.

[35] 'To lovers of the fine what is pleasant are things pleasant by nature'. Note also that virtuous (i.e. fine) actions are pleasant 'in their own right' (*NE* 1099a14-15).

[36] So, in the case of courage, say, it 'chooses and stands firm because that is fine (*hoti kalon*) or because anything else in shameful (*hoti aischron*)' (*NE* 1116a11-12); 'the brave person acts because of (*dia*) the fine' (*NE* 1116b30-1); 'the brave person . . . stands for against what is and appears frightening to a human being; he does this because it is fine to stand firm and shameful (*hoti kalon kai aischron*) to fail' (*NE* 1117a16-17).There are, Aristotle seems to allow, people who perform what are in fact fine actions, but

opportunities for fine action, I have argued, is developed through the adoption of the virtuous agent's perspective.

In short, then, by imitating the virtuous agent and adopting her perspective, the learner gains a fuller appreciation of the fineness of virtuous action and does this by seeing those features of a given situation and action in which the action's fineness is manifested. Moreover, from this perspective she is enabled to read the situations in which she finds herself in terms of the opportunities they afford for fine action. In representing prospective fine actions to her herself, the learner will see such actions as worth choosing for their own sakes, for this is what it is to see a prospective course of action as the fine thing to do.

6. Some issues considered

We have before us an account of how, through the imitation of a virtuous agent and adoption of her perspective, a learner comes to appreciate the fineness of virtuous action, to see opportunities for herself to engage in such action, and so to choose such action for its own sake. I will end this paper by addressing a number of questions that might arise in connection with this account, particularly if we recall that for Aristotle habituation must start from early childhood (*NE* 1104b11-12).

One concern that might be raised is that the model of imitation that I have proposed – involving the adoption of another agent's perspective, rather than the mere copying of actions – appears very demanding, particularly for a young learner. Could this form of imitation really be undertaken by the young learner? Yet it is a form of imitation we see even in children's games. Consider, say, a group of children playing doctors and patients. The child playing the doctor does not simply copy the actions she has seen a doctor perform, such as holding a stethoscope up to the chest of her patient; this is no doubt *part* of her imitation of the doctor, but in inhabiting the role of the doctor, she also adopts the perspective of the doctor and sees opportunities for providing 'medical care', where she did not previously. Her playmate's scratched knee affords the opportunity for bandaging (which it did not in a game of astronauts), as do her broken teddy-bears, and so on. The learner's ability to inhabit the perspective of the

who are not motivated by this quality. But note Aristotle does not say that in such cases they see the course of action as the *fine* thing to do. Those agents who act to avoid reproaches or legal penalties (*NE* 1116a19), say, are not described as seeing the fineness of such action (see also those of a 'Spartan disposition' described in *EE* 8.3). Indeed, he tells us in *NE* 10.9 that whilst the well brought up love what is fine and good, the many 'obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful' (1179b11-12). This, it turns out, is because 'they have not even a notion (*oud' ennoian*) of what is fine and truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it (*ageustoi ontes*)' (1179b15-16).

virtuous agent may be somewhat more limited at an earlier age, but this is surely a capacity that will develop as she matures.

It thus being granted that even a young learner can engage – to some extent at least – in the emulative imitation I have been describing, a more pressing issue concerns just how it is that a child could imitate a virtuous agent. For we might reasonably assume that the differences between the two agents, the kinds of situations each face and the kinds of actions each are capable of performing, are simply too vast for a learner successfully to imitate a virtuous agent. The courageous agent stands firm on the battlefield or stands up for the principles she rightly endorses, and whilst it is easy to see how her virtuous *friend* could imitate her in this (*NE* 1172a8-14), it is much harder to see how this is possible for a child. It is worth reminding ourselves, however, that in imitating an agent a learner is not required to perform the exact same action types that she performs. Whilst a virtuous agent displays courage on the battlefield, a learner will be required to reflect on what it would be for her to show courage in the kinds of situations she faces. The virtuous agent does not shy away from apparently fearsome things, and regards the situations she faces as fearsome (or confidence inspiring) to the appropriate degree. Likewise, a young student of virtue may learn to show courage by not shying away from her neighbour's fearsome-seeming dog, and learning to see this not as a creature to be fled from. The generous agent does not covet her wealth or possessions and is not pained when she donates large amounts of her salary to charity; a young child does not have the means to make large charitable donations, but she can learn to see her pocket money not as something to spend only on herself, but as something she could spend also on others.

This raises the question of whether the actions performed by a very young learner can be said to be virtuous actions, or 'what the virtuous person would do' (*NE* 1105b5-7). This is not the mistaken thought that a learner as such is incapable of performing 'truly' virtuous actions; both Aristotle's habituation thesis and defence of this in *NE* 2.4 show that a leaner can perform genuinely virtuous actions. The point is rather that the actions that a very young learner is capable of performing might be too quotidian to count as virtuous actions, and that as such this learner cannot, at this stage, be said to be doing 'just and temperate things' as Aristotle demands.[37] Perhaps this is so, and in which case we should perhaps grant that the habituation process is one that might involve a series of stages: in the very early stages it may be the case that a young learner does not yet strictly do 'just and temperate things', but as she develops and the situations she encounters become more complex, she is afforded more and more opportunities to do as the virtuous agent does. A strength of the interpretation of the learner's

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[37] I thank Joachim Aufderheide for pressing this issue, and for his suggestion about the stages of habituation.

habituation proposed in this paper, then, is that it offers a way of accounting for the early stages of a learner's development when she may not yet be capable of performing strictly just and temperate actions. The young learner can attempt to emulate and to adopt the perspective of her virtuous model, even when she cannot yet do precisely the actions that the virtuous agent does.

This brings us to the final challenge that may be raised against this interpretation, which concerns just how it is that a learner can ever see situations from the perspective of the virtuous agent. For how, we might ask, does the learner know what is salient to the virtuous agent and what is seen from her perspective? If those features of situations that are salient to the virtuous agent are not initially apparent to her, how is she able to envisage them when she attempts to adopt the virtuous agent's perspective? Here the answer is surely that the learner, at least in the early stages of her education, does not do this alone. Whilst a virtuous agent serves as a model for the learner, she need not be regarded as a passive model, but rather as actively guiding her young imitator. Returning again to the analogy with skills, not only does a master craftsperson serve as a paradigm of skill, whose example her apprentices can follow, but she can also guide and instruct her apprentices as they follow her example. Likewise, then, we can imagine the virtuous agent drawing the young learner's attention to what she sees as important about a situation as she performs a virtuous action, and to the features of the learner's situation that she ought to notice too.[38] Of course, the virtuous agent will not always be there to guide the learner, and as she encounters novel situations, the learner will be called to imagine for herself how the virtuous agent would view these. And over time, this way of seeing becomes her own.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that we can better explain the moral learner's development if we see her as engaged in the emulative imitation of the virtuous agent. In imitating a virtuous agent, a learner is required both to adopt the perspective of the virtuous agent, and to imagine what it would be for herself to do as that agent would do. From the virtuous agent's perspective, she is enabled to appreciate the fineness of the virtuous agent's actions and what makes them so, and moreover to see her own situation in terms of opportunities for fine action. In this way she comes to meet the knowledge condition of virtuously performed action, and at the same time learns to choose virtuous actions for their own sakes. Over time, what was once the perspective of another becomes her own, and she acquires the stability that is constitutive of moral virtue.

The development of virtue thus turns out to be significantly dependent on the presence of others, and the process of moral habituation to be an interpersonal, as well as practical,

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[38] See also Hursthouse 1988, 213-14; cf. Curzer 2012, 322.

process. Our view of the world, this picture suggests, is enhanced when considered from the perspective of another; a thought that chimes with Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of living together (*suzēn*) and perceiving together (*sunaisthanesthai*) in his discussion of the necessity of friends. Hence the saying: '[you will learn] what is noble from noble people' (ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἄπ' ἐσθλά, *NE* 1172a13-14).[39]

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