

# Aristotle on Moral Education as Emotional Training

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## 1. Moral education

It is a well known fact that Aristotle lays great emphasis on moral education. His ethics relies on the idea that it is the exercise of the virtues that makes up a good and flourishing life, and one of the two types of virtue, the ethical virtue or virtue of character seems to be the result of a long-term development, which has to start in our youth and whose success has a relatively stable impact on the way we feel and act as adult persons. Once, Aristotle says: “So it does not make a small difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another way from childhood on, but a very great one; or rather, it makes all the difference in the world.”

Or, to put it in other words, since our ‘conquest of happiness’ or *eudaimonia* crucially depends on the exercise of virtues and the virtues are, *cum grano salis*, acquired dispositions, and since the best time to acquire the relevant kind of dispositions is our youth, very much depends on the fact that the environment in which a young person grows up positively contributes to the acquisition of the relevant dispositions. This environment is mostly characterised by two factors: the direct, private environment, i.e. the family, the parents and teachers on the one side, and the *polis* and its laws on the other. Ideal conditions for a young person to grow up include a *polis* with good legislation and sensitive, virtuous parents and teachers. The absence of one of these factors does not necessarily imply that the individual development will be obstructed. If, for example, the legal and constitutional situation of the *polis* is in a bad shape, this can be compensated, to a

considerable extent, by the parents and the family. If not even the parents and the family guarantee the proper development of a young person, teachers can, in principle, compensate for this shortcoming. And, once again, if there were not even suitable teachers, when we were young, it is still possible, although more difficult, that friends help us to develop our character in a positive way, when we are already adults. To change or to design our traits of character becomes more and more difficult the older we grow. The chance to achieve good and virtuous traits of character is higher, if we grow up in the described sort of environment, but even the best environment can not guarantee a positive development of our character. In particular, even a *polis* with ideal legislation is not sufficient for the proper development of its inhabitants' dispositions, since the city can control the act and behaviour of its citizens by penalties, up to a certain degree, but the development of the younger citizens also requires the interaction with responsible individuals who can praise or blame particular actions in all respects of human life (this is, by the way, one reason, why Aristotle is so suspicious about Plato's program of collective education in the *Republic*).

This is, very roughly, the systematic place of moral education in Aristotle's philosophy. For Aristotle, moral education (in its transitive sense) is the endeavour to form a young person's development of traits of character or of dispositions of the character (*hexeis*). The importance that Aristotle gives to the respective process derives from the idea that once we have acquired bad traits of character is very hard, if not impossible, to get rid of them. Hence, it is the task of the legislator, the parents, and other educators in a city to shape the young people's character as long as it is still flexible and shapeable.

It might be worthwhile noting that Aristotle's developmental approach to virtue, that requires a long-term moral education, competes with at least two theoretical alternatives. The first theoretical alternative is the reason- or knowledge-based account of virtue: If virtue is essentially nothing but a kind of knowledge then it seems possible to acquire a virtue just as a piece of knowledge (unless one adds constraints concerning the relevant type of knowledge). The second theoretical

alternative is the Christian idea of a sudden total conversion as in the case of the Saul/Paul's conversion: Due to an extraordinary religious experience and with the help of one's faith, one can, on that account, leave behind one's (vicious) past, in order to start a new virtuous life unaffected by the way one used to live before. – The Aristotelian position is different inasmuch as the state of character we happen to have at a certain point of our life necessarily mirrors the way we have lived so far.

At this point we could ask first, what it means to acquire an disposition, and second, how it is possible to support the process of acquiring a disposition from outside. The answers to both questions will help me to formulate the central motif of my paper, namely that, from an Aristotelian point of view, moral education can be seen as a sort of emotional training.

First question: What does it mean to acquire a disposition? Aristotle explains that our dispositions come about from activities of a similar sort, for example, it is through our acting as we do in our dealings with human beings that some of us acquire a just disposition (the virtue of justice), or through becoming habituated to fearing or being confident, that some of us acquire a courageous dispositions (the virtue of courage). So, the general answer to our question is this: By repeatedly doing actions of the sort F we acquire the disposition of being F. Therefore, the kind of action we carry out is crucial. But to carry out one particular action of the sort F does not yet mean that we have acquired the disposition to F. What else is required? Certainly, we have to perform the respective actions many times. But the frequency alone cannot define a disposition. Whether or not we have acquired a certain position we can see from the emotions that accompany the respective actions: only if we take pleasure in carrying out a just action, we have a just disposition or a disposition to act justly. If, to take a different example, we are courageous or not, we can see from the fact whether we feel fear in a dangerous situation or not. If our character is mild or rather irascible can be seen from the situations in that we feel anger, etc. Generally, the dispositions we have are manifested in our emotions.

Second question: How can we support as educators the development of positive traits of character? Aristotle repeatedly insists that teaching or intellectual training is not enough for effecting a sustainable improvement of the character. By contrast, what the character is responsive to is pleasure and pain. And the educator can impose pleasure and pain by praising or blaming the respective person for her actions. Hence, we educate people by making them perform certain actions that are beneficial for the acquisition of certain traits of character and by associating the good actions with positive, encouraging emotional values and the bad ones with negative, deterrent emotional values. That is to say that we aim at making the young persons feel what they should and when they should and in the right way. Hence the educator offers something like an emotional training. Respectively the virtuous person is the emotionally well trained one.

In my present paper I am going to substantiate the Aristotelian idea that our moral life crucially depends on our well trained emotional responses. I will do so by explaining the Aristotelian concept of emotions and by describing the various functions of emotions in Aristotle's ethical thought. Having done so I will point out that the emotions can nevertheless have harmful effects if they are not well trained. This is, I think, the strongest argument for the need of moral education perceived as a kind of emotional training. I will conclude by outlining the main characteristics of our emotional life in its well-trained form.

## 2. What emotions are

When Aristotle speaks about emotions he usually call them *pathê tês psychês*. But even this formula can include more than just emotions. Therefore, every time he wants to introduce the emotions he has to specify what he means by '*pathê*' with a list of typical emotions. For the most part he mentions anger, fear, eleos (pity or compassion) as standard examples. Sometimes these lists include *epithymiai*, bodily

desires, sometimes not. Also, he never offers a straight definition of the phenomenon that we would call emotion. All the more, it seems to be important that there is one feature that all or almost all emotions share: That they are followed by pleasure and pain.

## 2.1 Emotions as connected with pleasure and pain

Once, Aristotle says that *pathé* are determined (*diôristai*) by pleasure and pain, which comes close to a definitional requirement. And indeed, most of the particular emotions he defines in the second book of the *Rhetoric* seem to include a specific type of pleasure or pain. I take the formula ‘are followed by pleasure and pain (*hepetai*)’ not as temporal succession, but as something like an implication: If there is an emotion, there are also occurrences of pleasure and pain – no matter how they are related to the other components of the emotion. Fear, for example, is said to be identical with pain or painful agitation derived from the imagination of a future harm, but in the case of anger Aristotle insists that the pain derived from an insult or humiliation is the cause of the anger in the narrow sense. Or, to take another example, the emotion called *charin echein* (to be grateful or thankful) only has an indirect relation to pleasure and pain, since the feeling of being grateful is always caused by a favor someone did for us, and the favor again is something that relieves us of burden or pain. If we generalize the observations made in this examples, we can say that the occurrence of emotions is somehow connected with pleasure and pain, but that there are various ways how pleasure and pain are related to other components of the complex state called emotion.

## 2.2 Emotions as responsive to judgments

In the *Philebus* Plato shows that pleasure and pain are not always connected with immediate bodily experiences; on the contrary, we also feel pleasure and pain, when we expect certain things to be the case or when we remember things that have already happened to us. Hence we could also say that we may feel pain when we think or judge that something will be the case. And if the emotions are defined as

pleasure and pain that we feel under certain circumstances we can also infer that emotions can result from opinions we have or judgments we make. This, I think, is the theoretical background for the rhetorical use of emotions in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The speaker can arouse certain emotions by making people think or believe that something is case. To arouse the emotion of fear, for example, the orator has to make the listener believe, through what he says, that some evil is about to happen and that this evil will be painful or destructive. It is crucial then to know by which judgment or believe an emotion can be brought about. This knowledge can be derived from the definition of a certain type of emotion, since such definitions include the object the emotion is directed at as well as the entire constellation in which the particular emotion comes about. The conviction that Aristotle seems to share with some modern cognitive theories of emotion, is that the emotions are not distinguished in how they feel or at least not only in this, but rather in the distinctions between the intersubjectively describable objects at which they are directed and the occasions on which they occur. This seems to be one reason why Aristotle is particularly interested in what the first chapter of *De Anima* calls the dialectical definition of an emotion, that is the definition which relates different types of emotions to different objects and situations.

That, for example, all people feel anger when they think that they have been insulted or humiliated, does not imply that all people would feel the same emotions in all particular situations. Some will be irritated by small and marginal insults, some not. Also, whether we feel anger or not depends on how we judge our own position in relation to the person who committed the alleged insult. If we think that we deserve more respect from this particular person, we will get angry, but if we think that this person is entitled to treat us contemptuously we wont feel anger. Hence, since people differ in self-esteem and in their factual and alleged social ranking they will differ in their emotional reaction too.

### 2.3 No judgment theory of emotions

In recent literature Aristotle has often been praised for systematically developing on the idea that emotions are related to our judgments and opinions. Sometimes his position has even been equated to judgment theories of emotions. By a judgment theory I understand a theory which either identifies emotions with judgments or makes judgments central for an emotion while regarding everything else, bodily effects e.g., as epiphenomenal. Though it is true, I think that Aristotle elaborated the insight, that emotions are covariant with some judgment, we should not make him a judgment theorist. There are some evidences why we should avoid this conclusion.

First, if we regard judgments as being combined with some higher cognitive efforts, such as the use of concepts, predicates, or proposition, then judgments cannot be the precondition for feeling emotions, since Aristotle regularly ascribes emotions to young children and animals, while animals are – in Aristotle’s view - incapable of using concepts, predicates, or propositions, and young children do not have the capacity to form fully-fledged judgments. It would be certainly possible to say that though they do not judge that a future harmful evil is likely to happen, they can be aware of certain dangerous situations which make them fear, for example the ox can see and perceive the hungry lion and even small children can have the phantasma of a frightening dog sitting around the corner. So, animal and children can have certain emotions without being able to make judgment in the full sense. And hence we can conclude that not all instances of emotions are brought about by judgments. In a sense this is also true of adult persons, since we would not say that the fear of the arachnophic must rely on the judgment that the spider on the wall is dangerous, at least not on his well-considered judgment. I only doubt that animals and small children could feel emotions which imply certain morally evaluative concepts: to feel pity, e.g., we must have concepts of what is deserved and what is undeserved, and it is hard to imagine that Aristotle would ascribe those concepts to animals.

Second, in contrast to judgments, emotions are events or episodes which consume a certain period of time and amount of energy; hence, it is possible to make a

certain judgment without having the corresponding emotion. Example: “People become calm whenever they have spent their anger on someone else, which happened in the case of Ergophilus; for though the Athenians were more angry at him than at Callisthenes, they let him go because they had condemned Callisthenes to death on the previous day.” Comment: The calmness toward Ergophilus does not correspond to a judgment saying that Ergophilus was not guilty; the deserved anger at him does just not occur since they spent their anger on someone else.

Third, for a rational person judgments are mutually excluded, if they are contradictory or inconsistent. Emotions obey to different laws of mutual exclusion. According to Aristotle the simultaneous occurrence of certain types of emotions is excluded, even if the corresponding judgments were logically consistent. For example, a judge who feels the emotion of indignation, cannot simultaneously feel the emotion of pity, even if the indignation is about the person x, while there is another person y who would have deserved his pity. The judge may even make the judgment that y suffers undeserved misfortune, but he won't be able to pity him, while being indignant. Emotions and judgments do not correspond. It is logically consistent to judge that x has offended us and to judge that y could be dangerous for us, but it is not possible to be afraid and angry at the same time.

#### 2.4 Emotions as bodily states

There is another important reason why judgments and emotions do not always correspond, namely that emotions are essentially bodily states or physiological changes. In the first chapter of *De Anima* Aristotle raises the question whether all so-called affections of the soul are common to body and soul or whether there are some affections that belong exclusively to the soul. He answers the question in negative – admitting a possible exception for nous – by discussing emotions. That they do not exclusively belong to the soul can be shown by that fact, he says, “that sometimes when severe and manifest impressions occur we do not get angry and do not feel fear, while at other times we are moved by small and feeble *pathêmata*, when the body is already in a state of tension and behaves as it does in anger.”

Seemingly, he wants to say that in the first case there is a clear impression either of something that is frightening or of something that is apt to evoke anger, for example an injustice or an insult done to me and my family, but that it does not actually evoke anger due to some bodily conditions. How is this possible? Well, for example, Aristotle says that older people are cowardly and fearful, because they are chilled or cooled. Here ‘being chilled’ or ‘cooled’ must not be taken metaphorically; in addition to other factors, old people do not tend to courageous and aggressive emotions because their bodies are cooled down and for the most part do not produce the heat that is needed for such emotions. Therefore it can happen that an old person is faced with a situation that would have evoked her anger some years before, but now no anger occurs because the body is not in the appropriate state, i.e., does not provide enough of the specific heat. In the second case, he describes the inverse constellation: The impressions are small and feeble, but they are enough to arouse an emotion, because the body already behaves in the way that is typical for the respective emotion. So if, for example, a previous event has already made someone’s blood surge through her veins, an insignificant insult or the vague and obscure suspicion that such an insult could have taken place can suffice for a new episode of anger. In *De Insomniis*, Aristotle even says that the more someone is under the influence of an emotion, the less similarity with the proper object of this kind of emotion is required to give rise to such emotions.

## 2.5 Emotions as involving long-term attitudes or evaluations

So far we have deliberately used a very vague concept of judgment. In order to model Aristotle’s theory adequately we either have to distinguish two kinds of judgment or to distinguish between judgment and something else, which I would call long-term attitudes or long-term evaluations. Take the following example. I am angry at a person who spoke contemptuously about philosophy. I form the judgment that he belittles the value of philosophy; this makes me feel bad and I desire to revenge on him, for example by making jokes about his profession. Now, if I were told the same did not say ‘philosophy’ but ‘psychology’ I could instantly

change my judgment that he tries to belittle philosophy. But what I could not change from one moment to the other is my attitude to philosophy. He made me feel bad, because – Aristotle’s example – I have an appreciation for philosophy. And in this particular moment I would not be able to terminate my anger by telling myself that philosophy is of no worth. Hence, the fact that his remarks made me feel bad relies on my relatively firm and stable attitude to philosophy. It is important for Aristotle’s ethics that these attitudes do not directly react to factual judgments we make. The famous division between the enkrates and the virtuous person ultimately rests on the same assumption: The enkrates does the right action, but does not desire to that kind of action, and hence won’t take pleasure in doing that. On the contrary, the virtuous person would desire to do the right action and take pleasure in doing it. We can here and now persuade ourselves to perform a certain action, but we cannot persuade us to desire and to like that way of acting. – And this is, I think, the reason for Aristotle, to regard emotions as something which is essentially passive for us, when it occurs. In the *Ethics* he argues that emotions can neither be praised nor blamed, because it is not up to us whether we feel them or not. What can be praised and blamed is our attitude or hexis toward them, and this is, I take it, because in the long run we are responsible for those stable attitudes. According to the famous doctrine of Aristotle, our character, which can be taken as the sum of all those attitudes, arise from similar activities, a courageous character from courageous acts, and coward character from coward acts. Thus, our voluntary actions are at the beginning of a development which leads to those long term attitudes, and since it was up to us to act this way or another, we are, Aristotle says, responsible for the beginning of our character, and hence we can be praised or blamed for it. And the same long-term attitudes are the bases for our emotions. It may not be up to us to feel fear or anger in a given situation, but it was up to us to live a different life with different kinds of actions which would have led to different kinds of long term attitudes.

### 3. Some ethically salient features of ‘trained’ and ‘untrained’ emotions

If this is roughly Aristotle’s concept of emotions, then it is easy to derive some ethically salient or even beneficial effects of the emotions in our ethical life. Those effects can be described regardless of whether we have trained and developed our emotional responses, as the virtuous has done, or not. That is to say that those features or functions of emotions do not depend on the virtuous state of a person. Since there are a lot of these functions and my list could even be expanded I will be very brief about the particular points.

#### 3.1 Emotions make a difference for the quality of life

Since emotions are essentially connected with pleasure and pain, it will definitely make a difference for the quality of our lives whether the positive or negative emotions prevail. People expect that the good life is a pleasant one, and Aristotle affirms that they are justified to expect that. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that a life, in which the painful emotions prevail over the pleasant ones, could be a completely good life. This, however, is not to say that happiness just consists in a sequence of positive emotions, since Aristotle seems to assume that the pleasures that are decisive for the quality of our life must somehow derive from our activation of our virtuous dispositions.

#### 3.2 Emotions can motivate and support our actions

Some Aristotelian emotions have a direct action-impulse. For example, anger is even defined as desire to take revenge, so that the emotion of anger can help us to take steps against those who offended us or our family. Though the other emotions are not defined by a certain direction of desire, it is easy to see that the emotion of confidence, for example, could support us in performing courageous acts, etc. In general, whenever we have a positive attitude to a certain type of action, we will take pleasure in doing it, and hence it will be easier for us to perform this kind of action. I am intentionally using the weak word ‘support’ in order to avoid the following difficulty: The best known examples for the impact that non-rational

impulses can have on our actions, are the cases of *akrasia*, where we are overcome by our lust or anger. In these cases non-rational impulses make us act against our better judgment and do not longer act in accordance with our decisions. Now it seems to me that Aristotle acknowledges that emotions can become action-guiding or action-relevant without overwhelming our better judgments, though I admit that it is difficult to describe this phenomenon in terms of Aristotle's action theory. But when, for example, Aristotle describes the emotion of *zēlos*, emulation or ambition, which always incites us to noble actions, it does not seem that we are overwhelmed by this emotion and that makes to perform noble acts against our better judgment. Hence, Aristotle seems acknowledge that there can be well-dosed emotional impulses which remain under the threshold-value of those non-rational impulses that make an action acrotic.

### 3.2 Emotions can modify our judgments

An analogous effect can be described with respect to judgments: emotions are able to modify them without spoiling, obscuring, or obstructing the judgment. This, I think. This, I think, is the mechanism which Aristotle presupposes for the rhetorical use of emotions. The orator evokes certain emotions in the audience in order to influence the decision they are going make. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle even defines emotions by their impact on our judgments; he says: The emotions are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments. In my view, Aristotle distinguishes this case, in which emotions modify the judgment from the standard case of conventional rhetoric, where orators tried to distract the audience from the subject-matter by evoking their emotions. When we are, for example, fearful, we will pay more attention to the dangerous aspects of a given situation and to detect possible ways out – in this sense we could say that emotions help us to realize the salience of certain features. Or, as Aristotle says, fear make us think. And this is obviously not identical with saying that emotions always spoil our judgment, though, of course, they can and often do corrupt our judgments or decisions.

### 3.3 Emotions 'preserve' earlier made experiences

If someone made many negative experiences he or she will become coward, but if she was often successful, she will become more and more audacious. This is, Aristotle says, why older people are often coward and suspicious, because they have had enough time to make many bad and disappointing experiences. Hence, the fact that people differ in their emotional responses, is partly due to the phenomenon that their emotions or emotional dispositions have been shaped by the actual experiences they have made. Admittedly, the context in which Aristotle stresses this point is the rather negatively context of the alleged cowardice of older people. But we could, of course, also contrive situations in which this effect might be very useful: For example, if we understand our emotions of fear and confidence as relying on a virtual record of former situations in which we were successful and situations in which we failed, then the emotions of fear and confidence can help us to assess the chance of success in present similar situation.

### 3.4 Emotions can make our actions right, when there is no time for deliberation

The courageous person, Aristotle says, reacts appropriately in all situations of danger, even if there is no time for deliberating and for making a decision. How is this possible? Aristotle is not very explicit about this point, but the following explanation would be plausible: Spontaneous acts are often caused or controlled by our emotions. The spontaneous action of the brave person can be in accordance with a momentarily felt episode of fear, or an episode of confidence, or the absence of the emotion of fear in a dangerous situation.

### 3.5 Emotions indicate whether an action is in accordance with our long-term attitudes

When Aristotle explains why ethical virtues are concerned with pleasure and pain he mentions two reason. The first reason is that virtues are to do with actions and situations of being affected, and pleasure and pain follow from every action and

situation of being affected. The second reason is that pleasure and pain indicate our long-term attitudes and dispositions. The person who finds her enjoyment in abstaining from bodily pleasures is moderate or temperate, while the person who finds doing it oppressive is intemperate. This general idea is neither restricted to pleasure and pain alone nor to virtuous dispositions. When in doing something we feel, for example, the painful emotion of fear, this can be taken as indication that we are about to act against our deeper convictions and attitudes. Also, when we find ourselves getting angry at someone who belittles philosophy, this occurrence of anger indicates that we have a positive long-term attitude toward philosophy. This brings with it the cognitive side-effect that we can learn from that emotion that we appreciate philosophy, if it is possible that this appreciation has remained unnoticed so far.

### 3.6 Some emotions stabilize our actions when we have not yet developed a virtuous character

It is a difficulty for Aristotle's theory of moral development that people are expected to acquire their virtuous traits of character by acting virtuously, but as long as they haven't achieved to acquire the virtuous state of soul, they do not really desire to act virtuously so that their pre-virtuous tendency to act virtuously is unstable and unreliable. Obviously, Aristotle thinks that this where the laws of the city and the educator comes in. But he also seems to assume that the emotion of shame plays a beneficial role in this pre-virtuous state. Aristotle assumes that especially young people are sensitive to shame; for they have been educated only by convention and do not yet understand other fine things. Young people live by their emotions and make many errors, but are restrained by shame. Hence we praise young people for being properly disposed to feel shame, but it would be considered inappropriate if the mature person would still be guided by her feeling shame. We can conclude then that in the process of acquiring virtuous traits of character shame helps young people to do the virtuous things, though they are not yet done for the sake of virtue or of the *kalon*.

### 3.7 Some emotions are connected with a positive type of self-esteem

If, as we said, emotions indicate our stable long-term attitudes it can also be shown why the emotion of anger, that has been so severely incriminated by the Stoics can play a beneficial role in our moral practice. Aristotle seems to assume that emotions, such as anger, shame, gratefulness, and *philia* cannot be explained without the assumption of a certain kind of self-esteem, which always seeks for affirmation in social interactions and tries to avoid being impaired or to get compensation for suffered impairment. I take this self-esteem to be a sort of positive reflexive attitude to oneself. That this is a non-trivial precondition for the occurrence of anger can be seen in cases where people do not get angry at things that they ought to get angry at. Aristotle says that those people have a slavish attitude. Hence they do not think themselves worthy of noble goods, and hence they will not even try to accomplish them. Also, they would not expect to be likable for virtuous friends, etc. so that the significant lack of self-esteem will lead to various negative results.

### 3.8 The limits of untrained emotions

These are some of the benefits of emotions in our moral life. But most of these functions can even turn out to be harmful, when our emotions are not reliable; and most of them are not reliable, if they have not been trained or cultivated. Take the example of the spontaneous action in dangerous situations; since there is no time for deliberation we have to rely on our emotions. But the person who has never stood his ground and has never faced up to dangerous situations can not hope that his emotions would be a good guide in this particular situation, since our emotions depend on our long term attitudes and the long-term attitudes are shaped by the way we live, and if have lived either too cowardly or too audaciously the actually felt emotion in a dangerous situation will be of no worth. Or take the example of self-esteem. As we just said in the previous section, self-esteem is the precondition for many important things, but it is not the self-esteem per se which is helpful, but

only the proportionate and adequate one. If one's self-esteem is too high in relation to his social ranking and his actual achievements he or she will feel offended by many people for negligible reasons. Or take what we said about shame. In a well-ordered context the feeling of shame will push young people in the direction of virtue, though they have not really grasped the nature of virtuous action. But in a different, corrupted environment the same emotion will help to equate the young people's attitude to their corrupted surrounding. — For all these reasons the modern parlance of the cognitive functions of emotions must be modified in an important respect if we want to apply it to Aristotle. Not emotions as such support our moral learning and acting, but only well-trained and cultivated emotions. The respective goal or ideal is that we cultivate our emotions up to a point where there is no more disagreement with our rational impulses and well-considered views. The virtuous person, for example, who has to act spontaneously will act exactly as he or she would have acted if there had been time for deliberation. — And this ideal, to get back to I have said in the introduction, does not amount to the attempt to dethrone the rational part of the soul, which was the guiding instance in Platonic philosophy, but is rather a variation to the ideal of the harmonic soul, insofar as the non-rational impulses of the soul should become consonant with that the reason says. — The place where Aristotle develops this idea is his theory of ethical virtues, since ethical virtues, I will argue, require that we have appropriate emotions, and our emotional responses are appropriate if they are just as our reason would have said.

#### 4. Virtuous Emotions

In the third section of my paper I am going to argue that the genuine place for emotions within Aristotle's ethics is his theory of ethical virtues. Having the ethical virtues requires that we choose the right actions and that we have the right emotions. Having the right emotions means that we feel them at the right times,

with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, etc. Hence, virtuous emotions are by definition good or right and cannot interfere with the required course of action. But what it means for the emotions to be good or right is determined by the rational part of the soul, the *logos*, or by right reasoning, *orthos logos*.

#### 4.1 Ethical virtues as excellences of the non-rational part of the soul

The first book of EN is completed by the distinction between two types of virtues, the ethical and the intellectual ones. The list of generally accepted virtues includes virtues of both types. But the ambition of the philosophical account of virtues is to base this division on a certain theory of the human soul. For the previous discussion of happiness has unambiguously shown that happiness is essentially connected with the activity of those capacities that are peculiar to the human soul. The capacity that exclusively belongs to the human soul has already been identified as *logos*, reason, but if the two types of virtue are to be related to typical capacities of the human soul, it is crucial to identify either a division in the concept of reason or a twofold use of the rational capacity. Actually, Aristotle says that either the sense of the phrase '*logon echon*' – 'having reason' is twofold – first, what has reason in the proper sense and has it in itself and second, what is able to listen, to obey or to be responsive to reason – or that one element of the non-rational part of the soul is able to listen, to obey or to be responsive to the part of the soul that possesses reason in itself. This division allows Aristotle to associate the intellectual virtues with the part of the soul that possesses reason in itself and ethical virtues with the corresponding part that does not possess reason in itself but, nevertheless, has a certain share in it, since it can react to what reason says. So far, so good. But how can we define the good state of the non-rational part of the soul? To be good, one could say, it must perform its typical capacities well. But what is the criterion for the good functioning of non-rational capacities? As we saw, the part of the soul that is responsible for the ethical virtues is not simply defined by being non-rational, but by being non-rational *and* being able to listen, to obey or to be

responsive to what reasons says. Hence, this part of the soul is in a good state if it actually obeys what reason says and if it reacts just as reason would recommend. So much is clear by the end of the first book of EN. But what does reason want us to do? When is the non-rational part of our soul in agreement with what reason says? The first book does not attempt to comment on these points, but leaves it to the extended discussion of virtue in the second book to develop an answer.

#### 4.2 The doctrine of mean as explaining the excellent state of the soul

When is the non-rational part of the soul in consonance with what the reason says? I want to argue that the famous doctrine of the mean is designed just to answer this question: Both the *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics* introduce the core of the doctrine of the mean with almost the same wording: In everything continuous and divisible there is a greater, a lesser, and an equal account, and this again means that there is always the possibility of excess, deficiency and the mean. This is a merely analytical point: In the realm of what is continuous and divisible ‘being good’ or ‘being right’ means that it is not *too* much and not *too* little, so that it must be somewhere in the mean between them. Immediately before the introduction of the doctrine of mean Aristotle gave a short version of the *ergon* argument that the reader already knows from the first book. It amounts to the assertion that the virtue of human beings is the disposition that makes the human being *good* and from which she will perform her function *well*. In the next sentence, we are told that the same idea will become clear in what follows, and what actually follows, is the doctrine of the mean. Having introduced the doctrine of the mean Aristotle quotes a sentential formula: “This is why people are accustomed to say of well-done products that it is neither possible to take away nor to add something.” A similar conviction is expressed in a joke that Aristotle quotes in the *Rhetoric*: “... as the man said to the baker when he asked whether he should knead the dough hard or soft: ‘What? Isn’t it possible to knead it *well*?’” Finally, when Aristotle summarises the doctrine in EN II. 6, he rephrases excess and deficiency with ‘going astray’, and the intermediate with ‘getting it right (*katorthoutai*)’. We can therefore

conclude that this doctrine is designed to show the sense in which the virtue is the good or right sort of dispositions; and the sketchy answer we get is that virtue is a good disposition because it avoids excess and deficiency, whereby ‘excess’ and ‘deficiency’ designate the two ways of failing to be right or good in the field of continuous subject matters. Hence we can conclude that the non-rational part of the soul is in consonance with what the reason says if our actions and emotional responses are neither excessive nor deficient.

The concluding definition of virtue in EN II. 6 formulates ‘virtue is ... in the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason (*logos*) and in the way in which the *phronimos* (the person of practical wisdom) would determine it’. Here it is clear that the phrase ‘mean relative to us’ is empty insofar as it does not itself determine the right course of action; what the mean consists in must be determined by the *logos* and the wise person, i.e., by a personal capacity and a qualified person. This is strictly opposed to any sort of rule-based ethics: It is not the correct application of a general rule or maxim that defines the good action, but the particular judgment of the virtuous person.

#### 4.3 Absolute versus qualified emotions

Clearly, emotions are the continuous subject with which ethical virtues are concerned. But when are they excessive and when deficient? With the introduction of the concept of a ‘mean relative to us’ Aristotle admitted that the right mean is not equidistant from the extremes and hence cannot be measured. But what does it mean then that our emotions are right and virtuous only if they are in the right mean? If the doctrine requires that we have neither too much nor too little fear, aren’t we bound to conclude that we should always feel a moderate amount of fear? Another problem is that the quantity of an action or emotion can be manifested in many different ways: it can be a matter of felt intensity, of motivational strength, of duration or of frequency, while the frequency, again, can be measured in occurrences, in the number of involved people, the number of occasions, the number of places, etc. Excessiveness in these various respects corresponds to

different types of failures. In this sense, the quantitative descriptions that someone is 'too angry' or 'acts too angrily' alone are elliptical. When we blame someone for her excessive anger or for acting too angrily we should, in principle, be able to specify the respect or bundle of respects in which her angry responses were excessive. There is another reason why quantitative descriptions alone are incomplete: When someone gets angry on many occasions and with many persons, we may blame him for her excessive anger. But how many occasions and persons are in order, and when does it start getting excessive? When we exceed the average number of occasions or persons? Maybe our angry person is faced with more injuries and insults than the average person; isn't she justified, then, to be angry more often? Obviously she is. The inevitable conclusion is that the absolute number or the absolute quantity cannot tell us when things become deficient or excessive. Whenever we have to judge a person's degree of anger, we have to take into account whether she is angry only with the persons who deserve it or with more, whether she gets angry only for respectable and important reasons or also for negligible reasons, whether her reactions are appropriate or exaggerated, whether she calms down after a reasonable period of time or whether she is unable to get over it, etc. We can conclude then that the ascription of quantitative deficiency and excess in cases like this ultimately rests on the counting of qualitatively specified failures. Aristotle regularly refers to these qualitative failures by saying that we should feel anger, fear, appetite, pity and in general pleasure and pain at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way. Only then we can speak of an appropriate emotion.

Whenever we blame someone for her excesses or shortcomings, it is because of the number of *inappropriate* emotional responses or actions. 'Inappropriate' can mean that we do things we should not do or that we fail to do things we should do; accordingly, we can classify the mistaken reactions as either sufficient or excessive. In accordance with the number of sufficient or excessive reactions, we can build a continuous scale stretched out between maximal deficiency and maximal excess;

there is no need at all to assume that the ‘deficient’ and the ‘excessive’ part of the scale have the same length (even a zero extension of one of the two parts is not excluded), so that the right mean cannot be defined by equidistance from the poles; the mean is a mean just because it is located *between* both parts of the scale and hence belongs to *neither* direction. Some virtues involve more than one scale, in which case it is clear that being virtuous implies the hitting of the mean on all relevant scales.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

The doctrine of the mean has often been criticized or ignored. I take this doctrine to be essential for Aristotle’s theory of ethical virtue and the role of emotions, because this doctrine gives a vague and general description of what it means to have the right emotional responses. It turned out that this doctrine is neither the general prescription to be moderate in all of our actions, nor the guideline to select only those actions that are equidistant from the opposed extremes, nor the recommendation to reach a harmonic state of the soul by reducing all emotions to a mean or moderate measure. It rather formulates the idea that our emotional responses must be appropriate and that the appropriateness can be missed in two opposed ways. The appropriate emotional response can require quite strong emotions in one case, but can also require not to react emotionally at all. Hence, it would be misleading to think that all virtuous actions must be accompanied by a certain measure of emotions. In the paradigmatic cases, virtuous actions rely on a decision, and they never occur against our decisions. If they are accompanied by an emotion the respective emotion must not obscure or obstruct our decisions. What is important is that virtuous actions occur in accordance with our long-term attitudes, and these are presumably the same evaluation-involving attitudes that are responsible for our emotions.

To assess the appropriateness of an emotional response is a delicate matter, it requires the personal competence of the man of practical wisdom. I take this to be an intellectual or rational competence, because the appropriateness of emotion is

just meant to describe what it means for non-rational part of the soul to obey to what the reason says. And this latter formula make only sense if the obeying part and the part obeyed to are not the same. But if the appropriateness of emotions are determined by a mysterious faculty which is to be located in the rational part of the soul, the emotions themselves to not provide the measure for what is appropriate and what is not.