

***Phronesis And Virtue of Character:***  
**The Making of Morally Right Goals in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics***  
by  
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## 1. Virtue Makes the Goal Right? The Humean Controversy

In this chapter I aim to set the stage for a debate on the nature of the starting-point of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is generally translated as “practical wisdom”. It is the knowledge of how to perform morally right actions. Its starting-point, as I will later explain in detail, is the setting of morally right goals. Why does there have to be a debate in the first place? The short answer would be that some Aristotle scholars disagree with ways to read an important sentence in *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*). This infamous sentence is:

*1. Virtue makes the goal right, phronesis the things towards it. (EN 1144a6-9)*

I will refer to this sentence as the “making the goal right” sentence throughout this thesis. Many philosophers worry that a literal reading of this sentence would lead to a “Humean” interpretation of Aristotle’s ethics. The term “Humean” here denotes a specific type of ethical system, rather than what Hume says strictly. A “Humean” ethical system emphasizes the role of desire in ethical decisions, in contrast to intellect. Some claim that this Humean system contradicts Aristotle’s general attitude towards moral actions, especially his definition of *phronesis*. The general structure of this contradiction is:

- a. The “making the goal right” sentence should be read directly, which means that “virtue makes the goal right”. (“The literalist premise”)

b. The literalist reading of the “making the goal right” sentence equates a Humean reading of Aristotelian ethics. (“The equivalence premise”)

c. The Humean version of Aristotelian ethics is incompatible with Aristotle’s general conception of *phronesis*. (“The incompatibility premise”)

The two camps of the current debate differs on whether to reject *a* or *b*. Those rejecting *a* are called intellectualists and most of the others non-intellectualists (There is one exception of a type of intellectualist reading that rejects *b* instead, they will be called the literalist intellectualists, as they accept *a*, the literalist premise). In the rest of this essay I aim to show that although between these two there is more evidence supporting the latter, the non-intellectualist position itself nevertheless still faces problems.

Both sides, however, agree that a Humean reading of the “making the goal right” sentence should be avoided. They differ only on how to avoid it. Therefore, I will firstly show that a Humean reading should indeed be avoided. In order to show that, I shall reject these two conditions: 1. The equivalence premise is not possible, i.e., it is not at all conceivable to read the “making the goal right” sentence in a Humean way. In that way, it is unnecessary to avoid the Humean reading, as such reading cannot happen anyway; 2. The incompatibility premise is not true, i.e., a Humean reading of the “making the goal right” sentence would fit well in Aristotle’s overall structure. In this way avoiding Humean reading again becomes unnecessary as such reading is innocuous.

Rejection of the first condition sets the stage for one of the focal points of the debate. The non-intellectualists challenge the equivalence premise, while the (non-literalist) intellectualists defend it. However, firstly, I would like to show how a Humean reading of the “making the goal right” sentence is possible. Without that the intellectualists will have nothing to defend and the non-intellectualists will have no targets to aim. The second condition is even more pivotal to the debate. Without it, the debate would not have existed. If the incompatibility premise is not true, even if the “making the goal right” sentence is interpreted as expressing a Humean view, one can still ask: so what? It is incompatibility premise that exhibits the significance of this debate in the broader picture of Aristotle’s moral philosophy. It is because of the incompatibility of Humean reading of Aristotle, that scholars debate ways to avoid it and conserve Aristotle.

I seek to reject these two conditions in this chapter. In order to do this, I will firstly clarify important concepts in this debate: *phronesis*, starting-point, Humean ethics and virtue of character. By doing so I will be able to reject the two aforementioned conditions and pave the ground for the overall debate. At the end of the chapter I will briefly outline positions taken by different camps in the debate.

### **1.1 General Characteristics of *Phronesis***

*Phronesis*, or “practical wisdom”, is a central concept in both *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. Hence, to understand *phronesis*, we have to firstly understand Aristotle’s overall project in these two books. Aristotle’s aim in both books is to explore ways to act morally. His overall answer to this question is that a person acts morally when her action leads to a moral end. Aristotle calls the moral end of an action its “good”. In the opening sentence of

*Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle has claimed that “every action and deliberate choice seems to seek some good”. (1094a1) An action is morally right when a “good” of the action is achieved. For example, if the moral end of helping others is being generous, then “being generous” is said to be the “good” of helping others. Only when that is achieved could one say that the person has acted morally. Now, how could this “good” of an action, which seems too general to grasp, be met in reality? This forces us to look at the particular content of “good” in actions. Aristotle thinks that the essential content of good in an action is its function (*ergon*). This “good” is said to “lie in the function”. Using Aristotle’s own example, playing flute is said to be the function of a flute player, since that is what he is supposed to do. (EN 1097b25) He is fulfilling his function when he plays the flute and subsequently, acting rightfully. Notice that flute-playing is used as an analogy here. Although itself is an amoral action, it is used to illustrate the definition of an action’s function. Now, what acting morally really means is that the moral function of an action is fulfilled. However, it takes expertise to carry out those functions. Those who are good at carrying out a particular function is said to be excellent in that particular area. If a flute player wants to act morally, he has to know how to play flute well in the first place.

*Phronesis* is essentially the knowledge of how to carry out correct functions of all morally right goals. It is the sum of knowledge of carrying out correct functions in all particular moral areas, such as courage, generosity, friendliness etc. Aristotle defines *phronesis* in *EN* Book V 9 as the “true supposition” of “furthering the end”. (EN 1142b33). In other words, a practically wise person is marked by his success (true supposition) in pursuing right goals (ends). Using the example of generosity, a typical moral goal: a practically wise person can be generous whenever she wants to. She knows how to tackle many practical problems. How much money to share?

Who to share the money with? In which way should the money be shared? To throw the money off a building would be both wasteful and demeaning. It does not help those most in need and may harm their dignity. Therefore, although someone doing so might have the goal to be generous, in practice she cannot reach her goal. In contrast, if a person organizes a charity successfully and helps many to make progresses in their lives, she is said to be have acted generously. The difference is that the latter person has *phronesis*.

It should be noted here that this instrumental *phronesis* mentioned here is only part of Aristotle's practical philosophy. *Phronesis* cannot come into function without its starting-point (*arche*). Starting-point in general means "the fact that something is so, and, we do not also need the explanation of why it is so." (EN 1095b5-6) In other words, starting-point is first principles of a system on which other mechanism in the system can be based. Aristotle is tackling the problem of infinite regress here. In deductive systems such as *phronesis*, an action is taken because of certain given premises. Those premises themselves may need further explanation. However, Aristotle cannot allow this chain of explanation to continue forever. In that case knowledge can never be obtained. Some principles are needed as the starting-point. In the case of *phronesis*, its starting-point is "making goals morally right". In other words, the first thing a practically wise person has to know, is what are the right goals to pursue. A person with knowledge of how to act generously still will do so if she does not know that acting generously is something that she ought to do. In the rest of the essay I will use starting-point and "making goals right" interchangeably because in the context of *phronesis*, "making goals right" is the content of the starting-point.

The definition of *phronesis* as a sort of know-how is usually compared to another concept in *Nicomachean Ethics*: *techne*, or craft. *Techne* describes also a person's aptitude in fulfilling given goals. *Techne* is said to be a productive instead of active state and it is said to involve reason. (EN 1140a10) Aristotle uses the example of building. (EN 1140a9) Building is a *techne* because it teaches people, through a well-thought plan, how to achieve the goal of building a house. Therefore, superficially both *phronesis* and *techne* can be said to be the know-how of achieving desired ends. How is *phronesis* different from *techne* then? This has to do with the first characteristic of *phronesis*.

### **1.1.1 *Phronesis* vs *Techne***

*Phronesis*' first characteristic is that it is always about a particular category of goals: the morally right goals. As aforementioned, *phronesis*' starting-point is making goals morally right. This moral starting-point determines that *phronesis* operates within the boundary of morality.

*Phronesis* concerns only "what is *good* for themselves and for human beings." (EN 1140b8) It does not concern things that are not morally right, be it amoral or immoral. On the contrary, *techne* as a capacity is morally neutral. A person who can fight well is said to possess *techne*.

However, this capacity can be used for morally right or wrong goals. Both Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker know how to use the force. However, because Luke uses it for morally right purposes, he is said to have *phronesis* and Darth Vader, regardless of how well he uses the force, cannot be said to have *phronesis*. We can see here that while *phronesis* is evaluated on morality, *techne* is not.

Aristotle further claims that unlike *techne*, which is craft, *phronesis* is a kind of virtue (not to be confused with the virtue we would talk about in later chapters, which is short for “virtue of characteristics”). This difference between *phronesis* and *techne* is confirmed by the following two pieces of evidence. Firstly, *phronesis* concerns action rather than production. Production is about creating something else, while action is only about the acts performed. Aristotle has highlighted that while the end of production differs from production, the end of action is action itself. (EN 1140b8) The hallmark of a craft is that it aims at production while that of a virtue is that it aims at action. A builder is said to have *techne* in building. However, the end of building is the house, which is not equivalent to the process of building. *Techne*'s value is in the quality of the product but not the action itself. On the other hand, a successful philanthropist is said to have the *phronesis* of acting generously. The end of acting generously, however, is acting generously itself. For the philanthropist herself, acting generously does not produce anything else rather than the fact that she has acted generously.

Secondly, Aristotle also adds that “in the case of a craft, someone who makes errors voluntarily is preferable but with practical wisdom he is less so, as is also the case with the virtues.” (EN 1140b21-22) It is preferable for someone with craft to make errors voluntarily because it shows her ability to bring about an (erroneous) product. Only people with supreme *techne* can make sure that errors will be achieved. It is conceivable that a master builder can deliberately build a house that collapses exactly on the fifth day. The proper end of a house is to last and shelter and this is a wrongful use of the *techne* of building. Nonetheless, this master builder can still be said to possess more *techne* than average builders because they are not up to the task of designing



such a house. However, for a virtue like *phronesis*, the end must be carried out in the correct fashion. The same master builder cannot be said to have *phronesis* in honoring his profession.

In summary, *phronesis* and *techne* are distinguished by their categorical difference. *Phronesis* is a virtue and *techne* is a craft. Furthermore, although *techne* can apply to all activities, *phronesis* can only be used to achieve morally right goals.

### **1.1.2 *Phronesis* as Intellectual**

The second general characteristic of *phronesis* is that of being an intellectual state. Aristotle mentions repeatedly that *phronesis* is mostly about deliberation, which is an intellectual state. Deliberation is actually a characteristic that *phronesis* shares with *techne*. *Techne* is about “getting a theoretical grasp on how something may come to be that admits of being and of not being”. (EN 1140a11) The focus is on “[deciding] being and of not being” here, i.e., what objects to create and what not to. This phrase emphasizes that *techne* is always about *choosing* what to do. To choose what to bring into existence is a key component to successful production. One piece of timber in the wrong place makes the entire house crumble. Therefore, the builder must choose correctly where to and where not to lay a piece of timber. It is also important that this decision is made through “theoretical grasp”. The decision here must be based on reasons. The builder must put that piece of timber in a certain place because he knows it will help to stabilize the building. This shows that deliberation is indeed an intellectual state.

Deliberation is also significant for *phronesis*. Aristotle says that it is “characteristic of a practically wise person to be able to deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous

for himself'. (EN 1140a25) This deliberation is a process of using reason to determine whether to reject or embrace an action. As aforementioned, a practically wise philanthropist should know what actions to take given a certain condition. For example, when she needs to decide whether to throw money off a building, she shows her *phronesis* by doing the right action in that given situation—to reject the proposal. Again, Aristotle emphasizes the intellectual state of deliberation here. An indication of “deliberating correctly” is that practically wise people “rationally calculate well about what furthers some excellent end”. (EN 1140a26-28) The philanthropist decision not to throw money off a building is reached through rational calculation. She chose that decision based on whether it furthers or hinders her goals. Therefore, *phronesis*' deliberation cannot be random. Rather, it is the result of a calculation based on reason and given facts.

## **1.2 How is A Humean Reading of Aristotle Possible**

### **1.2.1 Definition and Consequences of a Humean reading**

Now I should explain the definition of “Humean” reading used in this debate. Aristotelian scholars' use of “Humean ethics” is related to general characteristics of Hume's ethical teachings but does not necessarily follow his comprehensive idea. I will not attempt to show Hume's authentic moral philosophy but rather what the Aristotelian scholars have used as “Humean ethics”. The “Hume” that I mention in this essay will be this caricatured philosopher of passion. Hume is famous for saying that reason is and ought to be the slave of passion. (Hume, 399) In this way Hume's reason operates just like Aristotle's *techne*, which concerns only facts of concrete situations. In other words, it teaches a person what to do in a given situation to achieve a given end but does not tell the person which ends to pursue. Instead, those ends are perceived

through passions, such as desire or aversion. Passions teach a person which ends to pursue by giving her “experiences of approval and uneasiness of disapproval”. (Cohon 2010) In this case, a Humean has no rational account of determining which ends to pursue. A person does generous things just because doing generous things makes her happy. Now, since determining which ends to pursue is just another way of saying Aristotle’s “making goals morally right”, which in turn is starting-point of practical philosophy, Hume is actually claiming a particular kind of nature of the starting-point, that it is perceived through passion only.

### **1.2.2 Possibility of Reading Aristotle in A Humean Way**

Now I will reject the first condition that makes the debate trivial, i.e., that it is impossible to read Aristotle in a Humean way. Why would scholars conceive of this peculiar kind of reading in the first place? To understand this, we have to go back to the “making the goal right” sentence.

People who read it literally would conclude that the first half of the sentence really means “*virtue* makes the goals right”. In other words, virtue determines starting-point of *phronesis*.

Furthermore, as I will explain later, it is possible to read virtue as a state of passion. Therefore, the literal reading of first half of the “making the goal right” sentence could equate to: the starting-point (making of right goals) of Aristotelian ethics is obtained through some kind of passion (virtue). If its starting-point is obtained through passion, it could be said that Aristotelian ethics is indeed Humean. Hence, a literal reading of the “making the goal right” sentence could lead possibly to a Humean interpretation of Aristotelian ethics.

Now, to show the possibility of a Humean reading on Aristotle, I just have to show that the virtue mentioned in the “making the goal right” sentence is indeed a state of passion. As

aforementioned, this virtue is different from the general kind of virtue, to which *phronesis* also belongs. It is short for “virtue of character”. Virtue of character is defined as something that helps “[keep] closely to what is appropriate to each person.” (EN 1178a13) In other words, it preserves a person’s propensity to perform moral actions. Virtue is, for example, the generosity of a generous person. A person who is characteristically generous would want to act generously all the time. Furthermore, there is evidence that virtue preserves people’s moral propensity through appealing to their feelings. Virtue is “in many ways to be intimately attached to feelings”. (EN 1178a16) For example, a characteristically generous person is so because she feels to act generously: when she acts generously she feels good and when she acts otherwise she feels bad. Virtue also excludes reason. “Where the virtues are concerned, knowing has little or no strength.” (EN 1105b2) This suggests that virtue is in the exact opposite position of reason. Aristotle puts it more explicitly in this way: “For virtue of character is concerned with pleasures and pains.” (EN 1104b10) If this sounds familiar, it is because that is exactly how Hume describes passions(including desire). As aforementioned, a Humean reading of Aristotle would lead to a goal setting process by desire. This is exactly what is happening in this context with virtue. To set up a goal based on virtue of character is the same as setting up a goal based on desire. To sum it up, a Humean reading of Aristotle runs in this way:

a. (According to the “making the goal right” sentence) Virtue of character sets goals. (The literalist premise)

d. Virtue of character is non-rational. (The non-rational virtue premise)

e. An ethical system is Humean when something non-rational sets the goals. (The Humean non-rational premise)

f. Therefore: Aristotle's ethic is Humean.

Now it is time to reject the second unwanted condition, that a Humean reading is innocuous to Aristotle's ethics in general.

### **1.3 Incompatibility of a Humean reading and *Phronesis*' general characteristics**

I will now aim to prove statement *c*, that a Humean reading of the “making the goal right” sentence is incompatible with general characteristics of *phronesis* and therefore should be rejected. There are three arguments supporting the incompatibility premise: 1. Textual evidence against desire's role in setting of goals for *phronesis*; 2. *Phronesis* requires an understanding of what right goals are and why they are right; 3. A Humean reading of Aristotle will trivialize the role of *phronesis*.

#### **1.3.1 Textual Evidence against Humean Reading**

There is plenty of textual evidence in Aristotle that explicitly contradicts a Humean reading. These texts exclude desire from playing a role in the setting of right goals. Aristotle explicitly says that “once someone is ruined by pleasure or pain, to him it does not appear a starting-point.” (EN 1140b18) To decide by “pleasure or pain” is exactly how Hume argues that starting-points should be made. “Pleasure or pain” is the deliberating mechanism behind desire in place of reason. A person with reason deliberates by using arguments. A person with desire, on the

contrary, deliberates by listening to her own pleasure and pain. The above texts show that Aristotle does not approve of the second kind of people. Later we will show that there are more positions available between someone deliberates only using reason and someone only using desire. However, it is clear here that the Humean position is one of the position clearly opposed by Aristotle.

### **1.3.2 Humean Reading vs. Cognition**

Even if one leaves those texts aside and claims that other texts (the “making the goal right” sentence potentially) support a Humean reading, such reading is still at odds with general characteristics of Aristotelian moral actions. Accepting it would mean much more than abandoning literal readings of the few aforementioned texts. It would also lead to confusion regarding Aristotle’s general attitude towards *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is, as Taylor labels, a “cognizant” process. (Taylor 2016) In the context of starting-point of *phronesis*, a cognizant process means that practically wise people *understand* their chosen goals as true morally right goals. Taylor’s main evidence includes the following text: “The good deliberation will be the sort of *correctness* that is in accord with furthering the end about practical wisdom.” (EN 1142b33) Therefore, it is not enough for practically wise people to believe in certain goals. They must also understand why those goals are indeed morally right. This cognizant nature of starting-point of *phronesis* is an effect of the combination of the two aforementioned general characteristics of *phronesis*. Firstly, as *phronesis* is only the pursuit of *right* goals, as explained in section 1.1.1, it is important to know that the goals we are pursuing are indeed right. Regardless of whether *phronesis* makes the goals right, practically wise people should be able to

verify the nature of the goals they are pursuing. Any uncertainty will prevent them from carrying out actions.

Secondly, because of the intellectual characteristic of *phronesis*, the aforementioned process of verifying right goals must be done through reason. Whatever makes the goals right, reasoning or not, must set the goals so that they align with rational deliberation. In other words, the goals have to be *rationally* understandable to the agents. Once a goal is established to be right *through reasoning*, it becomes the truth. Taylor rightfully points out that Aristotle stresses the importance of truth. Aristotle wants to make sure “the deliberate choice is an excellent one, and the very thing one asserts.” (EN 1139a25) In order to make this assertion, one needs “practical thought and truth”. (EN 1139a25) To grasp something as true requires some rational mechanism to check the truth value of statements. Furthermore, this mechanism has to be universal and consistent, i.e., one will not contradict one’s own judgment given the same conditions.

A Humean reading cannot give us this mechanism. Because Humean goals are established by desire, they cannot be consistently examined. Therefore, they will never be the truth that Aristotle requires. Desire is neither universal nor consistent. Given the same condition, one can feel like doing something at one time and not doing the same thing at another. Two different people will also have different judgments about one statement. Nothing can be claimed to be true in this relativist setting. The Humean philanthropist will not be able to argue that she did the right thing. When you ask her if it is right to act generously, she will not know how to respond. As her decisions are made relative to her instant desires, she cannot make moral judgments about universal goals or even her own goals. In this way, a Humean ethic cannot fulfill Aristotle’s

cognizant requirement of starting-point. It should be noted that Hume himself is not a radical relativist as depicted here. However, as aforementioned, the “Humean” position in this essay is a caricature used by Aristotle scholars to represent a situation that they want to avoid, i.e., a moral principle based entirely on desire.

### **1.3.3 Trivialization of *Phronesis* Through the Humean Reading**

Lastly, a Humean reading would trivialize the role of *phronesis*. As aforementioned, the role of reason in Hume is purely instrumental and akin to *techne*. Therefore, *Phronesis* according to Hume would be no different from just a special kind of *techne*. Aristotle gives *phronesis* much importance when he says “at the same time as *phronesis* is present, *all* the virtues of character will all be present”. (1145a2) This is in accordance with the fact that *phronesis* is mentioned at least 71 times<sup>1</sup>, as one of the most frequently mentioned term in the entire *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is hard to think that the Humean definition of reason can play such an important role. The Humean reason is purely instrumental. It concerns production rather than action. However, as explained in section 1.1.1. Aristotle’s *phronesis* concerns action rather than production. It is a virtue and not a craft like *techne*. It is different in kind from rather than as a subsection of *techne*. If it is so, *techne* will be more important for Aristotle than *phronesis*. In fact, Aristotle mentions *phronesis* many more times in *Nicomachean Ethics* than he mentions *techne*. All the evidence points to a *phronesis* that is unique and important and not just instrumental.

In summary, the Humean reading faces textual challenges. It also conflicts with the general characteristics of Aristotelian ethics. Therefore, it is clear that a Humean reading of Aristotle is

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<sup>1</sup> This number is according to the index page in C.D.C Reeve’s new translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*. It includes mentioning of “practical-wisdom (*phronesis*)”, “practically wise person”, “practically wise”.



unacceptable. However, as explained in section 1.2, the most literal reading of the “making the goal right” sentence would lead to a Humean reading and results in the contradiction a-c.

Therefore, Aristotelian scholars argue about ways to avoid the contradiction. They differ from each other only in their strategies. I will briefly lay out those different strategies in the next section.

#### **1.4 General Arguments of Both Sides of the Debate**

The first two premises of the trilemma, the literalist premise and the equivalence premise, are in this order for a reason. The literalist premise is more basic than the equivalence premise. If one rejects the literalist premise, the claim that the “making the goal right” sentence should be read literally, there is no need to argue about the equivalence premise. People who argue against *a* are generally intellectualists. Their argument runs roughly as follows:

1. A Humean reading of Aristotle is unacceptable (The incompatibility premise).

2. A Humean reading can only be avoided if something other than desire makes the goals right. (a variety of the Humean non-rational premise)

3. Virtue of character is a kind of desire (the non-rational virtue premise).

Therefore: Virtue of character cannot make the goals right (not-the literalist premise).

The first premise is already established in section 1.3 and can be accepted as given. Different scholars from the intellectualist camp have different ways to argue for 2 and 3. I will present their ideas in chapter 2.

For those who accept the literalist premise, they still face the choice of whether to accept the equivalence premise, that the literal reading of the “making the goal right” sentence would lead to a Humean interpretation of Aristotle. Because accepting both the literalist premise and the equivalence premise would lead to the trilemma, most scholars choose to reject the equivalence premise. The equivalence premise can be expanded into the aforementioned argument *a, d, e, f* in section 1.2.2. As everyone in this camp has already accepted the literalist premise (*a*), in order to avoid ending up at the conclusion that Aristotle is Humean (*f*), one must seek to reject either the non-rational virtue premise (*d*) or the Humean non-rational premise (*e*). Those rejecting the non-rational virtue premise, that virtue of character is non-rational, are the second kind of intellectualists, literalist intellectualists. Their argument is as follows:

1. A Humean reading of Aristotle is unacceptable (the incompatibility premise).
2. A Humean reading can only be avoided if something other than desire makes the goals right. (variety of the Humean non-rational premise)
3. Virtue of character makes the goal right (the literalist premise).

Therefore: Virtue of character cannot be non-rational (not the non-rational virtue premise).

Notice that all intellectualists accept the incompatibility premise and the Humean non-rational premise. The difference is that for the second type of intellectualists, the conclusion and the third premise, the literalist premise, switched. I will include them in chapter 2 along with the non-literalist intellectualists.

Those rejecting the Humean non-rational premise, that an ethical system is Humean when something non-rational sets the goals, are non-intellectualists. Their general argument would be:

1. A Humean reading of Aristotle is unacceptable (the incompatibility premise).

2. Virtue of character makes the goal right (the literalist premise).

3. Virtue of character is non-rational. (the non-rational virtue premise)

Therefore: A system can remain non-Humean when something non-rational makes the goals.

(not the Humean non-rational premise) I will discuss their ideas in chapter 3.

Now it is clear to see that winning this debate depends on arguing which one of premises, literalist premise, non-rational virtue premise and Humean non-rational premise, is more likely to be false and therefore is more appropriate to reject. In chapter 4 I will compare arguments for and against those three premises. I will argue that the literalist premise and the non-rational virtue premise are more defensible than the Humean non-rational premise. This gives the non-intellectualists advantages over the intellectualists. However, the other two premises, especially the non-rational virtue premise, also faces serious problems. Therefore, the non-intellectualist position has to face its own problems as well.

## **2. The Intellectualists: Intellect, Instead of Desire, Makes the Goal Right**

In this chapter I will explore the first solution to the previously mentioned Humean controversy regarding the reading of the “making the goal right” sentence. As the most prominent feature of Humean ethics is the role of desire in making the goal right, scholars from all camps want to make sure first, that it is not desire or its equivalents that makes the goal right. A natural follow up question would be: if not desire, then what? The most intuitive replacement for desire is something that is often used as its antonym with regards to sources for actions: intellect. Both play the role of informing an agent which actions to take. Just as desire is related to feelings, intellect is related to rational thinking. On the other hand, some claim that the replacement of desire with something at the other end of the spectrum amounts to a false dichotomy or even a blatant violation of Aristotle’s own golden mean principle. This controversy will be discussed in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I want to discuss possible ways for intellect to replace desire’s role in making goals right. Scholars supporting using intellect as the replacement, whom in this thesis I will refer to as the intellectualists, have different ways to make that happen. The first group of intellectualists wants to show that despite of the apparent claim in the “making the goal right” sentence that “virtue makes the goal right”, Aristotle actually assigns something else, which involves the intellect, other than virtue, for that role. I will call this group of intellectualists the non-literalists, as they reject the straight-forward reading of “virtue makes the goal right”. The second group of intellectualists, the literalists, on the other hand, affirm the literal reading of the “making the goal right” sentence, that virtue makes the goal right. They, however, argue that virtue itself is at least partly intellectual. Therefore, intellect would still replace desire in making

the goals right. I will discuss the arguments of the first group of intellectualists in section 2.1 and the second group in section 2.2. In section 2.3 I will discuss some common challenges faced by the intellectualists.

## **2.1 Non-literalists: Something Other Than Virtue Makes the Goal Right**

The first group of intellectualists want to replace the role of virtue of character in making the right goals all together. In order to do this, they have to solve two major problems. Firstly, they must explain why it is possible to circumvent the apparent statement of the “making the goal right” sentence that virtue makes the goal right. They must provide another way to read it. Secondly, they have to find a convincing intellect-related replacement for the role of making right moral goals elsewhere in Aristotle’s texts.

### **2.1.1 Alternative Reading of The “Making The Goal Right” Sentence**

The first requirement seems daunting enough, as the “making the goal right” sentence explicitly says that “virtue makes the goal right”. However, as several intellectualists have shown, there are more nuances in this sentence than it appears to say. Firstly, we should remind ourselves that the Humean problem only matters when desire is the *basis* for the choice of moral goals. Whether this is true depends on how we interpret what Aristotle means by “A makes B right”. If this “right-making” happens only in an instance, then surely A is the only basis for choice of B. For example, if I strike a billiard ball with a cue, then my striking is solely responsible for the ball moving away, as the action is a one-off event involving only the two elements, billiard ball and cue. However, the “right-making” could be a process consisting of multiple stages. Now A could be at any stage of the process of the “right-making” of B. The non-literalists believe that in the

case of “virtue makes the goal right”, virtue is only at the very last stage of the “right-making” of moral goals. It is, in this way, not their basis. Taking a real-life example, the Chinese firm Foxconn takes order from the American firm Apple to make iPhones. Apple provides the original design and Foxconn assembles the different spare parts in accordance to Apple’s instruction. It is equally valid to say both “iPhones are made by Apple” and “iPhones are made by Foxconn”. However, it is clear that the essence of an iPhone depends more on Apple than on Foxconn. Many firms can replace Foxconn and still make iPhones. However, no iPhones can be made without Apple. Therefore, although both Apple and Foxconn are referred to as makers of iPhones, Apple’s role is more basic to that of Foxconn’s.

The intellectualist think that virtue takes orders from intellect just as Foxconn takes orders from Apple. This leaves the possibility open of Aristotle calling virtue the maker of right goals while still giving intellect a more basic role in the goal making process. Some intellectualists see hints of this arrangement in Aristotle’s description of the learning process of virtue of character. As per common interpretation of Aristotle, virtue of character is learnt through habituation. In EN II 2 Aristotle gives some examples of learning process of virtues such as temperance and courage. He insists that we become temperate by abstaining from pleasure and courageous by being habituated to despise and endure frightening things. (EN 1104a31-B2) In both cases, an agent obtains a virtue by getting used to perform actions in accordance to that virtue. The fact that virtue of character is obtained from habituation is typically seen as a proof that the former is based on desire. When a person learns to be in a certain way simply by getting used to it, she does not have to know why she should be in that way. Instead, she just has appropriate feelings towards circumstances, such as the feelings of endurance in case of courage. A virtuous person

has gotten used to downplay the uneasy feelings in a dangerous situation. Rational thinking is not needed in this situation. For example, if I do not want to steal just because I was raised up that way, it does not mean that I rationally decide that stealing is a bad thing and should not be done. Rather, it means that I do not steal because my upbringing makes me feel unpleasant when stealing stuff. The traditional reading of habituation would make it an evidence for the non-rational basis of virtue of character and subsequently, the “making the goal right” sentence.

On the contrary, C.W.Taylor (2016) points out, that this process of habituation can in fact be interpreted as a proof that virtue of character bases itself off of intellect. Taylor describes the relationship between intellect and virtue of character as that between “an expert mathematician and her pupil” (Taylor 2016). Although the pupil does not know the derivation of a certain formula, she still can memorize the formula. Moreover, after she learns enough formulas, she could even derive new formulas on her own. What the pupil learns from the master is not simply feelings of wanting to do something. Instead, she learns to think rationally. Rationality can be learnt through habituation in this way. Those with virtue of character learns how to think rationally by following examples of rational decisions made by virtuous (and at the same time rational) people. After enough practices, the agent will always choose the goal in accordance with intellect. For example, an intemperate person might react on impulses. The way to make her temperate is to habituate her with temperate actions, that means, to let her know to wait for reason’s instruction. In the case of a courageous person, she has learnt to overcome her fear and take the most appropriate action. As pupil she used to be scared by, for example, the piercing sound of bullets, and could not make any rational moves. However, she can observe how her more experienced commander suppresses her fear and choose the rational option. After

observing her commander for enough times, she will naturally turn to the rational choice when in the same situation again, that is, to be courageous. Virtue of character hence is possessed only by agents who ultimately base their decisions on reason, a skill they learnt through habituation.

Therefore, when Aristotle says “virtue makes the goal right”, it could mean that “virtue makes the goal in accordance with what intellect informs it”.

Nevertheless, another question arises subsequently: Why does Aristotle need this complicated two-layer system to make the goal right, if after all it is still intellect that calls the shot? Why do we need this extra step involving virtue of character? This could be explained by another of virtue of character’s functions: motivation. Virtue of character motivates the inert agent towards reaching the goal. The knowledge of the right goal alone would not make the agent fulfil that goal. Only the desiderative part of the soul could get one into action. For example, I am keenly aware that right amount of exercise is good for my health. However, I still lack the motivation to join my friends and go to the gym.

The desiderative part of my soul just does not like that idea. Virtue of character is central to solving that problem. Aristotle states that “virtue produces acting that is itself the end”. (EN 1144a5) It is the only action producing part of the soul. When my desiderative soul decides to do something, I will in the end fulfil that goal. It works this way because the desiderative part of the soul, where virtue of character resides, bridges the vegetative part of the soul, which only listens to the feelings, to the rational part of the soul, which only formulates things into theories. Taylor argues that someone with virtue of character in a moral behavior B will understand that B is the right behavior and at the same time wants to perform that action (Taylor 2016). If I have the



virtue of character in diligence, I will understand that exercise is good for my health and at the same time want to go to the gym. Only when I have the urge to go to the gym, can I make the right goal of going to the gym. In this way, the process of “right making” of the goal can be divided into two parts, the rational part where intellect identifies which are the right goals to pursue and virtue of character where the agent is motivated to want to achieve those goals. The latter only brings about what the former has envisioned into action, similar to how Foxconn brings Apple-designed iPhones into being. Virtue of character could be preceded by something intellectual in the goal making process. Therefore, it is possible that the real maker of right goals is in fact something other than virtue of character.

### **2.1.2 “Real” Makers of the Right Goal**

Now I have shown that it is possible to read the “making the goal right” sentence alternatively, so that virtue of character does not become the basis of the goal making process, but rather as a catalyst. The remaining step for a non-literalist intellectualist is to find the kind of intellect that serves as the basis of the goal making process in place of virtue of character.

Talking about an intellectual component in Aristotle’s practical philosophy, *phronesis* is surely the first thing that attracts our attention. Can *phronesis* be the actual maker of right goals? Again, it seems to conflict with the literal reading of the “making the goal right” sentence. This time it has to do with the second half of the sentence: “...and *phronesis* the things towards it (the goal)”. It seems that Aristotle has clearly assigned *phronesis* the step *after* the making of the right goal. In fact, if we look closer at some definitions of *phronesis*, it might even be trivially wrong to suggest that *phronesis* could set the right goals, as its very definition precludes such a role.

*Phronesis* consists of *euboulia*, or good deliberation. Aristotle mentions that “it is characteristic of practically-wise people to have deliberated well”. (EN 1142b30) Deliberation is the choosing of correct actions that leads to expected goals. For example, *phronesis* will tell me what to do to stay healthy: I will choose to go to the gym over napping. This presupposes that the goals, in this case, to stay healthy, are already made. Without a given end it will be impossible to deliberate; hence it would be impossible to have *euboulia*, which is a key component of *phronesis*, making the goals.

However, Taylor points out again that *euboulia* does not cover all of *phronesis*' meaning. He describes *phronesis* as a combination of *nous* and *euboulia*. This echoes earlier claims by scholars such as John McDowell. McDowell envisions different kinds of *phronesis*. He calls the *phronesis* that makes the things towards the goal right instrumental practical craft. This kind of *phronesis* merely brings some blueprints to realization. (McDowell 1998, 32) As explained in the first chapter, a purely instrumental *phronesis* reduces it to *techne*. Aristotle definitely envisions more for *phronesis* in general. McDowell argues that it amounts to a non-instrumental kind of practical wisdom, which comes up with the blueprint for the other kinds of practical wisdom to realize. (McDowell 1998, 33) In general, *nous* makes the blueprint apparent to us and *euboulia* brings them to realization. This blueprint is hard to describe in exact formulas because according to McDowell, it is not a collection of universal rules to be applied. Instead, this blueprint is a correct attitude to living *as a whole*. McDowell thinks that when a virtuous person does something specifically, she is performing that action for its own sake. That action is a “case” of “doing well” (the blueprint) and therefore the blueprint is not external to that specific action. (McDowell 1998, 26) That specific action is not just an instrument to get the blueprint right, it is

part of it. Therefore, instrumental means such as *euboulia* are not useful here. *Euboulia* needs a specific content to operate on. For example, I can decide whether organize a charity will help the poor. However, helping the poor itself is not something instrumental for something else. It is just a case of the blueprint of a moral life. This blueprint needs something else to be discovered.

Taylor thinks that the other part of *phronesis* might help in this situation.

The other part of *phronesis*, according to Taylor, is *nous*, translated as the intellectual intuition or understanding. Taylor takes this idea from Aristotle's description of *sophia*, the theoretical wisdom (which is frequently compared to *phronesis*, the practical wisdom) as the combination of *nous* and *episteme* (scientific knowledge). The former is the knowledge of first theoretical principles, while the latter are rules of deducting new theories based on the first principles.

Taylor believes that there is a structural parallel between *sophia* and *phronesis* (Taylor 2016). In this way *euboulia* is comparable to *episteme* and *phronesis* must also have a *nous* on its own to match *sophia*'s *nous*. The instrumental kind of *phronesis*, or *euboulia*, only explains how the agent makes practical deliberations on some events. However, in order to choose between several options, one must have some criteria outside of those options. Eventually, the agent would need a set of irreducible criteria, or first practical principles.

Aristotle talks about *nous*' role in both theoretical and practical wisdom in EN VI 11. He says that "understanding (*nous*) concerns with things that come last in both directions". (EN 1143a35) For *sophia*, the last things are actually the first things, i.e. the basic principles used to deduct more complicated theories about the natural world. For *phronesis*, on the other hand, the last things are the starting-points of practical ends. In chapter one we have proved that starting-points

of practical philosophy refer to the basic goals. Therefore, Aristotle can be interpreted here as saying that it is *nous* that makes the right goals. Reconciling the two versions of makers of the right goals, *nous* must be earlier in the process than virtue of character as it is said explicitly here that *nous* concerns the last of those ends, i.e. the most fundamental of practical goals.

Moreover, unlike virtue of character, *nous* does not belong to the desiderative part of the soul. It is always grouped with other intellectual parts such as *sophia*, *phronesis* and *episteme*.

Admittedly there are only hints, and no concrete evidence, that practical *nous* is part of *phronesis*. Remember that Aristotle did not specify a practical *nous*; it is Taylor who invented the practical *nous* based on the Aristotelian text in the last paragraph. The best evidence appears in VI 8, where the theoretical *nous* is contrasted to *phronesis*. The *nous* is said of terms “for which there is no reason”, but *phronesis* concerns “not scientific knowledge but rather perception.” (EN 1142a25). It is strange that *phronesis* is said to be about perception rather than deliberation. A possible explanation is that Aristotle is contrasting the *nous* of *sophia* and the *nous* of *phronesis*, and referring to the former simply as *nous* and the latter as *phronesis*. It is the latter kind of *nous* that is about perception about the first principles, which Aristotle simply calls *phronesis* here. It is only possible when the practical *nous* is part of *phronesis*, that it can be referred to as *phronesis*. The quest of setting *phronesis* as the maker of right goals is hence accomplished. In this way, the process of performing practically right actions is interpreted as such: *Phronesis (nous)* makes the right goal → virtue of character makes the agent want to achieve that goal → *phronesis (euboulia)* maps practical steps to achieve that goal. A real-life example would be: I understand from *nous* that the poor needs to be helped → virtue of character motivates me to do actions in order for that to happen → my *euboulia* helps me decide that I have

to organize a charity. Finally, a morally right action, the organization of a charity, will be performed.

On the other hand, even if intellect does not precede virtue of character, the latter obviously cannot function without the former. Some non-literalist intellectualists have argued that virtue of character is not the *sole* maker of right goals. Richard Sorabji (1973) points out that virtue of character is entangled with *phronesis*. Whenever virtue of character works, *phronesis* must work as well. He argues that habituation itself is not enough to cultivate complete virtue of character. Teaching, which is done through *phronesis*, is also required in order for virtue of character to be complete.

The incomplete kind of virtue of character is called the natural virtue. It is indeed possible to have natural virtue without intellectual comprehension of moral values. Habituation is sufficient in giving us this kind of virtue. For example, a child can learn to help anyone in need by observing virtuous people performing that action. However, she still does not understand why one should help other people. This kindness, however, is not yet a virtue of character according to Aristotle. Aristotle thinks that one is virtuous only when one does something for the sake of that virtue. He claims that “if someone should acquire understanding his natural virtue will then be full virtue.” (EN 1144b14) Thus full virtue cannot exist without the intellectual content. The child who simply repeats other people’s action certainly does not have that kind of virtue of character. It is not a coincidence that Aristotle also thinks that a child lacks *phronesis*: “while young people become wise in such things, they do not seem to become practically-wise.” (EN 1142a12) It seems that both complete *phronesis* and virtue of character are missing in a young

person's mind. I would argue here that it is because of this lack of *phronesis*, that a young person does not have complete virtue of character, which means to do kind actions for the sake of kindness.

In order to do kind actions for the sake of kindness, the child must obtain a knowledge of the good life, i.e. *phronesis*. This knowledge of the good life serves as the guidance of all virtues. Only with *phronesis* can an agent have a complete virtue of character. Aristotle has argued that is the kind of virtue which once one has it, one will have all the other virtues. It is the understanding of a correct lifestyle. A right action is only done for its own sake when one understands that it is part of the correct lifestyle. Aristotle also says that *phronesis* and virtue of character cannot exist without each other. He clearly states that "it is not possible to be fully good without practical wisdom nor practically-wise without virtue." (1144b32) Here we are only interested in virtue of character's dependency on *phronesis*. Because of this entanglement, an agent always obtains a complete virtue of character alongside her acquirement of *phronesis*.

Let's return to our discussion of the "making the goal right" sentence. What Aristotle means here is then complete virtue, which is a product of both *phronesis* and natural virtue. The desiderative natural virtue only exists to preserve the right goals that we obtained from *phronesis*. The child who is used to being kind will have the propensity to perform kindly. This helps to prevent her from losing the goals she learnt from *phronesis* to external desires. Therefore, according to this thread of non-literalist reading, it is both *phronesis* and the natural virtue of character that makes the goal right. A Humean reading, which is based on purely desiderative foundation of moral goals, can hence be avoided.

## 2.2 The Literalists: The Rational Virtue of Character

Another group of intellectualists are less keen to adopt an alternative reading of the “making the goal right” sentence. That means they accept virtue of character’s role in making the right moral goals. However, they are equally worried about the Humean problem, and want something intellectual to make the goals right. This forces them to engage in some even more radical readings of Aristotle: that virtue of character is, despite of all indications, something rational. I will call these intellectualists literalists.

The literalists would argue firstly that there is no obvious evidence of the non-rational status of virtue of character in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Hendrik Lorenz (2009) argues for this point by comparing EN and EE’s definitions for virtue of character (Lorenz 2009, 192). In the *Eudemian Ethics* it is clearly stated that virtue of character is a desiderative state and is non-rational. For example: “since there are two parts of the soul, there is a corresponding division of the virtues...the other virtues belong to the part of the soul that is non-rational but capable of desire.” (EE 1221b27-31) Virtue of character is placed against intellect on the side of desire. Aristotle emphasizes this several times in EE but does not mention it explicitly in EN. Lorenz believes that this is an indication that Aristotle changes his definition for virtue of character in the EN, that it becomes no longer purely desiderative.

Although the absence of explicit mention of the non-rational state of virtue of character raises the possibility of the latter being rational in EN, mere absence of the opposite alone does not prove Lorenz’s point. He still has to find positive texts supporting the rational nature of virtue of

character in EN. Lorenz manages to find the evidence based on the link between virtue of character and decision (*prohairesis*). The close relation between these two is manifested in the statement that virtue of character is a “prohairesis” state, or in other translations, a “deliberately choosing state”. (EN1139a22) *Prohairesis* is decision and prohairesis per Lorenz means “capable of or inducing to decision making” (Lorenz 2009, 196). This shows that an important criterion of being virtuous, is to be able to make correct decisions. Now the task is to show that decision making is a rational process in Aristotle.

Everyday use of the word “decision” does not suppose what criteria the decider bases her decisions on. One can decide on something because of her feeling or reason. However, Aristotle’s definition for decision is much stricter. The term which Aristotle associates decision with is our old friend deliberation (*euboulia*): “What we deliberate about is the same as what we decide to do, except that by the time we decide to do it, it is definite; for what we decide to do is what we have judged [to be right] as a result of deliberation.” (EN 1113a2-5) Decision is about the same kind of thing as deliberation because they both reason about the moral course of action. The difference is that deliberation comes first and decision second. The deliberation already lays out the right course of action and decision makes sure that that action will be carried out.

Virtue of character, as a prohairesis state, is therefore the capability of reasoning about the moral course of action for a virtuous person. This is a rational state because decision requires the agent to choose some course of action for the sake of that action. In order to decide for something for its own sake, the agent has to deliberate about the correct way first. For example, an imprudent person could perform dangerous acts to impress her lover. Her action may seem superficially



same as what a brave person would do, for example, to attack an armed robber. Therefore, in terms of instrumental *phronesis*, there is no difference between these two actions. However, her action is not based on reasoning about morally right goals. Something is amiss at the first part of the “making the goal right” sentence. She did not in fact make a right goal. Therefore, it cannot be said that she rightfully decided to perform that action in the Aristotelian sense. Decision in the Aristotelian sense, as abovementioned, must be made about a moral end. The impetuous person was simply acting on her impulse and never “decided” to do a moral action. A real brave person would perform a brave action for the sake of that action itself. For a brave person, a decision was firstly made that she should be acting morally, then a moral action followed. Only so can it be said in the Aristotelian sense that she decides to perform morally. On the other hand, for an impetuous person no decision was made, the action followed naturally from her feelings only.

In this way, virtue of character must have prior deliberation, which is an intellectual process. It is therefore a rational state. Lorenz argues that because virtue of character itself is a rational state, the “making the goal right” sentence does not amount to Humean interpretation. When Aristotle says that “virtue makes the goal right”, he is already instilling intellectual element into the beginning of the process. The making of right goals hence is free from pure desire.

### **2.3. Criticism of Intellectualists**

I have presented three intellectualist positions, two non-literalists and one literalist. There are more versions of intellectualist arguments but they all share some similar problems.

The intellectualists have a hard time gaining explicit textual support. Both the non-literalists and literalists have to make radical reinterpretation of Aristotle in order to let intellect make the right goals. Taylor has to prove the existence of the *nous+euboulia* structure, which he admits is only insinuated in actual texts. Lorenz has to go against explicit passages in EN to prove that virtue of character is rational. Apparent textual counterargument including this line: “virtue of character seems in many ways to be intimately attached to feelings”. (EN 1178a16) Texts like this bring doubts to his claim that Aristotle does not state in EN that virtue of character is non-rational.

Sorabji and McDowell’s arguments seems to avoid these textual loopholes. They give justice to both *phronesis* and virtue of character. However, there are still two big questions about this mixed strategy. Firstly, although Moss refers to them as firm intellectualists, I am more reluctant to do so. It is true that they both introduces intellect to the first step of the goal making process. However, unlike the other intellectualists, they do not rule out desire’s role there. In fact, their argument makes it clear that both desire and intellect must be at the basis of the goal making process. Therefore, it is hard to label them as intellectualists in the first place. I will mention them again in chapter four as an alternative position to both intellectualists and non-intellectualists.

Secondly, this position itself also faces another kind of textual challenge, one that is at least as problematic. The mixed reading ultimately questions the necessity of the “making the goal right” sentence itself. If, as Sorabji claims, that virtue of character and *phronesis* are two inseparable processes, why does Aristotle bother to assign them different roles in that sentence? Why does he

not simply say that “virtue of character *and phronesis* makes the goal right *and* the things towards it”?

These bold measures taken by intellectualists is a result of their stark aversion to the Humean position. However, some may claim that there is plenty of space between desire and intellect and jumping to the other extreme end is not necessary. In fact, Aristotle, with regards to his famous golden mean principle, often avoids taking extreme positions. This is where the non-intellectualists begin their attacks.

In addition, I will argue that taking intellect as the sole decider of moral actions is very non-Aristotelian and is in fact Platonic. This position reminds me of Plato’s theory of Ideas. As intellect influences one’s belief rather than action, in the intellectualist system, the understanding of ethical concepts themselves are prioritized over practices. This early Platonic tendency is criticized by Aristotle himself. I will explore this argument further in the last chapter, where I will weigh the two camps against each other, but firstly, I will show arguments from the other camp, the non-intellectualists.

### **3 The Non-Intellectualist: Between Intellect and Desire**

Not every Aristotle scholar approves of the intellectualist solution to the Humean problem. Some argue that replacing desire with intellect is an act of false dichotomy: the fallacious belief that one must choose between desire or intellect alone for the role of making right goals. This belief ignores nuances of both and exaggerates their distinctions. According to those who are arguing against the intellectualist view, whom I would call the non-intellectualists, it is possible to preserve the original “making the goal right” sentence without the help of pure intellect because there are available positions between pure desire and pure intellect. In fact, choosing a position between two extremes is a typical Aristotelian position. Aristotle is known for his praise of the “golden mean”. In EN especially he has discussed why extreme positions are usually wrong. He thinks that theoretical grasps of facts are “naturally ruined by deficiency and excess.” (EN 1103b11) To be courageous, for example, is to be at the correct distances from both rashness (excess of courage) and cowardliness (deficiency of courage), the two extremes of the spectrum. It is only “preserved by the medial position”. (EN 1103b25) Imagine Aristotle himself facing the Humean problem, which is caused by an extreme position (making of goals through pure desire, i.e. deficiency of rationality), it would be uncharacteristic for him to solve it by approving the other extreme (making of goals through pure intellect, which demonstrates an excess of rationality). I will also explain in the last chapter that the excessive extremity does not come without cost: it would turn Aristotle into early Plato, whose ethical positions he has argued against. But firstly, I would like to show in this chapter that a position between too much and too little rationality is possible. To do so I will show firstly that the non-rational virtue’s role in making the goal right is supported by texts. After that I will explain why this does not amount to a Humean position.

Both steps will be carried out in the framework of Jessica Moss' (2011) theory regarding virtue of character.

### **3.1 Non-Rational Virtue Makes the Goal Right**

First of all, the non-intellectualists want to cement the non-rational virtue of character's role as the maker of right goals. The modifier "non-rational" is also important here. In the last chapter I mentioned the literalist intellectualists, who argue that although it is indeed virtue that makes goals right, virtue itself is in fact a rational state. The non-intellectualists would seek to refute this view as well. Therefore, a non-intellectualist would believe in these two conditions: 1. It is virtue that makes the goal right; 2. Virtue is a non-rational state.

Non-intellectualists face fewer textual difficulties than the intellectualists, a point which I briefly mentioned at the end of the last chapter. There is much more textual evidence for the two abovementioned conditions than their negations, i.e. virtue does not make the goal right and/or virtue is a rational state, which are positions held by the intellectualists. In this section I will show the textual evidence for the two conditions.

#### **3.1.1 Virtue Makes the Goal Right**

There are many texts in EN telling a similar story to the "making the goal right" sentence. Moss has divided them into three categories, all of which make cases for the literal reading of the "making the goal right" sentence: 1. The division of labor in the "making the goal right" sentence; 2. The parallel between *phronesis* and *sophia*; 3. The correspondence between ends and virtue of character (Moss 2011, 224).

Moss can use the division of labor to counter arguments from scholars like Sorabji and McDowell. As previously mentioned, although Sorabji and McDowell alike are not strictly speaking intellectualists, their position is also against Moss' as they insist that intellect has a role at the very basis of the making of right goals. Moss has thus labeled them as intellectualists as well. Although I do not agree with this categorization, I do recognize that here Moss argues against all those who place intellect at the basis of the goal making process, partially or completely. Therefore, for the sake of her argument, Moss is legitimized to lump Sorabji and McDowell together with the intellectualists. I also mentioned at the end of the last chapter that those scholars argue that virtue and *phronesis* are simply too interconnected to separate, and although they face less direct textual challenges than the intellectualists, they must explain then why Aristotle felt it necessary to divide labor for virtue and *phronesis* in the "virtue makes the goal right" sentence. One possible argument is to say that this sentence means no division of labor at all. This argument is possible because, as mentioned in chapter one, Aristotle uses the word "virtue (*arete*)" in two different ways: as the general virtue, *arete*, which even includes *phronesis*, or as short form for "virtue of character," *ethike arete*. For most of this thesis I use the second definition. However, if one uses the first definition, technically one could argue that Aristotle is just specifying *phronesis*' role in deliberations towards the goal. This is like saying "this suit looks sleek and the pants match the shoes." The pants are just part of the suit. It has a special role on its own and also takes on the general project ("looking sleek").

Moss argues against this position by asking why the same cannot be done for virtue. (Moss 2011, 221) That means: why can't virtue, instead of *phronesis*, be the one that plays the special role of

making the goals right and also participate in the general project of making things towards the goals right? Remembering that Sorabji and co. argue that virtue cannot be separated from *phronesis* and vice versa, it seems contradictory if *phronesis* can embark on a special task without virtue and not vice versa.

On the other hand, even the intellectualists cannot deny that virtue plays some role in making the goals right. As argued in the last chapter, they usually resort to relegating virtue to a secondary role, for example, that of motivation. However, a question can be asked about motivation as well: why is motivation only needed in making the goals right but not in making the things towards them right? Does not one need more motivation to jump out of the trenches than to decide to be courageous? So why does Aristotle not mean virtue in the second half of the “making the goal right” sentence? Admittedly, it is possible to argue that once someone makes up their mind about doing something, she is on the course of finishing it. If she does not finish the project, it only shows that she has not made up her mind about it yet. Therefore, the soldier who has decided to be courageous will definitely jump out of the trench. Otherwise it only proves that he has not really decided to be courageous yet. However, this interpretation will deny the possibility of weakness of mind. Aristotle calls this phenomenon *akrasia*. As I will clarify in chapter four, the absence of *akrasia* is a marker of early Platonic ethics, which is at odds with Aristotle’s own system of ethics.

In addition, virtue of character is mentioned as the specific maker of right goals several times in EN and EE, which makes it more difficult to suggest that Aristotle does not really mean it in the “making the goal right” sentence. In the same book, just one chapter after that sentence, Aristotle

talks about the division of labor again when talking about decision: “Deliberate choice will not be correct without practical wisdom or without virtue, since virtue makes us do the actions that the end consists in whereas deliberate choice makes us do the actions that further it.” (EN 1145a5-7) If it is not clear here which of virtue and *phronesis* is assigned which role, a more explicit case is made in EE: “Does virtue make the goal right or the things toward the goal (right)? We suppose the goal, because there is no syllogizing or logos about this. Instead, this must be laid down as a starting-point”. (EE 1227b23-25) Here, Aristotle is obviously aware of the division of labor and clearly gives the role of making the goal right to virtue. Moreover, he even explains his reason for that proposition: because *phronesis* can only “syllogize” when goals are present, which in turn can only be made by virtue. This clearly shows that the right goal is made before *phronesis* swings into action. Aristotle leaves no confusion here that the making of right goals is the responsibility of virtue and virtue only. More importantly, Aristotle affirms here that virtue and *phronesis* alike should be responsible for specific areas. This challenges Sorabji’s argument, which suggests that these two always work together.

In case some intellectualist would argue that Aristotle could have changed his mind in EN, the last quote can also bring us to the second set of evidence for virtue’s goal making role: that Aristotle seems to envision a parallel between *phronesis* and *sophia*, practical and theoretical wisdom respectively. In both theoretical and practical reasoning, there is some logical system that deduces results from given conditions. It is *episteme*, scientific knowledge, in *sophia* and *euboulia*, deliberation, in *phronesis*. However, both *episteme* and *euboulia* lack the ability to come up with the fundamental conditions. Aristotle makes the parallel clear by saying that “for just as in theoretical sciences the hypotheses are our starting-points, so in the productive ones the



*goal* is a starting-point and hypothesis” (EE 1227b28-29). This starting-point is itself not deductible from reason. Therefore, we need some special ability to grasp this starting-point in reasoning. In *sophia* Aristotle has indicated that it is *nous*, or intellectual intuition/understanding, which creates the fundamental conditions, or the “first principles”. He clearly affirms that “understanding is of starting-points (of *sophia*)”. (EN 1141a8) The relation between *episteme* and *nous* is: “theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) must be understanding (*nous*) plus scientific knowledge(*episteme*)---scientific knowledge, having a head as it were, of the most estimable things.” (EN 1141a18-20) *Nous* is the “head” of *episteme* in the sense that it caps off *episteme* “in a way a capstone does a wall or pillar”. (Reeve<sup>2</sup>, 277) For example, a physicist can calculate the force wind exerts on a high-rise. The result of the calculation, whether the building can stand in the windy season, is a form of *episteme*. However, in order to do this, the physicist has to use, for example, Newton’s third law of motion: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Understanding of this law is *nous*. Only when a person is able to use Newton’s third law of motion to deduce whether the building can withstand the wind, will she be said to have *sophia* in this particular matter.

If there exists a parallel between *sophia* and *phronesis*, the latter must also have a structure similar to that of the former. As mentioned in the last chapter, some intellectualists, notably Taylor, also use this parallel to their end. Taylor argues that *phronesis* must have a *nous* of its own in order to make that parallel work. This practical *nous* is, just like *euboulia*, a component of *phronesis*. It therefore must be intellectual and clearly something other than virtue. He uses

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<sup>2</sup> See comments in Reeve’s translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

the existence of practical *nous* as evidence that virtue is not principle in coming up with fundamental practical conditions, i.e. making the goals right.

Moss turned Taylor's argument on its head by arguing that it is virtue, instead of practical *nous* that comes up with the fundamental practical conditions. It is virtue + *phronesis* (*euboulia*) that is parallel to *nous* + *episteme*. Now virtue and practical *nous* compete for the same spot, which has more claim? I will argue that virtue has two advantages and one disadvantage. One obvious advantage is that virtue of character is frequently mentioned in the texts, whereas practical *nous* is only reconstructed from the *phronesis/sophia* parallel itself. It will be difficult to argue for a reconstructed term over a term already coined by Aristotle himself unless there is very strong textual evidence for the reconstructed term and against the existing one.

Virtue of character's position also enjoys an advantage in terms of textual evidence. This comes from virtue of character's close relationship to the starting-point. The practical starting-point is closely linked to virtue of character. This quote is usually used as an argument against the Humean interpretation: "once someone is ruined by pleasure or pain, to him it does not appear a starting-point." (EN 1140b18) The intellectualists read this sentence as a proof that with desire one can never have a starting-point. However, on the other hand we can also conclude from this sentence that to have a practical starting-point, one must be able to manage one's own desire properly, which is virtue of character's role. A person with virtue knows the correct way to react to a certain situation, and therefore cannot be said to be corrupted by pleasure or pain. Moreover, Aristotle is aware of starting-point's role in both *phronesis* and *sophia*: "Virtue and vice respectively keep healthy, and corrupt, the starting-point, and in actions the that-for-the-sake-of-which is the starting-

point, just as in mathematics the hypotheses are. Neither indeed in that case is the *logos* instructive of the starting-points, nor in this case, but virtue either natural or habituated of right belief about the starting-point.” (EN 1151a15-19) This text supports virtue of character’s role in the *phronesis/sophia* parallel on multiple levels. Firstly, it affirms that starting-point is important to both *phronesis* and *sophia*. Secondly, it also states clearly that the role of bringing about the starting point belongs to virtue. Lastly, it also explains why virtue is better than other things (*phronesis* or practical *nous*) in this role: *logos* plays no role in forming the starting-point, therefore, it is left to the non-rational part of the soul to carry out that role.

It seems that virtue of character has won this battle decisively. However, this interpretation also has one major problem. If virtue of character takes the role of forming the starting-point, *phronesis* will be limited to the deductive process once again. If *phronesis* only takes some given principles and follows some steps to arrive at more precise courses of action, it will be limited to a completely instrumental role. It will be once again difficult to tell *phronesis* apart from *techne*. If the practical wisdom of being kind to others is separable from recognizing the importance of kindness, how is it different in kind from the skill of building a house? Indeed, I mentioned in chapter one that *phronesis* is different from *techne* as it is not a skill but a virtue by itself. Its excellence is not merely in bringing about a desirable outcome but rather in performing that action well. If *phronesis* only takes order from virtue, which is supposedly non-rational, how is it possible for an agent to *understand* what is considered excellent in performing an action?

You have probably noticed that we have already encountered this problem once. In chapter one I already discussed the problem of the trivialization of *phronesis*. Once *phronesis* is forced out of

making of right starting points, it will be reduced to an instrument just like *techne*. Aristotle gives extra priority to *phronesis*, a difference in importance which the categorical difference between it and *techne* (practical vs. productive) does not suffice to explain. (This problem will be brought up again and more closely discussed in the fourth chapter) Last time the culprit of the trivialization of *phronesis* is the Humean interpretation. The non-intellectualist position seem to lead to the same problem as the Humean interpretation does. Indeed, the non-intellectualists' biggest problem will be to distance themselves from the Humean position. I will explain how they could do it in 3.2.

Moss' last category of textual support for virtue of character's role is its relationship to starting-point. I already mentioned that as the second advantage it has over practical nous. Therefore, I have laid out so far the three planks of evidence Moss uses against some intellectualists' claim that virtue of character is not the real maker of right goals. From these three categories of textual evidence we can see that virtue of character's role as the maker of right goals is strongly supported by the general argument in EN and EE. She does so by showing that the arguments intellectualists (Taylor 2016 etc.) and perceived intellectualists (Sorabji, McDowell etc.) use lack evidence that could overturn the literalist reading of the "making the goal right" sentence. However, as I mentioned in the last chapter, this is not enough to refute all intellectualist arguments. The literalist intellectualists also believe that virtue of character makes the goals right. They nevertheless think that virtue of character itself is a rational state. Therefore, in order to argue that it is not intellect that makes the goals right, the non-intellectualists still have to prove that virtue of character is a non-rational state.

### **3.1.2 Virtue of Character Is Non-rational**

The non-intellectualists also enjoy textual advantages against the literalist intellectualists (the likes of Lorenz, who claim that intellect makes the goals right, while virtue of character itself belongs to intellect). The literalist intellectualists rely on the interpretation of virtue of character as a rational state, which contradicts many descriptions in EN and EE. I have listed some of the reasons in 1.2.2, in explaining why virtue of character as the maker of right goals would lead to a Humean interpretation. The foremost argument for that proposition is that virtue of character is intimately related to desire. It belongs to the desiderative part of the soul, which is characterized by feelings: the things that come about in soul are of three kinds---feelings, capacities, and states. (EN 1105b20) The desiderative part of the soul is the part that receives feelings. Virtue of character is introduced as something that is “in many ways to be intimately attached to feelings”. (EN 1178a16) Of course “intimately attached” is not exactly the same as “consisted of”. Some intellectualists would even argue that this shows why virtue of character does not entirely consist of feelings. It sounds more natural to say that something intellectual is intimately attached to feelings, than that something already non-rational is attached to feelings. Analogously, it makes more sense to say that dogs are intimately related to wolves than to say that wolves are intimately related to wolves.

Nevertheless, virtue of character’s relationship with desire goes beyond mere correspondence. It may even be argued that virtue of character exists separately because of its relationship with desire. Recall that *phronesis* is also a form of virtue. However, it is not the same sort of virtue as the virtue of characters, but rather an intellectual virtue. Aristotle is very clear about the contrast of these two virtues: There are mainly two kinds of parts of the soul (per non-intellectualist interpretation), and the virtues are divided in accordance with these, and the intellectual virtues belong to the rational parts while the others belong to the parts that are non-rational but have desire. (EE 1221b28-31)

Therefore, the difference between intellectual virtue and virtue of character is related to the more general difference between different parts of the soul. The two respective parts of the soul, appetitive and rational, are differentiated precisely by the involvement of intellect. Since Aristotle makes it clear that intellectual virtue and virtue of character belong to these two parts of soul respectively, they must obey this division as well. If, as the literalist intellectualists claim, that virtue of character is a rational state as well, Aristotle will be contradicting himself by saying that a rational state could be in the non-rational part of the soul. The distinction between these two is also exemplified by the different methods to obtain them. “Virtue of thought results from teaching” (EN 1103a15) while “virtue of character results from habit” (EN 1103a17). Teaching is obviously a rational process which proceeds from things already known. (EN 1139b26) However, per non-intellectualists habituation does not require rational thinking (As shown in chapter two, Taylor would dispute this. More see the discussion on habituation in chapter four). On the other hand, it relies on what a modern psychiatrist would call “conditioning”. For example, a person can be “habituated to despise frightening things” (EN 1104b1) per Aristotle. All that is needed in habituation are conditioned feelings towards things. The fact that Aristotle gives virtue of thought and virtue of character different means of learning, one rational and one non-rational, shows that he is clear about their distinction in terms of rationality.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Lorenz, who is a literalist intellectualist, argues for virtue of character’s rational state by showing its relationship to decisions. Lorenz argues that since virtue of character is essentially making decisions and decision making is a rational process, virtue of character must be rational as well. However, Moss sets out to refute this argument. She argues that such argument does not enjoy enough textual support. Lorenz’s most crucial evidence, that virtue

is a “prohairetic” state, is not clear enough in linking virtue of character to a rational kind of decision. Virtue is “prohairetic” in the sense that it *helps* to establish the correct decision. However, it does not need to do that on its own. It could rely on the help of *phronesis* in the rational part of making decisions. In claiming that a “prohairetic” state means the whole process of making correct decisions, Lorenz is already assuming that virtue of character has rational characteristics. If he continues to use this “evidence” to prove that virtue of character is rational, he is committing himself to a circular argument. Furthermore, Moss also brings our attention to the fact that the statement “virtue is a prohairetic state” only appears once in Aristotle and is immediately after the passage containing the “making the goal right” sentence. Therefore, it is conceivable that this statement is a “reiteration of the goal passage” (Moss 2011). “Making correct decisions” here means simply “making the goals right and carrying them out” —the process described in the “making the goal right” sentence. The “virtue is prohairetic” statement merely reiterates that virtue is part of the abovementioned process.

Thereby we have shown that the literalist intellectualist position faces no less textual challenge than the non-literalist intellectualist position. In Moss’ words, the intellectualist has the “textual burden of proof” on their shoulders. Nevertheless, I have also mentioned above briefly that the non-intellectualist position is dangerously similar to the Humean position. In the next section I will discuss Moss’ theory of *phantasia*, an attempt to distance the non-intellectualists from Hume.

### **3.2 *Phantasia*: Non-rational vs. Non-cognitive**

The non-intellectualists have to fight two enemies at the same time: the intellectualists and the Humean position. However, they will take this situation as an asset rather than as a disadvantage.

The two opponents of the non-intellectualist position share a common characteristic: both are extreme positions. One claims that the intellectual is solely responsible for the making of right goals, the other claims that role for desire only. A non-intellectualist, however, will be averse to such extreme positions. In fact, the division of makers of goals into intellect and desire is for them a false dichotomy. There are many positions available in between these two positions and the real answer will more likely be at one of those intermediate positions rather than the end ones. There are different ways to locate the intermediate positions. It is possible to combine elements of desire and intellect. However, such a combination might not be able to help our understanding of the “making the goal right” sentence. As shown above, Sorabji holds a similar position in claiming that virtue and *phronesis* cannot operate without each other. However, this does not explain the specific roles they played in the “making the goal right” sentence. Therefore, I will only mention this position briefly in the last chapter, when I refer to McDowell’s position.

In this chapter I will show Moss’ strategy in finding the middle position. Moss chooses to redefine the meaning of intellect and desire themselves. The spectrum of potential makers of right goals is divided more precisely by rationality and cognition. Rationality is similar to the concept of intellect. Something rational is defined as something that uses reason and deduction to arrive at conclusions. Cognition is a newly introduced term here. If someone is cognizant of a position, it means that that person understands that that position is correct. In the first chapter I have combined this feature with rationality, as it is usually assumed that if someone is to understand something as right, one must use reason to arrive at that conclusion. This reading is also shared by the intellectualists. As also shown in the first chapter, this cognition is an important feature of Aristotle’s maker of right goals. Moss argues, however, that these two terms do not have to merge



with each other. There are three possible states according to Moss: rational and cognizant, non-rational and cognizant, and non-rational and non-cognizant. The intellectualists, because of their merger of rationality and cognition, fail to recognize the existence of the middle position.

This middle position is possible to Moss because she thinks that there exists more ways of cognition besides reasoning, such as perception and *phantasia*. (Moss 2011, 252) It is *phantasia*, or imagination, that Moss uses to defend the middle position. *Phantasia* is a non-rational cognition, this is shown by the fact that it can be possessed by both animals and humans, as well as the non-rational part of the human soul. Wild beasts, for example, “do not have a universal supposition but only imagination of particulars.” (EN 1147b5) Because wild beasts are not rational, it shows that *phantasia* is a non-rational way to perceive things. A person with *phantasia* understands that a position is right when that right position appears to her. She does not “wait for reason” because she is the sort of person “who follows appearances”. (EN 1150b28) In other words, she will be able to see the truth, instead of understanding it. Moreover, *phantasia* is only available to people with virtue of character: For an excellent (virtuous) person discerns each of them correctly and, in each case, what is true is apparent to him. For each state has its own special set of things that are pleasant or noble, and an excellent person is perhaps “distinguished most by his seeing what is true in each case”. (EN 1113a30-33) Aristotle sees no problem in letting virtuous people perceiving the truth in virtue of seeing them. It is also clear here that the only criteria required for this seeing is virtue of character itself. Intellect is not at all mentioned in this sentence. Therefore, this sentence could be used as an example for cognition without involving intellect.

How does this help promote the non-rational virtue's candidacy for the maker of right goals? Well, it defuses the threat of the non-intellectualist position, which affirms the non-rational virtue as the maker of right goals, collapsing into the Humean position. One of the central problem of the Humean position as mentioned in chapter one, is that it does not fulfil the requirement of cognition by Aristotle. A person with only desire cannot understand her chosen position as right. However, Moss shows that her non-rational virtue is not the same as that desire. Through *phantasia*, the person with non-rational virtue is able to understand her position as right, without relying on her reasoning. Hence, Moss has successfully shown that a non-intellectualist non-Humean position is possible. The key problem of the Humean position is not its lack of rationality, but its lack of cognition.

Nevertheless, looking back at the dangers of the Humean position listed in chapter one, one still remains unsolved in Moss' explanation: the trivialization of *phronesis*. If virtue of character is solely responsible for the making of right goals, does it reduces *phronesis* to something merely instrumental? Is there a way out of this reduction without extending *phronesis*' role in the "making the goals right" sentence? On the other hand, is this reduction to be avoided at all cost? I will explore the ramifications of this problem in the last chapter. I will present arguments against both the intellectualist and non-intellectualist positions. After that, I will attempt to show that the cost of choosing the latter is much more bearable than the first.

## **4. Comparison and Conclusion**

In this last chapter I will compare the two positions (intellectualist and non-intellectualist) side by side. As for criteria used for the comparison, firstly I will compare textual support for both positions. Subsequently, and perhaps more importantly, I will compare these two positions in terms of their compatibility with more general trends in Aristotle's ethics. After the comparison I will arrive at the conclusion, that the non-intellectualist position seems to be more plausible. However, this comparison will also show that the current non-intellectualist position still has important issues to address.

### **4.1 Comparison in Textual Support**

Firstly, I will summarize the textual support for and against both positions, which we have encountered in the last three chapters. As mentioned in chapter three, the non-intellectualist camp enjoys an obvious advantage in this category. I will recap that advantage here. However, I will also question whether this advantage is strong enough to make the non-intellectualist position impeccable.

The non-literalist intellectualists argue that *phronesis* could have worked before virtue of character in the process of right goal making. For example, Taylor has argued that the intellectual *nous* plays the role of the starting point of the process. However, in the last chapter I have shown that this kind of interpretation is largely disadvantageous compared to the straight-forward interpretation of the non-intellectualists. Virtue is more closely linked to the starting point of the right goal making process throughout NE and EE. In addition, unlike terms used by some intellectualists, virtue of character is already a frequently used word by Aristotle himself.

Regarding the interpretation of the “making the goal right” sentence itself, the intellectualists have to rely on more obscure ways of interpretation. For example, Taylor has to bring in the concept of the intellectual nature of habituation to suggest that something intellectual can occur prior to virtue in the goal making process. As aforementioned in chapter two and three, this concept itself is far from what is normally conceived, that habituation is indeed a feature of the non-rational part of the soul. Now we have the strange situation whereby both intellectualists and non-intellectualists use habituation as an evidence for their own stands. Moss uses the normal interpretation and Taylor his own. Taylor’s interpretation is meticulously constructed and a full discussion on it will be beyond the scope of this thesis. However, one thing is sure, that his interpretation deviates far from orthodox reading of Aristotle. Interpretations like this show the dilemma of an intellectualist: in order to explain a text in an unusual way, she needs to use an even more unorthodox interpretation of another term in Aristotle. Progressively the interpretation becomes more and more convoluted and unnatural.

This applies to the other species of intellectualists, the literalist intellectualists, as well. While dodging the most controversial claim about *phronesis*’ role in the making of right goals, the literalists have to defend the equally unnatural position that virtue of character is actually an intellectual state. This claim goes against most of Aristotle’s description of virtue of character. He has repeatedly stated that virtue of character belongs to the desiderative part of the soul instead of the rational one. He also clearly juxtaposes virtue of character against virtue of intellect which includes *phronesis*. The literalists’ only major piece of evidence is the statement that virtue is a deliberately choosing (prohairetic) state. As mentioned in the last chapter, Moss has argued that this statement alone does not mean that virtue of character has to be intellectual.

It could be that virtue of character is not complete until a decision is made, in this case it is not that different from our “making the goal right” sentence. The latter means basically that virtue of character is not complete until a goal is made. Regardless of the success Moss’ counterargument, literalists like Lorenz has created for themselves more textual hurdles to jump. For example, in order to arrive at the conclusion of an intellectual virtue of character, from the statement that virtue is a prohairesis state, Lorenz has to prove two additional claims: 1. A prohairesis state means a state that is based on decisions; 2. Decisions are inherently intellectual. Lorenz has indeed provided proofs for those claims and evaluating those proofs will be beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I would like to point out this shows how far intellectualists have to go to find textual evidence, which usually involves proving even more unusual claims. The more one has to prove, the easier it is for her to be refuted. As Moss said, the intellectualists always have the “burden of proof” on them. (Moss 2011 214)

The intellectualists could point out, however, that the non-intellectualists also difficulties in explaining the group of text about the difference between *phronesis* and *techne*. I have briefly discussed this distinction in chapter one while introducing the concept of *phronesis*. I mentioned that *phronesis* is different from *techne* because it is a virtue instead of craft and it focuses on the action itself rather than the product. In fact Aristotle has devoted much of the two chapters (EN VI 4 &5), which introduce the concepts of *techne* and *phronesis* respectively, to explaining how they are different. He says in EN VI 4 that “production and action are different...so that the practical state involving reason is also different from the productive state involving reason.” (EN 1140a3-4) In VI 5 he repeats that “practical wisdom cannot be either scientific knowledge or craft knowledge (*techne*)...not craft knowledge because action and production differ in kind.”

(EN 1140b1-2) It is noteworthy that these two chapters are part of the introduction of the five ways the soul grasps the truth: craft knowledge (*techne*), scientific knowledge(*episteme*), practical wisdom(*phronesis*), theoretical wisdom(*sophia*) and understanding(*nous*). (EN 1139b15) Therefore, it seems that the differences between *techne* and *phronesis* are important to their very definitions: *phronesis* is defined as something other than *techne* and vice versa. On the other hand, Aristotle certainly puts more weight on *phronesis* than *techne*, the former, for example is mentioned many more times in EN. If an interpretation blurs the line between these two, equating *phronesis* to the less important *techne*. it can be said that it trivializes the concept of *phronesis*. I have stated in chapter one that this trivialization of *phronesis* is one of the Humean interpretation's primary vices. Non-intellectualists such as Moss seem to be making the same mistake.

Moss is aware that her interpretation restricts *phronesis* to the role of realizing goals made by virtue. However, she argues that this does not reduce the significance of *phronesis*. She argues this is so for two reasons. First, realizing pre-made goals is of paramount importance to Aristotle; second, *phronesis* is important for the task of determining the mean. Aristotle's emphasis on practical matters is constant (Moss 2011 229). Throughout EN, it is clear that forming the correct belief alone is not enough. The carrying-out of the belief is just as important. Moss brings our attention to Aristotle's remark in *Politics* that "There are two things in which the welfare of all men consists: one of these is the correct establishment of the aim and end of their actions, the other the ascertainment of the actions leading to that end." (Pol 1331b27-30) Therefore just because *phronesis* does not have anything to do with the goal does not mean it is not important.

The fact that it is in charge of the carrying out of the goals alone matches the importance Aristotle gives it throughout EN.

*Phronesis* is also important because it determines the mean of a goal. I have repeatedly mentioned how important the concept of mean is to Aristotle. The goal that virtue gives is only a rough direction. In order for it to be fulfilled, it has to be determined where the goal actually lies. For example, a virtuous person may know that courage is important, however, only a practically wise person knows where courage really lies in the scale from cowardliness to recklessness. Only after that can the person be said to know what courage means and wants to achieve it. Aristotle has given this role to *phronesis*: “virtue then is a deliberately choosing state, which is in a medial condition in relation to us, one defined by a reason and the one by which a practically-wise person would define it.” (EN 1106b35) Therefore, without *phronesis*, a virtuous person cannot tell what really is the goal that she has set for herself and therefore that goal setting will be meaningless. In this sense, although *phronesis* is not involved in the goal setting process, it is nevertheless important to the process as a whole.

I would like to point out, however, that Moss still does not explain why *phronesis* is different from *techne*. Rather she does not seem to care that her depiction of *phronesis* is similar to *techne*. Her *phronesis* could perhaps be an important element as well; however, neither of its important characteristics are irreplaceable by *techne*. *Techne* also brings the goals to realization and determines the means. For example, in making a building the craftsman could also determine how heavy the beam should be: not too light and not too heavy. Therefore, Moss still fails to explain why Aristotle is so careful about separating *techne* and *phronesis* and commits so much

more importance to the latter. The intellectualists do not have this problem because in their interpretation, *phronesis* participates in the making of right goals, something *techné* can never aspire to. Aristotle mentions that *phronesis* focuses more on the action itself rather than the production. That means someone with *phronesis* certainly has an idea of what the right action is and does the action for its own sake, not for the sake of something else. The non-intellectualists, as they exclude *phronesis* from involvement in the making of right goals, cannot differentiate *phronesis* in this way. Before they can find some other ways, they are at odds with Aristotle in this matter. Although the non-intellectualists face much less textual challenge than intellectualists, this shows that they are far from reconciling all textual discrepancies in EN.

#### **4.2 Comparison to More General Characteristics in Aristotle's Practical Philosophy**

Perhaps more important is which reading fits better to the overall trend in Aristotle's practical philosophy. We want to make sure that Aristotle is generally consistent in at least all of EN. Sometimes textual evidence can be sacrificed for the sake of consistency of the entire project. This thesis itself, as laid out in chapter one, examines ways to avoid a major inconsistency in EN, i.e. the Humean reading. The intellectualists think that the Humean reading is inconsistent with EN's emphasis on the intellect and cognition and the centrality of *phronesis*. They are willing to risk so much revision to textual evidence in order to prevent those inconsistencies. Another consistent theme in EN that we have previously talked about is that of the mean. The non-intellectualists accuse the intellectualists of violating that general character. The act of embracing intellect, the extreme opposite to desire, in order to replace the latter is seen as a violation of the rule of golden mean. Moss, for example, argues that the intellectualists wrongfully equate rationality to cognition. Between the rational and cognitive intellect and the non-rational and



non-cognitive desire there still exists a non-rational and cognitive middle state. By overlooking this middle state and restricting our choices to the ends of the spectrum, the intellectualists have violated the rule of golden mean.

The non-intellectualists, however, may not be as free from the same problem as they believe. Taylor, in his response to Moss, has argued that she has made the same mistake that she accuses the intellectualists of: that of a false dichotomy. Some intellectualists have argued that virtue of character has at least partial intellectual elements. Some even claim that virtue of character is after all an intellectual state. Moss' key argument against that claim is that virtue of character belongs to the desiderative part of the soul and that part of the soul is composed of desire instead of intellect. She supports this argument by giving accounts of Aristotle comparing the desiderative part of the soul to the intellectual part of the soul, for example: "one part of soul is non-rational, another has reason" (EN 1102a25); "in these accounts the part of the soul that has reason is distinguished from the non-rational part." (EN 1138b9) Because virtue of character belongs to the desiderative part of the soul, which distinct from the intellectual part of the soul, it must be a non-rational state.

Taylor sees this argument as an example of false dichotomy on Moss' part. Moss' argument rests on the clear division between rational and non-rational parts of the soul. Taylor thinks that this does not have to be the case. Aristotle himself lists at least four parts of the soul: vegetative, desiderative and two intellectual parts ("scientific" and "rationally calculative"). Moss draws a distinct line in the middle: the first two being non-rational and the last two being rational. Taylor argues that the desiderative part of the soul actually contains elements that are both non-rational

and rational. He points out that Aristotle does not only distinguish the two groups (rational and non-rational) but also within the groups, i.e. vegetative and desiderative souls (Taylor 2016). The former concerns basic bodily functions, such as breathing and eating. These activities are direct responses to desires and contain no elements of intellect. However, the desiderative part of the soul is different: apparently, then, the non-rational part is also twofold, since the vegetative part does not share in reason in any way but the appetitive part (indeed, the desiring part as a whole) does so in some way, because it is able to listen to reason and obey it. (EN 1102b30) Aristotle allows parts of soul that have both non-rational and rational elements. It is thinkable that he will also allow a mixed virtue to reside in that part of soul. Virtue of character can thus be a mixed kind of virtue.

Taylor explains how virtue is able to listen to reason by claiming that habituation itself can be interpreted as learning to listen to reason. I have outlined this argument in 2.1.1. What is important here is that by proving that the desiderative part of the soul has rational elements, Taylor shows that Moss also violates her own treasured principle of golden mean. She draws too clear a line between rational and non-rational parts of the soul and between virtue of thought and virtue of character. Therefore, in respect to consistency to the principle of golden mean, both intellectualists and non-intellectualists are culpable of violations.

The non-intellectualists nevertheless enjoy one important advantage in terms of consistency with the rest of Aristotle's practical philosophy: his emphasis of *praxis* over theories. This is of course a complicated issue not without controversy. This distinction is mostly exemplified by Aristotle's departure from the early Plato. I will not attempt to analyze Aristotle's differences

and similarities from Plato in practical philosophy. That project is obviously too broad for this thesis. However, I would like to point out how the intellectualist position will transform Aristotle's practical philosophy to something really similar to that of early Plato, which he soundly rejects.

The non-intellectualists will argue that this reduction of Aristotle to early Plato is another natural consequence of the intellectualist's failure to follow the principle of golden mean. Moss has called their position "Kantian" in contrast to the Humean position that they argue against. She argues that a "Kantian" position is just as far from Aristotle's real position as the Humean one. She does not go into details as to what exactly a "Kantian" position is and I will try to elaborate on that now. The so-called Humean and Kantian positions are very general tendencies instead of well defined positions. I have argued in chapter one why the Humean position contradicts with Aristotle. I will briefly outline here why the "Kantian" position is not viable for Aristotle either.

What Moss calls the "Kantian" position is very similar to Plato's ethics in the early dialogues. Both of them emphasize theories over practices and intellect over feelings. The intellectualists' central claim for the prominence of intellect is that Aristotle insists that we want to achieve some goals because we find them "good". This requires cognition of what is right and what is wrong, i.e. one has to have concepts about nature of right things. Although Moss has already argued that intellect is not necessary for cognition, I will argue that even if cognition requires intellect, one should not over emphasize that kind of intellectual cognition since that will reduce Aristotle to early Plato. Much like the "Humean" position, which is more of a caricature than Hume's real intention; the so-called "Platonic" ethics that I refer to here is more of a general representation of

what Aristotle argues against, rather than Plato's real ethical theory, which is far more complex. The difference between this version of Platonic ethics and Aristotelian ethics is the relation between intellect and passion. In this simplistic version of Platonic ethics, virtue and vice are established merely by the presence and absence of knowledge. (Kraut 2016) Intellect alone will result in the success of practical actions. Passion is merely something to be put under intellect's command, a position best illustrated by the tripartite of soul in the *Republic*. For example, if a person has the knowledge of what courage is, he will be able to carry out courageous actions. Therefore, a practically rational person is already capable of acting morally.

Aristotle envisions the relationship between intellect and passion somewhat differently. He recognizes the vital function of passion. This can be firstly seen from the obtaining of virtue from habituation instead of teaching, as I already discussed in the last chapter. Virtue of character itself is described as a state "by dint of which we are well or badly off in relation to feelings" (EN 1105b25). Feeling/passion is seen as something important for the overall performance of moral actions and not just a nuisance to overcome. The effects of passion in Aristotelian ethics can be shown by the notion of *akrasia*. *Akrasia*, often translated as incontinence or "weakness of will", is the state whereby an agent does an action contrary to what is moral to her rationally. For example, someone looks to be in need of help on the street but is at the same time uttering angry words. My moral reason compels me to help her but I am also afraid of her and I might in the end not help her and blame myself afterwards. Early Plato/Socrates will claim that I do not really understand the meaning of helping someone and thus made the wrong decision. Aristotle thinks that for Socrates "there is no such things as lack of self-control...only because of ignorance". (EN 1145b25-26) He argues against that

proposition. For Aristotle *akrasia* is something real and in need of being taken care of. Even in the realm of practical intellect, it is impossible for a person to have both *phronesis* and *akrasia*. Being able to deal with *akrasia* is an important part of Aristotle's practical philosophy. This emphasis on the role of passion is also his most obvious departure from early Plato.

The intellectualists, however, have failed to stand firmly by Aristotle's side in this conflict. They have given intellect the center stage in the entire process of moral actions. The central position of the intellectualists is that intellect serves at the foundation of moral actions, either by usurping virtue of character's role, or by constituting virtue of character itself. Passion only plays a marginal role in the intellectualist context. They are admittedly a step further than the early Plato by recognizing virtue's role in motivating an action. However, compare to what Aristotle assigns to passion, motivation is still quite trivial. The intellectualist version of the moral action is still based on rationally made goals and carried out by rationally measured methods. In this scenario, an agent can understand the nature of a virtue without passion. Passion only serves as something purely instrumental, in the sense that an agent is capable of understanding something as morally good without taking passion into consideration. As aforementioned, Plato also gives an emphasis to understanding a moral concept through reason. Aristotle instead leans more towards experience and habituation. *Akrasia*, for example, is not something that could be overcome just by contemplation. He introduces methods such as "learning by doing", in which a person understands a moral concept through performing that action repeatedly. In this sense, an intellectualist reading of Aristotle will make him virtually early Plato. As shown by the aforementioned texts in EN, Aristotle has made it clear that he is against the ethical position of

that early Plato/Socrates. Therefore, the intellectualist interpretation is against one important trend in EN.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the non-intellectualists have advantages but not a complete victory. The non-intellectualists have fewer problems with the texts themselves and more importantly, does not have major differences from Aristotle's general trend in practical philosophy as the intellectualists do. However, they still have some relatively minor but hard to ignore challenges, most important amongst which is the distinction between *phronesis* and *techne*. In terms of consistency with general trends, the non-intellectualists also oversimplify the relationship between desire and intellect in terms of the partition of the soul. Generally speaking, the non-intellectualists do justice for elements related to desire and virtue of character but fail to do so for intellect and *phronesis*.

It seems that although desire and virtue of character is very important here, *phronesis* and intellect does deserve more attention than what they have according to the non-intellectualists. Some more fine-tuning should be done in the spectrum from passion to intellect. Perhaps the right position is to recognize the intertwined relationship between intellect and desire, *phronesis* and virtue of character. As aforementioned in chapter two, such a position is adopted by scholars such as Sorabji and McDowell. Sorabji argues that *phronesis* and virtue of character cannot exist without each other. On one hand, he argues that virtue requires *phronesis*, but on the other hand, he also claims that *phronesis* requires virtue. (Sorabji 1973, 205) This relationship between virtue and *phronesis* is best explained in Aristotle's own words: it is not possible to be fully good

without *phronesis* nor phronetic without virtue of character. (EN 1144b2) According to Sorabji, *phronesis* and virtue of character are already intertwined when they are created, in the sense that they make each other exist.

McDowell's argument focuses instead on the relationship between *phronesis* and virtue of character after they are created. He argues that moral actions require both elements of desire and intellect. McDowell's point of departure is also the tendency in Aristotelian ethics of conception of right conduct being "grasped from the inside out". (McDowell 1998, 50) In other words, a true concept of right conduct cannot be obtained from some universal propositions as Plato proposes. McDowell therefore has emphasized the importance of virtue of character, which allows the agent to grasp right conducts subjectively. On the other hand, he is aware of Aristotle's identification of virtue with knowledge. Therefore, there must also be some elements of intellect in the process. The end result is a kind of ethics that requires both passion and intellect. This ethics uses a syllogism of some common premise and some more particular ones. (McDowell 1998, 67) The particular ones require intellect. The common premise, however, is based on a general blueprint of how one should live her life. This is different from the Platonic form of goodness as the common premise is not external to the particular premise. The particular premise is a "case" of the common premise itself (McDowell 1998, 26). When the agent performs that action, her action is not detached from the overall blueprint as just an instrument. The difference between an instrument and a case can be illustrated with this example: I go to an advanced German class as a way of fulfilling the requirements of a German degree. Here, attending the German class is instrumental to a German degree, all I need is to perform that action successfully. However, attending that German class is also a case of my passion in learning new

things. Here, just doing well in that class is not enough, I will also have to be aware that what I am doing is showing my passion in learning German. It is noticeable that as an instrument, intellect itself is enough to perform the role, however, as the case of a lifelong passion, I must also show feelings such as interest and enjoyment. Without those feelings, I will not experience a fulfilment of my passion in my learning even if I perform well in that class. McDowell's system blends intellect with passion. He avoids ignoring any of them. Therefore, this system might be more balanced than both the intellectualist and non-intellectualist points of view.

Both Sorabji and McDowell's arguments serve to give both intellect and virtue suitable treatments as it is evident that neither is dispensable in Aristotle's general project. Of course, to clarify these intertwined relations is no easy matter. As already mentioned in chapter 2 and 3, these scholars have to explain why the "making the goal right" sentence has assigned virtue of character and *phronesis* distinct roles. It is not enough to say that both work for the making of right goals. One must clarify how these two work with each other and perhaps also which one is more central. That could be the theme of further research into this topic.



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