

will allow us to gain greater clarity into this central tenet of Socratic Political Philosophy.

ARISTOTLE'S TREATMENT OF THE SOCRATIC PARADOX IN THE
NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

By

Gregory A. McBrayer

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2009

Advisory Committee:
Professor Charles E. Butterworth, Chair
Professor Ronald Terchek
Professor Rachel Singpurwalla
Professor Karol Soltan
Professor Charles Manekin

© Copyright by
Gregory A. McBrayer
2009

Foreword

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
Luke 23:34

*I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.*
Machevill, speaker in "Prologue"
Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*

Dedication

For mom and dad.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of Government & Politics, The Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society (PEGS), and the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life of the University of Maryland for the financial support that has sustained my graduate education in political philosophy. Their financial aid has allowed me the freedom to pursue my studies, and for that I am grateful.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the countless teachers who have encouraged me or given me guidance through the course of my education, including, among others, Benjamin R. Barber, Ronald J. Terchek, C. Fred Alford, James Leshner, Rachel Singpurwalla, Ann Hartle, Charles Platter, and Eugene F. Miller. I am especially grateful to Stephen L. Elkin, Charles E. Butterworth, and Robert C. Bartlett. I would like to thank Stephen L. Elkin for taking such an active interest in my success, as his support has opened many doors that might otherwise have remained closed. I would also like to thank Robert C. Bartlett, who, apart from the assistance that he has provided on this dissertation, was the first to turn me to recognize the brilliance of Plato and Aristotle. Lastly, and above all, I would like to thank Charles E. Butterworth for the thoughtful assistance he has provided at every stage of writing this dissertation, as well as the encouragement and support that he has provided over the course of the last five years of my doctoral studies. I am extremely grateful for the intellectual and prudential guidance that he has offered me. Mr. Butterworth is a true friend, and we should all aspire to be such successful, generous scholars.

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Problem of Moral Responsibility.....	1
Socrates' Strange Dictum.....	6
Aristotle.....	14
Turning to the Classics.....	21
General Outline of the Dissertation.....	28
Chapter 2: Interpreting Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics	31
Turning to the Nicomachean Ethics.....	31
Why is Aristotle's Manner of Writing So Complex ?.....	37
Audiences.....	46
Summary	50
Chapter 3: Aristotle's Introduction to the Problem of Moral Responsibility.....	55
Introduction	55
Turning to Book III.....	59
Voluntary Versus Involuntary.....	61
Ignorance.....	65
Choice.....	67
Deliberation.....	69
Wishing.....	69
Objections to Aristotle's Account of Moral Responsibility Thus Far	70
Concluding Thoughts on Book III	78
Chapter 4: Aristotle and the Socratic Impasse That No One Voluntarily Does Wrong.....	82
Transition from Moral to Intellectual Virtue.....	82
A New Beginning.....	88
The Socratic Impasse	93
Can One Who Knows Be Incontinent ?.....	102
Continuing Investigation of Incontinence	115
Aristotle's Agreement with Socrates.....	119
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	124
Glossary.....	137
Bibliography.....	141

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem of Moral Responsibility

There is a problem that emerges when one asks the question “How ought I to live?” which is *the* guiding question of political philosophy. For the question is both theoretical and practical. That is, it is theoretical insofar as it is a question to which we seek an answer. But at the same time, it is a practical, somewhat urgent, question whose aim is to tell us how we ought to behave in the world. The answer to this question, supposing there is one, will tell us what we have to do or how we are to live. But what is the relationship of the practical question to the theoretical question? Is there any relationship whatsoever between them? Do they come about conterminously, does one lead to the other, or are they completely independent of one another? Must one know the right thing in order to do it, or is the performance simply enough? What, in sum, is the relationship between knowing and doing or between intellectual and moral virtue?

As we begin to work through the question, “How ought I to live?” we cannot help but notice a myriad of other questions that immediately spring to mind and must be examined out in the open: What is the good life for a human being, the virtuous way of life? Is there such a thing as human excellence or virtue? Even if there is a human good, to what extent is it accessible? There is great variety in the types of lives that human beings lead, that much is clear. But less clear is the degree to which one can simply choose amongst competing concepts of the good life. That is, to ask

the question “How ought I to live?” implies that we are somehow capable of choosing how we live, that we are in some way free to live one way instead of another. We even praise those human beings who we think live in a good way and blame those who we think live badly. But whenever we praise or blame the way of life of a given human being, even in the abstract, we implicitly acknowledge that that human being could have lived another way. Praise or blame rests upon the conviction that human beings are morally responsible for the choices that they make. Virtue, moral virtue, presupposes, to an extent, moral responsibility. If the question “How ought I to live?” is to have any real meaning, we must be able to change the way we live. Otherwise, it is a futile question. Moral responsibility touches on the related questions of knowledge, virtue, and freedom, and they are united, in a sense, by a question concerning moral responsibility.

We cannot begin to talk about living morally or virtuously without some understanding, however dim, of moral responsibility. If praise and blame are to have any coherence, human beings must be capable of acting differently, and they must be able to choose amongst competing actions, ends, and ways of life. “Since virtue,” as Aristotle says, “is concerned with feelings and actions, and praise and blame come about for voluntary actions... it is no doubt a necessary thing for those who inquire about virtue to distinguish what is a voluntary act and what is an involuntary act...”(*Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1 1109b30-34).¹ To speak about living virtuously or

¹ References to the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are by book, chapter, and, where applicable, Bekker number. Roman and Arabic numerals refer to book and chapter respectively. I have made extensive use of Joe Sachs’ translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Focus, 2002), modifying the translation where I have seen fit based on the L. Bywater edition (Oxford Classical Texts, 1988 imprint). All unmodified instances of the *Ethics* refer to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Eudemian Ethics* will be referred to by its full title.

morally, it is necessary to distinguish voluntary from involuntary acts; it is necessary to understand responsibility, moral responsibility.

When do we hold or deem someone to be responsible for the things, especially the bad things one has done? Moral responsibility, as the name implies, intimates to us the picture of a responsible human being, someone who knows what he is doing. That knowledge consists both of the particulars or details of the action and consequences as well as some more general conception of what is right or good. Alasdair MacIntyre, speaking of Aristotle, says, “The educated moral agent must of course know what he is doing when he judges or acts virtuously.”² And this is something we also recognize from common opinion. Moral responsibility has some connection, at first glance, with knowledge.

What then, of wrongdoing? Our common sense understanding of intentional wrongdoing also carries with it the assumption that the actor *knows* in some sense. We blame especially—or even only—those persons who know what they are doing. Knowledge is somehow necessary if the act is to be voluntary and therefore culpable or blameworthy. Frequently, to use a rather anecdotal example, one hears a mother scold her child with the rebuke, “You should have known better!”, perhaps betraying a certain confusion: the knowledge is and is not there. And often a regret or lamentation is expressed with the words, “If I had only known better.” Alternatively, one hears the regret, “I knew what I was doing was wrong when I did it.” These common sayings bespeak a notion that right action is bound up inextricably and perhaps inexplicably with knowledge, even if the how of the relationship has not been entirely worked out.

² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 149.

This notion of the connection between knowledge and moral responsibility isn't limited to expressions of common opinion; it is also reflected in correctional systems, theories of punishment, and carries over to education. In other words, this debate has real world implications. In fact, criminal matters touch on precisely these questions of moral responsibility. If knowledge is implied in responsibility, in what sense is knowledge really meant? Is it what a rational person would do in such a circumstance? And what of the morally vicious agent, must he too act knowingly? In general, vice is what is knowingly and deliberately chosen for its own sake. The person must have intended to do what he in fact did, and anticipated, to a degree, the consequences that followed. He must have intended the means and the ends. How, then, does the defense of insanity factor into a debate about moral responsibility? It is somehow believed that a criminal must know what he is doing in order to be held accountable for his actions, but does a criminal—or better, a criminally insane person—*ever* know right from wrong? As David Schaefer pointedly asks, “If we assert that the criminal is responsible for his conduct only if it is not the product of a mental defect, are we not implying that crime per se may be the product of a simply healthy psyche?”³ Are we willing, as Schaefer asks, to admit that criminals are healthy and sane? Or would we say that all criminals lack in a decisive respect some knowledge or characteristic? Or perhaps it is simply the case that common sense holds contradictory opinions regarding the sanity of criminals, since we believe that criminals both know and do not know. Or are we only attributing a calculating sort of rationality to criminals or knowledge of the details of what they have done? An affirmative answer to these questions seems to be avoiding the crux of the problem.

³ Schaefer, “Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle’s Account of *Akrasia*,” p. 222.

Of course we demand these types of knowledge, if they can be so-called. The heart of the issue is whether a cool, calculating criminal who is fully aware of the particulars and the goal in mind can possess a healthy psyche—or, to use an old fashioned term, soul. To say that an answer to this question is not ready at hand, or that common opinion is mixed or contradictory, would not be controversial.

It is clear, then, that we cannot get away from the notion that somehow, in some way, responsibility is wedded to knowledge. If someone does not know what he is doing, we do not find him responsible or culpable for his actions. Any wrongdoing that is involuntary is excused, and ignorance implies involuntariness. Only wrongs committed voluntarily and knowingly are culpable.⁴

A most radical objection to this common understanding of moral responsibility, if not *the* most radical challenge, comes from Socrates. Socrates is famous for having asserted that *all* wrongdoing is a result of ignorance and is therefore not culpable.⁵ No one, therefore, knowingly or voluntarily does wrong. The radical nature of this assertion cannot be overstated. Socrates' thesis that all wrongdoing is involuntary and therefore not culpable threatens the core of morality or moral responsibility as it is commonly understood. But Socrates' assertion contradicts the way things appear to us; it appears paradoxical or runs contrary to the way the world is ordinarily understood. Is Socrates' statement, then, meant to be taken seriously, literally, as Socrates' genuine attempt to provide an accurate account of reality and of human decision making? At first glance, perhaps even at second or

⁴ Occasionally, ignorance is not an acceptable excuse, it is true. But in these cases, there is a reasonable expectation that someone should have known. This rebuke carries with it an implication of willful or intentional ignorance.

⁵ See especially *Gorgias* 509e and *Protagoras* 345d9-345e4.

third glance, we cannot help but shake our heads in bewilderment. In some cases, pondering Socrates' thesis can even lead to moral outrage and indignation. No one who does wrong is responsible for his actions? By all appearances, the way human beings act reveals to us the falsity, and perhaps even the moral depravity, of such a statement.

Socrates' Strange Dictum

Did Socrates, then, intend the remarks as they stand? There has been a great deal of scholarly debate on the question of this Socratic thesis, commonly known as the Socratic Paradox, and a great deal of conflicting textual analysis has been offered on both sides of the debate. There are essentially two grounds on which the debate focuses. In the first place, it is debated whether Socrates genuinely subscribes to the paradox. And the second question is whether the paradox is indeed accurate as an account of human activity. The answer to the second question often determines the answer to the former: if the paradox is false then it must not have been what Socrates truly meant. It is interesting to note that not many scholars take Socrates at his word and simultaneously think he is wrong. There is instead a large cadre of scholars who want to hold fast to Socrates but reject his paradox, so distance must be placed between the two and attempts are made to show that the paradox is not really Socrates' own. R.E. Allen, for example, says that it is incredible that Socrates actually believed in the paradox, because, "The man does not exist whose principles, at some time, have not been corrupted by his passions."⁶ Surely Socrates could not have been so foolish not to recognize that no such man exists. C. G. Lukhardt argues

⁶ Allen, "The Socratic Paradox," p. 256.

that, taken literally, the Socratic Paradox is “patently false,” because there are clearly people who act in ways other than they think that they ought to.⁷ For the most part, these scholars reject the Socratic thesis on the basis of experience—that is, seeing the way the world appears to the senses. In addition to these appeals to the world as it appears to us, the paradox is rejected because Socrates’ thesis is outrageous on moral grounds. Common opinion rejects the paradox as wrong and pernicious, so either Socrates is wrong and pernicious or—because Socrates is good—he cannot seriously believe that the paradox is true. Yet the fact that the paradox runs contrary to the way the world appears and often meets with moral indignation is certainly not proof that this was not, in the end, Socrates’ reasoned account. Appearances may in the end be just that, appearances, and we certainly cannot accept moral indignation as proof of the falsity of a claim even if it does reveal something. Nonetheless, many attempts are made to reconcile Socrates’ opinions with common sense, arguing that the paradox is not really Socrates’ true opinion on the matter.

Most recently, Roslyn Weiss makes such an attempt to reconcile Socrates’ paradox with conventional opinion in her book titled *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies*. There, Professor Weiss argues that Socrates did not believe in the Socratic Paradox. The paradox was rather Socrates’ reaction against the prevailing intellectual climate as it was manifested particularly in the sophists and rhetoricians, and Socrates pushed his Paradox as a view that “runs *para* (counter to) a particular contemporary *doxa* (belief or opinion).”⁸ Moreover, according to Weiss, Socrates’ *ultimate* goal is “to eradicate the false beliefs and puncture the bloated self-image of others [namely,

⁷ Luckhardt, “Remorse, Regret, and the Socratic Paradox,” p. 159.

⁸ Weiss, *The Socratic Paradox and its Enemies*, p. 5.

the sophists and rhetoricians],” and the paradox was his tool of choice for undermining those beliefs.⁹ Socrates does not mean his Paradox to be taken seriously; it is merely a dialectical weapon wielded to bring his sophistic and rhetorical enemies to confusion and contradiction.

Professor Weiss argues that Socrates wields these dialectical weapons for the sake of victory in argument; his goal is not correct understanding but vanquishing others with his wit. It is mere vain vaunting for the sake of verbal victory. In other words, Professor Weiss depreciates the role of wisdom or knowledge for Socrates; winning an argument is the primary goal. Yet Socrates says very clearly that the opposite is the case. He chides love of victory in argument for its own sake and asserts that he engages in dialogue or dialectic inquiry in order to arrive at something true. Simply put, dialectic is not eristic.¹⁰ In fact, Socrates says that he believes it is a great good to be shown to be false insofar as it releases one from a great evil, and he thinks that holding a false opinion—especially about the good, the just, and the noble—is among the greatest of evils.¹¹ So if one in fact holds a false opinion and that opinion is shown to be false, it is better to lose an argument and be refuted, as it removes this greatest of evils from one’s soul.

Through the paradox, we begin to see what was so dangerous about Socrates’ thought, and why Weiss and others would attempt to disarm it and render Socrates’ words worthless. If Professor Weiss is correct, however, the paradox ceases to be paradoxical. The Socratic Paradox is no longer a fundamental problem to be grappled

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Weiss argues strongly for the position that Socrates is simply arguing with the sophists and rhetoricians for the sake of winning an argument. In the *Euthydemus*, however, Socrates chides two sophists for the eristic tendency of wielding words simply for love of victory.

¹¹ *Gorgias*, 457e1-458b3.

with and examined; it's a playful ruse. If it's a playful ruse, it no longer contradicts common opinion in any *serious* way, and it is certainly devoid of any controversial implications. It is merely a tool used to make others look foolish. It is simply a playful ruse—nonsense. Socrates, rendered harmless and uncontroversial, can safely be brought back into the fold of conventional opinion. Why, though, would Socrates merely wield these unconventional tools simply to settle back into an opinion of moral responsibility that is perfectly conventional? And where, for that matter, does he ever assert that there is intentional wrongdoing or deny that knowledge equals virtue?

Most scholars address the Socratic controversy by trying to minimize it or show that it is not Socrates' final word on the matter. My hope, contrary to the intention of other scholars, is to resurrect the controversial nature of the Socratic thesis and lay bare its teaching and consequences. Let us see what is so radical about the thesis. Is virtue knowledge indeed? Is all wrongdoing involuntary and therefore not culpable? If the paradox is true, it essentially renders all morality senseless, as it makes little sense to assign blame to someone who commits an involuntary crime—and all crime is involuntary. Moral theory rests upon the notion that the person who committed the crime knew what he was doing and was free to do otherwise, and Socrates removes the grounds upon which morality stands. Can morality be rescued on Socratic grounds?

Understanding this paradox is essential to understanding Plato's Socrates. Through the paradox, we can get a handle on what Socrates means by his two other famous dicta: Knowledge is the only virtue, and ignorance is the only vice. The

paradox ties these statements together—or rather is a logical consequence of them—and can help us penetrate through to the core of Plato’s Socrates. These statements are necessarily related, like opposite sides of the same coin. If we want to argue that Socrates was not serious about the paradox, we have to be willing to accept that he was not serious in asserting that knowledge is virtue.

Socrates asserts his famous paradoxes that no one voluntarily does wrong and that virtue is knowledge in many places, and often as a seeming side-thought or throw-away. His most notable and explicit claim that no one voluntarily does wrong is found particularly in two dialogues, the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras*. Thus, one turns to these two dialogues in an attempt to understand Socrates’ understanding of moral responsibility, even though there are certainly many other pieces of the puzzle. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates states in the course of a conversation with Callicles that “no one does injustice wishing (*boulomenon*) to do so, but all the ones doing injustice do injustice (*adikein*) involuntarily.”¹² His remarks to Protagoras in the dialogue named for him are even more telling:

“For I pretty much think that none of the wise men holds that any human being willingly errs or carries out any shameful and bad deeds. Rather, they well know that all those who do the shameful (*ta aischra*) and bad things (*ta kaka*) do them involuntarily (*akontes*).”¹³

Despite positing these paradoxical statements here and less explicitly in multiple other dialogues, Plato’s Socrates never offers his reader a thematic treatment of the relationship between knowledge and virtue.¹⁴ The arguments always take place

¹² *Gorgias*, 509e

¹³ *Protagoras*, 345d9-345e4. Please note that this is the only place in this section where Socrates speaks in his own name.

¹⁴ Consider, in addition to *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, *Meno* 77b-78d, *Timaeus* 86b-e, *Laws* V 731c-d and IX 859c-864c, *Republic* I 336e-336a and VI 505d-506a.

in a context and are offered to a particular human type. Moreover, Socrates frequently uses intentionally bad arguments in order to lay bare his interlocutors' confusion. The problem, then, is that although Plato's Socrates states explicitly many times in his own name that no one voluntarily does wrong, he denies giving the readers a thematic treatment of the question and refuses even to say what it means. One suspects that a proper inquiry would require a monumental work dealing with a large number, if not all, of Plato's Socratic dialogues. For they are all partial stories, and therefore only partially reveal any answers. When one recognizes the scope that is necessary for such an inquiry, and given the bounds of a doctoral dissertation, one is forced to make decisions. In order to limit the scope of the dissertation, a limited number of possibilities present themselves. The first way to proceed would be to treat many dialogues in a rather cursory manner, picking and choosing amongst the corpus, in order to weave an argument together. While I think there are perhaps scholars who can do this well, I am not sure that the result would hold up to serious scrutiny. Another way to proceed would be to subject one Platonic dialogue to exceedingly thorough analysis. Admittedly, this would be an excellent way to proceed. The problem is that there is no dialogue which has the Socratic thesis that no one does wrong voluntarily as its guiding theme, although it certainly lurks in the background of many dialogues. Many dialogues raise the question explicitly, and are worthy of investigation, but the mention always takes place within the context of a distinct inquiry.¹⁵ This is certainly true of the two dialogues that make explicit mention of Socrates' thesis that no one willingly does wrong. So, for example, the

¹⁵ Consider Laws IX 859c-864c, where the Athenian Stranger discusses voluntary wrongdoing in what he explicitly calls a digression.

Gorgias is thought to be about rhetoric, or at least somehow about rhetoric and justice. And the *Protagoras* takes up the question of sophistry as well as questions of the unity of the virtues, courage, pleasure, and the teachability of virtue. Admittedly, the Socratic Paradox remains in the background of these two dialogues. But I would like to examine the question in the foreground, out in the open.

Moreover, if Plato's Socratic works can collectively be said to be his apology of philosophy generally and of Socrates particularly, we can see why he might want to obscure the most radical aspects of Socratic philosophy. There is good reason to avoid articulating clearly, in one's own name, the argument behind the thesis that no one willingly does wrong if indeed it is as radical and threatening to morality as I have suggested. Instead of acting as an apology, a clear articulation of this thesis may well serve as an indictment of Socratic philosophy. There is good reason why this radical statement might remain, then, in the background for Plato's Socrates, and never rise to the surface. It is an opinion directly opposed to that of the city, for the city's laws stand, in some important respects, upon a notion of wrongdoing that assigns responsibility to the wrongdoer. Thus the Socratic thesis may truly be radical in its rebuke of the city's opinion or understanding of moral responsibility and, by extension, its criminal system.¹⁶ Perhaps Plato has Socrates assert these paradoxes, but refuses to allow him to elaborate what that means for a dual purpose, first, out of a respect for the city and secondly out of a need for self-protection from that very city.

¹⁶ Consider also Socrates' rebuke of the City of Athens in the *Apology of Socrates*, where he says that chastisement or education is the proper response to someone who has done wrong before proceeding to punishment, especially of the capital variety (See *Apology*, also Pangle's "Interpretive Essay" to the *Laws*).

As Plato never has Socrates discuss this question out in the open, we are, to say the least, in need of guidance. As fortune would have it, we have one in Aristotle, for Aristotle offers the first attempt to hold up the Socratic thesis to investigation. Moreover, Aristotle has the additional distinction of having near-direct experience with the man and his argument. Plato presented Socrates' thesis, but Aristotle examined it thematically and scrutinized it in his usual way of examining opinions. There is less danger to Aristotle in his treatment of the question, if for no other reason than that he can begin by treating it as the opinion of someone else, namely Socrates. Being removed from the original position grants him some leeway in rationally examining Socrates' thesis. Moreover, his treatment of the relationship between virtue and knowledge takes place within his wider discussion of ethics, which by all outward appearances is a defense of traditional ethics or morality. His discussion of Socrates' radical thesis is both at a remove and in the course of an argument that explicitly intends to support common opinion—it is by far less dangerous by outward appearance. So does Socrates' understanding of the relationship between virtue and knowledge, of moral responsibility, withstand Aristotle's rational scrutiny, and what light can Aristotle's thematic treatment shed on the investigation at hand? In an attempt to get a better hold of the Socratic thesis that all wrongdoing is done out of ignorance and therefore involuntary, we would do well, then, to turn to Aristotle. It is with this opinion or hope in mind that we bring Aristotle to bear on this question of such great importance.

Aristotle

Rather than try to enter the labyrinth of the Socratic Paradox through the Platonic dialogues, turning to Aristotle seems more practical. Due to the frequent, calculated references to Socrates and the Socratic Paradox that Aristotle makes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, attention to that work promises to offer a much more fruitful path. Moreover, Aristotle's references to Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics* consistently reinforce the notion that *the* central argument between Aristotle and Socrates has to do with the Socratic Paradox.¹⁷ In her new book, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, Ronna Burger argues—persuasively, in my opinion—that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is Aristotle's prolonged dialogue with Socrates, and that considerable insights may be drawn from the *Nicomachean Ethics* keeping its dialogical nature in mind. Indeed, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “Aristotle stages a debate with Socrates, represented as the proponent of a teaching that puts into question the common understanding of virtue. Over against this teaching, the *Ethics* sets out to develop a non-Socratic account [of virtue]...”¹⁸ Burger uses the notion that the *Ethics* is best conceived as a dialogue between Aristotle and Socrates as a heuristic device to interpret the work, and her method, she says, should be judged “by the philosophical results it yields.”¹⁹ In my analysis of Aristotle's treatment of Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I will follow Ronna Burger's lead in utilizing the

¹⁷ See III.8.1116b3-5, VI.13.1144b17-21; VI.13.1144b28-30; VII.2.1145b23-27; VII.3.1147b13-17. The only reference to Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that does not deal with the Socratic Paradox would seem to be IV.1127b22-26, but even this example points to the tension between Socratic virtue and the common understanding of virtue.

¹⁸ Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

heuristic that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is best viewed as a dialogue or conversation with Socrates.

In other words, Aristotle takes Socratic philosophy to task in the *Ethics*, and this means, above all else, taking Socrates to task on his paradoxical identification of virtue and knowledge. Since Aristotle acts as the arbiter between the man of moral virtue, or the gentleman, and the Socratic philosopher in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he can make Socrates' case more openly without exposing himself to some of the more radical charges that were leveled against Socrates. And if the virtues of character and the life devoted to it are to be saved, Aristotle must show the problems with Socrates' understanding of virtue. In turning to Aristotle, I am guided by the belief that he will act as an intelligent, critical interpreter of the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge.

Nor is Burger alone in turning to Aristotle to understand Socrates. Martin Heidegger makes frequent recourse to Aristotle in an attempt to understand the Platonic dialogues, arguing that Aristotle makes clear what Plato leaves obscure.²⁰ Alfarabi enigmatically claims that Aristotle sees the perfection of man as Plato does, and more.²¹ While everyone may not view Aristotle's work as a dialogue with Plato's Socrates, there is clearly room for this method of interpretation. Scholars and even philosophers at various times and places have had recourse to Aristotle, Plato's star pupil, in an attempt better to understand the teaching of Plato's Socrates.

With specific reference to my thesis topic, it will become quite clear that Aristotle, too, is concerned with the strange Socratic assertion that virtue is knowledge, an assertion so at odds with the way that we ordinarily understand the

²⁰ See Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* p. 7-8

²¹ Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. "The Philosophy of Aristotle," i.

world. We most certainly want to be able to hold people accountable for the wrongs that they commit for reasons other than inculpable ignorance. Aristotle gives full voice to this sentiment, while not shrinking away from the profound challenge that Socrates offers to the ordinary understanding of virtue and vice. Indeed, this rift is central to the debate between Aristotle and Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*—all of the other arguments point back to this central question. Is virtue knowledge, and, if so, what might that mean? The test case for Socrates’ thesis, according to Aristotle, is the phenomenon of incontinence, and I will accordingly devote considerable attention to Aristotle’s analysis of Socrates’ denial of this phenomenon, a denial which springs from the roots of the Socratic thesis that knowledge equals virtue. Indeed, there is a vast literature that treats of Aristotle’s account of Socrates’ denial of incontinence in VII.3. Many scholars have turned to Aristotle to understand Socrates’ denial of this phenomenon.²² My thesis will expand upon this scholarly literature, however, by situating the apparent disagreement between Socrates and Aristotle in Book VII within the larger structure of the *Ethics*. The entire analysis of Aristotle which follows is all done with a view toward understanding the Socratic thesis that knowledge equals virtue, and, while the topic is most clearly on the table in Book VII, our analysis must not be limited to this part of the work.

Aristotle details, in part, Socrates’ thesis from *Protagoras* for us in Book VII, Chapter 2 of the *Ethics*. While many scholars deny that Socrates actually believed that no one does wrong, Aristotle is not among them. Aristotle does not hesitate to treat Socrates’ thesis that no one voluntarily does wrong as indeed Socrates’ genuine

²² See, among many others, J.J. Mulhern, “Aristotle and the Socratic Paradoxes;” Amélie Rorty, “Akrasia and Pleasure: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7;” and A.W. Price, “Akrasia and Self-Control.”

understanding of the way things are, and he treats this thesis with the seriousness with which such a radical statement, offered by a serious thinker, demands. All the while, Aristotle reminds us of the very clear objection that Socrates' thesis does indeed contradict the way the world appears to us—the thesis, therefore, appears nonsensical. In a discussion of vice and lack of self-restraint, Aristotle counts Socrates amongst some (he does not say who the others are) who deny that it is possible for those who conceive things correctly to behave incontinently (*akrasia*). It would be terrible if one could know and do otherwise, as if knowledge were dragged around like a slave by something else, as the common opinion of the matter stands. It is this type of speech against which Socrates used to do battle (*machein*). No one acts contrary to what seems to him or her to be best, but rather all wrongdoing comes about as a result of ignorance, ignorance of what is truly best. Aristotle then goes on to say that it is necessary to seek or investigate the argument (*logos*) concerning this event or occurrence (*pathos*), because it clearly disputes things appearing (*phainomenoi*) to be manifest. If one objection to the Socratic thesis is that it contradicts the world as it appears, Aristotle will certainly not overlook this objection.

Upon investigation of the matter, Aristotle ends up in agreement with the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VII.3). There Aristotle says,

And since the ultimate term is not a universal and does not seem to pertain to knowledge in the same way as something universal does, it also appears that what Socrates was looking for turns out to be the case. For it is not when knowledge in the governing sense seems to be present that the experience of unrestraint occurs, nor is it this that is dragged around by passion, but a knowledge involving sense-perception. So about its being someone who knows or not, and how, while knowing, it is possible to behave without

restraint, let it have been discussed to this extent (*Nicomachean Ethics*: VII.3 1147b10-20.).

To be sure, it is difficult to take any one thing Aristotle says and offer it as his final word on the matter, due to his style of writing. This conclusion, however tentative, is arrived at in Book VII after an analysis of wrongdoing in Book III and a search for the intellectual virtues in Book VI (and what do we make of the account of the moral virtues that falls between these topics?). In order to understand Aristotle's agreement with Socrates in this matter, it is imperative to go back and analyze these two books as they bear so directly on the heart of the matter. What is the relationship between moral responsibility and knowledge, according to Aristotle, and, by extension, Socrates? We can only begin to know after an examination of the relevant books have been discussed.

Aristotle, I believe, can be especially helpful in understanding Socrates' strange thesis regarding moral responsibility and its relationship to knowledge and virtue. During the course of this investigation, therefore, I will turn for the most part to Aristotle in an effort better to understand Socrates' strange theses that virtue is knowledge and that all wrongdoing is involuntary. My focus in using Aristotle will be on his *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly Books III and VII, as I will describe in the outline of the thesis that follows. If we really want to understand Aristotle's account of voluntary actions, it is necessary to begin with his discussion of the subject in Book III, which also appears to treat issues discussed by Socrates and Plato. Thus, Chapter Three of this thesis will be an investigation of Aristotle's account of moral responsibility found there. In turning to Aristotle's account of ethics, it will be

helpful occasionally to return to Plato's Socrates as well as to Aristotle's other works, namely his *Eudemian Ethics* as well as some of his works on logic.

I will use Aristotle fully aware that it is commonly argued that Aristotle and Socrates differ fundamentally on the question of ignorance and vice.²³ While recognizing the objection of identifying Aristotle and Socrates and even being open to the validity of such an objection, I do hope to investigate the matter and remain open to the possibility that they ultimately share many of the same considered opinions. Consider the following by means of example. In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we get the pronouncement from Aristotle that it has been beautifully said that the good is the thing at which all things aim; it would follow that all human beings aim at the good. Whether they attain the good or miss the mark is another matter. In a similar vein, Socrates says that no one is content to have the appearance of the good; we all want the real good.²⁴ No one would voluntarily be deprived of the good things. Stating this positively instead of negatively shows the agreement with Aristotle: everyone wants the good. It follows that anyone who does wrong must believe that those actions are good in themselves or that those actions are perfectly acceptable, excusable, or justifiable means to another good. My contention is that Aristotle reaffirms Plato's—or Plato's Socrates'—conception of the good as that at which all human beings aim. To say that everyone aims at the good is the same as declaring that no one aims at the bad. While there are many who argue that Plato and Aristotle differ on the fundamental questions, others do see similarities. No less of an authority than Alfarabi, for that matter, argues that Plato and Aristotle presented the same

²³ See, for example, Santas, "The Socratic Paradoxes," and Mulhern, "A Note on Stating the 'Socratic Paradox.'"

²⁴ *Republic* 505d-e.

theory. “So let it be clear to you,” he says, “that, in what they presented, their purpose is the same, and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy.”²⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, to offer another example, claims that “Aristotle’s belief in the unity of the virtues is one of the few parts of his moral philosophy which he inherits directly from Plato.”²⁶ While I would not go so far as to say that Aristotle’s moral thought is simply inherited from his teacher Plato, I do hope to show that in fact Aristotle and Socrates, Plato’s teacher, end up with quite similar positions with regard to moral responsibility. I concede that this harmony is not readily apparent, and David L. Schaefer, speaking with reference to this very matter of knowledge and virtue, states that “only a thorough scrutiny of Aristotle’s argument reveals his deeper agreement with the Socratic thesis.”²⁷

Assuming perfect, or even partial, harmony between Socrates and Aristotle is in no way essential to proceed in the manner that I have proposed. Even if, in the end, the ultimate conclusion finds significant differences between Aristotle and Socrates regarding knowledge and virtue, the use of Aristotle to understand Socrates is warranted: Aristotle still treated the Socratic theses regarding knowledge and virtue systematically and is therefore suitable to the investigation as an intelligent commentator.

Martin Heidegger, moreover, argued that Aristotle made clear what Plato left obscure and he also holds it as a reasonable assumption that Aristotle understood Plato.²⁸ His examination of Plato’s *Sophist* begins and makes frequent return to

²⁵ *The Attainment of Happiness*: I, sec. 64.

²⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.157.

²⁷ Schaefer, “Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle’s Account of *Akrasia*.” p. 247.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, p. 7-8.

Aristotle in an attempt to understand that dialogue. I will therefore attempt a thorough scrutiny of Book III and VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, because I believe that such an investigation can inform our understanding of moral responsibility and the radical relationship suggested by Socrates between wisdom or knowledge and virtue. Even at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, we get an early indication that Aristotle is sensitive to the problem of virtue and knowledge. He suggests that they are somehow related, or at least that knowledge is in some way connected to the human end or goal (*telos*). He indicates early on that one must possess awareness or recognition (*gnōsis*) of the end in order to aim at it (1094a23), and that humans ought to get a grasp, at least in outline, as to what the end is and to which of the sciences (*epistēmai*) or powers (*dunamai*) it belongs (1094a25-26). From the very beginning of Book I, Aristotle raises the question of the relationship between knowledge and living well. Aristotle displays his sensitivity to the question of the relationship of knowledge to virtue throughout the *Ethics*, and, although he treats many questions in his great ethical work, he never strays too far from this all important question.

Turning to the Classics

Before turning to outline the chapters, perhaps a defense of the following two questions is in order. First, why go back to Aristotle and Socrates in the first place, and secondly why go back to their moral theory in a dissertation that is supposed to be dedicated to political philosophy?

After many years, perhaps many hundreds of years, it became acceptable in the Twentieth Century to turn to the thought of the Classics in matters of morality and politics, particularly the thought of Plato and Aristotle. This willingness to turn to the

Classics is based at least partly on the conditional opinion, certainly open to being rejected later, that Aristotle and Plato actually have something to teach regarding political and moral matters. Stated differently, we face the same problems that they faced. And this openness is related to dissatisfaction with or a rejection of the culmination of the political and moral thought that sought to displace the earlier, classical way of thinking that has roots at least as early as Niccolò Machiavelli.²⁹ Many faults or shortcomings emerged in Modern Rationalism, as its promises to usher in an era of reason and solutions to the political problems proved to be unfulfilled. A universally valid set of rules discernable to unaided human reason that will solve all of our problems is no longer believed in or even hoped for in the post-modern world. Enlightenment rationalism has been killed by post-moderns, revealing the flaws in a rationalism that did not recognize its own limits. Everything is a possibility now, and political and moral philosophy is badly in search of an answer to the question of how to ground answers to these questions, or even if a grounding is necessary or desirable.³⁰ But if everything is once again a possibility, and all bets are truly off, then the Classics are back on the table as a means for helping us to think seriously about politics and morality. After all, classical rationalism is quite distinct from modern, Enlightenment rationalism. Reason, at least in its modern or Enlightened form, has been pronounced dead, which has led some hopefuls to search

²⁹ The rejection of Classical Political Thought is evident, to say the least, in the writings of Machiavelli and Hobbes. However, one is inclined to wonder whether their rejection of Classical Political Thought is intended in its own right or whether these thinkers weren't simply throwing out the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, as a matter of necessity, as Classical Political Thought, specifically Aristotle, had been subsumed under theology. For an analysis that traces this out, see Clark A. Merrill, "Leo Strauss' Indictment of Christian Philosophy."

³⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 117. With the failure of modern rationalism, MacIntyre argues, the only remaining choices are Nietzsche or Aristotle. "Hence the defensibility of the Nietzschean position," he says, "turns *in the end* on the answer to the question: was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle?"

for rationalism of a different stripe: “In light of all these problems,” Franco Volpi says, “the recovery of the practical philosophy of the Aristotelian tradition offered itself as an alternative solution insofar as it was recovered as an alternative paradigm of knowledge for modernity and for the unitary notion of science that characterizes modernity.”³¹

Many thinkers, scholars, and philosophers have returned to the thought of Plato and Aristotle in the wake of Nietzsche’s devastating attack on the Enlightenment. The number of scholars and serious thinkers who have returned to the Classics in order to reflect on politics, morality, and philosophy in the twentieth century is quite remarkable. And the scholars are quite diverse, coming, as Aristide Tessitore notes, “from a number of different disciplines and from a number of different perspectives within those disciplines.”³² Scholars, commentators, and thinkers are on the right and on the left, communitarian and liberal, religious and secular, and the list of scholars spans America and the continent. A return is in many ways an appropriate response for thinkers who hold reason in high regard and recognize the success of Nietzsche’s project. Alasdair MacIntyre has pronounced Aristotle to be the only viable option to Nietzsche for intelligent human beings living in the age in which we find ourselves; the Enlightenment is dead, and our only options are Aristotle and Nietzsche.³³

The fact that many thinkers have returned to Aristotle and Socrates by itself is not sufficient justification to join this recovery effort; the return is warranted only if

³¹ Franco Volpi, “The Rehabilitation of Practical Philosophy and Neo-Aristotelianism,” p. 6.

³² Tessitore *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*, p.1.

³³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapter 18. As an aside, I would argue that there is at least one other possibility, namely revealed religion.

there is actually something to learn from Aristotle and Socrates regarding the fundamental human problems. Or to state it slightly differently, there are permanent human problems that continue to occupy the minds of intelligent men; inquiry into political and moral matters stems from a genuine concern with the nature of the best life and the best regime. The problems we have mentioned thus far are problems not only for Aristotle, but also for any serious student of political philosophy. The relationship of knowledge to virtue, or of intellectual to moral virtue, remains a question worth asking, as no definitive answer has been reached. In fact, as the answer reached in the Enlightenment has now been rejected, and we are left to understand this question anew.

The age in which we find ourselves is one doubting all answers to the permanent questions, but it is not necessary to think that Aristotle, or Socrates for that matter, possesses definitive *answers* in order to proceed with an investigation of his thought. Rather, this dissertation takes as its fundamental aim making clear the questions related to moral responsibility or more accurately to the *problem* of moral responsibility. My working assumption is that the relationship between knowledge and morality is problematic and worthy of investigation, but it remains to be shown precisely how it is a problem. What questions ought to be asked as one tries to move forward, and what ought to be taken into consideration? What are the sources of tension in a discussion of morality and knowledge, and what are the perplexities or impasses that we will reach? Before one goes about answering questions, one must first make clear the questions. And to assert that Socrates or Aristotle came up with systems with clear answers gives the wrong impression of these thinkers. Our first

response as to why we ought to turn to the thought of Aristotle and Socrates is that the problem of moral responsibility was precisely that for these thinkers, a problem, an alive, genuine, urgent problem that demands our attention as thinking human beings, human beings alive and open to the question of how we ought to live our lives. Perplexed, we turn to the thinkers who saw virtue as a question, a point of inquiry, in order to clarify our thinking. Clarity about the terms of the debate, or the perennial issues, must be met, and this dissertation is guided by the assumption, certainly open to qualification or rejection, that Aristotle and Socrates can aid us to see the nature of the problem more clearly.

Within the discipline of morality or ethics, it has been especially fashionable to turn to the thought of Aristotle. Indeed, many philosophers, as Amélie Oksenberg Rorty says, “have recently turned their attentions to Aristotle’s ethics, particularly to the *Nicomachean Ethics*... [And] Some of the impetus for the return to Aristotelian scholarship in ethics has come from a sense of the impoverishment of recent moral philosophy.”³⁴ In part, the return to Aristotle in ethics comes about not only as a result of a rejection of an earlier way of thinking but also from a profound dissatisfaction with a discipline that is dominated by two schools of thought. For quite some time, ethical theory has come to be dominated by either Kantian (deontological) or Utilitarian ethics. Both of these approaches to ethics stress specific actions, or try to prescribe definite, discernable rules for how one ought to act that hold in all cases. Dissatisfied with these choices, moral theorists have turned to the thought of Aristotle if for no other reason than to examine or to elaborate an

³⁴ Rorty, “Introduction” to *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, p. 1. Bartlett and Collins similarly state, “In the last twenty years or so, there has been a sustained and systematic return to the thought of Aristotle,” in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*.

alternative account of how human beings ought to live. This endeavor is guided by the hope of finding an alternative to these two schools. Virtue ethics, in its Twentieth Century form, has tried to revive interest in Aristotle's way of thinking. Indeed, virtue ethics seems to be quite in vogue, thanks, in large part, to the Alasdair MacIntyre's widely successful work, *After Virtue*. Within ethics as a sub-discipline of academic philosophy, Aristotle has once again garnered serious attention.

But why is it appropriate for students of political philosophy to follow this lead? Perhaps the most compelling reason is that Aristotle himself treated ethics as a part of political science or philosophy (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.2 1094a-1094b). That is, according to Aristotle, ethics or morality is properly the domain of political science or political philosophy. Any inquiry into Aristotle's ethics that hopes to do it justice, therefore, must remain sensitive to the political nature of the inquiry. If ethical theory has treated Aristotle's ethics as a distinct course of inquiry separate from political concerns, it has failed to understand the nature of the problem for Aristotle and thus misrepresented his thought. For Aristotle, an investigation of morality necessarily falls under political philosophy. Any effort to separate morality from politics is mistaken insofar as questions of morality necessarily take place within the political community and that community claims to offer the most definitive answer to the question of what the good life is. As Aristide Tessitore states, "Studies of Aristotle's ethics, although often excellent, typically lack a deep appreciation for the political dimension within which that teaching is presented."³⁵ With respect to morality, politics must remain on the table. The virtues are necessary for us living together well. This seems to be especially true of the moral virtues, as these are those

³⁵ Tessitore *Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*, p. 1.

virtues that dictate how a good human being acts with respect to other human beings. Going forward, however, we have to recognize an important division. Aristotle divides the virtues into two categories, moral and intellectual, and an important question is what is the relationship between the two. The political nature of the first, moral virtue, is evident, but what is the relationship between politics and intellectual virtue. Or, what is the relationship between the moral and the intellectual virtues? Are they completely independent, is there perfect harmony, does one depend upon the prior establishment of the other, or are they coterminous? Can one possess the moral virtues without possessing the intellectual virtues and vice-versa? What is the relationship between knowledge and virtue, especially given Socrates' claim that knowledge is the sum of virtue? Again we have run into the same impasse: what is the relationship of knowledge to virtue? I intend to investigate these questions through an examination of Aristotle's ethics, especially in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and I intend to do so keeping the political dimension of the work central. Aristide Tessitore's *Reading Aristotle's Ethics* has paved the way for this work by highlighting the political nature of Aristotle's writing, but in this work Tessitore only sketches out an interpretive framework for reading the *Ethics* and leaves particular themes or problems for other authors. He does this with the "expectation that an awareness of this unjustly neglected component of the *Ethics* will prove useful in subsequent attempts to clarify and disentangle its particular themes and notorious problems."³⁶ I intend to follow Tessitore, taking up his charge, and bring the awareness to bear on the question of moral responsibility especially as it relates to knowledge and virtue.

³⁶ Tessitore *Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*, p. 7.

General Outline of the Dissertation

Briefly, let me state the structure of the thesis as I intend to treat the questions at hand. The current chapter hopefully has served as an introduction to the problem of moral responsibility especially as it relates to the relationship of knowledge and virtue. I hope to have shown this truly to be a problem that is alive and well and to have pointed to Aristotle and Socrates as two thinkers who have understood the problem well. I also hope to have shown sufficient justification for going back to the Classics in an attempt better to understand morality.

Proceeding with the understanding that I have shown Socrates as well as Aristotle to be of help in thinking clearly about these matters, I will turn in Chapter Two to an introduction to the investigation of Aristotle's moral philosophy. Such an investigation must situate Aristotle's moral, or as he would call them, ethical writings within his larger corpus and attempt to ascertain what sort of an aim the *Nicomachean Ethics* has. As we are considering what sort of a work the *Ethics* is, we try to make clear Aristotle's style of writing. Who is the intended audience of the *Ethics*? What sort of a study is it? What type of knowledge does it hope to impart, and what sort of knowledge is even possible of the matters under consideration? This is, I believe, a necessary preliminary before one can move to the substantive discussion. Understanding the aim of the entire work will greatly aid understanding the aim or intent of any of the parts.

Relying on the method of interpretation that is to be worked out in Chapter Two, in Chapter Three we will attempt to make sense of Aristotle's account of moral

responsibility found in Book III of his *Ethics*, as this is the part of the *Ethics* generally agreed to treat of the subject. There, Aristotle takes up the question of voluntary versus involuntary acts, proceeding from the premise that only voluntary acts can be blamed or praised. As virtue is under consideration, Aristotle tells us that a virtuous act must be voluntarily performed. My suggestion is that a conception of voluntary versus involuntary will hinge, in part, on knowledge or knowing. Somehow, knowledge, or intellectual virtue, becomes inextricably linked with moral virtue.

Aristotle's investigation of the intellectual virtues is found at the end of Book VI and then sustained throughout Book VII of the *Ethics*. An investigation of these chapters is pertinent to the investigation at hand, as Book VI ends and Book VII begins with references to Socrates and variations of his famous thesis that knowledge is virtue. An investigation of Book VII should, therefore, tie together the questions raised at the outset. What is the relationship between virtue and knowledge, and how does Aristotle arrive at the understanding he has come to hold? By this point, we should have some very clear conclusions to draw, which will lead into the final chapter.

The final chapter will hopefully present the conclusions from the previous chapters as well as articulate whatever new perplexities or impasses have arisen, as there no doubt will be. Even if we have reached the conclusion that virtue is knowledge and vice ignorance, what then? What ought human beings to do? Does the dictum knowledge is virtue give us any guidance into the question of how we ought to live? Can we really excuse all wrong-doing on the basis of ignorance alone? Are human beings responsible for their ignorance? How and in what manner can one

be responsible for one's own ignorance? Or, differently stated, how can one take up the responsibility of pursuing knowledge? Hopefully, I will be able to provide some insights into how Aristotle understood these question. And in so doing, hopefully we will have gained some insight into the permanent question that man perpetually poses to himself about morality and human knowledge.

Chapter 2: Interpreting Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

Turning to the Nicomachean Ethics

Turning to Aristotle to aid in understanding the Socratic Paradox means turning, above all, to his *Nicomachean Ethics*, for it is here that Aristotle addresses Socrates' paradox regarding knowledge and virtue directly. Yet even as we turn to Aristotle guided by the initial consideration that it may be useful for understanding Plato's Socrates, or enlightening in its own right, we have to recognize that this endeavor is also fraught with difficulties. To begin with, Aristotle's discussion of Socrates' thesis takes place over halfway through the book, in Book VII. Additionally, Aristotle's discussion of Socrates on moral responsibility in Book VII is Aristotle's *second* account of moral responsibility, the first taking place in Book III. So if Book VII depends on Book III, and both or either of these books depends in any way on what comes before, some understanding of the previous books is in order.

First and foremost, Aristotle's intention and manner of writing in this work must be determined before any interpretation of that writing can be proffered. Situating the work within his writings can also aid in that endeavor. This means determining, in the first place, what type of work the *Nicomachean Ethics* is. Additionally, Aristotle's audience must be identified: for whom is this work written? Moreover, it must be considered whether that audience is homogeneous or composed

of different groups or types of human beings. These and related questions are of immediate importance, because our answers to these questions will dictate, in part, the method of interpreting this work. A private letter to a friend would be interpreted differently than the public speech of a politician. Dialogues are written differently from essays, and should accordingly be read differently. Before proceeding to treat Aristotle's account of moral responsibility, then, we are compelled to give an account of the *Ethics* as a whole that pays proper attention to its political, practical, dialectical nature, and identifies its primary audience or audiences.

An objection may immediately be made to this proposed method: why shouldn't the work be read straightforwardly? Why not turn directly to what Aristotle says in Books III and VII to discern his teaching on moral responsibility? And doesn't what has been said thus far imply a method of writing that is overly convoluted, difficult to interpret, or even deceitful? The easiest defense to these objections is to indicate the contradictory conclusions reached in Aristotle's accounts of moral responsibility in Book III and VII. That is, Book III offers an account of moral responsibility that mostly accords with convention: both virtue and vice, Aristotle tells us, are things that are voluntary (III.5.1114b21-25). In other words, people voluntarily do wrong or vicious things. But in his analysis of the Socratic thesis, Aristotle ends by telling us that it appears Socrates was correct (VII.3.1147b13-15). And, to restate, Socrates' position is that all wrongdoing is the result of ignorance and therefore involuntary (VII.2.1145b21-35). Thus, Books III and VII seem to be in contradiction. The question on the table then is: what has intervened to change Aristotle's argument?

Before diving into that particularly complex example, which is the core of this dissertation, I would first like to establish, in the present chapter, that Aristotle does indeed write in this particularly perplexing manner by offering other, earlier examples. I will also argue that these perplexities are not the result of carelessness but are carefully and deliberately made. Additionally, I will offer some suggestions as to why Aristotle would have chosen to write in this deliberately perplexing manner.

With respect to the first matter, even a superficial reading of the *Ethics* supports the claim that Aristotle's manner of writing is unusually perplexing. Many commentators readily admit as much. Terrence Irwin, for example, states that, "Often Aristotle's own argument is brief, inexplicit and incomplete on some important issues."³⁷ Robert C. Bartlett calls Aristotle's manner of writing "unusually complex and subtle."³⁸ Aristotle, according to Jonathan Barnes, is "terse, compact, abrupt, his arguments condensed, his thought dense."³⁹ With specific reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as a result of these seeming inconsistencies, Barnes proclaims that it is "evidently not a unitary work."⁴⁰ Aristotle's writing is indeed difficult to make sense of, as a quick glance at the scholarship reveals, but I do hope to show that the *Ethics* is in fact a unitary work.

Indeed, beginning at the very outset, the reader is struck by Aristotle's perplexing style of writing that he will use throughout the text. The oft-quoted opening lines of the *Ethics* show very clearly Aristotle's lack of clarity:

³⁷ Terrence Irwin, "Introduction" to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. xvii.

³⁸ Bartlett "Aristotle's Introduction to the Problem of Happiness: On Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*," p. 677.

³⁹ Barnes, "Preface" to *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, p. xi.

⁴⁰ Barnes *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 5.

Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and choice, seems to aim at some good, and hence it has been beautifully [or nobly, *kalōs*] said that the good is that at which all things aim (I.1.1094a1-3).

One could certainly take Aristotle here to be asserting, in his own name, that all things aim at *the* good, but this is not at all what he in fact says. Every art, inquiry, action and choice *seem* to aim at *some* unspecified good. And hence, it has been *beautifully* or *nobly* (*kalōs*) said that all things aim at the good. But something that has been beautifully said is by no means necessarily truly or correctly said. In fact, there may be beautiful stories, myths, untruths, or even beautiful or well-born lies.⁴¹ Moreover, we have jumped from some unspecified good (*agathou tinos*) to the good simply (*t'agathon*). Lastly, it has been beautifully said that the good is that at which all things aim, but this construction is in the middle voice in the Greek, a voice between active and passive, and it thus leaves the speaker unidentified. It seems presumptuous to assume that it is Aristotle speaking in his own name, even if, in the end, one does conclude that. If nothing else, the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics* ought to alert the careful reader to be on his toes, so to speak.

Aristotle proceeds here on the basis of conditional clauses, as opposed to direct declarations:

“If there is some end of the things we do that we want on account of itself, and the rest on account of this one, and we do not choose everything on account of something else (for in that way the choices would go beyond all bounds, so that desire would be empty and pointless), it is clear that this would be the good, even the best.” (I.2.1094a18-22).

On the surface of things, Aristotle here appears to tell the reader that there is an end for human beings, and that it is the highest good. Yet a closer reading reveals just

⁴¹ Cf. *Republic* 414b-415d.

how tentative this statement really is. It asserts absolutely nothing: if there is some end (*telos*) in question then that end is the best (*ariston*) thing. Aristotle also raises the possibility, only immediately to discard it without evidence, that human desire may in fact be pointless.

Aristotle occasionally contradicts himself, frequently hesitates, and constantly reminds the audience of the limits to his investigation. Aristotle couches his assertions in uncertainty, using the construction that something *seems* or is held to be so (*dokei*) with great frequency. Some of his arguments are asserted, and others rejected, without anything approaching a logical argument (consider I.11.1101b5-9). Sometimes Aristotle appeals to popular opinion either to support what he says or to reject an alternative opinion (I.4.1095a16-28, I.5.1095b14-22), and at other times he makes such appeals to the “refined” (I.4.1095a17-20, I.5.1095b22-23), and on occasion he appeals to the opinion of the wise (I.4.1095a20-21). Aristotle refuses to review all opinions, saying that it would be rather pointless, and chooses to examine only those opinions that have prominence (I.4.1095a28-30). But obscurity alone is insufficient ground for rejecting an opinion. In addition to the opinions of those mentioned, Aristotle also cites the authority of poets (I.4.1095b10-14). Aristotle also tells his audience that his arguments in Book I are imprecise or simply a sketch (I.3.1094b11-27, and I.7.1098a21-1098b8), and frequently he drops a line of argument. Moreover, he often tells the reader that the argument under consideration would be more appropriate in another type of inquiry or speech (*logos*) (e.g., I.6.1096b7-8). In one telling case, when trying to rule out the possibility of the existence of Plato’s forms, and in particular the form of the good, Aristotle urges the

reader simply to let the matter drop, “since to be precise about them [the forms] would be more at home in another sort of philosophy” (I.6.1096b30-31). In the context of his investigation of the human end or the human good, Aristotle relegates a discussion of *the* good to another philosophic inquiry, a philosophic inquiry different in kind from the one presented here. Again in Chapter Eleven, when discussing whether the fortune of one’s descendents has any influence upon one’s happiness after death, Aristotle allows there to be some such influence because to deny it would be too unfeeling and contrary to people’s opinions (I.11.1101a22-24). It seems as though every time he encounters a touchy subject, Aristotle demurs.

Aristotle’s contradictions and peculiarities in argument are often found within the same book, often within the same chapter, and sometimes even within the space of a few lines. The difficulty of interpreting Aristotle reflects, in more than one way, the difficulty of the subject matter. He is speaking about matters that he tells us it is difficult if not impossible to be precise about, namely the beautiful or noble and the just (the good is not mentioned). That Aristotle’s manner of writing is perplexing should be clear, and it is precisely this perplexing manner of writing that allows for, or perhaps even encourages, diametrically opposed interpretations of his work. The reason for such blatantly contradictory interpretations is quite obvious as soon as one notices that Aristotle contradicts himself many times in this work. As was stated, this thesis will have to confront the direct disagreement in Aristotle’s account of moral responsibility in Books III and VII. A simple reading of these two sections reveals, as I briefly showed, stark contradictions in Aristotle’s teaching regarding moral responsibility, and these contradictions must be understood. That means that the two

teachings have to be reconciled in some way, or they are dependent upon the context, or the contradiction is the result of carelessness, or the teaching of one book is somehow superior to the other—that is, Aristotle intentionally presents multiple teachings regarding moral responsibility in his *Ethics*. In order to make such determinations, we have to try to articulate the method of interpreting contradictions, omissions, and seeming repetitions. I hope to have shown convincingly that Aristotle's manner of writing is not straightforward. It remains, however, to be shown that this manner of writing is the result of deliberate care rather than of confusion or carelessness. I hope next to show why Aristotle might write in this manner.

Why is Aristotle's Manner of Writing So Complex ?

There are four reasons that explain why Aristotle wrote in a deliberately perplexing manner: first, to avoid persecution; next, to protect salutary opinions; thirdly, for the sake of education; and, lastly, as a result of the necessary incompleteness of human knowledge.

In the first place, the guiding question under consideration in the *Ethics*—namely, what is the best life?—is a politically sensitive one. That is, any conclusions reached or answers given necessarily degrade, or relegate to secondary status, other ways of living. Moreover, if the best human life is not identical with the life of the good citizen, then Aristotle's discussion runs the risk of offending any and all existing political associations, including, of course, the one in which he lives. In other words, to ask what the best life is for a human being is necessarily to call into question the authoritative answer given to this question by the political association or city.

Aristotle's assertion late in the *Ethics* that the contemplative life is the best life for a human being, for example, necessarily depreciates the life of the morally serious man, the man upon whom the political association depends. Aristotle's discussion of human happiness and the best life properly falls within a political discussion. Aristotle's manner of proceeding tries to pay the proper respect to the moral and political world, even as he points beyond it.

Aristotle's attempt to call the city's opinions into question only with extreme caution and reticence—or even, the attempt to preserve some of the city's opinions—is not the result merely of self-interest. We should not misinterpret Aristotle's indirect speech as duplicitous for the sake simply of self-preservation. Quite to the contrary, Aristotle's manner of teaching can be viewed as quite philanthropic, insofar as it attempts to better any human being who might read his work. Aristotle's work is not an unbridled attempt to uproot the prevailing political opinions, even if those opinions are somehow inadequate. Living together well requires traditional opinions. Aristotle's task is in this respect twofold: encourage respect for traditional opinion or authority and point to the limits of that respect. To state it somewhat differently, Aristotle wants to laud both moral and intellectual virtue, and this is no small task. For moral and intellectual virtue may ultimately prove not only to be distinct, but even in direct tension with one another. Some moral opinions are decent or salutary, even if the basis on which these opinions rest is not necessarily rational. That is, there is something beneficial about the attachment that most decent human beings have to moral virtue, even if they do not fully understand that attachment. It would be a disservice to such decent human beings to go around willy-nilly exposing their

false opinions without having the ability either to provide new reasons to be attached to moral virtue or to point to something higher. Because Aristotle's educational project recognizes its own rational limits, it has, in a way, humbler aims. Aristotle does not seek to turn every human being into a philosopher, nor does he think that is even desirable or possible. He seeks, rather, to reassure some morally serious persons of the decency of that attachment.

But there is, clearly, an educational purpose to the text. In this work that is so political, we are reminded that education must be the object, above all else, of the one who is engaged in politics, the legislator.⁴² The educational aspect of the *Ethics* is another reason why Aristotle's manner of writing is incomplete. The book is not written for those who already have insight into these things by themselves (I.4.1095b10). Such persons have no need of this book. Rather it is for those who are able to be educated. Aristotle leaves certain arguments or conclusions for the reader to figure out for himself or herself. Rather than simply supplying the reader with ready made answers, in other words, Aristotle tries to teach us to think. If the conclusions were simply dictated as a matter of fact, without the intellectual training that it takes to get there, it wouldn't be worthy of the name education. The *Ethics* is an exercise in rational thought, in syllogistic reasoning. The work, to put it another way that I will explain shortly, is dialectical in nature, and dialectics, Aristotle tells us, is useful for three purposes: training or exercise (*gymnasia*), casual encounters, and the philosophical sciences (*Topics* I.2.101a25-30). The usefulness of dialectics in exercise, Aristotle says, should be evident on its own terms. It is teaching or training in how to think.

⁴² Cf. *Politics* VIII.1.1337a11-12. Also *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9

All of this is not to say that the end result will provide clear answers. It may not. But it may still yield significant insight, most generally into the limits of human knowledge. This, too, explains the partial character of Aristotle's writings. One of the reasons that Aristotle does not straightforwardly give us answers because human knowledge is necessarily incomplete in at least two regards. First, knowledge of the whole eludes human beings.⁴³ And secondly, the future is always unclear (I.10.1101a17-19). But progress in knowledge is possible. We can improve our knowledge, recognizing that some of our strongest held opinions are false or that deepest longings are nonsensical or imaginary. Learning *from* Aristotle truly means learning *with* Aristotle.

Granting, then, that Aristotle intentionally writes in this manner, how ought we to read Aristotle? Or, what are some things to keep in mind as we attempt to make sense of his work? First, as was previously noted, the inquiry in Aristotle's *Ethics* is political. Indeed, ethics is a part of politics for Aristotle, and this must be kept in mind. Aristide Tessitore argues that many otherwise excellent studies of the *Ethics* "typically lack a deep appreciation for the political dimension within which that teaching is presented."⁴⁴ Accordingly, every attempt will be made to remain sensitive to the political nature of the *Ethics*. Following Tessitore, as well as Bodéüs and others, I hope to take Aristotle's own assessment of the nature of the *Ethics* seriously. Very early on, in I.2, Aristotle tells us that the *Ethics* is a sort of political inquiry (*mēthodos*, 1094b10-11). The end of the inquiry in the *Ethics*, namely the human good, is stated outright at the beginning, and falls under some knowledge or

⁴³ Consider *Topics* I.11.104b15-17. Also, *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100a3-b17.

⁴⁴ Tessitore *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*, p.1.

capacity. It would seem, Aristotle says, that the science or art of politics aims to understand the good for a human being. Aristotle's inquiry into the question of human happiness leads him almost immediately to declare that the question of the human good—or happiness—belongs to the knowledge, science, or capacity of politics (*politikē*). Politics thus understood may mean the political art or even political science, but it should be clear above all that it most emphatically is related to politics. So the investigation that takes place in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a political investigation (I.1.1094b10-11). We ought to be alert to the possibility that Aristotle defers to political authority and therefore sparingly offers criticism.

Being political in nature, the discussion is accordingly practical. It is widely recognized that the *Ethics*, as well as the *Politics* for that matter, both fall under the category of Aristotle's practical works, that is, those works that deal with action.⁴⁵ Aristotle treats the question of human happiness from a practical point of view. The end of the present matter is not contemplation or theory (*theōria*), Aristotle says, but that we might become good (II.2.1103b26-27). Although he later amends, rejects, or qualifies the assertion, Aristotle states here that the end of the inquiry is action (*praxis*) and not knowledge though he does acknowledge that we would be more apt to find the good if we possessed some knowledge or recognition (*gnōsis*) of the good (I.2.1094a22-24). Since this discussion deals with actions, which are variable, differing levels of accuracy are to be expected. In matters concerning the beautiful or noble and just, about which politics deliberates, too much precision cannot be expected. On the other hand, in matters of geometry, one ought to expect the highest

⁴⁵ Terrence Irwin, "Introduction" to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. xiv. Also, Martin Ostwald "Introduction" to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, xiii-xvii.

level of precision. So the focus of the work is practical, as opposed to theoretical. And as a practical work, we should expect a lesser degree of precision. As a result, every speech or argument (*logos*) about actions “is obliged to speak in outline and not precisely” (II.2.1104a1-2). As Aristotle alerts his reader:

“And it is necessary also to take each of the things that are said in the same way, for it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with admits; for to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician seems about like accepting probable conclusions from a mathematician” (I.3.1094b22-27).

One would proceed correctly “if one were to attain the clarity that goes along with the underlying material, for precision ought not to be sought in the same way in all kinds of discourse, any more that in things made by the various kinds of craftsmen” (I.3.1094b12-13). For the present inquiry is about the noble and the just, it is a political investigation, and there is great variation and disagreement about them.⁴⁶

Again in Chapter Seven, Aristotle encourages the reader to let an outline of the preceding suffice (I.7.1098a20-22). In matters of the utmost urgency or importance for a human being, the philosopher Aristotle encourages accepting arguments that fail to rise to the highest accuracy. He defends this lack of rigor as appropriate for his course of inquiry. The current inquiry, Aristotle reminds us, is not for the sake of knowing, but rather it is for the sake of acting. Aristotle distinguishes the geometrician from the carpenter along these lines, saying that both look to right angles in their work, but one does so for the sake of utility and the other because he is a beholder or theorizer (*theatēs*) of the truth.

⁴⁶ Is there a theoretical inquiry into political and ethical matters? Aristotle certainly does not rule out completely the possibility of such an inquiry, but it is clear that the *Ethics*, while perhaps pointing to such an inquiry, does not quite rise to it (See Bartlett “Aristotle’s Introduction to the Problem of Happiness: On Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*”).

Perhaps the best way to summarize the difficulty of interpretation, or to bring all of the preceding together, is to call Aristotle's work what it is, namely dialectical. Aristotle necessarily adapts his style of writing depending on the nature of the inquiry, and is prone to use a dialectical style in his practical works. Aristotle distinguishes between dialectal syllogisms and demonstrations in the *Topics*. Demonstration comes from premises that are known to be true and primary or first (*prōton*: *Topics* I.1.100a25-30). But this is not Aristotle's typical manner of proceeding, and in fact, it is questionable whether Aristotle ever produced a single demonstration, strictly speaking.⁴⁷ Rather than writing demonstrations, then, Aristotle most often writes *dialectically*. This is true of his writings on nature and metaphysics and is especially true of his political writings. This means that Aristotle does not set down premises as simply true in his political writings; rather, the starting points are always provisional and may lead to contradiction or conclusions that are not in accord with reason. When this happens, Aristotle says, it is necessary to destroy the argument where the falsehood began (*Topics* VIII.10.160b23-25). Aristotle is not above, then, following an argument to its logical conclusion to test that argument. Aristotle often begins from opinions, opinions that are respectable or highly esteemed in some way. These conventional opinions (*endoxai*) often contain a kernel of truth, or will perhaps aid in the endeavor to arrive at a better understanding

⁴⁷ In order to demonstrate a matter, the demonstration would have to proceed from truth (*alētheia*) or a first principle or, more simply, first thing (*prōton*). Consider the difficulty Aristotle has in explaining how the mind or soul (*psuchē*) grasps the first thing (*prōton*) in *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100a3-b17. The soul cannot know (*epistamein*) the first principle, but it can grasp it by intellection (*nous*). At the very least, this intuitive intellection of the first principle seems out of harmony with Aristotle's heavy emphasis on empiricism earlier in the *Posterior Analytics*. If the truth, strictly speaking, of the first principles cannot be *known* simply, then the prospects for demonstration are questionable. Consider also Maimonides *The Guide of the Perplexed* II.3, 15, 24 where Maimonides says that Aristotle never made a demonstration concerning heavenly things.

of matters. Aristotle's investigations proceed, taking certain beginning points that he later ends up modifying or even rejecting. These dialectical inquiries can yield significant insights even as they reveal the argument to be flawed, as it shows, in the first place, wherein lies the flaw, and, in the second place, can help to provide a fuller account of the matter under investigation, or even point to another road to investigate the matter. In some instances, these beginning points may hold up under scrutiny, and in other instance they do not. Yet in any case, the investigation, if properly begun, can yield insight.

Aristotle begins his dialectical reasoning from very common opinions, the things that are rather familiar to us (*Physics* I.1. 184a). He begins from things that are clearer to us, even if it is not clear according to nature. The goal or hope is that we will arrive at what is clearer by nature. An Aristotelian dialectical syllogism (*dialektikos syllogismos*) reasons (*syllogizomesthai*) from these reputable opinions (*endoxai*), but it does not necessarily evaluate all commonly held opinions. To review all opinions (*doxai*), especially in ethical matters, would be rather pointless, to repeat (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.1095b), and Aristotle thinks it would be sufficient to review those opinions that have the greatest prominence. Aristotle evaluates opinions that are reputable or held in high esteem (*endoxai*, *Topics* I.100a25-27) or those that are widely held. "A dialectical inquiry," Joe Sachs offers, "might assume some opinion that equates knowledge with perception (which is just what happens in the first half of Plato's *Theaetetus*), but it would do so in order to try it out and test it."⁴⁸ When arguing dialectically, then, Aristotle reasons from "things that seem true to everyone, or to most people, or else to the wise, and of the latter either to all of them

⁴⁸ Joe Sachs, "Introduction" to *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, p. xiii. Also consider *Topics* I.102a6-7.

or most of them or to those who are best known and most respected” (*Topics* I.1.100a30-100b23). But these beginning points are all questionable, even if we begin with the opinions of the wise. The dialectical nature of Aristotle’s inquiry adds to the difficulty of interpretation, and it must be taken into account, especially if one attempts to understand a part of his work. Aristotle’s dialectics is a double edged sword, simultaneously helping and hindering our inquiry. One has to try to follow Aristotle as he proceeds through investigation; one can understand his arguments only if one understands the motion of the work. Simply recounting a part of a work of Aristotle’s without a larger context is problematic insofar as it is removed from the larger argument. One has to determine where Aristotle is in the inquiry. Just as one could not hope to understand adequately a conversation by only hearing snippets, so too would one’s understanding of Aristotle be limited without an appreciation of the entire conversation. The *Ethics* is a conversation, and the books and chapters are parts of that conversation. We have to get away from the notion that Aristotle reaches conclusions that are absolute, reached from premises that have been firmly settled and established. Rather, the conclusions he reaches are provisional, and must be judged in light of the movement of the entire argument.

In general, Aristotle finds it acceptable to proceed from commonly held reputable opinions, especially the opinions of the wise. In many ways, then, Aristotle’s dialectical arguments mirror dialogues with the wise. Indeed, in many of his writings on nature, for example, Aristotle will begin with an opinion of Zeno, Anaxagoras, or Empedocles. And in the *Politics*, he frequently takes up the opinion of Socrates and Plato, as well as the opinions of Phaleas (II.7) and Hippodamus (II.8).

Aristotle takes these opinions put forward by his real or constructed interlocutor and proceeds to examine them in the manner of a conversation, i.e., dialectically. Therefore, as Carnes Lord says, “the possibility must at least be considered that Aristotle’s political writings are in their own way as radically ironic as those of Plato—that they deliberately withhold Aristotle’s final or most fundamental reflections on man.”⁴⁹

Are we not back where we began then? If Aristotle’s writings are dialectical, why not turn back to the dialogues of Plato to understand the Socratic Paradox. My answer is that Aristotle does precisely what Plato does not do with respect to the paradox: Aristotle submits the Socratic Paradox to dialectical inquiry. There is no direct dialectical treatment of the Socratic Paradox in Plato, even though it features prominently in several dialogues. Plato never allows his reader to see a conversation between his Socrates and a sound interlocutor. In this sense, perhaps Aristotle surpasses Plato. In the *Ethics*, particularly Book VII, Chapters 2 through 3, Aristotle creates a dialogue between Socrates and himself on the question of knowledge and virtue. We have before us, then, a first rate thinker, Aristotle, submitting Socrates to the same dialectical inquiry that the latter generally inflicts on others. We see firsthand a conversation between two philosophers.

Audiences

Given the political nature of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we cannot help but notice that the intended audience is composed of those human beings who are most likely to be engaged in politics in some capacity. Bodéüs argues, rather persuasively,

⁴⁹ Lord, “Aristotle” in *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 121.

that the lawgiver is Aristotle's most direct audience. As Carnes Lord points out, "Aristotle's practical science is directed not to philosophers or students of philosophy, or not principally to them, but to political men."⁵⁰ While Lord may be correct in arguing that the *Ethics* is dedicated principally to political men, it is not a foregone conclusion that it is dedicated solely to them. It is entirely possible that Aristotle recognized that a diverse audience would be attracted to the work, or even that he intended to appeal to a diverse audience. If I.2 points to the political nature of the inquiry in the *Ethics*, I.3 tells us something about the intended audience. Aristotle writes this work for an educated audience, for people who are good at making distinctions, and possess good judgment. Above all, the student cannot be too young, because such persons follow their impulses and are too inexperienced in the actions of life. They are unfamiliar with politics. Carnes Lord is correct to point out that, at least in part, the audience is composed of human beings familiar with politics. Aristotle will return to the question of his audience in a digression in the next chapter, I.4, and indicate that his students will have to have been brought up beautifully or nobly by means of proper habituation (1095b4-6). He then goes on to quote Hesiod, granting further insight as to whom he intends to reach:

Altogether best is he who himself has intelligence (*noēsis*) in all things,
But good (*esthlos*) in his turn is he who trusts one who speaks well.
But whoever neither himself intellects, nor, harkening to another,
Lays to heart what he says, that one for his part is a useless man
(1095b10-13).

Aristotle clearly has in mind as students neither those who already know nor those who are unwilling to listen to another. He intends to speak to someone who is able

⁵⁰ Lord, "Aristotle" in *History of Political Philosophy*, 120.

and willing to learn. “The listener to whom the *NE* prologue refers,” as Bodéüs says, “may be understood as a learner (*manthōn*), Aristotle’s undertaking as a kind of teaching (*didaxis*), and the discourses (*logoi*) mentioned there as discourses for teaching (*didaskalikoi logoi*).”⁵¹

We immediately see that the *Ethics* is not addressed to the best human beings, for this type of human has no need of Aristotle’s treatise, although it may be addressed to those who are potentially the best type of human being. If the theoretical life, or the life of the philosopher, is best, we can concede Lord’s assertion that Aristotle’s intended audience in the *Ethics* is not philosophers. We are further justified in this assertion when we remember that the work is practical and not theoretical, especially since philosophy is concerned, above all, with theoretical investigation. We cannot, however, rule out potential philosophers, as the potentially best are not identical to the best actually. Best, to repeat the Hesiod quote, would be to possess intelligence regarding all things without the help of another.

While the *Ethics* is not addressed to the highest type of human beings, we also see that it is not addressed to the lowest type, those who disregard the advice of others who speak well. The *Ethics*, then, is addressed to the in-between types (*metaxu*) or even to the good (*esthloi*). It may well be that this middling type—those who trust the ones who speak well—is in fact composed of those who are at the top of the social structure both from the perspective of economic and political clout, but from the perspective of intelligence they are of the middling sort that Aristotle describes. These types of human beings can be guided by, and even have a propensity to follow the advice of, those who might know. Such persons are already predisposed at the

⁵¹ Bodéüs *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics*, p. 100.

very least, surely to moral virtue. To the extent that such persons are open to trust the one who speaks well, Aristotle intimates that in fact his intended audience may well have such a predisposition. The type to which Aristotle appeals has a predisposition in favor of goodness (*esthlos*, distinguished in the Hesiod quote from *agathos*).

The *Ethics*, in contrast to the *Politics*, is dedicated above all to improving the gentlemen. While the *Politics* certainly intends to teach the gentlemen, it is with a view to the improvement of all.⁵² The *Ethics* is dedicated to those who are willing and able to learn from another, those who have some genuine concern with morality. These are serious human beings who take it as a given that one ought to try to be good. Those who do not begin from such premises must be ruled, and the discussion of how that ought to be done is to be found in the *Politics*. Both works together form the whole of Aristotle's political teaching, or at least indicate what the whole might look like. Education is for those willing, interested, and capable of learning, and laws for those who either are unwilling or incapable of listening.

The audience of the *Ethics*, to repeat, is composed of human beings who are between the best and worst types, and to persons who take moral virtue seriously. They believe in the just and the noble as a result of having been raised properly or even beautifully. But even this group, the morally serious, is not homogeneous. In fact, Aristotle may be speaking to multiple audiences in his text. Aristide Tessitore persuasively argues that there are two audiences in the *Ethics*. He recognizes that the work is addressed to morally serious persons but goes on to state that it is addressed

⁵² Cf. Strauss, *City and Man* pp. 23-25.

to “two distinct types of morally serious persons: those who are not and never will be philosophers *and* those who are potential philosophers.”⁵³

In fact, if the intended audience of the *Ethics* is composed of two distinct groups, the morally serious and the would-be-philosophers, this allows for the possibility that the *Ethics* may have two distinct teachings. That is, it may speak differently to the morally serious person than it does to the would-be-philosophers. The compatibility of the two teachings, if in fact that proves to be the case, is by no means guaranteed, and, in fact, they may ultimately result in profound conflict. That is, the life of the morally serious person and the life of the philosopher may ultimately be in direct conflict. If this were to be the case, there is no reason for Aristotle to announce openly such a conflict, and indeed good reason to understate or even mitigate this difference. As we turn to Aristotle’s account of moral responsibility in the following chapters, I would urge, following Tessitore and others, openness to the possibility that conflicting accounts of moral responsibility could be intended for distinct audiences. As we turn in the following chapters to evaluate Aristotle’s discussion of moral responsibility in Books III and VII, it is absolutely essential to bear in mind the conclusions articulated here regarding Aristotle’s cautious style of writing.

Summary

Aristotle’s writings, especially the practical writings, are meant to speak to multiple audiences. He frequently retreats to common opinion, or even tries to

⁵³ Tessitore *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*.

provide common opinion with a more solid grounding even if that opinion may be, in the end, groundless. Aristotle is perfectly willing to leave our common opinions intact and only challenge those readers who are sensitive to inconsistencies and dissatisfied with a defense of a particular opinion that is salutary but unconvincing. Aristotle knows that many readers turn to the *Ethics* hoping and longing to have their deepest held opinions concerning morality confirmed, and, if this is one's strongest desire, Aristotle will not disappoint. But he does prod those few who are not satisfied unless their opinions can be shown to withstand the strongest rational scrutiny, those few who are willing to abandon their deepest held opinions if rational support for those opinions fails to be demonstrated. Accordingly, there will be silences, pregnant omissions, hesitations, and even outright contradictions. This does not mean that any interpretation of the *Ethics* is possible. Whenever we struggle to interpret Aristotle, we must take his cues as our guide and let him point us toward his answers. We have to work to find Aristotle's final or most fundamental reflections on man.

As we move forward then to interpret the *Ethics*, we need to take note of the movement of the argument that occurs in the text, although not necessarily attempting to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the entire text. Thus far, drawing primarily on Book I of the *Ethics*, I have provided many examples of the intentionally ambiguous manner of Aristotle's writing. And Book I really serves as an introduction to all that follows. It introduces us to Aristotle's manner of writing: it sets up the question under consideration and delineates the manner in which it will treat the question. It is also intended to attract the attention of the intended audience. The theme, or rather, the guiding question of the *Ethics* is what is the good life for a

human being. Aristotle seeks in this quest to identify the highest human good. Aristotle chooses to focus on the question of happiness for precisely this reason, because all human beings presumably want to become happy. Accordingly, this quest for or inquiry into the highest human good would seemingly be attractive to *any* serious human being. It is certainly of great interest to both the would-be philosopher and the morally serious human being, Aristotle's intended audience. And Aristotle offers, at least officially, an answer to this most important question. A mere seven chapters into the work, Aristotle delivers: happiness, or the human good, is an activity (*energeia*) of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there is more than one virtue, with the best and most complete one (I.7.1098a16-18).

By arguing that our prospects for happiness are wedded to the acquisition of virtue, Aristotle has further managed to harness the audiences' interests and steer it toward virtue. The decent human beings in the audience will follow Aristotle into the discussion of virtue, as he has appealed both to their self-interest and to their sense of decency. Aristotle tries to appeal both to the morally serious person and to the potential philosopher, or even to the two characteristics of the same person. But he does occasionally draw our attention to the distinction between moral and intellectual virtue, although the examples are quite muted by his overriding concern to show them to be compatible. For example in Chapter Five, Aristotle posits three possibilities for the best life: the life devoted to pleasure, the political life, and the contemplative life. After dismissing the life of pleasure by comparing it to the life of fatted cows, and arguing that the life of politics is incomplete, Aristotle refrains from speaking about the theoretical life and instead turns to the life of money-making. In the order of the

inquiry, the contemplative life is replaced by the life of money-making, which is dismissed as obviously not being the highest life as money is instrumental. Aristotle fails to take up the question of whether the best life for a human being is the contemplative life here in Book I. It is postponed until much later; the audience must be made to find such praise a little more palatable. In the interim, he admonishes the life of money-making, a censure sure to please the supporter of moral virtue and the reasoning that leads to the rejection is meant to impress the theoretically inclined, even if it is ultimately unconvincing. Furthermore, Aristotle's raising and then immediately dropping the distinction between intellectual and moral virtue at the beginning of Book II allows Aristotle to capture virtue simply, something that appeals to both the would-be philosopher and the gentleman. Aristotle thus exploits the desire of all human beings, especially the serious ones, to be happy, and he thus, for the moment, collapses the distinction of those who want to pursue moral virtue and those may turn out to be more interested in intellectual virtue: the intellectually and the morally virtuous human being are united in the quest for happiness as well as their attachment to virtue. He unites them by appealing to what is of great interest to both. Aristotle manages to unite the interests of both the intellectually and morally virtuous and this serves two purposes. First, it keeps both audiences interested in the inquiry, and secondly, it makes each favorably disposed toward the other, as Aristotle has given the reader no reason to doubt the harmony between moral and intellectual virtue.

Book I, then, serves as an introduction, and Book II goes on to set the terms of the discussion for the next four books. Aristotle tell us at the very beginning of Book

II that virtue is of two sorts, moral (or character, *ēthos*) and intellectual, and he focuses the inquiry on moral virtue and will continue to treat moral virtue for the next several books (II-V). Moral virtue, or virtue of character, comes about for a human being as the consequence of habit (*ethos*). One's character is thus what one has acquired as a result of habituation. Although Aristotle will occasionally draw the reader's attention to intellectual virtue, the focus for the time being is on the moral virtues. That means that the majority of the substantive books deal above all with virtues acquired as a result of habit, although the virtues are not the habits themselves. The bulk of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is dedicated, above all, to a treatment of moral virtue. Book III begins to take up and treat the individual virtues such as courage and justice independently, but not before taking up the question of moral responsibility. This much makes sense. If Aristotle is going to focus on moral virtue, he must first show in what way human beings are morally responsible. Without moral responsibility, any talk of moral virtue is either non-sensical. Aristotle's first discussion of responsibility takes place, then, within his broader discussion of moral virtue. In the next chapter, I will turn to investigate the account of responsibility found in Book III.

Chapter 3: Aristotle's Introduction to the Problem of Moral Responsibility

Introduction

Aristotle presents his official teaching regarding moral responsibility in Book III.1-5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There, Aristotle offers a clearly articulated teaching regarding moral responsibility, which I will call Aristotle's official teaching. Most work on Aristotle's account of moral responsibility focuses, understandably, on this account. This is only half of the story, however, because Aristotle takes up the issue again in Book VII. By beginning with Aristotle's official teaching in Book III in the present chapter, I am laying the groundwork for a comparison of his two presentations of the question.

In the present chapter, I will briefly point out a few observations from Book II that will further the argument before turning to Book III. Then I will subject chapters one through five of Book III to rigorous scrutiny in order both to arrive at Aristotle's official teaching regarding moral responsibility in Book III and to bring to light the problems associated with that official teaching. I will then provide compelling reasons for us to doubt that Aristotle's official teaching regarding moral responsibility is his final statement or genuine teaching on the matter, and I will also show why Aristotle would have given an official account that is not ultimately his own. I also argue that although Socrates is not explicitly named as Aristotle's protagonist in Book III, Aristotle clearly has him in mind. In fact, Aristotle alerts the careful reader to the Socratic nature of the unnamed objector to his official presentation of moral

responsibility. In Book III, Aristotle addresses Socrates' paradoxical teaching on moral responsibility, without naming it explicitly, and officially dismisses it. I will show that Aristotle's official teaching regarding moral responsibility, which includes a rejection of Socrates' paradox, in large part serves a political purpose. No one, as best I can tell, has sufficiently taken note of the political dimension of the *Ethics* when attempting to interpret Aristotle's teaching on moral responsibility as it is found treated in the entire work.⁵⁴ The present chapter will pave the way for a reinvestigation of Aristotle's teaching regarding moral responsibility that we find in the first three chapters of Book VII, which takes the form of a dialogue with Socrates and his paradox that all wrongdoing is involuntary. Despite having been officially dispensed with in Book III, Socrates' paradox emerges in Book VII as a powerful objection to Aristotle's earlier account of moral responsibility. Essential to my thesis is my argument that Aristotle's treatment of moral responsibility begins from and remains concerned above all with Socrates' strong paradoxical objection that no one voluntarily does wrong, even if it has to be suppressed or rejected for political purposes. Before turning straight to Book VII, we must first examine the account of moral responsibility in Book III.

As we have seen, the conclusion of Book I leads to a discussion of virtue (*aretē*), which Aristotle cleaves immediately in half at the beginning of Book II. Virtue, Aristotle tells us, is of two kinds, intellectual and ethical or moral (*ēthikos*).

⁵⁴ David Schaefer has dealt well with the subject in "Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle's Account of *Akrasia*," but his inquiry focused solely on Book VII. I aim to treat Books III and VII in tandem to arrive at Aristotle's teaching regarding moral responsibility. Ronna Burger's new work, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, has been extremely helpful, and traces the Socratic influence on the entire *Ethics*.

After briefly telling us how someone comes to possess these virtues, Aristotle states that he will focus on moral virtue for the foreseeable future. Aristotle explicitly postpones an inquiry into intellectual virtue and how reason is related to moral virtue, telling the reader there will be a discussion of it later (II.2.1103b31-34). A discussion of moral virtue that abstracts from the very relevant question of reason's relationship to virtue follows. As with any abstraction, fundamental issues are therefore missing or suppressed. Indeed, Aristotle does not directly address reason and the rational virtues again until Book VI, although he will make occasional reference to them. It is of the utmost importance to keep in mind that Books II through V are dedicated to a direct investigation of moral virtue to the *explicit* exclusion of intellectual virtue. Moreover, Aristotle will go on in the next few books to speak about moral virtue as though the virtues are things desired for their own sake. That is, he will speak about moral virtue from the point of view of someone for whom moral virtue is the highest. It is important to keep in mind that Book I had raised the possibility of another virtue for its own sake, intellectual virtue, to which Aristotle will not return until after the conclusion of the discussion of the moral virtues.

Despite postponing a discussion of moral virtue's relation to reason in Book II, Aristotle does make several comments that are noteworthy for the current investigation.

First, Aristotle mentions that one difference between moral and intellectual virtue is how they come to be. Intellectual virtue comes about, for the most part, from teaching. By contrast, moral virtue is the result of habit. That is, one has to be

habituated or trained to become morally virtuous: one becomes just by performing just actions.

But immediately we get the impression that proper habituation, however necessary, cannot suffice. In order for action truly to be virtuous, it has to be the product of our own free choice. As choice involves deliberation, reason creeps back into consideration. Three things, Aristotle tells us in Book II, lead us to make a choice, the beautiful, the pleasant, and the advantageous (II.31104b30-34). These three things can be brought together into a single common heading, namely things that are deemed to be good. The good comprises the beautiful, the advantageous, and the pleasant. In other words, humans make choices based on a consideration of what they believe to be good.

In II.4, Aristotle states that there are three qualifications that are necessary in order for an action to be considered virtuous: they have to be done first and foremost with knowledge, they have to be the result of choice, and one has to be in the corresponding stable condition (II.4.1105a28-33). In the first place (*prōton*), Aristotle tells us, a virtuous act must be done knowingly. Secondly, one has to choose the virtue and cannot do it accidentally or merely as a result of habituation if it is genuinely to be virtuous. Habituation is a good and necessary beginning point, but in and of itself it is insufficient. Knowledge is an integral part of virtuous action, as is choice. And if choice is solely the result of habituation, to what extent can it truly be called choice? To what extent does one voluntarily do something or refrain from doing something if one has been habituated thereto, and the action chosen is not the result of reflection, deliberation, or knowledge? Indeed Aristotle has already

mentioned the central qualification, choice, in the previous chapter, and choice will prove to be inextricably linked with knowledge. Aristotle mentions choice in the list of qualifications as if to highlight its importance. With respect to knowledge, Aristotle already told us that it comes about by teaching, not by habituation. No matter how much Aristotle tries to focus on moral virtue, he cannot abandon or escape completely reason, or knowledge. We will also see how intimately choice is bound up with knowledge in Book III.

Turning to Book III

The importance of choice and knowingly doing virtuous actions leads directly into Book III. Here we dive into the heart of the matter. Aristotle lays before us the major problem for his account of moral virtue, and the seriousness of this part of the investigation cannot be overstated. Aristotle's account of moral virtue stands or falls by his ability to provide a convincing account of moral responsibility. Aristotle needs to have a coherent account of moral responsibility if his exhortation to moral virtue that follows is to make any sense. Exhortations to virtue would fall on deaf ears if the audience were incapable of taking responsibility for their actions and choosing to live virtuously. Since virtue is concerned only with voluntary actions, Aristotle says, "it is no doubt a necessary thing for those who inquire about virtue to distinguish what is a voluntary act and what is an involuntary act" (III.1.1109b32-34). To repeat, it is no doubt *necessary* to articulate an account of moral responsibility. Unless there is such a thing as a voluntary act, there is not virtuous action. Virtue depends on freedom and the ability to act voluntarily. What voluntary acts are, then, has to be determined.

Aristotle immediately adds a further consideration, however: a conception of volition is not only necessary for one inquiring, but also *useful* for those legislating about honors and punishments. The correctness or truth of his account of moral responsibility is but one consideration. That is, another guiding concern of the investigation of moral responsibility is political. It is useful to have a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts in the political world, for the sake of honoring and punishing, even if no such clear line can be drawn with precision theoretically. Aristotle leaves it unclear which consideration is more pressing. At any rate, Aristotle alerts the reader as to how important an account of moral responsibility is for a political community.⁵⁵ A political community cannot stand without clear standards for voluntary behavior. Without a clear account of moral responsibility, reward and punishment, praise and blame, all lack clarity. In Book III, Aristotle takes the side of the political community and seeks to provide for the community a plausible account of moral responsibility that it can use in determining matters of praise and blame. And Aristotle does provide a straightforward definition of moral responsibility in Book III. Aristotle's official position is that one is responsible for one's actions if that person is not forced to do an act and knows or sees (*oida*) the particular circumstances regarding that act. While this seems straightforward,

⁵⁵ C. Fred Alford argues in *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Greek Tragedy* that Aristotle developed his conception of choice in response to the conception of voluntary used by the tragic poets. The tragic protagonists seem to act out of necessity, be it internal or external, leaving little room for praise or blame, and such a conception of the voluntary is politically harmful. The poets, by depriving the protagonist of choice, undermine the motivation for the spectators to pursue virtue, exhortations to virtue by the chorus notwithstanding. "Thus, Aristotle must forge a new concept, *proairesis*, to capture what we mean today by the free power to choose, for the meaning of the term *hekon*, found in the tragedies, covers too much territory, meaning any action not made under external compulsion." See p. 120 and ff.

Aristotle consistently alerts the careful reader to the problems with this official account, and also tells us why he puts forward the account he offers.

Voluntary Versus Involuntary

Aristotle provides the reader of the *Ethics* with a clear definition of voluntary action in III.1, action that could appropriately be blamed or praised. A voluntary act is one done with knowledge and free of external force. Aristotle's official pronouncement regarding moral responsibility is that one cannot be held responsible if one involuntarily commits an act, and lack of volition comes about as a result of either force of ignorance (III.1.1111a22). Aristotle's procedure is a negative one: he first defines the involuntary and leaves us to the opinion that the voluntary is what remains. This manner of proceeding is open to the following objection: it is not necessarily the case that if Aristotle can define the involuntary that what is left over is the voluntary. In the first place, Aristotle could have failed to exhaust the class of the involuntary. Secondly, there may exist a class of actions that is between voluntary and involuntary or is mixed (*miktai*), a possibility Aristotle at least entertains (III.1.1110a11-14). It is also possible that no act is free from ignorance and force. Understood in a certain light, all human action contains elements of ignorance and force, as I will argue shortly.

But Aristotle sets the bar for ignorance and force very high, or, differently stated, he sets the bar for knowledge somewhat low. Aristotle limits the knowledge that is necessary to make an act voluntary to knowledge of particulars. No knowledge of such lofty ideas as justice, beauty, or the good is necessary in order to

know and therefore to act voluntarily. One only needs to know the particular details surrounding an act.

But even this low standard of knowing the particulars is problematic. To use Aristotle's own example in Chapter One, let us examine the case of the person who throws things overboard from a ship during a storm. This action, according to Aristotle, is mixed, being neither fully voluntary nor fully involuntary. It is voluntary insofar as the act was preferred at the time it was committed, and it is involuntary insofar as the person had to adjust to the unfortunate necessity of the storm—he had to choose between two evils. And, as Aristotle says, “it is not easy to give an account of what sort of things one ought to choose in return for what sort of ends, since there are many differences among the particular circumstances” (III.1.1110b7-9). So the person who throws things overboard in a storm is between voluntary and involuntary action. There is, presumably, no way the person could have known about the storm before setting out on the trip. Chance played an enormous role in his or her decision. But while the ship in a storm is, in one sense, exceptional, in another important regard it is really quite typical. Given the fact of human uncertainty regarding the future (consider I.9-11), are not all human actions to some degree reminiscent of the boat example? Are there not always metaphorical storms that can descend in a moment's notice? Human beings are never entirely free from external constraint imposed by the outside world; necessity limits choice. Even the most voluntary of acts still in a very fundamental way mixed (*miktos*) at best, partaking somehow of both the voluntary and the involuntary. Despite Aristotle's neat distinction between voluntary and involuntary, his own example reveals the fact that reality is much more complex.

There is no neat division between voluntary and involuntary even though human beings hope to be able to draw one.

The official teaching, to be clear, is that force has to be something external in order to render an action involuntary—being carried off by either the wind or even another person. Someone, Aristotle says, may raise the objection that the pleasant and the beautiful are external sources of compulsion, and would thus render service done in their pursuit involuntary. From the very beginning of his account of moral responsibility in Chapter One, Aristotle faces an unnamed interlocutor who raises very Socratic reservation. Yet Aristotle rejects this objection on the grounds that if the objector were correct, *all* actions would be forced and none would be involuntary since, as Aristotle observes, “*everyone* does *everything* for the sake of these ends” (III.1.1110b11, emphasis mine).⁵⁶ This response does not do away with the problem, however. The pleasant and the beautiful were two of the three parts of the good listed in II.3. Aristotle here omits the advantageous, a quite telling omission, for if we concede that all are compelled to pursue their own advantage and cannot be blamed for it, no act remains for which one can be blamed.⁵⁷ The unnamed objector, to bring the beautiful and the pleasant together under one category, simply claims that people are compelled to pursue the good. His objection, then, carries considerably more weight, as it now begins to look a lot more like something Aristotle would agree with. What if, instead of asserting that the pleasant and beautiful are sources of compulsion, one were to assert that the good is a source of compulsion, insofar as human beings are such by nature as to pursue what appears to be good to them? Consider, in this

⁵⁶ Cf. *Republic* 505e.

⁵⁷ Cf. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* V.84-116.

context, the very famous opening lines of the *Ethics*. “Every art and every inquiry, and *likewise every action and choice*, seems to aim at some good, and hence it has been beautifully said that the good is that at which all things aim” (I.1.1094a1-4, emphasis added). Aristotle suppresses the most radical version of this objection: can anyone voluntarily pursue what he believes to be bad, or are all *compelled* to pursue the good as they see it? Aristotle has told us that every choice seems to aim at some good. Indeed, part of Aristotle’s reasoning for rejecting this as an excuse for vicious acts is that if it is true one could not take credit for virtuous acts done in pursuit of the beautiful. In other words, vice has to be voluntary because virtue is voluntary. But that is not a sound refutation of the objection and it depends upon the acceptance of the voluntary nature of virtue, something the interlocutor may not concede. Thus Aristotle begs the question: is virtue voluntary? This failed refutation merely highlights the greater problem. Is virtue voluntary? Aristotle’s unnamed objector could simply respond by contending that all actions—virtuous, vicious, or other—are involuntary. Aristotle limits his objector to a tame version of the argument that all human beings cannot help but pursue the good as they see it. Or, stated differently, no one voluntarily does wrong. Aristotle concludes his discussion of force by saying that it *appears* that what is forced is that whose source is external.

To repeat: Aristotle buttresses his account of the voluntariness of doing wrong by an appeal to voluntarily doing right. In other words, Aristotle here builds a case for intentional wrongdoing by reference to intentionally doing right. But this avoids the fundamental question. Can one voluntarily do right, or voluntarily do anything for that matter? Aristotle relies on his readers’ unwillingness to doubt that virtuous

acts could possibly be involuntary. But his proof in many ways presupposes what it is trying to prove, or at least presupposes agreement. This is good dialectical reasoning, insofar as it proceeds from agreements, but the judicious reader is justified in asking whether that agreement is warranted. The only way out of this impasse would be if each human being is somehow responsible for the way that the good appears to him or her, and Aristotle does not discuss that here.

Ignorance

Instead, Aristotle turns next in this chapter to discuss, rather briefly, ignorance with respect to volition. Obviously, ignorance is an excuse for wrong or vicious behavior. Therefore Aristotle has to distinguish culpable from non-culpable ignorance. He must articulate what makes some ignorance blameworthy and some ignorance excusable. However, Aristotle's discussion of ignorance raises more questions than it answers with respect to one's responsibility for one's conception of the good. In every instance, Aristotle tells us, what is done on account of ignorance is not a voluntary act (III.1.1110b18-19). Aristotle is quite clear in this section that ignorance of particulars is what excuses actions, not a more general type of ignorance. Thus Aristotle moves to a fairly moderate account of culpability that is in line with conventional thinking on the matter. But Aristotle has failed to argue how it might be the case that one is responsible for his own ignorance. To repeat, Aristotle says that there are two types of involuntary acts, those that happen through either force (*bios*) or ignorance. The sorts of things that are forced are those the cause of which is

external. The question that immediately comes to mind, then, is whether the cause of ignorance is internal or external.

At any rate, Aristotle very clearly articulates his official teaching regarding ignorance. As was just stated, one's actions are involuntary when one's ignorance is of particulars, and in this case there is pity and forgiveness. Aristotle distinguishes the six particular circumstances about which one could be ignorant. They are: who is acting, what the act is, what the act is concerned with, sometimes also the means, what the action is for the sake of, and how the act is done. Whoever acts ignorantly of any of these six particulars has acted involuntarily, Aristotle says, and especially the one who is ignorant of the most governing particulars, namely the things in which the action consists and for the sake of which the action is done (III.1.1111a15-21). Aristotle adds the caveat, without any argument, that it is necessary for the one who acts involuntarily also to experience pain and regret (*epimeleia*). This qualification is not unproblematic. It seems to presume, at the very least, a later awareness or recognition of the particulars of which one was previously unaware, and this may in fact never occur. A second problem is why one would experience pain and regret over something one has, by Aristotle's account, done involuntarily. If the act were involuntary in the strictest sense, one has no basis for feeling responsible for it. If the wind, to use Aristotle's example, forced one person into another causing the latter to fall to his death, there is no cause for regret. The person is, strictly speaking, not responsible for his actions. This is not, of course, to deny that human beings genuinely feel regret over matters for which they are not responsible. Of course they do. Rather it is to call into question the rationality of that regret.

Having set down conceptions of force and ignorance, Aristotle can now conclude with a definition of a voluntary act. A voluntary act “would seem to be one whose source is in oneself, when one knows (*oida*) the particular circumstances in which the action takes place” (III.1.1111a22-24). We should be clear that Aristotle hedges even more than usual in this circumstance. Instead of telling the reader what a voluntary act *seems to be*, which is already a far cry from telling us that a voluntary act *is*, Aristotle tells us what it *would* or *might* seem to be. That is, Aristotle uses the optative mood of “to seem” (*doxeien*) a mood indicating hope or wish, or at the very least a lack of certainty. Aristotle ends the chapter with a few objections to his conclusion, and dismisses these objections on the grounds that they are strange (*atopos*). While Aristotle may be correct to label these objections strange, strangeness, in and of itself, is no refutation. The truth, after all, may be strange.

Choice

In the next chapter, Aristotle distinguishes choice (*prohairesis*) from voluntary acts, because, although they are similar, they are not the same thing. Aristotle has told us that a voluntary act would seem to be one whose source is in oneself when one knows (or sees: *oida*) the circumstances of the act. Choice, Aristotle tells us, seems to determine what belongs most properly to virtue more than to individual actions. Because children and animals act voluntarily, but not as a result of choice, choice and volition need to be distinguished from one another. Choice doesn't immediately get us very far, then, although we quickly see that we cannot choose things that are impossible nor can we choose things that are possible but out of our control, such as

winning an athletic competition. We can choose things that lead to that end, such as preparing adequately, but we cannot choose the end itself, since, in the athletic example, we cannot control the decision of the judge or the training routine of competitors. The same line of argument holds for health and happiness. We cannot simply choose to be happy. To press the athletic metaphor, there are factors beyond our control in life just as in an athletic contest. We can only choose to train properly toward the end of health and happiness. Choice is of things related to the end. This still avoids the fundamental question, namely how does the end appear for one?

We are what sorts of people we are as a result of the choices we make, and not, Aristotle tells us, by opining. But there is a problem associated with this, and Aristotle points it out. Don't human beings make choices based on opinions about the good and the bad, and if so, where do those opinions come from? Aristotle does concede this:

And we choose what we most of all know (or see: *oída*) to be good, but we have opinions about things we do not know (*oída*) very well... And if an opinion comes before a choice or comes along with it, that makes no difference, for we are not considering this, but whether it is the same as any sort of opinion (III.2.1112a7-13).

All Aristotle is trying to do in this context is show that choice is different from opinion; for his current purposes he isn't trying to articulate the relationship between these two concepts. So we still are unclear about where our opinions come from or what way we might be thought to be responsible for them, especially our opinions about the highest end or goal (*telos*) of human life. It is clear that we do not simply *choose* our ends.

Deliberation

Chapter Two reaches an impasse, as choice is considered among voluntary things, but it does not exhaust the list. Some voluntary acts are not the result of choice. Aristotle raises the possibility, explored in the next chapter, that choice is a voluntary act that has been deliberated about. Aristotle tells us that deliberation concerns things that are up to us and have to do with action.

The Aristotle switches gears slightly and tells us that the causes (*aitia*) are nature, necessity, and chance—but also intelligence (*nous*). He moves on rather quickly to point out that deliberation is not about ends. “We do not deliberate about ends, but about the things that are related to the ends... But the end being posited,⁵⁸ they consider in what way and by what means it would be the case” (III.3.1112b15-16). Deliberation, then, is about means, not ends. The ends are given. But where do the ends come from? Aristotle’s digression would indicate that the ends come from nature, necessity, chance, or intelligence. Aristotle determines that deliberation is about the things one is to do by oneself, while the actions are for the sake of something else. The thing chosen, or the choice, is the result of the desired thing that has been deliberated about. Choice, then, would be the deliberate desire of things that are up to us. Aristotle decides to let this outline of deliberation and choice suffice.

Wishing

Aristotle does take up the question of ends in Chapter Four, though he does not resolve this question. Here he tells us that it has been said that wishing (*boulēsis*) is

⁵⁸ *Tithēmi*, Aristotle uses the middle voice leaving unclear who puts down the ends or how they are put down.

for the end, and that the end is thought by some to be the good and by others to be the thing appearing to be good (or the apparent good: *phainomenos agathos*). We seem, in Chapter Four and following into the next chapter, to have hit the heart of the problem with respect to Aristotle's official teaching on moral responsibility. In the choice between whether persons wish for the good or the apparent good, Aristotle seems to try to have it both ways. He asks rhetorically whether one must say that "what is wished for simply and truly is the good, but for each person the apparent good?" (III.4.1113a22-24). He seems to be saying that all human beings truly and simply pursue the good, but that some human beings go wrong and chase apparent goods, that is, things that are not truly good. The decisive step remains missing. Aristotle does not show how what is wished for is up to us. If anything, Aristotle has here indicated that the end, namely the good, is the thing that is truly and simply wished for, even if some human beings simply go wrong, misguided by pleasure.

Objections to Aristotle's Account of Moral Responsibility Thus Far

The movement of chapters one through four takes us closer to the problem; they do not solve it. The question, beginning in Chapter One, was what makes something voluntary. A discussion of volition didn't suffice; rather it led us into a discussion of choice, which led in turn to a discussion of deliberation, which culminated in a discussion of wishing. The question of responsibility keeps being put off. The conclusion is a let down, because Aristotle leaves unclear *how* the choice or wishing for the end is within our power or up to us. To be sure, the official conclusion that Aristotle draws in Chapter Five, albeit by hook or by crook, is that virtue and vice are

both up to us (III.5.1114b13 and ff.). That is, they are things we voluntarily do as a result of choice. Activities, or ways of being at work (*energeia*), are made up of acts that we choose in accordance with the end (*telos*) that is wished for. Our actions and choices are up to us insofar as we choose them in accordance with our *end*. Given the end, we voluntarily engage in means toward that end. But what of the end itself, or to complicate matters further, what of how we see that end? Is the end something given to human beings, given by god, nature, chance, or good-fortune? Would one voluntarily wish for a bad view of the end, especially if that means being unhappy? Can a human being voluntarily choose to be unhappy? To say that no one is voluntarily wretched or unhappy is partly true and partly untrue, according to Aristotle. No one, he says, is unhappy voluntarily, but he tells us that one can be base voluntarily.

Then Aristotle does something quite strange and, as far as I can tell, unique in the *Ethics*. He issues a challenge to the reader and essentially invites a refutation. If baseness is not voluntary, the thing ought to be disputed. In effect, Aristotle says, “Show me where I’m wrong.” If there are no objections, Aristotle will proceed as if vice and virtue were voluntary. But there were objections and another will indeed follow in Chapter Five. Aristotle is content, though, so long as his account of voluntary virtue and vice *appears* so (III.4.1113b20). He then adds as further proof of his official position the fact that lawmakers bear witness to it by punishing those who do vicious things. Aristotle defers to the actions of the political community, reminding us again of the political nature of the overall inquiry and once again alerting us to the sensitive nature of the discussion. The city must punish the

transgressors of the laws, and therefore must rely in deed on affirming moral responsibility. Moreover, Aristotle adds that lawmakers praise and blame in order to encourage virtuous behavior and to deter vicious behavior, highlighting the practical necessity of responsibility for governing. This appeal to common practice merely serves to show that common opinion agrees that there is such a thing as voluntary virtuous and vicious action, but appealing to popular opinion does not rise to the level of a proof. Moreover, Aristotle alludes to the fact that this action may be practical, even if not grounded on a true account of human action. In other words, Aristotle recalls to the reader's mind a standard other than truth, political utility. We would do well to remember that the purpose of this investigation is to *be* good, not simply to *know* it (II.2.1103b25 and ff.). The city must punish wrongdoers for the politically salutary reason that it encourages virtuous behavior among the citizens and discourages vicious behavior. Aristotle's account of moral responsibility in Book III serves his explicit aim very well. This is an account of moral responsibility that is perfectly in harmony with doing well. Whether or not it accords as well with knowing is another question.

Aristotle next moves to give a specific example of punishment, with the supposed intention of showing the compatibility of his theory of moral responsibility with the city's. In the example he uses, the perpetrator of the vicious act is ignorant but somehow responsible for his ignorance and therefore deservedly punished. "In fact," Aristotle says, "people apply punishment for ignorance itself if the one who is ignorant seems to be responsible for it, as when the penalties are doubled for people who are drunk, which is the cause of their ignorance." Aristotle's example is

revealing. People punish the drunk for purposefully becoming intoxicated, reflecting their belief that the drunk person is responsible for his or her condition. Does Aristotle's example serve to shed any light on one's responsibility for ignorance generally, or does it rather reveal the problematic nature of determining responsibility for ignorance. According to common sense, the drunk person is *more* responsible (if responsibility admits of degrees) than someone who is ignorant.⁵⁹ This is because a human being must *become* drunk; one doesn't start out that way. A human being's natural state is sobriety; one has to do something actively in order to become drunk. What about other forms of ignorance? Does one not begin from ignorance and have to be active to learn or come to know something? Does one *become* ignorant? The law of Athens that punishes intentionally becoming ignorant as a result of intoxication highlights, rather than solves, this problem. By likening drunkenness to ignorance, Aristotle invites us to reflect on both the similarities and the differences between the two and on what would have to be necessary in order truly to hold someone responsible for being ignorant.

The drunk is punished because it was presumably within his or her power not to become drunk in the beginning. By similar logic, Aristotle states that it was in the power of the unjust or dissipated person not to become unjust or dissipated in the first place, but this is asserted and not argued for. Is becoming unjust like becoming drunk? Is justice the natural state of a human being as sobriety is? Does Aristotle make use of or exploit the reader's tendency to believe that most human beings are

⁵⁹ Alcoholism, of course, only complicates these matters. Is one responsible for the genetic make-up that has inclined him or her to alcoholism? In other words, *is* one an alcoholic from birth or does one *become* an alcoholic? Aristotle's example only serves to highlight the problem of responsibility, as some human beings appear by nature to be less inclined to be able to make moderate use of alcohol.

decent to begin with? With respect to the fundamental question in this case, Aristotle is surprisingly reticent. Did the person who has become unjust know justice to begin with, or was he originally ignorant of it? With respect to ignorance, especially ignorance concerning the end (*telos*), can ignorance of the end ever be in one's own power? To what extent is one responsible for one's character? As Susan Sauvé Meyer says, "Aristotle no more requires the agent to be responsible for her character in order to be responsible for the action of feeling produced by character than he requires the statuary to be responsible for his statuary skill in order to be responsible for the statue he produces using that skill."⁶⁰ Aristotle does say, though, that we are responsible, in a way, for our active conditions, because "we are in control of their beginnings" (III.5.1114b32-1115a1). But Aristotle doesn't make clear the way we are in control in the beginning, and in fact earlier in the *Ethics* he gives good reason to doubt that the beginning is within our control. The beginning, at the very latest, would be when we are very young children, to whom Aristotle unequivocally does not grant choice (III.2.1111b8 and ff.). The beginning of our character or active condition would be formed in large part, if not entirely determined, by our nature and the way we are raised and not, therefore, be up to us in any serious respect. It would be senseless, then, to hold one accountable for his birth and the conditions of his childhood. It would be strange to hold someone thus responsible, even if some such conception of responsibility is necessary if society is to function.

Here we would do well to hearken to Aristotle's words when speaking about one's ability to be just and moderate: "It makes no small difference, then, to be habituated in this way or in that straight from childhood, but an enormous difference,

⁶⁰ Meyer, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility: Character and Cause*, p. 50.

or rather *all the difference*" (II.1.1103b23-25, emphasis mine). We thus find Aristotle in flat contradiction of himself. On the one hand he says we are responsible for the beginning of our active condition, and on the other he tells us very clearly that the beginning of our active condition is quite out of our own hands. Rather our active condition appears to be formed in large part by our parents and the political community, as well as by the influence of nature and chance. We could blame the parents, and hold them accountable, but this is quite obviously inadequate because they, too, are what they are as consequence of the habituation and nature they received from their parents. The process goes on and on so that no one is ever responsible for his or her actions. This problematic aspect of when responsibility begins, then, has to be suppressed because it threatens to undo any attempt to construct an account of moral responsibility. Political associations have to take a somewhat arbitrary but firm stand on the point at which someone becomes responsible for his or her actions.⁶¹

At the end of Chapter Five, Aristotle again raises an objection from an unnamed interlocutor, who presses Aristotle on the question of how one is responsible for his or her conception of the end. This is a powerful objection that threatens to undo Aristotle's clear account of moral responsibility:

But suppose someone were to say that all people aim at the apparent good, and they do not govern its appearance, but rather whatever sort of person each one is, of that sort too does the end appear to him. So if each one were somehow the cause of his own active condition, then he would also somehow be the cause of its [the end's] appearance. But if not, no one is the cause of wrongdoing for himself, but does these things on account of ignorance of the end, believing that by these

⁶¹ In the United States, the decision that we hold adults to be responsible for his actions the day he turns eighteen reflects both the need for a clearly defined answer to this otherwise difficult problem and the somewhat arbitrary nature of the precise cut-off. Why not seventeen?

means one will secure the highest good for oneself. But the targeting of the end is not self-chosen (*authairetos*); instead, one needs to be born having vision, by which to discern beautifully and choose what is truly good, and one is of a fortunate nature in whom this comes about beautifully. For with respect to what is greatest and most beautiful, and which is impossible to get or to learn from anyone else, but which one will have in such a condition as one was born with—to be well and beautifully born in this respect would be the complete and true blessing of nature (III.5.1114a31-b12).

Aristotle has quite beautifully and elegantly stated *the* serious objection to his official account of moral responsibility. If Aristotle's sole goal in the present case is to buttress moral responsibility, one cannot help but wonder why he gives such a powerful objection. This objection echoes Aristotle's earlier language, where he says that a recognition (*gnōsis*) of the end (*telos*) or highest good (*to ariston*) would have great weight in one's life and, "like archers who have a target, we would be more apt to hit on what is needed" (I.2.1094a18-24). Thus far, Aristotle has only been able to show that people voluntarily choose means based on a given end, but he has not shown how they are responsible for the end itself. To be clear, Aristotle has not shown that the end is self-chosen, and this is absolutely necessary if we are to be truly responsible for our actions.

Aristotle's official account of moral responsibility stands or falls by his ability to refute this objection related to our ability to choose ends. Aristotle does not do that. To this most serious, and logically compelling objection, an objection one might say that is perfectly in line with Socrates' radical paradox, Aristotle offers the following: If the objector is correct in asserting that no one voluntarily does wrong because no one is responsible for the way in which the good appears to him, then all virtue is similarly involuntary. And since we said the virtues were voluntary things,

“then the vices must be voluntary things too, since they come about in a similar way” (III.5.1114b21-25). Terrence Irwin rightly points out that Aristotle explains “that if we deny responsibility for our states of character, we must treat both virtue and vice as entirely non-voluntary.”⁶² But that is precisely the objector’s claim: both virtue and vice depend upon the fortune or chance of one’s birth; neither is voluntary. So Aristotle’s response to the objector rests on the conditional claim, never proven, that virtue is voluntary. Aristotle relies on the refusal of the reader to doubt the voluntary nature of virtue to defend the voluntary nature of vice. But the nameless objector did not call into question only the voluntary nature of moral *vice*; he likewise called into question the voluntary nature of *virtue*. The one who sees the end is of a fortunate nature, blessed, he even says, by nature. There is very no volition in being born possessing keen vision of the human end. It is, in the decisive respect, luck. The capacity to see beautifully what is truly good is not, strictly speaking, up to us. We are not responsible for this natural ability. Whether one comes to see the human end rightly or not depends on nature and birth. The nameless, Socratic objector calls into question Aristotle’s entire project with respect to moral virtue, and Aristotle only focuses on half of the difficulty—vice—in his response. The objector could respond by calling into question the voluntariness of virtue, something Aristotle certainly asserted but did not demonstrate (again, see III.5.1114b21-25). Moreover, Aristotle must recognize the line of argument of this objection, as his own response to the objection is couched in a conditional sentence. *If* virtue is voluntary, he says, *then* vice must be too. But that remains an open question. This conditional response ends Aristotle’s account of moral responsibility in Book III. He has officially rejected or

⁶² Irwin, Notes to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 320.

dispensed with the objection. Aristotle lets the matter stand thus, and simply reasserts—above the objection—the voluntary nature of both virtue and vice in order to move in the next chapter to his first discussion of a particular virtue, courage. For the intellectually serious person who expects Aristotle to put down soundly and resoundingly the objection of this unnamed interlocutor, Aristotle’s actual defense must be unsatisfying. Perhaps, however, he has satisfied the morally serious person with his rescue of moral responsibility. Whatever the case, Aristotle certainly has not done full justice to the far-reaching objection from his Socratic interlocutor. We will return to this powerful Socratic objection again in Book VII.

Concluding Thoughts on Book III

Despite the problems I mentioned, Aristotle’s official teaching regarding moral responsibility serves a definite purpose. On the surface, the official teaching is unequivocal, free of nuance, and falls perfectly in line with a conventional account of morality. Indeed it offers a reasonable basis for a traditional account of responsibility. One is responsible for one’s actions except when one is forced or ignorant, ignorance being clearly and narrowly defined here. Only external actions count as force, and ignorance is limited to ignorance of particular circumstances surrounding the act. Moral responsibility, an otherwise extremely problematic topic in moral and political philosophy, is neatly solved. Aristotle puts to rest any ambiguity in the question and asserts that human beings are in fact responsible for their behavior, virtuous or otherwise in order to move on, beginning in Chapter Six, to a discussion of particular moral virtues. The official teaching regarding moral

responsibility in Book III is free from controversy. Thus, Aristotle offers clear guidelines for legislators and citizens regarding moral responsibility. Moreover, he offers his readers guidelines for reasonably praising and blaming human action, guidelines that do not assign excessive blame or excuse too many actions. True to the spirit of his teaching regarding moral virtue generally, Aristotle's account of moral responsibility is very moderate. It provides clear and moderate standards for praise and blame, honoring and punishing.

This account of moral responsibility would have great appeal to a certain part of Aristotle's audience. In the last chapter, I argued that Aristotle intends to speak to a diverse audience in the *Ethics* and I identified the two major factions that he has in mind as the morally serious person and the would-be-philosopher. The account of moral responsibility that Aristotle offers in Book III would appeal, above all, to such a morally serious person. Moral virtue depends upon such an account. By contrast, I hope to have shown how the account in this chapter would not have satisfied the would-be-philosopher, because there are simply too many questions unanswered and objections that went unrefuted. The account that Aristotle here offers is therefore not addressed to him, except perhaps as a test to see whether he finds this account satisfactory. Rather, Aristotle offers a refined, moderate, reasonable defense of moral responsibility to men whose primary concern is with morality. Aristotle gives a politically salutary account of moral responsibility in Book III, and it is intended to address the concerns of those men for whom political health is of the utmost concern. Aristotle has shown to the morally serious person that philosophy, which is what Aristotle is engaged in here in the *Ethics*, is not subversive to political health and can

even contribute to the well-being of the *polis* by attempting both to clarify the basis of moral virtue and to provide it with a reasonably solid foundation. Philosophy and politics, at least this far, are perfectly compatible.

With his account of moral responsibility in Book III, Aristotle has made things clear and easy for us, and, as Terrence Irwin says, “we can either praise Aristotle for avoiding mystifying and misguided efforts to tackle the free-will problem or blame him for evading the central problem he should have faced.”⁶³ I have already noted the political reason why one would evade or suppress the central problem: a clearly defined account of moral responsibility is politically salutary and highlighting the problem is not. The problem with Irwin’s account of Book III is twofold. First, Irwin fails to make note of the political nature of the inquiry at hand and thereby doesn’t consider the possibility that Aristotle’s refusal to tackle the problem of moral responsibility could be intentional and serve a purpose. As Aristotle has indicated, and as I have shown, a clear account of moral responsibility free of theoretical problems is well-suited for a large constituency of his audience and also politically useful or even politically necessary. Secondly, Book III is not Aristotle’s last word on the matter in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. One of the great difficulties in the scholarly research on Aristotle’s account of moral responsibility is that works tend to focus exclusively on Aristotle’s account of moral responsibility in Book III. Occasionally his account in Book VII is addressed, but generally not in reference to Book III. That is, the scholarly works tend to treat these books in isolation from one another, and I think that this has led to many misinterpretations of Aristotle’s correct teaching regarding moral responsibility.

⁶³ Irwin, “Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle,” published in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, p. 117.

To that end, I will turn in the next chapter to investigate Book VIII, having made clear the many objections along the way that one could raise to Aristotle's account of moral virtue in Book III. By far the most far-reaching challenge to Aristotle's account is made at the end of this account in Chapter Five of Book Three in the name of the unnamed objector. My suggestion is that this objection is Socratic in nature, falling perfectly in line with the Socratic thesis that knowledge is virtue and even stating explicitly that no one is responsible for wrongdoing. That is, here in Book III, as Aristotle tries to turn the focus to an investigation and praise of moral virtue, he disposes of this calling into question of moral virtue made in the name of intellectual virtue. Aristotle wants to advocate moral virtue, even if its grounding cannot stand up to rational scrutiny. Socrates' name is suppressed in this objection, although he will later be named explicitly as Aristotle turns from moral virtue to investigate intellectual virtue. As I have shown, Aristotle's apparently clear account of moral responsibility in Book III is, when pressed under the weight of investigation, revealed to be riddled with problems. One cannot, therefore, take it as Aristotle's last word on the matter. In order more fully to understand his teaching, we are compelled to turn to his later investigation of the matter in Book VII where Aristotle names Socrates as his interlocutor. In other words, the main challenge to Aristotle's official account of morality in Book III is indeed issued by Socrates. In the next chapter we will turn to examine these sections in order to see if Aristotle's official account can withstand Socratic, that is, rational, scrutiny.

Chapter 4: Aristotle and the Socratic Impasse That No One Voluntarily Does Wrong

Transition from Moral to Intellectual Virtue

Having made clear the inadequate character of Aristotle's earlier articulation of moral responsibility in Book III in the previous chapter, I will turn in the present chapter to Book VII in order to explore Aristotle's fuller or more precise account of the relationship between knowledge and virtue, and hence, of moral responsibility. To restate the findings of the last chapter, in Book III Aristotle had limited voluntary and therefore culpable actions to those acts that are free from force and ignorance, where force and ignorance are very narrowly, and also inadequately, defined. For a fuller account of moral responsibility, especially as it relates to force, but above all as it relates to ignorance, Aristotle must meet head on the best or at least most powerful argument opposed to his earlier account. The issues Socrates raised must be addressed if Aristotle's account of virtue is to be persuasive. He must face Socrates as the representative of the position that *all* wrongdoing is the result of ignorance and therefore excused. Socrates' argument threatens to explode Aristotle's neatly defined, yet inadequately defended, boundary between culpable and non-culpable ignorance. After a lengthy but necessary preparatory investigation into Aristotle's earlier account of moral responsibility, we are now in a position to understand Aristotle's direct treatment of the so-called Socratic Paradox in Book VII. This open

disagreement, or dialogue, concerning moral responsibility, will bring to light the relationship between ethical and intellectual virtue. This clash of intellectual titans will force Socrates and Aristotle's respective arguments into the open, enabling one to gain greater clarity about these arguments.

Turning from an analysis of Aristotle's account of moral responsibility in Book III to an examination of the same topic in Book VII, we must note that Aristotle makes a new beginning in Book VII (1145a15) that was prepared for in Book VI. Book VI marks beginning of Aristotle's treatment of intellectual virtue (VI.1. 1139a and ff.). Early in Book VI, Aristotle reminds us that, "We *were* claiming that the virtues of soul are divided into those that belong to ethics (*ēthos*) and those that belong to thought (*dianoia*)" (VI.1.1138b35-1139a1). Aristotle reminds the reader of the distinction he made in Book II, between ethical (*ēthikē*) and intellectual virtue (*dianoētikē*). Up to this point, Aristotle's investigation of virtue has focused almost solely on ethical virtue, taking this division for granted, and Aristotle now intends to take up the question of intellectual virtue. But in the interim, he briefly considers the role that the intellect plays even in in ethical questions. But admitting intellectual virtue into the discussion threatens to undo everything Aristotle has done, insofar as his earlier treatment spoke of ethical virtue independently of intellectual virtue. The discussion at the end of Book VI points to the *need* for a new beginning, thanks in large part to Aristotle's brief encounter with Socrates at the end of Book VI, for Aristotle's division between intellectual and ethical virtue has depended upon either a refutation or a suppression of Socrates' radical thesis that virtue is knowledge. Because he raises Socrates' identification of knowledge and virtue, Aristotle is now

compelled to return to his earlier remarks concerning choice and moral responsibility, and this ultimately leads to a direct investigation of the so-called Socratic Paradox. In order to rescue moral virtue, Aristotle must now deal, in some way, with Socrates. Either Socrates must be rejected, moral virtue must be rejected, or they must be reconciled in some way.

Aristotle begins his discussion of intellectual virtue by first speaking about the soul (VI.1.1139a2-3). The soul, Aristotle reminds us, is composed of two parts, the irrational and the rational parts (VI.1.1139a3-4; cf. I.110226-28). This division of the soul into two reminds the reader of the tenuous division of virtue into two that Aristotle is now calling into question. The account of intellectual virtue—as distinguished from moral virtue—that follows in Book VI reflects the division of the soul into a rational and irrational part. Indeed, the division of virtue into two parts may depend upon Aristotle's ability to maintain the division of the soul into the rational and irrational.

In Book I, however, Aristotle had said that the sort of speech that divides the soul into two is used abundantly in exoteric or popular arguments (*exōterikoi logoi*) and one ought to make use of them (1102a26-27); Aristotle says that it makes no difference for the discussion in Book I if this is an accurate understanding of the soul or simply a way of understanding the soul metaphorically. The analysis of intellectual virtue that follows is therefore problematic, insofar as it relies on this questionable division of the soul. It suffices to say that Aristotle has not here defined what a soul is, or even that it is.

Aristotle's reinvestigation of virtue leads to a reinvestigation of choice, which was important in his earlier account of moral responsibility. Aristotle quickly asserts that there is no choice without intellect (*nous*) and thinking (*dianoia*; VI.2.1139a33-34). This being the case, Aristotle must turn to a search for intellectual virtue, and this investigation treats virtue from a higher plane (*anōthen*, VI.3.1139b14). Judged by this higher standard, what, he asks, is the relationship between intellectual and moral virtue? If thought and intellect play a role in choice, Aristotle must clarify the distinction he made between moral and intellectual virtue in Book II, as the two now prove to be more intimately linked than was previously asserted.

Indeed, Aristotle gives the reader good reason to doubt that the distinction between the rational and irrational part of the soul holds up under investigation. Instead, the two parts of the soul may well collapse into one another and be ultimately indistinguishable: "For good action (*eupraxia*) is an end (*telos*), and desire (*orexis*) is for this. On account of this, choice is either desiring intellect (*nous*), or intellection (*dianēotikos*, adj.) desire, and this sort of beginning (*archē*) is a human being" (1139b3-5). These remarks, coupled with Aristotle's earlier indication that dividing the soul into two is how the soul is spoken of in exoteric writings, should lead the reader to stop and reevaluate Aristotle's earlier distinction between the rational and irrational parts of the soul, for it now appears that the two are inextricably linked. Indeed, they may always have been inseparable by nature (I.13.1102a30).⁶⁴ It is therefore possible that the soul exists and acts as a single unit for Aristotle. Joe Sachs

⁶⁴ Terrence Irwin says, "For his [Aristotle's] complex theory of responsibility depends heavily on the Platonic division of the soul which is always accepted in the Aristotelian ethical works." *Ibid*, p. 143. While Irwin is correct to say that Aristotle makes use of the division of the soul into a rational and irrational part in the *Ethics*, he does not note the ways in which Aristotle himself points to the limitations of this way of speaking about the soul.

points us to *De Anima* for Aristotle's more careful and complex consideration of the soul. Aristotle, he says, "suggests that all activities of the soul belong to it as a whole, at 429b11-22... and, at 432a22-b8, that desire is present in all thinking."⁶⁵ In other words, the account of intellectual virtue that follows in Book VI rests upon an inadequate understanding of the soul, that, in the last analysis, may not be Aristotle's true understanding.⁶⁶ Perhaps Aristotle will give us an indication as to how we could begin to think about intellectual virtue based on a more careful consideration of the soul.

At any rate, Aristotle spends the bulk of Book VI, as he states at the beginning, attempting to solve the problem of the target.⁶⁷ For in all the active conditions of the soul, he says, "there is some target to which the one who has a rational understanding looks off as he tightens or loosens his grip" (VI.1.1138b21-23). In trying to solve this problem, Aristotle enters a region where, it would seem, thinking enters into considerations of moral virtue.

Prudence or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) emerges as the most likely power of the soul that provides the necessary link between moral and intellectual virtue, since it is the intellectual faculty that deals with determining the right action in a particular circumstance. Moral virtue deals with actions, and prudence is that power

⁶⁵ See Sachs' Translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, page 102, note 141.

⁶⁶ Consider also *Republic*, where Socrates calls into question his earlier tripartite division of the soul, saying there is a longer road that leads to a better understanding of the soul (504b). He provides a hint almost immediately by saying that "Now this [the good] is what the whole soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything" (505d-e). If we can speak of the soul as being unified in its pursuit of the good, the earlier tripartite division would no longer hold. I would also consider Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* in this context, which treats philosophy, a seemingly rational activity, as the manifestation of an intense erotic desire (201d-212c,).

⁶⁷ The problem of the targeting of the end has been with us all along. See I.1.1094a22-24; II.6.1106b31-33; III.12.1119b16-19. Also VI.12.1144a7-9, where Aristotle says "For virtue makes the target correct, and prudence the means to it [the target]." I discussed at length in the last chapter the problem of targeting the end. See especially III.5.1114b and ff. where Aristotle discusses the difficulty in correctly seeing the target.

of the soul that is a “truth-disclosing active condition involving reason about human goods that governs actions” (VI.5.1140b20-21). But Aristotle finally concludes that it is impossible to be prudent without being good (VI.12.1144a36-1144b1), further blurring the distinction between ethical and intellectual virtue. Prudence (*phronēsis*), a sort of intellectual virtue, emerges as necessary for moral virtue. But once an intellectual virtue has been admitted to be in some way concomitant with moral virtue, the boundaries between them are murkier than before. Indeed, Aristotle tells us, some people even say that *all* the virtues are forms of prudence (VI.13.1144b17-18). “Some people,” as it turns out, is Socrates, and Aristotle concedes that Socrates was partially correct in speaking of virtue and prudence in the same breath, although he was also partially mistaken. He was correct insofar as he said there is no virtue without prudence, but mistaken insofar as he said that all virtues are forms of prudence (VI.13.1144b18-21). This is Aristotle’s first explicit reference to any version of the so-called Socratic Paradox, and this encounter makes evident the dire need for a fuller treatment of Socrates and his understanding of the relationship between moral and intellectual virtue.⁶⁸ In order to maintain the dual division of virtue, Aristotle must distinguish his position regarding prudence from Socrates’ position.⁶⁹ Aristotle certainly tries to distance himself from Socrates’ identification of moral and intellectual virtues, but manages only a slight separation from the Socratic position. Whereas Socrates believed that all the virtues *are* reasoned accounts

⁶⁸ Socrates equates prudence with virtue in *Meno* 88c-d. This is but one formulation of the so-called Socratic Paradox.

⁶⁹ J.J. Mulhern tries to argue in “Aristotle and the Socratic Paradoxes,” p. 295, that despite that fact that it is true that Aristotle nowhere provides a solution to the Socratic Paradox in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, an Aristotelian solution can be constructed based on the distinctions Aristotle has made concerning virtue from Book I forward, his prime example being the distinction between intellectual and moral virtue. I, however, try to show that the Socratic Paradox calls precisely this distinction into question.

(*logoi*), we, Aristotle says, believe they are *with* or accompanied by (*meta*) reason (*logos*) (VI.13.1144b28-30). It is unclear who “we” are in Aristotle’s statement. Aristotle says most emphatically that Socrates equates virtue with prudence, but he also indicates that Socrates thought virtue was reasoned accounts (*logoi*), and only parenthetically alludes to the most radical formulation of that thesis, that virtue is knowledge(s) (*epistēmai*, VI.13.1144b29-30). If virtue does in fact equal knowledge, then no one who possessed knowledge could fail to act virtuously.

Socrates’ radical identification of virtue and practical wisdom at the end of Book VI, which is alluded to in its less radical form, calls Aristotle’s entire ethical project into question, so a more thorough investigation of intellectual virtue and Socrates’ thoughts on the matter is called for. Aristotle has raised a problem by raising the question of what role wisdom and knowledge play with respect to virtue, and the insufficiency of his account of intellectual virtue at the end of Book VI demands a more thorough investigation of this topic. Having introduced Socrates’ understanding of the relationship between wisdom and virtue, Aristotle is compelled to make a new beginning in Book VII and tackle this problem directly. For Aristotle’s account of moral virtue to stand, Socrates’ theses must be either refuted or at least rejected.

A New Beginning

Aristotle calls the reader’s attention to the importance of Book VII with the pronouncement of a new beginning. Aristotle’s encounter with Socrates at the end of Book VI requires a more complete investigation, and Socrates’ thesis must be

addressed directly instead of in passing.⁷⁰ The difference in Book VI between Aristotle and Socrates concerning moral and intellectual virtue culminates in a direct confrontation between Aristotle and Socrates in Book VII. Aristotle finally addresses the Socratic objections that he managed to postpone or reject in Book III, since he can no longer hold Socrates at arm's length.⁷¹ Indeed, the fact that Aristotle engages the foremost political philosopher, Socrates, in direct dialogue in Book VII further alerts the reader that Book VII promises to be a most philosophically rich book, and certainly marks an ascent over his quick dismissal of a nameless Socratic objector in Book III. The encounter between Socrates and Aristotle in Book VII will allow us to see whether moral virtue in its best articulated form can withstand Socratic investigation. The main objector to the *Ethics* as it has been presented thus far is not the unethical or immoral man, but the philosopher.⁷² Socrates' objections to Aristotle's account of moral virtue can be said to reach their climax in Book VII, and here, as opposed to the earlier encounters, Aristotle turns his sight to meeting Socrates directly and in name. It is reasonable, then, to suppose that Aristotle's direct treatment of Socrates' impasses in Book VII—and indeed of Socrates' final appearance in the work—marks a clear ascent over Aristotle's discussion of moral

⁷⁰ J.J. Mulhern, "Aristotle and the Socratic Paradoxes." He rightly points out that there generally have not been too many commentaries that treat both the end of Book VI and the beginning of Book VII, but he argues that the two references to Socrates are arbitrarily divided by their assignment to different books. I, on the other hand, argue that the encounter at the end of book VI with Socrates offers such a profound challenge to Aristotle's account of moral virtue that it requires a break and a new beginning, so that the division between books VI and VII is not arbitrary.

⁷¹ I addressed the inadequacy of Aristotle's response in Book III to a Socratic objector (especially III.5.1114a31-1114b25) in the last chapter of this dissertation.

⁷² Cf. *Republic* 336b-354c, *Gorgias* 481b-523a.

responsibility in Book III, as it is now a much more philosophic investigation. Book VII stands apart from the rest of the book.⁷³

Upon making his new beginning, Aristotle immediately expands the moral universe beyond the limits of the investigation in the previous six books, and it turns out that virtue and vice do not exhaust the human possibilities. In addition to vice, there are two other character flaws that are to be avoided: incontinence,⁷⁴ which has hitherto only been alluded to, and brutishness. As virtue is opposed to vice, so continence is opposed to incontinence. The opposite of the beast-like state is something heroic and godlike, Aristotle tells us, as Homer made Priam say about Hector (VII.1.1145a18-21). Both of these states are exceedingly rare among human beings, Aristotle tells us, and although he will provide many examples of the bestial state in Chapter Five, he avoids giving an example of this rare, god-like man.⁷⁵ It is certainly possible that bringing us into dialogue with Socrates, as Aristotle is about to do, leads us to an example of that rare god-like human being, the philosopher.⁷⁶

⁷³ Thus Ronna Burger, in *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*, p. 132 says, "It [Book VII] seems to have left behind the gentleman as a member of its audience, along with the attempt to capture ethical virtue as the virtuous person understands it." Moreover, Aristide Tessitore says, "More than any other book in the *Ethics*, Book VII departs from the standard of *orthos logos* that provides the dominant horizon for the treatise as a whole. The more extensive use of arguments drawn from dialectic and natural philosophy and, in general, the greater emphasis on puzzle and discovery, reveals that the dominant horizon is not the only or even fundamental one. The radical dissimilarity between the life of the philosopher and that of the *kalos k'agathos* [the gentleman] emerges most clearly for those willing to undertake a thoughtful reading of Book VII..." (*Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, p. 72)

⁷⁴ I will render *akrasia* as incontinence and *engkrateia* as continence. I would prefer "lack of self-control" and "self-control" were the former not so cumbersome.

⁷⁵ For the problematic nature of Aristotle's use of Priam's "pitifully ironic" words about Hector, see Burger *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*, pp. 132-133.

⁷⁶ Both the godlike and beast-like man live outside of the political community. Consider Aristotle's remarks in *Politics*: "One who is incapable of participating or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god" (I.1253a26-29). Consider in this context also Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, Maxim and Barb number 3: "To live alone you must be an animal or a god—says Aristotle. He left out the third case: you must be both—a *philosopher*."

Instead of a discussion or example of this rare, god-like human being, Aristotle instead introduces three new terms: softness (*malakia*), luxuriousness (*truphē*), and endurance (*karteria*). He then turns briefly to a consideration of the method he will undertake at this point in the book. Aristotle's new beginning in Book VII requires a new method of investigation as well. It is necessary, Aristotle says, after having posited things as they appear to be (*ta phainomena*), to go through the impasses or confusions, in order bring to light all the respectable opinions (*endoxa*) regarding these experiences. And here Aristotle clearly refers to these phenomena as experiences (*pathē*). If the difficulties are resolved, and the respectable opinions remain, then the matter will have been brought to light sufficiently (VII.1.1145b2-7). The goal appears to be to leave respectable opinions intact to the degree that this is possible.⁷⁷ The problem is clear: If Aristotle's explicit aim is to keep received opinions intact, his aim is not to bring the *truth* regarding the matter under investigation fully to light. He will only push matters as far as they can go while still leaving received opinions intact.

Once he has established his new method of inquiry, Aristotle turns first to an examination of continence and incontinence. Now it seems, Aristotle tells us, that continence and endurance are morally serious and therefore praiseworthy, while incontinence and softness are low and blameworthy. These then are the phenomena as they present themselves and as they are generally understood. According to common opinion, continent people are morally serious, and should accordingly be praised because they stand by their reasoning and do not fall into doing things that are based on account of passion. The incontinent person, by contrast, succumbs to his

⁷⁷ Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*, p. 137.

passions all the while knowing that his actions are base. Some people say that a continent person is like a moderate and a person of endurance, while others deny it. But earlier, Aristotle calls moderation a moral virtue (III.10.1117b23 and ff.), and he will soon deny that the moderate person is continent, on the grounds that a moderate person does not have strong or base desires that are characteristic of the continent person (VII.2.1146a9-15).

Although continence, according to common opinion, is praiseworthy, Aristotle withholds his agreement with that judgment and therefore only delicately or with great hesitation points to the problem with continence, namely that the continent person possesses base desires. But he does point us toward the confusion that is revealed in respectable opinion according to which continence is praiseworthy, and this may help us to understand why Aristotle withholds his praise of continence. The continent and the incontinent person are similar in a fundamental way that Aristotle fails to make clear, though he does leave the conclusion to be drawn. Both the continent and the incontinent person share base passions, and it would be absurd to praise as virtuous someone who possesses base desires. Moreover, greater continence is called for only in the case of extremely intense base passions. Continence is praised despite, or precisely because of, the presence of base desires, and, in the case of tremendous continence, despite the presence of tremendous, base desires. The praise recognizes that the person is base, but that he has somehow overcome his baseness. Moreover, precisely this self-overcoming is what is praiseworthy, and this makes even less sense, since it is also a part of the self that is overcome. The

continent person is both controller and controlled.⁷⁸ A human being cannot control himself unless he is composed of more than one psychic element, for example a rational and an irrational part. Aristotle has prepared us for this understanding of the soul, and encouraged us to make use of it, but it is an understanding that is used abundantly in popular or exoteric writings. Since the soul is only spoken of as two-fold in such writings, there is good reason to think that continence and incontinence are also popular or exoteric understandings of the phenomena. The phenomena of continence and incontinence are so confused that one wonders whether they even exist or if they are not just a useful way of describing human psychology that would ultimately have to be rejected in favor of a more precise understanding of the soul.

All of this is meant to reveal the impasses regarding moral virtue and incontinence that Aristotle has not brought clearly to light. And it makes sense, given his proposed method of inquiry in Book VII, that he does not mark these confusions as clearly as possible, since he hopes to keep respectable opinion intact. After all, one ought not to disparage continence, especially if disparaging it leads people not to moderation, but to licentiousness. Before moving on, it must be pointed out that Aristotle indeed distinguishes incontinence from licentiousness (*akolaston*), and he also brings it to light that some people speak of incontinence with respect to spiritedness, honor, and gain. He will treat these later.

The Socratic Impasse

In Chapter Two, however, the impasses regarding incontinence come to a head, but Aristotle refuses to raise any of the confusions regarding incontinence in his own

⁷⁸ Consider *Republic* 430e and ff.

name. Instead he puts these in the mouths of others. The impasses come from two sources, namely philosophy and sophistry, and these are two activities that must be distinguished. Putting the impasses in the mouths of others allows Aristotle to play the role of guardian of respectable opinion, or as an arbiter between the gentlemen and the philosopher, a role perfectly suited to allow him to follow his proposed method of inquiry. Someone, Aristotle says, might raise an impasse: “Some” (*tines*) say that it is not possible for one possessing knowledge to behave without continence. Here, however, as opposed to his use of earlier unnamed interlocutors in Book III, Aristotle identifies the objector who raises the impasse (*aporein*) as Socrates. Indeed, “it would be terrible,” according to Socrates, “if, when knowledge is present, something else were to master it and drag it around like a slave” (VII.2.1145b23-24).

This is the second reference in just a few short pages to Socrates. At the end of Book VI, and here again in Book VII, Aristotle points to two Platonic dialogues where Socrates takes up a question concerning virtue. Earlier, Aristotle made mention of Socrates’ position in the *Meno*, and here in VII.2, he takes up Socrates’ position in the *Protagoras*. The *Meno* can be said to have as its theme the question, “What is virtue?” and the *Protagoras* has as its theme the question, “Is virtue teachable?” In the *Protagoras*, Socrates chastises the opinion of the many, who think that knowledge does not rule when it is present in a human being, but that something else rules him, be it anger, pleasure, pain, erotic love, or fear. Thus the many liken knowledge to a slave being dragged around by all the others.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ In the *Protagoras* and here in the *Ethics*, Plato and Aristotle both use *andrapodon* as the word for slave, as opposed to the more common *doulos*, confirming that Aristotle is indeed referring to the *Protagoras* here.

Indeed, Socrates used to do battle against the argument that knowledge could be overpowered altogether, saying there is no such thing as incontinence (VII.2.1145b25-26). This is no small impasse that must be reconciled, as Socrates does not simply say our understanding of incontinence is in need of clarification. He rejects outright the *existence* of the phenomenon we are trying to understand.

The articulation of Socrates' argument consists of three parts. First, as was just mentioned, Socrates claims that there is no such thing as incontinence. Secondly, Socrates denied the existence of *akrasia* because he thought that no one acts contrary to what takes to be best. Lastly, one only acts contrary to what is best as a result of ignorance. Aristotle refrains from mentioning the radical conclusion that Socrates draws in the *Protagoras* from these arguments, perhaps because this would prove to be an irresolvable conflict between the Socrates and respectable opinion. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates states the conclusion to Protagoras in the only part of that passage where he speaks in the first person: "For I pretty much think that none of the wise men holds that any human being voluntarily errs or voluntarily carries out any shameful and bad deeds. Rather, they well know that all those who do shameful and bad things do them involuntarily" (345d-e). In other words, if Socrates' understanding of incontinence is correct, it would destroy Aristotle's earlier account of voluntary wrongdoing and, with it, respectable opinion. If Aristotle's account of moral virtue and moral responsibility is the most plausible articulation of moral virtue and responsibility, then Socrates' thesis undermines moral responsibility as such.

The problem with Socrates' position concerning the relationship between virtue and knowledge, according to Aristotle, is that Socrates' argument (*logos*) is in

contention with the phenomena (*phainomenois*) that come plainly to sight (*enargōs*; VII.2.1145b27-28).⁸⁰ Respectable opinion (*endoxa*) relies a great deal on the way that things appear or seem to be, and Socrates denies that appearances accurately capture reality.⁸¹ By denying the phenomenon of incontinence, Socrates stands in stark contradiction to respectable opinion. Socrates' position is paradoxical in the literal sense that it runs contrary to respectable opinion.⁸² Aristotle aims to reconcile respectable opinion with the impasses that occur, to the extent that such a reconciliation is possible. In other words, Aristotle tries to reconcile philosophy and the city as the impasses raised here are those raised by philosophy. But the extent to which Socrates' thesis regarding *akrasia* genuinely runs contrary to the opinions of the city, going so far as to deny the existence of a moral phenomenon, dims the prospects for any reconciliation. The difference, after all, is not simply about the correct way to understand something but whether that something exists.

Moreover, if Aristotle's intention is to preserve respectable opinion, he should simply drop Socrates' radical denial of the existence of incontinence. Socrates' rejection of incontinence can be rejected on the grounds that it contradicts plain appearances; it can be rejected precisely because respectable opinion fails to take seriously the impasse posed by Socrates' thought. In fact, Aristotle indicates that Socrates is alone in his rejection of the existence of continence, therefore posing very little threat to respectable opinion. The benign nature of Socrates' denial of this

⁸⁰ W.D. Ross translates perhaps too strongly in his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Now this view [i.e., Socrates'] plainly contradicts the observed facts."

⁸¹ *Endoxa* is related to the Greek verb *dokein*, to seem.

⁸² Weiss, *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies*, p.5. Aristotle seems to be the originator of referring to Socrates' arguments as the Socratic Paradox, insofar as Aristotle states that Socrates' arguments contradict the way things appear.

phenomenon does not result from a lack of radicalism, but rather because it is so radical that it garners little to no attention from the morally serious. Socrates' impasse is likely to be laughed off or identified with mere sophistry (VII.2). Instead of letting sleeping dogs lie, instead, that is, of suppressing or reconciling this tension between Socratic thought and respectable opinion—Aristotle instead chooses to highlight the tension, contrary to his explicit aim.

Indeed, Aristotle takes the paradoxical nature of Socrates' argument to be justification for an investigation into the matter, instead of a justification for letting it drop, as he immediately says that it is *necessary* to examine whether the experience (*pathos*) of incontinence is really ignorance, as Socrates says it is, and if so, what manner of ignorance (VII.2.1145b28-29). Moreover, Socrates is now the judge before whose bar respectable opinion must come, not the other way around, as Aristotle earlier indicated. Aristotle's procedure thus shifts the burden of proof from Socrates to those who would reject his thesis. That is, Aristotle's procedure is to examine attempts to refute Socrates, with every failed attempt strengthening Socrates' thesis, as opposed to attempting to use Socrates' thesis to refute respectable opinion.

Aristotle begins his inquiry into Socrates' claim by stating a rather straightforward opinion regarding the incontinent. He tells us, "That such a person [the *akratic*] believes beforehand is apparent (*phaneron*)" (VII.2.1145b30-31). Aristotle leaves unclear precisely what it is that the unrestrained person believes beforehand, and we are left to fill in the gaps for ourselves. Aristotle suggests—he does not explicitly state—that the unrestrained person, at the moment he behaves without self-restraint, acts contrary to a previously-held belief. This much, at any

rate, is apparent. Of course, this formulation is problematic, since it is precisely appearances with which Socrates' arguments contend. An appeal to appearances, when these are precisely what are at stake, is not a refutation of Socrates. If such an appeal to appearances were sufficient, there would have been no need to inquire in the first place.

Aristotle next points out that some attempt to save respectable opinion by conceding considerable ground to Socrates, but rejecting other parts of his argument. This attempt too is unsuccessful. Aristotle says that these are willing to concede to Socrates that nothing is more powerful than knowledge, but they try to save the phenomenon of incontinence by distinguishing between knowledge and opinion. While it is impossible to act against knowledge, these people think that one can act against his opinion concerning what is best. This objection serves a valuable role as it reveals the more problematic aspect of Socrates' thesis by what it refuses to accept. These people are unwilling to agree to the thesis that no one acts contrary to what seems best to them. But this is precisely the grounds upon which Socrates denies the existence of incontinence. In other words, this is the heart of the matter. The denial of the existence of incontinence depends upon the thesis that no one acts contrary to what he takes to be best: *because* no one acts contrary to what he takes (*hupolambanō*) to be best, but only as a result of ignorance, there is no such thing as incontinence (1145b25-27).

While these people deny the central aspect of Socrates' argument, they do not turn to a direct examination of it. Instead they focus their sights elsewhere, differentiating between knowledge and opinion. They offer no argument to refute

Socrates' contention that no one acts contrary to what he takes to be best. And while the distinction between knowledge and opinion could certainly carry the argument forward, it could also be equivocation in the service of avoiding the fundamental problem. At any rate, Aristotle gives every indication that the distinction that such people make between knowledge and opinion is not sufficient for refuting Socrates' thesis. Presumably, this argument turns to opinion because opinion is weaker than knowledge. But since there tends to be forgiveness for people who behave incontinently as a result of either the weakness of their opinions or even self-doubt, Aristotle says, this cannot be what we are after, for incontinence is something blameworthy, not forgivable. Moreover, there is fundamental agreement here between them and Socrates, as they concede to Socrates that unrestraint is impossible for one who knows. At any rate, Aristotle will return to opinion (VII.3, and again in VII.8-9). After two attempts to disprove Socrates' thesis, it still stands.

Next Aristotle raises the question of whether incontinence occurs when prudence (*phronēsis*) resists. Aristotle raises the possibility because he rejected opinion on the grounds that it was too weak, so he decides to see if incontinence occurs when something stronger, namely prudence, resists. Aristotle, however, immediately rejects this possibility as absurd, since this would require the co-presence of prudence and incontinence, and no one would claim that a prudent person would voluntarily do base things (VII.2.1146a4-7). Here Aristotle concedes considerable ground to Socrates' thesis; prudence cannot be present when one does

base things.⁸³ Prudence, at any rate, is too strong, and opinion is too weak to be what resists when incontinence occurs.

The discussion of the relative strength or weakness of the faculty that attempts to resist when incontinence occurs leads Aristotle to examine the strength or weakness of that which it opposes. What causes the tension? It turns out that the continent person possesses strong, base desires and is thus distinguished from the moderate person (VII.2.1146a9 and ff.). In fact, the continent person must have strong base desires, for if he possessed only weak desires, continence would be nothing great.

Aristotle quickly points out that this line of argument can begin to devolve into a sophistic impasse (VII.2.1146a21-1146b5). The sophistic argument states that an senseless person would be better off incontinent than continent, because, as a result of incontinence, one does the opposite of what one believes is best. One's senselessness in such a situation thus mistakes bad things for good ones, and as a result of incontinence with respect to what one believes to be good (which is actually bad), he will choose what he believes to be bad (which is actually good). So incontinence, according to sophistic argument, is not always bad. But these types of arguments are not made with a view toward understanding the phenomenon of incontinence, but are made instead with a view to being impressively clever. Such an argument is irrefutable, but provides no clear direction out of the argument, and seeks to remain at the level of paradox. Here Aristotle distinguishes the kind of impasse

⁸³ "We are brought up short, however," says David Schaefer, "by the realization that the view Aristotle has now adopted—that prudence is incompatible with wrong action—is actually a form of the Socratic thesis he had found to contradict the *phaenomena*!" ("Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle's Account of *Akrasia*," p. 227).

(*aporia*) raised by Socratic inquiry from the impasses raised by sophistic inquiry. Indeed, Aristotle separates Socrates' impasse from the sophistic impasse by a number of steps. Moreover, we would do well to remember that Socrates' impasse suggested to Aristotle the need for further inquiry, and Aristotle sees no such necessity with respect to the sophistic impasse. Merely sophistic argumentation seems to be for the sake of refuting someone (*elenchein*), or forcing them into a paradox (*paradoxos*). Thus, Aristotle distinguishes Socratic inquiry from the use of paradox, reserving the use of the term paradox as a term of disparagement.⁸⁴ It is clear, then, that the so-called Socratic Paradoxes are not paradoxes at all, at least not as the term is used or understood by Aristotle.⁸⁵ To refer to Socrates' theses as paradoxes is to reduce them to sophistic games, and to incline one to reject them as such. From the treatment that Aristotle gives to Socrates' views on knowledge, virtue, and unrestraint, it is clear that he viewed them as genuine impasses, rather than sophistic paradoxes. Perhaps it would be useful, and more accurate, to refer to the Socratic Paradox as the Socratic Impasses.

⁸⁴ See, for example, *Metaphysics* Book Γ, Ch. 7: "Now this opinion has come about for some people in the same way that other paradoxes have; for whenever one is not able to refute (*luen*) eristic arguments, by giving in to the argument, he concedes the thing on which the reasoning was based to be true." (1012a18 and ff., slightly altered from Sachs's translation). Consider also *Rhetoric* II.21, II.23, and III.11, 14, and 18.

⁸⁵ Weiss, in *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies*, argues that Socrates employs his so-called paradoxes for the sake of defeating opponents, namely the sophists, in argument, and this is precisely the manner in which Aristotle here disparagingly says the sophists employ paradoxes. Socrates' overarching goal in practicing philosophy is not the pursuit of wisdom or knowledge of truth according to Weiss; rather, Socrates' overarching concern is "to eradicate the false beliefs and puncture the bloated self-image of others" (p.4, but see Chapter One in its entirety).

Can One Who Knows Be Incontinent?

Aristotle continues to press Socrates' impasse in the next chapter, laying out two tasks that remain in his investigation of incontinence. First he must take up the question of whether the incontinent acts knowingly (*oida*) or not, and if so, in what respect; then he will expand the inquiry to a host of topics including what sort of a thing continence and its privation are concerned with, what the relationship is between them, as well as their relationship to endurance and softness, and "similarly for all other points belonging to this theoretical inquiry (*theōria*)" (VII.3.1146b6-14). It is especially noteworthy that here in Book VII, the study has risen to the level of a theoretical inquiry (*theōria*), especially considering that earlier in the *Ethics* Aristotle told us that the inquiry was not for the sake of contemplation or theory but rather in order that we might become good (II.2.1103b26-28).⁸⁶ This confirms our earlier suspicion that Book VII marks a clear ascent over the previous books, and begins to embark on philosophic investigation. Specific to our purposes, the inquiry here in Book VII marks an ascent over Aristotle's earlier treatment of the same material in Book III. Moreover, the present inquiry can no longer be said to be strictly for the sake of actions—if we are concerned merely with actions, perhaps the earlier account suffices. If, however, we are interested in intellectual clarity, the inquiry must become theoretical and requires contemplation.

A proper beginning point for the inquiry is to determine whether continence and incontinence are distinguished by what they are involved with or by the manner in which they are involved with whatever that thing might be. It is certainly possible,

⁸⁶ Aristotle has only mentioned *theōria* twice up to the point in the work. In the first instance, he denies that the present occupation, i.e., the *Ethics*, is for the sake of *theōria*. The only other place is where Aristotle speaks of beholding (or contemplating) a great and beautiful work (IV.2.1122b).

Aristotle states, that continence and incontinence are distinguished in both of these regards. In other words, with respect to what and in what manner do we say a person lacks continence? Is it possible to be incontinent with respect to all things, or is simple, unqualified incontinence concerned only with one thing? Raising these questions reveals that we do not yet know what incontinence is, so we are not yet in a position to judge Socrates' position with respect to it. Aristotle's first insight is that the incontinent person is concerned with the same things that a licentious person is concerned with, namely pleasure, but the incontinent and the licentious differ in the manner in which they are involved with these same things. The licentious person differs from the incontinent insofar as he chooses the pleasant things, because he believes the pleasant thing should always be pursued, whereas the incontinent person pursues the pleasure at hand despite believing that he ought not to pursue it. The licentious person is not marked by any internal struggle.

By distinguishing between the licentious and the incontinent with respect to belief, Aristotle must revisit the question of what it is that the incontinent person believes. And so Aristotle will make six attempts in this chapter to refute Socrates' thesis and save the phenomenon of incontinence. First, Aristotle will consider whether the incontinent person possess opinion but not knowledge; second, he will distinguish two senses of knowing; third, he will distinguish the different ways one knows premises with heavy reliance on an example; fourth, he will compare the incontinent person to someone who is drunk, asleep, or insane; fifth, he will treat the topic from the standpoint of nature, again making heavy reliance on an example; and last, he will again compare the incontinent person to one who is drunk or asleep (this

time leaving out insane). The parallels between the third and fourth attempts, on the one hand, and the fifth and sixth attempts, on the other, should be noted. I will treat in turn each attempt to save the phenomenon.

As in the last chapter, Aristotle turns first to opinion—this time qualifying it as true opinion—and again rejects this possibility quickly. It is not against true opinion that the incontinent person acts against, Aristotle avers, because people believe in their opinions just as strongly as people who know, as Heraclitus indicates (1146b24-31). From a subjective standpoint, there is no difference between knowledge and opinion.

Aristotle's second attempt to save the phenomenon of incontinence relies on the equivocal way in which the word "knowledge" is employed. It is possible, Aristotle says, for someone to have knowledge but not to use that knowledge, and it is also possible for someone to have knowledge and to put it to use. It makes a difference whether the one who has knowledge is contemplating (*theōreō*) or not contemplating what it is necessary to do (1146b31-34). Here in the chapter that has risen to the level of a theoretical inquiry, Aristotle indicates that in order to do what it is necessary to do, one must contemplate knowledge. The *Ethics*, which, as stated above, Aristotle says is for the sake of action and not for the sake of theory or contemplation, now reveals that contemplation is necessary for doing what it is necessary to do. In other words, in the context of a theoretical inquiry into the question of the relationship between virtue and knowledge, Aristotle now emphasizes the primacy of contemplation for living well. In order to do what one ought or needs to do (*dei*), one *must* contemplate. For, to return to the argument, it would seem

terrible (*deinos*), Aristotle says, for one to act contrary to knowledge while contemplating it, but it would not be terrible if one were to act contrary to knowledge while not contemplating it. This distinction between the two ways of knowing could save the phenomenon of incontinence, but if it does, Aristotle fails to draw that conclusion. Indeed, this distinction, as David Schaefer says, “is plausible enough, yet incomplete, inasmuch as it does not explain *why* it is that the akratic fails to exercise his knowledge.”⁸⁷ Moreover, it is not clear that this distinction captures the phenomenon as it presents itself. The phenomenon of incontinence, by outward appearances, is marked by the tension between knowledge and desire—that is, both are present and active and the phenomenon is the tension between the two and the ultimate failure of knowledge. If knowledge is inactive, there is nothing against which desire struggles. If the knowledge is not being exercised or contemplated, Aristotle’s distinction fails to account for that apparent tension.

Recognizing that the treatment is incomplete, having sided yet with neither common opinion nor Socrates, Aristotle continues his attempt to examine whether people are unrestrained knowingly by distinguishing between two different manners of having premises. Nothing, he says, prevents someone from acting contrary to knowledge who has knowledge of both the universal premise and the particular premise but who uses only the universal premise. And the universal premise itself differs, as it consists of two parts. The example of a universal premise that Aristotle gives is that dry food is beneficial to every human being. The two parts of this universal premise, then, are dry food and human being, and there are two particular

⁸⁷ Schaefer, “Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle’s Account of *Akrasia*,” p. 229. Emphasis in original.

premises that would have to follow in order to arrive at the conclusion that one ought to eat this particular food. The entire syllogism would run as follows:

Universal Premise:	(Every) Dry food is beneficial to every human being
Particular Premise 1:	This particular food is dry food
Particular Premise 2:	I am a human being
<hr/>	
Conclusion:	This particular food is good for this particular human being

One would have to hold all three premises to arrive at the conclusion that one ought to eat this particular food. It would not be absurd at all, Aristotle tells us, if one possessed the universal knowledge in this case but acted against it because he lacked particular knowledge. In other words, it would not be strange if one possessed the premise that dry food is beneficial for a human being but failed to eat it because one does not have the premise that the particular food in front of one is dry food or if one does not activate (*energeō*) that premise. Under these circumstances, presumably, one could knowingly act without continence. But it would be amazing, Aristotle says, if one knew the universal premise and the particular premise that this food is dry food and failed to eat it.

There are, however, two very important and related problems with this attempt to explain incontinence. The first has to do with the veracity of the first universal premise, the second with the seemingly uncontroversial recognition of oneself as a human being.

In this seemingly morally irrelevant example of eating dry food, Aristotle offers us the possibility of a universally valid premise with respect to all human beings. But the entire project of the *Ethics* thus far has should lead us to be

suspicious of the notion that there are any universally valid rules for a human being to follow. Aristotle's discussions of both justice and of the mean ought to compel the reader to question the notion that there can be a universally valid principle of action. Aristotle does mention in II.6, however, three actions for which there is no mean condition—adultery, theft, and murder. These actions carry the connotation of baseness as soon as one names them, Aristotle says (1107a9-12). Aristotle provides very little argument as to why these actions are base, but his assertion that the name of these actions already carries with it the particular judgment of baseness is revealing. Murder, for example, already carries in its name the connotation of a base killing, thus leaving open the possibility that there can be a taking of human life that is not murder. The action itself is killing, and one can inquire whether a particular act of killing is justified or if it is unjustified, i.e., if it is murder. To call a killing murder is already to have pronounced on the question of its baseness.⁸⁸ Perhaps there are justifications, such as self-defense, for killing under certain circumstances. The city, at any rate, must insist that killing under some cases is justifiable, or else it could never defend itself in war and would, of necessity, perish. Is euthanasia, to mention another example, ever justified by the demands of mercy? And is suicide ever justifiable?⁸⁹ And can we not imagine a situation which would at least compel us to reflect on whether adultery could ever prove justifiable? What, for example, if an act of adultery were the only way to save the life of one's spouse?⁹⁰ Or what if it were the only way to procure an heir to the throne and thus maintain civil order and prevent

⁸⁸ The Greek is *androphonia*, which is slaughter of men. An *androphonos* was a legal term, and referred to someone convicted of homicide (See entry in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*).

⁸⁹ Consider Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, especially §6.

⁹⁰ Consider Genesis 12 and 20. Twice Abraham tells his wife Sarah to pretend she is his sister.

the city from falling into civil war?⁹¹ Less imagination is necessary, I suppose, to consider an example where taking someone's property without his or her consent is justifiable. I am not attempting here to prove that these actions are in fact excusable; it is enough to have muddied the waters sufficiently and to suggest that actions, because they deal with particulars, cannot be treated simply in universals. Indeed, Aristotle gives the reason every reason to doubt that such a set of rules exists. Aristotle insists on the variability of particular actions, and this is why his account of moral virtue focuses on the more ambiguous mean conditions of the soul as opposed to trying to discern a universal set of moral rules.

Even justice, according to Aristotle, is varied or changeable. Many, in fact, take the variability of justice as evidence that all justice is strictly conventional, but Aristotle insists that there is something just by nature, even if it is changeable (V.7.1134b18-33).⁹² Justice, then, is much like health. There is a natural conception of what it means for a human being to be healthy, even if each particular instantiation of health varies relative to the particular human being.

Indeed, to return to the text, perhaps this is why Aristotle chooses the seemingly innocuous example of eating dry food. For even this example is

⁹¹ Consider, for example, the circumstances that led to the Norman conquest of England when the childless King Edward the Confessor died without a clear heir apparent.

⁹² Consider what L. Strauss has to say about the variability of the demands of justice, according to Aristotle: "There is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there are no universally valid rules of action. Not to repeat what has been indicated before, when deciding what ought to be done by this individual (or this individual group) here and now, one has to consider not only which of the various competing objectives is higher in rank but also which is most urgent in the circumstances. What is most urgent is legitimately preferred to what is less urgent, and the most urgent is in many cases lower in rank than the less urgent. But one cannot make a universal rule that urgency is a higher consideration than rank. For it is our duty to make the highest activity, as much as we can, the most urgent or the most needful thing. And the maximum effort which can be expected necessarily varies from individual to individual. The only universally valid standard is the hierarchy of ends. This standard is sufficient for passing judgment on the level of nobility of individuals and groups and of actions and institutions. But it is insufficient for guiding our actions." (*Natural Right and History*, p. 163)

problematic when judged in the light Aristotle's discussion of the appropriate amount to eat in II.6. There, when determining how much one ought to eat, Aristotle insists that the proper amount of food one ought to eat must be judged in relation to the particular human being who is doing the eating: six pounds of food is not enough for Milo the wrestler, but it is probably too much for most human beings (1106b1-4). There is no universal rule telling one whether (or, more precisely, how much) one ought to eat. This means, to return to the syllogism, that one cannot *know* the universal premise that Aristotle stated the person *possesses* (he does not say the person knows that premise). There is no food that is universally good for a human being, as food can admit of excess. The incontinent person mistakenly tries to discover universal rules that apply when in fact none can be found. As such the universal premise is likely to contradict other universal premises. I will return to this problem when Aristotle takes it up again in his next example.

The second problem with this syllogism is that one would have to ask whether this particular dry food is beneficial for this particular human being. As in the Milo example, one would have to know not only that one is a human being in order to eat correctly, but also what *type* of human being. Now, of course, knowing one's dietary needs is not philosophically interesting, but this pedestrian example points to the higher philosophic imperative to "know thyself." Aristotle insists that one might possess the particular premise that one is a human being, but two questions should follow. First, "what is a human being?" And to ask what a human being is, for Aristotle, is to ask its end is, and it is unclear that the common sense recognition that one is a human being would qualify as scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) of what it

means to be a human being. Moreover, one would have to be able to distinguish what type of human being one is, or where, within the full range of human possibilities, one falls. In other words, if the philosophic imperative to know oneself is no easy task, it calls into question the ability of most people to determine what is truly good for them. While Aristotle reveals the uncontroversial problem with the first particular premise (he admits that one can fail to recognize that this particular food is dry), he leaves it to the reader to find fault with the universal premise and the second particular premise. To repeat, there are two problems with the example Aristotle gives when trying to save the phenomenon of incontinence by distinguishing between the two ways of possessing premises. The first was the dubious possibility of a human being knowing a universal premise with respect to human conduct, and the second was the highly questionable notion that most people know what it means to be a human being in both the universal and particular case. Looking back to the high standard Aristotle set for scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) in Book VI—knowledge must be the result of a demonstration deduced from first principles (*archai*)—we see that it is doubtful if there can ever be knowledge concerning human action, considering its necessary variability. Indeed, one wonders whether knowledge thus understood is possible at all.⁹³

⁹³ In order to demonstrate a matter, the demonstration would have to proceed from truth (*alētheia*) or a first principle or, more simply, first thing (*prōton*). Consider the difficulty Aristotle has in explaining how the mind or soul (*psuchē*) grasps the first thing (*prōton*) in *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100a3-b17. The soul cannot know (*epistamein*) the first principle, but it can grasp it by intellection (*nous*). At the very least, this intuitive intellection of the first principle seems out of harmony with Aristotle's heavy emphasis on empiricism earlier in the *Posterior Analytics*. If the truth, strictly speaking, of the first principles cannot be *known* simply, then the prospects for demonstration are questionable. Consider also Maimonides *The Guide of the Perplexed* II.3, 15, 24 where Maimonides says that Aristotle never made a demonstration concerning heavenly things..

After the food example, Aristotle mentions another way that one can have knowledge but fail to use it, and this person both has and does not have knowledge. Aristotle likens this person to someone who is asleep, insane, or drunk. Aristotle has used this language several times before in Book III when discussing ignorance (III.1.1110b20 and ff.; III.5.1113b30-33). I have argued that Books III and VII need to be read in conjunction with one another, as they treat of the same topic, and, in Book III, Aristotle likens the insane and drunk to the ignorant. If the analogy holds both forward and backward, Aristotle quietly intimates that the incontinent person is indeed ignorant, which means that he cannot therefore act knowingly. The phenomenon of incontinence has not yet been saved, and Socrates' equation of virtue and knowledge still stands.

Aristotle next turns to investigate the phenomenon of incontinence from the point of view of nature. Stated in somewhat different terms, he looks for a physical cause of the phenomenon.⁹⁴ Perhaps this step follows from the physical description that Aristotle has just given of the *akratic* as akin to someone who is asleep, drunk, or mad. Turning to a natural or physical investigation suggests that the previous argument of the chapter is a different type of investigation, and Aristotle generally distinguishes between natural and logical inquiries. The parallelism that I noted between Aristotle's third and fourth inquiry, and fifth and sixth, is clearer with this distinction in mind. Aristotle examines the same considerations, first from the standpoint of logic, and then from the standpoint of nature.

Just as in the logical inquiry, Aristotle makes heavy use of an example in his physical inquiry. Aristotle first gives the example of someone who holds the

⁹⁴ Aristotle says that one can look into the cause physically (*phusikōs*).

following two premises: first, all sweet things ought to be tasted, and second, this particular thing is sweet. The conclusion would lead the one who holds these two premises to taste the sweet thing, assuming the person is able and in no way prevented from doing so. Just as in the previous example, the conclusion follows from a universal premise and a particular one. Of course, this example does not speak of the incontinent person but rather the licentious person, and so we would have to adjust the premises for the incontinent person. For him, the universal premise is that no sweet thing should be tasted, a highly dubious premise. Indeed, both the licentious person and the incontinent person hold extreme, unreasonable universal premises. As is often the case with Aristotle, the reasonable premise would be the more moderate premise that some sweet things should be tasted. I have already gone over the difficulty with trying to find universal premises with respect to human action, so there is no need to dwell on the difficulty, but it is remarkable that Aristotle fails to call either universal premise into question. At any rate, the incontinent person holds the universal premise that no sweet thing should be tasted, and he also holds an additional universal premise: every sweet thing is pleasant. Finally, he holds the particular premise that this particular thing is sweet. One more thing is necessary, Aristotle says, for incontinence to occur. Desire must also be present. Since Aristotle had earlier cast doubt on separating desire from intellect, there must be an intellectual component to desire (VI.2.1139b3-5). The desire must somehow contain the notion (opinion, belief) that the particular object is worthy of desire, i.e., that it is good. Aristotle does not make it clear, but the incontinent person holds two contradictory premises concerning what is good. The first universal premise that the incontinent

person holds, that no sweet thing should be tasted, can be slightly modified so as to say that it is good not to taste sweet things. The second universal premise is that every sweet thing is pleasant, hence the desire for the sweet thing. The missing, but implicit premise is that pleasure is good. In other words, the incontinent person holds the contradictory premises that eating sweets is both good and not good. If the premise that some good things ought to be tasted is the reasonable one to hold, the incontinent person has not sufficiently thought about when and under what conditions it would be good to taste something sweet and instead prefers the seeming simplicity of ready-made universal prohibitions and commands in an attempt to reduce the complexities of the world into all-or-nothing categories. Indeed, animals are incapable of incontinence for precisely this reason, Aristotle tells us, because they are incapable of forming universal conceptions (VII.3.1147b3-5). At any rate, Aristotle makes clear what is going on in the mind of the incontinent person. On the one hand, he holds the universal premise that sweet things ought not be tasted, and, on the other, he holds that sweet things are pleasant. The incontinent person ultimately acts as a result of the latter premise. The opinion that the sweet thing is pleasant wins out in the case of the phenomenon of incontinence. This is the opinion that governs action—the final premise. Its finality results from the fact that it is the final premise at work that governs the action.⁹⁵ Aristotle says that someone can lose his continence because of a reasoned account, in a way, and by an opinion that incidentally contradicts correct reason (1147a35-b3). The incontinent person's actions contradict his universally held premise that one ought not to taste sweet things. But he does not

⁹⁵ Ronna Burger's comments here were extremely helpful for understanding this section (*Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 143-144). She points out that the premise "sweet things are forbidden" would be the final premise for the continent person.

know such a thing, and the fact that he possesses contradictory opinions regarding the matter reveals his lack of knowledge.

Since this final premise is not universal and does not seem to pertain to knowledge in the same way as something that is universal, it seems as well that what Socrates was seeking turns out to be the case, Aristotle says: “For it is not when knowledge in the authoritative sense seems to be present when the experience of incontinence occurs, nor is it this that is dragged around by passion; rather it is when the perceptive is present” (1147b13-17).⁹⁶ VII.3 is a highly condensed, philosophically rich chapter in which Aristotle conducts a theoretical investigation which includes both a logical inquiry and an inquiry based on nature. And here, despite setting out to dispel Socrates’ contention and preserve common opinion, Aristotle concedes one aspect of the so-called Socratic Paradox: no one knowingly does wrong; knowledge cannot be dragged around like a slave.⁹⁷ Moreover, Aristotle has saved, in a way, the phenomenon of incontinence, although he has radically altered the understanding of this experience. The incontinent person is not overcome by passion; rather, he is guided in his actions by the final premise that the sweet thing before him is pleasant. At this point, the discussion with Socrates appears to have concluded, but the conversation concerning incontinence continues for another seven

⁹⁶ What is here translated as “the perceptive” is *tēs aisthētikēs*. While most translators agree that the adjective refers back to knowledge (*tēs epistēmēs*) in the previous line, which would render it “perceptive knowledge” or “knowledge bound up with perception,” Aristotle is at least somewhat ambiguous.

⁹⁷ Indeed, John Cook Wilson (*Aristotelian Studies: I. On the Structure of the Seventh Book of the Nicomachean Ethics, chapter I-X*) finds Aristotle’s agreement with Socrates in VII.3. so contrary to what Aristotle says elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* but also and especially in the *Eudemian Ethics*, that he rejects that VII.3 could have even been written by Aristotle. The agreement with Socrates, he says, “appears quite unworthy of Aristotle” (p. 48), and his answer in VII.3 is “worse than no answer”; moreover, “there is no trace of this doctrine in the other books of the Nic. Ethics” (p. 49). Cook Wilson in fact points to the first half of Book III as evidence that the conclusion in VII.3 is not Aristotle’s, which I treated in the last chapter. I readily acknowledge the apparent inconsistency between Books III and VII, and the current investigation aims to resolve that tension.

chapters. We can immediately identify two reasons why the discussion continues. In the first place, Aristotle has failed to make clear why the incontinent person acts on the basis of the premise “this sweet thing is pleasant” instead of on the basis of the premise “one ought not to eat sweet things.” Second, Socrates’ denial of incontinence was only one aspect of the fundamental perplexity that he raises. Socrates denies the phenomenon of incontinence because he holds that no one acts contrary to what he thinks is best, but only as a result of ignorance, and Aristotle has not directly addressed this contention. Can one knowingly do wrong, acting contrary to what he thinks is best?

Continuing Investigation of Incontinence

Having not yet answered these questions, Aristotle continues to press the issue, trying to discern what incontinence is simply or without qualification. It is clear, he tells us, that continence and incontinence have to do with pleasure, just as softness and endurance have to do with pains. But pleasures themselves must be divided, Aristotle here tells us, first into the necessary and unnecessary. The necessary pleasures are those that have to do with the body, especially those that deal with touch and taste. Among unnecessary pleasures, Aristotle first speaks of those that are choiceworthy in themselves; the examples he gives are victory, honor, and wealth. One can be incontinent with respect to money, or gain, or honor, or even spiritedness, but these particular instantiations are only incontinence in a qualified sense or are only called incontinence by a certain likeness (VII.4.1147b31-35). As further proof that these examples are not incontinence simply, Aristotle points out that greater blame is

attached to incontinence simply. So, under this bifurcation, Aristotle concludes that incontinence deals with the necessary pleasures of the body, the same things with which licentiousness is concerned, namely food, drink, and sex. While Aristotle's original division of pleasure was into necessary and unnecessary, he now divides pleasure according to its naturalness. Some pleasures are beautiful (or noble, *kalon*) and serious, and thus choiceworthy by nature, and there is a class of pleasures contrary to this. If the class is truly contrary, it would consist of unnatural pleasures for the base or shameful and non-serious. The pleasures that Aristotle had just spoken of as unnecessary but choiceworthy in themselves—money, gain, victory, and honor—are now said to be in the middle between natural and unnatural.

Having argued that there is no incontinence in an unqualified sense with respect to these in-between pleasures, Aristotle now turns to investigate the relationship between incontinence and unnatural pleasures, pleasures that one feels as a result of a defect, habituation, or possessing a depraved nature (VII.5.1148b15-19). Aristotle will determine that there cannot be incontinence, strictly speaking, with respect to these unnatural pleasures either. Aristotle has quietly opened the account of those who knowingly do wrong to include others besides the incontinent person. In addition to the incontinent, the licentious person as well as the brutish person may potentially do wrong knowingly. But in none of these cases would it seem that the actor acts against what he believes to be best. The licentious person, we can infer from what Aristotle has said before, proceeds on the premise that all sweet things should be tasted, for example. There is very little to dispute in the case of the licentious person; he clearly acts in accord with what he believes to be best, and, as

Aristotle has defined him, the licentious person pursues pleasures related to the body.⁹⁸ Aristotle will return to a discussion of the licentious person momentarily. At present, he wishes to discuss a new moral low, the brutish, animal-like condition. Twice in this context, Aristotle mentions the tyrant Phalaris by name.⁹⁹ The tyrant, over and above the *akratic*, would seem most of all to be in a position to be able to do knowingly whatever he wishes without fear of retribution and without regret.¹⁰⁰ In this case, Aristotle speaks of the nefarious activities of Phalaris, who took pleasure in such unnatural activities as roasting his victims alive and cannibalism (VII.5.1149a13-14). Aristotle limits his examples of animal-like behavior to barbarians and tyrants, as both stand outside of society in their way. People arrive at this condition, to repeat, from either a defect, improper habituation—for example, those who have been abused since childhood—or from having a corrupt nature. Aristotle compares these beast-like human beings to the insane or the diseased. The reason that Aristotle argued that one cannot be incontinent with respect to the in-between pleasures was that no blame attaches to them in the way that blame attaches to incontinence with respect to natural, i.e., bodily pleasures. Here, too, Aristotle argues that there is no such thing as incontinence, and he cases this conclusion a lack of blame. These diseased, depraved, beast-like humans are frightening. Indeed, these beast-like men are so repulsive that “they escape our judgment of blame. We cannot recognize in them a human being to condemn.”¹⁰¹ Nature, or an abused childhood, or

⁹⁸ Indeed, in the *Protagoras*, which is the dialogue most relevant to Aristotle’s treatment of the Socratic thesis, Socrates implies that Protagoras is a teacher of injustice. Protagoras does not praise incontinence, but licentiousness (*akolasia*, consider 341e, 349d, 359b).

⁹⁹ *Politics* V.10.1310b26-31.

¹⁰⁰ Consider Plato, *Gorgias* 466b and ff., *Republic* 344a, 573b-580c; and Xenophon, *Hiero*.

¹⁰¹ Burger *Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 148.

disease has rendered them inhuman. If these people do wrong, the cause seems to lie in the way they became what they are.

Next Aristotle turns to incontinence with respect to spiritedness, and theorizes that this is less shameful than incontinence with respect to desires insofar as spiritedness seems to follow reason in a way (VII.6.1149a24-26). Moreover, spiritedness seems to be more natural, insofar as it is more common for human beings to become spirited than to follow desire excessively.

In VII.7, Aristotle distinguishes continence and incontinence from endurance and softness. Continence and incontinence have to do with pleasure, while endurance and softness have to do with pain. With respect to pleasure and pain, most people are in-between the extremes. Most people, that is, fall somewhere between being continent and incontinent, just as most people fall between endurance and softness. This is important because it throws light on the discussion that came before. Most people are neither virtuous nor vicious, but somewhere between continence, endurance and their respective privations. Aristotle makes one further division in incontinence, between impetuosity and weakness, before moving on to discuss licentiousness. The weak person acts incontinently after having deliberated, while the impetuous one acts without control on account of hastiness.

But if these two are distinguished, they are united by the shared feelings of regret, which also distinguishes them from the licentious. The incontinent person is thus curable, while the licentious person is not. The incontinent person is better off than the licentious person, then, since the best thing remains in him, which is correct

opinion concerning the first principle (*archē*).¹⁰² Despite occasionally departing from correct opinion concerning the first principle as a result of passion, the incontinent person still preserves it (VII.8.1151a24-26). Indeed, it is the presence of correct opinion that defines both the continent person and the incontinent person, although the former stands firm in his correct opinion while the incontinent person stands apart from correct opinion on account of passion.

Aristotle's Agreement with Socrates

At this point, Aristotle turns to conclude his discussion of incontinence. Once he has clarified what incontinence, continence, softness, and endurance are, both Socrates' position and respectable opinion remain intact. Aristotle has accomplished his self-imposed goal of reconciling respectable opinion to the impasses. Moreover, Aristotle ends this discussion by agreeing with the Socratic thesis that no one knowingly does wrong, having unpacked this enigma, and provided insight into what it means.¹⁰³ One such insight is the distinction between knowledge and correct opinion. Correct opinion, which both the continent person and the incontinent person

¹⁰² Earlier, Aristotle said that the licentious person was better off, since there was nothing to tell the one who already knew what to do but simply lacked the self-control to do it (VII.2.1146a31-1146b2).

¹⁰³ This is by no means universally concluded. J.J. Mulhern, in "Aristotle and the Socratic Paradoxes," declares that for Aristotle the doctrine that virtue equals knowledge is too simple to be true. Yet he admits that he struggles to find textual evidence to the contrary: "It is true, of course, that Aristotle's entire solution to the paradox is not to be found in this or any other compact passage of the *Ethica*..." (p. 295). It is also not clear to my mind why simplicity is grounds for determining the falsity of a doctrine. He also rejects the paradox as Aristotle's opinion because he argues that that would mean no one does wrong willingly. Because, as he says, "if this conceptual paradox were left standing... no one does wrong knowingly" (p. 295). Mulhern correctly draws the conclusion, but is dissatisfied with the result. Mulhern finds that those scholars who think Aristotle and Socrates agree focus solely on VII.3. I hope that I have avoided this accusation by my careful treatment of III.1-5 and VII.1-10. My investigation of Aristotle's treatment of the Socratic Paradox has gone to great effort to place that investigation within Aristotle's broader discussion of morality and moral responsibility—it is not an isolated treatment of a handful of lines ripped out of context.

possess, is capable of being overcome by the desire for pleasure, but knowledge is not. No one, Aristotle says, echoing Socrates, can knowingly do wrong, and the one who possesses practical wisdom cannot be incontinent. The weakness of opinion, even correct or true opinion, points to the strength of knowledge. But there can be no scientific knowledge regarding moral virtue, of right and wrong, since this is the realm of action (*praxis*), which is necessarily variable, and thus does not admit of universally valid rational principles. The most that one can hope for is to possess prudence, and the prudent person both sees what one ought to do and is able to act on it (VII.10.1152a8-9).¹⁰⁴ It seems, Aristotle says, that the one who possesses prudence is able to deliberate beautifully about the things that are good and advantageous for living life well as a whole (VI.5.1140a25-28). Despite leaving it unclear how precisely one comes to possess prudence or lacks it, Aristotle gives every indication that nature and habituation determine one's standing.

Indeed, nature and habituation are decisive in forming all of these active conditions. To repeat, both the one who possesses continence and the one who lacks it possess correct opinion concerning first principles. One arrives at correct opinion of the first principles in the first place as a result of either nature or habituation, and one stands by that correct opinion or fails to as a result of nature or habituation. With respect to the incontinent person, Aristotle points to the fragility of correct or true opinion that rests solely on habituation. Correct opinion is not sufficient for correct choice. Although Aristotle states that the incontinent person is so voluntarily, because he somehow sees what he is doing, he gives every indication that nature or

¹⁰⁴ Here Aristotle says the prudent person possesses knowledge, using the word for knowledge that is related to sight, *oida*, as opposed to the word for scientific knowledge, *epistēmē*.

habituation is responsible for making the incontinent person possess such an active condition that leads to incontinence in the first place. Aristotle now answers the question he left unanswered in VII.3. There, as I pointed out, Aristotle left unclear why the continent person acts on the basis of the final premise that one ought not to taste sweet things, while the incontinent person acts on the basis of the final premise this sweet thing is pleasant. Here the answer is revealed: it is either the result of the person's nature or how that person was habituated. Very little, it would seem, in the determination of what sort of a human being we are to be, is up to us. Both the continent person and the incontinent person possess correct opinion, and whether they stand by that opinion or apart from it depends on their nature and upbringing.

It turns out, then, that Aristotle's stance toward respectable opinion has undergone a quiet but radical change. Aristotle does not deny outright the existence of the phenomenon of incontinence, but he has parted ways with the usual interpretation of the it. In parting with the conventional interpretation of incontinence, Aristotle reveals his fundamental agreement with Socrates, as both assert an analysis of the phenomenon that leaves intact the primacy of the good in action. Aristotle has kept the phenomenon of incontinence intact as well as the plain facts of the matter, thus preserving respectable opinion to a degree. But he has so radically altered the understanding of the phenomenon that incontinence is left standing only in name. It no longer looks like incontinence as previously understood. Before, this phenomenon was understood to occur when the part of the soul that possesses knowledge is overcome by the desiring part of the soul. Aristotle here denies that the phenomenon of incontinence is the desiring part overcoming

knowledge. Desiring and thinking, we should recall, are inseparable. Instead, the incontinent person possesses conflicting opinions about what is good. The incontinent person, indeed all human beings, desires to be happy with his whole soul. But the incontinent person, and similarly the one who possesses continence, possesses conflicting views of what will bring him happiness. Indeed, incontinence is now understood to be the inability to stand by one's conception of what is good for oneself in the face of a competing good while continence is the ability to stand by one's conception of the good. Nature, habit, or some combination of the two determines which opinion one stands by.

Although habit is very hard to change, it is easier to change, Aristotle says, than one's nature. The problem is that long habituation comes to resemble nature. Here Aristotle quotes Evenus, who says, "I tell you, friend, it [habit] is exercise continued for a long time, and so this, for human beings, ends up being their nature" (VII.10.1152a32-33). Aristotle presents Evenus as a sort of moral determinist, and even seems to endorse this view.¹⁰⁵ Whether we are virtuous or vicious, continent or incontinent, prudent or foolish is all determined by nature and habituation. The example of Evenus is quite interesting, since Socrates mentions, somewhat tongue in cheek, that he was a sophist who taught virtue for profit.¹⁰⁶ Aristotle of course points out the hypocrisy of one who claims both to be able to teach virtue and that virtue is not teachable, but, less obviously, Aristotle quietly indicates that he shares Socrates' doubts concerning the teachability of virtue, and, in this case, its necessary

¹⁰⁵ See also *Metaphysics* Book Δ, Ch. 5 (1015a29 and ff.); *Rhetoric* I.11.1370a10 and ff.; *Eudemian Ethics* II.7.1223a31.

¹⁰⁶ Plato *Apology of Socrates* 20b; see also *Phaedo* 60d-61c, and *Phaedrus* 267a.

concomitant, prudence.¹⁰⁷ With such heavy emphasis on nature and habituation, Aristotle suggests that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to teach virtue.

Where then, does virtue come from? By speaking of the prudent person and the clever person, Aristotle reminds us of the distinction between the two that he made earlier: cleverness allows one to discern the means to the object one has set down, but prudence appears to be that “eye of the soul” that allows one to see clearly what is good and advantageous for oneself—to see the human good (VI.12.1144a22-31). What then, allows one to see this clearly? Every indication is that it is the result of either nature, proper habituation, or some combination of the two, for surely no one would choose to remain ignorant of what is truly good for oneself. But placing the emphasis so squarely on matters out of control when it comes to determining our character, Aristotle further calls into question one’s responsibility for that character. Indeed, the only reason one would live viciously, or incontinently, would be because one fails to see the human good. For if one truly saw the human good, one would be compelled to pursue it. In order to determine the human end correctly, one must be born, it would seem, possessing something like good vision, by which to discern correctly and choose what is truly good. And to be born in such a condition, “would be the complete and true blessing of nature” (III.5.1114b5-12).

¹⁰⁷ Consider the passage just referred to in the *Apology* of Socrates, but also especially *Protagoras* 319a and ff. and the subsequent investigation of the question in *Meno*.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I followed a somewhat unconventional path. In doing so, I have been guided by the belief that Aristotle makes clear what Plato leaves obscure.¹⁰⁸ And indeed, Aristotle has illuminated an otherwise impenetrable labyrinth within the Platonic corpus. In attempting to escape this labyrinth and still conquer the Minotaur that is the Socratic Paradox, we turned to Aristotle as our Ariadne, for a guide is always welcome in such matters. With Aristotle's help, we have made sense of the Socratic Paradox, and he has enabled us to see past the paradoxical nature of the statement to the understanding of human action and desire that it entails.

Aristotle helps us to make sense of Socrates' thesis, he helps us to understand what it might truly mean if it is not simply meant as a paradox. In other words, Aristotle treats the paradox seriously, providing depth and breadth to an otherwise enigmatic statement. The Socratic Paradox is open to the charge of intellectualism, but we now see, with Aristotle's help, that the Socratic Paradox takes passion and desire into account. We see, moreover, that desire and reason are not as neatly cleaved as one would initially believe, as desiring is present in thinking and vice versa.¹⁰⁹ Aristotle makes clear how precisely the quest for wisdom, philosophy, arises out of the recognition that virtue is knowledge.

Turning to the *Ethics*, we found that Aristotle treats in Books III and VII the topics on which the Socratic thesis touches, although Socrates is mentioned by name

¹⁰⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* p. 7-8.

¹⁰⁹ For Socrates' account of the desiring aspect of philosophy, see *Symposium*, especially 203b and following.

only in VII. We discovered that Aristotle offers competing or even contradictory teachings regarding the relationship between virtue and knowledge in these books, but that this contradiction can be explained. In order to arrive at that explanation, and thus to understand Aristotle's final teaching concerning knowledge and virtue, it is necessary to understand the aim of the work as a whole as well as to recognize that these two parts of the work serve different purposes. Following the movement of the *Ethics* as a whole; situating each discussion of moral responsibility within the larger movement of the conversation; noticing Aristotle's several hesitations and omissions; remaining sensitive to the dialectical nature of the work; and paying attention to the work's political nature provided great insight into the discrepancy between Books III and VII. The seeming contradiction between Aristotle's two accounts of moral responsibility in Books III and VII can be explained, above all, by the shift of focus from moral to intellectual virtue. Aristotle's teaching regarding moral responsibility in Book III serves a primarily political purpose and provides the foundation for his account of the moral virtues that follows. Book VII, by contrast, aspires to greater theoretical clarity while trying to preserve the politically salutary teaching of Book III. Aristotle self-consciously presents an account of moral responsibility in Book III that is riddled with difficulties, forcing one to look to Book VII for his fuller theoretical account. Book III relies on too narrow a conception of both force and ignorance, and, above all, leaves unclear how human beings form their conception of the human end (*telos*). If the targeting of the end is not self-chosen, but is received from nature or habituation, then no one is responsible for wrongdoing. Discerning truly what is good and living well would be a blessing of nature, and not, strictly

speaking, within one's control (III.5.1114a31-1114b8). Aristotle rejects in Book III the notion that our prospects for correctly seeing the human end are determined by chance, but the grounds of that rejection, resting on hypothetical arguments, are quite insufficient (III.5. 1114b13 and ff.). When Aristotle discusses praise and blame, he outlines a conception of moral responsibility that leaves room for the notion that we are responsible for wrongdoing.

But, of course, that is not the end of the story, and Aristotle returns to the question of intentional wrongdoing in Book VII, providing his fuller theoretical account of the relationship between knowledge and virtue in the guise of an investigation of Socrates' denial of the phenomenon of incontinence. Turning to Socrates allows Aristotle to reveal to the philosophically inclined reader an understanding of moral responsibility that moves beyond his own inadequate account of moral responsibility in Book III. Aristotle declines, however, to broadcast his agreement with the most radical aspects of Socrates' thesis in order to preserve the politically salutary effects of his earlier account of moral responsibility, an account of moral responsibility that is useful, if not necessary, for the lawmaker, especially with a view to honoring and punishing citizens (Consider III.1.1109b30 and ff.). Aristotle gives every indication that Book VII is of the utmost importance and thus contains his considered judgments. In trying to arbitrate between moral and intellectual virtue, Aristotle often mutes the differences between Socrates and virtue as it is ordinarily understood. Indeed, he only obliquely refers to the potential rift: Socrates is only explicitly mentioned with respect to one character virtue, namely truthfulness, and in this case Aristotle acknowledges that Socrates does not possess this particular virtue

but rather is prone to the related vice of irony. The only time Aristotle mentions Socrates in conjunction with a moral virtue, he is said to be the example of someone who possesses the vice, albeit a graceful vice (IV.7. 1127b25 and context). Socrates is not mentioned with respect to any other moral virtue, but he really comes to the fore once Aristotle turns to an investigation of the intellectual virtues.

Aristotle gives every indication, however, that Book VII is of the utmost importance and thus contains his considered judgments, indicating his turn, following Socrates, away from the moral virtues and on a quest for intellectual virtue.

Aristotle has begun anew in Book VII, and he marks the ascent over his previous discussion by bringing intellectual virtue to the forefront of his account of human excellence. Moreover, Aristotle broadens the variety of moral characters in Book VII beyond simply virtue and vice to include continence and incontinence, and beastlike and godlike conditions, thus revealing how limited his earlier account of virtue and vice was. Indeed, expanding the variety of character types brings Aristotle into direct confrontation with Socrates, as Socrates denies the very existence of one of the new states of character, namely incontinence. Although he does so somewhat obliquely and under the pretense of acting as arbiter between Socrates and common sense, Aristotle ultimately agrees with Socrates in Book VII: the common sense understanding of incontinence is fundamentally flawed, and this conclusion reveals Aristotle's silent nod to Socrates' assertion that no one voluntarily does wrong.

Aristotle takes up Socrates' denial of the phenomenon of incontinence, declaring, in fact, that such an investigation is necessary even though Socrates' denial contradicts the plain appearance of things. Aristotle merely alludes to the fact that

Socrates' denial of incontinence depends upon the more radical claim that no one knowingly does wrong. By focusing on incontinence, Aristotle implies that incontinence is the test case for Socrates' equation of knowledge with virtue. Aristotle's investigation of Socrates' claim regarding incontinence takes place over the first ten chapters of Book VII, although his last mention of Socrates by name in the *Ethics* occurs in VII.3. When Aristotle mentions Socrates for the final time, he concedes that what Socrates is correct in saying that it is impossible for knowledge, at least in the governing or authoritative sense (*kuriōs*), to be present when incontinence occurs.

By focusing on Socrates' denial of the phenomenon of incontinence, Aristotle implies that this is the test case for Socrates' thesis that virtue is knowledge. But if this inference is correct, then Aristotle concedes other aspects of the thesis without raising any hackles. If incontinence is the least persuasive part of the identification of knowledge and virtue, and Aristotle ultimately comes around to Socrates' point of view on incontinence, then Aristotle has left no reason to doubt the Socratic Paradox. As Ronna Burger says, "[O]nly a confrontation with the issue of *akrasia* can really put the Socratic position to the test. In the course of this confrontation, it looks as if Aristotle moves closer and closer to the Socratic position, which appears at first so counterintuitive, until by the end he is led to a recognition of its fundamental principle."¹¹⁰ The reader benefits from this dialogical argument between Aristotle and Socrates, as Aristotle makes clear the fundamental principle in question, the principle guiding Socrates' denial of incontinence.

¹¹⁰ Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 134.

Aristotle arrives at Socrates' opinion by a somewhat circuitous route, but he arrives there nonetheless. It becomes clear that ignorance must play a role if one is to fall victim to incontinence, for such a one necessarily lacks a genuine understanding of his own good.¹¹¹ When Socrates asserts that all wrongdoing is the result of ignorance, this is what he has in mind. It is not the case that someone is ignorant of the particular action he or she is engaged in; rather, the person is ignorant of the place of that action would have in a good life. The incontinent, to use the example that Aristotle uses, fails to have a clear grasp of what a truly good human life is. As Aristotle goes on to elaborate, incontinence in particular is marked by a failure to reflect seriously on the proper place of physical—that is, bodily—pleasures within a good human existence. What is at stake is not so much the particular action, whether such and such an action is or is not pleasant, but a failure to situate the particular action within a larger understanding of the human good. What is necessary is a true understanding of the human good, or an investigation of what is the best life for a human being. As Socrates tells us over and over, there is no inquiry more important. Aristotle helps us clearly to see the Socratic impetus for the Socratic way of life. The only way to avoid vice would be to possess an accurate understanding of what is good for a human being.

Aristotle spends the next several chapters explaining his agreement with Socrates, elucidating what is at work when the phenomenon that is called incontinence occurs, and thus providing great insight into what Socrates meant. As it is commonly understood, incontinence occurs when knowledge is overcome by passion or desire. Without being completely dismissive of common opinion, indeed preserving it

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 152.

insofar as possible, Aristotle shows the flaws in such an account. Aristotle does not go so far as to deny the phenomenon of incontinence, but he ends by changing its meaning so radically that it barely resembles the phenomenon whose existence Socrates denies. The understanding of incontinence that Aristotle arrives at is perfectly compatible with Socrates' denial of the phenomenon; Aristotle has truly preserved common opinion as much as possible.

Given Aristotle's heavy emphasis on preserving opinion, it is easy to overlook that he concedes to Socrates that knowledge is not present when incontinence occurs and that it is impossible for the incontinent person to possess prudence. Despite dismissing opinion twice in successive chapters (VII.2 and 3), Aristotle finally states that opinion indeed marks the incontinent person. While knowledge cannot be overcome by passion, opinion can. Correct opinion can be overcome by the passionate desire for pleasure. But even this is not quite accurate, as Aristotle declares that incontinence comes about somehow (*pōs*) from a reasoned account or an opinion (VII.3.1147a35-b1). In other words, the struggle that we see in the incontinent person is not between knowledge and desire, nor is it between opinion and desire. Since desiring and thought cannot be separated, the struggle felt by the incontinent person occurs between competing "desiring thoughts" (VI.2.1139a33-b5). Stated somewhat differently, the incontinent person possesses competing opinions regarding what is truly good for him.

And to possess conflicting opinions regarding what is good for oneself is ultimately ignorance concerning what is truly good for oneself. To use the example Aristotle gives in VII.3, the incontinent person believes both that eating sweets is bad

and that eating sweets is good. This person strives to follow general rules that he supposes are universally valid, such as that sweets should not be tasted. The incontinent person possesses opinions regarding general rules of conduct, believing it is good to follow these rules, but he recites them in the same way that one might cite demonstrations or the verses of Empedocles without understanding them (1147b9-12). He also possesses the opinion that pleasure is good (1147a24 and ff.), and the nature of the struggle now comes to light. Not having reflected sufficiently on the question of the good for a human being, the incontinent person is torn between contradictory desiring thoughts. By trying to follow universal rules, the incontinent person shows himself to be blind to the complexities of human life. For Aristotle, all particular questions must be viewed in light of the hierarchy of human ends, which would entail knowledge of what *the* end for a human being is, and the incontinent person lacks this knowledge. The cause of all of the incontinent person's wrongdoing is, in a word, ignorance. His ignorance points to the need for knowledge of the end of human life, to knowledge of what the good life is for a human being. The incontinent person is weak in the face of pleasure precisely because he possesses inadequate knowledge concerning what is truly good. To repeat, Aristotle says that incontinence occurs, in a way, from an opinion that is not opposed to right reason. Aristotle never says what this opinion is, but it is possible that the missing opinion is that pleasure is good (1147b). Let us return to Aristotle's example: one thinks it is good to refrain from eating sweets, but one also thinks that eating sweets is pleasant. This missing opinion or argument, that pleasure is good, is also at work. The person simultaneously holds contradictory opinions (eating sweets is bad, eating sweets is

good), and he acts upon the latter opinion, lacking the strength to stand by the first opinion. (Strength would only be necessary in the case of people who have an opinion regarding what is good; it does not take strength to refrain from eating rat poison) And Aristotle implies in VII.9-10 that possessing that strength (continence) or lacking it (incontinence) is a result of one's nature, habituation, or some combination of the two.

Here I have made clear what Aristotle leaves unclear. Aristotle's agreement with Socrates is far deeper than his explicit concession to his view in VII.3. The incontinent person does not act contrary to what he believes to be best, because he does not hold a consistent view of what is best. He holds contradictory opinions about what is truly good for himself, and therefore lacks knowledge concerning his own good.

The incontinent person, therefore, lacks self-knowledge. In the first place, he fails to understand his own motivation for action. He claims to be overcome by passion, but the real source of his struggle is a competing conception of what is truly good for himself, and pleasure is central to this competing conception of the good. The root, then, of the incontinent person's failure to understand his own motivation for actions is his failure to recognize that he possesses competing visions of what is good for a human being. The incontinent person has not sufficiently reflected on what is truly good for himself, exposing his most fundamental lack of self-knowledge. The inscription at Delphi, it turns out, is not easy; indeed, it is a difficult task for human

beings to know themselves.¹¹² In the absence of such self-knowledge, greater continence is needed, and this comes about, somehow, from greater habituation.

The incontinent person is indeed ignorant of the human good, following general rules of action as a result of habituation. Aristotle points simultaneously, then, to the weakness and strength of habituation: habituation is weak, insofar as we see that people pursue pleasure instead of following the rules they have been habituated to follow. By contrast, however, habituation makes a great deal of difference in determining whether one will be continent or incontinent, and this is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change once that character has been formed. In both cases, Aristotle points to the insufficiency of habituation while stressing how difficult it is to overcome one's rearing. Habituation is an insufficient guide for discovering how to live well truly, even if it is the best that can be hoped for in some cases.

If, however, ignorance is the root of human ills, and habituation is ultimately insufficient for overcoming ignorance, this points to the utmost urgency of the need for a knowledge or science of human affairs, for human beings can never live well either individually or collectively without such knowledge. In the last chapter, however, I raised the possibility that knowledge, at least as Aristotle defines it in VI.3, may be impossible for human beings to attain. Aristotle holds a very high standard for knowledge in VI.3, requiring knowledge to proceed by demonstration from first principles (*archai*). To my knowledge, Aristotle fails to provide an example of a first principle that is grasped by the intellect.¹¹³ This is even more

¹¹² Consider *Alcibiades Major* 129a and ff.

¹¹³ One potential first principle is the principle of non-contradiction, which Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* Γ, Ch. 3 (1105b18 and ff.). But Aristotle will only go so far as to say that this is the "most certain" (*bebaiotatos*) of all principles.

problematic if we were to try to discover knowledge of the first principles for action. If our only prospects for knowledge or science depend upon grasping the first principles, our prospects are bleak.¹¹⁴

Fortunately, Aristotle's manner of inquiry in the *Ethics* provides an example of another route to knowledge, especially knowledge of human affairs. The knowledge the incontinent person lacks, according to Aristotle, is prudence, and we should not forget that Socrates emerged in Book VI as the proponent of the view that prudence is the basis of all virtue (1144b17-32). Aristotle will echo that conclusion in the last analysis (VII.10.1152a6-9). Indeed, Aristotle's conclusion is quite telling, as it reveals precisely what knowledge the incontinent person lacks; he lacks knowledge of what it means for a human being to live well. And this knowledge is prudence, for prudence is the "truth-disclosing active condition involving reason that governs action, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being" (VI.5.1140b4-7). Moreover, by referring to Socrates as the proponent of the view that prudence is virtue, Aristotle alerts the reader to the possibility that Socrates' way of life embodies prudence. Socrates is the prudent man, possessing the active condition that discloses what is good and bad for a human being.

Indeed, by imitating Socrates' method of inquiry and holding him up as the standard of the prudent man, Aristotle points to an alternative path to acquiring knowledge concerning human affairs. One must begin as Aristotle and Socrates do, not from first principles, but from what is first for us (I.4.1095b2). We should begin

¹¹⁴ Perhaps, however, a science of human affairs would not look to discover the beginning principles (*archai*), but the end (*telos*). The targeting of the end, however, is no less difficult to find, for everyone, or nearly everyone, agrees that the human end is happiness, but precisely of what that happiness consists there is much disagreement (I.4.1095a20 and ff.). In many ways, the entire work of the *Ethics* can be seen as a search for the elusive human end (I.2.1094a18 and ff.).

from respectable opinions (*endoxai*) about human affairs, and the method of inquiry is not demonstration (*apodeixis*), but dialectics, for progress in understanding can come about as a result of dialectical inquiry. That is to say, we should philosophize. To say, as Socrates does and Aristotle now agrees, that no one knowingly does wrong leads to the conclusion that philosophy is the one thing necessary. Insofar as the philosopher aims to know himself, he embodies this quest for knowledge. Philosophy aims to discover what is truly good for a human being, striving to replace opinion concerning virtue with knowledge about it. Moreover, philosophy calls into question the opinions that one has received as a result of habituation, which Aristotle argues is difficult to change (VII.10.1152a30-31). Philosophy at least offers one the hope of rising above the accidental circumstances surrounding the way that one was raised. If one is to transcend opinion, which provides a weak attachment to virtue, one must turn to philosophy. The conclusion of Socrates' twin theses—no one knowingly does wrong and virtue is knowledge—is that one ought to pursue knowledge as the one thing needful, even if its attainment is unlikely. We now see why the thesis that no one knowingly does wrong is so central to Socratic philosophy, insofar as it provides the very impetus for that pursuit.

Last, I would like to mention some prospects for further inquiry based on the work that has been done here. Two ways to continue to pursue this investigation come immediately to mind. The first is to continue to follow Aristotle's argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle's investigation of Socrates leads him, in the end of Book VII, to inquire into pleasure. After all, the one who lacks self-control falls prey to the allure of pleasure. In order to understand completely Aristotle's—and, for that

matter Socrates’—understanding of self-control, the phenomenon would have to be situated within a comprehensive account of pleasure. This, of course, would lead inevitably into an inquiry of what the good life for a human being is, as well as determining the role that pleasure plays in such a life. I have tried above to show how the equation of knowledge and virtue, coupled with the highly dubious nature of any claim to knowledge, point to the urgency of philosophy as a way of life. If knowledge is the answer to the problem of virtue, then the life devoted to pursuing knowledge emerges as the chief claimant for the title of the best life.

The second way to further this investigation is to turn to the very place where Socrates is initially said to have made the radical claim that knowledge equals virtue, and thus return to the starting point for this dissertation: the Platonic dialogues. This study began by wondering about Socrates’ highly paradoxical equation of knowledge and virtue in such dialogues as the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. Confident that Aristotle has helped us to understand Socrates’ claims, we are now in a position to view the dialogues anew, from a higher plane. Having followed Aristotle’s treatment of Socrates’ claims both from the point of view of logic and of nature, we can return to the source himself, Socrates. Clearly, although both lines of inquiry are sketches of future research agendas, they rest on or presuppose the validity of the conclusions reached in the study set forth here.

Glossary

This glossary is meant to serve as an explanation of some of the important Greek terms that Aristotle uses in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that are of particular importance for this dissertation.

Appearance (*phainomenon*)

The way that something appears to be, as distinguished from the way that it is. According to Aristotle, Socrates' thesis that no one acts contrary to what he holds to be best contradicts the appearance of things.

Beautiful or Noble (*kalon*)

The Greek *kalon* has a wide variety of meanings, comprising the beautiful, noble, and fine. Because beautiful tends to capture this same range of meanings in English, I ordinarily translate *kalos* as beautiful, but also occasionally as noble when this seems to better capture the sense of the Greek.

Choice (*prohairesis*)

A choice is something done voluntarily and with reason and thought (III.2.1112a15-17). Aristotle moves from voluntary (III.1), to choice (III.2), to deliberation (III.3), to wishing (III.4) in an attempt to lay out a theory of moral responsibility. See "involuntary."

Contemplation (*theōria*)

The activity of beholding with the intellect. By the end of the *Ethics*, Aristotle says that the contemplative life is the best life a human being can lead: "But the person who is at work with his intellect and takes care of this and is disposed in the best way toward it seems also to be most dear to the gods... and it is likely that the same person is the happiest. So in this way too, a wise person would be the most happy" (X.9.1179a23-32).

Contenance and Incontinence (*akrasia* and *engkrateia*)

Engkrateia is literally "self-control," and *akrasia* is "lack of self-control." It is the ability or inability to withstand the temptation of pleasures, especially of the bodily type. Aristotle says that Socrates denied that there is such a thing as incontinence on the grounds that no one acts contrary to what he believes to be best (VII.2. 1145b25-27). See *Protagoras* 352a and ff.

End or Goal (*telos*)

The purpose of a being, or that for the sake of which a thing is done. The *Ethics* looks for the human end, the final or most complete good for a human being. Aristotle points to how central the discovery of the human end is in trying to attain happiness. He indicates early on that one must possess awareness or recognition

(*gnōsis*) of the end in order to aim at it (1094a23), and that humans ought to get a grasp, at least in outline, as to what the end is and to which of the sciences (*epistēmai*) or powers (*dunamai*) it belongs (1094a25-26). Such a recognition (*gnōsis*) of the end (*telos*) or highest good (*to ariston*) would have great weight in one's life and, "like archers who have a target, we would be more apt to hit on what is needed" (I.2.1094a18-24).

Ethics (*ēthikos*)

The state of character that comes about as the result of habit. Aristotle divides human virtue into two, ethical and intellectual.

Good (*agathon*)

As Aristotle reports in the famous opening lines to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it has beautifully been said that the good is that at which all things aim. The question, then, is what is the good for a human being. According to Socrates, everyone pursues what he believes to be good or best.

Impasse (*aporia*)

The word could also be translated as a state of perplexity or confusion, or being at a loss. In the Platonic corpus, Socrates is known for being at an impasse and bringing his interlocutors to an impasse. Scholars thus call "aporetic" those dialogues of Plato that end without Socrates and his interlocutors reaching a definitive answer to the question they are exploring. According to Aristotle, impasses are necessary steps for investigation.

Involuntary (*Akōn*) Page 18

An action is involuntary, according to Aristotle, if it is the product of ignorance or external force (III.1.1110a1-4). The heart of the controversy surrounding the Socratic Paradox is whether one can voluntarily do wrong, or whether all wrongdoing is the product of ignorance.

Intellect (*nous*)

By process of elimination, Aristotle says that *nous* is the intellectual capacity with which first principles are grasped (VI.6.1141a7-8).

Know (*gignōskein*, *epistamasthai* and *eidenai*)

Aristotle and Plato employ several verbs related to knowing, although *gignōskein* differs from *epistamasthai* in the way that the French *connaître* differs from *savoir* or the German *kennen* from *wissen*. Additionally, *eidenai*, the perfect form of the verb to see, is also used to mean "know." The English "knowledge" translates the Greek noun *epistēmē* which is related to *epistamasthai*, and "awareness" or "recognition" translates *gnōsis*. Aristotle holds a very high standard for knowledge (*epistēmē*) in VI.3, requiring knowledge to proceed by demonstration from first principles (*archai*). In order to demonstrate a matter, the demonstration would have to proceed from truth (*alētheia*) or a first principle or, more simply, first thing (*prōton*). In *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100a3-b17, Aristotle says that the soul cannot know (*epistamein*) the

first principle, but it can grasp it with the intellect (*nous*). At the very least, this intuitive intellection of the first principle seems out of harmony with Aristotle's heavy emphasis on empiricism earlier in the *Posterior Analytics*. If the truth, strictly speaking, of the first principles cannot be *known* simply, then the prospects for knowledge that proceeds from demonstration are questionable. One potential first principle is the principle of non-contradiction, which Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* Γ, Ch. 3 (1105b18 and ff.). But Aristotle will only go so far as to say that this is the "most certain" (*bebaiotatos*) of all principles

Licentiousness (*akolaston*)

The character trait of indulging in the bodily pleasures of food, drink, and sex. Both a licentious person and an incontinent person are concerned with bodily pleasure. The licentious person differs from the incontinent insofar as he chooses the pleasant things, because he believes the pleasant thing should always be pursued, whereas the incontinent person pursues the pleasure at hand despite believing that he ought not to pursue it. The licentious person is not marked by any internal struggle (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.8, and VII.9.1151b34-1152a6) See "continence and incontinence."

Opinion and Reputable Opinion (*doxai, endoxai*)

An understanding of the world that most citizens hold by virtue of having been raised and educated in a particular city (*polis*), especially concerning what is good and noble or just. Aristotle begins his inquiries from very common opinions, the things that are rather familiar to us (*Physics* I.1. 184a). The goal or hope is that we will arrive at what is clearer by nature. An Aristotelian dialectical syllogism (*dialektikos syllogismos*) reasons from these reputable opinions (*endoxai*, *Topics* I.100a25-27), but it does not necessarily evaluate all commonly held opinions. To review all opinions (*doxai*), especially in ethical matters, would be rather pointless (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.1095b), and Aristotle thinks it would be sufficient to review those opinions that have the greatest prominence.

Paradox (*paradoxos*)

Something contrary to opinion or expectations, incredible. Aristotle distinguishes Socratic inquiry from the use of term paradox, reserving the use of the word paradox as a term of disparagement (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.2.1146a21-27). See also *Metaphysics* Book Γ, Ch. 7 (1012a18 and ff.) and *Rhetoric* II.21, II.23, and III.11, 14, and 18. Using Aristotle's distinction between impasse and paradox, the phrase "Socratic Paradox" is a bit of a misnomer. See "impasse."

Practical Wisdom or Prudence (*phronēsis*)

One of the two potential peaks of intellectual virtue, along with wisdom. Wisdom in practical matters, prudence is a "truth-disclosing active condition involving reason about human goods that governs actions" (VI.5.1140b20-21). We believe, Aristotle says, that men like Pericles possess practical wisdom, as distinct from wisdom simply. See wisdom (*sophia*).

Speech or Argument (*logos*)

This word has a variety of meanings, such as speech, statement, word, argument, account, or reason. The capacity for reason, according to Aristotle, is what distinguishes a human being.

Virtue (*aretē*)

The excellence of any particular kind of being. The virtue of a knife, for example, would be to cut well. The *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole can be seen as an attempt to discover what that human excellence is, on the grounds that such an excellence would make a human being happy. One of the important distinctions Aristotle draws is between moral and intellectual virtue.

Wisdom (*sophia*)

The most precise kind of knowledge, wisdom would consist of intellect (*nous*) and knowledge (*epistēmē*), a knowledge, so to speak, with its head on (VI.7.1141a19-20). People say, according to Aristotle, that Anaxagoras and Thales were wise, but lacked practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).

Bibliography

I. Primary Sources and Works in Translation

A. Aristotle

The Complete Works of Aristotle. (1984) The Revised Oxford Translation, in Two Volumes. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Ethica Nicomachea. (1894) Ed. I. Bywater. Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.

Eudemian Ethics. (1992) Trans. by Michael Woods. Oxford University Press, New York.

Metaphysics. (2002) Trans. by Joe Sachs. Green Lion Press, Santa Fe, NM.

Nicomachean Ethics. (Forthcoming) Trans. by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Nicomachean Ethics. (2002) Trans. by Joe Sachs. Focus Publishing. Newburyport, MA.

Nicomachean Ethics. (1985) Trans. by Terrence Irwin. Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis.

Nicomachean Ethics. (1962) Trans. by Martin Ostwald. Prentice Hall, New York.

Nicomachean Ethics. (1998) Trans. by W. D. Ross, Revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection. (2004) Trans. by Joe Sachs. Green Lion Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Physics. (2005) Trans. by Joe Sachs. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ.

Poetics. (2006) Trans. by Joe Sachs. Focus Publishing. Newburyport, MA: 2006.

Politica. (1957) Ed W. D. Ross. Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.

Politics. (1984) Trans. by Carnes Lord. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

B. Plato

Burnett, John. *Platonis Opera*, Vol. 2. (1901) Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.

- Platonis Opera*, Vol. 3. (1903) Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.
- Platonis Opera*, Vol. 4. (1902) Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.
- Platonis Opera*, Vol. 5. (1907) Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.
- Duke, E. A., W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan.
Platonis Opera, Vol. 1. (1995) Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts.
- Johnson, David M. (2003) *Socrates and Alcibiades: Four Texts*. Focus Publishing.
 Newbury, MA.
- Pangle, Thomas L. (1987) *The Roots of Political Philosophy*. Cornell University
 Press, Ithaca.
- Plato. *Euthydemus* (2009, forthcoming). Trans. by Gregory A. McBrayer and Mary
 D. Nichols, with an Interpretive Essay by Mary D. Nichols and Denise
 Schaeffer. Focus Publishing. Newburyport, MA.
- Gorgias*. (1988) Trans. James H. Nichols. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Laws*. (1988) Trans. Thomas Pangle. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Protagoras and Meno*. (2004) Trans. Robert C. Bartlett. Cornell University
 Press.
- Republic*. (1991) Trans. Allan Bloom. 2nd Edition. Basic Books, New York.
- Symposium*. (2001) Trans. by Seth Benardete with commentaries by Allan
 Bloom and Seth Benardete. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- West, Thomas G., and Grace Starry West. (1984) *Four Texts on Socrates*. Cornell
 University Press, Ithaca.

II. Secondary Literature

- Alfarabi. (2001) *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. Trans. by Mushin Mahdi.
 Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- . (2001) *The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato the
 Divine and Aristotle*. In *Alfarabi: The Political Writings: "Selected
 Aphorisms" and Other Texts*. Trans. by Charles E. Butterworth. Cornell
 University Press, Ithaca, NY.

- Alford, C. Fred. (1992) *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Greek Tragedy*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Allen, R. E. (1960) "The Socratic Paradox." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 2. pp. 256-265.
- Bambrough, Renford. (1960) "Socratic Paradox." *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 41. pp. 289-300.
- Barnes, Jonathan. (2000) *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Bartlett, Robert C. (2008) "Aristotle's Introduction to the Problem of Happiness: On Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*." *American Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 52, No. 3.
- . (2003) "Political Philosophy and Sophistry: An Introduction to Plato's *Protagoras*." *American Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 47, No. 4.
- . (2004) *Plato: "Protagoras" and "Meno."* With notes and interpretive essays. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Bartlett, Robert C., and Susan D. Collins, editors. (1999) *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Bodéüs, Richard. (1993) *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*. Trans. by Jan Edward Garrett. SUNY University Press, Albany.
- Burger, Ronna. (2008) *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Cook Wilson, John. (1879) *Aristotelian Studies: I. On the Structure of the Seventh Book of the Nicomachean Ethics, chapter I-X*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hardie, W. F. R. (1968) *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1997) *Plato's Sophist*. Trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Irwin, Terence. (1995) *Plato's Ethics*. Oxford University Press, New York.

- . (1980) “Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle.” Published in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. Edited by Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- Jaffa, Harry. (1972) “Aristotle.” Published in *The History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. 2nd Edition. Rand McNally Press: Chicago.
- Klein, Jacob. (1964) “Aristotle, An Introduction.” Published in *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*. Basic Books, New York.
- Kraut, Richard. (2006) Editor. *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.
- Liddell, and Scott. (2001 Impression) *An Intermediate Greek-English Dictionary*. Founded upon the 7th Edition, Oxford University Press.
- Lord, Carnes (1987). “Aristotle.” Published in *The History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. 3rd Edition. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Luckhardt, C. G. (1975) “Remorse, Regret, and the Socratic Paradox.” *Analysis*, Vol. 35, No. 5. pp. 159-166.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. (1984) *After Virtue*, Second Edition. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana.
- Marchant, E.C. *Xenophontis Opera Omnia, Vol. 2. Commentarii, Oeconomicus, Convivium, Apologia Socratis*. Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford: 1921
- . *Xenophontis Opera Omnia, Vol. 4. Institutio Cyri*. Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford: 1963.
- Merrill, Clark A. (2000) “Leo Strauss’ Indictment of Christian Philosophy,” *Review of Politics*, 62/1 (Winter) 77-105.
- Meyer, Susan Suavé. (1993) *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility: Character and Cause*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- . (2006) “Aristotle on the Voluntary.” Published in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.
- Mulhern, J.J. (1968) “A Note on Stating the ‘Socratic Paradox.’” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 29, No. 4. pp. 601-604.

- . (1974) “Aristotle and the Socratic Paradoxes.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 2. pp. 293-299.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1998) *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. Duncan Large. Oxford University Press, New York.
- . (1989) *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books, New York.
- Pangle, Thomas L. (1988) “Interpretive Essay.” Published in *Plato’s Laws*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Price, A.W. (2006) “Acrasia and Self-Control.” Published in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.
- Robinson, T. M. (1970) *Plato’s Psychology*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Rorty, Amélie O. (1980) “Akrasia and Pleasure: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7” Published in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. Edited by Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- . (1980) Editor. *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles
- Santas, Gerasimos. (1964) “The Socratic Paradoxes.” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2.
- . (1966) “Plato’s *Protagoras* and Explanations of Weakness.” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1.
- Schaefer, David L. (1988) “Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle’s Account of *Akrasia*.” *Polity*, Vol. 21, No. 2.
- Schofield, Malcolm. (2006) “Aristotle’s Political Ethics.” Published in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA
- Singpurwalla, Rachel. (2006) “Reasoning with the Irrational: Moral Psychology in the *Protagoras*,” *Ancient Philosophy*, 26.
- Smith, T. W. (1994). “The Protreptic Character of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.” *Polity*, 27(2), 307-330.
- . (2000). “The Audience of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.” *The Journal of Politics*, 62(1), 166-186.

- Strauss, Leo. (1991) *Natural Right and History*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Terchek, Ronald J., and David K. Moore. (2000) "Recovering the Political Aristotle: A Critical Response to Smith." *American Political Science Review* 94, No. 4.
- Tessitore, Aristide. (1992) "Aristotle's Ambiguous Account of the Best Life." *Polity* Vol. 15, Number 2.
- . (1996) *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- . (1999) "Socrates in Aristotle's "Account of Human Affairs." Published in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- . (2002) Editor. *Aristotle and Modern Politics: The Persistence of Political Philosophy*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN.
- Vlastos, Gregory. (1969) "Socrates on *Acrasia*." *Phoenix*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Studies Presented to G. M. A. Grube on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday.
- Franco Volpi, "The Rehabilitation of Practical Philosophy and Neo-Aristotelianism" Trans. By Eric Buzzetti, Published in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Weiss, Roslyn. (2006) *The Socratic Paradox and its Enemies*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Xenophon. (2001) *The Education of Cyrus*. Trans. Wayne Ambler. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- . (2001) *Memorabilia*. Trans. Amy L. Bonnette. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.