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**The Soul, the Virtues, and the Human Good:
Comments on Aristotle's Moral Psychology**

Abstract

In modern moral philosophy, virtue ethics has developed into one of the major approaches to ethical inquiry. As it seems, however, it is faced with a kind of perplexity similar to the one that Elisabeth Anscombe has described in Modern moral philosophy with regard to ethics in general. For if we assume that Anscombe is right in claiming that virtue ethics ought to be grounded in a sound philosophy of psychology, modern virtue ethics seems to be baseless since it lacks or even avoids reflections on the human soul. To overcome this difficulty, the paper explores the conceptual connections between virtue and soul in Aristotle's ethics. It claims that the human soul is the principle of virtue since reflections on the soul help us to define the nature of virtue, to understand the different kinds of virtues, and to answer the question why human beings need the virtues at all.

Keywords: Elisabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, Aristotle, virtue, soul, modern virtue ethics, moral psychology

1. Introduction: The lack of the 'soul' in modern virtue ethics

Virtue ethics has regained a central position in modern moral philosophy. Over the last decades, it has been developed into one of the major approaches to ethical questions besides deontology and consequentialism. The reappearance of virtue-ethical thinking can be traced back to Elizabeth Anscombe's widely discussed essay *Modern moral philosophy* (1958). In this essay, Anscombe accuses both Kantian and consequentialist ethical theories of being reliant on what she calls 'a law conception of ethics', which, at the same time, lacks a well-grounded law-giving authority – such as God as the law-giver – and, hence, lacks justification at its foundation. As she writes, it is 'as if the notion "criminal" were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten' (Anscombe 1997, 31). For Anscombe, the only alternative is that the concepts of moral obligation and moral duty and of what is *morally* right and wrong 'ought to be jettisoned' because they are 'survivals (...) from an earlier conception of ethics, which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful

without it' (Anscombe 1997, 26). I shall not attempt to determine whether this is a fair description of the pitfalls of Kantianism and consequentialism. Instead, I would like to turn to the more positive side of Anscombe's essay. Her suggestion is twofold. Firstly, she claims that it is more promising for ethics to evaluate a person's actions with reference to the 'thick', specific concepts of the virtues and vices known from Aristotle than to employ the highly abstract notions of being *morally* right or wrong. In this respect she writes:

We should no longer ask whether doing something was 'wrong', passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g., it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once. (Anscombe 1997, 34)

Secondly, Anscombe admits that turning to an ethics of the virtues is easier said than done. For in order to do so, we first need to develop a better understanding of virtue concepts; and this, according to her, presupposes what she calls a 'philosophy of psychology', i.e. reflections on basic psychological states connected to virtuous agency, such as an agent's motives or intentions. Therefore, she claims that reintroducing the Aristotelian virtues into ethical thinking cannot be done without analysing the psychological conditions of virtuous and vicious behaviour. She argues for this second claim in the following manner:

In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a 'virtue'. This part of the subject matter of ethics is, however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what *type of characteristic* a virtue is (...) and how it relates to the actions in, which it is instanced (...). For this we certainly need an account at least of what a human action is at all, and how its description as 'doing such-and-such' is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such concepts is required. (Anscombe 1997, 29-30)

If we try to translate this into more Aristotelian terms, it can roughly be interpreted like this: the very concept of a virtue, and, with it, a sound analysis of virtuous and vicious actions, rests on a theory of the human *psychē*, i.e. the human soul. And if we want to understand the virtues and vices, we need to elaborate their psychological basis and thus to develop a rich account of the different powers residing in the human soul, of their structure and their order.

While the first of the two positive claims made by Anscombe has initiated a whole series of books promoting the idea of the virtues in modern ethics, the second has been widely ignored. Today, there are all kinds of modern virtue ethics, the main ones still neo-Aristotelian in style, yet there are also Platonic, neo-Stoic, utilitarian, Humean, Nietzschean, and explicitly pluralistic accounts of virtues. They all more or less subscribe to Anscombe's

first claim by taking it for granted that our everyday moral life is in the end better described and analysed in terms of virtues and vices than in terms of duties, preferences, pleasure and pain, consequences, and the like. Almost none of the approaches, however, not even of the neo-Aristotelian ones, takes up Anscombe's second claim.

Thanks to Anscombe's own work, we have certainly gained a better understanding of human agency and of the issues connected to it, such as action causation, the difference between explanatory and justifying reasons, intentionality, and so on. This, however, belongs to action theory,, which itself is only *part of* what Anscombe has called a 'philosophy of psychology'. Anscombe suggests that we need to ask questions such as 'what type of characteristic a virtue is', or how a virtue 'relates to the actions in, which it is instanced'. Put in Aristotelian terms again, this amounts to asking what the nature of virtue is, i.e. how virtue is to be defined, and whether the virtues are mere potencies to perform virtuous actions or rather something actual themselves. According to Aristotle, questions like these can only be answered on the background of an elaborated doctrine of the human soul. Yet this is what modern virtue ethics does *not* provide. There is little talk about the soul, and the proposed functional substitutes, if there are any, create difficulties for both defining virtue and exploring the link between the virtues and the overall theory of the human good. Let me give just two famous examples:

In his *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre explicitly states that in order to reintroduce virtues into ethical thinking, we can no longer rely on what he calls Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology'; i.e. Aristotle's assumption that what is good for an individual living being will have to be defined in terms of its specific nature,, which is such that it moves a living being towards a specific *telos* (MacIntyre 2007, 148). The *telos* of a living being is in line with the order of its soul, and the latter corresponds to its specific nature, Aristotle claims. Therefore, the *telos* of a dog is different from the *telos* of a lion or a human being. Moreover, the order of the soul of a living being is not always in pre-established harmony with its nature but might sometimes be achieved in the very process of pursuing the *telos*. For human beings, the virtues are a result of such an ordering process. MacIntyre wants to preserve Aristotle's teleology but rejects his metaphysical biology, i.e. the grounding of virtues in the human soul (MacIntyre 2007, 162-63).¹ In effect, he replaces biology with social theory and comes to define virtue with respect to the concept of *practice*, that is, as 'an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of, which tends to enable us to achieve those goods, which are internal to practices and the lack of, which effectively prevents us from achieving any such

¹ Due to the fact that MacIntyre does not give any reasons for his rejection of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, some critics have argued that it is best understood as tracing back to MacIntyre's Marxist background (see Lutz 2012, chap. 1,150-160).

goods' (MacIntyre 2007, 191). Thus, the grounding of the virtues in a metaphysics of the human soul is replaced by a 'socially teleological account', as MacIntyre emphasizes (MacIntyre 2007, 197). The difficulties that stem from this replacement are obvious. MacIntyre himself recognizes the need for embedding his claims into a bigger story in order to exclude the possibility that a disposition can be called a virtue, which enables us to achieve the goods of, for example, the practice of torture (MacIntyre 2007, 199-200).²

A second kind of replacement can be found in Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* (2001). Foot seeks to elucidate the meaning of virtue terms by showing that they belong to a wider range of evaluative concepts, which denote natural norms. The underlying conception of natural normativity is based on the claim that all normative judgments about an individual living being share a common structure insofar as they are species-dependent. The life-form of the species sets the norms for evaluating individual members of that species. So, as oak trees need deep and sturdy roots in order to flourish, bees need stings. And just as an individual oak tree, which lacks deep and sturdy roots is a bad oak tree, i.e. an oak tree suffering from a natural defect, so a bee without a sting is a deficient bee. According to Foot, the same is true for human beings. In this respect, she agrees with Peter Geach in claiming that human beings need virtues as bees need stings (Foot 2001, 44). But how do we arrive at a full description of the life-form of a species that in turn helps to define the norm? Foot refers to Michael Thompson's essay *The representation of life* (1995) in, which he claims that the description of a life-form is a set of natural-historical judgements found, for example, in 'the voice-overs on public television nature programmes' or in field guides (Thompson 1995, 280). Thompson explicitly states: 'I think our question should not be: What is a life-form, a species, a *psychē*?, but: How is such a thing described?' (Thompson 1995, 279) Here, again, the study of the human soul is replaced by something else. Thompson means to reinforce the *ontological* study of the soul by way of approximating it *logically*, i.e. by an examination of how we talk about its performances. In effect, he substitutes philosophical psychology for a linguistic approach. This, in turn, creates difficulties for Foot's conception of the good human life. For if we want to follow Foot, we will certainly have to count reproduction among the norms defined by the human life-form, and, thus, will regard it as essential for the flourishing of human beings since it also belongs to the flourishing of plants and animals. Consequently, Foot cannot account for the fact that a human being who voluntarily refrains from reproduction, say for religious reasons, does not exhibit a natural defect but rather a virtue, i.e. chastity. If she insisted, however, that a life of chastity cannot be good, that would run against many intuitions.

² It should be added, however, that MacIntyre has changed his position and has come to reaffirm both a metaphysical and a biological grounding of the virtues (see MacIntyre 1999 and 2007, xi).

In modern virtue ethics, so it seems, we are faced with a similar kind of perplexity as Elisabeth Anscombe was 60 years ago. If we assume that Anscombe is right in claiming that virtue ethics ought to be grounded in a philosophical psychology, modern virtue ethics, so it seems, is baseless since it lacks a theory of the human soul. It is, we could say, as if the notion of "virtue" were to remain when thinking and talking about the human soul, as the enabling condition of all the virtues, had been abolished and forgotten.

Some authors, however, have in fact connected the virtues and the soul to each other, but apparently with rather destructive consequences. Philosophers like John Doris or Gilbert Harman have tried to show that, from the point of view of empirical psychology, the assumption that there are stable character traits globally influencing our behaviour is not warranted. The experimental record, they say, speaks for "situationism." It suggests, as Doris says, 'that situational factors are often better predictors of behavior than personal factors' (Doris 2002, 2; cf. Harman 2000). Hence, according to Doris and Harman, there is no room for thinking that the kinds of traits called virtues exist at all. This seems to be the most extreme attempt to get rid of philosophical psychology in the sense Anscombe has suggested. Simultaneously, it is meant to refute Aristotelian virtue ethics. If moral behaviour can be perfectly explained by referring to situational factors alone, Doris and Harman suggest, then we should better not assume the existence of dispositions such as virtues and vices. The experimental record, however, does *not* warrant the antecedens. As, for example, Lorraine Besser-Jones or Rachana Kamtekar have shown, the psychological studies the "situationists" invoke can just as well be interpreted in terms of virtue theory (Besser-Jones 2015, Kamtekar 2004). Nancy Snow has even pointed out that there are other studies, which explicitly support the attribution of virtues and vices to persons (Snow 2010 and 2013). So empirical psychology and virtue ethics do not contradict each other.

In what follows, however, I shall focus on what Anscombe has called a 'sound philosophy of psychology'. I shall argue that Anscombe is right in claiming that virtue ethics needs to be grounded in a philosophical psychology. To put things more straightforwardly, I shall defend the claim that the human soul is the principle of virtue. Reflecting on the human soul will not only help us to see 'what type of characteristic a virtue is' but also what kinds of virtues there are, and why we human beings need the virtues at all. In defending this claim, I am able to rely on Aristotle who has given a full account of the relation between virtue and soul. Aristotle's account, however, is not easily accessible in every respect. Although he explicitly links the different kinds of virtues to the different parts of the human soul, the details of the supposed connection are highly controversial. In the following chapter, I shall start with a recollection of the more uncontroversial parts of his theory, which at the same time aims at a first understanding of the nature of virtue. I shall then proceed to the more problem-

atic aspects of the relation between virtue and soul in Aristotle. Finally, I hope to solve the most pressing problems by extending the focus and taking into consideration not only Aristotle's ethical writings but also his metaphysical and psychological reflections. In doing so, I wish to contribute to both the ongoing debate concerning Aristotle's moral psychology and contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

2. The general relation between virtue and soul in Aristotle's ethics

As Aristotle clearly indicates in the first two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN), virtue and soul are fundamentally inter-connected concepts. It is in these passages that Aristotle establishes the fundamental bond between virtue and soul. He does so in three steps: firstly, in introducing the concept of virtue in the context of the *ergon* argument (EN I 7); secondly, in defining the essence of virtue (EN II 5-6); and, finally, in distinguishing different kinds of virtue (EN I 13 and VI 2). In this chapter, I shall briefly summarize and explain the main ideas behind the three steps.

a) First step: how virtue is introduced in the ergon argument (EN I 7)

The *ergon* argument is built on the assumption that what it means for something to be good needs to be determined with regard to its *ergon*, i.e. its characteristic activity. Aristotle explains the underlying thought by drawing the following analogies: just as we call an eye a good eye if it perfectly actualizes its most salient potency, i.e. sight, and just as we call a harpist a good harpist if he perfectly actualizes his most salient potency qua harpist, i.e. if he plays the harp well, so a human being is called a good human being if it perfectly actualizes its most salient potency. Now, given that eyes or harpists have an *ergon* qua eyes and harpists, human beings, too, must have an *ergon* qua human being, which works as a standard of excellence for each of them. Like others, I do not consider this assumption to be unjustified from the outset (cf. Wilkes 1980, Whiting 1988, Gómez-Lobo 1991). On the contrary, it is well-grounded in our everyday practice of evaluating artefacts, bodily organs and persons with a particular profession or social function. Moreover, it is by no means dogmatic, since it does not take for granted that human beings have an *ergon* but, rather, invites us to search for one.

So, the question we should ask at this stage is what the *ergon* of human beings might be. In order to find a characteristic activity of human beings, Aristotle starts to reflect on the question what genus human beings belong to. That is, he starts by asking what is peculiar to us *as living beings*. This is an intelligible move given the general fact that we can learn more about the nature of some X, and hence about its characteristic activity, if we realize both the

species and the genus X is a member of. Again, just as we come to see what is peculiar to eyes by realizing that an eye is a certain bodily organ, we presumably come to see what is peculiar to human beings by realizing what is special about them in comparison with other living beings. For Aristotle, living beings are different from non-living beings by having a soul. The soul is the principle of life, so he claims in *De Anima* (Aristotle, *De An.* 413b10). It is by being "ensouled" that living substances live, i.e. that they can actualize the capacities living things characteristically exhibit, such as nutrition, growth, perception, locomotion, or reason; and it is by lacking a soul that non-living substances cannot perform such activities.

Someone who does not accept that souls exist does not need to resign at this early stage. We can easily take Aristotle's claim to be merely terminological. Given that there is a difference between living things and non-living things, living things must have a special feature; there must be a cause for their peculiar life-activities. Others may call this cause whatever they like, Aristotle calls it 'psyche', soul.

Now, being ensouled is what human beings share with plants and animals. Therefore, in order to see if there is something peculiar to human beings, we have to compare the soul of human beings with the souls of animals and plants. In doing so, we shall discover how the human soul is by far more complex than the soul of plants and animals. Here is how Aristotle describes the differences:

(...) living is apparently shared with plants, but what we are looking for is the *ergon* of a human being; hence we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. The life next in order is some sort of life of sense perception; but this too is apparently shared with horse, ox, and every animal. The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the part of the soul that has reason. One part of it has reason as obeying reason; the other has it as itself having reason and thinking. Moreover, life is also spoken of in two ways as capacity and as activity, and we must take a human being's *ergon* to be life as activity, since this seems to be called life more fully. We have found, then, that the human *ergon* is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason. (EN I 7: 1098a1-8)

Now if, as Aristotle states, the human *ergon* is an 'activity of the soul in accord with reason', how is virtue related to it? Aristotle continues by explaining that it is through virtue alone that we actualize the human *ergon* fully or perfectly. Consequently, if a human being is supposed to be a good human being, it needs to acquire the virtues and it needs to act according to them. This is the final premise of the *ergon* argument, which leads to the well-known conclusion that what is good for human beings is to live in accord with virtue.³ Hence, it is

³ As Aristotle puts it in EN I 7 (1098a14-18): '(...) we take the human *ergon* to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be activity (*energeia*) and actions (*praxeis*) of the soul (*psyche*) that in-

through virtue that we come to act perfectly rationally. No virtue, no perfectly rational activity, and so no human good. It will be easier to see whether this is true once we have reached a better understanding of the nature of virtue.

b) *Second step: how virtue is defined (EN II 5-6)*

In book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines human virtue in terms of an essential definition; he first identifies its genus term (*genus proximum*) and, after that, explores the specific difference (*differentia specifica*). As Aristotle holds, the genus term virtue needs to be subsumed under is *hexis*, that is, virtue is a habit or state.⁴ He reaches this conclusion by way of elimination:

Since there are three conditions arising in the soul – feelings (*pathē*), capacities (*dynamēis*), and *hexeis* – virtue must be one of these. (...) If, then the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, the remaining possibility is that they are *hexeis*. And so we have said what the genus of virtue is. (EN II 5: 1105b20-1106a13)

While it is rarely mentioned in the commentaries, Aristotle here apparently presupposes what he has elaborated in the *Categories*. Ontologically speaking, virtue is a quality. If we call someone temperate, for example, we predicate a property, i.e. being temperate, of a substance, i.e. a particular person; her being temperate characterizes the person *qualitatively*. For being temperate is neither a quantitative feature nor a relational, temporal, or local one, nor any of the other categories Aristotle distinguishes.

Quality, however, has a fourfold meaning (cf. Aristotle, *Cat.* 8: 8b24ff.) One of it pertains solely to the material side of a first substance. Being tall and thin as a rail, for example, are features of the body alone, of its shape and external form (*schēma, morphē*). Second, a quality can be a property of both body and soul jointly; such qualities are called affections (*pathē*). There are different kinds of affection, depending on the part of the soul that is chiefly involved. Some affections merely pertain to the body, e.g., the bleaching of light hair in the summer sun. In others, the different parts of the soul interact with the body. If, for instance, someone gets pale when being ill, his paleness is an affection of his body, which is caused by a disturbance of his vital functions, hence by some disorder in his vegetative soul. If, by con-

volve reason (*meta logou*); hence the *ergon* of the excellent man (*spoudaiou de andros*) is to do this well and finely. Now each *ergon* is completed well by being completed in accord with the virtue proper to that kind of thing (*kata tēn oikeian aretēn*). And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul (*energeia psychēs*) in accord with virtue (*kat'aretēn*).

⁴ Since the translations of *hexis* are diverse, I will stick to the Greek term throughout this paper, including quotations.

trast, he gets angry when talking to a stubborn person, a different kind of affection comes into play since in order to get angry, the mind is presupposed; hence, this is an affection of body and animal soul, which is caused by some intellectual activity. Natural capacities (*dynamēis*), by contrast, are not qualities of the body but of the soul. Two persons may have the same bodily shape, yet one is by nature good in drawing whereas the other is not. The fourth meaning of quality is what Aristotle calls "hexis kai diathesis", usually translated as states and conditions (*Cat.* 8b26). The difference between the two, Aristotle claims, is a difference of perseverance. Conditions, on the one hand, are those qualities 'that are easily changed and quickly changing', like heat and chill, or sickness and health, for 'a man is in a certain condition in virtue of these but he changes quickly from hot to cold and from being healthy to being sick' (*Cat.* 8b35). These conditions are, as Thomas Aquinas explains, dependent on accidental or external factors that often vary (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* I-II, 49, 2, ad 3). *Hexeis*, on the other hand, differ from conditions in being more stable and long-lasting for they are caused by long-term formation. Aristotle mentions the virtues as examples since 'justice, temperance, and the rest seem to be not easily changed' (*Cat.* 8b33). A *hexis*, then, is a subcategory of *diathesis*; it is a condition but a stable and long-lasting one.

So, when Aristotle identifies the genus of virtue in book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he can rely on what he has said in the *Categories*. Given that virtue terms denominate a person's qualities, and given that there are four kinds of quality, virtue must be one of these. Since we already know that virtue makes us realize our *ergon*, and that the human *ergon* is an activity of the soul, we can exclude shape and external form from the list of possible genus terms. What is left are affections, natural capacities, and *hexeis*. Now, neither virtues nor vices can be affections or feelings. For whereas affections arise involuntarily, virtues and vices do not; furthermore, we are praised for virtues and blamed for vices but we are neither praised nor blamed for having an affection. For much the same reasons virtues are not capacities either. We are born neither virtuously nor viciously, but we are born with certain natural capacities such as, for example, sense perception. If something arises in us by nature, Aristotle explains, we first have the capacity for it, and later perform the activity; virtues, by contrast, need to be acquired, and they can only be acquired by having learned to perform virtuous acts (Aristotle, *EN* II 1: 1103a26-b3). Furthermore, capacities are ethically neutral, we can use them either for good or for bad ends; virtues, by contrast, are not. If then, Aristotle concludes, virtue is neither an affection nor a capacity, it must be a *hexis*; so *hexis* is the genus term.

Before turning to the specific difference of virtue, let me pause here for a moment in order to give a more positive account of what it means that both virtues and vices are *hexeis*. In this respect, Thomas Aquinas can be of great help. No doubt, there are many differences

between his own and Aristotle's theory of virtue.⁵ However, the doctrine of virtue he develops in the *Summa theologiae* seems to be fundamentally Aristotelian.⁶ For Thomas, as for Aristotle, every virtue is a habit or *habitus*, i.e. a *hexis*. Therefore, Thomas carefully examines the nature of habit before he deals with the virtues. This examination is quite illuminating. It gives us, first, a definition of *habitus* that helps to explain why it is that human beings need to acquire the virtues at all. According to Thomas Aquinas, a habit is a disposition or arrangement, something that brings order into what is not ordered or arranged yet (Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* I-II, 49, 3). Consequently, dispositions and habits reside in compound beings alone, i.e. in beings 'for whose natures and operations several things must concur, which may vary in their relative adjustability' (*Sum. theol.* I-II, 49, 4, in c). Human beings, as we have seen, are of such a complex nature. We are compounds of body and soul and we are endowed with different capacities, among them, not the least, the capacity of choice. If we did not acquire the virtues, we would not be disposed to live in accord with our specific nature as rational beings who act for reasons, which entails acting voluntarily. Secondly, Thomas helps to explain the way we "have" the virtues or vices once we have acquired them. Unlike conditions such as being sick or cold, virtues and vices are stable and long-lasting qualities. They dispose and arrange us so profoundly that we cannot lose them easily. Rather, we have them as some sort of permanent possession. In this respect, the virtues and vices belong to what has been called "second nature." And thirdly, as something like a "second nature", we can see that virtues and vices are both something actual and something potential. As *acquired* habits, the virtues are actualizations of our potency to acquire them. In this respect, Aristotle holds that the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, rather that we are able by nature to acquire them (Aristotle, EN II 1: 1103a24). However, once we have acquired them, we have acquired stable *dispositions*, i.e. potencies, in this case potencies to act in accord with the virtue in question. Hence, insofar as virtues are subject to the logic of act and potency, the acquisition of virtues is not an end in itself, as Thomas emphasizes; we do not acquire virtues in order just to possess them, we acquire them in order to be able to *act* virtuously.

Regarding the specific difference of virtue, we need to determine what exactly we are disposed to when we have acquired the virtues. For this, Aristotle can once more refer to what has been said in the context of the *ergon* argument. Given that every virtue causes its possessor to be in a good state and to do well, his overall definition of human virtue is this: "(...) the virtue of a human being will (...) be the *hexis* that makes a human being good and

⁵ The dissimilarities between Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas are emphasized by De Young/McClusky/Van Dyke (2009), Pinsent (2012), and Stump (see Stump 2011 and 2015).

⁶ As, among others, Flannery (2001) and Te Velde (2015) try to show.

makes him perform his *ergon* well" (EN II 6: 1106a23). Both virtues and vices are *hexeis*, that is, human habits or states; whereas vices are *hexeis* that bring about something bad, virtues are *hexeis* that bring about something good. And what is good and bad for a human being is determined by the *ergon*. Virtues, then, make us act rationally, vices make us act irrationally. The claim that the virtues arrange or dispose our soul so as to enable us to act rationally can be fully grasped once we see how the human soul is in need of such an arrangement. Step three is supposed to elucidate this point.

c) Third step: how the different kinds of virtue are distinguished (EN I 13 and VI 2)

Virtue itself is a genus term covering different sorts of virtue. Aristotle distinguishes ethical from intellectual virtues; but he also distinguishes two different sorts of intellectual virtue, one concerned with practical thinking, the other with *theoria*, i.e. speculative thinking. The distinctions clearly refer to the different parts of the soul. Aristotle proceeds as follows. He first claims that one part of the soul is non-rational, while the other has reason (EN I 13: 1102a29). The non-rational part of the human soul is itself divided. One part of it is the bearer of those capacities we human beings share with plants; it is the cause of life-activities such as nutrition and growth. Yet in this respect the morally good and bad people are not distinct from each other; so, for Aristotle, the nutritive part of the human soul (*threptikon*) has no share in human virtue. There is, however, a second part of the non-rational soul, which is of a more complex nature, for it seems to partake in both the non-rational and the rational part. As proof of the existence of this part, Aristotle refers to weak-willed or acratik agents as well as to their more controlled or continent counterparts:

Another nature in the soul would also seem to be non-rational, though in a way it shares in reason. For in the continent and the incontinent person we praise their reason, that is to say, the part of the soul that has reason, because it exhorts them correctly and toward what is best; but they evidently also have in them some other part that is by nature something apart from reason, clashing and struggling with reason. (...) However, this part appears, as we have seen, to share in reason. At any rate, in the continent person it obeys reason; and in the temperate and the brave person it presumably listens still better to reason, since there it agrees with reason in everything. The non-rational part, then, as well as the whole soul apparently has two parts. For while the plant-like part (*phytikon*) shares in reason not at all, the part with appetites (*epithymētikon*) and in general desires (*orektikon*) shares in reason in a way, insofar as it both listens to reason and obeys it. (EN I 13: 1102b14-32)

Whoever is familiar with weakness of will certainly would agree. For it is in being weak-willed or incontinent that we can experience the different parts of the soul Aristotle talks

about here. On the one hand, there is our desire, say, to stay in bed; on the other hand, reason reminds us of the duties of the day. The continent person will finally get up, even though with an inner resistance; the weak-willed person will not, her desires win over. So, the part of the human soul, which is the cause of our desires and affections apparently is of a special nature. It belongs to the non-rational part insofar as it does not necessarily care for reason and even struggles against reason at times; yet it is also able to listen to and obey reason, hence it can partake in the rational part of soul. Consequently, the rational part of soul must also be twofold. One part has reason to the full extent, 'by having it within itself', as Aristotle says; the other one is the desiring part that has reason only insofar as it can listen to it (EN I 13: 1103a3).

The division between intellectual and ethical virtues accords with this difference. The *ethical virtues* dispose the non-rational part of the human soul; once we have acquired the ethical virtues, our desires and affections will no longer struggle against but obey reason. Hence the right way to acquire the ethical virtues is long-term habituation, through, which the desires and affections are adjusted to reason. The *intellectual virtues*, by contrast, dispose the fully rational part of the human soul; once we have acquired the intellectual virtues, the virtue of wisdom for instance, our rational capacities will be working perfectly. Since there are no desires in the rational part of the soul that need to be adjusted, the right way of acquiring the intellectual virtues is by teaching and learning. Yet, in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle declares that the fully rational part of the human soul is also twofold:

Now we should divide in the same way the part that has reason. Let us assume there are two parts that have reason: with one we study beings whose principles do not admit of being otherwise than they are, and with the other we study beings whose principles admit of being otherwise. For when the beings are of different kinds, the parts of the soul naturally suited to each of them are also of different kinds, since the parts possess knowledge by being somehow similar and appropriate to their objects. Let us call one of these the scientific part (*epistēmonikon*), and the other the rationally calculating part (*logistikon*). (EN VI 1: 1139a6-13)

Things whose principles admit of being otherwise are practical goods, most of all goods concerned with action. It might be good for you to ϕ here and now but not for me; and while it was good for you to ϕ then, it need not be good now, even though the situation may be similar. Thus, in practical thinking we have to deal with contingencies. Since this is a special *ergon*, the part of the rational soul that is concerned with practical truths, i.e. the calculating part (*logistikon*), has a special virtue. Aristotle calls it *phronesis*, that is, prudence or practical wisdom. In theoretical thinking, by contrast, we study things that cannot be otherwise. The

virtue that makes us appropriate to that kind of activity by perfecting the scientific part (*epistēmōnikon*) of the rational soul, is *sophia*, that is, wisdom.

So far, it should be obvious that for Aristotle virtue and soul are closely connected to each other. Without exploring the human soul, we neither understand the nature of virtue nor the different kinds of human virtue nor the reason for the necessity of acquiring the virtues at all. From the reflection on the human soul, however, we are also faced with the following question: Is the human soul a unity or rather an aggregate of many things? With this question, we enter the more controversial elements of Aristotle's moral psychology.

3. Does the human soul have unity?

In current debates, the question of the human soul's unity has been primarily addressed with respect to the virtue of *phronesis*. Where does *phronesis*, i.e. prudence or practical wisdom, belong to, to the rational or to the non-rational part of the human soul? The question emerges because, for Aristotle, *phronesis* and the ethical virtues can be conceptually distinguished but not separated from each other. As he claims, we cannot be prudent without being good, that is, without having the ethical virtues; likewise, we cannot have the ethical virtues without being prudent (Aristotle, EN VI 13). Prudence requires goodness of character because the prudent agent, in contrast to the clever one, deliberates his actions on the basis of willing to promote something good. Hence his practical inference about what to do here and now has a good principle. He asks himself, for instance, what it means to obey the demands of justice here and now, whereas the clever agent starts deliberating by asking how he can gain as much personal advantage as possible in the given situation. The good principle, Aristotle says, is present in the mind of the good agent but not in that of the vicious one, 'for vice perverts us and produces false views about the principles of action' (EN VI 12: 1144a35). Conversely, goodness of character requires prudence because we cannot know what to do here and now unless we have come to an adequate understanding of the situation we find ourselves in and to a wise decision on that basis; prudence is what enables us to deliberate and decide rationally. Given, for example, that it is good to fulfil the duties of the day, it will be good to get up early. While the good character provides the good end and, thus, the major premise of the practical deliberation, the intellectual virtue of prudence produces the minor premise and the right conclusion, i.e. the decision to get up sufficiently early.

So, again, the question is: Do the ethical virtues, on the one hand, and *phronesis*, on the other hand, belong to two distinct parts of the human soul? Or are they one and the same under two different descriptions, such as the convex and the concave? This is how Jennifer

Whiting puts the problem in a recent paper.⁷ According to her, there are two ways of solving it. The first one is the more common and traditional reading among Aristotle scholars. Whiting calls it the "conservative solution"; I prefer to call it the *relational view* of ethical virtue for it tries to solve the problem by giving a relational account of the two parts of the human soul that are involved in ethically virtuous agency. Here is how Whiting describes it:

What we have here is a single state that involves both the practical subpart of the rational part and that subpart of the non-rational part that is capable of obeying reason, so that this state does not belong exclusively to either of these parts but involves a certain *relation* of these two parts. (Whiting, 'Hylomorphic virtue', 10)

The second view is the one, which Whiting ascribes to John McDowell and, which she wishes to defend herself. She calls it the "radical solution"; I prefer to call it the *identity view* of ethical virtue for it tries to solve the problem by identifying the two parts of the human soul that are involved in acting ethically virtuously. Whiting describes it as follows:

The alternative is to *identify* the relevant subparts with one another: McDowell could say of practical intellect and the desiring part that is capable of obeying reason that they are ultimately a single part of soul, which can however be described in two different ways. (Whiting, 'Hylomorphic virtue', 10)

Whiting, I think, is perfectly right in ascribing this view to John McDowell for in *Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology* McDowell claims: 'Practical wisdom is the properly moulded state of the motivational propensities in reflectively adjusted form; the sense in, which it is a state of the intellect does not interfere with its also being a state of the desiderative element (i.e. the desiring part of soul, K.B.).' (Mc Dowell 2002, section 11) So, what is the correct account of the human soul and its connection to ethical virtue in Aristotle? How can we determine whether the relational or the identity view is true?

Two points seem to speak for the *relational view*. First, Aristotle clearly relates the ethical virtues to the non-rational, desiring part of soul, and *phronesis* to the practical subpart of the rational part of soul; he then explains how both come together in ethically virtuous actions. This is what I have tried to show in the second part of this paper. Secondly, his description of the continent and the incontinent agent presupposes that the two parts of soul are distinct from one another. In the case of incontinent, or weak-willed, agency, reason wants us to ϕ while desire causes us not to ϕ ; in acting continently, we ϕ but we still feel the desire not do so. As Jennifer Whiting claims, the whole second point is of minor concern. For neither the incontinent nor the continent agent exemplify virtuous action. Therefore, if we aim to

⁷ This paper, called 'Hylomorphic virtue', has been presented at several workshops but is not yet published. It is to appear in *Body and Soul* (see Whiting 2018).

understand the relation between the ethical virtues and the soul, we can leave continence and incontinence aside. As it seems to me, however, the first point is not convincing either. For it seems to be too weak to say that, in acting ethically virtuously, the two parts of the soul happen to be related to each other. Such a relation could easily come about incidentally. Yet it is not by incident that reason and desire pursue the same good end in the case of the virtuous agent. Rather, it is in accordance with the human *ergon* that reason takes the lead and gets the desires to follow. Thus, it seems that the relational view cannot account for the *necessity* of the connection between the different parts of soul.

Do these arguments support the *identity view*? Concerning the virtue related to continence and incontinence, i.e. temperance, it may seem so. As Aristotle explains, in temperate action there is no conflict between reason and desire. He even claims that 'what reason asserts *is* what desire pursues' (Aristotle, EN VI 2: 1139a24). It seems tempting to read this as an identification of reason and desire in virtuous agency. Yet, they *are* not identical. They cannot, if it is true that *phronesis* is the virtue of the practically rational part of soul whereas the ethical virtues are the excellences of the desiring part of soul. This is what Aristotle holds. As we have seen, the different parts of the human soul each have their particular *ergon* or function, hence there have to be different virtues enabling the performance of these *erga*. And this is in fact the case, as Aristotle says at the end of book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is here that we see how the different kinds of virtue are connected to the different parts of the human soul:

First of all, let us state that both prudence (*phronesis*) and wisdom (*sophia*) must be worthy of choice in themselves, even if neither produces anything at all; for each is the virtue of one of the two rational parts of soul. Secondly, they do produce something. Wisdom produces happiness, not in the way that medical sciences produces health, but in the way health produces health. (...) Further, we fulfil our *ergon* insofar as we have prudence and virtue of character; for virtue makes the goal (*skopos*) correct, and prudence makes the things promoting the goal correct. The fourth part of the soul, the nutritive part, has no such virtue related to our *ergon*, since no action is up to it to do or not to do. (EN VI 13: 1144a1-12)

Here it is apparent that, contrary to Whiting's claim, the practical intellect and the desiring part that is capable of obeying reason are not identical. Of course, they need to converge in ethically virtuous agency; yet they do so precisely in virtue of being distinct from each other. The desiring part makes us pursue a good goal, and prudence enables us to make a good decision about how to reach the goal here and now. Hence, the identity view cannot account for the apparent *diversity* of the different parts of the human soul.

I therefore want to propose a third reading,, which I think comes closer to Aristotle. We might call it "the unity in diversity view." It takes into account not only Aristotle's ethical writings, but also his psychological considerations expressed in *De Anima* and the *Politics*. In the following chapter I will briefly sketch this view.

4. Virtue and soul: the unity in diversity view

According to Aristotle, human beings are composed of body and soul; yet the human soul is made up of heterogeneous components, as I have mentioned above. One of them is the non-rational soul comprising nutritive, perceptive and appetitive capacities. For Aristotle, this part of the soul is nothing but the form of the living human body; it is essentially linked to bodily organs and bodily functions. The other part is the rational soul or, as Aristotle calls it, the intellect or '*nous* as such'. Taken as such, the intellect has no connection with the body; it is neither linked to bodily organs, nor does it regulate bodily functions, at least not immediately. Furthermore, *nous* in the sense of the *nous poietikos*, i.e. the active intellect, seems to be ontologically different from the rest of the human capacities. This is at least one way of interpreting the notoriously difficult passage of *De Anima* III 5. Yet, at the same time, the intellect is the supreme element in human beings, as we learn from *Nicomachean Ethics*, book X. Aristotle takes it to be either itself divine or the most divine element in us; and he takes the objects of the intellectual activity to be the supreme objects of knowledge (EN X 7: 1177a15-22). So far, we can once again account for the diversity in the human soul. Diversity, however, does not preclude unity. Unity can obtain between different things if they are parts of a whole. But in order for parts to form a whole, there has to be a unifying principle that sets apart the ruling and the subjected element. Since we now deal with different kinds of governance, the relevant passage is in the *Politics*:

At all events, we may firstly observe in living creatures both a despotical and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotical rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. (*Pol.* I 5: 1254b3-10)

By ruling the body *despotically*, the soul is united with the body. A despotic regime, Aristotle claims, is a regime that prevails between elements of different kinds, i.e. elements that barely have anything in common. A resemblance (*homoiōma*) to it or a pattern (*paradeigma*) of it,

so Aristotle holds, can be found in households (Aristotle, EN VIII 10: 1160b24-1161a9).⁸ For him, the master governs over the slave despotically. This can be a natural and expedient kind of rule for both master and slave if the slave is by nature unable to govern himself.⁹ At the same time, the master as the ruling element absolutely controls the activities of the ruled element. Regarding the relationship between body and soul, it follows that it is only through the reign of the soul that the body of a living being can do well; likewise, the living being's characteristic activities all emerge from the soul. The unifying principle of the rational and the non-rational part of the human soul, by contrast, is a *constitutional* or *royal* regime, that is, a regime between elements of similar kind. In the household, this corresponds, for example, to the community of a father and his children, 'since the father is concerned for his children' (Aristotle, EN VIII 10: 1160b26). Regarding the relationship between the rational and the non-rational soul, it follows that the interests, so to speak, of the desires and appetites residing in the non-rational part of the soul cannot be neglected by reason; they are important for the well-being of the whole living creature. The intellect needs to respect them even though it is the intellect that decides to what extent.

Hence, it is the intellect, i.e. the rational part of the human soul, which is responsible for its diversity but brings about its unity. Since the intellect is ontologically different from the rest of the soul, perhaps even a divine element in us, as Aristotle suggests, understanding the intellect allows us to explain why the human soul is of such a heterogeneous nature. At the same time, the intellect's activity is the ultimate *ergon* of human beings; thus, it is the key to understanding how the unity of the human soul is to be established. It needs to be established by unfolding the intellect's ruling power. And here virtue comes in, for the virtues help to execute the ruling power of the intellect. We human beings need to acquire the virtues because the unity of the human soul is neither given nor granted by nature. Rather, it is the acquired perfection of the human soul, that is, the result of a perfective process of unification. It is a twofold perfection, for both parts of the soul need to be perfected in order to bring about the perfect unity of the whole:

The *intellectual part* of the soul needs to be perfected in order to come into touch with the non-rational part. It needs the non-rational part in two different respects. Firstly, in order to develop theoretical excellence, i.e. wisdom, the intellect needs the *phantasmata*, i.e. the perceptual impressions and sensual representations of objects in the environment, as a start-

⁸ "For master and slave have nothing in common, since a slave is a tool with a soul, while a tool is a slave without a soul. Insofar as he is a slave, then, there is no friendship with him. But there is friendship with him insofar as he is a human being." (EN VIII 11, 1161b)

⁹ Note that this is not meant as a justification of Aristotle's claim in *Pol.* I 3-7 that there *are* slaves by nature.

ing point for forming true beliefs about the world. Secondly, in order to develop practical excellence, i.e. prudence, the intellect needs to reign over the body and the animal appetites to be able to bring about the practical good in the material world. The perfect qualities of the human intellect that are the result of the perfective process in question are the *intellectual virtues*.

The *non-rational part* of the soul needs to be perfected since it is unable to rule human conduct all on its own. Unlike non-rational animals, human beings lack natural instincts; there is no pre-established harmony between perceptions, affections and bodily movements in human beings. The non-rational part of the human soul, taken as such, lacks order. The positive side of this negative claim is that the non-rational soul is capable of listening to reason and of obeying its commands. But the sensual capacities of the soul do not conform with reason from the start. They have to receive this condition by a certain formative, perfective process. This process is the process of ethical habituation. If it is successful, the non-rational soul acquires qualities of perfection that are called *ethical virtues*.

5. Conclusion

The unity in diversity view of the relation between the human soul and the virtues, so it seems, can help to solve some of the pressing problems concerning both Aristotle's moral psychology and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Let me finally briefly summarize the advantages it provides.

As to the debate on Aristotle's moral psychology, the view, first of all, allows us to see to what extent the soul is the principle of virtue. For exploring the parts of the human soul helps to explain the nature of virtue, the difference between the ethical and the intellectual virtues, and even the different sorts of ethical and intellectual virtues alike; furthermore, it helps to understand why we human beings need the virtues at all if we are to live a good human life. Secondly, the unity view justifies Aristotle's final conclusion in *Nicomachean Ethics*, book X, hence it reveals the unity of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is sometimes challenged. Given that it is the intellect that is peculiar to human beings, and given that the intellect is twofold, comprising both practical and speculative thinking, with speculative thinking as the act of the *nous* as such, it cannot come as surprise that the most excellent way of life for us humans is the life of *theoria*, i.e. contemplation. Contemplating about things that cannot be otherwise is, as Aristotle claims, the most supreme intellectual activity for human beings; at the same time, it is the most pleasurable. Living in accordance with the ethical virtues is the second best, since here the intellect is operative as well but in a less supreme way, for it deals with contingencies.

As to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, the unity in diversity view does full justice to Anscombe's claim about the necessity of a philosophy of psychology. For it helps to understand, e.g. what type of characteristic a virtue is and how a virtue relates to the actions in, which they are instanced. Of course, there is a lot more to say about how exactly Aristotelian psychology can contribute to modern virtue ethics. But if we do not avoid to study the human soul both on metaphysical and empirical grounds, and if we refrain from substituting philosophical psychology for either social theory or philosophy of language, we will certainly be able to overcome the difficulties some of the neo-Aristotelian accounts of virtue ethics struggle with. With regard to MacIntyre and Foot, here are at least some hints. Concerning Alasdair MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*, the unity in diversity view allows us to say that the practice of torture can by no means be virtuous since it represents both a lack of prudence, insofar as it is based on the idea of choosing bad means, i.e. inflicting pain on another person, and a lack of character, insofar as it involves the willingness to use such means. Concerning Philippa Foot, the unity view can make perfect sense of someone's refusal to reproduce for the sake of chastity. For it shows that a life devoted to contemplate God is not deficient in any sense but can be a good life.

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